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The Human Point of View

by Leslie Zeigler*

"For the love of Christ controls us," Paul tells the little band of Christians in Corinth, "because we are convinced that one has died for all . . . And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creature . . ." (2 Cor. 5:14-17, RSV).

Paul is here expressing the crucial element of the Christian faith -- the message of the cross. God himself, in Christ, suffered and died for us on the cross, and through this event, including Christ's resurrection, we are new creatures. The cross provides the key to our understanding of the Christian faith, and this key requires recognition that it is the love of Christ which now controls us, not our own human point of view. The message of the cross, as Paul repeatedly emphasizes, is, from the human point of view, a scandal -- a scandal which radically challenges, actually reverses, our human expectations and values, thereby effecting the new creation of which he speaks.

**The cross,
a scandal from the human point of view,
is the key to our understanding
of Christian faith**

But Paul's words were not welcome to those Corinthians who first heard them. They preferred to look at themselves from a human point of view. They were enormously excited about some traveling preachers who had recently come among them, proclaiming various forms of meditation or spiritual exercises, or training procedures, which, if put into practice, were guaranteed to make life more meaningful, to "raise their consciousness" (to use a present-day expression), to produce a realization of their true human potential. The message of these preachers was not only reasonable, it seemed to be much more practical than the message they heard from Paul. Paul talked about forgiveness, or something called grace, and it seemed to be the forgiveness of someone who had been so foolish as to get himself executed. In contrast, these preachers called upon the Corinthians to be real human beings, and they offered them help in that endeavor, help in actualizing their full humanity.

And Paul's words are no more welcome to many in the church today than they were to the Corinthians. We not only have our full share of wandering preachers offering help in "becoming ourselves," but we have an army of experts equipped with the results of some nineteen centuries of development of, and appreciation for, the human point of view. Not only our university halls, but our seminary classrooms, our denominational headquarters, our speakers' platforms at both regional and local church conferences and meetings, even many of our pulpits -- all are home to many who loudly and energetically proclaim that, if we are to live fully and properly, it is from the human point of view that we *must* regard both Christ and ourselves.

This human point of view reaches its inevitable conclusion, of course, in the rejection of the message of the cross. From

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the human point of view the cross is, obviously, a cruel, inhumane execution. To make such an event the basis of the doctrine of the atonement -- to hold, in whatever fashion, that in this event the Father allowed, much less offered, the death of his Son for the sake of the world, can only be the epitome of child abuse. And any group which worships such a Father, equally obviously, cannot avoid assuming a major responsibility for the increase in child abuse, as well as other forms of violence and oppression, which our society is experiencing today. This critique of the cross, and rejection of the doctrine of the atonement, along with other similarly decidedly unorthodox teachings as well, which have become common currency in many of our seminaries for some years,¹ came to the attention of a startled public as a result of the wide-spread publicity generated by the "Re-Imagining Conference" held in Minneapolis in November, 1993.

For the rest of this essay I wish to turn our attention to the path which leads inevitably to this conclusion -- a path which is made smooth by presuppositions belonging to the human point of view, and which is composed of a number of teachings equally as antithetical to traditional Christianity as the interpretation of the cross mentioned above. Hopefully, some understanding of this path being trod will help us appreciate the seriousness of the warning given by Paul -- It is the love of Christ which controls us, not we ourselves.

But, from the human point of view, our human experience becomes our norm

The basic element involved in the human point of view is that our human experience becomes our norm. Theologically speaking, theology becomes anthropology. We will look briefly at how this approach contrasts with traditional Christian theology in two areas -- the doctrine of God and the interpretation of Scripture. With respect to the interpretation of Scripture, it is the feminists with whom we will be concerned, as they are the most avid practitioners of the human point of view.

"Gods" Fashioned From the Human Point of View

First, we need to consider a very important statement made by John Calvin, a statement which has been repeated by generations of theologians since his time. He wrote (*Institutes*, 1:13:2) that the word "God" is merely an empty term, flapping around in our brains, with no relation to reality, unless and until we attain some knowledge of God as he has made himself known, as he has imaged and designated himself. The term "God" is simply a general, abstract, empty term until it is given some definite referent -- until we know *which* god we are talking about.

For the Christian, the Scriptures, the ancient creeds, and the historical Christian faith have been very clear that God has made himself known in his Son, Jesus Christ, and has designated himself through that event as the Triune One -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Christian answer to the

question, "Who is God?" is simply, "The Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ." And the Christian answer to the question, "How do we know this God?" is simply, "Through the Scriptures."

But this God who tells Moses "I am Who I am," who enters into contingent relationships with human beings at particular times and in particular places, who approves of certain actions and not of others, has always been, to say the least, hard to live with. Human beings have always preferred the human point of view -- have always preferred gods for whom they can write the job descriptions themselves.

Scripture refers to these preferred gods as idols, and the author of Isaiah 44:9-20 gives us as clear a description as has ever been written of the idol maker and his idol. The craftsman cuts down a good, healthy tree, uses part of it for a fire to warm himself and to cook his dinner. Then from part of it he makes a graven image -- the figure of a man, like himself, with the beauty of a man -- to which he falls down and worships, praying, "Deliver me, for thou art my god!"

It's only at this point that Isaiah delivers his punch line, a punch line which is all too often overlooked. He tells us of the awesome power of the idol. That piece of wood, which the craftsman himself has formed, has deceived him, has led him astray to the point that he no longer recognizes his own creation. He has been blinded -- blinded by his own creativity -- so that he no longer recognizes that he is worshipping a delusion. He is unable to ask himself, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Other Old Testament passages speak eloquently of the idols as being useless, unable to do anything, unable to support their people, instead, having to be carried around and being a burden to them. But Isaiah puts his finger on a far more dangerous characteristic -- they have the power to deceive and delude their makers.

Such gods have the power to deceive and delude their makers

The work of those attempting to craft a god of their own making, the god *we* want, and for whom *we* can provide the job description, is rampant within the church today. The foundation upon which this work is based is a full-fledged human point of view -- namely, that not just what Isaiah called idols are made in the carpenter shop, but *all* gods, including the Christian God, have their origin in somebody's carpenter shop.

