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## Preface

This dissertation is the result of an in-depth inquiry as to how women have faced the challenge of understanding the scriptural message regarding women's identity and roles in the family, the church, and contemporary society. The topic is here narrowed down to one particular area of focus: Jesus and his treatment of women, which is foundational for understanding feminist and egalitarian hermeneutics and exegesis. Women who want to live a godly life in today's world are called to read, interpret, and apply Scripture as God intended it rather than to revision it in accordance with their personal preferences, desires, and cultural influences. In this postmodern world it is easy to substitute one's own biases for the actual teaching of Scripture.

At the very outset, it was apparent that feminists do not all agree on this subject. Some view Jesus as a proto-feminist, while others consider him to be still operating within a patriarchal frame of reference. This lack of consensus raises the question of hermeneutics: hermeneutical theory and presuppositions as well as exegetical methodology and practice. Hence it was feminist hermeneutics with regard to Jesus' approach to women that I chose to explore.

In my quest, I was fortunate to find a mentor who, though differing in background and perspective, allowed an open exploration of this topic. Over the eight years we have worked together, Professor König has consistently challenged me to become a more careful scholar. He has insisted on fairness in dealing with the views of others and has always urged me to provide evidence and arguments for my conclusions. Professor König has truly been a blessing to me, and I wish him many more years of scholarly writing and

mentoring and service in the Lord's work. I am also grateful to Mrs. Dorothy Patterson, who first encouraged me to pursue this course of study.

Last but not least, I am grateful to my family, especially my husband, who has been an invaluable support through the entire process and sought to live out the words of Scripture, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph 5:25–27). This dissertation is dedicated to my family, and to all women who are honest seekers for the truth. *Soli Deo gloria.*

## Summary

The subject of the present dissertation is a critique of feminist hermeneutics and exegesis with special focus on Jesus' approach to women. The dissertation commences with a discussion of the topic's relevance and a disclosure of this interpreter's presuppositions. This is followed by a survey of gender-conscious approaches to interpreting Scripture, including feminism, egalitarianism, and complementarianism. Also discussed are the nature of hermeneutics and relevant New Testament passages. The main body of the dissertation consists of a description and critique of the feminist and egalitarian interpretation of Scripture passages setting forth Jesus' approach to women.

Chapter 2 starts with a description and assessment of the contributions by three major proponents of radical feminism, Mary Daly, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, and Daphne Hampson. This is followed by a discussion of the work of reformist feminists Letty Russell, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (including a critique of Fiorenza's reconstruction of the place of women in early Christianity), and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Chapter 2 concludes with a treatment of literary approaches by more recent feminist writers.

The discussion of egalitarian literature on Jesus and women in Chapter 3 is divided into three periods: the early years (1966–1986); the maturing movement (1987–1999); and recent contributions (2000–2004). Writers whose work is assessed include Krister Stendahl, Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, Paul Jewett, Mary Evans, Ben Witherington, Gilbert Bilezikian, Aida Spencer, Richard Longenecker, Grant Osborne, Ruth Tucker, R. T. France, Stanley Grenz, Linda Belleville, William Webb, and others.

The final chapter of the dissertation (Chapter 4) contains a discussion of select exegetical insights from a study of New Testament passages on Jesus' approach to women, a comparison of feminist and egalitarian hermeneutics and exegesis of Jesus and women, a proposal concerning a proper hermeneutic on Jesus and women, and a summary of findings as well as a brief presentation of the dissertation's overall contribution and areas for further dialogue.

Key Terms:

feminism; egalitarianism; complementarianism; hermeneutics; exegesis; Jesus; women in the church; women in ministry; gender; radical feminism; reformist feminism.



## Chapter 1

# **Introduction: Survey of Feminism, Egalitarianism, and Complementarianism, Nature of Hermeneutics, and Relevant New Testament Passages on Jesus and Women**

## **1.1 Introduction**

### **1.1.1 Issue, Relevance, and the Road Ahead**

As women struggle to determine their place in both the religious academy and in church ministry, how one should interpret the relevant passages of Scripture related to women is of critical importance. Jesus and his approach to women in particular have been a focus of attention, as Jesus' stance toward women is an important indication of how Christian women should view themselves and conduct themselves in the church.

The present work will not engage in *direct* exegesis of the relevant passages. Nor will I seek to advocate my own position on the topic. Rather, after declaring my own presuppositions on the issue, I will attempt to evaluate the contributions of feminist and egalitarian scholarship on Jesus in an effort to get at the underlying hermeneutical questions at stake. As a woman, I am very sympathetic to women's struggle to be accepted as legitimate interpreters of Scripture and appreciate the various attempts at solutions that have been proposed by those who feel that Scripture is patriarchal and should be used discerningly to better the lives of women.

At the same time, as a conservative evangelical, I feel a responsibility to interpret Scripture to the best of my ability in keeping with its intended message, whether or not the result is in keeping with my own preferences. While this dissertation is of profoundly

personal relevance, I will seek to address the subject in a way that fairly represents the views of others and that listens to the underlying goals and motivations for their position.

What is the road ahead? Clearly, the last word has not been spoken regarding Jesus' approach to women. In this dissertation I am attempting to provide a fair evaluation of feminist and egalitarian scholarship on the subject from a complementarian perspective. I am committed to continued dialogue with others on this subject, although for me as a conservative evangelical Scripture is the final authority.

Study in the original documents (the Scriptures, Second Temple literature, etc.) remains of primary importance. Constructive dialogue with others who have an academic interest in the same subject is essential. For this reason feedback and discussion on this dissertation's evaluation of feminist and egalitarian scholarship on Jesus and women would be a helpful part of the scholarly process.

There are some key issues for which further dialogue will be helpful. Many of these issues will receive attention throughout this work. In light of the insights gained from this dissertation, I will list what I perceive to be some of the most critical questions (some of them interrelated) that require further clarification.

The first major issue is the question of the perceived patriarchal nature of Scripture. It is undeniable that patriarchy as a cultural system of family relations exists in Old Testament times. Is it possible that patriarchy as a cultural institution can embody a principle that at least in some sense transcends this institution and in some way expresses God's will for human relationships? Is this system intrinsically evil? How is patriarchy to be defined? What kind of authority is exercised in this kind of system, and how is it to be evaluated? What do Jesus' teaching and practice contribute to this discussion?

The second major area for further dialogue is the topic of hermeneutics, specifically, issues surrounding the question of how the meaning of texts is to be discerned. This, in turn, involves an assessment of the respective places of author, text, and reader in the hermeneutical process. What are the proper criteria for the validity of interpretation? Are texts autonomous? What is the role of the reader and interpreter? What is the role of the author? What is the role of the interpretive community and of tradition in interpretation? What is the role of presuppositions?

The third important issue which is related to the second one is the epistemology and hermeneutic of postmodernism. According to postmodernism, truth is but the linguistic expression of a socially constructed notion of customs and values characterizing a particular community. Yet while contemporary, postmodernism should not be uncritically accepted. Noted philosopher J. P. Moreland (2005: 75–92) has recently raised some serious questions about the validity of postmodernism. Others, likewise, have expressed concerns with several of its features (Carson 1996; Erickson 2001). This is not the place or time to settle this issue. Suffice it to say that the question of Jesus' approach to women (the subject of the present dissertation) is considerably connected with issues that are addressed by postmodernism in the contemporary debate (e.g., reader-response approaches, the role of experience in interpretation).

Related to the question of postmodernism, fourth, is the question of history and the nature of historical research. In the introduction and the interaction with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in Chapter 2 I have argued that while historical work is fraught with difficulty, and naïveté is to be eschewed, the possibility remains that historical research is able to reconstruct a given scenario with reasonable plausibility on the basis of the

available sources. The question here is, “Is the skepticism of the postmodern ‘new historicism’ unfounded?”

Finally, all sides can agree that concerted efforts be made to combat abuse of the male exercise of authority which is still found in many cultures today. In the end, this is not merely an academic issue but one that as all would concur has enormous practical consequences. A clear understanding of this would be essential especially for those who tend toward the more conservative side where authority is vested in the male person, and there is the danger of its misuse.

This is one of the great strengths of feminism, which has always strongly rejected male dominance and women’s abuse. In the following section I will further elaborate on the difference between patriarchy and what may be called “patricentrism,” between harsh male dominance on the one hand and loving, caring leadership on the other. This, too, should open up fruitful avenues of further dialogue and discussion, because on this issue feminists and complementarians agree. A climate of goodwill and humility will foster mutual growth in understanding, benefit men and women alike, and bring glory to God.

This introductory chapter will proceed as follows. I will first make some preliminary remarks simply to indicate the position from which I approach the research, since an interpreter’s own presuppositions are of great importance and have the potential to bias outcome. Second, I will provide a brief survey of feminism, egalitarianism, and complementarianism as a general backdrop for the evaluation of feminist scholarship specifically on Jesus’ approach to women in the body of this dissertation (Chapters 2 and 3). In order to set the stage for evaluating feminist and egalitarian hermeneutics on Jesus’ approach to women I will, third, provide a discussion of the nature of hermeneutics. This

will be followed by a brief survey of the relevant passages in Scripture where Jesus deals with women in order to determine relevant scholarship for evaluation.

### 1.1.2 Approach and Presuppositions

Every interpreter has presuppositions that guide his or her research, and I am certainly no exception. In the interest of transparency and the attempt to overcome the power of presuppositions in interpretation to the extent that this is possible, it is important to acknowledge one's presuppositions at the very outset of one's work. Though the present work focuses on Jesus and women, I will first identify my overall approach to Scripture. I approach interpretation from several perspectives. After my conversion from agnosticism to Christ at the age of 17, where I realized my own sinfulness and need for salvation and submitted myself to Christ's lordship, I embarked on a quest to understand more fully my female identity and role in light of Scripture's teachings.

As an interpreter self-consciously standing in a Protestant, Reformed, and evangelical tradition, and based on Scripture's own testimony regarding itself (Grudem 1983: 19–59), I am committed to the inerrancy, inspiration, and final authority of Scripture (Geisler 1980; Dockery 1995). As a woman, I have an interest in discovering the scriptural message regarding the identity and role of women in the church and in the world today. As a conservative evangelical Christian living in North America, I live in a largely egalitarian culture, which also has significantly impacted the way the church conceives of women's roles.

Previous study of Scripture on the issue of women's roles has led me to a complementarian viewpoint, that is, I believe that men and women are both created in

God's image and with equal worth and dignity while at the same time being mysteriously distinct in their divinely assigned roles in the church and the home, though this does not necessarily affect the political arena. It is not the purpose of this dissertation, however, to demonstrate the validity of complementarianism as such from Scripture. Rather, I will attempt to provide a fair and reasonable evaluation of feminist and egalitarian scholarship on Jesus from a complementarian viewpoint (for a survey of the major tenets of complementarianism see the survey in section 1.2.3 later on in this chapter).

This critique will be undergirded by an understanding that Scripture is both a divine and a human word, that is, God so inspired the writing of the biblical documents that the human authors remained free to express themselves in the idiom and within the context of the culture of their times (1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21; cf. Luke 1:1–4), a phenomenon that has been described by B. B. Warfield as “concurvive operation.” In this sense, there is a cultural aspect to Scripture. At the same time, however, I view the Bible as divine revelation.

In my approach, I would see it as very important to distinguish between fundamentalism and a conservative evangelical reading of Scripture and to set myself apart from fundamentalism. Fundamentalism can generally be categorized as a narrow-minded approach to Scripture that might tend to neglect the historical-cultural background. It may be dogmatic and oblivious of its own presuppositions, may tend to impose doctrine onto Scripture, and is often characterized by simplistic thinking. Indeed, some have used the Bible in the past to justify such terrible things as slavery and racism.

Conservative evangelical interpreters of Scripture, on the other hand, for the most part are more open to taking the historical-cultural background into account;

acknowledge their own presuppositions; employ an inductive method; and normally are more nuanced and open to complexity and diversity. Ever since Carl F. H. Henry's significant work in the second half of the twentieth century (see esp. his *magnum opus*, the 6-volume *God, Revelation and Authority*, published in 1976), evangelicalism in the United States has defined itself over against fundamentalism by its general stance toward culture as being one of engagement rather than antagonism and rejection.

As a conservative evangelical Christian I may at times find myself confronted with the label "fundamentalist" nonetheless. As Eckhard Schnabel (1995: 61) helpfully states, evangelicals ought to be careful with their claim to interpret the Bible "literally," since this will inevitably be perceived by many as narrow-mindedness. He sets apart the conservative evangelical mindset from that of fundamentalism in that he aptly identifies several of fundamentalism's negative features from which I would also distance myself. According to Schnabel, fundamentalism is characterized by a lack of self-critical thinking as opposed to the greater openness to being engaged by others characteristic of evangelicals. Schnabel notes fundamentalists' legalistic attitude with regard to issues of conduct, such as hair length of men, dress of women, as well as consumption of alcohol, compared with the evangelical conservative approach of discernment, an individual's conscience, and an emphasis on grace.

Schnabel observes that fundamentalism on an institutional level is often characterized by a strict control of its members and a stance of separation toward non-fundamentalists, that is, other Christians as well as the world at large. By contrast, evangelicals believe in engaging the culture with the claims of Christ and participating in a variety of cultural activities.

As a conservative evangelical, therefore, I would distinguish myself from a fundamentalist in that, while holding to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, I realize that Scripture needs to be interpreted and that my interpretation is affected by my own presuppositions and may not necessarily be right. I also would perceive myself to be more nuanced and sophisticated in my hermeneutics and exegesis of Scripture and more open to dialogue and critical engagement.

My view on the biblical teaching regarding male-female relationships is that men and women have distinctions in role. I am strongly anti-slavery and firmly believe in the equal worth and dignity of all human beings regardless of gender, race, or socio-economic status. My study of Scripture indicates that all human beings are created in God's image, and no gender, race, or socio-economic class is superior over another.

Applied to gender roles, this means, for example, that when Scripture speaks of a wife's *submission* to her husband, this is to be distinguished from female *subservience* to men. My view of submission involves the recognition of a divinely ordained order, while subservience has class and possible abusive connotations where authority lies with the human being. A truly biblical notion of submission is predicated upon the notion of basic gender equality in worth and dignity and of being created in God's image, yet with a distinction in role and with authority ultimately resting on God in Christ. In practice, this should entail great humility, sacrificial, Christlike servanthood, and loving responsibility on the part of the male leader.

It may be objected that holding to a form of female submission to men (as complementarianism does) amounts to advocating the supremacy of one part of the human race over another, as in the case of racial segregation, prejudice, or slavery. The



main difference I see from Scripture here is that gender, as well as gender roles, is said to be rooted in creation (Gen. 1:27: “God created humanity male and female”), while slavery is not (Piper and Grudem 1991: 65 cited in Felix 2002: 383). My understanding of Scripture is that slavery or racial discrimination is not attributed to the divine will.

To be sure, Old Testament Scripture regulates (and limits) slavery, but neither God nor Scripture ordain it (Yarbrough 2005: 141; see his entire discussion on pp. 139–42). In the New Testament, Paul actually advises slaves to gain their freedom if possible (1 Cor. 7:21) and urges the Christian slaveholder Philemon to set the runaway slave Onesimus free (Phlm. 8–22). No similar advice is given to wives or to people in churches with male leaders (Yarbrough 2005: 141; Felix 2002: 383).

Lastly, it is also my view that complementarianism should be distinguished from patriarchy (understood as men exercising a dominant, heavy-handed type of authority). In feminist literature, patriarchy regularly has strongly negative connotations. However, I believe that the North-American scholar Daniel Block (2003: 33–102, esp. 40–48) has made a strong case that ancient Israel practiced, not patriarchy as it is normally depicted today by many feminists, but what Block calls “patricentrism.” According to Block, like the spokes of a wheel, life in ancient Israel revolved around the father in his role as the provider and protector of the extended family. Hence it was not so much the “rule” of the father (patri-archy), but his loving care and provision for the wellbeing of his own that were most central to the father’s role.

At this point, I differ from the standard feminist critique of Scripture as steeped in patriarchy and thus as being in need of correction and revision. Rather, I see Scripture in its entirety as pervaded by the principle of men bearing the ultimate responsibility and

authority for marriage and the family as well as the church, “God’s household” (1 Tim. 3:15). This principle of male headship reaches from God’s creation of the man first (Gen. 2:7), to his holding the first man accountable for humanity’s sin (Gen. 3:9–12), to the ancient Israelite practice of “patricentrism” as defined above, to the all-male Levitical priesthood in Old Testament Israel, to Jesus’ choice of twelve men as his apostles, to Paul’s teaching that men bear ultimate responsibility and authority for the church (1 Tim. 2:12). In fact, Paul himself believed that his teaching of male headship was rooted in the Genesis creation narrative (cf. 1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:13).

It is true that the historical narrative books of the Hebrew Scriptures witness to numerous abuses of this abiding principle of male headship in the Old Testament period, such as arbitrary divorce (Deut. 24:1–2), the intermittent practice of polygamy, divorce, adultery, rape, incest, etc. I believe that it is important to recognize that Scripture does not condone these behaviors and attitudes (Köstenberger 2004: 42–51). Also, patriarchy as practiced in Old Testament times is a cultural practice that as such is not binding for all times. For example, the father was in charge over an extended household, including a large circle of relatives, slaves, and others.

The way I see it, the New Testament does not abrogate the principle of male headship even subsequent to redemption in Christ. Thus Paul still can call Christian wives to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22–24), and Peter similarly enjoins wives even of unbelieving husbands to submit to them (1 Pet. 3:1–6).

Feminists regularly stress women’s need for liberation, and I highly appreciate this. There can be no doubt that all over the world millions of women are oppressed, often simply because of the traditional structures remaining intact, though I have to admit

that this is not a feature of the society in which I live. North America is very much egalitarian in practice. Christian wives should indeed be liberated from the dominant, unloving, abusive exercise of their husband's authority (cf. Gen. 3:16), as this form of "rule" is in the Bible replaced with the loving, sacrificial exercise of the husband's servant leadership in Christ (Eph. 5:25–28). But as I read Scripture, the gospel does not entail a promise of, or call to, women's liberation from all forms of male authority over them. Nevertheless, I see men's authority in the home and in the church not as autocratic or grounded in male superiority or merit, but in the mysterious, sovereign divine will and subsumed under the supreme lordship and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

After these preliminary remarks simply to indicate the position from which I approach the research, it is now possible to turn to a brief but broad-based survey of feminism (both radical and reformist), egalitarianism, and complementarianism in order to provide a backdrop for the examination of the specific topic under consideration: Jesus and women.

## **1.2 General Survey of Feminism, Egalitarianism, and Complementarianism**

### 1.2.1 Feminism

#### *1.2.1.1 Precursors*

The survey of the rise of the feminist movement may begin in the period of church history leading up to the Protestant Reformation, where ecclesiastical authority was firmly vested in the hands of men. The Reformation, with its emphasis on individual believers' right and obligation to study the Scriptures for themselves, may have embodied the seeds of a greater consciousness of the value of women. This consciousness

apparently led certain women to assert their right to preach and teach (Baird 2003: 331–32, 335–37). Among the first such women was Anne Hutchinson, who was executed by the Puritans in 1660. Women also rose to have a prominent role in the campaign to abolish slavery in the American South, a campaign that extended also to women’s rights.

In the 1830s, Mary Stewart was the first to advance issues of gender equality and social justice in the United States. The Grimké sisters, Angelina and Sarah, contributed “Appeal to the Christian Women in the South” (A. Grimké 1836) and “Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women” (S. Grimké 1837) respectively, claiming that the Bible had been misunderstood and mistranslated (Gifford 1985: 14–20; Dayton 1976: 89–91). The Quaker, Lucretia Coffin Mott, argued in a 1849 sermon that Scripture was not supremely authoritative or inspired. In the same year, Antoinette Brown published an article in the *Oberlin Quarterly* in which she set forth the argument that 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:12 merely proscribe *inappropriate* teaching by women (A. Brown 1849; cf. Dayton 1976: 88–89). She was ordained in the Congregational Church, New York in 1853, probably the first American woman to undergo ordination. Other outspoken women in the second half of the nineteenth century include Catherine Booth, co-founder of the Salvation Army, Frances Willard, who established the Christian Temperance Union, and Katherine Bushnell, leader of Women’s equality Bible studies.

Feminist hermeneutics in the nineteenth century primarily employed two kinds of uses of Scripture (Collins 1985: 4): (1) prooftexting, by which early feminist writers were able to counter the use of biblical passages by those who sought to limit the role of women; and (2) references to female characters in Scripture that could serve as role

models for women, such as Deborah, Ruth, or Esther. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her *Woman's Bible* leading the way, a more critical approach began to take hold, which viewed the biblical texts as sexist. These approaches mark the first stage of feminist hermeneutics and are still in use today.

The rising tide of women active in Christian ministry and scholarship reached a culmination point in *The Woman's Bible*, which was edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1895, 1898) and enlisted 20 women contributors (Gifford 1985: 27–30). Though Stanton did not consider the Mosaic Law to be inspired (1895: 12), she acknowledged the Bible as the bedrock of male-dominated Western law and civilization and sought to achieve legislative reform through a reinterpretation of the Bible. The authority of the Bible's teaching on women was questioned, as was the Bible's authoritative status. Because she believed that women's emancipation was impossible if Scripture's position was accepted, Stanton applied higher criticism (1895: 12). Biblical narratives were not assumed to be true, and criteria of authenticity applied. Stanton also attempted to correct traditional interpretations of passages related to women.

In 1919, women in America gained the right to vote. Interestingly, the decades subsequent to this milestone for women (1920–60) saw little growth in the women's movement. Only when American society entered a major social upheaval in the 1960s with its anti-establishment message and its civil rights emphasis, did modern-day feminism emerge. Initially, feminism was a radical, secular phenomenon. Soon, however, Christian feminists took up their task of providing an interpretation of Scripture that sought to give special consideration to women's concerns and interests. At a conference in Chicago in 1973 on the topic "Evangelicals for Social Action" the Evangelical

Women's Caucus was started. From 1975 to 1983 the movement grew, but so did tensions regarding biblical interpretation and inerrancy. An organizational fracture took place in 1986 when divergent views on the authority of Scripture emerged surrounding the issue of homosexuality. This led to the establishment of Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE; Cochran 2005: 77–109), a leading advocate of egalitarianism.

Three branches of feminism gradually emerged: (1) radical feminism; (2) reformist feminism; and (3) egalitarianism (also called biblical feminism). In simple terms, it may be said that radical feminism rejects the Bible and Christianity as unusable because of its male patriarchal bias. It focuses on feminine religious experience as a key to interpretation. Reformist feminism essentially rejects Christian tradition about women and uses the Bible as a means to reconstruct a proper positive theology for women. However, the Bible itself is not seen as inerrant or authoritative. The third movement, egalitarianism or biblical feminism, rejects these first two approaches' critical stance toward Scripture, viewing the Bible as inerrant and authoritative. Nothing in the Bible should be rejected, and Scripture is seen as teaching complete male-female equality (Kassian 1992: 206–7).

#### ***1.2.1.2 Radical Feminism***

The most prominent example of a radical feminist theologian is the Roman Catholic author Mary Daly, who wrote *The Church and the Second Sex* in 1968. Influenced by Simone de Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex*, Daly saw a sign of hope for the liberation of women in the Second Vatican Council. Ecclesiastical reform was slow, however, and Daly became more radical, moving outside the boundaries of the church. In 1973 she

wrote *Beyond God the Father*, outlining the case against the Bible and Christianity. According to Daly, Christianity is a male structure in which God is man, and thus man is God. Daly contends that the mere use of inclusive language is insufficient to liberate women from the bondage imposed on them by Scripture, for the Bible's core symbolism remains patriarchal. Instead, Daly calls for a "castrating of language and images that reflect and perpetuate the structures of a sexist world" (1973: 9; emphasis Daly's). She is one of several in this camp who traveled through Christianity and arrived at radical feminist conclusions of what has been called "post-Christian feminism."

Daly's radical turn continued in her publications *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978) and *Pure Lust* (1984) in which she attacks both Christianity and Christian feminism. According to Daly, only lesbian radical feminists can rise above the normal experience of male patriarchy. Daly has now completely broken away from Christianity and represents the major proponent of this brand of feminism in North America.

Another North American radical feminist of note is Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. Mollenkott, an English professor, moved from being an egalitarian in her first work, *Women, Men, and the Bible* (1977; discussed under Egalitarianism below) to advocating a reformist feminist position in *Speech, Silence, Action!* (1980) and *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (1983), to a pronounced radical feminist stance in her more recent work. In her 1987 work *Godding: The Bible and Human Responsibility* (1987), Mollenkott embraces pantheism and the notion of the Self as God. In *Sensuous Spirituality: Out from Fundamentalism* (1992), Mollenkott openly declares her lesbianism. Mollenkott's last major work to date is *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious*

*Approach* (2001), in which she develops her vision of an “omnigendered society” in which all gender distinctions are transcended.

The most prominent proponent of radical feminism in Britain is Daphne Hampson (*Theology and Feminism*, 1990). Hampson started her career as a historian in Oxford, England; she also completed a Harvard doctorate in systematic theology and since 1977 has been a lecturer in systematic theology at the University of St. Andrews. Hampson took a leading part in the campaign to allow women to be ordained as Anglican priests in Britain. She now considers herself a post-Christian feminist and believes Christianity and feminism to be incompatible and the Christian “myth” to be untrue. Having come to the conclusion that “feminism represents the death-knell of Christianity as a viable religious option” (1990: 1), she wishes to find a way to conceptualize God that is in continuity with the Western tradition. Hampson has spent many years in the United States, also serving as a visiting scholar at Harvard Divinity School (Hampson 1990: v).

In an intriguing critique of the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (whose background is Roman Catholic) and Phyllis Trible (whose roots are in the Southern Baptist movement), Hampson (1990: 32–41) writes that the problem with their approaches is that both still seek to place themselves within “the trajectory of biblical religion” (1990: 35) and “to close the gap between past and present” (1990: 37). Yet Hampson lodges a fundamental criticism about the approaches of both of these eminent reformist feminist scholars (1990: 39):

Why, unless one is a Christian, should one be wanting to undertake such a re-reading? Indeed, in Trible’s case, unless one is a conservative Christian who believes the text to be the word of God? If one is a fundamentalist Christian who



believes the text to be inspired, then one sees why the text is alone to be interpreted in terms of the text. But if one is not fundamentalist (and not simply working as a literary critic) then there are questions which need to be brought to the text. What authority could, for example, the text of the creation story possibly have post-Darwin?

Once one accepts some form of Scripture's authority, Hampson contends, one assumes that Christianity in some sense is true. She perceives that, once one adopts a basically critical stance toward Scripture, such an assumption is no longer warranted. Hence, Hampson adopts what she calls a "post-Christian position" (1990: 41; 1996).

### ***1.2.1.3 Reformist Feminism***

As mentioned, the major difference between radical and reformist feminist scholars is that the former reject the Bible and the Judeo-Christian tradition, whereas the latter opt to stay within the Christian tradition and to reform it from within. Such reformist efforts include the use of gender-inclusive language, the re-interpretation of biblical texts, and various other means. Feminists differ with regard to the specific methodologies they employ. As Margaret Farley (1985: 44) states, "There is pluralism within feminism as in any other rich and comprehensive interpretation of humanity and the world." She lists, however, as shared principles the notions of equality, equitable sharing, and mutuality.

Also, while methods differ, feminists do share in common the conviction that the text should be read from their feminist perspective, and that traditional interpretation is patriarchal and in need of revision. Ruether (1985: 117), in her method of correlation, identifies this problem of "the patriarchal social order of men over women, masters over

slaves, king (or queen) over subjects, nobility over peasants itself [as] seen [to be] reflecting the cosmic and heavenly order.” Ruether, then, advocates a prophetic critique of the patriarchal elements in Scripture.

Similarly, Sakenfeld (1985: 56) writes, “Recognizing the patriarchy of biblical materials, Christian feminists approach the text with at least three different emphases:

1. Looking to texts about women to counteract famous texts used ‘against’ women.

2. Looking to the Bible generally (not particularly to texts about women) for a theological perspective offering a critique of patriarchy (some may call this a ‘liberation perspective’).

3. Looking to texts about women to learn from the intersection of history and stories of ancient and modern women living in patriarchal cultures.

. . . Feminist interpretation moves back and forth among these options.”

This hermeneutical program involves “decoding” a biblical text (i.e., removing the patriarchal bias inherent in Scripture) and subsequent “recoding” in keeping with their feminist outlook. Often historical criticism is used, while at other times reformist feminists employ literary criticism of the Bible. A representative work edited by Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, and Marie-Theres Wacker (1998: 63–82) discusses as methods of feminist exegesis the following: with regard to historical criticism, feminists employ textual criticism and translation, methods in the history of origins, form and genre criticism, and history of tradition. Literary methods include textual linguistics, the study of narrative guided by structuralism, literary criticism, reader-response criticism, and semiotics. These authors also discuss depth psychology and social-historical approaches.

The other significant common ground between proponents of this approach is that they do not hold to the view that Scripture is inerrant and authoritative, though the Bible does serve as a starting point for theological formulation and reflection.

In an important essay, written in 1985, the American feminist Carolyn Osiek proposed a division of reformist feminism into two groups: revisionists (theorists who endeavor to remove the underlying patriarchal bias of biblical texts; e.g., Phyllis Trible); and liberationists (political activists emphasizing women's need for justice and liberation from oppression and using the biblical text as a springboard for such teaching; e.g., Letty Russell, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Rosemary Radford Ruether). Osiek also deals with a third group she calls "loyalists," more commonly known as egalitarians or biblical feminists.

These twentieth-century feminists built on early precursors and developed more complex and sophisticated systems of feminist interpretation. One major representative of Phyllis Trible, a revisionist reformist feminist, used rhetorical criticism in examining key biblical texts for women. Her major work, written in 1978, is *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. In her exegesis of the Hebrew texts she translates "adam" as "earth-creature" formed out of "adamah," earth, rather than "Adam," man. Trible believes that Genesis 1:26–27 indicates that humankind was created as "two creatures, one male and one female" (1978: 18). She notes that in Genesis 2:22–23 the two are called "ish" and "ishah" respectively. According to Trible, the creation narrative reveals that man and woman equally share in sin and punishment and thus sustain a complementarian-cooperative relationship.

In 1984, Tribble published the influential *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, in which she treats the stories of four women in the Hebrew Scriptures who were subjected to terror (Hagar), rape (Tamar), murder (Jephthah's unnamed daughter), and dismemberment at the hands of men (an unnamed woman). Rather than reject the Bible, Tribble advocates returning to the Scriptures in order to re-tell the stories of women who suffered abuse on behalf of the victims in order to "appropriate the past in a dialectic of redemption" (1988: 4) and to re-read them with a view toward understanding and appropriating the lessons they can teach women (1979: 74).

Letty Russell, professor of the practice of theology at Yale Divinity School, edited *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (1985), a feminist volume focusing primarily on literary approaches to Scripture. Ordained in the United Presbyterian Church USA, Russell served as a pastor and educator. Russell had edited *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible* in 1976 on behalf of a small Task Force on Sexism in the Bible. That volume had been prepared in the conviction that the message of the Bible needs to be liberated from sexist interpretation.

In her introduction to *The Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Russell, a liberationist reformist feminist, claimed that Scripture had been held captive by patriarchal, sexist interpretation and was in need of liberation. "Feminist and liberation theologians," on the other hand, according to Russell (1985: 12), read "the Bible from the perspective of the oppressed, [and] they note the bias in all biblical interpretation and call for clear advocacy of those who are in the greatest need of God's mercy and help: the dominated victims of society."

Rather than rejecting Scripture outright because of its patriarchal perspective, Russell continues to look to the Bible for its general message of liberation, citing the story of Israel's redemption from slavery in Egypt as well as God's liberative action in the person of Jesus Christ (1985: 17). Citing Katharine Sakenfeld, Russell asks, "How can feminists use the Bible, if at all? What approach to the Bible is appropriate for feminists who locate themselves within the Christian community? How does the Bible serve as a resource for Christian feminists?" (1985: 11). Liberation, thus, is Russell's interpretive key in her reading of Scripture. While she does not reject the Bible as the normative source of her theology, she does reject many of its teachings as well as its overall patriarchal cultural context.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, another liberationist reformist feminist, in her widely influential *In Memory of Her* (1983), used the historical-critical method in order to reconstruct early Christian origins, particularly with regard to Jesus' treatment of women and the status of women in the early church. The questions Fiorenza and other early feminists addressed were: "What was the role of women in the life and ministry of Jesus, and what was women's status in the life of the early church?" This larger reconstruction, in turn, was subsequently used as a framework to interpret specific texts in keeping with their broad historical reconstruction of early Christianity.

Fiorenza proposed a fourfold "hermeneutic": (1) a hermeneutic of suspicion toward traditional interpretations of biblical texts owing to patriarchal bias and assumptions; (2) a hermeneutic of remembrance that uncovers women's agency in foundational Christian tradition; (3) a hermeneutic of proclamation that relates this reconstruction to the Christian community; and (4) a hermeneutic of imagination that

expresses feminism in ritual, prayer, hymns, banners, and art. In Fiorenza's work, Jesus was shown to stand in judgment over today's marginalization of women. According to Fiorenza, female subordination is not part of the original gospel but a result of Christianity's accommodation to Greco-Roman culture.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, another liberationist reformist feminist, in her earlier work sought to address Mary Daly's criticisms of reformist feminism, the main criticism being its exclusive nature (see Kassian 1992: 233–37 and the following discussion). In contrast to Daly, Ruether viewed feminism as part of a general movement for the liberation of all those who are subject to oppression, male as well as female, and continued to be committed to Christianity and “biblical religion.”

In her works *Mary, the Feminine Face of the Church* (1979) and *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983), Ruether set out to “reclaim” the biblical narrative regarding Mary from the patriarchal mythology of Christian tradition, where Mary was a passive victim without any say in her own destiny. Mary is a model of discipleship, whose faith is akin to that of Abraham and courage of self-giving which reflects that of Christ. The Magnificat reflects the theme of social justice, where liberation theology and feminism meet (1979: 32–34).

With the publication of her seminal work *Womanguides* in 1985, however, Ruether took a more radical turn. In her introduction to this volume, Ruether stated unequivocally, “Feminist theology cannot be done from the existing base of the Bible” (1985: ix). Rather, reading between the lines of patriarchal biblical texts should be supplemented by reading extra-canonical texts. Nothing less than new texts, a new canon, and a new church are required as women “reconstruct meaning” for themselves by

reading past writings and by creating new stories that are revelatory as well in that they resonate with their experience.

#### ***1.2.1.4 The New Feminism and Its Precursors***

In the early years of modern feminism scholars primarily utilized historical or sociological approaches, probing into the most likely orientation of Jesus' followers and the role of women in that movement. Many (though not all) reformist feminist scholars, whether revisionist or liberationist (or both), drew on some form of the historical-critical method, such as redaction criticism (whose goal is to determine the special interests and emphases of a given biblical writer), with the primary purpose of determining *historically* whether Jesus was patriarchal or egalitarian, or what was his approach to women in relation to first-century Judaism and the Greco-Roman world.

At the same time, some feminist scholars followed primarily a literary or narrative approach to scriptural interpretation, bringing their feminist outlook to the text in an effort to *re-read* Scripture in light of their concerns and interests. This method is already found in the work of precursors such as the Old Testament scholar Phyllis Trible, especially in her influential contribution *Texts of Terror*. It can also be seen in the 1983 issue of the journal *Semeia*. The most recent expression of this literary approach is located in the multi-volume *Feminist Companion* edited by Amy-Jill Levine, where the term "feminist" encompasses all types of feminism without distinguishing between radical and reformist approaches or further subtypes. I will provide a brief and general description of this series in more detail in Chapter 2.

The journal *Semeia*, published by the Society of Biblical Literature, devoted an entire issue (Volume 28, 1983), to the Bible and feminist hermeneutics from a literary vantage point. This is a sign of the increasing attention given to feminist interpretation in the larger world of scholarship and to literary approaches within feminist interpretation as a whole. The volume, edited by Mary Ann Tolbert, gathers several papers originally presented at the 1981 meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) in Dallas.

The introductory essay by the editor, Mary Ann Tolbert, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2, is devoted to a discussion of “the problem of the Bible and feminist hermeneutics.” Tolbert is a “reformist feminist” who is committed to operating within the framework of the Christian tradition and expresses a “bias in favor of the Bible” (though she is prepared to dismiss it if necessary; 1983: 114).

Other essays relevant for the present dissertation deal with women in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. The first of these, by Janice Capel Anderson, engages in a “revisionist rereading” of Matthew’s Gospel (putting her in the “reformist revisionist” category). The second essay, by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, seeks to isolate texts featuring women in Mark’s Gospel that possess liberative potential for women (emphasizing the feminist agenda of women’s liberation).

Another representative work is the two-volume *Searching the Scriptures* (1994). The first volume contains essays on the history of feminist interpretation in different socio-historical locations as well as several methodological contributions, including chapters on “Historical-Critical Methods,” “Literary-Critical Methods,” “Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods,” and “Reconstruction of Women’s Early



Christian History.” The second volume features an introductory essay, “Transgressing Canonical Boundaries,” as well as commentaries on biblical and non-biblical books, including (in this order) the Gospels of Mark, John, Matthew, and Luke.

The most recent comprehensive literary work of feminist scholarship is the multi-volume *Feminist Companion*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine of Vanderbilt University. This series spans the entire New Testament, assembling what the editor judges to be the most important feminist scholarly contributions of the past couple decades. Included are several essays first printed in *Semeia* 28 (1983) as well as those produced by participants in the annual meetings of the SBL and AAR. The volumes span the whole range from text-oriented to revisionist and even radical. Rather than viewing this diversity as a liability, the editor revels in the multiplicity of viewpoints represented in these volumes. In Chapter 2 I will review the relevant essays on Jesus’ stance toward women in the Gospels and subject them to an evaluation. In my survey of the development of the feminist movement I turn now to a discussion of the emergence of egalitarianism.

### 1.2.2 Egalitarianism

The 1970s saw the birth of so-called biblical feminism, a movement later termed “egalitarianism” owing to its emphasis on the full equality of men and women while maintaining a professed commitment to scriptural inspiration and authority. This movement represents an effort within evangelicalism to revisit the traditional interpretation of gender passages in the Bible, including Jesus’ perspective on women, in order to align it with a notion of gender equality similar to that which had gained widespread acceptance in the larger culture. Within an inerrantist framework, this

movement considered itself to be both biblical and feminist. The following discussion refers mainly to egalitarian views on Scripture in general, yet it will provide a helpful frame of reference for the study of Jesus' view on women as seen by egalitarians.

While feminists rallied around the notion of *liberation from oppression*, egalitarians adopted *equality* as their central tenet. The teaching of Galatians 3:28 that in Christ “there is neither male nor female” served as the key biblical text by which all other teachings of Scripture are to be measured. The following survey of the history of the egalitarian movement and some of its major proponents will provide the backdrop against which the hermeneutics underlying the egalitarian literature on the subject of Jesus’ approach to women will be evaluated in Chapter 3.

#### ***1.2.2.1 The First Wave of Egalitarian Works: The 1970s***

The following four major works were at the forefront of this movement: *All We’re Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women’s Liberation* by Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty (1974); *Man as Male and Female* by Paul Jewett (1975); *Women, Men & the Bible* by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott (1977); and *In Search of God’s Ideal Woman* by Dorothy Pape (1978). Scanzoni and Hardesty maintained that “equality and subordination are contradictions” (1974: 110). Jewett (1975: 71) echoed this concern when he posed the question, “But how can one defend a sexual hierarchy whereby men are over women . . . without supposing that the half of the human race which exercises authority is superior in some way to the half which submits?” According to Jewett, any interpretation of Scripture that did not align with “Paul’s fundamental statement of Christian liberty” (cf. Gal. 3:28) was “incongruous” with the Bible, for it “breaks the analogy of faith” (1975:

134). Mollenkott contended that the hierarchical model is unhealthy and carnal. Pape (1978: 173) asserted that hierarchical roles indicate superiority and inferiority.

Scanzoni and Hardesty in particular anticipate many standard egalitarian exegetical arguments of the following decades in their 1974 volume. Their quest is for the “liberated Christian woman” who is “free to know herself, be herself, and develop herself in her own special way” (1974: 12). The goal of women’s liberation is defined as women’s attainment of full humanity (1974: 206), which also entails women’s right to privacy and choice (thus supporting the 1973 Supreme Court ruling legalizing abortion in the US, 1974: 143). The authors deny the eternal subordination of the Son, saying that John 10:30 and 14:9 balance 14:28 and that all these passages relate solely to Jesus’ earthly ministry (1974: 22). According to Scanzoni and Hardesty, Ephesians 5:21–33 teaches the mutual submission of husband and wife, since “[i]n Christ there is no chain of command but a community founded and formed by self-giving love” (1974: 22; see also 1974: 99). Paul’s teaching on male-female interdependence in 1 Corinthians 11:11–12 is seen to override 1 Corinthians 11:8–9; 1 Corinthians 11 is superseded by Galatians 3:28 (1974: 28).

With regard to the woman being called a “helper” in Genesis 2:18, Scanzoni and Hardesty note that God is called a “helper” in Psalms 121:1–2 and 146:3, 5; they say that because it is impossible to think of God as subordinate to man, in the case of the woman, too, “helper” cannot convey the notion of subordination (1974: 26). The conventional argument that the man’s creation prior to the woman implies his headship is said to be a “traditional rabbinic (and one might add ‘Christian’) understanding that is not supported by the text” (1 Tim. 2:13 is set aside; 1974: 28). The reference to man created as male

and female in Genesis 1 precludes any notion of female subordination in Genesis 2 (1974: 28–30). The term *kephalē* means “source,” not “head” (1974: 30–32, 100). Male rule is a consequence of the Fall (1974: 32–36). Jesus is “woman’s best friend” (1974: 54–59), and the early church witnessed women’s “full participation” (1974: 60).

The authors note that Lydia was the first European convert (Acts 16:14–15); 10 out of 29 persons greeted in Romans 16 are women; and there were women Old Testament prophets, New Testament teachers (especially Priscilla; Acts 18:24ff), and administrators (especially Phoebe). Scanzoni and Hardesty claim that 1 Timothy 5:1–2 refers, not merely to older women, but to women elders, on the grounds that Paul here talks about “established orders of ministry.” Junia was a female apostle, taking the term in a technical sense (Rom. 16:7). In interpreting 1 Timothy 2:12, *authentēin* is viewed to have a negative connotation (i.e., “interrupt,” “domineer”). According to Scanzoni and Hardesty, Paul’s concern in 1 Timothy 2:12 is to preserve the “cultural status quo” of male dominance in the church (1974: 71). However, the authors claim that the conservatism of 1 Timothy 2:12 is transcended by the radical egalitarianism of the programmatic pronouncement of Galatians 3:28 (1974: 71–72). To refuse women ordination is seen to quench and grieve the Holy Spirit (1974: 180).

In her foreword to Paul Jewett’s *Man as Male and Female*, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott notes that Jewett was “the first evangelical theologian to face squarely the fact that if a woman must of necessity be subordinate, she must of necessity be inferior” (1975: 8). Mollenkott contends that “[c]rucial to [Jewett’s] entire argument is the point that Christians today should not strive to maintain the status quo reflected in the first-century church as though that example were meant to establish the norm for all times and

all places. Rather, Christians today should seek to implement the liberating principles of the New Testament in order to achieve the New Testament ideal of a redeemed humanity in Christ” (1975: 11). Any church that would seek to keep women in submission today, Mollenkott maintains, would also need to reinstitute slavery. The “ideal to implement” is rather the “liberating vision of Galatians 3:28” (1975: 12).

According to Jewett, to argue for the priority of the man is also to argue for his superiority (1975: 14). Jewett takes as his starting point Genesis 1:26–27, which affirms that man was created in God’s image as male and female (hence the title of his book). From this Jewett turns to an examination of Pauline texts such as 1 Corinthians 11:2–16; Ephesians 5:22–33 and the parallel passage Colossians 3:18–19; 1 Corinthians 14:34–35; and 1 Timothy 2:11–15. This is followed by a survey of the teaching of Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Barth on the subject as well as a sketch of women in the Old Testament and Judaism and of Jesus and women. After this Jewett returns to evaluate Paul’s teaching on women. He notes that Paul consistently refers to Genesis 2 rather than Genesis 1 and claims that Paul is here dependent on “incorrect” rabbinic teaching (1975: 119; similar to Scanzoni and Hardesty’s argument). Jewett argues that, on the contrary, if temporal sequence conveys superiority, woman should be considered superior to man because she was created last, since clearly creation moved from inanimate creation to animals to humans (1975: 126–27). Yet despite following “incorrect” rabbinic teaching, Paul possessed “remarkable insights for a former Jewish rabbi” in that he wrote what Jewett refers to as the “Magna Carta of Humanity” in Galatians 3:28 (1975: 142). In conclusion Jewett, like Scanzoni and Hardesty, calls for the ordination of women (1975: 170).

