# Feature

## Approaching the Text

*In this issue we consider several approaches to text and the insights these may give to the teaching of Religion Studies. Ed Conrad takes a phenomenological approach where the reader is actively involved in creating the text's meaning and contrasts this with historical criticism where the text is seen as containing meaning and the reader is an objective interpreter. Ed advocates this as the best approach to the Bible where both the authors and the backgrouns history are uncertain. A special case for the female reader is made by Elaine Wainwright who considers the influence of different feminist views to appraoching text. Majella Franzmann explores the idea that recurrent themes in texts enable us to build a picture of those communities who produced and/or used the texts. Eddie Crangle explores differences in cognitive style and their influence on preferred meditative styles and their associated worldviews in Eastern religions. He suggesys such analysis will enhance the understanding of text and thus contribute to the enrichment of Studies in Religion.*

## Reflections on Biblical Reflections

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I want to address the issue, "The Biblical Text: Is it a Window or a Mirror?" I think that many read the biblical text with the assumption that they can see through it to realities that lie behind it: the world of ancient Israel or the world of the early Christian community and the intentions of its authors or redactors including their theological ideas, etc. It will be my contention that the text is more like a mirror in which our own world is reflected than it is like a window into the past. To understand my point of view, my discussion needs to be located in the context of broader changes that are occurring in academic thought in general. It is becoming increasingly clear that we do not simply know as detached and objective observers of reality. Everything we know we construct. For example, botany is not some-

thing that exists out there in the world but is something we create to give order to the kinds of plants we encounter. In the same way religions do not exist in the world. When we study religions, we create them[1]. We are not detached observers. We are not magnetic intellects that attract knowledge; we create it. What we know, then, is relative to who we are and where we are (our social location).

While some terms can quickly become jargonistic, the developments I have just mentioned can be broadly understood under the rubric of post-modern thought. (The use of this term, however, is not without its problems.)[2] Feminist thought has been influential in these changes for it has become all too obvious to women that traditional knowledge has been constructed by men. Often what women have been asked to study in academic disciplines has ignored women's ways of knowing -of constructing the world in which they live. The same has occurred in third world countries where, for example, liberation theologians have argued that it is the poor and oppressed whose voices need to be heard. These voices have been a challenge to the rich and powerful who in the past have assumed the responsibility of constructing knowledge of the real world according to the ways they experience it.

All of this has consequences for the way we interpret texts we read. We do not read as detached observers but become involved in our reading, asking questions about ideas and characters we encounter, linking later parts of texts we read with earlier parts, etc. In short, when we read and interpret literature, we are actively involved in the creation of a text's meaning.

The way of reading and interpreting the Bible that has become the mainstream academic discourse during this century is called historical criticism. It is a method of inquiry that incorporates the main ideas of modern thought and is now being challenged by what I have referred to above as post-modern thought. Historical criticism works on the assumption that an interpreter can take a detached objective view of the biblical text. The text is seen as containing its meaning, like ore buried in the ground. The object of the interpreter is to mine the text for meaning, always trying to avoid becoming subjectively involved in creating meaning. This traditional historical-critical way of reading the Bible has assumed that the Bible is like a window through which we can see meaning, that the Bible is about the real world of ancient Israel or early Christianity, that we can look through it to see what was really happening.

Developments in contemporary thought are challenging this traditional historical-critical way of reading and understanding the Bible. Much historical-critical reading is coming to be understood by scholars as the interpreters' reflections in a text that is like a mirror rather than a window to the real world behind the text.

The aims of historical-critical interpretation of biblical texts were twofold: (1) to understand the intentions of the authors of the biblical text, and (2) to situate those intentions against the historical background in which the authors wrote. While this approach to the text had the advantage of freeing the text from the dogmatic theologies that made the text speak an alien theological language, it is increasingly being seen to be problematic. (Here I am speaking from my field as an Old Testament scholar, but what I say also relates to New Testament Studies.) The problems are: (1) that we have no idea who the authors of the biblical books

were, and (2) the historical background is not clear. Literary theory since the rise of the New Criticism and later with the emergence of structuralism has shown that the meaning of texts is not dependent on authorial intention. The New Criticism was a movement in English literature in the 1940s and '50s that contended that the meaning of a literary work was not to be understood "as the outpouring of the poet's soul, nor as a window in his [or her] world." Rather, the literary work was understood as an object that carries its own meaning. A literary work is something to be **looked at**; it is not something to be **looked through** for meaning.[3] Structuralism downplays the role of the author and focuses on the conventions that prevail in a culture for reading and writing literature. Here again the focus is on the text as an object of study and not realities behind the text such as the intentions of the author or historical realities. In light of these developments in literary theory (the New Criticism and Structuralism), it becomes difficult to sustain an historical-critical approach that associates meaning with authorial intention or historical realities to which the text refers. To ignore developments in literary theory is to read the text as a special text, a text unlike other literature we encounter. This is an observation made by David Gunn when he says, "The life force of modern historical criticism was a determination to deal with the biblical text in the same way as secular texts were treated, even if that should lead to the shaking of some dearly held verities. And that assumption, ironically, is at the heart of the current challenge which historical criticism faces - a challenge to both its notion of history and its notion of texts."[4]

It is becoming increasingly clear that the biblical portrayal of Israel does not fit easily into the world of ancient Palestine as it is being constructed by archaeologists. It is now obvious that Israel did not move into the land of the Canaanites in a conquest or an invasion as depicted in Joshua. Since archaeology is showing that there was no material change in culture, it is apparent that Israel grew out of the Canaanite population and did not replace it. Furthermore, there is no archaeological evidence for either David or Solomon or the large empire they were supposed to have ruled. All this suggests that the history of Palestine was probably quite different from that depicted in the Bible. The biblical narrative about Israel is better understood as a construction of a past by a later community than as a reflection of what really happened. Neither the authors nor the historical context in which the authors wrote is very clear. This requires us, then, to focus on the texts we read as literary constructions and not as transparent data that allows us to see the ancient world as though through a window. The biblical text is not so much a record of events as it is an ideological construction of the past.

While historical critics know that the Old Testament cannot be read straightforwardly as an historical account, they nevertheless take the broad picture as it is presented in the biblical narrative as reliable. The biblical portrayal of Israel is used as an historical backdrop to trace the development of Old Testament books.[5] But can we speak about a Yahwist, for example, in the days of David or Solomon when we know this as an historical period from the biblical depiction? Can we speak of the prophet Isaiah when we have no way of knowing if there ever was a prophet Isaiah in eighth century Israel? In short, the data are missing for pursuing the two main aims of historical criticism:

to look for the intentions of the authors and to understand those intentions against the historical background in which they wrote. The Bible produced by unknown authors written against a background for which little or no data exists makes approaches such as the New Criticism or Structuralism, which makes the text itself an object of study, appealing.

More recently, however, contemporary literary theory has shown us that texts are not simply independent objects carrying meaning; readers are more involved in the production of meaning than we once thought. When we read texts, and this is true of texts such as the Bible, we will inevitably see ourselves reflected in the meaning that emerges out of the texts we read. Textual meaning, then, is not fixed but is reader dependent. This raises important issues for a text such as the Bible when it is read as authoritative scripture by communities of faith. The Bible's meaning is not singular; its meaning is plural and dependent on the readers and the context out of which they read. Focus on the author and the historical context characteristic of historical criticism has been replaced by focus on the reader and the present context in which the Bible is read.

