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WOMEN AND THE SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Edited by

Nicole L. Tilford



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For the women of
the Society of Biblical Literature
past, present, and future

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FOREWORD

On page iv of the thirteenth issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* one finds a seemingly insignificant note. There, nestled between Mr. F. P. Ramsay and Rev. C. W. Rishall in a list of newly registered members, lies the name Miss Anna Ely Rhoads. Today we recognize this name for what it is: the first of many women who have joined the roster of the Society of Biblical Literature over the past 125 years. In the pages of the journal, however, there is no fanfare, no bold or italic font to mark this momentous occasion, no special report. Rhoads is simply a name.

In many ways, that is as it should be. History is made by the daily actions of individuals, regardless of whether they receive immediate recognition for their efforts. Yet there is also a danger to reducing individuals to names in a ledger; that which makes a scholar unique—the personal stories, the multifaceted identities, the frustrating challenges, the hard-earned accomplishments—can easily become forgotten after the field has moved on and the work has become outdated.

This volume is intended to counter that tendency. It sets out to preserve the stories of women who have helped shape biblical studies and related fields over the past century and a quarter. The focus is on those women who have been members of the Society of Biblical Literature, the largest learned society of scholars who teach and research biblical studies. Although not all scholars who study the Bible and related material have been members of the Society, the Society's changing membership provides a clear snapshot of how the field has developed in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The volume begins with a lengthy essay by Marion Ann Taylor that traces the history of women's participation in the Society of Biblical Literature. Keeping with the tone of the volume, Taylor organizes her survey as a series of short narratives, many of which reconstruct the stories of early women pioneers in the field. In doing so, Taylor stands as witness for those women who can no longer tell their own stories.

Following Taylor's essay, the volume is divided into five parts. Part 1 contains the stories of seven of the ten women who have served as presidents of the Society of Biblical Literature: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1987), Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (2007), Carol A. Newsom (2011), Carol Meyers (2013), Athalya Brenner-Idan (2015), Beverly Roberts Gaventa (2016), and Gale A. Yee (2019). Unfortunately, Phyllis Tribble (1994), Adele Berlin (2000), and Carolyn Osiek (2005) were unable to contribute to the present volume; for their stories, readers are encouraged to see the brief bios in Taylor's essay. As representatives of the Society in their respective years, these women are in a unique position to reflect on their experiences of the Society from various perspectives over the course of their careers: as students, as faculty, as members of Society committees and boards, and finally as Society presidents.

The presidents of the Society, however, reflect only a small subsection of the larger membership. Therefore, contributors for the next three sections were selected from a wider pool with a variety of factors in mind. We specifically sought scholars who were established in their career, since, like the presidents, they could reflect on changes in the Society over multiple years of experience. We also sought scholars who were experienced with various facets of Society service (e.g., editorial board membership, committee membership, publication record) and with the different communities that make up the Society's membership. Obviously, such criteria excluded many scholars with fascinating stories that deserve to be preserved (more on that in a moment). Yet the resulting combination of contributors should provide readers with a glimpse into the vibrant diversity of women contributing to the guild today.

In order to provide a basic structure for the volume and ensure that multiple perspectives were included, parts 2–4 prompted contributors to reflect on their experiences from a specific context. In part 2, for instance, contributors were asked to reflect on specific subfields that the Society services: archaeology/history (Beth Alpert Nakhai), Hebrew Bible (Tammi J. Schneider), early Judaism (Hindy Najman), and New Testament/early Christianity (Jo-Ann A. Brant). Part 3 takes a different approach, asking contributors to reflect as members of specific communities: African American scholars (Gay L. Byron), scholars from South America (Roxana Flammini), Latina scholars (Jacqueline M. Hidalgo), LGBTQ scholars (Lynn R. Huber and Melissa Harl Sellew), scholars from European countries (Christl M. Maier), scholars from Africa (Madipoane Masenya [Ngwan'a Mphahlele]), Jewish scholars (Adele Reinhartz), and

Asian scholars (Yak-hwee Tan). Finally, part 4 asked contributors to reflect on different aspects of professional life: publishing (Billie Jean Collins), mentorship (April D. DeConick), public scholarship (Amy-Jill Levine), working in a religious context (Vanessa Lovelace), work-life balance (Tina Pippin), and teaching (Elizabeth Struthers Malbon).

Yet, as is well recognized, each individual's identity is multifaceted. One can be a teacher and a public scholar and a scholar who focuses on a specific subdiscipline and a member of a specific ethnic community and so forth. Because of this, we encouraged contributors not to be constrained by their primary focus but to consider their story in light of any context that they deemed relevant. Each of our contributors has a rich, complicated, and complex story, and their stories reflect that.

Moreover, the chapters herein contain the *individual* stories of the women who wrote them. Although writing from a particular context or set of context(s), the contributors do not represent the experience of all women scholars who come from similar contexts. Reinhartz, for instance, reflects on her experience being a Jewish scholar in the Society of Biblical Literature; in doing so, however, she in no way represents the experiences of all Jewish women who have been members of the Society. Each contributor's story is her own and should stand as a testament to *her* unique struggles and accomplishments.

Part 5 concludes the volume by inviting two junior scholars to reflect on the future of women in the Society. Although not representing all of the paths women members now take, the contributors here reflect the possibilities and challenges of two tracks currently common in the profession, namely, the traditional tenure-track professor (Kelly J. Murphy) and the independent scholar (Sarah Sheckman). In doing so, they provide food for thought as we consider how we want the Society to develop for all of its members in the years to come.

Unfortunately, a printed volume can only include so many contributions. Many valuable stories have not been included here simply because we do not have the space to do so. We have therefore created a special section of the Society of Biblical Literature archive designed to preserve the stories of women members. The Society's archive was established in 1982 to house the official history of the Society. However, as this volume demonstrates, the organization's history far exceeds the administrative files, committee reports, publications, and program materials related to the Annual, International, and Regional Meetings. In creating a women's section of the archive, we seek to preserve the unofficial history of

the Society and thereby provide future scholars the resources needed to appreciate the full complexity of the Society's development. In the women's section of the archive, all past or current members who self-identify as women, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, academic rank, institutional affiliation, or geographic location, are invited to share their personal anecdotes, accounts, and memories through video, audio, pictorial, and written reflections (see the About Us section of the Society's website for more information). The present volume can present only part of the story of women's participation in the Society of Biblical Literature. With the help of members, the ongoing women's section of the archive can help preserve the rest.

In the following pages, the reader will find words of encouragement and words of challenge, issues where the Society has made great gains over the past few years and issues that need more attention. Our hope is that readers will leave with a fuller understanding of our common heritage and a greater appreciation for the diverse contexts from which our women members operate. Anna Ely Rhoads began the history of women in the Society of Biblical Literature when she joined over a century ago. It is up to us to determine how this history will develop over the next century and beyond.

Nicole L. Tilford
Production Manager, SBL Press
2019

CELEBRATING 125 YEARS OF WOMEN IN THE SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE (1894–2019)

MARION ANN TAYLOR

“Are there any lives of women?” said Mara.

“No, my dear,” said Mr. Sewell; “in the old times, women did not get their lives written, though I don’t doubt many of them were much better worth writing than the men’s.”

— Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Pearl of Orr’s Island* (1862)

Fourteen years after the inception of a small guild of East Coast Euro-American biblical scholars in 1880, Anna Ely Rhoads (1862–1943) became the first woman member of what was originally called the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis (“Proceedings” 1894). The significance of this first should not be underestimated given women’s long history of exclusion from universities, academic societies, and positions of influence in academic and religious institutions. This paper begins to tell the story of women who were Society of Biblical Literature members during the pre-centennial period (1880–1980),¹ when “women mattered hardly at all” (Trible 1982, 3), and in the post-1980 period, which witnessed slow but perceptible changes that have impacted all members, the most perceptible being the addition of women presidents. Representative women’s stories will be briefly sketched to highlight themes of continuity and change in women’s experiences in the profession during the 125-year period in which they have been Society of Biblical Literature members (1894–2019).

I want to thank David Kupp, Joy Schroeder, Maud Sandbo, Catherine Taylor, Glen Taylor, Cassandra Granados, and Nicole L. Tilford for their helpful feedback on an earlier version of this paper.

1. I am indebted to Dorothy Bass’s historical reflections on women’s studies and biblical studies presented at the Society of Biblical Literature’s centennial celebrations in 1980 and published as Bass 1982.

Setting the Stage: The Long History of Women Interpreting and Studying the Bible

Rhoads was, of course, not the first American woman interested in biblical literature and exegesis. A surprising number of nineteenth-century American women experimented with womanly, motherly, or feminist hermeneutics, which anticipated later feminist and womanist hermeneutics, and some engaged with contemporary biblical scholarship.² Examples include African American preachers and speakers, such as Zilpha Elaw (1846), who in her memoirs described her encounters with God using the language of Paul; Jarena Lee (1849), who identified herself with the Old Testament prophets in her autobiography; and Maria Stewart (1832), who borrowed heavily from the Bible in her essays, speeches, and meditations. Euro-American biblical commentators include Harriet Livermore (1824), author of a biblical theology/commentary on women entitled *Scriptural Evidence in Favor of Female Testimony*; Antoinette Brown (1849), who published an academic paper in the *Oberlin Quarterly Review* on Pauline passages traditionally used as prooftexts to prohibit women's preaching; renowned author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1873), who published *Woman in Sacred History*;³ and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her committee (1895, 1898), who published a two-volume feminist commentary on biblical passages referencing women. These women and their countless forgotten foremothers worldwide were reading, interpreting, and publishing on the Bible for almost two millennia before women were finally invited to join the Society of Biblical Literature.⁴

Rhoads was also not the first American woman to have studied the Bible in an academic institution. An increasing number of American educational institutions somewhat reluctantly began to open their doors to women during the second half of the nineteenth century. Examples of early theologically-trained American women include the aforementioned Antoinette Brown, who completed her theological studies at

2. For examples of American women's writing on the Bible, see Taylor and Weir 2006; Taylor and Weir 2016; DeGroot and Taylor 2016; Sohn-Kronthaler and Albrecht 2019.

3. Stowe was close to the center of American biblical scholarship and theology. She called her husband Calvin, who was a biblical scholar, "Rabbi," as he encouraged her to use recent scholarship in her work.

4. For examples, see Taylor 2012; Taylor 2012–2013.

Oberlin in 1850; Anna Oliver and Anna Shaw, who received their Bachelor of Sacred Theology degrees at The Methodist School of Theology in Boston in 1876 and 1878, respectively; and Mary Adelia Phillips, the first woman to receive a theological decree from Garrett Biblical Institute in 1878.⁵ During the same period, private women's colleges, such as Wellesley and Bryn Mawr, provided women impressive graduate-level education in subjects related to the Bible and the ancient Near East (Hogeland 1972–1973).

Many women also received formal biblical, theological, and pastoral training—including preaching—at denominationally diverse Bible institutes and training schools. For example, at America's first Bible institute, the Missionary Training College for Home and Foreign Missions in New York, a woman was awarded the graduation prize in 1888 for excellence in "Homiletic Exercises," and women taught a variety of subjects including Bible doctrine.⁶ Some of the schools that trained women in Bible, theology, and mission were founded by women. Lucy Rider Meyer, for example, founded both the Chicago Training School for City, Home, and Foreign Missions in 1885 and the Deaconess Training School in 1887. Nineteenth-century American women were increasingly becoming theologically-educated.⁷

ANNA ELY RHOADS: First Woman Member of the Society of Biblical Literature; First Alumnae Life Trustee of Bryn Mawr

Anna Ely Rhoads was invited to join the Society of Biblical Literature in 1894, the same year she completed her master's degree at Bryn Mawr College. This college for women educated and employed an impressive

5. For a discussion of Antoinette Brown, see Cazden 1983. For a discussion of the challenges faced by Mary A. Phillips, see Chamberlain and Cosgrove n.d. For information on Anna Oliver, see "Anna Oliver (1849–1892)," at <https://tinyurl.com/SBLW510a>; for Anna Howard Shaw, see Ralph W. Spencer, "Anna Howard Shaw," at <https://tinyurl.com/SBLW510b>.

6. Founded in 1883, this institute later moved to Nyack where it became the training center for the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination (1897); see Hassey 1986, 17.

7. As Hassey (1986, 31–45) has shown, opportunities for evangelical women to exercise public ministries declined between the World Wars as did their involvement in all aspects of theological education. Using Moody Bible Institute as a case study, she shows that the school's forty-year history of encouraging their women in all forms of ministry was later suppressed.

number of America's early female biblical scholars. Throughout her studies at Bryn Mawr, Rhoads was mentored by well-published Semitic scholar George Aaron Barton (PhD Harvard) who taught Semitic languages, as well as New Testament, Christian thought, and Patristic Greek. Barton encouraged Rhoads to expand her academic horizons and study at the University of Leipzig as part of her master's program (1890–1891); he would later encourage her to join the Society of Biblical Literature. Barton's archived report of Rhoads's academic progress in the fall of 1893 indicates that he believed that Rhoads had great potential as a scholar: "[Rhoads'] work on these topics [in biblical literature, New Testament Greek, and patristics] has been uniformly excellent. The results reached in her investigations of the Relation of Barnabus to the 'Teaching of the Twelve Apostles' are interesting and important, being a valuable contribution to the discussion of this question, and will soon be offered to the *Journal of Biblical Literature* for publication."⁸ The article was never published.

Although Rhoads did not pursue a doctoral degree, she continued to be involved in the Society after her marriage in 1897 to William Coffin Ladd, a classics and French scholar who taught at Haverford College. She was also active within the Quaker community, where she presented papers and published on a variety of topics. Following her husband's untimely death in 1908, Rhoads Ladd parented her daughter Margaret (1900–1949) and supported the work of her alma mater, Bryn Mawr College, where her father, Dr. James E. R. Rhoads, had served as the first president. She served the college as alumnae director and was honored as Bryn Mawr's first alumnae life trustee in 1920 ("Bryn Mawr College Calendar" 1920, 64). She also was elected a college trustee and served as secretary of the board for many years. Rhoads Ladd's motion to the board of directors of the alumnae association to encourage Bryn Mawr alumnae to volunteer in war relief in 1917 reflects her philosophy that education should impact life and that educated women can make a real difference in the world ("Minutes of the Annual Meeting" 1917, 4).

8. My thanks go to Bryn Mawr College's archivist, Emilie Leifer, who provided me with a copy of Rhoads's graduate student report.

(LUTIE) REBECCA CORWIN: Professor and Second Woman Member of the Society of Biblical Literature (1896)

Two years after Rhoads joined the Society of Biblical Literature, Rebecca Corwin (1862–1932) became a member. She was already a member of the American Oriental Society (1895) and a professor in the Department of Biblical Literature and Semitic Languages at Mount Holyoke College where she taught subjects related to both Old and New Testaments (1894–1899). Mount Holyoke's College Calendar for 1897–1998 lists Corwin as offering five courses in biblical literature: a first-semester study of Job as literature; a two-semester introduction course on the gospels that included a historical study of the life of Christ; a two-semester course in Old Testament History; and two additional second-semester courses, the first on apostolic history and the epistles, and the second on the poetical and prophetic books of the Old Testament. Corwin is also listed as offering four semesters of Hebrew, two semesters of Arabic, one semester of Syriac, and two semesters of Assyrian cuneiform.⁹ Sensing a need to upgrade her previous degrees (AM and STB), Corwin moved to Chicago where she completed her doctoral degree at the University of Chicago. Her thesis, "The Verb and the Sentence in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah" was published in 1909. Corwin became a professor of biblical literature at The Methodist Training School in Nashville Tennessee.¹⁰

EMILIE GRACE BRIGGS: Biblical Scholar, Professor, and Her Father's Amanuensis

Emilie Grace Briggs (1867–1944) joined the Society of Biblical Literature in 1897. That same year, Briggs became the first woman to receive a diploma and her BD (summa cum laude) from Union Theological Seminary. Her father, Charles, was Union's Professor of Old Testament, a founding member, early treasurer, and president of the Society of Biblical Literature, and a renowned defrocked Presbyterian cleric. Emilie Briggs's academic achievements at Union were sensationalized in local papers. One

9. I want to thank Micha Broadnix of Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections for his help in finding out more about the forgotten scholar Corwin.

10. I was not able to track down any further information about Corwin's career at this school.

headline read: “Heretic’s Child Wins with Honors. Emilie Briggs Graduated from the Union Theological Seminary. Passed All the Men” (“Emilie Grace Briggs” n.d.).

Like her father, Emilie Briggs was a gifted linguist and exegete. While still a divinity student, Briggs began her twenty-year career at the Episcopal New York Training School for Deaconesses where she taught Greek, Hebrew, and New Testament (1896 to 1916). While teaching, Briggs pursued doctoral studies at Union and began to publish. An early witness to her academic gifts is found in her article “סֵלָה [Selah],” which was published in the *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* (E. Briggs 1899). Her article that explored the date of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians was published in *New World* (E. Briggs 1900). Archivist Ruth Tonkiss Cameron discovered that Briggs prepared a significant number of the Hebrew-English dictionary entries submitted to her father’s trans-Atlantic publishing project, the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (1906). Her contributions to what perhaps should have been titled, *Brown-Driver-Briggs-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, were never acknowledged. A *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* published that same year (C. Briggs and E. Briggs 1906–1907), however, listed Emilie as coauthor with her father.

Emilie Briggs’s seven-hundred-paged, handwritten doctoral dissertation on the deaconess in the ancient and medieval church was *textual* in that it involved both word studies and biblical exegesis (notably, 1 Cor 11 and 1 Tim 3), *contextual* in that it argued for the full participation of women in ministry, and *bold* in that it contested the modern consensus that a deaconess was an “experiment in modern philanthropy” (E. Briggs 1913a, 598).¹¹ Sadly, the graduate faculty’s stipulation that in order to earn her degree Briggs must publish her excessively long thesis led to years of revision and negotiations with publishers that proved an insurmountable barrier. She never published the dissertation and thus never formally earned her PhD, though she published an article based on her research (E. Briggs 1913b).

Brigg’s father’s unfinished projects became her primary focus during his illness and following his death in 1913. She successfully completed his *The History of the Study of Theology* (C. Briggs 1916) and their joint

11. For a copy, see Emilie Grace Briggs Papers, Series 2, Box 2, Union Theological Seminary Archives / Archives of Women in Theological Scholarship, The Burke Library (Columbia University Libraries), Union Theological Seminary, New York.

commentary on Lamentations, but the latter was not accepted for publication. Briggs spent years organizing her father's papers with a view to writing his biography, but she did not complete this work.

MARY EMMA WOOLLEY: A Most Remarkable Early Society of Biblical Literature Member (1898), Professor, College President, and Feminist

Like Briggs, Mary Emma Woolley (1863–1947) was the daughter of a minister who encouraged education. Her father negotiated her acceptance as the first woman to attend Brown University where she completed her BA (1894) and MA (1895). Her studies included philosophy, history, political science, Latin, Hebrew, German, and French. Woolley began her successful teaching career at Wellesley College in 1895. She was soon promoted to associate professor (1896) and then full professor (1899) in the newly created Department of Biblical History, Literature, and Exegesis.¹² Woolley also joined the Society of Biblical Literature during this period (1898). Under her leadership, the study of the Bible at Wellesley was transformed from a religion course taught by members of other departments into a veritable department that required its professors to be trained biblical scholars. This requirement, as historian Dorothy Bass (1982, 8) observed, “would be significant later to dozens of women in the [Society of Biblical Literature], since the Wellesley department was by far the single largest source of employment for them for the next half-century.”¹³

Woolley's organizational and administrative skills as well as her social justice concerns were quickly recognized. She turned down a job as head of Brown's women's college and instead accepted the offer of the presidency at Mount Holyoke College in 1901, a position she held until 1937. Those present at her inauguration felt that she was “the right woman for the place and that under the able guidance of a leader so gifted in mind and heart, so experienced in teaching and administration, so successful in ... [demonstrating] enthusiasm and love for students, Mount Holyoke has a great future” (Buckley 1901, 815). An ardent feminist who supported women's suffrage and a number of other social justice causes, Woolley was awarded

12. Bass (1982, 8) notes that Woolley's name is listed not simply as a member but as an attendee at the Society meeting in 1899. She suggests that Woolley was the only woman listed as attending until 1905.

13. For a full description of this department, see Kendrick 1950.

eighteen honorary doctorates and received many other awards and honors. Woolley was in Bass's (1982, 8) opinion "one of the most remarkable of all [Society of Biblical Literature] members of either gender and at any time."

MARY INDA HUSSEY: First Woman on the Society of Biblical Literature's Executive Committee, and a Brilliant Assyriologist

Mary I. Hussey (1876–1952) pursued graduate studies in Semitic languages and ancient Near Eastern civilizations at Bryn Mawr College where her fascination with Sumerian and Akkadian texts was fostered under the direction of George Barton, who had earlier mentored Rhoads (B. Lee 2012). As part of her graduate work, Hussey studied under the world's best Assyriologists at the Universities of Pennsylvania, Berlin, and Leipzig and completed her doctorate from Bryn Mawr in 1906. She taught at Wellesley College (1907–1911) before accepting a position as assistant at the Harvard Semitic Museum (1911–1913), where she prepared two volumes of *Sumerian Tablets in the Harvard Semitic Museum*, published by Harvard University Press (Hussey 1912, 1915). In 1913, she began teaching in the Department of Biblical History and Literature at Mount Holyoke College (1913–1941). During her time at Mount Holyoke, Hussey served as the treasurer for the Society of Biblical Literature (1924–1926), becoming the first woman to hold a position on the Executive Committee during the thirty years that had passed since Rhoads had become the first woman member of the Society of Biblical Literature.

While teaching at Mount Holyoke, Hussey traveled extensively in the lands where the texts she loved had been found. She believed that the study of ancient literature, history, and archaeology enabled readers "to think historically about the Old Testament by removing the nation Israel and the Bible from a possible position of isolation and placing them among the peoples and the literature of the ancient world" (Hussey 1918, 216). Hussey was highly respected by her colleagues in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies and served as field secretary for the American School of Oriental Research for fourteen years. She was the first woman to serve as the annual professor at the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem (1931–1932). Hussey resumed her passion for publishing ancient texts when she retired, and by the time of her death eleven years later (1941), she had nearly finished preparing a volume on Akkadian religious texts from the Yale Babylonian collection.

LOUISE PETTIBONE SMITH: Distinguished Scholar, Professor, First Woman Author in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Second Executive Member of Society of Biblical Literature, and Social Justice Advocate

Like Rhoads and Hussey, Louise Pettibone Smith (1887–1981) was educated at Bryn Mawr College where she earned her BA (1908), MA (1912), and PhD (1917) in Semitic languages and Palestinian archaeology (Ko 2012). Her graduate studies took her to Jerusalem, where she was the first woman to hold a fellowship at the American School of Oriental Research (1913–1914). A year later, she began her long, prestigious career as the John Stewart Kennedy Professor of Biblical History at Wellesley College, where she taught until retirement in 1953.

Smith was a long-standing member of the Society of Biblical Literature whose honors include being the first woman to be published in the Society's flagship journal (Smith 1917)¹⁴ and the second woman to deliver a paper at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting (Eleanor Woods having delivered the first in 1913).¹⁵ Smith was also the second woman to serve on the Society's Executive Committee, where she was secretary from 1950 to 1952.

Smith's scholarship was wide ranging. She practiced both historical and literary criticism and published on the book of Ruth in the renowned *The Interpreter's Bible*.¹⁶ She pursued her interests in ancient Near Eastern and Jewish literature and in classical, contemporary, and practical theology. She translated important theological works such as Rudolf Bultmann's *Jesus and the Word* (1934) and *Faith and Understanding* (1969), Hans Hofmann's *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr* (1956), and Karl Barth's *Theology and Church* (1962). She also translated *Calvin: Commentaries* from Latin with Joseph Haroutunian (1958). During her teaching sabbaticals, Smith studied at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, Radcliffe College, and univer-

14. What now reads more like a long scholarly article on the messianic ideal of Isaiah was in fact Smith's doctoral thesis.

15. Professor Eleanor D. Wood of Wellesley was the first woman to present a paper at the Society (1913). It was entitled "The Weliyeh of Bedriyeh at esh-Shaphat" and was illustrated using a stereopticon, an early version of a slide projector. For a discussion of other early women members of the Society of Biblical Literature, see Bass 1982, 6–10.

16. Smith was responsible for the introduction and exegesis section on the book of Ruth in Smith and Cleland, 1953.

sities in Halle, Bonn, and Marburg. Her theological studies pushed her to probe the practical significance of biblical texts and to become involved with a number of social justice causes, especially those of women and children. During the final year of the Second World War, for example, Smith joined the American Association for Greek War Relief and took leave from Wellesley to work for the United Nations' Greek refugee camp in Palestine for six months and to teach English at Pierce College in Athens for four months.

Smith's experiences of bias against women inside and outside the academy were typical of women scholars' experiences at the time. In an interview recorded at age of eighty-four, Smith spoke about the problem of inadequate remuneration of women professors. Recalling her first year of teaching at Wellesley when her yearly salary was \$900.00, Smith said: "I lived in a hall bedroom that was so narrow that if I wanted to open a bureau drawer I had to get my feet under me on the bed" (Glasscock 1971, 28).¹⁷ She also expressed anger about the employment challenges faced by women in the 1970s since women's colleges were now hiring "all the men" for positions women previously held. Speaking bluntly, Smith's interviewer, Jean Glasscock, raised the issue of another impediment to women's employment that unfortunately continues for some even today: "But theological schools are certainly far from generous or gracious, are they, toward women?" (Glasscock 1971, 5). Unfortunately, Glasscock did not publish her further comments on this subject. Instead she asked Smith: "[Have you brought] in most of the men [hired to replace women] yourself, or many of them?" (5). Smith's answer revealed that a number of women had been involved in hiring men to fill positions women had previously held.

BEATRICE ALLARD BROOKS: Single Parent and Scholar of Women in the Ancient World

Beatrice Allard Brooks (1893–1977) graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 1915, where Professor Mary Inda Hussey inspired her interest in ancient Near Eastern literature. During graduate studies at Bryn Mawr, Brooks was supervised by George Aaron Barton, the same professor who had mentored Rhoads and Hussey and encouraged them to get involved in the

17. My thanks to Sara Ludovissy, assistant archivist at Wellesley, who provided me with a copy of Glasscock 1971. Jean Glasscock also authored a history of women at Wellesley College (see Glasscock 1975).

Society of Biblical Literature. Brooks later thanked Barton for “his unfailing helpfulness and sympathetic interest.”¹⁸ She joined the Society of Biblical Literature in 1917. Brooks spent the final year of her doctoral studies at Bryn Mawr on a research fellowship at Harvard University that was funded by Wellesley College. Her published dissertation (Brooks 1921) examined the moral practices of various social groups in ancient Mesopotamia. It included a discussion of texts about marriage, divorce, prostitution, dowries, adoption, cult functionaries, and female goddesses.¹⁹ Brooks’s interest in women in the ancient world continued after graduation. She published “Some Observations concerning Ancient Mesopotamian Women” (Brooks 1923) and took up the subject of women again in her article, “Fertility Cult Functionaries in the Old Testament” (Brooks 1941).

Brooks, like many other women scholars, faced onerous personal challenges. Her husband of nine years died in 1929 leaving her alone with two young children. This personal tragedy opened the possibility for her teaching career at Western College for Women in Ohio. Brooks worked her way up the academic ladder to full professor in the Department of History and Literature of Religion and chair of the Department of Religion before retiring in the 1960s.²⁰ Unfortunately, notes of her lectures at Western are not extant. It is easy to imagine that Brooks returned again and again to the topic of women in the ancient world in her teaching.

MARY REDINGTON ELY LYMAN: Pioneer Woman Scholar,²¹ Adjunct Professor, Full Professor with an Endowed Chair

Mary Redington Ely (1887–1975) graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 1911 and joined the Society of Biblical Literature in 1918. Ely also

18. Brook’s Vita is appended to her published dissertation Brooks 1921. Twenty-six years later she published *A Classified Bibliography of the Writings of George Aaron Barton* (Brooks 1947).

19. Other scholars during this period were pursuing questions about women in ancient texts and ancient religions. At the 1916 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Barton presented a paper on “The Evolution of Ashera” and John P. Peters presented a paper on “The Worship of Tammuz” (“Proceedings” 1917).

20. My thanks go to Jacqueline Johnson, Miami University’s archivist, for locating images and information on Brooks from her time at Western College. For a basic biography, see “Dr Beatrice Allard Brooks” n.d.

21. Lyman was named “Pioneer Woman Scholar,” in her obituary notice in the *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1975, found in the archives of Vassar College. My thanks to

became an active member of the National Association of Biblical Instructors and served as its secretary in 1922 and president in 1945. Eight women also served as president of the National Association of Biblical Instructors before the organization changed its focus and name to the American Academy of Religion in 1963.²² The question arises as to why women held a significant number of executive positions in the National Association of Biblical Instructors and not in the Society of Biblical Literature in these early years. Perhaps the scholars involved in the National Association of Biblical Instructors, which focused on the “methods and contents of courses of study, and the application of religion to character building,” were more open to allowing women to exercise leadership in their organization than the scholars exercising leadership in the Society of Biblical Literature, whose “primary object,” as described by Ismar J. Perlitz (1933), was “technical and creative research.” Perhaps the early Society of Biblical Literature really was an old boys club!

At any rate, after joining the Society of Biblical Literature in 1918, Ely earned a BD from Union Theological Seminary in 1919. The Traveling Fellowship she received for her academic achievements at Union allowed her to study in Cambridge for a year. Reflecting on her time there, Ely wrote: “Imagine my dismay, when I discovered that the conscience of Cambridge University would not permit them to give me a transcript for my work there, because that would put them on record as having given instruction in theology to a female.” Instead, each of her Cambridge professors gave her “a personal letter addressed to ‘whom it may concern,’ testifying that [she] had taken his course and performed the assigned tasks” (Feeman 1971).²³ Ely continued her graduate studies at the University of Chicago where she received her PhD in 1924. In 1920, she began teaching in the religion department at Vassar College. She taught there until 1926, when

Dean M. Rogers, Special Collections Assistant of the Archives and Special Collection Library at Vassar College, for sending me their biographical file on Lyman.

22. These women were Eliza H. Kendrick of Wellesley College (1927), Laura H. Wild of Mount Holyoke (1931), Florence M. Fitch of Oberlin College (1935); Mary E. Andrews of Goucher College (1938); Katharine H. Paton of Baldwin School (1941); Mary Ely Lyman of Sweet Briar College (1945); Virginia Corwin of Smith College (1950); and Mary Francis Thelen of Randolph-Macon Woman's College (1951). Thelen's published views on why the name NABI should be retained are in Eckardt and Thelen 1956.

23. From in the archives of Vassar College. For an account of the challenges faced by other women pursuing graduate studies, see Rossiter 1982.

she married Eugene William Lyman, Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Union Theological Seminary, and soon afterwards adopted two children. Lyman's marriage to a professor at Union opened up the possibility of part-time teaching at the seminary, where she became the first of two women to teach at Union in 1927—religious educator Sophia Lyon Fahs was the other. That same year she began teaching as an adjunct professor at Barnard College. Lyman held both teaching positions until 1940 when her husband—who was fifteen years her senior—retired from Union Seminary. Commenting on what was her first retirement from Union seminary, Lyman later said with some amusement, "Union took it for granted that she would retire too."²⁴

Instead of retiring, Lyman accepted the position of dean and professor of religion at Sweet Briar College for women in 1940. Nine years later, the possibility of full-time teaching position at Union Seminary opened up that required her to be ordained. She was ordained as a Congregational minister in 1949, and in 1950, Lyman became the first woman to hold a full professorship and an endowed chair at Union Seminary, making her one of the first to hold such a position in theological education in America (Bass 1982, 10).²⁵ She also became Union's first dean of women. Lyman retired again from Union in 1955, traveled the world for eight months, and then took up part-time teaching at Union Seminary and Vassar College.²⁶ In her retirement, she also continued to speak in churches and at conferences and to serve on the boards of a number of organizations.

In addition to her passion for teaching, Lyman was a productive scholar, publishing six books and innumerable articles for both scholarly and popular audiences.²⁷ In his work, *History of New Testament Research*, William Baird (2003, 337–41) names Lyman together with Louise Pettibone Smith (featured above), renowned text critic Silva Lake, and Pauline scholar Mary Edith Andrews as women who advanced the American

24. "They're Working Again," 1956, found in Vassar's archives.

25. The renowned Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick had previously held the chair given to Dr. Mary Lyman.

26. Lyman was also a visiting professor at Randolph-Macon Woman's College in 1957–1958.

27. Lyman's books include *Paul the Conqueror* (1919); *Knowledge of God in Johannine Thought* (1925); *The Fourth Gospel and The Life of Today* (1931); *The Christian Epic* (1936); *Jesus* in the prestigious Hazen Books of Religion Series (1941); and *Into All the World* (1956). See also her *Journal of Biblical Literature* article, "Hermetic Religion and the Religion of the Fourth Gospel" (1930).

study of New Testament.²⁸ Trained as a historical critic, Lyman set aside “the older view which ... used theological interpretation as a method of research” and embraced “a consideration of the New Testament writings as a means through which to view the community life of which they were an expression” (Ely 1925, 9). She focused much of her scholarly work on the Gospel of John and was chosen to write the volume on Jesus in the renowned series Hazen Books on Religion (1937). At the same time, Lyman published articles that explored the spiritual and practical applications of biblical texts for Christians. In an article published in response to the Cuban crisis, she offered a theologically profound and pastorally sensitive defense for “martyr-like courage” and “a come-what-may faith” that confesses with Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Lyman 1963). Her interests in the social gospel movement and women’s leadership in the church are also reflected in her many of her writings (see Waller 2015). Lyman received many honors during her long and varied career, including honorary doctorates from Mount Holyoke College (1937), Ronaoko College (1943), Hood College (1955), and Western College (1957).

Lyman’s career connects with the stories of many other Society of Biblical Literature women members. She encountered both academic and professional success and setbacks because she was a woman. While marriage to a professor opened up her career as an adjunct professor at Union, it also meant Union terminated her job when her husband retired. Yet this happenstance enabled her to come into her own as a dean and later a full professor with an endowed chair at a seminary. Lyman was a successful scholar who also loved teaching, and it was her love of teaching that impelled her to accept a teaching position after retirement.

MARGARET BRACKENBURY CROOK: Thirty-Nine-Year Society of Biblical Literature Member and Voice for Change

Like Briggs and Woolley, Margaret Crook (1886–1972) was the daughter of a minister whose influence on her life was formative (Elferdink 2014). She sensed a call to ministry in the Unitarian Church following her father’s death when she was eight, though she had no idea at the time of the enormous hurdles this call presented an English woman. She received

28. All these notable women scholars were Society of Biblical Literature members.

an honors degree in philosophy (1913) from the University of London as well as a diploma in anthropology with distinction (1914) before studying theology at Manchester College, where she was the first woman to complete the requirements for ordination in the Unitarian Church (1917) and where, like Briggs, she was first in her class. Like Woolley and Smith and many other early female members of the Society of Biblical Literature, Crook was a feminist activist involved in women's suffrage and high-risk relief work with refugee women and children. She began her very successful full-time ordained ministry in 1918 at Norwich's octagonal chapel.

Choosing family responsibilities over career, in 1920 Crook joined her family in the United States, where she was unable to find a ministerial position. However, she found employment as the executive secretary for the American branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, a position that provided opportunities for lecturing. After hearing one of her public lectures, William Allan Nelson, the president of Smith College, offered Crook a position in Smith's Department of Religion and Biblical Literature (1921). Crook quickly learned Hebrew and developed an expertise in the Old Testament. She found the Society of Biblical Literature a place to network with other women and to be introduced to cutting-edge scholarship (Elferdink 2014). A prolific author, Crook published stories and poetry, more than thirty articles and reviews in the field of Old Testament studies, an important volume related to her teaching interest in the Bible and Literature (1937), an article on the book of Ruth (1948), a monograph on Job (1959), and a groundbreaking book *Women and Religion* (1964).

As a scholar with interdisciplinary interests and deep connections to the Unitarian-Universalist Church where the numbers of women ministers had declined significantly, Crook used *Women and Religion* as a platform for what she called a "reconnaissance" of women's place in the male-monopolized religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Her solution to the problem of the "man-formulated, man-argued, man-directed faiths" was a "breakthrough" that had the "capacity to be critical when criticism brings new insights" (Crook 1964, 1, 5–6). This radical idea called women scholars to reflect critically upon the methods and organizations into which they were being absorbed. "The time has come," she declared, "for women to share fully in creating the basic structure of the thought that is to animate these [new] movements, in the forms of devotion, the art and symbolism that must be created to give the new inspiration durability" (Crook 1964, 247–48; see also Potter and Morrow

2012). This new kind of scholarship was different than what men had been doing and what women scholars were presently doing. Crook supported her vision with engaging comments on such figures as Eve, Miriam, Deborah, Jael, Huldah, Judith, Esther, and Mary, and by tackling difficult Pauline texts.

The reviews of *Women and Religion* were mixed, and the volume was not fully appreciated until the 1980s, when, as Crook's biographer noted, the ideological influence of her work was finally recognized: "feminist religious studies gained traction as an academic discipline ... [and] religious studies scholars highlighted *Women and Religion* for its discussion of male domination in the Judeo-Christian tradition and its call for women to assume an active role in reshaping their faith" (Elferdink 2014). In other words, Crook's groundbreaking, integrative, and interdisciplinary work marks a change in direction that some Society of Biblical Literature members educated in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s would follow as they began to focus their primary research and publishing interests on issues related to women in theology and the Bible and advocate for systemic change in the Society of Biblical Literature, an organization they regarded as male-centered.

LEONA GLIDDEN RUNNING: Can Women Teach in Seminaries? Pioneer Adventist Biblical Scholar and Women's Advocate

Like Smith, Leona Glidden Running (1916–2014) had a long and successful career that was marked by a number of firsts. Running was an evangelical academic who secured a teaching position at a very conservative theological seminary ("Leona Running Dies at 97" 2014). Running was the first female faculty member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary (1955) and the first Seventh-Day Adventist woman to earn a PhD in ancient Near Eastern Studies (Johns Hopkins University, 1964). She was also the first woman to join (1961) and later become president of (1981–1982) the Chicago Society of Biblical Research, a society that evolved from a local chapter of the Society of Biblical Literature ("History" n.d.). Throughout her career, Running was an active member of both the Society of Biblical Literature and the National Association of Professors of Hebrew. The paper she presented at the latter association was based on her experiences of teaching biblical Hebrew at Saint Andrews: "Seminary Hebrew: How Much, How, and Why? Or, Streamlining Biblical Hebrew in

the Seminary” (1972). Her most notable book was the 436-page biography of William Foxwell Albright, which she wrote with David N. Freedman (1975). Running was well respected as a scholar in the academy.

Running faced innumerable challenges as the only woman on the faculty of a conservative school whose denomination opposed women’s ordination. Ernest D. Dick, the president of the Adventist Seminary that hired her, initially expressed his concerns about “a women’s ability to teach male students, and [about] male students’ willingness to be taught by a woman” (“Leona Running Dies at 97” 2014). Running proved Dick wrong, and she soon was given full tenure as a teacher of languages—though she was never allowed to teach other subjects. Her teaching competencies included Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Aramaic, Egyptian, and Akkadian, as well as a number of modern languages. Running officially retired at sixty-five, but continued to teach Egyptian, Akkadian, and Syriac and to mentor students until she was eighty-six. She was honored by Andrews University with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters in 2012.

As a feminist in a very conservative world, Running was not averse to advocating for change in Adventist theology and practice. At a meeting of the Adventist General Conference Committee in 1972, for example, Running pointed out the imbalance in the committee’s membership—275 men and only 4 women—and raised pay equity issues based on “discrimination against women who were not recognized as head of a household” (Schwarz 1979, 527). Perhaps more significantly, Running kept abreast of developments in scholarship, the church, and society related to women, and beginning in 1971, she collected books, articles, magazines, and audio-visuals written by women and about women, including women in ministry. She bequeathed her significant collection to the Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University, where it now resides.

Women Trained to Read in Manly Ways

While it is commonplace to caricature the American women who secured teaching jobs in biblical studies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as showing “virtually no interest in women’s issues” (Murphy 1993, 43–44), the history sketched above suggests that many early women Society of Biblical Literature members *were* feminists. This conclusion fits with what historians have observed about the women who taught at women’s

colleges in this period, namely, they had “genuinely feminist tendencies ... [and] they tended to be among the forward-looking women of the day, and they shared a sense of pride in their own achievements as independent women at independent women’s institutions, as well as strong networks of support among themselves” (Bass 1982, 10).²⁹ The stories of Society of Biblical Literature women members similarly testify to their personal involvement in a number of social justice projects. These privileged Euro-American women were very aware of social injustices and advocated for change in their places of employment, their religious institutions, and in the political organizations they joined.

The feminist tendencies of the Society’s women scholars did not, however, generally drive their primary research and publishing. Important exceptions include Briggs’s female-centered research project on deaconesses, Brooks’s research on ancient women and fertility cultic functionaries, Smith’s commentary on Ruth, and Crook’s programmatic feminist work, *Women and Religion*. But, with the exception of Crook’s later scholarship, even these women-focused research projects stand apart from earlier American protofeminist and feminist interpretations of the Bible. Generally-speaking, early Society of Biblical Literature women members did not appropriate either the feminist hermeneutic present in Stanton’s *Woman’s Bible* project or the womanly or motherly hermeneutic present in the popular writings of many nineteenth-century women who read the Bible through the lens of their experiences as women.

Instead, early feminist Society of Biblical Literature women tended to absorb and endorse the critical models and approaches of their male colleagues; they read and analyzed ancient texts using Eurocentric linguistic, historical, and historical critical methods developed in the postenlightenment world of the academy. These American women were highly-skilled practitioners of the kind of modern rational criticism that nineteenth-century essayist Frederick Temple elevated over “all other studies” and described as the leading academic method of “the manhood of the world” (Bass 1982, 84). They practiced and propagated what Oxford notable Benjamin Jowett (1907, 34, 36, 55) described as a “manly” activity reserved for the highly educated and cultivated chosen ones.³⁰ According to Jowett, the

29. Women such as Woolley and Smith were not only able to train their successors, but they were able to hire them.

30. Jowett’s groundbreaking essay, “On the Interpretation of Scripture” was first published in *Essays and Reviews* in 1860.

task of a critically attuned *male* interpreter was to clear away the dogmatic, systematic, controversial, and fanciful interpretations of past interpreters, who were blind to the original meaning of the text by their rootedness in their present context (7). Jowett would have included the American women scholars discussed above among the class of highly competent critically attuned male interpreters. With the exception of Crook, American women scholars were not yet challenging the patriarchy embedded in ancient culture and ancient texts, confronting the hegemony of historical and linguistic approaches, or experimenting with forgotten feminist, motherly, and womanist hermeneutics. They were unaware of the long history of women's counter readings of biblical texts and of the need to rewrite history of biblical interpretation to include the voices of women. They were not yet doing "biblical criticism à la femme."³¹

The Rise of "Biblical Criticism à la Femme"

It is not surprising that so-called second wave feminism impacted Society of Biblical Literature members and, ultimately, the manly organization itself. Organizational change came slowly to the Society, however, as it was a guild controlled by the *alte Herren* who constituted 96.5 percent of the membership in 1970. The membership numbers themselves tell a story about women's success or, rather, lack of success as women in the profession. In 1900—twenty years into the Society's history—the Society had boasted two hundred members, five of whom were women. Ten years later, the number of women members had more than doubled to constitute 5 percent of the total membership. Riding the crest of what is often identified as the first wave of American feminism, women members continued to increase, and in 1920 numbered twenty-four, or more than 10 percent. The numbers of Society of Biblical Literature women members decreased from this point on, however: 8 percent in 1930, 6 percent in 1940, 5 percent in 1950; figures from 1960 are unavailable; 3.5 percent in 1970.³²

31. See Janet L. Larson's use of this term in Larson 2004, 84.

32. I am grateful for all of Christopher Hooker's help with this project. As the Society's Director of Membership and Programs, he cautions that membership numbers prior to 2003 (when the current system was put in place) are not entirely reliable. More reliable figures are expected when the older and currently inaccessible data stored in the archives are combined with the current system. The Society of Biblical Literature dashboard has the data from the current system through 2017. The Soci-

In 1971, theologian and historian of religion Carol P. Christ of the American Academy of Religion and New Testament scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza of the Society of Biblical Literature founded the Women's Caucus in Religious Studies, a grass roots organization meant to support women's concerns in the academy.³³ This important group became a voice for change in the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature as they eventually advocated for representation of women on various boards and committees, for anonymous submission and evaluation of manuscripts submitted to the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, and for a job registry with the Council of the Study of Religion (Schüssler Fiorenza 1988, 6). Their meetings also became a place where Schüssler Fiorenza and other committee members "began doing theology consciously as women and for women." Their conversations spawned ground-breaking publications on a variety of topics related to ancient and modern women (Murphy 1998, 133).

Although the seventies witnessed the coming of age of the American feminist movement, change did not come quickly for women in the Society of Biblical Literature, as revealed by the momentous and thoughtless decision not to include a woman on the committee tasked to plan the Centennial Meeting and the celebratory centennial publications (Collins 1985, 1). The committee's decision to have one session on Women and the Bible under the general rubric "The History and Sociology of Biblical Scholarship" raised the ire of women like Phyllis Tribble, who had already emerged as a leader in the nascent field of feminist biblical scholarship. But "seeing the invitation [to participate] as an opportunity for visibility and prophecy" (Tribble 1982, 3–4), Tribble and others organized the first program unit in the Society's hundred-year history to be devoted specifically to women—a panel discussion on "The Effects of Women's Studies on Biblical Studies." During the emotive panel discussion at the Centen-

ety's "2018 Membership Report" has some additional demographic reporting, but it is based on answers to the member profile questions. I am using numbers Bass cites in her analysis of numbers of women in the Society's first hundred years (Bass 1982, 9–10).

33. The Women's Caucus website describes the organization's purpose as follows: "The Women's Caucus was founded in 1971 to provide advocacy, representation and a safe place to discuss concerns women faced in the academy at a time when few women held faculty positions and women had little chance to determine the production of knowledge in the field. At that time women's scholarship and women's presence was overlooked or trivialized" ("Mission of the Women's Caucus," n.d.).

nial Meeting in 1980, Tribble disclosed that the women who had planned the three-hour session chose to “eschew celebration to speak for clarity, justice, and honesty within a scholarly organization that, like many others, is none too eager to repent” (Tribble 1982, 3). Adela Yarbro Collins’s later reflections on this notorious program unit were accurate: “The existence of this session only made more apparent that women are a minority in the SBL and that feminism has made little impact on the guild” (Collins 1985, 1).

Collins’s election to the Centennial Publications Editorial Committee a month after the November 1980 meeting was strategic. As the voice for women in the Society of Biblical Literature, Collins made sure that the obvious gap in the Committee’s six projected publication series that “virtually ignored the experience of women, feminist exegesis, and feminist hermeneutics” (Collin 1985, 1) was filled by a volume she edited and introduced that featured cutting-edge articles written by seven of the society’s leading feminist scholars: Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, T. Drorah Setel, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Bernadette J. Brooten, Carolyn Osiek, Nelly Furman, and Esther Fuchs.

From this time forward, the Society of Biblical Literature made strategic decisions to appoint women as editors and to increase the number of books authored by women in the series published by the Society. Indeed, as the most recent Society publishing report indicates, twenty women, beginning with Collins in 1986, have served as the general editor of one or more of the forty series of books published by the Society. These series include women-focused series such as the Bible and Women (eds. Irmtraud Fischer, Christiana de Groot, Mercedes Navarro Puerto, and Adriana Valerio) and more classic series such as Text-Critical Studies (ed. Sidnie White Crawford), Texts and Translations (eds. Martha Himmelfarb and Elizabeth Asmis), and Resources for Biblical Studies (eds. Beverly R. Gaventa, Susan Ackerman, and now Davina Lopez).³⁴

While the Society had previously published several books authored by women before the notorious Centennial Meeting, after 1980, the numbers of books authored, coauthored, edited, and coedited by women grew exponentially. As of September 2018, women have authored ninety-six

34. I am grateful to Nicole L. Tilford, Production Manager of SBL Press, for preparing lists and spreadsheets that show the publishing and editing history of women who authored, coauthored, edited, and coedited volumes and served on various editing boards.

books, coauthored fifteen, edited twenty-five, and coedited eighty-two of the Society's publications. These publications highlight women's scholarly expertise in almost all areas related to biblical studies.³⁵ For example, 12 percent of the forty-one books in the Texts and Translations series (1972–1999) were authored by women; 11.6 percent of the sixty-nine books in the Septuagint and Cognate Studies category (1975–) were authored or coauthored by women; 12.9 percent of the thirty-one books in the Writings from the Ancient World series (1990–) were authored by women; 32.4 percent of the thirty-seven books in the Writings from the Greco-Roman World series were authored, coauthored, or coedited by women (2001–); 36.4 percent of the twenty-two books in the series Archaeology and Biblical Studies (1988–) were authored by women; 57 percent of the seven books in Global Perspectives in Biblical Scholarship (2000–) were authored, coauthored, or coedited by women; and 100 percent of the six volumes in the Bible and Women series (2011–) were coedited by women.

Further evidence of change can be seen in the Society's flagship journal. Three women have now served as editor of the journal (Jouette M. Bassler, Gail R. O'Day, and Adele Reinhartz). While women have published articles in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* since 1917, tracking the number of articles authored by women has been difficult because most early authors published using only their initials and last names. Practices changed in 2002, however, when the journal's general editor, Gail O'Day, began to generate annual reports noting gender, ethnicity, nationality, and the specific discipline of article authors, as well as the numbers of articles submitted and accepted. Since 2014, women have consistently submitted around 20 percent of articles, with a gradual increase each year (submissions in Hebrew Bible being a much higher percentage than in New Testament). The acceptance rate of blind-reviewed submissions by women for the period 2015–2017 was 26 percent; for men in this period it was 22 percent (Reinhartz 2018, 3, 8, 11–12).

The development of new program units related to women also gave women a more significant voice in the Society of Biblical Literature. 1981 marked the beginning of a consultation on Women in Scripture that developed into what continues to be the Women in the Biblical World Section.

35. Exceptions include a number of specialized series that have published few books: for example, *The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (1985–1989: three books); *The New Testament in the Greek Fathers* (1987: nine books); *Biblical Encyclopedia Translations* (2007– : five books); and *History of Biblical Studies* (2007– : four books).

The program unit *Female and Male in Gnosticism* began in 1986 and continued until 1992. The first consultation on *Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics* was held in 1989; it was renamed as *Feminist Theological Hermeneutics of the Bible* in 1990, changed to a group in 1992, and renamed *Feminist Hermeneutics* in 1999. 2001 witnessed the beginning of the *Gender, Sexuality, and the Bible* group. In 2006, *Recovering Female Interpreters of the Bible* was initiated.

Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, a small number of African American, Asian American, and Latina biblical scholars joined the choir of Euro-American women's voices at the Society of Biblical Literature. In 1985, Clarice J. Martin was the first African American woman to receive her PhD in New Testament (Duke University) and four years later, Renita Weems received her doctoral degree in Old Testament (Princeton Theological Seminary).³⁶ Chinese-American Old Testament scholar Gale Yee received her doctoral degree in Old Testament (Saint Michael's College) in 1985 and was followed by Lai Ling Ngan (Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary) in 1991. Asian American New Testament scholar Seung Ai Yang completed her doctoral degree (University of Chicago) in 1992.³⁷ Dominican-born Aida Besançon Spencer received her doctoral degree in New Testament (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) 1982 and twenty years later was joined by Awilda Gonzalez Tejera (now Babb) (ThD, New Testament, Boston University, 2002), Renata C. Furst Lambert, whose doctoral work was in Biblical Studies/Old Testament at the Université de Montréal (2004), Ahida (Calderon) Pilarski who did her doctoral work in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (2008), and Cristina García Alfonso (PhD Hebrew Bible, Brite Divinity School, 2008).³⁸

36. According to Randall C. Bailey's (2000, 707) unofficial count, in 2001, twenty-four African American women had doctorates in New Testament and twenty-one in Hebrew Bible.

37. I am indebted to Jun Young, Seung Ai, Gale Yee, and Hisako Kinukawa for this unofficial list.

38. In 2009, Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz completed her doctorate in New Testament at Vanderbilt University. In 2010, Jacqueline Hidalgo received her doctoral degree from Claremont Graduate University in Religion and Maziél Barreto Dani defended her New Testament doctoral thesis in February 2019 at Brite Divinity School. I am indebted to Loida I. Martell for taking the time to consult with other Latinx scholars to generate the short list of eight Latina biblical scholars from 1982–2019. It is also

Additional program units that sponsored scholarship by and about women of color gave voice to the interlocking systems of power that impact the lives of women. These units include African American Theology and Biblical Hermeneutics, which began as a group in 1986 and became a section in 1999 when it was retitled African American Biblical Hermeneutics; Gender and Cultural Criticism, which began as a cultural consultation in 1993 and became a section in 1996 when it was retitled the Bible and Cultural Studies; Latino/a and Latin American Biblical Interpretation, which began as a group in 2003 and became a seminar in 2011; and Asian and Asian American Hermeneutics, which began as a group in 2003 and became a seminar in 2011.

The impact of the new women-centered program units on the women who presented papers and those who attended the Society of Biblical Literature meetings in the 80s and 90s was palpable. In 2010, Karen Jo Torjesen's described her experience of the early sessions on women and the informal gatherings that followed in glowing terms:

women broke the silence with each other as women and began to share their experiences and how they felt about them. It was powerful and revelatory. And it enhanced a sense of connectedness. As we progressed we had the beginnings of ways to connect our idiosyncratic, individual experiences to see how they were part of larger patterns. ("A Discussion with Karen Torjesen" 2010)

Reflecting back on these early days eight years later, Torjesen wrote:

When we were first doing feminist Biblical work, the impact was on women. That work gave women the power and the courage to challenge "patriarchal" ideas of womanhood in faith traditions, seek leadership in their communities, fight for space for women's voices and seek ordination. We had little impact on the "alte Herren." Now we have impact on institutions, organizations and public debate in a way that was unimaginable when we started. (email message; used with permission)

Commenting on these same developments in 2001, Phyllis Bird suggested that the new programming at the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion intended to empower and support

important to note that not all of these women secured teaching positions in their primary discipline.

feminist scholars and scholarship had an unintended effect of isolating women from mainstream scholarship. Bird queried: “what will it take for feminist contributions to move from the ghetto of feminist studies into the ‘mainstream’—or for the ‘mainstream’ to realize that it is only a current in the turbulent waters of the discipline?” (Bird 2015, 18).

Program books from the various meetings that the Society of Biblical Literature sponsors suggest that feminist contributions to the discipline have moved closer to the center in recent years. In addition to program units that include gender-related terms in their titles are the current units at the Society’s meetings, including International Meetings, that specifically mention gender as an appropriate object of study in their descriptions.³⁹ Moreover, many other units that do not include gender-related terms in their descriptions now include sessions and papers that deal specifically with women or gender.⁴⁰

The Continuing Journey of Women in the Society of Biblical Literature: Are We There Yet?

In 1987, ninety-three years after Anna Rhoads became first woman member of the Society of Biblical Literature, renowned Catholic feminist

39. These include: Religions of Israel and Judah in Their West Asian Environment—1986 (formerly Canaanite and Israelite Religion, Israelite Religion, Israelite Religion and Its West Asian Environment); Christian Apocrypha—1988 (started as Apocryphal New Testament Literature, Christian Apocrypha in 1989, and later became Intertextuality in Christian Apocrypha in 1990); Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (International Meetings)—2003; Bible and Visual Culture—2005 (International Meetings); Representations of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible (International Meetings)—2008–2009; Contextual Interpretation of the Bible (International Meetings)—2010; Speech and Talk in the Ancient Mediterranean World—2010; Biblical Masculinities (International Meetings)—2011–2014; Meals in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and Its World—2012; Megilloth—2013; Maria, Mariamne, Miriam: Rediscovering Marys—2014–2016. I am grateful to Christopher Hooker for compiling this data.

40. During the past decade, these include: Minoritized Criticism and Biblical Interpretation; Contextual Biblical Interpretation; Use, Influence, and Impact of the Bible; Homiletics and Biblical Studies; Book of Acts; LGBTI/Queer Hermeneutics; Paul and Politics; Christian Theology and the Bible; Formation of Isaiah; Postcolonial Studies and Biblical Studies; Slavery, Resistance, and Freedom; and Writing/Reading Jeremiah Group.

biblical scholar and theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza became the first woman president. This position of great honor is bestowed on scholars whose scholarship and service are judged as outstanding and significant by their academic peers. Like many of the early members of the Society of Biblical Literature, Schüssler Fiorenza encountered numerous educational and career barriers. At the University of Münster she was denied a doctoral scholarship because giving money to a woman who had “no future possibilities for becoming a professor of theology” was viewed as a waste of resources (Murphy 1998, 132). But this obstacle did not stop the indomitable Schüssler Fiorenza from completing her doctoral thesis on the forgotten roles of women in early church ministries, *Der vergessene Partner* (1964). In 1970, Schüssler Fiorenza moved to the United States where both she and her husband, an American theologian, accepted teaching positions at the University of Notre Dame. This propitious move brought Schüssler Fiorenza to a place where she could connect with other women who encouraged her pioneering feminist scholarship based on a hermeneutics of suspicion, of proclamation, of remembrance, and of creative actualization, and called for change in both church and academy.⁴¹

Schüssler Fiorenza’s ground-breaking work made her an obvious choice for the first woman president of the Society of Biblical Literature, and she used her presidential address as an opportunity to celebrate the progress of women and feminist scholarship in the Society:

Woman scholars have not only joined in the procession of educated men but have also sought to do so in the interest of women. We no longer deny our feminist engagement for the sake of scholarly acceptance. Rather we celebrate tonight the numerous feminist publications, papers, and monographs of SBL members that have not only enhanced our knowledge about women in the biblical worlds but have also sought to change our methods of reading and reconstruction, as well as our hermeneutical perspectives and scholarly assumptions. (Schüssler Fiorenza 1988, 8)

Ten years later, Schüssler Fiorenza (1999, 22) seemed less optimistic as she, like Bird, wondered “whether and how much our work has made serious inroads in biblical scholarship.” In an interview with journalist Cullen Murphy in 1993, Schüssler Fiorenza voiced her concern that the feminist movement’s gains would not be lasting: “When I look back at the last

41. See her collection of previously published essays in Schüssler Fiorenza 1984.

century, I'm always surprised at how many questions, how many issues, were raised that we did not think about again until a few years ago. Today, perhaps, with the democratization of the media, what has been done will not be lost" (Murphy 1993, 138).⁴²

In 1994, pioneering feminist Old Testament scholar Phyllis Trible became the Society of Biblical Literature's second female president. Like many early women members, Trible was encouraged by male mentors (especially renowned rhetorical critic James Muilenburg) to pursue doctoral studies and an academic career. She began her teaching career at Wake Forest University in 1963 and moved to the Boston area in 1971 to teach at Andover Newton. This move introduced her to Mary Daly and other Boston feminists who challenged her to figure out a way to hold together the Bible that she loved and her nascent feminism. In a ground-breaking lecture, published in 1973 as "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," Trible took up "the hermeneutical challenge," which she believed was "to translate biblical faith without sexism" (Trible 1973, 31). In her celebrated work, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978, 7), Trible more clearly identified her approach as feminist hermeneutics and defined feminism not as "a narrow focus upon women, but rather a critique of culture in light of *misogyny* ... a critique [that] affects the issues of race and class, psychology, ecology and human sexuality" (emphasis original). In *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of the Biblical Narratives* (1984) and her presidential address, "Exegesis for Storytellers and Other Strangers" (1995), Trible showcased her skills as feminist exegete. Athalya Brenner (2013) speaks for many when she lauds Trible as one of the "prominent matriarchs of contemporary feminist Bible criticism."

Eight other women have been Society of Biblical Literature presidents since 1994. While not all of these scholars find it helpful to use the term *feminist* to describe their work, they are all feminists in their own way, and their outstanding contributions to teaching, their publications, and their leadership in the academy and various other institutions have done much to ameliorate the position of women in the academy generally and in the Society more specifically. Much of their work has also moved feminist scholarship closer to the center of the guild. These scholars, whose areas of expertise are wide ranging, also began to represent the diversity pres-

42. For more on Schüssler Fiorenza, see her chapter on "Decentering and Recentering Biblical Scholarship" in this volume.

ent among women in the Society of Biblical Literature; they help women imagine what they too can do despite differences in academic training, specialties, and social location. Each is celebrated as a scholar of great influence not simply in terms of what they have done for women, but also in terms of the respect they have garnered from their peers for their many contributions to the academy, the Society of Biblical Literature, and other academic and religious organizations.

Jewish Hebrew Bible scholar, Adele Berlin, the Society's third woman president (2000) models a literary approach to reading biblical texts, as seen in her well-known work *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (1983) and in her commentaries. Berlin's presidential address on the book of Esther and ancient storytelling showcases her skills as a classically trained historical critic and a narrative critic (published Berlin 2001). The *Festschrift* in her honor, *"Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding": Essays in Honor of Adele Berlin* (Grossman 2013) acknowledges the wisdom and understanding Berlin brought to her writing, teaching, and mentoring at the University of Maryland where she was the Robert H. Smith Professor of Biblical Studies and is now professor emerita.

New Testament and Christian origins' scholar Carolyn Osiek is the first Catholic sister (RSCJ) to serve as president of the Society of Biblical Literature (2005). Earlier she had served as president of the Catholic Biblical Association (1994–1995). After graduating from Harvard Divinity School where she completed her thesis on the Shepherd of Hermas (published as Osiek 1983), Osiek taught at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago for twenty-five years before moving in 2003 to teach New Testament at Brite Divinity School of Texas Christian University, where she is the Charles Fischer Professor of New Testament emerita. She also serves her religious community as provincial archivist. Osiek has published and edited twelve books, including commentaries and thematic studies on families and women in the early church, as well as numerous articles. Her challenging yet irenic presidential address, "CATHOLIC or Catholic: Biblical Scholarship at the Center," addresses complex issues related to the history of biblical interpretation in the church and the academy (published Osiek 2006).

Presbyterian Old Testament scholar Katharine Doob Sakenfeld served as the Society's fifth woman president (2007). Sakenfeld received her doctoral degree at Harvard and spent her career teaching Old Testament literature and exegesis at Princeton Theological Seminary. She published commentaries on Numbers and Ruth, served on the translation committee

of the New Revised Standard Version, and as general editor of the five-volume *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. She is well respected for her work as a feminist scholar who brings a global perspective to her interpretive work (Bird, Sakenfeld, and Ringe 1997). In her presidential address, "Whose Text Is It?," Sakenfeld took on a prophetic mantle and called upon the academy to set aside assumptions about what constitutes worthy scholarship and embrace a more inclusive vision of biblical interpretation. She concluded: "Let us be on the move toward that ethical calling to become a company of scholars who rejoice in working with and learning from those least like ourselves and who show special generosity of spirit to those whose struggle to be heard is more difficult than our own" (Sakenfeld 2008, 18). Her book *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today* (2003) models such a generous approach.⁴³

Carol A. Newsom, the sixth woman president of the Society of Biblical Literature (2011), is another illustrious scholar whose broad research interests include the Dead Sea Scrolls, wisdom and apocalyptic texts, issues of moral agency, texts about women and other marginalized groups, and most recently the Bible and ecology. Newsom's impressive oeuvre includes thirteen books authored or edited and scores of articles in journals, encyclopedias, and edited collections, as well as translations and reviews. As coeditor of the critically acclaimed *Women's Bible Commentary* (2012), she continues to encourage feminist biblical scholarship and the recovery of the forgotten voices of important women biblical interpreters from before the twentieth century. Her foundational training at Harvard University prepared her well for her long career at Candler School of Theology at Emory University (2005–2019) where she was the Charles Howard Candler Professor of Old Testament and senior fellow at Emory's Center for the Study of Law and Religion. Newsom's gifts as a teacher, administrator, and scholar who "has expanded, deepened, and rearranged the contents and boundaries of biblical scholarship" are celebrated in the Festschrift, *Writing the Moral Self: Essays in Honor of Carol A. Newsom* (Williamson, Breed, and Hankins).⁴⁴

The Society of Biblical Literature's seventh woman president (2013), Carol Meyers received her call to biblical studies and archaeology in the department that Mary Woolley (see above) created at Wellesley College.

43. For more on Sakenfeld, see her chapter "Society of Biblical Literature Reminiscences" in this volume.

44. For more on Newsom, see her chapter on "Becoming a Biblical Scholar: A Misfit's Search for Models and Mentors" in this volume.

