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FEMALE IMAGERY IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL:
A FEMINIST READER'S RESPONSE

A dissertation submitted
in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for
the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Elaine Guillemin

The University of Saint Michael's College
Toronto School of Theology

Toronto, Ontario
September 1998
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ABBREVIATIONS

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<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
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<td>EThL</td>
<td>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovansiensis</td>
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<td>HJ</td>
<td>Heythrop Journal</td>
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<td>JAAC</td>
<td>Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism</td>
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<td>JAAR</td>
<td>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</td>
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<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
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<td>JR</td>
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<td>JSNT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</td>
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<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
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<td>NOVT</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum</td>
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<td>NTS</td>
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<td>RB</td>
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<td>SBL</td>
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<td>TB</td>
<td>Tyndale Bulletin</td>
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<td>TSK</td>
<td>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</td>
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<td>USQR</td>
<td>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</td>
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<td>WMANT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament</td>
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<td>ZTK</td>
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Who does the naming, in what context, and for what purpose remain the operative questions. (Mary Eagleton)

Contemporary women are reclaiming the power to “name” themselves and their experience of God and the world as significant factors in defining the Christian tradition. One important locus of women’s struggle for self-definition is biblical interpretation. Crucial for feminist biblical readers/interpreters is the question of how an androcentric and sometimes misogynist Bible can function as Scripture, i.e., as a spiritual resource, with the power to engage feminist women. That is, feminists who hold the Bible as Scripture, or ‘Word of God’, must find

1See Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, “American Women and the Bible: The Nature of Woman as a Hermeneutical Issue,” in Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, SBL 10, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 33, for a historical perspective on women’s struggle for the “power of naming, of sharing in the definition and interpretation of reality, for which . . . women longed . . . [who] were not content to submit in silence while men ‘named’ them.”

2Representative literature includes two important early collections of essays: Letty M. Russell, ed., Feminist Interpretation of the Bible (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985) and Yarbro Collins, ed., Feminist Perspectives. More recently, Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., The Women’s Bible Commentary (London: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). Newsome and Ringe, xiii, 4, observe that because of its religious and cultural authority the Bible has been one of the most important means by which woman’s place in society has been defined. The way in which women in the Bible are “silent and silenced, the contempt and the violence with which they are treated mirror the realities of many women’s lives. For them, the Bible is experienced as giving a divine stamp of approval to their suffering.”

3W. C. Smith, What is Scripture? (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 239, “Being scripture is not a quality inherent in a given text, or type of text, so much as an interactive relation . . . an engagement -- among humans, the transcendent, and a text.” See below in Chapter two for a discussion of the Bible as ‘Word of God’. The assertion of the androcentric nature of the Bible is based on the observations, among others, that most of the biblical writings are ascribed to male authors and most of the biblical interpreters are male. The biblical text constructs a world in which female existence is subsumed under male existence, which is considered the norm for
a way to address "the fundamental question of how an intrinsically oppressive text, one which is actually morally offensive in some respects, can function normatively in and for the sake of the believing community."

1. Feminist Biblical Scholarship

Many feminist scholars have addressed this question in a body of work in which exegesis and/or interpretation of biblical texts is carried out from a variety of experiential/theological perspectives which often depart from more traditional historical-critical approaches.5

understanding reality.

5Sandra M. Schneiders, Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991), 55. The terms "feminist" and "feminism" have been defined/described in many ways. At this point, I observe that feminism emerges from women’s experience but is applicable to human experience as a whole. Feminist beliefs and actions oppose oppression of either gender by the other, and support the possibility of mutuality between women and men. The term will be used more precisely throughout the paper.

Representative studies dealing with fundamental questions of feminist interpretation include Carolyn Osiek’s analysis of various feminist hermeneutical alternatives for biblical analysis, Drorah Setel’s examination of some of the fundamental presuppositions of academic enquiry and suggested changes for feminist theory, Margaret Farley’s discussion of the nature of critical feminist consciousness in relation to an androcentric Bible, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s feminist interpretive model of critical evaluation. A sampling of feminist analyses applied to specific texts reveals the multi-faceted character of much of the work: Nelly Furman’s interdisciplinary analysis of the Jacob cycle of stories, Esther Fuchs’s literary characterization of mothers and sexual politics in the Hebrew Bible, Mieke Bal’s re-reading of biblical love stories from a narratology perspective, J. Cheryl Exum’s (sub)versions of biblical women’s stories, and Phyllis Trible’s seminal literary-feminist readings of terrifying biblical stories of women’s abuse. Specifically Matthean studies also reveal a wide range of approaches: Janice Capel Anderson’s “reader-response” analysis of the symbolic significance of gender and the role of the implied reader in the gospel, Elaine Mary Wainwright’s feminist critical reading of Matthew’s gospel, Amy Jill Levine’s analysis of the social and ethnic dimensions of Matthean salvation history, and Jane Schaberg’s feminist theological interpretation of the Matthean infancy narratives. Even this

brief survey indicates that contemporary feminist biblical criticism constitutes a veritable paradigm shift in the world of biblical studies, as old data is seen from a completely new perspective.⁶

It is useful at this point to review briefly five paradigms of feminist biblical interpretation recently identified by Carolyn Osiek, namely, the "rejectionist," "loyalist," "sublimationist" "revisionist," and "liberationist" models, and indicate to what extent they are helpful in addressing the question of how the Bible can function as Scripture for Christian feminists.⁷ Osiek rightly asserts that each of the models presents a viable alternative, an option from which to approach the task of feminist interpretation of the Bible. The assumption is that feminist criticism is identifiable as feminist not because of the use of any one particular method, but rather because it shares "the particular concerns, questions and sensitivities" which feminist scholars bring to their task.⁸

II. Paradigms of Feminist Biblical Scholarship

   Within the context of Christian theology and praxis feminist biblical criticism takes on unique dimensions. Different foundational beliefs regarding the Bible, revelation, and the Christian life, for example, generate different feminist interpretational models. Osiek points out that all of these models demonstrate that, ultimately, it is not exegesis but rather one's experiential and

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⁶Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (New York: Crossroad, 1984), xxi, ff. notes that a paradigm shift implies "a transformation of the scientific imagination . . . an intellectual conversion . . . [which] engenders a shift in commitment that allows the community of scholars to see 'old' data in a completely new perspective."

⁷Osiek. "The Feminist and the Bible," 93-106. Yarbro Collins in her introduction, 7, notes that Osiek considers the different models as genuine alternatives, the choice among them being influenced by "our conditioning and experience."

⁸Russell, Feminist Interpretation, 15 ff.
theological premises that determine how one interprets biblical data. Feminist interpretation is the result not of a particular kind of exegesis, but rather of exegesis carried out from a particular experiential and/or theological stance. This involves not only ways of dealing with biblical material, but a consideration of the criteria used in evaluating one’s approach to the Bible. Feminist biblical exegesis not only embraces a variety of methodologies and disciplines, but also builds its interpretive bias and understanding into the exegesis itself.

The first two models mentioned by Osiek are the “rejectionist” and the “loyalist.” The “rejectionist” position operates on the premise that the Bible is not authoritative, and that the entire Judeo-Christian tradition as a whole is to be rejected as unredeemably corrupt.9 The “loyalist” position, on the other hand, assumes that the problem lies not with the text but rather with the interpreters. It operates on the premise that the essential validity and goodness of the biblical tradition as Word of God cannot be dismissed. Osiek’s third model, the “sublimationist,” highlights the “otherness” of the feminine as seen in cultural imagery and symbolism.10 The fourth,

9 Representative of this approach is Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); The Church and the Second Sex: With a New Feminist Postchristian Introduction by the Author (New York: Harper and Row. Colophon Books, 1975); Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978). Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, 25, notes that Daly’s hermeneutical-methodological approach “allows her to explore the feminist construction of world in language and in the consciousness of individuals, yet does not focus on concrete social-political structures of oppression.”

10 This model is represented by the work of Joan Chamberlain Engelsman, The Feminine Dimension of the Divine (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979). Insofar as this study pays attention to female imagery for God and Christ, the subject matter of this model is of interest. The sublimationist view of the differences between men and women as essential rather than as socially constructed, however, does not serve the interests of this study which aims not to exalt the differences but to minimize them, to reveal their socially constructed nature, and to work to transform the societal roles of women and men.
"revisionist" interpretational model considers the tradition redeemable, and invites investigation of the problematic patriarchal nature and content of the Bible by means of responsible interpretation of the Bible and its meaning(s) for contemporary women and men. The fifth, "liberationist" model proclaims that the central message of the Bible is human liberation, and that women’s liberation from patriarchal domination is the beginning of the realization of the reign of God for women. This avowedly “advocacy” position demands not only a radical reinterpretation of the Bible, but also calls for a total restructuring of the expression of the tradition.

Osiek judges the first model to be extremely limited in that it is rootless and unconnected with the past, while the second shows little awareness of or interest in confronting present realities.

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11 Osiek groups three feminist biblical critics under this title: Letty M. Russell, Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974); Schüßler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her; Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation (New York: Seabury, 1975), Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983). Feminist scholars Letty Russell, Elisabeth Schüßler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether espouse a “liberationist feminism” which takes as its starting point the broader perspective of liberation theology. All three operate on the premise that God’s reign is the mission of the believer in the present world as well as hope for the future, and that the beginning of its realization for women means liberation from patriarchal domination so that all may share in a common task as partners and equals. Theirs is an advocacy theology and exegesis, committed to “socioeconomic humanization [as] the outward manifestation of redemption.” Russell begins with a theological understanding of God’s salvific action in the world through Jesus Christ as the essence of biblical revelation. Patriarchal imagery and androcentric language are the culturally conditioned form but not the content of the biblical message. The content is Christ, and feminist theology must clarify Christ’s work as that of “the new human.” Ruether’s “critical hermeneutics of culture” approach finds the core of the biblical message of liberation in the prophetic tradition, texts which do not deal specifically with women (and which themselves are at times misogynistic). Such texts, freed from their historical/cultural contexts inspire a message of human liberation. As a social-critical tradition, prophetical traditions can be used in the interests of feminism. Schüßler Fiorenza’s “historical-reconstructionist” approach deals primarily with New Testament texts which transcend androcentric-patriarchal structures. The tradition is not unredeemable, but demands a total restructuring of its expression. Schüßler Fiorenza seeks to develop a model that can integrate the so-called countercultural, heretical, and egalitarian traditions and texts into its overall construction of scriptural theology and history.
such as the political implications of social interaction and relationships advocated on the basis of fidelity to the biblical text. As well, there is often a tendency to stretch history and the literal meaning of the text to fit the initial premise.\textsuperscript{12} The "sublimationist" model, while useful in terms of highlighting the "otherness" of the feminine, is severely limited as a tool to effect real transformation of gender roles. The fourth model's attempts to revise the patriarchal biblical tradition may be somewhat lacking in political strategy in that it attacks symptoms rather than the cause. Osiek points out that the last model, the "liberationist," offers great promise as an effective means of creating an alternative vision of salvation. It is also limited however, chiefly because it constructs a somewhat restricted theology of revelation upon the hermeneutical principle that "revelation" is whatever promotes the full humanity of women, and that whatever diminishes that humanity is not "revelation."\textsuperscript{13}

III. The "Revisionist" Model

For several reasons, the "revisionist" model of biblical interpretation proves most useful for the present study. First, it treads a careful middle ground between the extremes of the

\textsuperscript{12}Osiek notes that this model has been popular with many women and has proved satisfying because in it careful exegesis is carried out within a conservative theological framework to explain and interpret the role of women within their biblical faith.