The notion of fluid textual meaning is an important insight into the way the Bible has functioned as an authoritative text in communities of faith. The interpreters of the biblical text, not the text itself, ensure singularity of meaning. A text becomes canonical and authoritative for a community when the plurality of possible meanings necessitates that an authoritative group of interpreters control meaning. At its inception the historical-critical approach to the study of the Bible freed the text from the control of communities reading the text through the lens of dogmatic theology. But since then, historical criticism itself has been domesticated by theological communities who find in its approach a way of controlling and limiting the meaning of the text.[6] In the historical-critical investigation of prophetic books, for example, this theological taming has gone hand in hand with the growing significance of the redactor. Redactional intentions are increasingly seen to be theological ones, and those theological intentions reflect the needs of the interpreter. For example, Roland Clements speaks about the redactional history of the Book of Isaiah in particular and prophetic books in general as follows:

> *To trace the process of literary growth by which the Book of Isaiah came to assume its present shape is a task which cannot yet be regarded as completed. The useful essays into tracing the redactional history of such a large and primary work have not yet achieved anything approaching a consensus regarding the relative dating of each of its component parts and sayings. Nevertheless, it must be claimed that the recognition that such a redactional history was undertaken by ancient scribes and interpreters for profound spiritual and interpretive reasons is an important factor for us to keep in mind. The prophetic word of God is essentially a divine message concerning his actions and intentions towards his people, and it should not be surprising for us to discover that it has been the continuity and connectedness of this divine purpose which provides the proper basis of unity in the four major prophetic collections.*[7]

Do we discover God's actions and intentions when we investigate the redactional history of a prophetic book? Or, do we project our own theological intentions into the text so that we see them reflected in mirror-like fashion in historical-critical investigation? I would argue - in light of the important role of the reader in the con-

struction of meaning - that God's intentions coming to expression in the redactional history of Isaiah and other prophetic books, to which Clements refers, are mirrored reflections displaying his own theological interests. Historical criticism plays a major role in the construction of meaning in which is reflected the theological biases of the interpreter's community. Historical-critical scholars have tended not to recognise their own input as readers in the construction of a text's meaning because they do not acknowledge that as readers they bring strategies of interpretation to the text, which they utilise in the construction of meaning. Historical criticism, like all interpretation, is a reader oriented enterprise. I was surprised, therefore, when I recently reread Julius Wellhausen's *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* to look at a passage in which Wellhausen - for many the father of historical criticism - reflects on himself as a reader of the Old Testament. He records his reading experience toward the beginning of the book as follows:

*It may not be out of place here to refer to personal experience. In my early student days I was attracted by the stories of Saul and David, Ahab and Elijah; the discourses of Amos and Isaiah laid strong hold on me, and I read myself well into the prophetic and historical books of the Old Testament. Thanks to such aids as were accessible to me, I even considered that I understood them tolerably, but at the same time was troubled with a bad conscience, as if I were beginning with the roof instead of the foundation; for I had no thorough acquaintance with the Law, of which I was accustomed to be told that it was the basis and postulate of the whole literature. At last I took courage and made my way through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and even through Knobel's Commentary to these books. But it was in vain that I looked for the light which was to be shed from this source on the historical and prophetical books. On the contrary, my enjoyment of the latter was marred by the Law; it did not bring them any nearer me, but intruded itself uneasily, like a ghost that makes a noise indeed, but is not visible and really effects nothing. Even where there were points of contact between it and them, differences also made themselves felt, and I found it impossible to give a candid decision in favour of the priority of the Law. Dimly I began to perceive that throughout there was between them all the difference that separates two wholly distinct worlds. Yet, so far from attaining clear conceptions, I only fell into deeper confusion, which was worse confounded by the explanations of Ewald in the second volume of his History of Israel. At last, in the course of a casual visit in Göttingen in the summer of 1867, I learned through Ritschl that Karl Heinrich Graf placed the Law later than the Prophets, and, almost without knowing his reasons for the hypothesis, I was prepared to accept it. I readily acknowledged to myself the possibility of understanding Hebrew antiquity without the book of the Torah.*[8]

It is useful to make some comments on Wellhausen's analysis of his reading experience in light of contemporary reader oriented literary theory. Wellhausen acknowledges in his examination of his own reading that he is not reading as a solitary reader. He brings to his reading, strategies for interpretation, i.e., he is a member of what Stanley Fish would refer to as a community of interpretation.[9] It is this community that helps him to identify what to look for in his reading. This community is made explicit in Wellhausen's comments. He refers to "aids accessible to me," books such as Knobel's *Commentary* and Ewald's *History of Israel*, and contact with Ritschl. Indeed, as one reads Wellhausen's account of his reading experience, it becomes apparent

that the issue of the priority of the Law was a community issue. His misgivings about the law as "foundation" when it seemed more like a "roof" to him were grounded in the community of German Lutheran tradition. It was Wellhausen's own world, not the world of ancient Israel, in which the Law was discredited. To speak of the Torah as Law and to see Law in opposition to, for example, the prophets, is to reflect his own Christian world in which a clear distinction was made between the Law and the Gospel; it shows no appreciation of the significant role played by the Torah in Judaism.[10] When Wellhausen reads he does not peer through the text into the history of Israelite religion. The biblical text does not give him a view into two separate worlds that existed in Israelite religion: the world of the Law and the world of the prophets. The biblical text can give us no such clear vision into the past.

In making these observations, I am suggesting that Wellhausen was a product of his own time just as all of us are necessarily shaped by the ideological worlds in which we live. We need perhaps to be more like Wellhausen in being candid about our feelings when we read the text. What I do want to argue is that all readings, including Wellhausen's, necessarily reflect the world of the reader. To have allowed Wellhausen's reading - a reading that is a product of Wellhausen's nineteenth century interpretive community - to have become normative for subsequent Old Testament scholarship is to deny the biblical text a plurality of meanings resulting from encounters with new readers as it moves into new contexts. To read the Pentateuch as source critics guided by nineteenth century readings is an attempt to control the text—to rob it of new life.

I have been critical of historical-criticism, whose father is Julius Wellhausen. Its practitioners, primarily those in theological seminaries or university departments of theology, have dominated academic inquiry. The appeal of historical-criticism to Christian interpreters is clear because it follows the Christian practice of looking for reality and textual meaning behind the text restricting meaning to the singular. *"And the Word became flesh and lived among us . . ."* (John 1:14). The Jewish procedure is different. Meaning is associated with the words of the text itself and the multiple meanings the text creates. *"In the days of King David innocent children could interpret the Torah in forty-nine ways positively and forty-nine ways negatively"* (Midrash Lev. Rab. 26). While Christians have attempted to restrict biblical meaning, Jewish interpreters, like many post-modernists, have celebrated the plurality of the Bible's meanings.[11] As the Bible is now being read in secular university departments of religion and increasingly in departments of literature, its new settings will produce new and diverse meanings not restricted by the former dominance that historical-criticism has played in Christian theological communities. Historical criticism has not been so much a window into the past as a mirror producing Christian reflections.

Let us read the Bible as readers who read recognising that we are seeing our own reflections in the text. The biblical text, like any text, cannot speak for itself; only readers can give it expression. Only when we read with this recognition can a text communicate from the past.

Let us celebrate the plurality of the Bible's meanings. Welcoming new readers and new ways of reading will enrich our own experience of the text. The reflec-

tions of many readers will show the prismatic character of the text. Just as a prism shows the different reflections of light so the reflections of many readers show the richness of the text.

## Endnotes

1. On this point see Jonathan Z Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1982). He says, "Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his (sic) imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy."

2. On this point see Stephen Moore's "The 'Post-Age' Stamp: Does It Stick? Biblical Studies and the Post-Modern Debate," *JAAR* 57 (1989) 543-59.

3. The quoted words and the general ideas here are from John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984) 145.

4. "New Directions in the Study of the Hebrew Narrative," *JSOT* 39 (1987) 66.

5. On this point see Philip R Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'* (JSOTSup 148; Sheffield: JSOT press, 1992), esp. pp. 16-20.

6. On this point see my article, "Changing Context: The Bible and the Study of Religion" in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays in Honor of Francis I. Andersen's Sixtieth Birthday, July 28, 1985* (ed. E W Conrad and E G Newing; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 393-402.

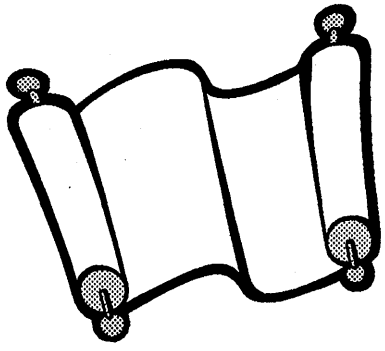
7. "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah," *Int.* 36 (1982) 129.

8. J Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh: A & C Black, 1985; repr. as *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* [New York: World Publishing, 1957]) 3-4.

9. See Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1980). For a discussion of the implications of Fish's approach for biblical study see my *Reading Isaiah* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 3-33.