She completed her graduate education at Brandeis University (1975) and began a long and successful teaching career at Duke University, where she taught in the Religious Studies Department and pursued interests in archaeology, the Hebrew Bible, and women—both ancient and modern (e.g., she was the associate director of Women's Studies [1986–1998]). For her outstanding work as a field archaeologist, Meyers was honored by the American School of Oriental Research in 2014 with the P. E. Macalister Field Archaeology Award. She published commentaries on Exodus, Haggai, and Zechariah and broke new ground with *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (1988), a book Esther Fuchs (2008, 85) described as the “first comprehensive effort to present a female-centered view of the Bible using historical rather than literary criticism.” Meyers chose to revisit this subject in her Society of Biblical Literature presidential address and once more challenged traditional assumptions about women's lives in ancient Israel (published Meyers 2014).⁴⁵

Dutch Israeli biblical scholar Athalya Brenner-Idan was the first international woman scholar to serve as president of the Society of Biblical Literature (2015). She brought to her position international experience as a feminist Hebrew Bible scholar and educator committed to “new approaches, new possibilities and new legitimations ... as power, responsibility, and interpretation [is extended] beyond white male supremacy” (Brenner-Idan 2016, 15). Her ideological stance is partly rooted in her own experience: the book, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (1985), which she expected would result in her promotion, instead engendered hostile criticism. Her promotion was denied, and the feminist methodology she used was deemed “not truly academic, not meaningful, a passing fad and waste of time and energy and money” (Brennar-Idan 2015, xii). The resilient Brenner-Idan went on to hold teaching positions at Radboud University, the University of Amsterdam, Tel Aviv University, Brite Divinity School, Hong Kong's Chinese University, and Stellenbosch University. Her contributions to feminist biblical studies have continued and include the twenty-volume *Feminist Companion to the Bible* series (1993–2015), which she initiated and edited, her unconventional book, *I Am—: Biblical Women Tell Their Own Stories* (2004), and her work in the *Texts@Contexts* series.⁴⁶

45. For more on Meyers, see her chapter on “Accidental Biblical Scholar” in this volume.

46. For more on Brenner-Idan, see her chapter on “Having Been, 2015: Some Reflections” in this volume.

Presbyterian New Testament scholar Beverly Roberts Gaventa served as the Society's ninth woman president in 2016. Her graduate education at Union Theological Seminary and Duke University prepared her well for a distinguished teaching career at Colgate Rochester Divinity School (1976–1987), Columbia Theological Seminary (1987–1992), Princeton Theological Seminary (1992–2013), and most recently at Baylor University (2013–). Like many earlier women in the Society of Biblical Literature, Gaventa focused much of her scholarly work on texts and issues being debated currently in the academy and beyond, but she wondered how women have heard the words of Scripture. She explored this question in *Our Mother Saint Paul* (2007), where she suggested that the women in Paul's audience might have been especially drawn to his self-identification as a woman in labor and a nursing mother. She also embraced the most important female figure in the gospels in her well-received book, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (1995); she later wrote: "Mary hooked me, and I found out that there was more to her than I knew" (Gaventa 1996, 17). Gaventa's presidential address on Rom 13 called for "a more generous hermeneutic in our scholarly discourse, one that reads both the primary texts and the work of other scholars as we ourselves wish to be read" (Gaventa 2017, 21). It is such "constructive, generous listening and learning, both of texts and of one another" that Gaventa says she has valued most highly in her experience of the Society and that she desires will continue into the future (22).⁴⁷

Chinese American Old Testament scholar Gale A. Yee holds the tenth position in the genealogy of the Society's women presidents (2019) and is also the Society's first ethnically diverse woman president. Yee's early journey to this position of well-deserved honor overlapped with mine as we shared weekly lunches and ideas with a group of women in Toronto who were at various stages of their studies in Bible. Yee describes her Toronto educational experience as one in which she "had to sink or swim in the male- and Euro-centric vortex."⁴⁸ Her journey did not end in that vortex, however, as she was also shaped by her experiences as a Catholic—now Episcopalian—and as an outsider by reason of her gender, race, and class. These experiences pushed her to experiment with a wide variety of approaches to the study of biblical texts—literary, feminist, postcolo-

47. For more on Gaventa, see her chapter "The Gift of an Unexpected Journey," in this volume.

48. See Yee's essay in this volume, "Negotiating Shifts in Life's Paradigms."

nial, and cultural criticism, among others (see, for example, 2003, 2006, 2010). Yee's contributions to the academy are significant and include her dynamic modeling of the importance of continuous engagement with new and evolving methods of reading texts.

Conclusion

This short account of the history of women in the Society of Biblical Literature suggests that women members of the Society have lives worth recording and that members today have much to celebrate. The Society is not the same small and rarefied American guild that it was in 1894 when Rhoads became the first woman member. It is also not the same organization that Tribble (1982, 3) described as one in which "women have mattered hardly at all." Today, the Society of Biblical Literature is a large, inclusive, and increasingly global organization in which women really do matter; their voices are heard at every level of the organization.

Women in the Society today, like their Society foremothers, are highly trained scholars working successfully in a wide variety of fields and sub-fields. The contents and boundaries of women's scholarship have changed however. Women's areas of scholarly expertise are now even more diverse. Some happily do the kind of scholarship early members practiced that fits into the mold of the traditional Eurocentric male, while others break rank with historical-critical scholarship by criticizing such fundamental norms as reason and objectivity and developing new approaches to reading texts. Still others try to build bridges between these approaches. We benefit from all their work. But questions remain as to what mainstream scholarship should look like.

In addition to valuing scholarship, women in the Society today, like their foremothers, value community. Many women—both past and present—mention the men (fathers and professors) and women who encouraged them on their academic journeys, and they continue to place a high value on mentoring the next generation. Some speak of how the Society's meetings enabled them to experience community or find their tribe; Crook's experience of the Society's meetings as a place to learn about the latest research and share experiences with other women who understand the challenges women face working in a male-dominated profession is still true for many women members today. We can only imagine what it was like to have been the first woman member of the Society, the first or

even tenth or one hundredth woman to give a paper before a sea of suits, the first woman chair, or the first woman president. We celebrate the courage of our Society foremothers who paved the way for the generations of women that have followed them.

Additional programming in the years that followed the notorious Centennial Meeting of 1980, including the Society's Women Members' Breakfast and other special sessions, has made it easier to foster community in an increasingly large and diverse organization. Additions have encouraged scholarship, peer mentoring, and collegial relationships and countered women's experiences of isolation and opposition. Women members do not all experience the same challenges. Sometimes their challenges are personal, sometimes theological, and sometimes systemic, as those in positions of power control university admissions, scholarships, hiring, promotion, publishing, and even the planning of meetings. More recently, and influenced by the Me-Too movement, women in the Society of Biblical Literature have named sexual harassment as an issue they face in the academy, and this reality highlights even more the importance of supportive community for women in the Society.⁴⁹

The theme of employment also surfaces in this history. During the decades in which women were encouraged to work in the home, married women who trained as scholars had to find other vocations—Mary Lyman and widows were notable exceptions. The experiences of Elizabeth Mary MacDonald (1897–1984), foremother of Canadian biblical studies, were unfortunately typical (see Idestrom 2010). Following the completion of her doctoral dissertation, "The Position of Women as Reflected in Semitic Codes of Law" (1928),⁵⁰ MacDonald was offered a position at the Royal Ontario Museum, which she turned down in order to care for her infirm mother. Then after marriage to a man who shared her love for biblical languages and history, she worked as a mother and clergy-spouse and, later, professor-spouse, keeping up her languages by speaking and writing to her husband in different languages, including the ancient Semitic languages. One year they even exchanged Christmas cards written in Aramaic (Idestrom 2010, 174). However, she was never formally employed in the academy. Like MacDonald and the Society's first member Rhoads,

49. The panelists were participating in a discussion about the "SBL as a Male-Dominated Space" at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Denver, CO, on 19 November 2018.

50. Her dissertation was published by the University of Toronto Press in 1931.

many early women scholars found it impossible to find employment in the academy. Like many contemporary Society members, they chose alternative academic careers or worked as independent scholars. Have things really changed that much?

Early on, many highly trained female academics found employment in women's college and training institutes. Corwin taught at Mount Holyoke and the Methodist Training School in Nashville; Briggs taught at the Episcopal New York Training School for Deaconesses; Woolley was a professor at Wellesley College and then president of Mount Holyoke; Hussey and Smith taught at Wellesley; Brooks was a professor at Western College for women; Lyman taught at Vassar, Barnard, and Sweet Briar College where she was also dean; and Crook taught at Smith College. But as Smith testified, even women's colleges began to replace women in the 1970s, by hiring men for their positions.

Moreover, for much of the twentieth century, most theological colleges refused to hire even the most qualified women scholars. Ernest D. Dick, the president of the Adventist Seminary where Running was hired in 1955, was not alone when he expressed his reservations about hiring a woman to teach at a seminary training men for ministry ("Leona Running Dies at 97" n.d.). Running proved his sentiments wrong, as the women who had earlier taught at conservative evangelical schools such as Nyack and Moody College had at the turn of the century (see Hassey 1986, 31–45). But qualified women even today face similar challenges to employment in a number of conservative theological institutions. In a recent podcast, conservative Reformed Baptist pundit John Piper (2018) responded negatively to a listener's question: "Should women be hired as seminary professors?" Piper's answer rested on his conviction that "If it is unbiblical to have women as pastors ..., [it cannot be biblical] to have women who function in formal teaching and mentoring capacities to train and fit pastors for the very calling from which the mentors themselves are excluded?" As long as men in positions of power hold to such views, women who want to teach in conservative denominationally affiliated colleges and seminaries will continue to face employment challenges.

If Stowe's character Mara asked today "Are there any lives of women in the Society of Biblical Literature?" what would the answer be today? The panel members who discussed issues of "systemic gender inequality" as they relate to the topic, "SBL as a Male-Dominated Space," at the November 2018 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature would likely

answer in the negative.⁵¹ They would argue that at its core, the Society is still about the lives of men and that “the very topics naturalized as ‘the important stuff’ of scholarship, the usual paths of professional success, and common institutional structures [continue to] reproduce SBL as a male-dominated space.”⁵² Panel members also shared deep stories of pain and touched on many of the issues present in the stories of other women members throughout the Society’s history. They called for systemic change.

My answer to the question, “Are there any lives of women in the Society of Biblical Literature?,” is much more positive. Researching this history has introduced me to forgotten foremothers in the academy who lived courageous and inspiring lives as they moved into a world that American women had not inhabited before. Their academic work was often of the highest quality, and their challenges as professional women in the male academy are ones with which we can easily identify. I wish that our foremothers had left us their lecture notes and diaries, which would allow us even greater insights into their lives. The lives of the Society members shaped by second wave feminism, who pushed for change not only in the structure of the Society but also in terms of the methodologies we use to analyze and interpret biblical texts, are also worth telling. Their pioneering work has changed the face of biblical studies. Thankfully the lives of many of these pioneering scholars can be more easily accessed through the Archives of Women in Theological Scholarship (n.d.).

Women members of the Society of Biblical Literature today stand on the shoulders of all the women who have gone before us. They have left us a rich legacy. Many were great scholars who made a difference in the academy and in the world and set a high bar for those who follow in their footsteps. We should celebrate their lives and embrace their courage as we take up the task of equipping the next generation of Society women “to outdo us in every field.” As part of our work, we need to rethink how we give account of our history, the history of the Society, the history of our institutions, and the history of our disciplines, including the history of the

51. As my colleague David Kupp (personal communication) suggested, the question could be expanded in light of Willie James Jennings’s (2017) Fuller address: “Can ‘White’ People Be Saved?”: “Is the Society of Biblical Literature a white male-dominated space?” and to ask the further question, “Can ‘white’ biblical scholars and scholarship that has been forcing those seeking approval and membership to conform and squeeze into its ‘white, male’ colonial mode of existence be saved?”

52. See the description of the session in the program book for the meeting.

interpretation of the Bible and other ancient texts to include the voices of women. To this end, we need to continue to recover marginalized voices and to include women's ways of hearing and interpreting texts in our commentaries, in our lectures, and on our course syllabi.

our work should equip,
 the next generation of women
 to outdo us in every field
 this is the legacy we'll leave behind
 — rupi kaur, *progress*

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PART 1

PRESIDENTIAL REFLECTIONS



DECENTERING AND RECENTERING BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA

For the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Denver, professors Fernando Segovia of Vanderbilt University and Susanne Scholz of Perkins School of Theology organized two panels—one of senior scholars who attended the event of my presidential address in 1987 and one of junior scholars whose studies have been impacted by the vision of my presidential address. These panels were convened by professors Segovia and Scholz not for personal reasons but to discuss the address's impact and influence on the Society of Biblical Literature, marking it as an event of change in the Society's self-understanding. Among the many reasons for such stock-taking were the following developments in the Society of Biblical Literature over the years:

1. The manifold theoretical and organizational developments that have taken place since the address was given;
2. The drastically changed situation of the profession;
3. Major social and cultural developments, for example, the demise of the East-West conflict in 1989–1991 and the start of the cycle of wars in the Middle East;
4. The present political situation under Trumpism¹ and its biblical right-wing support.

Such developments within the Society of Biblical Literature, including the multiplication of ideological criticisms in the field, the explosion

1. *Collins English Dictionary*: Trumpism 1. The policies advocated by Donald Trump, 2. a controversial or outrageous statement attributed to Donald Trump.

of multimedia communication possibilities, and the ever-broadening diversity of the Society's range of offerings as well as its global expansion, have not only been brought about by the geographically and historically marginalized members of the Society, but are also easily co-opted by the neoliberal academic takeover of the university, a situation that was already diagnosed by Judith Plaskow (1988, 521–38) in her presidential address for the American Academy of Religion. Rather than discussing these sociopolitical developments or the impact of my presidential address on this development, I want to point to the prehistory of this event in order to indicate how the pre- and posthistory of the address shape each other.

Let me begin with the historical location of the address. The first time I attended the 1971 Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, I was a new immigrant to the United States.² At the meeting in Atlanta I noticed a small announcement by Carol Christ inviting women scholars to come to an organizing meeting, and I decided to attend the meeting in order to meet some women colleagues. Since I had published a book on women in the church (Schüssler Fiorenza 1964), I wanted to find out how the women's movement in the States was received in the churches and how it impacted religion. At this meeting the Women's Caucus: Religious Studies was founded. Since there were only a handful of biblical scholars at the meeting and I was the only Society of Biblical Literature member willing to serve, I became with Carol Christ the first cochair of the Caucus.

According to Judith Plaskow, this meeting

Addressed the political and intellectual dimensions of women's exclusion, nominated a woman for vice-president and laid plans for a Working Group on Women and Religion in 1972 (AAR/SBL, Annual Meeting Program 1971:22). The existence of a substantial and vocal group of women who were committed both to making the ethos and structures of the Academy more hospitable to women and to doing serious scholarly work that placed women at the center, created a political and programmatic space for women's participation that could then develop in a variety of directions. (Plaskow 1988, 524)

A year later, at the International Congress of Learned Societies in Los Angeles, the Caucus called for representation of women on the various boards

2. For a biographical account, see Segovia 2003, 1–30.

and committees of American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, the anonymous submission and evaluation of manuscripts to the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, and the establishment of a job registry through the Center for the Study of Religion. At the Society of Biblical Literature business meeting, two women were elected to the Council and one to the Executive Board. Fifteen years later, I was privileged to inaugurate what I hoped would be a long line of women presidents consisting not only of white women but also of women of color,³ who were and still are woefully underrepresented in the Society of Biblical Literature.

At this meeting I also noticed that I was one of the few married women present who had a full-time position. After I had received my doctorate in Münster in the summer of 1970, no possibility existed for women theologians to teach at a Catholic Theological Faculty in Germany. Although I had received the Catholic faculty prize as well as the Nordrhein Westfalen government's prize for the best dissertation in 1970, no future in German academe existed. Hence, Francis and I decided to look for teaching positions in the United States. Because of my first book *Der vergessene Partner* (Schüssler Fiorenza 1964), I was aware of the nepotism rule that usually relegated "wives" of professors in the United States to part-time teaching. Hence, an essential part of our job negotiations was the insistence that we would only accept a faculty appointment if I received an equal faculty position. Since I was promised an equal assistant professor position at the University of Notre Dame, I accepted the invitation and started full-time teaching in the fall of 1970.

Because of my involvement with the Women's Caucus, in 1972 I was invited to a women's meeting in Grailville, Ohio, another historic meeting crucial for the development of feminist studies in religion and biblical

3. To my knowledge, only one African American and one Asian American but no Latina woman had received a doctorate at the time of the address. My colleague Dr. Katie Geneva Canon, who much too early passed on in 2018, shared her negative experiences as a student in biblical studies (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8rOCHJFvH4>) that compelled her to move to the field of ethics for obtaining a doctorate. At the time of the address, Randall Bailey (1999) presented the following statistics in a lecture on "The Current Status of Scholarly Black Biblical Interpretation in the U.S.": seventeen African Americans held doctorates in Hebrew Bible and sixteen in New Testament Studies, six of whom were wo/men, one in New Testament (and one more to graduate this spring), and five in Hebrew Bible. These statistics, which had not changed much in the ten years after the address, prove that the ethos of the discipline is kyriocentric. See Schüssler Fiorenza 1999, 20 n. 11.

studies. Approximately seventy-five women—Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and goddess worshipers, ordained ministers and scholars in religion and theology—were brought together by the National Council of Churches and the Catholic Grail movement for a workshop entitled “Women Doing Theology.” This workshop was the birthplace of feminist theology in the United States.

These two events, the 1971 Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature and the 1972 Grailville meeting, turned out to be decisive not only for me personally but, most importantly, for the development of the academic fields of feminist studies in religion and feminist the*logy. However, it must also be pointed out that neither the workshop at Grailville nor the Women’s Caucus choose to call their theoretical and organizational work “feminist.” We do not know who coined the designations “feminist studies in religion” or “feminist theology.”⁴ Both meetings opened up for me entrance not only to the emerging women’s movement in church and synagogue, but also to the American academic women’s movement in religion.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, I was active both in the Society of Biblical Literature and in the Catholic Biblical Association, the confessional brother organization of the historically Protestant-oriented Society of Biblical Literature. I served as member of the Catholic Biblical Association board, first as Consultor (1974–1976) and then as Associate Editor of *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (1974–1977), and was active in the initiation and discussions of the Task Force on “Women in Early Christianity,” which was convened during the 1978 and 1979 Annual Meetings of the Catholic Biblical Association. This Task Force was officially chaired by Rev. Richard J. Sklba and sought to study and evaluate the biblical arguments of the *Declaration Intersigniores on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*, which was issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 15 October 1976, the feast of Saint Theresa of Avila.⁵ The work and discussions of the Task Force resulted in a report that was critical of the declaration’s use of biblical texts, biblical interpretations, and arguments. Since I could not find my copy of the report when writing this article, I tried to obtain the report of the Task Force from the

4. I published my article on “Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation” in 1975.

5. See the response of leading Catholic scholars to the declaration in Swidler and Swidler 1977.

Catholic Biblical Association. However, the report could not be located.⁶ I am not sure why this is the case, but it seems most likely that the report is not available because of our critique of the papal document.

While being involved in the work of the Catholic Biblical Association, I also served as an associate on the Society of Biblical Literature Council from 1975–1978 and on the executive committee of the Society of Biblical Literature from 1984–1987. I was also a member of the Consultation and Section on Women in Scripture of the Society of Biblical Literature (1981–1982), served as cochair of the Society's Section on Women in the Biblical World (1983–1985), and was actively involved in shaping the program of the Women in the Biblical World Section panels in the beginning 90s.

The two-volume commentary project *Searching the Scriptures* grew out of a five-year-long series of discussion-panels sponsored by the Women in the Biblical World section. Section members Esther Fuchs, Catherine Kroeger, Gale Yee, and Mary Rose D'Angelo collaborated with me in organizing the Society of Biblical Literature discussion sessions on Rethinking the Woman's Bible in preparation for the 1995 centennial celebration of *The Woman's Bible* edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Esther Fuchs planned a volume on the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, whereas I was working on a N*w Testament⁷ volume. However, it must be noted that the first volume of *Searching the Scriptures* (Schüssler Fiorenza 1993) is not dedicated to Stanton but to the memory of Anna Julia Cooper, an African American foremother of feminist biblical studies. The contributors to the volume were not primarily Society of Biblical Literature members but feminist contributors located in different areas of religious studies. The second commentary volume of *Searching the Scriptures* (Schüssler Fiorenza 1994) sought to honor *The Woman's Bible* project of Stanton but did not adopt its title because of the problematic confessional and racist underpinnings of this historic work.⁸ At the same time, the panel discussions also inspired a successor volume to Stanton's *Woman's Bible* called *The Women's Bible Commentary*, which was edited by Carol Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (1992).

6. E-mail of Lisa Tarker, Executive Assistant on behalf of Catholic Biblical Association office at Catholic University of America, 4 February 2019.

7. The * in New Testament seeks to alert the reader that the name is problematic because it implies Christian supersessionism.

8. See the introduction to vol. 1.

When it was announced that I was elected as the first woman to become president of the Society of Biblical Literature, a journalist asked one of the leading officers whether I was elected because the Society wanted to acknowledge not only my active participation in the Society of Biblical Literature but also my theoretical contributions to the discipline, since my book *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1984) had appeared to high acclaim. The officer reacted with surprise and responded: "Oh no! Elisabeth was elected because of her work on the Apocalypse which proves her to be a serious and solid scholar!" It was not clear to the reporter whether he simply did not know of my feminist work or whether he did not think it was a scholarly publication because it was a book "for women."

This response convinced me that I needed not only to give an explicitly feminist presidential address, but also one that critically addressed the theoretical frameworks of biblical studies. At the same time it needed to speak to the marginalized members of the Society of Biblical Literature and place them into the center of attention. I approached this task in the full awareness that feminist biblical scholarship has its roots not in the academy but in the social movements for the emancipation of slave, freed, and freeborn women. Against the assertion that G*d has sanctioned the system of slavery and intended the subordination of women (Zikmund, 1982, 85–104), the Grimké sisters, Sojourner Truth, Jarena Lee, and others distinguished between the oppressive anti-Christian traditions of men and the life-giving intentions of God.⁹ How then was one to approach an assembly that, for the most part, considered feminist studies and other scholarly work of the margins to be unscholarly and of no significance to the academy?

Instead of calling in my presidential address for an exodus from the academy and church as many feminists at the time did, I called for a paradigm shift in the self-understanding of biblical scholarship by bringing to bear the theoretical perspectives and insights of the margins on the hegemonic center with the goal to change it. Such a change, I argued, demands a revision of the self-understanding and ethos of the discipline and the creation of biblical studies as a public-political discourse. Such a change is also best served when biblical texts and biblical scholarship are analyzed in terms of rhetoric and social location. I laid out this argument in three

9. For Jarena Lee, see Andrews 1986.

steps: I reflected on social location and biblical criticism, the rhetoric of biblical scholarship, and the ethos of biblical interpretation. I ended the address with the invitation that the Society engage in a disciplined reflection on the public dimensions and ethical implications of our scholarly work. In so doing, we “would constitute a responsible scholarly citizenship that would be a significant participant in the global discourse seeking justice and well-being for all.” I ended by asserting that “the implications of such a repositioning of the task and aims of biblical scholarship would be far-reaching and invigorating” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1988, 17).

Celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the address’s publication at the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Denver, two “Decentering Biblical Scholarship” panels were sponsored by ten Society of Biblical Literature sections and seminars, which do the work of changing the discipline: Asian, Asian American, Latinx, African American Post-colonial, Feminist, Contextual, and Rhetorical Hermeneutics, as well as Studies of Racism and Pedagogy, Reading Theory and the Bible, and Paul and Politics. This coming together of so many different theoretical change-makers was an instantiation and particular realization of the address’s call for a theoretical and practical paradigm shift that fosters a vision of biblical studies as a rhetoric, ethics, and politics of justice and wellbeing.¹⁰

Such a call is still necessary today to bring about an ethics of justice and wellbeing for everyone in these Trumpian Neoliberal times. Sharing with many the assumption that the mentality of the “old white boys club” could be changed, I did not take into account that this “scholarly old boys club” that has defined the Society of Biblical Literature in its first hundred years could give way to a neoliberal organization ruled by the market. Sessions at the Annual Meeting continue to serve scholarly debates and search for meaning, but now compete in the market place of the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature for “selling” their intellectual or published “wares.” Let me explain: the ramifications of neoliberal marketization of social assets and values are detailed in Saskia Sassen’s (2014) upsetting and frightening book *Expulsions*. Her core hypothesis is “that the move from Keynesian economics to the global era of privatization, deregulation, and open borders for some, entailed a switch from dynamics that brought people in to dynamics that push people out” (211).

10. See also my collection of essays in Schüssler Fiorenza 2014.

The world that was built in the twentieth century after the devastation, genocide, and starvation of World War II, Sassen argues, was driven by “a logic of inclusion,” by efforts to bring minorities and the poor into the political and economic mainstream. However, toward the end of the century, the Keynesian nation-based project of building a just society, she observes, began to give way to two neoliberal shifts across the world in the 1980s.

The *first neoliberal shift* required the global outsourcing of manufacturing services, clerical work, harvesting of human organs, and the raising of unregulated crops as well as the creation of global cities as strategic spaces that function as a new geography of austerity cutting across the old East/West and North/South divisions. The *second shift* produced the ascendance of finance in the network of global cities. As a consequence, it economically impoverished and excluded people who ceased to be valued as consumers and workers. The need to reduce national debts compelled governments to solve this debt problem by cutting social welfare programs and government regulations of the markets. Sassen writes, “Anything or anybody, whether a law or a civic effort, that gets in the way of profit risks being pushed aside—expelled” (213).

Plaskow details this Neoliberal development of the academy in her presidential address:

I am referring to the changing shape of higher education, the adoption of corporate models by college and university boards and administrators, and the emergence of a two-tier system of employment in academia.... While adjuncts used to be mainly specialist who supplemented the expertise of a full-time faculty, they have now become a permanent underclass that administrators increasingly rely on to hold down costs.... The problems we are experiencing in our own institutions are a part of a larger global reorganization of labor that has changed the nature of work for millions of people. (Plaskow 1988, 529)

This development has now climaxed with Trumpism in the United States. It threatens to render the social fabric and to subvert all human rights and democratic processes. These values and mindsets of neoliberalism’s agenda are practiced in the academy every semester with a “shopping” period during which professors have to advertise their wares in order to attract student consumers who at the end of the semester are compelled to evaluate the products purchased. Or, faculty are encouraged to “brand”

their courses by engaging in the process involved in creating a unique name and image for a product in the consumers' mind, mainly through advertising. Such branding aims to establish a significant and differentiated presence in the market that attracts and retains loyal customers.

White fundamentalist biblical religion has played and continues to play a significant role in the ideological neoliberal takeover. Since neoliberalism has enlisted fundamentalist biblicism for promoting its goals, feminist and other emancipatory biblical studies have become very important in the struggle against the dehumanizing mindsets, lies, and ideologies of consumer culture. However, I do not see a concerted effort either in the discipline or in affiliate organizations to address the overall impact of neoliberalism's antidemocratic and antiintellectual market forces. Some political efforts attempt to respond to single issue problems as, for instance, gay marriage or the impoverishment of children, but no program has been developed for discussing the biblical foundations of social and political responsibility in a neoliberal age and its implications for biblical studies.

As Henry Giroux details in his book *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (2014), the hostile takeover of education by corporate market forces with its vicious and predatory excesses is in the process of undermining all democratic processes and of radically reshaping the mission and practices of higher education. This process reduces human values and experiences to data that can be measured and monetized in the capitalist marketplace. Neoliberalism's multipronged assault produces cultural illiteracy, denies the resources for democratic collaboration, reduces human values and learning to that which can be measured, and undermines higher education's ability to foster values like caring for each other. Giroux also points the way to such a critical constructive response:

This is about more than reclaiming the virtues of dialogue, exchange and translation. It is about recovering a politics and inventing a language that can create democratic public squares in which new subjects and identities can be produced that are capable of recognizing and addressing the plight of the other and struggling collectively to expand and deepen the struggle for justice, freedom and democratization.... We need a language of hope, one that is realistic rather than romantic about the challenges the planet is facing and yet electrified by a realization that things can be different, that possibilities can not only be imagined but engaged, fought for, and realized in collective struggles. (204)

Seen in this light, the task of emancipatory, political, biblical interpretation is to recover the Bible as a political artifact as Scholz (2017) has proposed, not only for providing materials to delegitimize Trumpism's claim "to make America great again" and most importantly for indicting neoliberal structures of dehumanization and for recovering a radical democratic-religious language of truth, hope, human dignity, and love.

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SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE REMINISCENCES

KATHARINE DOOB SAKENFELD

Over many decades I have known that my memory retains only small snippets of my life, fleeting moments, rather like tiny clips from a movie without attention to an overarching plot or like a strobe flash illuminating micro-instants of an on-stage play. Whether family, friends, or career, this pattern is consistent and the memories typically preclude significant analysis. So here I share with you a few such clips related to the Society of Biblical Literature, generally unverifiable and even not precisely datable. Names are generally omitted simply because I cannot reconstruct the details further.

First, a brief account of my journey toward Old Testament teaching and research. Already in high school my favorite assignments were research papers; I loved investigating, digging around in sources to figure things out. My undergraduate program at the College of Wooster included a freshman course in Old Testament. I was captivated from the start by approaches never imagined in my home church experience: the documentary hypothesis, the historical context for prophetic oracles, even the possibility that influences of another religion (Zoroastrianism) might be detected in some biblical texts. Wooster required four semesters of independent study, so I looked at this new-to-me religion, Zoroastrianism, then at texts claimed by some scholars to show influence of it. But how did those scholars decide that those texts were composed late enough to be influenced by Zoroastrianism? By the documentary hypothesis. But what were the criteria for the assigning of passages to documents and time frames? Partly Hebrew vocabulary, grammar, and idiom, partly by comparison to other materials from the ancient Near East.... The desire to figure things out just kept pulling me onward, until I ended up in Harvard's program in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. The trajectory of my publications over four decades shows how far I have moved from the positivist

assumptions of my student days. My joy in exploring new frontiers has only increased as I have learned how deeply the reader's perspective and context matter for the interpretation of any text.

I completed graduate school and moved to teaching at Princeton Seminary in 1970. During my first year or two at Princeton, a graduate school colleague contacted me and a dozen or so other classmates in the region. He had landed a teaching post in New York and invited us to bring sleeping bags to his home as a base for attending the upcoming Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, riding the subway to and from the venue. We had a fabulous time—it was the beginning of decades (still ongoing) of grad school buddy reunions, and I remember walking the halls and attending papers in awe at finally seeing in person the famous scholars whose work I had studied in the past years. Significantly, I do not recall having any awareness during my grad school years in the 1960s that there was a Society behind the revered *Journal of Biblical Literature*; if there were student members, that was far beyond my horizon. What an amazing contrast to the present situation, where student members are counted in the thousands, and doctoral students typically regard a presentation on a Society program as necessary for a successful CV in a difficult job market.

In 1980 as part of the Society's centennial celebration, a panel (to which I was one contributor) was organized to comment on "The Effects of Women's Studies on Biblical Studies." Theologian Letty Russell concluded that panel with practical suggestions for moving ahead, in which she proposed cooperation with the already existing Liberation Theology Working Group of the American Academy of Religion that would welcome the formation of a "sub-group of women on feminist hermeneutics" that could work jointly with the Society of Biblical Literature (Russell 1982, 70). It is my unconfirmed recollection that in response to Russell's suggestion, and with her encouragement, another woman biblical scholar and I approached the Society program committee to request a joint American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature session on feminist biblical hermeneutics. My recollection, again unconfirmed, is that this proposal was turned down because jointly sponsored sessions were either not done or too difficult to organize. Undaunted, Russell spoke with the American Academy of Religion Liberation Theology Working Group, and they ceded a 1981 section time to papers for this project. Shortly thereafter I became a representative to a new Society of Biblical Literature program unit that eventually planned joint sessions with the American Academy of Religion group.

My first invitation to chair a session was for a series of papers on Women in the Hebrew Scriptures. I recall detailed advance mentoring by an experienced colleague in the familiar protocol of keeping the session moving forward on time—passing notes to the speaker at five-, two-, and one-minute intervals. But there was no instruction on what to do if the presenter ignored the notes, and eventually I found myself standing up close beside one speaker who refused to stop, even as I said aloud into the mike (or do I just imagine that I spoke aloud?), “I’m sorry, but we must move on.” My Princeton colleagues and I subsequently had our students rehearse their presentations before faculty and students, with group feedback on how to abbreviate papers to fit the allotted time. Eventually these rehearsal sessions became an annual Princeton student-sponsored event, with faculty present by invitation.

Over the years I served as a member of program unit steering committees representing a variety of topics, primarily related to feminist and cross-cultural hermeneutics. Of these, time on the steering committee of the Bible in Asia, Africa, and Latin America group (1992–1995) is especially memorable. We were able to organize an historic first in the history of the national programming of the Society of Biblical Literature: an entire double session (twelve speakers) of papers by women scholars from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. (Most of these papers, along with some others, were published as *Semeia* 78 [Bird 1998].) Twenty-five years ago, identifying, contacting, and inviting appropriate speakers was a significant undertaking. Even more challenging was obtaining funding to assist with the expenses of some of these women coming from distant and low GDP countries. The Society had undertaken a capital campaign that included in its case statement a reference to providing such support, and after pressure by several of us North American women, funds were released ahead of schedule to support this project. I am happy that such support has now been regularized, with a few selected international women and men receiving support for attendance at each Annual Meeting.

A range of committee service over thirty-plus years at the national level has given me a deep appreciation not only of the importance of the myriad volunteers who do much of the Society’s work, but also of the increasingly complicated responsibilities of the dedicated professional staff at work on our behalf in the Atlanta headquarters. In the late 1980s, for example, as a member of the executive committee of Council, I held the title secretary-treasurer, which actually meant that I was supposed to serve as the unpaid adviser/consultant/supervisor of the Atlanta staff. The advising was chal-

lenging because the duties of the staff itself were in flux in those years, and advising from Princeton to Atlanta by phone was hardly ideal. The subsequent development of a more formal personnel committee (still as part of the executive committee of Council) that met periodically on site with staff greatly improved the professionalism of relationship between staff and the unpaid executive leadership.

As a member of the Annual Meeting Program Committee (1988–1991), I was initiated into the procedures for approving applications for new or renewal program units. Particularly memorable was the fresh attention given to gender diversity on the steering committees listed in the applications. A number of applications were remanded to the units with request for the addition of women scholars to their planning teams. I believe that this happened only when members of our committee could identify potential women with appropriate specializations, although we did not offer any specific names. In a small way, this structural challenge sought to open a door for the decentering called for in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's 1987 presidential address (see Schüssler Fiorenza 2006).

In the mid-1990s I served on the Nominating Committee. The entire membership of the Society was invited to propose names for a variety of positions, with the presidency clearly of the most interest. I was surprised at how few responses we received to the call for nominations. A roster of nominees was kept over the years, and the committee discussed possibilities by phone and email. The nominee during my last year on the committee was Prof. Patrick Miller (1998 president). This selection was complicated by the fact that Miller was my immediate colleague at Princeton Seminary. Although the committee had only three members, we found a way for me to recuse myself, and it was noted that his name had been on the nomination list for a number of years. A personal highlight of my life was creating a ruse to invite myself to Pat and Mary Ann's for lunch to "ask Pat to help with something" and then presenting Pat, overwhelmed and deeply moved, with a bottle of champagne. Pat wondered incredulously whether this invitation was really real. A decade later I expressed the same wonder when my friend Sidney White Crawford, then chair of the Nominating Committee, offered me the same invitation. How could it happen that a kid from rural Appalachia ends up standing in front of the Society with no questions allowed at the end....

As I look back on my 2007 presidential address (see Sakenfeld 2008), I see that I attempted to meld two of the principal approaches past presidents have taken to this assignment: some sense of where the discipline

might be/should be heading and a focused analysis of a particular text. It is my sense that in the intervening decade the range of voices from different perspectives heard at the Annual Meeting has continued to increase, as I had hoped. Yet the very proliferation of voices may be leading to a degree of unintended ghettoization, as attendees are easily tempted to choose sessions that will represent (albeit perhaps expand) their current perspectives rather than those that may offer uncomfortable challenges. How would our take-away from the meeting change if each of us committed to attend one session outside of our comfort zone, one where we did not expect to be at ease with what we were hearing?

I close with my recollection of one of the most precious moments of my career: the receiving of the Mentoring Award from the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession in 2003. To hear former students testify in a public forum that my teaching had made a difference was a gift to be treasured for a lifetime. In the early years of attending the Annual Meeting, it was a priority for me to meet with my own teachers, usually in a group setting since their students were legion. Now it is my joy to spend time with my own past students, catching up now as friends and colleagues, knowing that they are making a difference for their students even as my teachers did for me, and as I did in some small way for them in their student years. And, of course, the range of topics on each year's program makes me feel like a youngster in an ever-expanding candy store!

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BECOMING A BIBLICAL SCHOLAR: A MISFIT'S SEARCH FOR MODELS AND MENTORS

CAROL A. NEWSOM

Like many biblical scholars, I first became interested in the Bible through exposure in a religious community. It wasn't until much later that I realized what an unusual church it was. McCoy Methodist church in Birmingham, Alabama, was located adjacent to Birmingham-Southern College, and many of the faculty attended the church and assumed leadership roles. I recall my mother wondering why the leader of her Sunday School class read from the New Testament in such a slow and deliberate manner. Then she realized that it was because he was translating from the Greek. Max Miller, a famously skeptical biblical historian and later to be one my colleagues at Emory University, was also one of the adult education leaders. A revival held in 1964 was preached by Thomas Ogletree, later to become dean of Yale Divinity School. So, even though I grew up in the Bible Belt, my exposure to religion and to the Bible was liberal and critical from the beginning. It was only later that I discovered that people read the Bible in any other way.

Although as a child I had considered whether some kind of vocation related to the church might be possible (women were just beginning to be ordained in the Methodist church), during high school other potential career paths also seemed attractive. My involvement with the high school debate team was profoundly formative for my intellectual development. We were expected to read widely and deeply in order to prepare for our topics. The first year I participated in the program the topic was nuclear disarmament, and though it did not seem odd to me, I suspect relatively few fourteen-year old girls were carrying around Henry Kissinger's *Nuclear Disarmament and Foreign Policy* in their book bags! As our team traveled to tournaments across the country, we met other similarly

geeky teenagers who were as intellectually serious as we were. Although girls were definitely a minority in high school debate in the 1960s, our debate coach, Ann Gibbons, had recruited a number of girls for the team. As a sophomore, I was paired with a senior girl, Wanda Wells, who became both my model and mentor. After a day's work at the library, she would look over my notecards, tossing out the ones that she said were "worthless" and pointing out which ones were valuable and why. Debate, by its nature, is an assertive and even aggressive sport, which is one of the reasons I enjoyed it! But girls had to be careful about how they embodied this stance, and Wanda modeled for me how to project confident assertiveness that wouldn't get called out for being too aggressive. It may or may not surprise those who know me that I often did get called for being too aggressive in cross-examination.

My interest in religion continued, though it became complicated by my conviction that I was probably an atheist. But I still read with great interest the books my parents brought home from their church study club, including works by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich. Moreover, the English curriculum on the Transcendentalists during my junior year in high school highlighted the influence of Hinduism on this movement, and so I read and was fascinated by the Bhagavad Gita. So many religions, so little time!

As I entered college (at Birmingham-Southern, since my mother worked on the staff, and the tuition discount trumped all my arguments for a school farther away from home), I assumed I would pursue some field related to the issues that had engaged me in debate team—perhaps political science or economics. In my sophomore year, however, I took an Introduction to the Old Testament course from Roy Wells. I vividly remember the mid-October afternoon when he was lecturing on the ancient Near Eastern context—as I recall, the topic was the Mitannians and the development of chariot warfare. The thought blossomed in my head: "They *pay* him to do this!" I literally couldn't think of anything more wonderful to study than the ancient Near East and all its religions. But, although I yearned to become an Old Testament professor (the terminology of "Hebrew Bible" was not yet used), the year was 1968, and the prospect of such a career seemed unconscionably too ivory-towerish. Lawyers had been in the vanguard of progressive change in civil rights and other social movements, and since my father was an attorney and the field was somewhat familiar to me, I decided to go to law school. My grades and scores were sufficient to get into Harvard Law School, so off I went in the fall of 1971.

My great discovery during the academic year of 1971–1972 was that you can't "will" a vocation. The education at Harvard Law was superb. I had to think and write more rigorously than I ever had before, and for that I am forever grateful. I volunteered to write a legal memorandum for the newly established Southern Poverty Law Center on the "implied warranty of habitability," and when I turned in my draft to the third-year law student who was supervising our projects, he gave it back to me with fully 20 percent of my words crossed out in red! It was a wonderful lesson on concise writing, and I wish he were still available to edit my drafts now. But as much as I valued the education I was receiving, it quickly became apparent to me that my heart was not in it. The only parts of the curriculum that truly appealed to me were the brief forays into legal history. I had to confront the fact that I am more of an antiquarian than an activist, even though I had wished it were otherwise. My fiancé and soon to be husband, Rex Matthews, recognized the extent of my unhappiness even before I did. One day he brought me a present—the paperback abridgment of James B. Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Pictures* (1973–1976). Fearing that if I finished the law degree I would feel compelled to make good use of it, I decided to withdraw at the end of my third semester and to enter Harvard Divinity School to do a masters of theological studies, so that I could get the languages I needed for doctoral study in religion. Rex celebrated my decision by giving me the big *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Pritchard 1969) for Christmas, a volume that I use to this day.

When I entered Harvard Divinity School, however, I still hadn't decided between my initial love of the Old Testament and my fascination with Hinduism and Buddhism. Moreover, an "Anthropology of Primitive Religions" class (yes, it was actually called that, then!) opened up altogether new ways of studying religion. Nevertheless, clarity came as I wrote an exegesis paper on Ps 82 for G. E. Wright's Old Testament class. This is my intellectual home, I realized, and I need to pursue it. I made an appointment with Frank Cross to talk about the Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations program. I knew he talked to a number of people about their interests, but I had a way to make sure he remembered who I was. He and I had gone to the same high school in Birmingham, Alabama—though many years apart, to be sure. His father had been the Presbyterian minister in the neighborhood. So we had a lovely time reminiscing about Ensley High School and even concluded that we had one of the same English teachers, he at the beginning of her career, I at the end of her career. I confessed that I wasn't sure I had the capacity to master all of the languages

required for the program, and he just said, "Well, we'll know by the time you've finished your masters degree." So I set about filling up my schedule with what I needed: Hebrew, Aramaic, Akkadian, even historical Hebrew grammar with the amazing Tom Lambdin. I also had the great privilege of studying with Thorkild Jakobsen in his last year of his teaching and then with William Moran, who was fearsome in teaching Akkadian but was a humanist of the broadest interests.

Back in the early 1970s, there were not many graduate programs that focused on Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East, and the programs at Harvard and Yale dominated the field. It made more sense for me to remain at Harvard in the Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations program, since my husband was also interested in pursuing a doctoral degree in the Church History program and was already managing the Harvard Divinity School Bookstore, an institution that became legendary under his leadership. The Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations curriculum, however, still bore the imprint of its intellectual heritage in the W. F. Albright tradition. It was strong in ancient Near Eastern languages, archaeology, and a somewhat distinctive approach to the history of religion. Even though Cross had brought a much more intellectually sophisticated perspective to the program, and even though I was excited by the situating of Israelite traditions in relation to ancient Near Eastern mythic traditions, I found much of the curriculum to be intellectually stifling. So I became something of an intentional misfit in the program.

This was the 1970s. Structuralism was the intellectual movement *du jour*. I had always been intrigued by the intersection between literary and biblical studies, and so, during the summer after my first year in the program, I decided to educate myself in structuralism and to apply it to biblical texts, presenting my results in the common seminar where our independent research was subjected to critique by a team of faculty and student critics. My "Structural Analysis of the Elijah-Elisha Cycle" was met, as I should have expected, with hostile criticism. It was as though I had committed an obscene act in the seminar! I was hurt, angry, crushed, furious. Finally, however, I made my peace. I would learn the languages, linguistics, and disciplines that this program could teach me so well. And then, once I had graduated, I would educate myself in those things that I longed to study. Actually, that turned out to be an excellent way to proceed. It is always relatively easy to educate oneself in those things one loves. But to learn those things that one is not drawn to requires some external structure and incentive. The result was that I learned much more about

philology and linguistics than I would ever have pushed myself to learn, and these disciplines have served me very well in all of my subsequent work. But I also learned what kind of a scholar I was *not*.

One of the great values of a good graduate program, of course, is the fellowship with the other graduate students. I learned so much from all of them, particularly to become aware of and to value the diverse intellectual styles that different scholars manifest. Despite our common interests, we had very different minds. I was also fortunate that there were several women in the program. Susan Niditch was in the class ahead of me, and Jo Ann Hackett and I entered the same year. We used to boast that our entering class was 40 percent female—there were two of us out of the five admitted that year. The friendships forged during those years have lasted until this day. But in addition to these remarkable women were a host of exceptional male students whose varied gifts have played out in a variety of distinguished careers. To recognize and to honor both one's own and others' varied intellectual styles is, I think, one of the best learnings that can come out of graduate education.

Although I had been privileged to have good mentors in high school and in college, graduate school is where mentorship first becomes tightly connected to one's academic future. I was deeply fortunate in this regard. No, that is not quite right. I was insanely lucky. Although I had entered the program intending to study early Israelite traditions and so had assumed I would work primarily with Cross, I found my interests shifting toward later and later materials, becoming intrigued by the newly reviving interest in early Jewish pseudepigrapha. I took a couple of courses with John Strugnell, who was a wonderfully colorful and utterly delightful scholar. I had some vague ideas about a possible dissertation topic when I went to him to float my ideas about critiques of the temple in Second Temple Judaism. "Well, Miss Newsom," he said, "I'm afraid it might not be possible to do that topic until the Qumran Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice have been published." I was crushed. I didn't have any other ideas. But then he continued, "so why don't you do that for your dissertation?" He pulled out a rather beat up and soiled file-folder of photographs of the Qumran Sabbath Songs and handed them to me. Naively, I flipped through the photos and thought, "Gee, I wonder if there is enough here to make a dissertation." I was such a neophyte and so naïve that I still am amazed that he was willing to entrust such a treasure to me for my dissertation.

Strugnell was a marvelous intellectual mentor. He didn't direct the dissertation exactly. But as I brought him work in progress, he would correct

it—unstintingly! I finally worked up the courage to ask him one week if there was anything I had done that he thought was any good. “Oh,” he said, “if I don’t comment on it, it’s fine.” It was good for me, a “praise junkie,” to learn to live without praise and to take satisfaction in developing my own sense of what was good in my work. Strugnell was also generous in the way he let me grow. When we once disagreed over a particular reading, he finally commented, “Well, Miss Newsom, I don’t agree with you. But it is *your* dissertation.” That was a gift. He didn’t try to save me from what he saw as my mistaken judgment. Nor was he so protective of his own identification with the text that he would bully me into his perspective. He was willing to argue his case against mine and then let me go my own way. I’ve always tried to embody his wisdom in my own mentoring of graduate students. I still miss his acute judgment, his delight in the texts, and his generous acceptance of what he saw as my odd intellectual bent.

I was also never oblivious to the fact that his giving me the opportunity to prepare a critical edition of a major text from the Dead Sea Scrolls gave me immediate visibility in the scholarly world as no critical monograph ever could have. Even those senior scholars in the field who strongly disapproved of Strugnell’s making use of graduate students to edit texts were always scrupulously fair in their evaluation of our work. They welcomed us into the community of Qumran scholars without prejudice. Through the experience of working with this text I also received a second important mentor whose generosity rivaled that of Strugnell himself. As I had worked on my fragmentary manuscripts, I had been able to make some modest observations about the structure of the original composition. But my dissertation was, essentially, a study of the fragments. One day, after I had graduated and taken up a teaching position, a small package from Germany arrived at my office. When I opened it, it was a fold-out of a reconstruction of the major scroll fragments developed by Prof. Hartmut Stegemann. He simply wanted me to have it for my research, he said. He had made a major intellectual breakthrough on reconstructing scrolls from fragments, had applied it to my text, and then just sent it to me as a gift. Fortunately, I was able to work directly with Stegemann over the next few years, learning his method and refining, with him, the work on the Sabbath Songs. Once again, it had been my great good fortune to find a mentor of astounding generosity.

Certainly not all women of my generation had their paths into scholarship paved so smoothly by kind mentors. There were many in various places who were met with skepticism about their academic seriousness,

opposition to their entry into the “boys only” club of scholarship, and even sexual harassment and other forms of intimidation. To my naïve surprise, I, too, discovered that not everyone who met me saw me as a scholar. I had not intended to apply for any jobs in 1979. I had just begun my dissertation and had a fellowship for a dissertation year. But in late spring of 1979, Paul Hanson received a call from someone at the Emory University School of Theology (aka Candler School of Theology) about an unexpected job opening they had. Paul urged me to apply. It was not the kind of job I had envisioned. Having loved my liberal arts undergraduate education, I wanted to teach in a similar kind of institution. But I had been worried about having no control over where in the vast United States I might end up, and, somewhat to my surprise, I had realized that I did want to return to the south. (Living in Boston had persuaded me that racism was an American problem, not just a Southern problem. There was no running away to some utopia.) So here was a job that could take me back south again. But it would be a seminary, not a liberal arts college. I decided that it was unlikely that they would ever hire me. After all, I had next to no theological education, and though I was, as I liked to describe myself, incurably religious, I hadn’t been grounded in a church context for a long time. But it seemed to me that it would be good to get some experience in doing a job interview, so I decided to apply.

Probably, if the job interview had been more thorough, they would never have offered me the job, and I would never have accepted it. But the interview process in those days was more abbreviated than it is now. And Candler had already made up its mind that it was time to be hiring some women onto the faculty. Indeed, the first tenure track/tenured woman had been hired just the year before. That was Roberta Bondi, who held a degree in semitics from Oxford University, where she had specialized in Syriac patristics, and who had subsequently been teaching at Notre Dame. The dean, Jim Waits, and the associate dean, the Old Testament professor Gene Tucker, were determined to hire another woman. And though the faculty in general was on board, the faculty in biblical studies was skeptical about me. Their advisory vote, as I accidentally came to discover later, was 4 to 1 against hiring me. Only Gene supported my hiring. To be honest, I’m not sure I would have hired me either. Not at that time. I had just begun my dissertation. I was a huge gamble. I also realized that many of those men also couldn’t put together the two terms “woman” and “serious scholar.” But fortunately, Gene and Dean Waits and the rest of the faculty did see potential in me and decided to take the risk. To their credit, all of my male

colleagues in biblical studies were very supportive once I came on board. But it wasn't lost on me that they were still making an adjustment in putting together the terms "woman" and "serious scholar." I knew that I had something to prove. (*Sigh*).

Why did I accept the job there rather than hold out for a position at a liberal arts school? I honestly am not sure. There was something astonishing to me about the sense of collegiality that I witnessed even in the course of the short interview. And that was not a mistake. Candler has been characterized by a carefully cultivated ethos of deep collegiality that I have come to value more and more as I have lived out my career in its midst. But even then I sensed how important it could be. Also, I was also aware that Emory had recently made a significant commitment to a graduate PhD program in religion. And it was very attractive to have the opportunity to work with advanced students. But in making the decision to go to Candler I had once again chosen a position that would make me a misfit—a person whose intellectual orientation was to religious studies in a humanities context but teaching in a theological seminary. In all honesty, I can't say that that has ever been an easy fit. But I loved the way the theological context drew me into more serious hermeneutical questions than I might have engaged in an undergraduate liberal arts context. And I think the students were stimulated by my situating the courses I taught not just within a confessional context but within the context of how theology engaged the humanities more broadly. I discovered that my intellectual proclivity was to prowl the borderlands of things. It's true. I hate belonging. I'm only happy moving back and forth across a border.

I was also fortunate at Candler to find a marvelous mentor in Gene. In my naïveté, I had no idea that Gene had a kind of checklist of professional development goals for me that he was going to be sure that I had the opportunity to fulfill. After I had finally finished my PhD, two years after I had started teaching, Gene insisted that I should apply for a grant to turn it into a book—and not just any grant, but a National Endowment for the Humanities grant. I was so naïve; I didn't realize that it was appropriate to inform the dean that you were going to apply for a grant for an off-cycle leave. I wrote the proposal and showed it to Gene. He gave it back. "You aren't selling your project," he said. And he was right. So, I rewrote my project on the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and, for the first time, fully realized just what an amazing text it was that I was bringing back from two thousand years of oblivion. I wrote with passion and, to my delight, got the grant. Graciously, my dean did give me the year off! But Gene also

engineered all kinds of other opportunities for me. There were invitations to write for various projects, invitations to be an associate editor for projects, and invitations to play a role in the Society of Biblical Literature.

Was I an affirmative-action baby? Yes, in many ways, I was. I got opportunities that I probably would not have gotten except that the academy needed women, and I had some people who spoke up for me. I had to process that. But in most of those contexts I did not doubt that I was up to the job, and it was important for women to be more present. So I never felt guilty about the opportunities that came my way. There were a few contexts, however, in which I experienced some resentment that I was serving an institution's agenda more than my own. But I began to learn that one also had to say "thank you very much, but no." I think that the larger conclusion that I would draw from my experience is not just that underrepresented populations need mentoring but that almost everybody in the field needs mentoring when they begin. As we age into the field, we tend to forget what we once did not know, what now comes by instinct about how professional development works. And we should be generous with our time in mentoring each and every student and junior colleague. But those people who have not grown up with the subliminal knowledge that comes with a familiarity of academic culture have a particular need of attentive but nonpatronizing mentors. Of course, it can also be possible to over mentor. Looking back on my own development, I would probably advise my younger self somewhat differently than I was advised. And I could wish that Gene and I had had more explicit conversations about goals and the means toward them. Not everybody wants the same things for themselves. But I say that not as a dissatisfaction with my mentoring but simply as what I have learned.

While I was still in graduate school, just at the time in the mid-1970s when feminist scholarship was beginning to appear in biblical studies, I was warned time and again that, while it was fine to *be* a feminist, I certainly should *not write* any feminist scholarship. That would derail my career because it simply was not taken to be serious scholarship. And so I was glad at the time that my dissertation was a totally traditional piece of philological scholarship. What could be more scholarly than a text edition of an unpublished Dead Sea Scroll? I was in the tradition of Erasmus and the Renaissance humanists! And I did love it, heart and soul.

Then I started teaching. I still remember writing out my first lectures for my wisdom literature class. I unselfconsciously still used generic "he," "him." But when I came to *do* the lectures, those words stuck in my throat.

I found them difficult to say. I realized I was particularly interested in the role of women and female symbolism in the wisdom tradition. But that was *just* teaching—not what I did in print. It was safe to explore my budding feminist interests there. A few years into my career at Candler, Cynthia Thompson, an editor at Westminster/John Knox Press asked me if I would be interested in editing a commentary to be written by women authors featuring feminist scholarship. “Oh, no,” I said. “As much as I’d love to see such a work, that’s really not what I do.” “Fine,” said the sly Cynthia. “I understand. But I do wonder if you’d take the time to write us a memo about what you’d like to see included in such a volume that might be useful to your teaching.” Ah, Cynthia! Of course, by the time I had finished my little memo concerning what I saw as the value of such a volume and what I saw that it might accomplish, I was begging to be one of the editors. Here I was, asking to be a misfit again. Fortunately, Cynthia had also been signing up a New Testament editor, the amazing Sharon Ringe, and so sometime in 1986, I think it was, we began to plan the first *Women’s Bible Commentary*.

I hadn’t been kidding Cynthia when I confessed my ignorance about feminist hermeneutics. I really was behind the curve. I had been teaching enough by then to see the need, but I didn’t have the expertise. Fortunately, Cynthia and Sharon were gentle mentors to me, and so, as we began to develop the first edition of the *Women’s Bible Commentary* (1992), I began to learn about feminist hermeneutics. Putting together a roster of women biblical scholars to cover every canonical book in the Protestant canon in 1987 was still a bit of a stretch. But when we looked, we did find them. Naively, Sharon and I thought that the shelf life of the *Women’s Biblical Commentary* would be about five to seven years. Then there would be less need for it. The popularity of the volume surprised us. And we realized that we had made a mistake in not including the wonderful materials in the apocrypha/deuterocanonical texts. So, the revised and expanded edition (1998) included those. Still, we thought that the volume would complete its mission and then pass out of print within a few years. It never dawned on us that we would need to publish a twentieth anniversary edition (2012), with the inclusion of the excellent Jacqueline Lapsley as the third editor.

Working on the *Women’s Bible Commentary*, however, quickly exposed us to the complexities of what it means to do feminist scholarship. I’m not sure that the term *intersectional* was in currency in the late 1980s, but we quickly became aware of those issues. Our roster of contributors was

largely North American, largely white, mostly Christian. Moreover, we had one author-voice for each biblical book. These days I don't have to spell out what is wrong with this model. But we were also up against the limits of what it was possible to do with any single project and especially one that was to be published in physical form. So, we decided simply to admit the limits of what we were attempting and to acknowledge that what we were doing was parochial, both in the negative sense of the term but also in the positive sense of the term—we were writing from a particular neighborhood and hoping to hear from other neighborhoods. Now, of course, one can find in biblical scholarship a rich environment of many different neighborhoods of interpretation. But I still think that the medium of print limits what we all yearn to see. Sharon and I decided that we would be too old to participate in a thirtieth anniversary edition, but it would be exciting to see if a web-based project might finally bring into being a rich and interactive conversation that does justice to a truly multivocal and evolving feminist interpretation of the Bible.

My involvement with the Society of Biblical Literature had begun in 1978 when I attended my first meeting in Saint Louis. I still remember just going around the meeting looking at name tags and then at faces. So *that's* Michael Stone, I remember thinking. The academic heroes of my reading lists were actual flesh and blood people! But mostly they didn't look anything like how I had imagined them. The size and scope of Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature in those days were so different than the present that I honestly do not know how to communicate the sea change. Later, in my teaching, I used to ask graduate students to do an exercise. I would put before them the 1975 Annual Meeting program book and the one from 1995 and ask them to analyze the differences. It was astonishing. In 1975, the field was almost entirely devoted to traditional historical critical fields of inquiry, with just a hint of literary and sociological approaches. But by 1995 it was an intellectual marketplace of astonishing variety. Those were the crucial years for the methodological explosion that took place in biblical studies. And the second half of that period was when I became more deeply involved in the Society of Biblical Literature.

Looking back, I can see that my mentor, Gene Tucker, made sure I got involved. I was invited to join the Nominating Committee in the late 1980s. Then I was asked to be on the Executive Committee (a body that no longer exists) from 1992 to 1995 in a role that combined being Program Committee chair with a position that involved being the liaison

between the Executive Committee and the paid staff. What I don't think many people now realize is how rapidly the Society of Biblical Literature transformed its institutional existence during those years. Before the mid-1980s the Society had been run as a small professional society, with a part-time executive secretary, who would be a faculty member at some institution but who worked half-time in directing the Society of Biblical Literature, mostly coordinating the Annual Meeting. But it had become evident in the mid-80s that the Society needed a full-time director with a slightly larger staff. This transition took place in 1987 with the hiring of the first full-time executive director, David Lull, and an enhanced staff, consisting of an associate director Gene Lovering and two administrative staff. Although David's and Gene's job was slightly less demanding than creating the world *ex nihilo* in seven days, there were similar challenges. My involvement on the Executive Committee in the early 1990s overlapped the later part of this transition time. Looking back, I can see now just how momentous the changes were, and how difficult. Via the institution of Scholars Press (1974–1999), the Society had also moved into significant publishing ventures in addition to the ever-expanding Annual Meeting. These were highly creative but contentious years for discerning the best institutional models for securing the goals of the Society of Biblical Literature. The Society was reinventing its sense of what it could be. But in this transition we were an awkward hybrid of volunteer and professional leadership. I certainly often felt that I was in over my head in terms of knowing how our different leadership components should relate. I was fortunately, however, to be serving alongside Phyllis Tribble, the second woman to be president of the Society of Biblical Literature and the first from the field of Hebrew Bible. I learned so much from her poise, wisdom, and insight. Within a few years a new structure of governance and professional leadership had been developed that has allowed the Society to flourish as it undertakes new ventures.

At the same time that I was learning about feminist hermeneutics and the dynamics of institutions in transition, I was developing my plans for the book I would write after the publication of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (1985). My intellectually misfit nature was in full force. I loved these Qumran texts, but I found the field of Qumran studies to be almost unendurably intellectually claustrophobic. Even when judged by the standards of the still methodologically conservative field of biblical studies, Qumran research seemed mired in a past century. That part of me that had prowled into the regions of structuralism was now exploring what

was going on in the 1980s world of poststructuralism and postmodernism. And through the work of Fredric Jameson I grasped the connections to the extraordinary prescient work of the social rhetorician Kenneth Burke (“St. Kenneth” in my pantheon of academic saints). I was on fire. Already in 1987 I recall confessing to Gene Ulrich at a conference in London that I had this strange, radical idea for what I wanted to do with Qumran texts and postmodern rhetoric. This would not, of course, have been Gene’s cup of tea at all, but I remember his gracious response. “Well,” he said, “I think your text edition of the Sabbath Songs has earned you enough credit to be able to do something experimental if you want.” He has never known how much that comment meant to me. I knew I was trying something risky. But I hadn’t realized how difficult it would be for me to bring it together.

The research for the book that ultimately became *The Self as Symbolic Space* (2004) had an auspicious beginning and then began what looked like a death spiral! I got a grant for my idea, and it was on my 1989–1990 sabbatical that I first read the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who was to become so central to my understanding of what I wanted to do in biblical scholarship. I had looked into his work initially because I thought he could help me understand the ideological dialect created by the Qumran community. I found, however, that I was so confused as to my methodological approach to my project (was it to be rhetorical? postmodern? but yet philological?) that I couldn’t conceptualize the book as a whole. I presented some papers, most of which were received with perplexity or polite distaste. There are few darker moments in a scholar’s life than to have a work that one believes in remain stubbornly inchoate. Finally, I put it aside. I had, I thought, a failed project. It was time to move on.

The years in which I was working on that project also gave me an insight into what seemed then to be an intellectually divided Society of Biblical Literature. In presenting papers and doing responses I ricocheted between Qumran sessions, where my methods were considered bizarre, and postmodern methods sessions, where my choice of texts was seen as odd. But the mid-1990s were a time when the Society was in fact intellectually bifurcated, with a lot of mutual suspicion between what appeared to be different scholarly camps—traditional historical-critical scholars and those who challenged the hegemony of historical-critical scholarship. It would be informative to compare a program book from 1995 with one from 2015, because I think there is now considerable fluidity between traditional methods and new ones. Differences remain, but the common ground of what counts as scholarship is much, much broader. At some

point, we exhaled and began to see that traditional and innovative approaches could, in fact, be mutually informative.

Back in the mid-1990s I was regularly teaching a course on the book of Job, and, not surprisingly, I began to find that Bakhtin was an ideal fit for understanding how the book of Job works. Bakhtin's insights into the dialogical nature of language and human interactions just made the book of Job blossom as I taught it. But I hadn't considered making Job a part of my research agenda. Then two things happened. I was approached with an invitation to join the editorial team of a large reference-work project on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Uh-oh. I was in danger of belonging. I remember making the decision in a split second. It was, truly, a flight response. "No, thank you," I said. "I need a break from incomplete sentences," referring to the broken nature of Qumran texts. But it was really my fear of having my identity consolidated as "Carol, who does Dead Sea Scrolls." Bakhtin would have understood. "Ah," he would have said, "you don't want anyone to *finalize you*."

The second fortuitous event was that I was invited to contribute to the *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. I agreed, if I could have Job. That was a wonderful experience. Although the commentary was pitched as a mid-level, accessible commentary, I was able to work through the text with Bakhtin's dialogical insights in mind (Newsom 1996). The theory was all there, though never explicit and always tucked into the exegetical discussion. A few years later I wrote *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Newsom 2003) in order to focus more clearly on the theoretical bases for the reading I had done. This extended immersion with Bakhtin's work had the added benefit of providing me with a way of reading texts that I thought might break the mental logjam that had derailed my research on *The Self as Symbolic Space*. But I was still uncertain. Then, in one of those serendipitous moments that seems almost too good to be true, on the very day that I began my sabbatical year that was to be the "get it done or give it up" time for that Qumran project, I dropped by the university bookstore. True to my border-crossing instincts, I was browsing the shelves in the anthropology section, when I picked up Dorothy Holland et al., *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (1998). It was the missing intellectual link, a model of cultural anthropology deeply indebted to the work of Bakhtin and his circle. Now I had what I needed to pull the project together. Somehow her work and its insights allowed me to orchestrate all of the many different approaches that had seemed so discordant and to pull them together into a single story about language and identity and the making and remaking of identity.

Though I have done other work since, it was the process of writing these projects that finally allowed me to develop the kind of approach to biblical studies that best suited my own intellectual style. While I began as something of a rebellious intentional misfit in the field, by the time I finished these projects I realized that my way of doing biblical studies in conversation with other disciplines was no longer considered transgressive but had, in fact, become something that many scholars, especially younger ones, embraced as their own accepted way of doing scholarship. My own intellectual trajectory has been part of a larger movement in our field, one that is reflected in many ways in the life of the Society of Biblical Literature. By the time I served as president in 2011, I realized that I could easily present my work-in-progress as the presidential address and have it recognized as quite representative of contemporary biblical scholarship. Indeed, looking at and listening to recent presidential addresses I am impressed by the variety and richness of the ways in which we, as an intellectual community, have collectively reimagined what it means to foster biblical scholarship.

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ACCIDENTAL BIBLICAL SCHOLAR

CAROL MEYERS

Let me be clear. I did not set out to enter the guild of biblical scholarship. It was an accident, or perhaps a serendipitous byproduct, of my college experience. Several aspects of my undergraduate education—Bible study was required, my professors were dedicated to research as well as teaching, and my undergraduate school was a woman's college in the 1960s—contributed strongly to my decision to seek graduate training and then a career in biblical studies.¹ I'll first describe each of these aspects and then offer some reflections about my experiences as a member of the Society of Biblical Literature and about the role of women in its governance and scholarship.

The Road to Biblical Scholarship: College Experience

When I entered Wellesley College in the fall of 1960, studying any religious tradition, let alone biblical tradition, was about the furthest thing from my mind. My first-year studies focused on math and science. Then came my sophomore year and a two-course Bible requirement. At that time, one could not graduate without taking a semester each of Old Testament and New Testament, together traditionally called "sophomore Bible." I never would have taken those courses had they not been mandatory. In fact, I do not think I noticed that requirement when applying to Wellesley. I had not made a campus visit, and no one from my small-town public high school had ever gone there. I knew relatively little about the college or its curriculum.