\textsuperscript{13}Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible," 104, "Its principle weakness lies in its almost partisan position on revelation... Such a restrictive basis for a theology of revelation can hardly stand up under heavy scrutiny of theological tradition. It seems to equate 'revelatory' with 'authoritative' in an almost simplistic way, then to reject as nonrevelatory whatever does not fit according to its own narrow criterion. See also Katharine Doob Sakenfield, "Feminist Uses of Biblical Materials," in Russell, Feminist Interpretation, 63, "How does one know that, insofar as a text perpetuates violence and oppression against women (or against anyone), it is in that respect not authoritative?"
"rejectionist" and the "loyalist" models, neither of which allows for constructive criticism of a problematic text. Second, within a revisionist perspective there is an understanding of the tradition of feminism and politics, and of their relation to Christian faith, which allows for transformation. Tradition is conceived of as an "all-encompassing movement that contains within itself the biblical text and the factors leading to its production,... as well as the reflective interpretation of the articulation in subsequent generations, including our own."14 It is not a limiting boundary, but rather "an open road that connects us with the past and points us in the direction of the future."15 The tradition in its patriarchal form is seen as historically, but not theologically, determined. It is presumed worth saving and capable of being rehabilitated. Consequently, feminist interpretation is conceived of as an attempt, in the words of Fox Genovese, "to press the tradition to the fullness of its meaning, and womanhood to the fullness of its being."16 Finally, the "revisionist" model offers a long range and enduring political vision for women's liberation from a patriarchal Bible. Osiek notes that this model could be considered to be somewhat lacking in political strategy, but at the same time admits that "for those with historical patience and vision it probably produces some long-lasting results."17

Osiek's observations are instructive for an understanding of the degree of usefulness of the "revisionist" model in addressing the question of the problematic nature of the Bible. Insofar as

14 Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible," 94.
15 Ibid.
the "revisionist" model focuses on exegesis rather than hermeneutics, it does not address head-on the problematical nature of the Biblical text. In the measure that it allows for the raising of philosophical and theological questions about what constitutes a text, about the relationship between reader and text, about the reading process itself and about ‘meaning’, and to the extent that it articulates a specific understanding of the Bible as Scripture and its relation to revelation, it proves useful for an investigation of the problem posed by the use of an androcentric Bible within a community of faith.

In this study I understand the notion of the Bible as Scripture to refer to its acknowledged normative status for those in both Jewish and Christian communities who look to it for self-understanding and personal and communal transformation. I agree with F. Young who observes that part of what it means to call a text Scripture is the affirmation that it can “... shape persons’ identities so decisively as to transform them ... in the context of the common life of ... community.”18 With Young, I understand the Bible’s ‘normativity’ to be the result, at least in part, of the gradual building up of a recognized canon, or “classic repertoire” in relation to a theological framework which constitutes a kind of “summary of the overarching (Christian) story contained in Scripture.”19 This repertoire has, however, the potential for different and diverse


19 Ibid.. 49. I borrow here from Young who is referring specifically to Ireneaus’s interpretational framework, his ‘Rule of Faith’, “associated with what a Christian receives at baptism, and ... regarded as a summary of the overarching Christian story contained in scripture.”

See R. Brown et al. eds., The Jerome Biblical Commentary (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1968), 7213, for a commentary on Vatican Council II’s statement De Revelatione, 2:9, that Tradition and Scripture “in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end,” but
readings, attested to by the fact that an ancient biblical text has in fact generated not one, but a series of variant readings and elicited equally diverse responses, including recent feminist "variant readings" which have engendered a response if not of total rejection, then often of deeply-rooted suspicion.

Together with those feminist critics who cling to the Bible as normative, I recognize that an androcentric Bible functions authoritatively as Scripture only when it is brought into dialogue with life/faith experience. Confronted by a Bible which not only affirms but also in large part denies the significance of women's experience, we presume it is normative not because it is "the perfect source of the content that [feminist] theological proposals . . . preserve, but [because it provides] a pattern by which the [feminist theological] proposal's adequacy as elaboration can be assessed." The patterns do not, however, represent some ideal form for all times, nor do they constitute a closed system which can be mined for "universally valid truths." Rather, they are understood as patterns within a dynamic process in which contemporary faith communities interact with both the primitive community's vision and our own concrete experience in the world.

Scriptural patterns must necessarily be elaborated both rationally and imaginatively as we strive to understand the meaning and implications of Scripture in a post-patriarchal culture and

"it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything that has been revealed."

Ibid., 174.

Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, 33-34, understands the Bible to function not as timeless archetype but as "historical-prototype" or "formative root-model."
society. The notion of an "imaginative" reading of the Bible as Scripture points to, among other things, the Bible's literary quality. As literary texts, the books of the Bible are inherently "figurative", that is they "represent an image of the real world which clarifies understanding of that real world." The telling of a biblical story, for example, becomes an 'image' of reality, and may so highlight claims upon us that we become involved and our lives are changed by the challenge. The Bible's mimetic, or representative quality, by which it represents life in terms larger-than-life, allows the Bible to clarify real life for the reader, to guide and persuade her/him by engaging mind and feelings, and so inspire action in the world. As an empathetic reader is drawn into the textual world by identification and/or reflection, the text may affirm her/his sense of identity, or in the case of a feminist reader, an androcentric text constitutes an obstacle to feminist identity. It is here that imaginative play (in both the text and the reader) comes to the fore. As P. Collins has noted, "... it is always through forms of imagination — myth, parable, image, symbol, ritual — that God's claim upon us is expressed in Scripture. And it is the imaginative, not just the rational, response in persons that can interpret and distinguish such forms."25

22Ibid., 174. Young, The Art of Performance, 74, notes that "The elaboration of the pattern involves both reasoning and imaginative insight to see just how it may be elaborated to meet new situations and problems faced by the Christian [feminist] community."

23Young, The Art of Performance, 149.

24S. Brown, "Notes: Exegesis and Imagination," Theological Studies Vol.41, No. 4. (December, 1980): 748, observes that in imaginative reading "... the exegete's continual contact with the primary language of metaphor, symbol, and myth may assist in the creation of a secondary language of conceptual, systematic reflection which will be at the service of faith and not an obstacle to faith."

In this study I propose to interpret and distinguish those forms of Matthean female imagery through which the claim of God upon Christian feminist women is expressed, in the hope of discovering "how [those] female images bear and disclose what Christian truth testifies to as the blessed action of God in the world." The task is twofold: to highlight the androcentric nature of the Matthean material in which the female imagery is embedded, and to find a way to recover/reclaim/reinterpret that imagery for the sake of women's faith. I make use of the work of two "revisionist" feminist biblical critics, Phyllis Trible and Janice Capel Anderson whose studies at least point the discussion in the direction described above. Both engage in exegesis from a literary-feminist hermeneutical perspective, and both raise questions about reading and the effects of reading. Because their literary-feminist readings owe much to feminist literary criticism generally, it will be useful to give a brief overview of some of the directions taken in recent feminist literary criticism and then discuss points of contact with feminist-literary biblical criticism, especially the work of Trible and Anderson.

IV. Feminist Literary Criticism and Feminist Literary-Biblical Criticism.

Feminist literary criticism may be described as a form of cultural politics which attempts to "free itself from naturalized patriarchal notions of the literary and the literary-critical." This

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27 R. Selden and P. Widdowson, A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, 3rd ed. (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 204. Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 187. "It is in the nature of feminist politics that signs and images, written and dramatized experience, should be of special significance. Discourse in all its forms is an obvious concern for feminists, either as places where women's oppression can be deciphered, or as places where it can be challenged."
“deconstructing” of male-dominated ways of seeing means among others things, that feminist literary criticism refuses to be incorporated by any particular “approach.” It also means that feminist criticism strives to disturb/subvert accepted theoretical praxes, or in some cases, even to embrace no theory at all because theory is perceived as often “male/macho.”28 An analytic and evaluative feminist literary criticism is always necessarily suspicious of and on guard against “an academic elite of largely male, white theorists for whom theory signifies power, status and an institutional base.”29

Feminists critics who engage in debates with other critical theories such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, etc., do so either because they consider these male-dominated theories dangerous and in need of critique, or because they appear to be “malleable and helpful to feminism.”30 Representative of the former is Elaine Showalter’s argument that critical theory shows an alarming attachment to the ‘male theoretician’. Showalter fears that feminist revisionism

28Ibid., 204 ff. Widdowson notes that the central debate in contemporary feminist criticism is between ‘a broad-church pluralism’ in which diverse theories proliferate (and which may well promote the experiential over the theoretical), and a theoretically sophisticated praxis which runs the risk of incorporation by male theory in the academy and the consequent losing touch with the majority of women.


of literary theory is really a kind of ‘homage’ paid to male theories. She suggests that attention should be shifted away from ‘the feminist critique’ of androcentric texts and toward women’s writing, and offers a ‘gynocriticism’ to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature. In opposition to Showalter, Alice Jardine offers “gynesis,” which from a deconstructionist perspective, sees women’s place not empirically within culture or history but rather discovers ‘woman’ as ‘an absence in the master narrative’. Cheri Register’s highly authoritarian “prescriptive criticism” stresses inspirational role-models and writing with the specific intention of raising consciousness. Annette Kolodny, on the other hand, advocates a “playful pluralism” in face of numerous theories, and suggests that feminist criticism should offer an endless plurality of readings, taking part in ‘an ongoing dialogue of competing potential possibilities’. Each of these theoretical approaches emphasizes different and often contrasting values/principles central to feminist theory. They all, however, constantly and “closely examine critical theory to ensure that the methods and tools we use genuinely aid the development of a feminist politics.”31

Feminist literary critics and feminist biblical critics address similar concerns and raise similar issues.32 Both highlight androcentrism in “canonical” texts and their interpretations. Both attempt to recover positive images of women and attitudes toward women in these texts. Both are concerned to revise previous androcentric exegesis. On the other hand, the task of feminist biblical critics is more circumscribed than that of their sister literary critics because their attention necessarily is focused not so much on ‘women’s writing’ as on questions concerning the nature

31Ibid., 216.

32See Anderson, “Gender and Reading,” 5, n.1 for the following discussion.
and authority of the Bible in terms of its relationship to women.33 Cheri Register's observations about women's reading of androcentric literature is significantly apt when applied to the reading of the Bible:

Women are estranged from their own experience and unable to perceive its shape and authenticity, in part because they do not see it mirrored and given resonance. . . . Instead they are expected to identify as readers with a masculine experience and perspective, which is presented as the human one.34

Register's remarks echo loudly in the consciousness of many a feminist biblical critic. Women, after all, are often absent or invisible in much of literature, and are for the most part downplayed in much of the Bible's theological interpretation of reality. There is very little female imagery for God in the Bible, and many biblical women are not presented as models with whom contemporary women can readily identify. In short, an androcentric Bible cries out for a "feminist critique." i.e., an historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena by focussing on images and stereotypes of women in literature, and/or omissions of and

33Ibid., 5, "In biblical studies scholars have had to try to recover repressed women's traditions within and without the canon. There are few Jewish or Christian texts known to have been produced by women prior to the modern period."

misconceptions about women in criticism. Phyllis Trible and Janice Capel Anderson offer examples of just such a "feminist critique" of androcentric biblical texts.

V. A Feminist Critique of Androcentric Texts

1. Phyllis Trible

The first study seminal for this project is Phyllis Trible's literary feminist reading of biblical stories of love and of terror, problematic because in them women are victims of male cruelty and patriarchal oppression. Trible treats the Bible as Scripture and identifies the voice of God with the biblical text, using rhetorical criticism in order to listen to and interpret Scripture as accurately as possible. Following her mentor, J. Muilenburg, she pays attention to the composition of strophes, the technical devices employed for their construction, and the stylistic phenomena which give them their unity. She focuses, in a 'close reading' of the text, on the literary unit "in its

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35 Showalter, "Feminist Poetics." 128. The "feminist critique" refers to feminist literary theory which focuses on the reading and interpretation of androcentric texts. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination," in M. Eagleton, Feminist Literary Theory, 94, 92, offer a trenchant description of androcentric literature as "not only speech quite literally embodied, but also power mysteriously made manifest, made flesh... [whose] author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch." They note that "the patriarchal notion that the writer 'fathers' his text just as God fathered the world is and has been all-pervasive in Western literary civilization."