10. A number of scholars in the past have pointed out the influence of German Lutheran tradition on Wellhausen's thought. See, for example, Jon D Levenson, "The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism," in *The Future of Biblical Studies* ed. R E Friedman and H G M Williamson; (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987) 28-34; and Friedemann W Golka, "German Old Testament Scholarship," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* ed. R J Coggins and J L Houlden; (London: SCM and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990) 258-260.

11. On this point see Susan A Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (SUNY Series on Modern Jewish Literature and Culture; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).



# Rereading the Grand Narrative Feminist Interpretation of the Christian Scriptures

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I take the title of this essay from Rosi Braidotti who categorises one of the functions of current feminism in terms of a rereading of the grand narrative of Western history:

*What seems to be at stake ... is the rereading of the grand narrative of rationality, and of the history of thought, in order to inscribe in it the living presence of women in their multiplicity...any labour of feminist reflection is above all creative labour. Women's thinking is always oriented towards creation, in several ways at once: whether it looks to the past, to recover cultural traditions and ways of knowing by women that have not been preserved by mainstream culture, or whether it aims at illuminating a present that women often experience as conflictual and contradictory, in feminist thought critique and invention progress together.*[1]

Within theological studies undertaken in the context of the christian tradition or within the study of Christianity from a religious studies perspective, the Christian Scriptures would be considered "the grand narrative" and during the last two decades, feminist scholars have reread that narrative from both a critical and a creative point of view. Indeed it is that two-fold perspective not as oppositional but as interactive that has characterised the feminist project within biblical interpretation as it has within most other disciplines. Given the particularity of each discipline, however, the feminist project takes on its own unique coloration within each. In this essay, the focus will be on the face of feminist interpretation that has emerged in biblical studies and more particularly in the interpretation of the Christian Scriptures.

Within the last twenty years, feminist, womanist and mujerista interpretations of the Christian Scriptures have increased significantly.[2] Hence, the terrain to be explored is quite complex. I have, therefore, chosen a map which may be consistent with the theme of Religion and Text which characterises this edition of the *Review*.[3] The paths followed will be that of Text, Reader, and Context (key aspects of contemporary biblical hermeneutics generally) as these have been laid within feminist interpretation of the Christian Scriptures. It will soon become clear, however, that these paths are not distinct but will continually cross one another within the analysis.

## Engaging the Text

One of the most commonly held assumptions of feminist biblical criticism is that the text itself has been produced in a context which is patriarchal and that it therefore encodes patriarchal structures and androcentric perspectives from that context. Decades of feminist studies involving women from different cultures, classes and religious traditions have, however, nuanced the understanding of patriarchy so that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza now defines it as a "pyramid of multiplicative oppressions" [gender, race,

class...], with the top of the social pyramid being occupied by the 'master' class. To better describe this she has coined the term 'kyriarchy.'[4] Within feminist analysis of biblical texts, therefore, attention is given to the encoding not only of gender but also of class, ethnic and religious structures, some of which were oppressive and continue to be so if reinscribed in interpretations.[5]

For christian feminists the way forward has not been significantly different from that experienced by all feminist in the face of the grand narratives of their history. Teresa de Lauretis and Rosi Braidotti recognise feminists' situatedness within patriarchy, shaped as they are by its grand narratives as well as their subject position on its edge. So too feminist biblical scholars [whether christian or post-christian] are situated within patriarchal christianity as a result of its cultural as well as religious impact and yet now stand on its edge undertaking a rereading similar to that in which other feminists are engaged. For the feminist interpreter, therefore, the approach to the text must be critical, seeking to identify and deconstruct the gender, ethnic, class and other layers of oppression encoded in the text. This is generally combined with an interpretation of the text which contributes in a variety of ways to the transformative agenda of feminism, shaping new feminist subjectivities for those for whom the Christian Scriptures still function as a resource for liberation and available to those whose culture has been shaped by those scriptures.

Within this perspective called feminist, there is a variety of approaches depending on the type of feminism within which a particular interpreter stands and its goal, attitudes to their christian tradition, and many other factors.[6] One example of these different nuances is seen in the goal of a feminist reading of the Christian Scriptures enunciated by Sandra Schneiders and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. For Schneiders it is "enhanced subjectivity" which she says belongs finally to the sphere of spirituality.[7] For Schüssler Fiorenza it is "moral deliberation and practical solidarity in the midst of diverse and often competing struggles for liberation".[8] These, in fact, are not necessarily in conflict but can be integrated into the personal, spiritual and political lives of many women and men within the christian tradition today who are appropriating the fruit of feminist biblical interpretation.

There are, however, those studies of women in the Bible or biblical world which claim an objective, value neutral approach to and for the text. I would hesitate to call such studies feminist since they reinscribe the androcentrism and patriarchy of the text without critique or transformative reconstruction and interpretation.[9]

Returning to the feminist approach, there are various positions taken toward the *canonical* or *authoritative* nature of the text within the christian tradition. For theologians Letty Russell and Rosemary Radford Ruether, a central biblical principle or norm [a "canon within the canon"] is used to critique androcentrism and patriarchy within the biblical text, the christian tradition and their contemporary context, thereby situating the authorising principle within the text. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, on the other hand, shifts the locus of authority to the community or *ekklesia*, and in particular to the community struggling against oppression in all its guises which she calls the *ekklesia* of women. Within her approach, the biblical text functions as "formative root-model"

containing within it traces of liberation and oppression as early christian readers read their "texts" and contexts.[10] For her the emphasis rests on the reading of this text within the contemporary struggle for liberation. Although many feminist biblical scholars have not articulated their position theoretically as Schüssler Fiorenza has nor have they shifted the authoritative locus so completely to the community, they are similarly engaged in a rereading of those texts as "critical praxis of liberation", for the transformation not only of feminist subjectivities but also of church and society.[11]

For feminist historians of early Christianity and formative Judaism as well as for feminist biblical scholars whose interest is the reconstruction of early Christianity, the Christian Scriptures are one *historical source* among many others both literary and non-literary.[12] They do not, however, regard the text as value-neutral historical data but rather as "perspectival discourse" produced within patriarchy and hence carrying the codes of both oppression and resistance within that culture. Ross Shepard Kraemer provides a detailed analysis of the methodological difficulties faced by feminist historians who seek to bring women's experience and attitudes to the centre of their historical project. Among other factors, she names the paucity of material written by women because of the control not only of writing but also of its transmission by men, the male perspective on women in much of the written documentation, and the difficulty of hearing any voices of resistance.[13] Drawing on the sources that women have uncovered as well as re-interpreted and using a feminist critical method, these historians have reconstructed the early centuries of the Common Era so that it accounts for women's experience within and contribution to the shaping of the societies and religious traditions involved.[14]

## Recognising The Reader

In more recent years, contemporary biblical hermeneutics has shifted its focus from the author to the reader and, influenced by current trends in literary criticism, has created an awareness among biblical scholars of the different readers who can be identified and evoked within biblical interpretation.

Beginning with the feminist *reader/critic*, it is clear that she or he shapes interpretation by the choice of exegetical method/s to be employed. There is a recognition by these scholars, however, that these methods have generally been constructed within an approach to knowledge and appropriation of meaning that presumes objectivity and value-neutrality. Feminist interpreters have, therefore, used these methods but in the context of a critical re-evaluation of them within the feminist paradigm. The most comprehensive articulation of this is contained in Volume One of *Searching the Scriptures* in the section entitled "Scrutinizing the Master's Tools: Rethinking Critical Methods" in which a number of scholars who have, in fact, employed these methods analyse their use by a wide range of feminist interpreters. The notes and recommended readings at the end of each article provide a very extensive introduction to methodological developments in feminist biblical interpretation within the past two decades.

Those using the newer literary critical methods, combined in some instances with a socio-historical approach, define the reader as *internal* ["the reader the implied author has created"], *external* ["a

historical audience that the critic constructs from information about readers/hearers at the time the text was written"] or *implied* [who "exists at the intersection of textual structures and perspectives that control any reading *and* positions outside the text from which the text must be read"].[15] The methods they employ are narrative criticism,[16] reader-response criticism[17] and rhetorical[18] or socio-rhetorical criticism[19]. Their feminist perspective, however, raises questions of gender, race and class in relation to the way each of these readers is constructed. Since, however, the implied, internal and external readers have been shaped by patriarchal ideology,[20] it may be necessary for the real reader/critic to read "against the grain" of this ideology. On the other hand, the above questions open the way to hearing the dissident voices in the text and constructing those external readers who may have been resisting readers in their context.