As one of the leading exponents of this human point of view, Gordon Kaufman, professor at Harvard University, has expressed it, we need to recognize that Scripture, like all texts, is a culturally bound product of humanly created concepts.² For Kaufman, Scripture does *not* refer to a Reality with Whom we must deal and Who deals with us -- One with Whom we must come to terms. Instead, for him

and others who accept the human point of view, the central concepts of Scripture, the concepts of God and of Christ, came out of an ancient carpenter shop. While they may have served a useful function at one time, we need to recognize that they are now badly disintegrated. They are actually misleading and dangerous, destructive to human well-being today. So the task of today's theologian is to get back to the carpenter shop and work on producing new images, new symbols that will serve a useful function for our time.

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That task has been undertaken with a vengeance. The theological landscape is covered with carpenter shops busily concocting "God" -- busily constructing gods who support and embody our "concern for life" or our disposition for "creative and loving works." The empty concept flopping around in our heads, to which Calvin called our attention, is being replaced by other empty concepts of our own making. We have ignored Isaiah's warning, and are being deluded by the work of our own hands into believing that we can accomplish our own salvation. The human point of view controls us. We do not recognize that the "God" we now expect to save us by promoting our well-being is merely an extrapolation of ourselves. As one author has put it, of course "our self-constructed 'God' loves us. The poor thing could hardly do otherwise."³

This human point of view is being promoted with exceptional vigor in those shops belonging to that guild known as "feminists."⁴ What Paul referred to as the "*human* point of view" has been modified to the "*women's* point of view." This modification is given expression in the pronouncement that the material being fashioned is of a different composition, something called "women's experience," and that a different operations manual has been issued -- one entitled "the feminist perspective," and carrying the subtitle "the promotion of full humanity for women."

Regardless of the specific approach taken in different feminist shops, and these approaches vary in detail, the key, or norm, both for the "God" to be constructed, and for understanding Scripture, is "women's experience." Obviously, this term is hardly definitive, as women's experience is no more uniform than that of the other instance of human existence, men. Hence, the qualification of the term expressed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is generally adopted -- "the experience of women struggling for liberation from patriarchal oppression."⁵

Within this program "patriarchy" is the expression for ultimate evil. It encapsulates all forms of racism, classism, and, above all, sexism. And in all these forms of oppression it is the men who dominate the women. Patriarchy

permeates all of our social, political, cultural, and economic structures. All of the evils of these structures can ultimately be laid at its door. And for the feminist theologian, the chief culprit is the Christian faith, with its Bible, its tradition, and its church structures saturated with patriarchy.

The task therefore for the feminist, is one of reconstructing the Christian faith, eliminating the oppressive patriarchy and substituting a product which "promotes the full humanity of women." The question whether this new product remains within the Christian tradition is irrelevant, as that tradition is already seriously flawed. It is only necessary to make these flaws more clearly apparent, and the new product may be promoted as an improved, more readily acceptable, or "re-imagined" form of Christianity, as exemplified most blatantly by the Re-Imagining Conference mentioned above. But, as also indicated above, this new product has been widely promoted for some time in our academic halls and at the scholarly and church meetings and conferences held throughout the country. Here we want to look briefly at the specifically feminist form of this promotion.

Biblical Interpretation from a Human Point of View

The major obstacle to be overcome is, of course, the Bible, and the procedure to be followed is governed by the official manual, the "feminist perspective." This manual is designed on the assumption that the Bible is a primary source of oppressive experience for women, rather than of liberation. It is regarded as essentially and thoroughly pervaded by patriarchy. It was written by men living in a patriarchal society, has been interpreted throughout the centuries solely by men, and has been used in the church to subordinate women to men. Moreover, its influence is regarded as the major reason for the oppressive patriarchal structures and attitudes within modern Western society.

This understanding leads the feminists to the obvious conclusion that what needs to be done, if possible, is to find something in the Bible, or some way of interpreting it, so that, despite its patriarchalism, it may serve the cause of liberation from that patriarchalism. Various approaches toward accomplishing this goal, are, of course, expressions of the human point of view, making use of women's experience as the norm for determining what is acceptable in Scripture and what is not. As Rosemary Ruether has expressed it, "Whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed *not* to reflect the divine or authentic relation to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer."⁶ In this vein, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza proposes a feminist perspective model of biblical interpretation which serves to identify sexist and patriarchal texts, and a "feminist hermeneutics of proclamation" which "must insist" that all texts thus identified "should *not* be retained in the lectionary and be proclaimed in Christian worship or catechesis."⁷

Obviously, we are being handed not only a new canon, but also specific directions regarding how it should be read. And this new canon is *not* a new authoritative guide for Christian faith, but a *tool* for promoting the feminist agenda

-- for promoting the "full humanity of women." Some feminists have found even this tool essentially detrimental for their purpose, and have openly abandoned Christianity. Many others have sought to produce a kind of theological potpourri from what they hold to be aspects of the Christian faith plus other traditions, particularly Asian, the folktales of Native American tribes, African tribes, and even Haitian voodoo. This brand of "spirituality" is being promoted more and more in the literature of the academic theological world,⁸ and was on public display, center stage, at the Re-Imagining Conference.

But it is to the work of those who attempt to make use of this tool in such a way that it may serve their purpose of helping to produce a reconstructed Christian faith, to which we wish to turn. We will look at three examples of biblical interpretation from scholars who enjoy reputations of being among the leaders in academia -- Phyllis Trible, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Sandra M. Schneiders.

Phyllis Trible's Interpretation of Genesis 16, 21

Trible's book, *Texts of Terror*,⁹ is commonly taken as a superlative illustration of primarily what she intended it to portray, biblical "tales of terror with women as victims" (p. 1). By these tales she intends to bring to light the long neglected data that shows "the inferiority, subordination, and abuse of the female in ancient Israel . . ." (p. 2). The story of Hagar (Gen. 16:1-16, 21:9-21) is presented as that of the first woman in the Old Testament to experience "the desolation of rejection" -- rejection, as Trible sees it, at the hands of not only Abraham and Sarah, but of God as well.