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott comes from a Plymouth Brethren background, where women were not permitted to preach, or to pray aloud, or even to ask questions at the Bible readings (Mollenkott 1980: 22). In the introduction to the revised edition of her 1977 work, which appeared in 1988, she states that she is committed to “human mutuality and equal partnership out of respect for God’s image in us all” (1988: vii; cf. the survey in Kassian 1992: 237–39). She characterizes her own volume as an “easy-to-comprehend introduction to some of the most basic concerns of Christian feminism” (1988: viii). Her prime target is “Christian patriarchalism” (1988: viii). In 1978, she co-wrote a book with Letha Scanzoni entitled *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* in order to assuage the fear that feminism might lead to the “homosexualization” of society. In 1983, she expanded chapter 3 of the present volume in *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female*. In 1987, she developed the concept of all people of faith as a corporately “Christed” new humanity in *Godding: The Bible and Human Responsibility*.

At the very outset of her book, *Women, Men and the Bible*, Mollenkott affirms the notion of “mutual submission” (1988: 13–18). She maintains that “health and justice demand that submission must be mutual, not unilateral” (1988: x). The Bible must be the central force, and Jesus the major standard (1988: 1). According to Mollenkott, extremists on either side argue for male or female superiority; the middle road is egalitarianism. Chapter 1 is entitled “The Christian Way of Relating” and advocates mutual submission. Chapter 2, called “The Patriarchal Way of Relating,” provides a survey of popular literature on womanhood in Mollenkott’s day. Chapter 3, “Is God Masculine?” contends that God is not male and that the first and second persons of the Trinity are associated with both male and female. Mollenkott contends that Jesus

“pictured God as a woman” in the parable of the woman and the lost coin in Luke 15 (1988: 45). For this reason she advocates the use of inclusive language with reference to God. In Chapter 4, Mollenkott calls for “freedom from (gender-related) stereotypes.”

Chapter 5 deals with “Pauline contradictions and biblical inspiration.” Mollenkott identifies as the major problem the Bible’s prevailing “patriarchal assumptions,” with the “notable exceptions” of Jesus’ behavior, the ministry of certain women in the early church, “many passages” concerning mutual submission, and several prophetic passages regarding the regenerative effects of the gospel. “For Bible believers [i.e. egalitarians] the problem is that the apostle Paul seems to contradict his own teachings and behavior concerning women, apparently because of inner conflicts between the training he had received and the liberating insights of the gospel” (1988: 78–79). In 1 Corinthians 11:8–12, “Paul seems to remember [that God is the creator of both Adam and Eve] and reverse[s] his own argument right in midstream” (1988: 80). She asserts that nothing in the text of Genesis 2 indicates female submission (1988: 81). Genesis 2 is “poetic narrative,” and the sequence of creation is not to be taken literally. Mollenkott insists that it is “not detrimental to the authority of Scripture” to recognize that some of Paul’s arguments “reflect his human limitations” (1988: 85). In any case, Paul “rises above these rationalizations [*sic*] in Galatians 3:28” (1988: 86).

Chapter 6 bears the heading “Learning to Interpret Accurately.” In this chapter, Mollenkott sets forth the by-now-familiar thesis that the term *kephalē* in Paul does not denote headship but refers to “source or origin,” like the “head of a stream” (1988: 92). Passages should be interpreted in context, and the literal meaning sought (1988: 92–93; this is different from how she approached Genesis 2, see preceding discussion). On page

98, Mollenkott contends that the question is not whether the Bible is inspired but in what way this is the case. Chapter 7 is entitled “Bible Doctrines and Human Equality.” In this chapter, Mollenkott maintains that submission is the result of the Fall, and there is “no hint of dominance and submission” prior to Genesis 3. Her book concludes with a call to “resist the patriarchal principle of dominance and submission” as new creatures in Christ (1988: 116).

Dorothy Pape’s volume is a popularly written work by a missionary wife and mother. It is organized in three parts, women in the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles. In the introduction Pape notes that Proverbs 31 is often seen as depicting “God’s ideal woman” and asks whether this is really the final word on the subject. In her discussion of the Gospels, Pape says that Jesus epitomizes Galatians 3:28. He did not call a woman among the twelve because to call a single woman would have led to unsavory suspicions and married women were busy with their families (1978: 25). Pape also highlights Jesus’ courtesy to women, confidence in women, and compassion for women.

In the book of Acts, Pape finds women functioning as full members of the church. They joined in prayer meetings (1:14), served as Spirit-filled prophets (2:15–18), helped establish and support local churches (Lydia, 16:40), performed acts of charity (9:39, 41), received miraculous healing (16:18), and were held responsible for their sin (5:1–10). Studying the Epistles turned out to be a “much less pleasant” task for her than studying Jesus and the early church (1978: 103). For there are in Paul “a few restrictive instructions for female believers, suggestive of an inferior status.” Pape discusses 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 before dealing with 1 Timothy 2:11–14 under the heading, “Women’s Church Role: Mute Benchwarmer?” She thus



acknowledges that there are in Paul's teaching certain restrictions placed on women, but only expresses discomfort with these without sustained argument.

### ***1.2.2.2 The Polarization of Evangelicalism into Complementarianism and Egalitarianism: The 1980s and 1990s***

The 1980s witnessed the first conservative responses to biblical feminism (such as Foh 1979; Hurley 1981), plus further works advocating the egalitarian viewpoint (e.g., Evans 1983; Hayter 1987), as well as the establishment of two North American organizations promoting egalitarianism and complementarianism respectively: Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) and The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW; for a survey of biblical feminism see Kassian 1992: 205–17). Representative works from these two camps are *Women, Authority & the Bible* (edited by Alvera Mickelsen; 1986), as well as now *Discovering Biblical Equality* (edited by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis; 2004), and *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* (edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem; 1991). The work by Mickelsen includes essays on biblical authority and feminism; the meaning of *kephalē* in the New Testament; and exegetical chapters on 1 Corinthians; Galatians 3:28; and 1 Timothy 2:12, plus thoughts on contemporary implications. Piper and Grudem's work covers much of the same territory from a complementarian perspective yet is even more comprehensive. *Discovering Biblical Equality* follows the exact same format as the work by Piper and Grudem and provides a chapter-by-chapter egalitarian response.

Both positions received more thorough exegetical and theological scrutiny in the 1990s. In 1995, two books appeared with identical titles, *Women in the Church*, written

by Stanley Grenz from an egalitarian perspective and the other from a complementarian viewpoint edited by Andreas Köstenberger and others. While Grenz's work surveys the entire span of biblical history in order to demonstrate egalitarianism being taught throughout Scripture, the work by Köstenberger focuses exclusively on one major passage in the debate, that is, 1 Timothy 2:9–15. Chapters are devoted to the historical background, the genre, Greek word study and syntax, exegesis, hermeneutics, and world view in relation to this passage.

In Köstenberger's book, Steven Baugh concludes in his chapter on the historical background of 1 Timothy 2 that Ephesus was not a feminist society. David Gordon contends that the Pastorals contain norms that are permanently valid. Baldwin shows that there is not a single reference where the word *authentein* means "domineer." Köstenberger shows on the grounds of Greek syntax that the term should be seen to convey the positive notion of exercise (not merely usurping) authority. After an exegetical chapter by Thomas Schreiner, which integrates the above findings into an exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15, Robert Yarbrough discusses the hermeneutical issues raised by the interpretation of this passage.

According to Yarbrough, there are three primary reasons why the surface meaning of 1 Timothy 2:12 is rejected by egalitarians: (1) Western culture's liberalized views of women; (2) the alleged meaning of Galatians 3:28; and (3) an alleged tie between women's subordination and slavery. Yarbrough shows how major interpreters in recent years (such as Krister Stendahl) were guided not primarily by biblical exegesis but by questions in the general culture. In some cases (e.g., Kevin Giles) interpreters even reject the Bible's authority in matters of science or social relations. Harold O. J. Brown, finally,

contends that the rejection of the biblical teaching on gender roles is a function of humanity's rebellion against its Creator.

Grenz's book pursues to demonstrate the thesis that "historical, biblical and theological considerations converge not only to allow but indeed to insist that women serve as full partners with men in all dimensions of the church's life and ministry" (1995: 16). This thesis is developed in seven chapters: (1) Women in the Church (contemporary American denominations); (2) Women in Church History; (3) Women in the Faith Community (Old Testament, Gospels, Acts); (4) Women in the Writings of Paul; (5) Women in Creation; (6) Women in the Church and the Priesthood; and (7) Women in the Ordained Ministry. According to Grenz, those who "categorically deny women the opportunity to obey the Spirit" are "acting unjustly toward women" and are "standing in opposition to the work of the sovereign Holy Spirit" (1995: 16).

In the first chapter, Grenz's collaborator Denise Muir Kjesbo attempts to show that church history reflects a pattern moving from "charismatic ministry" (with full female participation) to institutionalization (characterized by a marginalization of women). In his survey of the Old Testament data, Grenz points to the leadership of Miriam, Deborah's role as a judge, and Huldah's prophetic office as examples of authoritative functions of women in Old Testament history. Grenz neglects to point out that all Old Testament priests were male.

In his survey of the New Testament data, Grenz focuses on Galatians 3:28, "Paul's Charter of Equality," as his theological center. He claims that "[o]ur position in Christ carries us beyond creation . . . by lifting creation to God's redemptive intent" (1995: 105). Priscilla is cited as a "clear indication of authoritative teaching by a woman

in the church” (1995: 83), and the New Testament “nowhere directly prohibits the appointment of women to [the] office [of elder]” (1995: 90). Regarding 1 Timothy 2:12, Grenz claims that *authentain* constitutes an “unusual term that generally carried negative connotations” and addresses a circumstance where “unlearned women are usurping authority” (1995: 133–34).

In the final analysis, Grenz concludes that “a biblical understanding of creation, the community of Christ and the ordained offices all lead to the conclusion that women ought to be full participants with men in all dimensions of church life and ministry” (1995: 143). Grenz recasts the relationships of the persons of the Trinity (following Pannenberg) as one of mutual dependence, so that the “Father is dependent on the Son,” not merely for his Fatherhood but even “for his deity” (1995: 154). He also alleges that “complementarians . . . conclude that in the final analysis men more completely reflect the divine image than do women” (1995: 169).

Throughout the entire period (1970s through the present), the hermeneutical dimension of this debate has been explored. An attempt to discern some of the hermeneutical issues at work in the interpretation of New Testament gender passages is the 1993 article by Andreas Köstenberger, who identifies six major hermeneutical fallacies (whether committed by egalitarians or complementarians): underestimating the power of presuppositions (such as claiming not to have any presuppositions); lack of balance in hermeneutical methodology (e.g., background considerations overriding contextual exegesis); underrating the importance of the use of the Old Testament in the New (such as 1 Tim. 2:13 not being given adequate weight in interpreting 1 Tim. 2:12); the improper use of background data (e.g., citing women’s lack of education in the

ancient world as the reason for Paul's command in 1 Tim. 2:12); an arbitrary distinction between "paradigm passages" and "passages with limited application" (e.g., pitting Gal. 3:28 against 1 Tim. 2:12); and isolationist exegesis (e.g., setting off Jesus over against Paul, or the earlier against the later Paul).

Perhaps the most concerted attempt to date to address the complex hermeneutical questions involved in this regard has been by William Webb in his book *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals* (2001). Webb argues that discerning the "redemptive movement of the Spirit" (coining a new phrase) is critical in determining biblical teaching on gender roles. While scriptural prohibitions of homosexuality are consistent and thus continue to apply today, and slavery moves from acceptable to unacceptable, women's roles, according to Webb, move from hierarchical to moderately egalitarian, so that the "redemptive movement of the Spirit" is in an egalitarian direction.

### 1.2.3 Complementarianism

Though the study of complementarianism is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the emergence of complementarianism as already briefly sketched above provides the counterpoint to the emergence of egalitarian thought and also represents the perspective from which the author evaluates the feminist and egalitarian works in this dissertation. As discussed, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the development of egalitarianism and complementarianism as two opposite movements within the evangelical world. Both claimed an inerrantist, high view of Scripture and were committed to the authority of Scripture and its application to Christians' lives. Egalitarianism held that *equality* in all things including roles is the pervasive principle that emerges in the New Testament and

that ought to define male-female relationships in the church today. Complementarians, on the other hand, contended that male-female equality in *personhood* and value must be placed within the larger framework of *male-female distinctions in role*.

Essentially, complementarians look to New Testament passages that teach that male headship and female submission are grounded in the created order. When Paul, for example, states that he does not permit women to teach or have authority over men in the church (1 Tim. 2:12), he cites as warrant and scriptural support not merely the corruption of the created order in the Fall of humanity (1 Tim. 2:14), but the created order itself (1 Tim. 2:13). The apostle, for his part, takes the woman's creation from the man and for the man (1 Cor. 11:8-9) as indication of God's purposes for male-female roles in the Church as well as in the home, involving, respectively, male headship and female submission.

A second plank in the complementarian hermeneutic is the scriptural teaching on the husband being the head of the household and men's authority over the church as God's household (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:15; cf. 1 Tim. 3:2). Essentially, Paul's teaching on men's authority in the church is seen as the logical extension of the Old Testament teaching on the divinely instituted pattern for marriage and the home. Hence, gender role distinctions, with implications for male authority and leadership, are found not only in a few isolated passages, but rather are seen to be grounded in the created order and the subsequent sweep of biblical history and teaching.

Complementarians, then, believe that Scripture teaches genuine gender equality in terms of personal worth and dignity before God in Christ and desire to see male-female partnership and mutuality in marriage and the church. Nevertheless, they hold that while "there is no longer male or female" as far as salvation in Christ is concerned—all are

saved by grace through faith regardless of gender—the created order is not superseded by redemption in Christ. The New Testament writers still command even believers to observe the pattern of wifely submission and male authority, and distinctions in role are maintained in the church (e.g., Eph. 5:21–33; Col. 3:18–19; 1 Pet. 3:1–7).

After this broad-based survey of the history of recent interpretation with regard to women's roles generally in the church, I will now present a discussion on the nature of hermeneutics which will provide the basis on which to evaluate the feminist and egalitarian literature specifically on Jesus' approach to women. After this discussion of the nature of hermeneutics, a brief inductive study of all the relevant New Testament passages concerning Jesus' approach to women will be conducted, which will serve as the general frame of reference for the evaluation of feminist and egalitarian literature in Chapters 2 and 3.

### **1.3 The Nature of Hermeneutics**

Since proper hermeneutics is foundational to interpretation, and hence also essential for the construction of sound theology, the present investigation seeks to unearth the theological method, including the hermeneutical method, of various schools of interpretation with regard to Jesus' approach to women. As Simon Maimela and Adrio König (1998: 2) contend in the introduction to their edited volume *Initiation into Theology*, “[O]ne can only thoroughly understand a specific type of theology if one comes to grips with its hermeneutic.”

The discussion of the nature of hermeneutics will commence with a brief sketch of the history of interpretation. The academic sphere of hermeneutical theory is one in

which much debate and development have occurred. Since the underlying philosophy of the hermeneutical approach is paramount in determining meaning in a text, one must be clear on the various issues. This will be followed by treatments of first, feminist hermeneutics, and next, conservative evangelical hermeneutics. The identification of the tenets of each is essential for the accurate analysis of the feminist hermeneutical approaches to Jesus and women from the perspective of the conservative evangelical hermeneutical approach.

A focus on the special hermeneutical issues on which the critique in this dissertation hinges will conclude this section. The difficulty of reconstructing history and the resulting decision to relativize it or reconstruct it with confidence is of critical importance. The movement from the author to the reader in the understanding of hermeneutical theory and the related determination of the author's intention are also decisive. Issues related to canonicity will also be dealt with as part of the process of validating the document under consideration (the biblical Gospels) as a legitimate source for study. These discussions all provide this introduction to the challenges to be encountered while interacting with the literature on Jesus and women from the various viewpoints.

### 1.3.1 A Brief Historical Sketch of Hermeneutics

Surveying the history of biblical interpretation over the first two millennia of the Christian church is a daunting task but a brief sketch of some of the major developments will be helpful in order to place the ensuing discussion into proper perspective and to provide context for the hermeneutical evaluation of the hermeneutical literature on Jesus



and women (for a thorough survey see Chap. 2 in Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993). Dirkie Smit (1998: 275–317) divides the history into four major periods: the Early Church (1st–6th cent. A.D.); the Medieval Period (6th–15th cent.); the Reformation (15th–16th cent.); and the Modern Post-Enlightenment Period (17th–20th cent.).

To begin with, the early church involves even the writing of the New Testament which itself already constitutes interpretation, and the liturgy of the early church featured Christian sermons based on the Old Testament, which once again entailed hermeneutics. Jesus and his followers held to a high view of Scripture, including its inspiration. The first few centuries of the Christian era also saw the formation and recognition of the canon (culminating in Athanasius’s Easter Letter of A.D. 367) and the ongoing search for the central message of the Bible. In this context Irenaeus asserted the importance of the apostolic tradition, while Tertullian located the *regula fidei* (“the rule of faith”) in the institutional church.

In the early centuries, the Bible was interpreted for two primary reasons: for moral instruction and in order to develop authoritative doctrine and to refute false teaching. There were two major schools of interpretation in the early church: the allegorical school of Alexandria, Egypt (e.g., Clement, Origen) and the literal school of Antioch (modern Turkey; e.g., John Chrysostom, Theodore Mopsuestia). An attempt at synthesis was made by Augustine. In the Middle Ages, the Bible was read primarily in cathedral schools and monasteries. The predominant approach to Scripture utilized a fourfold meaning: literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical.

The Reformation period originated in the seedbed of the Renaissance, the period of rebirth of learning calling for a return to the sources of classical civilization (*ad fontes*,

“back to the sources”). This mindset was applied also to the biblical documents and issued in Erasmus’ edition of the Greek New Testament in 1516 and the publication of Martin Luther’s German translation of the Bible in 1522. The Reformation, with its rallying cry *sola Scriptura* (“Scripture alone”) and its emphasis on the importance of the Word in salvation, crystallized the conflict between Scripture and church tradition in the interpretation of the Bible. For Luther, the hermeneutical key for interpreting Scripture was Christ (*was Christum treibet*, “that which promotes Christ”). At the same time, there were certain differences between the Reformers. Lutherans focused on justification by grace alone, while Calvinists stressed that the whole Word is the revelation of the triune God. A crucial event in the history of hermeneutics of that period was Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press, which led to the proliferation of Scripture and the reading of the Bible by a much larger number of people than had previously been the case.

The Enlightenment, which was characterized by a rationalistic mindset, historical consciousness, and secularization, revolutionized the study of Scripture in several ways. Key figures in the early Enlightenment period were Descartes, who introduced epistemological doubt into modern thought with his maxim *cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”), and Kant, who separated reality from human knowing, maintaining that religious knowledge is possible only through experience. The Enlightenment saw a quest to know the “real story” behind the documents, with scholars seeking to determine who Jesus “really” was and what early Christians “really” believed. People began to study the Bible like any other book. A gap opened between “Israelite religion” and the Old Testament. Increasingly, the ideas of the unity of the Bible and of special revelation were

jettisoned. The Enlightenment also witnessed an escalating conflict between the university and the church in the way the Bible was read.

Overall, the development of hermeneutics in the Enlightenment period led to the following realizations: (1) historical study alone is not enough; (2) completely objective, neutral, and scientific study is impossible; and (3) study of Scripture must move beyond historical and literary analysis to theological and religious understanding. After the introduction of epistemological doubt by René Descartes, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud, each in their own way, taught the importance of being aware of interpreters' interests, power, and the subconscious and how these affect biblical interpretation.

More recent hermeneutical thought has built on these insights. The most important development in twentieth-century interpretation is the emergence of biblical criticism. One also detects a movement from author to reader, to the extent that some contend that reading actually produces meaning. The question naturally arises as to whether or not all readings are equally valid, as postmodernism maintains. Deconstructionism goes even farther and challenges the notion of meaning in communication altogether. More positively, those who differentiate between more or less accurate readings stress the importance of reading competency and responsibility.

### 1.3.2 Feminist Hermeneutics

The present dissertation focuses specifically on an evaluation of feminist hermeneutics and scholarship on Jesus. For this reason it will be important to provide also a brief introduction to general feminist hermeneutics at this juncture. The history of feminism

has already been surveyed in the preceding discussion. At this point it may be added that the term “feminism” is viewed by some as a liberation movement by *white* North American and European women. For this reason black American women have begun using the term “womanist” (after Alice Walker 1983: xi–xii). In general, feminist and womanist hermeneutics are concerned with how women self-consciously read the Bible and direct questions to it from their own experience. Other feminist hermeneutical stances include *mujerista*, Asian, and Latin American.

As has been chronicled in some detail in the preceding discussion, the beginnings of this approach can be traced to Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *The Woman’s Bible* in 1895. Only in the 1960s and 1970s did the women’s liberation movement follow up on Stanton’s impetus. Seminal works include Letty Russell’s *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible* (1976) and Phyllis Trible’s *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978). Radical feminists, such as Mary Daly (1973) or Daphne Hampson (1990, 1996), view Scripture as irredeemably male-centered and thus reject its authoritative status and even Christianity altogether, looking for alternative sources for theology.

Others, commonly called reformist feminists, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983, 1985), use women’s experience as their starting point but consider as non-redemptive “[w]hatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women” (1985: 115). An effort is made to separate the Bible from its patriarchal cultural trappings in order to uncover God’s word for women. Liberation is identified as God’s consistent purpose for the oppressed, including women, and everything that “denies the intention of God for the liberation” of women is not authoritative (Russell 1985: 139). Feminists also

contend that the Bible has often served as an instrument of power, even domination, in the hands of men.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1983) is more overtly hermeneutical in her approach. She suggests that women not accept the Bible's authority unquestioningly but rather use a "hermeneutics of suspicion." This is to be followed by a "hermeneutics of revision" which seeks to identify texts that may be used to nurture subjugated women and to help them in their struggles for liberation. Fiorenza's major contribution consists in an effort to reconstruct early Christian history, in particular with regard to women's place in the life of Jesus and of the early church. To this end Fiorenza uses historical and sociological criticism. Her contribution will be the subject of study in Chapter 2.

Overall, reformist feminists "use one chief criterion to judge biblical texts for truth, adequacy, and coherence—or the lack thereof. That criterion is the alignment of such texts with the feminist critical principle of women's full and equal humanity (or in some cases, a view of female ascendancy). . . . reformists employ a variety of methods, including historical-critical, literary, anthropological, sociological, sociopolitical, narrative, and various combinations thereof" (Nordling 2005: 229).

Womanist hermeneutics is the effort by black American women to draw upon the history of slavery and racism in their quest for liberation. Williams (1993) identifies Hagar as a prototype of a slave woman. Owing to the differences in women's experiences, Denise Ackermann concludes that there can "be no single hermeneutic which is valid for all women" (1998: 356). She calls for "a continuous re-articulation of our interpretations as our different social and historical contexts change" (1998: 357).

In keeping with this, African women's hermeneutics accentuates the unique experience of African women. Oduyoye (1998: 359–71) discusses (1) the contextual interpretation of Bible, church, and African tradition; (2) community and motherhood agendas as the basis for interpretation; (3) interpretation including translation into African culture; and (4) no expectation of unanimity in interpretation. African women's theology contends that theology does not culminate in words but must take on flesh among people. The theological community in Africa is seen as multi-faith and multi-cultural.

Oduyoye (1998: 370) sums up the contribution of African women's hermeneutics as follows. "African women theologians join both womanists and feminists in the concern for justice and liberation. All dominating systems are named, analyzed and deconstructed. With the womanist, the African women lift up the factor of slavery, which we continue to experience as the economic injustice embodied in world trade, and in the class system of masters and servants, maids and mistresses. We experience, as do African-American women, the triple burden of being black, female and poor, and our own special fourth of being African."

African hermeneutics largely views truth as open, subject to reinterpretation and recontextualization, with interpretation moving in a never-ending hermeneutical circle. Any final meaning remains therefore elusive, human existence constitutes a mystery, and no final hermeneutical method is possible. In the African context, hermeneutics is the function of the community, not the individual. Hermeneutics makes us aware of our culture of understanding and engages our world view, that is, the way we attempt to find

meaning in our lives. “African hermeneutics comes naturally in the sense that most aspects of life are integrated into a harmonious unity” (du Toit 1998: 377).

African hermeneutics is part of Third-world hermeneutics. The process moves from life to text and from text to life. Our existential questions are brought to the text, but the text in turn informs the way in which we understand our experience. Third-world hermeneutics seeks to address the way in which countries with a background of colonialism and the presence of Christian missionaries deal with that history. African hermeneutics also overlaps with Black and Latin American hermeneutics. Black hermeneutics refers to three different contexts: (1) in South Africa, it focuses on its colonial history and apartheid; (2) in North America, it draws on the memory of slavery and its aftermath; and (3) in Africa at large, it is concerned with contextualization and the relation between the Bible and African cultures.

African hermeneutics is distinctive. Its text is African suffering and dependence. African hermeneutics is a hermeneutics of protest and reaction against its colonial history. An important phenomenon is the influence of African traditional religions and the African initiated churches in co-determining African Christianity and theological hermeneutics. The African quest is for finding one’s roots, getting connected with one’s ancestors. The criteria of African traditional religions are experience, revelation, Scripture, tradition, culture, and reason (du Toit 1998: 391). African initiated churches comprise about 7,000 groups of churches, including predominantly disadvantaged people from the black working class. The Bible is known in an oral way, not as a text.

There are different hermeneutical approaches by African theologians as far as sources for African theology are concerned. Old-guard theologians are concerned with

indigenizing Western Christian theology in African terms. The Old Testament in particular is used to develop a *Theologia Africana*. African traditional religions are seen as a *praeparatio evangelica*. New-guard theologians, on the other hand, reject the indigenization process and affirm African traditional values instead. Du Toit (1998: 396–97) calls for a “poly-methodological and multi-hermeneutical approach,” since “[n]o single hermeneutical or methodological approach seems to fit the African context.”

All of this is to say that women in all parts of the world and backgrounds have begun in recent decades to make attempts to engage the Scripture with regard to what they teach about women. I close this survey with a quote by Cherith Fee Nordling (2005: 228), who helpfully identifies a common set of assumptions from which most feminist biblical scholars operate:

(1) Language not only expresses the world but helps to shape it. (2) Women’s diminution has been aided and abetted by male-centered language, symbols, and structures. (3) The texts reflect the patriarchal, androcentric, and sometimes oppressive forms of hierarchy, which have prevailed in Christian and Hebrew cultures. (4) All interpretation is interested and must necessarily be critiqued according to whose interests are being served by existing systems; this critique generally leads to a re-examination of texts and tradition to offer alternative interpretations, or a revision of the texts, or an outright rejection of the biblical canon.

### 1.3.3 Conservative Evangelical Hermeneutics as Understood in the Present Dissertation



What, then, is hermeneutics as understood by the author of this present dissertation? This writer concurs entirely with the presentation in Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993 (summarized in Klein 1998: 319–35). If exegesis is the task of explaining the biblical text, hermeneutics is the theory behind explaining the meaning of the biblical text, the principles used to understand what a given passage means (Klein 1998: 319). All of us engage in this task in ordinary, everyday communication. The difficulty with which the interpreter of Scripture is confronted is the distance between the time the Bible was written and today in time, language, and culture. Methods are needed to help us bridge this distance, methods that are not merely arbitrary but fit the subject to be studied and suit not merely our own preferences or prejudices.

The following discussion will include a description of evangelical hermeneutics and the five major tasks of exegesis. Issues related to this approach will be investigated including the difficulty of attaining an accurate historical background, who is doing the interpreting, and understanding authorial intent in the determination of the meaning of the written record. It may be helpful to note at this point that this approach to hermeneutics cannot be fit into a postmodern classification in the sense that it does not see itself as one of a group of legitimate hermeneutical options (e.g., charismatic hermeneutic, ecological hermeneutic, etc.). Rather, the approach taken here is to determine meaning in a way that is not contingent on the life situation of the interpreter. Therefore it would be erroneous to give this hermeneutic the title “patriarchal hermeneutic,” since the interpreter (including this author who did not originally come to the text with this presupposition) does not enter into the hermeneutical process with the expectation to find patriarchy validated in the exegetical outcome.

### ***1.3.3.1 The Goal of Hermeneutics***

The objective of hermeneutics according to this writer is to come as close as possible to *the actual meaning of the text*, that is, to the meaning *intended by the biblical writers* (Hirsch 1967; Osborne 1991; Erickson 1993; Vanhoozer 1998; for a good summary of the hermeneutic used in the present dissertation see Klein 1998: 319–35; and more fully Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993). As Hirsch (1967: 126) notes, “Validity requires a norm—a meaning that is stable and determinate no matter how broad its range of implication and application. A stable and determinate meaning requires an author’s determining will . . . . All valid interpretation of every sort is founded on the re-cognition of what an author meant.” Klein (1988: 325) likewise equates “*the meaning of the text*” with “*the meaning of the text that the biblical writers or editors intended their readers to understand*” (emphasis original). As Klein (1998: 326) explains, “*the meaning of the texts themselves,*” in turn, is “the meaning the people at the time of the texts’ composition would have been most likely to accept” (emphasis original).

It is true that recent interpreters have severely criticized this approach, and the pendulum has swung significantly to the notion that textual meaning is a function of the significance perceived by reader rather than the meaning intended by the author. However, as Kevin Vanhoozer (1998: 88) contends, the death of the author is not a liberating but a debilitating hermeneutical event. If the notion of “the author” dies, so does the possibility of speaking truly about texts. Any interpretation will be as good as any other, with no adequate criteria to judge between valid and invalid understandings. If “the author” dies, so too does the possibility of meaning in texts. The reader has taken the

place vacated by the author, and hence the entire notion of meaning has become ultimately meaningless.

I realize that it is very difficult, and sometimes as good as impossible, to be certain that one has discovered the meaning intended by the original author, but as I believe the author had something specifically in mind, I see it as imperative to try to approach this meaning as closely as possible. As Klein (1988: 326) writes,

The meaning of a text is: *that which the words and grammatical structures of that text disclose about the probable intention of its author/editor and the probable understanding of the text by its intended readers. . . .* We cannot always perceive a text's meaning accurately or easily. Our modern preunderstandings and prejudices may cloud our ability to see the meaning clearly. But these difficulties do not obscure the goal: the text's meaning. It is God's word that we seek to unpack; only the inspired text possesses authority as God's word. Any other meaning besides the text's meaning is a meaning imposed onto the text. For the Evangelical, this would violate the divine character and purpose of the Scriptures: to reveal God's meaning. (emphasis original)

Once this meaning is identified, interpreters can proceed to apply it to their lives (i.e., they assess the text's *significance* for them). It is critical, however, that application *follow* interpretation (Klein 1988: 326; see also the section "From Interpretation to Application" in 1988: 332–34; and Chap. 11 in Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993).

Some may object that the obscure origin and transmission of the biblical text alone testify to the fact that the aim of discovering the original intention of the author is academically naïve and untenable. This is part of the larger concern that it is impossible

for us today to recover by means of historical research history “as it really was.” I will deal with this larger concern in the following discussion under the heading 1.3.4.1 The Difficulty of Reconstructing History (see also the interaction with Fiorenza on this point in Chapter 2). At this point it should be noted that the text of Scripture, particularly that of the New Testament, has been demonstrated by modern textual criticism to allow for a confident determination of the original readings (Aland 1995; Metzger 1992; Komoszewski, Sawyer, Wallace 2006), so that the notion that the available text provides an adequate basis for seeking to reconstruct authorial intention is an academically defensible position with considerable support in the scientific academic community.

### ***1.3.3.2 The Major Tasks of Exegesis***

Evangelicals are open to all methods that are helpful in ascertaining the true meaning of a given biblical text on the basis of their belief that the Bible is the revealed and inspired Word of God (Klein 1998: 325). Interpretive competency entails skill in performing the following five exegetical tasks: studying (1) literary genre; (2) word meanings; (3) grammatical relationships; (4) literary context; and (5) historical-cultural background (for a helpful concise treatment of each of these tasks see Klein 1988: 327–32; for a helpful discussion of the second, third, and fourth tasks see Cotterell and Turner 1989).

The first step in proper interpretation is the accurate determination of the genre of a given passage, that is, the kind of literature represented by the text (see especially Hirsch 1967; Fee and Stuart 1993). Biblical genres include historical narrative, poetry, wisdom, parable, epistle, prophecy, and apocalyptic. The determination of the genre of a given piece of communication is critical, because each genre has its own rules for

interpretation, just as each game is played by observing certain applicable rules (Hirsch 1967). In the present dissertation, the major genre being studied is that of Gospel, a subgenre of historical narrative, recounting the teachings and actions of Jesus Christ and other figures with whom he had contact.

The second task of interpretation involves determining the meaning of the various words making up a particular text of Scripture (Silva 1983; Louw and Nida 1988). The determination of word meanings is rendered even more critical for evangelicals who believe in the verbal inspiration of Scripture. Word meaning is best discerned by studying a word's usage in context and in light of parallel usage in other comparable texts. In the case of difficult or rare terms the determination of the meaning of a given word may be uncertain and remain in the realm of probability rather than certainty. The goal of interpretation in this regard, as conceived by evangelicals, is the approximation of the author's meaning as expressed in the text and as it would most likely have been understood by its first hearers or readers.

The third task involved in interpretation is the study of grammatical or syntactical relationships between the individual words of a particular text (Cotterell and Turner 1989). This step is called by evangelicals "historical-grammatical exegesis," that is, interpretation that seeks to understand the meaning of a given biblical passage according to the rules of normal grammar as it was used at the time at which a given document was written. This means that biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek each follow certain patterns of expression, including rules for word order, case relations, verb tenses, conjunctions, and so on, which must be properly discerned and decoded for accurate interpretation to take place.

The fourth task of interpretation is that of studying a passage in its literary context. This entails the proper delimitation of the various literary contexts in the form of widening concentric circles, from immediate context (sentence, paragraph), to larger context (narrative unit, i.e. pericope), to the context of the book as a whole. For example, Jesus' words to Mary of Bethany at the anointing in John 12:5 have as their immediate context the anointing pericope as a whole (John 12:1–8). The larger context is the raising of Lazarus, which is narrated in John 11 (preceding the anointing) and the betrayal of Judas in John 13 (in the subsequent narrative). The whole-book context is the demonstration that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God (John 20:30–31).

The fifth and final task of interpretation as conceived by evangelicals, and one that is of particular importance for the present topic, is the determination of the historical-cultural background of a particular passage (Osborne 1991: 127–47). In the case of Jesus' stance toward women, the major primary sources are the canonical Gospels (for a helpful treatment of the historical reliability of the Gospels see Blomberg 1987). This is borne out by their apostolic origin (or in the case of Mark and Luke, their connection to Peter and Paul, respectively), their early date, and the church's recognition of these writings as authentic, authoritative, and inspired. Once the relevant passages are studied on a case-by-case basis, a composite picture emerges that provides a cumulative understanding of how Jesus treated women according to Scripture.

In reconstructing the historical milieu in which Jesus operated, that is, first-century Palestinian Judaism, extrabiblical sources can be useful as well. Caution must be exercised, however, when reconstructing historical background. One's presuppositions will invariably affect one's historical research (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993: 81–

116). In order to avoid circularity, one's presuppositions must be carefully considered and one's bias be clearly identified before attempting to engage in historical reconstruction.

### ***1.3.3.3 General Hermeneutical Principles***

As one attempts to come as close as possible to the actual meaning of the text as intended by the author and as one engages in the exegetical task outlined in the preceding discussion, the following general hermeneutical principles should be kept in mind.

First, there is a need for a "*listening hermeneutic*." As the German theologian Adolf Schlatter (1997 [1923]: 18) rightly notes, biblical exegesis ought to be based on the perception of what the texts are actually saying rather than the interpreter's creativity or ingenuity: "It is the historical objective that should govern our conceptual work exclusively and completely, stretching our perceptive faculties to the limit. We turn away decisively from ourselves and our time to what was found in the men through whom the church came into being. Our main interest should be the thought as it was conceived *by them* and the truth that was valid *for them*."

Second, there is the need to *distinguish between the "first" and the "second horizon" of biblical interpretation*. Grant Osborne (1991: 415) rightly echoes R. T. France's (1984: 42) call for "the priority in biblical interpretation of what has come to be called 'the first horizon,' i.e. of understanding biblical language within its own context before we start exploring its relevance to our own concerns, and of keeping the essential biblical context in view as a control on the way we apply biblical language to current issues."

Third, there is a need for *interpretive restraint*, particularly on the present topic where viewpoints tend to be entrenched and presuppositions threaten to skew the interpretive outcome. This means that one's conclusions should not exceed the evidence and must be stated cautiously. A cumulative case that is built on precarious interpretations of individual biblical passages will not be able to carry the weight of careful examination. This pertains particularly to the way in which interpreters read between the lines and supply information not stated explicitly in the text.

#### 1.3.4 Special Issues in the Hermeneutical Task

##### ***1.3.4.1 The Difficulty of Reconstructing History***

Recent scholarship has increasingly questioned whether history “as it actually happened” (the phrase is that of the German historian von Ranke: *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*) can be recovered to any degree of confidence from the available sources (see further on this point the interaction with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in Chapter 2). Postmodern theorists believe that history is written by the winners, that is, the available sources tell us what those victorious in a given struggle want posterity to believe happened; hence, according to them, history is a function of power rather than truth. History is but a fable agreed upon (for conservative evangelical evaluations of postmodernism see Carson 1996 and Erickson 2001).

There is, of course, some truth to these claims. As mentioned, sources still must be evaluated, and they will often (some would say “always”) reflect the bias of a particular historian. At the same time, few would go to the extreme of denying that it is possible to reconstruct history “as it actually happened” to at least some extent. For



example, few would question that Jesus Christ lived as a historical person, or that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. The reason for this is that a variety of sources, biblical and extrabiblical, attest to his existence and these facts of Jesus' life. The same can be said with many other historical persons and events both ancient and modern.

Feminists, likewise, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza being a prominent example, have confidence in their ability to reconstruct history. In Fiorenza's case, historical, redaction, and sociological criticism are used to reconstruct the egalitarian community of Jesus and of the early church. This shows that skepticism toward an interpreter's ability to reconstruct history from the available sources is not necessarily a tenet of feminism but is characteristic more particularly of postmodernism. At the same time, a good case can be made, at least to the mind of this writer, for the possibility that certain historical facts and events can be reconstructed from the available sources with a reasonable amount of confidence (Hughes 1983: 173–94; see further the interaction with Schüssler Fiorenza in Chapter 2).

As Felix (2002: 386, citing Thomas) notes,

It must be granted that twentieth-century exegetes are outsiders to the culture in which the Bible was written, and for this reason can never achieve a complete understanding of the original meaning of the Bible in its historical setting. An undue emphasis upon this limitation, however, loses sight of the fact that all historical study is a weighing of probabilities. The more evidence we have, the higher degree of probability we can attain. The practice of exegesis, therefore, is a continued search for greater probability and a more refined understanding.

#### ***1.3.4.2 The Role of the Reader, the Movement from Author to Reader in Hermeneutical Research, and in Defense of Authorial Intent***

The question must also be raised, not merely regarding *what* we are interpreting, but also *who* is doing the interpreting (Klein 1998: 324–25; Chap. 4 in Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993)? Evangelicals endeavor to operate within the Bible's own frame of reference, accepting the reality of a transcendent God and of the supernatural. Many who approach the Bible from a postmodern perspective allow personal situation and experience not merely to influence, but even to determine the outcome of the interpretation. According to this writer, if one desires to interpret Scripture, one must attempt to allow the authors of Scripture themselves to have weight in the interpretive outcome. This procedure should be applied in a fair and as unbiased a fashion as possible whether or not one believes that Scripture is the inspired, authoritative, and true Word of God, the divine revelation.

It is a realistic danger for any interpreter from whatever point of view to read one's own agenda into the Bible rather than to let the Bible speak for itself. Therefore, one must recognize that one has presuppositions but not allow these to be determinative in the interpretive outcome. Using proper exegetical methods will help interpreters overcome their own lack of knowledge or deficiency and will enable them to come as close as possible to the authorially intended meaning of Scripture and to determine its significance for their own lives.

The hermeneutical quest for the intention of the author is heavily criticized in many circles, and is in fact not only difficult but in some cases close to impossible, but this author is convinced that in principle it is an academically defensible and legitimate

strategy for discerning textual meaning (Hirsch 1967; Osborne 1991; Vanhoozer 1998). An author-oriented hermeneutic also corresponds best to reality and common sense, in the mind of this author, since every text has an author, and is willed by that author to express a particular message. Texts do not come into being on their own, nor do they, properly understood, “mean” anything apart from authorial intention.

It is true that the past several decades have witnessed a gradual shift in hermeneutical emphasis from author to text to reader (Osborne 1991: 366–415). Hans-Georg Gadamer (1965), for example, pointed out that interpretation can never truly recover the intended or original meaning of a given text—which to some extent is certainly true. According to Gadamer, interpretation ought to take place, not as a quest to discern past authorial intention, but in the interplay between text and reader in the present. While Gadamer himself held that this did not render interpretation a hopelessly subjective enterprise, his method did not clearly provide guidelines to escape such subjectivism.

In recent years, the movement from author to text to reader has come full circle in the schools of reader-response criticism and deconstructionism. These approaches have completely turned away from authorial intention, or even textual autonomy, and put the interpretive emphasis in discerning meaning squarely on the reader. According to reader-response criticism, a text means what it means to a given reader. This renders interpretation very difficult, however, since a given text will mean different things to different readers, and there are no criteria for adjudicating what constitutes a valid interpretation (anticipated by Hirsch 1967).

Deconstructionism and postmodernism, for their part, view texts as means of power rather than truth. Deconstructionists, such as the French thinker Jacques Derrida, seek to destabilize textual meaning by engaging in a critique of a given text that seeks to demonstrate its inevitably ambiguous nature. Building on, but transcending, both structuralism and poststructuralism, Derrida opposes any “logocentrism” (an undue emphasis on actual words) and seeks to “decenter” textual meaning. Derrida believes his mission is to liberate readers from any authorial or textual constraints and to empower them to engage in a sort of free play with the text by which they discover their own personal meaning.

Postmodernism rejects all metanarratives, including the story of Scripture. In fact, the French writer François Lyotard has defined the very essence of postmodernism as a distrust toward all metanarratives. By definition, according to postmodernism there is no absolute truth or meaning that applies to every interpreter. Rather, there is a variety of different interpretations, and no norms or criteria to decide on their validity. Hence interpretation ultimately breaks down in that every interpreter is an interpretive island onto him- or herself, and solipsism is the logical and inevitable result. Unfettered subjectivity and a belief that there is no absolute truth are the only remaining absolutes in postmodernism.

Now there surely is an element of truth in all of these approaches. It is true that the focus on authorial meaning is often oversimplified when one disregards the significant influence the reader has on the outcome of what is supposed to be the authorial meaning. Nevertheless, the radical shift from authorial intent to reader-created meaning is too reactionary. In the end, there is no adequate substitute to make up for the

loss of the author in determining the meaning of a given text. In most cases, for example, it is easy enough to discern the authorially intended meaning of a letter addressed to us. Therefore this writer believes that a hermeneutic focusing on the determination of authorial intent, however imperfect, remains an academically viable, and in fact the only fully adequate, strategy for interpretation.

Moreover, it is important to remember that there is no authorial intention recoverable other than the one expressed in a given text. This puts an important constraint on any author-centered hermeneutic. Hence, *authorial meaning is textual meaning*, and the meaning of a given text is the meaning intended by its author. The reader's part is initially limited to the largely passive role of seeking to discern the various textual clues for the original author's intended meaning to the extent that this is possible. Only subsequently is there a need to apply the reader's apprehension of the text's significance to her own personal life.

While objectivity in interpretation is clearly impossible in light of the presuppositions an interpreter invariably brings to the text, this does not mean that the interpretive enterprise is doomed to failure, however. Rather, interpreters who approach the text with an openness to be engaged by its message, and its ultimate author, God himself, embark on a quest to determine the meaning of a given portion of Scripture that Osborne (1991) and others have called a "hermeneutical spiral." This means that a dialectic is unleashed by which the interpreter asymptotically approaches the meaning of Scripture ever more closely through a series of readings and re-readings of the text.