Some background on the Bible requirement at Wellesley informs what I encountered in sophomore Bible. The college welcomed its first students

1. Some of the reflections about my career path appear in Brettler n.d.

in 1875, and from the outset the “study of Bible was considered an essential part of the education of all Wellesley students” (Onderdonk 1975, 130).² This requirement, which originally meant daily Bible study for spiritual purposes, soon became a credit course involving lectures by specialists. By the 1890s Greek and Hebrew were also offered, and the Bible curriculum was shaped by professors trained in the higher criticism that had emerged in Germany and become influential in North America (Kendrick 1932, 13–14). In 1892 a separate department of Biblical History, Literature, and Interpretation was established, and a major was instituted in 1901. The college president soon proclaimed that the department’s curriculum was exceptionally rich, providing an opportunity for study excelling “that of any other college from which statistics have been obtained” (Carolyn Hazard, cited in Onderdonk 1975, 142). The department took seriously its task of making Bible study “academically rigorous and intellectually satisfying” (Onderdonk 1975, 142). The emphasis on rigorous engagement with higher-critical principles of biblical study continued unabated and strongly characterized the courses I took in the early 1960s, by which time the department had become one of the college’s largest departments and arguably one of the outstanding such departments in the country.³

My introductory Old Testament course was intentionally multidisciplinary. The first sentence on the syllabus handed to me on the first day of class, which is one of the few documents I’ve retained from college days, describes the course this way: “The approach to the material employs literary, historical, and theological methods which are basically interdependent.” It also used materials from art history, archaeology, and the social sciences. As the syllabus explained, the course would examine “the matrix of events, personalities and ideas that produced the literature and thought of the Bible” and also reconstruct “the cultural, intellectual, and religious contexts in which the biblical communities emerged and

2. The founder of Wellesley College, Henry Fowle Durant, fervently believed that “education without religion is a wayless night without a star, a dead world without a sun” (cited in Taylor 1975, 16). Moreover, he asserted that “the real meaning of the Higher Education of Women [was] ... revolt ... against the slavery in which women are held by the customs of society—the broken health, the aimless lives, the subordinate position, the helpless dependence” (cited in Horowitz 1984, 44).

3. The 1932–1965 heyday of the Bible department ended after 1968 with the abandonment of required Bible courses (which meant emending the college’s bylaws; so Quarles 1975, 401). The department subsequently changed its name to Religion and Biblical Studies and later became simply Department of Religion.

produced their distinctive literature and theologies.” Long before interdisciplinary work became fashionable in academia, the Bible department encouraged students to engage a variety of materials and methods in an attempt to understand the literature and lifeways of the biblical past. Although my instructor for that course was not particularly inspiring, I was hooked—not only on biblical studies but also on multidisciplinary approaches. I began to study Hebrew, and I chose Bible as my major.

By the beginning of my junior year, I was also hooked on archaeology. That too was accidental and somewhat serendipitous. It began as a lark in the summer after my sophomore year. I was seeking an adventurous summer-vacation experience, and I heard that a Harvard Peabody Museum expedition needed students for excavations at a prehistoric site in Wyoming. I joined the dig. It turned out to be hard, tedious work, much less adventurous than I had imagined. Yet it was nonetheless exciting—intellectually exciting to learn about people who lived thousands of years ago by painstakingly uncovering and analyzing the material remains of their daily lives. Still, I was not about to become a prehistorian, for I was interested in the biblical world. To that end, I spent the following summer doing biblical archaeology. I met with Harvard archaeologist and biblical scholar G. Ernest Wright. Following his advice, I contacted David Noel Freedman, who was codirector of the Ashdod expedition in the early 1960s; he welcomed me to the project. The immediate result? My first published piece: a short article for the *Wellesley Magazine* about my dig experience, recounting how “I became familiar with the many activities in such an undertaking” and how I gained an “understanding of how archaeological data can be used to reconstruct the historical setting” (Meyers 1964). The lasting impact? It cemented my intention to make archaeology part of my professional life.

The outstanding professors with whom I had the good fortune to study fostered the notion that I could contribute to both archaeology and biblical studies. Wellesley’s faculty were dedicated classroom teachers and were also active scholars. They modelled careers in academia. One was Ernest René Lacheman, who was trained as an Assyriologist and trusted with the publication of many of the Nuzi tablets. Unable to secure an Assyriology position, he joined the Wellesley faculty in 1942 as a Bible instructor (Owen, Morrison, and Gordon 1981, xv; see also Gordon 1983). In addition, he was willing to give independent study courses in Akkadian to interested students, of which I was one. In his basement laboratory, I learned how to make latex molds of cuneiform tablets and begin to read

them.⁴ How else would I have had the audacity to write a senior seminar paper on the relationship of the Mesopotamian *bārû*-priest to certain passages in Isaiah?

Encouragement, along with information about the Society of Biblical Literature, came from other instructors too. Wellesley employed many of the few women who earned doctorates in biblical studies in the early to mid-twentieth century.⁵ I took a course with Lucetta Mowry, who later became a member of the NRSV translation team (Filiatreau 2004; cf. Mowry 1982). Among her many publications were several articles in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Moreover, she was also a field archaeologist! In addition, I learned about women who had taught at Wellesley in the past and who had played a role in the Society. Notable in this regard was Louise Pettibone Smith, who served on the Wellesley faculty for nearly four decades (1915–1953; see Ko 2012, 457). A longstanding member of the Society, she was the first woman to publish an article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (Smith 1917), and she served as the Society's secretary in the early 1950s.⁶ I also learned that Wellesley professor Eleanor Wood was the first woman to give a paper at an Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (in 1913). She used a stereopticon, the early twentieth-century equivalent of PowerPoint (Bass 1982, 8), for a presentation on biblical archaeology.

Clearly, being in a strong department with an abundance of role models and mentors was significant. I was the beneficiary of what would later be called the “Wellesley factor,” a term designating the combination of bright students with large and strong departments that gave Wellesley students a competitive edge in their postcollege endeavors.⁷ Moreover,

4. The graduate programs to which I applied were willing to accept me, although I had only an AB degree, no doubt because my college preparation included two years of Biblical Hebrew and two semesters of Akkadian, as well as some proficiency in French, German, and Latin, in addition to courses in Hebrew Bible and New Testament.

5. In the first half of the twentieth century, Wellesley was by far “the largest single source of employment” for women in biblical studies (Bass 1982, 8).

6. In preparing these reflections I discovered that in 1913–1914 Louise Pettibone Smith had been at the American Schools of Oriental Research in Jerusalem as the Thayer Fellow (Ko 2012, 457), a position that I would one day hold, fresh out of graduate school, in the mid-1970s. For more on Louise Pettibone Smith, see Marion Ann Taylor's chapter in this volume: “Celebrating 125 Years of Women in the Society of Biblical Literature (1894–2019).”

7. Dobrzynski (1995) notes that “more than any other college—large or small—

the general atmosphere of a woman's college was one that encouraged all students to pursue whatever they dreamed of doing and to believe they would succeed.

All told, these college experiences directly influenced my decision to pursue a career in a field that was a male bastion in the late 1960s.⁸ I was fortunate to have attended a women's college with a first-rate Bible department, and the few gender-related negative experiences I would have in graduate school seem inconsequential in comparison.

Reflections on the Guild: The Society of Biblical Literature

Lest my reflections seem too much like public relations copy for my alma mater, I now offer some comments about the Society of Biblical Literature: about my experience in the Society and then about its trajectory with respect to women. About a decade after I became a member in the early 1970s, I was asked to cochair a program unit; I then served intermittently on the committees of a dozen or so other units over the years. However, I was much more involved in the work of the American Schools of Oriental Research and the Albright Institute of Archaeology—serving as a trustee, an officer, and on numerous committees of both organizations. This began to change early in the twenty-first century when, to my surprise, I was asked to join the Society's Program Committee and then the advisory board for what would eventually become Bible Odyssey, the Society's online project. Being part of these two important Society groups gave me a strong sense of identity with the Society of Biblical Literature and its mission. Still, the opportunity to become vice-president (2012) and then president (2013) was a complete shock. I hesitated, for the challenge of these offices seemed daunting, but ultimately I agreed. This was a wise decision, for my two years as an officer on Council were among the most rewarding of my career. It was incredibly gratifying to see how Council members and staff dealt with both routine matters and serious problems—

Wellesley has groomed women who shatter the glass ceiling." She was referring to women in business, but the dynamics were much the same in other fields.

8. The impact of first-wave feminism likely led to the increased number of women biblical scholars in the early to mid-twentieth century. Women's membership in the Society of Biblical Literature rose from 2.5 percent in 1900 to 10.4 percent in 1920. But that number had decreased to 3.5 percent by 1970 on the eve of second-wave feminism (Bass 1982, 9).

including a 2012 labor-management dispute⁹—in a thoughtful, respectful, and productive manner.

My experience as a member of the Society, from ordinary dues-paying member to president, has been consistently positive. I cannot think of any instance in which I faced obstacles or discrimination or unpleasantness related to my gender. Perhaps the contrary was true. At least early on, when the percentage of women members was considerably lower than it is today, various committees likely invited me to join because they sought to include women. This would have been a kind of reverse discrimination, or tokenism, similar to what I experienced in my early years on the Duke faculty. Indeed, I often hesitated when I suspected an invitation to join a board or committee was simply so that it would have a woman member. But early on I made a policy decision: I had confidence that I was as competent as any man for whatever the position was and thus would willingly accept any opportunity to serve an organization or institution in which I believed. Moreover, I felt it important to honor the policy of an organization or institution, be it the Society of Biblical Literature or my university, to work towards inclusion of women in all facets of its activities. Well aware of my good fortune, I have always endeavored to “pay it forward”—to encourage and support my students, men as well as women, in their undergraduate and graduate work and beyond.

To conclude, I want to reflect on several aspects of women’s membership, leadership, and scholarship in the Society.¹⁰ To begin with *membership*: as would be expected, significantly more women are members of the Society of Biblical Literature now than early in its existence. According to data on the Society’s website,¹¹ which provides information beginning in 2004 about the gender of members, women consistently comprise slightly less than a fourth of the membership: 22 percent in

9. The union representing workers at two convention hotels urged the Society of Biblical Literature to boycott those hotels until a suitable new contract could be negotiated with the hotels. For the Society’s response, which involved reducing its obligations but not canceling the contract, see several links at <https://www.sbl-site.org/meetings/AMLabor.aspx>.

10. For a more detailed discussion of these features, see Marion Ann Taylor’s chapter in this volume: “Celebrating 125 Years of Women in the Society of Biblical Literature: 1894–2019.”

11. At https://www.sbl-site.org/SBLCommittees_SAG_Activities.aspx. See also the annual reports, beginning in 2002, available at <https://www.sbl-site.org/aboutus/reports.aspx>.

2004–2008, and 23–24 percent since then. This relatively static situation may be partly the result of the demography of doctoral programs, which often draw from divinity schools that are traditionally male dominated. Although many theological seminaries now have close to gender parity,¹² it will take some time for the women who graduate from those programs and then seek doctorates to work their way into academic jobs and concomitant membership in the Society of Biblical Literature. But the student bodies of more conservative seminaries include far fewer women, which would counteract the increases at other institutions. Still, some Southern Baptist institutions apparently are now encouraging women to do academic work even if they cannot become pastors (Allen 2017). Perhaps, as a consequence, will the percentage of women members of the Society of Biblical Literature slowly increase?¹³

In contrast to the rather stagnant membership rate for women (under 25 percent), the number of women in *leadership* positions in the Society has grown. In 2004, a respectable 35 percent of unit chairs or cochairs were women. In the 2011–2016 period, that number had increased to 40 percent, and for the 2018 Annual Meeting the number was 45 percent. The stipulation that steering committees of new or renewing program units be diverse with respect to gender has surely meant that the number of women in leadership roles is disproportionately higher than in overall membership.¹⁴ Similarly, policies of gender inclusion mean that nearly 40 percent of Society presidents since 2000 have been women.¹⁵ Finally, the editorial board of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* has hovered at about 40 percent female in the past several years. This disproportionate (in comparison to membership) representation of women in leadership roles is encouraging, for women are arguably more transformational than men in their leadership style, in working hard to establish and meet inclusive goals (see Edwards 2017).

12. E.g., Yale Divinity School student body became 50 percent female in 2010 (Yale University Library 2010).

13. It cannot yet be determined whether women in conservative traditions will seek advanced degrees in biblical studies; they may gravitate toward theology and Christian education.

14. See item seven in the list of Criteria for Program Unit Review in the *Annual Meeting Program Unit Chair Handbook*, 8.

15. Seven of the last eighteen presidents. Before that, only two women (Phyllis Tribble in 1994; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in 1987) were presidents. A list of presidents can be accessed at <https://www.sbl-site.org/SBLpresidents.aspx>.

However, unlike leadership, *scholarship*—as represented by publication in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* in the past three years—closely reflects membership, hovering at 23 percent female authors.¹⁶ But it is also worth noting the emergence of women-focused scholarship: studies of women in ancient texts, in communities of the biblical world, and in postbiblical tradition. In her address as the first woman to be president of the Society of Biblical Literature, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza noted, as have many others, that feminist biblical scholarship is rooted in social movements—the civil rights and women’s rights movements beginning in the 1960s—not the academy (1988, 7).¹⁷ Male-centered scholarship might have remained dominant without those external stimuli. Yet such stimuli did occur, and since the 1960s publications and presentations about women in the Bible and biblical world have increased steadily. An important example of publications about women is SBL Press’s ambitious Bible and Women series,¹⁸ and books and articles focusing on women appear frequently in other SBL Press books and in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

In considering the place of women in the Society’s scholarship, the gender of the authors of papers at the Annual Meeting that deal with women or women’s issues is also important. As might be expected, women give most of those papers. In 2004 women presented 82 percent of the papers dealing with women, and in 2017 the number was 79 percent. How might we interpret these high percentages? One might say that women are inherently better able to understand and analyze female-gender topics. Or the statistics might mean that men are just not interested in the subject. Either way, it raises a concern about a kind of ghettoization, in which the presenters on a certain topic are only those who share the gender of the subject under consideration (see O’Sullivan 1998).

Another kind of possible ghettoization also concerns me, namely, that papers about women are presented only in sessions or units devoted specifically to women-related topics. Here the trend is more promising. In

16. The Society’s Annual Report (accessed at <https://www.sbl-site.org/aboutus/reports.aspx>) does not include this information until 2015 (with the exception of the wildly disparate numbers in 2004 [45 percent] and 2005 [12 percent]).

17. Schüssler Fiorenza’s ardent support of women-centered scholarship is rooted in her belief in the ethical responsibility involved: the focus on women in the Bible and the biblical past must intentionally effect attention to and amelioration of inequities in the scholar’s present.

18. See https://www.sbl-site.org/publications/books_BibleandWomen.aspx.

2004, 71 percent of all women-focused papers were presented in women-related sessions, whereas that percentage had fallen to 60 percent by 2017.¹⁹ That is, papers about women, even if they are still given mainly by women, are increasingly mainstreamed—presented in sessions not specifically about women or gender—rather than peripherized (see O’Sullivan 1998) in women-focused sessions. Another positive sign of scholarship on women becoming mainstream is that the call for papers in eight general (not women-focused) units for 2018 encouraged submissions for topics dealing with women, whereas only two such units did so in 2017.

It is my hope that this trajectory will continue. It would indicate that research about women in the texts and communities of biblical antiquity is being integrated into the wider arena of scholarship. Just as the work of women scholars is taken seriously, so too are women as subjects of scholarship being taken seriously in many areas of our discipline. Perhaps this is the most encouraging development in the Society of Biblical Literature in recent years—one that surely affects the relevance of the work in our guild to the challenges in the world in which we live.

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HAVING BEEN, 2015: SOME REFLECTIONS

ATHALYA BRENNER-IDAN

1. SBL President. Me?

By now you've probably read the introductory essay in this volume. So you do realize the following. The first female president of the Society of Biblical Literature was Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in 1987. This monumental change from the regular—over 120 male presidents since 1880, most of them white and Christian (and Protestant!)—represented a real shift from the Society norm.

But, even more striking: while Phyllis Tribble was nominated president in 1994 and Adele Berlin in 2000, the pace of honoring female scholars became faster in the early 2000s: Carolyn Osiek in 2005 and Katharine Doob Sakenfeld in 2007. And lo and behold, within the present decade, the pace is absolutely stunning, no fewer than five (!) female presidents: Carol A. Newsom in 2011, Carol Meyers in 2013, Athalya Brenner-Idan in 2015, Beverly Roberts Gaventa in 2016, and Gale A. Yee coming in 2019. This is out of proportion to female membership in the Society as a whole and, to my mind, absolutely astounding. A token of the times? Perhaps. Please bear with me for repeating the list: my reasons for so doing will become evident presently.

I am number eight on this list. I remember how surprised I was when John Kutsko called me in 2013 to ask whether I would agree to the nomination of vice-president of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2014 and then president the year after. Who, little me?, was my first response. Certainly, by that point, I had been a member of the Society of Biblical Literature for some time. The first Society conferences, for me, were the International Meetings in Salamanca, Spain (1983); Amsterdam, the Netherlands (1985); Jerusalem, Israel (1986); and Sheffield, England (1988). These were obviously within a European context and easy when living and working in

Israel. But they were crucial to my professional development. The 1980s and early 1990s were heavy years for me. I lost my appointment at Haifa University because of my feminist criticism of biblical literature: university committees considered my book *The Israelite Woman* (1985; 2014; in Hebrew 2017) as nonresearch and a nonstarter. The International Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature provided a space where I could meet and network with scholars who shared my interests: the newly outspoken feminist bible¹ readers, or at least women studies readers. It was a heady feeling, a vindication, to meet like-minded women—and men. It was, actually, a lifesaver at the time.

This feeling of connection continued at my first Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting a few years later in San Francisco (1992). The late Marvin Pope organized a session on the Song of Songs: he, who only several years earlier had expressed skepticism about Trible's "depatriarchalizing" efforts, now invited declared feminist scholars to give papers in his sessions. That, for me, at the time, was academic victory, and from that first conference onward, the Society has been firmly and gratefully linked, in my mind, to promoting and containing—as a matter of respect and policy—the cluster of new-fangled approaches that now seem so regular to many of us.

Over the years, and when things became easier, I moved from delivering papers to serving on committees: the Feminist Interpretation unit; the *Semeia*, *Review of Biblical Literature*, and *Journal of Biblical Literature* boards; the Contextual Interpretation committees of the Annual Meeting and the International Meeting. Those activities were certainly voluntary and time-consuming, but the upshot was great. Over and apart from networking, they afforded a real opportunity to learn, to keep abreast of new research developments, and to assist other people in escaping that great sense of isolation I experienced when I first discovered the Society of Biblical Literature.

There was also another benefit. Coming from my Israeli background (and of that a little more later), I managed to get to a university-level education without ever reading the New Testament, not to mention having even a rudimentary knowledge of New Testament interpretation—and this in spite of coming from Haifa, a decidedly multireligious, multiethnic, and multinational community. For us, "bible," *TaNakh* or *Miqra'* as we call it, was almost exclusively the Hebrew bible. For the Society of Biblical Lit-

1. My practice is to write "bible" and not the usual capitalized "Bible."

erature, however, the *biblical* name component involves the Hebrew bible as well as the Second Testament and related fields. The work of many units and publications within it covers more than the Jewish or Christian—and now also Islamic—arenas, and that was an added benefit for me, an occasion for study, a chance to come to terms with the cultural world outside the one in which I grew up.

In other words, when Kutsko asked me to serve as president, I was well familiar with the Society of Biblical Literature and its mission. I had already served in various leadership roles and gained from the experiences. But I still had my initial doubts as to whether to accept this nomination: What about my being a woman, a secularist, Jewish, an Israeli, a declared feminist—in this or any other order?

A quick look at the list cited above helped me overcome many of these doubts. It was, first and foremost, obvious from the list that the choice for female presidents in the last two decades, and especially in this decade, was a matter of policy; as it seemed and still seems to me, it is designed to foreground female scholarship in and contributions to the Society in contrast to a long tradition of male mainstream dominance in the field. Furthermore, a quick look told me that the trend of nominating non-Christian presidents—which was practiced beforehand, here and there—was strongly supported in the choice of female presidents, again especially in the last decade. Moreover, at least five or six of the female presidents before me declared themselves as feminists who practiced feminist criticism of biblical literature, each after her own fashion: this factor I found extremely meaningful. Finally, a number of them are women of faith, but others—no matter their origin faith community—are secularist or secular, either by definition or by practice.

My remaining doubts then were, primarily, about being an Israeli in the age of BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement directed at the State of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and beyond, including against Israeli scholars at Israeli universities). This doubt was calmed down by Kutsko (although, as I well know, there was some grumbling about honoring an Israeli at the time, always behind my back if not directly to my face). Other doubts, about being a non-American, while the Society of Biblical Literature is an American learned society, were calmed by the knowledge this has recently happened before (David Clines, 2009), if not often, and with success.

So the short list, until 2013 including seven names of female presidents, was for me packed with much more information beyond their

gender. If put to the Society of Biblical Literature as a mirror it reflects a Society that, in many respects, is much more diversified and internationalized than the Society of the late 1990s. Its horizons have broadened beyond recognition. This has been a long process, of course, anchored in the late twentieth century. Nevertheless, the “America First” on which the Society was founded in the 1880s has changed beyond perception. The Society’s founding fathers (yes!) would have been shocked, indeed! The variety of topics discussed at conferences, the international activities, the attention to minorities and a relative decentering of mainstream notions, are all revealed also by the growing number and distinguishingly individual profiles of the female presidents—and this is, frankly, a joy.

2. But, Self-Congratulation? Only up to a Point!

To be a president of the Society of Biblical Literature is to function as a figurehead. This is largely an honorary position. You have some opportunity to decide matters of policy and activities since you serve on the Council for two years, one as a vice-president and once as a president. However, other Council member, who typically serve for two three-year cycles, six years altogether, can have much more influence—together with the executive director—on the Society’s development.

Being aware of the limited possibility for action inherent in the position, I set myself a limited amount of issues I hoped to foreground and about which I hoped to make a difference. This is hardly the place to itemize them, or to assess my success. Some of them were set out, or hinted at, in my presidential address in 2015 (published as Brenner-Idan 2016); others have been voiced elsewhere. Here, I’d like to list some of the issues that I think still need some improvement, in the hope that coming (female) presidents and Council members will pay attention to at least some of them and effect changes.

1. While Society membership fees are now proportional to members’ income declaration, which is good considering the fact that tenure is becoming rarer and adjunctship more common, the same cannot be said about conference fees for full members and for students.
2. The Society is mindful of women’s participation in committees, conferences, and publications under its wing. However, members

often engage is scholarly conferences and publications that have no female scholar participants or token participants only. This is a touchy subject: How can the Society extend its influence, not to mention authority, to arrangements beyond its realm? Nevertheless, a clear policy guidance to members will help here.

3. Many secularists complain that the Society favors faith-based education institutions, even when those institutions limit academic freedom within their authority. Again, the Society cannot interfere with what an institution does within its own vicinity; however, it can refuse to cooperate, in any and every way, with institutions that limit academic freedom or worse, even freedom of speech, or worse, legal LGBTQ rights. No, let us be naïve. The Society should refuse cooperation with such institutions, even if this would mean a certain loss of revenue or membership. Hopefully, the Society will be strong enough to sustain such a loss in the name of common decency, not to mention morality.
4. The International Cooperation Initiative (ICI) project is perhaps the most important project if the Society truly wishes to internationalize itself. As such, the project has to be overhauled and expanded beyond allowing a certain amount of books to be freely accessible to certain geographic locations considered underprivileged.
5. The professional policy guidance that has been formulated, and partly put into effect, since 2015 is a great step towards dealing with harassment of any kind, including sexual and racial harassment, under the Society's auspices and during Society events. However, as one often hears and reads on Facebook and Twitter, the instructions and procedure are neither totally clear nor always immediately helpful. Some fine tuning, perhaps, in the near future?

3. Finally

I could name other areas that I think need attention in the near future, and you, my readers, can add to those. This is by no means intended to detract from the giant steps the Society has undertaken in the last couple of decades, especially—but not only—under its female committee members and presidents. And under our executive director, John Kutsko from

whom I, personally, learned so much, especially about using due process and exercising patience.

Having written all that, let me add this. Our sister organization, as we often call it, the American Academy of Religion, has recently appointed its second female director, Alice Hunt. This directorship is a truly executive position, not just an honorary one. Let us hope that in the future, not the too distant future, when our present executive director gets tired of leading us, the Society of Biblical Literature will appoint its first female executive director as well.

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THE GIFT OF AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

BEVERLY ROBERTS GAVENTA

Had anyone told the twenty-two-year-old version of myself, entering an MDiv program at Union Theological Seminary (NYC) in the fall of 1970, that she would spend her life in biblical studies, that young woman would have erupted in uncontrollable guffaws. As an undergraduate religion and English double major, I had taken the usual introductory courses in Bible, and I had hated them. I went to seminary determined to pursue a PhD in Reformation history or perhaps theology and literature. In my first year, however, solely to fulfill a graduation requirement, I took a course on Romans with J. Louis Martyn, and my earlier plans were derailed by a first real encounter with the letters of Paul. In my second year, Raymond Brown arrived, cementing my new direction with his spellbinding lectures on the Gospel of John.

Martyn and Brown were both great teachers and mentors. Their contributions to the field and their friendship have influenced me throughout my career, and I miss them both to this day. Yet there are women in this story as well. Jennifer Frost, a PhD candidate in New Testament at the time, tutored for that first course in Romans. Her comments on my first exegesis paper ran to several handwritten pages as she corrected, directed, and above all nurtured what she must have seen as raw interest. I had no idea at the time how rare that level of mentoring was. I have tried to emulate it in my own work with students over the years. My extensive comments, whether on seminar papers, chapters of dissertations, or other projects, are intended to be encouragement toward better work. My impression is that most students understand that practice, although a few are not prepared to be nudged quite so vigorously.

Even into the next academic year, Frost would stop me in a corridor periodically to ask what I was studying, whether I would pursue a PhD, how things were going. She was not alone. Marcia Weinstein, a classicist

then teaching Greek at Union, took apart the limited and rigid Greek training I received as an undergraduate and introduced me to the breadth of the language. She also offered a great deal of advice and informal mentoring. Judith Kovacs, Liliás Morrison, and Barbara Hall were all in the PhD program at that time. I did not know them well personally, but the fact that they were in the program made a difference.

A similar dynamic took place in my doctoral work at Duke. While W. D. Davies, D. Moody Smith, Frank Young, and Orval Wintermute were fine and supportive teachers, there were no women anywhere in the departmental line-up when I arrived. Jill Raitt came to Duke during my second year. Among the students, the situation was different, as Lynn Mishkin, Barbara Geller, Martha Smith, and I all were working in early Christianity or early Judaism. We were working in rather different areas and had differing routines, but I think we were supportive of one another, although it may be that we were each so consumed with our own anxiety that we scarcely looked beyond our own noses.

The general atmosphere at Duke was encouraging, but there was little or no attention given to developing a publishing career or to pedagogy. No one was talking about teaching in those days. The working assumption seemed to be that you learned the field and became a researcher in graduate school; you then bumbled around until you became a teacher somewhere else (and I think other programs proceeded in the same fashion). I vividly recall standing in my first office at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, staring out the window, wondering how people went about putting together a syllabus. (The fact that applications for teaching positions now routinely request a statement of teaching philosophy from newly-minted PhDs amazes me. I am not sure I could write one now, and I am certain I could not have done it in graduate school.) The gaps in our formation, however, were equal opportunity: neither men nor women received more than casual mentoring in these areas of professional development.

There were other limits to the encouragement. My appointment at Colgate Rochester was quite the event among Duke students that year, as there were very few jobs available. I think only two of us were even interviewed, and I thought the interview might well be the highlight of my academic career. After word went around that I actually had been offered the position, one student announced to others—in my hearing—that he planned to go to Sweden to have “the operation” so he could get a job, too. I suggested that, in his case, I wasn’t sure it would help. (To

the best of my knowledge, he never held a teaching position.) That was the most vicious instance I have ever experienced of the undermining melody, “You’re only here because you are a woman.” It was certainly not the only such experience.

I arrived at Colgate Rochester Divinity School as the first woman appointed to a full-time position. Perhaps at least as important, I was under thirty, and most of my colleagues were in their fifties. The real frustration in that first job, beyond the usual challenges of preparing multiple new courses and trying to write for publication, was negotiating the expectations of women students. Because I was for several years the only woman on the faculty in a full-time position, each and every woman student seemed to imagine I could and would be the faculty advisor she wanted. Since that was impossible, all of us were frustrated. Some of my colleagues tried to be supportive, but the sense of isolation was genuine.

This is the period when the Society of Biblical Literature became a crucial part of my working life, and by that I mean both conferences (regional and national) and publications. Most of my Duke friends ended up outside academia, or at least outside biblical studies, so I had few peers with whom to exchange ideas. I also had no colleagues my own age at Rochester, certainly no women. I used to sit with each new issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* as if it were a lifeline. And I poured over the Annual Meeting book for texts, names, angles of interest, and new publications.

My first experience of the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature came early on, when I was still at Union Theological Seminary. In 1971 a group of students piled in a car and drove (in my memory it seems we drove without stopping) to Atlanta for the meeting there. The days of small gatherings of senior scholars in New York City were not then ancient history, but today’s plethora of offerings was nowhere on the horizon either. Graduate students did not read papers in those days, or at least it was a rare occurrence. One session stands out in memory, as I was present when Elaine Pagels read a paper, presumably on some aspect of gnostic exegesis. Apart from a couple of undergraduate instructors, that was my first experience of hearing and seeing a woman give an academic paper. The encouragement implicit in that event is not to be underestimated.

With my first teaching job—and therefore my first tiny budget for professional travel—I began attending Annual Meetings in 1976, and I have not missed a meeting in all the years since. I gave my own first paper in 1979, at the instigation of Robert Jewett, who was then chairing the Pauline Epistles section and who graciously invited me to read a paper.

I had just given birth a few months before the meeting, so putting together the paper at all was nearly miraculous (even though it was a section of my dissertation). My paper fell into the same session as one by Gerd Lüdemann, which meant there was a healthy audience—but certainly not an audience gathered to hear me. I nervously made my way through my prepared text only to find that the first question came from a prominent scholar who had walked into the room five minutes into my twenty-minute paper, and the question he asked was addressed in the opening paragraph.

Remembering that moment brings to mind other low points at the Society of Biblical Literature. I have dodged a few drunken passes and walked out on conversations turned crude. Along with others (male and female) of my generation, I have been interviewed in hotel bedrooms (a practice blessedly now prohibited by the Society). I recall with some aggravated amusement the scholar who introduced himself to me by saying, “I know who you are, as I saw you with your husband last night.” “Oh,” said I, “I was having dinner with So and So.” “Yes, your husband.” “No, he’s not my husband. My husband is at home, some thousand miles away.” To this day I am not sure the man ever understood what I was saying or what he had done.

Those low moments—and there have not been many—have not prevented me from involvement in the volunteer leadership of the Society, from which I have benefited immensely. My involvement with the Society began with publications. Having served briefly as book review editor of the *Journal of the Academy of Religion* (at the invitation of its then editor William Scott Green), I became the founding editor of *Critical Review of Books in Religion*, precursor to the *Review of Biblical Literature*. At about the same time, Wayne Meeks invited me to serve a one-year term on the Society’s Executive Committee. (This was long before the restructure of the Society, during a period when each president nominated a younger scholar to serve a year’s term, providing the leadership with a junior voice and the younger scholar with some sense of how the Society worked.) Later I served on the Research and Publications Committee, the Nominating Committee, and Council, all of which I chaired at one time or another.

All of this work takes time and energy, time and energy that might well have gone into my own research. Yet I have always found work for the Society gratifying (including my current service on the Development Committee). Many great friendships have emerged over the years, to say nothing of having a more informed sense of the broad spectrum of research and teaching that goes on within the Society.

My contribution to this book comes about because of one Society role in particular, that of being president for the year 2016. When the invitation arrived, the long procession of presidential addresses I had attended sprang to mind. I instantly remembered that Society meeting in 1976, when David Noel Freedman was president and was introduced by Raymond Brown. (Unfortunately, the introductions were not published in those days, as Ray's was a delightful play on the name, suggesting that there actually was no such historical figure, since all three parts of the name were clearly symbolic.) I thought also with special warmth of my Princeton colleagues who had been president of the Society while all of us were working together, Patrick Miller and Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, as their elections gave me profound joy.

Many things might be said about that experience, but I think the best word is *gift*. The major work of the vice-president of the Society is to introduce the president on the occasion of the presidential address. Despite the many years I had been present at those occasions, what I had never grasped fully is that, in most cases these two people do not know each other well. I had never even met Athalya Brenner-Idan, president in the year when I was vice-president. Her work is very different from mine both textually and methodologically. The process of getting to know her through her writings and through interviewing students and colleagues was time-consuming; I could more easily have written another research paper. Yet it was a very rewarding endeavor as well. We imagine ourselves to be so different from one another, but the process of getting to know someone well enough to introduce her credibly on a public occasion means that we must invest in that person, come to know her concerns and her impact and appreciate it as others do. What I did not calculate in advance was that the evening of Athalya's presidential address is, to date, the only time when both chairs—that of the president and that of the vice-president—on the platform in that vast ballroom were occupied by women.¹

A year later, my own presidential address was on Rom 13 and the notion of interpretive generosity.² I had worked on it long and hard, and I was confident that it was the best work I could do (a statement I rarely allow myself). But the national election of 2016 fell just days ahead of my address, suddenly making Rom 13 even more perilous than I had antici-

1. The presidential address is accessible in its published form as Brenner-Idan 2016.

2. The presidential address is accessible in its published form as Gaventa 2017.

pated and increasing my anxiety considerably. From the beginning I knew that asking for interpretive generosity would be risky, but it seemed especially so in the case of a text that has been weaponized by the powerful and in a context of heightened anxiety at the national and international level. That night I benefited from the gracious introduction of Michael Fox, who prepared his introduction with the prodigious intellect and energy that characterizes his research. I also benefited from the encouraging presence of a host of colleagues, former students, and friends.

That is a rare opportunity: to share work that matters to us with people we respect, even in anxious circumstances. It is rarer still for rising scholars who find even modest employment hard to secure. I hope that I have never taken my own privileged experience as a given, and I hope my students—present and former—will know that I have worked hard on behalf of their future and that of the field I could not have imagined for myself all those decades ago.

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NEGOTIATING SHIFTS IN LIFE'S PARADIGMS

GALE A. YEE

During my sophomore year in college, I was sitting in my required English Literature class on poetry. We had just written a paper analyzing Delmore Schwartz's "In the Naked Bed, in Plato's Cave." The instructor was making a point regarding multiple interpretations of the same poem, and he proceeded to read from two papers from the class to demonstrate this. I was stunned that one of them was mine, a more optimistic reading than the other. I was also dumbfounded when I received a grade of A for it and for the papers thereafter. Having failed miserably in the required math courses for my premed major, I think this experience motivated me eventually to become an English Literature major. I seemed to have a knack for the interpretation of texts.

My academic career in the interpretation of texts was also one of flux. It was frequently changing, because my scholarly journey involved a complex realization of a fragmented identity, a nonunitary self, which involved continual transformation. My biblical hermeneutics evolved over time from multiple epistemological standpoints. I am not simply a woman, but a third-generation Asian American female, who grew up as the oldest of twelve children in a patriarchal Chinese household in the slums of Chicago. I was the first in my family to graduate from college and, until several years ago, the only one to obtain a PhD. The holy trinity of gender, race, and class—my status as female, Chinese, and lower-class—put me unknowingly outside of the mainstream of American society. Sexism and classism were not part of my young vocabulary. Although I experienced racism when we moved to a white neighborhood, it was called "prejudice" at the time.

I suppose the biggest change for my biblical hermeneutics was when I became a feminist. I was not a feminist as an undergraduate in the riotous 1960s. I was not one of those "women's libbers," as they were called,

but more the protester against the war in Vietnam. Because of my skill in working with texts in English literature, I specialized in New Testament for my master's degree and for five years of my doctorate before switching to the Hebrew Bible. However, as a graduate student, I still did not consider myself a feminist. This was probably due to my thorough training by men in the historical-critical method, where I had to sink or swim in a male- and Eurocentric vortex. My dissertation was a boring redaction-critical investigation of the book of Hosea (Yee 1987), a text to which feminist biblical scholars would devote much energy. Although I would eventually treat Hosea from a feminist perspective later on in my career (Yee 1996, 1998, 2001), it did not occur to me to do so while writing my dissertation.

While a doctoral student in the late 1970s, I was caught up in the paradigm shift from historical criticism to literary criticism. Because literary analysis was something I was familiar with in my undergraduate days, I eagerly took up this approach to the Bible. My intellectual mentor became Phyllis Trible, not for her feminist work but for her exegetical applications of rhetorical criticism. One of my doctoral papers was published before I graduated (Yee 1982). It was a rhetorical analysis of Prov 8:22–31, the creation of Wisdom. Even though the personification of Wisdom as a female would occupy many a feminist, I cannot say that a feminist perspective characterized this early paper.

However, this paradigm shift from historical criticism to a literary-critical study moved critical analysis beyond the search for the ancient author's meaning. What resulted for me was the rediscovery from my undergraduate class that the Bible as a text was open to multiple interpretations, just like any other work of art. The Bible contained not just one single meaning, which under the historical paradigm was the author's intended meaning. Rather, the text itself engaged readers to see multiple and even conflicting interpretations of the same text. This was really a can of worms for those who thought there was only one correct interpretation of the biblical text, usually their own. For me, this multivalent feature of literary interpretation would pave the way later for my feminist interpretation of the text.

According to cultural theorist Stuart Hall, "Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narrative of the past" (cited in Xing 1998, 21). So, when did I begin to position and identify myself as a feminist? The year would have to be 1984, when I started my first job at a traditional Roman Catholic college,

the only woman on a large all-male theological faculty. My conscientization was both negative and positive. On the one hand, I became quite aware of and negatively affected by the systemic sexism and clericalism of the institution. On the other hand, I became fast friends with the different feminists of the college, particularly in the English department. Because of our literary interests, we had a common methodological base. They invited me to team-teach courses on women in theology and literature. They supported me through the mild annoyances as well as through the bitterest instances of male privilege and sexism. It was through them that I actually started reading feminist literature and began applying a feminist critique to the bible in the 1980s. During this time, I also became chair of the Women in the Biblical World Section of the Society of Biblical Literature from 1987 to 1995, and I remained on the committee until 2005.

In 1988 I signed a contract for *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Yee 2003). I was introduced to the social-scientific approach in Carol Meyer's *Discovering Eve* (Meyers 1988). Through her I discovered Norman K. Gottwald, whose work became very influential for my own. On the one hand, I knew that I would be incorporating the social sciences and feminist anthropology in my book. On the other hand, I wished to utilize my literary skills in analyzing sexist texts. How could I bring these two methodological approaches together (cf. Jobling 1987)?

I had become uncomfortably aware that the field of literary criticism was much broader than my own practice of it, which in hindsight was more akin to New Criticism, an ahistorical approach in which meaning is said to reside in the text itself, independent of author, location, and, as I came to realize later, the reader (Yee 1995). During my 1990 sabbatical at Harvard and several years thereafter, I embarked on an investigation of the different permutations of literary criticism, such as deconstruction, psychoanalytic, Marxist, New Historicism, and reader response criticisms (Eagleton 1983; Rivkin and Ryan 1998). This was my baptism by fire into critical theory. Although much of the theory that I read was tedious with impenetrable jargon, the Marxist literary theorists seemed to provide the most fruitful ways to bring together sociohistorical and literary critical insights in an integrated analysis. Particularly useful were the works of Terry Eagleton, especially his analysis of the structure and workings of ideology (Eagleton 1976a, 1976b, 1991; Eagleton and Milne 1996). Through his work I was able to develop a method in *Poor Banished Children of Eve* to deal with the symbolization of woman as evil. I called this method "ideological criticism,"

for it analyzed the material intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, economic class, and colonial relations in the production of biblical texts.

Feminist criticism itself was going through a major paradigm shift during the late 1970s, 1980s, and throughout the 1990s. Feminists of color, particularly African American feminists early on, challenged white feminists for privileging gender to the exclusion of race and class in their analyses (Combahee River Collective 1978; Davis 1981; hooks 1984). They repeatedly underscored the relational interconnections of the “isms”: sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism. African American theorist Patricia Hill Collins referred to these interlocking categories of experience as a “matrix of domination,” in which the fundamental issue of each of these oppressive social relations was the domination of one group over another (Collins 1990, 225–30). For me, the matter of feminism and race hit me emotionally during the summer of 1989, when I was invited to contribute to a festschrift for Rosemary Radford Reuther and meet with other authors at the Maryknoll School of Theology. This was an explosive occasion during which black feminists confronted white feminists on account of their racism, and white feminists were plagued with white guilt. Everyone was weeping. I was crying, too, but for different reasons. I remember tearfully expressing to Rosemary that, as an Asian American I belonged to neither group, black or white. The black/white binary did not conform to my experience, and it put me outside both these groups of women in racial matters. This experience of being a racial outsider left an indelible mark on me and became significant for my understanding of Asian American biblical hermeneutics later on.

The paradigm shifts that were occurring in the wider academic world also appeared in the Society of Biblical Literature, which acknowledged the racial minorities and women in its midst by forming of the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Minority Persons in the Profession and the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession in 1992. The Committee on Racial and Ethnic Minority Persons in the Profession celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2016 at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Antonio, Texas. I was invited to be one of the founding members of the committee, along with Vincent Wimbush (its first chair), Fernando Segovia, Randall Bailey, and an Old Testament scholar named Henry Sun, who is no longer in the field. I have to say that I joined the committee primarily as a feminist biblical scholar, not as an Asian American biblical scholar. Just like being the only woman in a large theology department, I was the only female biblical scholar in the

first iteration of the committee in 1992. Of course, I knew I was Asian American, but it did not initially factor into my critical analysis of the biblical text or my identity politics. It was only when I was invited by my future colleague Kwok Pui Lan to be on a panel dealing with "The Impact of National Histories on the Politics of Identity" in 1994 at the American Academy of Religion, that I had to think seriously about what it meant to be an *Asian American* biblical scholar (Yee 1997). This was when I "came out" as an Asian American woman, politically and intellectually. I joined the Ethnic Chinese Biblical Colloquium one year later in 1995, when Dr. Sze Kar Wan invited me to its first meeting at Andover Newton Theological School. I was one of the six scholars who attended this initial meeting and was the only female there as well.

I realized through the Society's Committee on Racial and Ethnic Minority Persons in the Profession, through Pui Lan's panel, and through the Ethnic Chinese Biblical Colloquium that Asian American identity and biblical hermeneutics would only be created by ethnic Asian individuals, who have consciously adopted an Asian American advocacy stance at some point in their histories here in the United States. "Asian American" became the name that I gave to my specific positioning *by* the narratives of the past and *within* the narratives past in the United States and in my professional guild. The question for me shifted from *being* to *becoming*, from "Who is an Asian American?" to "What are the different ways of becoming Asian American?" I was always female, but there was a certain point in my life that I became a feminist. So too did I consciously become an Asian American, even though, paradoxically, I was already an Asian American. The question for me became: what are the personal, interpersonal, cultural, and systemic influences that allow, trigger, or compel one of Asian descent in the United States to become an Asian American and appropriate this nomenclature intentional for herself? It was being a member of the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Minority Persons in the Profession, the Ethnic Chinese Biblical Colloquium, and the American Academy of Religion panel in the 1990s that persuaded me to develop seriously an Asian American biblical hermeneutic and to recognize how much racism was endemic in my personal and social history.

Besides trying to keep up with the formidable developments in Hebrew Bible, feminist theory, and critical theory, I now had to add Asian American studies to my reading list and professional agenda. I was one of the founding members of the Society's Asian and Asian-American Biblical Studies Consultation and on its steering committee from 1994–1999, witness-

ing the initial flourishing of Asian American biblical interpretation. I was able to examine the biblical text from an Asian American perspective in a number of succeeding articles (Yee 2006, 2009, 2010b, 2013a, 2016, 2018a, 2018c, 2019) and two edited volumes: *The Bible in Asian America* (Liew and Yee 2002) and *Honouring the Past, Looking to the Future: Essays from the 2014 International Congress of Ethnic Chinese Biblical Scholars* (Yee and Yieh 2016). I was still able to explore new methods on diverse topics such as the bible and cultural criticism (Yee 2013b), the bible and art (Yee 2014), and postcolonial criticism (Yee 2010a), as well as discover emerging contextual interpretations in the four volumes of *Texts@Contexts* that I coedited with Athalya Brenner and Archie C. C. Lee (2010, 2012, 2013, 2018).

The Society of Biblical Literature continued to keep me quite busy during these paradigm shifts in my thinking. Besides the years I was a member of Committee on Racial and Ethnic Minority Persons in the Profession (1992–1995), I became chair of the committee from 1995 to 1997. I was at-large member of Council from 1995 to 2003. I was associate editor of *Semeia* from 1998 to 2003 and then became general editor of *Semeia Studies* from 2003 to 2009. I was on the steering committees of the Bible and the Visual Arts (2001–2006) and Ancient Israel and Its Literature series (2014–2016). I was on the Research and Publications Committee from 2012 to 2016 and its chair in 2017. Finally, I was on the David Noel Freedman Award Committee from 2016 to 2018. In these various capacities, I was able to encourage and support others who were undergoing similar paradigm shifts.

I began this essay by highlighting how my scholarly career in the biblical guild was one of flux as I attempted to negotiate the different parts of my fragmented identity as a Chinese American female from the lower-classes. My career path was also one of flux, shifting from historical criticism to literary criticism to context-specific gender, racial/ethnic readings, and beyond.¹ My present academic work will likely continue this pattern as I investigate the material intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, economic class, and colonial relations in the production of biblical texts. Instead of silos of gender, racial/ethnic, queer, economic class, and postcolonial

1. These shifts largely followed those occurring in the guild at the same time. A glimpse at the number of program units for the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature will reveal the extent and variety of different approaches to the biblical text since its foundation in 1880 (<https://www.sbl-site.org/meetings/programunits.aspx>).

readings, et cetera, I encourage intersectional analyses of these and other phenomena in our future hermeneutical endeavors (cf. Yee 2018b, 8–13).² Through this, my hope is to bring together parts of our fragmented selves into our interpretations.

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2. *Intersectionality*, a term coined in 1989 by the African American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw 1989), expresses the critical views that race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, nation, ethnicity, and similar categories of analysis are best understood in relational terms rather than in isolation of each other. Since its emergence, the idea of intersectionality has been current in diverse academic fields such as sociology, psychology, political science, economics, legal studies, and critical race theory (Dill and Zambrana 2017; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; Collins and Chepp 2013; Collins 2015; Collins and Bilge 2016). However, except for a few essays, intersectionality has not been applied as a critical investigative framework in biblical studies to analyze the interconnected relationships among gender, race, class, colonial status, nation, and other social phenomenon (Buell et al. 2010; Kartzow 2010; Moxnes 2010; Buell 2010; Glancy 2010; Rey 2016; Smith 2016; Claassens and Sharp 2017).

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PART 2
REFLECTIONS BY DISCIPLINE



ARCHAEOLOGY/HISTORY

BETH ALPERT NAKHAI

I remember well the first time I attended the then-joint meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Schools of Oriental Research, back in 1990.¹ I was a doctoral candidate at the University of Arizona, with two graduate degrees (MTS, Harvard Divinity School, 1979; MA, The University of Arizona, 1985) already behind me. Long done with my coursework, I was working my way through my dissertation, some part of which was to serve as the basis for my conference presentation. I was also married, the mother of a two-year-old daughter, holding down multiple part-time jobs to help keep our small family afloat.

I had moved to Tucson, Arizona, in 1982 to pursue my doctorate with William G. Dever, in what was then this country's premier graduate program in Near Eastern and Biblical Archaeology. I grew up in New York, but between college and moving to Tucson, I had spent a decade in Boston. I waited tables, worked as a buyer for a chain of discount drugstores, completed a MTS at Harvard Divinity School, and worked for Charles Berlin in the Judaica Division at Harvard's Widener Library. While at Harvard Divinity School, I studied scientific illustration with S. Whitney Powell of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, thus enabling me to work as an archaeological illustrator. I then spent summers on digs in Israel and several times extended my stay in Jerusalem, working for Seymour Gitin at the William F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research (Tel Miqne/Ekron), for Avram Biran at the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology at Hebrew Union College (Tel Dan), and finally, for Dever (Tel Gezer).

1. Until 1997, the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Schools of Oriental Research met together.

Studying with Bill Dever at The University of Arizona was an exceptional experience. He was—and remains—a leader in our field. He was knowledgeable, positive, supportive, and a lot of fun. Tucson is a small city in the American Southwest but Bill breached its Sonoran Desert isolation by bringing great archaeologists to town. By day, the archaeologists would lecture, and in the evenings, Bill and his first wife Norma, of blessed memory, would throw fabulous dinner parties in their honor—so there was plenty of time for us students to make their acquaintance. Bill had generously used some of his start-up money from the university to fund a small excavation in Israel, and he selected me—together with fellow grad students Bonnie Wisthoff and J. P. Dessel—to serve as codirectors. The site we selected, Tell el-Wawiyat, is a small Middle Bronze II–Iron Age I village in the Lower Galilee.

All this is by way of saying that by the time I stepped onto the podium in New Orleans, I was already well exposed to the world of archaeology and biblical studies. Harvard Divinity School, The University of Arizona, eight summers of field work in Israel (including two as an excavation codirector), and a year working on an Israeli excavation in its Jerusalem headquarters, plus a presentation two years before at the Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology—all this should have prepared me for what I was about to do. It didn't, though, and I remember to this day the feeling of panic I experienced as I looked out into the large, packed conference hall and saw a roomful of men in dark suits. Were any women there? I'm sure there were; the Society of Biblical Literature already had a session on Women in the Biblical World, had a Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession, and hosted a Women's Caucus jointly with American Academy of Religion. Still, in "my" session, one would have needed binoculars to find them.² It is hard nowadays, when women are such a visible presence at the Society of Biblical Literature and American Schools of Oriental Research meetings, to conjure up the days in which they were not. Would I have found making a presentation less intimidating had there been women in the audience? That's a difficult question to answer, of course, but what does seem clear to me is that improvements in gender parity within the Society of Biblical Literature have made the

2. I have come to understand that in the 1970s and 1980s, when I began my work on Canaanite and Israelite religion through an archaeological lens, scholarship in the field was what we would nowadays call gendered male. At that time, contributions by women were hard to find—but I never gave any thought to that problematic issue.

annual conference both intellectually richer and more comfortable. As for the reaction to my presentation, I overheard some men talking about how they disagreed with my conclusions—not what I hoped for but still, talking about it, which seemed the point—and Hershel Shanks caught up with me in the hall and asked me to submit my paper for publication in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, which I was pleased to do (Nakhai 1994).

It was five years before I again took part in an Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. In the course of those five years, a lot had changed in my life. In the spring of 1993, I had successfully defended my dissertation. Throughout the next academic year, I held onto my two non-academic jobs and tried to figure out how to get a university position. In the fall of 1994, I applied for a full-time adjunct position in the Judaic Studies program at my university and received half of it; the next year, that position became full-time. The full-time teaching load was six courses per year, but the lack of job security meant that I held onto one of my half-time off-campus jobs, while the meager salary meant that I also taught a lot of summer school courses. All this teaching, plus some volunteer work and, most important, my family, meant that there was barely a moment to breathe, let alone to engage in research and publication.

Another big change for me had been giving up summers dedicated to archaeological field work. I had last been in the field in 1986 (only a few months after I had gotten married) and 1987, when I codirected the Tell el-Wawiyat Excavation. The next summer, our daughter was born, and I never resumed fieldwork. The reasons for this were partly personal; I was happily our summer childcare solution. They were also financial; the expense of international travel and related costs, coupled with the loss of summer school earnings, were more than I could justify. And, of course, the costs were both personal and professional. As recently as a few years ago, my commitment to archaeology was still being questioned by (male) colleagues who thought that if I had been serious, I would have stuck with fieldwork.

I chose a dissertation topic that could be pursued through library-based research rather than through fieldwork, and I continued to work that way. In the early 1990s, the papers I presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Schools of Oriental Research were developed from my dissertation research. In 1995, I returned to the Society of Biblical Literature. That snow-covered conference in Philadelphia was, for me, a family affair. I brought our daughter, then seven, from Tucson. My mother came from New York to be with us, and she brought my nine-year-old niece. No

one at the Society of Biblical Literature seemed to mind kids at the sessions (thank you)—and my niece, evidently inspired, went on to get a PhD of her own!

The second half of the 1990s offered little opportunity for nostalgia or for self-reflection. It passed in a blur—a lot of teaching, a few publications, a few conference papers (although none at the Society of Biblical Literature). Alongside the study of Canaanite and Israelite religions, the subject of my dissertation, I became increasingly interested in a different topic, the study of women in antiquity. Serendipity had its hand here. To interview for my original adjunct position at Arizona, I had to produce syllabi that would demonstrate what I could add to the then-small Judaic Studies program. A course on “Women in Ancient Israel” that would combine archaeological and anthropological perspectives with then-nascent developments in biblical studies would, in 1994, be novel. In all my years in graduate school at Harvard and at Arizona, I had never heard a faculty member use the word *woman* in class. The bibliography that I assembled for my new course, which included everything that I could find, was only a few pages long. How things have changed! My department head soon assigned me another new course, “Women in Judaism,” assuming I could figure it out because I am a Jewish woman.³ I had no training in this field but quickly discovered that I loved learning—and teaching—about the social and political activism of Jewish women in the United States and abroad. In an unexpectedly personal way, I found myself connecting with the activism of my own family, my mother, my grandmothers, and their mothers before them—and thinking about this in the context of both being a daughter and raising one. My students, primarily women, were eager participants in both of these “Women in ...” courses, which made them all the more exciting.

As I became increasingly aware of the growing corpus of research relating to women in antiquity, particularly in the field of biblical studies, I became concerned about the lack of presentations at the Annual Meetings of the American Schools of Oriental Research that dealt with women in antiquity. In the late 1990s, I read through two decades of American Schools of Oriental Research programs and discovered that there were more papers dealing with pigs in Israel and Philistia than with women

3. At Harvard Divinity School, several faculty members had called me out for being a Jew, but now being Jewish worked to my professional advantage!

across the entire Near East. Actually, there were no papers on women but there were some papers in which the pronoun *she* was used—in reference to a goddess. To remedy this (what seemed to me glaring) problem, I introduced a new session, then called The World of Women: Gender and Archaeology, which first convened in 2000.⁴ In 2013, I invited Stephanie Langin-Hooper (Southern Methodist University) to cochair with me, and the next year, I stepped down and she became chair. Now renamed, Gender in the Ancient Near East is a standing session at the American Schools of Oriental Research, providing a much-needed opportunity for scholars to present research on gender issues in antiquity.⁵

During this period of time, I broadened my own research to include the study of women—and goddesses—in antiquity. While excavating at Tell el-Wawiyat, we had uncovered an extraordinary plaque figurine on a Late Bronze Age IIB (thirteenth century BCE) floor. It portrays a woman standing, her left arm clasping a child to her hip. (Male) archaeologists who saw the figurine had dismissed it as belonging to a “dime a dozen” type, so I was surprised, when I began researching it for publication, to find no parallels. It was this project that I had discussed at the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature meeting, and with the goal of developing this project further, I applied for—and received—a Society of Biblical Literature Research and Technology Grant (2001). I spent much of that summer in the Harvard University libraries. This figurine, this chance discovery, offered me a tangible way to explore the intersection between women’s lives and religion in antiquity (Nakhai 2014c), and I have continued that exploration ever since.

Of course, I had always known that the only way to obtain a tenure-line position was to publish a book, but revising my dissertation while managing two jobs and family responsibilities was difficult. Finally, I quit the off-campus half-time job that I had held for the past ten years and in 2001, the American Schools of Oriental Research published *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel* (Nakhai 2001). When I look back on my

4. In 2003, the presentations from the 2000 session were published in a special issue of the American Schools of Oriental Research’s journal, *Near Eastern Archaeology*. My second edited volume is a collection of articles drawn from other papers presented in this session (Nakhai 2008c).

5. Of course, Gender in the Ancient Near East claims no monopoly over gender-related topics at the Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research; at the same time, such topics are found only rarely in other sessions.

dissertation and on this subsequent book, I cringe at the fact that I never incorporated any discussion of women's participation in Canaanite and Israelite religions. I can only explain this by reminding myself that while I was writing my dissertation, women as revealed through biblical studies was a relatively new topic—and women as revealed through archaeology was barely a topic at all. I could have remedied that flaw while revising my dissertation for publication, but I simply did not have the luxury of time that would enable me to introduce a new area of investigation to my book.

In 2003, at the urging of my department head, J. Edward Wright, the dean of my college created a tenure line for me, thus ending nine years of adjunct three-courses-per-semester-plus-summer-school teaching. I celebrated by giving a paper at the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Cambridge, England. Three years later, in 2006, I received tenure. It was only with a tenure line—and then tenure—that I could breathe and begin to think about a long-term research agenda. While I had been an adjunct faculty member, I had published a book (Nakhai 2001), an edited volume honoring Bill Dever (Nakhai 2003b; the second of his three *Festschriften*), and several articles. Now, though, with job stability and a reduced teaching load, I could move in new directions.

One development was that I became more involved with regional societies. I worked with the Pacific Coast chapter of the Society of Biblical Literature, presenting papers (2001, 2002, and 2003) and serving as its vice-president (2007–2008) and president (2008–2009). In that final year, I delivered the presidential address. Over that same period of time, I worked with Tammi Schneider (Claremont Graduate University) to found the American Schools of Oriental Research's Pacific Southwest chapter, which met together with the Society of Biblical Literature's Pacific Coast chapter. For a decade, I served as its coordinator and chaired one of its sessions. I served, as well, on the Board of Directors of the Western Commission on the Study of Religion, the oversight body for these two regional chapters (as well as the American Academy of Religion's Western Region and the Western Jewish Studies Association). Through all this work, I had the opportunity to meet lots of new people, including great early career scholars completing their doctorates and embarking on their professional careers. I doubt we would have become acquainted at the massive annual meetings, and I appreciate the many collegial relationships that I established over the course of that decade.

I also became involved, from its beginning, with the Biblical Colloquium West (later, California Biblical Colloquium), the brainchild

of luminary David Noel Freedman, which he founded in 2002. It was a small group of (primarily) biblical scholars who met annually, first in San Diego and later, through the 2000s, in Berkeley, thanks to Ron Hendel (UC Berkeley). I served throughout on the Executive Committee and eventually as president. While not affiliated with the Society of Biblical Literature, the members were primarily Society of Biblical Literature people. Sadly, with Noel's death in 2008, momentum faded and the group ceased its annual meetings.

In 2005, I was asked by outgoing chair Neal Walls (Wake Forest University School of Divinity) to serve as chair for a venerable Society of Biblical Literature section, Israelite Religion in Its Western Asiatic Environment (formerly Israelite and Canaanite Religion), which I did for a six-year term. I was impressed by the competition for places on the program and interested in the dialogue among committee members involved in the selection process. I additionally appreciated the fact that chairing this section ensured that I attend the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature for six consecutive years. For American Schools of Oriental Research members, this is generally difficult to do, since together the two meetings stretch over a week at a hectic time in the semester; work commitments and expense make attending both rather challenging.

During this period of time, one of my research trajectories concerned women in Canaan and, particularly, in Iron Age Israel. In 2004, I completed an article on mother-and-child figurines, including the one from Tell el-Wawiyat (2014c). In 2008, I completed one on Late Bronze Age II (Canaanite) plaque figurines (published in Nakhai 2015). In this second article in particular, I focused on women's agency, which is to say, on women as active members of—and participants in—a complex and cosmopolitan world. I then served as a respondent at a special Society of Biblical Literature session on Iron Age Terracotta Figurines from the Levant, organized for the 2013 meeting by Erin Darby (University of Tennessee, Knoxville) and Izaak J. de Hulster (University of Helsinki).

I returned to the question of women's agency, this time as it related to Middle Bronze II infant jar burials. Like my work on mother-and-child figurines, this project was inspired by a discovery at Tell el-Wawiyat—in this instance, two Middle Bronze II infant jar burials. The article I published (Nakhai 2018b), like an earlier one exploring female infanticide in Israel's Iron Age (Nakhai 2008b), used archaeological evidence (and, in the latter, texts as well) to consider gender and decision-making processes.

My interest in women's agency led me, as well, to reconsider the near-exclusion of women from reconstructions of ancient Israelite religion. Over the last decade, increasing attention has been paid to the four-room house, the primary residence of most Israelites and Judaeans. Its relevance to what is variously called *household*, *family*, or *domestic religion* (religion practiced at home rather than in public settings) derives from the fact that it is where most women both resided and worked, making archaeological evidence key to illuminating women's sacred experiences, traditions, and rituals. My work related to the Wawiyat excavation had familiarized me with village life (Nakhai 2003a, 2008a) and daily life (Nakhai 2005). I developed these lines of research further, discussing women and household religion at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (2009, 2011) and International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (2011), at other conferences in the States and abroad, and in a series of articles and a coedited volume (Nakhai 2011, 2014b, 2015, 2018b; Albertz et al. 2014).

Even while exploring women's roles in ancient religion, I have also queried the systemic biases in modern scholarship that have absented ancient women from most scholarly works. The question of how nineteenth–twentieth century (primarily male) scholars of antiquity have rendered women near-invisible in their reconstructions of the past—eerily replicating the work of the many male authors of the Bible—is one that I find particularly compelling. Focusing on Iron Age Israel, with its rich biblical and archaeological record, I have been looking at studies that purport to reconstruct history, religion, daily life, and more—but populate the studies almost exclusively with men. Since the early 2000s, I have presented on this topic at conferences, and I have published articles documenting this problem and its consequences (Nakhai 2005, 2007, 2018a, 2018c, forthcoming). Of course, the reasons that scholars were, in the past, disinclined to integrate women into their reconstructions of antiquity may seem obvious—but in my opinion, stating the obvious is insufficient. Rather, this obvious must be documented and remedied, both through scholarship that focuses upon women and through scholarship that is gender-inclusive. Common assumptions must be reexamined and the past populated with women alongside men. I find this work essential and compelling.

In 2002, I was elected to the American Schools of Oriental Research Board of Trustees. I soon proposed that the board prohibit any actions, in the United States or abroad, that would violate Federal Equal Employment Opportunity legislation; it did so by unanimous vote and later developed

a “Non-discrimination Policy.” In 2013, Jennie Ebeling (University of Evansville) and I spoke at a conference workshop, “The Values of ASOR: Developing a Comprehensive Ethics Policy,” about the American Schools of Oriental Research’s role in fostering gender equity in Near Eastern archaeology. The American Schools of Oriental Research’s 2015 “Policy on Professional Conduct” reiterates the organization’s stand against discrimination and harassment.

Because of my commitment to ensuring that women past and present are seen and heard, I have been investigating the status of women working in Near Eastern archaeology over the last century and more. This is, in a way, an outcome of my effort to ensure a place for ancient women at Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research. I began using the World of Women session to not only discuss the past but also to enable women to discuss their experiences in archaeology and the ways they envision the American Schools of Oriental Research supporting their work. I created special sessions at which, for example, female archaeologists talked about their workplace experiences. I often collaborated with Ebeling, an amazing partner in advancing gender equity in the American Schools of Oriental Research and on affiliated excavations. I also began enumerating the women who have served as excavation directors, American Schools of Oriental Research officers and committee chairs, and so forth, reporting this data at the organization’s Annual Meetings. I used my position as a member (2002–2010) and eventually chair (2010–2013) of the American Schools of Oriental Research’s Board Nominations Committee to ensure that more women were placed on the ballot; over time, the trustees came to include a larger cohort of women. Although I am asked why there is a need to continue documenting gender inequality in Near Eastern archaeology, in my opinion the imperative for remediation remains pressing.

In 2012, recognizing the demand by American Schools of Oriental Research members (particularly its female members) for gender equity in our professional lives, then-president Tim Harrison (University of Toronto) created the “Initiative on the Status of Women in ASOR” and asked me to serve as its chair. I have been honored to do so. My first acts were to query the organization’s membership about what they wanted to accomplish and to form a steering committee. In November 2013, I attended a meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature’s Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession, then chaired by Rannfrid Thelle (Wichita State University). Founded in 1989, this committee has a history of activism within the Society of Biblical Literature, and I knew that there was a lot to be learned

from its members. I was impressed by a number of things: the fact that the Commission on the Status of Women is a standing (and not a vulnerable ad hoc) committee within the Society of Biblical Literature; that its clearly defined mission includes information gathering, program and policy development, and monitoring of gender-based discrimination; that it serves as a resource for women in the Society of Biblical Literature; that it extends its mission to female biblical scholars who are not members; and finally, that the committee's members see themselves as powerful voices for change. I invited Rannfrid to speak at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research, in a session that I cochaired with Stephanie Langin-Hooper entitled "Women at Work: Making One's Way in The Field of Near Eastern Studies."

In 2008, I had attended Commission on the Status of Women's Outstanding Service in Mentoring Awards breakfast, at which Carol Meyers (Duke University) was honored.⁶ I loved the idea of a women's mentoring event, and in 2013, under the aegis of the Initiative on the Status of Women, I organized the American Schools of Oriental Research's first Mentoring Lunch. Now an annual affair, our most successful format, suggested by Arlene Press, the director of meetings and events, is speed networking. Tables are anchored by invited mentors, and participants have the opportunity to interact with them all. While I have never attempted to quantify the results of this event, I hear from mentors and mentees alike that they find it informative, professionally rewarding, and fun.

Another project that is extremely important to me is ensuring that people working on excavations abroad are safe from gender-based intimidation, harassment, violence, and discrimination in their fieldwork settings and in their subsequent excavation-related research and publication. Toward that goal, I launched a multiyear survey entitled *Survey on Field Safety: Middle East, North Africa, and Mediterranean Basin*. In the course of two years (2014, 2015), I received almost five hundred responses from people residing in twenty-four countries and doing fieldwork in almost as many. Respondents ranged from excavation directors to volunteers; almost four-fifths held advanced degrees. Results revealed an often-poisonous excavation culture. Sexual violations were tolerated at 20 percent of digs, while alcohol and drugs were rampant at a great many; physical

6. Some years later, I was pleased to coedit, and write for, a Festschrift honoring Carol (Ackerman, Carter, and Nakhai 2015; Nakhai 2015).

assault, racial or religious harassment, theft, and vandalism occurred at approximately 25 percent. Violations of professional integrity, including discrimination in field and postfield opportunities and assignments, were also common (see Nakhai 2017). While addressing such egregious issues is complicated, steps toward remediating problems and creating healthy fieldwork environments include: increasing the number of female excavation directors; developing and disseminating codes of conducts with clearly defined consequences for violations; holding trainings for staff and volunteers; having medical personnel and ombudspersons on site; and being knowledgeable about the laws and customs of both home countries and those countries in which excavations take place. I have been working with the American Schools of Oriental Research leadership to develop a code of conduct that includes standards for field safety and ensures that all excavation participants are cognizant of their legal and ethical responsibilities and rights. The Society of Biblical Literature's "Professional Conduct Policy" and its statement of "Professional Conduct and Harassment Procedures," both approved in 2015, have been helpful in my work.