Before considering Trible's interpretation, let us look briefly at the story of Hagar as it is traditionally understood. As the account is presented in Genesis, Abraham had just recently immigrated into Canaan, and the covenant with him, the promise that from him will come a great nation (Gen. 12:2-3), is the background against which the various events occur. This promise, including the promise of the land, is repeated a number of times (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:4-5, 18-21; 17:5-8; 18:19), and it is quite clear throughout (specifically stated in Gen. 17:16 and 19), that Sarah, Abraham's wife, is to be the mother of the nations. The central theme in the events recounted from Gen. 12 through 21 is that repeated threats to the fulfillment of this promise resulting from human actions will not ultimately prevail. It is God who is in charge of history, not the human actors.

Hagar's story is presented in two episodes, one before the birth of Isaac (Gen 16:1-16), and one after (Gen. 21:9-21). The background of the first episode is a seemingly devastating threat to the covenant promise -- the fact that Sarah is barren. Sarah takes matters into her own hands and gives her maid, Hagar the Egyptian, to Abraham, in the hope that she might obtain children by Hagar -- an approved legal custom of the time (see Gen 30:1-13). But Hagar, "when she saw that she had conceived, . . . looked with contempt upon her mistress." And Sarah, obviously not pleased, "dealt harshly" with Hagar, who then fled into the wilderness. There she was met by "an angel of the Lord" who sent her back to her mistress, "to submit to her" -- also apparently in

accordance with the legal custom of the times.¹⁰ But the angel also promised Hagar that she would bear a son, and he would have descendants so greatly multiplied that "they cannot be numbered."

The second episode (Gen. 21:9-21) takes place after the miraculous birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah in their extreme old age. It should be noted that Abraham, in response to the incredible promise of a son when he was one hundred years old and Sarah ninety, pleaded with God to give consideration to Ishmael, his son by Hagar. The answer was "No," accompanied by the repeated promise that Sarah would bear a son, who shall be called Isaac, and "I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him." As for Ishmael, he will not be forgotten, "I will bless him . . . , and will make him a great nation," but the covenant is to be established with Isaac (Gen. 17:17-21).

Sometime after the birth of Isaac, however, Sarah, watching him and Ishmael playing together, became concerned about the possible threat Ishmael presented to the inheritance of Isaac, and asked Abraham to "cast out the slave woman and her son." Abraham is reluctant to do so, but God speaks to him telling him to do as Sarah asks, "for through Isaac shall your descendants be named, and I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also" (Gen. 21:8-13). So Hagar is sent into the wilderness, where she and Ishmael are saved from death by a messenger from God who repeats to Hagar the promise of a great nation to be made through her son.

Trible's approach to the text focuses entirely upon Hagar's "victimization" as a woman

Although Trible is, of course, well aware of the understanding of this story as outlined above--as events taking place against the background of the fulfillment of the covenant promise to Abraham by the sovereign Lord of history--this understanding, central to the traditional Christian faith, is without significance for her except in the negative sense of contributing to the affliction of Hagar. Trible's approach to the text focuses entirely upon Hagar's "victimization" as a woman. She "belongs" to Abraham and Sarah, and much is made of the supposed "belittling" of her by their way of addressing her, whether by name or not, or, not addressing her at all, but merely speaking about her -- much that is very difficult to support on the basis of the text.

The relationship between Hagar and Sarah is seen, not in terms of a tension created between them by Hagar's attitude of contempt, but in terms of Hagar having seen "a new reality that challenges the power structure" (p. 13) -- that provides "an occasion for mutuality and equality" between her and Sarah (p. 12). But Sarah remains with the old structures, opposes her maid's insight, and, with the approval of Abraham, afflicts her, whereupon Hagar flees. She is met by the angel of the Lord, who afflicts her still further -- who

brings "a divine word of terror to the abused, yet courageous woman" (p. 16), sending her back to bondage.

It is of special interest that Tribble dismisses the words of promise given Hagar by the divine messenger as ambiguous and devoid of hope, as she is returned to bondage. Further, those "divine words of terror" also "strike at the heart of the Exodus faith," as "the God who later, seeing the suffering . . . of a slave . . . people, comes down to deliver them, . . . here identifies with the oppressor and orders a servant to return not only to bondage but also to affliction" (p. 16).

The second episode (Gen. 21:9-21) is seen by Tribble as an intensification of Hagar's suffering. Now Sarah "enjoys power greater than ever because she has born a son" (p. 21), and to protect the life of her own son, asks Abraham to cast out Hagar and her son. Abraham is reluctant, not because of Hagar, but because of Ishmael, but God sides with Sarah, and Hagar is exiled. Hagar is kept in her place, "the innocent victim of use, abuse, and rejection." She is "powerless because God supports Sarah." Tribble even applies the phrases reserved biblically for the Suffering Servant, and later for Jesus, to Hagar. "The Egyptian slave woman is stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted for the transgressions of Israel. She is bruised for the iniquities of Sarah and Abraham, upon her is the chastisement which makes them whole" (p. 28).

Tribble's interpretation is in the sharpest contrast with the traditional understanding of the biblical text. It is made not only from the human point of view, but from a particular brand of the human point of view -- one that is characteristic of "the feminist perspective," and it expresses very clearly the assumptions involved and the logical conclusions from those assumptions.

The basic assumption is that abuse results from hierarchical power structures, which prevent a relationship of "mutuality and equality" between human beings. Thus the prevailing social structure, with its unequal distribution of power, is the real culprit in Hagar's story of affliction. Her oppression, in contemporary language, is the result of nationalism, classism, and, of course, predominately, sexism. To this is added the ultimate affliction -- that of a divine power which discriminates against her in favor of the male Abraham. The divine promises given to Hagar are seen, not as an expression of concern and care for Hagar, but as failing her in that they are not the equal of the covenant promise to Abraham.

The human point of view, as always, sees the historical particularity of Scripture, with its view of a special covenant with some, but not with others, as not only unreasonable, but profoundly discriminating and unjust. This particularity, like the cross, is a scandal to human reason.