#### ***1.3.4.3 Issues Related to Canonicity***

The Scripture which we are interpreting has come down to us in church history as a canon of biblical books (Westcott 1896; Metzger 1987; Bruce 1988; Klein 1988: 324; Chap. 3 in Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993; Harris 1995). The canon of Old Testament books was possibly set as early as by the end of the first century A.D. The New Testament canon took shape in the first few centuries of the early church. When the ancient church compiled its canon, it recognized which writings bore the stamp of divine inspiration (Pache 1969). Four criteria can be discerned (Carson and Moo 2005: 726–43, esp. 736–37; McDonald 1997: 134–44, esp. 135):

- (1) *apostolicity*: direct or indirect association of a given work with an apostle;
- (2) *orthodoxy*: whether a writing conformed to the “rule of faith”;
- (3) *antiquity*: whether a writing was written during the apostolic era;
- (4) *ecclesiastical usage*: widespread use in the churches of the early period.

Paul’s letters were given recognition before the end of the first century (2 Pet. 3:16). The first impetus for the canon came from Marcion in c. A.D. 140. The four canonical Gospels were recognized as authoritative at least as early as Tatian (who compiled the first Gospel harmony, the *Diatessaron*) and Irenaeus in the second century A.D. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.11), in c. A.D. 180, already strongly argued for a four-Gospel canon. The canon is essentially attested in the Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 190), including the four canonical Gospels and the writings of Paul and others.

At the Reformation, the church removed several Old Testament apocryphal books from its canon while continuing to affirm the canonicity of all 27 New Testament books included in the church’s canon at least since Athanasius’s famous Easter letter of A.D. 367. Hence, the church through the ages, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, has held

that the 27 books of the New Testament (including the 4 Gospels dealing with Jesus, the subject of the present dissertation), and they alone, are inspired and authoritative.

Regarding the canon, the church has historically affirmed, first, that the canon is *closed*, that is, the early church's determination of canonicity was definitive and binding on the church ever since. For this reason I consider the canon as closed and consisting of the 66 books commonly acknowledged by Protestants as Scripture.

Second, the canon of Scripture is characterized by what has been termed "*progressive revelation*," that is, later revelation building on earlier revelation. This is important for interpretation, since it means that earlier revelation must be interpreted in the light of later revelation.

Third, the canon of Scripture is characterized by both an underlying theological *unity and diversity* in expression on the part of the different biblical authors (Klein 1988: 324). For example, with regard to unity, all of Scripture is the story of God's dealings with humankind. This theme runs through Scripture as a common thread and lends unity and coherence to the various biblical books. At the same time, different writers of Scripture may express themselves in diverse ways, a classic example being the way in which Paul and James address the issue of justification by faith.

Fourth, in light of the diversity of biblical books, some have postulated the need for a "*canon within a canon*," that is, a determination as to what is the "central message of Scripture" and an interpretation of portions of Scripture that seem to be at variance with that central message in light of it. The phenomenon of a "canon within a canon" is not a recent phenomenon. The difficulty with this procedure, however, in my view is that it in effect says that only what is considered to be the central message is important while

less central passages may be neglected. Also, there would seem to be a danger in an interpreter arbitrarily selecting a “central theme” of Scripture in keeping with her preference while neglecting teachings that are counter-cultural or otherwise offensive.

In light of these considerations, it seems reasonable to expect Jesus’ teaching and practice with regard to women, for example, to be in essential harmony with the teaching and practice of Paul, though a salvation-historical reading of Scripture will be sensitive to the element of progressive revelation between Jesus and Paul. With this I turn to a brief survey of the relevant passages to set a frame of reference for the ensuing study.

#### **1.4 Survey of Relevant New Testament Passages**

Before proceeding with the analysis of the use of Scripture in feminist and egalitarian literature on Jesus’ approach to women, it will be helpful to set the stage for the present study by a brief survey of the relevant New Testament passages. The following is a list of passages related to Jesus’ approach to women in the Gospels. Included are all instances where Jesus is shown to interact with a woman or where women are the subject of Jesus’ teaching. Not included are references to women in the Gospels unrelated to Jesus (such as the servant girl challenging Peter as to his association with Jesus) or references to women related to Jesus that are not relevant for assessing Jesus’ approach to women (such as the references to Mary in the infancy narratives). The references are presented in a harmony format, following Jesus’ ministry in approximate chronological order. The purpose of the following survey is not to provide a thorough exegesis and theology of Jesus’ approach to women of our own (which would be an important topic for another dissertation) but merely to take inventory of all the relevant passages and to lay the groundwork for the



discussion and evaluation of various views on Jesus' stance toward women in the following chapters.

#### 1.4.1 Jesus' Relationship with His Mother at the Wedding at Cana (John 2:1–12)

Jesus' mother is one of the invited guests at a wedding at Cana and prompts Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine. Subsequently, she is part of the group that returns to Capernaum prior to the Passover along with Jesus (2:12). This is the first recorded instance of Jesus relating to a woman (his mother) during his public ministry. During the course of the wedding, Jesus' mother makes him aware that the wedding party has run out of wine. His response suggests that he understands his mother to be asking him to provide additional wine for the wedding guests, perhaps by miraculous means. Jesus reluctantly complies, though not before pointing out that it is not yet time for him to show the world who he is (i.e., the Messiah).

Some might consider Jesus' address of his mother as "Dear woman" and his question, "Why do you involve me?" as disrespectful if not chauvinistic. As the ensuing course of events shows, however, Jesus does respect his mother and acts on her desire for him to remedy the situation. At the same time, Jesus makes clear that performing a public miracle would be inappropriate at this juncture of his ministry. As the previous chapter indicates, Jesus had just called his disciples to follow him (see 2:11). Perhaps he chose to perform this miracle in a private manner (not all the members of the wedding party knew where the wine came from) in order not to jettison his public ministry and training of his disciples.

#### 1.4.2 Jesus Talks with the Samaritan Woman (4:1–42)

The Samaritan woman encounters Jesus at the well of Sychar. After an extended conversation where she is confronted with her sin, she returns to her village and brings her fellow villagers to Jesus. In spite of the full knowledge that Jesus has of her unclean status and of her position in society, he goes ahead and asks the Samaritan woman for a drink. Jesus did not have to ask the woman to give him a drink; he could have found some other way to quench his thirst. Yet he initiates this conversation with the woman for a purpose. The flow of the conversation is such that Jesus gradually helps the woman to realize who he is and who she is in relation to him, that is, a sinner. At the climax of the narrative, the woman informs Jesus that when the Messiah comes “he will explain everything to us” (4:25). In response, Jesus declares that he is the one of whom she speaks (4:26).

Upon their return, the disciples are surprised to find Jesus “talking with *a woman*” (4:27). No reference is made to the woman’s ethnic identity. The disciples’ comment likely reflects the cultural stereotype that looked down on men engaging in conversation with women. At the very least, Jesus’ talking to the Samaritan reflects his openness toward women. In spite of the confrontational nature of the conversation, Jesus speaks kindly and sensitively to the woman, so that she is able to receive him and his words. Jesus shows his love and desire for the woman to come to know who he truly is and to receive eternal life by drawing her into conversation in an engaging manner. The interchange is quite long and includes a lot of give-and-take. It concludes with the woman returning to her village in order to get some of her townspeople. The amazing experience this woman had in conversation with Jesus may have overwhelmed her, along

with her possible embarrassment at the disciples' return, and she left her water jar when she departed, perhaps because it lost its importance to her (4:28). Jesus' request for a drink probably went unheeded.

In what follows the woman turns into an evangelist. She goes and brings the better part of her village to Jesus. Many of them believe for themselves that Jesus is the Savior of the world (4:42). The genuine relationship Jesus has with this woman ensues in many other Samaritans putting their trust in him.

#### 1.4.3 Jesus' Teaching on Adultery and Divorce (Matt. 5:28–32; 19:1–12; Mark 10:1–12; Luke 16:18)

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount touches on women in Jesus' teaching on adultery and divorce. Regarding adultery, Jesus raises the bar considerably when he included in his definition of adultery a man's lustful glance at another woman. This reflects the value Jesus placed on women and warned men against treating women as sexual objects, defining adultery not merely as a sexual act with a woman not one's spouse but also as a mental offense.

Regarding divorce, Jesus in Matthew 5:31–32, as well as in the later, related passage in Matthew 19:1–12, declares that anyone who divorces his wife, "except for sexual immorality," causes her to become an adulteress and that anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. Again, this protected women from arbitrary divorce in a male-centered society. Notably, the "exception clause" found in both Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is absent from the parallels in Mark and Luke.

#### 1.4.4 Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14–15; Mark 1:30–31; Luke 4:38–39)

After leaving the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus and the disciples (including James and John) depart for Simon Peter and his brother Andrew's house. Peter's mother-in-law is in bed with a high fever, and they tell Jesus about her and ask him to help her. Jesus bends over her and heals her of her fever. She gets up at once and begins to wait on those in the house. Peter's mother-in-law was not the only one healed that day; Jesus "healed all the sick" brought to him later that evening (Matt. 8:16). Here is one woman, albeit a relative of one of Jesus' foremost disciples, on whom Jesus has compassion and heals the moment he is asked. Here and thereafter, Jesus seems to heal all kinds of people without discrimination as to their gender. The fact that the woman immediately serves the people in the house indicates the completeness of the healing as well as perhaps her gratitude.

#### 1.4.5 Jesus Raises the Widow's Son at Nain from the Dead (Luke 7:11–15)

As Jesus is approaching the town gate of Nain, he comes upon a funeral procession of a young man, "the only son of his mother" (Luke 7:12), a widow, and a large crowd with her. When Jesus sees the woman crying, his heart goes out to her. He goes up and touches the coffin and tells the dead man to get up, and he does and begins to talk. Luke emphasizes that Jesus gave the widow's son back to his mother. This underscores that Jesus had compassion on a woman in need, a mother who had lost her only son and who had previously lost her husband.

1.4.6 Jesus' Concerned Family (including Mary) Comes to Take Him Home (Matt. 12:46–50; Mark 3:20–21, 31–35; Luke 8:19–21)

Early on in Jesus' ministry, his concerned family (including Mary) comes to take him home. The demands on Jesus were so heavy and the crowds so large that Jesus and his disciples are not even able to eat (Mark 3:20). His family fears Jesus "is out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). When Jesus hears of this, however, rather than allow his natural family to rein him in, he tells the crowd that his mother, brothers, and sisters are in fact those who do the will of God. He includes in the sphere of his true family anyone, male or female, who is prepared to do God's will.

1.4.7 Jesus Raises Jairus' Daughter from the Dead and Heals the Woman with Blood Flow (Matt. 9:18–26; Mark 5:22–43; Luke 8:40–56)

In Jesus' incidental encounter with the woman with blood flow, the woman, who was in some desperation owing to a health issue, believes that if she were to touch Jesus' cloak, she would be healed. When Jesus sees her, he acknowledges her, encourages her by saying, "Take heart," and by referring to her kindly as "daughter," and proceeds to heal her. Even though Jesus is in the midst of responding to a desperate call for help, he stops and treats the woman with kindness and compassion.

In raising the twelve year-old daughter of Jairus, the synagogue ruler, from the dead, Jesus takes the child's parents, both mother and father, inside with him as well as three of his disciples. He then takes the dead girl's hand and tells her to get up, and she does and walks about. Then he instructs the bystanders to give the girl something to eat

and orders them not to tell anyone what has happened. In this incident, Jesus brings the mother in with only a few others to observe the healing of her daughter.

#### 1.4.8 Jesus Teaches that Daughter will be Set against Mother, and Daughter-in-law against Mother-in-law, through his Ministry (Matt. 10:35; Luke 12:53)

As part of his instructions at the occasion of sending out the Twelve on a mission, Jesus teaches that a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. Specifically, both men and women in a given family will be set in opposition to one another, so that Jesus' ministry will result, not in peace, but in division. Women are part of the spiritual conflict that will occur as a result of Jesus' ministry in the context of individual families.

#### 1.4.9 Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman (Luke 7:36–50)

While Jesus is having dinner with a particular Pharisee, Simon, a woman who has lived a sinful life comes with an alabaster jar of perfume and weeps. Her tears wet his feet, and she wipes them with her hair, kisses them, and pours perfume on them. Jesus allows this, but the Pharisee he dines with is indignant. In explanation, Jesus tells Simon a parable about creditors and debtors in order to show that the person who owes more when relieved of his debt is much more grateful than the person who owes less. Thus the woman is upheld as an example of one who has been forgiven much and as a result loves much. Before all the guests, Jesus states to her that her sins are forgiven and that her faith has saved her and to go in peace. Jesus' response to the woman is compassionate, kind, and supportive in front of a group of critical individuals. He does not condemn the woman for her sinful past and instead forgives her and commends her for her faith.

#### 1.4.10 A Group of Women Supports Jesus and the Twelve (Luke 8:2–3)

While Jesus is traveling from one town and village to another proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, some women who have been cured of evil spirits and diseases are with him along with the Twelve. These women help to support the ministry out of their own means. Jesus graciously and mercifully healed them, and then allowed them to be with him and accepted their financial support. Jesus was not too proud to include these women in the larger scope of his mission.

#### 1.4.11 Jesus Exorcises a Demon from the Syrophenician Woman's Daughter (Matt. 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30)

As he withdraws to the region of Tyre, Jesus encounters a Gentile woman whose little daughter is possessed by an evil spirit. The woman begs Jesus to drive out the demon. Jesus' response at first is to deny her request, saying that his mission is focused on Israel. When the woman persists, Jesus, amazed at her great faith, states that the demon has left her daughter. Returning home, the woman finds her child lying on the bed with the demon gone. Here Jesus frankly acknowledges that his mission is not focused on the Gentiles. The woman humbly accepts her position as a Gentile and begs at least to be allowed to benefit from the "leftovers." Jesus sees this as great faith and honors it.

#### 1.4.12 Jesus Teaches Martha an Object Lesson (Luke 10:38–42)

Jesus and his disciples are continuing in their ministry and come to the village where Martha lives. She opens her home to Jesus. Mary, her sister, sits at Jesus' feet, listening

to what he says, but Martha was distracted by the preparations. When she approaches Jesus about getting help from Mary, Jesus says to her that Mary has chosen what is better. Jesus is open to going into these women's home and enjoys their company. He takes the opportunity to teach Martha a lesson about priorities and the need to put discipleship above taking care of material things. As the women mentioned in 8:2–3, Martha and Mary support Jesus and have a part in his mission.

#### 1.4.13 A Woman in the Crowd Calls Jesus' Mother Blessed (Luke 11:27–28)

In the midst of Jesus teaching on evil spirits, a woman calls out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." Jesus responds by saying, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." He challenges a woman who inappropriately focuses on Jesus' mother rather than on Jesus himself and directs her and the surrounding crowd to rather hear the word of God and obey it. Jesus' words here indicate that even being the mother of Jesus did not substitute for believing in God's word and obeying it.

#### 1.4.14 Jesus Commends the "Queen of the South" who Came to Listen to Solomon (Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31)

Jesus here uses the example of a woman who sought out the wisdom of one of Israel's kings in the past as one who will stand in judgment over the people in Jesus' day who rejected him. The Queen of Sheba is the second such person mentioned after the people of Nineveh who repented at Jonah's preaching. In the present instance, Jesus balances a general example (Nineveh) with that of a woman.



#### 1.4.15 Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10–17)

Jesus heals a woman on a Sabbath who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. In response to a challenge issued by an indignant synagogue ruler, Jesus calls him and those like him hypocrites for not allowing a woman such as this, a “daughter of Abraham,” to be set free from her predicament on the Sabbath while they would untie their oxen or donkeys and lead them out to give them water. By calling the woman “a daughter of Abraham,” Jesus includes her as a member of Israel as the chosen people of God. By choosing to heal the woman, even more in light of the fact that it was a Sabbath, Jesus showed that he valued her enough to heal her.

#### 1.4.16 The Woman Baking (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20–21)

In another one of his parables on the kingdom, Jesus makes reference to a woman baking. It is interesting to note that the woman is here shown in her domestic sphere. It appears that it is part of Jesus’ express purpose to use a woman as part of his teaching in order to ensure that women in his audience would comprehend his message about the kingdom. Jesus’ inclusion of a woman example in his teaching here underscores the value he places on women understanding spiritual truth.

#### 1.4.17 The Woman who Lost a Coin (Luke 15:8–10)

In this the middle of three parables on lost things, Jesus features a woman who had lost a coin. The woman does not rest, lighting a lamp, sweeping the house, and searching carefully, until she finds the coin and then rejoices with friends and neighbors. This is

compared with the rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Here again Jesus uses a woman as a character in one of his parables.

#### 1.4.18 The Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1–8)

Jesus again uses a woman in a parable to show his disciples that they should always pray and not give up. The parable is about a widow who was persistent in coming to an ungodly judge pleading with him to grant her justice, and though he refuses at first, he finally gives in because of the widow's insistent requests. This is compared to God's response to the plea to bring justice to those chosen ones who cry out to him day and night. The use of a woman in this parable again shows Jesus' openness toward women and possibly his desire to have them relate to the spiritual truths he is trying to teach.

#### 1.4.19 The Request of the Mother of the Sons of Zebedee (Matt. 20:20–28; cf. Mark 10:35–45)

According to Matthew's Gospel, the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 20:20) asks Jesus to grant that one of her two sons may sit at his right and the other at his left in his kingdom (in Mark, it is the sons of Zebedee themselves who pose the question). Jesus responds by stating that it is not his prerogative to grant these places. They belong to those to whom the Father has prepared them. In the present scene, Jesus speaks openly, honestly, and directly, without condemning the persons making the request but by putting them in their place and instructing them concerning the true nature of leadership in God's kingdom. Here Jesus is not afraid to confront another inappropriate request or statement by a woman, this time a request by a mother for her sons to be given special favor.

1.4.20 Jesus' Teaching on Marriage in the Resurrection (Matt. 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27;  
Luke 20:27–40)

In response to an insincere question by the Sadducees who raise a hypothetical scenario about a woman who was successively married to seven different brothers, Jesus clarifies that there will be no marriage in heaven but that people will be like angels in heaven. In so doing, he puts men and women on a level playing field with regard to life in the eternal state and removes the necessity for levirate marriage (cf. the Book of Ruth).

1.4.21 Teaching on Widows and the Widow's Mite (Mark 12:40–44; Luke 20:47–21:4)

In a few statements regarding the teachers of the law, Jesus tells his followers to be careful concerning them. Though they appear important in the synagogues and at banquets and in the way they dress, they act unrighteously, taking financial advantage of widows and for a show make lengthy prayers. Jesus states that such men will be punished most severely. Though it is not obvious in this lifetime, Jesus gives us a foretaste of the coming judgment, thus expressing his care for these widows and his contempt for the way they are being treated. These women are truly valued by Jesus.

Immediately after this, Jesus observes the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. He notices that many rich people throw large amounts, but that a poor widow comes and puts in two very small copper coins. Calling his disciples to himself, he tells them that the widow has put more into the treasury than all the others, because she gave all that she had to live on, while they gave out of their wealth. This shows that

Jesus appreciates the heart of this woman and the sacrifice that she made. This is the kind of woman Jesus commends in private to his disciples.

#### 1.4.22 The Fate of Pregnant Women and Nursing Mothers during the Tribulation (Matt. 24:19–21; Mark 13:17–19)

In the Olivet discourse, where Jesus discusses signs of the end of the age, he states how dreadful it will be for pregnant women and nursing mothers. He tells his listeners to pray that the end will not come in the winter or on the Sabbath, because there will be great distress never to be equaled again in the world. The fact that he mentions pregnant women and nursing mothers indicates Jesus' sensitivity, even when talking about most momentous end-time events, toward the needs of women during these challenging and particularly vulnerable stages in their lives.

#### 1.4.23 Two Women Grinding at a Mill (Matt. 24:41; Luke 17:35)

Further on in the Olivet discourse, Jesus mentions that at his return (Matt. 24:3, 36, 39; Luke 17:35) two women will be grinding with a hand mill and one will be taken and the other left after mentioning that two men will be in the field and one will be taken and the other left. This is another instance of the characteristic pairing of male and female examples in Jesus' teaching. Here it is seen that both men and women face the same judgment and the same responsibility for keeping watch.

#### 1.4.24 The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1–13)

The setting for the parable of the ten virgins is that of a Jewish wedding party where the bridegroom is delayed and only half of the bridesmaids were ready for the bridegroom's coming at any time. The ones who were not prepared missed the bridegroom's coming and were shut out of the wedding banquet. Again, Jesus juxtaposes parables featuring female characters with male or general ones in order to impart a particular lesson (in the present instance, the need for both men and women to be prepared for Jesus' return; see the parable of the talents in Matt. 25:14–30).

#### 1.4.25 Mary and Martha Grieve for Lazarus (John 11:1–44)

Mary and Martha send word to Jesus telling him that their brother Lazarus is sick. Jesus responds by saying that the sickness will not end in death but will serve to glorify God's Son. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Nevertheless, he delays two days, and Lazarus dies. As Jesus approaches the city, Martha goes out to greet him, while Mary stays inside the house mourning. Martha expresses her disappointment that Jesus did not come earlier but still has faith that God will do whatever Jesus asks him. Jesus states that her brother will rise again and identifies himself as "the resurrection and the life."

Martha goes back and tells Mary that Jesus is asking for her. Mary leaves quickly. When she reaches the place where Jesus is, she falls at his feet and says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus is deeply moved when he sees her and the others weeping and starts weeping as well. At Lazarus's tomb, when Jesus tells people to move the stone, Martha challenges him, saying there would be a bad odor, for Lazarus had been dead four days. Jesus responds, "Did I not tell you that if you believed,

you would see the glory of God?” After a brief prayer, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus’ relationship with Mary and Martha seems to be very close. Their interaction seems to be very straightforward and honest. Jesus relates to these women very openly and compassionately. He treats them in love and in no way belittles them, yet still with authority.

#### 1.4.26 Mary Anoints Jesus (Matt. 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8)

Some time after the raising of Lazarus, a dinner is given in Jesus’ honor (most likely, Matthew, Mark, and John here refer to the same incident; see Köstenberger 2001: 49–63). Martha serves (cf. Luke 10:38–42); Lazarus reclines with Jesus and the other guests. Mary takes out a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume, and pours it on Jesus’ feet, wiping his feet with her hair. Judas Iscariot challenges her actions, saying the money should have been given to the poor, but Jesus tells him to leave Mary alone and commends her for taking this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to use this precious possession of hers to anoint him for burial.

In the present instance, Jesus supports and defends Mary’s actions against Judas’s challenge. Mary here performs an act of unusual, sacrificial devotion and honors Jesus without concern for the negative reactions of others. This is acknowledged by Jesus, who states that wherever the gospel is preached, Mary’s act will also be told in memory of her.

#### 1.4.27 The Wailing Jerusalem Women (Luke 23:27–31)

On this occasion, Jesus is on his way to his crucifixion and observes the large number of people following him, including women who mourn and wail. He turns to them and says, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me . . .” He tells them they should instead be concerned for themselves and their children. This hints at the future judgment that would befall Jerusalem owing to Jesus’ rejection by the Jewish nation (cf. Luke 21:20–23).

In this instance, these women may not realize who Jesus truly is. The weeping and wailing may be because they see the horrors of crucifixion. Even so, Jesus challenges the validity of their sorrow, pointing out the horrors they themselves will face in the near future. Here Jesus, under stress and duress, addresses these women and speaks the truth to them.

#### 1.4.28 The Women near the Cross (Matt. 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 23:49; John 19:25–27)

A large group of women, including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and of Joses (i.e., Jesus’ mother; cf. Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), Salome (his mother’s sister?), Mary the wife of Clopas, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee, watch the crucifixion from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs (cf. Luke 8:2–3). John also recounts how Jesus entrusts care for his mother to the “disciple Jesus loved” (probably John the son of Zebedee).

This is a very moving scene, particularly Jesus’ parting words to his mother. Jesus is careful and responsible to place his mother in a new family of someone he trusts even more than his own earthly family. Once again, Jesus shows great sensitivity toward to the

needs of women (in this case his own mother). The fact that a large group of women had followed Jesus all the way from Galilee is an indication of how devoted they were to him.

1.4.29 Mary Magdalene and Others are Present at Jesus' Burial and on the Third Day Set out to Anoint Jesus' Body (Matt. 27:61; 28:1–11; Mark 15:47–16:8; Luke 23:55–24:12; John 20:1–18)

Matthew and Mark record that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph (Jesus' mother) saw where Jesus was buried (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; cf. Luke 23:55). Luke also notes that the women went home and prepared spices and perfumes but that they rested on the Sabbath as commanded (Luke 23:56).

On the morning of the third day, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James (Jesus' mother?), Salome, Joanna, and possibly others set out for the tomb where Jesus was buried to anoint his body. When they arrive at the tomb, an angel appears to them who has rolled away the stone from the tomb. The angel tells the women that Jesus has risen. So they go to tell the disciples, and on their way encounter the risen Jesus. He tells the women to tell the brothers to go to Galilee where they will see him. The disciples, however, initially do not believe the women.

In John's Gospel, Mary Magdalene is the first to go to the tomb and see the stone removed. She runs to tell Peter and the "disciple Jesus loved," who head for the tomb. Mary stands outside the tomb crying and, bending over to look into the tomb, sees two angels where Jesus' body had lain. After a brief interchange, Mary turns and sees Jesus. Thinking he is the gardener, she urges him to tell her where he has put Jesus' body so she can get it. In response, Jesus calls her by name: "Mary," and, in a moving recognition



scene, she turns toward him and cries out, “Rabboni!” (this means Teacher in Aramaic). Jesus tells her not to cling to him but to go and relay a message to the disciples, which she does.

Several of the women who had closely followed Jesus during his earthly ministry were the first to see him after the resurrection. In keeping with Jewish custom, these women were faithful to wait for the Sabbath to pass and then to set out to care for Jesus’ body. Hence, they are the first to see the empty tomb, encounter the angels, see the risen Lord, and report what they have seen to the disciples. Mary Magdalene appears to have had great devotion to Jesus, and her encounter with the risen Lord is particularly stirring.

### **1.5 Summary**

This introductory chapter sets the stage for the following study. The relevance of this dissertation is discussed along with issues requiring future dialogue. The presuppositions of the author are identified in order to clear the way for a fair evaluation of the pertinent literature. In order to illumine the dynamics of interaction between different approaches to women in Scripture, a general survey of feminism, egalitarianism, and complementarianism is provided. The nature of hermeneutics is discussed beginning with a brief sketch of the history of interpretation. Also in this section are treatments of feminist and conservative evangelical hermeneutics to identify the specific tenets of these approaches. Special issues such as the difficulty of reconstructing history, the role of the reader and the determination of the author’s intention, and issues related to canonicity are treated as well as part of an introduction to the challenges encountered in interacting with various viewpoints. A survey of relevant passages concludes this chapter.

## Chapter 2

### **A Critique of Feminist Hermeneutics and Exegesis on Jesus' Approach to Women**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The subject of this chapter is an analysis of the use of Scripture in feminist literature on Jesus' approach to women. On the basis of the survey of gender-conscious approaches to interpreting Scripture regarding Jesus in Chapter 1, the present chapter is devoted to a discussion of feminist literature on Jesus. I will first treat radical and then reformist feminism, proceeding writer by writer, and in each case work by work in chronological order of publication. I will first summarize the major contents and conclusions of each work with regard to Jesus' treatment and understanding of women and their roles and then subject it to critique and evaluation.

The discussion and critique of egalitarian scholarship on Jesus' approach to women will follow in Chapter 3. In essence, the chapter division of feminism and egalitarianism in Chapters 2 and 3 distinguishes between two groups of feminists and their approach to Scripture: (1) those who see the Bible as furthering patriarchy or sexism (feminists or reformist feminists); and (2) those who claim to view the Bible as an inspired witness to the grace of God in Christ ("biblical feminism" or egalitarianism; this closely resembles the classification of Greene-McCreight 2000: 36–41).

The material selected for comment pertains to Jesus' approach to women only and will not include treatments of larger Christological issues, such as Jesus' own identity in terms of male vs. female or issues related to gender language applied to God. Also not

considered are pieces that speak in general terms about the need to liberate the oppressed in society but do not specifically deal with the question of how Jesus treated women according to the Gospels. The following treatment aims at selected coverage of representative works and does not attempt to be exhaustive.

## 2.2 Radical Feminism

Owing to their negative assessment of Scripture's authoritative nature, truthfulness, or relevance for women today, radical feminists do not frequently exegete specific texts on Jesus' treatment of women. Rather, they tend to focus on broader theological or Christological issues such as the nature of God as Father or Mother and on the maleness of Jesus as an obstacle to full gender equality. The contribution of radical feminists has already been briefly summarized as part of the survey of feminism in Chapter 1. The following discussion will deal with the contributions of Mary Daly, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, and Daphne Hampson in more detail, especially as they relate to hermeneutical issues that have a bearing on our understanding of Jesus' approach to women.

### 2.2.1 Mary Daly

Mary Daly is doubtless one of the most radical feminists of the past few decades. Originally a Roman Catholic, Daly wrote her first major work, *The Church and the Second Sex*, in 1968 (the title alludes to Simone de Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex*). Daly's hope was that women's liberation would take root in the Roman Catholic Church subsequent to the Second Vatican Council. In 1973, disenchanted, she wrote the

considerably more radical *Beyond God the Father*, outlining the case against the Bible and Christianity.

According to Daly, Christianity is a male structure in which God is man, and thus man is God. Daly contends that the mere use of inclusive language is insufficient to liberate women from the bondage imposed on them by Scripture, for the Bible's core symbolism remains patriarchal. Instead, Daly calls for a "castrating of language and images that reflect and perpetuate the structures of a sexist world" (1973: 9; emphasis Daly's).

Daly's radical turn continued in her publications *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978) and *Pure Lust* (1984), in which she attacks both Christianity and Christian feminism. According to Daly, only lesbian radical feminists can rise above the normal experience of male patriarchy. Daly has now completely broken away from Christianity and represents the major proponent of this brand of feminism in North America.

At the heart of Daly's hermeneutic, then, is her complete rejection of Scripture owing to what she perceives to be its irremediable patriarchal bias. While reformist feminists seek to salvage non-patriarchal elements of Scripture, Daly rejects this approach and takes strong issue with her fellow feminists at this point. Consequently, Jesus and his treatment of women in the Gospels play little part in her model.

In fact, while Christians value Jesus as Son of God and Savior and thus look to him for an example and guidance in the area of gender roles, Daly takes issue with what she perceives to be the "Christian fixation upon the person of Jesus" (1973: 70). She laments the fact that the "death of God" movement did not also lead to the "death of

Jesus” in the twentieth century, “at least in the sense of transcending the Christian fixation upon the person of Jesus” (1973: 70).

Hence Daly urges feminists to overcome the “idolatry” related to the person of Jesus. She sees the problem in the exclusively masculine symbols for the idea of incarnation. “As a uniquely masculine image and language for divinity loses credibility, so also the idea of a single divine incarnation in a human being of the male sex may give way in the religious consciousness to an increased awareness of the power of Being in all persons” (1973: 71).

From the conservative evangelical perspective of this author, and judged by the standards set in Chapter 1, Daly does not employ conventional hermeneutical procedure. She does not endeavor to determine authorial intent, attempt to interpret a passage in its proper historical and literary context, or allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Daly’s feminist ideology is presupposed and overrides the overt teaching of Scripture, so that her positions cannot be said to derive from the actual interpretation of Scripture.

It is understood that from the perspective of a postmodern feminist interpreter, Daly’s radical stance toward biblical authority and historic Christianity is one legitimate expression of an individual interpreter’s right to reject traditional readings and sources of authority and to pursue alternative avenues of finding meaning and relevance. Understandably, if Christianity is false, then Scripture should not be awarded authority and meaning will be found in something other than the foundational document of the Christian faith. The very radicalism of Daly’s position makes it appealing to some as a viable non-Christian alternative belief system.

In my view, one particularly problematic part of Daly's program is her unduly strong reaction against the Scripture's perceived patriarchalism, issuing in an anti-male bias (contrast Ruether, who speaks of the liberation of both women and men; see following discussion). Her antipathy toward males causes Daly to try to de-center maleness not only from Scripture but also from Christianity and even Jesus. In the process, she recasts religion as the human experience of the "power of Being" (echoes of Tillich?) manifested no longer uniquely in Jesus but in all persons.

This clearly contradicts Scripture's emphatic claim that God revealed himself uniquely and definitively in Jesus (e.g., John 1:18; 14:6) and that salvation is found only in him (Acts 4:12). Speaking of the "power of Being" is an inadequate substitute for the scriptural witness to the one true God, the Creator and Redeemer, and Daly's focus on human religious experience does not adequately take into account the scriptural claim that God revealed himself to humans.

Daly's work is an example of someone who has rejected the authority of Scripture with the result that morality was radically recast as well. This is illustrated by her progression of thought as evidenced in her later writings *Pure Lust* and her *Webster's first new intergalactic wickedary of the English language*. Daly first gave up her Christian faith and subsequently apparently rejected any form of morality, promoting lust and evil as part of a radically libertarian agenda.

### 2.2.2 Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

Virginia Mollenkott, professor of English at William Paterson College of New Jersey, evidences considerable development in her work on her treatment of Jesus and women. In

her first work, *Women, Men, and the Bible* (1977; rev. ed. 1988), Mollenkott espoused egalitarian tenets such as “mutual submission” in marriage, contending that God is not male but transcends human gender, and arguing that the term “head” in Paul’s writings denotes “source or origin,” not a position of authority (see Chapter 1). Mollenkott noted that the church ought to follow Jesus’ egalitarian example in the interpretation of Scripture. Mollenkott urged that the church implement “the pervasive and liberating theology of human unity in the spirit of God” evidenced in Jesus’ ministry (1977: 99).

In her 1980 work *Speech, Silence, Action!* Mollenkott continued to contend forcefully that the Bible, rightly understood, teaches the liberating message of egalitarian relationships. In a chapter entitled “The Bible as Both Normative and Emancipating,” she explained that her esteem for the Bible derived from her Plymouth Brethren “fundamentalist” background. In this work Mollenkott sought to make a “case for an all-inclusive, egalitarian nondualistic, global Body of Christ—the single organism of the New Humanity,” strongly opposing traditional readings of well-known gender passages: “We have had enough of that [proof-texting] in sexist plucking out of context such passages as Ephesians 5:22 (wifely submission) or 1 Timothy 2:12” (1980: 28). Mollenkott advocated a “holistic reading of the Bible” in its *whole-Bible* context which she believed teaches a prevailing liberating and non-repressive message.

In 1983 Mollenkott published *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female*, in which she set forth biblical images of God, including also a chapter on “Christ as Female Pelican,” or “the Mother Christ” (with reference to Ps. 102:6). She acknowledged that most of the biblical language about God is masculine, but sought to show that Scripture also uses a considerable amount of *female imagery* for God, which, in

a patriarchal culture, is significant. Mollenkott drew the implication that “[i]f we truly believe that the Bible’s intentions are all-inclusive—that redemption is intended for everyone—we will not want to continue practices that exclude certain listeners” (1983: 114).

In her subsequent writings Mollenkott has turned increasingly radical. In her 1987 work *Godding: The Bible and Human Responsibility*, Mollenkott speaks of all people of faith being corporately “Christed” new humanity. For Mollenkott, the human presence of God is to be located in *relationship* and *caring* (1987: 2–3). “Godding,” then, is the making known of God’s presence in mutual service, support, and caring (1987: 4). The intention is for everyone to grow toward the recognition of God’s image in everyone and everything and toward mutual respect. In *Godding*, Mollenkott embraces monism, pantheism, and the notion of Self as God (cf. Kassian 2005: 219–23). According to Mollenkott, “God is both ‘other’ and ourselves . . . more all-encompassing than we could image Her to be” (1987: 4). As in her previous works, Mollenkott’s thought is motivated by an egalitarian agenda that seeks to do “justice to those people who were formerly excluded from the good basics of life” (1987: 33).

Mollenkott’s radical turn continued with the publication of *Sensuous Spirituality: Out from Fundamentalism* in 1992 (dedicated to her life partner Debra Lynn Morrison), whereby “sensuous” (in distinction from “sensual”) is used in the sense of “embodied” or “physical.” Mollenkott writes that “I speak and always have spoken in a lesbian voice; the feminism came much later than the lesbianism, signs of which were apparent in me by age four” (1992: 11). She proceeds, “Although I have come to identify myself essentially as a spiritual being who is currently having embodied human experiences,



those experiences have been authentically lesbian for as long as I can remember. (My heterosexual marriage was the attempt of a brainwashed fundamentalist to fit herself into the heteropatriarchal mold)” (1992: 11–12).

In this work Mollenkott describes how she was liberated from her fundamentalist understanding of total depravity and came to understand herself as “an innocent spiritual being” (1992: 16; contrast Rom. 3:23), involving the study of hermeneutics, interpretation of dreams, journaling, Tarot cards, psychotherapy, and mystical experiences. In the course of time, she came to understand herself, “like my Elder Brother, Jesus,” as “a sinless Self traveling through eternity and temporarily having human experiences in a body know[n] as Virginia Ramey Mollenkott” (1992: 16). It is “the all-embracing Consciousness” that she calls God, and that “consciousness is mine, and mine in Hers” (1992: 16). Mollenkott’s earlier emphasis on *Godding* has now evolved even further to an eclectic mix aligning her with Eastern views of reincarnation and mysticism.

Mollenkott anticipates that some of her readers may be thinking she has deserted Christianity in favor a new metaphysics. She counters that she is “drawn back to the essence of what Jesus actually believed, lived, and taught” and that she has recovered the true meaning of Jesus’ teaching in the original Aramaic, “a multivalent Middle Eastern language that does not draw sharp distinctions between inner qualities and external actions” but rather views the cosmos as “fluid and wholistic” (1992: 26). She quotes “one possible translation from the Aramaic” of the Lord’s Prayer:

O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos,  
focus your light within us—make us useful:

Create your reign of unity now—  
 Your one desire then acts with ours,  
 As in all light, so in all forms.  
 Grant what we need each day in bread and insight.  
 Loose the cords of mistakes binding us,  
 As we release the strands we hold of others' guilt.  
 Don't let surface things delude us,  
 But free us from what holds us back. . . .

“Gone,” Mollenkott concludes, “are traditional Christianity’s emphasis on sin, guilt, and retribution; instead, we are empowered toward co-creatorship, welcomed to continual renewal on a continuous Great Non-Judgment Day” (1992: 27). Mollenkott’s indication that she understands Jesus’ true thinking better than traditional historical Christian interpretation and doctrine substitutes her preferred view of the world, God, and self for the biblical view. Her self-understanding as an “innocent” spiritual being likewise does not derive from scriptural exegesis but from her self-acknowledged quest to move “Out from Fundamentalism” (the subtitle of her work).

Mollenkott’s last major work to date continues her radical turn. Her 2001 book *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach* represents an attempt to “move beyond the binary gender construct in order to set forth a new gender paradigm, which seeks to include and offer liberation to everyone who has been oppressed by the old model” (2001: vii). Based on a “new literal” reading of Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ “there is [literally] no male or female,” Mollenkott proceeds to imagine and

construct an “Omnigendered Society” in which all gender distinctions are transcended, where lesbianism is celebrated and cross-dressing practiced.

In her advocacy of lesbianism and an “omni-gendered society,” Mollenkott cites Herrstrom (1999: 83), who contends that “Jesus inhabits a shape-shifting universe, where above and below merge, the human and the natural world flow into each other, worlds without limits where any transformation is possible.” Herrstrom locates the background to Jesus’ water-into-wine miracle in John 2 in the “transgendered” Greek god Dionysus (a highly unlikely construal), observing that just as the Israelites crossed boundaries such as the Red Sea in their quest for liberation, so, too, “Jesus must separate from his mother and cross over into society,” and “each of us must cross the birth waters and emerge from womb to world” (2001: 154).

To cross a boundary is to erase it, Mollenkott contends. *Omnigender* thus represents Mollenkott’s effort to erase gender boundaries and to imagine a society with such a makeup. Yet her pursuit of this “Omnigendered Society” rests on doubtful scriptural foundations. In fact, it is surprising that Mollenkott continues to invoke Scripture to support her views, since she has abandoned the Bible as authoritative in any meaningful sense. Certainly Mollenkott has a right to reject Scripture and to construe an alternative system. From the viewpoint of one who holds to a high view of Scripture, however, Mollenkott’s approach including her advocacy of lesbianism is not acceptable as an adequate description of reality.

### 2.2.3 Daphne Hampson

Daphne Hampson, a lecturer in systematic theology at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, is the most prominent radical feminist in Britain. As mentioned in the introductory survey in Chapter 1, Hampson was part of the movement to ordain women to the priesthood in the Anglican Church. She now calls herself as a post-Christian feminist (see, for example, her work *After Christianity*, published in 1996) and holds that Christianity and feminism are incompatible and that Christianity is a mere “myth” (1998: 39). Convinced that “feminism represents the death-knell of Christianity as a viable religious option” (1990: 1), Hampson is seeking for new ways to conceptualize God.

Since the focus of the present dissertation is feminist scholarship on Jesus, it is not necessary to probe all of Hampson’s work in depth. It should be noted that only a small fraction of Hampson’s writings concern themselves with Jesus. This may be explained by the fact that as a post-Christian radical feminist, Hampson is looking for alternate ways to construct a world view and religion that is acceptable in keeping with radical feminist beliefs. In her search for suitable paradigms, Hampson posits, in an article entitled “On Power and Gender” (1988: 234–50), the “paradigm of mutual empowerment.”

“Can this paradigm be found in the Judeo-Christian tradition?” Hampson asks. At the very outset, she rejects the Trinity as a possible candidate, since it contains an element of hierarchy and dependence, with the Son submitting to, and depending on, the Father. Jesus’ life, too, according to Hampson, does not model a paradigm of mutual empowerment. Jesus was not a feminist, and there is “no evidence that the equality of women was even an issue in the society in which he lived” (1988: 247). Jesus did not

challenge the secondary role women played in Jewish religion, and he accepted the prevailing male and female roles in his society. He also referred to God as his “Father.” To be sure, perhaps against the mores of his day, he permitted a woman to sit and learn at his feet, but we “have no picture of Jesus sitting at a woman’s feet, learning from her” (1988: 247). Jesus (and Paul) may have been personally kind to women, or even ahead of their time, but this does not make them feminists. For this reason God, as traditionally conceived, and Jesus, seen as God or as symbolic of God, are unusable as sources for the feminist paradigm of mutual empowerment.

According to Hampson, women “have no use for a God who condescends to be with them in their weakness. Paternalism fits ill with feminism” (1988: 248). Women want to be whole, self-directed, free, and interdependent with others. They want a God who does not override our will and who is “non-dominative” (1988: 248). Hampson calls for “a model of the self as being related in its very being to God,” whereby God does not stand over against us as one “who could potentially dominate us, or who could suggest an action which to carry out would be for us to act heteronomously” (1988: 248). She posits the need for a utopian “world in which power is not exercised, in which the few do not coerce the many, or one sex dominate [*sic*] the other. A world in which service and self-giving which are unproductive for the one who serves and gives is reduced to a minimum” (1988: 248–49). Feminism is the “last great hope” for our world.

Clearly, Hampson presents a stirring vision, but it is also one that is, as Hampson herself states, at variance with the biblical message regarding the nature of God, Jesus, and many other facets of scriptural teaching. In fact, the only reason why Hampson would still refer to Christianity is to define her vision of feminism over against it. In

essence, feminism is whatever Christianity is *not*. It is self-actualizing rather than self-giving. It is assertive of its independence and autonomy rather than service-oriented, since service gives up self while feminism is all about (re)claiming power over self. It is strong rather than weak, and self-sufficient rather than dependent.

Remarkably, this radical egalitarianism extends even to God, the Creator. In order for Hampson's vision of feminism to be realized, God must be one of us. He must be like us. For any form of power is excluded (note Hampson's reference to her vision of a "world in which power is not exercised," 1988: 248–49). There is also no need for the cross, for Hampson denies any need for women to come to God in dependence, weakness, or need. Everything that the cross of Jesus Christ represents—service, self-sacrifice, loving self-denial—is excluded from Hampson's feminist vision.

