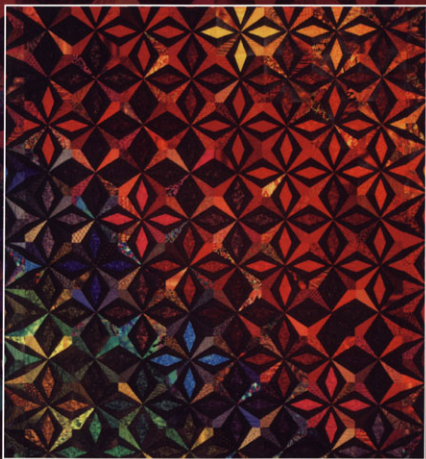


Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation



EDITED BY
Silvia Schroer and Sophia Bietenhard



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**Silvia Schroer &
Sophia Bietenhard**

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In memory of
Choon-Ho You-Martin
(†20 March 2002)

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FOREWORD

The Prehistory of the International Symposium in Ticino, Switzerland, 2-7 July 2000

The idea of organizing an international conference about 'feminist exegesis and the hermeneutics of liberation' grew from many years of contact between Swiss women theologians and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, New Testament scholar and Harvard Professor. Schüssler Fiorenza's work in the field of feminist exegesis and hermeneutics has earned worldwide recognition since the 1980s, becoming a standard reference not only in the feminist academic world but also for all movements that participate in the 'ecclesia of women'. The symposium was conceived on this basis in order to make possible direct, personal communication between women biblical scholars from throughout the world possible. The discussions were to have centered around the question of the liberative nature (for women) of feminist hermeneutics and exegesis. The speakers were given the task of explaining and elucidating their hermeneutic approach to the Bible and illustrating it utilizing a biblical text. They were requested to take a critical position with regard to concepts such as 'woman', 'gender', 'feminist' and 'liberation' and to consider to what extent, for whom and in what sense their feminist hermeneutics is liberative.

The symposium took place at the historical Monte Verità center above Ascona in Ticino, the southern-most canton in Switzerland. Forty-two women from 20 different countries from all five continents came. In addition to Christians from all the major denominations, two Jewish scholars also participated. This was the first opportunity for such a diverse international group of feminist biblical scholars to work together intensely over the course of several days. And it was the aim of the Swiss hosts to do everything within their power to make this event possible. They arranged the financing of the travel and lodging expenses for the majority of the participants. Without intensive fundraising and the financial support of numerous non-university organizations the conference would not have taken place or would have developed merely into a neo-colonial event that reflected current international structures of power and wealth.

At Monte Verità near Ascona

Switzerland is not traditionally well known as a home to feminist exegesis, but our country's longstanding tradition of democracy, plurality, ecumenism and its multi-lingual constitution have created a natural atmosphere for international encounters. The European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR) was founded in Ticino in 1986 for this reason. And it was the Swiss section within this organization that took the lead in promoting international contact, working with Greek women theologians to prepare an international conference in Crete in 1999. And as hosts to the symposium in Ascona it was particularly important to the organizers that women from all contexts would have the opportunity not only to participate in the discussions planned but also alternately to have the opportunity to lead the discussions.

The fact that this 'synagogue' or 'ecclesia' of women met at Monte Verità, the 'mountain of truth', is not without a touch of humor or irony. But mention of the history of this village is also important. The region around Locarno has been a haven for outcasts and intellectuals from across Europe since about 1870. Ascona and Monte Verità became the center of a utopian society based on visions of early Christian communism, of freedom and common ownership of property. Ascona and Monte Verità gave birth to revolutionary ideas about health, nature, love and psychology. Women played key roles in this community throughout its history—famous, special women. It is perhaps also symbolic that the four founders of Monte Verità, one of whom was pianist and feminist Ida Hofmann, left Monte Verità for Brazil via Spain in 1920.

In Retrospect

The multi-cultural diversity of the participants made the symposium a very colorful event in every aspect from the beginning. In addition to the main presentation of the day and various workshops in smaller groups, the tone and direction of the conference were determined to great extent by the extremely lively, at times even heated plenary discussions. The contents of these discussions were both scholarly and down-to-earth, and their open, collective spirit corresponded more to international religious gatherings than typically Western academic congresses.

The symposium did not provide any answers at its conclusion; rather, it formulated more precise questions, numerous observations and new challenges. The contributions to this publication revolve around these themes

and questions; the various aspects presented here offer a sort of profile of the symposium and hint at its significance for the 42 participants. The goal of this publication is to present something of this immense spectrum to academic audiences as well as to provide impulses for continued work with regard to the questions of the hermeneutics of liberation and feminist exegesis.