Another crucial aspect of the "feminist perspective" is the application of "gender" hermeneutics to biblical interpretation. This term refers to the practice of pursuing *only one* question when attempting to understand the data presented by a particular text -- namely, what gender-related evaluations of the status of women would serve to address the problem? It is never seriously considered that some

other question might lead to an equally adequate, or even more acceptable, explanation for the same data. This practice, of course, calls seriously into question the credibility of the interpretive work of the large number of feminists who make use of it.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's interpretation of the first resurrection witnesses

A prime example is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Fiorenza makes much of the role of women as paradigms of true discipleship in contrast to the flawed, uncertain, and wavering discipleship of the men who surrounded Jesus.¹¹ She is responsible for the wide-spread claim among feminists that Mary Magdalene, and not Peter, should be given primacy of apostolic witness. Fiorenza bases her view on the account in the Johannine tradition that Mary not only discovered the empty tomb, but was the first to receive a resurrection appearance (Jn. 20:1-20). "Thus in a double sense she becomes the . . . apostle of the apostles."¹² This account is also supported by Matthew 28:1-10, but in other texts, such as the confession reported in 1 Cor. 15:3-7, it is Peter who receives the first resurrection appearance.

For the interpreter then, the question becomes, why the difference? Fiorenza's answer is simply that we have a deliberate downplaying of the role of women, an adapting on the part of the primary Christian community to the patriarchal structures of the society around them.

Fiorenza sees a deliberate downplaying of the role of women, an adapting...to the patriarchal structures of the society

Another possible answer, and one that does far more justice to the basic New Testament theology of the resurrection, is offered by Anthony C. Thiselton.¹³ He refers to a treatise written by Walter Künneth¹⁴ in 1965, before the rise of feminist theology, and hence in no way offered as a response to feminist claims. Künneth begins with the understanding that the core of New Testament resurrection theology is the continuity of identity, through change and transformation, between the crucified Jesus and the risen, exalted, Christ. The resurrection appearances function, first of all, to establish the identity between Jesus and the Risen One. Further, the Christian faith proclaims that the new humanity shares in this continuity-transformation. ". . . We are convinced that one has died for all . . . And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view . . . If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature . . ." (2 Cor. 5:14-17).

Therefore, as Thiselton states, we should not be surprised to find the earliest texts tracing precisely this same pattern of

transformation and continuity in the experience of the earliest witnesses who proclaim the resurrection. "This is precisely Künne's point. *Peter denied Jesus*, and in his failure shared in the apparent 'failure' of the cross; and through the resurrection he was re-commissioned to the apostolic task as one who shared in fellowship with the Risen One after coming to the end of himself and his own strength." This restoration of fellowship between the Risen One and the disciples, Thiselton argues, is bound up with the founding of the apostolate, and hence provides *one* possible reason why "Peter, who denied Jesus, 'the twelve' who forsook him and fled, and Paul who persecuted him, occupy a special role as witness of the resurrection and resurrection salvation in 1 Cor. 15:3-6. *Apostleship entails both weakness and suffering, and resurrection.*"¹⁵

Thiselton also points out that, although Fiorenza obviously has the material at hand to consider Künne's hypothesis, she completely ignores it. She stresses again and again that the texts all expose the repeated failures of the men, but the women remain models of unflinching discipleship. But she never even considers the possibility that for the New Testament writers, "to be a witness to the resurrection has something to do with the birth of hope out of despair." Fiorenza operates from the human point of view, and within that, is committed to finding explanations "which depend wholly on gender differences,"¹⁶ not to those which may be compatible with the traditional Christian faith.

Sandra Schneiders' interpretation of John 4:1-42

Sandra Schneiders provides us with another example of the result of the "feminist perspective" applied to biblical interpretation. For her, as for Fiorenza, the "feminist perspective" serves as a tool to expose the bias of the biblical writers, and to allow us to see the actual accomplishments of the women who have been robbed of their true stature by patriarchy.

She has presented us with a book, *The Revelatory Text*,¹⁷ in which she has provided her theory for the proper approach to the interpretation of Scripture in order for the reader not only to understand what the text says, but also to experience its liberating power. She concludes with "a feminist interpretation of John 4:1-42" (pp. 180-199), which serves to illustrate the application of her theory. A look at her work provides another excellent example of gender hermeneutics in action.

Schneiders begins by emphasizing that the starting point of feminist biblical interpretation must clearly recognize that "the Bible is a major source and legitimator of women's oppression in family, society, and church" (p. 181). ". . . The text itself is pervasively androcentric and patriarchal, frequently sexist, and even misogynist. . . . It is often enough itself the problem, demonizing women, degrading female sexuality, erasing women from the history of salvation, legitimating their oppression, and trivializing their experience" (p. 182).

The essential concern of Jn. 4:1-42, an account of the meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, as being Jesus' mission to the Samaritans is, of course,

recognized by Schneiders. Within this context, however, her gender hermeneutic approach results in some interesting conclusions, most of them simply very telling illustrations of the relationship between one's basic assumptions and the conclusions one reaches, but one which involves a significant theological misunderstanding.

It is commonly recognized that the account of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman does not merely accidentally follow the account of his meeting with Nicodemus (Jn. 3:1-15). They have in common the failure of both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman to understand Jesus' message. Nicodemus, although "a teacher of Israel," cannot understand how a man can be born again. He does not see the significance of Jesus' statement, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Jn. 3:6). The Samaritan woman, although she comes to recognize Jesus as a "prophet," and could possibly be the Messiah, does not understand his reference to "living water" as that which only he can give, in contrast to ordinary water. She sees it, apparently, as simply some form of "magical" water which, obviously, she would like to have.

Schneiders, however, elevates the Samaritan woman by drawing a sharp contrast between her and Nicodemus, much to the detriment of Nicodemus. He sneaks out to meet Jesus at night; she bravely confronts him in the broad daylight of high noon. He is dull and non-understanding; she is "a genuine theological dialogue partner gradually experiencing Jesus' self-revelation even as she reveals herself to him" (p. 191). Schneiders presents the Samaritan woman as carrying on a theological questioning of Jesus regarding Samaritan theology and worship which ends with him telling her salvation is from the Jews, but, refusing the alternative of worship on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem, as the eschatological hour is coming, actually now is, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. In Schneiders' view, no where else in the fourth gospel "is there a dialogue of such theological depth and intensity" (p. 191).