In her book *Theology and Feminism* (1990), Hampson develops some of these ideas further in a chapter on Christology. She observes that Christian feminists seek to counterbalance the male orientation of Christianity (e.g., God as Father, Jesus as Son) by locating or positing female figures or feminine motifs "within what is a deeply masculine religion" (1990: 71; see Mollenkott's "female pelican" example above). For her part, Hampson states, "I have never been a Christian feminist" (1990: 71), because Christianity is not truly egalitarian at its core. She also rejects efforts at compensation by some who say Jesus was incarnated as a male, but the Spirit should be conceived as female, or those who elevate Mary as a compensatory figure to Christ.

Hampson has harsh words for what she calls the recent "fixation" on Mary by some feminists. She challenges the actuality of the virgin birth and claims there is no basis for elevating Mary along the lines of a high Mariology. Mary is in no way

equivalent to the male Christ, and biblical religion is not about Mary, but about Christ. What is more, Mary is not a role model feminists today could aspire to emulate, for “she conforms to the masculinist [*sic*] construction of femininity” (1990: 74). Mary’s major role is that of a mother giving birth to a male child, and her significance is solely construed in relation to the one to whom she gave birth, Jesus.

Further insight into Hampson’s thought is provided by a 1998 interview with Julie Clague (1998: 39–57) in which Hampson says she is not a Christian because she believes Christianity is a mere myth and because she cannot “conform to the kind of view of ‘woman’ that there is within this myth” (1998: 39). Feminism has brought about a revolution in the way in which women are conceived, and there must be no return to a society in which women are assigned a “place” to which they must conform (1998: 43). After working for the ordination of women in the Anglican Church, Hampson took a feminist “leap into maturity” (1998: 50) in the conviction that one can be a religious and spiritual person without believing in Christian doctrine.

In that interview, Hampson says that it was in her late teens that she discovered some people thought Jesus was God. She was “amazed and horrified” (1998: 49), because she found this completely unbelievable. At the same time she was told that Jesus had died for her sins. She could not accept this either. At the most, Jesus “was a very fine human being who loved God” (1998: 49)—no more. As to the Bible, Hampson regarded it as “just part of human literature in which people had recorded their experience and awareness of God” (1998: 50)—there is no way in which she could consider the Bible as inspired in a way other literature was not.

Taking her cue from Schleiermacher, Hampson believes “we need to be deeply in tune with who we most truly are.” We must come home to ourselves so as to find ourselves and realize who we are meant to be. Hampson defines “the problem with Christianity” to be “that Christianity is, by definition, a religion of revelation,” which has, “by definition, a transcendent God who is other than humankind, and, by definition, it believes there has been a revelation in a past period of human history” (1998: 51). This kind of “heteronomy” is impossible for Hampson, however: “I have got to see myself, in my relation to others, as at the centre of my world”—“a law unto myself”—“and not be a slave to anything which is outside myself” (1998: 51).

“Christianity is a Father-Son religion” and as such “has no place for independent, adult women who are self-directing people” (1998: 54). Why would a woman want to see herself as “in Christ”? “Why should she relate to God through someone else?” (1998: 55). Hence Christianity is most profoundly at odds with the central tenets of feminism, and being a “Christian feminist” is an improper conception of one’s identity. Hampson’s view of God, Jesus, and the Bible place her outside the church and outside Christianity, and this is a place she does not only desire for herself but that is the only place any woman who is truly a feminist in a consistent, radical sense could ever legitimately occupy.

With this, Hampson rejects Christianity as in any way possible for feminists to embrace. Hermeneutically, she has arrived at this conclusion not by the exegesis of specific passages of Scripture, but by examining the tenets of Christianity in light of her feminists presuppositions and by finding Christianity wanting. Hampson in no way allows herself to be engaged by Scripture. Nor does she engage in a “hermeneutic of



suspicion,” by which the “patriarchal bias” of Scripture is critiqued but passages relevant for women are isolated and emphasized (the hermeneutical program of reformist feminists). In this Hampson is a true embodiment of an uncompromising, radical form of feminism.

While someone who is a conservative evangelical Christian will obviously not agree with Hampson’s feminist vision and her view of Christianity as a myth, she is to be commended for the consistency with which she holds and develops her approach. If Christianity were indeed a myth, there is no reason why anyone should embrace the view of women within that myth. Even so, it is interesting that she feels the need to continue to engage Christianity at all in her work. Hampson’s exceptional clarity of thought also appropriately discerns, in my opinion, that Christianity and Scripture do contain a clear emphasis on male authority. Her discussion that follows condemning any of the approaches that seek to diminish the androcentric bias of Scripture, by seeking to uncover feminine images for God or female role models in Scripture, is also consistent within her frame of reference. Though I would disagree from my vantage point, she follows through in rejecting Scripture altogether instead of trying to redeem parts of it.

### **2.3 Reformist Feminism**

In the previous section I have surveyed radical feminism on Jesus and women as epitomized in the work of three leading feminist writers, Mary Daly, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, and Daphne Hampson. Under the present heading, I will discuss the contributions of the reformist feminists Letty Russell, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Rosemary Radford Ruether to the topic. A section will also be devoted to recent literary

feminist approaches. Essentially, reformist feminist hermeneutics differs from its radical feminist counterpart in that it still looks mainly to Scripture as a sourcebook for feminist theology and endeavors to “redeem” usable elements from Scripture’s portrayal of women for its construction of a feminist edifice of thought.

### 2.3.1 Letty Russell

Letty Russell, a Presbyterian minister ordained in 1958 and a professor of theology at Yale University, was an influential voice that wrestled with many of the general hermeneutical challenges with which reformist feminists were faced including the issue of Jesus and women. Her first major work, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective: A Theology*, appeared in 1974. In a concluding “Prologue” [sic], she wrote that the purpose of this work was that of “relating the experience of both oppression and liberation to the Tradition of Jesus Christ” (1974: 185). She held out a vision of “a truly androgynous world” “where men and women are equal and each can express his or her life style in a variety of ways” (1974: 183).

At the outset, Russell noted that in their search for liberation, women are “rejecting oppressive and sexist religious traditions that declare that they are socially, ecclesiastically, and personally inferior because of their sex” (1974: 18–19). Her goal was to establish the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes. She defined liberation theology as a concern with “the liberation of all people to become full participants in human society” (1974: 20). In her search for “usable history,” she found scriptural support for her feminist quest in Jesus’ reference to preaching the gospel to the poor in Luke 4:18. According to Russell, Jesus constituted a “breakthrough”—he treated

women as “full persons” (1974: 87, citing Matt. 11:2–6; John 4:7–30; Luke 8:1–3; 24:1–11). In her treatment of “usable language,” she opposed generic “he” as “generic nonsense” and located female images for God and Jesus in Scripture (1974: 97–102).

Russell also devoted chapters to salvation and conscientization, and incarnation and humanization. Jesus was a “feminist” “in the sense that he considered men and women equal” (1974: 138) and taught servanthood, not subordination (1974: 140–42). Russell approvingly cited Harvey Cox who wrote, “We should not invest monogamy with the sacred significance of being the only legitimate Christian or human form of familial structure” (1974: 152). She proceeded to contend that new experimental relationships may “help men and women to find alternative ways of lasting relationships of full personhood,” relationships that are driven by “a deep regard for the partner as a person and subject” (1974: 152).

Russell’s emphasis on feminism as a quest for attaining women’s full humanity finds fuller expression in her 1982 work *Becoming Human*. This is essentially a popular anthropology or doctrine of humanity from a feminist perspective. In a chapter entitled “Not Quite Human” Russell discusses Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–42. Russell observes that Jesus relates to the woman as a full human being, calling her to a “new history” as one who has a task in her community and a new future with her as a full participant (1982: 25). Metaphysically, she advocates viewing life as “a rainbow of partnerships” rather than as a pyramid of domination (1982: 29). God’s presence in Christ as our Neighbor means that “every person has become our partner” (1982: 45, citing Karl Barth).

Along the way, Russell redefines Christology, soteriology, and hamartiology. Philippians 2 demonstrates that Jesus was willing to become less than human, so that God exalted him to become more than human (1982: 52). Salvation means freedom, not so much from sin, as from (male) oppression and freedom to be human (which Russell defines as wholeness, *shalom*, and divine-human and human-human partnership). However, it must be noted that the primary oppressor of humans according to Scripture is sin, rebellion against God and his created order, not males. Also, not every exercise of authority is domination in a negative, coercive, abusive sense. With regard to Russell's interpretation of Philippians 2, it is important to note that for God in Christ to lower himself to become human in order to secure our salvation does not mean that his being is exhausted, or that his role in relation to humanity is best described as, becoming a "partner" for humans. Rather, Jesus is himself God who pre-existed eternally with God and subsequent to his earthly mission returned to his heavenly glory with God.

Perhaps the most significant hermeneutical contribution made by Russell is found in the edited volume, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (1985). In her introductory essay, Russell expressed her concern that Scripture had in effect been held captive by patriarchal, sexist interpretation, or as she put it, "one-sided white, middle-class, male interpretation" (1985: 12). According to Russell, Scripture "needs liberation from abstract, doctrinal interpretations that remove the biblical narrative from its concrete social and political context in order to change it into timeless truth" (1985: 12). One aspect of feminist interpretation is the use of inclusive language and interpretation, by which the canon is consequently changed and its authority weakened. This volume is an

exercise in inclusive interpretation of the Bible, for the purpose of affirming women “as fully human partners with men, sharing in the image of God” (1985: 13).

The roots of the present volume are found in the Liberation Theology Working Group of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). Russell chronicles the history of feminist hermeneutical reflection over the course of several years of these meetings. At the 1980 meeting, women were reminded that Elizabeth Cady Stanton in *The Woman's Bible* identified the Bible itself as the major culprit in the oppression of women owing to its patriarchal orientation and use by others.

The major topic of discussion at the 1981 Dallas meeting was the proper role of Scripture in feminist reflection. Katharine Sakenfeld summed up the options as follows: (1) locating positive texts featuring women in order to counteract texts “against” women; (2) rejecting Scripture as non-authoritative; (3) looking to the Bible in general for a liberation perspective; and (4) learning from ancient texts about women in patriarchal cultures for women in similar situations today.

At the 1982 New York SBL meeting, the discussion turned to the feminist understanding of biblical authority and canon. The conclusion emerged that the Bible does not function as the Word of God if it “contributes to the continuation of racism, sexism, and classism” (1985: 16). According to Russell, “*the Word of God is not identical with the biblical text*” (1985: 17, emphasis original). Russell contends, “The story of these texts is *experienced as God's Word* when it is heard in communities of faith and struggle as a witness to God's love for the world,” by the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1985: 17, emphasis added). We see here a crucial shift from authority inherent in

the biblical texts themselves to authority being vested in a person's experience. This emphasis on the role of experience and community has become a bedrock foundation of feminist hermeneutics.

Russell contends that "*liberation is an ongoing process expressed in the already/not yet dynamic of God's action of New Creation*" and that the "word is already liberated as it witnesses to God's liberation action in the story of Israel and of Jesus Christ" (1985: 17). Here Russell looks to the Bible in general for a liberation perspective, which she seeks to salvage from the overall patriarchal orientation of the Scriptures. Thus the theme of "liberation" serves as her "canon within the canon" that provides the criterion for what is or is not experienced as the "Word of God" and thus is authoritative.

In a later essay in the same volume, Russell compares and contrasts her hermeneutic to that of other major feminist writers such as Ruether or Fiorenza. Russell identifies her interpretive key as the "intention of God for the liberation of groaning creation in all its parts" (1985: 139), in distinction from that of Ruether, whose criterion is the affirmation of the full humanity of women. Fiorenza's hermeneutical key, according to Russell, is Jesus' establishment of a discipleship of equals. Russell developed her interpretive key through her own experience and life story. She finds in the Bible a source of her own expectation of justice and liberation. In her struggle against oppression she finds liberation in living in the already/not yet of the new creation.

Although Russell does not reject the Bible as a normative source of her theology, she does reject many of its teachings as well as its patriarchal context. For Russell, her own exercise of reformist feminist interpretation is "profoundly paradoxical" (citing Tolbert 1983): "one must defeat the Bible as patriarchal authority by using the Bible as

liberator” (1985: 140). Reading the Bible still helps Russell make sense of who she is owing to her background and tradition, but Scripture contradicts her world view. Hence Russell, in a move that she herself calls paradoxical, but that others may consider inconsistent, affirms parts of Scripture while rejecting others.

The question arises of how Russell’s approach is biblical. She does frequently cite Scripture and claims that her perspective is even more biblical than conventional theology, because it exposes its patriarchal bias. However, her basic hermeneutic of reading Scripture through a feminist lens and of eliminating what she deems unacceptable does not award to Scripture true authority. Starting with feminism, she only uses what agrees with her basic presuppositions and enlists suitable passages in support of her alternative construal. In my opinion, this procedure is circular and selective.

Russell’s 1986 Annie Kinkead Warfield Lectures (named after the wife of the famous Princeton scholar B. B. Warfield) were published in the following year as *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology*. Russell contends that Jesus did not use his authority to exercise dominance or to rule in an institutional sense. His authority was to forgive sins, to drive out demons, and to preach the gospel; his power was to heal (1986: 24). In her discussion of the source of authority, Russell makes a case for the authority of experience (1986: 30–33). She also repeatedly refers to the authority of the future, in the sense that it is her commitment to God’s new creation that controls her theological thought and praxis.

Interestingly, Russell appeals to the sociology of knowledge according to which our understanding of reality is socially constructed, a well known feminist principle (1986: 30). In order to eliminate the unwelcome patriarchal, male image of God as king

in the concept of the kingdom of God, Russell proposes the metaphors of God's household and of good housekeeping, which bring in a more overtly female dimension. Russell also discusses the power of naming and gender-inclusive language and suggests alternative paradigms of speaking about God in female terms such as Sophia (citing Fiorenza). She posits the following tools for rebuilding a feminist approach to Scripture:

(1) to “depatriarchalize” the Bible (Phyllis Trible's term) by adopting a stance of radical suspicion regarding the patriarchal bias of the biblical writers;

(2) to “listen to the underside” (i.e., the oppressed); and

(3) to “work from the other end” (i.e., the feminist future).

Essentially, Russell takes her programmatic cue from Fiorenza, whom she quotes as follows: “The common hermeneutical ground of past, present, and future is not ‘sacred history’ or ‘sacred text’ but commitment to the biblical vision of God's new creation” (1986: 69). She also cites Ruether as “appealing to the future as well as the past as her basis of authority” (1986: 69). This suggests that while Russell is more overtly political in her thought, she takes her basic hermeneutic from seminal feminist thinkers such as Fiorenza, to whom I now turn.

### 2.3.2 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

While there were precursors in the 1970s, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's historical reconstruction of early Christian origins, particularly as it relates to Jesus' and the early church's treatment of women, has been by far the most influential in the past several decades. In her major work *In Memory of Her* (1983) Fiorenza proposes a fourfold hermeneutic (Fiorenza 1984: 47–84; cf. 1983: xxiii, 26–36; Phillips 1999: 393–94;



Kassian 1992: 111–17): (1) a hermeneutic of suspicion toward traditional interpretations of biblical texts owing to patriarchal bias and assumptions; (2) a hermeneutic of remembrance that uncovers women’s agency in foundational Christian tradition; (3) a hermeneutic of proclamation that relates this reconstruction to the Christian community; and (4) a hermeneutic of imagination that expresses feminism in ritual, prayer, hymns, banners, and art (for an application of Fiorenza’s hermeneutic to a specific text of Scripture, namely Luke 10:38–42, see Fiorenza 1986: 21–36).

Fiorenza’s primary objective in *In Memory of Her* is “to reconstruct early Christian history as women’s history in order not only to *restore* women’s stories to early Christian history but also to *reclaim* this history as the history of women and men” (1983: xiv; emphasis added). Applying historical and sociological criticism to the Gospels, Fiorenza contends that the Gospels show Jesus standing in judgment over the kind of marginalization of women practiced today. Thus, female subordination is not part of the original gospel but a result of Christianity’s accommodation to Greco-Roman culture. Fiorenza’s hermeneutic is undergirded by the conviction that a text’s life-setting is “as important for its understanding as its actual formulation. Biblical texts are not verbally inspired revelation nor doctrinal principles but historical formulations within the context of a religious community” (1983: xv). Hence history precedes text and forms the focal point of scholarly investigation.

Taking her cue from Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the *Woman’s Bible* (1895, 1898), Fiorenza affirms that biblical interpretation is a political act and espouses a liberation theology model of biblical interpretation with reference to the work of Letty Russell, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Phyllis Trible (1983: 7–21). For Fiorenza, “a

feminist reconstitution of the world requires a feminist hermeneutics that shares in the critical methods and impulses of historical scholarship on the one hand and in the theological goals of liberation theologies on the other hand” (1983: 29).

Fiorenza’s conclusion is that “the revelatory canon for theological evaluation of biblical androcentric traditions and their subsequent interpretations cannot be derived from the Bible itself but can only be formulated in and through women’s struggle for liberation from all patriarchal oppression” (1983: 32). In other words, “only those traditions and texts that critically break through patriarchal culture . . . have the theological authority of revelation” (1983: 33). Significantly, Fiorenza finds “such revelation . . . in the life and ministry of Jesus as well as in the discipleship community of equals called forth by him” (1983: 34).

As Fiorenza (1983: 34) points out, her model “locates revelation not in texts but in Christian experience and community.” Hence, in keeping with the historical-critical method Fiorenza has essentially embraced, her primary interest lies, not in the text of Scripture itself but in phenomena *outside* of the text. What makes Fiorenza’s task more difficult, however, is the fact that “[m]ost of women’s early Christian heritage is probably lost and must be extracted from androcentric early Christian records” (1983: 52).

In Part 2 of her book, Fiorenza attempts to reconstruct women’s history as “the history of the discipleship of equals” (the title of Part 2). Fiorenza (1983: 107) understands the “Jesus movement” as a renewal movement within Judaism that presented an alternative to the dominant patriarchal restrictions in that culture. According to Fiorenza, Jesus’ vision of the kingdom included the praxis of inclusive wholeness (1983: 119, citing Luke 17:21; 1983: 122, citing Luke 1:52–53). Jesus’ healings, his table

fellowship with sinners, and his accepting attitude toward all are cited as proofs of this new approach on the part of Jesus.

Fiorenza quotes the statement in Luke 7:35 that “wisdom is justified by all her children,” then follows this with the claim that divine Sophia served as Israel’s God and that “the Palestinian Jesus movement understood the mission of Jesus as that of the prophet and child of Sophia” (1983: 135). Sophia, the female deity, also is the driving force behind Jesus’ pursuit of a “discipleship of equals.” Fiorenza also adduces the significance of texts such as the account of the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–42; the story of the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:24–30 and parallels; and the women followers of Jesus in Luke 8:1–3.

Fiorenza concludes, “As a feminist vision, the *basileia* [kingdom] vision of Jesus calls all women without exception to wholeness and selfhood, as well as to solidarity with those women who are the impoverished, the maimed, and outcasts of our society and church. It knows of the deadly violence such a vision and commitment will encounter. It enables us not to despair or to relinquish the struggle in the face of such violence. It empowers us to walk upright, freed from the double oppression of societal and religious sexism and prejudice. The *woman-identified man, Jesus, called a discipleship of equals* that still needs to be discovered and realized by women and men today” (1983: 153–54; emphasis added).

Fiorenza’s reconstruction of early Christianity has held virtually paradigmatic status amongst feminist scholarship for a considerable amount of time. The paradigmatic status of Fiorenza’s reconstruction is apparent also from the fact that other feminist and egalitarian scholars routinely take their point of departure from Fiorenza’s reconstruction.

From the vantage point of one who takes Scripture seriously as a source for Christian theology, Fiorenza's work on the historical Jesus is appreciated to the extent that it accurately represents the historical Jesus. In fact, it is the aim in interpretation to recover exactly what Jesus and the early church taught and practiced regarding women. If the early church practiced egalitarianism, this should likely be the norm for the church. The question, then, is, "Does Fiorenza's reconstruction accurately describe Jesus' approach to women as far as this can be discerned by historical research?"

The following discussion relates the contributions made to the evaluation of this historical reconstruction first by Amy-Jill Levine, followed by Kathleen Corely and John Elliott, and finally Esther Ng. In conclusion, I will add my own thoughts and evaluation.

In her article "Second Temple Judaism, Jesus, and Women," Amy-Jill Levine (1994: 8–33) seeks to provide a nuanced and evidence-based assessment of Jesus' treatment of women against the backdrop of the treatment of women in first-century Judaism. Against the stereotype that "the Jesus movement . . . was good for women" and "Second Temple Judaism . . . was . . . generally bad for women," Levine contends that (1) Second Temple Judaism was not as patriarchal as often alleged, speaking of a "critical feminist impulse" already present; and (2) that the Jesus movement was not as egalitarian as is commonly held (1994: 12–13).

Levine opposes the notion that "Jewish women of course were attracted to the 'community of equals' of the Sophia–Christ" (citing Crossan 1991: 298, following Fiorenza). According to Levine, Second Temple Judaism was considerably more diverse than supporting general stereotypes. Levitical purity legislation was not as "all-consuming" as often alleged (1994: 15, citing Sanders 1992: 71, 76; contra Witherington

1992: 957), and women participated in synagogal activities more than frequently realized (citing Brooten 1982).

As a result, Levine questions the notion of women being “liberated” by Jesus from an oppressive, patriarchal Judaism. After an extensive study of the hypothetical “Q” document, Levine opposes the view that women in the Jesus movement “were ‘liberated’ from a purity-obsessed, institutionally restricted, patriarchal Judaism” (1994: 32). If Jesus “proclaimed the elimination of gendered hierarchies [*sic*],” according to Levine, he failed. “The past may not be able to reveal the ideal, egalitarian community, but investigation of the texts (if not the texts themselves) offer a means of creating one yet” (1994: 33).

While one wonders to what extent Levine’s historical work is motivated by her desire to present Judaism in a more positive light than has previously been done, her reconstruction differs significantly from Fiorenza’s. Levine concludes that the historical and textual evidence does not support Fiorenza’s hypothesis of an “egalitarian Jesus.” Nevertheless, she holds out the hope that feminist investigation of biblical texts—albeit not necessarily the texts themselves—may aid in bringing about the feminist ideal in our day, all but abandoning the notion that feminists can find support for their ideal in the practice of Jesus and in the biblical texts themselves.

At the outset of her book *Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* (2002), Kathleen Corley, in a reference to Fiorenza’s landmark work, calls the notion that Jesus established a “discipleship of equals” a “feminist myth of Christian origins.” Summarizing her own conclusions, Corley writes,

While this study affirms the role of women in Jesus' own community and in subsequent Jesus movements, it challenges both the assumption that Jesus himself fought ancient patriarchal limitations on women and the hypothesis that the presence of women among his disciples was unique within Hellenistic Judaism. Rather, an analysis of Jesus' teaching suggests that while Jesus censured the class and status distinctions of his culture, that critique did not extend to unequal gender distinctions. The notion that Jesus established an anti-patriarchal movement or a "discipleship of equals" is a myth posited to buttress modern Christian social engineering (2002: 1).

What is significant is that Corley, a member of the "Jesus Seminar" known for its normally unconventional approach to Jesus and the Gospels, reached her conclusions on the basis of *historical research*, the very method that led Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza to the diametrically opposite conclusion that Jesus was in fact pursuing an egalitarian agenda. According to Corley, while Jesus was concerned for Jewish monotheism and expressed an interest in class and rank, "he did not address the concern most central to modern women—inequality between the sexes" (2002: 4). Rather, as Corley (2002: 4) notes, Jesus reaffirmed marriage, "the major hierarchical social relationship between a man and a woman that was considered the bedrock of the state in antiquity" (Mark 10:1–12 and parallels).

Corley observes that the reigning consensus among the members of the Jesus Seminar, many of whom were influenced by the scholarship of Schüssler Fiorenza, affirms that "Jesus preached a kind of social egalitarianism that pitted him against the social and religious hierarchies of his day" (2002: 7). Corley cites a litany of scholars

who refer to Jesus as a “feminist,” labeling his acceptance of women as “revolutionary,” “radical,” “unique,” “reformational,” or “unprecedented” in the ancient world, including Palestine (2002: 10; see 148 nn. 13–18).

However, while the vision of an egalitarian “society of Jesus” that eventually gave way to a patriarchal backlash by the second and third-century institutional church may provide an ideal rallying point as a “foundational myth for Christian feminism,” Corley argues that this reconstruction is historically untenable and not borne out by the available sources, including the Gospels. Corley identifies five specific problems with Fiorenza’s work:

(1) the radical distinction between Jesus’ attitude and practice toward women and that of his Jewish contemporaries is not borne out by concrete historical evidence;

(2) the reconstruction of Jesus’ “discipleship of equals” remains without real parallel in first-century Palestine (this would be a problem only if Jesus were limited to imitating other contemporary Jewish rabbis, however);

(3) the contention that Jesus preached “wholeness” in contrast to “holiness” is questionable;

(4) the insistence that Jesus founded an egalitarian community seems out of step with both first-century Judaism and Greco-Roman culture (but see comment at [2]); and

(5) the attribution of the decline of women’s status in early Christianity to Greco-Roman social institutions is doubtful.

Another critique of the notion that Jesus instituted an egalitarian community comes from John Elliott (2002, 2003). Elliott, professor emeritus of theology and religious studies at the University of San Francisco, contends that Fiorenza’s theory is

implausible both socially and politically in light of the available textual and historical evidence. According to Elliott, the notion of “the egalitarian Jesus” does not square with the actual historical and social nature of the nascent Jesus movement and represents an instance of the “idealist fallacy.”

After a detailed critique, Elliott summarizes his concerns as follows.

(1) The concept of equality is of modern origin and alien to the thought world and social reality of the ancient world: “The notion that all persons are created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights is a construct of the modern Enlightenment and thoroughly alien to the thinking of the ancient world. There the prevailing notion was rather that humans were by nature born unequal and this unalterable inequality was evident physically, socially, and ethnically” (2002: 77).

(2) “Equality” terminology (*iso-*) is never used in the New Testament to convey the notion of gender or other equality but rather that of equity or sameness (2002: 78, 84, citing the instances of *isos* in Matt. 20:12; Mark 14:46, 59; Luke 6:34; John 5:18; Acts 11:17; Phil. 2:6; Rev. 21:16; of *isotēs* in 1 Cor. 8:13–14; Col. 4:1; of *isotimos* in 2 Pet. 1:1; and of *isopsychos* in Phil. 2:20).

(3) Those who find egalitarianism in the New Testament interpret texts anachronistically by imposing a post-Enlightenment concept onto the first-century world. One example of this is Jesus’ call to discipleship (e.g., Mark 1:16–20 and parallel; 10:29–30 and parallel; etc.), which involved a renunciation of one’s natural ties where they conflicted with supreme allegiance to Jesus but did not amount to the establishment of egalitarianism. What is more, not all were called to leave their natural families, and those who were may have done so only temporarily. Hence, Jesus’ call for repentance and a



radical reorientation of priorities sought exclusive allegiance and unconditional trust in God in light of the imminence of God's reign and the urgency of Jesus' message but did not entail an explicit critique of the family as such. The same is true for Jesus' anticipation of conflict and division within biological families as a result of his call to discipleship (e.g., Mark 13:12 and parallel).

(4) The biblical texts cited in support of Jesus' establishment of an egalitarian society are better interpreted on the presumption of inequality of social status. Jesus' teaching regarding the reversal of status presumes the existence of status in the first place (e.g., Mark 9:35–37 and parallel; cf. Mark 10:13–15 and parallel). This includes differences in status between disciple and teacher (Luke 6:40; Matt. 10:24–25; John 13:16; 15:20); parents and children (Mark 7:11–13; 10:19 and parallels); and husbands and wives (Matt. 5:31–32; 19:9).

(5) No concrete historical or social evidence exists that Jesus instituted a "community of equals." There is no evidence in the writings of Josephus, Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius, or any other extrabiblical author.

(6) The primary New Testament text cited in support of egalitarianism, Galatians 3:28, pertains to the unity of believers in Christ, not their equality, affirming inclusivity with regard to ethnic, social, and gender boundaries rather than leveling all status distinctions.

(7) The equation between patriarchy and dominance customarily made by feminists does not hold.

(8) The egalitarian hypothesis is not borne out by the available historical evidence but rather constitutes an instance of the "idealist fallacy."

(9) Insufficient thought is given to the practical implementation of an egalitarian vision into concrete social reality. From a sociological point of view, Jesus' establishment of an egalitarian community would have required dramatic changes in the social structures of his day.

(10) The thesis has been rejected by feminist scholars such as Mary Rose D'Angelo (1992), Amy-Jill Levine (1994), and Kathleen Corley (1998, 2002) owing to its lack of historical support.

(11) The notion of Jesus' establishment of a community of equals fails to account for Jesus' reaffirmation of the family as the primary social structure and as instituted by God.

Elliott (2002: 90) concludes the first part of his study by writing,

By imputing to the biblical authors a modern concept of equality that is not found in the Bible and the ancient world and by allowing this imputed concept to determine their interpretation of the New Testament, they have produced an interpretation that distorts and obscures the actual content and thrust of these texts. Such an interpretative procedure appears [to be] more eisegesis than exegesis and deserves to [be] rejected as a[n] unhappy example [of] interpretive method. An anachronistic imputation of modern notions to the biblical authors should be challenged and resisted in the name of historical honesty wherever and however it occurs. To be sure, let us expend every ounce of energy it takes to reform the ills of society and church. But let us do so with historical honesty, respecting the past as past and not trying to recreate it with modern constructs or re-write it with new ideological pens.

In his sequel, Elliott investigates Fiorenza's theory with regard to circumstances subsequent to Jesus' death. Since this time period is beyond the purview of the present dissertation, I will refrain from reproducing Elliott's argument here. Suffice it to say that, according to Elliott, "The egalitarian theory fares no better in clarifying the structure of the Jesus movement after Jesus' death than it does in explaining the nature of the community established by Jesus" (2003: 204). Not only is the concept of equality or egalitarianism historically incompatible with first-century conditions, there is no evidence of egalitarianism in the New Testament or any other ancient source. Elliott (2003: 205–6) concludes that,

On a personal note, I must confess that I have not enjoyed mounting this critique. With every fibre of my egalitarian being I wish it were demonstrable that the Jesus movement had been egalitarian, at least at some point in its early history. This surely would make it easier for today's advocates of equality, among whom I count myself, to appeal to our past as a source of inspiration and moral guidance for the present. But, as the historical and ideological critic in all of us insists, wishing and politically correct ideology cannot not [*sic*] make it so. Ultimately, this well-intentioned theory is an unhappy example of anachronism and idealist thinking that must be challenged not just because it is indemonstrable or an example of flawed interpretation but also because it is so seductive. The notion that the Jesus movement ever formed a "community of equals" founded by Jesus is a phantasm, a *fata morgana*, a wish still awaiting incarnation. If the church were ever to put an egalitarian vision into practice, it would be a first-time event and an accomplishment that eluded even Jesus and his first followers.

Yet another recent critique of Fiorenza's work comes from Esther Yue L. Ng, *Reconstructing Christian Origins? The Feminist Theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: An Evaluation* (2002), originally a Ph.D. dissertation completed under the supervision of the British egalitarian scholar I. Howard Marshall in 1999. In her discussion of Fiorenza's understanding of the New Testament world, including her reconstruction of the Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts, Ng challenges her treatment of the so-called androcentric texts in Judaism and her depiction of the female figure of divine Sophia. She also questions the alleged presence of emancipatory impulses within Judaism that provided the plausibility structure for the emergence of an egalitarian vision among the early Christians.

With regard to the Greco-Roman world, Ng suggests that Fiorenza's picture of emancipation is too rosy, while her portrayal of patriarchalism is too gloomy (2002: 108). Ng (2002: 110) concludes that

the plausibility of true egalitarianism in early Christian groups is very small, if they took their models from their contemporary Graeco-Roman society, since the best kind of egalitarianism that can be found . . . falls short of our modern standards. If . . . early Christian groups met in households, we have even more reason to believe that, if these groups took Graeco-Roman households as their model, they would be hierarchical and patriarchal in nature, rather than egalitarian.

Ng (2002: 125) also evaluates Fiorenza's contention that the burden of proof rests with those who dispute the presence and agency of early Christian women and concludes that

a fair approach would be to examine the available evidence to see whether one's hypothesis does justice to the available texts.

Ng (2002: 329) also notes that Fiorenza operates with a "canon within a canon" in that she limits revelation to those texts that break through patriarchal structures. It appears that Fiorenza has awarded canonical status to her own reconstruction of early Christianity, insulating her against any further criticism by those who differ with her reconstruction, including other feminists. Since her reconstruction is only one of several possible alternatives, this leaves Fiorenza with an uncertain revelatory foundation.

With regard to the appeal to women's experience as a norm for determining whether or not a text has potential for liberation, Ng observes that any such appeal has its limitations since women's experience varies according to culture and a variety of other factors. Finally, Ng identifies a degree of circularity in any approach that starts out with a particular ideology, finds its ideal expressed in a particular historical reconstruction (such as Jesus' "discipleship of equals"), and then finds evidence that supports its conclusions.

In my view, the evaluations of Fiorenza's paradigm by Levine, Corley, Elliott, and Ng are on the whole persuasive. I add the following observations of my own. At the very outset, Fiorenza's contention that "only those traditions and texts that critically break through patriarchal culture . . . have the theological authority of revelation" (1983: 33) and that such revelation is to be found "in the life and ministry of Jesus as well as in the discipleship community of equals called forth by him" (1983: 34) sets up a "canon within a canon" based on her feminist presuppositions (see esp. Fiorenza 1984: 44-47; 1981: 107-8).

From the standpoint of one who holds a high view of Scripture it is not acceptable for Fiorenza to establish a “canon within a canon” and to advocate “transgressing the boundaries” of the recognized Christian canon in order to include writings she judges to be more favorable toward her feminist perspective as she searches for “a different theological self-understanding and historical imagination” (1994: 2.8; see also Ruether 1985; cf. the section on “Toward a New Canon” in Kassian 1992: 172–73). In my view, this procedure unduly blurs the line between inspired Scripture and later non-inspired writings.

When Fiorenza finds her enlarged Scripture to be “the open, cosmic house of divine Wisdom” (1994: 2.11) that allows access to divine revelation, in the opinion of this writer, she leaves behind the Scripture that can truly provide such access. Her citation of Luke 7:35 in support of her contention that “the Palestinian Jesus movement understood the mission of Jesus as that of the prophet and child of Sophia” (1983: 135) does not meet the requirements for exegesis as defined in this dissertation (cf. Kassian 1992: 179–81). While wisdom is personified in this passage, there is no evidence that Jesus or the early church understood wisdom as divine Sophia or Jesus as her “prophet and child.”

From the vantage point of one who holds to a high view of Scripture, Fiorenza’s (1983: 34) location of “revelation not in texts but in Christian experience and community” constitutes an unacceptable departure from Scripture’s testimony to itself as inspired and authoritative (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21) and shifts the locus of revelation to a sphere that is relative and thus in no way able to exercise any meaningful authority. Also, embarking on a quest for “alternative theological self-understanding” cannot be affirmed

as legitimate apart from being founded in truth as conveyed in Scripture. If historical reconstruction is no longer conducted on the basis of actual historical sources and evidence but fueled by “historical imagination” on the basis of feminist presuppositions, this does not conform to conventional notions of “historical” or “research.”

In response, Fiorenza (1985: 43–63) has strongly argued against a “Rankean understanding of history” (1985: 44–48) that seeks to determine “what really happened,” contending that such is an impossibility. Contrasting an objectivist-realist approach to history (von Ranke) with a constructionist one (her own approach; 1985: 48–55), she stresses the “time-boundedness” and “linguisticity” of history, which, according to Fiorenza, make it impossible to know the “real past.” The cautions and concerns raised by Fiorenza are real and should not be lightly dismissed. Nevertheless, regardless of our inability to determine “what really happened” with absolute certainty, an approximation of this ought to remain our goal. Fiorenza’s own constructionist approach utilizing “historical imagination” renders history far too vulnerable to revisionism.

As Conway (2002: 494) shows, this “new historicism,” which argues that all interpretation is invariably ideological, irremediably subjective, and inescapably relative, is itself on uncertain footing. Fiorenza’s (1985: 7) contention that history is always history for a certain purpose and a certain group, while containing an element of truth, does not adequately recognize the value of the available sources. As Elliott (2002, 2003) aptly observes, the reconception of “history” as “revisioning” and “reimagining” of the past in line with one’s own preferred version of reality does not properly distinguish between a given ideal and its real-life actualization in the form of concrete historical social structures.

In light of these insights, Fiorenza's historical reconstruction of the Jesus movement and early Christianity requires significant revision. For one holding to a high view of Scripture, in light of the cautions registered in the preceding discussion, there is even less room for accepting Fiorenza's reconstruction of an egalitarian Jesus community. Over the past few decades, Fiorenza's model has served as a powerful "myth of Christian origins" for the feminist movement. Incorporating the above research would necessitate the development of an alternative broad understanding of Jesus' approach to women and of the early church's practice with regard to women, particularly as far as their participation in roles of leadership is concerned.

This is not to say that Fiorenza's basic quest for a proper historical understanding of Jesus' treatment of women is not legitimate. Any view on this subject, whether feminism, egalitarianism, or complementarianism, must be based on a plausible reconstruction of the words and actions of Jesus on account of the available sources. There is a need for both a study of all the available extrabiblical sources and for an investigation in the four canonical Gospels toward that end.

The challenge that remains for people from all sides of the issue is to present an in-depth scriptural study for one's larger view of the identity and role of women according to Scripture. Jesus' example and teaching are central in this regard, but a comprehensive study would need to include also the book of Genesis, the sweep of Old Testament history, and the New Testament epistles, particularly Paul. As mentioned, this comprehensive study is beyond the scope of the present dissertation, whose focus is only Jesus and women (though this has been attempted by Clark 1980; Neuer 1991; Grenz 1995; and Patterson 1997).



I hold to a complementarian understanding of the issue at hand only because it to my mind flows most naturally from my reading of Scripture. If there were a convincing case that Jesus was a feminist or established an egalitarian community, this would require reassessment of the existing paradigm, and convictions would need to be adjusted.

### 2.3.3 Rosemary Radford Ruether

Rosemary Radford Ruether is one of the most prolific authors of the feminist movement, having authored or edited approximately thirty books. She has been cited as a representative of liberationist reformist feminism in Chapter 1. It has been noted that in contrast to Mary Daly, Ruether views feminism as part of a general movement for the liberation of all those who are subject to oppression, male as well as female. Reference has already been made to one of Ruether's earlier works, *Mary, the Feminine Face of the Church* (1979), in which she sets out to reclaim the biblical narratives regarding Mary from what she considers to be the patriarchal mythology of Christian tradition. Ruether identifies Mary as a model of discipleship, who in her Magnificat sounds the theme of social justice, where liberation theology and feminism converge.

In the following pages I will briefly survey Ruether's major publications which are directly relevant for this present dissertation. There is broad relevance in these works in that they serve as a prolegomenon to her later writings on the subject and more specific relevance in others as they deal closely with Jesus and women. As will be seen, some of Ruether's earlier works provide the background for her ideology that can later be seen to influence her hermeneutical approach. While Ruether published her first work in 1967, it is not until the publication of *Womanguides* in 1985 that the full scope of Ruether's

theological and hermeneutical program takes shape. Ruether's more significant works will be treated and critiqued more fully while less relevant publications will only be briefly summarized.

Ruether penned *The Church Against Itself: An Inquiry into the Conditions of Historical Existence for the Eschatological Community* in 1967. In this book she employs a "dialectical model" or "crisis theology" of ecclesiology, which involves a renaming process by which "realities that have falsely appropriated names . . . are . . . renamed according to their real nature" (1967: 5–6). For example, she criticizes "apostolicity" as a later generation's anachronistic projection of its monarchical episcopate onto the past. Rather than using an essentialist (taking its structure from the order of mind, by Ruether's definition) and metaphysical approach, Ruether urges adopting an existentialist (taking its structure from the order of existence) and "personalist" model. Consequently, she opts to understand Jesus in his original apocalyptic framework (1967: 89). One sees here already Ruether's emphasis on naming and her suspicion toward the church's claiming authority on the basis of the apostolic witness. Her subsequent works will develop these themes in considerably more detail.

In 1970 Ruether wrote *The Radical Kingdom: The Western Experience of Messianic Hope*. In this book she surveys historical movements and ideologies that sought to bring about the radical renewal and transformation of society, such as the Radical Reformation, the Enlightenment, or Marxism. While this book is mostly descriptive, it reveals Ruether's interest in liberation movements as paradigmatic for the feminist movement.

Ruether's liberationist feminist ideology finds its initial expression in the 1972 volume *Liberation Theology* (a collection of essays first published elsewhere), especially in the introductory chapter under the heading "The Oppressor and the Oppressed as a Model for Liberation Theology" (1972: 10–16). Ruether's views are more fully developed in her 1975 book *New Woman, New Earth* and will be discussed further below.

In 1974, Ruether edited *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (dedicated to Ruether's mother), a collection of essays including "Images of Women in the Old Testament" by Phyllis Bird, "The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament" by Constance Parvey, and "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church" by Ruether herself. (The New Testament article identifies Jesus as the "first 'feminist' " [1974: 138, citing Swidler 1971: 177–83], and focuses on Luke-Acts.) Ruether's article (whose subject is only indirectly relevant for this dissertation) chronicles the Church Fathers' views on women, ranging from misogynist to exalting virginity in high praise of women.

The following year saw the publication of Ruether's *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (1975, dedicated to Ruether's three children). The book contains various lectures studying the ideologies which have supported sexism. In opposition to patriarchy, Ruether views the women's movement as encompassing all other liberation movements (1975: xi). In this work Ruether identifies herself as one of the "implacable foes of those systems of ruling-class male power which have dominated human history" (1975: xiii). Her struggle to "transform this entire social system in its human and ecological relationships" involves nothing less than the "transformation of consciousness" (1975: xiv).

Most pertinent for the present dissertation is Chapter 3 of *New Woman, New Earth*, in which Ruether discusses women in the New Testament. Ruether finds in the Gospels a startling contrast between “the feminism of Jesus and traditional Judaism” (1975: 63; the same expression, “feminism of Jesus,” is found at 1975: 64). In support, Ruether cites Jesus’ close relationships with women and his ministry to women, such as the women followers of Jesus mentioned in Luke 8:1–3; Jesus’ references to poor widows and outcast women (Luke 21:1–4; 7:36–50); his miracles for women (Matt. 8:14ff; Mark 1:30–31; Luke 4:38–39; John 2:1–11); his feeling like a “mother hen” prior to the cross (Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34); and his healing of the woman with blood flow (Mark 5:25–34 and parallels). She also makes mention of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4; his pronouncements on divorce; and the women as first witnesses of the resurrection.

Even more important, according to Ruether, is Jesus’ model and teaching of servant leadership (citing Matt. 20:25–28), a theme that will surface regularly in later egalitarian literature on the subject (see Chapter 3). Ruether observes that, traditionally, the image of God as father has been used to support sexism and hierarchicalism in a domination-subordination model, in which males are identified with God the Father in a manner that places them in a hierarchical relationship over women and lower classes. But Ruether contends that Jesus opposed such an approach in his teaching on the subject (citing Matt. 23:8–11; Ruether 1975: 64).

Ruether also finds support for this contention in Jesus’ treatment of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42). She observes, “The principles of Christian community are founded upon a role transformation between men and women, rulers and ruled. The

ministry of the church is not to be modeled on hierarchies of lordship, but on the *diakonia* of women and servants, while women are freed from exclusive identification with the service role and called to join the circle of disciples as equal members” (1975: 66). However, it is not clear in what sense women are “equal members” of Jesus’ circle of disciples, nor why it is the *diakonia of women and servants* that is made the new paradigm rather than *diakonia* in general, whether by men or women (Jesus was incarnated as a male and practiced servanthood).

Also, Ruether cites the parallelism of male and female examples in the parables as evidence that “women were included equally with men *as* students of the Christian catechesis” (1975: 66–67). The link Ruether establishes between figures in parables and being equally students of Christian doctrine is not immediately evident; it is an inference drawn by Ruether, not a point made explicitly in Scripture. Though Jesus’ use of both men and women in parables shows that he sought to identify with the life experience of both male and female, one would need to be careful not to take this observation beyond what is warranted.