36 Trible, God and The Rhetoric: Texts of Terror.

37 As a guiding framework for this study, Trible's approach, which engages questions of faith by treating the Bible as Scripture, is more useful than those approaches in which "religious" or "spiritual" dimensions are ignored, as for example, the excellent literary studies of Mieke Bal, or the work of J. Cheryl Exum.
precise and unique formulation." Trible understands the task of biblical interpretation as "forever changing, [since] . . . new occasions teach new duties and contexts alter texts, liberating them from frozen constructions." Her innovative readings, always carried out with sensitivity to the play of language and to the power of metaphor and image, bring to light unsuspected richness of new meanings in biblical 'texts of terror'.

I follow Trible's lead by paying close attention to the functioning of the textual units, i.e., the passages in Matthew's gospel which contain female imagery. It is not only Trible's careful textual analysis that makes her work significant for this project, however, but also and especially her ability to integrate theory and substance. As W. Brueggemann notes in his foreword, Trible's work is not simply an exercise in method, but rather "it is the substance of the argument that makes the difference." Trible states her feminist argument thus:

... [this approach] interprets stories of outrage on behalf of their female victims in order to recover a neglected history, to remember a past that the present embodies, and to pray that these terrors shall not come to pass again. In telling sad stories, a feminist hermeneutic seeks to redeem the time.

I am inspired by Trible's argument, her recovery and remembrance of the stories of biblical women, as well as her prayerful concern for the effects on contemporary women of reading a patriarchal Bible. Like her, I also seek to redeem the present time by exploring texts which "reveal


40 Trible, Texts of Terror, ix.

41 Ibid., 3.
I attempt not so much to tell sad stories as to re-tell Matthew's story, and to "re-member" ancient female images embodied in the lives of contemporary women so that their faith might flourish. The 'new occasion' for this study is the opportunity for further feminist/biblical dialogue created by Trible's research. The 'new duty' is the obligation to continue to press the issues her studies have opened up. The duty is twofold: first, to continue to accent "neglected [female] themes and counterliteratures" embedded in the frozen wasteland of a predominantly patriarchal biblical text. The second is to explore, in even greater detail than has Trible, the question of possible feminist responses to the biblical texts.

2. Janice Capel Anderson

A guiding question for this enterprise is "the crucial question of woman as reader, as consumer of male-produced literature, [in this case, Scripture] ... examining the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its sexual codes." In order to focus on the question of a feminist reader, I propose to supplement Trible's rhetorical reading of the text with Janice Capel Anderson's

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42 Wilhem Wueellner. "Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" CBQ 49 (1987): 450. "text must reveal its context . . . must uncover the attitudinizing conventions, [the] precepts that condition (both the writer's and the reader's) stance toward experience, knowledge, tradition, language, and other people."

43 Johnson. She Who Is, 18, "The lens of women's flourishing focuses faith's search for understanding in feminist theology."

44 Ibid. xvi.

experimental feminist reading of Matthew’s gospel. Anderson’s study moves in two directions. First, she uses both rhetorical criticism and gender analysis to examine passages in which female characters speak and act/interact as “disciples.” Her analysis of the symbolic significance of gender in the gospel reveals that although gender roles are not a major theme in Matthew’s gospel, its norms and values incorporate attitudes toward gender. The story world of the gospel embodies patriarchal assumptions; there is tension between the treatment of female gender as either a positive attribute, as irrelevant in comparison to other values, or as a mark of subordinate status.

Anderson also employs concepts taken from Wolfgang Iser’s phenomenological theory of reading as well as other “reader-response” theorists to focus on the role of the implied reader in relationship to a feminist’s reading of the gospel. She uses Iser’s concept of the implied reader which is not only “textual structure” but also “structured act,” i.e., it is both inside and outside of the text, partly a creation of the text and partly a real individual to demonstrate how a ‘female reader’ may choose to respond either positively or negatively to the role of the implied reader. Iser’s concept allows Anderson to speak of the responses not only of a reader-in-the-text, but also of how an actual flesh-and-blood reader might respond to the text. She illustrates not only how an uncritical acceptance of the role of the implied reader and of the patriarchal worldview

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46 Anderson, “Gender and Reading,” 3-27.

47 Iser. The Act of Reading, 36, “... the reader’s role as a textual structure ... will be fully implemented only when it induces structured acts in the reader.” Stephen D. Moore, Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989). 72. “To read any text is necessarily to engage, in and through its rhetoric (however overt or subtle), a projection of the reader that the text requires. This projection is proffered as a role, one which can be taken on or rejected but which can not be circumscribed.”
represented can be destructive for a female reader, but also shows how a constructive reading experience is possible because of the gaps and areas of ambiguity found in the textual instructions. Anderson thus goes beyond Iser by introducing the notion of the gender of the reader as significant in the determination of textual meaning. She demonstrates that tensions exist within both text and readers, and shows how textual tension evokes various responses in readers.

Interpretations are affected not only by the way gender is treated in the gospel, but also by the ways in which interpreters are predisposed to view gender as they read.

This study enlarges the scope of Anderson’s experimental and limited reading of Matthew and takes her research in a direction that she herself suggests. First, attention is shifted from female story characters to female-gendered imagery; second, the question of a feminist reader’s response to the role of the “implied reader” is treated in depth. Taking my cue from Anderson I ask not only about Iser’s implied reader, but also how/why an actual feminist reader, namely myself, might respond to the role of the implied reader, and what implications this response might have for a feminist reading of an androcentric Bible and for feminist spirituality. It is necessary at this point to discuss why/how I adopt Iserian concepts rather than others and how I adapt Iser’s concepts for the purposes of this feminist study.

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48 Ibid., 26. Anderson in an appendix lists female imagery in Matthew’s gospel and notes that “More questions are raised than answered. It can only be hoped that readers will be stimulated to offer criticism and proposals of their own.”

49 Moore, Literary Criticism, 100. See n. 39 for remarks on the suitability of Iser for reading works others than novels.
VI. Wolfgang Iser and the Implied Reader

Before discussing Iser’s reader-oriented approach, it is useful to note objections to the use of modern ‘reader-response’ approaches in relation to ancient texts and to pay attention to how in fact reader-oriented criticism has been used in recent biblical criticism. Moore identifies two main objections: first, most modern audience-oriented critics ascribe to their hypothetical readers cognitive rather than affective experiences in contrast to ancient critics who discuss literature in terms of its effects upon an audience; secondly, the status of the construct of the “reader” is problematic because it raises the question of whether the reader as defined by the text stands in relation to an ancient audience or to a contemporary one, or to both. Moore observes in terms of the first objection that for the most part, gospel reader-critics tend to produce unfeeling readers whose experience of the text is inevitably cerebral. The problem is whether such a reading can be said to connect adequately with the intent of an ancient narrator. To the question of whether the contemporary audience is a more vital reality than the ancient one for the reader-oriented critic, Moore offers two answers. Some gospel reader-critics consider the reader an unchanging property of the text and consequently either bracket or include all actual readers; others attempt to give an actual contemporary reader a role, a task for which Iser’s reception theory is appropriated. However, in reality most reader-oriented critics of the gospel who work with Iser’s concept of the implied reader focus only on the concept as “textual structure,” the reader-in-the-text, and ignore the reader as “structured act,” i.e., the actual reader. Even when an exploration of a ‘real’ reader’s activity is attempted, the resulting reading, in sharp distinction to the theory

50Ibid., chapter 6, “Stories of Reading: Doing Gospel Criticism as/with a Reader,” 71-107, for a full discussion.
posed, is most often classically normative and correct. Moore concludes that the gap between theory and practice has much to do with institutional control, and that for biblical studies, "the moral is plain: criticism is an institution to which real readers need not apply."\(^5\) In other words, it seems to be the case that reader-response gospel critics generally produce readings which are not qualitatively different from those of other critics, and that in the end their "reader" turns out to be less an extension of the critic than an idealized alter-ego. Many reader-oriented gospel critics practice what amounts to no more than a "reader-oriented narrative criticism," so that biblical reader-oriented critics, like many literary critics, tend to be "author-oriented critics in reader's clothing."\(^5\)

It would seem that real readers are knocking at the door of biblical scholars, and that their admittance could be enrichment for both.\(^5\) This study is a step in that direction. It poses the question of what happens when a "real reader," an actual flesh and blood person with a book in her hand, and a feminist to boot, reads the Bible. It confronts the question with the help of Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response, and its richly evocative concept of the "implied reader." There are other reader-response approaches from which I could have chosen, and while it is true that Iser's project remains largely within the bounds of New Criticism, Jane Tompkins

\(^5\)Ibid., 106.

\(^5\)Ibid., 71. n. 3 lists recent reader-oriented gospel exegesis, most of which center on the intratextual reader. He notes, 73-74, that "recent literary exegesis of the Gospels . . . has found this reader-in-the-text approach especially congenial; . . . reader-response criticism in gospel studies is largely an extension of narrative criticism, and both remain close to author-oriented redaction criticism."

observes that Iser's concern with the reader's activity as instrumental to the understanding of the text goes beyond other reader-response theorists such as for example, Gibson, Prince, Rifaterre and Poulet. That is, Iser moves beyond a focus on the purely textual reader (Gibson), a preoccupation with the text (Prince), a conception of meaning as residing in the language of the text (Rifaterre), and beyond a concept of reading as immersion in the author's mode of experiencing the world (Poulet), to focus on a real reader actively involved in the production of textual meaning, a reader who is a co-creator of the literary work. It must also be admitted that I choose to read with Iser's formalist model rather than engage in explicitly "subjective" readings such as those of theorists Norman Holland or David Bleich, for example, because as Moore so astutely observes, unlike these psychoanalytical models, Iser's interpretational framework allows for the production of "what may pass as permissible critical reading" in the literary/biblical guild.

Iser's theory serves the interests of this study because it stresses the perceiver's central role in determining meaning. His theory has been criticized precisely on the grounds of having adopted an ahistorical, phenomenological starting-point which forecloses an integration of historical information in anything but a superficial fashion. It is true that Iser shuns the historical

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56 R. Holub, Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction (London and New York: Methuen, 1984). 99, notes that "Iser's... ahistorical, phenomenological starting point... forecloses an
reader. As Holub points out, Iser’s “implied reader” is ultimately an immanent construct, the product of an abstracted performance, while Iserian speculation on how the reader reacts, filling in the “gaps” as it were, involves little more than interpreting the text. It is also the case that the phenomenological nature of Iser’s theory is somewhat limited in terms of its practical application. Holub and others note that Iser’s implied reader differs sharply in theory and in practice. Iser maintains theoretically that in the interaction between reader and text, “the role prescribed by the text will be the stronger.” but “the reader’s own disposition will never disappear totally; it will tend instead to form the background to and a frame of reference for the act of grasping and comprehending.” Although in theory it would seem that Iser’s implied reader should bring a sociocultural and personal history to the text, in practice the individuality of the reader would seem to be bracketed, since s/he must realize the communicative intentions of the work under its control.

In defense of Iser it should, however, be emphasized that his unique if somewhat unclear and complex concept of the implied reader as both “textual structure” and “structured act” is valuable precisely because it makes it possible (depending on how seriously one takes either aspect of the concept) to analyze the experience of real readers in relation to the conditions that

integration of historical information in anything but a superficial fashion. Iser wants to talk about literature and literary norms in historical terms, but his phenomenology gets in the way.”