## Locating the Context

Within both the theory and the praxis of feminism there is a growing recognition of what Donna Haraway calls "situated knowledges."[21] The various socio-political, cultural and religious locations of feminist biblical interpreters are providing a context within which their interpretive work is undertaken and from which they are critiquing the dominant voice in the field which tends to be white Euro-American.

Renita Weems says of her text, *Just a Sister Away : A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible*,[22] that she published the book because she was "fed up with having to make do....weary of having to insert my reality into other women's writings."[23] Within Latin America, liberation theology, done from a women's perspective "not only deals concretely with daily experience, but it is the basis, the point of departure for their theological work" according to Elsa Tamez, Mexican biblical scholar. From her experience among her Hispanic sisters, she goes on to say that "theology is transformed by the incroporation of women's life experience, especially that of the poor."[24] Teresa Okure, African biblical scholar, says of African women theologians that "they freely use the term feminist but give it their own particular content" as she demonstrates in her article "Feminist Interpretations in Africa."[25] Korean, Filipino, Japanese and other Asian scholars also find that their contexts provide a unique location for feminist biblical interpretation.[26] Anne Pattel-Gray in her article in the forthcoming *Freedom and Entrapment*, critiques the interpretations of the christian tradition by those she calls "white church feminists" from the perspective of an Australian Aboriginal woman, challenging Australian scholars to a more nuanced approach to social location.[27]

The presence of Jewish feminists biblical scholars among those interpreting the Christian Scriptures and reconstructing the history of early Christianity[28] and their critique of feminist anti-Judaism within biblical interpretations has likewise challenged those feminist interpreters who stand within the christian tradition to a consciousness of the anti-Jewish bias within the text of the Christian Scriptures as well as christian interpretations of it.[29] This, however, is not just a question of context nor does it concern only feminist interpreters but demonstrates how an ethical issue arising in a contemporary context, namely anti-

Judaism, needs to be taken into account in all readings of the Christian Scriptures lest we reinscribe it in our interpretations as we do patriarchy and androcentrism.

Certainly many other factors contribute to an interpreter's social location and influence interpretation but this brief analysis will suffice in showing the way in which a recognition of context has contributed to a wealth of feminist biblical scholarship.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, let me reiterate that at this point in time, feminist interpretation of the Christian Scriptures is indeed international.[30] It is in dialogue with feminist critical theory, literary criticism and the social sciences as well as biblical hermeneutics and methodological studies as has been demonstrated. It seeks to address the academy as well as the *ekklesia*.[31] It is, indeed, a rich terrain about which much more could be said. The map of text, reader and context has, however, allowed for its partial exploration and provided, I hope, the pointers for those who wish to wander further afield.

## Endnotes

1. Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy*, translated by Elizabeth Guild (New York: Routledge, 1991), 216-217.

2. The terms 'womanist' and 'mujerista' belong to the African-American and Hispanic women who consider that the word 'feminist' has become synonymous with white Euro-American women. See Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, "Mujeristas: Who We Are and What We Are About," *JFSR* 8 (1993): 105-126 and "Defining Our Proyecto Histórico: Mujerista Strategies for Liberation," *JFSR* 9 (1993): 17-28 and Clarice J Martin, "Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament: The Quest for Holistic and Inclusive Translation and Interpretation," *JFSR* 6.2 (1990): 41-61.

3. The image of the map is drawn from Janice Capel Anderson's excellent review article "Mapping Feminist Biblical Criticism: The American Scene, 1983-1990", *Critical Review of Books in Religion* (1991): 21-44.

4. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*(Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 8, 114-118.

5. Renita J Weems, "Do You See What I See? Diversity in Interpretation," *Church and Society* (1991): 28-43, Kwok Pui-Lan, "Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretation" and Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation," in *Searching the Scriptures; A Feminist Introduction*, edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 101-116 and 117-129. Note that the references in this article are to the first volume. A second volume of commentaries on christian and jewish texts just appeared in November, 1994.

6. Some of the attempts to classify feminist biblical interpretation include Mary Ann Tolbert, "Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics", *Semeia* 28 (1983): 113-126; Joanna Dewey, "Feminist Readings, Gospel Narrative and Critical Theory," *BTB* 22 (1992): 167-173; and *But She Said*, 19-39, to name but a few. 7. Sandra M Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 167.

8. Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 132.

9. These studies include those which Carolyn Osiek called "loyalist" in her article, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, edited by Adela Yarbro Collins, SBL Biblical Scholarship in North America 10 (Chico: Scholars, 1985), 99-100. See also Ben Witherington III, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 and Francis J Moloney, *Woman First Among the Faithful: A New Tes-*

*tament Study* (Blackburn, Vic: Dove Communications, 1984).

10. Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 146-150.

11. Claudia V Camp, "Feminist Theological Hermeneutics: Canon and Christian Identity," in *Searching the Scriptures*, 154-171, provides a broader analysis of the canonical approach to the text and proposes three models of authority in feminist biblical hermeneutics: dialogical, metaphorical and that of the trickster. Kwok Pui Lan, "Racism and Ethnocentrism," articulates a position similar to that of Schüssler Fiorenza but from a different social location.

12. Bernadette Brooten, "Early Christian Women and Their Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction," in *Feminist Perspectives*, 65-91 and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

13. Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3-21.

14. See Bernadette J Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1982); Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church*(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: women in the Stories of the Apocryphal Acts* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987); and Kathleen E Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody, Ma.: Hendrickson, 1993).

15. See the excellent analysis of Literary-Critical Methods by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Janice Capel Anderson, "Literary-Critical Methods," in *Searching the Scriptures*, 241-254.

16. This is the approach which I employed in the Stage One analysis, "Inclusion within the Text," in *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel according to Matthew*. BZNW 60 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 59-153.

17. Janice Capel Anderson, "Matthew: Gender and Reading," *Semeia* 28 (1983): 3-27 and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers," *CBQ* 53 (1991): 589-604.

18. Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) whose method is rhetorical but who also leans toward the socio-historical.

19. Evelyn R Thibeaux, "'Known to be a Sinner': The Narrative Rhetoric of Luke 7:36-50," *BTB* 23 (1993): 151-160, in which she discusses the relationship between a literary critical and social scientific approach.

20. Lone Fatum, "Image of God and Glory of Man: Woman in the Pauline Congregations," in *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, Kari Elisabeth Børresen(ed.) (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991), 56-137, questions whether some feminist interpretation fails to take account of this aspect by too quickly employing a hermeneutics of suspicion.

21. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988): 575-599.

22. Published San Diego, Ca.: Lura Media, 1988.

23. Weems, "Do You See What I See?" 29.

24. Elsa Tamez, ed., *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 4. See also within that volume Tereza Cavalcanti's "The Prophetic Ministry of Women in the Hebrew Bible," 118-139.

25. Teresa Okure, "Feminist Interpretations in Africa," in *Searching the Scriptures*, 76-85, which also surveys the publications from her African context.

26. Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994); and LEE Oo Chung et al, eds., *Women of Courage: Asian Women Reading the Bible* (Seoul: SaDang Publishing House, 1992) are two recent examples.

27. See *Freedom and Entrapment*, edited by Dorothy Lee and Maryanne Confoy (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1995).

28. Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, SBEC 14 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen,1988); Adele Reinhartz, "From Narrative to History: The Resurrection of Mary and Martha," in *'Women Like This' : New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine, SBL Early Judaism and Its Literature 01 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991); and Sara Tanzer who is currently preparing a commentary on Ephesians.