The participants (organizers, interpreters and speakers included) at the conference were:

Elżbieta Adamiak, Poznan, Poland
 Margit Balog, Debrecen, Hungary
 Stella Baltazar, Sathyamangalam, Erode Dt, India
 Sophia Bietenhard, Zurich, Switzerland
 Nancy Cardoso Pereira, São Paulo, Brazil
 Pauline Chakkalakal, Richmond Town, Bangalore, India
 Musa W. Dube, Botswana
 Irene Foulkes, San José, Costa Rica
 Elisabeta Geréb, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
 Éva Geröfi, Budapest, Hungary
 Regula Grünenfelder, Luzerne, Switzerland
 Tal Ilan, Jerusalem, Israel
 Christine Janowski, Tübingen, Germany
 Eleni Kasselouri, Thessaloniki, Greece
 Esther Kobel, Reinach, Switzerland
 Kyung-Sook Lee, Seoul, Korea
 Christl Maier, Berlin, Germany
 Elisabeth Miescher, Riehen, Switzerland
 Verena Mühletaler, Berne, Switzerland
 Julia Müller-Clemm, Berne, Switzerland
 Ruth Muthei, Nairobi, Kenya
 Edit Nagy, Budapest, Hungary
 Minda Peranginangin-Tampubolon, Medan, Indonesia
 Anna Britta Perkins, Wellesley MA, USA
 Sarolta Püsök, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
 Viola Raheb, Bethlehem, Palestine
 Adele Reinhartz, Hamilton, Canada
 Franziska Schär, Basel, Switzerland
 Silvia Schroer, Berne, Switzerland
 Susanne Schüepp, Luzerne, Switzerland
 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Cambridge MA, USA
 Irène Schwyn, Berne, Switzerland

Regula Strobel, Fribourg, Switzerland

Marianne Strub, Basel, Switzerland

Yak-Hwee Tan, Singapore

Marie-Theres Wacker, Münster, Germany

Elaine Wainwright, Banyo, Australia

Heike Walz, Basel, Switzerland

Renita J. Weems, Nashville TN, USA

Marguerite Wieser, Geneva, Switzerland

Choon-Ho You-Martin, Korea and Munich, Germany

Edith Zingg, Luzerne, Switzerland

About the Selection and Organization of the Contributions

The editors were guided primarily by three principles with regard to the selection and organization of the contributions in this publication. First, we wanted to make the revised versions of the main speakers' presentations available for further contemplation and discussion. Second, the lively discussions in the plenary session that followed these presentations are represented here in two forms: a thematically organized series of highlights in the middle of the book offer insight into the main points of these oral discussions; narrative texts supplement the academic presentations and reflect the diversity of the international discussions about the Bible. Third, the international character of these discussions are reflected in eight contributions, post-symposium reflections more precisely, that have not been organized thematically but in correspondence with the geographical regions represented by the main speakers: North and South America, Africa, Western and Eastern Europe, the Near East and Asia. We thereby hope to avoid lending the inter-contextual discussions any sort of thematic hierarchy or any hint of judgment with regard to their content; at the same time we thereby would like to point out that many questions proved to be relevant throughout the spectrum of geographical and cultural contexts. Unfortunately, a contribution from a Greek-Orthodox perspective is wanting. And we also were forced to do without a contribution from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, whose writings and whose presence at the symposium often find echo in the contributions to this publication.¹ We are especially grateful for her participation.

1. For E. Schüssler Fiorenza's work, cf. the references to her publications in Silvia Schroer's contribution "'We Will Know Each Other by Our Fruits': Feminist Exegesis and the Hermeneutics of Liberation' in this book.

Thanks

As is customary in such undertakings, the pleasant task of expressing thanks remains for the end. Professor Philip Davies, the publisher of Sheffield Academic Press, reacted spontaneously and openly to our idea of publishing this book in the Anglo-American realm. Just as the symposium was made possible by the financial support of numerous organizations, this publication likewise has been subsidized substantially by contributions from: the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich; the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences; the Emil Brunner Foundation Zurich; the Synod Council of the Protestant Church Bern-Jura; the Catholic Interaid Organization Fastenopfer Lucerne; the Bethlehem Mission of Immensee; the Foundation for Women's Projects, the Protestant Women's Federation of Switzerland. Mark Manion and Daniel Dubach were responsible for the competent English translations and editing, and Duncan Burns guided the manuscript through production. Dorothee Bertschmann, Irène Schwyn, Julia Müller-Clemm, Jürg Baumgartner, Moisés Mayordomo and Henriette Guthauser assisted us with such very necessary and tedious work as the transcription of the symposium tapes, proofreading, computer assistance and additional translations. We thank all of these persons and organizations for helping to make this publication about feminist exegesis and the hermeneutics of liberation available to a broad international audience for discussion. We are sorry for the delay in publication, caused on the one hand by the enormous difficulties of trying to create a formally homogenous book from the heterogeneity of academic standards, theological thinking and different priorities of feminist scholars concerning living, fighting and writing, and on the other hand by the difficulties of trying to convince academic institutions to finance such an unusual book.