I conclude this essay with a few quick thoughts. I am honored to be included in this great project. Having been involved in this field for more than four decades, I have seen a lot and I am eager to read other women's reflections on their own experiences. Being forced, as it were, by the requirements of this essay to be both reflective and self-centered has afforded me the opportunity to think about my professional and personal commitments, accomplishments, challenges, and failures in ways that I normally would not. The experience has been quite interesting—and not always comfortable. Finally, even though I consider myself more an American Schools of Oriental Research person than a Society of Biblical Literature person, I very much value the many ways in which the Society of Biblical Literature has been integral to my professional growth.⁷

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SCHOLARSHIP OF PROMISE

TAMMI J. SCHNEIDER

It is an honor to be grouped with my colleagues who are writing in this volume. I realize I was not on the original line of women fighting to get into the academy, though they hired me and were still there when I began.

For this piece, I will refer to three incidents in my career that function as key markers for my role in the field as it reflects biblical studies writ large and the role of actual women in it. These incidents cover a span of more than twenty-five years and reveal a gradual shift in the role of women in the field of religion and, specifically, Hebrew Bible. These examples also provide an opportunity to discuss the impact that the focus on historical critical studies have had on the field of Hebrew Bible and how that focus has stymied the field's ability to respect, consider, and incorporate more thoroughly other approaches to the biblical text, including feminist methodologies.

The first incident concerns my job interview in 1992, a year in which there were few job openings. I was interviewed for the job I still hold: Professor of Religion at Claremont Graduate University (then Claremont Graduate School) specializing in Hebrew Bible. It was clear they were seeking to hire a woman since only women made the on-campus interview stage for the job. While the ad suggested the candidate would teach Hebrew Bible, the stress for the committee was someone who specialized in the ancient Near East and, more specifically, Mesopotamia. The fact that the two other candidates on the short list did not know Hebrew suggests the last thing they really wanted was for a woman to teach Hebrew Bible.

At one stage during the interview, I met with only female faculty from both Claremont Graduate University and the Claremont School of Theology. It was a small group. Karen Torjesen¹ or Ann Taves asked if I would

1. Note that Karen Jo Torjesen's (1993) book, so groundbreaking for the field of women's studies in religion, had not yet been published.

publish anything about women or feminist leaning. With a straight face and completely honest I replied, "I am a feminist and would love to publish and teach that, but I find it unlikely that I could do so because no one would publish it, and I would never gain tenure." The women in the room looked at each other and smiled. I still have the job.²

The second incident occurred a few years after I began teaching but before I was tenured when I was asked to teach a course on Women in the Bible for the Orange County Jewish Feminist Institute. It seemed an easy topic and one with a fair amount of scholarly information readily available. I was wrong. Because of the audience, the course would address: Sarah, Miriam, Bathsheba, and Esther. I relied heavily on Naomi Steinberg's *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective* (1993) but was shocked at how little else I found for the characters I was addressing. The resources were either in encyclopedia/dictionary articles, and therefore were short and summarized the character without getting into the text about them, or commentaries that were not at all interested in engaging with the textual data addressing the female characters, especially in ways that might negatively impact a characterization of a figure like a patriarch or King David.

The realization that so little was written about women coincided with a book contract to write a commentary on the book of Judges from a literary perspective, treating each biblical book as a literary whole.³ Since I was grappling with the book of Judges, a lack of discussion about female characters in the biblical text, and analysis of the text from a more feminist perspective, I decided to teach a class on "Women in the Book of Judges." This was the first time I taught a class on Bible rather than archaeology, ancient Near Eastern literature, languages, or history after serving three years on the religion faculty at Claremont Graduate University. Teaching the course changed the trajectory of much of my teaching and research. My students and I grappled with the Hebrew text but also translations of it which depicted the characters differently than the standard commentaries

2. For context, the religion department at Claremont Graduate University started a MA program in women's studies in religion in 1990 and in 1995 added the PhD in the same program. When I was hired, the MA program had just started. Shortly thereafter we started the PhD in women's studies, which has evolved into gender studies, which now infuses many departments of Religion in the United States, something it did not when I originally was hired.

3. The contract was for the book that became Schneider 2000.

and secondary literature suggested. The lack of commentaries asking the kinds of questions about the terminology used to address women, the situations in which the characters, both male and female, were placed, and if and how women functioned as a trope in the text led me to focus on those issues for my commentary.

These two incidents were brought together in the book, for which I received tenure: a commentary on Judges. One reviewer of the book, who provided a fairly positive review noted, “The feminist-gender orientation of the author is stressed already in the ‘Acknowledgements’” (2018). The reviewer uses the acknowledgements as a means of highlighting the “feminist-gender orientation of the author,” which is clearly a bad thing, as the following comments in the review make clear.⁴ So, I was wrong that I would not gain tenure by writing a feminist volume. I also do not recall reading, before or since, a review of a volume by a male (or female) scholar where they are critiqued for their acknowledgements. Ironically, the feminist-gender orientation that the reviewer found in my acknowledgements was recognizing the women of the Orange County Jewish Feminist Institute as my inspiration.

The third incident occurred in 2011 during the first panel of a new session at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature on the book of Genesis. I was asked to give a paper on feminist approaches to Genesis. By that time, I had already published two volumes on the topic (Schneider 2004, 2008) and felt secure in knowing a thing or two about the specific characters who were women in the Bible and approaching it from a feminist perspective. My trepidation concerned the fact that I had just become a dean, had a limited time to write the paper, and Walter Brueggemann was the respondent. I managed to find time to write the paper, but the tone certainly was snarkier than my usual presentation style.

Mine was the last paper of the session. The point of having a new session was an effort to break away from some of the more traditional approaches to Genesis, especially historical critical, and stake some new ground, ask new questions, and try to place newer approaches into the larger context of the world, especially religious and biblical studies. By 2011 much had now been published by women and about female characters and feminist concerns from a range of methodological approaches. I

4. One of the critiques, in particular, in his following comments addresses my interpretation of the character of Sarah in Genesis. Sarah is the focus of my second book (Schneider 2004).

was thus slightly surprised and frustrated that the bulk of the panel was, in my opinion, rehashing much that had been discussed for decades.

Happily, I learned that Brueggemann thought the same. His critique of the first two papers suggested he had been engaged in a similar argument with the first two speakers for a quite a while. He liked the third speaker's approach, though he had some legitimate, though gently offered, criticisms. He then turned to my paper where he quoted me saying, "Schneider suggests that the opposite of what she does is a gross masculinist generalization of the text" (I had argued that scholars refer to what I do as a feminist close reading of the text and offered that as, possibly, the opposite of my work). He then chuckled and said something along the lines of, "she is right, that is what we were doing." He suggested that his generation was not taught to interrogate the details of the text and contextualize it, as he claimed, I had done. He went on to argue that what my feminist colleagues and I were doing was much more interesting and exciting.

After breathing a sigh of relief, the discussion section of the session began, with suggestions by the audience that I could not make the critiques I had made, mostly, they argued, because of past generalizations of the text from which I had just been freed by Brueggemann. On some levels, the questions I received implied that, despite rooting my analysis of the characters solidly in the data provided by the text (and ironically enough, I was talking about Laban, not even a female character), I simply could not say such things.

In some ironic way, having Brueggemann support my ideas and approach legitimated for me the focus of my research. It was not that I had not previously published according to the methodological approach I had staked out, but his comments legitimated my work more than previous published reviews had. What still plagued me was why feminist research was still sidelined. How could it be that despite numerous efforts to change the methodological approaches away from the absolute dominance of historical critical approaches, at least at the Annual Meeting, they continue to dominate?

The five hundred anniversary of the Protestant Reformation was celebrated last year resulting in a fair amount of attention to the impact it had on various communities and the study of religion. Having participated in one of these panels, despite my pleas that it is a topic about which I know little, a few things became apparent. It is clear little attention has been paid to the impact the Reformation had concerning the study of the Hebrew Bible despite Wilfred Cantrell Smith's suggestion that

most Biblical studies for the past hundred years in our seminaries and academic institutions have been studies from within that transition rather than studies about it. They have assumed that the Bible has the status and the importance that the Reformation gave to it, rather than scrutinizing and interpreting to us that status and importance. It is from this assumption, for instance, that current Biblical scholarship and its doctoral programs arise. (Smith 1989, 24)

Smith's suggestion here is that much of modern scholarship on the Hebrew Bible is rooted in historical-critical considerations of the text which, to some extent, grow from notions about the Hebrew Bible rooted directly in Luther's relationship with that text.

What this means for women and feminist studies is that regardless of how data driven or grounded in modern methodology our research is, until recently, they were still sidelined and not incorporated into more mainstream commentaries and discussions of the texts. It also means the field has not developed a methodological approach towards scripture in general, leaving the Society of Biblical Literature outside the greater conversations in religious studies about scripture, its definition, and its role in various religious traditions. Some of the difficulty this narrow focus creates is apparent in the lack of a clear roadmap for scholars of the Hebrew Bible doing comparative work even with scholars of the Quran and the Book of Mormon, which the Society is now attempting to do.

I originally wrote this article before the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. There, for the first time, I attended sessions where scholars apologized for referencing diachronic schools like E and P. There were sessions where feminist concerns were front and center, and the term *feminist* did not even appear in the name of the session. New methodological approaches grounding the work in data and what the text, or texts, actually state abounded. It felt that the tide had turned and that diachronic approaches were no longer the only ones worthy of scholarly attention.

The Society of Biblical Literature has changed over the last twenty-five years, as has the field, the academy, and the world. My journey inside it has not been a bad one. I have had the opportunity to work with intelligent colleagues and publish on topics that matter to me. My greatest joy has been the chance to train amazing scholars who have taken scholarship far beyond where I envisioned. I had a blessing, of sorts, from the likes of a giant such as Bruggemann. Recent scholarship and papers presented at the Annual Meeting suggest that the field of Hebrew Bible is alive and well and

the number of sessions approaching the text from perspectives beyond traditional historical critical is growing. There are new series of commentaries only from a feminist perspective and articles and volumes abound with research reflecting multiple approaches to address women, LGBTQ, gender in general, minorities, and topics I could not imagine when I first interviewed for my job. So, now it is my turn to look at my colleagues and smile and await what future generations will bring to the study of the wonderful text that is the Hebrew Bible.

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**COMMUNITY AND SOLIDARITY:
THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN HEBREW BIBLE
AND ANCIENT JUDAISM**

HINDY NAJMAN

I write my story with delight and hope, but also with trepidation. Not because I am worried that my story will cause damage, but because I worry that younger scholars will despair or even give up on the kind of ethical and creative work that can be done in the academy. My story is not unlike most women of my generation. I begin by saying that I believe that the future can be brighter for women in my field.

I am in a privileged but complicated position. I am the first woman, the first American, and the first Jew to hold a chair of Old Testament at Oxford (along with many other professorial chairs for Jewish Studies and Hebrew Bible or Old Testament—where women have never been appointed). I carry that responsibility heavily, not lightly. I have enjoyed teaching in great institutions. I have been given important responsibilities with editing journals and books series and running international programs. My publications have been well received and I feel acknowledged and proud of those achievements. I celebrate that I have two children, and I want my students and my colleagues to know that that is part of who I am. We can be whole people in the academy. That does not necessarily mean having children or running marathons. There is no right or wrong paths; rather, there are many different paths. We, as women and as men, as human beings, can judge less and support more. My point is simply that we need to be members of our intellectual community as scholars and to be people who create a space (for men and women) where it is normal to be a woman in the academy. This will not be realized soon, but we can pursue different pathways and celebrate our progress. It is slow and it is at

times receding (one step forwards, two steps backwards), but some sense of progress is ever-present.

To be a woman in fields that are in many ways uncharted territories for women is a mixed blessing. There is much that we as women can create as well as possibilities that are enabled through our presence, and it is essential for women to become normalized into the discipline, as scholars, as human beings, and as women. It can even be celebrated as different. To be sure, female voices transform scholarship by asking different questions and not simply reinforcing and satisfying the needs of scholarship's past. These new questions are coming to be part of scholarship across not only my own disciplines and related disciplines, but also across the humanities and the social sciences. The voice of women, which is gendered and even distinctive, must not be denied.

I want to reflect on my time and work as a scholar. Not *only* as a woman but *also* as a woman. Dignity rests in how each of us lives out our humanity, and, of course, that has to be particularized in various ways for this volume. I want to address what it means for me to be a woman who works both as a scholar of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Judaism. Both areas encompass many subjects and fields, but it is not an exaggeration to say that these fields and subfields have—by and large—not been populated, led, or envisioned by women or even for women. The voice of women as students has emerged only recently and as senior scholars in our fields, perhaps only yesterday.

I also want to celebrate and honor the achievement of women and men who have made space for new voices and new perspectives. I have been graced with many people who have opened up those new pathways that seemed closed off or, even at times, insisted that my voice be heard and integrated into a discourse that was not previously open to my *questions or answers*.

As I write this essay and share my experiences with you, I reflect not only on my early experiences as a young graduate student, but also on my later experiences as a scholar who has taught at many different institutions. My comments and critical reflections thus reflect my positions across four different institutions, first as a student at Harvard, then, as faculty, at Notre Dame, Toronto, Yale, and now Oxford.

The Graduate

I did my graduate training at Harvard University's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. The women in the program were relatively sparse. At best, they were isolated. At worst, they were ostracized. There was no community and very little trust, but, more importantly, there was next to no collaboration among women. There was no space for it, despite the fact that we tried to create a supportive environment. The kinds of things that were said to women and about women in seminars, offices, and even among graduate students, were and are the very kinds of things we tell our students never to tolerate and never to propagate. In seminars, in the hallways, or in faculty offices—it was not a friendly or supportive environment for women. Women (not men) were discouraged to have children; marriage was seen as an obstacle to professional development and ultimately women were encouraged to behave like men. I was told once, if you behave like a male and a protestant your seminar presentation would be far better received. I did neither. It is important to state that I did not see all of this clearly as a graduate student. Much of this is retrospective reflection and critique. And now, having taught many students and having run many graduate seminars since 1998, I see the world through many different perspectives. I am in a position now where I can set the tone in my own graduate seminars and student meetings; I can also help facilitate a rigorous and ethical community of intellectuals ready to think critically and deeply about philology, history, and interpretation, but also about otherness and new paradigms for scholarly discourse. I did not fully understand then what I would *never* tolerate now and what I would come to tell my students—male and female—to refuse to accept.

There were great challenges in an environment that was condescending if we were female, dismissive if we were pregnant, uncomfortable if we were Jewish, or other in any other sense (and there are many ways of being other). These spaces were never easy. I found myself in new worlds or old worlds and very alone. There were times when my professional life became a kind of Kafkaesque version of *The Trial*. I was determined and fought harder to write and to disseminate ways of thinking that came out of my own work in philology, philosophy, and poetry. In my own writing I was determined to open up new pathways. But it was also the case that what I produced never quite fit into the framework of traditional Old Testament studies or Wissenschaft des Judentums. It was always different. Part of this was my fight for an independent voice, but it was also the case that

as a woman and Jew, my engagement with historicism and Protestantism was going to be different. It was never alright to simply accept a model of scholarship that was disparaging of the law or privileging the original text as I was mindful of the larger intellectual and theological implications for such narratives.

In all honesty, I want to say that women could have been kinder, humbler, and more committed to the growth of the field not *only* for women, but *also* for women. Men and women, in times of need and crisis, could have been courageous in the face of violence against the other. And yet, I, nevertheless, want to offer hope. It is never too late to heal our own institutions or our graduate community, and most importantly it is never too late to acknowledge our own cruelty. Then perhaps we can begin again and create new pathways of healing after destruction.

A Member of the Club

My first meeting at the Society of Biblical Literature was in 1997. I interviewed for a job, which I got, at the University of Notre Dame. I gave my first talk at that same meeting. It was a meeting that was overwhelming and intimidating but also intellectually exciting. In subsequent years at the Society of Biblical Literature, I worked towards building bridges across many different program units including Hebrew Bible, Dead Sea Scrolls, Hellenistic Judaism, ancient Judaism, rabbinics, wisdom and apocalyptic, prophecy, and pseudepigrapha. The Society of Biblical Literature was a place that fostered this new work, whereas so many other spaces in the academy inhibited or even paralyzed that kind of growth.

The Society of Biblical Literature was a place where young scholars could find a voice and support, not always but often. The people who offered support and gave me new spaces for thinking across boundaries and across what had been presented as sharp divides was nothing less than therapeutic and hopeful. I came up with ideas, and people provided contexts for me to develop them. There were so many people who opened doors for me at the Society of Biblical Literature in my early years. They created new pathways for me to think and to breathe and very early on trusted me even before I was ready to build seminars, edit journals and volumes, and create new collaborations that enabled fresh ways of reading Jeremiah, Jubilees, Philo of Alexandria, or Ezra-Nehemiah. There were other areas that were closed off, so I created new pathways—or at least I tried.

I want to also write about the support I received that was not about enabling me, but rather about giving me the space to find my own voice in the Society of Biblical Literature as an integral part of that field. I found previous voices who engaged philology and commentary, but they were not part of the normative path for thinking about biblical authorship, philology, poetry, and history. Philologists and philosophers such as Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Rosenzweig, and Peter Szondi continue to give new life to old texts, and they helped me describe paths that were not taken.

There was not yet a strong cohort of supportive colleagues though. There were certainly precious few women scholars and almost no senior women. I was compelled to open up new pathways across subfields, but more importantly across disciplines. I believed then, and know now, that this was an effective way to revitalize, sustain, and grow the texts that we teach and from which we learn. Perhaps some of my colleagues understood how I was finding my own voice, which both thermalized the marginal and, at the same time, reconfigured a new center. The reception and recognition of my own work and the work of many of my colleagues could not have happened without intellectual community. The support, mentoring, and friendship of my teachers and my colleagues and now my students gave me and continue to give me renewed hope that the fields in which we work are ready for new scholarship. The Society of Biblical Literature, then and now, gave young scholars a chance to share their new work and untethered optimism for their research.

To be sure, there are many forms of violence against women in the academy and more generally in the workplace, but one of the greatest obstacles for women in our fields are women destroying women. I have personally experienced this. We need to confront this directly if we are to make a lasting difference for women in the academy. We should not give up fighting for an ethical workplace and a pedagogically effective teaching space.

The women early on in my career and some later on as well, were suspicious of other women and were, for the most part, uninterested in offering support or encouragement. Perhaps their personal struggles had just been so hard or perhaps they did not take notice of others' struggles. The most disappointing part of the field for me—across the past twenty-five years—was the fundamental lack of support by women for women. Instead, there was, and at times continues to be, a kind of repetition of misogyny. Or, perhaps it should be analyzed as a kind of defending of turf:

when one does not expect there to be room for more than one exemplar of a marginalized group, to such an extent that younger women become dismissive of senior women, and senior women find bright new female minds threatening. Thus, women demean one another instead of supporting one another in some of the ugliest performances—where women use graduate students against other women in the name of rigor but really to protect territory and hierarchy and other such cases. They certainly do not offer support, and neither do their male colleagues when their colleagues were struggling.

I feel that the place of women, how women are treated, and, perhaps most importantly, the way women treat women in the academy has a very long way to go. And yet, I agreed to write here because I believe that this pattern can change and in certain circles is already changing. There are women I have in mind who have exhibited courage and voice and stood up. They exhibited courage for women as women, in the name of honesty and integrity and not in ways that were protective of their own work.

Professorships

I would be remiss if I did not note the paucity of women with full professorships across North America and Europe. The numbers are astoundingly low. And when women are appointed, it is incredible how many women, as well as men, undermine them for *being*—for being women, for being too productive or for not being productive enough, for writing on gender or for not engaging feminism, for having a family or for deciding not to. Women undermine their own achievements as women, as scholars, and also as pioneers. It is hard to find a voice and to create an environment for conversation when it is unclear what the conversation should look like. Even before they have a chance, some of these women who on paper look like they succeeded indeed are told or treated as though they have already failed. I say all of this knowing that there are newly minted PhD's who feel they don't have a chance in the field because of the paucity of positions. This is true for women and for men. I want to say that we need to work harder to create more interest and demand for biblical studies and ancient Judaism. I believe we can make a difference through thoughtful and strategic integration into the humanities and the social sciences. We need to be mindful of the challenges we face within the academy.

We can fight against these patterns of exclusion and destruction—but that battle needs to be waged across gendered lines and on both sides of promotion or tenure. There is a great deal more for us to do, as men and as women, as scholars and as students, as mentors and as supervisees. We need to be courageous, and we need to be clear from the very beginning what needs to be done and when it needs to be done. We need to act, but we also need to never become self-righteous in our work. Our younger colleagues can show us paths that were never taken with respect to gender equality, and they can also show us new ways of experiencing gendered behaviors in a new generation—a generation that perhaps has more options about how to manage sexism, unequal pay, parental leave (or lack thereof), and the cruelty of the academy (and being able to decipher when it is about gender and when it is about something really different).

Women should not be placed within an overly narrow framework for their intellectual work. Increasingly, we find women writing not only about matters connected to women, for example, Jewish law or marriage or purity laws, but also about other topics unrelated to matters of gender. I highlight this because women are not reduced to writing about gender. They can write about gender if they choose to, but not because they are expected to. This is incredibly important as women are increasingly included in the intellectual communities of text criticism, philology, law, and comparative religion (among other areas relevant to biblical studies and Jewish studies).

There is grave danger, of course, because the texts themselves from the biblical, ancient Jewish, and early Christian worlds are themselves written in a different time, different world, and certainly a radically different orientation with respect to how to understand gender and the feminine or a post-enlightenment world of educated women and men. This is not only dangers of anachronism, but also judging the texts based on our own expectations and critique. Furthermore, we cannot engage the texts of antiquity without problematizing them. This critique, of course, goes well beyond the matter of gender. This is beginning to be challenged across broader discourses with respect to philology, theology, gender, and assumptions around commentary and text criticism. The feminist critique cuts across these boundaries, across canons, and across cultures. Today, women are increasingly both owning this history of feminist critique, while at the same time entering areas that are not about gender or exclusion. We are creating a new culture of support and friendship that crosses lines of denomination, faith, gender, and age. We are working on

this together, and I feel that the Society of Biblical Literature has helped engender that optimism within me, but most importantly for my students and for my colleagues.

The question for me is also one of difference. I have seen how the female and the male voice in scholarship—when performed in a transparent and open area—can be incredibly generative and creative. Collaboration, conversation, and integration of both voices, both genders, regardless of tendencies and expectations, can create new and innovative forms of scholarship. This was made possible with some wonderful colleagues who were committed to these new ways of thinking. I cannot possibly mention all of my colleagues with whom I have collaborated; this is exhibited in my work and over many years of conversation. These are the people with whom I wrote, taught, built programs, and with whom I fought to make the academy a better place for teaching and research. Yet these people have made the world a better place for women in the field, and I want to honor their work, friendship, and kindness. These people have looked out for me, offered a hand when it was needed, and at moments that were essential.

Looking Ahead

I believe that it is not necessary for female scholars to wrap themselves in armor in order to achieve authority. To that extent, I am willing to express optimism. So, while Perpetua and Nikita are still heroes, and while the first, second, and third waves of feminism must be acknowledged, we have indeed landed in a new space. This is a new and uncharted space, and it is ready now for a new generation of thinking, creating, interpreting, composing, and writing. As scholars we need to create the conditions for this new generation to thrive as we continue to rebuild communities.

As citizens and as women we need to speak and act; we also need to listen. We need to trust the voices of our male and female colleagues who deeply believe in equal space for women. They are to be found. I found them. We need to watch the behavior of women against women, even by those who write treatises against sexism. We are all vulnerable and we are all capable of acts of violence.

We can commit ourselves to use our institutions more effectively and to watch carefully and recognize our own empowerment. We should fear less and act more, but do so with humility. I have now found myself in an institution that is alive to the humanities, biblical studies, and Jewish stud-

ies. It is an institution that believes in hard work and the life of the mind and has created space for men and women to work together. We can grow communities across disciplines and linguistic boundaries, with commitments to ethics and honesty.

I believe that the texts of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Judaism belong in the academy in a rich and vibrant way. We need to focus on their place in antiquity, modernity, and across the history of western civilization. This can be revoiced through our work. Part of the work we must do as women and men is to find a way to teach these texts in universities, while creating new spaces for a new generation of women and men in the academy. The Society of Biblical Literature can create that ethical and vibrant context for us as men and women to create again, all the while being mindful of a great foundation upon which we can build.

I close with optimism that our traditions of scholarship and textual editions, of interpretation and translation, of philology and history, of liturgy and philosophical reflection can be female and male. They have a rich past, and it is upon us to generate a new future. We need to recognize patterns of growth and learn from our past. We can learn to read ethically through responding, listening, and hoping, but we have to be courageous and take risks to protect our colleagues, students, and communities. We are teachers and we are students: we must continue to learn from the young and the old about integration, about achievement, and about creating conditions for new possibility.

A ROOM IN THE SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

JO-ANN A. BRANT

When I was twenty years old, I read *A Room of One's Own*. Virginia Woolf describes her attempt to enter an Oxbridge library in which several manuscripts she wished to study were housed. She was waved out “with a flutter of black gown” by a gentleman who “in a low voice” explained that “ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction” (Woolf 1981, 8). Less than fifty years after the publication of her lengthy essay, I could freely enter any university library I wished. I was keenly aware that I was entering into what had been the dominion of men and that my passage was made possible by several generations of women who had pressed against the door. My negotiation of the halls of the academy and the seminar rooms of the Society of Biblical Literature has been a continuation of their struggle. On many occasions, I have heard the ridicule of Woolf, especially when I don my cap, gown, and hood to participate in the tradition of the march of learned men to advertise that I too am “a Doctor of Letters” and a “most clever” woman (Woolf 1938, 20). Nevertheless, I have found that what I needed was not a room of my own but a room with a view. I found such a place down a back corridor of the Society of Biblical Literature.

The first real barrier in the journey to my active membership in the Society of Biblical Literature took the form of an either/or choice. As an undergraduate desiring to pursue an advanced degree in religious studies, I looked at the small number of female members of the faculty of arts and saw none in my chosen field and a smattering in history, English, and the classics. Those who were wed married late in their careers to colleagues in their field. I wince to recall the moniker my friends and I gave many of them: female academic frumps. In order to be taken seriously as scholars, they seem to have found that ill-fitting, snagged, polyester dresses served their purpose. As I began to consider graduate school seriously, my

faculty mentor presented my options in stark terms—either a doctorate or a family. At the age of twenty-two, I decided to pursue a relationship that I hoped would lead to marriage and a career as a high school English teacher that would allow me to follow my husband wherever his career led him. I spent four frustrating years denying myself the pleasure of engaging in the conversation about religion that has occupied the last thirty-five years of my life. The relationship fizzled, leaving me free to prioritize my scholarly ambitions.

Waiting four years turns out to have been a blessing because in that time Adele Reinhartz had successfully defended her dissertation at McMaster University, the school at which I was interested in studying, making my and other women's way to proceed through a similar course of study much smoother. The senior faculty member at McMaster, who had earlier barred many women's promotion from the MA to the PhD, was now prepared to be my advisor. He had formerly argued that it was a waste of financial and supervisory resources to admit women who would eventually drop out to fulfill responsibilities as a wife and mother. His opinion, it seems, had changed. Nevertheless, there were plenty of reminders that I was entering the world of men. My supervisor counseled me on the duties of a wife to pack her husband's luggage when I got married and included reference to my husband's merits in my letter of reference when I began my search for a position. In my first meeting with another scholar of great repute with whom I wished to study, he read over my undergraduate transcript and, upon spotting two courses in women's history, paused to quip, "I didn't know that women had a history." When I applied for a government scholarship for the second year of my MA, one of my faculty references lamented that it was unfortunate that I could not disguise my female gender on the application. His anxiety proved to be unnecessary. The majority of graduate students with whom I shared basement offices were men, some of whom were inclined to gift me with their knowledge of my dissertation topic and to publicly complain that women were taking their jobs when they realized that I was applying for the same positions they were. Fortunately, the faculty members were united as a department in their determination to be as supportive of women as men even if individuals lapsed from time to time into old gender norms.

One of the difficulties in the 1980s was negotiating where the powers that be stood on issues of inclusion. For many years, using gender inclusive language was a signal to a blind reader that the gender of the writer was female. When the acceptance letter arrived for one of my first publications,

the reviewer asked for some minor revisions and included the comment, "The author does not consistently use inclusive language. For example, on page x, he uses...." That gave me a chuckle.

In one of my last years in graduate school, the Religion Department's annual symposium was devoted to the work of Phyllis Trible. In the lively debate about her book *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Trible 1984), one full faculty member denied the merits of her work by stating that it was not scholarship and that she had better have written a work of fiction about the women in whom she took interest. Women who wanted to write about women had been warned that their work would be marginal in the academy. I myself was employing well-established methodologies in a dissertation that I could summarize as "Second Temple oaths and vows: how to make them and how to break them." In the sections that dealt with women's utterances and husband's power to dissolve their binding effect, I wrote in a dispassionate voice, but it was not my own voice.

Following the example of the female religious studies professors and graduate students and encouraged by the Chinese students, I had participated in a 1988 Year-of-the-Dragon department baby-boom. With a child to support and funding running out, I was prepared to follow the advice of my thesis supervisor rather than my own judgment and get it done. The problem was that my doctoral advisor had become deathly ill. When I approached the chair of the department and asked if Reinhartz could be my supervisor, he responded that this would send the wrong message to my current supervisor. Instead, each chapter of my dissertation was parcelled out to a different faculty member. While each chapter met the expectations of each supervisor, the dissertation lacked a methodological coherence, and I left my graduate studies without a focus that determined through which door I should enter the world of the academy.

Thus far in my career, I was left with the strong sense that I had been admitted to the guild only with the hard won permission of men who had made a seat at the table for me. Indeed, my first academic position at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, now Canadian Mennonite University, had been earmarked for a female candidate. The college had sent off one of their own promising student who had not completed her PhD by the necessary date, and I was hired to hold her chair until she could take it. When I gained my own tenure track position at Goshen College, students asked me whether I was hired as an act of affirmative action.

Blissfully, the experience of my years as a contributing member to the work of the guild has been very different. The men who have shared my research interests have not made room for me so much as not taken up all the room. Two years out from graduate work, my hope for a permanent position had begun to flag, and my own research interests had veered off the safe path. I decided that if the paper that I presented at what might be my last academic meeting was my swan song that I was going to be bold. In my research on the woman at the well and Mary's washing of Jesus's feet in the Gospel of John, I had stumbled across B. P. Reardon's *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (1989) and began to read John within the context of the genre of the Greek novel. As I read the paper at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society of Biblical Literature, I watched as the eyebrows of one of my doctoral advisors move slowly closer to his hairline. My audience was entertained but not convinced. Early the next day, I was waiting for the bus to the airport and found myself standing next to David Jobling, who was the president of the Canadian Society of Biblical Literature that year. I took a chance and introduced myself. He asked me if I had presented a paper. When I shared my title, he said that he has wanted to hear it but had obligations at a concurrent session and then asked if I had a copy. I dug it out of my bag and handed it to him. Two weeks later, I received an apology letter. Jobling had passed the paper along to Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, who was an editor of *Biblical Interpretation*, a new journal focused on experimental methodologies in biblical studies, and she wanted to publish it. Jobling, Malbon, and others were actively opening new spaces.

On the bus to the airport that fateful day, Jobling had given me a piece of advice when I confessed that I did not know where I belonged at academic meetings. He told me it was important to participate in the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, where I could find a smaller session in which people were working on projects close to my own interests. He instructed me to stick around for their business meeting if an invitation was issued. With this in mind, I attended a session of the Ancient Fiction and Early Jewish and Christian Narrative group of the (American) Society of Biblical Literature in 1994. I stayed for the business meeting, and soon members such as Charles Hedrick, Richard Pervo, Judith Perkins, Dennis R. MacDonald, and Chris Shea made sure that I felt at home. I knew where I belonged.

In the early 1990's, the Greek novels were not standard reading for New Testament scholars. When the Petronian Society held a session devoted to the novel at the 1971 Annual Meeting of the American Philo-

logical Association, they were accused of being a splinter group whose interest in fringe works did not meet the standards of the association.¹ The founding members of the Ancient Fiction group had trouble getting their work accepted for presentation by program chairs for the extant sections of the Society of Biblical Literature, so in 1992 Hedrick applied to form a group to stimulate interest in ancient fiction. The men who were treating the Greek novels (then called romances) as serious objects of study were themselves transgressing gender boundaries. It had been long presumed that the novels were written for a female audience and, if male, literate but not well educated. Thus David Aune (1987, 151) could write that the centrality of the heroine pointed to their popularity among women and even the possibility that some were written by women. This presupposition was not easily shaken. When the volume *Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context* (1994) appeared, which included the work of Ancient Fiction group members Perkins, Pervo, and Lawrence M. Wills, the publisher chose to illustrate the cover with a portion of *The Favorite Poet* (1889) by Lawrence Alma-Tadema (fig. 1). The image depicts a young Roman woman in the background reclining languidly on a cushion while another young woman in the foreground reads to her from a scroll.

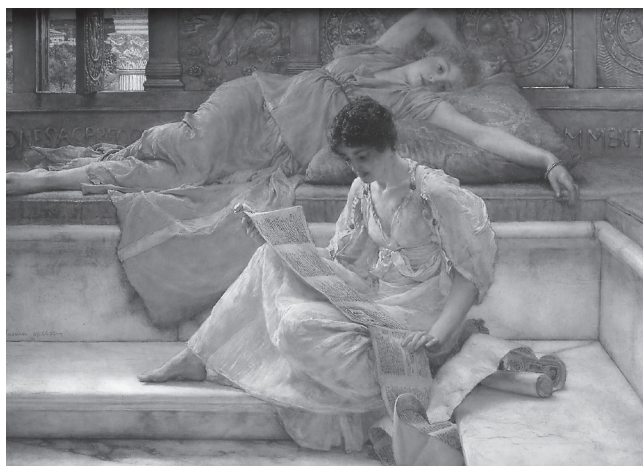


Fig 1. Lawrence Alma-Tadema. *The Favorite Poet*. 1889. Source: Wikimedia.

1. As reported by Gareth L. Schmelling (1996, 3).

Working with documents that were largely ignored and with methodologies that were not part of the established canon called for a culture of togetherness. Simply being interested in the topics of discussion gained one a place at the table. Given that the novels provided space for women's stories and women's voices, it simply made sense to the men who were studying the novels to listen to women's voices as partners in a project. Now, papers that treat the novels as a valuable source are scattered throughout the Society of Biblical Literature program in large part because of the publications generated by the Ancient Fiction group, now a section.

My work on John was enthusiastically received in the intimate sessions of the Ancient Fiction group, but when I presented a piece of what I hoped would be a monograph on John and Greek theatrical conventions to the Johannine Literature section, I scanned the large, packed ballroom and found very little expression of interest. The fact that a man standing at the back of the room was inadvertently and repeatedly dimming the lights by rocking back and forth against the light switch did not help. I left the room concluding that I had not found my audience and confined myself to the safety of the Ancient Fiction circle, who encouraged me to continue pursuing my project. I completed what became *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Hendrickson, 2005) during my 2001–2002 sabbatical, not worrying about publication and simply savoring the experience of reading the tragedies and classical scholarship. I wrote to please myself. Finding a publisher was not easy. I had the good fortune that the editor at Hendrickson who picked up my letter was James Ernest who had a background in classics, and his own research interests in Athanasius of Alexandria made him responsive to my approach. He invited two prominent Johannine scholars, R. Alan Culpepper and David Rensberger, to write the back-cover endorsements, and suddenly I no longer saw myself or my work as standing at the margin of the Johannine Literature section. Culpepper's own efforts to point to new vistas for Johannine research and Rensberger's active dedication to social justice placed them in the category of those who open up space rather than give space. A switch had flipped, and I no longer was speaking and writing with the hope of finding a larger audience and instead was being invited by members of that audience to share my research.

I realize that the complex of currents in academic thought and changes in social norms that made the difference between Woolf's and my experience are too tangled and intricate to analyze and describe in this short essay. Nevertheless, as someone who has wondered at her own good for-

tune to be born at such a time as this, I have tried to make some sense of it. In the course of writing that dissertation on oaths and vows, my understanding of language had shifted from thinking of language as the means by which I could explain the meaning of something to the tool with which I could do things. Ludwig Wittgenstein's critique of subjectivity and discussion of the socially conditioned notion of rationality and his recognition that language represents the world rather than objectively describing the world seem to me to be significant catalysts of the change from which I benefited. It seems so obvious now, but I can imagine a time in academia when scholars would have looked at Wittgenstein's (1973, 194) line drawing that illustrates the distinction between "I see that is a duck" and "I see that as a rabbit" and lined up with certitude under "this is a rabbit" or "this is a duck" camp (see fig. 2).

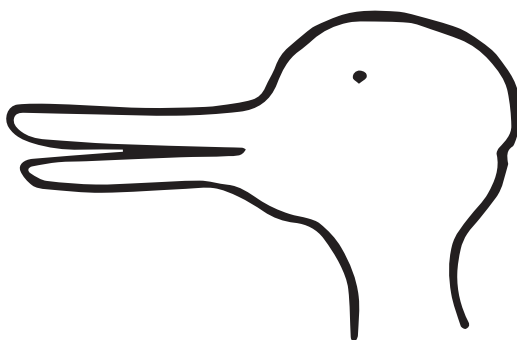


Fig. 2. Wittgenstein's line drawing of a duck/rabbit derived from Jastrow 1900, 295.

Gail O'Day (1992) provides a pointed example of the difference between "seeing that" and "seeing as" in her article "John 7:53–8:11: A Study in Misreading." She reveals how many previous readings ignored the rhetorical shape of the text in order to do one of three things. Some call the woman a wretch sadly in need of Jesus's mercy. Others deny any possible antinomianism by arguing that the woman deserves punishment. Many try to determine what Jesus was writing in the dirt. All the while, the rhetorical shape of the text permits us to see the woman as Jesus treats her, "a social and human equal of the scribes and Pharisees" (636). I do not purport to fully understanding all the nuances of Wittgenstein's work on language games, and I tend to blur the distinctions

between early and late Wittgenstein. I do recognize that the understanding of academic discourse as both a rational activity and a game in which we play by a set of rules, with an agreed upon vocabulary and set of concepts that can be changed or even abandoned, is critical to my experience in the Society of Biblical Literature. Add to this the rise of critical theory as a movement with its critical self-evaluation and inclusion of all cultural and social phenomena as important to the study of the formation of knowledge and underlying power relationships. Among many, two changes in what is normative at the Society of Biblical Literature stand out. First, we ought now to be conscious that the discourse that had once defined women's experience and women's place in culture, history, and now in the academy—or any attempt to speak on behalf of another without her or his approval—is unethical. Second, any discussion of an ancient text is the product of “seeing as” rather than “seeing that,” and we are all better off by making sure that scholars from diverse backgrounds and experiences join the conversation. We are all better off when our conversations are enriched by looking at the power dynamics within the room to see who has something to say before we fill up the room with well-rehearsed speeches.

During the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, there are plenty of displays that indicate that scholars can still slip into playing the game by an exclusive set of rules. Perkins and I regularly wander about the evening receptions together in order to overcome our reticence to talk to people we do not know. While striking up casual conversations with young male scholars, we often watch them as their eyes search over our heads looking for someone worth talking to. Then one of them will glance at Judith's name tag, and suddenly we are transformed from two grey-haired women into scholars. During a session at the 2014 Annual Meeting Alicia Myers, then my cochair of the Johannine Literature section, counted the number of references to female and male scholars in the five papers delivered. She was dismayed at the disproportionate references to men and the frequent choice of men as authorities when there were women who had made the same point in earlier publications. She was so bold the next year as to present a paper in which she named only female authorities, thereby making the point to all who paid attention that it was not difficult to find women upon whose work current Johannine scholarship rests. The bibliography of my dissertation lists 290 scholars, only five of whom are women: Morna Hooker, Mary Kelly, Lillian Klein, Sophie Laws, Lilly Ross, and E. Mary Smallwood. Another difference between

now and then is that members can unapologetically discuss power imbalances during the steering committee meetings, and problems with equity and inclusion are central to the conversations at the Society of Biblical Literature program chairs breakfast and at the editorial meetings of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

An interesting story requires such things as conflict, trials, and ordeals. I hope that in my effort to tell such a story that I have not misrepresented my experience. I am in no doubt about the importance of the Society of Biblical Literature to my academic career. In my tenure as a professor at a small liberal arts college, I have seen many younger colleagues drop their society affiliations and treat their department members and graduate school friends as their intellectual community. Most of them are soon overwhelmed by the demands of teaching and administering programs, and their CVs end without announcement of forthcoming publications. At the Society of Biblical Literature, people greet me with the sincere question "What are you working on?" and wait for an answer. Fortunately, when I board the ground transportation to the airport at the end of the meetings, I leave with renewed energy for my projects. The Annual Meeting and publications of the Society of Biblical Literature sustain a habit of thought that finds time in the spaces between teaching and administration to think about the New Testament and the literary world from which it arose.

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PART 3
REFLECTIONS BY COMMUNITY

MY SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE JOURNEY: SERVICE, SCHOLARSHIP, AND STAYING CONNECTED TO THE CALL

GAY L. BYRON

When I entered Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York to begin MDiv studies in 1989, I had never heard of the Society of Biblical Literature. And in fact, I had no clue about exegesis, hermeneutics, or the different theories and methods that are used for interpreting the Bible. At that point, I was simply focused on responding to what I understood as a call to ministry. It was primarily through reading the prophetic writings of James H. Cone that I discerned and chose a theological context that would provide resources to nurture my budding exploration of and burning questions about the Bible. I also chose to relocate from Detroit, Michigan, to a broader geographical context for exploring the possibilities of ministry for an African American woman. Indeed, it was not until I arrived in New York that I had my first opportunity to hear the gospel proclaimed by a black woman.¹

Although Professor Cone drew me to Union Seminary for MDiv studies and provided a solid foundation for understanding theology and, in particular, the powerful critiques and voices of black theologians, it was the arrival of New Testament professor Vincent L. Wimbush and his unyielding commitment to cultural-critical readings of the Bible, that sparked my interest in pursuing a vocation of biblical teaching and scholarship (Wimbush 2000).²

1. Rev. Sharon E. Williams, pastor of Baptist Church of the Redeemer, Brooklyn, New York. Williams is the first woman ordained at the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem.

2. Vincent L. Wimbush joined the faculty of Union Seminary in 1991. He later became the first African American to serve as president of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2010.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Wimbush was involved in a collaborative project among African American biblical scholars designed to identify their hermeneutical perspectives and dilemmas and also to showcase their interpretive methods and strategies. The essays resulting from this effort were published in the volume *Stony the Road We Trod: African Americans and the Bible* (Felder 1991). I read and took copious notes on all of the essays in this book, yet I was most influenced by the ones written by Renita J. Weems, "Reading Her Way through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible," and Clarice J. Martin, "The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: 'Free Slaves' and 'Subordinate Women.'" These essays, by the first two African American women to earn PhDs in Hebrew Bible and New Testament, respectively, opened a whole new world of possibility for me.

I had an opportunity to meet Weems, Martin, and several of the scholars who contributed to *Stony the Road We Trod* while attending a conference organized to celebrate its publication in Washington, DC. At that time I was still questioning and wondering, How did I get here? What will be my contribution to this field? Is this the vocation or calling God has in store for me? Although I didn't have concrete answers to my questions, after meeting this group of biblical scholars and hearing their stories of struggle, resistance, and tenacity, I returned to New York inspired with a renewed commitment to live with my questions, to move forward with graduate studies, and to explore to the fullest this vocational path of teaching and scholarship. The Society of Biblical Literature subsequently provided the larger framework for this professional exploration.

I first heard about the Society of Biblical Literature during lectures by my professors George Landes and Raymond Brown, who reminisced about the early days of the Society when it held its meetings down the street from Union, off of 121st and Broadway. It was easy to surmise that the Society, founded in 1880, was established by and designed for white men to share their scholarship with one another in United States and European contexts. Thus it is not surprising that, during my student days at Union, I never heard stories of the first woman, Anna Ely Rhoads, who joined the Society of Biblical Literature in 1894.³ And, of course, there was no mention of African American women, who were not in academic settings or affiliated

3. The Society of Biblical Literature does not have a record of when the first African American woman joined the organization.

with the Society of Biblical Literature but were engaging the Bible in their literary works and in various political and ecclesial contexts. For example, according to Martin, the nineteenth-century political writer Maria Stewart developed “hermeneutical strategies in opposition rhetoric” and appropriated biblical traditions within the narrative of her spiritual autobiography, *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart* (Martin 1993, 24–28).

So initially, I was a bit skeptical about the Society of Biblical Literature and wondered whether it would actually become a viable space for honoring my hermeneutical sensibilities. Over the years, I have found much to value from this organization focused on “fostering biblical scholarship.” Along the way, the journey has not always been without its challenges. Still, I remain committed to the mission of the Society and celebrate the publication of this volume.

Service

I attended my first Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco in 1992, the same year I started graduate studies in New Testament at Union Seminary. At that time, Wimbush was nominated to serve as chair of the newly formed Committee on Underrepresented Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession. The other members of the committee included Randall Bailey, Fernando Segovia, Henry Sun, and Gale Yee. This committee was approved in 1990 and officially constituted in 1992 to assess the status and encourage the participation of underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities in all professional areas of biblical studies.⁴ At that time the numbers of African American, Asian and Asian American, and Latino/a members in the Society were so low that leaders of the Society mandated an intentional focus on mentoring, networking, and other strategies to advance the representation of racial and ethnic minorities in the profession.

As a research assistant for Wimbush, I had the opportunity to prepare documents and sit in on some of the committee meetings. I was pleased to know that the Society that was initially established for scholarly exchange among men who were solely focused on “exegetical tasks” was now making efforts to “promote and vitalize the ways in which the Society speaks to and about racial and ethnic minorities.” The forming of this

4. https://www.sbl-site.org/SBLcommittees_CUREMP.aspx.

committee coincided with the publication of *Stony the Road We Trod* and other efforts among Latino/a and Asian American biblical scholars to find space within the Society for their unique experiences and engagement with the Bible. The sessions sponsored by the committee helped me to persevere as a doctoral student and develop research goals and a dissertation project that highlighted race and ethnicity in the New Testament and other Christian writings.

After finishing my studies and joining the faculty of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, I was appointed to serve as a member of the Committee on Underrepresented Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession and served for two terms, from 2005 to 2010. It was during this time that more and more underrepresented racial/ethnic scholars were entering the field of biblical studies to the point where the committee's luncheons were filled to capacity, and we began to be involved in more sessions beyond simply those focused on our particular ethnic identity groups. It was also during this time that underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities began to collaborate and hold symposia and other gatherings during which we would discuss the convergences and divergences in our readings of the Bible. The volume titled *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009) brought together colleagues from the major ethnic and racial groups in the United States (namely, African American, Asian American, and Latino/a) to apply critical race theory and ethnicity studies to the discipline of biblical criticism. Though this was not a project officially sponsored by the committee, the networking and alliances that had been built over the years enabled us to collaborate and generate new scholarship (Byron 2009a).

In addition to the Committee on Underrepresented Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession, the Society also mandated a Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession in 1992.⁵ Sharon Ringe served as the first chair of this committee and worked with Amy-Jill Levine, Peggy Day, Mary Ann Tolbert, and Antoinette Clark Wire to assess and track the participation and professional opportunities for women in biblical studies and related fields. This committee also sponsors forums and hosts a women's breakfast at the Annual Meeting, which creates opportunities for women to discuss academic issues and various challenges in their professional contexts. The committee has always included a strong advocacy

5. https://www.sbl-site.org/SBLCommittees_CSWP_Activities.aspx.

dimension, especially around developing policies and monitoring complaints of sexual harassment and ethical misconduct. I served as a student member of this committee, advocating for student concerns and organizing receptions for women students to network with one another and seek opportunities for mentoring. This involvement with the committee deepened my appreciation of biblical scholarship dealing with feminist and womanist⁶ perspectives, and also broadened my awareness of the unique obstacles women faced in the profession.

While serving on Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession and working as a research assistant with Committee on Underrepresented Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession, I experienced firsthand the intersectional weight of being an African American woman in the Society of Biblical Literature. Although both committees addressed important issues and sought to develop programs to address the biases and inequities in the Society's programs and policies pertaining to women and racial ethnic minorities, I often found myself having to choose between programs dealing with women or programs dealing with my ethnic identity. There were seldom opportunities for free expression and exchange around the unique challenges that African American women face in the guild. This is why it is so beneficial that the Society of Biblical Literature typically met concurrently with the American Academy of Religion, for the American Academy of Religion has had a strong series of sessions and programs around womanist theology and ethics. And it was in these sessions and gatherings that I gained insights and sources that expanded my biblical scholarship to include a focus on gender criticism and womanist hermeneutics.

Scholarship

While my initial involvement with the Society of Biblical Literature was through committee service, after completing doctoral studies I quickly became involved on program steering committees and started presenting papers and sharing my research. These early opportunities for leadership and ongoing mentoring helped me to gain traction in the profession and

6. For a definition of *womanist*, a term coined by novelist Alice Walker to articulate more precisely the unique experiences of black women, see Byron and Lovelace 2016, 1–2.

find a space for receiving critical feedback on my scholarship. I have already written about my early musings on “Biblical Interpretation as an Act of Community Accountability” (Byron 2002a), in particular, noting how my studies with Wimbush gave me an opportunity to take seriously the ways in which ethnic identities are appropriated in New Testament writings.

I dare say that had there not been a Wimbush present at Union during my tenure in the doctoral program, the nature of my scholarly interests and the course of my specific dissertation project would have been quite different, if not impossible to pursue. But, because I was in the right place at the right time, and, most importantly, because I received the right kind of consistent mentoring and support, I was able to pursue a project that went beyond the traditional boundaries of New Testament interpretation and included sources that would have otherwise been ignored or deemed inappropriate for New Testament studies (Byron 2002a, 56).

Yet now, with my involvement in the Society of Biblical Literature, it was time to go beyond the context of my particular school and supportive professors and branch out into the larger guild. With the publication of *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (Byron 2002b), the Society of Biblical Literature became instrumental in showcasing my scholarship on the rhetorical significance of Egyptians, Ethiopians, and blacks for understanding race and ethnic discourses in early Christian writings. In particular, the Ideological Criticism section and African American Biblical Hermeneutics section were two spaces where I could bring critical race theory, ethnopoltical rhetoric, and gender criticism to the reading of New Testament texts. My first Society paper featured a chapter from this book (Byron 1999), and I greatly appreciate the book review session on *Symbolic Blackness* sponsored by the African American Biblical Hermeneutics Group (Byron 2003a). In this context I presented my findings and engaged colleagues from different disciplines around the implications of this uncharted area of scholarship.

Related to this was a book review panel on a volume published by New Testament professor Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (2002). Kelley’s study shows how intellectual movements of modernity, such as orientalism and romantic nationalism became infused with the category of race. He then traces how this racialized thinking influenced modern biblical scholarship. In my response to this book (Byron 2003b), I emphasized how Kelley’s research relies heavily on the influential African American classicist Frank Snowden (1970, 1983), who argued that there was no racial prejudice in

antiquity. Thus Kelley relegates analysis of race around the Enlightenment period but overlooks how ethnocentric and racialized assumptions are inherent and infused in ancient biblical and patristic sources. The Society of Biblical Literature facilitated a number of sessions in the early 2000s that dealt with this topic. Yet the critical ideas, debates, and insights from these sessions hardly gained traction in the more tradition historical critical sessions of the Society.

As the years progressed, as noted above with the volume *They Were All Together*, underrepresented minority groups began to build coalitions and organize new sessions dealing with minoritized biblical criticism and other interpretive strategies of different ethnic groups. It remains to be seen how minoritized critics will continue to define themselves and furthermore how majoritized critics will engage this scholarship. Are there other categories that may facilitate *all* biblical interpreters and members of the Society to consider what is at stake in the tendency to racialize in the first place?

Likewise, women biblical scholars began to build coalitions and host roundtable discussions to share mutual scholarly interests, divergent cultural experiences, and potential common ground for understanding the future of feminist, womanist, and *mujerista* biblical studies. For example, in 2008, Dora Mbuwayesango and Susanne Scholz organized a session, "Dialogical Beginnings: A Conversation on the Future of Feminist Biblical Studies" (see Mbuwayesango and Scholz 2009). I joined several other colleagues during this session in sharing reflections on sociogeographical and hermeneutical differences that have shaped how I interpret biblical texts and how I have navigated institutional infrastructure that often precludes any real engagement of my scholarship (Byron 2009b). This dialogue focused on explicitly naming the contexts, communities, and experiences of women, not only in the United States but also throughout the global South and other parts of the world where Society members are represented.

In my own evolution, I have now moved into teaching the scholarship on race and ethnicity in biblical writings through my involvement with the Wabash Center on Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. I learned of Wabash through my participation in the Society of Biblical Literature meetings. Many of the structural pedagogical challenges evident in biblical studies classrooms stem from curricular assumptions that our diverse twenty-first century global, interdisciplinary paradigms have now outgrown. So, I have suggested that a focus on curricular and pedagogical change is what will advance our scholarship to the next generation

of students (Byron 2012). Consultations focusing on pedagogy within the Society are beginning to move the guild in this direction.⁷

Staying Connected to the Call

In more recent years, my scholarly focus has shifted to closing the intersectional gap I experienced during my early days in the Society. As a result of my service on the Society's Semeia Studies editorial board, I had an opportunity to promote and advance scholarship dealing with womanist biblical interpretation. As noted earlier, the American Academy of Religion has been offering sessions, preconference programs, and other forums for women of African descent to come together and share their particular insights. Yet, there is still no real space for African American women to articulate the ways in which womanist hermeneutics informs their scholarship. Therefore, in 2011 Vanessa Lovelace and I began to collaborate on a volume that showcases bold new approaches to womanist biblical hermeneutics. The volume, *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse* (2016) features analysis of both Hebrew Bible and New Testament writings and also brings together cross-generational and cross-cultural readings of the Bible and other sacred sources. The volume addresses contemporary topics such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement, domestic violence, and human trafficking, while at the same time uncovering the complicated portrayals of children, women, and other marginalized persons in biblical narratives. I am pleased that there is now intellectual space within the Society for womanist biblical scholarship.

As I reflect back over the nearly thirty years since attending my first Society of Biblical Literature meeting in 1992, there has been considerable movement in some aspects of the Society. Indeed, the advocacy, mentoring, and programming of the Committees on the Status of Women and Underrepresented Minorities in the Profession has paved the way for more participation by these members. However, most of the sessions they

7. See, for example, the Society of Biblical Literature consultation, Racism, Pedagogy and Biblical Studies. This consultation, organized in 2017, focuses on identifying and working against racism in classroom settings. Session topics have included "Practical Teaching Tools," "Racism, Pedagogy and Biblical Studies in the Context of the Black Lives Matter Movement," and "Best Practices with Latinx Students in Our Classrooms."

propose remain on the margins with limited influence or impact on the overall structure of the Annual Meeting program. My hope is that such sessions become more integrated into the mainstream discussion.

When the Society of Biblical Literature was first formed, clergy leaders were among the charter members (e.g., Jacob I. Mombert and E. A. Washburn). However, over the years, in many ways the voice of the clergy or the sound of the sacred has been overshadowed by theories and methods that have become the litmus test for critical scholarship. While I have always envisioned myself as a scholar who bridges both the academy and the church, it seems that I can now look back and see how my involvement in the Society of Biblical Literature through service and scholarship has provided another path for staying connected to the still small voice, my sense of call to ministry, that brought me to biblical studies in the first place.

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EXPECTATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES: BEYOND BEING A SOUTH AMERICAN WOMAN AT THE SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

ROXANA FLAMMINI

When I was invited to participate in this inspiring and unique project of the Society of Biblical Literature, I thought about what would be the main expectations, challenges, and opportunities for a woman from South America who became part of such a great and worldwide institution. More than twelve years after my first encounter with the Society of Biblical Literature, and after being involved in different projects and initiatives since then, I recognize that I have only positive things to express. It doesn't mean that I haven't gone through different challenges, but I gained plenty of experience by overcoming them.

Being a woman in academics and living and working in Argentina—that is my home country—is a challenge of its own. I am lucky enough to live in a big and modern city—Buenos Aires—and work at a university willing to face new challenges and to be involved in worldwide networks. Thus, my experience related to the Society of Biblical Literature is also the history of the academic center I created at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina in 2002, of the people who joined it, and of the network of relationships built in these last sixteen years.

During the 1990s, Argentina had a well-established tradition of research centers devoted to the study of ancient Near Eastern societies; most of these centers were located in Buenos Aires. One of them was based in a public national university: the Institute of History of the

I wrote this essay with the support of my home institution, Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina CONICE. I am grateful also to Nicole L. Tilford for inviting me to be part of this initiative and for editing and improving my contribution.

Ancient East/Instituto de Historia Antigua Oriental (IHAO), founded in 1958 at the University of Buenos Aires. Another was the Program of Egyptological Studies/Programa de Estudios de Egiptología (PREDE), founded in 1990 by the National Council for Scientific Research (CONICET), the main agency that fosters science and technology in Argentina. These two research units, which have significantly developed over the years, were the main centers of research during that decade. Unfortunately, in my country there is not a strong tradition of creating positions for researchers in the field at public or private museums; that is the reason why most of us developed our activities in universities and/or the CONICET. The economic history of the country, with its ups and downs, cyclical inflation, and political crisis created a difficult context to establish long term goals.

Nevertheless, with the turn of the twenty-first century, several new trends appeared that showed that the situation is slowly starting to change. From that time onwards, many public and private national universities began to gather researchers into new academic units, and with time, many of them have been linked to the CONICET, through a mixed administrative program that acknowledged the quality of a diverse set of research activities.

I have been working at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina since 1993. It is a private national university, founded in 1958, which nowadays has four campus in different cities: Buenos Aires (Puerto Madero Campus), Rosario, Paraná, and Mendoza. Puerto Madero Campus was inaugurated in 1998, gathering together various faculties, which at that time were spread out in different buildings throughout Buenos Aires. Since then, the university has continued to grow, with a new building being built even as late as two years ago.

Not only has the university built new and modern buildings, but it has also introduced many changes in its institutional life. In 2002, the Department of History, based at that time at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, decided to encourage the creation of research centers related to the field of humanities. Thus, the academic research center named Centro de Estudios de Historia del Antiguo Oriente (CEHAO), was founded with the aim of gathering together senior and junior researchers as well as undergraduate and graduate students. Our main goals were fostering the academic study of the ancient Near East—including biblical studies—and establishing a strong relation with academics in other related fields by hosting meetings and conferences. Since its creation, the CEHAO had welcomed many

relevant scholars: Marcel Sigrist, Israel Finkelstein, Émile Puech, David Ussishkin, Ze'ev Herzog, and Rita Lucarelli, among many others.

Once the CEHAO was firmly established, my main goal was to publish an academic journal with the idea of reaching a wide international audience. The journal would publish articles in Spanish, French, and English in order to improve the relationships with other academic institutions and to spread the work of local academics across the world. A secondary but related goal was starting a specialized library at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina focused mainly on the ancient Near East by exchanging printed publications—journals as well as books—with well-established institutions. With those ideas in mind, *Antiguo Oriente—Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios de Historia del Antiguo Oriente* was first published in 2003, and the news soon spread.

Among many encouraging and positive messages, we received one from Ehud Ben Zvi, editor of an open-access online journal: the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*. We have had a fruitful exchange between both journals ever since. Coincidentally, this initial exchange soon led to my incorporation into the Society of Biblical Literature. As I was reaching out, the Society was reaching in, seeking ways to foster scholarship in other parts of the world. I had many exchanges with Ehud with regard to this aim, and these conversations gradually drew me into a closer relationship with the Society.

Around the same time, I was invited to prepare a survey about the state of biblical studies in South America, and this challenge allowed me to meet someone who was of extreme relevance to the new relationship with the Society: Leigh Andersen, the managing editor of the Society's publications at the time and International Cooperation Initiative (ICI) staff liaison, an outstanding professional and a nice, understanding, and caring human being. Undoubtedly, she played a key role in implementing the joint projects that we proposed. Now, I have the opportunity to make a public acknowledgment to her commitment and support of our initiatives.

In 2007 an invitation to foster biblical studies through the Society's ICI Task Force arrived, and a new challenge began. The ICI had, and still has, as one of its main goals to make "scholarship available to scholars and students in underresourced countries" as Alan Lenzi (n.d.) expressed in his valuable post "Why You Should Submit Your Manuscript or Proposal to the Online, Open-Access Ancient Near East Monograph Series." I was invited to participate on the committee, and we created a database to promote the availability of academics who were able to travel in order to give

classes in different countries. At the same time, the idea of starting a new academic series was raised.

Central to the latter initiative was a young scholar, Juan Manuel Tebes, who had joined the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina and the CEHAO by this time. Juan gave a fresh impetus to the center. He suggested issuing a new series, named in Spanish the “CEHAO Monographs,” devoted to publishing undergraduate and graduate monographs, and individual or collective volumes focused on topics related to the ancient Near East from a historical and archaeological basis. Our goal was to spread research works written in Spanish, through an online, open-access platform provided by the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina. The first two volumes were published in 2007.

Then, we received a new proposal from the Society of Biblical Literature (coincidence again?): to start a series together, in order to publish monographs in Spanish and English with the aim of spreading academic research through an online open access platform. The works would be mirrored on the CEHAO’s and the Society’s websites.

A year later (2008), the Ancient Near East Monographs/Monografías sobre el Antiguo Cercano Oriente—nowadays the well-established and renowned ANEM/MACO Series—became a reality. The two Spanish volumes from CEHAO were integrated as the first two volumes of the joint series. Until 2015, I had the honor of sharing with Ehud the general editorship; after seven years of a fruitful relationship it was time to be succeeded in office by our colleagues Alan Lenzi and Juan Manuel Tebes. People who worked with us during those years—Alan Lenzi, Martti Nissinen, Steven Holloway, Santiago Rostom Maderna, José Manuel Galán, and many others who served in the board through the years—also played an important role in developing ANEM/MACO and were part of its success.

However, the beginning of ANEM/MACO was not as easy as we thought it would be. One of the challenges we faced was to adapt our way of institutional management to that of Society of Biblical Literature. In the Spanish-speaking academic world, it is very common that people keep an academic position for a very long time; but the Society promoted the rotation of members after serving one or two terms. This is in part because the two institutions (CEHAO and the Society) were extremely different in size: the Society of Biblical Literature was a huge and well-established institution while our center was incipient and modest. Nevertheless, we gave our series our full effort, and the amazing development of this initiative is a testimony to the positive engagement of those who believed

that international cooperation was not only possible but also could endure through time.

As I have already mentioned, the beginning was not as easy as it would seem at first sight. It was highly frustrating that for a very long time, only the two former volumes in Spanish remained in the publication list. Despite our efforts, no proposals arrived. But we kept working, contacting colleagues and promoting the new series. We firmly believed in the series' potential: we were convinced that researchers wanted to be read, while we wished to spread their work. We had a strong consciousness about the relevance of our academic research and the need to distribute it through a means that would be able to reach as many audiences as we could get.

Another strong point of our series was that we committed ourselves to making the process of reception, evaluation, and publication as quick as possible. We kept working hard, and, one day, something started to change. After three years of continuous efforts, the English counterpart started to grow more and more. Ehud's determination led him to succeed.

But it was not the same for the Spanish section. This fact made me realize that I had different challenges to face than Ehud. Alan Lenzi's "Why You Should Submit..." was translated and distributed across the Spanish-speaking academic world, while several personal messages were sent to researchers and institutions. However, I soon realized that it was not so easy to convince Spanish-speaking academics to publish their work in their mother tongue. English is nowadays an academic *lingua franca*, and I have to recognize that many scholars were reluctant to submit their work in a language that would be read just by a few interested people. On the contrary, publishing in English guaranteed an extended audience. To this prejudice, it has to be added that, as mentioned above, many Spanish-speaking authors were unenthusiastic to publish the results of their investigations in an online, open-access new series, despite having a university and a well-known institution behind the project ensuring the quality of the work published. It was a challenge to convince people that our initiative deserved to be supported and sustained. Ten years ago, open-access online academic publications had just started to appear and authors were cautious about publishing their work in that way.

Nevertheless, despite the frustrating situation, Ehud and the other members of the editorial board understood the challenges I faced. It took time, but my successor as cogeneral editor, Juan Manuel Tebes, would see the reversal of the situation. A new Spanish-language book was recently published, and several proposals are on their way.

I have already mentioned the expectations and challenges I have had to face in the different positions I held at the Society of Biblical Literature, but now let's talk about the opportunities. As I mentioned at the beginning, I started the relationship with the Society without great expectations. This is probably because I am an Egyptologist, and I believed that my field of expertise was to a certain point far from the Society's main academic interests.

Soon after encountering the Society, however, I changed my mind. I began to participate in the Annual Meeting, where I met more colleagues and had the opportunity to interact with people from all over the world. This allowed me to get to know the different realities, situations, and expectations that people had faced in academia; many of them we had in common; others were far from my own reality. Academic life is alive at the Society of Biblical Literature, and I have always felt the importance the leaders of the Society give to those engaged in projects who live abroad. Every year the Society's president sends a letter to the rector of our university expressing acknowledgment of our commitment to joint projects.

If you have been reading up to this point, you probably realized that I did not mention my experience as a *woman*. Precisely, I have not made any mention of my gender because being a woman was never a reason for being discriminated in any sense, neither at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina nor at the Society of Biblical Literature. I am aware that this is not the situation of many women around the world, and discrimination exists everywhere and not only because of gender. This is my personal experience, and as such, I consider myself very fortunate. I always felt I was respected and my opinions taken into account. Being from South America probably made the difference. People coming from different cultural backgrounds working together in a joint project need mutual adjustment, and it was certainly a challenge for us. But as you can see above, our willingness to rise to this challenge resulted in a successful bond that lasts until this day.