29. See especially Judith Plaskow's, "Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation."

30. Mention should be made here of the work of renowned feminist scholar, Luise Schottroff, *Let the Oppressed Go Free: Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament, Gender and the Biblical Tradition*, translated by Annemarie S Kidder (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991) and *Lydias ungeduldige Schwestern: Feministische Sozialgeschichte des frühen Christentums* (Gütersloher: Chr. Kaiser, 1994) as well as that of her recent doctoral student Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Frauen in der Apostelgeschichte des Lukas: Eine feministisch-theologische Exegese* (Gftersloher: Gerd Mohn, 1992) currently being translated by Linda Moloney for Fortress. Note too the forthcoming articles by Dorothy Lee and Veronica Lawson in *Freedom and Entrapment.*

31. To the above resources could be added Miriam Therese Winter, *WomanWord/A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter: Women of the New Testament* (North Blackburn, Vic.: Collins Dove, 1990); Christine Burke, *Through a Woman's Eyes: Encounters with Jesus* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1989); and Margaret Hebblethwaite, *Six New Gospels: New Testament Women Tell Their Stories* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1994).

# Reading the Nag Hammadi Texts for the "Community of Producers/Users"

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The Nag Hammadi writings (sometimes called the Coptic Gnostic writings), which consist of a total of fifty-two tractates (twelve of which are duplicates), were discovered in late 1945 in the Nag Hammadi region in Egypt. As with the Qumran writings discovered also in the mid-20th century, these texts are of immense significance for the study of the religions of the Graeco-Roman world, in this case especially Gnosticism and its relation to a number of other traditions including Judaism, early Christian traditions, Zoroastrianism, Greek philosophy, and so on. However, the collection of texts from Nag Hammadi differs from the Qumran writings in that it is not a relatively homogeneous set of writings, but certainly originated from different communities, some with a very definite tendency toward Gnostic belief, (whether that be firmly set within a Christian belief structure or only faintly influenced by Christian themes), others in which the presence of fully-fledged Gnostic concepts and themes are debatable.

Because of the presence of so many Christian writings in the collection, we can say that the community of users (ie the community which possessed the texts

before they were deliberately hidden) must have placed itself somehow within the broad range of groups calling themselves Christian, although what kind of Christians they were is not so obvious. There has been much debate on the degree of Gnosticism present in the various texts. If there are Gnostic and non-Gnostic (or even anti-Gnostic) writings alike, how could one community have ascribed with any degree of serious commitment to so many seemingly different ideas and beliefs?

The question itself may not be particularly helpful. There may not have been such an emphasis in the community on distinguishing so clearly the demarcation lines beloved of modern western scholars, and yet on the other hand, as we shall see below, the communities of producers (ie the communities from whom the texts originated) were often at pains to distinguish themselves clearly, often with quite a degree of vehemence, from other groups who also called themselves Christians. Of course some texts may not have been used as much as others but one must assume that all the writings were at least available to some of the people in this community. If Gnosticism focuses more on an individual's spiritual experience than on that of the community as a whole, then perhaps the fact that there is such a wide range of texts in the collection simply means that the individual differences of the community were taken into account rather more than any attempt to preserve some homogeneous community orthodox position.

The writings were gathered together and buried intentionally, away from the community in whose possession they were. Why does one bury writings instead of burning them if there is some perceived danger to the community, such as an investigation into its orthodoxy or otherwise? It would seem to me that texts considered worthless or heretical by the community would be more easily disposed of in the fire. Destruction of the evidence demands less effort and less subsequent danger than a careful burial.

I have reflected on my own library as a paradigm for understanding what the collection might have meant to the community of users. My books include "friends" and "enemies", as well as others of a more neutral nature. The "enemies" are not meaningful or helpful to me in any sense except that they are necessary under the old adage, "Know thy enemies". Burning them would cause me no distress, only some inconvenience. Those of a neutral nature include reference books and the "classics" which one reads for the historical background to one's area of study or thought world. The "friends" are those books I find most meaningful, which have given me much food for thought over the years, which have provided exciting starting points for new ways of thinking, those which have touched my soul...

Which books would I bury, when under threat of some kind, and try to preserve rather than burn? I have never been in a life-threatening (or even a job-threatening) situation because of the books I have on my shelves, so it is hard to imagine the conviction needed for such a decision about preserving books. I can only assume that the community which possessed the Nag Hammadi texts considered those texts they buried to be of positive significance for themselves, either for the community as a whole or for some individuals within it.

Of course, other scenarios are possible. Perhaps some of the texts were considered to be more dangerous than others

with which they had been collected in the same codex. Rather than tear out the dangerous ones and bury them (a surely suspicious sign to anyone investigating the library contents and finding codices with pages torn out!), the whole codex was buried. Maybe the situation was entirely different to what I have envisaged. Perhaps there was a heterodox group within the community who were expelled, together with their books, and these were buried on the way, with a view to later retrieval, because there was no way of transporting them safely at the time. Whatever the scenario, we are probably right in assuming that either the community as a whole or a smaller group within it could be designated as the community of users.

In each of the texts we find clues towards identifying a certain community thought-world from which the material is influenced and towards which the text is addressed, so in this way it is possible to speak of reading the texts to gain some understanding of communities of producers. At the same time, we are able to assume certain things about the community who would collect such texts. They have obviously felt that various themes in the texts were important as guide or exhortation. I do not assume that the communities of users can be in any way mirror images of the community of producers, but if we find some themes appearing over and over, we can assume that these themes had some significance for both producers and users alike.

What I propose to do here is to produce a kind of composite picture from the whole collection of an ideal community, one that holds as significant all the main themes of the collection. Of course no such ideal community existed, and this method simplifies some of the difficulties (one has to consider frequency or infrequency of occurrence of concepts/themes as indicating relative importance, composites of themes and how single themes are given their meaning by the other themes with which they are connected, and so on), but at least it is a place to start. Thus the first activity towards identifying such a community of the texts involves looking for common self-descriptions, concepts or themes. Despite the difficulties of attempting to make a single portrait of "a community" from the texts which are so diverse, there are some common features we could outline. Although not all the themes and concepts are given equal weighting in all the writings, we can say that, in general, none of the writings deny these basic themes.

## a. Insight (*gnosis*)

Most importantly, the texts witness to a conviction that salvation is a matter of insight or recognition of one's heavenly origin and destiny, hence the term Gnostic for those who hold this belief. I shall continue to use the term "Gnostic" in a general sense to characterise the members of the community of users, not meaning of course that I believe that the community belonged to any fully-fledged Gnostic group, but rather that they held the belief in insight as salvific along with other features listed below which are characteristic of what we might call Gnosticising groups (on the way to fully-fledged Gnosticism). I would also call them Christians, as I have written above.

Such insight is revealed to, or better, awakened in the Gnostics by saviour figures like Jesus. It is an individual experience of one's self, a recognition of what the Gnostic already possesses. The Apocryphon of James tells us that Jesus'

invitation is actually not the way by which people enter the kingdom of heaven, but rather by their own fullness which is of the Spirit (2.28-33). Jesus exhorts believers to become better than himself (6.19), to hasten to be saved and if possible, to arrive even before himself (7.10-15), for thus the Father will love them (7.15-16).

In general it could be said that insight hinges on three "moments"; that is, the origin and destiny of the Gnostic, and the present reality of his/her situation. In The Book of Thomas the Contender, for example, Thomas is exhorted to examine himself and learn who he is and how he was and how he will be, since it is not fitting for the brother of the Saviour to be ignorant of himself (138.7-12). In this way he will be called "the one who knows himself" (138.15-16). The Teachings Silvanus tells us that when believers truly know themselves (ie their birth from their first father, God, and their mother Wisdom [91.14-16], their original substance, race and species, their original divine nature [90.29-31; 92.10-15]), they are able to know God, Christ, the Spirit and the heavenly powers (117.3-5).

Lack of insight or knowledge is not simply ignorance, but risk, danger, liability. The Dialogue of the Saviour 134.1-24 contains a long exposition on the consequences of a lack of knowledge which can be summed up simply - if one lacks knowledge of something, that thing will be overpowering (eg fire, wind) or that thing is worthless (eg baptism) or one's fate will be caught up irretrievably with that thing (eg perishing with the body). The final statement picks up a common theme of the Gnostics: one who does not understand how s/he came will not understand how s/he will go, and this person is at home in this world (not a stranger to it), and will be humiliated along with the world (134.19-24).