57 See Holub, Reception Theory, 98-101; Moore, Literary Criticism, 98-107. Selden and Widdowson, A Reader’s Guide, 57.S. Moore, Literary Criticism, 102, notes, “Iser the phenomenological theorist can safely endorse the individual creativity of the reader . . . but Iser the practical critic must answer to his peers in the literary critical guild . . . ‘a cultural institution for presenting model responses to literary texts’.”

have governed them, and to compare that response with those of others in an intersubjective
dialogue.\textsuperscript{59} If Iser's theory is criticized for enabling us to do little more than "interpret the text,"
this "weakness" can also be considered a strong point; that is, Iser's approach is useful precisely
because it forces us to focus attention on the basic question of what it means to read,
to recognize that we cannot forgo an analysis of our own involvement with a text
if we are to understand what literature is about; that we can no longer ignore that
texts are constructed to be read, that they dictate the terms of their readability, and
that these terms are \textit{enabling constructs} rather than dogmatic strictures (emphasis
mine).\textsuperscript{60}

Having considered some of the difficulties and also the strengths inherent in Iser's model, I
contend that Iser's reception theory offers a useful if limited tool for an investigation of a feminist
reader's \textit{experience of reading}.\textsuperscript{61} First, it provides a framework for mapping out and guiding an
empirical study of a feminist reader's response to Matthew's gospel. Particularly useful is Iser's
concept of the implied reader as "both textual structure and structured act," partly within the text

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., x.

\textsuperscript{60}Holub, \textit{Reception Theory}, 106.

\textsuperscript{61}Holub, \textit{Reception Theory}, 83 notes the differences between Iser and Jauss, and also their
complementarity. Jauss' theory deals with the "macrocosm of reception; . . . Iser occupies himself
with the microcosm of response." Iser characterizes his theory as a theory of aesthetic response,
\textit{Wirkungstheorie}, which has its roots in the text, as opposed to \textit{Rezeptionstheorie}, or theory of
the aesthetics of reception such as that of Jauss, which arise from a history of readers' judgments.
In order to examine historical women's readings of the Bible throughout the centuries, it would
be possible and interesting to use Jauss' theory of reception which is concerned with existing
readers whose reactions testify to certain historically conditioned experiences of literature. This
however, is not the focus of the present study. I choose to use Iser's analysis of aesthetic
response which treats a dialectic relationship between text, reader, and their interaction, precisely
because I want to explore what happens to contemporary Christian feminists when they read the
Bible. The focus in this study is on the \textit{effects} of an androcentric biblical text on contemporary
feminist readers' \textit{consciousness} of their oppression/liberation in their experience of reading the
Bible, and on their response to that experience.
and partly outside of it, which allows one to speak of how an actual feminist reader might play the complex role of the implied reader. It must also be acknowledged, however, that Iser is not so much interested in real readers as in the process of reading. He focuses not on a real reader, nor on interpretive communities of readers, but rather on the question of how and under what conditions a text has meaning for a reader. Iser asks “why, generations later, a reader can still grasp the meaning (perhaps we should say a meaning) of the text, even though [she] cannot be the intended reader.”62 The present study asks why, centuries later, a feminist reader can still grasp a meaning of an ancient, androcentric biblical text, even though she was not the intended reader. Both questions lead not to an investigation of the history of reader’s judgments of the text, but rather to a consideration of what it means to read, and in this case, what it means for a feminist to read the Bible. Iser focuses on memory, interest, attention, and mental capacity, the reader’s disposition, etc., as factors which influence the implementation of perspective connections inherent in the text.63 Because Iser is interested in what happens to us through literary texts, his theory should prove useful for this study which proposes to investigate what happens to a feminist reader confronted with female imagery in Matthew’s gospel.

At the same time, Iser’s theory, like other reader-response theories, needs to be challenged from a feminist perspective if it is to prove useful for women’s emancipation.64 Feminists object to


63Ibid., 118.

64See Patrocinio Schweickart, “Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading,” in Speaking of Gender, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 34. Some feminist critics, aware of the individualistic nature of Iser’s concept of the implied reader, and conscious of the pervasiveness of androcentricty in most reader-response models, turn to Stanley Fish’s notion of an “interpretive community” to speak of the necessity of
the pervasiveness of androcentricity in much of literary theory and realize that a collective remedy is called for as women who recognize themselves in the stories of other women join together to transform culture. In this study, for example, a feminist experience of reading the Bible is understood to be not an isolated experience of reading, but rather one carried out in the company of and in terms of the values/norms shared with other feminist readers. Does this mean that all feminists must read alike? No, for as Iser's theory so clearly demonstrates, although all readers must respond to the biblical text, or in Iser's terms, must play the role of the implied reader when they read the Bible, each reader reads differently because of her/his own disposition, background, etc. Given this fact, one might ask just what constitutes a 'feminist reading'. Iser's individualistic concept of the implied reader offers no answer. For the purposes of this study, Iser's reader construct must be used in conjunction with, for want of a better term, the concept of a feminist "interpretive community," i.e., a locus for the articulation of shared feminist values and the construction of common criteria for competent reading. Only then can it be used to speak about a particular feminist experience of reading considered as representative of the experience of other feminist readers.

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reading and/or interpreting. I cannot make use of Fish's concept because on this point, Iser's theory is not compatible with that of Fish. Fish effectively reduces the whole process of meaning production to the already existing conventions of the community; the reader's activity is not considered (as in Iser's theory) as an attempt to understand the text; it is identical with the text. Fish understands an interpretive community as one whose strategies determine the entire process of reading.
VII. Feminist Interpretive Communities

The various ‘interpretive communities’, i.e., the reading, academic, and faith communities to which I belong, provide spaces in which to construct criteria of reading competency and to articulate, at least in a general way, some common values, beliefs and aspirations which animate our interpretational activities. I describe each community in turn, knowing that they are, of course, constructs which overlap to some degree. They represent my “communal persona” so to speak, and provide a way of speaking of the factors which influence my reading/interpreting of Matthew’s gospel. I begin by noting that a feminist perspective permeates the reading, academic and faith communities to which I belong. I am aware that I offer one perspective among others. As the previous discussions regarding feminist literary theories have indicated, there is no one feminist approach. nor is it desirable that there should be. Neither do I attempt to develop at any length a nuanced description of feminism. Rather, I present the principles which inform my judgments as a feminist reader, scholar and believer.65

I begin with the assumption that feminism, although it emerges from the experience of women, is applicable to human experience as a whole. The most fundamental conviction which animates my thinking/being as a feminist woman is the conviction that women are fully human and are to be valued as such. This conviction includes two closely related principles, namely the principle of equality and the principle of mutuality. The first affirms the equality of women and men as fully human; the second views human persons as embodied subjects, essentially relational,

65I am indebted for many of the following insights to Farley, “Feminist Consciousness and the Interpretation of Scripture,” 41-54.
autonomous and free. Any effort to justify the inferiority of women to men therefore falsifies women's experience. Women's interests and aims are to be respected no less than men's. Secondly, I embrace the feminist universalization of the principle of equality; all persons deserve an equitable share of what is necessary to human life and basic happiness. Feminist concerns are human concerns. Finally, I oppose individualistic notions of personhood in favour of relationality, which ultimately requires mutuality as the primary goal of relationships between women and men.

1. A Feminist Reading Community

These convictions function in my approach to reading as a feminist. I believe that to read/interpret as a feminist is to engage in a mode of praxis; that the point is not only to offer interpretations of texts, but to change the world. I make use of Iser's theory of reading, in which a moral emphasis is put on reading as a therapeutic activity which leads to fuller knowledge of the self and even to self-creation, in order to help feminist readers discover themselves as transformers of culture. While I share with many members of the feminist literary critical community, especially Elaine Showalter, a suspicion of male theorizing, I also attempt to utilize Iser's theory of aesthetic response, albeit with a feminist twist. I use Iser's concepts to engage in Showalter's "feminist critique" which both critiques the androcentric literature and highlights the effects of such literature on the women who read it. I join with Patrocinio Schweickart and Cheri Register who, among others, make clear the necessity of including the categories of gender and politics in literary analysis. I follow their lead by including gender as an analytical category in Iser's theory, which takes it out of the formalist camp and into political reality. I share the hope of these feminist theorists that inclusion of these categories will ensure that women's voices be
heard. and perhaps be listened to, as male theorists become more aware of them as significant in the enterprise of reading and interpreting literature, or as in this study, reading/interpreting Scripture. With these feminist theorists, I engage in literary criticism convinced that a feminist perspective will help ensure that often abstract male theories become engaged with historical reality. so that interpretation will encompass not only interpreting the text but changing the world.66 Finally, in this study I adopt/adapt Iserian reader-response criticism in an attempt to bring women reader’s “subjective” responses into conversation with classically normative and ‘correct’ readings of the Bible, in the hope that each might enrich the other. Ultimately I play the role of Iser’s “implied reader” not disguised as an “author-oriented” critic, but dressed in the robes of a “feminist resister” who stands with her sisters and ponders what can be accepted in an androcentric biblical text, what must be resisted, and why.

2. A Feminist Academic/Biblical Community

As a feminist engaged in biblical studies in the academy, I share Carolyn Osiek’s view that “biblical interpretation is too pluriform and complex to be served only within the limited boundaries of historical-critical exegesis,” and that “just as the varieties of feminist critique challenge traditional patriarchy, so too the varieties of biblical method challenge traditional exegesis and demonstrate that its claim to be “value-free” is simply false.”67 With feminist scholar Phyllis Trible. I understand the biblical text as Scripture, but also as problematic because of its androcentric and sometimes misogynistic bias operative in both text and interpretation. I embrace

66See especially the remarks of Schweickart, “Reading Ourselves,” 17-44.

the view of Elisabeth Schüessler Fiorenza and others who see the Bible as both oppressive and liberating for women, and approach it with a hermeneutics of suspicion rather than of acceptance. With Sandra Schneiders and others I consider the Bible to be a witness to revelation, and thus always in need of an interpretation, which involves among other things rediscovering and reclaiming women's stories and stories about women which have been distorted, and/or repressed. With them I practice a hermeneutics of remembrance, mining the silences and reading the gaps, seeking answers which will help keep alive women's stories/images and contribute to solidarity among all women. With feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson, I understand interpretation as creative re-vision, the utilizing of the artistic imagination to create new images of biblical women in order to rename the God of the Bible and the Christ of the gospels anew.

Principles of feminist interpretation influence and radicalize my view of literary and/or biblical scholarship as with feminist scholar Elisabeth Schüessler Fiorenza I come to understand ever more clearly the responsibility of biblical scholarship to be public and political; that is, that its public character and political responsibility are an integral part of our literary readings/interpretations of the Bible. I am sister to those feminist biblical scholars, Elaine Wainwright, Janice Capel Anderson, Drorah Setel, Esther Fuchs, and so many others, whose work enhances knowledge about biblical women and encourages us to adopt new ways of reading and new hermeneutical perspectives. I work for the day when, as Schüessler Fiorenza observes, "... the ethos, ethics, and politics of the community of biblical scholars [will] allow us to move our work done in "the interest of women" from the margins to the center of biblical studies."68

3. A Feminist Community of Faith

The notion of the acceptability of scholarship carried out in "women's interests" leads me to observations about my membership in a feminist community of faith, and to the question of the relationship of women's reading of the Bible to their spirituality. I engage in the enterprise of biblical interpretation as a Catholic woman who regards the Bible as Scripture, but not unproblematically so. With Joann Wolski Conn I experience women's spirituality as severely damaged by the distortion of biblical revelation in which God is a male being. This is so not only in the Bible but also in liturgical texts and/or Church documents. I deplore the resulting restriction of women's ability to utilize their own experience as a revelation of God's qualities and activities. In this thesis I attempt, by means of a theological/literary critique, to find in the Bible resources for women's mature spirituality. I am convinced that this is a legitimate "scholarly" enterprise on the grounds that "the personal is the political," i.e., that women's relationships with men and with God must be governed no longer by unequal distributions of power, whether educational or religious.