In a later essay, “The First and Final Proletariat: Socialism and Feminism,” Ruether notes that feminism arose in the late eighteenth century as part of the ideology of liberalism and that in the mid-1800s feminism was identified with socialism. Later, the liberation of women was envisioned by Marx and Engels as part of the communist revolution. Over against “the legacy of class, racist, imperialist, and sexist structures of domination” (1975: 183) and a Western capitalism that “is based on exploitation of people by people and the rape of the earth,” Ruether calls for the realization of a radical communism that overcomes economic oppression and the de-alienation of work and

moves toward the kind of utopian society envisioned by Marx and others (1975: 182–83). While now dated, this essay is revealing, in that it clearly shows her view that the roots of feminism were found in liberalism, socialism, and communism and that feminism was wedded to the notion of human liberation, not merely in economic terms, but primarily with regard to gender. Ruether's vision is spelled out further in the final essay of the volume, "New Woman and New Earth: Women, Ecology, and Social Revolution" (a theme developed more fully in her 1992 monograph, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*).

In 1976 a collection of essays, co-written by Eugene Bianchi and Rosemary Ruether, appeared, entitled *From Machismo to Mutuality: Essays on Sexism and Women-Man Liberation*. In alternating chapters, Bianchi and Ruether discuss the challenge of sexism and women's liberation. Ruether's contributions to the volume, in particular her essay "Sexism and the Liberation of Women," reiterate her liberationist feminist agenda laid out in *New Woman, New Earth*.

The year 1979 saw the publication of *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Tradition*, co-edited by Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin. In this collection of essays on leadership roles of women in the Jewish and Christian traditions, the editors and contributors seek to contribute toward the recovery of important chapters of women's history and toward the development of a new paradigm of female leadership. Similar to Fiorenza in Chapter One of the same volume, in an essay entitled "Word, Spirit and Power: Women in early Christian Communities" as well as in her work *In Memory of Her* a few years later, the editors claim at the outset that "[i]n Christianity originally women seem to have been incorporated into the teaching role, but

were eliminated early enough that the Church Fathers took for granted that women might never act as public teachers” (1979: 17). Since Fiorenza’s is the only chapter that deals with biblical passages and since Fiorenza’s work has already been evaluated, it is not necessary to engage the present volume further here.

Ruether proceeded to explore the topic of Christology and feminism in her 1981 work *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism*. Most pertinent for the present dissertation is the first chapter in the volume, “Jesus and the Revolutionaries: Political Theology and Biblical Hermeneutics” (1981: 7–18). The title is taken from the German New Testament scholar Oscar Cullmann’s book by the same title. In this book, Cullmann, similar to Martin Hengel before him, opposed S. G. F. Brandon’s thesis that Jesus was a political revolutionary, arguing instead that Jesus’ messianism was eschatological and personal. Ruether sides with Brandon, contending that “Jesus’s vision of the kingdom was essentially this-worldly, social and *political*, and not eschatological” (1981: 14).

Ruether’s assessment of Jesus’ agenda here is influenced by a feminist outlook, which likewise focuses on the transformation of political, socio-economic structures, particularly women’s liberation. For her and any others who focus on the political dimension it must be noted that Jesus’ statement before Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), suggests that Jesus himself did not primarily pursue a political agenda. This is also indicated by Jesus’ consistent refusal to be pressed into a political agenda (e.g., John 6:14) or to define his mission in this-worldly terms (e.g., the temptation narratives in Matthew 4 and Luke 4). Hence Jesus cannot be easily enlisted as

an exemplar of a program of social liberation such as the one proposed by Ruether and other liberationist feminists.

While Ruether's writings up to this point may still be viewed as expressive of a reformist type of feminism that regularly engages Scripture, her 1985 publication *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology* reveals a considerably more radical approach. As the preface to *Sexism and God-Talk* makes clear, these readings evolved from the lectures Ruether gave in her first feminist theology classes in the 1970s. In the Introduction to this volume, Ruether boldly states her hermeneutical program as follows: "Feminist theology cannot be done from the existing base of the Bible" (1985: ix). The reason for this is that the Old and New Testament "have been shaped in their formation, their transmission, and, finally, their canonization to sacralize patriarchy" (1985: ix). To be sure, Scripture "may preserve, between the lines, memories of women's experience. But in their present form and intention they are designed to erase women's existence as subjects and to mention women only as objects of male definition. In these texts the norm for women is absence and silence" (1985: ix). These statements indicate a clear rejection of Scripture as a basis for feminist theology.

Where should women go from here, then? What should take the place of the canon of Scripture? In the absence of an existing alternative canon, Ruether turns to a variety of sources. First, she proposes that women *read between the lines of patriarchal texts about women* in order to find fragments of women's experience that were not completely erased. Second, she suggests turning to *extra-canonical texts* that constitute "remains of alternative communities that reflect either the greater awe and fear of female power denied in later patriarchy or questionings of male domination in groups where



women did enter into critical dialogue” (1985: x–xi). Once canonical texts are read critically in light of what Ruether calls “that larger reality” [i.e., feminism], “a new norm emerges on which to construct a new community, a new theology, eventually a new canon. That new norm makes women as subjects the center rather than the margin. Women are empowered to define themselves rather than to be defined by others. Women’s speech and presence are normative rather than aberrant” (1985: xi).

*Womanguides* stays within the cultural matrix that has shaped Western Christianity, though Ruether states that creation stories from Australian aborigines or Amerindians, for example, “could be revelatory” (1985: xi). Ruether says the time has come for women to start the work of their own theological reflection. This work “need not remain encapsulated in past symbols and texts [i.e., the Bible]. New liberating experience is empowered to write new stories, new parables, new *midrashim*” (1985: xii). On the basis of this work of theological reflection issuing in new texts for women, a new feminist consciousness and movement will emerge. “We, too, can write new texts to express our new consciousness. We can read them in community gatherings of WomanChurch. They can become texts for teaching and preaching the vision” (1985: xii). Hence several of the included readings are feminist *midrashim*, such as that by Judith Plaskow on Lilith and Eve or that of several of Ruether’s female students at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary.

The Reader is essentially organized like a Systematic Theology, with Chapter titles including “Gender Imagery for God/ess,” “The Divine *Pleroma*,” “Stories of Creation,” “Humanity: Male and Female,” “The Origins of Evil,” “Redeemer/Redemptrix: Male and Female Saviors,” “Repentance, Conversion, Transformation,”

“Redemptive Community,” “Foremothers of WomanChurch,” “The New Earth” and “The New Heaven,” and “New Beginnings.” Readings in the chapter on Redeemer/Redemptrix, for example, include the following: Anath, Savior of Baal, Restores the World; The Androgynous Christ and Redeemer Humanity of Gnosticism; Christ as Mother: The Vision of a Woman Mystic; Jesus and Mary as Co-Redeemers in Catholic Piety; Woman Worship in Nineteenth-Century Romanticism; The Female Messiah in Shaker Theology; I Scream for Johanna, My Eternal Mother; and Unless a WomanChrist Comes, We Will All Die (the last two by Nancy Ore, one of Ruether’s students).

*Womanguides* thus represents a major shift in Ruether’s thinking. No longer is she concerned to show egalitarian tendencies in the historical Jesus as she did in one of her earlier works. Without using this terminology, she now advocates a “hermeneutic of suspicion” and rejects Scripture as irremediably patriarchal, calling for *new texts, a new canon, and a new church*. This is no longer reformist, but rather radical, even revolutionary, feminism. Again, the principle of a closed canon of inspired and inerrant Scripture that has been recognized historically and traditionally is set aside.

Although *Sexism and God-Talk* was published prior to *Womanguides* (in 1983), the readings published in the latter work form the textual base of the former. As Ruether explains in the 1993 preface of the reissued *Sexism and God-Talk*, she has encouraged her students to write feminist parables, myths, and *midrashim*. According to Ruether, these exercises strike at the heart of her understanding of inspiration and religious authority: “God did not just speak once upon a time to a privileged group of males in one part of the world, making us ever after dependent on the codification of their experience”

(1993: xiv). Feminists must uncover repressed memories, but they must also “reconstruct meaning” for themselves today in the “sparking of primal stories” that spring up from their experience.

*Sexism and God-Talk*, then, set forth in Systematic Theology fashion Ruether’s thought on the methodology, sources, and norms of feminist theology; on God-language; woman, body, and nature (the theology of creation); on humanity as male and female; on Christology (asking the question, “Can a Male Savior Save Women?”); Mariology; sin; the church; the New Earth; and eschatology. In the initial chapter, Ruether defends *experience* as the criterion of truth and basic source for feminist theology. Scripture and tradition, she contends, are *themselves* codified collective human experience. In fact, human experience is the starting and end point of the hermeneutical circle. Hence, symbols are authoritative only to the extent and as long as they are experienced as meaningful by a given person. “If a symbol does not speak authentically to experience, it becomes dead or must be altered to provide a new meaning” (1993: 12). Ruether’s theology of revelation is firmly rooted in individual human experience: “By *revelatory* we mean breakthrough experiences beyond ordinary fragmented consciousness that provide interpretive symbols illuminating the means of the *whole* of life” (1993: 13). Ruether’s critique of male-centered ecclesiastical tradition is fueled by the desire to “touch[ing] a deeper bedrock of authentic Being upon which to ground the self” (1993: 18, again reflecting Tillich). Ruether proceeds to postulate that the critical principle of feminist theology is *the promotion of the full humanity of women*. Whatever diminishes women’s full humanity is by this criterion judged “not redemptive” (1993: 19). Conversely, whatever does promote women’s full humanity “is of the Holy, it does

reflect true relation to the divine, it is the true nature of things, the authentic message of redemption and the mission of redemptive community” (1993: 19). She calls for the obliteration of all forms of sexism, as well as “humanocentrism” (1993: 20), urging “a mutuality that allows us to affirm different ways of being” (1993: 20).

In the chapter on Christology, Ruether discusses Jesus in her construction of a feminist Christology. She proposes to start with Jesus’ message and praxis and to strip off “the mythology about Jesus as Messiah or divine *Logos*, with its traditional masculine imagery” (1993: 135). This “historical Jesus,” Ruether contends, engaged in criticism of the religious and social hierarchy of his day in a way that is remarkably parallel to feminist criticism. She notes the important role played by women in Jesus’ vision of God’s new order in which the lowly are exalted. Ruether contends that women’s role is different from “doctrines of romantic complementarity” and that the Gospels do not “operate with a dualism of masculine and feminine” (1993: 137). Jesus as liberator calls for a dissolution of the web of status relationships by which people have come to identify privilege and deprivation. Rightly understood, Jesus represents the “*kenosis [self-emptying] of patriarchy*” (1993: 137). Christ, as liberated humanity, is not confined to the earthly Jesus. Rather, as the paradigmatic liberator, Christ urges us on to realize the liberation of all where such liberation is yet to be accomplished.

Ruether’s hermeneutic as set forth in *Sexism and God-Talk*, however, must be evaluated. Is it proper to root the doctrine of revelation in human experience and view Scripture as mere codified collective human experience? Scripture claims that God took the initiative to reveal himself to human beings, so that the doctrine of revelation ought to be grounded in God and his initiative. Humans are the recipients and interpreters of

revelation, not the creators and revealers. To say, as Ruether does, that revelation consists of human “breakthrough experiences beyond ordinary fragmented consciousness” excludes the possibility and reality of divine initiative in revelation and makes the human being the source and locus of revelation.

Ruether’s Christology is here subject to evaluation as well. In her effort to de-emphasize Jesus’ maleness Ruether questions Scripture’s testimony to Jesus as Messiah and the Word (*logos*), calling this “mythology.” Yet Jesus was clearly incarnated as a male, and fulfilled scriptural predictions of the Messiah, including his being the Son of David. Ruether’s distinction between the earthly Jesus and Christ at large is not borne out by Scripture’s own testimony. In effect, the view is set forth that the earthly Jesus did not fully implement what is considered to be his egalitarian or feminist vision, but Christ is seen as the “paradigmatic liberator.” However, one should not drive a wedge between the earthly Jesus and the Christ, as if those were two separate individuals. Also, the Gospels feature men and women as distinct and show them as fulfilling different roles, which does not support Ruether’s statement that the Gospels do not “operate with a dualism of masculine and feminine” (1993: 137).

In 1998 Ruether published *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* spanning from Jesus to the present. The first chapter, “In Christ No More Male and Female? The Question of Gender and Redemption in the New Testament,” is relevant for the topic of this dissertation. Under the heading “Gender Equality in the First Jesus Movement” Ruether reconstructs Jesus’ career as follows. Jesus, a “religious seeker” and young man of artisan class, was attracted to John the Baptist’s apocalyptic message of repentance. Later, however, he broke with the Baptist, inspired by a vision of Satan

falling from heaven like lightning (Luke 10:18). This vision convinced Jesus that he did not merely have to wait for God's intervention in the future but that Satan's power was already broken. Toward around A.D. 30 Jesus became convinced that the time of fulfillment of his kingdom vision was near. He gathered his followers and went to Jerusalem, where he was arrested and crucified. Yet a few of Jesus' followers became convinced that Jesus was not dead but alive and was present with them "in the Spirit." Hence the early church was born, with women playing an important role (1998: 16–20).

Ruether includes a chapter with an almost identical title in her 1998 work *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*. She states that in her view of Jesus she essentially follows John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, calling Jesus a "compelling healer and prophet" (1998: 17). As "examples of . . . iconoclastic egalitarianism and concern for women," Ruether cites Mark 5:25–34 and parallel; 7:24–30 and parallel; Luke 13:10–17; and Matthew 21:31. The scope of this dissertation does not permit a detailed critique of Ruether's reconstruction of the "historical Jesus." At the root of her reconstruction, however, lies the notion, problematic in my view, that Jesus is a mere human. To characterize Jesus as a "religious seeker" who was inspired by a vision and later became convinced that the coming of God's kingdom was near only to end up crucified does not do justice to the Gospel witness that unequivocally states that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah and Son of God (e.g., Matt. 26:64 and parallels; John 4:26) and was confessed as Lord and God by his first followers (e.g., John 20:28). The Jews' repeated attempt to stone Jesus clearly implies that Jesus' contemporaries understood Jesus' claim of divinity to be in direct conflict with their belief in only one God (cf., e.g., John 5:18; 8:59; 10:31).

Jesus' resurrection likewise is presented by Scripture as a reality confirmed by evidence and numerous witnesses, not merely a psychological, subjective perception in the minds of some of Jesus' followers (see esp. 1 Cor. 15:3–9). In fact, the actual reality of Jesus' resurrection is presented by the apostle Paul as an indispensable part of the Christian gospel (1 Cor. 15:12–20). Ruether's reconstruction of the "historical Jesus" therefore falls short of Jesus' own actual claims and of the Gospel witness. This lack of attention to Jesus' deity renders Ruether's Christology without foundation. This weakness also surfaces in her perception of Jesus in feminist and egalitarian terms.

Ruether is a prolific author, profound thinker, and astute theologian. Her extensive writings reveal a firm command of the major issues involved and have had a wide impact on the feminist movement. It is no coincidence that virtually all feminist writers in recent years take their point of departure from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Clearly, on the premise that Scripture is patriarchal and a mere product of human religious experience, it would follow that, for a feminist, there would be more proper authoritative and relevant sources than the Bible and that the canon should be expanded if not replaced by other writings more in keeping with feminist convictions. From the standpoint of one who holds to a high view of Scripture, however, this cannot be accepted. As in the case of other feminists, the difference I have with Ruether is primarily with regard to the nature of hermeneutics and Scripture (see 1.3 above), which underscores their importance in the theological process.

## 2.4 The New Feminism

In the past several decades, feminist biblical interpretation witnessed a general development from a historical to a literary approach, and this included some literature on Jesus and women (this is not to say that literary readings were not found in earlier periods, but that the focus shifted from a predominantly historical to a literary paradigm). This development is essentially in keeping with trends in the field of hermeneutics in general (see esp. Vanhoozer 1998), in light of the realization that meaning is ultimately not found in the reconstruction of a given historical setting *behind the text*, but in a particular reading of the *text itself*. Hence while literary feminist approaches often take their starting point in the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and other feminist writers utilizing historical approaches such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, their ultimate interest lies in the interpretation of particular biblical *texts* rather than in reconstructing the historical setting *underlying* those texts.

Hence Adele Reinhartz (2003: 15) writes that she follows “along a path that has been cleared by others before me over the last quarter century or more,” listing Fiorenza and others. Dorothy Lee (2003: 64) likewise takes her point of departure from the work of Fiorenza, yet seeks to transcend it in significant ways. She writes,

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has given perhaps the most thorough response to these questions, developing a methodology arising from women’s historical and political experience of marginalization. The hermeneutical methodology she has developed is based on a revised historical criticism that endeavors to enter the text imaginatively and critically, making contact with women’s hidden traditions. Employing a “hermeneutic of suspicion,” Fiorenza’s model incorporates



remembrance and re-actualization of women's reclaimed history in the struggle to develop a community of equality and liberation. This struggle has led, for her, to include other texts from the ancient world that contain resources for women's liberation.

As Lee observes, however, this method of historical criticism means that Fiorenza's "interest in the text as a literary and theological whole is generally secondary to its interest in the world *behind the text*, despite some rhetoric to the contrary." Lee herself is suspicious of Fiorenza's "hermeneutic of suspicion," because "it regards women's experience as the ultimate norm for authority in interpreting the text, creating arguably an 'alternative magisterium [teaching office]' " and using "suspicion" as the primary exegetical tool for exposing the alleged patriarchal bias reflected in the text of Scripture (Lee 2003: 65; cf. Lee 1994: 80–84; 1995: 140–54).

A better approach, according to Lee, studies "the presence or absence of female characters and their mode of presentation within specific biblical texts." Such a "feminist re-reading examines various biblical documents in order to draw women from the shadows, exploring the roles they play (or don't play) and assessing their literary and theological function. . . . Thus the task of feminist exegesis, in this view, is to bring to front stage the female characters of the text, to draw attention to their absence, and to examine the textual presuppositions that shape their characterization."

In the following section I will therefore survey feminist interpretations of biblical passages related to Jesus' approach to women that employ various literary methods. Special emphasis will be given to three representative and influential collections of literary feminist studies over the past two decades, namely the 1983 issue of the journal

*Semeia* published by the Society of Biblical Literature; the 1994 commentary collection *Searching the Scriptures*; and the five-volume *Feminist Companion to the Gospels* published in 2001–2004. On the basis of these representative feminist literary works, it will be possible to describe this approach to the interpretation of biblical texts related to Jesus' treatment of women and to evaluate the feminist literary approach to these passages.

#### **2.4.1 *Semeia* (1983)**

In a programmatic essay in volume 28 of the journal *Semeia*, Mary Ann Tolbert (1983: 113–26) “defines the problem: the Bible and feminist hermeneutics.” At the outset, she states her four commitments, in descending order: (1) a commitment to feminism and its critique of oppressive structures, including those of Christianity; (2) a commitment to operate within the framework of the Christian tradition (thus marking her as a “reformist feminist”: see Chapter 1); (3) a “bias in favor of the Bible,” though one that must of necessity “be open to judgment and, if necessary, dismissal” (1983: 114); and (4) a commitment to the canons of academic discourse.

Identifying feminism as essentially a liberation movement, Tolbert distinguishes between the “ascendancy position” which argues that women are superior to men and that power structures which currently place men in power over women ought to be reversed so that women are in power over men; and the “equality position” which aims for the replacement of all suppressive structures and advocates reconciliation between the sexes (the latter being the more common approach).

With regard to feminist hermeneutics, Tolbert affirms that not only feminist, but all biblical interpretation is subjective: “Interpretation, then, is always a subjective activity, in the sense that it is always influenced by the conscious and unconscious concerns of the interpreter” (1983: 117). Hence, for Tolbert, “all hermeneutical perspectives are advocacy positions” (1983: 117; see esp. Fiorenza 1981: 91–112). Yet, the fact that all scholarship is advocacy does not necessarily invite anarchy. Rather, the criteria of public evidence, logic, reasonableness, and intellectual sophistication still apply in distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable positions. Nevertheless, different reading communities will employ different canons of validity.

Feminist hermeneutics, then, positions itself over against *patriarchal* hermeneutics, which advocates a “male-oriented, hierarchically established present cultural power system” (Tolbert 1983: 118), and can be defined as a reading of a text or reconstruction of a history in light of the oppressive structures of patriarchal society. This enterprise may aim primarily at exposing the androcentric bias or oppressive intention underlying a given text, demonstrating that such a text is “unalterably patriarchal” and hence “without authority or value” (the ascendancy view) or at uncovering the “hidden liberation potential” of certain texts for women (more common among the proponents of the equality position; 1983: 119). In all this, feminist hermeneutics is grounded self-consciously in women’s experience of oppression.

What is more, according to Tolbert, feminist hermeneutics is profoundly paradoxical, because in seeking to dismantle the patriarchal bias of Scripture it employs as its tool for liberation the very Scriptures whose bias it seeks to dismantle. In keeping with her reformist stance, Tolbert eschews the notion of a “feminist revolution,”

advocating instead incremental changes over a long period of time, brought about by “small, often unnoticed acts of subversion” (1983: 121). This calls for patience.

Within the reformist position, according to Tolbert, there are at least three relatively distinct approaches to Scripture. First, one may look for a *trajectory of liberation* in biblical events such as the exodus, the message of the prophets, or the message of Jesus. This trajectory then becomes the central core of the biblical witness that determines which other texts are or are not authoritative (a “canon within a canon” approach). This strategy, which finds the essence of Christianity in its prophetic call of liberation for the oppressed, is ideal for the equality approach.

Second, one may look for biblical texts (however few) that bear the seeds of the *counter-cultural affirmation of women*. This involves the rereading of texts that have historically been understood from a male-centered perspective. Third, one may engage in a *reconstruction of history* that shows that the earliest phases of Christianity were egalitarian (see the preceding discussion of Schüssler Fiorenza).

Tolbert does not favor the first approach, conceding that “the prophets never argued for the liberation of women” and arguing that “some of the most misogynistic passages in the Bible” are found in the prophetic books of Scripture (1983: 123). The second approach, too, according to Tolbert, is less than satisfying because it merely involves “the discovery of the occasional or exceptional” in an otherwise “patriarchal religion.” She is more favorable toward the third approach, but notes that “the crucial question is . . . whether or not *any* historical reconstruction can form the basis of Christian faith and practice” (1983: 124). Thus Tolbert (1983: 124) asks,

. . . if one is convinced, as I am, of the pervasively patriarchal nature of the Bible and yet not persuaded that reconstructions of history can replace the canon [which essentially is Fiorenza's solution], is it still possible to stay within the Christian tradition?

This statement well captures the paradoxical (some might say "inconsistent") nature of the reformist feminist position. Realizing that history is an inadequate basis of authority, reformist feminists ground biblical interpretation, not in the biblical texts themselves, but in their own experience, engaging in the circular enterprise of identifying texts "with hidden liberation potential" on the basis of their feminist commitment. Since experience varies from person to person and from community to community, as feminists themselves readily acknowledge, however, it hardly constitutes a firm basis for authority or even validity of scriptural interpretation.

Tolbert's final attempt at a solution has Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologization as a point of reference. Recognizing that the miracles of the Bible were unacceptable for modern "enlightened" people in a scientific age, Bultmann sought to identify an "existential core" in the myths of Scripture. To be sure, Tolbert acknowledges that feminists' task is more radical, since "the Bible is not only intellectually unintelligible [Bultmann's view] but actively evil" (1983: 125). "Yet, the hermeneutical and theological dilemma Bultmann struggled to address still remains: how does one deal with a biblical text that is so completely saturated in an unacceptable perspective?" (1983: 125).

Tolbert holds out the hope that feminists may yet succeed in separating the *kerygma* [the core biblical message] from the text, and even suggests that feminism is the

future of New Testament theology. Tolbert's programmatic essay is by far the most pertinent piece in the 1983 issue of *Semeia*. Beyond this the volume also contains two studies that may be considered as representative of literary feminist studies in this period: "Matthew: Gender and Reading" by Janice Capel Anderson and "Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark" by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon.

In keeping with the feminist agenda of highlighting the androcentrism of biblical texts and of recovering positive feminine images, Anderson engages in a "revisionist rereading" of the Gospel of Matthew. Anderson's study is devoted to exploring the symbolic significance of gender in the Gospel of Matthew and to looking at the role of the implied reader in the context of a feminist reading of the Gospel. She finds evidence for the androcentric perspective of Matthew in the patrilineal ordering of the genealogy and the birth story centering on Joseph; the depiction of God as Father; the assumption of patriarchal marriage and inheritance; the fact that positions of power and status are held by men; and other references that reveal a male perspective (e.g., 5:28, 32; 14:21; 15:38).

In her study of the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:22–28), Anderson notes that gender is not a barrier to faith but the Canaanite or other women never reappear in the narrative nor become members of Jesus' inner circle. The women at the cross are presented as having cared for Jesus' needs on his journey from Galilee. The relationships of Peter's mother-in-law and of the mother of the sons of Zebedee to Jesus are mediated through their son-in-law and sons, respectively. Although women, with the exception of Herodias and her daughter in 14:1–12, are portrayed favorably, they assume subordinate and auxiliary positions.

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon's study "Fallible Followers" finds that women characters supplement and complement Mark's portrayal of the disciples, forming a composite portrait of fallible followers of Jesus. She observes that women or girls who appear in Mark's narrative "seem *almost* incidental to it" (i.e., Mark's narrative; 1983: 34, emphasis added). Two healed daughters contribute little to the narrative (5:22–24; 7:24–30); Peter's mother-in-law is slightly more prominent in that she is shown to serve Jesus and his disciples (1:31).

The body of the narrative features four women, two being healed by Jesus (the woman with blood flow and the Syrophenician woman) and two serving as examples of service (the poor widow and the woman anointing Jesus). In each case, the woman takes the initiative and Jesus responds. With regard to 15:40–41, where Mark mentions a group of women at the cross, Malbon disagrees with Munro's contention (1982: 234) that Mark is aware of women's presence in Jesus' ministry but obscures it, suggesting instead that Mark delays explicit reference to the women followers until the true meaning of discipleship can be understood (1983: 42).

Hence Malbon believes to have found a text that possesses liberative potential for women. Nevertheless, Malbon observes that not all women in Mark are followers of Jesus, just as not all followers of Jesus in Mark are women. While women characters are not as frequent, nor are they named as often as men, their significance is determined, not by their sex or numbers, but their relationship to Jesus. In the end, "[w]omen and men . . . all contribute to the development of a composite and complex image of what it means to be a follower of Jesus" (1983: 47).

Both of these studies are rather restrained and follow the text quite closely. While the feminist orientation of these writers is readily apparent—Anderson engages in a revisionist rereading of Matthew’s Gospel and Malbon searches for texts with liberative potential in Mark—their contributions are mostly descriptive and can best be classified as reformist. The focus on women characters in the Gospels and on women disciples is in keeping with the feminist agenda of identifying positive contributions of women that may have been overlooked or may not have been adequately appreciated. According to the standards for proper hermeneutics set by this dissertation, a unilateral focus on women’s passages in Scripture causes a neglect of the study of all the relevant texts including those featuring male characters and passages of general human concern causing any conclusions reached to be only partial.

#### **2.4.2 Searching the Scriptures**

Another representative work of feminist interpretation is the two-volume *Searching the Scriptures* edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1994). The first volume contains essays on the history of feminist interpretation in different socio-historical locations as well as several methodological contributions. Of particular interest to this dissertation are “Historical-Critical Methods” by Monika Fander; “Literary-Critical Methods” by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Janice Capel Anderson; “Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods” by Mary Ann Tolbert; and “Reconstruction of Women’s Early Christian History” by Karen Jo Torjesen.

Of more immediate interest for the present dissertation is the second volume, which features an introductory essay by Fiorenza, “Transgressing Canonical



Boundaries,” as well as commentaries on biblical and non-biblical books, including (in this order) the Gospels of Mark (Joanna Dewey), John (Adele Reinhartz), Matthew (Elaine Wainwright), and Luke (Turid Karlsen Seim), each approximately 30–40 pages in length.

In her introductory essay to Volume 2 of *Searching the Scriptures*, Fiorenza argues that the canon reflects an androcentric selection process which has also served “to inculcate a kyriarchal imperial church order” (1994: 8). For this reason feminist biblical scholarship cannot remain within the confines of the established canon but must go beyond them in its search for an alternative theological self-understanding and historical imagination. Yet rather than establishing a new feminist canon in a constructive fashion, Fiorenza conceives of her task as deconstructive. By destabilizing canonical authority, she seeks “to deconstruct oppressive cultural and religious identity formations engendered by the ruling Christian canon” (1994: 8).

In her search for a positive image for the function of Scripture in her feminist struggle Fiorenza finds “the open, cosmic house of divine Wisdom” whose dwelling has no walls and who permeates the entire world. Hence, according to Fiorenza, through feminist scholarship divine Wisdom continues to issue her invitation for readers to “eat of her bread and drink of her wine” (Prov. 9:1–6) and to engage in the interpretive adventure of “reading against the grain” of kyriarchy while purposefully transgressing canonical boundaries. Fiorenza’s hermeneutic has already been critiqued above, so that it is not necessary to do so here again. Her expansion of the Christian canon and her postulation of divine Sophia as alternative interpretive focus do not award Scripture the authority it claims for itself and go beyond what has been traditionally understood as interpretation.

The commentary on Mark by Joanna Dewey considers the themes of androcentrism and liberation. While Mark has included powerful stories of women, “what we have left in Mark is only a remnant of a once much richer women’s tradition” (1994: 508). The mention of women in Mark 15 and 16 is “too little too late” in an otherwise androcentric narrative. Mark has used women as needed for the plot and to teach men. Today’s feminists must go beyond Mark in order to create “a true discipleship of equals in which women—and all marginalized groups—are full participants” (1994: 508). The commentary on Mark is thus an example of a reformist feminist hermeneutic employing a “hermeneutic of suspicion” and criticizing Scripture for its patriarchal bias. While the feminist interpreter may uncover traces of women’s stories that can be salvaged from the Scriptures that are otherwise rendered unusable on account of their male orientation, the Bible itself is at most one among many quarries from which feminists may extricate source materials for their feminist position.

The commentary on John is written by Adele Reinhartz, a feminist Jewish scholar, who espouses the “Johannine community hypothesis” with regard to the background of John’s Gospel. In her “feminist-critical evaluation of the Fourth Gospel” (1994: 594–97), Reinhartz notes that John includes portraits of women who are “honored and empowered,” such as the mother of Jesus, the Samaritan woman, Mary and Martha, and Mary Magdalene. Beyond this, Jesus in John seems to adopt a liberationist stance when he claims that the truth will set people free (8:32).

On the negative side, Reinhartz notes the emphasis on Jesus as the “Son of God” and the prevalence of “Father-Son” language in John’s Gospel. As a Jew, Reinhartz is even more offended by the portrayal of “the Jews” as archenemies of Jesus. What is

more, liberation in John is not unconditional but predicated on faith in Jesus as Messiah. Hence the reader envisioned by the Gospel is a compliant reader engaging in a compliant reading, something that is impossible for Jewish readers as well as feminist readers, even more for a feminist Jew such as Reinhartz. The alternative is resistant reading, “reading like a trickster” (1994: 596).

Such a reading entails “a rejection of the claim that the text has an absolute, primary, sacred authority” (1994: 597) and a refusal to see oneself addressed by the text in any way. Yet, according to Reinhartz, such a reading is not merely an exercise in negativity but also involves an appreciation of positive role models in the text. The example she cites are Martha and Mary, who are comforted by their community in times of grief. While Reinhartz does not share their embrace of Jesus as Messiah, she empathizes with their decision to remain within the Jewish community and to work for change and transformation from within.

Reinhartz’s contribution, while astute at many points, should be challenged in its basic hermeneutical approach. Her advocacy of a “resistant reading” of John’s Gospel and her rejection of its claim that Jesus is the Messiah run counter to the Gospel’s explicit purpose statement (John 20:30–31). In her unbelief, Reinhartz rejects the central tenet of the Gospels—that Jesus is the Messiah—and this unbelief compounds the problem in that Reinhartz is negative toward the Gospel both on account of her feminism and on account of her Jewishness. However, since Jesus and the Twelve, as well as many of Jesus’ other first followers, were Jews, being Jewish should not be considered a necessary impediment to believing Jesus as Messiah. Her unbelief also overshadows Reinhartz’s concerns with John’s Gospel owing to her feminist stance.

The commentary on Matthew by Elaine Wainwright engages on the two-stage process of a deconstruction of the received reading of the Gospel and a reconstruction and revisioning of the Matthean text. Following Fiorenza, the author employs a hermeneutics of suspicion and remembrance with special focus on women characters in Matthew's Gospel. The first stage of investigation is literary, drawing on insights from narrative and reader-response criticism. The second stage employs the historical-critical method, especially redaction criticism, in an effort to reconstruct the socio-historical situation inscribed within the narrative. In a third stage other historical and sociological data are used to supplement the findings in the previous two stages of research and to reconstruct the community behind the Gospel. The preceding critique of Fiorenza's hermeneutic applies also to this commentary, so that it is not necessary to repeat our concerns here.

The commentary on Luke by Turid Karlsen Seim, finally, is presented as an attempt at reading Luke in order to discern patterns of gender in the Lukan composition. The author finds that Luke draws fairly strict boundaries for women's activity. Yet, at the same time, Luke also preserves strong traditions about women and attributes a positive function to them. Seim also draws significance from the fact that Luke's story is placed in the past and invokes the motif of remembrance. Since Luke among the Gospel writers shows the most overt interest in women, Seim has the easiest task of locating women's contributions in Luke's Gospel. Seim's work is mostly descriptive and, like all four mini-commentaries summarized above, too brief to allow for a thorough assessment and critique.

### 2.4.3 The Feminist Companion to the Gospels

*The Feminist Companion to the Gospels* provides another representative sampling of a large amount of recent feminist scholarship on Jesus. The volumes reflect a spectrum of approaches, ranging from the descriptive to radical revisionism, with various literary readings in between. In fact, “Feminist biblical commentary is remarkably diverse in its practitioners, its methods, its subjects, and its results” (2003: 2.1). Looking to biblical women as “their fore Sisters and their inspiration,” the authors seek to appropriate and utilize their insights to argue for a variety of feminist-type models and conclusions in order to engender “the narrative’s potential both for liberation, not just for women, but for anyone denied rights, denied voice, denied authenticity” (2003: 2.1).

Not all the contributions are relevant for the present study in that several essays relate to the narrative approach of a given evangelist or Christological issues that do not have a direct bearing on Jesus’ stance toward women. In what follows I will first provide a brief survey of the relevant contributions found in the five volumes of *The Feminist Companion on the Gospels* (one volume each on Matthew, Mark, and Luke; two volumes on John’s Gospel). This will be followed by an evaluation.

At the outset, the editor notes that while feminist biblical scholarship used to be a largely white, Western, middle-class phenomenon, this enterprise now has become a symphony of diverse voices (2004a: 14). Gail O’Day’s “Surprised by Faith: Jesus and the Canaanite Woman” discusses the account of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21–28. Just as Jewish tradition holds God accountable to the covenant community, so the Canaanite woman holds Jesus accountable with regard to his mission of wholeness. In

this way the woman becomes a model of persistence and faith for the readers of the Gospel.

Stephenson Humphries-Brooks discusses the three “Canaanite Women in Matthew”: Rahab, the ancestor of Jesus according to the genealogy; the woman of Matthew 15, “who becomes the teacher to the Son of David and the only character in the gospel tradition to best [sic] Jesus in a theological argument” (the editor’s summary, 2003a: 19); and Herodias, wife of Herod Antipas, who the author argues reflects the portrayal of Queen Jezebel in 1 Kings. Strikingly, the author presents not merely Rahab and the woman of Matthew 15, but also Herodias as a “success story” in that Herodias was “successful” in bringing about the death of John the Baptist.

In the volume on Mark, Deborah Krause contributes “Simon Peter’s Mother-in-Law—Disciple or Domestic Servant? Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Mark 1.29–31.” While earlier feminists have found in this story a “utopian moment” at which Peter’s mother-in-law represents women as disciples if not deacons, Krause is suspicious of the glorification of domestic service. Seeking to navigate the tensions between gender-determined servitude and egalitarian discipleship, between liberation and limitation, Krause finds neither a heroine nor a happy ending, but an inherent ambiguity in Mark’s portrayal of this female character.

Sharon Ringe, in an essay entitled “A Gentile Woman’s Story, Revisited: Rereading Mark 7.24–31a,” revisits the conventional feminist reading of this story as that of an outcast and oppressed woman and concludes that she is instead a desperate mother willing to do whatever is necessary to save her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus’ initial refusal to help the woman is interpreted as being a function of limited resources Jesus

wishes to preserve for his own Galilean people. Hence the primary issue is no longer the woman serving as a model of faith and Jesus moving from sexist to teachable but economic factors.

The volume on Luke features Turid Karlsen Seim's "The Virgin Mother: Mary and Ascetic Discipleship in Luke." Seim looks at Luke's treatment of domestic ideals, Mary, and motherhood. She finds that in the case of Mary the definition of motherhood is moved from biological procreation to ascetic and communitarian relationship as part of the Lukan theme of ascetic practice as a rehearsal of the life to come. According to Seim, this theme finds expression in Jesus' response to the women in the crowd calling his mother blessed (11:27); the woe over the pregnant and the nursing women (21:23); Jesus' words to the daughters of Jerusalem (23:27–30).

Barbara Reid, in " 'Do You See This Woman?' A Liberative Look at Luke 7:36–50 and Strategies for Reading Other Lukan Stories against the Grain," takes another look at the so-called pericope of the "sinful woman" in Luke 7:36–50 and notes how the epithet "sinful woman" is prejudicial. According to Jesus, that woman showed great love, and was forgiven, and there is no textual indication that the woman's sins were sexual or even that she was a prostitute. Reid views the woman thus not as a sexual sinner but as a potential disciple and even a Christological prefiguration. For Reid, the text is sexist and the evangelist's presentation shortsighted, and feminists today must ask, "What is wrong with this picture?" in order to arrive at a more satisfying interpretation.

Teresa Hornsby, in an essay called "The Woman is a Sinner/The Sinner is a Woman," takes up the same account, contending that Luke is concerned to portray Jesus as an ideal male and seeing in the depiction of Jesus as the recipient of a pleasurable,

potentially erotic act the potential of disrupting gender roles. Unlike in the other Gospels, Luke's anointing pericope does not focus on Jesus' future kingship or the anticipation of his burial. Instead, the story is recoded in terms of the woman's sinfulness and repentance. The designation "sinner" fixes the woman in her feminine role, while leaving Jesus' masculinity unmolested. It also helps to detract attention away from Jesus and onto the woman.

Esther de Boer, in "The Lukan Mary Magdalene and the Other Women Following Jesus," studies the reference to women followers of Jesus in Luke 8:1–3. Comparing Luke's account with those of Matthew and Mark, she observes that Luke has these women appear prior to the passion narrative. This makes clear that they were with Jesus consistently throughout his ministry rather than appearing only at the end. Nevertheless, in the end the women proclaiming the resurrection are not believed, because they lack authority. Hence, gender bifurcation is maintained here.

Warren Carter, in "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen: Luke 10.38–42 Again," looks at Mary and Martha as individual women rather than as gender paradigms. He proposes that "serving" did not entail "kitchen duties" but ministerial activity. Martha was preoccupied, not with her culinary duties, but with preaching and teaching. Carter proceeds to propose that Martha and Mary (not her real sister) were "missionary women partners" and that she was distracted by relational problems with her ministerial colleague. Jesus' prescription, so Carter, is to cultivate single-mindedness. Religious leaders today, likewise, are often distracted by church business and ought to return to a focus on worship.



After a helpful introductory essay by the editor, Amy-Jill Levine, the two-volume *Feminist Companion to John* (2003) commences with a piece entitled “ ‘You Just Don’t Understand’ (Or Do You?): Jesus, Women, and Conversation in the Fourth Gospel” by F. Scott Spencer, an attempt at applying Deborah Tannen’s work on gender communication to John’s Gospel. Spencer finds that the conversational patterns in the Fourth Gospel support Tannen’s findings and concludes that Jesus was possibly rude to women as a hierarchical male.

In a piece entitled, “Are There Impurities in the Living Water That the Johannine Jesus Dispenses?” Stephen Moore deconstructs traditional readings of John 4, concluding that the Samaritan woman is the “more enlightened of the pair” (2003: 1.95) and argues that Jesus’, rather than the woman’s, desire is central to the narrative. According to Moore, this encompasses not only Jesus’ literal thirst but extends also to his desire to be desired by the woman.

“What’s Wrong with this Picture? John 4, Cultural Stereotypes of Women, and Public and Private Space” by Jerome Neyrey engages in a reader-response analysis of John 4 employing the tools of social science and cultural anthropology. Neyrey argues that the narrative subverts gender expectations concerning men in that the woman frequently disobeys Jesus: she does not call her husband; does not give him a drink; and does not go “home” but returns to the public square.

The essay entitled “Divine Intervention or Divine Intrusion? Jesus and the Adulteress in John’s Gospel” by Holly Toensing observes that Jesus seems to presume that he alone is without sin and claims he imposes an impossible demand on the woman by commanding her not to sin any longer. According to Toensing, Jesus here perpetrates

patriarchal culture by placing on women a burden that is defined by men. Not only this, Jesus is guilty of applying a double standard by holding women to a higher code of ethics than men.

The last piece in Volume 1, “Transcending Gender Boundaries in John” by Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, constitutes an exercise in “post-feminist interpretation” that engages in a form of reader-response criticism. Kitzberger relates some of John’s to Synoptic characters (such as the Mary of Bethany and the “sinful woman” in Luke 7:36–50) and seeks to show that these regularly transcend gender roles. According to Kitzberger, Mary, by washing Jesus’ feet, becomes a role model for Jesus’ footwashing later in the Gospel. Kitzberger also enlists Lazarus in support of her feminist convictions in that he is presented as a model of “untying and the empowering of the silenced and marginalized” so they can “speak up for” themselves (2003: 1.177).

In her essay “Abiding in the Fourth Gospel: A Case Study in Feminist Biblical Theology,” Dorothy Lee contends that, for John, “indwelling” conveys the notion of mutuality between human and divine, with the result that alienation, competition, and hierarchy are overcome. In feminist terms, “abiding” as a relational category provides liberation and forges the pathway for achieving authenticity and self-realization free from the constraints of hierarchy.

Colleen Conway’s “Gender Matters in John” focuses on four major contrasting male-female characterizations: the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus; Martha and Peter; Mary of Bethany and Judas; and Mary Magdalene and Peter/the Beloved Disciple. Conway contends that, for John, women are superior to men, for while Jesus frequently corrects men, he reveals himself to women and commissions them. Thus Jesus appears to

Mary and asks her to communicate to the disciples, while Peter and the Beloved Disciple are bypassed. Despite her feminist findings, however, in the end Conway (2003: 2.102), citing Fiorenza (1994: 153), concludes that Jesus is portrayed as the ideal male (witness the Father-Son language throughout the Gospel) who supplants the feminine notion of “Jesus Sophia.” Hence, the Fourth Gospel is found to articulate a traditional view of gender roles.

On the whole, these sixteen essays from the five volumes of *The Feminist Companion to the Gospels* span the range from fairly conservative to rather radical. Nevertheless, there are several things they share in common. The first is a *commitment to feminism over Scripture* as guiding authority. Together with this comes a quest for women’s liberation from the constraints of male hierarchy and a search for positive female role models in Scripture. All of the above-mentioned essays study women characters in one or several of the Gospels.

The second common feature is a *critical stance toward Scripture*. Both Reid and Hornsby, for example, criticize Luke’s portrayal of the “sinful woman” in 7:36–50 as sexist. Spencer contends that Jesus was rude to women. Toensing charges Jesus with applying a double standard toward women and men.

The third common element is the use of a *variety of literary methods* by the contributors to these volumes. Moore employs deconstructionism; several other authors (such as Neyrey, Kitzberger) engage in reader-response readings. Most of the essays analyze fairly closely the text of a particular biblical narrative dealing with one or several female characters.

By way of evaluation, the unilateral focus on women in these essays may be problematic in that it does not capture the comprehensive teaching of Scripture on the subject. One example is Kitzberger's calling Mary of Bethany a role model for Jesus or Moore's calling the Samaritan woman more enlightened than Jesus. A certain ambivalence in some of the essays points to the possibly self-contradictory nature of authors who study Scripture yet are critical of its portrayal of women (Reid, Hornsby) or Jesus' behavior toward them (Spencer, Toensing).

