

examines and perspective he [*sic*] brings to bear on it but also the explanatory models he [*sic*] uses to conceptualize and explain the multifarious historical phenomena before him [*sic*]. This is precisely what provides historical judgments with the meaning and relevance they have for a reader who is confronted by them as a human being whose interests are primarily determined by the intellectual context of the present.²³

Not value-neutrality but public consciousness and discussion of one's values, interests, commitments, presuppositions, and sociopolitical location are required for historical discourse.²⁴ The self-conscious relativity and multiformity of historical inquiry create conditions for maximum communication across ideological lines. Nevertheless historical narrative and judgments are not totally relativistic and can be distinguished from mere fictive accounts. They are open to and necessarily subject to scholarly scrutiny. They can be tested in terms of the source material they draw on and in terms of the assumptions and models underlying them. In other words, historical judgments are intersubjectively understandable and intersubjectively verifiable. Three criteria for publicly testing historical knowledge are proposed. First, to what extent have relevant sources been utilized and how much has the present state of research been considered? Second, how much has the account reached an optimal plausible integration of all available historical information? Third, how logically rigorous, consistent, and coherent is the use of explanatory heuristic models, and are they reasonably free from self-contradictions? Explanatory models must be "adequate" to the historical object under consideration.²⁵

Public discussion of historical constructions as "history for" can be a valuable aid in clarifying the self-understanding of social groups as active participants in history. Liberation theology has therefore insisted that historical-critical biblical scholarship begin with an analysis of its own historical-political situation and with the articulation of one's "hermeneutical preference" rather than with the pretension of "objective," "truly historical" scholarship. This demand is in accordance with historical thinking.

The social value that history as a discipline provides lies in subjecting prevalent historical assumptions to rational analysis, thereby testing for validity the understanding that social groups have of themselves. Historical thought is valuable not only as an anti-dogmatic weapon . . . but also as a critical and rational instrument of inquiring into the historical dimensions of contemporary value systems and of self-understanding of contemporary societies.²⁶

Public historical discourse not only among historians but also among biblical interpreters and theologians would reduce the danger that communications will be broken off either with one's own tradition or with the traditions of different cultures, religions, and times. Finally, public historical discourse can make it possible to step "somewhat" outside our present horizons, by allowing us to remain conscious of our human and historical relativity and potential. Studying the past to recover its unfulfilled historical possibilities becomes a primary task for historical inquiry.²⁷ It enables us to keep our future "open" in light of our historical heritage and identity.

In conclusion, I have attempted to show that a certain reified understanding of history is contrary to feminist interests, for it excludes women's questions and thus women as historical subjects. The truly historical understanding of historical inquiry on the contrary invites active feminist participation in the writing of human history in order to keep "open" our unfulfilled historical possibilities for a more human future. Moreover, this understanding of historical inquiry is not just open to feminist participation but also, more appropriately, to biblical interpretation. It enables us to see the Bible not just as a history of Israel or the ministry of Jesus and the early church but also as history for certain communities and people. It allows us to integrate biblical history and biblical theology as historical rhetoric for believing communities.²⁸ It allows for a feminist-critical interpretation of the Bible as a historical rhetoric for women-church.

Rapprochement between feminist biblical and academic biblical scholarship is possible only when biblical-historical

scholarship has taken cognizance of the new developments in historical epistemology and critical hermeneutics and is *willing* to shed its outdated assumptions of "scientific factuality" and its pretensions of "positivist objectivity," as well as honestly to articulate its own social-ecclesial-political locations and interests.²⁹ In short, such rapprochement is possible only when established biblical scholarship recognizes its male-centeredness as a scholarly, intellectual "handicap" and in a process of public consciousness-raising has the chance to develop a truly "historical consciousness."

III. Historical-Critical Feminist Interpretation

Although women have participated in the production and teaching of historical-critical scholarship for more than a hundred years, only now do we seek consciously to do such scholarship and biblical interpretation not just for the academy or the church but for all women affected by biblical religion, and especially for women-church.³⁰ In order to do so, I would argue, we need to use the methods and means of historical inquiry developed by historical-critical scholarship while at the same time scrutinizing and contesting its androcentric philosophical-theological presuppositions, perspectives, and goals.