VIII. Statement of Purpose

I therefore propose to do a theological reading of Matthew as Scripture. I proceed by way of a literary-feminist reading of those portions of Matthew's gospel which contain female-gendered imagery. Although the imagery might at first glance seem to be "marginal" in the gospel, even a preliminary reading reveals that female images appear at significant points in the gospel.

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story, and are used symbolically and metaphorically to speak about the main character, Jesus. In the so-called “infancy-narrative,” for example, a section in which Matthew presents in a succinct and imaginative manner his theology of Jesus’ identity and birth, not only Jesus’ male ancestors, but four foremothers are named — Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, She-of Uriah, and Jesus’ mother, Mary (1:3, 5, 6, 16, 23). The historical women named in the genealogy not only indicate Jesus’ biological heritage but also point toward the theological significance of Jesus’ identity and origins.

In the next chapter, the placing of the metaphorical figure of the grieving Rachel (2:18) within the context of the tragic slaughter of the innocents invites the reader to associate the two tragedies. In the central section of the gospel, Jesus, in conflict with his opponents, replies to their charges by introducing the figure of personified Wisdom (11:19) into the discussion, and in the midst of heated debates about Jesus’ credibility, the Queen of the South (12:42) makes her entrance. Jesus near the end of his ministry has recourse to the simile of the mother hen (23:37) to speak of his chagrin over the peoples’ refusal of him, and then addresses a passionate and sorrowful lament to personified Jerusalem (23:37).

The presence of female images in Matthew’s primarily androcentric gospel raises questions not only about how the images function in the text but also about how a feminist reader might possibly respond to such imagery. I propose to use a particular experience of reading, (an experience which continues to generate fundamental questions regarding myself, the gospel text, and the reading process), as a heuristic device to determine what it might mean for late 20th century. Canadian, white, middle class, Christian feminists to read Matthew’s gospel. That is, I
attempt to "imagine" feelings and understandings that contemporary feminists might experience as they respond to Matthean female images.\textsuperscript{70}

I look to previous feminist studies which either point to the negative manner in which female reality is treated in the Bible, and/or highlight the positive ways in which women and attitudes toward women are portrayed/imaged/spoken about. Those most useful for the purposes of this study also deal, at least to some extent, with questions about the nature of the biblical text, the relationship between the reader and the text, and the reading process itself. Studies by Phyllis Trible and Janice Capel Anderson point in the direction of such an approach. They are useful because although they differ in method and areas of biblical study, both treat the Bible as the literature that it is.\textsuperscript{71} Trible's demonstration of the power of biblical images, her concern for the severity of women's suffering under patriarchy, her deep religious sense, and her treatment of the Bible as Scripture, impelled me to follow on the path of literary-feminist biblical reading. Anderson's brilliant use of Wolfgang Iser's theoretical concepts of the text, the reader, and the process of reading led me in the direction of "reader-response" criticism.

Although the approach in this study is primarily literary, historical concerns also play a part in my analysis. Attention is paid to historical matters when, for example, certain historical information can clarify aspects of the Matthean female imagery which may be ambiguous or

\textsuperscript{70}Jonathan Culler, \textit{On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 67. "To read and interpret literary work is precisely to imagine what a 'reader' would feel and understand."

\textsuperscript{71}For a full discussion of the question of what constitutes literature, see T. Eagleton. \textit{Literary Theory}, 1-18. It is not necessary for the purposes of this study to engage in an extended discussion of what literature is. Suffice it to say that rather than see "literature" as an 'objective', descriptive category, one should rather understand "literature" as a reality constituted by historically variable value judgments which themselves are closely related to social ideologies.
obscure because of historical, cultural, or linguistic remoteness. These concerns, however, do not dictate the questions that guide the hermeneutical process, nor do they limit the type of material considered “relevant” for understanding the text.\(^\text{72}\)

Ultimately, this study attempts to bring to the fore the notion that how feminists read the Bible is profoundly related to what it is that we read.\(^\text{73}\) I begin with the hope that this investigation of the female imagery in Matthew’s gospel and the possible responses of a feminist reader to that imagery may shed some light on the larger question of how and to what extent it is possible for a feminist reader to appropriate an androcentric biblical text as source of spiritual life.\(^\text{74}\)

Chapter I has given the rationale and outline of my project. In Chapter II, I discuss hermeneutical presuppositions, explain my use of Iser’s “reader-response” approach, and present

\(^{72}\) Schuyler Brown, *The Origins of Christianity: A Historical Introduction to the New Testament*. The Oxford Bible Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 3. “A point absolutely crucial for our investigation: the interest or lack of interest of New Testament writers in the questions with which we are concerned has no direct bearing on whether or not we may be able to find answers to these questions through the study of a New Testament book.”

\(^{73}\) Schweickart, “Reading Ourselves,” 25. “The feminist entry into the conversation brings the nature of the text back into the foreground. For feminists, the question of how we read is inextricably linked with the question of what we read.” For a discussion of “relation” as an interpretive principle, see Drorah Setel, “Feminist Insights,” 35-42.

\(^{74}\) Spirituality is used in the sense of human self-transcendence actualized by whatever is acknowledged as the ultimate or the Holy. It is expressed in our every-day activities. See Newsome and Ringe, *The Women’s Bible*, xiii, who note that women’s distinctive questions about the Bible and their distinctive insights into its texts have to do with “our experiences of self and family, our relationship to institutions, the nature of our work and daily lives, and our spirituality.” They remark on “the diversity among women who read the Bible and study it. There is no single ‘woman’s perspective’, but a rich variety of insights that come from the different ways in which women’s experience is shaped by culture, class, ethnicity, religious community, and other aspects of social identity.” xv. For a discussion of the problematic nature of a “women’s spirituality,” see the introduction in Wolski Conn, *Women’s Spirituality*. 
a feminist model of reading. In Chapter III, I use the model in order to indicate how, in my understanding, the implied reader of Matthew’s gospel is instructed to respond to the female imagery. Chapter IV delineates a contemporary feminist reader’s imaginative response to the narrator’s instructions. Chapter V draws conclusions and discusses the implications of my findings for feminist biblical scholarship and for a feminist spirituality.
CHAPTER II
HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH

I. Hermeneutical Assumptions

The following two assumptions ground my hermeneutical approach to the Matthean text:

1. The Scriptures are foundational texts.

2. The starting point of any interpretation is the interest of the reader.

1. The Scriptures are Foundational Texts

My first assumption deals with the status of the Bible as a privileged text within the Christian community, and with the question of its reading/interpretation by women and men of that faith. The Bible holds a privileged place in Christian faith. That status, however it is expressed, makes the Bible a touchstone of faith and of reality. Expressions such as ‘sacred Scripture’, ‘bearer of divine revelation’, ‘word of God’, and ‘divinely inspired writings’, bear witness to a belief in the Bible’s enduring religious value. In a Catholic view, the Scriptures are venerated, as is the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, as “the pure and perennial source” of the Christian life.¹ Countless Christian readers throughout the centuries have found in the Bible an understanding of self and of their experience because they read a text inherited from “the past” in light of the new questions which arise out of “their present.” Before raising questions from a

contemporary feminist perspective. it is useful to discuss briefly the sense of the expression ‘word of God’ and the question of its relation to ‘divine revelation’.

To speak of the Bible as ‘the word of God’ is to speak not literally, but metaphorically. Speaking, using words, is a human activity and therefore cannot be predicated of God. As humans, we use metaphor to speak of the ‘great unknowns’ of life, including God. Metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing, idea, or action is referred to by a word or expression normally denoting another thing, idea, or action, so as to suggest some common quality shared by the two. In metaphor, this resemblance is assumed as an imaginary identity rather than directly stated as a comparison. To speak of the Bible as ‘the word of God’ is therefore to suggest an imaginary identity between the Bible and ‘God’s word’.

The Bible as the word of God points to symbolic divine revelation, God’s self-gift to humans. Because that revelation is symbolic, it is as are all symbols, limited, inadequate, and ambiguous, and therefore in need of interpretation. The Bible points to revelation, is a “witness” to God’s self-revelation which occurred in the history of Israel and the early church and especially in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. No witness, however, is ever fully adequate to its subject matter, and all testimony must necessarily be interpreted. The Bible as “a limited, biased,

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3Schneiders, Beyond Patching, 47-8, “Revelation is, first and foremost, self-gift, the communication or sharing of one’s subjectivity. Symbolic expression is the only way personal subjectivity can render itself present.”
human testimony to a limited experience of God's self-gift, calls out for interpretation." As Sandra Schneiders notes.

... the temptation to see scripture, precisely because it is a linguistic reality, as the ultimate divine self-revelation is powerful. It is a temptation that must be resisted if a nuanced and theologically accurate understanding of scripture is to be developed. Such an understanding is the only basis for a theory of interpretation which can both take seriously the unique role of the Bible in Christian faith and respond to the challenge raised by the very real limitations of the biblical text.5

One limitation of the biblical text from a feminist perspective is the androcentric and patriarchal nature of Scripture. The problem is in the text. In what sense can a male-centered account of mostly male experience, operating out of patriarchal assumptions, and at times deeply sexist, be regarded as word of God? Biblical scholars who approach the biblical text as a human enterprise, and embrace a literary and linguistic rather than a purely historical understanding of the text, regard the biblical text not as containing meaning, but rather as a structured mediation of meaning (that continuously offers possibilities for meaning to be constructed by readers).6 Not only is interpretation necessary to actualize the meaning, but also many interpretations are possible. In this view, the text does not merely give information; rather it creates a world which it projects "in front of itself," and it invites the reader to enter that world. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, for example, speaks of the Bible as "a prototype," or "root model" always critically

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4Ibid., 52.
5Ibid., 50.

open to the possibility of its own transformation. The text, understood as possessing the capacity to function transformatively, opens the way for a feminist Christian reader to engage the biblical text with some hope of liberation.

Nonetheless, a feminist reader's experience of reading a foundational text which is both oppressive and liberating for her becomes an experience of struggle. She cannot struggle alone, but must join with others in a feminist interpretive enterprise.

The pervasiveness of androcentricity drives feminist theory beyond individualistic models. The feminist reader agrees that the production of the meaning of a text is mediated by the interpreting community. [She] hopes that other women will recognize themselves in her story, and join her in her struggle to transform the culture.

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8 Schneiders, Beyond Patching, 65, states, "It is my opinion that the [biblical] text has not yet been fully engaged from a contemporary hermeneutical and dialectical perspective and therefore that the answer to the question of whether the text is a tool of patriarchy or a resource for women's liberation is not yet available."

9 P. Schweickart, “Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading,” in Speaking of Gender, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 34. Schneiders, Beyond Patching, outlines a comprehensive if not exhaustive list of procedures which might be employed as a collective remedy, especially when dealing with texts whose content is oppressive. The text must be approached as a whole. We must recognize a 'hierarchy of truths' in Scripture; injunctions, disciplinary regulations, etc. are not equated with the paschal mystery. We must enter into the dynamics of the text, in an effort to disengage the question to which the text is an answer, discern the direction of the answers given, and use the text as a pedagogical guide for working out our own answers. We must bring to the text questions from our own historical experience, not necessarily expecting to find a textual answer to a modern question, but rather asking ourselves what it means to be a Christian.
I therefore take on the hermeneutical task not as an isolated individual but as a member of the academic biblical community and of the feminist biblical interpretative community. As a member of the first group, I share in the goal of reading the Bible as a literary critic, i.e., I approach the Bible as a literary document which has an ongoing life in the present. As a member of the second group I identify myself with what has been called “women-church,” i.e., “the movement of self-identified women and women-identified men in biblical religion.” I identify myself against patriarchy, conceived of as “a male pyramid of graded subordinations and exploitations [which] specifies women’s oppression in terms of the class, race, country, or religion of the men to whom we ‘belong’. ” I work toward the goal of women’s self-affirmation, power and liberation from all patriarchal alienation, marginalization, and exploitation.