Schneiders claims that the history of interpretation of the fourth gospel is a textbook case of the "sexual demonization" of biblical women

Schneiders claims that the history of interpretation of the fourth gospel is a textbook case of the "sexual demonization" of biblical women, as demonstrated by looking at the major commentaries, for they present the Samaritan woman as having lived a life of sexual sin (p. 188). To be sure, the statement that she has had five husbands, and the man she is now living with is not her husband, presents a problem for the interpreter. Is it a statement of historical fact, or is it to be understood symbolically, as a statement regarding the pagan worship of Samaria? A check of three of the major commentaries, all of them written prior to the development of the "feminist

perspective" -- those of C. H. Dodd (1953), C. K. Barrett (1955), and Rudolf Bultmann (1964) -- revealed a struggle with this question, but certainly no demonization of the Samaritan woman. They all deal to the best of their ability with such evidence as is at hand. They recognize the probability of the statement being a symbolic reference to the pagan worship of Samaria, but they also call attention to the fact that it does not present an entirely accurate picture of Samaritan history. They acknowledge that the statement *could* refer to the actual life of the Samaritan woman, but do not find it very probable in the light of the then current marriage laws. One commentator, Rudolf Bultmann, consistent with his existential view, regards it as referring to the "unrest" of human life, which drives us from one supposed satisfaction to another, and states flatly that there is no support in the text for the view that Jesus condemns the woman as an adulteress. Demonization is to be found only if one puts it there first.

At the conclusion of her conversation with Jesus, the Samaritan woman, leaving her water jar in her hurry, went into the city and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (Jn. 4:28f.) She is convinced that Jesus is a prophet because of his "unusual" knowledge, but the question remains -- is it possible that he is the Messiah? The Samaritans ask him to stay with them, which he does for two days. Then, "They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.'" (Jn. 4:42)

Schneiders interprets this final confession of the Samaritans, taken in the light of her reading of the whole passage, as clearly identifying the Samaritan woman to be among Jesus' postresurrection disciples. According to Schneiders, when the text is purged of its anti-feminist bias, this woman is seen to be one of the *foremost* of the disciples -- the one who successfully evangelized the Samaritans, bringing them to see that Christ is the universal Savior, theirs as well as the Jews. According to Schneiders, in the fourth gospel, "This woman is the first and only person (presented) in the public life of Jesus through whose word of witness a group of people is brought to 'come and see' and 'to believe in Jesus'" (p. 193).

Schneiders is, of course, well aware of the fact that Jn 4:42 has traditionally been given a quite different interpretation. She dismisses this, however, by stating it is the work of those who "hasten to undermine this evident identification of the woman with Jesus' postresurrection disciples," and that this attempt "betrays an ignorance, if not a suppression," of the characteristic Johannine view of people being brought to Jesus by a disciple and then coming to full faith in him on the basis of Jesus' own word to them" (p. 193). The "undermining" and "suppression" is, of course, the work of male bias.

But Schneiders does not mention the very significant theological aspect of the traditional understanding -- a significance which requires that it be seriously considered as an alternative to her gender interpretation. Leaving aside the fact that the woman's witness is presented as being based on her understanding of Jesus as a "prophet" -- "He told me all I

ever did" -- and therefore is not expressive of a true faith, the essential point of Jn. 4:42 is traditionally understood to be a warning to witnesses (and to preachers!) that *their* word, or *their* faith, is *not* the content of the Christian faith. Schneiders ignores a fundamental Christian tenet. Witnesses and preachers are not to assume that their hearers are to be brought to faith in *their* word. Such a faith would be a false faith, an idolatry. Their task is to witness *to*, to point *to*, the only true object of faith, the Father as revealed in the Son. And they need to remember that faith itself is a gift of the Holy Spirit, not something which *they* can bestow.

Conclusion

Examples of the work coming out of our various carpenter shops could be multiplied almost indefinitely, all of which involve the application of the human point of view. It would seem that the most useful suggestion would be to close them -- *all* of them, and exert the energy being spent in them in examining what it really means to make use of the human point of view. This view is analogous to Isaiah's healthy holm tree. It may serve useful and beneficial purposes, or it may be used in a way that is detrimental -- a way that deludes its users and leads them astray, so that they cannot recognize it is a lie they hold in their hands.

It certainly constitutes a beneficial use to employ human reason to the fullest possible extent in an effort to understand the message of the biblical texts on their own terms -- as they understand themselves. But it is a fatal delusion to use this human reason to devise norms and standards, on *our* terms, in the light of which the biblical texts *must* be understood, and *to which* they *must* correspond if they are to be deemed worthy of our attention. We have exceeded the expectation of the serpent -- we have not become "like God," we have, in our own eyes, become the new, remodeled, improved "God," who is now worthy of *us*.

Notes

¹See, for example, Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God so Loved the World?" in Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole A. Bohn, eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), pp. 1-30.

²Gordon Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975), and *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

³Leander Keck, *The Church Confident* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 51. This small book, particularly pp. 15-67, provides an excellent summary of the current theological situation in today's "mainline" Protestantism.

⁴I am well aware that the term "feminist" carries a wide range of meanings today, and cannot state too emphatically that I am not questioning in any respect the legitimate claims of feminists regarding equal rights for women politically or economically. It is the specific theological and hermeneutical stances dealt with in this essay I am opposing.

⁵Elisabeth SchüsslerFiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. xvi.

⁶Rosemary Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 115. Emphasis mine.

⁷Fiorenza, *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁸See, for example, Susan Brooks Thistlewaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds., *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies From the Underside*

(San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), and, Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, eds., *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminine Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989).

⁹Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

¹⁰See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 187.

¹¹Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 315ff.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 332.

¹³Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), pp. 446f. Thiselton's work is one of the best available on the theory and practice of biblical interpretation, and includes an extensive evaluation of feminist hermeneutics.