In other cases, the authors engage what this author considers to be unlikely readings judging by the above-mentioned standards for hermeneutics. Ringe's argument that Jesus' interaction with the Gentile woman in Mark 7 was driven by economics, not theology, and that Jesus sought to preserve his limited resources for his own Galilean people is a reconstruction of the historical background without adequate basis in the text or context. Carter's contention that Mary and Martha were women ministers is founded on an anachronistic construal of the word meaning for the Greek term "to serve." Kitzberger's view that Lazarus serves as a role model for the oppressed, likewise, lacks textual and contextual support in that the raising of Lazarus is shown in John's Gospel to validate Jesus' own claims and to anticipate Jesus' resurrection.

Overall, it should be noted that many of these essays evidence a considerable degree of sophistication in literary analysis. Nevertheless, the feminist commitment of these writers seems to influence the interpretive process and their conclusions in a direction that tends to magnify the role of women and characterizes men (including Jesus) as rude, patriarchal, and sexist. None of these essays provide a larger paradigm for apprehending the biblical message regarding men and women. Rather, they each

represent individual readings of texts that do not claim compelling authority or greater validity than other equally legitimate readings, feminist or otherwise.

#### ***2.4.4 Evaluation of New Feminism***

The new feminist literary approaches must be credited with a proper emphasis on the text of Scripture itself. The text of Scripture, rather than conjectural background reconstructions, should constitute the final point of reference for biblical interpretation. Having said this, my main concern in light of the hermeneutical standards set for the present dissertation is that these feminist literary approaches tend to proceed from the notion of textual autonomy while neglecting the notion of authorial intention.

In interpreting a given text, appropriate hermeneutical procedure according to the standards set in this dissertation involves the discovery of the authorial intention as conveyed in the text. Severed from authorial intention, the interpretation of texts is destined to result in eisegesis and in a transformation of the original purpose of Scripture based on the ideology and interpretative strategy of the reader. According to Vanhoozer (1998) and in keeping with the standards set in this dissertation, however, this is not responsible interpretation in that it deprives the author of a text of his right to communicate his intentions through the text. Anyone interpreting a given text, regardless of one's perspective, be it patriarchal, feminist, or otherwise, should recognize that authors, texts, and readers all should be treated with respect. Moreover, these rights should be balanced, with the rights of the author of a particular text being primary, since the author is the one who produced the document with an intention to convey a certain message.

While the focus on the text in literary feminist approaches is therefore affirmed, the strategy of exposing androcentric bias and of uncovering the hidden liberation potential of texts may have the effect of transposing the textual message in keeping with the reader's own vision, ideals, and ideological commitments.

This is clearly seen when Mary Ann Tolbert (1983: 113–26), in an article discussed at some length above, states at the very outset her commitment to both feminism and Christian tradition yet makes clear that when these are in conflict, her commitment to feminism is foundational. Tolbert conceives of feminism as the critique of oppressive structures, including those of Christianity.

While as part of her commitment to Christian tradition she cites a “bias in favor of the Bible,” she acknowledges that she is “open to judgment and, if necessary, dismissal” of the Christian Scriptures (1983: 114). An interpreter who is prepared to eliminate a given text on the basis of her feminist commitment does not accept proper boundaries of biblical interpretation according to this dissertation. In my view, the text itself as intended by the author must remain the center of discussion.

Also, Tolbert's acknowledgment that feminist hermeneutics is paradoxical should be evaluated. Feminist hermeneutics may be perceived not as paradoxical, but more likely as inconsistent. It would probably be more consistent for feminists to reject the Bible altogether (as radical feminists do) rather than to continue engaging in what Tolbert calls a “profoundly paradoxical” enterprise. Applied to the present issue, how can a given interpreter be highly suspicious of Scripture and yet use what she is highly suspicious of as a tool for reconstruction? Many feminists have commented on this challenge but have continued to have difficulty reconciling these countervailing notions.

Two other issues may briefly be noted. First, the “canon within a canon” which is evidenced by the selection of certain texts (and not others) for scholarly study in texts such as the volumes in the *Feminist Companion* engages in a selective use of evidence (see the preceding discussion of Fiorenza). To my mind, the focus on certain select pericopes for their “hidden liberation potential” for women and the setting aside of other texts owing to their “androcentric bias” is too narrowly conceived. The procedure of selecting a passage that favors one’s viewpoint while neglecting others that are judged to be countervailing does not meet the standards set for hermeneutics in this dissertation.

Second, the division of humanity by way of gender into two distinct “classes,” women and men, implicit in many of the feminist literary studies surveyed in the preceding discussion, and in fact much of feminism as a whole, is dichotomistic. This procedure would seem to tend to favor antagonism when many passages of Scripture do not dichotomize between men and women in such a way but rather show what they share in their common humanity (salvation, growth in Christ, sacrificial self-giving, and so on). Even in Christ not all role distinctions are eliminated, and the scriptural vision for male-female relationships is one of harmony rather than one of mutual antagonism and struggle for power.

## 2.5 Summary

Two of the major underlying purposes of feminism as a movement, namely, the affirmation of the equal value and worth of women and the redressing of injustices toward women in the past, are valid goals as seen by the author of this dissertation. In the area of the interpretation of Scripture, too, feminists have given new impetus to a fresh

study of relevant biblical passages on Jesus and women and in some cases served as correctives to established readings of the text (e.g., abusive notions of male headship). At the same time, the preceding survey of feminist literature dealing with Jesus and women has revealed areas of weakness.

The differences in hermeneutical approach between reformist feminism and a conservative evangelical one with regard to the issue of patriarchy in Scripture have been identified. As mentioned in the introduction, I do not personally share the feminist critique of the Bible as patriarchal as a whole. I understand the Old Testament narratives to reflect a pattern of male-female relationships that may be more adequately labeled as patricentrism. I do, however, have sympathy with the view that the negative notion of patriarchy as an abusive and illegitimate control of authority is itself an offensive ideology and this represents a sinful abuse of God's true intentions even where it is seen in Scripture. Since in my opinion the Bible does not teach or advocate this abusive notion of patriarchy (see the discussion of patricentrism in Chapter 1), I believe it is unnecessary to reject the teaching of Scripture or parts of it.

As we have seen, feminism currently appears to be in a state of transition. Fiorenza's historical reconstruction of the Jesus movement which saw Jesus as establishing a "community of equals" has been questioned by recent feminist authors. At this time there is no new overarching paradigm that has taken its place. The current scene shows an accepted diversity of feminist readings by practitioners of what may be called "the new feminism." This "new feminism," for its part, operates largely on the foundation of its reformist/liberationist precursors, including the "hermeneutics of suspicion," while eschewing labels such as "reformist" or "liberationist," and shares their critique of



Scripture as patriarchal and deficient. Yet it goes beyond older feminist models by being more textually focused, more literary in its methodology, and by being characterized by a large variety of approaches and presentations.

## Chapter 3

### **A Critique of Egalitarian Hermeneutics and Exegesis on Jesus' Approach to Women**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In the present chapter we will investigate the use of Scripture in major egalitarian works, both monographs and relevant essays, on Jesus' stance toward women. If the discussion is less overtly concerned with hermeneutical theory, this is so because I perceive possible inconsistencies of egalitarianism to lie not so much in its hermeneutical *theory* and its apparent high view of Scripture and affirmation of inerrancy and inspiration but in the egalitarian *execution* of its hermeneutics in terms of specific exegeses of key passages of Scripture on Jesus' treatment of women.

The discussion will proceed chronologically in order of publication, under three general headings. The first period, "The Early Years," spanning from the early 1970s through the late 1980s, will cover the contributions by Stendahl, Scanzoni and Hardesty, Jewett, Evans, Witherington, Bilezikian, Spencer, and Longenecker. The second unit, "The Maturing Movement," from the late 1980s until the late 1990s, will treat the material by Osborne, Tucker, France, and Grenz. The third rubric will contain discussions of the works by Belleville, Webb, Groothuis, Phelan, and Spencer.

A summary evaluation of the use of Scripture in egalitarian literature on Jesus' stance toward women will conclude this chapter.

## 3.2 The Early Years (1966–1986)

### 3.2.1 Definition of Egalitarianism

The evangelical egalitarian group Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) holds “that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of men and women of all racial and ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teaching of Galatians 3:28—*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” As a result, “all believers, without regard to gender, race and class are free and encouraged to use their God-given gifts in families, ministries and communities.”

With regard to the topic of the present dissertation, references to Jesus and the Gospels are rather infrequent in CBE’s discussion of biblical truths. The assertion that both “men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole Body of Christ, under His authority” is supported, among others, by references to Mark 15:40–41; 16:1–7; Luke 8:1–3; and John 20:17–18. The only other Gospel references are found in the context of the assertion that the “Bible defines the function of leadership as the empowerment of others for service rather than as the exercise of power over them” (citing Mark 10:42–45; John 13:13–17). Hence it appears that the primary support for evangelical egalitarianism is derived from the Pauline writings rather than the Gospels. In order to set the stage for an understanding of egalitarianism, therefore, one must briefly engage other New Testament texts. Setting egalitarianism within this larger framework will aid an understanding of their treatment of relevant passages in the Gospels.

Like most feminists (see Chapter 2), evangelical egalitarians posit the complete equality of men and women with regard to both personal identity and role. Unlike most

feminists, evangelical egalitarians hold to a high view of Scripture. Feminist writings commonly view the Bible as reflecting a patriarchal bias that should be exposed; egalitarians, however, typically maintain that the Bible itself, “properly interpreted,” teaches egalitarianism. In this belief, egalitarians find confirmation in Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ “there is neither male nor female” but all are “one in Christ Jesus.” The “few isolated texts that appear to restrict the full redemptive freedom of women” such as 1 Corinthians 11:2–16; 14:33–36 or 1 Timothy 2:9–15 must be interpreted in relation to this central and other similar texts.

With regard to the Gospel texts cited by egalitarians in support of the notion that both “men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole Body of Christ, under His authority,” the following brief evaluation pertains. Mark 15:40–41 mentions several women at the cross who were watching from a distance. It is noted that these women had followed Jesus and had cared for his need. This indicates that there were indeed women followers of Jesus, during his ministry as well as at the cross, as an integral part of the group around Jesus.

Mark 16:1–7 refers to three of these same women as bringing spices to anoint Jesus’ body. An angel instructs these women to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee. They did not do so, out of fear. Although the women are fully engaged in loving and serving Jesus and attempting to respond to the angel, this passage also is not an adequate point of reference for supporting the notion of unmitigated participation of women in all forms of ministry.

Luke 8:1–3 mentions some women who were with Jesus and the disciples, traveling about from one village to another as Jesus proclaimed the good news of the

kingdom of God, helping to support them out of their own means. Again, the women here are shown to be sacrificially engaged in Jesus' mission and an integral part of it. However, the present passage likewise does not provide adequate support for the argument that women should be involved in all forms of ministry without any restrictions.

Similar to Mark 16:1–7, in John 20:17–18 a particular woman, Mary Magdalene, is instructed by Jesus to relay a message to his disciples (in the present case that Jesus is ascending to his Father). This does not address a broad base of ministry possibilities for women.

The following passages are found in the Gospels, although they do not refer to Jesus' interaction with women. Both Mark 10:42–45 (dealing with servant leadership) and John 13:13–17 (discussing servants not being greater than their masters with regard to service) constitute generic statements about ministry. They do not deal directly with women. These two passages are included in the CBE statement to support a view of ministry in terms of service rather than authoritarian dominance on the part of leaders. The notion that leaders must have a servant attitude, however, should not be taken to imply that authority is completely removed from those serving in positions of leadership in the church. In the mind of this author, the contrast is between humility on the one hand and an arrogant abuse of authority on the other. The model of Christian leadership is not one of service without authority, but one of a responsible exercise of authority in a spirit of humility and servanthood.

### 3.2.2 Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women*

Krister Stendahl's book *The Bible and the Role of Women*, written in 1966, had an enormous influence on evangelical egalitarians (Yarbrough 1995: 178–82). Early in his book, Stendahl takes up the issue of Jesus choosing twelve men as his apostles (1966: 19–23). Arguing against a “museum-minded conservatism” (1966: 22), he raises the question of what “is simply ancient Near Eastern thought patterns and what is revelation” (1966: 22). What, in Stendahl's words, is the “translatibility” of the event of Jesus' choosing of twelve men as his apostles?

In the second chapter of his book, entitled “The Biblical View of Male and Female,” Stendahl, a strong early advocate of an egalitarian view of gender roles, devotes a short three pages to women in the Gospels and Jesus (1966: 25–28). Stendahl observes that even in Luke's Gospel, the most women-friendly of the four canonical Gospels, “the circle around Jesus is a circle of men,” the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38–42 notwithstanding (1966: 25). The Last Supper is a meal with the Twelve, who are all men, and men are in charge even of the preparations (Luke 22:12–13). Stendahl concludes that nothing in the Gospels indicates that Jesus transcends or stands in conscious opposition to the traditional patriarchal Jewish understanding of male-female relations (1966: 27).

Stendahl (1966: 32–35) proceeds to argue for an egalitarian model of ministry in today's church on other grounds (most notably the “breakthrough” verse Gal. 3:28) in spite of acknowledging the centrality of men in Jesus' inner circle and his lack of distancing himself from the traditional Jewish patriarchal model. According to Stendahl, seeking to enshrine permanently the principle of male leadership in the church would be

to fall pray to a “descriptive realism” that serves “as an archaizing deep freeze” and “displays serious hermeneutical naïveté” (1966: 35).

### 3.2.3 Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant To Be*

In their chapter, “Woman’s Best Friend: Jesus,” Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty quote Galatians 4:4–5 where God is said to have sent forth his Son in order to redeem those under the Law, noting that no one was bound more by the Law than women: “Jesus’ life on earth from beginning to end outlines a paradigm for women’s place.” They conclude that ever since Jesus’ day “the church has struggled . . . to cut through the barbed wire of cultural custom and taboo to emulate the one who promised both men and women, ‘If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed’ ” (1974: 59).

According to Scanzoni and Hardesty, Jesus’ behavior toward women was truly extraordinary in light of the patriarchal culture surrounding him. He never made jokes about women, took them seriously, and treated them as human beings without condescension or sentimentality. Jesus associated with all kinds of women, whether wealthy and prominent or poor and morally disreputable. Jesus taught women openly in the Temple Court of Women (citing Luke 21:1–4), considering them as capable of comprehending spiritual truth. He identified himself as the Messiah to the Samaritan woman and taught her about proper worship. This stood in contrast with other Jewish rabbis of his day who refused to teach women. Jesus also identified himself to Martha as the resurrection and the life and comforted her in her grief.

As to his teaching methods, Jesus incorporated women or activities relevant to women’s experience in his illustrations, be it grinding corn, putting yeast in bread, lost

coins, or wedding feasts. Jesus also touched women and called them “daughters of Abraham,” (e.g., Luke 13:10), a highly unusual designation. When the woman with blood flow touched Jesus, he did not ridicule her but told her that her faith had made her well (Mark 5:34). Jesus also accepted intimate gestures of love from women at several occasions without rebuking them, instead commending them for their devotion (John 12:1–8; Luke 7:36–50).

Women followed Jesus to the end, risking life and virtue. They found the tomb empty and heard the angels announce that Jesus had risen and bore witness to the fact that Jesus was alive (Mark 16:6–7). Jesus’ first resurrection appearances were to women, and it was women who were first instructed to bring the gospel of his resurrection to others.

Overall, Scanzoni and Hardesty closely follow the Scripture and make some astute observations about the value and worth of women in Jesus’ eyes. However, they occasionally exceed the evidence, such as when they claim that Jesus’ promise of liberation from the Law and of people being set free by the Son convey the notion of liberation in feminist terms. Yet all that can be conclusively determined by a survey of Jesus’ treatment of women is that Jesus treated women well and with respect, awarding them great value. At the same time, Jesus never gave any indication that women were to be teachers or free to take whatever role they may aspire to in the church or the home. In this context, it should also be noted that Scanzoni and Hardesty do not address Jesus’ choice of twelve men as his apostles and his commissioning of these men as the core leadership group representing the church.



### 3.2.4 Paul Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*

Paul Jewett, professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller Seminary, wrote the widely influential *Man as Male and Female* in 1975. In his treatment of Jesus and women (1975: 94–103), Jewett notes that while Jesus never clashed with the rabbinic authorities over women's rights, he was truly revolutionary in the way he treated women. According to Jewett, Jesus “*treated women as fully human, equal to men in every respect; no word of deprecation about women, as such, is ever found on his lips*” (1975: 94; emphasis original).

Jesus “broke through the barriers of tradition and custom in a way that put women completely at ease in his presence” (1975: 97). Relatively early in his Galilean ministry, mention is made of women disciples who followed him along with the Twelve. Jewett cites Joachim Jeremias who calls this “an unprecedented happening in the history of that time,” maintaining that “Jesus knowingly overthrew custom when he allowed women to follow him” (1975: 97, citing Jeremias 1969: 376). He mentions all the same women followers discussed previously and notes that they remained faithful to the end.

Martha and Mary were not followers like these other women but stayed at home yet were truly disciples of Jesus. Jesus fellowshiped with these women the same way he did with his male disciples. Mary, similar to the woman in Luke 7:36–50, is a liberated first-century Jewish woman who felt free to behave in a way that only a male slave would have done, anointing Jesus' feet with her hair. Jesus' relationships with women were characterized not only by intimacy and openness but also by social breadth (1975: 101). Included were upper-class women such as Joanna, wife of Herod's steward (Luke 8:3) as

well as lower-class women such as the unnamed sinful woman in Luke 7 or the woman in John 4, who was not only a woman, but also Samaritan and sinful.

Jesus' interactions with women demonstrate that "Jesus conceived the commandment to love one's neighbor as knowing no boundaries of the sort that prejudice erects" (1975: 101). Jewett also cites Jesus' praise of the poor widow's mite (Mark 12:41–42; Luke 21:1–2), his commendation of the faith of the Syrophenician woman (Matt. 15:28), and his healing of women in need such as Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:30–31), the infirm woman in Luke 13:10–11, or the desperate woman with blood flow in Mark 5:25–26. Jesus' parables draw significantly on illustrations relevant to women's experience (Matt. 13:33; 25:1; Luke 15:8; 18:1–8).

Hence it is not surprising that women followed him all the way to the end (Luke 23:27; Mark 16:1). Even on his way to the cross, Jesus had words of comfort for women (Luke 23:28). Women were the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 28:9–10; Mark 16:9–11; John 20:11–18). "His male disciples first proclaimed the resurrection to the world; but his female disciples first received the revelation on which this proclamation was based" (1975: 103).

Similar to the comment on Scanzoni and Hardesty above, Jewett's scriptural focus is commendable. Indeed, there is much in the Gospel witness to Jesus' treatment of women that indicates that Jesus included women among his followers and awarded them great dignity and respect. Jewett's discussion seems to be somewhat at variance with Stendahl, however, in that Jewett casts the Gospel witness in a considerably more favorable light than does Stendahl, who concludes that Jesus nowhere transcends the patriarchalism of his day.

### 3.2.5 Mary Evans, *Woman in the Bible*

In 1983 Mary Evans, a lecturer in biblical studies at London Bible College, published *Woman in the Bible*, a book hailed by the North American egalitarian scholar David Scholer as “[t]he best book in support of women in ministry written from an evangelical perspective with a commitment to careful exegesis” (back cover). The third chapter of Evans’s book is devoted to material in the Gospels (1983: 44–60). Evans contends at the outset that Jesus’ approach to women is “without precedent in contemporary Judaism” (1983: 44, citing Forster and Jeremias) and “revolutionary” (1983: 45).

In every source, Jesus’ attitude toward women comes across clearly: in parables, miracles, and discourses. All the Gospels, not just Luke, present Jesus in the same way. According to Evans, Jesus taught that women were to be treated as subjects, not objects. She states that in Matthew 5:28, Jesus makes clear that he expects his followers to control their sexual desires and that he includes women among his disciples, because they are to be not just the objects of men’s desires. She also draws attention to the fact that Jesus considers “leaving a sister” as great a sacrifice as leaving one’s parents, children, or houses (Matt. 19:29; Mark 10:29).

She quotes Luke 13:16, where the crippled woman is identified as a “daughter of Abraham” and notes that Jesus deliberately chose the title to bring out the value he placed on this woman. Evans observes that Jesus talked freely with women in contrast to Judaism which instructed men to avoid any unnecessary contact with women and notes that Jesus, again in contrast with contemporary Judaism, completely ignored concerns of

purity in his healings of women such as the woman with blood flow (Matt. 9:18–26). Rabbinic parables avoided mention of women, while Jesus pointedly includes them.

In her discussion of women as followers and disciples Evans comments on the fact that Jesus chose twelve men and no women to be his apostles. She notes that Jesus many times went against contemporary custom and convention and that he clearly could have done so in this case as well if he had chosen to do so. However, Evans believes that Jesus here chose to remain within the constraints of his patriarchal Jewish culture and that thus his choice of twelve *men* as apostles is only of temporary significance.

Apart from this, Evans contends that women were included “in the true discipleship of Jesus” alongside men because of “active Christian love for the neighbour” (1983: 51). On the basis of her understanding of the meaning of the term *diakonein*, “to serve,” as conveying the sense of “very personally the service rendered to another” (1983: 51), Evans connects all forms of service, including those mentioned in Acts and the Epistles, such as prophecy, preaching, and taking up collections, under the rubric of service to be rendered equally by men and women. Evans also asserts that “the woman also shared with the rest of the disciples in other activities such as their teaching sessions” (1983: 51; citing Luke 10:39; John 11:28) and implies that because women were taught by Jesus along with men, they are equally his disciples and equally equipped to teach God’s people in the future.

Evans notes that Jesus treated women as responsible for their actions (e.g., sin; the woman taken in adultery) and as intelligent and capable of being engaged in in-depth theological conversation. As examples she uses the Syrophoenician woman, the Samaritan woman, and Mary and Martha. In her discussion of women in the passion

narratives, Evans draws attention to two functions of women, that of witnesses and that of being “the first proclaimers of it [i.e., the message of the resurrection] by the direct command of the angels and of Christ himself” (1983: 54). She concludes her chapter on the Gospels by stating that “it is . . . difficult to find any difference in the approach of Jesus to women and to men” (1983: 56). While she acknowledges that all of Jesus’ twelve apostles were male, she states that “it is not clear what significance this was intended to have for the church” (1983: 57), though earlier in the article Evans argued that this was merely of temporary significance.

Overall, Evans draws a rather sharp distinction between Jesus’ approach to women and first-century Judaism. As discussed in Chapter 2, the feminist scholar Amy-Jill Levine has rejected this characterization, contending that first-century Judaism was not as monolithically patriarchal as is often claimed while Jesus was not as egalitarian as is sometimes maintained. Not all first-century Jews or Jewish rabbis treated women solely as sex objects and excused men indulging in lust (Levine 1994: 8–33). As to divorce, there clearly was a range of views from conservative to liberal (cf. Matt. 19:3–12 and parallels; *m. Gittin* 9:10).

When Evans quotes Matthew 5:28 to justify the inclusion of women among Jesus’ disciples, it is unclear on what basis she draws this conclusion, since the passage does not directly address this issue. However, if one sees a disciple generally as a follower of Jesus without any implication as to positions of leadership, this seems to be unobjectionable, though not the central point made in the passage (i.e., men lusting after women).

With regard to Evans's point that leaving one's sister was viewed by Jesus as equally sacrificial as leaving other members of one's family, it should be noted that this is not explicitly stated in the text but rather constitutes an inference drawn by Evans. Certainly, sisters are considered important as members of one's family, but in Jesus' statement they are included *alongside* all other family members. There seems to be no good reason to draw particular attention to leaving one's sister. Jesus' point is not that leaving one family member is more or less or equally important than leaving another, but just that a sacrifice is made when a person leaves one's family and embarks on being a disciple. Beyond this, it may be true that part of Jesus' message is that sisters are not any less important family members to leave behind than others, but this is probably not his major point.

The term "daughter of Abraham" indeed seems to have been chosen deliberately by Jesus to emphasize the value he placed on this woman. This does appear to stand in contrast with first-century Judaism where this expression is virtually unknown.

When Evans discusses the temporary significance of twelve male leaders, she neglects to mention that Scripture does not state or suggest in any way that Jesus intended this to be a mere temporary pattern. As a matter of fact, if Jesus' general approach was to be countercultural while living within his culture, as Evans herself acknowledges, why was Jesus willing to accommodate himself to Jewish culture at this point?

Indeed, one could see how Jesus might have accommodated himself when no major principle was at stake (such as paying the temple tax or observing religious festivals). In the present case, however, it could be argued that there is in fact a major principle at stake here, and although Jesus has gone against Jewish tradition in his general

dealings with women thus far, here is one point where he deliberately chooses to follow the pattern laid out in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Evans also makes the point that women rendered certain kinds of service to Jesus (*diakonein*) and then turns to other passages in the New Testament where individuals are said to engage in service, *diakonia* (prophecy in 1 Pet. 1:10–12; preaching in Acts 19:22; taking up a collection in 2 Cor. 8:19), and levels all these various forms of service. However, not all kinds of service mentioned in Scripture are the same. To level all New Testament passages referring to “serving” without regard to their respective referents is committing the “referential fallacy” or what Carson calls an “unwarranted linking of sense and reference” (Carson 1984: 64–66; cf. Osborne 1991: 76–78).

Evans’s argument seems to be as follows: (1) Women were equal to men in terms of worth and dignity. (2) Women were equal to men in terms of following Jesus and discipleship. (3) Women were equal to men in terms of service. Because of this progression, and because Evans essentially levels all forms of service, both those involving the exercise of authority and those who do not, there is an implication that women are equal to men also in terms of leadership.

When Evans asserts that “the woman also shared with the rest of the disciples in other activities such as their teaching sessions” (1983: 51; citing Luke 10:39; John 11:28) and implies that because women were taught by Jesus along with men, they are equally his disciples and equally equipped to teach God’s people in the future, this does not necessarily follow from the biblical evidence. Even if women were included in Jesus’ teaching sessions alongside of Jesus’ male disciples, this would not by itself prove that they are called to serve as teachers and have authority over the church. In fact, both of

these encounters are private interactions with Jesus, not “teaching sessions” where women are instructed by Jesus alongside of the rest of the disciples.

In her discussion of women in the passion narratives Evans exercises remarkable restraint when she notes that it is possible that the women were the first to see the risen Jesus only because they happened to be at his tomb first (1983: 54). However, when she refers to women as “first proclaimers” of the message of the resurrection, she exceeds the evidence. In Luke 24:9–10, the women merely report to the Eleven all that has happened to them; they relay a message, but do not preach a sermon or the like. In John 20:18, Mary Magdalene likewise simply reports to the disciples that she has seen the Lord and tells them what Jesus had told her. In Matthew 28:10, the women are instructed to tell the disciples that Jesus will meet them in Galilee.

With regard to the radical difference Evans claims to exist between Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries, research does suggest that many Jews in Jesus’ day were legalistic and patriarchal in orientation. In this regard Jesus does indeed provide a contrast in that he was not a legalist and thus did not feel bound by rabbinic purity regulations and similar concerns that caused rabbis to limit contact with women. At the same time, to use this to support the notion that Jesus not only welcomed women among his followers but treated them as equals to men in terms of leadership roles exceeds the evidence.

### 3.2.6 Ben Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*

In *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* (1994), Ben Witherington provides a study of both Jesus’ attitudes toward women as reflected in his words and deeds and of the women with



whom Jesus interacted during his earthly ministry according to the Gospels. He also deals with Jesus' views on marriage, the family and singleness, and his teaching on adultery and divorce. Although consistently seeking to magnify Jesus' positive stance toward women, Witherington concludes in the end that Jesus was neither a chauvinist nor a feminist.

After a brief assessment of the relevant historical background, Witherington has chapters on women in the teaching of Jesus, women and the deeds of Jesus, and women in the ministry of Jesus. This is the most thorough book-length study of Jesus' attitude toward women. Witherington provides generally helpful treatments of all the major passages which have been briefly surveyed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. In general, however, it can be observed that Witherington goes beyond the clear teaching of certain biblical passages in an effort to underscore women's equal status to men.

There is no need here to reproduce Witherington's treatment of each of the relevant passages in detail. Overall, Witherington helpfully notes how Jesus' teaching on subjects relevant to women, such as adultery, divorce, and singleness, was countercultural. However, we may cite a few examples where Witherington's egalitarian commitment may unduly flavor his assessment of the biblical evidence.

A case in point is Witherington's assertion that "the community of Jesus, both before and after Easter, granted women *together* with men . . . an equal right to participate fully in the family of faith" (1984: 127). At the very least, "equal right" and "participate fully" need careful definition. "Equal rights" terminology improperly retrojects post-Enlightenment concerns into first-century Judaism.

Also, it is unclear how Witherington can say that the community of Jesus, before Easter, acknowledged women's "equal right" to "participate fully" in the life of community in light of Jesus' choice of twelve men as his apostles, unless serving in positions of leadership is not part of Witherington's definition of "full participation" and "equal rights." Even if this is the case, it seems misleading to call women's "full participation" except for positions of leadership "equality," as Witherington does.

Witherington similarly insists that "Luke especially seems determined to drive home his point about the equal place and new roles of women in the community of Jesus by utilizing the techniques of male-female parallelism . . . , male-female role reversal, and by giving space to stories about women not found in the other Gospels" (1984: 129). Again, speaking of women's "equal place" without further qualification may be misleading in light of the fact, attested also by Luke, that Jesus' inner circle consisted of men (Luke 6:12–16). While the Lukan evidence does suggest that women were accepted by Jesus as his followers just as men were (though not among the Twelve), this does not mean that there were no differences in role.

### 3.2.7 Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*

Bilezikian, formerly of Wheaton College, authored a basic book on gender roles. He sets his discussion of this issue within the creation-fall-redemption pattern in Scripture. In his treatment of creation and the Fall, Bilezikian denies any reference to headship and submission, claiming that God's original creation is "equalitarian" [*sic*]. The old covenant era is described by Bilezikian as dominated by the "dark side" of polygamy, patriarchal oppression, a double standard on adultery, and compromise divorce

legislation. On the “bright side,” he discerns women’s assumption of positions of rulership (e.g., Deborah) and “the recovery of the goodness of monogamous, equalitarian [*sic*] marriage” (1985: 69). According to Bilezikian, the new creation in Christ reverses the effects of the Fall, most notably male headship.

In his treatment of Jesus, Bilezikian paints a picture of Judaism as “mercilessly” oppressing women and as “strictly” segregating them from men (1985: 81). Jesus, on the other hand, “took a firmly countercultural stance on many issues” (1985: 81), affirming creation and repudiating the Fall. He seeks to restore women’s dignity to Eve’s condition prior to the Fall and “thrusts them to center stage in the drama of redemption with the spotlights of eternity beaming upon them, and He immortalizes them in sacred history” (1985: 82). Bilezikian proceeds to provide brief treatments of “unnoticeable [i.e., unnoticed] women,” “women as faith models,” instances of “undoing the fall,” “equal opportunities,” “privileged opportunities,” and the “abrogation of rulership.”

Under “equal opportunities,” Bilezikian notes Jesus’ mention of “sisters” among his disciples in Matthew 12:46–50 and claims that in his answer to the woman calling Jesus’ mother blessed in Luke 11:27–28 “Jesus catapulted women along with men, both shoulder to shoulder, to the cutting edge of God’s program for the redemption of the world” (1985: 95). Bilezikian also notes Mary’s adopting the stance of a disciple in Luke 10:38–42 and the reference to women disciples in Luke 8:1–3.

Under “privileged opportunities” Bilezikian mentions the women in Jesus’ genealogy (Matt. 1:3, 5, 6), Mary’s response to the news of the incarnation, Jesus’ first miracle, the first Samaritan and Gentile convert, and women being “first” in receiving Jesus’ resurrection teaching, seeing Jesus at the cross, and being witnesses of the

resurrection. With regard to the wine miracle at Cana, Bilezikian's argument is that because "both a man and a woman [i.e., the groom and the bride] were equal beneficiaries" of the miracle, "a woman became instrumental in providing with her spouse the occasion for the first manifestation of Jesus' eschatological glory" (1985: 99).

In his discussion of the "abrogation of rulership" by Jesus, Bilezikian points to Jesus' teaching on servant leadership in passages such as Matthew 18:1–5, 20:20–28, or 23:1–12. He claims that "[t]rue kingdom greatness is not to be achieved through rank, position, and leadership but by accepting the placement of oneself in a position of inferiority and dependency in regard to others" (1985: 106). Proceeding on to Matthew 18:15–20, Bilezikian derives from this passage the conclusion that, "[a]ccording to Jesus, the appropriate locus for authority rests within the congregation and not in a leader above it. Jesus smashed the pyramidal concept of ecclesiastical authority and replaced it with participatory consensual community rule" (1985: 107).

Bilezikian summarizes his conclusions from the study of Jesus and the Gospels with regard to women's roles as follows:

Jesus intruded into the sin-laden institutions of the world in order to release a new kind of life, an *irrepressible ferment* that would change men and women and empower them with the effervescent dynamic of the Spirit. Endowed with new powers, they would personify the new creation and establish the new community. In this community, men and women are called by God to occupy kingdom functions and to assume *kingdom roles at maximum levels of involvement and visibility tolerable within their contemporary cultures*. In multiple ways, Jesus established the *principle of full access of both men and women* to the

responsibilities attendant to the harmonious functioning of the new community. Jesus taught His followers in word and deed to consider the *gender difference irrelevant* to the concerns and to the processes of the kingdom of God (1985: 118, emphasis added).

Bilezikian proceeds to validate his model of church leadership from Paul's epistles, casting his discussion in terms of "equal rights" in Christian marriage (1 Cor. 7:1–5), in mixed marriages (1 Cor. 7:14), and in Christian service (1 Cor. 7:32–35), and speaking of wives' and husbands' "mutual submission" (Eph. 5:22).

The question of why Jesus chose only men among the Twelve is treated by Bilezikian in a lengthy footnote (1985: 273, n.14). He ties in the all-male composition of the Twelve with the intended target audience of Jesus' mission, which in the first place was Jewish. According to Bilezikian, this required that all members of the Twelve were Jews, and that all of them be male. The exclusion of women, Samaritans, and Gentiles in this initial phase was required by the dynamic of Jesus' mission.

Later on, however, all of these groups of people were included in the church's missionary force. Hence "[p]ragmatic considerations of accommodation determined the composition of the first apostolic group" (1985: 274). The exclusion of women was "a temporary but necessary expedient" (1985: 274). Those who contend today that women should be excluded from leadership positions in the church might just as well argue that Gentiles should be excluded as well.

By way of brief evaluation, even allowing for the popular nature of Bilezikian's work, his exegesis of the relevant passages is often brief. One example where Bilezikian's exegesis is subject to evaluation is his point that, at the wine miracle at Cana,

both bride and groom were equal recipients of the miracle. The text itself only mentions the groom briefly in passing, and the bride is not mentioned at all. The inference Bilezikian draws is clearly different from the authorially intended message (i.e., Jesus' first "sign" of his messianic identity, John 2:11) and unduly imports his egalitarian presuppositions into the text.

Bilezikian's picture of Judaism as "mercilessly" oppressing women and as "strictly" segregating them from men (1985: 81), although true in essence, paints Judaism in extreme terms, perhaps in order to magnify the contrast between Jesus and contemporary Judaism. This kind of exaggeration can also be seen in Bilezikian's claim that in his answer to the woman calling Jesus' mother blessed in Luke 11:27–28 "Jesus catapulted women along with men, both shoulder to shoulder, to the cutting edge of God's program for the redemption of the world" (1985: 95). What in the text is essentially a rebuke of the woman and her sentimental elevation of motherhood and an affirmation of the priority of Christian discipleship has in Bilezikian's hands become an endorsement of an egalitarian role relationship between men and women. Yet there is no indication that Jesus in the present passage intended to comment on the question of whether or not women should serve in church leadership on equal terms with men.

Finally, Bilezikian's argument that Jesus' teaching on servant leadership precludes any meaningful notion of "rank, position, and leadership" in the church is questionable as well. Again, Bilezikian exaggerates when he claims that "Jesus smashed the pyramidal concept of ecclesiastical authority and replaced it with participatory consensual community rule" (1985: 107). The true biblical contrast is between an

improper and a proper use of authority, not between the use of authority and the lack thereof.

### 3.2.8 Aida Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*

Aida Spencer's recent essay on Jesus and women in *Discovering Biblical Equality* (2004) will be discussed and evaluated later in this chapter. The present earlier work, *Beyond the Curse* (1985), includes a twenty-page chapter on Jesus' teachings and practices concerning women as well. The chapter follows the opening presentation of the teaching of Genesis entitled "Equal in Eden," in which Spencer argues that male-female role distinctions are a function of the fall rather than part of the created order.

The chapter on Jesus takes its starting point from the torn curtain in the temple which signified that all now had open access to God, Gentiles as well as Jews, women as well as men. Jesus' choice of twelve men as apostles was to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. In a footnote, Spencer contends that "[i]f Jesus' choice of twelve male disciples signifies that females should not be leaders in the church, then, consistently his choice also signifies that Gentiles should not be leaders in the church" (1985: 45, n. 5; see the preceding discussion of Bilezikian).

In order to demonstrate the extent to which Jesus broke the traditional barriers between men and women, Spencer then provides a treatment of first-century Jewish thought and practices with regard to women. This is followed by a discussion of Luke's account of Mary and Martha, which according to Spencer shows "Jesus' new principle of encouraging women to seek religious training" (1985: 61). Spencer thus urges seminaries today to encourage women on equal terms with men to come and learn the Scriptures.

Spencer's treatment of Jesus and women is not comprehensive but rather focuses on the difference between Jesus and contemporary Judaism in their treatment of women. Because Jesus encouraged women to seek religious training, Spencer contends that they should be allowed to serve as ministers on par with men. However, her reasoning is unpersuasive for several reasons. First, the torn temple veil most likely signifies equality of *access* to God, not necessarily equality of opportunity to serve as minister.

Second, Jesus' encouragement for women such as Mary to learn does not necessarily imply that he supported their equal participation in positions of church leadership. Analogously, seminaries today should certainly encourage women to enroll as students, but this encouragement to learn does not necessarily entail equality of access to the pastoral office. Beyond this, Spencer's treatment is too brief to serve as an adequate apologetic for an egalitarian approach to gender roles. Her 2004 essay is considerably more astute hermeneutically and will be the subject of a thorough critique later on in this chapter.

### 3.2.9 Richard Longenecker in Alvera Mickelsen, ed., *Women, Authority & the Bible*

Remarkably, there is no essay on Jesus and women in the egalitarian volume edited by Alvera Mickelsen, *Women, Authority & the Bible* (1986). Special chapters are devoted to 1 Corinthians, Galatians 3:28, 1 Timothy 2:9–15, and 1 Timothy 2:12. There are, however, two short paragraphs devoted to Jesus and women in Richard Longenecker's essay "Authority, Hierarchy & Leadership Patterns in the Bible" (1986: 71–72). Longenecker quotes C. E. Carlston who wrote that "Jesus was perfectly at ease in the company of women" since "for him equality between the sexes was . . . a rather self-



evident fact” (1986: 71, citing Carlston 1980: 96–97). Jesus had women followers and frequently ministered to women. In contrast to other rabbis, who doubted women’s ability to learn Scripture and depreciated their worth, he granted women the right to learn the good news and to participate in his ministry.

In the rest of his essay Longenecker sets forth a “developmental hermeneutic” (referring also to his previous work: 1984: esp. chap. 2, pp. 16–28; and 1979: 195–207) by which he means an approach that “clarifies the fullness of the redemptive note sounded in the New Testament” (1986: 81). According to Longenecker, Paul and the early church worked from two categories of thought when dealing with the roles of the sexes: (1) God’s *created order*, indicating hierarchy, subordination, and submission; and (2) God’s *redemptive work*, where freedom, mutuality, and equality “take prominence.” Longenecker contends that while “hierarchical order is built into creation by God and must be respected,” “a hierarchical ordering of life is not always fixed, particularly when redemptive concerns overshadow what is true because of creation” (1986: 82). While both creation and redemption categories must be taken into account in the Christian life, priority is to be given to the latter.

As to a proper *hermeneutical starting point*, Longenecker contends that one must begin studying any issue at the point where progressive revelation has reached its zenith, that is, with Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels and with the apostolic interpretation of his ministry in the New Testament. From there one can trace out lines of continuity and development both back into the Old Testament and forward into the patristic period and beyond. This is why a study of the role of women must likewise begin with Jesus and the apostolic period. And this, too, is why, according to Longenecker, Galatians 3:28 is so

important, “for there the gospel is clearly stated as having revolutionary significance for the cultural, social and sexual areas of life” (1986: 83).

What is more, Longenecker maintains a distinction must be made between the *New Testament proclamation about new life in Christ* and its *first-century implementation* (citing Jewett). According to Jewett (1975: 147–48), “we should look to the passages which point beyond these first-century attitudes toward women to the ideal of the new humanity in Christ. Only thus can we harness the power of the gospel to make all history, not just first-century history, salvation history.”

Longenecker contends that such a developmental hermeneutic “compels us as Christians to stress the redemptive notes of freedom, equality and mutuality that are sounded in the New Testament” (1986: 84). It is also in line with “the partnership ideal of Genesis 1:26–27. More importantly, it is based on the recorded attitudes of Jesus toward women and the principles of the gospel” (1986: 84).

Overall, Longenecker’s discussion is not very specific. He bases his case on vague references, such as to “the recorded attitudes of Jesus toward women and the principles of the gospel” and the claim that freedom, mutuality, and equality should “take prominence” in God’s redemptive order. His categories of creation and redemption are set up in an unduly dichotomous manner. In truth, however, God’s redemptive work does not nullify God’s created order but, to the contrary, reaffirms it. God and his purposes in creation and redemption are not divided or contradictory.

Longenecker states that redemption suggests freedom, mutuality, and equality. Yet redemption as a theological category is to be properly understood as salvation from sin through Christ. Freedom in redemption, rightly conceived, means freedom from the

power of sin, not freedom from all submission to authority as built into the structure of human existence by the Creator. Equality in Christ, likewise, in scriptural terms, does not mean the removal of all distinctions of role but that there is only one way of salvation for both men and women: confessing one's sin and trusting in Christ for salvation; in this there is no difference.

It appears that Longenecker in the way he constructs his two categories and defines redemption is guided by a particular understanding of Galatians 3:28 (which he frequently cites). However, redemption, properly understood, does not nullify God's created order but makes it possible once again for men and women to live in harmony with it. The suggestion of freedom from what Longenecker calls a "hierarchical" ordering of male-female relationships is not properly part of the New Testament message of God's redemptive work in Christ. The Old and the New Testament complement one another, and "progression" must not necessarily be taken to mean "supersession."

A developmental hermeneutic is helpful when one observes scriptural restraint. Longenecker, however, introduces terms such as "freedom" or "equality" into his discussion of the biblical teaching on women in a way that his interpretation in fact supersedes scriptural teaching on the true meaning of redemption. Rather than developing his understanding of the meaning of redemption in Christ from the relevant biblical passages, he asserts his own understanding that is outside the central concept of what redemption in Christ really means. The scriptural ideal of a new humanity in Christ in this life does not encompass equality in every sense if by this one means leveling all distinctions, particularly in role.

### 3.2.10 The Early Years: Summary and Preliminary Assessment

The first major work discussed above was *The Bible and the Role of Women* by Krister Stendahl. While Stendahl strongly advocates an egalitarian approach to gender roles, he does so not on the basis of Jesus' approach to women. Rather, according to Stendahl, nothing in the Gospels indicates that Jesus transcended or stood in conscious opposition to the traditional patriarchal Jewish understanding of male-female relations.

Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, in *All We're Meant to Be*, call Jesus' behavior toward women truly extraordinary in light of the patriarchal culture surrounding him. They observe that Jesus took women seriously, treating them as human beings, and that he associated with all kinds of women regardless of class or background. They also note that Jesus, in contrast to other rabbis, taught women and considered them capable of comprehending spiritual truth.

Scanzoni and Hardesty point out that Jesus incorporated women or activities relevant to women's experience in his illustrations and that he touched women and healed them. Jesus also accepted intimate gestures of love from women at several occasions, commending them for their devotion. They note that women followed Jesus to the end. Jesus' first resurrection appearances were to women, and it was women who were first instructed to bring the gospel of his resurrection to others.

Paul Jewett maintains that Jesus was truly revolutionary in the way he treated women. According to Jewett, Jesus "treated women as fully human" and "equal to men in every respect" (1975: 94). Jesus "broke through the barriers of tradition and custom in a way that put women completely at ease in his presence" (1975: 97). Similar to Scanzoni

and Hardesty, Jewett observes that Jesus' relationships with women were characterized not only by intimacy and openness but also by social breadth.