Feminist studies as an intellectual discipline has only begun to articulate the challenge that such a shift in scholarly commitment and purpose implies for historical knowledge and for a truly human historical consciousness. Feminist scholars in all areas of intellectual inquiry are in the process of inaugurating a scientific revolution that engenders a paradigm shift from an androcentric—male-centered—world view and intellectual framework of discourse to a feminist comprehension of the world, human culture, and history.³¹ While androcentric scholarship takes *man* as the paradigmatic subject of scientific knowledge and defines women as the "other," or as the object of male scholarship, feminist scholarship insists on the reconceptualization of our language as well as of our intellectual frame-

works so that women as well as men become the subjects of intellectual inquiry.

The shift from an androcentric to a feminist construction of the world and of history challenges the established intellectual frameworks of androcentric scholarship and questions their claim to objectivity and value-neutrality.

But insisting that women be entered into sociology [or history] as its subjects, we find that we cannot escape how its practices transform us into objects. As women we become objects to ourselves as subjects. . . . So long as "men", "he", and "his" appeared as the general and impersonal terms locating the subject of sociological assertions, the problem remained invisible. We had learned to "enter" our subjectivities into sentences beginning "he" and to disattend our sex under the convention—applying only to women since it is irrelevant for men—that the pronoun was in this context neutral. Once we had understood, however, that the male pronoun did indeed locate a male subject for whom women were constituted in the sociological relation outside the frame which organized his position, the appearance of impersonality went. The knower turns out after all not to be "abstract knower" perching on an Archimedean point but a member of a definite social category occupying definite positions in the society.³²

Feminist studies therefore maintains that established scholarship as androcentric scholarship is not only *partial*, to the extent that it articulates male experience as human experience, but also *biased*, to the extent that its intellectual discourse and scholarly frameworks are determined only by male perspectives primarily of the dominant classes. This feminist claim runs counter to the assertion of traditional historical-critical biblical scholarship that prides itself on being impartial, objective, and value-neutral. Recognizing its sociopolitical location and public commitment, a feminist biblical interpretation must therefore utilize historical-critical methods for the sake of presenting an alternative interpretation of biblical texts

and history for public scholarly discussion and historical assessment. In order to do so, we must develop a hermeneutics of suspicion to be applied both to the contemporary scholarly historical discourse and to that of the biblical writers. The feminist hermeneutics of suspicion understands androcentric texts as selective articulations of men often expressing as well as maintaining patriarchal historical conditions.

As androcentric texts, our early Christian sources are theological interpretations, argumentations, projections, and selections rooted in a patriarchal culture. Therefore they need to be read critically for their theoretical-theological androcentric tendencies and their polemical theological patriarchal functions. Such texts must be evaluated *historically* in terms of their own time and culture and assessed *theologically* in terms of a feminist scale of values. A careful analysis of their androcentric tendencies and patriarchal functions, nevertheless, can provide clues for constructing a historical model of interpretation that does justice to the egalitarian and patriarchal tendencies and developments in the early church. The critical analysis of androcentric biblical texts needs to be utilized positively for a feminist reconstruction of Christian origins in order to arrive at a feminist biblical consciousness. A hermeneutics of suspicion must lead to a feminist hermeneutics of remembrance.

In the past decade women historians have articulated the theoretical problem of *how* to move from androcentric text to historical context and of *how* to write women into history. Scholars of American history in particular have pointed out that the task of feminist historical interpretation is to place the lives of all women at the center of historical reconstructions and at the center of efforts to transform and change societal structures and institutions.

Feminist historians are asking what it was like to be a woman at various times in history and are exploring women's subjective responses to their environment. . . . In short, new approaches to women's history are at-

tempting to integrate women into the mainstream of American historical development rather than isolating woman as a separate category.³³

Feminist historians, therefore, point out that the literature on women in history is too often limited by narrowly focusing on *woman* as a topical or heuristic category rather than exploring new conceptual frameworks that would allow us to place women at the center of human social relations and political institutions. Furthermore, feminist historians question the androcentric scholarly evaluation of "historical significance" and point out that many of the historical sources on women are not descriptive but prescriptive. Women are neglected in the writing of history although the effects of their lives and actions are a reality in history. Ideas of men *about* women, therefore, do not reflect women's historical reality, since ideological polemics about women's place, role, or nature increase whenever women's actual emancipation and active participation in history become stronger.

Some feminist historians, therefore, propose a theoretical framework that can maintain the dialectical tension of women's historical existence, namely, to be at one and the same time active participants in history and objects of patriarchal oppression. Since gender dimorphism is generated by such patriarchal oppression, it is not "natural" but social.³⁴ Therefore we must reject heuristic concepts such as "biological caste" or "women's experience" as essentially different from that of men because these categories render women passive objects because of biological differences or of male dominance.