As I mentioned at the beginning, my relationship with the Society of Biblical Literature began many years ago with few expectations. But it grew and gave me the opportunity to face big challenges as coeditor of the ANEM series and a member of the ICI's board. These were amazing opportunities, and I feel extremely grateful for all these opportunities throughout the years, because they allowed me to grow as an entire human being—not just a woman from South America—who works in academia.

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LATINA DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

JACQUELINE M. HIDALGO

Introduction: The Persistence, Integration, and Difference of Latina Biblical Scholars

Kay Higuera Smith, a New Testament scholar of mixed Mexicana/Californiana and Anglo descent, has been teaching full-time at Azusa Pacific University for eighteen years. She had no real mentors through her graduate studies, aside from an undergraduate Jewish Studies professor. Luckily, she found supportive peers in her PhD program. Nevertheless, she describes how she learned to ignore her Latina identity during graduate school, and she narrates her scholarly journey as a transition into integration, the integration of herself into her scholarship and teaching:

I also spent many years of my graduate work being forced to compartmentalize my own Latinx experience and to avoid asking questions that I as a Latina/woman was interested in. It became wearisome to do so. For instance, in my PhD program, there was no discussion of hermeneutics or contextual interpretation, and when I attempted to bring these questions into my research (questions which I found myself constantly drawn toward), I was discouraged by my professors. They subscribed to the classic ideology of the academy that it is important to efface our subjectivity in order to do good scholarship. Now, doing work as a Latina and exploring gender issues as well gives me a sense of greater personal integration. It is also important for research.... There is much work to be done in writing about the way that discourses and fields of knowledge are employed to wield power that is cloaked, often to the ones doing the wielding as well as to those over whom it seeks to wield such power. This is especially important for our students to realize. (email message, 19 June 2018)

I begin with Kay's narrative because she succinctly conveys key themes that came up for multiple Latinas, though certainly not all the Latinas, I surveyed for this essay. Latinas, like other women in our academy, often face struggles in finding adequate mentoring and support through graduate school and beyond. Moreover, women of Latin American descent often confront these tensions in an intersectional way, where gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class remain intertwined aspects of their personal and scholarly identities. Our intersectional identities often compel us to seek out diverse methodologies and diverse conversation partners even as we do not neatly fit into any one space.

These experiences are not necessarily universal to all Latinas, but I begin with Kay's story because she has been an inspirational scholar for me. When I was a graduate student at the same institution Kay had attended years before, I had different advisors and was not forced to compartmentalize questions that I found central to my context as a woman of Latin American descent. Yet I had few role models who were Latinas. Kay was the most senior Latina biblical scholar I knew personally. She has always modeled a scholarly generosity tempered by strength and resolve. She showed me how to pursue the questions that mattered to me, even if biblical studies has not always been the easiest field in which to pursue those questions. Many Latinas in the Society of Biblical Literature had to face our own struggles with integration: integrating into biblical studies and pressing biblical studies—or at least other biblical scholars—to integrate the questions, methods, and concerns that matter to us. In low numbers, as with other women, we have persisted.

The Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) has comparatively few Latina/o/x scholars. Latina/o/xs constitute only about 4 percent of faculty nationwide (Myers 2016). Although Latinx/o/as enroll in colleges and universities at ever increasing rates, they still lag behind in graduating college and going on to graduate education (Field 2018).

The Society of Biblical Literature's numbers are even worse than the national average for faculty, as shown in the scant numbers of Latino/as (men and women of Latin American heritage) in the Society Report over the years. According to the 2017 Society Report, of the 43 percent of members who identify their ethnicity, only 2.3 percent identify as of Latin American descent (Society of Biblical Literature 2017, 24). In 2018, ninety-four members self-reported as Hispanic/Latino/a/x in the United States. Only nine of these Hispanic/Latino/a/xs self-report as women, with another twelve refusing to designate a gender. Since the Society has been

collecting this data in 2013, there has been a total of eighteen self-identified Latinas over the years of the survey.¹

The term *Latina* itself is quite complicated in US discourse, and it can be difficult to know for whom we look when we search for Latinas in biblical studies. The term remains contested as a group label and has only been broadly used in the United States for a few decades.² In this essay, I generally use this term to refer to women who have at least one parent whose lineage traces to Latin America;³ alternatively, they may be women who themselves hail from Latin America but now live and work in the United States in ways that compel them to identify as Latina.

Because there have been so few Latina biblical scholars and so little written about our perspectives in biblical studies, I approached this essay as an opportunity to provide a simple introductory summary of key themes that came up among the women (all seemingly cisgender) I surveyed. I underscore the diversity of Latina perspectives—even among the small number of biblical scholars I surveyed—as well as the challenges that Latina differences can pose for our integration into the Society of Biblical Literature. This essay is by no means exhaustive. Nor does it contain one specific argument about Latinas in biblical studies. The women who responded to my survey generously shared far more insights than I could pack into this brief essay, and I hope that they all have more opportunities to write about their experiences and insights.

1. Thanks to Nicole L. Tilford, Production Manager of SBL Press, I received some additional information from the Society for this essay (email message, 15 October 2018).

2. More than twenty years ago, Suzanne Oboler (1995) described the divergent ways that people react to the homogenizing label of *Latina*. Reactions have, if anything, become more diverse as there are increasing numbers of Latina/o/xs in the United States and increasing numbers of people who trace their ancestry to contexts beyond the more historically dominant locations of Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba.

3. I am following general scholarly trends in Latina/o/x studies, but this decision to focus on Latin American descent can be quite limiting. The term *Hispanic* could potentially include women of Spanish and Filipina descent, while excluding women of Brazilian descent; I know of at least one other scholar of Spanish descent I might have contacted, but I decided to focus on the sense of Latina as those from Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. However, even that decision, which excludes the Francophone Caribbean, is open to debate.

A Brief Note about the Survey behind This Essay

This essay is intentionally multivocal, and although my voice has certainly shaped it in critical ways, it is methodologically important to me that this essay also contains significant direct words from others. Latina/o/x theologies and religious studies have often emphasized working *de y en conjunto*, research that grows out of and is accountable to communal praxis because it is work undertaken together and relationally (De Anda and Medina 2009, 185). I have tried to bring a practice of *de y en conjunto* to this essay by surveying, interviewing, and sending drafts to other Latina biblical scholars.

When I sought out Latinas to survey for this essay, I was only able to reach out to sixteen and received only ten responses (eleven if you include me, a mid-career scholar). I started by contacting women I knew, either because I had met them during my time at the Society of Biblical Literature or because I knew of their work; I contacted several because friends mentioned them to me. I reached out to four senior scholars, six mid-career scholars (including two women no longer working in tenure-stream/contract positions in biblical studies), and six Latinas in different stages of pursuing a PhD. I suspect that doctoral students found answering my questions more perilous than those of us at mid-career or senior stages.

Given our comparatively small numbers, this survey cannot provide rigorous social-scientific data, but I think it can give us a snapshot of perspectives. I asked about identification in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and scholarly methods; I asked whether they thought their gender and/or ethnic identities impacted their scholarship. I also asked about how they came to the Society of Biblical Literature, what their experiences were with the Society, what sort of mentoring they had, and what they wanted the Society to know.

Being Latina and Being a Biblical Scholar

Latinas are themselves a diverse group in the United States, and Latina biblical scholars are no exception. Many of the women in this survey would identify as Latina only with many caveats. One identified as racially white with a Mexican mother; Doris García-Rivera, a biblical scholar and president of the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, identified fundamentally as a Puerto Rican who adopts the Hispanic label “when filling forms,

when injustice, racism or prejudice is exerted to Hispanics undocumented people or other Hispanics around me, and when my Hispanic brothers and sisters need my voice to strengthen theirs" (email message, 29 August 2018). In addition to these two women, nine of us identify as Latina, but we insist on further specifying our family backgrounds or countries of origin, which broadly include Mexican (3), Peruvian (2), Puerto Rican (1), Honduran (1), Cuban (1), and Costa Rican (1, myself). Many, but not all, of us were born in or grew up in the United States, its colonized territories, and/or Canada.

To be a Latina is to be a member of a broader pan-ethnic grouping that has often been racialized in US history, but that ethnic group is not itself a race.⁴ Thus some of my respondents further identified their own racial history and lineage in a variety of ways, encompassing Native American, Jewish, mestiza and/or mixed race, Euro-diasporic, Afro-diasporic, and Asian-diasporic communities. Of the eleven experiences recounted here, four of us identify as having one white, non-Latina/o parent. Having one white parent may have helped the four of us navigate non-Latina/o/x white social worlds more easily. Nevertheless, many of us, including three of us with a white parent, do not describe our participation in the Society as being particularly easy or comfortable.

We had quite distinct paths that led us to becoming biblical scholars, but most of us started on this scholarly journey with a religious background and religious questions. Although most of us identify as at least culturally Catholic, few of us identify as practicing Catholics. Only two who identify as Catholic describe their scholarship as growing out of and responding specifically to Catholic churches. Six of the women depict their turn to the academic study of the Bible as rooted in their work with Protestant churches or in Protestant traditions. At least four were significantly motivated by gender and/or racial/ethnic inequities within their churches.

Three of us, however, do not narrate our turn to biblical studies as one that is rooted in church-based struggles. For one woman, whom I call Lara because of her request for anonymity, it was really courses in college, and decidedly not her experiences as a Catholic, that sparked her interest in the study of the New Testament. She had learned more about Protestant theology in college and wanted to be able to determine information about

4. On the impossibility of developing an adequate theory of Latinas as race and/or ethnicity, see Martín Alcoff 2006, 227–30.

the historical Jesus for herself. Kay roots her studies in questions about spirituality, but similarly she wanted to understand better how Jews and Christians could share texts but read them differently. Kay sees herself as a scholar of both religious studies and biblical studies. I would similarly say that, while my own religious background may have drawn me to the study of religion more broadly, I continued to study religion and the Bible more particularly because I was motivated by questions about race, ethnicity, gender, power, and difference. I also am the only Latina biblical scholar in this survey who holds a joint appointment in a religion department and a Latina/o Studies program, where, like Kay, I perceive biblical studies as only one of the fields I teach and work in.

Methodologically, we are also diverse in identification. A couple identify with a strictly historical-critical focus. More identify their training as strictly historical critical but describe their own methods as diverging from this training. For Lara, her ethnicity is irrelevant to her work on a conscious level, and her gender is only occasionally relevant. Others identify more with forms of ideological and cultural studies criticism, such as postcolonial or decolonial approaches or feminist criticism. Two spoke specifically about how their approach to the Bible can shift depending on the context: with whom are they interpreting the Bible in a particular moment?

Although many of us register the import of cultural studies approaches for our work, none of us identify ourselves solely or first and foremost as a Latina biblical critic. Gender is a relevant concern to all of us, though one of us observed that our feminist concerns do not always look like feminist concerns for other groups. Another thus identified as an intersectional feminist; for many Latinas attention to gender cannot be extricated from attention to race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

Except for Lara, most spoke directly about how all interpreters have questions and perceptions that are shaped by a reader's own experiences and histories. We are mostly contextual critics inasmuch as we believe that everyone has a context that impacts them as a reader. This fact is so obvious to most of us that it can be frustrating that so many other biblical scholars do not recognize how their own locations shape their work. Thus, we find those scholars often miss out on an opportunity to read both themselves and biblical texts more deeply and more critically.

A recognition of the import of readers' contexts does not mean that we are necessarily trying to provide a Latina reading of the Bible. For instance, Doris views her religious identification as superseding her other identities, though she thinks they are all relevant to her work:

I position myself as a Puerto Rican liberal, ecumenical Baptist woman from a low income working family, nurtured amidst the context of a housing project, attaining higher degrees in science and theology, with ample intercultural experiences, aware of some of the interconnections among kyriarchal structures (as [Elisabeth] Schüssler Fiorenza presents between race, gender, class and colonial structures).... Theologically speaking—incarnation/interculturality and the dignity of the human being—are my two pillars guiding my ethics and justice actions.... Most of the time I choose my identity as a missionary to implant my mark in most of the things I do. (email message, 29 August 2018)

Doris's description is specific to her, yet I think it captures an important sensibility that came up for several women (though not all of us). Our identification is intersectional and our readings are intersectionally attentive, but that does not mean our readings are merely constrained by our ethnic and gender identities.

Even for those of us who identify our readings as Latina, we may not always view them as narrowly Latina. For instance, according to Sophia Magallanes,

As a Progressive Pentecostal Latina I value my training [in the historical-critical method], but use it to the service of highlighting things my perspective sees that have been neglected by older and Eurocentric male scholarship.... What seem to me like “neglected” and “obvious” insights in Joban studies have not been highlighted in academia because of the limitations of a Euro-centric and male dominant reading of the text. I am embracing my perspective to pave the way for those coming after me. (email message, 2 October 2018)

The questions from Sophia's Latina context provide insights that others have missed. Her insights are not about a narrow Latina reading of the Bible. Rather they can help provide a fuller reading of biblical texts.

Latina contexts do not just shape our readings; other Latinas are our reading partners. According to a scholar who requested anonymity and whom I call Valeria, “My identity as a Latina is profoundly relevant to my work. *Leyendo en comunidad* for me is a key concept for interpreting Scripture in a way that is relevant to the Hispanic community and beyond” (email message, 14 August 2018). I also view my questions as being shaped particularly by the different Latina/o/x communities with whom I interact and have interacted. Those Latina/o/x communities and their histories are also the subjects of my scholarly inquiry. My first book

was interdisciplinary and historically comparative, and my book privileged the oral historical perspectives of Chicano/a activists who are now in their sixties–eighties. Thus, I do not only read biblical texts in conversation with Latina/o/x communities. I also read those communities and their histories in relationship to biblical texts and histories. For this reason, and as I discuss further below, I often feel like an outsider or even an interloper in the fields of Latina/o studies and biblical studies, avidly reading in both but never fully welcome in either because I ask questions, employ approaches, and focus on texts outside the mainstream questions, approaches, and texts of each field.

Our questions and insights may be shaped by Latina contexts, but we generally view these questions as connecting with the histories and insights of other communities. Take, for instance, how Maziel Dani, a scholar of Puerto Rican background, describes the work of her dissertation:

My experience living under colonial rule together with my studies on the New Testament as a site of imperial negotiation are the heartbeat of my scholarship and the inspiration behind my dissertation, “Adverse Possession: The Reclamation and Colonization of Land in Matthew’s Gospel.” My research is focused on the ways the Bible, particularly the Gospel of Matthew, can be used to justify the acquisition and conquest of foreign land under the guise of divine purposes. (email, 1 August 2018)

For Monica Rey, also a doctoral student, her interest in how foreign women are represented in the Hebrew Bible has everything to do with her context as a Latina of Peruvian descent who has observed how other Latina and African American women are treated in daily life in the United States. Similarly, Cristina García-Alfonso’s dissertation focused on *resolviendo* (narratives of survival) among women characters in the Hebrew Bible because of her own experiences as a woman in Cuba during the economic hardships of the early 1990s. None of these women read the Bible to look for Latinas or specifically Latina experiences. Instead, they see how their own contexts can impact the questions they bring to biblical texts.

In addition to our scholarship being shaped by our identities, our professional roles have also deeply impacted our scholarship. Those of us who teach find our approaches to reading the Bible have been deeply shaped by the needs of our students. For instance, Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz states,

In our current exclusivist climate, I strive to help my students to seek/find other ways of knowing that accept the plurality of the world and the fact

that there cannot be only one proper way of reading the Bible.... I feel constantly challenged to find/uncover/create, together with my students, other ways of reading, other ways of knowing that acknowledge and are aware of the existence of other worlds. (email message, 27 August 2018)

Attention to our students means that Latina/o/x perspectives and concerns are not the only ones we read or bring to the text. We are instead interested in teaching plurivocal interpretations and interpretive practices. As Monica argues,

I'm less drawing from my own experiences.... I could've submitted a Latinx syllabus, but for me, it was more important to expose students to their own stories. So whether that was lesbian biblical hermeneutics, or queer biblical hermeneutics, or womanist biblical hermeneutics, that I felt was more important to me than just having a devotion to one particular ethnic group. (google hangouts interview, 17 August 2018)

I, too, care about reading more broadly and serving more students than just Latina/o/x students, and I believe that reading with, from, and about contextual particularity can be a bridge to conversations across difference. Although many of us situate our questions as growing out of our diverse Latina/o/x contexts, we read more broadly and more diversely than just our own context. Teaching diverse interpretive approaches and interpretations from diverse readers matters in the classroom and it matters for our work. Some of us are inspired by the Zapatista line articulated in the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle (1996): "The world we want is one where many worlds fit." We have to read and teach approaches from a variety of ethnic/racial/gender contexts in order to prepare our students—and to keep ourselves able—to work with and across difference so that many worlds can exist together.

Struggles with Isolation and Integration in Society of Biblical Literature

I surveyed women who are or have been members of the Society of Biblical Literature at some point. For many of us, our feelings of belonging to the Society are complicated by experiences of marginalization and isolation. Still, many of us appreciate that the Society has tried to bring women into leadership and to provide spaces for Latinas.

We mostly became members of the Society as graduate students. For some, our advisors or mentors told us to join. Or other students or organizations like the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI) or the FTE (once the Fund for Theological Education, now the Forum for Theological Exploration) convinced us to join. The majority of us see membership in the Society as a professional obligation rather than a willing choice. Sophia offered the most inspiring story here: “In 2005 (right after finishing my first masters degree), my late mentor—Gerald Wilson—submitted my master’s thesis to a regional SBL meeting without my knowledge when I was 24. I gave it at the meeting and ended up winning a small scholarship. This changed my life completely” (email message, 2 October 2018). Her story demonstrates that guiding young Latinas into the space of the Society—in supportive ways—can make a huge difference in their pursuit of doctoral degrees in our field.

Therefore, many of us think the Society can do important work in fostering the success of Latinas in the academy. Many of us perceive the Society as already having started some important work to support and foster the diversity of biblical scholars and biblical scholarship. As Lara stated, “I think the SBL is doing a good job in encouraging the presence and leadership of women in the Society. I don’t know how women who identify as Latina/Hispanic feel about their role in the SBL” (email message, 13 August 2018). The Society has done important work in nurturing and providing spaces for distinctive biblical scholarship. As Kay observes, “I think SBL is doing a good job recognizing the ways that the academic field of discourse in Biblical Studies has been and continues to operate from deeply colonial assumptions. There are more and more spaces now for the kinds of academic interactions that want to explore and push back on this discourse, unlike a couple of decades ago” (email message, 19 June 2018). Maziél has further described the Society as a positive and supportive space.

It has been quite helpful when the Society provided spaces for Latinas to network and to practice alternative forms of being academic together. Several of us were grateful for the existence of the Latina/o and Latin American biblical interpretation group as well as the Minoritized Criticism section. We also need the Society to continue to meet with the American Academy of Religion so we can meet with more Latinas. As Valeria notes, “I wish the SBL knew how important human relationships and friendships with other scholars is to women from a Hispanic/Latina background. Scholarship *en conjunto*, or *en comunidad* are hallmarks of

LatinX work outside of the SBL” (email message, 14 August 2018). Yet Valeria has to make this observation because several of us have struggled with experiences of isolation and marginalization.

Surviving Isolation

The Society of Biblical Literature has been associated with the isolation and anxiety that often envelop academic life—and not just for Latinas. Since there are so few Latinas, our feelings of isolation and self-doubt have often been exacerbated. Struggles with isolation as well as the poor job market, compelled Cristina, the first Cuban woman to receive a PhD in biblical studies, to leave the field. The dearth of tenure-track or steady contract jobs should give everyone pause about the future biblical studies in general. However, I share Cristina’s story at length because it captures her sense of isolation in the Society and how important it was for her to find integration elsewhere in order to thrive in her career:

In Clinical Pastoral Education, the idea is that you integrate all of who you are. I think to find a community that celebrated that was new because that’s not academia. They don’t care about your feelings and transformational learning. So that was a shock because I found a community that felt different than SBL. I remember going to the national [CPE educators] meeting thinking I was going to experience the same sort of isolation, and it was just so communal, and that people who really didn’t know me just supported me. That was refreshing.... My work is recognized.... You need to integrate the Hebrew Bible scholar that you are in this. I am much happier. There are times that I do wear my Hebrew Bible hat when a heated conversation comes up in the classroom.... It’s a tool. It’s about integrating all of that. (google hangouts interview, 19 June 2018)

For Cristina, Clinical Pastoral Education education provided a better space for her to be a whole person, a Hebrew Bible scholar still, but in a context where she can integrate all of who she is.

Several of us registered experiences of alienation at the Society of Biblical Literature that we thought were specific to our embodied identities. Sophia, for whom presenting her work at the Society as a young scholar was transformational, also found challenges there: “Many times I had to seek out non-white mentors who were female. Many times I was misunderstood in my presentation of material until people followed through in asking questions. I have learned how to assert myself and the insights that

my perspective delivers” (email message, 2 October 2018). When asked about what she wants the Society to know, Sophia said, “we have not only valid things to say, but some of our insights are necessary in providing a more robust reading of the text.” Too often we feel like our voices and perspectives are not given equal weight or seen as important.

Because we can confront hostility in Anglo-dominated spaces, learning from other communities of color has helped many of us survive. We also have had to network beyond biblical studies. Monica stated,

You can't be in this field without experiencing racialized and gendered marginalization and trauma.... If it wasn't for the fact that I had a mission and that I saw the good in the times I have taught for my students as world citizens, I wouldn't be in this field.... I think you have to sacrifice parts of yourself to continue in this field.... The mental health piece is really important to me because 1. There is a lot of stigma around mental health and 2. It is just a huge unspoken thing that you can't be in this space, in SBL, without finding joy in life elsewhere.... Academia in general is predicated on criticism. It's also isolating, and that's why organizations like HTI and FTE are crucial because otherwise I don't think I would still be doing this if it wasn't for those organizations. (google hangouts interview, 17 August 2018)

In order to survive feelings of isolation and alienation, many of us have had to find resources external to the Society that enable us to persist.

Several of us noted the import of Hispanic Theological Initiative and the Forum for Theological Exploration. Both organizations connected us with other scholars of color and with mentors who have helped us survive. But we do not just need other Latina mentors. Lara was successfully mentored by men. Though the scholars of color who have mentored me have been critical to my success, my mentors (and I was fortunate to have many in graduate school, at Williams College, and in Latina/o studies, biblical studies, and religion more broadly) were not just other women of color. I think that I have largely succeeded academically—despite doing research that feels outside the mainstream of Latina/o/x Studies or biblical studies—because of the diverse mentoring I was lucky enough to have.

We also should bear in mind that biblical scholars may not always teach or work in contexts that would support their membership in or access to the Society of Biblical Literature. By focusing on the Society I have not captured everyone who might be considered a biblical scholar. As Doris observes,

within the context of Latin America a woman theologian can take up many forms—most of the time a pastor, a church's leader or a Christian institute teacher. Most of the women who graduated with an MDiv from our Seminary (that excel in some theological oriented education) and a few with a PhD, have become pastors or church's leaders. This is different from a biblical scholar defined by the parameters of the Caucasian-Eurocentric system of theological education most of the theological schools use. The challenges (family and financial mainly), to become a scholar within these parameters, keep getting harder for women in Latin America or the Caribbean. (email message, 29 August 2018)

For Doris, what constitutes Latina biblical studies does not necessarily fit the limits of the guild. I share her concerns, though perhaps from another perspective. I see Latinas studying *scripture* and not simply *the Bible* in a variety of ways. These Latinas do not conform to the standard boundary definitions of biblical studies as a field. Both of us worry that it actually is getting more difficult, not easier, for Latinas to become biblical scholars.

Struggling for Integration

The Society of Biblical Literature has done well by providing spaces for diverse forms of biblical study and criticism, enabling nourishing connections within and across different communities and methodologies. The Society has provided spaces where we can integrate our contexts into our studies. However, enabling that diversity of programming has also led to a feeling of further fragmentation—and an ongoing sense of marginalization—rather than integration into biblical studies.

A Latina/o/x-specific group can help us to find spaces to be together and talk about shared questions in the midst of an overwhelmingly Anglo and male guild. As Hebrew Bible scholar Ahida Calderón Pilarski describes,

When I started to attend the SBL, the only people I knew were my professors. It was overwhelming to see this society as predominantly white as my place of work. Sporadically I will see a person of color. The formation of the 'Latino/a and Latin American Biblical Interpretation' section became the bridge to more opportunities to develop a network of minority scholars. Still, scholars of color at the SBL, even among women, are so few that at times it is discouraging to make our voices and presence be of any impact" (email message, 15 September 2018).

Thus, the building up of Latina/o/x spaces at the Society can be double-edged; while giving us a group, it can leave us feeling further marginalized, as if our concerns have been removed from the center of biblical studies or as if we cannot communicate with other communities. For Leticia that means that we have sometimes been hindered from communicating across difference the way we want to:

We have had the great opportunity and challenge of developing our own ways of reading the Bible as minoritized groups, the problem is that the system of SBL has not succeeded in helping us to listen to each other ... because in the interest of giving everyone a forum we have multiplied the number of groups and end up fostering the atomization of the Society of Biblical Literature into diverse groups, dividing more than uniting. There is always the possibility of collaboration, but that's not the norm, and the scheduling sometimes seems to be against minoritized groups when we are scheduled during the same time slots, so we are not able to support each other. We need to find new ways of engaging each other within the rich diversity of the Society. (email message, 27 August 2018)

The sense of atomization may explain why Monica admires someone like Gale Yee. For Monica, Yee is an exemplary scholar who can work across different methods and groups, working as an Asian American and minoritized critic, a feminist critic, and a historical critic. As a doctoral student, Monica worries about being too isolated from other scholars and forms of scholarship in biblical studies. Valeria and others also worried about being pigeon-holed as Latina scholars. We all want to be able to talk with other scholars across differences of methodology and context.

The women I surveyed have found different ways to integrate their identities into their scholarship and to integrate into the guild, even if for some of us such integration has been more of a struggle and has felt more tenuous. My questions about integration have revolved a lot less around belonging to biblical studies. I only participate in the Society of Biblical Literature because of the compelling work undertaken by minoritized groups, though I can never attend all the sessions I would like or collaborate with all the scholars I would like. I have served as cochair of the Bible and Cultural Studies unit, and I have participated on the Minoritized Criticism and Biblical Interpretation and Latina/o and Latin American Biblical Interpretation steering committees. I observe how sparsely attended these sessions can be and how hard it is to get groups to work collaboratively. Many of us serving the minoritized groups are over-extended in other

ways (at our institutions, within the academy at large, and/or in our own families), and so it is hard to take on the responsibility of coordinating sessions. We also want the space to do our own work, and we do not want to be forced to collapse our smaller groups. Despite the stresses and sense of fragmentation, I have found the work in these minoritized groups nourishing. They are why I continue to be an active participant in the Society.

Conclusion: From Integration to Infiltration

A real sense of integration into biblical studies seems to elude most of the women I surveyed. Like Kay, their feelings are more about how they can integrate themselves into their biblical scholarship rather than how they can feel integrated into a broader biblical studies. They fear that integrating themselves into their scholarship comes at a cost; they fear being isolated in Latina/o/x groups. Isolation can also manifest in anxieties about scholarly belonging that I alluded to earlier—a fear that we don't belong in the guild of biblical studies; that we don't belong to other, seemingly more relevant Latinx religious studies scholarship; or that we even don't belong among other Latina/o/xs who study the Bible. These are registers of impostor syndrome: feeling like an impostor or being treated like one (or both). From my privileged vantage point, as a tenured scholar with intellectual and interdisciplinary freedom, I turn to Lena Palacios's (2018) perspective on being a minoritized scholar: "we need to throw away our imposter syndrome and embrace a newly defined infiltrator syndrome." Instead of viewing ourselves as isolated impostors, we should see ourselves as infiltrators, able to use the small spaces we have at the Society of Biblical Literature to struggle for more just academics and worlds.

My scholarly journey is quite different from most of the women I spoke with for this essay. I had some historical questions about the Christian Bible to be sure, but I really would not have been interested in biblical studies were it not for the work in cultural studies undertaken by scholars such as Fernando Segovia. I was most compelled—and still am—by the work of those like Vincent Wimbush who push us to decenter the Christian Bible and to see it in relationship to other human social and cultural phenomena. Like the other colleagues I surveyed, I always wanted to be part of a bigger conversation, but I never looked to the mainstream of biblical studies for that bigger conversation.

I have the privilege of a unique position, teaching in an undergraduate Latina/o studies program and religion department. In the Trump era when too many of my colleagues, students, friends, and family fear being targeted by the rise of overt white supremacist and nativist discourses and legal actions, my biggest fear is that I am irrelevant to the communities and conversations that matter most to me, conversations about necessary conditions for real justice. In whatever small ways I can, I want to participate with those scholars, in whatever field, who study human histories and human phenomena with an eye toward the liberation and flourishing of humanity and the earth. I want to participate with the humanities scholarship that works toward surviving and thriving beyond the contemporary moment of heteropatriarchal, racialized, ecocidal, and xenophobic violence. What Segovia described in his 2014 presidential address as “global systemic criticism” speaks more to the magnitude of concern I worry about.⁵ He also captured my sense of the global diversity of voices we must turn to in our present crises.

Global crises—and how to address them—are the conversations that motivate my smartest Latina students at Williams. The few who go on to graduate school do not go on to biblical studies.⁶ I wish that doctoral programs in biblical studies would reckon with why my smart Latina students are not at all interested in pursuing their degrees. Although a few of us felt we were well supported in pursuing the questions that matter to us, too many responded with Kay’s sense that they had to compartmentalize themselves during their doctoral programs only to pursue integration afterwards.⁷ No wonder my smartest Latina students do not want to bury the questions that truly matter to them now and pursue some form of integration a decade later.

For me, the minoritized critics are the biblical scholars whose conversations can actually branch beyond biblical studies and connect better to other fields of the humanities and to critical conversations about justice. The measure of Latina biblical studies is not its integration into the Society; the measure of the Society’s success should be whether biblical studies and biblical scholars actually speak with and beyond other humanities

5. See the published version, Segovia 2015.

6. I expressed some of these concerns in an earlier essay, Hidalgo 2013.

7. There is also a problem of language study and the sorts of institutions (and the costs of additional master’s degrees, for instance) one has to have attended in order to have adequate language preparation for doctoral programs in biblical studies.

fields in a way that engages the next generation of Latinas. Even the few of us Latinas in the Society reflect a diverse array of trajectories, methods, and perspectives. My hope for the Society of Biblical Literature is that it, too, can learn from and embrace this diversity while creating more spaces for meaningful work within and across difference.

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THE PROMISE OF HAPPINESS IN THE SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

LYNN R. HUBER

Recently a potential research student came to my office to inform me that she was no longer interested in studying Christian textual traditions and queer identity with me. She explained that, having grown up Christian and recently come out as a lesbian, these topics were too personal, and she wanted to normalize her sexuality. Reading an essay of mine (or at least reading the first few pages, she admitted) was the thing that prompted her realization. It was an essay in which I offer a queer lesbian reading of Revelation's "Great Whore" (2011). The student explained that she wanted to continue studying religion, but not something as personally potent as queer biblical studies. Her words hit me hard. They felt like a rejection of my identity. Sitting in my office afterwards, with *this* essay on my to-do list, I realized that my encounter with this student captured much of what I experience as a queer lesbian in the field of biblical studies and a member of the Society of Biblical Literature. It is often an experience of raised hopes, followed by the disappointing realization that people really prefer the normal and comfortable.

In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010, 90), Sara Ahmed, a queer theorist and self-proclaimed "feminist killjoy," explains that "the promise of happiness is directed toward certain objects, as being necessary for a good life." Cultural representations of the good life teach us that the objects that lead to happiness are those most closely associated with heterosexuality, as well as with whiteness and wealth. We are taught to strive for these things, including marriage, career, home, family, and children. Even when our inclinations and desire lure us elsewhere, we should channel our desires towards these things that are markers of the good life. Those closest to us, including families and friends, are often the most overt enforcers of this

happiness script, which includes carefully choreographed gender roles, since their happiness is inextricably bound to ours. My mom taught me this, when she would regularly and disappointedly ask, “Why don’t you put on a little makeup?” or “Can’t you wear less masculine clothing?” My deviation, which included the tendency toward androgyny and a seemingly congenital disinterest in boys, made it difficult for my mom to realize her own good life, the picture perfect, heterosexual Christian family. This was difficult for both of us (something my mom noted on her death bed). As Ahmed observes, “deviation can involve unhappiness” (91).

This cultural script requires that queer stories have unhappy endings, lest they “promote homosexuality” (Ahmed 2010, 88). On the page and the screen, queer loves are unrequited or sacrificed to the straight friend, golden years are lived in solitude, or lives are cut short by illness and violence. Stories about the queer professional life have similarly required negative endings. How can we forget Sal Romano, one of the only gay characters on AMC’s *Mad Men*, who was fired for spurning the advances of a client? In light of these narratives, almost half of all LGBTQ workers remain closeted at work (Fidas and Cooper 2018),¹ and many who are out in the workplace worry about appearing “too gay,” “too femme,” “too butch,” “too queer.” We remain uncomfortable in our queer skin out of fear that we might make the social space of the office or workplace “uncomfortable” (e.g., nonheteronormative) (Ahmed 2013, 148). Some academic spaces may be somewhat more open to queer identities; however, LGBTQ biblical scholars know that many of the colleges and universities still committed to offering courses in Bible and biblical languages are places where we would never be employed. In fact, a telling test of ally-ship is whether or not straight colleagues pursue positions at these institutions.

When asked to contribute to this volume and to offer my experience of the Society of Biblical Literature as someone with the LGBTQ community, my first instinct was to think of the ways my story fits the expectation that queer stories are unhappy stories. I figured I was expected to perform a kind of oppression strip tease, where I make myself vulnerable to the pen-

1. This is in spite of the fact that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) interprets Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act as forbidding workplace discrimination based on gender identity and/ or sexuality. However, not all states in the United States have passed legislation against discrimination, contributing to the continuing climate of fear.

etrating eyes of my straight colleagues. However, while I understand the “shame and negative feelings” associated with a queer affect (Love 2007, 127), the truth is that my time within the profession has included hitting many of the marks of a good professional life. I have had paper proposals accepted more often than not and been invited onto the boards of program units related to my academic interests, including John’s Apocalypse and Cultural Contexts, Archaeology of Religion in the Roman World, and the ISBL’s Bible and Visual Culture group. I am occasionally asked to participate on panels for other program units, and I serve on editorial boards for the *Review of Biblical Literature* and Bible Odyssey. More importantly, I have developed a full network of professional colleagues and friends, including people along the LGBTQ spectrum and those who are straight. Being active within our professional organization in these ways has contributed to my earning tenure and promotion. I live the good life I was promised when I started the PhD program at Emory back in the 1990s. Even though I do not want to diminish my own hard work, I must admit that much of this stems from my privilege as a white, cisgendered, and visibly able-bodied individual. I know friends and colleagues who have not been given similar opportunities on account of their identities and perceived difference. Additionally, I realize that my personal experience of the Society of Biblical Literature as relatively benign comes as a result of the hard work of my predecessors, especially those feminists, womanists, and scholars of color, who have fought hard for inclusion and acceptance.

Despite the happiness I experience as a member of the Society of Biblical Literature, I still feel a sense of difference or out-of-place-ness as someone who identifies as queer and who does queer scholarship. The distinction between being queer and doing queer work is important and one that some overlook by collapsing personal and academic identities. Again, when I was approached to participate in this volume, I wondered if I was asked to contribute because I’m an out gay woman or because of the work I’m trying to do with queer biblical interpretation. While I don’t always foreground queer interpretive questions and themes in my work on Revelation, I still think of everything I write as chipping away at categories used to control and suppress difference, such as binary understandings of gender and sexuality, and assumptions about what counts as worthy of inclusion. Toward this latter end, I’m committed to engaging the works of female-identified and LGBTQ interpreters, especially those outside of academia. Just because I am gay woman does not mean my scholarship is inherently queer. Doing queer scholarship does not attach to a particular

sexual or gender identity; rather, it can involve participating in conversations about queer affects, ways of knowing, and interpretive practices, as well as engaging the diverse texts that form the ever growing and morphing queer canon. I would argue that queer scholarship requires at least a commitment to political stance that challenges gender binaries and heteronormativity in any of its many manifestations.² At its best, I believe, queer biblical scholarship includes engaging the tools of queer discourse, including the camp and drag stylings of gay male culture, the earnest longing associated with lesbian rhetoric, or the swagger of female masculinity.

I don't think anyone is surprised to hear that the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature are experienced by some as very male spaces. Ritual retellings of jokes about the preponderance of tweed, khaki, and facial hair only underscore the fact that straight, white men dominate the meeting. We get it. You all are quite good at properly performing the gendered role of the professor as imagined in the cultural products of mid-century America. Although some of my best Society buddies wear jackets with elbow patches, I still believe that the Annual Meeting's gender bias is harmful. Panels continue to be dominated by male-identified white scholars, and patriarchal language and practices abound. Similarly, academic gatherings like the Annual Meeting assume a kind of "compulsory heterosexuality" that works hand in hand with gendered assumptions (Rich 1980; Ahmed 2013, 145). The possibility that a professional adult can leave their everyday life behind for a few days during the school year to engage in "the life of the mind" (which for some seems more along the lines of drunken shenanigans) is built upon the belief that we're all married or partnered. The model takes for granted the existence of a selfless spouse, typically a wife, who stays home to take care of kids, aging parents, and other dependents. This wife will also, presumably, drive you to and from the airport and have dinner ready for you when you get home. I know the privilege that comes with being partnered, as I have a spouse who is usually happy to care for our dogs instead of joining me for a weekend of stimulating conversation about ancient texts and traditions. This bias toward coupledness, especially understood in terms of traditional gender

2. Scholars, of course, disagree over what constitutes queer scholarship and perform this scholarly work in a variety of ways. One of the first and best examples of the range of approaches possible in queer biblical scholarship is Ken Stone's edited volume *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (2001). See also the *Bible Trouble* volume, edited by Hornsby and Stone (2011).

roles, makes our professional meeting possible. If an individual chooses to opt out of this heteronormative reality, their professional opportunities are limited. For the most part, we are forced to play by the rules of this game, unless we are collectively willing to entertain different models for academia. Furthermore, the straightness of the Annual Meeting becomes especially profound when the papers are put away and the receptions begin. In these moments many convention-goers are unwilling to restrict their heterosexuality to the privacy of their own hotel rooms, performing explicit flirtations in lobbies and ballrooms, something simply not possible for those who are queer.

There are a few oases where queers and their friends gather, including both formal and informal spaces. One formal space is the LGBTI/Queer Biblical Hermeneutics program unit. A couple years before the unfortunately labeled “Great Divorce” of 2008, when the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature announced they would be meeting on different weekends, a handful of scholars (Ken Stone, Diane Swancutt, and Holly Toensing) proposed a new program unit focused upon LGBTQ biblical interpretation. This unit, which I eventually cochaired with David Tabb Stewart and which is now chaired by Joseph Marchal, provides a rare venue dedicated to both developing LGBTI readings of biblical texts and articulating queer interpretive approaches. The unit has offered thematic sessions on topics ranging from camp and drag to conceptions of queer time, as well as collaborating with a wide-range of other groups, including Healthcare and Disability in the Ancient World and African-American Biblical Hermeneutics. The program unit intentionally welcomes scholars from different stages in their careers, encouraging graduate students to propose, preside, and even sit on the board. By having a graduate student on the board, the unit recognizes that individuals doing course work and writing their dissertations are often on the cutting edge of the field. This is just one way the unit tries to push against academic norms.

One of the queerest spaces I’ve experienced at the Society of Biblical Literature was a collaborative effort initially organized by the Bible and Cultural Studies steering committee (including Erin Runions, Tat-siong Benny Liew, Jione Havea, Jennifer Glancy, and Jacqueline Hidalgo) inviting a number of program units to work together to create space for intellectual conversation and support across difference. The program units, which represented nontraditional hermeneutics (e.g., LGBTIQ, Feminist, Latinx, Postcolonial, Asian and Asian American, Islander),

cosponsored two sessions, which were then divided in two halves, creating four mini-sessions. These mini-sessions were devoted to teaching and learning about shared theoretical and pedagogical topics, such as memory and orality, and to providing time and space for mentoring graduate students and junior scholars. This creative use of human resources and time, which required productively manipulating the schedule given by the Society of Biblical Literature, created opportunities for a variety of people to form connections across interpretive boundaries. An aim of organizing these sessions was to support scholars employing interpretive approaches and tools not typically used in the context of biblical studies, including those that challenge the historical-critical hegemony. This collaborative effort, which occurred over three or four years, functioned as a type of queer resistance to scholarship that privileges straight, white, Euro-American ways of knowing.

The spaces created by the LGBTI/Queer Biblical Hermeneutics unit and the nontraditional hermeneutics collaboration have been spaces consisting primarily of people with shared commitments to inclusion and difference.³ These spaces communicate a clear commitment to challenging the strictures of straight academia and, therefore, provide a safe place for scholars to embrace and exhibit queerness. Performing queerness outside of these spaces can be a bit more complicated. This is not entirely on account of straight colleagues' responses to queer perspectives, although sparse audiences and misunderstandings about queer vernacular are par for the course. A bigger issue for me is my internal sense that I should toe the line and tailor my actions and words to the expectations of straight scholarship. I feel pressured to avoid making others uncomfortable with my queerness. This happens even in very accepting spaces. A few years ago I was asked to respond to a series of papers offering queer readings of Pauline texts, an ostensibly queer-friendly environment. Still, most of the papers, written primarily by white, cis-male scholars, struck me as being somewhat vanilla in approach. They engaged queer theory on a theoretical level, but not with the passion and playfulness or the poetry that explicitly signal queerness. Given this, I wanted my response to the precirculated papers to embody queerness as a way of highlighting the straight affect of the papers. To this end, I referenced lesbian sexuality in an explicit, yet

3. One exception was a panel organized by the LGBTI/ Queer Biblical Hermeneutics group that included a paper offered by Robert Gagnon, an outspoken opponent of the LGBTQ community.

relevant, way and ended my response with a call to embrace the material reality of queer life: “The question is then, what is queer? I’d fill that category with dirtiness, deviance, glitter, leather, AIDS/ HIV, house music, stuffed animals, studs, fairies, dildos and plastic wrap” (Huber 2015). I intended, to return to the insights of Ahmed, to be “happily queer.” I wanted to embrace the deviation of queerness and trouble the “conventional ideas of what it means to have a good life” (Ahmed 2010, 115). I like to think that I embrace this attitude in all parts of my life, but after this particular performance I felt nausea. I feared that my fellow⁴ scholars would no longer take me seriously and that I had offended them by challenging their queer quotient. No one verbalized any of that; however, I was feeling the pressure of compulsory straightness that comes with being a good biblical scholar.

My experience of being a queer scholar in the Society of Biblical Literature is complicated, as I can imagine the experiences of many others are similarly complex or ambivalent. I am thankful, however, for colleagues, both at the university where I work and within the academy, who are willing to support me in my efforts at being happily queer. In many ways these people (and hopefully they know who they are) are my community of accountability and the ones who often give me hope that, despite the culturally determined unhappy endings of queer lives, my life in the profession is one of meaning and even queer joy.

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4. While the papers were all by male-identified authors, another queer woman was invited to read a paper for an author unable to attend. I was not entirely alone, although the panel was definitely not as diverse as I would have liked.

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**A VOICE FROM THE PERIPHERY:
BEING A EUROPEAN FEMINIST SCHOLAR IN THE
SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE**

CHRISTL M. MAIER

From the perspective of the United States, Europe may be seen as a bunch of small countries with strange tongues and a long history of strife, glory, and decline, the rise of which after World War II was partly due to the United States' economic power and benevolence. How did these people come to join the Society of Biblical Literature? Well, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many of them fled their countries due to hunger, unemployment, or political and religious prosecution and immigrated to the so-called New World. Among them were two brothers of my grandmother, but, I'm guessing, only a few theologians. From the 1930s onwards, a significant number of European intellectuals fled Europe, and I do not know how many of them did join an association of biblical scholars such as the Society of Biblical Literature or the American Academy of Religion. After World War II more Europeans came, drawn to US private universities by relatively high salaries and the promise of renown. In my perspective, it was the Society of Biblical Literature's own outreach to Europe that first brought European scholars to the Society. The Society organized International Meetings starting in Salamanca, Spain, in 1983, and most of these meetings have taken place in Europe. Within this greater map, my own way to join the Society may be just one little episode of a multivocal and multilayered story. Since Europe is so diverse with regard to nationalities, systems of higher education, and Christian denominations, I certainly cannot speak for all Europeans. Yet at some points in my story I will refer to commonalities and differences among the European countries.

The Society's meetings have been crucial for my career as a German Lutheran theologian, for finding my place in the broader scholarly com-

munity. Senior members of the Society supported and encouraged me particularly to lift my voice as a woman and to offer scholarship from a feminist perspective. Looking back to over twenty years of membership in the Society of Biblical Literature, I can discern three phases of my involvement in the Society and its different groups.

1. Joining the Society of Biblical Literature as a Young Scholar

In 1995, I became a member of the Society of Biblical Literature for two reasons. In the summer of 1994, I attended the International Meeting in Leuven, Belgium, and enjoyed its inspiring atmosphere and open-minded discussions in sessions. There was no raising of eyebrows or patronizing comment in personal conversations during the meeting when I talked about my dissertation on the foreign woman of Prov 1–9, which I had just submitted (see Maier 1995). Among German male scholars, this topic would immediately lead to the verdict that I was a feminist and thus ideologically blinded and not to be taken seriously in their academic world. Given my positive experience at this meeting, I sensed that I should join the Society in order to find more scholars willing to discuss my ideas. Indeed, I found productive and intellectually exciting discussions of papers at the International Meetings in Budapest (1995), Dublin (1996), Krakow (1998), and Rome (2001). On these occasions, I also met European colleagues whom I otherwise would never have known. It was highly interesting to learn about their contexts at universities and in churches and about the differences in higher education among European countries.

Most effective for networking was a group of young European scholars gathering around a restaurant table and exchanging the wildest ideas about how the Bible should be studied and interpreted at the close of the second millennium. The people who convened us youngsters in these table talks were Heather McKay and David Clines. Besides their genuine interest in the new generation of European biblical scholars, they offered valuable advice and coaching to anyone who needed it. Moreover, Heather and David introduced my colleagues and me to a host of senior scholars whose books we had studied and to whom we now could speak as colleagues—at least this was my impression, and it was so different from my experience of rigid academic hierarchies in Germany, dominated by

an older generation of men who had established schools of thought that promoted only their own students. The scholars I met at the International Meetings were open-minded and seemed to care about developments in biblical studies beyond their own countries. Moreover, the friendly and supportive atmosphere at these meetings helped young scholars to enter the broader community, on the condition that they were able and willing to present their research in English.

In Europe the situation of biblical scholars depends significantly on the specific conditions in their societies and their churches. In order to learn more about this variety, I also joined the European Society of Women in Theological Research in 1995 (see www.eswtr.org). The society was founded in 1986 as a network of women involved in academic research in theology and religious studies. It hosts a European conference every two years to discuss relevant themes in feminist theology and women's studies. Between conferences, scholars meet at national or regional levels and continue to work together in subject groups. The journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research presents different approaches and perspectives within Europe (see, e.g., Blohm et al. 2013; Dievenkorn and Toldy 2016). This society includes a country group for the United States and Canada, that is, European women who currently live in North America. Since the European Society of Women in Theological Research is a scholarly organization formally related to the American Academy of Religion, there is a session at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature to discuss topics of mutual interest and keep each other informed about the situation on both sides of the Atlantic.

The first Annual Meeting I attended was held in Orlando, Florida, in 1998, my second in Nashville, Tennessee, in 2000. At both meetings, colleagues welcoming me as a new attendee would tell me that the setting—Disneyland and Opryland respectively—was not “the real United States” and I should come again next year. Arriving from the academic periphery, I suddenly became aware that the center was hard to find. Following their advice, I have missed almost no Annual Meeting since 2000. In the various conference cities, I would often stay over Thanksgiving and explore their surroundings. Through these after-conference-tours, I found that the United States was not much different from Europe in terms of its states and regions, tribal mentalities, and urban-rural divide.

In 1998, I quickly realized that surviving the Annual Meeting would entail finding my way through myriads of hallways and lecture rooms and

making up my mind in advance to attend those sessions in which I would feel comfortable to raise a question in the discussion. I was astonished by the various perspectives and contemporary inquiries in the sessions, which led well beyond the rather narrow academic horizon I had encountered in Germany. Given my experience with International Meetings, I knew that it would be most important to introduce myself and actively seek out people whom I wished to meet. Even if these conversations were brief or only an exchange of business cards, they were the first step toward discerning some familiar faces among these thousands of people in the book exhibit and at the receptions.

An excellent pathway to encounter strong and like-minded women has been the Women Members' Breakfast, which provides space and time to celebrate women's achievements and to critically assess what more should be done to help their advancement in the profession. Through these conversations I became aware of the various seminaries and schools of theological and religious education in the United States. I learned about women's struggles to enter a field of long-standing white male privilege and about the challenges of women of color to make their voices heard in the academic world. In listening to their stories, I realized that my own marginalization as a feminist scholar intersected with a privileged position in terms of skin color, education, and job position at a German state university.

Two of the major advantages of the Annual Meetings are, in my view, that there is a session for every taste and that one may meet people from around the world. While attending numerous sessions on literary approaches, feminist biblical interpretation, African hermeneutics, and all sorts of novel perspectives, I gradually became aware of their status as niches, pockets of new seed sown at the margins of a huge field of traditional biblical scholarship. These assumedly marginal areas, however, raised my consciousness about hegemonic strands of research and the unequal distribution of scholarly resources. They helped me to put the more traditional and positivistic approaches to the Bible in perspective. Meeting scholars from all over the world who are experts in a particular topic or approach and who share their research and personal situation always has been and still is energizing and valuable for my own research and teaching.

2. Teaching in the United States and Working in the Society of Biblical Literature's Program Units

In 2000, I received my Habilitation¹ at Humboldt-University in Berlin upon a second book, a redaction-critical assessment of prose sermons in the book of Jeremiah (Maier 2002). With this, from today's perspective, totally old-school endeavor I aimed to qualify as a serious German biblical scholar able to obtain a position as professor at a German university. Far from it! Although I applied to about twenty positions, and female scholars with two published books were rare in those days in Germany, I did not get any job offer, mostly because of my feminist articles and interests. In this grim situation I started searching the Society's website for open positions, applied to Yale Divinity School, and finally got a termed position there as associate professor of Old Testament—because I was not only trained in historical-critical exegesis but also able to cover feminist hermeneutics. Without my prior experience at the Annual Meetings, which so far had been my only occasions to visit the United States, and without Heather McKay's supportive encouragement and coaching, I would not have made it through the semifinalist interview at the meeting in Toronto, much less secured the position.

Starting in July 2003, Yale was a new and exciting world to me, and thanks to my marvelous colleagues in Hebrew Bible and New Testament I settled in quite easily and enjoyed both teaching and doing research at this vibrant place. During this time my second phase of involvement in the Society began—the work on steering committees. My new research focus was space, and so I joined the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Constructions of Ancient Space Seminar. This collaborative work led to the book series *Constructions of Space*, edited by members of the seminar (Berquist 2007; Berquist and Camp 2008; George 2013; Økland et al. 2016). Due to the announced separation of the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature, we started a new Society of Biblical Literature program unit *Space, Place, and Lived Experience in Antiquity* in 2005, which for me meant nine

1. A Habilitation is as postdoctoral lecture qualification based on a second book to be evaluated by the respective department and its thesis publicly defended. In the German scholarly tradition, a PhD and a Habilitation were required for a professorship. Due to the implementation of junior positions and tenure-track systems in the last decades, this has changed in sciences and economics, but in the humanities a Habilitation is still common.

years of organizing and chairing sessions and gaining expertise in spatial studies, which eventually led to my third book, focused on Jerusalem as a space and personified female figure (Maier 2008). With a colleague from South Africa I also cochaired a program unit at the International Meetings in 2009–2011 named Place, Space, and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World (see the resulting publication Maier and Prinsloo 2013). In 2006–2011 I served on the steering committee of the program unit Women in the Biblical World. One basic insight of spatial studies is that space is socially constructed: humans organize and shape space according to their needs, and large spaces are the product of profound negotiations among those who share them. This is also an appropriate characterization of the Society as a place of lived academic experience.

While exploring Yale Divinity School as a space of learning and teaching future leaders in church and society, my wish to contribute to such a space also in my home country became even stronger. Fortunately, the position at Yale increased my international experience and finally made me attractive also to German universities. In 2007, I returned to Germany for a tenured position at the University of Marburg, founded by Philipp I, Landgrave of Hesse, in 1527. Its department of Protestant theology is one of only a few in which *feminist* is not regarded as a cuss word. Since then, I have kept coming to the Annual Meetings in order to stay in contact with my American colleagues, several of whom have become close friends. I also encourage some of my PhD students to attend the International and Annual Meetings in order to introduce them to this vibrant community of biblical scholars.

In the spring of 2018 I attended a Regional Meeting for the first time, because I happened to be in New Haven for a sabbatical at Yale Divinity School, where it was held, and because I was curious as to how the Society reaches out to attract scholars of the next generation. In my peripheral view, this gathering of senior and junior colleagues of a particular region was worth the effort and successful in having doctoral and master's students present their papers. Thus, I found it to be an ideal means to attract emerging scholars to the Society.

3. Serving on the Society of Biblical Literature's Strategic Committees

My third phase of involvement in the Society of Biblical Literature started in 2012 when I joined the *Journal of Biblical Literature* editorial board

for a six-year term. In this phase I became aware of all the discussions behind the meetings, about strategies of development, disciplinary trends, the situation of higher education, and the role of theology and religion in this context. In 2016, I was elected to the Status of Women in the Profession Committee, and I became its chair at the beginning of this year. This behind-the-scenes experience helped me to realize the huge endeavor and massive work of the Society in order to advance the study of the Bible and to support biblical scholars in their professional life.

Given my European perspective, I currently perceive two trends in the Society that may challenge the organization's goals, and I call them tribalism and loss of mother tongues. In Europe, the more the different nation-states align their politics and downplay their differences, the more people become regional and even tribal. To uphold the significance of one's region and the assumed idiosyncrasies of its long-time inhabitants seems to be a reaction to a fast-changing and globalized world. I would argue that there is only a certain amount of news and information that one person is able to share with others, and too much information only leads to uncertainty and fear of the future. To care for one's family, tribe, or region is a good thing as long as people who do not belong to it are not barred from participating. Over the last few years, the so-called refugee crisis in Europe has catalyzed this phenomenon. I think, however, that this is not a specific European issue but a global one. For the Society, this means that the plethora of subjects and groups that uphold a specific identity is a blessing as long as nobody is barred from sharing his, her, or their insights. In my view, joint sessions of different program units are an excellent means to tackle questions from various angles and thus to work against this trend.

My second point, the loss of mother tongues, pertains to the necessity to communicate in English within the Society. While this is indispensable for the communication at meetings, the underlying problem is that studies written in other languages are no longer read by younger scholars. Europeans who are not British are forced to publish their research in English in order to be read and recognized. Nowadays, even European emerging scholars privilege English and neglect other European languages. If this trend continues, entire strands of biblical interpretation, such as German source and redaction criticism, French structuralist studies, and Scandinavian form criticism, will be represented less and less often in the program book and have less attendees in their respective sessions. This trend necessarily leads to a narrowing of perspectives and to a loss of scholarly interaction at the international level. In order to counter this trend,

I would recommend that International Meetings focus even more on the specific approaches and perspectives pursued in the respective country.

Despite both of these trends, I think we need to find common ground as biblical scholars in a world that is more and more hostile to faith communities and religious expression—at least, this is the situation in Central Europe. Instead of defining smaller and smaller groups with a specific identity marker, I suggest that we explore what we have in common and strive to overcome real and imagined borders.

For an example that pertains to my current involvement in the Society, one may ask whether a Status of Women in the Profession Committee is not totally outdated. Looking closely one may find hardly any common denominator for all female members of the Society of Biblical Literature, because we have learned that various categories of discrimination—gender, class, race, religion, age—intersect and define multiple subgroups. In conversations at the Women Members' Breakfast these multiple identities and situations are perceptible. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that female members represent only about 24 percent of all members and that women scholars still face gender-related discrimination in their professional life. Despite about fifty years of feminist research and decades of affirmative action at all levels, women are still underrepresented in leading positions in higher education, and it is still women who carry a bigger load when balancing family and career. In all institutions, power is unevenly distributed and thus should be shared more widely. Therefore, instead of exacerbating the divisions among women, I suggest we find out what would be helpful for all of us and how the thriving of women would lead to the thriving of the whole Society. Therefore, the Status of Women in the Profession Committee is still vitally important for tracking the status and progress of women in the field, providing mentoring and networking opportunities, and making the Society a space of lived experience with greater participation by women.

One last notion: looking back to my own involvement in the Society of Biblical Literature, I also recognize how easy it has become to communicate across oceans and continents. Instead of buying a phone card and calling home from the hallway of a hotel after carefully checking the time difference, we now communicate online, send notes in an instant, and even see each other's faces on our smartphones. Instead of carrying around a huge printed program book, we compile our preferred sessions on the smartphone. Given the new technologies of communication and the detrimental effects of world-wide travel to the earth's atmosphere,

some are asking whether it is still necessary to meet annually in the United States and internationally.

Although it might be worth thinking about the frequency of our conferences, I am still skeptical about the idea of virtual meetings, both due to my studies in socially constructed space and to personal experience. In my view, nothing can replace a face-to-face communication at real meetings. To visit a conference with thousands of other attendees is a symbol of common goals and interests although we spread out in a myriad of sessions. It is still important to be challenged by papers one would not otherwise have read, to meet people one would never have sought out via the internet or Facebook, and to realize our differences in scholarly temperament and methodological approach. Personally, I would not be where I am without all these meetings. I may be old school, but I still prefer listening to papers, engaging in discussions, attending panels, and gathering around a table, sharing food and good conversation. I think that facing my conversation partners in real time and space still offers more chances for us to understand each other in our particular contexts. In my view, the center is not a specific place but a virtual space, the common goal to interpret the ancient biblical texts in a world that has many centers and many more peripheral areas that need our attention.

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A WOODEN SPOON FROM THE POT: SHE SPEAKS

MADIPOANE MASENYA (NGWAN'A MPHAHLELE)

Introduction

The African-South African (Northern Sotho) expression *leho la go tšwa pitšeng* literally means “a wooden spoon from the pot.” A human being who is *leho la go tšwa pitšeng* is one who has first-hand experience on a specific matter. The present piece presents the story of Mmago Monotela. Located within a context that is notorious for its history of apartheid (read: racial segregation), this reflection will present a brief introduction of her journey into the discipline of biblical studies and how it led to her path eventually crossing with that of the Society of Biblical Literature. As an individual African woman, how has her journey been shaped by her encounter with the Society of Biblical Literature? Which unique opportunities and challenges has she faced in this context?

Within the rich African folklore, storytelling formed an integral part of how I was nurtured as an African child growing up within a village setting. Also, proverbs and idioms were part of the daily conversations between people. In this piece I have taken liberty, even in my attempt to decolonize the discipline of biblical studies, not only to use a Northern Sotho idiomatic expression (*leho la go tšwa pitšeng*) as part of the title of my reflection, but also to cast my reflection in a storytelling form, thus diverging from the conventional article-writing style. I am grateful to the editors for allowing such a deviation from the status quo. Of the many names I have been given, I have selected to use my name Mmago Monotela as the subject through whom the story is narrated. I now invite the reader to lend Madipoane (read: Mmago Monotela) his or her ears.

Her Immersion into Biblical Studies

Why would a learner who studied maths and physics end up registering for biblical studies as one of her major subjects at university level? Why would someone who had encountered the Christian Bible basically in a church setting end up venturing into the scientific studies of the Bible at an institution of higher learning? The answer to the preceding questions is short and disgusting: the white men who taught black students the natural sciences at this historically black university would tell the prospective students to their face that, at the end of the year, only a very small number of students would pass their bachelor of science degree subjects. So, right from the beginning of the year, most science students would know that irrespective of their hard labors, getting a fail in designated subjects was a harsh reality awaiting them.

Given her poor socioeconomic background and her naivety about the contents of biblical studies, Mmago Monotela figured that her enrolment in biblical studies as a major subject within the bachelor of arts degree would enable her to complete her pregraduate degree within the designated period of three years. In that way, she would defeat the challenge of having to do a particular science subject twice before she could complete a junior degree. She had hoped that her Sunday school classes would have prepared her to navigate the biblical studies classes with ease. Alas! How wrong she was! Not only did Mmago Monotela find biblical studies a bit challenging, but more importantly for the present reflection, the subject matter was foreign to her own African-South African context. As a scientific study of the Bible, with the historical-critical methodology's false claim on objectivity,¹ the subject as taught then, and dare it be said even today, was detached from the harsh realities of South African black (female) life. With hindsight, and taking a quick snapshot of her life since

1. Mmago Monotela would therefore agree with Walter Brueggemann that "we are now able to see that what has passed as objective, universal knowledge has in fact been the interested claim of the dominant voices who were able to pose their view and to gain either assent or docile acceptance from those whose interest the claim did not serve. *Objectivity is in fact one more practice of ideology that presents interest in covert form as an established fact*" (Brueggemann, 1993, 9; my emphasis). In Mmago Monotela's context, there was only one normative Eurocentric way of approaching the subject matter of biblical studies; yet in her view, Renita J. Weems (2011, 15) has rightly argued that "no one way of reading, thinking and talking about biblical stories can be privileged over another."

then up to now, Mmago Monotela can fully agree with the words of the following lament:

Ours is a theological education characterized by one assuming the role of an insider in one context and that of an outsider in another context. One becomes an insider as one is being trained as a student, an insider to the theologies which are foreign to oneself, an insider as one trains African students in Western-oriented studies of the Bible, an insider as one does research. If the research conducted is not played according to the rules inside the game, it will not earn this “insider/outsider” accreditation to the Western academic status quo, which itself remains basically an outsider to the African status quo. (Masenya [ngwana’ Mphahlele] 2004, 460)

Mmago Monotela would be stuck with the preceding foreignness, all the way from her pregraduate and graduate days through her teaching career as an emerging biblical scholar up to now as a Hebrew Bible² tenured professor at the University of South Africa. She would still encounter such foreignness later in her association with the Society of Biblical Literature, hence the need to elaborate on this aspect right here at the beginning of her narrative. What now of this foreign subject and its package? The answer to the preceding question is the focus of the next section.

Navigating a Foreign Biblical Studies Context

Why was biblical studies foreign to Mmago Monotela, we may ask. Its subject matter as offered to black students then and even up to now, was/is not only communicated in English, one of the three colonial languages used on the African continent, but also even most of the sources that were used for the subject’s instruction were/are written mostly by European men. Also, all the academics who were involved in the teaching of the subject were white and male.³ In South Africa’s historical past, males of Caucasian

2. As matter of fact, during her PhD graduation ceremony in 1996, she was named the first black female to get a PhD degree in the South African context, and the first person to approach the Old Testament from a womanhood perspective at the University of South Africa.

3. The preceding phrase points to foreignness with regard to Mmago Monotela’s race (read: African ancestry) and to her female gender. Would it occasion any surprise then that, later on, during her enrolment for the master of arts degree in biblical studies, when she was encouraged by her prospective white male supervisor to integrate

descent were the ones who mainly benefitted from the patriarchal apartheid Afrikaner status quo. It thus occasions no surprise that their teaching of the biblical text to African students would basically focus on the biblical text and its past.⁴ In the process, atrocities such as racism, sexism, and classism, among others, suffered by those who like Mmago Monotela sat at the bottom of the hegemonic ladder, would not feature in their teaching of the subject. The works of black liberation theologians and biblical scholars,⁵ works that could have resolved the challenge of a foreign biblical studies' content to some extent, could not be allowed to enter Bible and theology curricula. In Mmago Monotela's view though, approaches to the subject matter of biblical studies that are detached from the everyday life experiences of marginalized people cannot be helpful in a continent such as Africa, one with no luxury to study the Bible detached from the everyday harsh realities on the ground.⁶ This is the same book that was used by foreigners to enslave, colonize, and oppress African peoples in the name

her African context in her studies of the Bible, she would be stunned? Why? The subject matter of biblical studies up to then, had basically focused on the biblical text's past, detached from the harsh realities of South African black life.

4. The preceding fact brings the following scenario to mind: A guest professor was at one of the International Society of Biblical Literature's consultations with senior academics in Saint Andrews, Scotland. When asked about what he would view as setbacks in present-day biblical scholarship, he lamented the loss of philology. During question time, Mmago Monotela asked him how he may balance philology with the concerns of the contexts of present-day Bible readers, particularly those readers who are located in contexts such as Africa, where the Bible was used to perpetuate harsh systems like slavery and apartheid, contexts in which the Bible continues to enjoy a normative status. The guest professor responded by telling his audience that he usually reminds students who ask similar questions that he is not a theologian but a biblical scholar! Mmago Monotela was puzzled by the response from a biblical scholar who still choose to remain with the text and nothing else but the text.

5. See Itumeleng Mosala, Takatso Mofokeng, Simon Maimela, and Desmond Tutu, among others.

6. The words of Makhosazana K. Nzimande (2009, 34) come to mind here: "Attempts at dialogue have in the past often failed to bear visible fruit because Western biblical scholars assume epistemological dominance. Your own 'marriage' to exegesis ("hard" analysable linguistic components') as an indispensable *modus operandi*—even to the extent of playing a mediating role—could assist you [read: Hans de Wit and his European peers] in understanding the 'over-protective' stance of biblical scholars in the global-South. Those reading the Bible in contexts of poverty are *not* interested in 'the analytical approach' or in being 'rational' or in the 'critical attitude' in the Western-sense of the word" (my emphasis).

of the deity.⁷ The experiences of marginalized African peoples, however, were not allowed to have a share in the content of the subject. Yet Mmago Monotela would find the words of Teresa Okure appealing:

Our contemporary life experiences are not only a valid standpoint for understanding the biblical text. They are the only standpoint we have. Experience is the primary context for doing theology and reading the Bible. Experience here is not feeling, but total emersion in life, being seasoned by life. (Okure 2000, 202)

In order to deconstruct the foreignness caused by the male gender, Mmago Monotela is persuaded that the experiences of African people, in particular those of (marginalized) African women, ought to be integrated with the subject matter of biblical studies. Why? Within patriarchal contexts, the fields of Bible and theology, once embraced by people of African descent, have historically, prior to the formation of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in 1989,⁸ basically been the preserve for men. It thus occasions no surprise⁹ that in South Africa, only as recent as the year 1996 when Mmago Monotela obtained a PhD, she would be named the first black South African female to obtain a PhD in biblical studies; as a

7. Itumeleng J. Mosala (1988, 4) could thus argue: “No other political or ideological system in the modern world that I know of derives itself so directly from the Bible as the ideology of *Apartheid*. The superiority of white people over black people, for example, is premised on the divine privileging of the Israelites over the Canaanites in the conquest texts of the Old Testament.”

8. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter the Circle) was established in the year 1989 in Accra, Ghana, by a group of African women theologians. Some of the African women, including Mercy Amba Oduyoye, who is credited with the Circle’s formation, realized that, although the experiences of the people of the then so-called Third World were the preoccupation of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians in theologizing, the experiences of African women were excluded in the theory and praxis of theology. A decision was then made to form an equal space (hence the notion of a circle) in which the experiences of African women would be deliberately integrated into the act of theologizing. Isabel A. Phiri, one of the founding mothers of the Circle and one of the previous Circle’s general coordinators, could thus write: “The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians ... is a community of African women theologians who come together to theologise from the experiences of African women in religion and culture” (Phiri 2003, 5; see also Nyagondwe Fiedler 2017).

9. See n. 2.

matter of fact, she became the first African woman to obtain a PhD degree in Hebrew Bible on the African continent.

As noted previously, Mmago Monotela would encounter the preceding foreignness later in her association with the Society of Biblical Literature. When and how did Mmago Monotela encounter the Society? What motivated her very first participation in the Society? How has her participation in the Society's meetings shaped her scholarship (if at all) through the years? To the preceding questions we now turn.

An African Woman Meets the Society of Biblical Literature

It was important to provide the preceding discussion on the foreignness of biblical studies and its content in Mmago Monotela's academic context because her subsequent encounter with the handling of the subject matter at the Society of Biblical Literature would not be that different. Just like in her South African context, Eurocentric epistemologies, philosophies, and methodologies would basically be the norm in many scholars' interaction with the subject matter of biblical studies. Even a cursory glance at the names of many sessions through the years and even up to today is sufficient to give a reader a glimpse of what appears and is still to a greater extent regarded as normative (read: hard core biblical scholarship). It thus occasions no surprise that whatever appears to deviate from the status quo would still be regarded by many as perspectival, as though the claim to objectivity in the approach to the subject matter of any offering including the subject biblical studies is still zealously clung to.

Mmago Monotela's research visit to Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, in March 1995 was necessitated by the fact that, given South Africa's conservative history (see the introductory section to the present text) and subsequently the patriarchal slant of many a higher education offering including biblical studies, there were basically no resources to enable researchers to do feminist/womanist biblical hermeneutics. So, as part of her doctoral research, Mmago Monotela had an opportunity to conduct research elsewhere outside of South Africa, especially in a country where feminist/womanist research had already been grounded. She subsequently engaged in feminist/womanist research under the supervision of feminist Hebrew Bible scholar, Dr. Phyllis Bird. As the then visiting scholar to Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary, an institution with rich resources concerning feminist and womanist

research, Mmago Monotela had an opportunity to attend the classes of the following feminist theologians, Dr. Ruth Duck and Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether. During her three months' research visit in the United States, she also had an opportunity to meet with womanist Hebrew Bible scholar, Dr. Renita J. Weems. As her research focus was on the book of Proverbs, Mmago Monotela also had an opportunity to make connections with feminist Hebrew Bible scholar, Dr. Claudia Camp. As a matter of fact, her visit to Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary and her connections with Dr. Phyllis Bird prepared fertile soil for Mmago Monotela's very first encounter with the Society of Biblical Literature, a possibility that was facilitated through the efforts of Dr. Phyllis Bird and Dr. Sharon Ringe.

Mmago Monotela's first attendance of the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the year 1995. Overwhelmed by the foreignness of the meetings, which were dominated by thousands of men of Caucasian descent, she felt like a real drop in the ocean! Mmago Monotela experienced real loneliness (coupled with a feeling of foreignness) amidst lots and lots of people, but heading back home on the very first day of the meeting was not an option. Very few continental African scholars, let alone women, could be seen along the corridors or the meeting halls then. As a matter of fact, the preceding situation, especially with regard to the attendance of the Annual Meetings by continental African women, has not changed much if at all.¹⁰ While fascinated by the sight of the many attendees of an academic conference, a setting which she had never witnessed before, Mmago Monotela was also overwhelmed by the numerous parallel sessions that were offered in that setting. The temptation of wanting to grab an opportunity to attend as many sessions as possible also stared her in the eye.

As a matter of fact, Mmago Monotela's identity as a woman who came from the global South possibly facilitated her very first encounter with the Society of Biblical Literature. How so? Her first participation in the Society was to mark the very first session in which women from Africa, Asia, and Latin America were invited to present papers. Five women from the African continent presented papers at the same session. The preceding

10. It may thus not be an exaggeration to argue that hardly ten African women from the African continent make it to the Annual Meetings each year, while hardly five African women manage to attend the International Meetings yearly. This is a huge underrepresentation of this important constituency whose majority are mainly the recipients of male Bible interpretations in many a church on the African continent.

session made herstory, since for the first time in its history, the Society of Biblical Literature provided a platform in which women from the marginalized regions of the globe were provided with the platform to read the Bible informed not by foreign contexts, but by their own marginal experiences within patriarchal cultures. The proceedings from the specific meeting were later published in *Semeia* 78 (Masenya [ngwana' Mphahlele] 1997). An important question we now ask is: How has her encounter with the Society of Biblical Literature shaped her? We now turn to the preceding question.

Shaped by or Shaping the Society of Biblical Literature?

Despite the foreignness that Mmago Monotela experienced in the Society of Biblical Literature settings, especially in the first few years of her attendance of the meetings, there are gains she can attest to. Setbacks were also real though. The Society of Biblical Literature has sessions in which the subject matter of biblical studies is integrated deliberately with present day Bible readers' contexts. Such sessions usually appeal to her. The following examples can serve as cases in point: African Biblical Hermeneutics, African-American Bible Interpretations, Contextual Readings of the Bible, Feminist Interpretations of the Bible, Postcolonial Bible Interpretations, and Minoritized Readings of the Bible, among others. Although the preceding sessions tend to take seriously the concerns of marginalized Bible-reading communities, the concerns will not be completely similar to those experienced by continental African women biblical scholars, hence Mmago Monotela's developing of the *bosadi* (womanhood-redefined) approach to the reading of biblical texts. Mmago Monotela has historically and even up to today also found the Society's women's breakfast a refreshing space in which a deliberate effort is made to affirm women as researchers and successful mentors. The challenge with regard to the aspect of mentorship though is that due to the very negligent number of attendance by continental African women scholars; very little if any, affirmation of successful mentorship from African women may feature within the preceding setting.

Mmago Monotela's attendance of some of the preceding sessions and others not only assists her in de-foreignizing the subject matter of biblical studies some, but also in strengthening her commitment as a justice-seeking biblical scholar. Although she is persuaded that there is no value-free interpretation of the Bible and that the historical-critical methodology has

played and continues to play a major role in enabling biblical scholars to get a glimpse of the contexts of the production of biblical texts, she is not persuaded that the teaching of biblical studies, as well as research done on the subject, should remain solely with the text and its past and have nothing to do with the concerns of present day Bible readers. The preceding view is informed not only by the history of how her predecessors (see black liberation theologians and biblical scholars among others) turned the oppressors' use of the Bible upside down by successfully using it as a tool for liberation, but also by the critical role that the Bible, for better or for worse (see Masenya [ngwana' Mphahlele] 2009), has been used and continues to be used in her context and the broader African context, many a time, to the detriment of the lives of many an innocent African woman, mostly in the name of the deity. In her view, such a context cannot abound in biblical scholars who take refuge only in the study of the biblical past. The preceding context also poses a challenge to those African biblical scholars who find themselves tossed between institutional demands to Africanize higher education offerings and the predominantly Eurocentric academy whose preoccupation is only with the biblical text. How may such scholars develop an African women's biblical hermeneutic that would first and foremost address the needs of local communities while still endeavoring to have a global reach within a global village setting? The preceding question is the one that both the Society of Biblical Literature and scholars would do well to grapple with.

One of the gains from Mmago Monotela's attendance at the Society of Biblical Literature is that she has found a conducive space in which individual scholars can make a mark internationally. The Society has created a unique space in which she can network with scholars at the global level. Mmago Monotela has consequently received numerous requests to make contributions in specialist books in the form of book chapters. Her contribution in such books is important as it enables the scarcely heard African female voice to be heard, also globally. She has also been afforded opportunities to edit books. The latter exercise is in her view a noble one as it enables the mentorship process to happen. Related to the preceding gain is the opportunity which she has been afforded to serve as cochair of two Society sessions as well as a member of the Annual Meetings Programming Committee. Although her contribution remains somewhat small, even within the preceding platforms, Mmago Monotela is of the opinion that her voice remains an important representation of some of the marginal voices within an Society of Biblical Literature setting.

Concluding Remarks

From humble beginnings to bigger endings; invisibility to some visibility; a less audible voice to the one that can be heard, even though many a time, not necessarily always understood. Mmago Monotela's is a story representative of stories of those (read: women) who come from a different (foreign) context, one whose people have always been expected to consume that which they did not produce, while those who expect them to do so appear to remain allergic to consume that which has been produced in Africa. In a global village though, including even in the task of biblical scholarship, striving in humility for some form of egalitarianism and reciprocity may persuade us to affirm the truth underlying the following African proverb: *motho ke motho ka batho* (a human being is a human being because of other human beings). The wooden spoon from the pot has spoken.

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A JEWISH WOMAN'S SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE EXPERIENCE

ADELE REINHARTZ

Until receiving the invitation to contribute to this volume, I had not given much thought to how being a Jewish woman has affected my experience in the Society of Biblical Literature. For that reason, I welcome the opportunity to reflect on this question, more than thirty years after I became a member of the Society.

Two caveats at the outset. First, I do not in any way claim to represent the experience of all, most, or many female Jewish Society of Biblical Literature members, or even the experience of those women who share certain specific aspects of my own identity: New Testament specialists, Sabbath observant, Canadian, child of Holocaust survivors, and of “a certain age” (hint: eligible to retire but not yet retired). Any individual's experience in the Society is shaped not only by the structures and practices of the organization itself but also by her academic and friendship circles, her own assessment of her place within the field, and countless formal and informal encounters over the years of her Society participation.

Second, the request to reflect on my Society experience as a Jewish woman set me thinking in the direction of marginalization. But much as one might expect that the experience of a Canadian Jewish female New Testament scholar in the Society of Biblical Literature would be one of compound alienation—as a non-American, non-Christian, nonmale working outside her own area of religious and ethnic identification—such has not been my experience. Or, to be more accurate, while I felt myself to be marginalized in certain respects in the early stages of my involvement in the Society of Biblical Literature, such is no longer the case. The natural process of moving from graduate student to contract faculty to tenure-track and eventually full professor led to knowing more people,

developing a research profile and reputation, and, eventually, becoming less concerned at finding oneself the only woman, non-American, or Jew in the room.

Although the organization, or, at least, my corner of it, is majority American, Christian, and male, I have long felt accepted and valued as a scholar and as a person, and I have every assurance that my contribution—scholarly, organizationally, and individually—is important and appreciated. The Society of Biblical Literature has been central to my career development. It has provided opportunities and access to wonderful friends and colleagues and a scholarly framework that is at the core of how I view myself as a scholar.

Thoughts on Being a Jewish Woman at/in the Society of Biblical Literature

I would venture that every junior scholar, whatever their gender, age, religious identification, country, or other identity elements, feels invisible or nearly so at their first few Society of Biblical Literature meetings. How could it be otherwise? The program is broad and deep, the atmosphere frenzied, crowds rushing to and from sessions barely stopping hastily to greet friends and acquaintances. I remember many a meal eaten in solitude, in quiet envy of the chatter going on at tables all around me. My natural shyness was not an asset. How and when that all changed I cannot entirely reconstruct, but I know it had to do, first, with the warm reception I received from peers and senior scholars once I began participating in sessions, and, second, with the close personal friendships that I developed with academic colleagues over many years.

Although I began full-time teaching in 1981, I did not begin attending the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting until some years later. I will never forget the moment in 1987 when I sailed into a room of dark-suited, white-skinned men in the full bloom of pregnancy with my third child, to deliver my first paper ever to the Johannine Literature Section. After the session, I was greeted by the other speakers—whose work I had read for my doctoral exams and dissertation—who encouraged me to work the paper up for publication and to attend the Johannine Literature sessions. I would not be surprised if there were then, and still are today, some New Testament or Johannine scholars who question whether anyone other than a believing Christian can or should aim to be a scholar of the Gospel of John. But I am

grateful that these sentiments have rarely been expressed to me in person, and, even more appreciative of the genuinely warm acceptance that I have had in my chosen subfield—male Christian-dominated as it is—including among those who disagree with my positions on certain key issues.

Academic acceptance is one thing; getting through the Annual Meeting is another. Whether male or female, Christian or not, first-time attendance at the meeting can be an alienating experience. Some first-timers, of course, will have graduate school or departmental peers who are also attending, but most also wish to network by meeting more senior scholars and finding new peers whose interests they share. I suspect that most people, or at least, those who are not discouraged by their initial experiences, find their way organically or, more precisely, haphazardly, over time. My Society social life improved immeasurably, and perhaps ironically, as a result of a sabbatical in Israel in 1992–1993, at which, through colleagues, I met scholars in fields adjacent to my own (e.g., Dead Sea Scrolls), who also attended the Annual Meeting. In addition, I began to form friendships with other Johannine scholars simply by attending all of the sessions of the Johannine Literature Section, at which I saw the same people over the course of the meeting and through the years. No doubt these sorts of experiences are shared by many.

These factors—academic inclusion and the development of an Society of Biblical Literature social circle—may be the most important elements affecting whether or not participants feel marginal to the Society and whether they value and enjoy their experiences at the Annual Meeting. These aspects are nonquantifiable, and, in great measure, they are specific to each individual. Nevertheless, they can be influenced and shaped by developments within our fields or subfields of study, as well as by the structure of the Annual Meeting and by the Society of Biblical Literature as an organization.

In my experience as a female Jewish specialist in the New Testament, three developments have made a difference: the presence of other women in the society; the growing importance attached to the Jewish context of the Jesus movement and its literature; and the addition of Sabbath services and meals to the Society of Biblical Literature calendar.

Women and the Society of Biblical Literature

The field of biblical studies has been male-centered since its inception. Although there were women Society of Biblical Literature members from

almost the beginning of the Society, it took more than one hundred years, until 1987, for there to be a female president—Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. My observation is that in the thirty-one years since then the Society has become more attentive to women's presence and activity within the Society. It has also become more proactive about ensuring that women are welcome at the Society of Biblical Literature—and that they are not just included but also given voices in all the major committees, including Council itself and at the highest levels of leadership.

According to the 2017 Annual Report (found on the Society's website¹), approximately 25 percent of the membership of the Society of Biblical Literature is female. Aside from presence on Society committees, it is not easy to gauge female Society activity. What is clear, however, is that the 2018 Annual Meeting program still includes a significant number of "manels," that is, all-male panels. Although women make up only 25 percent of the membership, it is hard to believe that there remain corners of the field in which there are no female scholars. Does this mean that there should be no all-female panels? Not in my book; the demographic trends of the society do not suggest that the field, or the Annual Meeting, will be female-dominated at any point in the foreseeable future.

The Annual and International Meetings are not the only large-scale Society of Biblical Literature activities; the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, the Society's flagship journal, is another enterprise that involves many Society members. As general editor of journal from 2012 to 2018, I have paid close attention to the level of women's participation. Women participate in the journal in two ways: by submitting their scholarship for consideration and by membership on the editorial board, which, for the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, involves providing double-blind peer reviews that aid the general editor in deciding which submissions will be published.

The *Journal of Biblical Literature* began publication in 1882; the first female general editor came on board more than a hundred years later, in 1995. Since then, however, three of the five most recent editors have been women: Jouette Bassler (1995–1999), Gail R. O'Day (2000–2006), and myself (2012–2018). Editorial board composition shows approximately 50 percent female editors (article reviewers) in any given year. But there is much room for improvement with regard to the submission of journal articles. In recent years, according to the Society's annual reports,

1. See Society of Biblical Literature 2017.

approximately 22 percent of total submissions have been by woman, and 23 percent of articles published have female authors. Each issue has at least two articles by women scholars. These numbers can be improved only if more women submit their article manuscripts to the journal.

Scholarly Issues: The Jewish Context of the Jesus Movement

From an academic perspective, the most important development that affects my Society of Biblical Literature experience as a Jewish woman has been the growing attention to the Jewish context of the Jesus movement and its literature. Although readers of the New Testament should always have known that Jesus, the disciples, Paul, and almost all other New Testament figures were Jews, serious attention to this point began to be paid in earnest only in the mid-twentieth century in the post-Holocaust period, and, as far as I can tell, it has become an important feature of the field only in the last twenty years or even more recently.

It had seemed natural to me as a doctoral student that my academic background—a BA and MA in Jewish Studies with a focus on ancient Judaism—would be helpful in my work as a New Testament scholar. It helped greatly that my thesis supervisor, E. P. Sanders, was himself completely committed to the idea that one cannot study New Testament without also studying Second-Temple and early rabbinic Jewish sources and that the doctoral program at McMaster University (in Hamilton, Ontario) was structured along these lines.

The deep importance of Jewish sources and context for understanding the Jesus movement was by no means obvious to all New Testament scholars in the 1970s. That situation has changed considerably in the last ten years or so. There are now Society of Biblical Literature units devoted to the study of Jewish sources in conjunction with the New Testament, and, overall, a far greater presence of sessions that fall squarely within the field of Jewish sources, including archaeology, extracanonical literary sources, rabbinics, and Jewish inscriptions. This development has created a sense of greater openness not only to Jewish scholars but to scholars, Jewish and non-Jewish, whose main areas of interest are precisely in Jewish studies. This change has also normalized the presence of Jewish scholars in at least some of the sessions on New Testament texts, and helped to bring Jewish studies and Jewish scholars from the margins to the center.

Being Jewish at the Society of Biblical Literature: Sabbath Observance

Finally, there is the concrete matter of the Sabbath. The biggest obstacle to Jewish participation at the Society of Biblical Literature is the fact that it begins on the Jewish Sabbath. In the early years of my own participation, this was a major problem for me due to the simple fact that the Annual Meeting always begins on a Saturday. Because the conference almost always took place in the United States, I always had to travel, often a great distance. If I waited until Sunday I would not arrive until the conference was almost half over. If I came Friday, I was faced with the challenge of where and how to eat Sabbath meals, as well as how to attend the conference without violating some core Sabbath restrictions. This situation, more than anything else, created an unwelcoming environment not just for me, but for many other Jewish participants.

In 1992–1993 I was on sabbatical in Jerusalem, and there I met a fellow Sabbath-observant Society member, Esther Chazon, a Dead Sea Scrolls scholar at the Hebrew University. In 1993, for the Annual Meeting held in Washington DC, Esther and I decided to take the Sabbath meal matters into our own hands. With the help of Adele Berlin, we ordered food and invited every Sabbath-observant Society of Biblical Literature attendee we could find to join us in our hotel room for a “picnic” dinner and lunch. So began “Sabbath meals in the room.” Over a few short years the numbers grew, making for riotous and highly enjoyable mealtimes that, I would suggest modestly, helped us all overcome the sense of alienation that we had felt during Shabbat at the Society of Biblical Literature before this point. But the situation also became unmanageable as the numbers spilled over into the hallway outside our hotel room. It was time to put these meals on a more formal and official standing.

This task was taken on by Edith and Meir Lubetski, and some years later, by Joseph Weinstein, an American Schools of Oriental Research member, who continues to perform this valuable service for all interested American Academy of Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, and American Schools of Oriental Research participants. Joe not only arranges for meals but also for Sabbath and weekday communal prayer, and, often, a dedicated refrigerator for kosher food that can be accessed throughout the duration of the meeting. Celebrating Shabbat together is a wonderful way to begin the conference and provides an opportunity to touch base with friends and meet new colleagues. For me and many

others, this opportunity has made the Society of Biblical Literature feel much more hospitable.

Conclusion

I began by stressing that I view my own Society of Biblical Literature experiences as personal rather than as representative of any group, including the small group of Jewish female New Testament scholars with whom I have the most in common. Yet it is possible that others, of any gender, ethnic, or religious affiliation and area of specialization will recognize themselves in some of my comments. I would offer some general observations.

First, our experience as women members of the Society of Biblical Literature is deeply affected by other self-identifications such as race, ethnicity, gender/sexuality, life stage, career stage, and academic specialization. Second, our experience is also shaped by the presence, or absence, of women, in the meeting rooms and on the podia of the Annual and International Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, on the committees of the Society, and in the pages of SBL Press journals and books. The Society of Biblical Literature as an organization—Council and major committees—is sensitive and committed to the importance of gender and other forms of diversity. But the Society of Biblical Literature can play a larger role in increasing awareness among program unit steering committees as well as affiliate organizations in order to ensure that “manels” are a thing of the past. And third, our sense of belonging and participation is affected by the academic content of the activities undertaken under the Society’s auspices. Inclusion of feminist and womanist discourse as well as gender-related papers and topics more broadly—not only in the sessions sponsored by feminist and womanist program units but in other sessions—would increase women’s sense of belonging.

The Society of Biblical Literature has been a central source of professional development and satisfaction, as well as considerable personal enjoyment. I hope that the organization will continue to grow and develop along with the field of biblical studies itself and provide opportunities for all members to feel welcome.

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TRAVERSING THE SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE WHILE TRANS

MELISSA HARL SELLEW

My story will be rather different from that of most, if not all, of the women writing or featured in this collection.¹ As a woman of transgender experience, it was only late in my career that I was able to emerge fully into the open as my true self. For most of my professional life, I wore the camouflage of apparent white male identity, and what is more, of seemingly cisgender and heterosexual male identity. As a woman hiding in plain sight, I felt unable or unwilling to speak or act with authenticity from the perspective of any gender. It was an uncomfortable place to try keep my balance, in that zone of quiet invisibility. After years of living within a cloud of worry and frustration, only in recent years have I started to live openly as a woman. I have found joy in acceptance from my peers, especially from other female scholars, along with fresh invitations to address my academic interests, now from an explicitly trans perspective.

Living and working as a woman in hiding made my personal and professional life rather confusing at times. I've known there was something different about me in this regard from a young age. I was sent to a child psychologist by my parents at age three and later at age fifteen; I was forced to line up with "other" boys in kindergarten, after I had put myself where I thought I belonged, with the other girls. These were early lessons about how important it would be for me to hide my feelings and hopes in order to survive in the world. Starting in adolescence, I struggled to find a way to exist and thrive despite my inner turmoil. As a form of personal research, I would avidly read popular feminist authors like Germaine Greer and

1. Recent online demographic surveys of the Society of Biblical Literature membership find that people who self-identify as transgender or "other" amount to less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the Society.

Gloria Steinem, starting in high school, as well as magazines targeting women and girls that my mother and sister brought into the house. My reading made me feel engaged by and yet painfully separated from the experiences of other young women.

The turn in our field toward women's studies took on steam while I was a graduate student at Harvard Divinity School in the mid-to-late 1970s and the early 1980s. It was an exciting time, though also quite challenging in certain ways. As we all know, women struggle(d) to be acknowledged as doing important work, especially if they focus(ed) largely on women's topics (and one worries that the same might now be said of trans scholars writing on trans topics). In this context, female scholars offering solidarity and mutual support for each other seems crucial. I remember wanting to enroll in one of the classes taught by Mary Daly, icon of radical feminist theology at Boston College, who was about to publish her groundbreaking book *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), which sounded so intriguing to me as a woman in hiding. I was not allowed to join the class, due to my apparent male identity: at that time she taught women-only courses. I didn't have the language or the temerity to ask Professor Daly to admit me to her class on the grounds that there was an unseen woman somehow sheltered within my visible cocoon of masculinity. I understood the decision; it added one more bit of disappointment to my nearly life-long melancholy over my gender difference, but I saw the value of her choice.

As a woman shielded by the camouflage of male identity, despite such setbacks I knew I was benefiting from the significant systems of privilege baked into our gendered world. I was not proud (nor am I now) of having been aided by those advantages, despite my considerable discomfort at the time. I suspected, for example, that I got approval as a candidate for ministry in the Presbytery of Boston, despite my somewhat unorthodox views on certain questions, due to the comfort the more conservative clergy and lay elders were able to take from my apparent if imperfect masculinity. But I did not reveal my truth to them; I knew that such an avowal would no doubt have made them see me as unsuitable for ordination. It was with mixed emotions that I went on to hear Krister Stendahl address me on the topic of becoming a righteous "man of God" as he preached on 1 Tim 6 at my ordination service one night in November 1981.

As a student I was privy to the comments, observations, and complaints of my male peers as we all prepared for the job market. It was a time when colleges and seminaries were ramping up their feeble efforts to diversify their faculties by appointing more women (and in some

places, more members of other traditionally excluded groups, whatever their gender). This led to bitterness and dismissive comments from some of my white male peers, grouching that their opportunities for placement were being threatened unfairly. It was as though tenured professorial positions somehow belonged to them by right. My response to such complaints was not all that I would now have wished, other than remarking that from what I saw, the best people were still getting the jobs, whether they were men or women. Now I would hope to offer a more robust and positive case for a diverse faculty, more reflective of the demographics of society.

My first teaching appointment was as Lecturer on Greek and Latin at Harvard Divinity School, beginning in 1981. I occupied the lowest rung on a thoroughly hierarchical faculty ladder, and as such I was assigned forty-five advisees who were pursuing MDiv or MTS degrees. The trend in the mid-80s was to see more and more women, a large portion of them mid-life empty nesters, enroll in seminaries, responding to a new openness to female clergy and church leaders in at least some circles. I was surprised (but secretly thrilled) to be asked by the newly formed lesbian student caucus to serve as their faculty sponsor, something they needed so as to use school facilities for meetings. I agreed at once, despite some unvoiced wonder about their choice, given that I was presumably seen by them as a straight man and given the presence of other, visibly female women on the faculty at the time. Perhaps it wasn't felt to be safe for an untenured female professor to sponsor a lesbian student group, whereas my involvement as an apparent male might have seemed innocuous, if rather odd. An advisee of mine who sought to join that student group was a transsexual woman (to use the terminology of the day) who had left her career as a lawyer to seek ordination as a minister of the Metropolitan Community Church, at that time the only denomination that was fully and heartily welcoming of queer and trans pastors and lay members. Her attendance in the lesbian caucus caused some consternation, more than it likely would today. I never felt able to step out of the closet to explore my own trans identity with that student, due in part to the complexities of our advising relationship, as well as to my own ambivalence and fears.

At the time there were half a dozen untenured faculty members at Harvard Divinity School, along with about three times as many tenured full professors. All the full professors were male; all the nontenured faculty were female, if one could include me, hidden in my male disguise. Despite their lack of rank and privilege, the women faculty were quite a

stellar group, though only one was to be offered tenure at the school.² It was an unspoken delight for me to be able to join in on social occasions with my untenured colleagues, sharing drinks and stories at the faculty club, listening to and learning from this amazing group, all women scholars. Within a couple of years of my departure from Harvard to teach at the University of Minnesota, where I have spent the rest of my career, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza arrived on campus, inaugurating a new era of acknowledgement and cultivation of the work of women in theological disciplines at the school.

When I did first start sharing the story of my lifelong suppression of my female gender with friends and colleagues in the Society of Biblical Literature, five years ago, it was with hesitation and worry about how I might be perceived and received once I made my gender transition fully public. The topic of transition for transgender people is complicated and can take many forms and many years, with much of the work involved out of public view. A first and fundamental moment is one's internal recognition and acknowledgement of having a gender identity at variance from the physical sex one was assigned at birth. Many of us struggle and resist this recognition at first, perhaps for a long time, potentially without ever taking steps to live in one's true gender. One could dismiss this resistance as a period of denial, but for many people, hiding is the only viable option. Life would be so much easier if we could proceed with our daily lives, whether at work or at home, while feeling congruence between what the world sees and believes about us and the way we feel and experience our inner truths. It turned out that my worries about how colleagues would accept me were largely unfounded.

I struggled at first to find ways to explain myself to my professional academic world, despite the help of therapy related to my diagnosis of what was then termed "gender identity disorder" and is now called "gender dysphoria." I was quite fortunate in my nearly random choice

2. Our leader in many ways was Constance H. Buchanan, an associate dean and founding director of Harvard's important Women's Studies in Religion Program. Clarissa Atkinson, a leading scholar of medieval Christianity and specialist in the mystic Margery Kempe, was a real inspiration to me. Another associate dean was the noted Islamic scholar Jane I. Smith. Younger women on the faculty included Margaret R. Miles, an historical theologian who contributed major work on the body and gender; Sharon D. Welch, a fierce advocate of feminist critical studies; and Sharon Daloz Parks, who was doing important work in the areas of ethics and leadership.

of a colleague with whom to speak first about my gender, someone, as it turned out, who listened to me with exceptional grace and kindness. We were on a scholarly jaunt touring the Pauline cities and other sites of western Turkey, during which I was thrown amidst a group that included some male friends that I had known since graduate school days. Over the first days of the trip, I watched myself performing some old behaviors and ways of conversation, personality flaws, as I see them, including a certain competitive aggressiveness (ironically modeled by my hard-charging mother) that I had adopted years before as a way to try to fit in as a man in the academy. I was chagrined and ashamed at how I was acting and blurted out my concerns to this newly met female colleague, who immediately with sympathy and without question accepted my claims to being a (trans) woman and has supported me wholeheartedly ever since.

That acceptance helped me overcome my fears of how other women, especially other queer women, might respond to my avowal of female identity. I had suspected that they would reject me based on my complicated life history and socialization as a male, a fear that seemed quite reasonable to my worried mind and heart. Trans women have not always been treated very respectfully by cisgender women, including feminist women. Still today, there remain at least a few women (termed “trans-exclusive radical feminists” by trans-welcoming folk), especially vocal in England, who when faced with a trans woman will adopt an essentialist, body-centered definition of womanhood, despite its obvious variance from the central value of feminism that our bodies are not our destinies.

It has been disturbing and disappointing to watch some of the heroes of my adolescence and adulthood, such as Germaine Greer and Martina Navratilova, adopt a sometimes loud and often angrily dismissive attitude to trans women like me. Gloria Steinem also voiced opposition to recognizing trans women as women until a recent shift in her thinking. But my own reception by the women I actually know, both in the professional context and in my personal life, has been remarkably positive. There is the occasional raised eyebrow over why one would jettison male privilege for life as a queer trans woman, but people quickly realize that being female was not a matter of choice for me—that is simply who I am—whereas coming out and asserting my female identity in public and in the workplace was definitely a matter of choice.

I had long planned to delay my public transition, including medical interventions and legal name change, until after my retirement from university teaching. Perhaps I would simply leave town and take up residence

in a city where no one knew me under my former identity. I was fearful of the amount of rumor and gossip that would follow any public announcement and dreaded the need to have an endless series of deeply personal conversations with hundreds of people on campus and at conferences like the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature. But it turned out that rumor and gossip were my friends.

On the spur of the moment, unable to stand the pressure of living as a woman everywhere but in my professional life, I corrected the information on my Power Point presentation from my former to my new name, just minutes before speaking at a small digital humanities workshop in the summer of 2016. That event was held the day before the opening of the quadrennial conference of the international Coptic studies organization, where I approached the registration desk and asked for a new name tag, now to be emblazoned with the name Melissa Harl Sellew. I hadn't prepared for this step at all. I acted on impulse, and so had no female clothing packed for wearing on the trip. The reaction of colleagues was fascinating. Female friends, and some men, seemed to be delighted, and several women welcomed me "to our team," as more than one of them put it. Other men adopted a stance that seemed to signal ambivalence, confusion, discomfort, or all of these feelings and more. One woman gave me her straw hat to guard against the strong California sun, stating that the look was more feminine than what I had been wearing. Two men that I had known for years saw the female name on my tag, thought it was a joke, and laughed loudly when they saw it. The looks of surprise and consternation when they learned that the name was now quite real were also memorable.

The impact of my unprepared, spontaneous, and awkwardly staged coming out at that conference was stunning. It turned out that I would need to have very few of those dreaded one-to-one conversations with colleagues and students about my gender transition (quite different from the much desired intimate and in-depth conversations I have had ever since with dear friends). The story seemed to spread like wildfire through my corners of the guild without much help from me; as I said, rumor and gossip were my friends. I did speed up the process by sending out a mass email to professional contacts who had communicated with me sometime within the prior two years. Though many of those contacts made no direct response to my message about my gender transition or waited till they would see me in person, the gesture seemed to help. On my return to campus, and at the national Society of Biblical Literature meeting that fall, I

simply showed up as myself, and nearly everybody had apparently already heard the news. There seemed to be some interest and curiosity about how I was doing, but I felt no overt resistance or pushback. Some men seemed to simply avoid the whole (distasteful?) topic of my gender by making no comment at all. Another fortunate aspect of my coming out as transgender at work is that I teach at an institution that shows respect for equity and diversity in several realms, including gender variance. My department updated my name and other public contact information immediately and without hesitation: the name on my door, on the department website, and on the official class schedule changed seamlessly.

My emergence into public sparked in me an unexpected ability and willingness to speak publicly about how my gender consciousness has affected my interpretive work as a scholar of early Christian literature. It was a pleasant surprise to be invited to speak on a panel on Transgender Hermeneutics at the 2018 Annual Meeting in Denver, organized as a joint session of the Gender, Sexuality, and the Bible and the LGBTQ/Queer Hermeneutics groups. I chose to speak about how my gender journey had altered my reading of the noncanonical Gospel of Thomas, a text of special interest across my career. It was my first attempt explicitly to apply a gender-theoretical lens to my scholarly work, as distinct from my personal life, and I gained some valuable perspectives while listening to my fellow panelists and in later conversations and reading. I have subsequently dived more deeply into recent and stimulating work from a variety of approaches that I find illuminating, including feminist, postcolonial, and queer theory, to expand and strengthen my work on Thomas and New Testament literature.

The Gospel of Thomas offers a particularly rich site for topics related to gender and gender expression. In my most recent work, I discuss Gos. Thom. 22, where we find Jesus stating that only “When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and *when you make male and female into a single one*, so that *the male be male nor the female be female*, ... then you will enter [the kingdom]” (Miller 1995). This call for singularity, somehow an existence beyond gender difference, is called severely into question by the final words of the gospel, Gos. Thom. 114, where Simon Peter urges Jesus to exclude Mary from the group, on the grounds that “women are not worthy of life.” Jesus responds in a way that underlines the strongly masculinist perspective of the text, despite its avowed values of gender-busting salvation: “I myself will lead her and make her into a living

spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom.” Perhaps Jesus’s choice of pronouns here, distinguishing both Mary and himself from “you males,” offers a crack in the strongly androcentric system at work here.³

The Society of Biblical Literature panel and the writing on the topic I have done since on the Gospel Thomas and gender are two occasions where my new visibility as a transgender female professor of early Christian studies has brought me unexpected opportunities for speaking and writing. There seems to be considerable interest in hearing about my particular version of living while female in our world. I have been asked to speak at churches and in college classrooms, and to serve on the boards of organizations that serve the queer and trans communities. An especially delightful such invitation was to tell my story as part of this comprehensive collection on 125 years of women in the Society of Biblical Literature. I am honored to be counted among their number.

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3. See my forthcoming article “Reading Thomas from Here: A Trans-Centered Hermeneutic” (currently under review for publication).

AN ASIAN ASIAN WOMAN RUNNING THE SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE MARATHON

YAK-HWEE TAN

Introduction

I had never heard of Society of Biblical Literature until I came to the United States from Singapore in the early 1990s to pursue my graduate degree in biblical studies in Texas. Words were buzzing around that a couple of our biblical studies professors would not be present on a particular week because of an academic meeting that they would be attending. The name *Society of Biblical Literature* came up again when I continued with my graduate studies at a theological seminary in Virginia. One of the professors of the seminary shared the benefits of being a student member of the Society and encouraged us to be one. However, I did not see the benefits of being a member of an American academy when I was returning to pastoral ministry in Singapore after my studies. There seemed to be a gap between the academy and the church in terms of research and practice in my Asian context.

However, I was back in the United States in the late 1990s to pursue my doctoral studies in New Testament studies at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Since my sojourn in the States would be longer than my previous one, I would be actively engaging with the Society. Hence, the beginning of my academic marathon run in the Society of Biblical Literature.

I have intentionally used the term *Asian Asian* to define my identity vis-à-vis *Asian American*. The rationale is that I was not born in nor have I resided in the United States except when I was doing my graduate studies. I returned to Asia upon finishing my doctoral studies. However, there are some points in this paper where I would use *Asian* to denote people who originally come from the region of Asia.

The mission statement of the Society is commendable and worth citing:

Founded in 1880, the Society of Biblical Literature is the oldest and largest learned society devoted to the critical investigation of the Bible from a variety of academic disciplines. As an international organization, the Society offers its members opportunities for mutual support, intellectual growth, and professional development through the following:

- ♦ Advancing academic study of biblical texts and their contexts as well as of the traditions and contexts of biblical interpretation
- ♦ Collaborating with educational institutions and other appropriate organizations to support biblical scholarship and teaching
- ♦ Developing resources for diverse audiences, including students, religious communities, and the general public
- ♦ Facilitating broad and open discussion from a variety of critical perspectives
- ♦ Organizing congresses for scholarly exchange
- ♦ Publishing biblical scholarship
- ♦ Promoting cooperation across global boundaries¹

In the light of its strategic vision, the Society has provided me with opportunities and challenges from the time when I was an Asian doctoral student to my present status as a professor teaching at a theological institution in Taiwan. My social location as an Asian woman biblical scholar in Asia is an important factor in the way I engage with the challenges and opportunities in the Society. My social location is not static but a shifting one because of the complex world in which we live, locally, regionally, and globally.

As I have argued elsewhere (Tan 2010), one's social location is both a "dis-ease" and/or a "dis-cover(y)." On the one hand, social location is a dis-ease that is seen as a disruptive academic presence with respect to discipline and also as a disruptive physical presence because of one's ethnicity, gender, and class. However, paradoxically, social location is also dis-cover(y). It provokes the academic discipline from its status quo to dis-cover new perspectives and also to dis-cover the physical presence of the Other.

With those two concepts in mind, I will reflect on the opportunities and challenges I have had as an Asian woman running the academic marathon in the Society of Biblical Literature.

1. <https://www.sbl-site.org/aboutus/mission.aspx>.

An Academic Marathon of Opportunities and Challenges

At the Starting Line

The Society of Biblical Literature provides opportunities for doctoral students and biblical critics to present their research interests on biblical texts within their contexts as well as recognizing the presenters' own traditions in engaging the texts. The opportunity came for me when my Annual Meeting paper proposal was accepted when I was a doctoral student (Tan 2000). I was excited but also apprehensive because I was sitting with some renowned biblical scholars at the session. From the list of presenters at the session, I realized that I was the only Asian woman presenting but was glad that the respondent to my paper was an Asian American biblical scholar who is known for his Asian hermeneutics. At the session, some thoughts went through my mind such as, "Would my English be comprehensible to the audience? What if I do not understand the questions or comments?" These thoughts, consciously or unconsciously, reflected concerns I had due my identity as an Asian in a predominately Euro-American academy.

The focus of my paper presentation was a reading of Paul's Letter to the Romans, notably, Rom 14:1–15:13, using some categories from Confucian understanding of community. It was a reading from an Asian-philosophical perspective. From a Confucian philosophical point of view, each individual has an important role to play in society; whether the individual be male or female, ruler or ruled, he or she is an integral part of sustaining balance in the cosmos. As such, from a cosmological point of view, the role of each member of a community is not seen as hierarchical or patriarchal; rather, the role is paradoxically complex and complete (Chen 1991). Therefore, there is another way the notion of community could be read in the face of the disunity in the church in Paul's Letter to the Romans. That is to say, while there might be gendered differences in the community, a model of social interaction rather than a hierarchical model sustains the unity of the community.

The Society of Biblical Literature not only provided the platform for young and promising scholars to present their papers but also the opportunity to turn their presentations into published academic papers. Therefore, it was very encouraging to have my first presentation published after taking into account of the constructive comments from the respondent and audience at the session (Tan 2005). The paper was published in a volume with the subtitle, "Shared Ground, Uncertain

Borders,” reflecting the fact that biblical hermeneutics allows the same biblical book to be viewed differently, depending on one’s perspective. The Society of Biblical Literature must be commended for their efforts to develop the profile of prospective scholars and their scholarship.

I described my experience at my first presentation as one at the starting block, ready for the race. Though I was the only Asian woman at the starting block of a predominantly Euro-American academic race, nevertheless I was at the block. The academic marathon had just started.

On the Mark, Get Set ...

Asia is a multifaceted continent with regard to religions, cultures, economics, and politics. It is in Asia that Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity had their births; however, the practices of these religions differ from one country to another because of political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors. For example, while Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, it is not ruled by Islamic law but rather by the country’s official foundational philosophical theory of the state called the “Pancasila.” The five principles of Pancasila are “(the principle of) belief in the One and Only God according to the principle of a just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia and (the principles) of peoplehood guarded by the spirit of wisdom) in the form of deliberation (and) representation, and the realization of social justice for the whole people of Indonesia” (Titaley 2011, 227).² Therefore, when one does biblical criticism in Indonesia, the biblical critic needs to bear in mind that there are other factors that might impinge on the way the biblical critic engages with the biblical text in a multifaceted context, such as Asia.

As someone from multireligious, multicultural Singapore and postcolonial Singapore, I was drawn to engage the biblical texts from Singapore’s colonial/postcolonial condition. Therefore, postcolonial criticism, which had been around in the literary field for some time and was beginning to impact biblical criticism, proved attractive to me. For me, the criticism is not simply an academic exercise but one that addresses the multifaceted me as I engage with the criticism. Again, the Society of Biblical Literature provided me the opportunity to present my exploratory understanding of

2. The quotation cited by Titaley is part of the preamble of the Indonesian Constitution of 1945.

postcolonial criticism of the Johannine community at the Johannine Literature Section of the Annual Meeting (Tan 2003). Again, I was the only Asian woman in the session. I greatly appreciated the questions and comments from the audience, which further advanced my research project, especially in the area of method and theory. The presentation of my paper was subsequently revised into an article (Tan 2006), which I contributed to a book entitled *New Currents through John: A Global Perspective*, edited by Tom Thatcher and Francisco Lozada Jr. The publication of this book by the Society of Biblical Literature with the title the words *new currents* and *global perspective* intimated the Society's willingness to foster such an endeavor.

The impact of colonialism continues to impact the world today but in different forms, such as economic and cultural domination. Postcolonial criticism was a rather new and cutting-edge approach in relationship to biblical criticism, yet the openness of the Society to experiment with this new method and theory not only advanced the academic study of the biblical texts for the academy but also for promising scholars who were passionate about using a new-found method in their research projects.

Go, Go, Go ...

The opportunities to present papers increased my visibility as a biblical scholar; however, I suspect that my identity marker, *Asian woman*, makes that visibility more apparent. Even within that identity marker, the term *woman* is exceptional because statistically, women are small in number in the area of biblical studies and theology in Asia. Hence, I was often invited to sessions where there were presentations from an Asian perspective and better still if there was a notion of feminist or woman in the presentations.

At the many Asian and Asian American sessions that I attended, either as a respondent or participant, I noticed that the attendees at these sessions tended to comprise primarily Asian Asians or Asian Americans. They were present either because they were interested in the subject matter and/or to support their presenters-colleagues. While the focus of the sessions were Asian, Asian American, or both at the same time and sought to be gender-balanced, the presence of women presenters was comparatively small. Moreover, the feminist perspectives or women concerns tended to be overlooked at these sessions. For example, in one of the sessions in which I was one of the respondents to a book by Julius-Kei Kato (2012), I

highlighted the absence of the feminist perspective(s) in the book, which spurred further discussion on feminist perspectives with respect to the Asian American diasporic context (Tan 2014). Therefore, feminist perspectives had to be an intentional endeavor, being discussed only when an audience member or respondent like myself specifically brought it up.

My identity marker as an Asian puts me in an advantageous position to respond the papers from Asian perspectives, but it also reveals the conventional stereotyping of one's identity. On the one hand, stereotyping is a convenient way for steering committees to make a quick decision on inviting the person to respond to or present a paper, but, on the other hand, such stereotyping tends to limit the respondent or presenter to a particular persuasion or perspective in his/her engagement with the text (Hall 1997, 239). The respondent or presenter can either cry in despair or resist such stereotyping. In the field of postcolonial criticism, stereotyping presents itself as a binary marker between "self" and "other," but in course of the contact between the "self" and "other," ambivalence occurs because of the different perspectives each brings. Therefore, the biblical critic is "something else besides" because her/his identity is always shifting (Bhabha 1994, 107). My identity as an Asian Asian, a woman, a feminist, a postcolonial critic, and a Johannine scholar is a hybridized one. Therefore, the implicit essentializing of one's identity is problematic for me.

I was pleased to be recognized as a Johannine scholar, but I could not get away from the geographical marker *Asia* when I was asked to present a paper giving an overview of "Johannine Scholarship in Asia" (Tan 2012). Asia is such a big continent, and I remarked that I could only present a perspective from East Asia. The session focused on Johannine scholarship and its challenges from different parts of the world, such as Africa, Europe, and Asia.

In my delineation of Johannine scholarship in East Asia, I commented that the reason much of this scholarship is traditional in nature is that many Asian Johannine scholars were trained in the West, such as Europe or the United States. However, some Asian Johannine scholars did seek to engage the Johannine texts using different approaches from their own contexts. For example, the Logos in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel could be engaged using the Chinese (Taoism) philosophical concept of Tao, which is understood as the governing principle of the order of the universe. I remembered there was a strong opposition from a reputable European New Testament scholar who insisted that the only way in which the Logos is to be understood is by using the Greek concept of Logos.

Consequently, there was an interesting discussion on contexts of the text and also the contexts of the contemporary critics engaging the biblical texts.

An important insight for me from that session was that when Asians engage the biblical texts from a nontraditional Eurocentric approach, they are under suspect and undermined. Furthermore, the other panelists were all male and of European descent, which was also an indication as to the type of scholars and scholarship that Johannine literature primarily attracts, one that is male-centered and traditional.

Being a member of the Society of Biblical Literature gives me opportunities to help change this dis-ease. One way is by serving as a member of different committees, such as a cochair of the steering committee of Postcolonial Studies and Biblical Studies Section, chair of Johannine Literature Section (International Meeting), and a member of the *Semeia* editorial board. These opportunities also allow me to gain some insights into the working of the Society of Biblical Literature, which seek to fulfil its strategies and vision and offer Asian perspectives on that agenda. I was successful at times, but not all the time as other concerns took precedence. Nevertheless, the academic marathon continues.

The narration of my marathon in the Society of Biblical Literature is a personal one and is not a representative voice of all Asian women or men in Asia. So, what are the challenges and opportunities for the wider Society in terms of scholarship and engagement with the biblical texts in the complex world that we live in today? Personally, I cannot underestimate the possibilities that the Society offers for the engagement of the Bible locally, regionally, or internationally. However, I would like to highlight some salient factors for the Society of Biblical Literature to consider with regards to biblical scholarship and scholars in Asia in the polarized world we are in.

The Academic Marathon Continues

Identity and Representation

At the Society of Biblical Literature, Asians and Asian Americans are grouped together as a unit because they are people originally from Asia regardless of where they are located now. I remember a remark from a distinguished feminist scholar at one of the meetings when she discovered

that I was a doctoral student from Asia, not from the United States: “So, you are an Asian Asian, not an Asian American!” I did not understand her remark then but gradually, it dawned upon me as the years passed by that, indeed, there are nuances in my identity as an Asian Asian vis-à-vis Asian American. Such nuances are ethnicities, history, culture, and economics. These nuances are in turn translated into different concerns and agenda when Asians and Asian Americans come together to engage the biblical texts. As such, they disclose the diversities within the group.

In my observation of the sessions at the Annual Meetings, I noticed that the concerns tabled or discussed were primarily Asian American, such as diasporic identity, whereas when the International Meeting was held in Seoul, Korea in 2016 in partnership with the Korean Society of Old Testament Studies, the New Testament Society of Korea, and the Society of Asian Biblical Studies, the concerns were primarily centered on the reality of empire and religions in their multifaceted guises, for example, economic powers, issues of ecology, and the marginalization of women in Asia. Therefore, we might be “same-same, but different” as the context of Asian Asians is different from that of Asian Americans in the engagement of the biblical texts.

Furthermore, as expected, the International Meeting in Korea drew many Asian biblical scholars, and for some, it was their first time to attend such an academic meeting. As with all academic meetings, the participation of women was and is minimal as the issue of marginalization of women is still prevalent in Asia. The Society’s goal to promote cooperation across global boundaries was achieved at this International Meeting, but the opportunity for Asians is still limited since attending the Annual Meeting, which is held in the United States, is and will continue to be difficult, primarily due to language differences and money.

Language and Money

Christianity is a minority religion in Asia. The English language is not the mother tongue of most of Asians. These two aspects, therefore, impact representation and participation at the Society of Biblical Literature meetings since the meetings are conducted in English. Furthermore, even the works of Asian biblical scholars who are well known in their countries and regions and have already published numerous articles in their mother tongue in Asian journals are not made accessible to the wider academic

world because of the problem of translation. When I was a member of Semeia editorial board, I wanted to edit a volume to profile the works of Asian biblical scholars. However, the challenge for them to write articles in English was and still is an uphill task. Furthermore, many Asian biblical scholars are teaching in church-related institutions, which means that they have responsibilities in the church besides teaching in the seminary. Hence, having time to do biblical research is a challenge. The project that I envisioned is on the back burner for now.

Asia is a continent where there is a wide disparity in terms of economics. For Asian biblical scholars who come from poorer economies, it is difficult to attend the Annual Meeting in the United States. Women biblical scholars, who form a small fraction of Asian biblical scholars, have less opportunity to attend the Annual and International Meetings since priority was and is still normally given to senior faculty members who are normally male. To put it in another way, Asian women biblical scholars have to contend with the prevalent question of hierarchy and patriarchy in addition to the issue of money. The Asian biblical scholars who attend the Annual and International Meetings are primarily sponsored by their teaching institutions or receive some grants or scholarships such as that from the Society of Biblical Literature. The financial support in some ways encourages and enhances their research and teaching.

In sum, the issues of identity, language, and money are important factors for Asian biblical scholars in Asia who wish to engage with the Society of Biblical Literature with respect to their physical presence and scholarship.

Conclusion

I described my involvement in the Society of Biblical Literature as an academic marathon because like a marathon, it requires a lot of determination, stamina, and courage in order to run the marathon race. There are many diseases from within and outside the marathon run itself that could cause one to either give up or to discover a renewed strength to endure and persevere. As an Asian woman biblical scholar in this academic marathon race, there are many hurdles, such as ethnicity, gender, money, and language in order just to run the race, let alone win it. The Society of Biblical Literature has provided me the starting blocks for the race, and I am still running the race with hope that the Society of Biblical Literature

will continue to offer the strategies and opportunities not only for me but also for other Asian biblical scholars in Asia.

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PART 4
PROFESSIONAL LIFE



AMID THE ALIEN CORN: A WOMAN'S JOURNEY THROUGH ACADEMIC PUBLISHING

BILLIE JEAN COLLINS

My relationship to the Society of Biblical Literature has perhaps been more multifaceted than most: student member, presenter and session organizer, author, editorial board member (Writings of the Ancient World, Archaeology and Biblical Studies), and acquisitions editor with SBL Press. I have been asked to reflect on my experiences as a professional, a woman, and a publisher—in particular as the Society's acquisitions editor from 2005 through 2015—but in the process of doing so, I will necessarily touch on all of my experiences in the academic and publishing worlds.

I matriculated at Yale University graduate school directly out of college in 1982. I cannot recall a single incident where I felt discriminated against as a female student. My fellow students, both those who started with me and those more advanced, were more or less evenly divided between the sexes. One impression has stayed with me though: I knew several male graduate students who had wives who worked fulltime, which allowed them to devote themselves fulltime to their studies. At the same time, I was aware of no female students who were being supported by their husbands. My husband was also a student, a common circumstance, and I had to work twenty hours a week throughout graduate school, which I felt definitely put me at a disadvantage.

One of the privileges of attending a school like Yale was the opportunity to attend lectures by the most distinguished scholars in the field. I recall one such elderly scholar giving a talk during which he made a comment that was sexist. I also recall discussing it with a fellow female graduate student afterwards, as we walked back to the Yale Babylonian Collection. In response to her indignation, I offered one of the go-to excuses: that he

was from another era. She responded that sexism should always be called out whenever it occurs, not silently condoned.

I earned my PhD from Yale's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures in 1989 at the age of twenty-eight. It was an awkward time to enter the job market; positions in ancient Near Eastern studies were few and far between, and for a Hittitologist the prospects were dim indeed. I recall one conversation with a male mentor shortly after I received my PhD. I suppose we were discussing possible directions of research. I recall that he advised me to avoid gender and feminist studies, as they would pigeonhole me. While such advice could not be offered today, at the time I believe it was unfortunately true; gender studies were ghettoized in the 1990s.

I gave my first conference paper at an American Oriental Society meeting in New Haven. I had completed the paper months in advance of the meeting, an accomplishment that certainly has not been repeated. One of my mentors commented afterward that I looked very demure during my presentation—another accomplishment that has probably not been repeated. I abandoned early on the practice some women had and, it appears, still have of using only their first initials in their publications. I doubt that it fools anyone, and women need to be more visible, not less.

After earning my degree, as a stop-gap I took an entry-level position at Bantam-Doubleday-Dell in New York City, where I would occasionally encounter Jackie O in the hallway. I wasn't thinking about an alternative career track at that point, but as an interim solution publishing was an obvious choice for me. I loved books—not just reading them, but the physical books themselves—and this was an opportunity to explore the fast-paced world of trade publishing. Fast-paced, that is, for everyone but me. With a two-hour commute each way between New Haven and New York, keeping up with my research proved impossible, and, watching the faces of the commuters who did this day in and day out, I knew it was no life for me.

Still, my year spent on the train would be my unintentional entrée into academic publishing, though there would be a delay of several years before I found myself fully on that path. Indeed, I attempted to avoid that very fate by accepting a one-year appointment at the Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations in Changchun, People's Republic of China, to teach Hittite (1990–1991). Many Americans spend time in China teaching English as a second language; but I can say in all modesty that I am the only American who ever went to China to teach Hittite.

The tactic worked. On my return from China, I was privileged to joined the staff of the Chicago Hittite Dictionary as a research associate (1991–1995), where I shared an office with a male colleague and fellow research associate. At some point it came out inadvertently that he was making significantly more money than I. Granted he had been there for some time while I had only been working on the dictionary for a couple of years. Perhaps I shouldn't have expected otherwise. Still I was surprised and disappointed; we were doing the same work after all. That was the first time it occurred to me that my sex might be a factor in my career.

As a junior scholar I gave a handful of papers at the Society of Biblical Literature, in those under-attended sessions dealing with the areas peripheral to the holy land—that is, the greater ancient Near East. I recall one session in particular where my paper was scheduled to follow that of a senior scholar in my field of Hittitology, who talked on some fairly obscure point of Hittite grammar. My own paper was on pork consumption in Hittite Anatolia, and as his talk wound down, the room began to fill with biblical scholars interested in my topic. This influx into a till now thinly populated room did not go unnoticed by the speaker, who scarcely concealed his pique.

After four years I left the Chicago Hittite Dictionary to take a position with the American Schools of Oriental Research as director of publications. The salary was basic, but compared to the slave wages of a research associate on the Chicago Hittite Dictionary it seemed like a fortune. The American Schools of Oriental Research today is a large, diverse organization that has taken a leadership role in world heritage issues. During my tenure, however, it was much smaller, far less diverse, and primarily concerned about its dwindling membership and diminished influence as an arbiter of fieldwork in the eastern Mediterranean. To say that it was an old boys' network is no overstatement. When I joined the staff in 1995 the journal editors were all male, as were the chairs of the primary committees, including that overseeing publications. Most of these individuals had known one another for decades. As a philologist and an Anatolianist, I was definitely a curiosity.

I was also not the good-daughter type. I intended to make the most of my position and to do the best job I could to advance the American Schools of Oriental Research's publications. My aspirations were not necessarily received well by all. One editor accused me directly of being too ambitious. On another occasion, a member of the board of trustees called to reprimand me forcefully for allegedly overstepping my authority, calling me a

“loud voice.” It was a misunderstanding that he later apologized for, but the overt sexism of his attack shocked me. On yet another occasion, another member of the board sent a private email to the American Schools of Oriental Research president, which the latter then “accidentally” forwarded to me and others, in which the trustee called me “hysterical.” I had provided (very demure) spreadsheets demonstrating how a plan to take membership revenues away from the publications would result in the program running deeply in the red. I had facts behind me, not hysteria. On the bright side, only once in my ten years as director of publications at the American Schools of Oriental Research was I asked to take the notes during a meeting of the publications committee.

During one meeting of the trustees of the American Schools of Oriental Research, in which a lack of funds was (as ever) the topic of conversation, a senior donor suggested that the organization could save money by hiring housewives who would be grateful to work part-time at low rates. I immediately challenged his suggestion, to the discomfort of many in the room. Afterwards, one woman and long-time member chided me that he was a generous donor and should be treated accordingly. I responded as my fellow student had back at Yale: sexism must be called out every time, whomever it comes from.

So far as I recall, I have never experienced sexual harassment of any kind at the hands of mentors, employers, or colleagues. Nor have I ever felt that my sex was a factor in book projects or research articles being accepted; rather it has led to opportunities to serve on editorial boards seeking gender balance. When one achieves mid-career, one begins to be invited to contribute to various essay collections and surveys. Over the years I have been invited to contribute to a number of edited volumes on the subject of women in antiquity. My main qualification for these invitations seems to have been my sex, as my research had not to that point focused on issues of sex or gender in antiquity. Having accepted some of these invitations, it seems I am now a card-carrying member of the club of scholars interested in ancient gender. Indeed, more recently I have taken up the call and pursued questions of sex and gender in Hittite ritual, my main area of research.

Gender has, however, played a role in job interviews. I interviewed for a position with American Research Center in Egypt, which involved a flight to Cairo. In a fugue from jet lag, I met with the executive director as well as the person in charge of the publication of grant-funded projects preserving and documenting Egypt’s cultural heritage. This person and

I did not have a rapport from the get go, which puzzled me. His dismissive attitude to my responses left me unbalanced and a little nervous. The position was offered to the male candidate. It was only when I returned to the United States and spoke with someone familiar with the situation that I learned that this individual had a reputation for misogyny. On another occasion I interviewed for a faculty position at a prestigious university. As part of that process, I met with a dean who was a woman. Oddly, she expressed the hope that my candidacy would be given due consideration along with the other three (male) candidates. Her remark was well-intentioned but also somehow patronizing.

The leadership of the American Schools of Oriental Research had understood that I was capable and gave me a level of respect even at those times when we were at cross-purposes, but changes at the organization that I was uncomfortable with led me to look elsewhere for employment. With ten years of experience in directing a publishing program for an academic society, I moved to the Society of Biblical Literature, which provided me a position when I needed one and generously gave me time off to pursue my own research and teaching. During my years at the Society of Biblical Literature, I traveled to Germany on three occasions for several weeks at a time. I taught several courses in Emory's Department of Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian Studies. For these opportunities, I am forever grateful.

However, my tenure with the Society of Biblical Literature was not without difficulties that at times I felt were related to the fact that I was a woman. In that environment it was distressing to see my own behavior change. The confidence that I once possessed had gone; I became nervous, hesitant, and unsure. I experienced firsthand the fragility of a sense of self-worth in an unsupportive environment.

Discussions about tasks, such as a potential newsletter, which I was told I would be expected to edit, took place around me, but, despite my considerable experience with editing and producing newsletters, at no point was I invited to offer input. The newsletter did not materialize. And I languished. Similarly, at a later time I was assigned to serve as managing editor of *Journal of Biblical Literature*, a task that did recognize my considerable editorial experience. But again, I was assigned the responsibility without any prior consultation. I could not help but wonder, would my preferences and opinions have been willfully ignored were I a man?

The insidiousness of gender bias is that it is sometimes difficult to recognize and even harder to demonstrate. Overt sexism is easier to

deal with in many ways. Men in positions of power are, in my experience, more comfortable with their male subordinates than their female subordinates. Women do not necessarily react to situations or make decisions like men, and this difference is often viewed negatively. Gender bias manifests in a thousand subtle ways. Opinions are overlooked or discarded; input is ignored; ideas, even exact words, are appropriated without credit. All of these things happened to me in my time at the Society of Biblical Literature.

I never saw myself as a *female* scholar; in fact, I greatly resented the adjective; nor did I view myself as a *female* member of the Society's staff. I was an individual, and I disliked it when other women on the staff would joke in self-denigrating ways about the gender imbalance on the staff, which was heavily weighted to women. Such self-inflicted sexism wasn't limited to the staff. Once when I was serving as the Society's representative during a local tour following an International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, a female member mistook me for the executive director's administrative assistant, for no reason other than my sex.

One thing I experienced as a staff member in both the American Schools of Oriental Research and the Society of Biblical Literature was working with volunteer committee chairs who lacked interest or motivation. I would prepare detailed proposals and plans that would then be presented to the committee by a (male) chair who hadn't taken the time to understand the proposal, thoroughly mangling it in the process. This often led to unnecessarily contentious discussions and misunderstandings that were difficult to set to rights.

One of the assignments that came my way was to spearhead a new edition of the *SBL Handbook of Style* (2014). I was delighted with the prospect of being the lead on such an important project. But one afternoon during the planning phase, it became clear that my name would be listed far down on the credits. I remember my face burning as this realization settled on me. It took me a moment to collect myself before I could work up the nerve to say that I was not okay with that arrangement. It was, for me, a breaking point of sorts. I felt that if I was to be in charge of managing the project, that fact should be reflected in the credits of the book. I made my point. When the volume published, my name was listed in the credits first as project director. (As a footnote I should add that I had reason to regret my assertiveness when, following the publication of the new edition, the corrections began to flow in from our zealous and apparently style-obsessed membership!)

In the end, I learned an immense amount at the Society of Biblical Literature, but I knew that I wanted more than my position at the Society could offer. I understood that no one was going to hand me the career I wanted; I would have to take it for myself. On Christmas Eve night in 2009, I registered Lockwood Press as an LLC in the state of Georgia. It would be an academic press dedicated to the subjects that mattered most to me: the ancient Near Eastern and eastern Mediterranean worlds, from earliest antiquity through the Middle Ages. Thus began a new journey that would ultimately allow me to resign my position at the Society of Biblical Literature in 2015. I was fifty-five years old. I have never looked back.

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MENTORING WOMEN AS WOMEN: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTION

APRIL D. DECONICK

For a long time, I had mixed feelings about mentoring. I was uneasy being a mentor because I have never had formal mentoring training, nor have the people who mentored me over the years had training. The mentoring I had experienced was ad hoc, without the kind of intention fostered by mentoring programs. Some of the mentoring I received was so ad hoc that I did not even recognize it as mentoring until later when I had occasion to reflect on the subject. So in 2015, when I received the women's mentoring award from the Society of Biblical Literature, I was profoundly shocked. I have yet to graduate a woman with her PhD in the New Testament and early Christian studies (more on this later), so I was sure that some mistake had been made. I could not believe that three junior women in the Society—Kelley Coblenz Bautch, Frances Flannery, and Angela Kim Harkins—nominated me for this award because they considered me to be their mentor “modeling collegiality, encouraging us to step up, to publish, and to ask (even dangerous) questions, and giving us real opportunities” (Coblenz Bautch, nomination letter dated June 25, 2015).

The perception that these junior women had of me as their mentor compelled me to reconsider the topic. Perhaps my ambiguity about mentoring was trapped in my preconceptions that mentoring had to involve a formal institutional relationship. Until my nomination, I had not considered mentoring to include what I considered to be my normal activities in the Society or that my informal conversations with these junior women over dinner or drinks had been perceived to be the frank advice of a mentor about our profession. When I read their nomination letter, however, what struck me the most is how connected I felt with them in our shared experiences as we made our way as women in the

profession trying to negotiate around (over/under/through) exclusion and disenfranchisement.

I learned from these junior women what a mentor can mean. They taught me that mentoring can mean developing ad hoc relationships with junior women in the Society, including them in the sessions we plan, the conversations we have, the initiatives we undertake. It can mean encouraging them to ask new questions about difficult subjects and supporting them when they do. It can mean facing head-on the marginalization of women in the profession by creating spaces for women to collaborate, fostering community in the Society rather than competitiveness, and establishing a tone of collegiality in our interactions and our activities with each other. It can mean including them in high-level leadership decisions. It can mean inviting them to publish in our edited volumes. It can mean writing and publishing books that inspire. It can mean having frank conversations and offering honest advice about publishing and university culture even when it is done in a bar or coffee house. As I reread their nomination letter in preparation to write my personal reflections on mentoring for this anniversary volume, I began to wonder how I became this kind of ad hoc mentor. Whose shoulders was I standing on?

1. Imitation

During my graduate school years in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I was in the Near Eastern Studies Department and the PhD Biblical Studies program at the University of Michigan. My experience being mentored there was an osmotic experience. What I learned I mostly absorbed from watching my professors and imitating their best practices. I do recall one occasion when my advisor Jarl Fossum told me that I should expect to write and publish minimally one academic article every year (like he did). I learned one major thing from him about professors. Professors are authors, and if I wanted to be successful in the academy, writing would be a top priority. His advice has been indispensable to me, not only in terms of my initial attempts to wear the professorial hat, but every day since then.