¹⁴Walter Kunneth, *The Theology of the Resurrection* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1965).

¹⁵Thiselton, *Ibid.*, pp. 446f. Italics in original.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 447.

¹⁷Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

Discussion Questions:

1. Contrast the human point of view which begins with "my experience" with a biblical view which begins with God's revelation. How would each view the cross? Election? The Trinity? Theology verses anthropology?
2. Discuss Calvin's statement that the word "God" is an empty term until God makes himself known.
3. How are we prone to fashion a god and "write the god's job description?" Why are we prone to fashion a god?
4. Explain and discuss Trible's interpretation of the Genesis narrative. From a traditional interpretation, how does the Genesis text give rise to doctrine and then how is doctrine used to view the text? Give examples using the covenant and sovereignty of God.
5. Explain why Fiorenza argues that traditional interpretation fails to acknowledge Mary Magdalene as the first witness of the empty tomb. What does a traditional interpretation, centered on the cross, suggest is the reason?

Editor's Note: The Board of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry concurs with Dr. Zeigler's note 4. Biblical Christian faith calls us to affirm that both women and men are created in the image of God, are fallen, and are redeemed by Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Both women and men have a legitimate claim to equal political and legal status and educational and economic opportunity. Men and women are called equally to service in the church.

Brief Summary of Zeigler's Article

It has become common among today's so-called "mainline" theologians to regard the Christian faith from "the human point of view." From this perspective our human experience becomes our norm -- theology becomes anthropology. God is not the Sovereign Lord of history -- a Reality Who deals with us, and with Whom we must come to terms -- but a human construct, fashioned to aid and support the realization of *our* view of a truly human existence.

This perspective provides the very fertile medium which nourishes the feminist theologians. For them, human experience becomes "women's experience," and the obstacle to the realization of "the full humanity of women" is patriarchy. And, for them, the chief culprit is the Christian faith, understood as its Bible, its tradition, and its church structures being saturated with patriarchy. The first task facing the feminists, therefore, is to make clear how the assumed patriarchal bias of the Bible has degraded women, legitimized their oppression, distorted their roles, even demonized them. Then, with this understood, to obtain, if possible, a picture of their true stature and their activities.

Examples are given of biblical interpretation as carried out by three leading feminist scholars. In all three cases the presupposition of biblical bias controls their work, and, of course, their conclusions. But an examination of their interpretations makes it evident that not only is the biblical bias toward women a problematical assumption, but that in the attempt to demonstrate its existence, they have either rejected or ignored generally accepted traditional understandings of the texts involved -- understandings that are central to the traditional Christian faith itself.

Phyllis Trible has rejected the traditionally understood central theme of Gen. 11-22 -- the promise to Abraham, although seriously threatened by human action, shall not be thwarted by human actors. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has ignored the basic message of the cross and resurrection -- ". . . if any one is in Christ, he is a *new creature*." Sandra Schneiders has ignored, actually rejected, an essential tenet of Christianity -- faith is a gift *of the Holy Spirit*; it cannot be a gift *given by a witness* to that faith (or by a preacher). And both Fiorenza and Schneiders, as a result of their "gender hermeneutics," elevate the women involved in the texts at the expense of the men -- a conclusion very difficult to support on the basis of the texts themselves.

The human point of view has been improved upon so as to exceed the expectations of the serpent -- we have not become "like God," we have, in our own eyes, become the new, remodeled, improved "God," who is now worthy of *us*.

Can't we all just get along?

When truth trumps modernism, everyone--including the vanquished--wins

by Frederica Mathewes-Green*

Reprinted with Permission from *World* July 15/22, 1995 and Frederica Mathewes-Green.

SCRIPTURE REFERS TO "THE SPRING OF THE year, the time when kings go forth to war." Summer is the time when Christians go off to church conventions. For some of us, going to these gatherings is uncomfortably like going forth to war.

In some denominations, those who should be our dearest colleagues in the faith seem like bizarre strangers. Not long ago, one mainline group actually voted on whether to require clergy to abstain from sex outside marriage—and the resolution failed. Another sought to affirm women's spirituality by recovering worship of Ashtoreth, in a program for laity titled "Baking Cakes for the Queen of Heaven." A friend of mine asked his bishop, "Do you believe in the Resurrection?" and received this hesitant reply: "I have great respect for the historic traditions of the church." Much of this and you have to grip your ears to keep your head from spinning around.

It's tough enough when we are clearly divided. But sometimes the division isn't clear, and we're using the same words to mean different things; "The Cross" can signify salvation by Jesus's blood, or the psychological woundedness humans share. It's "the barrier of a common language."

The foundational assumption of modernist theology is that people are basically good: We are born good, loved and affirmed by God, but the trials of life damage us. In our pain God keeps caring for and healing us, calling us to be our true selves, with a love that is unconditional and beyond understanding. Very simply, people are good, then are hurt, then are healed.

CLASSIC CHRISTIAN BELIEVERS, however, hold that we are essentially fallen; we take to sin like ducks to water. Our unhappiness is caused less by external damage than by our interior impulse to be each a petty emperor, our selfishness spinning us into a pit of estrangement from each other and God. The depth of our sin proves the height of God's love, for only the great sacrifice of the Cross could rescue us; we accept it with humble gratitude, resolving to obey God's will though it often runs counter to our own. This "dying to self," because it conforms human will to God's will, has the side-effect of healing and self-fulfillment. In short, people are fallen, then rescued, then obedient, then healed.

But fog lies over the battlefield. For example, modernists will refer to their own emotions as authoritative factors in the dialogue, to general confusion. A theological or moral assertion is disqualified— "true for you but not for me"—if it produces in them feelings of rejection or oppression.

Call this notion "Feelings trump truth." Believers expect that God's will is seldom our natural own; it is holy and challenging, and bound to make humans uncomfortable at certain points. Emotions may be useful guides to insight, but they may also be deceptive, leading us back into selfish willfulness; we need to heed the objective authority of Scripture and the church's historic witness to the unchangeable core of the faith (what Chesterton called "giving our ancestors a vote").