I embrace the norms, values and interests of feminist biblical interpretation, especially a hermeneutics of suspicion, assuming that biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and serve patriarchal interests. I also assume that the tradition is not theologically determined, and

10 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology (New York: Continuum, 1995), 11, sees feminist scholars participating in four quite different discourses, those of the university, organized religion, feminist theory, and the feminist movement. She believes that “we have to privilege feminist movements for change in order to integrate all of them . . . into our life and work.”

11 Schüssler Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, xi ff. The term “women-church” is not used as an exclusionary expression, but rather as a political-oppositional term to patriarchy. Schüssler Fiorenza notes that “in a feminist conversion men (italics hers) must take the option for the oppressed and become women-identified, . . . women must seek to overcome self-alienation.” Feminist theology advocates for men a “theology of relinquishment,” while it articulates for women a “theology of self-affirmation.”

12 Ibid. Schüssler Fiorenza uses ‘patriarchy’ in the classical Aristotelian sense, and as a heuristic concept for feminist analysis that allows for conceptualization of sexism, racism, etc., as basic structures of women’s oppression.
that through acts of creative imagination, it is possible to reinterpret the tradition and to offer a feminist theological reading of the Bible. That is, I seek to “create narrative amplifications of the feminist remnants that have survived in patriarchal texts . . . and in ever new images and symbols, . . . to rename the God of the Bible and the significance of Jesus.”

In short, I read “as a woman,” conscious of the struggle of women to relate to a biblical text which at once affirms and denies us. As Jonathan Culler has remarked, reading as a woman is not just a theoretical position which appeals to experience as a given, but postulating “a woman reader,” calls into question the literary and political assumptions on which both men and women have based their reading. Jane Schaberg describes reading as a woman thus: “Reading as a woman is based on the conviction that experience as a woman is a source of authority for response as a reader, on the assertion that there is a continuity between women's experience of social and familial structures and their experience as readers.” That is, one is reading as a “resisting reader, sensitive to women's history of suffering, survival and courage. . . . reading from the usually ignored and devalued vantage point of women's experience.

Important for this study is the idea that reading means not only engaging in a cerebral response, but also becoming emotionally involved with a text. This emphasis stands in contrast to reader-response theory which generally does not focus on emotion/feeling/action as much as on an intellectual process. As Stephen Moore has observed, “the experiences that modern

13 Schüessler Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, 21.


audience-oriented critics ascribe to their hypothetical readers are . . . "generally cognitive rather than affective: not feeling shivers along the spine, weeping in sympathy, or being transported with awe, but having one's expectations proved false, struggling with an irresolvable ambiguity, or questioning the assumptions upon which one had relied".\textsuperscript{16} I therefore attempt to read as a woman, as a feminist reader who wishes to "write the body, as well as the mind, with emotion 'inscribed' in my reading/writing."\textsuperscript{17}

The Christian Scriptures remain foundational as a heritage, as a source for power however flawed, that many feminists are unwilling to relinquish. I carry out the hermeneutical task in the company of all feminists who believe that despite its limitation, the Bible can function for them as 'the word of God'.\textsuperscript{18} We believe this is so not because the Bible "contains divine revelation," but because when readers dialogue with biblical texts which mediate and witness to divine revelation, religious transformation can occur. We share the conviction that the Bible as word of God will promote and enhance the full personhood of women.


\textsuperscript{17}Helene Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," in \textit{The Signs Reader: Women, Gender and Scholarship}, eds. Elizabeth Abel and Emily K. Abel (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 280. "Listen to a woman speak . . . it's with her body that she vitally supports the 'logic' of her speech. In a certain way she inscribes what she's saying, because she doesn't deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking. Her speech, even when 'theoretical' or political, is never simple or linear or 'objectified', generalized; \textit{she draws her story into history}" (emphasis mine).

\textsuperscript{18}Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{Bread Not Stone}, xii, argues that feminists cannot afford to abandon the Bible, but must reclaim biblical religion as our heritage because 'our heritage is our power'. Such a reclaiming can only take place through a critical process of feminist assessment, an evaluation of the Bible in the light of women's lived experience.
This brings me to my second assumption regarding the interest of the reader as the starting point of all interpretation.

2. The Starting Point of Any Interpretation is the Interest of the Reader

My second assumption derives from reader-response criticism, an approach to literature which focuses on the reader and the reading process. Since the reader-response approach includes diverse theoretical positions, it is useful to identify the major theorists, note feminist contributions to the discussion, and discuss women's experience as the starting point of a feminist reader's interpretation of the Bible.

a. Reader-Response Theories

All reader-oriented theories focus on the three poles of author, text and reader. In varying degrees attention is given to text, reader and/or the interaction between the two. While some reader-oriented theories examine authors' attitudes towards their readers or deal with the kinds of readers implied by texts, others focus on the role actual readers play in determining literary meaning, or explore the relation of reading conventions to the interpretation of texts. Still others are concerned with the status of the reader's self. But for all reader-response critics the crucial question is that of the meaning of the text, which for them is never self-formulated. In reader-response theory, the reader must act upon the textual material in order to produce meaning.
Theories focused on the reader have no single or predominant philosophical starting point. Rather, they emerge from within different philosophical traditions, and emphasize different aspects of meaning production. A sampling of major theorists reveals that for some, the text remains an essential element. Theorists like Gerald Prince focus on the reader as an element of the text; Michael Rifaterre is concerned with literary meaning which resides in the language of the text; Gorges Poulet investigates the reader's consciousness in order to describe the kind of mental attitude that will produce the most complete understanding of the text as the reader submits her/his subjectivity to the consciousness that generates the work.

Other theorists are concerned with the role actual readers play when they attempt to determine literary meaning. Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, for example, draw upon hermeneutics and phenomenology in order to speak of the reader's consciousness. In the reception theory of Jauss, readers judge a literary text against criteria derived from a "horizon of expectations" which allows them to value and interpret the work in light of their present "horizon of expectations," but always in relation to the past. For Iser, the reader acts as co-creator of the literary work by concretizing the text in relation to her/his own experience, i.e., her/his extra-literary norms, values and experiences. The American critic Stanley Fish focuses on the developing responses of an "informed reader" in relation to the words in sentences as they


20See Jane P. Tompkins, ed. Reader Response Criticism (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), for representative essays by the following critics. Tompkins outlines the critical positions of each essay, focuses on their treatment of textual objectivity and on the kind of moral justification each author makes for his approach.
succeed one another in time. Jonathan Culler focuses neither on the text nor on the reader, but examines the notion of “literary competence,” i.e., that set of conventions that directs the reader to pick out certain features of the work corresponding to public notions of what constitutes an “acceptable” or “appropriate” interpretation. Within a psychoanalytical model of interpretation, Norman Holland and David Bleich hold that reading is a process which depends upon the psychological needs of the reader, with interpretation a function of the reader's identity.

In sum, reader-response criticism may be understood as an approach in which texts are conceived of as poetic structures engaged from within concrete situations by readers in the process of achieving meaning. The reader is invited to dialogue with the text about the subject matter with which the text is concerned. Meaning emerges as a reader with her/his specific interests interacts with the text. Interpretation is an act of “interested” parties with diverse interests. Mark Brett distinguishes, for example, between interpretative interests which are the goals of particular critical methods or strategies of reading, and those which consist of the reader’s own values, ideology, commitments or purposes. While the former are more directly connected to interpretation, the latter have more to do with the use of interpretation.21

One might object that the reader’s use of interpretation in order to speak of personal values, whether feminist, political, etc., constitutes an “ideological” reading of a text. In a general sense, “ideology” refers to ‘committed’ or ‘engaged’ modes of interpretation. It denotes “a manner of thinking characteristic of a class or individual, [or] ideas at the basis of some economic

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or political theory or system." Ideology is evaluated negatively when the commitment is seen as either too exclusive or too uncritical. An 'ideological reading' may also be compared and found wanting when contrasted with the supposedly objective reading of a literary critic or an historical-biblical critic. The impossibility of such a value-free position, however, has been recognized by many.

Mary Ann Tolbert observes that the most common objection to any "special" reading of a text is that it is subjective, and therefore tends to distort what a text is really saying. In fact, all interpretations may be said to be "subjective" because all readings are influenced in one way or another by the vested interests and concerns of the interpreter. All hermeneutical perspectives are advocacy positions.

If the eisegeis/exegesis argument is a false perception of the issues surrounding interpretation, then "the image of the objective interpreter who only construes what the text really says" must be abandoned. Once we honestly admit that all scholarship is advocacy, we allow


\[\text{23}\text{For a discussion of the general rule of literary criticism that readers should become objective and dispassionate, see Wayne Booth, "Emotions, Beliefs, and the Reader's Objectivity," chapter 5 in The Rhetoric of Fiction, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 119-147. For a critique from a feminist perspective, see Mary Ann Tolbert, "Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics," Semeia 28 (1983): 112-116, whose arguments inform much of my discussion.}\]

\[\text{24}\text{Tolbert, "Defining the Problem," 117, n.11, refers to various arguments regarding how specific interpretations fit the cultural and religious settings of the specific interpreter.}\]

\[\text{25}\text{Ibid. Tolbert cites Bultmann's concept of pre-understanding (Vorverständnis) as a limited acknowledgment of the same issue.}\]

\[\text{26}\text{Ibid., 118.}\]
that even the criteria of logical argument, reasonable hypotheses and intellectual sophistication are themselves influenced by the special interest groups of which they are a product. Therefore, the objective/subjective polemic (for example, 'feminist hermeneutics' versus 'hermeneutics') is unmasked as a form of ideological pressure to concur with the dominant perspective. Tolbert notes that feminist hermeneutics (and any other hermeneutics which does not fit the dominant model of biblical research) stands not against an objective, value-neutral hermeneutics, but against patriarchal hermeneutics, i.e., an advocacy position for the male-oriented, hierarchically established present cultural power system. “It is the dominant group that brands one set as objective, reality-oriented exegesis and the other as subjective eisegesis.”

Since neutrality is an impossibility, and the interpreter always acts within some value-system and always makes value-laden statements, the question arises of whether a reader is then free to make of a text anything s/he wants. Reader-response critics reply that on the contrary, the only mistake a reader can make is to think s/he is free to impose her/his idiosyncratic views. In fact, the reader is always circumscribed, whether by textual structures or by shared standards of cognition and judgment. In this study I endorse the view that ideology is a factor in any

\[^{27}\text{Ibid., 119.}\]

\[^{28}\text{Various reader-response positions emphasize that the reader is not simply a free-wheeling agent. Stanley Fish, “Interpreting the Variorum,” in Tompkins, Reader-Response Criticism, 182-183, notes that “Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies... The fear is of interpretive anarchy, but it would only be realized if interpretation (text making) were completely random. It is the fragile but real consolidation of interpretive communities that allows us to talk to one another, but with no hope or fear of ever being able to stop.” Walter Benn Michaels, “The Interpreter’s Self,” 199, in Tompkins, Reader-Response Criticism “admits of neither an autonomous text nor an autonomous self confronting it, but considers that the self is but another text, already “embedded in a context of a community of interpretation. We can choose our interpretations but we can't choose our range of choices.”}\]
research, and that it is dangerous only when hidden, and thus denies the possibility of critique from outsiders. In this sense, I read the Bible in a way that precludes what Iser holds to be a “correct” reading, that is, I read as one who is induced to participate in the events of the text only to find that she is supposed to adopt a negative attitude toward feminist values she does not wish to question. My conscious attempt to read the biblical text from a feminist perspective does not result, as Iser fears, in open rejection of the book. It does result, however, in a feminist critique of reader-response theory and to aspects of Iser’s theoretical framework.

b. Reader-Response Theory and Feminist Criticism

Reader-response criticism, as currently constituted, is utopian. The different accounts of the reading experience that have been put forth overlook the issues of race, class and sex, and give no hint of the conflicts, sufferings, and passions that attend these realities. The relative tranquility of the tone of these theories testifies to the privileged position of the theorists.