Professor Fossum assisted with my first publication (1990), sending one of my seminar papers (with his recommendation) to an academic journal (*Vigiliae Christianae*) for review. He did this again with a second paper I cowrote the following year (1991) and later with my first monograph, which was a revision of my thesis (1996). When I wanted to organize

a conference at the University of Michigan to innovate the field of early Jewish and Christian mysticism (which I was writing about through the lens of the Gospel of Thomas), Professor Fossum supported me by extending invitations to scholars he knew. At that time (1995), I was barely out of graduate school and not yet employed, but through these introductions, Professor Fossum helped me network so that I could establish myself as a scholar with conversation partners, most of them senior scholars with significant networks themselves. I used to joke with the late Alan Segal that knowing him meant that I knew just about everyone. Senior scholars have networks that can work like magic for younger scholars who need connections to establish themselves to get into the game.

2. A Gender-Specific Problem

It was not until my second year teaching at Illinois Wesleyan University (an undergraduate liberal arts college) that I realized that my experience being mentored at Michigan had not involved other women. This realization came to me during a one-on-one luncheon with Mona Gardner, who was the associate dean. She warned me about how university service can become a black hole for women. She advised me to limit my university service to one committee a year. In practice, I have never been able to limit my service to one committee a year (maybe two), but her warning raised my awareness of the problem as a gender-specific problem.

Once I moved to Rice University and began taking on more and more leadership roles, I realized that one of the biggest hurdles for women in the profession can be the best practices that universities use to appoint committees. Women professors are vulnerable because we are often assigned to campus committees as representatives of women faculty. While these best practices are necessary—we must have women on university committees—the math works against us so that we are locked in a damned if we do and damned if we don't scenario. Since there are so few of us in the university systems, we tend to get multiple assignments for every one assignment male colleagues might get. These assignments increase the more competent we are and as we move into the senior ranks where there are even fewer of us. While we are sitting hour after hour on these extra committees, our male colleagues are in their offices writing themselves into tenure and promotion. I began to see firsthand one of the reasons why women tend to be promoted to full professor less frequently than men, or take that much longer to do so.

It took years for me to fully understand that I had been mentored informally as a female graduate student by male professors who were not aware that learning to be a professor as a woman was not the same as learning to be a professor as a man. When I was still an assistant professor struggling to teach a full slate of new classes, write toward a second book, and deal with an appointment by the provost to revamp the first-year advising program, I came to the realization that I not only did not really know how to be a professor, but I had no idea how to be a professor as a woman. Both of my parents were high school graduates, and my mother did not work outside the home, so I had no woman to model for me what I was trying to do. This left me in the dark when it came to balancing my home life with my work life, establishing authority in the classroom and in the field of biblical studies, negotiating conferences and other academic venues, managing the invisibility of women's scholarship, interacting with administrators and the public, and other demands that professional women contend with. The male professors who informally mentored me could only help me so much. When it came to understanding the obstacles I faced as a woman in the profession, they could not. They had not stood in my shoes.

3. The Professor as a Woman

I did not receive mentoring from other women until I started to attend the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, and even then the mentoring was ad hoc. I did not recognize it as mentoring at the time. The woman who most influenced me is the late Jane Schaberg. I met her when I substituted for her as a sabbatical replacement at the University of Detroit, a private Roman-Catholic institution. At the time I was an impoverished graduate student, so in order for me to be able to attend my very first Society of Biblical Literature meeting in Chicago, she and her friend Barbara Butler shared their room with me. Professor Schaberg is the woman who reached out to me at the annual Women's Breakfast every year and saved a chair for me at her table (it was the only time of year that we actually saw each other). It was a comfort for me to know that when I walked into that room after an exhausting meeting there would be room for me at her table. I remember when Professor Schaberg stood up to attacks against her thesis on Jesus's illegitimacy (1987). I remember when her job was threatened over it, and we worried together what she would do if she were fired. Her courage and erudition in face of these accusa-

tions and threats were palpable. I do not think I have ever met someone so brave. Later in her career, I joined her on one of her final academic panels. The event took place in Jerusalem at the Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian Origins where we discussed at length Mary Magdalene as an historical figure (2008) and published our opinions together in the conference volume (2013). It was the only time our research intersected.

Her death struck me hard. In my sorrow, on April 27 (2012), I wrote her the letter I wish I had written to her while she was alive, thanking her for her mentorship and friendship. "Your passing is so difficult for me," I wrote.

You took me under your wing when I was a graduate student struggling to make ends meet and write my dissertation. You welcomed me to teach at the University of Detroit during your sabbatical and were a guiding light when I decided to pull together my first course on Sexuality and Christianity. Without you, I might have never become a feminist. Without you, I might never have learned to read against the grain. Without you, I might never have struggled with holy misogyny (2011). I have always admired your courage and your conviction that the search for truth lies beneath, sometimes even in contradiction to the patriarchal storyline. You taught me that feminist reading is about fairness, about giving voice to what was marginalized, covered up, or forgotten. You taught me that feminism is about living with conviction and purpose even when the odds are stacked against you and what you have to say, as honest as it is, provokes disdain and anger and ugliness and suppression. You were so brave in the face of fire when you set forth an interpretation of the virgin birth stories that rocked both the academic and church communities, when you said, look, there is something deeply disturbing going on with these stories, and I think it points to the illegitimacy of Jesus. You were so courageous when you brought the Magdalene out of the attic, when you took on Mary and re-envisioned her through Virginia Woolf and the noncanonical sources, when you saw her as Jesus' Elisha and revealed how women like Mary are silenced who question the patriarchal order of our world (2004).

Even now as I share these words from her obituary letter, I face the bitter knowledge that I did not realize the profound impact her mentorship had on me until she was gone.

4. Patriarchal Obstacles

Now I am a senior professor with formal and informal mentoring relationships. As a mentor, I try to provide counsel from the feminist perspective

that Professor Schaberg embodied. As a mentor, I try to raise awareness of the patriarchal obstacles that women in the profession face, such as issues of authority in the classroom or in the Society or in the profession at large. Or dealing with the virtual invisibility of women's contributions, including heavy service obligations and our publications which often challenge (and threaten) hundreds of years of male biblical scholarship. Or navigating male networks of exclusion and nepotism (think: the men's club or the old boy's network) that ignore or marginalize women and our work. Or managing complicated home lives that may include partners, children, and extended family, who all have certain expectations of us as women that we may not be able to meet. Or dealing with our bodies, our pregnancies, our miscarriages, our infertility, our menstruations, our menopause, our aging. Or knowing options when those #Me-Too incidents (all too frequently) happen to us, as graduate student women, as junior women, as senior women.

It is unfortunate that sexual harassment is something that we need to discuss as mentors, but it is. Sexual harassment among graduate students and among faculty is a reality. It happens on campuses, at conferences, and other professional events. I imagine that there are many incidents that we know about but perhaps have not talked about even with the #Me-Too movement. The most traumatic of my experiences happened on a summer-abroad archaeological tour when I was a graduate student. I was harassed by a professor on that trip, only to discover later that this professor had a reputation for sexually harassing female graduate students at his institution and no one had ever done anything about it. Nothing prepared me for that experience, and I was too naïve to know what I should have done about it. But we should be ignorant no more.

When I first joined the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, we worked to write and adopt (2015) a professional conduct policy and a transparent procedure for investigating the professional conduct for the Society of Biblical Literature. Both documents are posted on the website for the Society of Biblical Literature. Should women face sexual harassment during a meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, there are clear steps that can be taken to report the incident and launch an investigation of professional misconduct, which may lead to disciplinary action.

The best advice I can give about sexual harassment is to pay attention to Title IX training and become familiar with the processes on our campuses and workplaces for reporting sexual harassment and seeking assistance when an incident occurs. Most important, anyone who

experiences a serious verbal threat or physical assault (whether at the workplace or a professional event) should contact law enforcement officials directly and promptly.

5. The X-Factors

My professional location is a private university setting open to undergraduate and graduate students. In this setting, I intentionally mentor both women and men who wish to have successful careers in ministry, biblical scholarship, and the study of religion. As chair of my department, it has been gratifying to mentor faculty, women and men, in various places of their careers, including tenure and promotion. I also have mentored junior women in the Society in a very ad hoc way, and some of these relationships have deepened into true friendships where the advice and advocacy has become a two-way street.

Most of the graduate students I have mentored, however, have been men. It has been my experience in my department that women tend to apply less frequently to study the Bible and early Christianity than they do to study other subfields in religious studies, and when they do apply to study the Bible they are less prepared academically. I wonder if this pipeline problem is evident in other graduate programs in biblical studies? If so, is there something about the field that is perceived to be unattractive or uninteresting or even hostile to young women? Or has the field been made less accessible to many of them at a young age because of confessional conservatism?

In terms of the content of my advice, it varies depending on the interests and the goals of each person, whether short-term or long-term. Such crucial information can only be understood by listening (really listening) to what every person has to say about themselves, what they think they want or not, and why. It is essential to listen in order to advise because life decisions always involve x-factors. For instance, what do we do as mentors when we might think students should take (or decline) a particular job for reasons that make perfectly good sense us? In cases like this, I sit with the student and let him or her talk without interruption about what he or she thinks and feels about the job. I will occasionally ask probing questions to draw out the x-factors in the student's situation, considerations that might revolve around family interests or circumstances, peer pressure, or personal emotions. Getting this information out in the open helps students make

the decisions that are right for them. Ultimately the decision has to be the student's decision, and that decision does not have to align with our wishes as mentors. Every person has x-factors that make their decisions personal.

6. Writing as a Sacred Practice

What remains stable for me in these one-on-one mentoring conversations is the suggestion to make writing a sacred practice and publication the end-goal. This is particularly important for women scholars who experience delegitimation and marginalization, or are overburdened with university service and administrative responsibilities, or are perceived as only a teacher. When we make writing a sacred practice, we develop behavioral and social strategies that prioritize writing in our daily lives. When we make writing a sacred practice, we allow ourselves opportunities to write to discover what we have to say. When we make writing a sacred practice, our research is constantly on our minds, triggering connectivity and creativity that might otherwise never occur. When we make writing a sacred practice, our voices gather strength and our ideas become more visible because we publish better articles and better books more frequently. Whether we develop a practice that relies on hours of uninterrupted time, or like me, write in bursts between other responsibilities, the important thing is to make it a devotion that occurs regularly and continually.

To assist with this sacred practice of writing, I also suggest to those I counsel that whenever possible we try to teach to our research. This means choosing to teach classes that best coordinate with the research we are currently involved with or intend to do. This does not mean that we have to create new courses all the time or have narrow special topic classes, but that we try to find ways to refocus the materials for a specific class on some of the materials we are planning to use in our research. This can help us keep the connectivity and creativity sparking between our sacred practice of writing and our teaching and feed our class preparations into materials we can use for finishing an article or a book chapter.

7. Boundary Work

The other suggestion that I make has to do with work-life balance, which I find is challenging for so many women in the profession. It may sound

counter intuitive, but to those I counsel on this subject I suggest finding ways to limit the amount of time we work as professors, to give ourselves permission not to be on the job, or, to put it another way, to engage in intentional boundary work.

For example, I limit my work to eight-hour days so that I do not bury myself in my work and keep working because (here is the truth) there is always more work. Working all the time (or feeling that we need to be working all the time) can become very unhealthy. It can lead to high levels of anxiety and depression, as well as erode the important relationships we have in our lives with our spouses, our children, our families, and our friends. In addition to cultivating these important relationships, time off from work provides us with opportunities to rest the left side of our brains and nurture the right sides with creative activities like drawing or painting, playing an instrument, or crafting. Giving the left side of our brains time off regularly can be rejuvenating. Personally I have found this strategy to be life-saving.

8. Intentional Advocacy

While mentoring is about raising awareness, listening, and giving advice, it is also about intentional advocacy. This can be the behind-the-scenes support that we give when we recommend junior women for panels at the Annual Meeting of the Society, or nominate them for committees and leadership in the Society, or suggest to publishers that they would be good editors for books. Intentional advocacy might also include our visible efforts to disseminate information about their publications and make reference to them in our footnotes and bibliographies.

One of the most important ways to advocate for junior women is to get them integrally involved in the Society, so that they are professionally active as soon as they join the Society. Junior women often do not understand the basics of the Society. They do not know how to navigate the call for papers or submit a proposal to a program unit. As women mentors, we might assist them, explaining about the various units, what units might be most appropriate to approach with a paper proposal, and how to formally submit. As mentors, we might introduce junior women in the Society to scholars on the steering committees of program units or recommend their work to them. These kinds of interventions are essential to helping junior women begin to create foundational relationships and essential networks.

When I first joined the Society, I felt very displaced and dislocated as a young scholar and as a woman scholar. My academic interests in early Christianity and mysticism were not represented in the Society because the units were fixated on the canon. I was aware of a number of senior scholars with similar interests, so we wrote a proposal for a new cross-disciplinary consultation on early Jewish and Christian mysticism even though the Society was discouraging new applications at the time due to scheduling restraints (this posture remains a problematic issue for the Society). I convinced my seniors that we must try, that we as members all needed a space to be able to locate our scholarship and participate in the Society. We submitted a proposal and launched a new unit the following year (1996). Not only did I finally have a place within the Society to be a scholar, but it turns out that many others finally did too. The unit expanded over the years with new leadership and more participants, so that the unit now broadly covers esotericism in antiquity. To mark this broader perspective, the unit was renamed *Mysticism, Esotericism, and Gnosticism in Antiquity*.

This kind of creative development work in the Society is highly significant for women to undertake, especially junior women who may be working on subjects that are innovative or not yet integrated into traditional knowledge. This kind of work in the Society can alter traditional androcentric biblical scholarship by giving junior women a place to offer papers that otherwise would have no home. Women often find themselves working on the margins of traditional fields or in newly emergent areas of study. So it is essential for us to create and support innovative platforms for our scholarship within traditional scholastic societies like the Society of Biblical Literature. The regulatory practices that oversee these units, like our Program Committee, need to understand how significant these innovations are for women's work, and to the future of biblical studies. Limiting units is seldom good for women's scholarship.

While I was serving on the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession as chair, we took up active advocacy in a powerful way. We created slide presentations of the covers of women's published monographs each year and projected them (with a photo of the author) at the annual Women's Breakfast (2017, 2018). We also spent time in that same space acknowledging the work that the women of the Society do throughout the year, implementing a simple call out for women to stand and be celebrated if that year they had graduated with their PhD, published an article or book, received an award for a publication, presented a paper at the Annual

or Regional or International Meeting, chaired a committee in the Society or served on a committee or started a new unit, accepted an academic or administrative position, received tenure or promotion, chaired a department or university committee, served on a university committee, served on an editorial board, worked as a managing editor, edited a book, received a teaching award, evaluated a peer, reviewed a manuscript, or mentored a woman. When the whole room is left standing and applauding, it is a powerful visible testament to how much impact women actually have on a profession in which they often feel invisible and disenfranchised. This is mentoring on the big scale, inspiring us with the knowledge that other women are walking the path successfully, and they *are* in our shoes.

9. A Brave New World

The Society of Biblical Literature does not have a formal mentoring program for women because it has been perceived to be impractical to create a program that would be customized to fit the diverse locations in which women in the profession find themselves (e.g., church-affiliated schools, seminaries, pulpits, secular institutions, private and public colleges and universities). But this does not mean that mentoring is not happening in the Society or that it cannot be effective even when it is ad hoc, when women get together with other women. In fact, it was within the Society under Professor Schaberg's guidance that I finally understood how to be a professor as a woman, what was at stake, what were the risks, and (to use a sports metaphor because it seems appropriate) how to play ball. Most importantly I learned from her that when it comes to scholarship, I should not be afraid to ask different and even dangerous questions. The field of biblical studies has been controlled by men's questions for so long that we can be stifled and impeded (even railroaded) when it comes to asking our own extraordinary questions. We might feel we do not have the authority to ask what needs to be asked. We might feel shamed or guilted into silence. We might worry that others will think we are misinformed or unsophisticated, not worth listening to. We might feel that our questions are so heretical that others will laugh at us or worse, become angry.

I have experienced all of these feelings when it comes to my own scholarship, past and present, which continues to ask questions about early Christianity as a lived religion that produced texts that appear to me to be more Dionysian than they are Apollonian, resisting domestication

and challenging reason. How do we understand the constant presence of the irrational and extraordinary in our texts? What about the haunted and the possessed, the holy and the demonic, that show up time and again in the stories? What about the ecstatic and the mystic, the moments of revelation that erupt relentlessly in their writings? What about the voices and the visions, the rapture and the ritual, the journeys through heaven and hell? What about the trauma and the therapy, the transfigurations and deifications, the new bodies and the new selves, the collapse of gender identities and structures of power? What about the ubiquitous monsters, the gnostics who again and again swear to experience in ecstasy something so beautiful, so transforming, so transcendent that nothing compares, not even the biblical God? There may be no satisfying answers to these questions (yet). But it may be enough just to ask them, because it is in the asking that we begin to push up against the established practices and the boundaries of tradition that often confine scholarship and cloud our vision.

Because my own vision of biblical scholarship echoes so closely Professor Schaberg's vision, it is fitting to close this reflection on mentoring with my final words from her obituary letter. "You dared to transgress the boundaries of tradition," I wrote, "and in so doing, you showed us a brave new world through your eyes. It is a world of radical transformation for women and men, where sexism, racism, and poverty, where all the distinctions that keep us apart, dissolve. I admire deeply how you were convicted that scholarship on the Bible was not worth doing if it did not result in political and religious justice and the renewal of humanity."

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PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP:
**“IF WE ARE SILENT AND WAIT UNTIL THE MORNING
LIGHT, WE WILL BE FOUND GUILTY” (2 KINGS 7:9)**

AMY-JILL LEVINE

Entering the Guild

The Bible fascinated me from an early age, but not simply because the stories I heard in the synagogue and that my parents told me were interesting. It also fascinated me, and continues to do so, because of how select interpretations over the centuries and across the globe cause harm to people because of religion, gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, class, ability, and a host of other subject positions. When I was in elementary school, I, one of the few Jews in the public-school system in North Dartmouth, Massachusetts, was also fascinated by the Christian tradition: Christmas trees and Easter bunnies, Our Lady of Fatima and the Dominican Sisters (in habits) who lived in the convent (with its lush property) not too far from my house on Tucker Road.

In the early 1960s, when I was in second grade, a neighbor announced, “You killed our Lord.” Having no recollection of committing deicide (not the sort of thing one would forget), I replied firmly, “I did not.” “Yes, you did,” she replied, “our priest said so.” I knew that priests wore special collars (the Nehru Jacket was in style at the time, so priests could be mistaken for having fashion sense); I thought the rationale was to keep the clergy from lying. The collar sits on the windpipe, so were the priest to lie, the collar would choke him. (I still think this is a good idea.) Since priests could not lie without dying, the charge had to be true. I was seven years old, and I was convinced that I had killed G-d. By the time the bus got to my neighborhood, I was in tears. My mother, who met me at the bus stop, assured me that G-d was fine. Vatican II had already started, but *Nostra*

Aetate, the text that insists, “True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today,” had not yet been promulgated.

I started asking questions about Christianity (which then meant Catholicism) and started going to Mass and to catechism when I could. My mother thought this was a bit odd, but she and my father were supportive. “Go, you might learn something,” was her general approach. My father enlisted in the Navy and never graduated college. My mother, who graduated in 1933 from Jackson (now Tufts University) with a mathematics degree and who wanted to go to graduate school, was told by her parents: “You have two brothers, and we need to get them through medical school, so you need to come home and work.” My mother was forty-four when I was born, and I am an only child. She determined that anything her little girl wanted, as long as it was academic, she would make it happen. Asking for a pony got me nowhere; asking for a trip to a museum got me the visit and a book detailing the collection.

In the late 1960s at Tifereth Israel, a Conservative Synagogue in New Bedford, boys who turned thirteen read from the Torah on Saturday morning; they also gave a *d’var Torah*, a speech in which they expounded on their text. Girls, usually in groups of two or three, chanted the *Haftarah* on Friday night; we also each led one of the songs (I did *ahavat olam*). We did not share our views of the text. We were not taught how to lay *tefillin*; we were not given a *tallit* or a *kippa*. We were taught Torah trop (cantillation), but only so that we could follow along when the boys in our class *leyned* (chanted the text). This seemed unfair to me, and I asked both my parents and my teachers about it; they agreed that it was unfair, but, well, so was life. I knew Jewish women could be strong enough to protest injustice—Deborah and Esther, Henrietta Szold and Hannah Senesh were already role models. But somehow it did not occur to me that this injustice could be addressed, or that I could address it, in my own community.

The year after I became bat mitzvah, my father died. My mother decided that she would say Kaddish at the synagogue for him after sitting the seven days of *shiva*, and I went along. My middle school was close to the synagogue, so if the timing worked, I could be done with the prayers and in homeroom before the bell rang. The third morning of this practice, as the clock ticked, there were eleven women (counting myself and my mother) and eight men. Not enough for a minyan, since only men counted. I nudged my mom; for me, being late to school was anathema (it

still is). Finally, looking at her watch, she simply started to recite the opening prayer. The other women joined. I was stunned, and embarrassed, and then immensely proud. That is, by the way, how the synagogue became egalitarian. I also realized the import of speaking up, inside as well as outside the community; I realized that one voice (granted, it helps to have support) can change a system.

In the fall of 1974, I matriculated at Smith College, a women's college, and I experienced for the first time a women-only classroom. We did not raise our hands before the professor finished the question, and we were not afraid of sounding smart. We could ask questions about women in literature, authors and characters both, without being told such subjects were irrelevant.

I learned about how select texts, biblical and otherwise, restricted women's voices, and how new forms of reading encouraged us women to find our own voices. I learned how the biblical text and its interpretations (and history, the literary canons, science, art ...) marginalized women or shuttled us into predetermined categories, such as sinner and virgin (neither held much personal appeal). At that same time, I came to understand why a schoolmate accused me of killing her Lord. I saw how and why the New Testament material continued to be deployed against Jews. I also learned how the Scriptures of both synagogue and church spoke of same-sex relations and how those teachings impacted my gay and lesbian friends who in college (remember, this was back in the 1970s) were beginning to find their own voices. I now had the language of exegesis and hermeneutics, the critical reading strategies picked up by my double-major in English (my senior thesis was on Thomas Shadwell, whom Dryden, with some cause, referred to as "Sh--," which meant then what it means now; I had wanted to write on Rochester's "Imperfect Enjoyment" [look it up], but the English Department informed me, "Young ladies at Smith do not write on such subjects"), and the ability in Greek and Hebrew to see how texts take on meaning when we read and to realize that we make choices, meaningful choices, when we translate and interpret.

In the required course for the religion major, which I managed to put off (too much philosophy of religion; not enough Bible) until the second semester of my senior year, Julius Wellhausen's *Prolegomena* (1957) was the first assigned reading. I told the professor (now deceased) that I found the text anti-Jewish; Wellhausen, he assured me, was reporting, objectively, how Second Temple Judaism, "late Judaism," devolved into xenophobia, legalism, misogyny, and elitism. Jesus, he assured me, rejected all these

social sins. I did not pursue my original view—he was the professor even though he was not a specialist in Bible; he knew more than I. (In retrospect, I grant that I was clueless.)

I applied to the Duke PhD program directly from Smith. I wanted to work with W. D. Davies (who was the major scholar doing work in the gospels' Jewish context), and I wanted to advocate for those—Jews, women, gays, and lesbians (we only had LG at the time)—who were harmed by select interpretations. If I washed out of the PhD program or if I couldn't get a job, then I figured I'd go to law school, which was my mother's preference.

Remarkably, Duke admitted me (having the language skills helped; so did Karl Donfried's recommendation and the high standards to which he held his students—for this he has my deepest gratitude). The director of graduate studies at the time wrote to offer me a very generous fellowship package that included teaching opportunities. He also wrote how much he had "appreciated the beauties of the Smith campus." Back then, I was honored and amused; today, in the era of #MeToo, I might not be so sanguine.

At Duke, I encountered again the view that Second Temple Judaism had lost the vision of the prophets and had created a system of works righteousness. Paul, of course, rejected this view. I'm not sure I ever heard such comments from the professors, but this was the view I heard, over and over again, from the divinity students. As I continued to be confronted with such claims, I came to adopt what has come to be known as a "hermeneutics of suspicion": I began to question the conventional wisdom. And I began to search the sources, both primary and secondary, on my own. The work of E. P. Sanders and Krister Stendahl gave me new insights into Paul; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her* (1983) as well as the Society of Biblical Literature's early *Semeia* volumes added to this academic turn. When Elizabeth Clark joined Duke's faculty (after I took my qualifying exams and thus too late to help formulate the dissertation topic), I finally had a mentor who showed me how to navigate the academy, with its prejudices regarding confessionalism, gender, sexuality, marital status, class, and the other systemic issues that, close to fifty years later, are still very much in place. Liz Clark, whom I could never repay for the guidance she gave me, told me to pay it forward. I've done my best to do that.

At Duke as well, I ran into how religious concerns impact the academy. In my second year, the then-dean of Duke's Divinity School refused to allow me to teach in the New Testament classroom because I am not a

Christian (I queried the new director of graduate studies as to whether all the Divinity School faculty were “Christian” narrowly defined; he advised me not to ask such questions). Since the fellowship required teaching, I found myself as a preceptor in the “Old Testament” (the term used) classroom. A year later the dean died, and his replacement found no reason *not* to let me teach in my chosen field. And I learned: on certain questions, such as my own identity, I cannot compromise.

I also found some difficulty getting published under “Amy-Jill Levine”—whether the two women’s names or the Jewish last name, or both, were the problem I cannot guess. My Old Testament professor then advised me to send out articles under “A.-J.,” and the gates opened. Reviews reading, “Displaying remarkable feminist consciousness, *he* argues ...” began to appear. At conferences, even several years after getting my PhD, I’d be ignored until I rose to give my invited lecture. One very prominent professor, who had invited me to a conference on the Gospel of Matthew, apologized to me after having ignored me at the opening reception: “I didn’t know A.-J. Levine was a woman; I thought you were someone’s wife,” he explained. Well, yes.

In retrospect, the prejudices of the Duke administration, which forced me to learn more about the Old Testament even as I came increasingly to appreciate the differences between the Old Testament and the Tanakh, worked out well (a *felix culpa*). For my first job, in Swarthmore College’s small Department of Religion, I was responsible for Old and New Testaments, the ancient Near East, Greco-Roman religion, Christianity up to Augustine, and everything dealing with women and Jews. I also cotaught Introduction to Religious Studies. The chair of the Swarthmore search committee did ask D. Moody Smith, my dissertation advisor, “Just how Jewish is she?” Dr. Smith responded, “Probably more than some and less than others.” Technically, the comment is nonsensical, but it proved helpful. My being a woman counted in my favor (the Swarthmore department decided, in 1985, that it would be a good idea, finally, to hire one of us); my being Jewish was a potential negative.

That first year teaching at Swarthmore I turned the dissertation into a book (Levine 1988; I wanted to call it *Matthew and the Missionary Position*; the press balked) and started to work on representations of women in Hellenistic-Jewish writings. I also tried to break into the Society of Biblical Literature guild by writing to the chair of the Matthew group and proposing a paper (all this, by way of snail mail): “We have already invited all the papers for next year,” he replied. The Society, with all its

delicious program units, appeared to me a closed group. I started writing to committee chairs, proposing papers, contacting former faculty for supporting letters, and finally got invitations to present and then committee memberships.

That first year also provided an opportunity, finally, to produce a child, since I now had a decent maternity package. However, at that time at Swarthmore, despite the school's marvelous leftist political leanings, there was no stopping of the tenure clock for having a child. Maternity leave was determined on a case-by-case basis, and no on-campus child care existed. I immediately joined a number of committees to try to rectify this situation; the women on the Swarthmore faculty could not have been more helpful. Experiences in collegiate governance served me well when a few years later the Society of Biblical Literature appointed me the junior (i.e., untenured) member of the first configuration of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (Sharon Ringe chaired).

At Swarthmore, one did well to give birth between the end of May and the beginning of August. Sarah Elizabeth ("Sarah" for my father, Saul; "Elizabeth" for Liz Clark) was born on Friday, June 6, 1986. (I did have a minor concern about that 66[8]6 date; perhaps it is not surprising that she's a corporate sales manager for a hotel consortium.) *That Monday*, the members of the Religion Department came to my house—they generously agreed to move the meeting from the campus seminar room—to begin discussing the readings for the new intro course. I thought it would be good to read the suggested bibliography out loud to my daughter. Sarah's first book was Nietzsche's *Antichrist*.

That first year I taught for both the Religion Department and the Women's Studies Program. I had wanted to work on the subject of women (the term *gender* had not yet permeated the guild) for my dissertation. Several Duke faculty, all men, advised against it. One suggested that the topic was faddish and that I was better off working on something like *justification* in the Pauline corpus. Even at Swarthmore, I was advised to avoid turning to women's studies for publication, lest members of the school's Tenure and Promotion Committee or external readers for the tenure file find it an inappropriate topic.

The reasons I survived: good timing, good colleagues and strategic alliances, and especially the support of my partner, Jay Geller, who is not only the first reader of most of my work, but who also put his own academic job search on hold in order to take care of Sarah and, four years later Alexander (also a summer baby), and me.

On Speaking Out

Having experienced blocks built from preconceptions of both gender and religious/ethnic identity, I realized that my biblical knowledge could be utilized to offer alternatives to the sexist, homophobic, anti-Jewish, and otherwise prejudicial, and harmful, teachings that continued, and continue, to permeate both Jewish and Christian communities. I started to give talks at local churches and synagogues, and these eventually morphed into invitations to national and international clergy groups. I started to write letters to editors when I encountered texts that promoted anti-Jewish, anti-LGBTQI, anti-Catholic, anti-women, anti-poor, anti-disabled, and even anti-Evangelical views. I still do, whether writing to individual authors in the hopes that they will correct their views, to the editors if the authors refuse, or to ecclesial hierarchy where available when clergy do not correct misinformed and therefore toxic sermons.

Moving to Vanderbilt Divinity School in 1994 provided the opportunity to reach increasingly diverse audiences, including more church groups. Yet even before I arrived in Nashville, complaints about “hiring that Jew” began to surface. Some members of the Christian community were convinced that I would take the faith away from the young men seeking ordination (that the school admits women might have been a shock as well). Some members of the Jewish community were convinced I was a messianic Jew and therefore would delegitimize Jews who did not accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. The dean, Joe Hough, arranged for me to speak to a number of the doubters; the doubts quickly went away (without any wounds being displayed), and the greater Nashville community quickly became a welcoming home.

Vanderbilt also provided another location where work needed to be done. Elected chair of the university-wide faculty Senate (I should have skipped that meeting), I proposed, with the support of the other members of the executive board, that we needed to extend benefits to same-sex couples. That meant lobbying the deans, the Staff Council (some of whose members were convinced that homosexuality was a sin and that therefore it would be sinful to support same-sex partners), and the General Counsel. Knowing something about biblical teaching, and something about approaching those opposed to the idea of same-sex benefits with respect rather than reproach, helped. The initiative passed on Holy Thursday.

Along with my ongoing efforts to prevent the Bible from being deployed, to use the cliché, as a rock thrown to do damage rather than a

rock on which one stands, on matters concerning gender and sexuality and anti-Judaism, I have also been working for over a decade on how the text is used in discussions of Israel/Palestine. To Christian Zionists, I speak of Palestinian human rights and the mandate to care for the disenfranchised; to Christian supersessionists who see Jesus as having done away with Israel's covenant and therefore the connection of Jews to the land, I show how even the New Testament keeps that connection in place; to the religious Zionists in my own community, I speak of Ezekiel's mandate that land must also be allotted to the "aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you" and so on. The conversation includes the Bible, but it also includes history, theology, ethics, and eschatology.

Such efforts are time-consuming. Following the kerfuffle that faced me and the other six members of the scholars' committee that reviewed the script for Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, I received over four-hundred emails accusing me of everything from attempting to censor the New Testament to anti-Catholic prejudice to being a "Talmudic Jew" who wanted to bring about the antichrist (that odd combination being one of the weirder charges). I responded to every email (after about the first ten, I had a template), and close to ninety percent wrote back much calmer and often apologetic letters.

Such efforts at speaking out can also be painful (and numerous times, locally, I've been relieved that my children and I have different last names). After flagging a plethora of anti-Jewish statements published by the World Council of Churches (up to 2006), several theologians and ministers accused me of silencing the previously silenced, projecting my own pain onto others, and even of dismissing the concerns of African, Asian, and Latin American women. After first resisting my concerns (and manifesting what might be seen as "Christian fragility," along the lines of "white fragility" in response to accusations of racism), officers of the WCC Press in Geneva concluded that I was right and changed their publishing guidelines. After speaking out in support of messianic Jews disowned by their own families and communities (one does not choose one's belief system any more than one chooses whom to love), fellow Jews accused me of being disloyal to my own tradition.

At Vanderbilt, I was the founding director of the Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality; I took the frequent calls and office visits and still do: from parents concerned that their gay children were bound for hell; from youth tossed out of their homes because of their

sexual and gender identities; from senior citizens guilty over their ongoing sexual desires and activities outside of wedlock (bless these folks!); from women who wanted abortions and others who felt guilty for having them; from desperately unhappy wives and husbands who were told divorce is sinful and remarriage worse; from men and women convinced they were born in the wrong body and equally convinced that gender reassignment is unnatural and therefore sinful; and so on. Only in this strange world does a Fundamentalist Christian call a Jew who belongs to an Orthodox synagogue and who teaches at a very left-leaning Divinity School to find out if it is kosher to report a church elder for child abuse, since Paul states (1 Cor 6) that followers of the Christ should not take their cases to the court. Only here does the Jewish professor, sworn in as an expert on the Bible, Gender, and Sexuality, testify in family court, in child custody cases where the heterosexual, remarried mom wants to restrict contact between gay dad and his children, because dad is “living in sin.”

Because of the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* (2017), which I coedited with Marc Zvi Brettler, as well as of my other cross-over publications, I get emails consistently from Christians surprised to read that first-century Judaism was not the morass they had been taught and from Jews surprised to see how Jesus and Paul fit into their Jewish contexts; I answer every letter. In part, the reason I started to write children's books (with noted children's book author and rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso) is to prevent young Christians from learning anti-Jewish stereotypes from uninformed Sunday School and Vacation Bible School teachers; I am now writing and filming adult education biblical studies for Abingdon Press in order to reach the parents and grandparents of these children.

On average, I am on the road every three to four days. Talks for academic institutions, clergy groups, churches and synagogues, foundations, libraries, museums ... each one designed to challenge stereotypes, surface and then correct prejudices, open new interpretive opportunities, and promote biblical literacy. In spring 2019 I taught at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, the first time, I believe, a Jew has taught a New Testament course. Admirals club membership, American Airlines executive platinum status, and Diamond tier Hilton help. So does the support of my family. My husband once referred to my concern to stop bad Bible reading as an addiction; perhaps it is. But it is better than being addicted to drink or drug. At the end of the day, I often have a sense that my mother is proud of me, that I have followed Liz's advice to pay it forward, and that, if there is a G-d, I'm doing what that G-d put me on the earth to do.

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WORKING IN A RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

VANESSA LOVELACE

I recognized my call to a vocation in the religious academic context soon after I began my seminary studies at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois (1997). At the time, I believed that I had entered seminary to prepare for congregational ministry. However, within my first year, the immersion in the rigorous study of the biblical texts in Introduction to the Old Testament sparked my interest in pursuing further graduate biblical studies. The critical reflection of the Bible energized me, and I realized that I had a passion for engaging future ministers and church leaders in dialectical discourse on biblical texts.

That desire, however, was tested during my doctoral studies at Chicago Theological Seminary. In fulfillment of my program's teaching requirement, I taught as an adjunct instructor at a private liberal arts college. Although this was a church-related school, it did not require any affirmation of doctrinal statements. Therefore, the students were from different faith backgrounds and no religious affiliation. The experience teaching biblical texts to students whom I would regard as *those in the pews*—if they attended church at all—rather than *those in the pulpit*, brought a different perspective on the reception of the Bible, even though some were religion majors who planned to attend seminary after finishing college. These were students that I was confident would take their newfound knowledge about the formation of the Bible, its social and historical context, and its expansive literary content and hold to a higher expectation those making sermonistic proclamations in the name of the God of the Bible. I was tempted to apply to teach at an undergraduate school after earning my doctorate. Still, my call to teach in a seminary setting was stronger, and I continued to focus on that goal while I continued my doctoral studies.

Despite my aspirations to teach in a seminary setting, I had not yet fully committed to a full-time vocation in the academic ministry. I am

an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and was serving in a local church as an assistant pastor before leaving to begin my doctoral studies full-time. Nevertheless, my goals were to work full time as an associate pastor in the area of family ministry and continue to teach part time as an adjunct instructor upon earning my degree. Fortunately, I received the Fund for Theological Education (FTE) North American Doctoral Fellowship, which helped solidify my future vocational aspirations.¹ Not only did fellowship provide me with the funding I needed as a doctoral student to attend the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, but it also compelled me, as part of the program commitments, to attend an annual Fund for Theological Education doctoral fellows conference where I engaged faculty of color at seminaries, divinity schools, and religious studies departments. It was during the 2004 conference that I attended a session on the roles and responsibilities of faculty members. As I listened to the long list of teaching, advising, committee assignments, community service, guild meetings, and research and writing responsibilities, I realized that I had to reassess what it was that I was actually called to do. On the drive home I discerned that I was called to the teaching vocation full-time and that the pastoral ministry would have to wait until another stage in my career.

The decision to pursue an academic vocation in a religious context was the right one, and I have found it to be a rewarding experience. I have the privilege to be part of the formation of learners as they discern their calls to Christian ministry and leadership in a variety of fields. Yet, I would contend that despite my personal satisfaction with working in a religious academic context, the increase in the numbers of women in religious leadership—both in the church and the academy—generates a degree of dis-ease or discomfort or even outright disapproval, as I have seen in my own work environment.

My religious work setting is the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia. I joined the faculty at the ITC in July 2012, and I teach the required courses and electives in biblical studies (Hebrew) and languages. The ITC is a unique experiment in black Christian ecumenism. Chartered in 1958, ITC is a consortium of historically black seminaries that share faculty and classroom space. The collaborative is made up of five seminaries (Charles H. Mason Theological Seminary,

1. As of 2014, this is now the Forum for Theological Exploration.

Gammon Theological Seminary, Morehouse School of Religion, Phillips School of Theology, and Turner Theological Seminary)² and an ecumenical fellowship. The ITC is one among six historically black graduate theological schools in the United States and the only one with a cooperative ecumenical model. At the time of its founding, the purpose of the ITC was to train and develop black ministers and religious leaders, some who had been denied the opportunity to matriculate at white graduate theological seminaries in the US south.

Today ITC prepares women and men from across the contiguous United States, the Caribbean, Africa, and India, as well as learners in such places as Hawaii, Afghanistan, and Kuwait who are enrolled through our distance learning program for Christian ministry and leadership. Although our student body remains primarily men who are preparing for congregational ministry and other traditional forms of ministry such as chaplaincy and pastoral care and counseling, we also offer both women and men courses with an emphasis in community organizing, rhetoric in public space, and qualitative research methods for those called to lead in the public square and academia.

When I arrived at the ITC, I was among eight full-time women faculty members out of twenty-one full-time faculty members. The female life and presence during ITC's early years consisted primarily of a small number of female students and wives of students, as well as faculty wives, who took part in social and educational activities as part of the ITC Women's Fellowship hosted by the constituent seminaries (Interdenominational Theological Center 1970, 11). There were a few women who were appointed to ITC's faculty, however they served in part-time positions and were usually the spouses of male faculty members. They primarily taught religious education classes and were addressed by the honorific "Mrs." The first was Mrs. Carrie L. George, Instructor of Religious Education and Director of Field

2. The ITC originally consisted of six seminaries: Founding constituents Morehouse School of Religion (Baptist), established in 1867 as Augusta Institute, Augusta, Georgia, to prepare black men for ministry; Gammon Theological Seminary (UMC), founded in 1883 as an integrated seminary; Turner Theological Seminary (AME), a department of Morris Brown College, Atlanta, established in 1894; Phillips School of Theology (1944), a department of Lane College, Jackson, Tennessee; Johnson C. Smith (PCUSA), established as a department of Johnson C. Smith University, Charlotte, North Carolina in 1867; and Charles H. Mason Theological Seminary (Church of God in Christ), chartered in 1970 as a constituent seminary of the ITC (Robinson 2011). Johnson C. Smith left the ITC in 2014.

Experiments, who was joined by Mrs. Evah O. Kincheloe, Associate Librarian, and Mrs. Ruth Cox Lantz, Instructor in Religious Education.³ They were joined a decade later by Mrs. Shantilata Yohan, who taught courses in Christian education, administration, and leadership. Mrs. Melva Costen was appointed full time as Instructor of African American Church Music, Chapel Organist, and Choir Director in 1973 (Ellingsen and Henry 2008, 62).⁴ The number of women faculty who filled positions in Christian education would suggest that early on women faculty members were regarded as only being fit for educating men in faith and not the higher disciplines (e.g., theology) reserved for male faculty members.

The continued presence of sexism in the church and academy, to include the guild, goes beyond the ITC. Thus, even where the gifts of women in ministry are acknowledged, some women are prohibited from teaching men in Christian colleges and universities and graduate theological schools or are only permitted to teach coed courses alongside male instructors in the classroom. There are those occasions when women are encouraged to teach other women courses in approved vocations such as women's ministries in congregations, college campuses, chaplaincies, missionaries, and other ministries that minister to women and girls. A major issue surrounding the debate whether or not women should serve on theological school faculties is the continuing belief among a number of evangelical Christian bodies that the role of the seminary is for training *men* for pastoral leadership in congregations. Therefore, the vocational pastoral ministry of men should be modeled by men.⁵ As such, while some may approve of women teaching men and women in Christian colleges and universities, others believe that, since the Bible teaches that women cannot be pastors (often citing 1 Tim 2:9), women cannot be models and mentors for men in seminaries and divinity schools.

3. Mrs. Kincheloe was a former librarian at the Chicago Theological Seminary. Her husband, Dr. Samuel Kincheloe, was Professor of Sociology at the ITC. Carrie L. George had an earned PhD in Guidance and Counseling (Psychology) from Atlanta University ("Carrie George Obituary" 2004).

4. Dr. Melva Costen is the wife of former ITC president Dr. James H. Costen and first administrative dean of Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary (1983–1997).

5. Complementarian-leaning evangelical leader Rev. John Piper generated a social-media firestorm when he argued in his podcast that women should not teach in seminaries (see Piper 2008).

Others maintain that women should never have authority over men, whether in the classroom or the church, particularly when it comes to teaching the Bible. This would be particularly true in the areas that the Association of Theological Schools considers as the four primary fields, which are held by conservatives in higher regard as a divinely inspired male realm: Bible, theology and ethics, church history, and practical theology (Meinzer and Merrill 2007, 12). However, some evangelical graduate theological schools might permit women to teach men such courses considered under the umbrella of broader theological categories such as religious education, homiletics, and pastoral psychology and pastoral care since they are regarded by some as “soft” disciplines.⁶ Thus in certain circles women can teach religious education courses to men if cotaught with a male teacher, but they may not teach the Bible.

The view that women should not teach the Bible presents a double challenge for me as a black woman teaching biblical studies and languages in an academic religious context. When I accepted the call to the academic ministry with a concentration in (Hebrew) Bible, Culture, and Hermeneutics, I did not realize that, as a US-black woman, I would be part of disrupting a space long held mostly by white men. It was in fact both the influences of a black male and a black female Hebrew Bible scholar that determined which field I would enter. I was introduced to both Randall C. Bailey, who I was privileged to have as a mentor and colleague at the ITC for two years, and Renita J. Weems, the first black woman to earn a terminal degree in Old Testament (1989), at my local church, Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. The then pastor Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. invited them on separate occasions to preach and or lecture to the congregation. I was enraptured by their ability to read and interpret the biblical text in its original language from an African American cultural context. It did not occur to me at the time that I would eventually follow in their footsteps. However, once I made that decision, I learned that in addition to Clarice J. Martin, the first black woman to receive a PhD degree in biblical studies (New Testament, 1985), I would eventually join an elite coterie of US-black women scholars with terminal degrees in biblical studies.

6. However, some churches and seminaries would regard homiletics as a man's area of teaching. For example, see interview with Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary president Daniel Akin on professional positions that women would not be hired for as instructors over men (Ledbetter 2007, 3).

It only took attendance at my first Society of Biblical Literature meeting to understand that in both the United States and in Europe the field of biblical studies was largely regarded as the domain of white men. Although the Society of Biblical Literature got off to an auspicious start in voting to admit its first woman member less than fifteen years after its founding (1894), white men dominated the world of biblical scholarship, “a world of which they were in the process of appointing themselves guardians” (Bass 1982, 6). It wasn’t until after World War II that an African American was conferred a PhD in biblical studies. The ITC faculty was the beneficiary of two such pioneers: Charles B. Copher, the second US-black to earn a PhD in biblical studies (Old Testament, 1947); and Joseph A. Johnson, the second US-black to earn a PhD in New Testament (1958).⁷ What is not clear is whether their employment at historically black graduate theological schools was a deliberate decision as part of their commitment to educating black clergy and religious leaders or if segregation and racism prevented them from teaching at white institutions.

The door would be closed for another four decades before black women would enter the academy. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s presidential address at the 1987 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature mentions the lack of representation in the guild by African American and Asian American women. In the published version of her address she notes that “to my knowledge only one Afro-American and one Asian-American woman have yet received a doctorate in biblical studies” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1988, 6 n. 10).⁸ The recently deceased Katie Geneva Cannon recounts in an interview the painful lesson that she received in the politics of earning a PhD in biblical studies. She recounts enrolling at Union Theological Seminary to study Hebrew Bible. Upon completion she would have been the first black woman to earn a PhD in Bible. However, once she fulfilled her course requirements her advisor informed her that he would not be renewing the grant that would provide her the financial support to continue her studies. The white men in the biblical studies department had effectively halted her plans. She switched her program to

7. The first African American to earn a doctorate in biblical studies was Dr. Leon Wright in New Testament from Harvard University (1945). He was employed at Howard University School of Divinity (Scrivner 2013).

8. Schüssler Fiorenza is referring to Clarice J. Martin, the first African American woman, and Gale A. Yee (1985), the first Asian American woman to earn a doctorate in biblical studies.

ethics with Beverly Harrison, who informed Cannon that the men had determined before the completion of her first semester at Union that she would never earn a PhD in Hebrew Bible. Cannon would come to learn that, “At that point in 1974, no woman of African descent had ever gotten a Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible. That is the holy of holies in Theological Academy” (Garrett-Cobbina 2018).

Fortunately, since Cannon’s experience the number of blacks with terminal degrees in biblical studies has grown in the second half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century.⁹ Still, out of more than eight thousand members of the Society of Biblical Literature, women constitute less than one-quarter and US members of African descent consist of 3.4 percent (Society of Biblical Literature 2018, 8). Among those, an unofficial count by this author of US-black women with doctoral degrees in biblical studies hovers around thirty or less than one percent. Of those, the numbers are about split evenly between Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and New Testament. Currently, this trend has been at a pace of ten newly earned degrees a decade. Thus, black women are still “woefully underrepresented” in the Society of Biblical Literature since Schüssler Fiorenza (1988, 6) willed for their representation as members and on boards and committees. Moreover, despite our growing numbers, fewer black women hold teaching positions in the field of biblical studies than hold the degrees. The first women appointed to the ITC Bible faculty were Helen Kenik, Assistant Professor of Old Testament (1983), and Ann Holmes Redding, who also happened to be black, Assistant Professor of New Testament (1992).¹⁰ Redding is no longer in the academy. However, between 2012 and 2016 there were three black women faculty in the biblical studies and languages

9. At the 1985 Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, a group of black women members gathered for the inaugural joint session of Womanist Approaches to Religion and Society (Byron and Lovelace 2016, 3).

10. In 1995 the full-time women faculty at the ITC reached eight of twenty-four and represented every area of the curriculum, including Rev. Carolyn Ann Knight, Assistant Professor of Homiletics; Dr. Carolyn A. LeeNette McCrary, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling; Dr. Rosetta Ross, Assistant Professor of Ethics; Dr. Jacquelyn Grant, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology; Dr. Marsha Snuligan Haney, Assistant Professor of Missiology and World Religions; and Dr. Anne Wimberly, Associate Professor of Christian Education and Church Music. They were later joined by Dr. Maisha Handy, Assistant Professor of Christian Education, and Dr. Lisa Allen, Assistant Professor of Music and Worship.

department at the ITC at the same time, a first for any higher education institution in the United States.¹¹ While this is no longer the situation, we can still celebrate the achievements and contributions to the ITC and the guild of black women in the field of biblical studies.

At the ITC, we continue to celebrate the increase in the number of women enrolling in seminary to earn an MDiv degree towards ordination in the Christian ministry. We have traveled some distance from the days when the deans of the constituent seminaries at the ITC discouraged female students from being candidates for ordination and directing them instead to pursue studies in Christian education (Ellingsen and Henry 2008, 41). Still, despite the number of female students matriculating at the ITC who declare their intention to pursue congregational ministry at the completion of their degree, some have been discouraged within the first year from pursuing this vocation for several reasons. One is the complaint of a number of women students that they receive less support from their churches and denominations than their male peers. For example, a number of female students have reported that male students often are appointed to pastor churches with better financial stability, membership, and geographical location. In contrast, women might be appointed to smaller rural churches that are struggling financially. Another reason a few women students reported for deciding to eschew congregational ministry is their experience of sexual harassment by a male church leader or field education supervisor and the inadequate support that they believe that they received after reporting the incident. Yet others have discerned, like myself, that they have a call to the teaching and research ministry in the academy. Fortunately, I am in a position to identify and help nurture those women by encouraging them to become student members of the Society of Biblical Literature, helping to prepare them with their course of study plan, and writing letters of recommendation. Still, there is also a group of women who belong to denominations and churches or fellowships that do not ordain women to the Christian ministry.¹²

11. The three were Margaret Aymer (New Testament), Lynne St. Clair Darden (New Testament), and Vanessa Lovelace (Hebrew Bible).

12. As published in 1990, over half of the graduates of Charles H. Mason Theological Seminary, the Church of God in Christ-affiliated seminary of the ITC, were women. However, the Church of God in Christ does not ordain women to the office of elder, bishop, or pastor although, they may be permitted to lead a local church (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990, 89–90).

Of course, women students still have other vocational options, and some even choose to be bivocational. A number of my colleagues, male and female, are bivocational, working in both the church and academy. There are several reasons why faculty may choose to pursue this option. Some may do so out of a sense of vocation; others may belong to denominations that require them to spend part of the time serving in congregations to retain their standing. However, others are bivocational out of economic necessity. In 2017–2018 the median salary for the entry-level position of assistant professor in Association of Theological Schools member schools in the United States was nearly \$70K (The Association of Theological Schools 2018). There was an almost \$2K pay gap between men and women, with men earning more. However, these figures are only averages, and while they may appear to meet the standard-of-living threshold, a number of us earn salaries far below the median annual pay. When Carrie George left ITC after several years, some of her colleagues assumed it was on account of the male-dominated environment. However, she expressed that her departure for a teaching position at a nearby state college was for an increase in salary, not discrimination (Ellingsen and Henry 2008, 39). Moreover, some faculty face pay inequality along gender lines. Implicit in the hierarchization of faculty jobs in religious settings by field, with biblical studies and theology and ethics at the top and Christian education at the bottom, is the masculinization of the former and the feminization of the latter. Thus, not only do faculty in the fields of Bible and theology tend to earn higher salaries, but also men in those positions tend to be paid more for the same job than women, which perhaps is a reason why men hold these positions so guardedly in the church and academy. There is more at stake than ecclesiastical power and authority; there is also economic empowerment and justice.

In conclusion, despite the discomfort or disapproval of women teaching biblical studies in general and a black woman in the field in particular, women working in a religious context are among some of the best candidates to fill positions in the church and academy. In my opinion, openness to diversity in gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality among Christian ministers and leaders will better help prepare the church to respond to an increasingly shrinking global community with love, justice, and compassion. In my position of accompanying students in their life-long journey of Christian formation, I can take advantage of integrating my research and teaching in the classroom to help students explore how both the writers of biblical texts and their interpreters use

the language of insiders and outsiders to influence identity formation. I can help them to think critically about issues of belonging and the politics of belonging in order to imagine a society in which all are welcomed in the beloved community.

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WORK-LIFE BALANCE: THE BURDEN OF BALANCE

TINA PIPPIN

I want to begin with a bold but rather useless declaration: there is no such thing as work-life balance. I want to contend that this ideal life-style is dangerous for women. There may be some woman biblical scholar I need to envy for reaching such a utopian goal, like Anne Lamott's (1995, 26) friend who writes pages and then has scones with Jesus before the sun rises. My reality is of living in constant chaos—this essay is now past due, but so is that pile of student papers to grade, along with a new class to prepare, and then there is that conference my students and I are presenting at the end of next week, and I really need to be thinking about that panel presentation for the Society of Biblical Literature, and about revising that article proposal for some volume, and about that other thing to write that is really late, and the half-baked proposal for some other volume, and about all the other things I have let slide off the list, and did my college sophomore daughter just text me she wants to get a tattoo? Then I remember that chaos, the deep (*tehom*), is the feminine space where everything began in the biblical origin story. In seeking balance are women buying into what Catherine Keller (2003, 23) calls “tehomophobia”? But what does it mean to embrace the chaos and dive into the watery depths?

Balance for Scholarship

The leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention would rend their robes and wail loudly if they realized they funded the doctoral degree of an Other (Episcopalian) on their religious spectrum. After seminary and a thesis in Christian ethics at Candler School of Theology, I spent a year in Germany in the University of Göttingen-Candler exchange program. I knew the golden years of Bultmannian scholarship were over when a

professor in an Ethics of the New Testament seminar declared (in 1981), “homosexuality is a sin,” and fortunately the class erupted in a shuffling of feet as a rebuff. When I visited doctoral programs in New Testament, I was told on several occasions, “One does not do both New Testament and Christian Ethics,” and it became the gauntlet laid before me, an old male guard holding on to a rusty standard for archaic reasons I have yet to understand. Fortunately, my college New Testament professor, James L. Blevins, moved to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky (“B.F.”: Before the Fall, Fundamentalist, or other f-word one might want to supply, except for feminist), and offered me a spot. This generous Bultmannian scholar opened up the study of New Testament to his students who did interdisciplinary dissertations connecting fields such as narratology, process theology, Marxist literary criticism, ethics, and liberation hermeneutics (me). Yet, this invitation came with a personal price. It was at this point, in graduate school, that work-life balance became difficult, as I faced the realities of not having a degree from a name-brand university. I began to teach as an adjunct at local colleges and universities, taking on every course I could get in order to be more marketable and also because I loved the teaching experience. The inequities of contingent teaching in terms of pay, large class size, lack of a campus office, travel times to other towns, and stretching outside my primary disciplines, plus completing a dissertation, all complicated work-life balance. At this time a group of us in the doctoral program also started a graduate student journal, *Paradigms*, that had a good run for a few years with the editors who followed me (Kenneth Craig and Mark McEntire).

During this time of late graduate school and a bit beyond, work-life balance became an unachievable goal. The field of biblical studies was and is overwhelmingly white and male, and women and minority scholars faced and continue to face the “must be better than to be equal to” syndrome. The politics of academia adds pressure to the power imbalances. Without Ivy League credentials, I felt the need to increase in other areas, such as teaching and research. I was never close to achieving work-life balance, but the journey was worth the effort, in hindsight, for I gained teaching experience in a variety of contexts. That said, I do not recommend such a track for mentoring emerging women scholars. I would rather put my energy into changing such abusive systems.

Intellectual balance was also difficult to achieve. My experience is somewhat divergent from the main path of biblical studies. My predominant area of study, the Apocalypse of John, is a bit of an off-road experience,

and the book's crude, violent, exclusivist vision of the future offers (perhaps demands) alternative interpretive methods. The historical-critical method of interpretation expanded quickly in the last half of the twentieth century, and those who utilize critical theories now have a wealth of new ideas and intellectual movements that throw traditional ways of doing biblical studies consistently off balance. Those who claim to keep their balance in this sea of material are actually mired in male, white supremacist, patriarchal readings that have controlled the scholarship for much of its history. But womanist, feminist, disabilities, queer, postcolonial, affect, new historicism, narratology, postmodern, poststructural, deconstructive, indigenous, ideological, materialist, Marxist, cultural, environmental, film theories, and more now vie for the attention of the biblical scholar. Maintaining balance between these competing voices is difficult, if not impossible. Yet the feminist interpretive herstory these methods have generated has enabled us to reconstruct the few named and mostly unnamed women in the text in positive ways, to deconstruct the text and expose the power and empire and patriarchy that shaped their stories, that is, to take an ax to the text. It is well worth the uncomfortable imbalance.

I do not give gratitude for this rocky ride. But I am on the journey because of my call to resist and counteract oppressive readings of this text. The Bible is an awkward composite of grand narratives and fantastic tales, ancient laws and wisdom, and fevered visions of possible future worlds of gods. The stories throw us for a loop. We are irresponsible scholars if we ignore the voices from the margins and the political repercussions of the Bible in our world: for example, in our legislatures, schools, courts, prisons, borders, and bodies of women. As a scholar of apocalyptic literature and culture, I believe I have a responsibility to read with others for justice on earth, and this often makes my reading of an unbalanced Bible unbalanced. I am choosing to return to *tehom* not as a negative space of disorder but as a positive, creative space, as a space of disruption, subversion, and babel.

Balance with Activism

My balance is about making choices, as well as about recognizing privileges. When I got my tenure-track job at Agnes Scott College in the fall of 1989, I knew that being white and heterosexual and from a Christian background were key positives, although unspoken. These privileges also

were leverages in my social activism on campus. Even more than race, my hetero/cisgender privilege opened a space to work with colleagues toward the broadening of insurance for domestic partners and for more inclusive curriculum. And these privileges, along with tenure and promotion along the way, opened up more stable places for me to join coalitions and work actively in our campus living-wage campaign.

The choices I have made as an activist educator have provided valuable relationships that have deepened my teaching life. My colleagues in custodial and dining services and landscaping, for example, are the knowledge holders in this economic justice work, as they live in the heart of the inequities. The work in the living-wage campaign is daunting and slow and at times discouraging, with dangers of compromise and only smatterings of minor victories. But the work of dismantling our (neo)plantation structure is worth the imbalance. Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed names the responsibility of using our privileges in whatever contexts of our work:

When being freed from labor requires others to labor, others are paying the price of your freedom. That is not freedom. A feminist army that gives life and vitality to some women's arms by taking life and vitality from other women's arms is reproducing inequality and injustice. That is not freedom. For feminism to become a call to arms, we have to refuse to allow the arms to become dead labor. We have to refuse to support the system that sucks the blood, vitality, and life from limbs of workers.... It is a demand for reparation. (2017, 86–87)

This statement also and especially pertains to contingent faculty, in unstable and underpaid positions in an ever-declining job market in higher education. In this, too, work-life balance is a multidimensional trap for women. For those of us with work and class and race privilege, who can afford certain assistances to maintain some balance, the systemic imbalances around us hold us accountable. In other words, the utopian ideal is held out as something we should strive for, but the multitude of women's voices beckon us to turn away from its tempting materialist call. Reflecting on the parts of the system we must utilize in our work—undervalued administrative staff, caretakers of elderly parents, and so forth—Ahmed reminds us of the need to form coalitions to change systemic injustices of just pay, inclusive respect, and healthy workplace for all.

The neoliberal, corporate university does not want activists. Women in power are telling us to “lean in” (Sheryl Sandberg, 2013) but they are

also steering us toward “tempered radicalism” (Debra Meyerson, 2001). The “good” or “beautiful” or “necessary trouble” that Congressman John Lewis and other activists prioritize are muted by such coopted corporate-speak. Susan Faludi (2013), bell hooks (2013), and other critics rightly call these movements “faux feminism,” for they benefit neoliberal corporate culture and capitalist, patriarchal structures. But this secular version of the “woman of substance” of Prov 31:10–31, who has and does everything properly to great financial reward and family honor, does not represent or institute change for the majority of women. “Her light does not go out at night” (31:18). She certainly leans in. She gives to the poor and needy (31:20), but she does not change the system of slavery and economic inequality. We must do better.

Balance for Family

In the Society of Biblical Literature, relationships have been central to my work-life journey. I came into the professional society at a kind of gap time. I experienced mixed mentoring from a few senior female scholars, with one significant negative critique of my first book. I do not remember seeing anyone model balance; all I saw was the typical “women have to do twice as much to be half as valued” in the work syndrome. I still live in this syndrome, partly due to the often-gendered, racial, classist, ableist nature of work at a small liberal arts college. I fear that the need to build “deviance credits” (Shor and Freire 1986, 66)—by serving the institution in standard ways in order to subvert it—will always be an issue when challenging the neoliberal, capitalist institutions of higher education.

The traditional triad of balance at my college is teaching, research, and service, in that opaque order. Add to that young children and aging parents, illness, or other life interventions, and the work triad of academia is unstable. The reality is that these work commitments are more fluid over time, depending on employment and context and publication opportunities and stability. For this reason, as Emily Toth points out,

Some young women are advised to postpone childbearing and feminist research until after they have tenure. They’re told to write on subjects to which they’re not committed, to wait in silence and cunning until the tenure decision is made. And then, somehow, everything will flower: the academic woman’s life will become her own. (1995, 45)

It worked that way to a certain extent for me. A child, house payments, and other adulting things came later in my career—after tenure. Yet as Toth points out, “A woman who waits until after tenure to write on women has given up a decade or more of intellectual life” (45). Toth sounds a dire warning, but it points to the importance of building relationships with others in the field who can begin to change this structure.

Marriage and family demands have shifted somewhat over the years since I began teaching. Mater/paternity leaves are more common. I remember years ago a female colleague in another department arrived to teach for the day having driven her two children in heavy traffic and pouring rain to school, equipped with homemade muffins for some event, only to have the muffins succumb to the rainy sidewalk. This juggling of responsibilities, of children, of aging and also infirm parents, of personal health issues, and in several cases I know, of the sudden death of a spouse, is difficult and exhausting. Do women give up more of their career in service to family and community than do men? And what of women working as long-term contingent faculty, in which income can shift from semester to semester? And on top of all that, most of the women I know in my field are part of the #MeToo movement. If somehow all the #MeToo stories of the years of the Society of Biblical Literature could be gathered and told, what would be the outcome?

Balance and Life

The vision of an ideal work-life balance for women continues to lurk as some optimal goal. The sheer unattainability of this objective works against women. Years ago I bought a Biblegirl (of the Bibleman Bible-team animated series) cape and mask to use in a Bible class in showing cultural appropriations of outdated and sexist models of biblical womanhood. The complete outfit of the original Biblegirl consists of a yellow eye mask and purple cape with Prov 31 on the back (she has since been updated a bit). The proverbial ideal woman has superpowers. Now she uses Phil 4:8–9 and dual lightsaber tonfas (used with the word of God in this series). She brings peace by destroying the villains with her lightsabers and Bible, but she remains a sidekick to the lead male with his big, double-edged sword.

Ahmed offers a different use of superpowers for the feminist cause of justice. Her superhera is a “feminist killjoy” who engages the “willful

work” of diversity but not with the goal of bringing happiness to others or to institutions of inequality. “A killjoy manifesto: requires an ongoing and willful refusal to identify our hopes with inclusion within organizations predicated on violence. I am not grateful to be included in an institution that is unequal” (Ahmed 2017, 264). With my tenured privilege, I am compromised and have opportunities at the same time. I can challenge the sexist burden of balance at my home institution and at the Society of Biblical Literature. The Society of Biblical Literature has a white, male-dominated history that various killjoys on the margins have been disrupting for decades. The work is slow, and the strength of coalitions vary. For instance, in various ways members of the Atlanta Womanist/Feminist Biblical Studies Consortium (aka “Bible Bitches”) to which I belong are feminist counterparts to the myth of balance and the ideal woman. Over years of food and drink, celebration and loss, new jobs and retirements, we gather to support each other and subvert the master narratives.

At the Society of Biblical Literature meetings, there are also feminisms, a continuum of approaches and commitments. We gather at the Society of Biblical Literature Women Members’ Breakfast to celebrate ourselves and honor the wo/mentors in midst of continued patriarchy. In professional societies I have seen remnants of the stereotypical old boy network, of Ivy-League-educated men in Brooks Brothers suits drinking Scotch late at night and building some power grid that women in the field are not privy to in the same networked ways (see Simeone 1987, 84–87). In spite of the obvious gains in the Society of Biblical Literature in the last decades, tokenism and lost gains are always realities, especially in a shrinking academic job market.

I ultimately have no real answers on work-life balance. I used to have it as a far-off goal, because the messages of traditional markers of achievement were so powerful. Now I am content to be an underachiever, for the sake of health, for the potential of growth, and for coalition-building with others on the margins to cause necessary trouble. I am also more in search of questions than answers. For Ahmed (2017, 2), feminism is a life question: “To live a feminist life is to make everything into something that is questionable. The question of how to live a feminist life is alive as a question as well as being a life question.” For me, work-life balance is also a life question.

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TEACHING STORIES BY STORIES OR TEACHING AS A WOMAN/MOTHER/MENTOR

ELIZABETH STRUTHERS MALBON

My university teaching career began in 1976–1977 as a graduate teaching assistant at Florida State University, solo teaching two overview courses in a Western Humanities series. I then spent one year as a sabbatical replacement teaching biblical studies at Vassar College (1978–1979). However, I spent most of my time (thirty-six years, 1980–2016) teaching primarily, but not exclusively, New Testament courses to undergraduates at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). I have been fortunate in being asked to reflect on my teaching experience on several occasions (Malbon 1996, 2010, 2016), and I welcome this opportunity to do so in relation to women and the Society of Biblical Literature. The Society has been a perennial part of my career as a biblical scholar and teacher, and I have always been conscious of being a woman in this professional organization in which men noticeably outnumber women, as they do in the profession itself.

I have considered myself a feminist from the time I first heard the term. (Yes, young women—and men—there was a time before that.) Although feminism was never the focus of my teaching or my research and publications, I have had occasions to speak with others (and learn from them!) about feminist teaching (Malbon 1994, 1995), and I have written occasionally on the (frequently neglected and/or misunderstood) women characters in the Gospel of Mark (Malbon 1983, 1991; see also my entries in Meyers, Craven, and Kraemer 2000). But I hope feminism has been presupposed and manifest throughout my teaching and research (Anderson and Malbon 1993; Dewey and Malbon 2009; Malbon 2012).