Silvia Schroer, Sophia Bietenhard
Berne, May 2003

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

*Elżbieta Adamiak (*1964)*

Elżbieta Adamiak studied theology in Lublin (Poland), Regensburg (Germany) and Nijmegen (Holland). She earned her doctorate with a dissertation on the image of Mary in the feminist theology of C. Halkes. She is an assistant in the Department for Fundamental Theology and Dogma at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan (Poland). She has been a committee member of the European Society of Women in Theological Research since 1999.

*Stella Baltazar (*1952)*

Stella Baltazar is a sister of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. She earned Masters degrees in Christianity and in Sociology from the University of Mysore, India. She is currently a consultant/resource person for Caritas Switzerland, monitoring their projects in India. She also is an EATWOT (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians) National Coordinator. Stella Baltazar is involved in organizing women at the grass-roots level, training animators for the empowerment of marginalized women and evolving a feminist spirituality and theology in the Indian context.

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Sophia Bietenhard was born in Switzerland. She completed studies as a pedagogue and as a Protestant theologian/pastor. She earned her doctorate with a dissertation on the figure of Joab in 2 Samuel and has worked on various publications on feminist exegesis and Old Testament hermeneutics. Sophia Bietenhard works as a pedagogue and in adult education.

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Nancy Cardoso Pereira is a Methodist pastor. She has been working with the aged and with reflection groups on topics such as the Bible, the women's movement and the land reform movement in Brazil. Presently

she is working at the Pastoral Land Commission and teaching philosophy and anthropology at Castelo University in São Paulo. Her research interests are in the prophecies of Elijah and, above all, folk religion in the Hebrew Bible. She also writes poetry and is the co-editor of the feminist theological journal *Mandragora*.

*Musa W. Dube (*1964)*

Musa W. Dube was born and lives in Botswana. She is a lecturer at the University of Botswana, teaching New Testament studies. She has authored several publications on postcolonial feminist biblical interpretation, including *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (2000).

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Tal Ilan was born in Kibbutz Lahav in Israel. She attended schools in Israel and England and served in the Israeli Defense Forces from 1975 to 1977. She then studied at Hebrew University in Jerusalem from 1978 to 1990, writing her dissertation on Jewish women in the Greco-Roman period. She is a freelance scholar, teaching at academic institutions in the United States, Europe and Israel. She lives in Jerusalem.

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Kyung-Sook Lee studied at Ewha Women's University in Seoul, Korea, and completed her doctoral studies at Göttingen University in Germany. From 1981 to 1988 she taught at Mokwon University in Daejeon, Korea, and has taught at Ewha Women's University in Seoul since 1989. Her research interests are in Old Testament studies and feminist theology.

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Philomena Njeri Mwaura is a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at Kenyatta University in Kenya, where she recently completed her doctoral studies.

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Viola Raheb was born in Bethlehem. She studied educational science and Protestant theology in Heidelberg. From 1998 until 2002 she was a school inspector for the Protestant Lutheran Schools in Jordan and Palestine. She is an active member of various national and international human rights groups and regularly lectures about Palestine throughout Europe and the United States.

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Adele Reinhartz is Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. She teaches in the area of first-century Judaism and Christianity and has worked extensively on the Gospel of John, feminist criticism, biblical narrative and, most recently, the interconnections between the Bible and film.

*Silvia Schroer (*1958)*

Silvia Schroer studied Catholic Theology and Classical Philology in Münster and Munich (Germany) and in Fribourg (Switzerland). She earned her doctorate for research on Old Testament reports about the visual arts in Ancient Israel and earned a position as the first woman lecturer in the Theology Department in Fribourg with her postdoctoral thesis. She is Professor of Old Testament and Related Studies in the Protestant Theology Department at the University of Berne. For a number of years she has applied her research interest in ancient oriental iconography to the service of feminist exegesis.

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Yak-Hwee Tan is an ordained minister with the Presbyterian Church in Singapore. She completed her Masters studies at the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Texas and at the Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. She is a PhD candidate in religion, major in New Testament Studies, at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. Her research is on the representation of the Johannine community from a postcolonial perspective.

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Marie-Theres Wacker is Professor of Old Testament and Women's Research at the Catholic Faculty of Münster University in Germany. She is the author of several books on feminist exegesis and, together with Luise Schottroff, co-editor of a feminist Bible commentary, *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung* (1999, American translation in preparation). Her research interests are in feminist-exegetical methods and hermeneutics, the debate on biblical monotheism, Hellenistic Judaism and prophecy.

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[Asterisked dates indicate birth year]