In her 1989 article, “Reading Ourselves,” feminist critic P. Schweickart summarizes and critiques Culler’s survey of mainstream reader-response theory over the last fifteen years. She notes Culler’s observations about reader-response criticism’s pre-occupation with questions regarding the subject-object relation established between reader and text during the process of reading. The issues are those of control of the text and of what constitutes its objectivity. Does

29Iser, The Act of Reading, 202. believes that unless a reader endeavors to rid herself of ideological biases, a correct reading of the text will be precluded.

Ibid. “If [a reader] is induced to participate in the events of the text, only to find that he is then supposed to adopt a negative attitude toward values he does not wish to question, the result will often be open rejection of the book and its authors.”

31Schweickart, “Reading Ourselves,” 21. I am indebted to Schweickart’s article for the following discussion.
the text manipulate the reader, or does the reader manipulate the text to produce the meanings that suit his/her own interests? What is "in" the text? How can we distinguish what it supplies from what the reader supplies?" Culler observes that the models of reading proposed differ and often conflict. Critics like Bleich, Holland, and Fish assert that the reader is in control, while for Rifat terre, Poulet, and Iser, the text is the dominant force. Culler argues that the prevailing models of reading generally vacillate between reader-dominant and text-dominant poles. The closely related question of the objectivity of the text elicits similarly equivocal answers. The apparently dualistic theory which gives credit to both text and reader, argues Culler, eventually gives way to a monism in which one or the other supplies everything, as for example in Iser's theory, which ultimately implies the determinacy of the text and the author's authority. Depending on which aspects of the theory one takes seriously, Iser's theory collapses into a monism of either text or reader.

Schweickart finds Culler's survey instructive, "for it enables us to anticipate the direction that reader-response criticism might take when it is shaken from its slumber by feminist criticism." She notes that interestingly enough, Culler, a leading theorist of reading, has himself raised the question of the significance of gender by asking a question which until very recently had not occurred to reader-response critics: "If the meaning of a work is the experience of a reader, what difference does it make if the reader is a woman?" Schweickart observes that a feminist

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32 Ibid., 22.

33 Ibid., 21, quoting Culler, On Deconstruction, 42. Elaine Showalter, Speaking of Gender (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 1-4, "Within Anglo-American feminist discourse, the term "gender" has been used for the past several years to stand for the social, cultural, and psychological meaning imposed upon the biological sexual identity. Thus gender has a different meaning than the term "sex," which refers to biological identity as female or male, or "sexuality,"
theory of reading elaborates the subject-object relation established between reader and text, but that unlike main-stream theory, the issue of gender, either the gender inscribed in the text or the gender of the reader, becomes a crucial factor. By introducing gender into the discussion, feminist criticism will help an utopian and mythically abstract main-stream reader-response criticism become aware of two factors it has suppressed, namely gender and politics.

Schweickart maintains that reader-response criticism needs feminist criticism, which both challenges and enriches it. If reader-response criticism will engage in a serious and sustained way with feminist theory, it will no longer be able to take refuge in the objectivity of the text, or assume that a supposedly “gender-neutral” interpretation is possible. It will thus be preserved from its incoherence, and/or even its dishonesty. On the other hand, reader-response criticism will gain a foothold in the real world by being forced to confront the disturbing implications of historical reality. Reader-response criticism in dialogue with feminist theory would listen to and learn from the “feminist story,” or feminist model of reading in which gender has a prominent role as the locus of political struggle. It would hear women’s voice, and take into account how their experience and their perspective have been systematically assimilated into a male perspective, considered as the norm, and the need to correct this. Literature would thus be identified as an important arena of political struggle. Politics would become a crucial component of the project of interpreting the world in order to change it.

which is the totality of an individual’s sexual orientation, preference and behaviour.”

34Ibid. 21. Schweickart notes that someday, perhaps, when privileges have withered away or at least become more equitably distributed, some of the reader-response theories will ring true. That is not yet the case.

Feminist criticism, Schweickart notes, has always included substantial reader-centered interests. She suggests that feminist theory can contribute much in an area neglected in mainstream reader-response criticism, namely the question of the profoundly damaging effect on women readers of an androcentric literary canon.\textsuperscript{36} Very rarely in male-centered texts does the context of women's lives function as a symbol of the human condition. Androcentric texts do not mirror back with symbolic exemplariness the patterns underlying women's empirical reality; rather, they control her. A woman reader is in fact "immasked" by reading a male-centered text, since the process of immasculation latent in the text is actualized through her activity.\textsuperscript{37} The subjectivity of the woman reader plays a crucial role by making her the agent of her own immasculination.

c. A Feminist Reader's Hermeneutical Starting Point

The starting point for my literary-feminist reading of Matthew's gospel is an experience of dismay and of intrigue — dismay at the androcentric/patriarchal nature of the Biblical text, and intrigue sparked by the "remnants" of the tradition that seemingly affirm women. This experience

\textsuperscript{36}Androcentric or male-centered texts can be described as those in which the language and mind-set legitimize patriarchy, or the power of the fathers. See Adrienne Rich, \textit{Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution} (New York: Norton, 1976), 57 ff. For a general discussion of patriarchy see Gerda Lemner, \textit{The Creation of Patriarchy} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 27, citing Judith Fetterley, \textit{The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), xx, "the cultural reality is not the emasculation of men by women, but the immasculation of women by men. As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny."
sets me the task of undertaking a "dual hermeneutic," in which androcentric ideology must be unmasked, and in which those patterns of the tradition affirmative of women must be recovered. My interpretative goal is to map out the phenomenon of a feminist reader's response to female imagery embedded in Matthew's androcentric gospel. My ethical interest could be described as a commitment to reclaim Matthean female imagery in the interests of women's emancipation. My interpretational tools are concepts from Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response. 

II. Wolfgang Iser: The Act of Reading

Iser is concerned primarily with the individual text and how readers relate to it. He focuses not on the text as object but on the act of reading as process. I outline below Iser's concept of the "implied reader" and the two poles this reader is supposed to span, namely, the text and the reading process.

1. The Implied Reader

In order to understand the effects caused and the responses elicited by literary works, one must allow for the presence of a reader. Iser proposes the concept of an "implied reader," a term which has its roots in the structure of the text, and is in no way to be identified with a real reader. Iser's concept of the implied reader refers to the active nature of the reading process which varies historically from one age to another. He wants to allow for the reader's presence without in any way predetermining his/her character or historical situation. Iser's "implied reader" is thus not a typology of possible readers, but is rather "a textual structure anticipating the presence of a

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18See Chapter 1 for an explanation of my choice of Iser rather than other theorists.
recipient without necessarily defining him; this concept prestructures the role to be assumed by each recipient. 

The implied reader designates a network of response-inviting structures which impel an actual reader to grasp the text. Real readers respond to the role of the implied reader as they read. Part of this role is internal to the text and is sometimes called the "inscribed" or "ideal reader." Part is external, the vantage point outside the text from which textual structures are actualized. The implied reader is thus both "textual structure and structured act," dynamically joined together. The implied reader is distinguished from the flesh-and-blood reader past and present because it includes the textual structure which must be realized as well as the structured act of realization. The role of the implied reader as textual structure emerges from the interplay of the four textual perspectives of narrator, plot, characters and position marked out for the fictitious reader. The reader's role as textual structure is only fully implemented when it induces structured acts in the recipient. This is because although the textual perspectives are given, their gradual convergence and final meeting place are not linguistically formulated, and so have to be imagined. This is the point where the textual structure of the role begins to affect the actual reader.

An actual reader must imagine the convergence of perspectives and their final meeting place, i.e., the meaning of the text, since they are not formulated in the text. S/he must assemble

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39Iser. The Act of Reading, 34.

40Ibid., 35-36. "Textual structure and structured act are related in much the same way as intention and fulfillment, though in the concept of the implied reader they are joined together in the dynamic process we have described." Iser's "bi-functional" concept of the implied reader as an heuristic device allows him to move from text to reader in a sophisticated endeavour to grasp process. The composition and/or contribution of either half of the partnership is not always clear. See comments of Holub. Reception Theory, 82-101.
the meaning toward which the perspectives of the text have guided her/him, by ideating the meaning in his/her own mind. Since the meaning does not exist as a given reality, it must be ideated, and so the structure of the text sets off a sequence of mental images which lead to the text translating itself into a real reader's consciousness.  

The actual content of these mental images will be colored by the real reader's existing stock of experience, which acts as a referential background against which the unfamiliar can be conceived and processed. As the reader accommodates new instructions, s/he replaces previously formed images, shifts vantage points, and fits the diverse perspectives into a gradually evolving pattern. Thus the vantage point of the reader and the meeting place of perspectives become interrelated as the reader, through her ideational activity, is drawn into the world of the text.

For Iser, the implied reader is an expression of the role offered by the text, it is "the conditioning force behind a particular kind of tension" produced by the real reader when s/he accepts the role. That tension arises from the fact that there are "two selves," the role offered by the text, and the real reader's own disposition. Since the one can never be fully taken over by the other, tension arises within a real reader. While the role prescribed by the text will be the stronger, the real reader's own disposition will never disappear, but will tend instead to form the background to and frame of reference for the apprehension of a text. This background is responsible for the many different ways in which people fulfill the reader's role set out by the text. The fact that the reader's role can be fulfilled in different ways, according to historical or individual circumstances, indicates that the structure of the text allows for different ways of

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41 See note 50, below, for explication of the term "ideate."

42 Ibid., 36.
fulfillment. Each actualization of the text represents a selective realization of the role of the implied reader, whose own structure provides a frame of reference within which individual responses to a text can be communicated to others. Iser's concept of the implied reader thus provides a link between all the historical and individual actualizations of the text, and makes them accessible to analysis.

2. The Text

In Iser's functionalist approach to literature, the focus is not the text as object but the act of reading as process. He is interested in the text in its potential to allow and manipulate the production of meaning. Iser understands the text as a set of instructions which activates the reader to carry out these instructions, that is, to assemble "the aesthetic object" (the meaning). The "repertoire" (content) is the familiar territory on which text and reader meet to initiate communication. The familiar territory is interesting because it is to lead in an unfamiliar direction. Through the repertoire, the literary text reorganizes social and cultural norms and literary traditions so that the reader may reassess their function in real life. This literary recodification of social and historical norms enables the participants — or contemporary readers — to see what they cannot normally see in the ordinary process of day-to-day living; and it enables the observers — the subsequent generations of readers — to grasp a reality that was never their own.43

"Strategies" (structures underlying traditional narrative techniques, which allow them to have effect) organize the presentation of the repertoire and constitute the conditions under which the presentation is communicated to the reader. They lay down the lines along which the reader's

43Ibid., 74.
imagination is to run. Two such structures defamiliarize the familiar. The strategy “foreground and background” refers to the relationship that permits certain elements to stand out while others recede into a general context, thus steering the perceptions of the reader in a particular direction. The strategy of “theme and horizon” involves the selection from a whole system of multiple perspectives in a text.