Teaching Stories by Stories

A few comments about my teaching situation and practices will set the stage for my reflections on teaching as a woman/mother/mentor. The content of my teaching has been largely the stories of significant ancient cultures: classical and Hellenistic Greek and Roman cultures and medieval cultures in humanities courses, and, in New Testament courses, the stories of Jesus in the gospels and of Paul and his communities in his letters and those written in his name. But teaching and learning are also story-like. As I have written before, “there is a story of teaching and learning together. It is the teacher’s role to start telling this story and to invite students into it” (Malbon 2016, 32). I made this observation of a class I taught on “Jesus and the Gospels” in fall 2012, a small class meeting in a seminar room: “I noticed that students kept arriving earlier and earlier—a bit surprising for a 9:30 AM class—just to talk with each other, usually about the Gospels! In fact, one student said, ‘I don’t think of this as a class; I think of it as my book group.’ When the class itself develops such a narrative with each other, learning is increased because everyone participates in teaching as well, and, as teachers know, the best way to learn is to teach” (33).

There are obvious ways to teach the gospels as stories by having students physically experience a narrative aspect of the stories. One of my favorite procedures was to help learners, of whatever age, work through the sea-crossing events in Mark’s Gospel (chs. 4–8) in a memorable way. Because most readers do not have a mental map of the places Mark mentions (and many readers skip over the place names as meaningless!), we created a physical map—with blue crepe paper outlining water bodies and signs marking named places—and moved ourselves or some object across the space. In a seminar room, the table became the map; in a flexible classroom, the floor became the map. In a small classroom, I once projected a map onto the white board and students tracked the journeys of Jesus and his disciples on it with colored markers. In a church with fixed pews, I designated the aisle as the River Jordan and the chancel as the Sea of Galilee and moved myself through that space. In a fourth- and fifth-grade Sunday school class, I filled my younger child’s wading pool with water, and we made paper sailboats and blew them across the sea. I believe that Mark’s geographical cues, often denigrated by twentieth- and twenty-first-century commentators as confused and/or confusing, were clear indications of ethnic differences for Mark’s first-century audiences, but that is easier

to teach by having learners put themselves through the paces of Mark's story—enacting a story to teach a story.

Once, in a class on the gospels, I had been illustrating, in some detail, how Mark's narrative strategy is frequently parabolic, in line with the parabolic teaching strategy portrayed by Jesus in Mark. I concluded, "So Mark's Jesus teaches in parables, and Mark's Gospel teaches in parables," and one student added, "And *you* teach in parables," and we all laughed. Teaching stories by stories works.

Although the letters of Paul are not narratives themselves, it is not difficult to lead students to construct the story behind each letter. In my New Testament introduction class, the students soon learned that the first question I asked for each letter in turn was "What's the occasion?" (Actually, after a few letters, I asked, "What's the first question?," and they knew.) What occasioned the letter? Why was it written at this time to this community? I solicited a number of students' answers, their constructions of a story behind the letter, before looking at the letter in greater detail. One assignment asked students to write in the imagined first-century voice of Paul, for example, explaining Paul's advice to the Corinthians on marriage. Another assignment, with even more scope for the imagination, asked each student to write a Pauline-style letter to a community of which the student was a part. In a smaller class on Paul, we then exchanged these letters, and each student wrote the letter *from* that community (the community of the other student's letter) to which the letter he or she received in the exchange was "Paul's" reply, that is, the letter presupposed behind "Paul's letter." Students were consistently amazed that they are able to read between the lines to construct the community situation, the story, just as scholars do when reading and interpreting Paul's letters. When we read aloud in class some sample letters, reading in the opposite order in which they were actually written but in their imagined chronological order, the fit was impressive. In addition, the occasional misreadings of our pseudonymous letters, corrected by the original authors in ways not possible with Paul's letters, also served as constructive warnings of the difficulty of the interpretive task (with these three paragraphs compare Malbon 2016, 37–38, 40).

An important distinction to help students develop is that between the time of the story and the time of the story's telling. An analogy to another series of stories worked for me for years. Many students have seen reruns of the TV series *M.A.S.H.* I asked, "During which war is this series set?" Someone generally knows and calls out, the Korean Conflict. But rather

often someone also calls out, the Vietnam War. Aha, I say; I watched the series when it first ran, during the Vietnam War, when it frequently followed the evening news with its daily body counts of the dead in Vietnam. It was, in fact, a running commentary on the then-current Vietnam War, set back in the time of the Korean Conflict. The gospels are similar in their reflections on the Jesus story at and for a later time. Telling a story to clarify a story can be a powerful—and entertaining—way to teach without threatening (compare Malbon 2010, 178).

Probably the story I told my students that I have heard back from them more than any other is the story I made up to illustrate the difference between a photograph and a portrait when introducing the genre of the gospels. First, we shared a laugh about their photographs on their student IDs—usually taken during first-year orientation. Then I told a story of a beloved grandmother whose children decide to have her portrait painted to celebrate her eightieth birthday. They begin by giving the artist a photograph, and all he can see is the enormous wart on her nose! But when he goes to meet grandma at her home, he is welcomed into the cozy kitchen, where grandchildren are running in and out to sample the fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies—which he also samples. As grandma regales him with stories of her children and grandchildren, it does not take long for the artist to see grandma as others see her and to paint a portrait that is true to life in all its rich dimensions and treasured by her family. The gospels are like that—loving portraits of Jesus painted by and for communities of faith.

Biblical scholarship is also storylike. I found that my students appreciated hearing stories of scholarly conversations I had at Society of Biblical Literature meetings, including a few arguments and some good laughs. It is important that students learn that arguing one's views, while respecting one's conversation partners, is an essential academic discipline—and quite handy in many roles in life, including that of engaged citizen.

Sources of Stories: Teaching as a Woman

Although it is not, of course, unique to women to focus on relationships, it is an essential element of teaching as a woman. Such relational teaching, is more subjective than objective. Students—and people—are simply more open to learning if they have established some sort of positive relationship, even if minor, with the teacher—better yet, with other students as well. Feminists, both women and men, know this well.

At some point in the 1990s, I took my turn on the departmental committee charged with reading the student evaluations of all the departmental faculty. One comment in an evaluation of a respected senior male colleague stuck in my memory: “How can I learn anything from him? I don’t know anything about him.” I was startled, although perhaps I should not have been. I had already realized that, even in large classes, one way of gaining the trust of students—essential before I started pulling rugs out from under their feet (What do you mean Paul did not write Ephesians? His name is on it! What do you mean we don’t know who wrote the gospels?)—was to let them know a little about myself and to find out a little about them, especially about what they wanted to learn in the course.

In 1997, when I chaired a Society of Biblical Literature session of presentations that were incorporated into *Semeia* 72, *Taking it Personally: Autobiographical Biblical Criticism* (Anderson and Staley 1995, but appearing later), those words from my male colleague’s teaching evaluation came back to me, and I wrote this poem (also in Malbon 2016, 33) and offered it orally to the *Semeia* contributors:

Teaching It Personally

I once read a student’s comment
on a faculty colleague’s teaching:
“How can I learn anything from him?
I don’t know anything about him.”
I don’t even know
what he thinks he knows
about
what he thinks
he’s teaching me.
The distance he maintains
between
the truth he would proclaim
and his proclaiming it
is vast
and void
and empty.
I am underwhelmed by nothingness.
There is no he,
no we,
no me.

Feminists have reminded us of the importance of not bracketing ourselves or our students out of the teaching situation. At the close of the first class session in my large introductory New Testament class, I stressed the importance of naming and claiming your stance by showing a video clip from the movie “Dead Poets Society”—the courtyard scene where the English teacher (Robin Williams) is encouraging his students to take the initiative to explore their own ways of walking, a clear metaphor for their own ways of thinking, reading, and interpreting literature—and living their lives. I end the scene with the unapproving look of the headmaster from the window above, and we reflect briefly on what might get in the way of such initiative for any of us (compare Malbon 2010, 181–82).

Teaching as a woman means teaching in relationship to others—to students especially, but to other scholars and teachers as well, both living and dead. Teaching as a woman means assisting students to live and learn in relationship—to the teacher, to each other, to the larger community, and to the world of those, living and dead, who have read, interpreted, loved, and critiqued the texts we study together.

Sources of Stories: Teaching as a Mother

Being a mother teaches one a great deal. Motherhood is not the only way to learn such lessons, but it is a particularly joyful way. Stories of what I have learned from my children (some of which, of course, they learned from me) served me well in my teaching and in my reflecting on my teaching. My children have shown me that imaginative thinking can be encouraged—and even taught. My son is six years older than my daughter. When she was a toddler, he would set up imaginative scenes for her. He would place two children’s chairs facing each other and say, “This is a boat,” and hand her a child’s plastic bat and say, “This is a paddle”—and away she would paddle down the imaginary stream. When she was in early elementary school, I overheard her playing with her friend at our house. Her friend could not imagine her way into the pretend situation, so my daughter suggested some lines her friend’s character could say, and that got her started. My daughter started a story for her friend so that the friend could join in the story, just as my son had done for his sister. I tried to do that for my students.

When he was in early elementary school, my son had a friend over to play. I had just taught my son how to make a paper airplane (although

I had to follow instructions from the newspaper). He needed no instructions after the first one, and his friend wanted to make one too. So my son got a sheet of paper for each of them. When his friend sat down opposite him at the table, he said, “No, sit by me, so we will see the same thing.” Indeed. Good teaching technique that. You have to orient yourself to the point of view of the learner first if you expect to be able to teach anything. Although your goal may be to orient the learner to your point of view, that is not where the process begins. My children made that clear to me.

Of course, stories about my children growing up were a great way of illustrating certain things about stories behind New Testament texts, and my students always engaged with and remembered the stories about my children—and sometimes the point I was trying to make about the New Testament. When in class we were contrasting the approaches Paul takes with the Galatians and the Corinthians, I told a story about how I spoke to my children about math tests. Both were actually very good in math, better than I ever was. But my son never really studied; he did work out the homework problems, but he never studied for math tests. When he would report, “We had a math test today,” I would typically ask not “Was it hard?” but “Did you know you were going to have a math test?” The answer was usually, “No; it doesn’t matter. It’s math; you either know it or you don’t.” I would reply, “Well, try to know when you are going to have the next math test.” My daughter, on the other hand, would study and worry and worry and study before a math test. My advice to her was, “You’ve been working the problems every day; by now you know it; don’t worry.” Paul said very different things to the Galatians and the Corinthians too because they had very different challenges and tendencies. Stories clarify stories—and make them memorable.

Here are a few other lessons I learned as a mother: how to change channels quickly (Child sleeping? I am working on scholarly work immediately!); how to be fully present (Children home from school? I am *not* doing scholarly work but offering a snack—although I might fold laundry—so that it is clear I’m ready to listen but not demanding anything.); how to repeat yourself without frustration (No, you still may not do that.); how to understand and appreciate individual differences and respect—and encourage—growing autonomy (Yes, I think you can do that by yourself now.). These skills were useful as a teacher when answering the same question over and over again, usually, but not always, with a different student. And they were useful when speaking individually with a succession of students during office hours. Whatever else is going on

in your mind or at your computer, you need to be fully attuned to the student at your door.

An important realization as a mother and a teacher was recognition of the importance of choice in human relationships. With children the choices were small ones: Do you want to take your bath now or in five minutes? Do you want carrots or celery with your peanut butter for snack? Which three (short) books do you want me to read to you at bedtime? With undergraduate students, the choices are, however, equally important in affirming individuality and respecting other commitments. Some choices among quizzes and writing assignments and due dates made a huge difference in my large New Testament classes. It was not practical for me to make individual arrangements for make-up quizzes and assignments for 120 students; so I shifted that responsibility—and flexibility—to the students. A total of 140 points were available for them to earn by weekly quizzes and short weekly writing assignments; they could complete as many as they chose (quality also counted) and keep up to 100 points. This system made room for occasional illness or simply a bad week, and it took some unnecessary pressure off the students—and me. It also rewarded students for taking responsibility for themselves. As an editor, I offered authors a choice of due dates (within a workable range) for turning in final manuscripts, so that they could work with the realities of *their* lives as well as mine and the publisher's. Of course, mothers, teachers, and editors have more power than children, students, and authors, but recognizing the autonomy of others by building in choice where possible humanizes these differential power relations. These are things I learned as a mother, a parent, which is, of course, not the only way to learn them, but it was a richly meaningful way.

Ongoing Stories: Teaching as a Mentor

In a job interview in the late 1970s, I was asked, “How do you feel about being a mentor for women students?” I cannot really remember how I answered; I do remember having not thought about that question previously. I know more about the importance of such mentoring now, but I think women teachers in the classroom are mentors for women and men—although sometimes in different ways. For both women and men students, a teacher, particularly a biblical studies teacher, is a mentor in modeling openness to questioning—and even critiquing—ideas and texts

that are old and treasured. As I told my students, a biblical *scholar* does not proclaim the answers before she asks the questions. A teacher can model not being frightened or frozen by uncertainty. I often sought to support and encourage students who were uncomfortable with questions that do not have definitive answers. A senior male engineering student once told me at the end of a course, “This is the first class I’ve taken that made me change my mind.” Teaching as a mentor also involves modeling how to be in conversation with those with different opinions and interpretations. Although I required my students to *be familiar with* dominant scholarly views on New Testament materials—not to *embrace* them—I also provided opportunities for minority views to be presented. And I pointed out when I myself was in the minority, for example, as a nonbeliever in Q. Teaching as a mentor means inviting students into scholarly conversations.

An important step for me in my evolution as a teacher was the realization that grading written work is actually a one-on-one mentoring experience. This change in perspective on my part made grading more meaningful for me, and, I think, for my students as well. Decades ago I attended a Writing across the Curriculum workshop at my university, in which I read the research that showed that most students can correct most of their writing errors if they are required to do so. So I took the plunge and did require them to do so. I stipulated that, depending on the length of the assignment, more than three or four errors in grammar, spelling, typing, or failure to use inclusive language for people would result in “No Grade” and would start a twenty-four-hour clock for them to make the corrections and turn in a paper I could grade. I pointed out to them that their future employers were not going to accept grammar mistakes and misspellings, so they might as well get used to that now. But it was scary. The first time I tried this, I think there were two graded short papers out of twenty-five or so, although I did not share those figures with the class. In advance, I had listed numerous online and campus sources for writing assistance. Students did revise, and I had to read their papers a second time, but at least I could. For the second paper, there were many more grades, and somewhat less rereading. By the third paper, nearly everyone had come up to the standard and stayed there—and I could read, comment on, and grade the content of their papers. Then I could give editorial suggestions for improving their argumentation rather than constantly tripping over run-on sentences and subject/verb disagreements. Although I had made more work for myself for a couple of weeks, this procedure made their writing and my commenting more meaningful and more useful. I could be

their mentor, as a senior writer to a junior writer. My students used to refer to my marks as “slicing and dicing.” Yet one student told me that, when she showed such a paper to her mother, her mother said, “That teacher must really love you!” The student did not object to her mother’s conclusion. We honor students when we mentor them.

But teaching as a mentor also involves more than grading writing and helping to shape attitudes toward the subject matter of a course. As is even more obvious now than it was a few years ago, women and men do not share the same life experiences, dangers, or opportunities. Once I asked a male student to whom I was speaking in my office why he kept calling me “Mrs. Malbon,” since I had never introduced that term. He said, “Oh, I did not know if you were a Dr.” I asked, “What would you call a male professor if you did not know if he were a Dr.?” Immediately he replied, “I would call him Dr. because he might be insulted if I called him Mr. and he was a Dr.” He seemed entirely innocent of the idea that a woman professor might also be insulted. Since then, when I introduced myself on the first day of class, I introduced Dr. and Professor as alternate titles that I could go by. Although I realize that, at some colleges, faculty go by first names, that is not the standard at Virginia Tech, so it seemed important—for all my students, both women and men—to assert equality with my male colleagues in this way.

Two stories of men students in the same class illustrate the truism that not all men (and, likewise, not all women) need the same mentoring. I was walking to the classroom building for the only night course I ever taught. Hearing footsteps matching mine behind me, I picked up my pace, and so did the footsteps behind me. I quickened my pace a second time, and so did the footsteps behind me. Then, as I stepped onto a ramp that led to the building’s door, a six-foot man jumped over the low wall of the ramp and landed right beside me and said, “Hi, Professor Malbon!” I replied, “Don’t you *ever* do that again!” Shrugging his shoulders and smiling, he asked, “Do what?” I hope my explanation saved some other woman from a fright. Another male student in that same class, on the third floor of a building without an elevator, generally got to the classroom before I did. He seemed to have noticed that my footsteps kept getting slower, and he came down a flight of stairs to meet me and offered to carry the load of books I was bringing for our small class to use. The next class he was waiting down another flight of stairs, and the next class he was waiting for me at the door of the building. What he did not know, and did not ask, was that I was in my first trimester of pregnancy and was both nauseous and tired. Teaching

as a mentor, like teaching in general, must be modified according to the needs of the learner.

However, given the weight of our culture, in mentoring women students especially, I have often needed to encourage them not to doubt themselves but to take appropriate risks with their academic and intellectual work. A bright engineering student once reported to me that she was being offered a special opportunity in engineering but was planning not to accept it because she did not feel worthy of it. I said, "Can you imagine a male student turning it down?" She replied, "Of course not." I responded, "Then why can you imagine that for yourself?" I'm happy to report that she reimagined herself and accepted the opportunity. There is no need for others to provide a glass ceiling for women if we can be taught to do it ourselves! As women scholar-teachers, we need to mentor all our students, but particularly our women students, to push against gendered restraints, not to internalize them.

I invited another woman student who asked great questions but was going to take the less challenging option for the final writing assignment to come to my office to explain why. Her reason was that she was used to doing excellent work and was afraid she might not be able to do that with the more challenging assignment. I reflected back to her how important, and original, her questions in class and in my office on other occasions had been and encouraged her to "take the risk." She did—and her paper was so impressive that we continued with a Directed Individual Study the next semester, and the final result was that she presented her paper at a regional Society of Biblical Literature meeting, a national student conference, and an international scholarly conference.

Not too surprisingly, I think, I have received mentoring in important ways in my teaching career. In relation to scholarship, my mentors were men not from my home institution. But in relation to the departmental business of teaching and the other professional responsibilities of academic life, I had the support of senior woman colleagues at critical moments. In my early years in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Virginia Tech, a senior woman colleague in Philosophy invited me to lunch once each semester just to see how things were going. Once I told her, "Not well." My first child was a toddler, and, after having offered to our departmental scheduler to teach either early or late but not both, I was assigned an 8:00 am and a 4:00 pm class. My colleague said, "I'll talk to him." The next day I received a hand-written note from the scheduler, offering me a great schedule, with the two classes closer in time, and *asking* if this would

be okay. When I thanked my woman colleague, I asked her what she had said to him; she replied, "Don't even ask." But the problem did not recur, and I learned I could probably do that for someone else when I became a senior member of the department.

Once at a regional Society of Biblical Literature meeting, I was in a committee meeting with a senior male colleague from my department and other women and men from elsewhere. One senior woman offered to refill the coffee cup of my male colleague, but when she brought it back to him, he made some sexist/gender stereotyped comment. She looked straight at him, holding the hot coffee over his lap, and said, "[Name], I'm trying to do something nice; don't mess it up." I don't think he replied, but he was careful not to say such things any more when we returned home. I regard that as mentoring, not only doing something that helped me in my immediate situation, but teaching me what women in more secure positions could do for women in less secure ones.

As a final example of my being on the receiving end of mentoring, and mentoring by a woman, I remember a university committee on which I was serving just after I received tenure. It was a fairly large committee, maybe twenty of us, with just three or possibly four women. A senior male colleague told a sexist joke, and all the male colleagues laughed. When the laughter died down, the most senior woman colleague said, "[Name], I did not find that funny." The silence was awkward but impressive. Some weeks later, a male colleague started to tell a joke, then stopped and said, "I've changed my mind." The men seemed to hold their breaths, and the women nodded our approval of his decision. Then, near the end of the committee's weeks in service, a third male colleague started to tell a joke, then stopped, then said, "No, it's okay," and told an adult/sexual—but not sexist—joke. The men laughed, and all the women made sure to laugh too. I do not remember any of the jokes, but I have never forgotten the words, "I did not find that funny," which I have used myself on occasion and found them equally effective. Again, I saw a strong and clever woman change the tone and behavior in a meeting in a simple but powerful way. I was mentored.

For more than a decade I was the only woman teaching religion in the department. But eventually I was joined by women colleagues. I have a lovely memory of someone outside the department saying something about "one of the women in religious studies," and the phrase so reverberated in my mind that I missed what my colleague was saying and had to ask that it be repeated. "One of the women" had such a nice ring to it.

Like many women my age and stage, I have had numerous experiences of being the only woman in the room at department, college, and university meetings—and at the Society of Biblical Literature. I wish for my younger colleagues to be “one of the woman,” not the only one.

I have tried to pass my mentoring by faculty colleagues on to faculty colleagues. My favorite experience in this regard involved a three-way conversation with a woman colleague I had been mentoring for several years and a new woman colleague. In response to a question by the newest and youngest of us three, I was about to say something, and the middle colleague said my words exactly, apparently she had remembered them, just as I had remembered what I had heard senior women say in my presence and to my benefit. The torch had been passed, and I just smiled in silence. I no longer remember either the question of the newest colleague or the answer of the middle colleague, which had once been my answer; but I remember my smile.

Over and over I have been amazed at how little it sometimes takes to make a difference—for faculty and students. “I did not find that funny” has been powerful for me. “Take the risk” was powerful for a student of mine. Mentoring can be passed on. Mentoring must be passed on. Mentoring is a form of teaching.

* * *

Being a woman in the Society of Biblical Literature has been an essential part of my career as a scholar and a teacher. In teaching as a woman I have attended to relationships—the relationships between texts and contexts, the relationships within each text and between texts both within and beyond the canon, and also the relationships between teacher and student and between student and student. In teaching as a mother I have made room for imagination and sought to be aware of the point of view of the learner, appreciative of individual differences, and respectful—and encouraging—of growing autonomy. In teaching as a mentor I have tried to pass on the support and encouragement—and simple strength and wisdom—I have first received. Because the subject of my teaching has been stories long told, I have found it natural to teach stories by stories—and to draw upon my experience as a woman, as a mother, and as a mentor in order to enable my students, immersed in their own stories, to engage with these ancient stories in challenging yet enriching ways. I once overheard

a student say to another before class, "Religion classes are all about the same thing." "And what is that?" I asked. "That things are more complicated than they seem." I agree, and I find this statement true not only of religion classes but of the Bible and teaching and women and the Society of Biblical Literature and life.

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PART 5
LOOKING FORWARD



THE PROBLEM OF PRIVILEGE: THE FUTURE OF THE SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

KELLY J. MURPHY

A “Committee on Committees.” Broken air conditioning units on the floor of the building that houses humanities programs. Underpaid adjuncts teaching multiple classes a semester. Science and technology departments that feature shiny new labs and well-paid professors. SOV, QUAP, and other seemingly endless lists of acronyms. And a university run more like a corporation than an institution of higher learning. Each of these things could—or does—exist at the university where I now teach. But this particular list comes from Payne University, the name of the fictional institution that provides the setting for Julie Schumacher’s (2018) satire *The Shakespeare Requirement: A Novel*. The title of the book stems from one of the central crises of the narrative: how important are the humanities for an undergraduate education? At Payne, students in the English Department were once required to take a course on Shakespeare. But do they really need to anymore? Switch out “Shakespeare” for “Hebrew Bible” or “New Testament,” and you can probably guess where I’m headed.

When I finished my PhD in Hebrew Bible at Emory University in 2011, I was lucky enough to secure a job as a teaching fellow at Augustana College, a small liberal arts institution in the Midwest. During my two years there, I stayed on the market: hunting the elusive tenure-track position. I had several on-campus interviews but did not land a job until

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I was almost ready to sign a three-year instructor position at Augustana. However, in early 2013 I received a tenure-track offer from the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Central Michigan University, where they needed someone who could teach Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and, preferably, Judaism. I had always imagined I would end up at a small liberal arts school. Central Michigan is anything but: some 17,000 undergraduates, Division I sports teams, and a Global Campus that offers online degrees around the world. And, as the name suggests, Central Michigan is located in the center of rural, flat, and often brutally cold Michigan. But this was a tenure-track job. Born a Michigander, though I did not live there past the age of five, I decided the offer meant I was returning home. I said yes without hesitation.

Like Carol Meyers, I think of myself as an “accidental biblical scholar.”¹ When I enrolled as a first-year at Mary Washington College, neither of my parents had attended college. I navigated my way through my undergraduate experience without any real sense of what exactly it was I was supposed to be doing beyond getting a degree. As I set out fulfilling the various general education requirements, I briefly imagined myself pursuing a degree in (most) fields: creative writing led me to think I might be a novelist; anthropology found me imagining myself the Margaret Mead of the early 2000s; psychology briefly offered the clearest path to a career. (Math, biology, and dance—despite repeat efforts on that last one—never felt like real options.) However, it was in the religion courses I took to tick off a few boxes on the way to graduation that I found my passion—initially with theology and the Big Questions (Why are we here? Is there a God? If so, what’s this God like?). Along the way to earning my BA, I only took one course on the Bible: Introduction to the Old Testament. In particular, I remember how enthralled I was the day when we unraveled the Genesis flood account: How many names did God have in the story? How many animals boarded the ark? How long did the flood last? *Why* did God flood the earth? That there might be two stories behind the one we now read—and that those stories might be based on even older accounts—was gripping. That course planted a seed.

A year after I graduated from Mary Washington, I ended up at the University of Chicago’s Divinity School. However, I was still unsure exactly what it was I wanted to do. A course on the Hebrew Bible and Law

1. Meyers, “Accidental Biblical Scholar,” in this volume.

with Tikva Frymer-Kensky, of blessed memory, made me fall in love with biblical studies and early Jewish interpretation of the biblical texts. Tikva encouraged me to continue to study the Hebrew Bible. From there, I went on to the Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Oxford University to earn an MSt in Jewish Studies and, finally, to Emory University to earn a PhD. The institution where I now teach is almost nothing like the colleges and universities I attended. Nevertheless, there are common threads running through my experiences in education and teaching that are relevant to the issues I want to highlight in the following pages. Whether I was at a small liberal arts school or at a prestigious research university, I have been fortunate to always have wonderful professors who helped me to see the biblical texts (and so the world) in new ways. This is something I hope to do for my students. It is also something that I believe is integral to the mission of the Society of Biblical Literature. At the same time, however, whether I was at a small college or a large public university, I also encountered sexism and misogyny—from students, colleagues, and administrators. This, too, is often a part of the Society of Biblical Literature.

As I write this reflection, I am keenly aware that my position as an associate professor at a large regional public university that is confronting declining enrollments and an increasing focus on vocation profoundly shapes what I consider the challenges and opportunities facing women and other underrepresented groups in the Society of Biblical Literature as we move forward. So, too, does the fact that I write from a place of profound privilege: I am white, married to a man, and tenured. When I consider my own past and current present, I cannot help but think about how I am complicit in a system that is, in many ways, broken. There are privileges I know I have and ones that I don't yet even recognize; there are my own biases that I am well aware of and the still unknown ones, too. In the following, I outline two interrelated challenges that I think we need to meet in the future and reflect on how I see these challenges as potential opportunities. But I also recognize that there are many other challenges and opportunities, including ones that I am all too aware of and others that I do not yet know.

Men and the Society of Biblical Literature: A Challenge

In Schumacher's (2018) *The Shakespeare Requirement*, one of the main characters—a woman named Janet—finds herself wanting to give advice

to an intelligent first-year undergraduate named Angela: “*Don’t waste your time being impressed by people (usually men) who are already adequately impressed by themselves*” (235). Though Janet never says this aloud to Angela in the book, for weeks after I finished the novel, the line replayed over and over again in my head. If I could go back in time, I would give my younger self the same advice. To be sure, this is deeply personal advice that speaks to who I am. Yet, to invoke a famous phrase from second-wave feminism, the personal is political. I, personally, have wasted a great deal of time being impressed with people (usually, though not always, men) who were already adequately impressed by themselves. For example, as a graduate student—and, later, as a new PhD—I spent a number of years being impressed by a particular program unit in the Society of Biblical Literature that was run by and consisted largely of men. I tried very hard to position myself as an eligible steering committee member and was delighted when one of the cochairs of the program unit asked me to have coffee to talk about the possibility of joining. At the start of the meeting, I was told that they wanted to talk to me because they had been told by the powers-that-be in the Society of Biblical Literature that they needed to diversify their committee. At first, I thought that they were seeking to do this was a good thing—a testament to their commitment to a more diverse and well-represented Society of Biblical Literature. However, what followed skewed that initial perception. Instead of being asked a series of questions about my work over coffee, I was asked questions about my personal life: I was wearing an engagement ring, yes? When was I getting married? Did we plan to have children? I tried, uncomfortably, to shift the conversation back to the program unit’s focus, mentioning the previous papers I had given at the Society of Biblical Literature, a recent publication, and a forthcoming article that were pertinent to the group’s focus. After that meeting ended, I never received an invitation; a colleague, also a recent PhD, was offered a spot on the steering committee. Maybe this was because he already had a related book contract and was, admittedly, more published than I was at the time. But I suspect that there were other factors at work. Of course, my personal experience did not emerge out of a vacuum; rather, it stemmed from larger systemic issues in the Society and the academy more broadly: sexism and misogyny. And so, Janet’s would-be advice in *The Shakespeare Requirement* speaks to one challenge I think women and other underrepresented groups in our guild will continue to face as we move forward in the coming years. Succinctly, this challenge is the Society’s “man problem.”

As Robert Cargill (2019, 4) writes, “the field of biblical archaeology, and biblical studies in general, has always had a ‘woman problem.’ Women have long been a minority. To be sure, there have always been notable exceptions ... but for the most part the field has been dominated by men—often charismatic, loud, entertaining, obnoxious, and mostly white men.”² The contributions in this volume—written by women whose involvement in, service to, and shaping of the Society of Biblical Literature paved the way for future women in the society—attest to this in varying ways. For example, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon writes, “I have always been conscious of being a woman in this professional organization in which men noticeably outnumber women, as they do in the profession itself.”³ Similarly, Hindy Najman explains, “[Hebrew Bible and ancient Judaism] encompass many subjects and fields, but it is not an exaggeration to say that these fields and subfields have—by and large—not been populated, led, or envisioned by women or even for women.”⁴ Of course, the demographics are shifting. As Meyers outlines, there are now more women members than there were years ago, and the role of women in leadership roles has increased, too.⁵ Yet even as we celebrate the 125th anniversary of women in the Society of Biblical Literature, the old adage stands: sometimes the more things change, the more they stay the same.

That things change but nevertheless stay the same is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the recent coinage of terms like *manels*, *manthologies*, and *festicles*. Cargill (2019, 4) writes, “Progress is being made with regard to gender parity in archaeology and the academy. Therefore, you can understand why I am continually baffled—and women all the more so—when all-male conference panels (‘manels’) are assembled, all-male edited volumes (‘manthologies’) are published, and all-male festschrifts (‘festicles’) are printed.”⁶ Cargill’s statement about the Society’s “woman problem” was

2. Of course, this problem is not specific to the Society of Biblical Literature. See The Chronicle Review’s (2018) special issue entitled “The Awakening: Women and Power in the Academy.”

3. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Teaching Stories by Stories or Teaching as a Woman/Mother/Mentor,” in this volume.

4. Hindy Najman, “Community and Solidarity: The Place of Women in Hebrew Bible and Ancient Judaism,” in this volume.

5. Carol Meyers, “Accidental Biblical Scholar,” in this volume.

6. The term *festicle* was coined by Eva Mroczek when she asked on Facebook, “What do you call a Festschrift with 17 men and a single lone woman? A Festicle, of course” (23 March 2018).

a response to the announcement of yet another manthology and, in particular, to the now often-standard response one encounters when editors or organizers are called out on such publications: “I hear many excuses when these all-male offerings appear, one of the most frequent being: ‘I invited several women, but none of them accepted my invitation, so I filled those spots with men’” (2019, 4). How would Anna Ely Rhoads, the first woman to join the Society of Biblical Literature 125 years ago—not to mention all of the other women who stand between her and me—react to this utter lack of change?

Yet as the coinage of terms such as *manel*, *manthology*, and *festicle* illustrate—as do the excuses to their repeat appearances—the problem is not a woman problem at all. Rather, as Cargill insinuates, the Society has a “man problem” (as does academia more broadly). Men created the Society of Biblical Literature, continue to populate the Society, and, so, men have a significant stake—and a great advantage—in how the Society is shaped moving forward. And while this gender disparity is now often acknowledged and even decried by women and by men alike, attempts to reconfigure systemic issues often encounter push back that frames the problem in, frequently, personal ways. For example, as others note, we often hear: “We would have had a woman on our [Paul, text-criticism, theology, or other] panel, but they all said they were too busy.” And so, when I look back on my interview with the steering committee of the program unit where I was rejected in favor of a male colleague, I can now clearly see how I had been conditioned to be impressed by these men. At the time, I left the meeting shaking and in tears, feeling like I had failed to measure up and that I was not a real scholar, even while I knew, logically, that everything about that interview had been wrong. Even if I was the least qualified candidate to be on the steering committee, my marital status should never have been part of the equation that determined my eligibility.

Education and the Society of Biblical Literature: A Challenge

Schumacher’s *The Shakespeare Requirement* narrates the (mis)adventures of Professor Jay Fitger, newly installed chair of the English Department at Payne University, as he attempts to (among other things) get the disgruntled members of his department to agree on a SOV (“Statement of Vision”) demanded by the administration. The Society of Biblical Litera-

ture members familiar with current pressing issues in higher education in the United States—especially at nonelite institutions—will recognize the increased emphasis on professionalization at Payne, the competition for funding and tenure-track lines between departments, and the rising skepticism about higher education. At one point in the novel, Fitger muses:

At a time when education and the pursuit of knowledge had become the objects of a sneering disdain, when most Americans seemed eager to ship intellectuals—especially anyone with a PhD in the humanities—out to break rocks in the countryside, the English Department's course of action was to tinker with documents that mattered to no one. When they should have been manning the barricades, they were scheduling a vote on that meaningless treatise, the Statement of Vision. (Schumacher 2018, 67)

Fitger's contemplation encapsulates the second challenge that women (and all members) of the Society of Biblical Literature will continue to face moving forward with, I suspect, an increasing ferocity. The writing on the wall, especially in the United States, suggests that the very existence of the Society of Biblical Literature hinges on its ability to continue to make itself relevant outside the confines of whatever conference center we find ourselves in at the end of every November. More important, such relevance is inextricably intertwined with the need for diverse membership, representation, and participation from women and other underrepresented groups. This challenge is the Society's "education problem."

As an illustration, the British Academy recently reported that Theology and Religious Studies programs were at risk of disappearing from universities in the United Kingdom ("Theology and Religious Studies Risk Disappearing from Our Universities, Says the British Academy" 2019). The report also notes that "while women made up 64% of students on first degree programmes in 2017/18, they made up only 35% of doctoral students and 37% of academic staff. In other similar humanities subjects 53% of academics are women." As Roger Kain, Vice-President of Research and Higher Education Policy at the British Academy, explains, at present "not only are the subjects' popularity on the wane but the problem is compounded by the profile of their teaching staff; if more ethnically and gender diverse groups do not rise through the ranks, there is a danger that these highly relevant disciplines disappear from our universities." In short, "if unaddressed, the profile of Theology and Religious Studies teaching staff

could prove to be a stumbling block to recruiting students from the next generation, who increasingly value diversity, leading to further ‘pipeline’ problems in the disciplines.” While biblical studies is not synonymous with either theology or religious studies, both anecdotal and official accounts suggest that the issues facing our own discipline in the United States are similar: diminishing interest in the academic study of the biblical texts, along with a lack of diversity in the front of our classrooms.

As we move forward, we need to face three interconnected issues as we confront this particular challenge: first, the perception of the value of the humanities in higher education; second, the increased distrust of higher education itself; and, third, the way the education problem disproportionately affects women and other underrepresented members of the Society of Biblical Literature. In other words, the man problem and the education problem are directly connected and inseparable. In fact, our impending education problem radically intensifies our man problem.

First, titles of various op-ed and think pieces attest to the continued and, perhaps, increasing worry over the place of the humanities in higher education: “The Humanities as We Know Them Are Doomed. Now What?” (Hayot 2018); “There Is No Case for the Humanities” (Stover 2018); “Teaching in the Twilight of the Humanities” (Zaretsky 2019). These titles may sound alarmist, but recent trends demonstrate that they represent a real issue. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point planned to eliminate thirteen majors in the face of budget cuts (American studies, art, English, French, geography, geoscience, German, history, music literature, philosophy, political science, sociology, and Spanish) before criticism resulted in a reversal of that decision. But other places have not fared as well. Perhaps the most alarming canary in the coal mine, so to speak, is how Wheeling Jesuit University—a Catholic institution—announced in the spring of 2019 it would be shutting down its undergraduate program in theology (Flatley 2019). Across the country, colleges and universities are cutting departments and programs, including those that house biblical studies. From the front lines of a large regional public university in a state with a projected steady decrease in graduating high school seniors and, accordingly, continued declining enrollments, along with a body of parents and students who think of a four-year degree as providing a straight path to a job, I confront this particular component of our education problem on a near daily basis. Why, my students regularly ask, do they need to take an introductory level biblical studies class if they are, say, a business major? As more students think as they do, our enrollments get smaller.

With a smaller number of students, it is difficult to make the argument to replace tenure-track lines. With a smaller number of faculty teaching courses, enrollments go down even more. With decreased enrollments, it becomes even more challenging to make a convincing case that there needs to be a Department of Philosophy and Religion. It is imperative that the Society of Biblical Literature face this challenge because such cuts impede the Society's own ability to enact its mission statement, the shorthand version of which is to *foster biblical scholarship*. "As an international organization," we are told, "the Society offers its members opportunities for mutual support, intellectual growth, and professional development," including through "advancing academic study of biblical texts and their contexts as well as of the traditions and contexts of biblical interpretation" and "collaborating with educational institutions and other appropriate organizations to support biblical scholarship and teaching" (Society of Biblical Literature 2011). While it is certainly not the case that all members of the Society of Biblical Literature work in higher education, a great many of us do. Yet what we do does not seem cost effective—much less important—to many of our students, their parents, some of our colleagues outside the humanities, and, often, our administrators.

Second—and again related to the Society's own mission—is the increased distrust of higher education in public opinion. For example, the Pew Research Center reported in July 2017 that "a majority (58 percent) of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents believed that colleges and universities have a negative effect on the country, up 13 percentage points from the previous year" (Niemi 2018). As Nancy S. Niemi observes, "the Pew survey is not the only recent sign of growing public distrust of higher education: This year's percentage increase in state support for higher education is the lowest in five years; tenure is being attacked and in some cases eliminated; and we hear frequent expressions of doubt about a college degree's 'return on investment.'" Niemi traces various suggestions that attempt to account for this negative assessment of higher education, including in-state tuition increases (with no parallel increase in middle-class incomes), the 2008 recession, which "accelerated the disparity between family income and college tuition and fees, while simultaneously weakening the link between college degrees and high-paying jobs," and how as "anti-intellectualism, always quietly present in the American zeitgeist, became noisier; suddenly, studying the humanities was useless," while "religious beliefs became an accepted counterweight to critical thought." All of these implicate the future of the Society of Biblical

Literature, which, as an organization, seeks to advance “academic study of biblical texts and their contexts,” especially through “educational institutions” and by “developing resources for diverse audiences, including students, religious communities, and the general public” (Society of Biblical Literature 2011).

Third, and finally, this education problem particularly affects women and other underrepresented members of the Society of Biblical Literature. To begin, one interpretation of the general distrust of higher education is that it is a *repercussion to the growing number of women in higher education*. According to Niemi (2018), “Now that women enroll, succeed, and in many cases, surpass men in attaining college degrees, the value of those degrees is diminishing.” In short, the more women succeed at the university level, the less men want to enroll. Nevertheless, as men find other ways to thrive economically with or without a four-year degree, they “still have power to disproportionally shape” women’s lives. Accordingly, as Niemi concludes, “Until gender equity stops looking like male diminution, women will remain at a disadvantage.” It is not hard to see how this affects the future of women in the Society of Biblical Literature. Even as many men within the Society support gender equity, it is also the case that not all do. Thus, it is not hard to imagine that something similar to what is happening on college and university campuses could also happen within our own Society as (some) men react to the increased presence of women. Moreover, as programs on campuses across the United States are cut, all faculty suffer, but such cuts often affect women and other underrepresented groups more because of their historical marginalization in the academy.⁷ Additionally, under normal circumstances, study after study demonstrates that students, other faculty, and administrators often expect women and other underrepresented faculty members to work more than their white male colleagues (Flaherty 2018a). With fewer positions in general, the workload will continue to be unevenly distributed. Similarly, study after study shows that women and other underrepresented groups

7. As Sarah Sheckman outlines in “Contingency and the Future of Women in the Society of Biblical Literature” in this volume, cuts to programs across the United States means that most people who graduate with a PhD in biblical studies will not land a tenure-track position. For more on this challenge and how we can meet it, readers are referred to her chapter as well as to Kelly J. Baker’s (2018) *Sexism Ed: Essays on Gender and Labor in Academia*. Baker’s important work provides an excellent overview of sexism in higher education.

regularly receive lower teaching evaluations not because they do not teach as well but *because they are not white men* (e.g., Flaherty 2018b). In other words, women and other underrepresented groups are overworked and underappreciated. And despite the amount of labor women and other underrepresented groups do, their increased presence in academy is apparently so unnerving to some men that they are, consciously or unconsciously, creating yet another cog in a machine that is working to destroy higher education completely.⁸

Refiguring Biblical Studies: An Opportunity

As dismal as our man problem and our education problem might appear, they also provide us with opportunities. As biblical scholars, we often invoke the notion of refiguring: a way of studying biblical texts, characters, and the methods we employ so that we might interpret them with fresh eyes. Through this process, we can offer new perspectives. How can we use the challenges I've identified here to refigure the Society of Biblical Literature?

To begin, even while the coinage of terms like manel, manthology, and festicle exemplify the Society's ongoing man problem, these same words inspire hope and provide opportunities. The regular practice of inviting the same (male) voices to the table over and over again has been named, and we are already seeing how such naming leads to activism and to change. For example, a colleague recently alerted me to two stickers that she came across that are designed to "augment posters or flyers advertising manels."⁹ One reads, "Garantiert Frauenfrei" and the other "Warning: May Contain Traces of Women." And as I finished writing this essay, a series of blog posts on Feminist Studies in Religion appeared that outline the numerous structural problems that manifest in the creation of manthologies, alongside the ways that we might work to stop their perpetuation (see, for example, Benjamin 2019; Imhoff 2019; Joseph 2019). As Mara Benjamin (2019) explains, if we discover that a chapter we have written is for a volume that lacks adequate gender representation, those of us who have the power to do so can withdraw our contributions. As Sarah Imhoff (2019) describes, "Manthologies are a network problem." To

8. With thanks to Sarah Shectman for this observation.

9. With thanks to Laura Suzanne Lieber, from whom I learned about these stickers.

change the problem, Imhoff notes, all of us—including men—must work to expand our networks. Rather than ask yet another man whose work we are familiar with to contribute to our anthologies or to sit on our panels (or to be on our steering committees), we can seek out new contributors, who will doubtlessly bring much needed new perspectives and ideas with them. With Alison L. Joseph (2019), we can “recognize that there is discrimination at all levels of academia,” and so fight against power imbalances, especially by “[going out of our ways] to mentor, support, and invite underrepresented scholars.” Women can do this work, but men must do it, too. Sara Parks (2018, 241) describes how men have the opportunity to “manplify”—in other words, to amplify “the interests of those outside their own circles of identification.” This is the kind of “amplification of women’s scholarly voices” that scholars like Cargill (2019, 4) and others are working toward. Like Joseph (2019), I am “encouraged by [these] ‘calls to arms.’” Thus, even while things might seem the same, there is a clear push for change being spearheaded by a diverse group of people in the Society of Biblical Literature to address sexism and misogyny. As others have observed, if all members of the Society work toward gender equity—as well as other equally important equities—we can refigure our field.

Additionally, we have the opportunity to stop wasting our time “being impressed by people (usually men) who are already adequately impressed by themselves” (Schumacher 2018, 235). This is related to both our man problem and our education problem. Too often in the past, biblical scholars (many of whom were men) were so impressed with themselves that they assumed that what they did was so important that they did not need to make a case for how or why it mattered for those outside their conference room paper presentations. We cannot let this practice continue in our present or into our future. We need to explain what we do to the outside world by making a compelling case for our existence within the world of higher education. This also requires us to figure out how to make ourselves more accessible and understandable to the larger public. Women and other underrepresented groups of the Society of Biblical Literature cannot do this alone.

Or, maybe we can. Maybe the question is whether or not the old guard wants to come with us into the future.

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CONTINGENCY AND THE FUTURE OF WOMEN IN THE SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

SARAH SHECTMAN

When I was an undergraduate at Wellesley College and deciding whether I wanted to pursue a PhD in Hebrew Bible, my advisor warned me not to. He explained how terrible the job market was (already; this was in 1994). Nevertheless, I persisted, and thanks in large part to what must have been a pretty positive recommendation letter from him, I started as a PhD student at Brandeis University in the fall of 1996. (Here it is revealed that I am the alternate-timeline version of Carol Meyers.¹) As I pursued my doctoral degree, I tried to be realistic about job prospects. When people asked me (generally in a particular tone of voice) what you can do with a PhD in Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern studies, I told them that teaching and editing/publishing were really the only options. I reminded myself that I might end up doing the latter, though like most I preferred the idea of the former.

By the time I finished my degree, I had become geographically limited. There are very few job openings in Hebrew Bible in the Bay Area, and most of them are at theological schools that aren't really interested in hiring a feminist Jewish atheist. I also defended my dissertation in the fall of 2006, not long before the bottom fell out of the job market. I took a couple of visiting assistant professor jobs in other states, flying home as often as I could. They were full-time jobs that came with benefits (retirement accounts!) and an office, but after the second one I knew that it wouldn't really work as a continued solution. I did some additional adjunct work in the Bay

I am grateful to Kelly Murphy, Hilary Lipka, and Ilona Zsolnay for their feedback on earlier drafts of this contribution.

1. See Carol Meyers, "Accidental Biblical Scholar," in this volume.

Area and in Southern California, for which I was paid a low of \$3,000 and a high of \$8,500 per course.²

After the second of the visiting assistant professor jobs, during which time I had coedited a volume and edited down my dissertation into my book, I decided that I would give editing a try. Thanks to a Wellesley alumnae connection I found an editorial mentor, the managing editor of *Jewish Social Studies* at the time. When she left that position, I took over. I also leveraged my connections in academia to get started doing editorial work in Hebrew Bible. I had managed to stay active in academia during this time, thanks again in large part to mentors who invited me to participate in conferences and helped me find volunteer opportunities within the Society of Biblical Literature.

I bounced around between being contingent³ faculty and an “independent scholar”—I use scare quotes because I don’t really like the term and find it a little stigmatizing, implying that I exist apart from the community of affiliated academics—chasing an academic affiliation that would keep me connected to the academic community and, more practically and literally, to the research databases I need in order to continue to do my own writing. My position as managing editor of *Jewish Social Studies* now provides me with database access through Stanford’s library. Yet this was not a given—I had to negotiate this access as part of my compensation; otherwise I would not have it. If I were ever to leave that position, I would be left without access to ATLA’s Religion Database once again. Thanks to the Society’s new agreement with JSTOR, I would still have access to religion periodicals at least—but it is worth noting that scholars like me pay Society membership dues out of our own pockets, whereas many full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty are able to pay for this out of their university or professional-development funds.

I no longer take contingent work, although I am offered adjunct positions from time to time, because it is exploitative, and I can make more money editing. However, I lump “independent scholars” such as myself in with contingent faculty because we face many of the same obstacles, including lack of institutional support for our scholarship, the exhaustion

2. As the American Association of University Professors (n.d.) points out, adjunct pay per course is generally not comparable to what full-time faculty earn on a per-course basis.

3. American Association of University Professors (n.d.) defines contingent faculty as any part-time or full-time appointment that is not tenure-track.

of looking for full-time faculty jobs (I don't think of myself as currently on the market, but I would apply if a full-time faculty position in Hebrew Bible opened up at a secular institution in the Bay Area), and a general stigma because the myth of meritocracy suggests that we have somehow failed by not getting a full-time faculty job. I am inordinately lucky to have a spouse who supports my academic work and who has a job (and health insurance) that, along with my own income, provides enough for me to take unpaid time to do research. This means that I have been able to keep up a fairly high level of participation and publication even without having an academic appointment. Not everyone can do this—indeed, most probably can't. I was helped in large part by strong mentorship and by the fact that I was asked at an early stage in my postdegree career to join the Pentateuch Section steering committee and then to cochair it, which in Society committee terms is a fairly high-profile gig. I was also the first (and still the only) scholar not serving as full-time faculty to be invited to join the Annual Meeting Program Committee. My status was apparently one reason I was asked to be on the committee, but the fact that I remain the only one, despite our discipline's now long-standing recognition, at least in writing, of how changed the career trajectory is for someone with a PhD in biblical studies, is a powerful reminder that our leadership does not yet reflect the realities of many of its members.

Contingency is a well-known problem in academia, but just in case anyone reading this is still unaware of the numbers, about 30 percent of US higher-ed faculty are currently full-time tenured or tenure-track, versus 70 percent who are contingent, with some estimates as high as 75 percent contingent (American Association of University Professors n.d.; American Association of University Professors 2017). Moreover, contingency disproportionately affects women: nationally, women are estimated to constitute between 51 and 62 percent of contingent faculty, whereas men make up about 59 percent of full-time faculty (Baker 2018, 41). There is no reason to believe these trends will not continue, with more faculty, and especially women, off the tenure track.

Contingent positions can vary wildly in terms of pay, benefits, and job security. Though some jobs may look reasonable by these metrics, they do not lead to tenure and both the prestige and the long-term security that tenure entails. And many of them are exploitative positions: a recent adjunct opening I read about came with a 5/5 teaching load, no benefits, and a salary of \$31,000. Academics trying to earn enough to live on often have to cobble together a series of low-paying jobs on different campuses,

which often requires them to spend considerable time commuting from one campus to another (Bernstein 1986; Mann 2018). These kinds of jobs provide little support (American Association of University Professors n.d.) and leave no time for research and writing, which are critical to landing a full-time faculty job. In short, the longer contingent faculty work, the less likely their prospects of landing a full-time faculty job. Contingent faculty are frequently marginalized by their institutions; they are not integrated into their departments, which both creates and perpetuates the stigma that goes along with contingent teaching.

Among Society of Biblical Literature members employed as faculty, the rates for full-time faculty are better than the current national averages: 54 percent of Society faculty are full-time tenure or tenure-track, whereas 46 percent are contingent.⁴ Moreover, when broken down within gender, these numbers remain fairly consistent: 53 percent of women and 54 percent of men have full-time faculty jobs, whereas 47 percent of women and 46 percent of men are contingent.

When viewed as a percentage of the total, however, representation of women is considerably lower. Women are 25 percent of all full-time tenure or tenure-track faculty to men's 75 percent, and they are 26 percent of contingent faculty to men's 74 percent. These numbers reflect overall membership in the Society of Biblical Literature, where women are about 24 percent and men are 76 percent. So, although women's rates of employment do not differ significantly from men's, their overall employment is still quite low. (Notably, in terms of service on committees and participation in the Annual Meeting, women are participating at higher than membership percentages.⁵)

4. All data is drawn from the Society's 2019 Member Report, though I am also grateful to John Kutsko and Christopher Hooker for providing me with more detailed data, which broke faculty employment types down by gender. I used the "all member" rather than the "current member" totals, since they are a larger number and therefore are likely to be more representative. In discussing the Society's data specifically, *contingent* includes adjunct, full-time nontenure-track, part-time, postdocs, and unemployed (unless otherwise specified); basically any faculty employment that is not full-time tenured or tenure-track (whereas the Society report uses *contingent* only for adjunct faculty). I did not include retired faculty or independent scholars in this data, though I do generally include the latter when discussing the larger structural issues surrounding contingency. Though I used the data for only one year, reports from other years suggest that the numbers are fairly consistent.

5. Information on women's participation as volunteers is drawn from a report to

Furthermore, though the differences in employment rates are not major, they are still consistently worse for women. As noted, 53 percent of women and 54 percent of men have full-time faculty positions. When we look at the numbers for contingent work in more detail, too, we see that women are more likely to be adjuncts or work part-time (8.7 percent and 10.9 percent, respectively, to men's 7.9 percent and 8.0 percent). More significantly, men are more likely to have full-time nontenure-track employment (26.8 percent, to women's 22.4 percent), which is more likely to come with benefits like health insurance and retirement savings. Women, on the other hand, are much more likely to have postdocs: 4.5 percent of women to 2.3 percent of men.

The demographics of race and ethnicity are similar: though the Society's membership numbers are, let's admit it, abysmal,⁶ the employment rates of members of racial and ethnic minorities do parallel their membership rates in the Society to some extent. Scholars of African descent face the greatest discrepancy here: they are about 5 percent of Society members but only 4.2 percent of total faculty, and they are employed as faculty at a rate of only about 43 percent (of total members of African descent), the lowest of any ethnic or racial group.⁷

The low number of women and members of ethnic and racial minorities in the Society of Biblical Literature, as in academia more broadly, is related to what is called the *pipeline problem*. The pipeline problem, so the explanation goes, is that not enough members of these underrepresented groups are graduating from graduate school—that is, the pipeline is “leaky” (Haws 2015; Baker 2018, 4). As of 2015, women were studying religion as undergraduates more and even enrolling in PhD programs more, but their rates of attaining PhDs in religion are not growing as fast as men's are (Haws 2015). There are a number of possible reasons for this problem, including discrimination and the fact that seminaries are major feeders

the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, shared with me by Christopher Hooker, April 2019.

6. They are lower than national averages, though in some cases not by much. See US Department of Education 2018.

7. I did not have the breakdown of these numbers by type of employment, however, so I cannot provide more detailed data on how members of these groups are represented by type of faculty position (though the Society probably does have that data). Nationally, however, African American scholars are more likely to be contingent than full-time faculty (Baker 2018, 42).

to PhD programs in biblical studies, and those seminaries are generally dominated by white, Christian males.⁸ But another likely factor is the lack of support these students are facing while in graduate school, in particular the lack of family-friendly policies.⁹

Though this evidence is anecdotal, it is still telling: in my graduate program, no woman with a child ever finished her PhD. Some women came into the program with children; some women had children while they were students. But either way, none of them ever graduated. Women graduates who now have children all had them after they graduated (and, notably, there is a very high rate of contingency among women graduates from my program). They finished their coursework and their comps, but they stalled out at the dissertation stage. The men who came in with children or had children while they were students all went on to finish, however. Some of them had wives who worked at least part time, though one or two had wives who stayed home with the children. Though both men and women dropped out of the program, women did so at a higher rate. Women also took longer on average to finish their degrees, and of the women who have finished their degrees since 1996, when I started graduate school, only one has a full-time faculty position.

More women in the United States are working part-time, largely owing to childcare issues (Miller 2019). If one parent is working very long hours, then the other one (if there is one!) will usually end up working fewer hours in order to have the flexibility to cover unforeseen childcare issues, even if they have regular childcare. Someone has to be on call in the evenings, for daycare or school pickups, for illnesses and doctor's appointments. Highly educated and high-achieving women are likely to be married to similar men; they do not generally have spouses who will stay at home, as did the male professors of a generation ago and as do many male professors today, especially in a field such as biblical studies, which has more than the usual share of people who espouse so-called traditional family gender roles. Women with advanced degrees are also having children at a much

8. Relatedly, whereas 4.5 percent of women members are employed as religious leaders, 9.5 percent of men members are; this is one of the largest disparities in employment rates by gender of the occupation types that the Society reports.

9. Though academia is generally fairly generous with family benefits for full-time faculty, graduate students and contingent faculty usually have no such benefits (Baker 2018, 17).

higher rate: 85 percent of women with advanced degrees in their early 40s have children, in contrast to 65 percent twenty years ago (Miller 2019).

Though academia offers parents a greater degree of schedule flexibility, making it easier to shift work times to accommodate things like medical appointments, it still demands long hours, especially in tenure-track positions and in positions with large teaching loads. This is equally true of graduate school, and if my own graduate experience is indicative, then attempts by mothers to become part-time PhD students usually end in dropping out entirely—the leaky pipeline. One reason that women are moving to contingent work in academia at higher rates than men, then, is that they are responding to the inability of two people to work the hours expected of them if they also have children (Baker 2018, 14).¹⁰

In the larger picture, then, the future of both men and women in the Society of Biblical Literature is bound up in the increasing trend toward greater use of contingent faculty over the last decades, from a 45/55 split in 1975 to the 70/30 one of today (American Association of University Professors 2017).¹¹ It is a given that there are not enough full-time, tenure-track jobs for the PhDs that are out there, and the assumption is that these jobs are still the ideal: they provide the most job security, resources, and benefits to academics. So what can and should the Society of Biblical Literature do to address the needs of contingent faculty, especially as there are likely to be more and more of them over the next decades?

(1) *Add more contingent faculty to committees.* The first thing the Society can do is put more contingent and independent scholars on committees. As an organization, the Society has two branches: the executive, housed in the offices in Atlanta and headed by the executive director; and the membership, who people the various committees that keep the organization running and who populate the annual meeting every year. Currently, 2,015 Society members are working as full-time (not retired) faculty, of a total active membership of 8,324. That means about 24 percent of members are full-time faculty in higher education. Contingent faculty number 1,713,

10. The overall shortage of jobs for people graduating with PhDs is, of course, also a major factor. And some families with two academics may also face a “two-body” problem, in which only one of them is able to secure full-time faculty work.

11. Though the numbers in biblical studies look more like the 1975 national numbers, we don’t have a point of comparison with how things looked in biblical studies in 1975, and so we can’t say what the change may have been. There is no reason to think that biblical studies has somehow been the exception to this trend, though.

or 20.6 percent of all members. Yet of the sixteen committees and boards of the Society, including Council, five have no contingent-faculty members at all, including Council and, surprisingly given that contingency is a women's issue, the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession.¹² Of the 110 members of these committees, only fourteen (including me) are contingent; the rest are all full-time faculty. Likewise, contingent faculty are vastly underrepresented on the Society's editorial boards.¹³ The American Association of University Professors (n.d.) notes that "shared governance responsibilities should be shared among all faculty, including those appointed to part-time positions," and the same should be expected of professional academic organizations. The Society should also create a committee on contingent faculty (or task an existing committee) to study the issue and create concrete proposals for how the organization can support contingent workers.¹⁴ Though the Society should work to encourage institutions to continue tenure lines and to create new ones, they should also work to support and destigmatize contingent work, and these would be excellent first steps in doing that.

(2) *Educate members on the pipeline and job numbers.* At the same time, the Society should work to gather more granular statistics for both the graduate pipeline and faculty positions, to determine who is getting hired and what various programs and departments look like. The Soci-

12. This information is based on the list of names provided at <https://www.sbl-site.org/aboutus/committees.aspx>, excluding the Student Advisory Board. I gathered employment-status data using Google searches. I took anyone with the title associate professor or professor (or the European equivalents) to be full-time faculty; assistant professors were harder to determine, though usually these are accompanied by qualifiers such as *visiting* or *adjunct* when they are contingent. Thus, although it is possible that the numbers are off by a few, there is still a notable imbalance. This is most surprising for the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (and the committee's student member is no longer a student). It should also be noted that many of these full-time tenure-track faculty do have experience as contingent faculty, even if they are currently full-time tenure-track faculty.

13. Of the 108 book series editors, I only looked up thirty-six before giving up; only five of them were not full-time faculty. Of the forty-eight members of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* editorial board, one is a postdoc and the others are full-time tenure-track faculty.

14. A number of professional organizations, including the Association for Jewish Studies and the American Academy of Religion, have created similar committees or have statements of policy on contingent faculty. See Association for Jewish Studies 2019 and American Academy of Religion 2015.

ety provides an annual report of statistics compiled from membership data, but they should break down the employment statistics they collect to include additional factors, such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, and any other factors where job candidates regularly face discrimination (Baker 2018, 102). The membership data already includes much of this information, and additional data fields could be created where it does not. Separate member surveys could also be sent out if the member data is insufficient. When the membership reports are published, the accompanying email to members should emphasize those areas where improvement is needed. The Society could also sponsor sessions at the Annual Meeting on diversity in the field, pipeline issues, and job statistics. There's a leaky pipeline both in graduate school and in employment, but the field at large can't do much about the problem if it doesn't fully understand it. Society members are also the people doing the hiring, and they can't change what they don't know is a problem.

(3) *Provide more travel funding for the Annual Meeting.* Likewise, more money is needed for women and scholars from underrepresented groups, both students and people with doctorates. This is related to issues of sexism, discrimination, lack of equity, and inclusion/exclusion, which are problems both during graduate school and after. Attending the Annual Meeting is vital for job candidates, since it's where the majority of preliminary interviews for full-time tenure-track jobs take place, and it's a massive social and intellectual event, where scholars make and maintain the connections that are vital to success. Students, contingent faculty, and independent scholars are generally donating their time to professional organizations like the Society of Biblical Literature at a higher cost to themselves than are full-time faculty, who often have access to research and travel funds for attending conferences and whose salaries (which continue over the summer months) are intended to cover at least some amount of service to the guild. The financial burden of participation, not to mention volunteerism, is thus much higher for scholars off the tenure track. More white men attend the Annual Meeting because they have more money and privilege and are better able to get there. This is an equity issue, in addition to a diversity one. The Society should lead by working to provide more travel funding for the Annual Meeting for attendees who lack institutional financial support, by offering registration rates on a sliding scale as they do for membership, and by making childcare at the Annual Meeting more readily available and affordable. Raising money is always a difficult matter, but as the Society grows its endowment it has more abil-

ity to create these kinds of solutions, which will be key in increasing not only general attendance but also committee service for underrepresented groups, as committee work often requires a multiyear commitment to attend the meeting.

(4) *Work on ways to provide research-database access and institutional affiliation.* The Society can help address two of the main reasons scholars take on (often exploitative) contingent work: institutional affiliation and the library access that generally comes along with it. Contingent workers may find themselves without library access during breaks in teaching jobs, at the very point when they have a little time to do research. As an institution, the Society has already worked with JSTOR to provide members database access. They should do the same with ATLA, either providing ATLA access through Society membership or working with ATLA to expand its network of institutions offering alumni access (the current list of institutions in the ATLA Alum program is mostly theological schools and seminaries and is clearly geared toward clergy researching sermons rather than scholars researching academic articles). The Society should also work to get institutions to provide their graduates affiliation for a few years after graduation, so they have something to put on that line of their name badges at the Annual Meeting and so that they have letterhead to use for their job applications. A lack of recognized letterhead is a significant issue in terms of drawing attention to a job application—search committees faced with hundreds of applications will use any number of factors, consciously or unconsciously, to start to winnow the pile.¹⁵ The Society could also try to create a network of institutions that will provide affiliation for local scholars, and they should encourage hiring institutions to be mindful of biases against people who have not been on traditional career trajectories.¹⁶

(5) *Support unionizing contingent faculty.* Contingent workers often end up overworked and overextended. This is part and parcel of the increased emphasis on “greedy jobs” and the lengthening of the average work week (Miller 2019). But contingent faculty should have the same protections and privileges that tenured faculty do, as they are doing much of the same work (Baker 2018, 98). When contingent faculty unionize, they

15. In addition to confirmation of this practice that I have received from colleagues, see also Sample 2012; Kelsey 2013.

16. This latter is a policy in place at Barnard College, as was related to me by Elizabeth Castelli, personal correspondence, 26 April 2019.

are able to negotiate better salaries, working conditions, and job security. Since it can't transform the economy, the Society should work to support faculty unionization and labor-reform efforts, in addition to advocating for the continuation of existing tenure lines and the creation of new ones.

(6) *Increase enforcement of harassment and discrimination policies.* Finally, the Society should continue its work to prevent harassment and discrimination, which affect the pipelines. The more male-dominated a field is, the more prone to harassment it is (Baker 2018, 29), and as we have seen, the Society is significantly male dominated. The Society already has a robust policy and procedures for preventing harassment and discrimination, but it could do more to let members know the specific actions it has taken to enforce these policies (omitting names, of course). Many members have the sense that nothing will come of their complaints, since Title IX complaints at colleges and universities so often go nowhere. A little information on this matter, especially about the enforcement options and requirements available to the Society because it is not a Title IX institution, would go a long way toward encouraging more survivors to come forward and effect change. Many professional organizations are also conducting climate surveys (Elsesser 2018; Sapiro and Campbell 2018), intended to gather data and educate members about how pervasive a problem harassment and discrimination are. Educating members about the problem is a necessary first step in addressing the problem, and the Society should get data on harassment from members as well.

Some of these suggestions would no doubt be more challenging for the Society to implement than others. And many of them are ideas that Society members could take back to their own institutions, as well. It has become axiomatic say that the faculty-hiring system in higher education is broken. But that is not to see the full picture. The tenure-track system still exists and works the same way it always has. The problem is that it works for increasingly fewer people, and a separate system exists alongside it for everyone else. Universities are shifting increasingly toward this second system, which is exploitative and unsustainable, and faculty in the first system should not for a minute believe that the existence of the second system does not threaten the existence of their own.

Just under a quarter of the Society's members are full-time tenure or tenure-track faculty; imagining that the field exists only because of and for such faculty is to ignore the evidence and to harm the many members who will never have those jobs but who nonetheless contribute in remarkable ways to the quality of biblical studies. Solidarity among faculty of all types

is key, and that solidarity needs to lead to action. Kelly Baker, a scholar of American religion and a member of the American Academy of Religion, notes, “The problem of contingency is a problem for all of academia, not just those who happen to work off the tenure track” (Baker 2018, 91). The evidence suggests that contingency is only going to increase over the coming decades. It is a problem that is not going away. It is in the interest of all Society of Biblical Literature faculty and members to make sure the organization is addressing the needs of its most vulnerable and underrepresented members.

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