We must seek instead heuristic models that explore women's historical participation in social-public development and their efforts to comprehend and transform social structures. It is not "biological" sex differences but patriarchal household and marriage relationships that generate the sociopolitical inferiority and oppression of women. Patriarchy is at home in the patriarchal household and its property relationships rather than in innate biological differences between women and men.³⁵ Wherever the

"private sphere" of the patriarchal house is sharply delineated from that of the public order of the state, women are more dependent and exploited; in societies in which the boundaries between the household and the public domain are not as sharply drawn, women's positions and roles are more equal to those of men. While the public sphere is stratified by class differences, the domestic patriarchal sphere is determined by sexual role differences and dependencies.

Although some scholars of women's history and religion have postulated matriarchy as an oppositional societal structure to patriarchy, others have constructed heuristic models to measure women's power and influence within patriarchal history. In order to do so, they seek not only to restore women to history and history to women but also to reconceptualize history and culture as the product and experience of both women and men. Women's experience of solidarity and unity as a social group is not based on our biological differences from men but on our common historical experiences as an oppressed group struggling to become full historical subjects. This theoretical framework allows women to locate our strength, historical agency, pain, and struggle within our common historical experiences as women in a patriarchal society and family. It also allows the scholar to account for variations in social status, class, and cultural identity.

This feminist theoretical framework encompasses a "view of women's historic role as located simultaneously in the center of social relations and at the edge of them." It thereby allows us to explore patriarchy as the source of women's oppression as well as of women's power. The interest of women in their own social history is similar to a colonized people's interest in unearthing their own past.

The search to understand collective conditions and the relations of race to the dominant society has enabled blacks to locate their strengths, their social importance, and the sources of their oppression. Furthermore, this process has provided an analytical framework for recognizing their unity through historical experience,

rather than simply through their racial difference from the ruling caste.³⁶

Like historians of other oppressed groups and peoples, feminist historians seek to comb androcentric records for feminist meaning, reappropriating the patriarchal past for those who have not only suffered its pain of oppression but also participated in its social transformation and development. As biblical historians, we can do so because the canonization process of early Christian writings has preserved both the patriarchalizing texts of the New Testament and the early Christian traditions or texts that permit a glimpse of the egalitarian-inclusive practice and theology of early Christians. These texts are like the tip of an iceberg, indicating a rich heritage now lost to us. Therefore we must cease interpreting the women's passages in the New Testament in isolation from their historical-ecclesial-social contexts. What is necessary is a systemic interpretation and historical reconstruction that can make the submerged bulk of the iceberg "visible."³⁷

The scant references to women as well as the inconsistencies in our New Testament sources still indicate that women were members and leaders in the early Christian movement and that the formation of early Christian traditions and their redactional processes followed certain androcentric interests and theological perspectives. This androcentric selection and transmission of early Christian traditions seems to have engendered the historical marginality of women. New Testament texts are not an accurate reflection of the historical reality of women's leadership and participation in the early Christian movement.

It is important to note that the redaction of the Gospels and of Acts was undertaken when the patriarchalization process of the early church had begun. Since for various reasons the authors were not interested in extolling women's and slaves' active participation in the Christian movement, we can methodologically assume that the early Christian writers transmit only a fraction of the possibly rich traditions of women's contributions to the early Christian movement.³⁸ Much of the information and many of the traditions about the agency of women in the

beginnings of Christianity are irretrievable because the patriarchal transmission and redaction process considered these stories and information either as insignificant or as a threat to the gradual "patriarchalization" of the Christian movement. A feminist reading of biblical texts and the reconstruction of their historical-social worlds therefore need to utilize all available historical-critical methods and means of inquiry, in order to reconstruct the historical-theological tendencies and rhetorical aims of the redactional process of the history of the tradition.

If the "silences" about women's historical experience and theological contributions in the early Christian movement are produced by androcentric language, texts, and historical models of reconstruction, then we must find ways to "break" the silences of the texts and to derive meaning from androcentric historiography and narrative. Rather than understand the texts as an adequate reflection of the reality about which they speak, we must search for rhetorical clues and allusions that indicate the reality about which the texts are silent. Rather than take androcentric biblical texts as informative "data" and objective reports, we should understand them as social constructions by men and for men and read their "silences" as indications of the historical reality of women about which they do not speak directly. Rather than reject the "argument from silence" as valid historical arguments, we must carefully read the clues of the text pointing to a different historical reality and integrate them into a feminist model of historical reconstruction in such a way that we can give voice to their silences and understand them as part of the submerged traditions of the egalitarian early Christian movement.³⁹