Modernists project their emotional framework onto orthodox believers, presuming that we are driven by our feelings, particularly fear. They believe that we are fearful of change, fearful of unfamiliar people and practices, and fearful of the Holy Spirit doing a new thing. They think that if they treat us with loving patience, these fears will gradually ease, and we'll no longer be so rigid. Unsurprisingly, orthodox believers find this treatment condescending and frustrating. The objective events of a Friday and Sunday two thousand years ago are not projections of emotion.

NOT ONLY IS DIALOGUE trapped in a bog of vague, double-handled words; those who protest that confusion and seek clarity often get labeled "divisive." We are victims of what has been called "repressive tolerance": the ruling elite will permit us to be wrong-headed and backward, as long [as] we grant their right to be open-minded and progressive.

If you're going forth to battle during the remainder of this summer, do what you can to dispel the fog. Flush out honest disagreement in the name of actual, not feigned, progress; a useful tool is the single word "repentance," for it will disclose basic differences in the view of God and man. And don't buy the progressives' "Yeah, we're cool" strut. The modernist worldview is shallow, lonely, and impotent, warmed only by the circular movements of a petty self. It lacks what the adherents of "mere Christianity" know: the stunning passion of the Cross, that drama ranging from knowledge of our desperate lostness to our plunge into grace through submission to God's will. This is not a battle where we seek to defeat our enemies. When we pull them over the battle line, everybody wins.

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Bible Study of the Gospel of Mark

CHAPTER 5

(chapter 6 will follow in the next issue)

of THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Observe the Text to understand the author's meaning:

Read 5:1-20. Notice Jesus is in Gentile territory now. In vs. 1-5 notice how many times “tombs” and “chains” are mentioned. Where does this man live? What condition is he in? Is he strong? Harmful to himself?

In vs. 6-7 what does he do when he sees Jesus? What name does he call him? Again notice that the unclean spirits recognize Jesus. Contrast that with the disciples name for Jesus in 3:38. Yet in vs. 7 what does the man say to Jesus? Who is he blaming for his problem? Is that characteristic of unclean spirits in Mark? Notice in 2 places--vs. 10,12 the demons “entreat” Jesus and Jesus in vs. 13 gives them permission. Who has authority here?

What is the purpose of allowing the demons to go into the pigs? What happened as a result of it? What did the herdsmen do? Who came? What had been a private affair became a media event! Describe the visible changes in the demon possessed man. What was he like before and what is he like now?

What is the response of the people? Why do you think this is their response? What should have been their response? Now the people “entreat” Jesus to do what? Why? The demon possessed man also entreats Jesus, for what? What does Jesus tell him to do instead? What is the response of the people when Legion tells them about Jesus?

What do we learn from this about Jesus ministry? Jesus came to cast out unclean spirits--those that oppose the Holy Spirit. But what does that mean in terms of our lives---what did Jesus restore to Legion?

Read 5:21-43. Jesus crosses back into Jewish territory. Do you see literarily that Mark intentionally slows the story down. When we hear the synagogue official's request, we expect Jesus to hurry to his house. Instead, the story slows down as Jesus talks to the woman with the hemorrhage. As the story slows down, what happens to Jairus' daughter? Although Jairus' name is mentioned in vs. 22, after that he is referred to 4 times as "synagogue official". What is the significance of this repetition? From vs. 22-23 what do we know of Jairus' faith in Jesus?

What is the state of the household when Jesus arrives? Why does Jesus say that she is not dead but asleep? The text tells us the girl, “arose” “walked” and “ate”--what does this say about the state of her health? Jesus touches the girl--in Nu 19:11, touching a dead body makes one unclean. What does this tell us about Jesus' authority over death?

Now go back to the woman who has the hemorrhage. Was it humanly possible to heal her? How long had she tried to find healing? What was the result of her searching for human solutions? What does her faith lead her to do? According to Lev. 15:19, touching a woman with a flow of blood made a person unclean. Jesus does not let her remain anonymous, in the background. What does he do? Do you think Jesus' act increased her faith--made it personal?

What kind of understanding do the disciples have of Jesus if they are surprised that he knew she touched his cloak? Do they understand he is the Son of God?

Interpret the text:

1) Jesus heals with his word the demon-possessed who live in the tombs. He heals by his word the hopeless who have searched for healing for years. He raises the dead by his word. He calms the sea by his word. Do you see a connection with Genesis when God created by his word and now Jesus restores by his word?

2) Do you see Jesus doing greater things--he begins by healing a man with unclean spirits, later he heals “legion”. He healed Peter's mother-in-law, now he heals a woman sick 12 years and then he raises Jairus' daughter from the dead. Do you sense that the clash between the scribes and Jesus is escalating? Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law is one thing but raising the synagogue official's daughter from the dead in front of a large gathering of people is quite another thing!

3) What does this chapter say about the sovereignty of God, that is, the authority of God? even over death?

4) Does this encourage us to come to Jesus seeking the impossible?

BIBLE STUDY NOTES

(Compare these notes to your thoughts after you have looked at the passages and answered the questions yourself)

Mark 5:1-20. Calvin makes the point that unclean spirits are not human traits of avarice, greed, self-seeking but rather are spirits who oppose God's spirit and desire to destroy human beings (who are the image of God). If God is a person, a spirit, then it is conceivable that Satan and his legions are also spirits, persons. Only God is more powerful.

Jesus took an impossible situation, a destroyed life and turned it into a restored life that witnessed to him.

Mark 5:21-43. Calvin says that the power did not automatically flow out of Jesus but rather His Spirit led the woman to Jesus and then Jesus "knowingly and willingly" restored her to health.

AN IMPORTANT NEW BOOK: *Straight & Narrow? Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* by Thomas E. Schmidt. "I welcome Tom Schmidt's *Straight & Narrow?* with enormous gratitude and the deepest appreciation. It is remarkably informative on medical and behavioral questions, as well as expertly incisive on the biblical evidence. It shirks no issue and evades no counter arguments. The author goes to extreme pains to be fair to revisionist viewpoints, and the whole is set in a person-focused pastoral frame. It is in my judgment without equal as an indictment--as devastating as it is calmly and lucidity argued--of the progay case as not only unbiblical and unreasonable but also socially and medically highly irresponsible. A book that deploys accessible scholarship with prophetic power." David F. Wright, University of Edinburgh. Reprinted with permission of InterVarsity Press.

