

Religious Education Congress 2017
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Reading the Scriptures
with the Mind, Eyes, and Heart of a Woman
Session 4-17

FEMINISM: A perspective and a movement that springs from a recognition of inequities toward women, and advocates for changes in structures that prevent full human flourishing.

ONGOING CONCERNS:

- Inequities regarding:
 - Poverty / Wealth
 - Employment; Wages
 - Uncompensated Labor
 - Education
 - Government
 - Business
 - Healthcare
 - Violence Toward Women
 - Church Ministries

Bible can be a help or a hindrance – not neutral

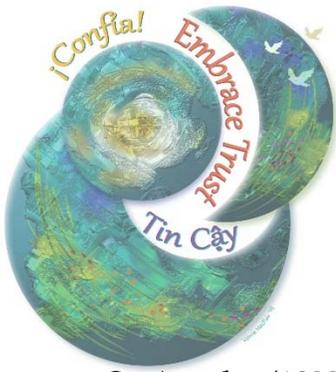
FEMINIST BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Forerunners:

- Helie, Beruriah (second century)
- Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)
- Julian of Norwich (1342 - ca. 1416)
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) - *The Woman's Bible* (1895 and 1898)
- Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways* (Orbis Books, 2001)

Method:

- Women's realities & experience as a starting point
- Analysis of the historical context in which the Bible was written: who wrote the text, for whom, in what circumstances, and with what purpose.
- Attention to the world in front of the text, how the text is heard and appropriated.
- Re-imagining, Recovering forgotten & overlooked traditions
- Analyze the whole text, not just those in which female characters appear
- Expose texts of terror, insisting: "Never again!"
- Action for Transformative Change



Passion & Resurrection: From Atoning for Sins to Birthing Hope

“He died to save us from our sins” (1 Cor 15:3; see also Rom 3:25)

Gospels & Paul: Differing accounts, images of Jesus, theological interpretations

St. Anselm (1033-1109): Human sin so great that only the death of God’s Son could make satisfaction/atonement

Suffering Just One

- Pss 22, 31; Wisdom 2:12-20; 3:1-9; Servant of Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Mark 14:61; 15:4-5
- “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34)

All language about the paschal mystery is **metaphorical, symbolic, figurative**.

Problematic Aspects:

- Glorifying abuse & suffering
- Subverting protests & struggles against human suffering & violence
- Idealizing sacrificial love, submission, surrender
- Literalizing metaphors
- Losing sight of God’s LOVE as central
- Separating Christ’s death from Incarnation and Resurrection

Johannine Metaphors: Self-Surrender to Love

- uplifting of the bronze serpent (3:15-16)
- the giving of Jesus’ flesh for the life of the world (6:51)
- the outpouring of water at Tabernacles (7:38-39)
- the seed that must die before it can bring forth fruit (12:24).
- good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (10:17-18);
- friend who lays down his life for a friend (15:13)
- footwashing (13:1-20)
- birthing new life

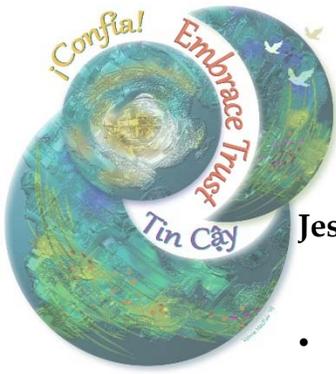
Friend who lays down his life for his friends out of love

- 10:11-18 Jesus freely lays down his life; no one takes it from him
- 15:13-17 no greater love; I call you friends
- John 11-12: Jesus’ love for Lazarus, Martha, and Mary (11:3, 5, 36)

John 13:1-20

13:1 “Having loved (*agapēsas*) his own who were in the world, he loved (*ēgapēsen*) them to the end (*telos*)” → 19:30 (*tetelestai*)

- Beyond Reciprocity: Includes Peter & Judas
- Missionary Dimension



“Very truly, I tell you, **servants** are not greater than their master, nor are messengers (*apostoloi*) greater than the one who sent them.” (13:16)

Jesus’ Mission:

To befriend humanity so as to draw all persons to himself and unite them with God (12:32; 17:21)

- Life in abundance 10:10
- Alleviate suffering: healing, forgiveness, confrontation of injustice
- Forming communities of friends who lay down their lives for one another out of love

Birth of New Life

19:34 blood & water from the side of Jesus

2:1-12 Cana

Prologue: birthing of God’s children through faith in the *Logos*

All things **came into being** (*ginomai*) through him (vv. 3-4)

To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were **born** (*egennēthēsan*) not of blood or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God” (1:12-13)

3:3,5 “No one can see the kingdom of God without being born again/from above” (3:3); “no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit” (3:5).

4:14 “those who drink of the water I give them will never be thirsty. . . The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life”

7:38 “rivers of living water will flow from the womb (*koilia*)” of Jesus / the believer

16:21-22 “When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come.

[cf. 2:4;13:1]. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”

John 19:40 – wrapping // swaddling – Luke 2:7

John 20:22 // Gen 2:7; Ezek 37:5 “I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live.”

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-211): “O amazing birth!”

Ambrose (bishop of Milan – d. 397) - “Christ is the Virgin who bore us”

Julian of Norwich: “Jesus our savior is our true Mother in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom – we shall come.”

Meister Eckhart (1260-1327): “God lies on a birthing couch, giving birth all day long.”

Symbol of Birth - Cross as symbol of birth, change, transformation (Mary Grey)

Birth: speaks of love that is Mutual and Self-Replicating; Suffering is not deserved or desirable, but gives value to travail as part of a process of bringing forth new life.

For Further Reading: Barbara E. Reid, *Taking up the Cross. New Testament Interpretations through Latina and Feminist Eyes.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.