Like other sources, androcentric biblical texts are part of an overall puzzle that must be "fitted" together in creative critical-historical interpretation. It is crucial, therefore, that we challenge the androcentric model of early Christian history by assuming instead a feminist pattern for the historical mosaic, one that allows us to place women as well as men at the center of early Christian history. This feminist critical method could be likened to historical-theological "detective" work in that it does not rely on the

obvious "facts" or "invent" its evidence, but is engaged in an imaginative reconstruction of historical reality. Or to use the metaphors of the feminist poet Adrienne Rich: In order to "wrench meaning" from androcentric texts and history we have to "mine" "the earth-deposits of our history" to find the "bottle amber perfect," "the tonic for living on this earth the winters of this climate."⁴⁰ A feminist hermeneutical method and process for unearthing biblical feminist history, for "entering an old text from a new critical direction," is not just a "chapter in cultural history" but an "act of survival." In deconstructing dominant male language and traditions,

feminist interpretation restores the complexity of historical and symbolic processes. Feminist interpretation draws its strength from recognizing the common tradition as common, the product of many labors and subjectivities. But this recognition in turn compels feminist interpretation to take the tradition seriously and to struggle to appropriate it. The point of feminist interpretation is not to reject the tradition *in toto*, but rather to reappropriate it in the name of those whose participation has been governed by injustice, those who have been excluded not so much from its workings as from its dominant subjective voice.⁴¹

In conclusion, in order to break the hold of androcentric biblical texts over us, it is necessary to uncover the mechanisms and incoherencies of such texts, to see the inconsistencies of our sources, to elaborate the androcentric projections and political-theological functions of such texts and their contemporary androcentric interpretation. In order to recover the historical defeats and victories, sufferings and contributions, of our biblical foremothers and foresisters as our own heritage and historical power, we must insist on new feminist models for historical reconstruction.

Such models of historical remembrance must replace the androcentric models of biblical history and help us to re-vision Christian origins and biblical theology in a feminist perspective. Biblical history and theology can no longer be undertaken only for men but must also be writ-

ten explicitly for women. We must not seek an increase in antiquarian information but an increase in historical consciousness and biblical remembrance.

Rather than integrating itself into the Rankean paradigm of historical biblical scholarship, a feminist historical reconstruction of early Christian origins seeks to recover the literary or rhetorical historical paradigm as well as the understanding of history as remembrance and memory for those who were participants in it. The significance of the latter distinction comes clearly to the fore in discussions on the historical significance of the Holocaust. Responding to revisionist historians who argue that this event has never taken place,⁴² the Jewish historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet has addressed the relationship between history and memory most forcefully. He argues that

today we are witnessing the transformation of memory into history. . . . My generation, people about fifty, is probably the last one for whom Hitler's crimes are still a memory. That both disappearance and, worse still, depreciation of this memory must be combated seems to me obvious. . . . But what are we going to do with this memory, that while it is our memory, is not that of everybody?

But rather than pursue the political implications of this statement, he insists on a clear-cut distinction between memory and history. He relates that during the war his father had him read Chateaubriand's famous article in the *Mercure* of July 4, 1807, from which he quotes:

In the silence of abjection, when the only sounds to be heard are the chains of the slave and the voice of the informer; when everything trembles before the tyrant . . . this is when the historian appears charged with avenging the people.

But Vidal-Naquet disagrees with Chateaubriand on the task of the historian. He insists:

I still believe in the need to remember, and in my way I try to be a man of memory; but I no longer believe that historians are charged with "avenging the people."

We must accept the fact that the war is over, that the tragedy has become, in a way, secularized.⁴³

Although I would not insist that revenge is the historians task, I would maintain that history and remembrance should not be separated as if "the war is over." Neither anti-Semitism nor misogyny are movements and events of the past. To recover biblical history as memory, and remembrance as history for women, does not mean abandoning critical historiography but deepening a critical understanding of historical inquiry, conceiving of historiography as a memory and tradition *for* people of today and tomorrow. We participate in the same struggle as our biblical forefathers against the oppression of patriarchy and for survival and freedom from it. We share the same liberating visions and commitments as our biblical foremothers. We are not called to "empathize" or to "identify" with *their* struggles and hopes but to continue *our* struggle in solidarity with them.⁴⁴ Their memory and remembrance—rediscovered and kept alive in historical reconstruction and actualized in ritual celebration—encourage us in historical solidarity with them to commit ourselves to the continuing struggle against patriarchy in society and church.