Jesus' parables draw significantly on illustrations relevant to women's experience. Hence it is not surprising that women followed him all the way to the end. Women were the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. "His male disciples first proclaimed the resurrection to the world; but his female disciples first received the revelation on which this proclamation was based" (1975: 103).

Mary Evans, too, maintains that Jesus' approach to women was "revolutionary" and without precedent in Judaism (1983: 45). In every source, Jesus' attitude toward women comes across clearly, in parables, miracles, and discourses, and all the Gospels present Jesus in the same way. On the basis of Matthew 5:28, Evans claims that Jesus included women among his disciples, because they are to be not just the objects of men's desires. She also draws attention to the fact that Jesus considered "leaving a sister" as a sacrifice equal to leaving one's parents or children or houses.

Even more strongly than the other scholars already reviewed, Evans consistently contrasts Jesus' actions with those of other rabbis of his day. She notes that Jesus talked freely with women; that he completely ignored concerns of purity in his healings of women; and that his parables included women, all in contrast to other rabbis. The one exception, according to Evans, where Jesus opted to remain within the constraints of his patriarchal Jewish culture is his choice of twelve men and no women as his apostles, a pattern she considers to be of only temporary significance.

Apart from this, Evans contends that women were included "in the true discipleship of Jesus" (1983: 51), which entailed their performance of all kinds of

service, including prophecy and preaching. Since women shared with other disciples in Jesus' teaching sessions, they are equally his disciples and equally equipped to teach God's people in the future.

In her discussion of women in the passion narratives, Evans draws attention to two functions of women, that of witnesses and that of being "the first proclaimers of it [i.e., the message of the resurrection] by the direct command of the angels and of Christ himself" (1983: 54). She concludes her chapter on the Gospels by stating that "it is . . . difficult to find any difference in the approach of Jesus to women and to men" (1983: 56).

Another egalitarian work during this period that has been evaluated is Ben Witherington's *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, a study of Jesus' ministry to women and their roles as reflected in his early ministry. As stated, this is the most thorough investigation of Jesus and women including consideration of the first-century historical background and exegetical observations on all the major biblical passages on the subject. Witherington's conclusion is that Jesus was neither a feminist nor a chauvinist.

Gilbert Bilezikian has provided a basic and popular, yet very influential, treatment of the subject. His language is exaggerated and often inflammatory. His exegesis is not careful and is influenced heavily by his egalitarian presuppositions. His major arguments are (1) that God's original creation purpose is egalitarian and that the reversal of the consequences of the fall necessitates a restoration of women's equal rights and status, entailing full participation in all roles of leadership in the home and the church; and (2) that Jesus' teaching on servant leadership undermines any position of authority in the church, whether by men or by women, resulting in an egalitarian model of women's roles

in the church. As will be seen in what follows, these two lines of reasoning become an integral part of subsequent egalitarian argumentation.

Aida Spencer's brief chapter on Jesus and women was shown to be highly selective and inadequate as an apologetic for an egalitarian approach to women's roles. Spencer does provide an interesting treatment on the differences between Jesus and contemporary Judaism in their treatment of women. Her appeal to the torn curtain in the temple and to Jesus' encouragement of Mary, however, was shown to be unable to bear the weight of Spencer's argument.

Richard Longenecker, finally, noted that Jesus was perfectly at ease in the company of women since he held to the "equality between the sexes" (1986: 71). Jesus had women followers and frequently ministered to women. In contrast to other rabbis, who doubted women's ability to learn Scripture and depreciated their worth, he granted women the right to learn the good news and to participate in his ministry. Longenecker's major contribution lies in his proposal of a "developmental hermeneutic" which proceeds on the basis of his postulation of two theological categories, creation and redemption, of which he holds the latter to have priority.

We note several areas of difficulty in the hermeneutic of these proponents of the early years of the egalitarian interpretation of Scripture. The first concerns Jesus' relationship with his rabbinic contemporaries. Stendahl is alone in this group claiming that Jesus did not transcend his Jewish surroundings. Scanzoni and Hardesty, Jewett, and Evans all contend strongly that Jesus differed radically from other Jewish rabbis of his day in his treatment of women. Bilezikian and Evans, in particular, draw a fairly sharp distinction between Jesus' approach to women and first-century Judaism. To be sure,

unlike many of his Jewish contemporaries Jesus was not a legalist and thus did not feel bound by rabbinic purity regulations that caused them to avoid contact with women. However, Evans' and Bilezikian's treatment is unduly monolithic in its generalization about first-century Jews treatment of women. Especially Bilezikian fails to distinguish between the ways *different* Jews treated women (see Levine 1994). Also, to cite the differences in approach between Jesus and other rabbis as support for the notion that Jesus not only welcomed women among his followers but treated them as equal to men in terms of leadership roles exceeds the evidence.

A second difficulty is that some of the interpreters discussed appear to presuppose a particular worldview of liberation, freedom, or equality rather than deriving it from their interpretation of Scripture. Scanzoni and Hardesty, for example, claim that Jesus' promise of liberation from the Law and of people being set free by the Son conveys the notion of liberation in feminist terms. Yet Jesus never gave any indication that women were to be free to take whatever role to which they may aspire in the church or the home. Jewett's (1975: 94) comment, likewise, that Jesus treated women as "equal to men in every respect" is potentially misleading in that it may be taken to suggest that women were equally welcome to serve in the role of teachers or leaders as men. Yet as has been seen in Chapter 2, even most recent feminist historical scholarship (e.g., Amy-Jill Levine, Kathleen Corley) has concluded that Jesus did not come to establish an egalitarian community where role distinctions no longer applied.

A third difficulty for those who interpret Scripture in egalitarian terms arises with regard to Jesus' choice of twelve men as his apostles and his commissioning of these men as the core leadership group representing the church. Scanzoni and Hardesty do not



address this. Bilezikian also does not comment on this in the text of his work and limits his discussion on this to a single endnote. Both Evans and Bilezikian suggest this is merely a temporary pattern. An argument against this is that, in light of the fact that Jesus generally was countercultural, as Evans and Bilezikian acknowledge, it seems unlikely that Jesus would have chosen to accommodate himself to the surrounding culture if an important principle were at stake.

A fourth difficulty is that of exaggerated claims on the basis of limited evidence or observation. Examples include:

- the argument that Jesus welcomed women as disciples based on his denunciation of male lust in Matthew 5:28;

- the contention that women are equal to men based on the observation that leaving one's sister is considered as equally sacrificial to leaving other family members;

- the observation that because women engaged in certain kinds of service, they should be able to perform all kinds of service, including teaching and preaching;

- the argument that because women were taught by Jesus along with men, they are equally his disciples and equally equipped to teach God's people in the future;

- the contention that women were the "first proclaimers" of the message of the resurrection on the basis of Matthew 28:10; Luke 24:9–10; and John 20:18, which is not borne out by these particular passages.

In fairness, it should be noted that asserting exaggerated claims based on limited evidence is not the exclusive domain of egalitarians, nor does focusing on this issue critique the egalitarian case at its strongest point. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate to note the kinds of exaggerated claims found in egalitarian literature, in part because they

are fairly frequent and found in many egalitarian writers, and in part because it may be a sign of the weakness of the egalitarian position that many of its adherents resort to exaggerated claims in order to advance their case.

A fifth concern relates to the following line of reasoning intimated by Evans: (1) women were equal to men in terms of worth and dignity; (2) women were equal to men in terms of following Jesus and discipleship; (3) women were equal to men in terms of service. Because of this progression, and because Evans essentially levels all forms of service, there is (4) an implication that women are equal to men also in terms of leadership. However, while few would argue with the first point, the subsequent points are subject to debate.

Sixth, concerns were registered with Longenecker's developmental hermeneutic. It was shown that Longenecker's creation-redemption dichotomy does not necessarily follow from the evidence he adduces.

### **3.3. The Maturing Movement (1987–1999)**

Egalitarianism in the second phase presents itself as a maturing movement. After the pioneering work of Krister Stendahl, Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, Paul Jewett, Mary Evans, Ben Witherington, Richard Longenecker, and others, the years 1987–99 witness the contributions of Grant Osborne, Ruth Tucker, R. T. France, and Stanley Grenz.

### 3.3.1 Grant Osborne, “Women in Jesus’ Ministry”

In his 1989 article “Women in Jesus’ Ministry,” Grant Osborne discusses the topic under three major headings: Jewish and Hellenistic attitudes toward women; Jesus’ relationship with women; and correspondences between Jesus’ and Paul’s attitudes. Osborne notes that while Bernadette Brooten cites inscriptions to support the notion that women served as synagogue rulers, none of those date prior to A.D. 70. Osborne also cites Stephen Clark (1980: 242) who points out that there is little evidence that Jesus was consciously breaking Jewish conventions regarding women or that his Jewish contemporaries considered his relationship with women a threat to their beliefs as they did his fellowship with sinners.

Osborne’s discussion of women in Jesus’ ministry takes its starting point from data presented by Munro (1982: 226) and follows a redaction-critical approach, assuming Markan priority and noting ways in which Matthew or Luke respectively alter the material in Mark or share common material (“Q”). He also treats women in John. Munro’s data are helpful in that they relate the mention of women in the respective Gospels to those of men and thus put the treatment of women in the Gospels in larger perspective. Overall, men are mentioned three times more often than women, a ratio that roughly holds true in the various Gospels and traditions, whether the individuals are named or unnamed.

In his treatment of Mark, Osborne traverses the by now familiar territory (see Chapter 1) and emphasizes the Markan discipleship theme with regard to women. At one point he notes that a woman’s sacrificial act of service at Jesus’ anointing renders her “a model for true discipleship” but says that he does not want “to overstate Mark’s

emphasis, as if he portrays Jesus as a radical egalitarian” (1989: 268). Rather, he draws attention to the fact that “[i]n his teaching Jesus distinctly reaffirms the traditional Jewish values of hearth and home,” including the childbearing role of women (citing Mark 10:2–12, 13–16, 19). Concluding his treatment of women in Mark, Osborne acknowledges that “Mark accepts the basic patriarchal structure of Judaism but within that framework uses women in a remarkably positive role as valid disciples of Jesus and even as models of faith” (1989: 270).

Moving on to Matthew, Osborne notes that the first evangelist only adds mention of one single woman not referenced in Mark. Also, he observes that Matthew tends to shorten Mark’s stories of women (as well as most other stories). He proceeds to note small redactional changes introduced by Matthew over against Mark (assuming that Matthew used Mark as one of his sources). He notes that women are used in kingdom parables and that “Jesus used men and women equally as role models” (1989: 275). He comments that after Jesus’ resurrection the women in Matthew are portrayed more positively than in Mark. The way Osborne casts this is that “[t]he women have temporarily replaced the Twelve and function similarly to the righteous remnant of the prophetic period in calling the disciples back to God” (1989: 275). Osborne concludes that while in Mark the women “finalize the theme of discipleship failure,” in Matthew they “summarize the overcoming power of Jesus’ presence in discipleship” (1989: 276). According to Osborne, “[t]hey become the archetypal disciples who succeed even when the disciples fail” as well as a group of outcasts “reinstated to their proper place in God’s economy by the redemptive presence of Jesus” (1989: 276).

In his treatment of women in Luke, Osborne notes that Luke features many of the same women as Mark and Matthew but adds several significant passages, which indicates his special interest in the role of women in Jesus' ministry. Thus Luke alone mentions what Osborne infers to be women's presence in Jesus' "inner circle of disciples" and "participate[d] also in the [i.e. Jesus'] mission" (1989: 280; 8:1–3). Osborne notes that this pericope is preceded by two other accounts not found in any of the other Gospels featuring women's encounters with Jesus. In both cases, the raising of the widow's son (7:11–17) and Jesus' anointing by a "sinful woman" (7:36–50), Jesus has compassion on these women. Again, Osborne says he does not want to overstate the case, noting that "[i]f Jesus had been a revolutionary feminist, he would have included a woman among his inner circle of twelve disciples" (1989: 280). He claims that while "Jesus clearly accepted the basic patriarchal matrix of his time, *the roles of women were redefined* within rather than outside that structure" (1989: 280; emphasis added).

In his treatment of the women in the concluding chapter of Luke's Gospel, Osborne comments, "Clearly their importance as bridge-builders between Jesus and the early church . . . is great indeed" (1989: 282). Nevertheless, Osborne acknowledges that "it is certain that Jesus continued to reserve the place of leadership for men even in Luke, the most outspoken proponent of women's rights" (1989: 283). Yet while Jesus stayed within the patriarchalism of his day, Osborne contends that Luke the evangelist "goes out of his way to stress the equality of men and women in the kingdom" (1989: 283). What is more, Osborne cites Tucker and Liefeld who have contrasted the moral weaknesses of men to the spiritual strength of women (citing 7:36–50).

Turning to women in John, Osborne discusses Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary and Martha, and Mary Magdalene. Osborne sees Jesus' entrusting his mother to the beloved disciple as signaling that she "becomes a model for the woman disciple whose very relationship to her son is transformed at the 'hour' of Jesus' triumph" (1989: 285). Mary's act of anointing Jesus marks her as a "devoted disciple" (1989: 286). Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene in 20:17 to "go and tell my brothers" are interpreted by Osborne as "a clear apostolic commission" to proclaim a message with both redemptive ("brothers" connotes forgiveness) and theological overtones (their reinstatement before God; 1989: 287). Osborne concludes that "women have an equal place in the mission of Christ to the world" (1989: 287).

In his final section, "From Jesus to Paul," Osborne claims that Jesus, while refusing to challenge the "patriarchal matrix," "consciously planted a seed of change." According to Osborne, "Paul and Jesus alike began a social revolution, the results of which are still felt" (1989: 290). For Osborne, therefore, the Gospels provide a bridge to Paul in that the concerns expressed by the evangelists are similar to those of Paul. Osborne speaks of the "elevation of women to a ministerial role" as a "sign of the inbreaking kingdom," even though he concedes that first-century women did not have a pastoral role (1989: 290).

Overall, while much of Osborne's discussion of the various passages stays within conventional parameters, his concluding section on implications does not demonstrably follow from his interpretation of the textual data. Rather, there is a pattern of general statements which encompass more than what is in the text and result in unsubstantiated claims of women being equal to men or coming alongside men in kingdom ministry, such

as when he speaks of women's "new place alongside men in the kingdom inaugurated by the Christ" (1989: 282). Other examples include:

- the claim that at the end of Matthew "[t]he women have temporarily replaced the Twelve and function similarly to the righteous remnant of the prophetic period in calling the disciples back to God" (1989: 275);

- the characterization of the women traveling with and supporting Jesus and his disciples in Luke 8:1-3 as women's presence in Jesus' "inner circle of disciples" and participation "in the [i.e. Jesus'] mission" (1989: 280);

- the interpretation of Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene in John 20:17 to "go and tell my brothers" as "a clear apostolic commission" to proclaim a message with both redemptive ("brothers" connotes forgiveness) and theological overtones (their reinstatement before God; 1989: 287);

- Osborne's conclusion that according to John "women have an equal place in the mission of Christ to the world" (1989: 287).

- anachronism is apparent when Osborne speaks of Luke as "the most outspoken proponent of women's rights" (1989: 283).

Osborne does show restraint and demonstrates careful exegesis on other occasions. One example of this is his comment that he sees no New Testament evidence for women functioning as first-century "pastors" (1989: 290).

### 3.3.2 Ruth Tucker, *Daughters of the Church* and *Women in the Maze*

The first chapter in Ruth Tucker's book *Daughters of the Church* (1987) deals with "The Gospel and the World of Jesus: Wives and Mothers." For the most part, Tucker traverses

by-now familiar territory in the women she discusses. Her discussion of Martha's confession of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God in John 11:27 notes the verbal similarity with Peter's confession of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi and from this draws the implication that "Martha seems to have a status as a spokesperson in John similar to that of Peter in the Synoptics. Certainly her role is greater than his in the fourth Gospel" (1987: 28).

Tucker also provides a brief discussion of Jesus only appointing male apostles, asking the counter-question: "What would have happened if Jesus had appointed a female apostle?" (1987: 46). Tucker's response: (1) it would have been logistically difficult for a woman to travel alone as an itinerant missionary in the first century; (2) a woman would not have been accepted as a religious teacher in most areas; (3) women were not accepted as witnesses; (4) the apostles symbolically represented the twelve tribes of Israel. She sums up her findings as follows: "Jesus had women learning from him as disciples and traveling with him in service. He engaged in theological dialogue with women. He helped women in need and in sin without demeaning them. He treated men and women alike with regard to their failings. He encouraged both men and women in their faith. . . ." (1987: 47).

Many of Tucker's observations are valid. However, her contention that Martha's "status as a spokesperson in John" was "similar to that of Peter in the Synoptics" and that "[c]ertainly her role is greater than his in the fourth Gospel" raises questions. As in the Synoptics, Peter is presented in John's Gospel as the spokesman of the Twelve (see esp. 6:68–69, a passage Tucker does not discuss; see also 13:6–11, 36–38). From his call to discipleship, which is narrated in John 1:40–42, to his final commissioning by Jesus in



John 21:15–19, Peter is portrayed as the primary apostle among the Twelve in keeping with the Synoptic portrait. Martha, by contrast, appears only in John 11. Without diminishing the significance of her confession of Jesus in 11:27, she hardly rivals Peter's status as the spokesman of the Twelve in John's Gospel, and her role is certainly not greater than his.

A discussion of Tucker's treatment of the question why Jesus did not choose a woman as an apostle will be deferred until after the following survey of her second book on the subject.

In her book *Women in the Maze: Questions & Answers on Biblical Equality* (1992), Tucker devotes two chapters to the present topic: "Was Jesus a Feminist?" (Chap. 11, 1992: 81–86) and "Did Jesus Offer Public Ministry to Women?" (Chap. 12; 1992: 87–93). At the outset of her discussion, Tucker cites Leonard Swidler (1971: 177), who in his article "Jesus Was a Feminist" wrote that Jesus "thought of women as equals of men." Tucker contends that in contrast to first-century Palestinian Judaism which regarded women as inferior, Jesus' approach to women was "nothing less than revolutionary." Tucker acknowledges that applying the label "feminist" to Jesus is debatable, but she states that "it is safe to say that he showed an unusual sensitivity to women and their needs" (1992: 80).

Tucker cites Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4 as an example. Commenting on Jesus' relationship with his mother, she makes the point that Jesus was not rude to her but that he considered motherhood as secondary to discipleship. Jesus' treatment of his mother demonstrates that "all his followers, whether male or female . . . had equal status in his sight" (1992: 83). With regard to Jesus' response to the

woman who called his mother blessed (Luke 11:27–28), Tucker cites Gilbert Bilezikian (1985: 95), who writes that Jesus “catapulted women along with men, both shoulder to shoulder, to the cutting edge of God’s program for the redemption of the world.”

Tucker also discusses the question of whether Jesus was married and the significance of his including examples for women’s lives in his parables. Tucker also notes that Jesus abrogated the double standard for women in his teaching on divorce.

In her chapter, “Did Jesus Offer Public Ministry to Women?” Tucker argues that Jesus had women disciples (citing Luke 8:1–3). She quotes Grant Osborne (1989: 280) at length to the effect that women became “part of the inner circle of disciples” and “participate[d] . . . in the mission” of Jesus. Why, then, did Jesus not include a woman among the Twelve? According to Tucker, the “most compelling explanation for Jesus’ failure to call women to be among the twelve has to do with decorum. The potential for scandal was too great. . . . that the gospel message might be slandered because of rumors of sex scandals was a risk he could not justify” (1992: 89). Tucker also notes that “the twelve disciples were perhaps seen as representative of the twelve tribes of Israel, and only males could symbolically fill these roles” (1992: 89). Tucker disavows, however, that this constitutes an abiding principle, since none of the Twelve was Gentile, which would mean that only Jews could serve in church leadership today.

Tucker notes that the debate over women in ministry is really a debate over women and authority. She rightly acknowledges that no one argues that women should not have ministry; but some deny that women should perform ministry that entails authority. According to Tucker, however, Jesus taught that ministry entails servanthood, not exercising authority (citing Matt. 20:20–28; Mark 9:35–37 and the parallel Matt.

18:3–4; John 13:15). She implies that any role distinction between men and women with regard to ministry is therefore moot. In conclusion, Tucker discusses the significant role played by women at the resurrection, again citing Osborne.

By way of evaluation of Tucker's arguments in *Women in the Maze*, the following comments should be made. Tucker's statement that Jesus' treatment of his mother demonstrates that "all his followers, whether male or female . . . had equal status in his sight" is not clear. If by "equal status" it is meant that all are equally saved and equally members of God's kingdom in Christ, this is in keeping with the biblical message. If, however, "equal status" is extended also to roles in the church, this is another matter (see comments on Jesus' choice of twelve men as apostles in the following discussion).

Tucker's citation of Gilbert Bilezikian to the effect that Jesus "catapulted women along with men, both shoulder to shoulder, to the cutting edge of God's program for the redemption of the world" is rhetorically effective but not necessarily accurate. It is unclear where in Luke 11:27–28 Tucker and Bilezikian find "women along with men, both shoulder to shoulder" engaged at the "cutting edge of God's program for the redemption of the world." As in the previous example, equality of status as member of God's kingdom may be implied, but not necessarily in terms of roles in the church.

Tucker's argument that the "most compelling explanation for Jesus' failure to call women to be among the twelve has to do with decorum. The potential for scandal was too great. . . . that the gospel message might be slandered because of rumors of sex scandals was a risk he could not justify" is an argument from silence. More likely is the reason, suggested by Tucker herself, that "the twelve disciples were . . . seen as representative of the twelve tribes of Israel, and only males could symbolically fill these roles."

Tucker's contention that since ministry entails servanthood, not exercising authority, and thus any male-female role distinctions with regard to church offices is moot, is based on a false dichotomy between servanthood and the exercise of authority. As the following discussion will show, servant leadership and the proper exercise of authority can go hand in hand, and church offices do entail the exercise of authority, without violating the principle of servanthood.

### 3.3.3 R. T. France, *Women in the Church's Ministry*

In his 1995 work *Women in the Church's Ministry*, R. T. France includes a brief section on women in the ministry of Jesus. In his opening paragraph France provides a brief discussion of attitudes toward women in ancient Judaism. Helpfully, France acknowledges that the picture was not uniform, and that examples of a "more enlightened attitude" toward women can be found (1995: 76; this contrasts favorably with Evans's monolithic portrayal of first-century Judaism).

According to France, Jesus sees women not as "mere possessions of men, or even second-class citizens; still less were they primarily of sexual interest. He related to women and valued them as real people of independent worth and personality, and they played a significant role in the movement which arose out of his public ministry" (1995: 77). He sees the fact that no woman was included among the Twelve as a "historical provision of limited duration, not an ideological statement about the permanent values of the kingdom of God" (1995: 78). He also contends that Luke 8:1-3 suggests that Jesus' "inner circle was not very sharply distinguished in practice" from the wider group of Jesus' followers "among whom women were prominent" (1995: 78).

France concludes that while the Gospels “do not, perhaps, record a total reversal of Jewish prejudice against women and of their exclusion from roles of leadership,” they “do contain the seeds from which such a reversal was bound to grow” (1995: 78). While the church was slow to respond, “[i]n the ministry of Jesus we see an irreversible turning of the wheel which set the Jesus movement on a new course with regard to the respective roles of men and women” (1995: 79).

Overall, France’s brief summary assessment is similar to Osborne’s. Like Osborne, France claims that Jesus’ approach to women contains the seeds of women’s liberation. Like Osborne, too, one detects exaggeration as when France says that the reversal of Jewish attitudes toward women effected through Jesus’ ministry “was bound to grow.” The fact that Jesus treated women positively, and that this stood in marked contrast to much of Jewish patriarchal society, does not mean that there was going to be a major movement of “reversal” (Osborne calls it “revolution”) toward women’s liberation from patriarchalism. An instance of special pleading is France’s insistence that Jesus’ inner circle “was not sharply distinguished” from the wider group of Jesus’ followers among whom women were prominent. It is not clear from Luke 8:1–3 that the women supporting Jesus and the apostles, though they were traveling with them, went beyond supportive roles to become equal participants in Jesus’ mission alongside the Twelve.

#### 3.3.4 Stanley Grenz, *Women in the Church*

Stanley Grenz devotes about six pages in his book *Women in the Church* to discuss women in Jesus’ ministry (1995: 71–77). He speaks of “the attitude of our Lord coupled with his liberating message” as forming the foundation for women’s roles in the early

church (1995: 71). Grenz is convinced that the “gospel’s liberation of women comes into full relief only when we view the ministry of Jesus . . . in light of the strictures against women prevalent in the ancient Near East” (1995: 72).

Surveying Jesus’ approach to women, Grenz observes that Jesus treated all people, male or female, as persons and that he regularly showed compassion to the needy, including women. Grenz also points out that Jesus, in contrast to other rabbis, frequently included incidents from women’s lives in his teaching. While acknowledging that Jesus did not include any women among the Twelve, Grenz contends that this fact should not “blind us to the importance of their presence among Jesus’ followers” (1995: 75).

In a later chapter, Grenz contends that, first, the “new creation vision consists of the renewal and completion of creation” and that the “call for full participation of men and women in the church is the fulfillment of God’s egalitarian intention from the beginning” (1995: 179; this was already argued by Bilezikian, albeit in a much less sophisticated fashion). Grenz also avers that the notion of the priesthood of all believers, in contrast to Old Testament times when only men could serve as priests, demands that women be allowed to serve as pastors and church leaders. In keeping with this, Grenz maintains that the ultimate point of appeal must be the gifts distributed by God.

In the end, however, Grenz calls for nothing less than a complete reassessment of the conventional view of leadership and authority. True servant leadership is that of a shepherd who cares for his sheep, not that of a ruler who lords it over his people. Mutual submission must replace a dominance-submission model in the church. Quoting extensively from recent leadership theorists, Grenz makes a case that shared leadership and leadership teams are more effective than the single-leader model. For this reason

also, “Because men and women view the world in different ways, the church leadership team is enhanced by the presence of both” (1995: 230).

Grenz also notes that Jesus instructed women and involved them in theological discussion. Commenting on the fact that Jesus’ first appearance after this resurrection was to women, Grenz states that “[f]or the Evangelists this meant that in God’s new economy, men *and* women are credible witnesses and capable messengers of the risen Lord” and that “[i]n the postresurrection community, women and men share in the proclamation of the good news. This new role for women forms a fitting climax to what developed throughout Jesus’ life” (1995: 77).

In closing, Grenz cites Osborne’s statement (already critiqued above) which speaks of the “elevation of women to a ministerial role” as “a sign of the inbreaking kingdom” (1995: 77).

In evaluating Grenz’s contribution, he largely depends on the exegetical work of others and seeks to tease out the larger theological implications. Most notably, he concludes his treatment with two lengthy quotations from Grant Osborne, whose work has already been subjected to an evaluation above. In light of Grenz’s dependence on Osborne, the criticisms addressed with regard to Osborne’s work therefore also apply to Grenz’s contribution.

One observes that Grenz uses “liberation” language several times at the outset of his treatment of Jesus’ approach to women (see the preceding discussion on this). Several of Grenz’s statements also are characterized by a certain ambiguity if not exaggeration, such as when he says that “[i]n the postresurrection community, women and men share in the proclamation of the good news,” as if to imply that all role distinctions between men

and women in the church have now been eliminated. However, his explanation as to why Jesus only chose men as apostles is not adequate for the following reasons.

First, his point that the “new creation vision consists of the renewal and completion of creation” and that the “call for full participation of men and women in the church is the fulfillment of God’s egalitarian intention from the beginning” fails to recognize several important pieces of scriptural evidence that question the notion that God’s intention was “egalitarian . . . from the beginning.”

While a critique of this point is beyond the scope of the present dissertation, it should be pointed out that Grenz here takes a different approach than Longenecker, another egalitarian already critiqued. Longenecker, in arguing for a “developmental hermeneutic,” acknowledges that God’s creation entails male headship and female submission but argues that redemption in Christ trumps creation. Grenz, by contrast, claims God’s intention was “egalitarian . . . from the beginning,” so that redemption does not supersede creation but rather renews and completes it.

Grenz’s argument that the notion of the priesthood of the believer necessarily requires egalitarianism likewise fails to convince, as do his contentions that gifting must be the sole determinant of the exercise of spiritual gifts and that a hierarchical view of church leadership must be replaced with an egalitarian one.

### 3.3.5 The Maturing Movement: Summary and Preliminary Assessment

The first representative egalitarian work considered in this period was Grant Osborne’s “Women in Jesus’ Ministry.” The burden underlying Osborne’s article is to redress an imbalance he perceives between the scholarly treatment up to that point on women in



ministry in the Gospels and Paul, respectively. By showing that Jesus favored an egalitarian approach to gender roles, Osborne hopes to put further discussions on women in Paul's writings on a better foundation. He sets out to demonstrate that Jesus' and Paul's teaching and practice essentially cohere and that both are amenable to an egalitarian pattern of ministry. Osborne divides his treatment into three sections: (1) the Jewish and Hellenistic background to the issue; (2) Jesus' relationship with women; and (3) correspondences between Jesus' and Paul's attitudes.

As mentioned, while much of Osborne's discussion of the various passages stays within conventional parameters, his concluding section on implications does not always demonstrably follow from his interpretation of the textual data. Rather, there is a pattern of general statements from which it is claimed that women are equal to men or come alongside men in kingdom ministry, such as when he speaks of women's "new place alongside men in the kingdom inaugurated by the Christ" (1989: 282).

Next, we considered two works by Ruth Tucker, *Daughters of the Church* and *Women in the Maze*. The first book is essentially a history of women in the church, and only the opening sections are relevant to the present dissertation. Overall, Tucker's treatment of Jesus and the Gospels traverses familiar territory. The one exception is Tucker's contention that Martha's status among the disciples was that of a spokesperson similar to Peter and that her role is greater than his in the Fourth Gospel. However, all Gospels, including John, present Peter as the spokesman of the Twelve. It does not follow from a careful reading of the Gospel evidence that Martha's status rivals Peter's.

A second matter taken up by Tucker in *Daughters of the Church*, repeated in slightly different terms in *Women in the Maze*, is the issue of Jesus appointing only men

among the Twelve. Tucker essentially accounts for this by the difficulty in logistics posed by women traveling with men in that day and the potential for scandal such a practice would have created. (She also raises the possible symbolism inherent in the twelve tribes of Israel.) Hence, Tucker doubts that this constitutes an abiding principle. However, the potential for scandal did not stop Jesus from engaging in extended conversation with the Samaritan woman or from regularly associating with “sinners.”

Tucker’s second book, *Women in the Maze*, is presented in a Question-and-Answer format to defend the validity of egalitarianism. In it Tucker contends that the debate over women in ministry is really a debate over women and authority. Since according to Jesus, ministry entails servanthood, not the exercise of authority, any role distinction between men and women with regard to ministry is moot. However, this contention is based on a false dichotomy between servanthood and authority.

On a different issue, when Tucker states that all of Jesus’ followers “had equal status in his sight,” she does not make clear her point of reference. Does she refer to roles in the church or entrance requirements to the kingdom? As it stands, her argument is unfortunately ambiguous and potentially misleading. Similarly, when Tucker discusses Jesus’ answer to the woman shouting in Luke 11:27–28, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you,” as a basis for arguing that women along with men ought to be engaged “shoulder to shoulder” at the “cutting edge of God’s program for the redemption of the world,” equality of status as member of God’s kingdom may be implied, but this would not seem to preclude role distinctions in the church.

The third author considered in this period is R. T. France’s *Women in the Church’s Ministry*. In his brief section on women in the ministry of Jesus, he aptly shows

how Jesus valued women as real people of independent worth and personhood. However, France's conclusion from Luke 8:1–3 exceeds the evidence when he states that Jesus' inner circle was not sharply distinguished from the wider group of Jesus' followers. The passage cannot be taken to blur the lines between the Twelve and other followers of Jesus such as the women mentioned in Luke 8:1–3. It is not clear from this passage that the function of these women, though traveling with Jesus and the Twelve, went beyond supportive roles to positions on par with leadership roles in Jesus' new messianic community.

France employs a trajectory hermeneutic when he makes the statement that, though the Gospels “do not, perhaps, record a total reversal of Jewish prejudice against women and of their exclusion from roles of leadership,” they “do *contain the seeds from which such a reversal was bound to grow*” (1995: 78) and that in the ministry of Jesus “we see an *irreversible turning of the wheel which set the Jesus movement on a new course*” with regard to male-female roles in the church (1995: 79, emphasis added). This extrapolation is unjustified in that Jesus did not give any clear indication that he meant to abolish all male-female distinctions with regard to leadership in his community.

Fourth in the study of egalitarian works in this period was Stanley Grenz's *Women in the Church*, a book written in collaboration with the church historian Denise Muir Kjesbo. Grenz's book represents an attempt at presenting a biblical theology of women in ministry, with chapters on women in the churches, in church history, in the faith community, in the writings of Paul, in creation, in the church and the priesthood, and in the ordained ministry. Grenz's thesis is that “historical, biblical and theological

considerations converge not only to allow but indeed to insist that women serve as full partners with men in all dimensions of the church's life and ministry" (1995: 16).

At the outset of the section dealing with women in Jesus' ministry, Grenz acknowledges that Jesus did not provide any explicit teaching on the role of women in the church. His attitude and actions toward women, which were revolutionary in his first-century context, together with his liberating message, form the foundation for women's roles in the early church. Grenz concedes that Jesus did not include any women among the Twelve but insists that the "call for full participation of men and women in the church is the fulfillment of God's egalitarian intention from the beginning" (1995: 179). Citing Osborne, Grenz speaks of the "elevation of women to a ministerial role" as "a sign of the inbreaking kingdom" (1995: 77).

Moving beyond his discussion of women in Jesus' ministry, Grenz contends for women's full participation in all aspects of the church's ministry, including leadership roles, by citing as major support (1) the notion of the priesthood of all believers; (2) the gifts distributed by God as ultimate grounds of appeal; and (3) the need for a complete reassessment of the conventional view of leadership and authority (already anticipated by Bilezikian).

Much of what Grenz argues has been said before. However, when Grenz speaks of "God's egalitarian intention from the beginning" (1995: 179), it should be noted that this places him in conflict with another egalitarian, Richard Longenecker, who argues for a "developmental hermeneutic," where an original creation order including male headship is acknowledged but redemption in Christ is said to supersede male-female role distinctions.

Another interesting element in Grenz's approach to the issue of women's roles in the church involves his appeal to the New Testament notion of the priesthood of all believers as necessitating egalitarianism. The concept of equality, rightly understood, is important, but does not negate the continuing realities of authority and submission. It does not necessarily follow that because God gave a gift of leadership or administration, no parameter can be set for the use of such a gift.

"The Maturing Movement" witnesses a large deal of continuity with arguments advanced during the early years of the egalitarian movement. At the same time, one sees a certain amount of refinement and maturation of hermeneutical procedure and the introduction of several new lines of argumentation. In terms of continuity, one notices again, first, a fairly straight line drawn from Jesus' "revolutionary" treatment of women to the notion of "the egalitarian Jesus" without considering the possibility that certain boundaries may be drawn in Scripture regarding the role of women in ministry (e.g., Grenz).

Second, many of the writers in this period evidence use of "equal" language that follows from the presupposition of an egalitarian world view. Thus Osborne speaks of Luke as "the most outspoken proponent of women's rights" and claims that in John "women have an equal place in the mission of Christ to the world" (1989: 283, 287); Tucker claims that "all his [Jesus'] followers, whether male or female . . . had equal status in his sight" (1992: 83). At the same time, it can be noted that egalitarians tend to be a bit more restrained in their use of "liberation" language than the proponents of egalitarianism in the early years.

Third, egalitarian writers in the present period continue to wrestle with the question of why Jesus did not include women among the Twelve. One approach taken is that of attributing a culturally relative rationale to Jesus' practice (such as that of avoiding the appearance of scandal that would have resulted from women traveling with Jesus and the apostles, see Tucker) and to argue that this rationale no longer applies today. Another approach is that of positing a trajectory hermeneutic that acknowledges the limitation inherent in Jesus' practice on this point and argues that Jesus' overall treatment of women contained the "seeds" of a full-fledged egalitarian paradigm in the future. Compared with the earlier period, egalitarian writers here display a greater degree of sophistication in the way in which they deal with Jesus' choice of twelve men as apostles.

Fourth, as in the previous period, one frequently finds a pattern of exaggeration or claims that are not adequately supported by the evidence adduced (if any). The preceding discussion lists several such exaggerations.

Fifth, several writers in this period appeal to the New Testament conception of servant leadership as leveling all role distinctions between men and women (see esp. Tucker, Grenz; cf. Bilezikian). Servanthood and the exercise of authority are presented in dichotomous terms, and the former is elevated above the latter. As argued, however, this dichotomy is false, and both servant leadership and a proper exercise of authority by church leaders are taught in Scripture.

Sixth, a proposal that is somewhat similar and yet different than Longenecker's "developmental hermeneutic" is that of R. T. France. This writer claims that Jesus' treatment of women contains in "seed form" a full-fledged egalitarianism (cf. Bilezikian 1985: 118, who speaks of Jesus' unleashing of "an *irrepressible ferment* that would

change men and women and empower them with the effervescent dynamic of the Spirit”). However, this extrapolation does not necessarily follow.

Similar to France’s argument is Osborne’s attempt to show coherence between Jesus’ practice and Paul’s teaching with regard to women’s roles. This effort is evidence for the maturing of egalitarianism as a movement, for it is clearly inadequate to interpret Jesus’ treatment of women in the Gospels in isolation from passages in Paul. At the same time, the preponderance of the evidence suggests that both Jesus and Paul did not practice or teach an unfettered form of egalitarianism, though the demonstration of this is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Even bolder is the argument, advanced by Grenz, that God’s “intentions” are “egalitarian from the beginning” (echoing Bilezikian; but contrast Longenecker) and his appeal to the priesthood of believers and the gifts distributed by God in arguing for an egalitarian approach to gender roles. Again, a critique of this contention is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Suffice it to note that it does not logically follow that God’s distribution of a certain gift (such as that of teaching or administration to a given woman) precludes the setting up of certain parameters for the exercise of this particular gift.

### **3.4 Recent Contributions (2000–2004)**

The third and final period of egalitarian writings on Jesus and women under consideration spans from 2000 to 2004. The works considered include those by egalitarians Linda Belleville, William Webb, Douglas Groothuis, John Phelan, and Aida Besançon Spencer. Once again, the procedure will be first to present the conclusions of the respective writers in chronological order of their contribution plus brief evaluations

where appropriate. This will be followed by an assessment of recent contributions as a whole in relation to the previous two periods considered.

#### 3.4.1 Linda Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church, Two Views on Women in Ministry*

Linda Belleville is primarily a Pauline scholar, and her contribution to the present topic, Jesus' stance toward women, is therefore limited. There are places in her work, however, where she does address the subject, and these will be summarized and evaluated here. Belleville's work *Women Leaders and the Church* (2000) is part of the Three Crucial Questions series. However, none of the three questions Belleville deals with directly focuses on Jesus' stance toward women. In dealing with the first question, "In which ministries can women be involved?," Belleville mentions in passing that in light of the Egyptian Isis cult, in which women were equal participants with men, "Jesus is not quite the liberator of women as he is sometimes pictured" (2000: 37). Women were not as universally religiously oppressed in the first century as is sometimes argued. Women in the Isis cult knew equality and liberty, at least in the religious realm. It is unclear, however, why Belleville adduces the Isis cult as a relevant piece of background information in dealing with Jesus' stance toward women in the first place, since there is little (if any) evidence that the Isis cult was practiced in Palestine.

Later in the same chapter, Belleville returns to the same topic. Again, she contends that "[a]lthough Jesus is often hailed as the liberator of women . . . , Jesus . . . , in fact, did not affirm any roles for women that weren't already a possibility in Roman society" (2000: 47). According to Belleville, the difference lies not in roles, but in



attitudes. Unlike his contemporaries, Jesus encouraged women to learn, was at ease with women in public, and treated women with dignity. As in the case of the Isis cult, however, the question rises why Belleville compares *Jesus* to the Greco-Roman world, since his realm of operation was in Jewish Palestine. In any case, it is unclear how women could be liberated with regard to roles but not attitudes in the Greco-Roman world. Normally, these would seem to be related. Belleville neither identifies specific roles in Greco-Roman society nor explains how it is possible for roles and attitudes to be at odds.

Belleville proceeds to affirm that “[t]here is no lack of women leaders in the pages of the New Testament” (2000: 49). She cites Mary the mother of Jesus and the women among the 120 mentioned in Acts (1:8, 14–15; 2:1–4). While there were many male leaders as well, “virtually every ministry role that named a man also named a woman” (2000: 50). In an endnote, Belleville acknowledges that “[t]he only roles lacking female names are *overseer* and *elder*, but then specific men are not singled out in these capacities either” (2000: 187, n. 34). She discusses the women mentioned in Luke 8:1–3 under the rubric of ancient patronage and cites the women who served as the first witnesses of the resurrection. Junia is called a “female apostle” (2000: 55–56).

Belleville concludes that “the work of ministry depends on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not on the holding of an office. Gift precedes function” (2000: 69). The role of leaders is “not to govern . . . or exercise authority,” but to equip others for ministry (citing Eph. 4:12).

In dealing with her second question, “What roles can women play in society?” Belleville includes a brief discussion of Jesus’ teaching (2000: 109–11). She claims that

Jesus' "language was that of mutuality and equality"—no word about subordination in marriage. In commenting on Jesus' reference to Genesis 1:28 ("God created them male and female") in Matthew 19:4, Belleville contends that "[t]he creation order knows nothing of male priority or prerogatives. God created two sexually distinct beings on equal footing" (2000: 109). Belleville also observes that Jesus' call to discipleship equally extended to men and women (citing Mark 10:29–31) and considers this as particularly significant since the "household (*oikos*) was the domain of the woman, and the bearing and raising of children was her primary responsibility" (2000: 111). Jesus treated women as "social equals" (2000: 111).

In her essay in *Two Views*, Belleville makes the argument that the authority given by Jesus to the twelve apostles was only to drive out demons and to heal the sick, not to preach and teach (citing Matt. 10:1 and parallels). She does acknowledge that the Twelve were sent out to preach the gospel (Mark 3:14 and parallels), but that authority is not mentioned in this context (2001: 107). A few pages later Belleville reiterates her argument (2001: 109–10) and adds the by-now conventional rebuttal that Jesus chose not only twelve *men* but twelve *Jewish* men, but that no one argues today that he intended to restrict church leadership to Jewish men (see Tucker et al.). Be that as it may, Belleville believes it is only the church that possesses authority, but not church leaders, whether male or female (2001: 110). These arguments have already been dealt with above (see interaction with Tucker and Grenz).

### 3.4.2 William Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*

The overall burden of Webb's book is to argue for a "redemptive movement hermeneutic" that acknowledges the progressive nature of biblical revelation with regard to ethics and human relationships. With regard to the three topics he chooses to address, namely slaves, women, and homosexuals, he concludes that

(1) slavery is accepted in the Old Testament but that the New Testament contains seeds for its being overturned (e.g., Philemon), so that the "redemptive movement" is toward the abolition of slavery;

(2) women are subordinated to men in Old Testament times as part of the system of patriarchy, while the New Testament shows signs of women's equal participation in church leadership (e.g., Gal. 3:28), hence, as in slavery, the biblical "redemptive movement" with regard to women is toward equality and liberation;

(3) with regard to homosexuals, Webb does not discern any progression (it is equally condemned in the Old and the New Testament), so that the church today should still not condone homosexuality.

Specifically, in his chart on pages 46–47, which lists "already some movement" (relative to original/broader culture), Webb cites almost exclusively texts from the Old Testament and the New Testament epistles. The only Gospel evidence included is the fact that Jesus has female disciples and that women initiate divorce in one Jesus saying (Mark 10:12). It appears, therefore, that Gospel evidence does not feature prominently in Webb's hermeneutical scheme.

### 3.4.3 Douglas Groothuis, “What Jesus Thought About Women”

At the outset of this brief article the author, professor at Denver Seminary, notes the difference between Jesus and first-century Judaism. He points out that in his parables Jesus “shows no gender favoritism” (2002: 18). Citing the example of Mary of Bethany, Groothuis observes that Jesus affirmed women as students. He also highlights Jesus’ willingness to interact without condescension with women, citing the Samaritan woman in John 4 as an example.

In the final section, Groothuis addresses the question why no women were among the Twelve. He observes that women were among Jesus’ close followers and contends that, “given the highly patriarchal setting of Jesus’ ministry, it would have been unlikely if not culturally impossible for him to have ministered effectively with women in his innermost circle” (2002: 19). He also points to evidence that women served in leadership during the New Testament period.