## (b) Union

### 1. Union with the Lord who is known or who is the source of knowledge.

Themes of love and friendship with the Lord are directly linked with the insight of the gnostic. Teach. Silv. exhorts believers to know who Christ is and acquire him as friend (110.14-15). In Trimorphic Protennoia., the Word is the Beloved (49.11) from whom the community receive the revelation of the Light, which is the knowledge of their true nature (their origin in the Light) (47.22-23; 49.20-23; 49.9-11).

There are a number of fairly common images which develop the theme of union with the Lord; for example, the vine/tree, branches, roots and fruit in The Interpretation of Knowledge 19.26-36, and Christ as the sun, and the believer as his beams in The Treatise on. Resurrection. 45.31-39.

### 2. Union within the group of believers

The theme of union among the group of believers occurs only rarely within the collection of texts. This is not unnatural in a group where individual practice and insight is the norm or focus of the group identity. Where the theme does occur, it seems to be more as a result of the external circumstances of the group than as a strongly held conviction springing from the belief system itself, a sign of the necessity of bringing the group together more strongly because of persecution.[1]

With so much emphasis on individual insight and the gifts that flow from it, it is hardly surprising that inevitably jealous-

ies erupt within the group of believers. The example of The Interpretation of. Knowledge will suffice here. The text presents the relationship of the Son to his smaller brothers as a pattern for the relationship between the brothers themselves (15.19-38): that he was sent for them (14.28-29), humbled himself on their account (10.27-30; 12.22-23), that he loves them (15.18), and is not jealous but regards himself as a brother and gives grace (15.17-19, 23-26). They must not be jealous of one another's spiritual gifts since by their relationship as members of the same Head, all share in each other's gifts (16.18-38; 18.28-38). That the friction within the group is of gravest concern can be shown by the way in which jealousy is ranked on a par with ignorance (passim within 17 and 18). To share in true heavenly harmony requires reconciliation with one another in the earthly realm (18.22-27).

### (c) Conflict with other groups.

As insight and what it produces in believers can be a source of disunity among the members of the same group, so it can also be the occasion for conflict outside the group. In the First Apocalypse of James, James is opposed because he knows the roots of his aggressors, who they are, what kinds they are and so on (25.21-23). Some texts witness to violent persecution by those who are ignorant, without insight. The Interpretation of Knowledge describes enemies who exist in the flesh and are senselessly mad, who are persecuting the community to death, tearing apart what appears to be them (the physical bodies of community members) as if they could hope to find them, but all in vain (20.24-26, 30-37).

Some polemic in the texts is reserved for Jews (e.g. The Second Treatrise of the Great Seth which calls them the "unseeing ones" [65.2-4; 68.25]), but most is directed against other Christian groups, Gnostic and non-Gnostic alike. The Gospel of Philip presents a situation of two communities in contention, both of whom are using the same terminology and ritual practice, and both calling themselves Christians. The community of the text sees itself as continuing in the line of the apostles (62.6-7; 74.16-18), although even the apostles and the apostolic men were "Hebrews", the designation given by the community of the text to those whom they oppose, of whom they were formerly a part (52.21-24). Hebrews are those who have received something other than the Lord, since instead of having the name of Christian as a gift, they have borrowed it and have not understood it (55.29-30; 62.6).[2]

### (d) Dualism

Dualistic images and binary concepts are prevalent in the texts, mirroring the situation of groups in conflict with the world and with all others who are strangers to them. Some examples from The Gospel of Truth are summarised in the following table:

| the world | vs | the heavenly region |
|---|---|---|
| deficiency, envy, strife | | unity and perfection (24.20-26) |
| multiplicity | | unity (25.10-19) |
| terror | | imperturbability (42.7) |
| emptiness | | fullness (36.21-34) |
| ignorance (sleep, nightmare, terror) | | wakefulness (28.32-30.14; 32.26-34) |

### (e) The world

The texts hold a fundamentally negative view of the world (*kosmos*) as either inherently evil, or as imperfectly (perishably) created, or as the domain of the evil powers, or as some combination of all of these. As a corollary of this, the human body, as the means of being in the world, is evil, a product of the archons, and the means by which the Gnostic is imprisoned in the earthly context. The negative view is exemplified by The Interpretation of Knowledge in its description of the world as the place of unbelief (1.35-37), the "pit" into which believers have fallen from the heavenly region, having been brought down (by the Demiurge?), bound in nets of flesh (6.28-29).

Gnostics are basically strangers in this world, since their real homeland is the heavenly world. The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles makes this clear by describing the setting of the community as the worldly city, Habitation (10.3), in which they are strangers and servants of God (5.10-12) and in which they must spread the word of God (5.12-14) and heal all those who believe in Jesus' name (10.4-6; 10.33-11.1). Believers must endure in this city which is full of apostasy and difficulties (7.3-14), since those who endure the burden of the yoke of faith will be included in the kingdom of heaven (7.15-19). Likewise in The Apocryphon of John, believers who are in the flesh, bear this state while they look expectantly for the time when they will be met by the receivers (25.33-26.1). All that is needed is endurance to finish the good fight and inherit eternal life (26.3-7).

### (f) Worldly existence

The communities of the texts have no interest in worldly existence per se and no interest at all in issues of social reform or transformation. The world is simply the setting for the conflict with the powers. Most often the works of the community are expressed in terms of battle against the archons. The Sophia of Jesus Christ, for example, exhorts believers to tread upon the malicious intent of the archons (108.15-16; 119.1-4), an activity which parallels to a certain extent both the work of the drop of Light/the sons of Sophia (107.16-108.5), and the Saviour (Codex Berolinensis 8502 121.15-122.3; cf. also BG 104.11-12). Even in this same text, where the activity of the believers is described as missionary preaching (a surprisingly constant theme in the writings), it should be seen in terms of cosmic struggle rather than as missioning earthly inhabitants. With the final commissioning by the Saviour: "I have given you authority over all things as sons of Light that you might tread upon their power with your feet" (119.4-8), the Gnostic receives authority for dealing with the archons/powers of the cosmos. Perkins in-

terprets the activity of treading as the apostolic preaching of the Gnostics, linked to the defeat of the powers[3] (cf. also the missionary preaching in the Letter of Peter to Philip which clearly entails a struggle against the archons; 137.22-27).

## (g) The future aspect of present existence

Some texts emphasise that the believers are already enjoying a heavenly existence even as they must endure within the earthly context, although not all are as explicit as the Gospel of Philip in its assertion that one must experience resurrection in this earthly context before dying, if one is to be saved and not end up in "the Middle", which is death (66.7-21). The Concept of our Great Power asserts that the community has already found rest in the heavens (42.30-31) and has come to be in the unchangeable aeon (48.12-13). This sort of imagery and approach to the world fits well with the idea of the Gnostics as liminal groups; that is, those who are neither at home in the world nor yet fully at home in the heavenly region, those who live constantly here in the in-between, a "world between worlds".

Ingvild Gilhus' study of the gnostics as permanent liminal groups captures this aspect of their existence very clearly.[4] Drawing principally on Victor Turner's outline of the three phases of *rites de passage* (separation, *limen* [margin] and aggregation), Gilhus identifies gnostics as permanent liminal groups, characterised as those experiencing a period of transformation and danger after separation from the world, while the heavenly region or fullness of salvation is not yet attained. In this liminal stage, the gnostic receives *gnosis* and experiences *communitas* ("a relatively undifferentiated community of equal individuals under the authority of the elders or the instructors" [119]) which opposes existing social structures and maintains the unity of the group. The anti-structural element of this existence finds its expression in such associated aspects as ecstasy as the means of revelation, and status reversal. Kurt Rudolph's characterisation of Gnosticism as on the borderline geographically, politically and culturally adds further support to Gilhus' paradigm of liminality.[5]

The liminal aspect of Gnostic existence can be found illustrated in parallel structures of the texts. We could easily investigate in more detail here, for example, the structure of the earthly and heavenly regions with their various borders and means of access, with the "Middle" forming a kind of liminal ground between. Then there is the structure of the heavenly hierarchies, many of them triads, the most important often including Sophia or the Logos as some "in-between-worlds" character.[6] The Jesus figure too is a liminal figure. Indeed, he could almost be said to be a prototypical figure for Gnostic self-understanding in this regard.[7]

Like the Gnostic, the Jesus of the texts is one who inhabits a sort of middle ground by his sojourn in the earthly region. He is a heavenly character outside of his "normal" heavenly context who has somehow made himself accessible within the earthly context, in particular to those Gnostics who are trapped there, but like himself do not belong there. Like them, he is a stranger to this world.[8]

This "between worlds" state is taken a step further in some writings in which the Jesus figure is between heaven and earth in another way; that is, between resurrection and ascension. He has left the earthly region in a sense but has not finally re-

turned to the heavenly region.[9] However, given the nature of the Gnostic Jesuses in general, there is really no need to posit some kind of special new heavenly aspect to the post-resurrection Jesus who reveals further secret knowledge. He is already, even in the earthly context, a character between "worlds".