Thomas E. Schmidt, Ph.D. teaches New Testament and Greek at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA. Dr. Schmidt is a member of the Presbyterian Church(USA).

Straight & Narrow? is available from your local Christian bookstore or from InterVarsity Press by calling 1-800-843-9487.

A NEW RESOURCE: Presbyterian pastor, Pride Carson, has written a review of this year's Presbyterian Women's Horizons Bible Study: *Glimpses of Home: Biblical Images of the Realm of God* by Eugenia A. Gamble. For a copy of the review, contact PFFM at P.O. Box 10249, Blacksburg, VA 24062, or call (540) 552-5325.

Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry

*We are a group of Presbyterian women and men, clergy and laity who believe that **Theology Matters**--
what we believe has consequences for our family and our ministry*

1. We believe in the One living and true God who exists eternally in three persons -- the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We believe that "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."(1) We believe that God is our Creator, that he has revealed himself to us through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and that apart from this revelation we remain ignorant of his name, his nature, and his will.

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that asserts that the creature has the right to name and define the Creator, or to determine how God should act in any time and place.

2. We believe that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. We believe that he was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, performed miracles, suffered and died on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, is seated in glorious authority making intercession for his elect, and that he will return to judge sin and establish his eternal kingdom.

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that denies either the human or divine natures of Christ, his atoning work, or his exalted Lordship.

3. "Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death."(2)

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that asserts that there are other "lords" to whom we owe allegiance.

4. We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the inspired Word of God -- the unique, reliable, and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ and his will for our lives. We believe that the Creeds and Confessions of the church, while subordinate to Christ and the Scriptures, are nevertheless authoritative standards.

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that declares that the Bible is an ancient document inapplicable to modern life, that God continues to give new revelation apart from Scripture, or that the meaning of Scripture is at variance with the plain meaning of its words understood in their historic context. We also reject the false ideology that teaches that the plain meaning of the Creeds and Confessions, understood in their historic context, are without authority in the church.

5. We believe that from every generation and race, God has sovereignly called and redeemed a people for his own glory -- "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people."(3) We believe that Jesus Christ is alive and present with this people by the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit whose work it is to regenerate, give faith, justify, sanctify, and give assurance that we are, by grace, at the price of Christ's shed blood, the adopted sons and daughters of God.

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that teaches that human beings have the capacity within themselves, by virtue of their humanity alone, and apart from redemption, the power to become the sons and daughters of God.

6. We believe that as the people of God, we have been called and commanded to proclaim the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, to call men and women, boys and girls, to the obedience of faith, and in every generation to reclaim and reform the purity of the Church's witness.

Therefore, we reject the false ideology that denies the Church's call, in every generation, to challenge cultural distortions of the gospel and to witness to the uniqueness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and human beings.

(1) The Shorter Catechism
(2) The Theological Declaration of Barmen
(3) 1 Peter 2:9

**“What is idolatry? It is to imagine or possess something in which to put one’s trust in place of or beside the one true God who has revealed himself in his Word.”
Heidelberg Catechism, 4.095**

(PFFM's Board of Directors includes 7 Presbyterian clergy and 3 lay people--6 women and 4 men)

News from Around the World

ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER, professor at United Methodist Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL (and quoted in Dr. Zeigler's article, p.3), preached at a seminary chapel service which included "A Psalm in Search of the Goddess" taken from Miriam Winter's *WomenWisdom*. The Psalm led worshippers in asking forgiveness and blessing from pagan goddesses: Nut, Anath, Astarte, Ishtar, Inanna, Sophia, Isis, Cybele, Hera, Aphrodite, Artemis, Demeter, Persephones, Asherah and Gaia. Worshippers confessed, "we love you Gaia" and beseeched, "Anath and Astarte, forgive us, for all we have done to You."

Defending the use of the psalm in worship, Ruether said, "While I think the use of the Psalm in the May 4 liturgy was a mistake in terms of audience and communication strategy, it is, to my mind, *not* theologically objectionable." (emphasis in the original)

According to the Methodist renewal publication *Good News*, Ruether went on to explain, "Basically the Psalm [litany] recognizes that true glimpses of the divine have been found in the many *female* names for deity, that have been found in Jewish tradition, in Christianity and in the many religions of the ancient world that have named the divine as female. As we move beyond a Christian parochial exclusivism to including some recognition of world religions, we at GETS cannot continue to assume that only true insights into the divine are found in our Biblical and Christian tradition . . ."

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary President, Neal F. Fisher, however, protested the goddess litany saying, "I found it theologically objectionable and completely out of place in our chapel."

Meanwhile, faculty at Presbyterian Church (USA) Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA, recommended that Professor Ruether be invited to deliver their prestigious Sprunt Lectures in Spring, 1997.

PRESBYTERIAN RE-IMAGINING PARTICIPANT, Sylvia Thorson-Smith, announced during the Presbyterian General Assembly the formation of an independent group, *Voices of Sophia*, which she co-founded with former denominational staffer Rev. Mary Kuhns. Kuhns was Associate for Justice for Women before the reorganization in 1993. *Voices of Sophia* supporters presented their agenda in the form of *95 Illuminations* drawing a parallel to Martin Luther's 95 thesis which marked the beginning of the Reformation. The group's illuminations include, "we call the church to reclaim the long-silenced Sophia language. . . God-Sophia, Jesus-Sophia, Spirit-Sophia. . ." They announce judgment on those who disagree with their political agenda, "woe to you who fear diversity of gender and sexual orientation . . . Blessed are you who affirm the diversity of gender and sexual orientation. . ." The *95 Illuminations* conclude by invoking the goddess, "May Sophia bless and give wisdom and voice to all."

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Join us in being a voice calling the Presbyterian Church(USA) and individual Presbyterians back to Reformed Christian faith rooted in Scripture and our Confessions while also rejecting false gods and their ideologies.

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