### 3.4.4 John Phelan, “Women and the Aims of Jesus”

John Phelan’s short paper, “Women and the Aims of Jesus,” was originally delivered in 2003 at the international conference of Christians of Biblical Equality. In the first half of his address, Phelan cites several Old Testament prophetic passages to support his argument that Jesus’ mission was “to declare that access to God was possible for all” (2004: 10). Now, in Christ, all of God’s people are priests, have the Holy Spirit, and are holy. Also, God’s spiritual gifts were given to all. Phelan concludes that for these reasons “any restriction on any of God’s people, male or female, is contrary to the kingdom ideal and a violation of the express intent of Jesus.” “Hard passages” (i.e., passages that seem

to restrict women serving in leadership positions) “must be read in light of the intentions of Jesus and the presence of the kingdom of God in the church” (2004: 11).

Hence, according to Phelan, (1) nothing can contradict “the clear expectation of Jesus” that all barriers be removed and all God’s people have the Spirit; (2) whatever restrictions may be implied in Paul’s writings must be seen within the context of his teaching on spiritual gifts and his mention of several women as leaders of house churches, which is “roughly equivalent to pastors today” (2004: 11); (3) the only “problem text” is 1 Timothy 2:12, which is not applicable today but rather directed only “against the abuse of freedom in a particular setting” (2004: 11). Why, Phelan asks, alluding to Paul’s argument in Galatians, “go back to the old pattern of restriction and barrier, of slavery and fear?” Hence those who believe Scripture teaches role distinctions between men and women are modern-day “Judaizers” seeking to rob women of their freedom in Christ.

#### 3.4.5 Aida Besançon Spencer in *Discovering Biblical Equality*

Aida Besançon Spencer, who authored an earlier book *Beyond the Curse* in 1985, here provides a fifteen-page discussion of “Jesus’ treatment of women in the Gospels” as part of *Discovering Biblical Equality*, a monograph-length response to the highly influential *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (1991). At the outset of her article, Spencer notes common agreement that Jesus affirmed women and treated them with dignity and respect. His conversations with women indicate his esteem for them, his teachings are favorable to women, women form an important part of Jesus ministry

(helping usher in the time of God's rule), and Jesus' teachings and comments often take into consideration a woman's perspective.

Under the heading "Jesus' Actions Affect Women's Priorities," Spencer states that it is a cultural viewpoint for women's place to be in the home. She claims that "this emphasis on women's remaining in the household as much as economically possible does not flow from any clear teaching in the Old Testament" (2004: 131) and proceeds to argue that Jesus "does not treat women primarily as homemakers" (2004: 132, citing Luke 11:27–28). According to Spencer, obeying and learning from God have a higher priority for men as well as women (cf. Luke 10:38–42), and rearing children is a significant ministry for both (citing 1 Tim. 3:4–5, 12).

Under the heading "Jesus' Apostles Affirm the Jewish Foundation of His Covenant," Spencer critiques the argument, advanced in the fourth-century *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, that women ought not to teach in the church because Jesus nowhere sent out women to preach. According to Spencer, this teaching unduly makes gender the abiding principle and illegitimately assumes that what the biblical model does not explicitly establish it therefore forbids. However, Spencer's argument here unduly reverses logic.

Her critique is of a statement in a fourth-century document, *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, which she then implies is representative of recent argumentation restricting women's roles in church leadership. The quote from the document indicates that the church should restrict women from leadership because Jesus himself appointed only male apostles. Yet contemporary arguments for distinctive male-female roles in the church are considerably more nuanced in considering a variety of passages.

Spencer proceeds to affirm that while it is true that Jesus appointed only men as his apostles, “Nowhere does Jesus ever say—or even imply in anything he says—that only men can be leaders in the church” (2004: 134). According to Spencer, this is an argument from silence that represents a limited view of the text, i.e., the all-male composition of the Twelve as supporting male-only leadership in the church. Also, Jesus “does not teach that we will advance God’s reign by maintaining male-female distinctions in leadership” (2004: 134). Here, again, according to Spencer, is an argument from silence.

With regard to authority, Spencer argues, like Belleville before her, that the authority given to the apostles by Jesus is not over people but over demons and unclean spirits. Here she leaves behind the issue of male-female roles and moves on to a discussion of the nature of authority. Spencer implies that not even Jesus’ (male) apostles were given authority over people; hence apostleship does not involve the exercise of authority over others. Therefore authority in itself is irrelevant as a paradigm for leadership; “leadership no longer is a question of power but rather of service” (2004: 135).

Spencer goes on to state that “apostleship is not synonymous with church leadership” (2004: 135); there is no direct link between “apostle” and “elder” or “overseer.” She continues to argue that the Twelve represented the twelve tribal heads of Israel and thus had to be twelve free males, not women or slaves. Thus the Twelve should not serve as a precedent for leadership. Nevertheless, Spencer proceeds to make a case that apostles included women. According to Spencer, subsequent to Jesus’ resurrection the notion of “apostle” was broadened to include all disciples who were to bear apostolic

witness to the resurrection: “in the new covenant era the apostolic witness includes both women and men” (2004: 137).

Spencer then goes back to Jesus and argues that while women “may not have been part of the Twelve,” “they certainly were part of an inner circle that was trained in all ways as the twelve men were” (2004: 138). She herself had said earlier that it was “[a]fter Jesus’ death and resurrection” that “apostle” was broadened (2004: 137). Now she seems to suggest that this broader definition in effect already obtained during the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry. In the end, Spencer states that “women functioned as witnesses or ‘apostles’ who had been with Jesus, were eyewitnesses of the resurrection and were sent by Jesus to proclaim the good news” (2004: 140). “As apostles sent by God, the twelve Jewish men looked back to the old covenant, where the multinumbered [*sic*] women and men looked forward, beyond the resurrection to the new covenant” (2004: 140).

Spencer concludes that (1) Jesus’ appointment of twelve Jewish men as his apostles should not be awarded paradigmatic status for church leadership today, because both the number twelve and those men’s ethnicity are culturally relative; (2) women, too, such as Junia, functioned as apostles, so women, too, should be able to serve as church leaders today; (3) the ranks of the Twelve were not replenished (with the exception of Judas’ replacement) after their deaths: how can the Twelve serve as precedent for church leadership if their particular ministry was not perpetuated? For these reasons, Spencer argues, we should “emphasize what Jesus emphasized in his teachings: humble mutual service, not male-female distinctions in leadership” (2004: 140).



### 3.4.6 Recent Contributions: Summary and Preliminary Assessment

The first interpreter surveyed under the present rubric was Linda Belleville, particularly her *Women Leaders in the Church* and her essay in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*. Belleville's primary focus is on Paul, but she does briefly deal with Jesus' stance toward women in both works. In the former work, Belleville starts out by saying that in the Egyptian Isis cult women were equal participants in worship with men, so that Jesus was "not quite the liberator of women" he is sometimes supposed to have been. Also, Jesus "did not affirm any roles for women that weren't already a possibility in Roman society" (2000: 47). Hence, the difference lies not in roles, but in attitudes. There were many women leaders in New Testament times, including Jesus' mother Mary and others, and virtually every ministry role "that named a man also named a woman," except for overseer and elder. Junia is cited as a woman apostle.

Many of Belleville's points are not limited to Jesus' stance toward women and thus a critique is outside the scope of this present dissertation. One pertinent point is Belleville's contention that Jesus' call to discipleship equally extended to men and women and that Jesus treated women as "social equals." Again, it should be noted that women as well as men are called to Christian discipleship, but there are no necessary implications with regard to women's roles in church leadership. Also, Belleville's use of the term "social equals" is potentially ambiguous in that it implies equality of worth and dignity necessarily implies equality of role.

In her essay in *Two Views*, Belleville deals with the issue of Jesus' selection of twelve men among his apostles. Her essential argument is that the apostles did not have authority to preach and teach, but only to drive out demons. Also, authority is not vested

in church leaders, but in the congregation as a whole. By Belleville's own acknowledgment, however, the Twelve were sent out to preach the gospel (Mark 3:14 and parallels). Why would Jesus send out the Twelve to preach the gospel without giving them authority as they do so? Whether or not authority is specifically mentioned, it seems intrinsic to the act of sending and the task to be accomplished.

The next work under consideration was William Webb's *Women, Slaves, and Homosexuals*. The adjudication of the merits of Webb's case is beyond the scope of this dissertation (for a thorough critique see Grudem 2005). For our present purposes we will only consider Webb's citing of evidence from the Gospels. He only cites women as Jesus' disciples and a woman initiating divorce as evidence for a movement toward women's equality in the church. Two brief comments must suffice here.

First, Webb's citation of women disciples of Jesus and of women initiating divorce is insufficient evidence to establish progressive movement in redemptive history and even more so does not suffice to establish an egalitarian view of gender roles in the church; the issue is considerably more complex. Even if a certain movement in this direction could be discerned, it still does not logically follow that the desired end is complete egalitarianism. An alternative outcome would be women's greater participation in worship that still falls short of women's equal participation with men in church leadership. This would seem to be more likely in light of New Testament passages restraining women's functioning in church leadership.

Second, Jesus and the Gospels arguably are not thoroughly treated in Webb's "redemptive movement hermeneutic." Jesus clearly marks a major stage in salvation

history and therefore should be treated more thoroughly in an investigation of the biblical teaching on women's roles in the church.

The article "What Jesus Thought about Women" by Douglas Groothuis does not provide thorough exegesis or original argumentation. It is of a survey nature and for more in-depth treatments refers the reader to the work of Belleville or others. The article contains what we have found to be many of the standard features of egalitarian argumentation, such as references to Jesus' treatment of women and his inclusion of them in parables, as well as a discussion of reasons why Jesus did not include women among the Twelve.

Next we considered John Phelan's short paper, "Women and the Aims of Jesus." In keeping with the character of this paper as an oral address, there are no foot- or endnotes, no exegesis of texts, and no interaction with scholarly literature. The scope of Phelan's paper is broad and general in nature. His essential thesis is that since (1) according to the Old Testament prophets, the Spirit would be given to all, (2) so the purpose of Jesus' mission was to provide access to God for all, and (3) thus no one should erect any barriers to women in leadership.

There are several difficulties with this logic, however. Most importantly, there is a difference between what Phelan calls "equal access" and "equal opportunity to serve in positions of church leadership." Scripture is clear that in Christ believers, whether male or female, have "equal access" to certain things, such as salvation (Gal. 3:28). But this does not necessarily mean that this "equal access" extends to all ministerial roles.

The final piece under consideration under the present rubric was Aida Spencer's essay on "Jesus' treatment of women in the Gospels" in *Discovering Biblical Equality*. At

the outset, Spencer contends that in Jesus, obeying and learning from God have a higher priority for both men and women, and rearing children likewise is a significant ministry for both genders (not just women). Yet both of the examples she gives to support her claim, the woman calling Jesus' mother blessed in Luke 11:27–28 and Mary sitting at Jesus' feet in Luke 10:38–42, do not deny that women may have a central role in the home.

Jesus' response in Luke 11 is not designed to keep women out of the home or place them in positions of leadership, but rather to emphasize discipleship as more important even than motherhood. This is not a discussion of egalitarian issues or leadership.

Mary's sitting at Jesus' feet likewise shows the importance of Christian discipleship for women as well as men, without reference to female roles or any intention whatsoever of addressing the importance of motherhood. Spencer's point that childrearing is important for men as well as women (citing 1 Tim. 3:4–5, 12 as support) still fails to address women's function of giving birth to children which is explicitly stated in the passage she cites (i.e., 1 Tim. 2:15). It is a biological fact that men cannot give birth to children, and Scripture suggests that there are certain implications for women's role from this fact.

With regard to authority, Spencer argues, similar to Belleville, that the authority given to the apostles by Jesus is not over people but over demons and unclean spirits. Hence apostleship does not involve the exercise of authority over others, and thus authority is irrelevant as a paradigm for leadership; "leadership no longer is a question of power but rather of service" (2004: 135). This argument is not new; it is employed by

previous egalitarian writers such as Bilezikian, Tucker, Grenz, and Belleville, among others, and has been adequately critiqued in the preceding discussion.

Spencer goes on to contend that there is a difference between apostleship and church leadership; there is no direct link between “apostle” and “elder” or “overseer.” Her purpose here seems to be to argue that even though Jesus did choose only men as apostles, this has nothing to do with church leadership being restricted to men, since apostles cannot be seen as the same as church leaders. However, even if these two roles are not “synonymous,” there is a clear link between leadership in Jesus’ new messianic community (the apostles) and leadership in the apostolic church (elders, overseers).

While not strictly “synonymous,” one should not rule out the obvious equivalency. This would be an instance of a “disjunctive fallacy” or a “fallacy of the excluded middle” by which two extremes are posited (synonymous or irrelevant) and the middle (equivalent) is illegitimately excluded. A better way to construe the relationship between Jesus’ and Paul’s pattern of leadership is to see them in essential continuity and agreement (note that relating Paul’s teaching to Jesus is also the burden of the egalitarian scholar Grant Osborne, though his argument is different).

Spencer goes on to state that “apostleship is not synonymous with church leadership” (2004: 135); there is no direct link between “apostle” and “elder” or “overseer.” She continues to argue that because the Twelve represented the twelve tribal heads of Israel and thus had to be twelve free males, not women or slaves, they should not serve as a precedent for leadership. Yet while Spencer may be correct in seeing a connection between male headship in Old Testament Israel (as evidenced by the tribal heads being male) and male headship as reflected in Jesus’ choice of men among the

Twelve, to turn this into an argument for the inclusion of women in church leadership is a logical non sequitur.

First, it is unclear why the Twelve building on Israel's tribal heads should disqualify this from serving as a precedent for leadership.

Second, it must be clearly noted that there is a difference between male vs. female leadership and Jewish vs. Gentile leadership in the church. The New Testament makes clear that the church unites both Jews and Gentiles in the church and nowhere bars the latter from church leadership. With regard to male and female, however, while both are also united in the church, there is clear indication in the later New Testament writings subsequent to the Gospels that the all-male pattern of leadership, which spans from the Old Testament to Jesus and beyond ought to be preserved because it is rooted in God's created order.

Even though Spencer has just argued that apostles are not synonymous with New Testament church leaders and thus do not provide a suitable paradigm, she goes on to make a case that apostles included women. Subsequent to Jesus' resurrection the notion of "apostle" was broadened to include all disciples who were to bear apostolic witness to the resurrection. Yet even if it is true that the concept of apostleship in the early church included women as well as men, it remains true that the original set of apostles was unique and distinctive from the "rest of the apostles."

In the conclusion to her article, Spencer contends that (1) Jesus' appointment of twelve Jewish men as his apostles should not be awarded paradigmatic status for church leadership today, because both the number twelve and those men's ethnicity are culturally relative; (2) women, too, such as Junia, functioned as apostles, so women, too,

should be able to serve as church leaders today; (3) the ranks of the Twelve were not replenished (with the exception of Judas' replacement) after their deaths, so how can the Twelve serve as precedent for church leadership if their particular ministry was not perpetuated? For these reasons, Spencer argues, we should emphasize, with Jesus, the importance of humble mutual service rather than male-female distinctions in leadership.

By way of evaluation, it should be noted regarding Spencer's first point that few award paradigmatic status to Jesus' appointment of twelve men as apostles. No one argues that there should only be twelve church leaders today; few (if any) would argue that only Jews should serve in this capacity. Yet while the number of ethnic makeup of the Twelve has a salvation-historical tie-in (the twelve tribes of Israel) that accounts for their composition, the maleness of the group's members is not so clearly culturally relative.

Second, Spencer's argument that women, such as Junia, like men, functioned as apostles, so women, too, should be able to serve as church leaders today, cannot be pursued here and falls beyond the purview of the subject of the present dissertation.

Third, what are we to make of Spencer's argument that the ranks of the Twelve were not replenished (with the exception of Judas' replacement) after their deaths, so how can the Twelve serve as precedent for church leadership if their particular ministry was not perpetuated? As in her first point, few would argue that men should be in church leadership today *solely* or even *primarily* on the basis of Jesus' appointment of twelve men among his apostles.

Finally, Spencer's point that, like Jesus, we ought to emphasize humble mutual service, not male-female distinctions in leadership is well taken, except that there is no

necessary dichotomy between humble servanthood and male leadership. This critique of Spencer and other recent egalitarian contributions illustrates well the concern I have expressed with egalitarian interpretation of texts dealing with Jesus' approach to women in general, namely that egalitarian interpretation *in practice* often falls short of the hermeneutical ideal expressed *in theory*.

The two essays that deal specifically with egalitarian hermeneutical theory in the same volume as Spencer's essay, authored by Roger Nicole and Gordon Fee respectively, articulate this kind of hermeneutic when they profess belief in the following principles:

- the divine authorship and inspiration of Scripture
- Scripture as a source of intrinsic authority external to the interpreter
- the primacy of authorial intent over against reader-response criticism and postmodernism
- the role of presuppositions
- the dual authorship of Scripture (divine as well as human), meaning that God gave us his Word in a specific historical context and in the form of particular literary genres
- the importance of distinguishing between literal and figurative meaning; prescriptive or descriptive texts; individual, collective and universal references; peripheral versus central doctrines; fragmentary versus canonical interpretations; and the situation of those being addressed or represented
- the diversity of Scripture within an essential unity



In principle, all of these tenets are to be commended. As the preceding discussion in this chapter has shown, however, egalitarian exegesis frequently does not attain to these ideal in its hermeneutical practice.

### 3.5 Summary

The preceding treatment of various egalitarian contributions to the subject focused on the description of the various positions on the one hand and on the evaluation and critique of specific exegetical outcomes on the other. Unlike in Chapter 2, where the problem turned out to be broader hermeneutical issues such as the prevailing “hermeneutic of suspicion,” the expansion of the canon beyond the conventional 66 books of the Bible, and the rejection of scriptural authority owing to its alleged patriarchal bias, the discussion in Chapter 3 centered for the most part on the exegetical execution of the egalitarian hermeneutic.

In the preceding discussion I organized the development of the egalitarian interpretation of biblical passages relating to Jesus’ approach to women into three consecutive periods: (1) the early years (1966–1986); (2) the maturing movement (1987–1999); and (3) recent contributions (2000–2004). The egalitarian scholarship under review in the present chapter displays a pattern of consistent and by now familiar arguments while at the same time evidencing an increasing hermeneutical sophistication.

The early years were largely taken up by the articulation of the egalitarian viewpoint over against radical feminism on the one hand and the historic position of the church on the other. Early egalitarians or so-called “biblical feminists” such as Letha Scanzoni, Nancy Hardesty, Paul Jewett, or Gilbert Bilezikian argued that Scripture itself

teaches complete male-female equality, not only of worth and dignity in Christ, but also of ecclesiastical role. In keeping with this fundamental tenet, egalitarians developed interpretations of key passages on gender roles that in many cases differed from the conventional readings but were in keeping with their overall egalitarian presuppositions.

On the one hand, these egalitarians affirmed a high view of Scripture. Yet, on the other, their vested interpretive interests in egalitarian exegetical outcomes frequently created a conflict between their theoretical hermeneutical ideals and the practical exegetical implementation. Hence, these early egalitarians developed a system of interpretation of all relevant passages that allowed them to read Scripture from an egalitarian viewpoint but that was not always evidently derived from a natural reading of the biblical texts themselves.

The work of egalitarian writers of the next period, “The Maturing Movement,” such as Grant Osborne, Ruth Tucker, or Stanley Grenz, issued in the development of a system of egalitarian interpretation that on the whole was considerably more sophisticated than the efforts of their predecessors in the previous period. Moving beyond the interpretation of individual passages in an egalitarian sense, interpreters of this period increasingly sought to develop a biblical theology of gender roles, relating Jesus to Paul and other parts of the canon.

Grant Osborne, for example, sought to show that Jesus and Paul both were egalitarians who “treated women as equals” and unequivocally affirmed their roles of leadership over against the surrounding patriarchal culture. While the church had traditionally affirmed that Jesus’ choice of twelve men as apostles meant that certain roles continued to be off-limits for women, scholars such as Osborne chose to focus on

the dramatically increased prominence given to women in Jesus' ministry and claimed that Paul "finished the job," as it were, by constituting the church as a completely egalitarian institution.

The egalitarian interpretation of passages in the Gospels in this period thus served the purpose of using "the egalitarian Jesus" as the foundation and of showing how Paul's teaching was consistent with Jesus' practice with regard to gender roles. Interpreters such as Osborne did not deny that certain Pauline passages seemed to restrict women's service in roles of ecclesiastical authority, but they set these passages aside as irrelevant for today by arguing that Jesus' egalitarian practice and Paul's alleged egalitarian teaching in certain passages (e.g., Gal. 3:28) should be used as the general norm, and any passages that do not cohere with this ideal be judged as marginal and culturally relative.

The final period, "Recent Contributions," provided some of the finest examples of further increased sophistication, culminating in Aida Spencer's essay on Jesus' approach to women in the egalitarian tome *Discovering Biblical Equality*. Increasingly, egalitarians such as Spencer or Belleville were found to engage in a fundamental critique of the very nature of authority and leadership in the church. They claimed that authority in Scripture is limited to service and that leadership is but a benign inclination to promote the welfare of others. Hence men and women ought to relate to one another, both in the home and in the church, by practicing "mutual submission." Thus the egalitarian outlook resulted in the erosion of any meaningful notion of authority in the church, whether exercised by men or women.

Unlike radical feminists, who reject Scripture entirely, and unlike reformist feminists, who adopt a hermeneutics of suspicion owing to Scripture's perceived

patriarchal bias, egalitarians claim to consider Scripture to be authoritative, inspired, and inerrant. For this reason they cannot simply dismiss scriptural passages that do not conform to their egalitarian commitment, nor can they expand the Christian canon or say Paul (or other writers of Scripture) was in error as he wrote. Their major interpretive option is therefore to find ways to interpret individual biblical passages along egalitarian lines, and, where this proves difficult, to postulate a “center of Scripture” with regard to gender roles that allows them to set aside as culturally relative or otherwise inapplicable passages that do not support egalitarianism. As has been seen, the result is at times strained exegesis, and at other times unlikely interpretations that seem to be driven more by egalitarian presuppositions than an inductive study of the text. While it is therefore hard to fault egalitarians with regard to their professed view of Scripture or hermeneutical theory, their exegetical practice is frequently vulnerable to criticism.

## Chapter 4

### **Conclusion: Evaluation of Feminist and Egalitarian Hermeneutics and Exegesis on Jesus' Approach to Women**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of the present chapter is to provide an evaluation of feminist and egalitarian hermeneutics and exegesis on Jesus and women and to draw together some of the most significant findings of this dissertation. The chapter begins by a listing of the exegetical insights gained from an original study of passages pertaining to Jesus and women which had the purpose of determining relevant feminist literature for analysis. This is followed by a comparison of feminist and egalitarian hermeneutics, noting similarities and differences in these movements' hermeneutical presuppositions, view of Scripture, and exegetical practice. A brief discussion pointing the way toward a proper hermeneutic on Jesus and women rounds out the preceding discussion. The dissertation concludes with a summary of findings, highlighting the major observations flowing from the evaluation of feminist and egalitarian hermeneutics and exegesis in Chapters 2 and 3, with a brief discussion of the overall contribution of the present study to scholarship.

At the very outset, it should be noted once again that there is no such thing as a uniform "feminist" or "egalitarian hermeneutic." When I speak of a "feminist" or "egalitarian hermeneutic" here or elsewhere in this dissertation, therefore, I do so in a general sense on the basis of certain traits most practitioners of feminism or egalitarianism share in common. The following comparison of feminist and egalitarian hermeneutics will of necessity be largely general in nature. While some examples will be

given, the reader is referred to the specific descriptions and evaluations of the various individual scholars representing different kinds of feminism and egalitarianism with regard to Jesus and women in Chapters 2 and 3.

In general, feminist hermeneutics is united in its *commitment to feminism* and its *critique of Scripture as patriarchal and androcentric*. Scripture is not awarded an authoritative status that is external to the interpreter, but rather is subjected to critique on the basis of the interpreter's feminist outlook. This, as I have attempted to demonstrate, runs counter to the notion of valid interpretation on the basis of the conservative evangelical criteria for biblical interpretation set forth in the introduction of this dissertation.

It should be noted here that the purpose of this dissertation was solely the *evaluation of feminist and egalitarian scholarship on Jesus and women*, not the construction of a positive paradigm of male-female relationships. The limitation of the present dissertation is that its deliberately restricted focus on Jesus' approach to women renders its insights partial and in need of supplementation. Any full-fledged assessment of the issue would also need to consider the rest of the New Testament, including the book of Acts, the writings of Paul, and of the other New Testament authors. The strength of this narrow study is that the focus on Jesus has allowed a full study of feminist and egalitarian scholarship on this particular area of relevant research.

While it has not been the purpose of this dissertation to propose alternative paradigms to feminism, I will start with a presentation of the select exegetical insights from an original study of the New Testament passages on Jesus' approach to women which would play into the development of such a paradigm if one were to attempt this.

This will set the stage for the evaluation of feminism as discussed in Chapter 2 as it formed the basis for the selection of relevant material for analysis. The evaluation of feminist literature on the topic of Jesus and women includes radical, reformist, and what has been labeled the “new,” more recent and more literarily oriented, feminism. This presentation of feminism will then provide the basis for comparison with egalitarianism which immediately follows. A summary of findings and overall contribution, as well as section on the road ahead to emphasize the need for further dialogue and interaction on the issue, will conclude this chapter.

#### **4.2 Select Exegetical Insights from an Original Study of New Testament**

##### **Passages on Jesus’ Approach to Women**

In terms of the exegesis of specific New Testament passages related to Jesus’ approach to women, the survey of passages in Chapter 1 has yielded the following general observations. First, Jesus treated women consistently with respect, dignity, compassion, and kindness (e.g., Luke 7:36–50). This is characteristic of his dealings with the numerous women who approached him for help, be it on their own behalf (e.g., Matt. 5:20–22 and parallels; Luke 13:10–17) or on behalf of a loved one (Luke 7:11–15).

At the same time, second, it is clear that Jesus dealt with women firmly, honestly, and straightforwardly, and resisted any attempts to be manipulated or otherwise unduly swayed. This can be seen in Jesus’ dealings with his own mother (John 2:3–5; Mark 3:20–21, 31–35 and parallels), his interaction with the Samaritan woman (John 4:7–26), the Syrophenician woman (Matt. 14:3–12; Mark 7:24–30), Martha (Luke 10:38–42), a woman in a crowd who calls Jesus’ mother blessed (Luke 11:27–28), or the mother of the

sons of Zebedee (Matt. 20:20–21). It should be noted, however, that Jesus does the same with men, treating men and women equally as sinful and in need of correction.

Third, in his teaching, Jesus often uses women alongside men as illustrations, especially in his parables (Luke 15:8–10; 18:1–8; Matt. 24:41; 25:1–13). This indicates Jesus' desire that his message resonate with women as well as with men and that women can identify with his teaching on the kingdom.

Fourth, there are times when Jesus shows special sensitivity to women's concerns, such as when he comments on the fate of pregnant women and nursing mothers at the coming tribulation (Matt. 24:19; Mark 13:17) or his remark to the wailing Jerusalem women on his way to the cross (Luke 23:27–31).

Fifth, Jesus allows women to follow him and to support him financially (e.g., Luke 8:2–3). Women are thus an important part of Jesus' mission.

Sixth and finally, none of the passages studied above give any indication that Jesus envisioned a community where men and women would be equal with respect to assuming positions of leadership. Jesus chose twelve men as his disciples. At the same time, there is also no explicit verbal denial issued by Jesus regarding women in leadership roles.

### **4.3 Comparison of Feminist and Egalitarian Hermeneutics and Exegesis on Jesus and Women**

Overall, as mentioned, there is a considerable spectrum within feminist interpretation. On the one extreme lies *radical feminism* which rejects Scripture in its entirety as irredeemably patriarchal and turns to other sources of validation. Daphne Hampson, for



example, rejects both Jesus and the Trinity as proper role models for feminist theology. According to Hampson, Jesus accepted the prevailing male and female roles in his society and thus is unsuitable for the feminine paradigm of mutual empowerment. The Trinity is also discarded owing to the hierarchical structuring within the Godhead (Father-Son), which is incompatible with radical feminism's rejection of any form of hierarchy or authority.

In one sense, radical feminism is more consistent than reformist feminism in that it carries through with its critique of Scripture and does not seek to "salvage" usable elements through revisionist exegesis but rather defines itself in direct antithesis to Scripture. This was found to be true for all three major radical feminists studied in this dissertation, Mary Daly, Virginia Mollenkott, and Daphne Hampson. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of a conservative evangelical viewpoint radical feminism's substitution of women's experience for scriptural authority does not adequately consider Scripture's own claim of being divine self-revelation with the result of exchanging Christianity for a pagan or even occult form of religious expression and experience (see especially the work of Mary Daly and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott).

Closer to the middle is *reformist feminism*, which, as mentioned, is characterized by a certain degree of ambivalence toward Scripture. Tradition and other reasons cause interpreters in this category of feminism to retain the notion of Scripture as a useful source for theological formulation. Large portions of scripture are questioned through the use of a "hermeneutics of suspicion." On the one hand, Scripture is mined as a source, while on the other it is rejected as unacceptable in light of feminist presuppositions. As

the preceding discussion has shown, many reformist feminist interpreters are well aware of this tension, and describe it as “paradoxical.”

With regard to Jesus, there are a large number of reformist feminists who view Jesus as a feminist. Letty Russell, for example, says Jesus was a feminist “in the sense that he considered men and women equal.” Fiorenza, likewise, famously sought to make a case for Jesus’ establishment of an egalitarian circle of followers. Ruether repeatedly speaks of “the feminism of Jesus.” According to these reformist feminists, the problem is with the church’s suppression of these earlier “egalitarian impulses” and with its reversion to a patriarchal, male-dominated model. Here Scripture and the church must be liberated from their “patriarchal captivity.”

Still closer to the middle are representatives of what above has been labeled the “*new feminism*,” a group of feminist scholars that eschews labels such as “reformist” or “liberationist,” engaging in a variety of literary approaches to biblical interpretation. While this group of writers, likewise, is characterized by a considerable amount of variety, they are united in a methodology that may be described as more textually oriented and literary in nature. Unlike Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and others, whose efforts aim primarily at a historical reconstruction of early Christianity *behind the text*, these writers seek to find answers *in the text itself*.

As mentioned, this “new feminism,” for the most part, is characterized by individual readings of passages of Scripture rather than posing a larger hypothesis such as Fiorenza’s. Employing literary techniques such as studying a narrative’s plot or characterization, these practitioners focus their study on women intersecting with Jesus in the Gospels in their effort to discern a given narrative’s “potential for liberation.” Some,

such as Dewey, are critical of the Gospel records (such as Mark), considering their mode of presentation too androcentric. Others, such as Carter, detect in female characters in the Gospels (such as Mary and Martha) “gender paradigms” for ministerial activity.

On the other side of the spectrum lies egalitarianism which professes a belief in Scripture as authoritative, inspired, and inerrant. Egalitarians, similar to many reformist feminists, are virtually united in their belief that Jesus practiced egalitarianism, despite the fact that all members of the Twelve were men and Jesus affirmed traditional marriage. Some (such as Longenecker or Webb) posit a “developmental” or “redemptive movement hermeneutic,” arguing that redemption in Christ supersedes the patriarchalism characteristic of the Old Testament.

It may be observed that these egalitarian writers sustain an interesting relationship with radical and reformist feminists as well as the practitioners of the “new feminist” school. On the one hand, they share with these groups the conviction that feminism is a given, a non-negotiable. On the other hand, they differ in their claims regarding the nature and authority of Scripture. Rather than adopting an attitude of rebellion or suspicion, they profess to affirm the absolute trustworthiness of Scripture in the canonical configuration found in the Protestant Bible.

Interestingly, however, many egalitarians and radical/reformist feminists differ sharply as to the method they use to arrive at the teaching of Scripture on women, that is, whether or not Scripture *itself* teaches feminism/egalitarianism. Both radical and reformist feminists, albeit to a differing degree, contend that Scripture is characterized by a “patriarchal bias” and must therefore be subjected to a rigorous critique in light of feminist tenets (though they differ as to the degree by which elements of scriptural

teaching may be salvageable for feminists today). Egalitarians, on the other hand, believe that Scripture, rightly interpreted, *teaches* egalitarianism, that is, the notion of complete gender equality with regard not only to personhood and worth, but also to role. It must be concluded that both cannot be right. Either Scripture teaches egalitarianism, or it does not.

#### **4.4 Toward a Proper Hermeneutic and Exegesis on Jesus' Approach to Women**

In Chapter 1 I provided a discussion of the nature of hermeneutics. I defined the objective of hermeneutics as the determination of the authorially intended meaning expressed in the text, outlined the five major tasks of exegesis, and discussed the difficulty of reconstructing history. I also proposed a “listening hermeneutic” that takes seriously the claims of the text; pointed to the necessity of making a distinction between the “first” and the “second horizons” of biblical interpretation; and issued a call for interpretive restraint that balances the rights of the author, text, and reader.

The assessment of feminist and egalitarian literature on Jesus and women in this dissertation has indicated that the feminist/egalitarian presupposition of radical gender equality tends to influence the interpretive outcome where scriptural texts do not easily lend themselves to a feminist reading. This vitiates the principle of a “listening hermeneutic.” It also does not adequately distinguish between the “first” and the “second horizons” of interpretation in that egalitarianism is allowed to preempt exegesis, which, according to the standards set in this dissertation, ought to be concerned with determining the authorially intended meaning expressed in the text rather than validating one's own

presuppositions. This, it should be noted, obtains for every interpreter, whether holding to a patriarchal, feminist, or other kind of hermeneutic.

Finally, I observed a tendency on the part of egalitarian interpreters to magnify the role of women by exceeding the textual evidence and to build a cumulative case on a weak textual foundation. Here it is egalitarian interpreters that are in a difficult position, for unlike feminist interpreters they do not have the option of finding Scripture to teach gender inequality with regard to roles, or their egalitarian viewpoint has been compromised. This also makes it hard for egalitarians to claim genuine openness with regard to the interpretive outcome, since by virtue of their dual commitment to gender equality and scriptural authority they must of necessity arrive at an interpretation of Scripture that is consistent with their egalitarian viewpoint. In fact, some (such as Mollenkott) started out as egalitarians and later moved to a reformist and then radical feminist position.

#### **4.5 Summary of Findings and Overall Contribution**

I conclude with a brief discussion of a summary of the most important findings and of the overall contribution made by the present dissertation. The study of feminist and egalitarian scholarship on Jesus' approach to women in Chapters 2 and 3 has yielded several important insights. First, the literature on the subject has proven to reveal a considerable amount of *diversity*. It has been clearly shown that not all feminist, or egalitarian, writers agree with each other on the topic. One important example of this divergence of views among *feminist* writers is the fact, extensively documented in Chapter 2, that in recent years several feminist scholars have expressed serious

reservations about Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's paradigm positing Jesus' establishment of a "community of equals." An example of *egalitarian* diversity is the difference of viewpoints with regard to the question of whether or not God's purposes were originally egalitarian (see Chapter 3).

Second, in a related point, the fact that Fiorenza's view of Jesus' establishment of a "community of equals" has been seriously challenged even by feminist scholars questions the original feminist contention that feminism is rooted in the practice of Jesus and the early church as well as the central tenet of egalitarianism that Jesus "treated women as equals." This is questioned not only in terms of personhood, but also with regard to ecclesiastical role. Here a greater problem is posed for egalitarians than for feminists, for while the latter are able to reject Scripture as patriarchal and to substitute other sources, this option is not available for egalitarians, who are committed to a high view of Scripture.

Third, certain concerns were raised with regard to the "hermeneutic of suspicion" employed by many feminists. The feminist critique of Scripture as irremediably patriarchal and the substitution of extracanonical sources by Fiorenza, Ruether, and others were challenged in several respects. To begin with, the location of authority in the experience of the interpreter leads to subjectivism and renders interpretation without a sufficient standard for validity. Also, it is potentially inconsistent for an interpreter to use as a source the very document the interpreter considers inadequate. Feminist writers, such as Mary Ann Tolbert, acknowledge that the feminist stance toward Scripture is at the root "paradoxical" in that Scripture is at the same time critiqued as patriarchal yet continues to be used as a useful source for feminist theology.

Fourth, egalitarianism was found to be generally sound in hermeneutical theory, but at times inconsistent with regard to hermeneutical practice, that is, in the exegesis of specific biblical passages concerning Jesus' approach to women (see Chapter 3). Hence the discussion of the egalitarian interpretation of scriptural passages on the topic focused not so much on hermeneutics as on exegesis. The egalitarian reading of Scripture in light of their egalitarian viewpoint (e.g., Scanzoni and Hardesty, Bilezikian, Belleville, Spencer) may, to the mind of the writer of this dissertation, result in potential bias and an interpretation that goes beyond the evidence given in the biblical text.

Fifth, in general terms, it was identified that there are certain affinities between feminist and egalitarians exegetical practice. These include: an effort to identify and magnify the contributions of women in Scripture; the reinterpretation of biblical passages dealing with women in keeping with feminist or egalitarian presuppositions; and the use of a "canon within a canon" approach by which certain biblical passages are elevated to normative status while others are marginalized. This may suggest that feminism exercised a certain degree of influence on egalitarian scholarship, especially in the area of exegetical practice and argumentation.

In terms of the overall utility of the present dissertation for the study of feminist hermeneutics, the first contribution consists in the chronicling of the history and evolution of feminist and egalitarian hermeneutical scholarship on Jesus' stance toward women (Chapter 1).

The second contribution can be identified in the critique of the hermeneutics of feminist and egalitarian literature on Jesus and women. Chapters 2 and 3 contain a

thorough description and assessment, both individual and collective, of a range of radical, reformist, and “biblical” feminists and their writings on Jesus and women.

The third contribution is represented by the demonstration of certain affinities between egalitarian and feminist scholarship on Jesus. It was noted that egalitarians face a unique challenge in this regard owing to their dual commitment to a high view of Scripture and an egalitarian understanding of gender roles.

Fourth, the dissertation has consistently raised the concern that, to the mind of the writer of the present dissertation, feminist as well as egalitarian hermeneutics are too heavily weighted on the side of the reader and would be better served by returning to a greater respect for the intention of the author and the intention as expressed in the text.

As I started this dissertation, I acknowledged the need for further dialogue on Jesus’ approach to women and its contemporary implications. Additional study on the perceived patriarchal nature of Scripture would be one significant area for further refinement on the definitional level. While maintaining the rejection of the abusive notion of patriarchy, the exploration of the possibility of positive biblical models of male leadership within the biblical teaching of patricentrism may prove to be illuminating. The outcome of the debate on important hermeneutical issues such as the respective roles of author, text, and reader will have enormous implications for the results of the study of Jesus and women.

The postmodern notions of hermeneutics and epistemology also deserve further scrutiny since the postmodern critique of modernism is not convincing in every respect. The question of history and the nature of historical research affect the interpretive outcome as well. Finally, it is hard to overstate the practical implications of a study of



this nature. The significance of dealing with the abuse of women in male-dominated societies and the correction of misunderstandings surrounding the biblical teaching on the subject remain major challenges. While differences in viewpoint will likely remain on the larger issues that form the subject of this dissertation, further interaction would be served by proceeding on the basis of academic rigor in scholarship and a disposition of mutual respect and goodwill.

In the effort to encourage further dialogue, it seems fitting to emphasize at the close of this chapter areas of decided agreement between the three positions discussed in this dissertation. Feminism, egalitarianism, and even complementarianism are unified on the following important issues. This is where we find the road for sincere and constructive dialogue in the future.

(1) *A total rejection of racism and the various ways in which racism was defended from Scripture.* Racism is always wrong, and Scripture, rightly interpreted, does not truly support racism in any way. This is a very significant area of agreement that rejects that part of recent Christian history where the Bible was illegitimately used to perpetrate unjust and discriminatory social systems, be it in the North American South or South African *apartheid*. It is significant because it affirms the equal humanity and value of all people created in the image of God regardless of race, social class, gender, or any other factors, and from this all three positions discussed in this dissertation take their point of departure.

According to the book of Genesis, all people, regardless of race, were created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul in his discourse on the equality of access to salvation enjoyed by all human beings regardless of race, class, or

gender, unequivocally states that there is “neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). The final book of the Christian canon, the Book of Revelation, is replete with references to people from all tribes, languages, and nations worshiping God on his throne in heaven in the final state (Rev. 7:9 *et passim*). This beautiful scriptural vision and hope unites all true Christians.

(2) *A total rejection of slavery, even though there are clear traces in the Bible that it has been practiced in Israel and in the early church.* Again, this area of agreement within the three positions is significant because of the common recognition of the equal value and humanity of all human beings.

The advocacy of slavery from Scripture has been soundly refuted. With regard to American slavery in the Old South and its purportedly biblical defense by Reformed theologians such as Dabney, Thornwall, and Hodge, it must be clearly stated that Southern slavery, like slavery anywhere, was a great evil. As Robert Yarbrough (2005: 140) rightly notes, “Much of the defense mounted in its favor deserves criticism. Racism is roundly condemned by the Scriptures of both Testaments. Devout Christians with sophisticated hermeneutical understanding and formidable learning can be wrong in interpreting and applying the Bible.”

It is important to remember, as Yarbrough (2005: 141) says, that “[n]either God nor Scripture ordained slavery, though biblical law and doctrine did regulate and limit it. Slavery is never said by Scripture to have been created by God.” Yarbrough also notes that, with one exception (Deut. 15:12–18; Lev. 25:39–43), slavery in Israel had a six-year limit). He quotes Dandamayev (1992: 6.65) who observes, “We have in the Bible the first

appeals in world literature to treat slaves as human beings for their own sake and not just in the interest of their masters.”

Also, in New Testament times, Paul advised slaves to gain their freedom if they could do so lawfully (1 Cor. 7:21). Yarbrough (2005: 141) goes on to point out that, “far from mandating slavery in biblical times . . . New Testament teaching was the foundation for the abolishing of the institution of slavery in the Roman world.” He cites Bruce (1977: 401) who notes that the Epistle to Philemon alone “brings us into an atmosphere in which the institution could only wilt and die” and again Dandamayev (1992: 6.65) who notes that “[t]he early Christian ideology undermined the institution of slavery, declaring an equality of all people in Christ.”

This involves the recognition of the progressive revelation of the Bible, according to which certain Old Testament practices, such as food laws, the sacrificial system, or slavery were practiced in ancient Israel but where the New Testament indicates discontinuity with Old Testament practices in Christ. It is true that Jesus and Paul did not directly pursue the abrogation of slavery, but they did affirm the full humanity of all persons and taught that the church is the family of God and the body of Christ in which all distinctions of “slave or free” are completely obliterated and replaced with mutual love, care, and respect.

(3) *A total rejection of male domination in the family, the church, and the state.* The authority vested in men according to complementarianism has nothing in common with male domination and superiority and female inferiority. As stated above, central biblical passages such as Genesis 1:27 or Galatians 3:28 make clear that women and men are equally created in God’s image and of equal value in God’s eyes. According to this

author, Scripture teaches that male authority is a caring authority that should open all possible venues for women to develop their God-given call and abilities (Eph. 5:25–30).

All three positions discussed in this dissertation must unite in condemning all forms of abuse of authority. One of the positive contributions of feminism and egalitarianism has been that they have raised the consciousness of many regarding the undue oppression of women by men in numerous societies around the world. This is true particularly of Africa and Muslim countries where women are still often treated as second class and as inferior to men. Complementarians support the efforts to eliminate abuse of male authority over women wherever it is found and to promote the exercise of loving male nurture and leadership. In this context it is worth remembering that complementarianism differs from egalitarianism and feminism not on the equality of all human beings, male and female, but on the fact that we believe God has ordained different roles for male and female, roles equal in value, but different in content.

On the foundation of these pronounced areas of agreement, further dialogue in several of the above-cited critical areas would be profitable, including the patriarchal nature of Scripture, particularly the Old Testament; the influence of postmodernism on the subject of the present dissertation; the nature of historical inquiry; and several of the important issues related to biblical interpretation highlighted in the preceding discussion, including the nature of meaning, the role of author, text, and reader, and the nature of Scripture itself. On the basis of this common ground, it is hoped that the present dissertation will make a small contribution to clarifying some of these issues and to encouraging further dialogue in this difficult yet vital area of Christian belief and practice.

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