There is danger even to a heavenly figure in this kind of earthly existence, and the texts attest to suffering and persecution for Jesus. Danger is experienced above all in the return journey to the heavenly place of origin, the most intense experience of liminality, where often the process involves a conflict with Death or Hades or the archons. Those who undertake the journey, Jesus and the Gnostics alike, are in the dangerous spaces between worlds, where the forces of evil or chaos rule. This is the *rite de passage* par excellence.

In summary then, the texts identify a group of people whose origin and destiny is in the heavenly region. Though strangers to this earth, they are trapped here and are forced to endure a fleshly existence in a kind of in-between state between being awakened to their real identity and the return their true homeland. The revelation or awakening experience has been given by a saviour figure who is united with them, who is himself a stranger between worlds, and his revelation is concerned most often with secret knowledge which is important for the experience of that final liminal state of the journey between this world and the heavenly world after death.

## Notes

1 Joseph A Gibbons, "The Second Logos of the Great Seth: Considerations and Questions." *Society of Biblical Literature. Seminar Papers. Annual Meeting.* 109/2, 1973, pp 242-57, esp. 257.

2 The term "Hebrew" does not designate "Jew" here, but is used metaphorically. "Jew" is used elsewhere in the text in a list including Romans, Greeks, barbarians, slaves or free (62.26-34). See Jeffrey S Siker, "Gnostic Views on Jews and Christians in the Gospel of Philip." *Novum Testamentum* 31, 1989, pp 275-88, esp. 277.

3 Pheme Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism.* Theological Inquiries. Paulist Press, New York, 1980, 71-2, 85, 94, 180.

4 Ingvild S Gilhus, "Gnosticism - A Study in Liminal Symbolism." *Numen* 31, 1984, pp 106-28. 5 Kurt Rudolph, "Zur Soziologie, soziologischen 'Verortung' und Rolle der Gnosis in der Spätantike." *Studien zum Menschenbild in Gnosis und Manichäismus.* Ed. Peter Nagel. Wissenschaftliche Beiträge, Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle-Wittenberg 39 (K 5). Halle (Saale), 1979, 19-29, esp. 25. Rudolph sees the advent of Gnosticism as partly a reaction to the Roman imperial occupation of the East and speaks of its rise in the large cities, "und zwar in der Hauptsache an der Grenzlinie zwischen Orient und Rom". It is not only politically but also culturally "on the edge": "Das... Doppelgesicht der gnostischen Mythologie: das hellenistische Gewand über einem orientalisch-jüdischen Körper wird verständlich durch die Situation der hellenistischen Städte, wo bekanntlich beide Traditionen aufeinanderstie°en und auch einen sozialen Konflikt zum Ausdruck brachten." (25)

6 Gilhus also includes Ialdabaoth as a paradigmatic figure for the Gnostics' liminal state; *Liminal Symbolism*, pp 121-4.

7 Cf. my forthcoming article with Michael Lattke, "Gnostic Jesuses and the Gnostic Je-

sus of John." *Festschrift Kurt Rudolph.* diagonal-Verlag, Marburg, 1994, pp 143-54. Together with Jesus I would add the Adam character in some writings as prototypical of the Gnostic's liminal experience.

8 Cf. my article, "Strangers from Above: An Investigation of the Motif of Strangeness in the Odes of Solomon and Some Gnostic Texts." *Muséon* 103, 1990, pp 27-41.

9 Many assume that this can be said for the writings in general, especially the gospels, but such an assumption is in need of revision or at least closer analysis for many texts. Several commentators (Arai, Gärtner, Kasser, Lelyveld, Ménard), for example, take the phrase "the living one" or "the living Jesus" in Gos. Thom. (Prologue and Log. 52, 59, 111) to identify the risen Jesus. It seems clear that the phrase is a reference to Jesus' heavenly being, rather than specifically to resurrected being, since he shares this attribute with his heavenly Father (Log. 37, 50). We should also note that there is no passion story within Gos. Thom. to help in situating the Jesus figure as pre- or post-passion/resurrection, although there is an exhortation to take up one's cross in the way of Jesus (Log. 55).

# Cognitive Styles and Studies in Religion

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Studies in Religion are qualified generally by two view-points that stand in apparent opposition: 1) *pluralism*, wherein emphasis is placed on **differences** within religions[1], and 2) *globalism*, which stresses identity or **unity** within religious phenomena[2]. Philip Almond correctly observes that "... such order as has been created by us from the phenomena of religion and religions is the consequence, not of our coming to know the world as it is, but of our imposing a conceptual order upon it."[3] Indeed, research in cognitive psychology suggests that the preferred cognitive style of the researcher determines the organisation and presentation of collected information. That is to say, the indifferent data are appreciated according to the implicit mind-set of the researcher and subsequently organised to conform, in this instance, to the preferred contexts of either pluralism or globalism. Cognisance of the rôles of both cognitive styles in Studies in Religion permits a researcher to recognise and accept not only the tremendous diversity of religious experience but also the unity or global aspect of religious experience.

Cognitive psychologists speak of a continuum of cognition. Therein, they identify two preferred modes of perceiving, here named 'analytical style' and 'global style'[4]. These styles apply to numerous areas of the individual's psychological functioning which include intellectual tasks such as problem solving as well as motivational operations[5]. Individuals are consistent in the employment of their preferred cognitive style.

Analytical cognisers have the ability to perceive items as discrete from their backgrounds; their development of high levels of psychological differentiation results in analysis, and the subsequent structuring of experience whereby the self is rigidly detached from the environment[6]. That is to say, analytical perceivers are field-independent; they have strong ego-

boundaries; and they sharply discriminate between the elements of existence. Insofar as analytical perceivers see **differences** in the world, they are 'pluralists'. Here, not only is analysis applied to the experience of immediate perceptions, but also to the experience of symbolical material, ie thinking[7]. Consequently, those who prefer the analytical style might perceive and think in terms of various colours, distinct races, different religions, etc.

People who prefer the global style of cognition are field-dependent. That is to say, the surrounding field or environment, in this instance, strongly influences perception; global cognisers find it difficult to separate items from their backgrounds[8]. Consequently, the perception of the self as segregated from the environment is very limited; ie they have weak ego-boundaries. According to Witkin[9],

*... people with a relatively field-dependent way of perceiving have a less developed sense of their identity and of their separateness from others than do the more field-independent perceivers. A self which ... in experience easily "loses" itself in the field - is characteristic of people who tend to experience the body or any object as "fused" with its surroundings.*

Global perceivers thus place a general emphasis upon the connection, rather than the distinctions, between the elements of existence. Insofar as global perceivers find **similarity** or **identity** in the world, they are 'globalists' or 'wholists'. Unlike the analytical perceiver, low levels of differentiation are applied to both the experience of immediate perception and the experience of symbolic material. As a result, global perceivers tend to see similarities rather than differences in the world. For example, instead of categorising people as blacks, whites, etc, global perceivers would think mainly of humanity; the world, instead of being divided by boundaries or lines on a map, would be understood as united or one; reality is perceived as whole[10]. The cognitive styles are summarised as follows:

**Continuum of Cognition**

| **Analytical Style** | **Global Style** |
|---|---|
| High differentiation | Low differentiation |
| Field-independent | Field-dependent |
| Strong ego-boundaries | Weak ego-boundaries |
| Sharp discrimination | Little discrimination |
| Emphasis on differences | Emphasis on identity |
| Pluralism | Wholism |

The above models of perceiving, it was noted, permeate the individual's entire psychological functioning to influence, among other operations, both intellectual tasks and motivational processes. When the dynamics of preferred cognitive styles are applied to the fertile field of Studies in Religion, researchers impose a conceptual order upon religious phenomena in accordance with their preferred cognitive style. That is to say, researchers who prefer the analytical mode of perception not only are motivated to look for diversity, but also perceive and find diversity in religious phenomena. Equally, the researchers who prefer the

global mode of perception look for and recognise similarity or unity in religious phenomena. The work of Steven Katz represents a fine example of the analytical style. In his argument for the sheer diversity of religious experience, Katz states[11]:

*Neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of experience give any indication, or any grounds for believing, that they are unmediated. ... The notion of unmediated experience seems, if not self-contradictory, at best empty. ... The Hindu mystic does not have an experience of x which he then describes in the, to him, familiar language and symbols of Hinduism, but rather he has a Hindu experience, ie his experience is not an unmediated experience of x but is itself the partially preformed anticipated experience of Brahman. ... the nature of the Christian mystics pre-mystical consciousness informs the mystical consciousness such that he experiences the mystical reality in terms of Jesus the Trinity, or a personal God, etc., rather than in terms of the non-personal ... Buddhist doctrine of nirvana.*

In apparent opposition to Katz, John Hick represents, in this instance, the global style of cognition by calling for a wholistic understanding of the divine Reality. Hick decides that[12]

*The ultimately real and the ultimately valuable are one, and to give oneself freely and totally to this One is our final salvation/liberation/enlightenment/fulfilment. ... Let us then avoid the particular names used within the particular traditions and yet use a term which is consonant with the faith of each of them - Ultimate Reality, or the Real.*

Hick's argument thereafter displays a synthesis of analytical and global styles by calling for a theory which enables the researcher to simultaneously recognise both differences and identity in religious phenomena. That is to say, Hick further proposes that the manifold modes of religious experience constitute different experiences of the unitary Real[13]. Hick's argument thus confirms the conclusion of the psychologist H A Witkin who states that "... it is possible for a person to operate at different levels of differentiation at different times or even at the same time."[14] In his emphasis on both the varieties and the universality of religious experience, Hick joins other notable scholars such as William James, author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*[15].

The hermeneutical application of the dynamics of preferred cognitive styles to my main area of research in eastern contemplative practices reveals interesting possibilities for future research into preferred meditative styles and their associated world-views or religious traditions. According to Graham Reed[16], experienced meditators

*... are people who are prepared to reject the hard-headed criteria of reality orientation which are normal in their culture for various reasons they are motivated to loosen their normal conceptual bounds and cognitive organisations. At the same time, their motivation itself may well be associated with their normal cognitive styles.*

In the association of cognitive styles with preferred meditative styles, the analytical aspect of the continuum of cognition relates to the mindfulness meditations (*satipatthâna*) found in early Buddhism. In the elementary form of these practices, the meditator takes notice of all stimuli that arise with regard to body, feelings, mind, and mental contents. Here, emphasis is placed on observing the different features of existence. For example, one would contemplate the body internally (ie in oneself) and externally, the various parts of the body, etc.

The meditator would note also the length or shortness of the breath, various bodily postures, or even analyse the body into more impersonal components in order to gain some detachment from the body. Mindfulness practices thus involve discrimination wherein reality is dissected. Undoubtedly, these practices relate to the Buddhist notion regarding the plurality of the elements of existence.

The global dimension of the continuum of cognition largely bears upon *samatha* practice or concentration meditation found predominantly in both Hinduism and Buddhism. If concentration practices are successful, the ego-boundaries (and any notion of separateness, ie as a subject set off against an object) evaporate. The problem then arises as to how to rationally describe this experience of unity as the use of language usually tends to be divisive.

In subsequent meditative practices, early Buddhism amalgamates both concentration and discrimination practices. In this instance, an experience of wholism is closely associated with analysis. The Buddhists say little of what they learn about this. Perhaps the meditator's realisation moves beyond any notion of being one with the world, as well as beyond the idea of being totally separate from the world. It seems that the meditator, in these circumstances, must deal with an experience that incorporates, in some sense, both styles of cognition; ie the meditator is aware of the unity or wholeness of reality while being aware, simultaneously, of the separateness or different aspects of reality. A more mundane realisation might permit one to recognise the individual races of the world while simultaneously seeing their interconnectedness, or the fact that they are somehow intimately related. This reconciliation is best expressed in the integrative philosophy of *Hua-yen* ("Flower-Garland") Buddhism by the analogy of the waves and the ocean. In one sense, the waves are separate and different from the ocean; in another sense, the waves **are** the ocean. Similarly, physicists talk about light being, in one sense, a particle, and, in another sense, a wave: perhaps it is both, maybe it is neither. In 'the world as it is', the particle and the wave articulate two conceptual orders of the scientific view.

The above examples of cognitive styles demonstrate the creation of conceptual order from the phenomena of religion and religions. However, 'the world as it is' remains independent of the researcher's mode of perception and its subsequent expression. In the creative formation and articulation of conscious experience, the view of 'the world as it is' becomes refracted by the preferred cognitive style of the researcher into either a pluralistic view or globalistic view (or some synthesis of both). In the continuum of cognition, each cognitive style is independently valid. For this reason, both pluralistic and globalistic view-points in Studies in Religion should be recognised as equally legitimate.

This paper, by drawing attention to preferred cognitive styles and their rôles in Studies in Religion, tentatively calls for the conscious, eclectic synthesis of approaches to the study of 'the world as it is'[17]. That is to say, present conditions in Studies in Religion engender the opportunity for an evolution of our conceptual expression in order to create to an ontology that, while rich in contradiction, more accurately reflects the nature of the material. Such an approach does not aim necessarily for consensus, but a richer understanding of the complexity and relatedness of the material without surrendering

either integrity or the ideals which guide the researcher in Studies in Religion.

## Endnotes

1. For example, see Philip C Almond, "The End of 'Religious' Pluralism?," in Norman Habel (ed.) *Religion and Multiculturalism in Australia*, Adelaide: AASR, 1992, pp. 47-55.

2. For example, see Schuon, Frithjof. *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, Peter Townsend (ed.) New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

3. Almond, op. cit., p. 54. When instituted by a stimulus, consciousness imposes a serial order upon widespread parallel processes. See I M Posner et al. "On the Selection of Signals," *Memory and Cognition*, 1,1 (1973): 2-12(:11). Similarly, the development of a pluralistic way of viewing the world is determined by the formation of a segregated, structured self or ego which "... provides internal frames of reference for viewing, interpreting, and dealing with the world from the position of an autonomous agency apart from the field, rather than fused with it." See H A Witkin et al., *Psychological Differentiation*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962, p. 17.

4. The characteristics common to analytical perceivers and those identified in global perceivers are not always polar opposites. Witkin, op. cit., p. 2.

5. Graham Reed, *The Psychology of Anomalous Experience*, Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1988, p. 26.

6. Witkin, op. cit., p. 14.

7. ibid.

8. ibid., p. 2.

9. ibid., p. 5.

10. Though one style is preferred, individuals nevertheless apply both cognitive styles throughout the day. For example, an average couple, relaxing at home in the evening, may be physically intimate; ego-boundaries weaken and each person has a sense of merging or union. The following morning, the couple are driving along Coronation Drive when a motorist cuts them off at an intersection. Suddenly, the lingering sense of union becomes a charged impression of "us and them"; the "enemy". That is to say, reality is perceived now as divided.

11. Michael Murphy, *The Future of the Body*, Los Angeles: Jeremy P Tarcher, 1992, pp. 165-166 quoting Katz, Steven. (ed.) *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, London: Sheldon Press, 1978. (No page number provided.)

12. John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London: Macmillan Press, 1985, p. 39.

13. ibid., p. 39; p. 43.

14. Witkin, op. cit., p. 17.

15. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Glasgow: Fountain Books, William Collins, 1977, 1st publ., Random House, 1902.

16. Reed, op. cit., p. 119.

17. By doing so, we aim for interpretation that is free from working the material to satisfy criteria that are largely unconscious.