Generally, there are four perspectives through which the pattern of the repertoire first emerges: the vantage points of authorial comment, dialogue between characters, development of plot, and the position marked out for the reader. Their function is to initiate the production of the meaning of the text, which cannot be totally represented by any one perspective. There is continuous interaction between these perspectives which are interwoven in the text and which offer a constantly shifting constellation of views to the reader, whose role it is to fit the diverse perspectives into a gradually evolving pattern. Since the reader cannot embrace all perspectives at once, when s/he is concerned with any one of these perspectives, that particular view constitutes the “theme;” the reader’s attitude will be conditioned by the “horizon” established from past reading and the other perspectives.

The “theme and horizon” strategy organizes a relationship between text and reader so that the reader can gradually take over an unfamiliar view of the world on the terms laid down by the text. The structure of theme and horizon allows all positions to be observed, expanded, and changed. The reader’s attitude toward each theme is influenced by the horizon of past themes, and as each theme itself becomes part of the horizon during the time flow of reading, so it, too, exerts an influence on subsequent themes. Each change denotes not a loss but an enrichment, as attitudes

4Ibid., 166. Iser notes that not all four perspectives are utilized in every work.
are at one and the same time refined and broadened. It is the resultant accumulation of
equivalences that constitutes the aesthetic object.\textsuperscript{45}

3. The Reading Process

Iser's phenomenology of reading complements the repertoire and strategies that make up
the functionalist model of a literary text. Reading is not a direct internalization (because it is not a
one-way process) but is rather a dynamic interaction between text and reader. Gaps (asymmetry
between text and reader) give rise to communication in the reading process. Gaps or blanks
stimulate the reader to fill the blanks with projections, as s/he is drawn into events and made to
supply what is meant from what is not said. Iser offers the concept of "the wandering viewpoint"
as a means of describing the way in which the reader is present in the text; "instead of a subject-
object relationship, there is a moving viewpoint which travels along \textit{inside} that which it has to
apprehend."\textsuperscript{46}

In a journey through the text the reader's wandering viewpoint engages in a dialectic
movement of modified expectations and transformed memories. The reader constantly evaluates
and perceives events with regard to her/his expectations for the future and against the background
of the past. By means of the wandering viewpoint, the reader unfolds the multiplicity of
interconnecting perspectives which are offset whenever there is a switch from one to another. The
wandering viewpoint divides the text up into interacting structures, and these give rise to a

\textsuperscript{45}Iser. \textit{Act of Reading}, 99, notes that "the structure of theme and horizon . . . initiates a
process of communication through transformation of positions, as opposed to pinpointing of
information and grouping of data."

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid, 109.
grouping activity that is fundamental to the grasping of a text. In confronting the various schemata of a text, a reader tries to establish connections between them that lend coherence to their activity. S/he must put together what her wandering viewpoint has divided up in a process of "passive synthesis," a process which takes place below the threshold of consciousness, and is therefore independent of conscious observation.

The basic element of this synthesis is the image which cannot be equated with the empirical object, nor with the meaning of a represented object. Images transcend the sensory. The imagistic vision of the imagination is not the impression objects make upon sensation, but is rather a mental activity of the reader's imagination. Images are neither perceptions nor ideas, but rather "something which accompanies our reading" (the image is not itself the object of our attention). The mental image is something not yet fully conceptualized, a vision of the imagination, an attempt to ideate that which one can never see as such.47

The image is basic to the ideation involved in reading, the process in which the reader's creative imagination ultimately produces an aesthetic object. The image endows the nongiven with presence, makes innovations conceivable, and adheres to perception in constituting the aesthetic object. The image is not a piece of mental equipment in consciousness, but a way in which consciousness opens itself to the object, prefiguring it from deep within itself as a function of its

47Ibid., 137. n. 6. Iser uses the word 'ideate' as "the nearest English equivalent to the German vorstellen, which means to evoke the presence of something which is not given. Ideate does not refer to 'idea', i.e., something which imprints itself on the mind, as in the Lockeian tradition.
implicit knowledge. Images constantly shift, and every image we have is duly restructured by each of its successors.

Readers are powerfully affected by this activity of imaging. Ultimately, the image and the reading subject are indivisible. The reader is absorbed into what s/he has been made to produce through the image; s/he cannot help being affected by her/his own production. If a reader is absorbed into an image, s/he is no longer present in reality, but is preoccupied with something that takes her/him out of given reality. The fact that a reader has been temporarily isolated from her/his real world means that "for a brief period at least, the real world appears observable... we are able to perceive it as an object... This detachment, even if only momentary, may enable us to view our own world as a thing 'freshly understood'."

Since the manner in which the literary image is controlled is of vital importance to our understanding of the whole reading process, the various phases in which the images are built up must be considered. The process of image building begins with the schemata of the text, which are aspects of a totality that the reader must assemble. The reader must assemble this totality, and in so doing, s/he will create a sequence of images that eventually results in her/his constituting the meaning of the text. This meaning must be produced, even though it is prestructured by the signs given in the text. Images are produced and recede again, being modified and reconstituted in a complex temporal process. Meaning, as an end result of this process, consists of a synthesis of

48Ibid.. 137. Iser's term "image" refers to a psychic synthesis, both different from and more than the sum of its parts. It is crucial for Iser's notion of reading as an interaction between the textual signals and the reader's acts of comprehension. For Iser, meaning is not an object to be grasped by a subject. Meaning, because it is an effect to be experienced, can only be grasped as an image, a process at work in the reader's unconscious.

49Ibid.. 140.
various phases, and since the images can never be precisely duplicated, it is never exactly the same.

The constitution of meaning gains its full significance when something happens to the reader. The reader's viewpoint cannot be determined exclusively by her/his own personal history or experience, but this history cannot be totally ignored either; only when the reader has been taken outside her/his own experience can her/his viewpoint be changed. The real reader is given a role to which s/he must then adapt and so 'modify' her/himself if the meaning s/he assembles is to be conditioned by the text and not by her/his own disposition. Reading removes the subject-object division, and so the reader becomes occupied by the author's thoughts. Division is not between subject-object, but between subject and self. The split between subject and self enables the subject to make her/himself present to the text. It also brings about a tension since a new experience has to be incorporated. As a result, a layer of the reader's personality is brought to light which had hitherto remained hidden in the shadows. An inner world is laid open to the reader which is her/his own, but into which s/he cannot enter without the help and stimulation coming from this particular work of art.

The significance of the work lies not in the meaning sealed in the text, but in the fact that meaning helps to bring out what had previously been sealed within the reader. In the process of 'imaging' the reader discovers the significance of the meaning, i.e., the reader absorbs the meaning into her/his own personal existence. Reading thus effects a "heightening of"

\[^{50}\text{Ibid., 155.}\]
self-awareness" as readers, through formulating meaning, also formulate themselves, and "thus discover an inner world of which they had hitherto not been conscious"\(^{51}\)

4. Feminist Critique of Iser

One feminist critique of Iser's model concerns its individualistic nature. The critique is driven by a feminist awareness of the pervasiveness of androcentricity in the literary tradition, in texts, in reading strategies and in values.\(^{52}\) Reading a male text is not an isolated event for women, since patriarchal texts are everywhere, always conditioning women's participation in the literary and critical enterprise. Schweickart maintains that an omnipresent androcentricity drives feminist theory beyond the individualistic model of Iser to the notion of the production of the meaning of a text as mediated by, for example, Stanley Fish's "interpretive community." In Fish's theory, meaning is a product not of the interaction of an individual reader with a text, but rather depends totally on the interpretive strategy one applies to the text, and the choice of strategy is regulated by the canons of acceptability that govern the interpretive community. Since the feminist reader is painfully aware that the ruling interpretive communities are androcentric, she must work to create feminist interpretive communities where she will be joined by sympathizers. "The feminist reader hopes that other women will recognize themselves in her story, and join her in her struggle to transform the culture."\(^{53}\)

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\(^{51}\)Ibid., 158.

\(^{52}\)See Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves," for a fuller critique.

\(^{53}\)Ibid., 34.
Schweickart's critique of Iser also highlights the usefulness of his theory for feminist interpretation. She points out that Iser's concept of the text as a "skeleton of schematized aspects that must be concretized by the reader" makes intelligible the feminist claim that the androcentricity of texts and its damaging effect on women readers are not figments of their imagination, but are implicit in the "schematized aspects" of the text. Iser's insistence on the necessity of the reader's activity to actualize the latent meaning of a text therefore clarifies how a feminist reader who actualizes an androcentric text uncritically, i.e., simply selects among the concretizations allowed by the text, reads to her own destruction if she is unaware of her freedom of choice: to submit to its power to structure her experience, or to resist and read as a feminist. Iser's emphasis on the act of reading serves the interests of feminist analysis as pragmatic, for as Schweickart notes, "we cannot afford to ignore the activity of reading, for it is here that literature is realized as praxis. Literature acts on the world by acting on its readers.”

In sum, a feminist critique of Iser and others challenges their abstract theory which posits privileged readers. Feminist theorists call for the inclusion of the categories of gender and politics in interpretational theory. They envision and are creating reading models in which women's experience and perspective are recognized rather than assimilated into the generic masculine. Ultimately, a feminist entry into the conversation highlights the issue of literature as an important arena of political struggle.

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54 Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves," 24.
III. A Feminist Model of Reading

This brief discussion of a feminist critique of reader-response theory as practiced by Iser and others invites and opens up space for the construction of a feminist model of reading. I offer a model of reading which rather than abandoning Iser, attempts to accommodate his theoretical concepts, especially that of the implied reader, for feminist use. I give below the rationale for the necessity and usefulness of this feminist model, describe it, and indicate how I propose to use it to interpret Matthew’s gospel.

1. Rationale

Feminist theorists seek a feminist model of reading which enables a woman to take control of the reading experience, to read in a way that affirms her womanhood as a valid paradigm of human existence. Schweickart offers a three-step model of reading by which a feminist reader avoids “immasculation” and reads a text to her benefit. In the first step, a feminist reader who critically analyzes her experience of reading will realize that the power of the text is matched by her awareness of her essential role in the process of reading. The text may direct her reading, but she is in control of her response to the direction. In a second step, a feminist reader chooses to take control of the reading experience. She cannot, however, ever underestimate the power of an androcentric text to structure that experience. She must, therefore, in a third moment, “re-read” such a text, recall and examine how previously she might have read uncritically, so that she might understand and therefore undermine the subjective predispositions that had rendered her

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55Ibid., 33, “Taking control of the reading experience means . . . reading so as to affirm womanhood as another, equally valid paradigm of human existence.”
vulnerable to its designs."\textsuperscript{56} In effect, she must resist the text, read it as it was \textit{not} meant to be read, read it against itself.

Schweickart observes that a critical advocacy of a resisting reading leaves questions about the power of male texts unanswered.\textsuperscript{57} "Where does the text get its power to draw us into its designs? Why does a demonstrably sexist text remain appealing even after it has been subjected to thorough feminist critique?" Schweickart answers that feminists readers sometimes find that even androcentric texts appeal to them because they play on authentic liberatory aspirations, on the very impulses that draw these women to the feminist movement.\textsuperscript{58} Such texts therefore merit a dual hermeneutic: "a negative hermeneutic that discloses their complicity with patriarchal ideology, and a positive hermeneutic that recuperates the utopian moment, the authentic kernel from which they draw a significant portion of their emotional power."\textsuperscript{59} This proposition has obvious implications for the interpretation of an androcentric biblical text which continues to appeal, to influence, and to draw many feminist readers into its designs.

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid.. 28.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid.. 27.

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid.. 27. Schweickart refers to the thesis of Frederic Jameson that 'the effectively ideological is also at the same time necessarily utopian', implying that the male text draws its power over the female reader from authentic desires, which it rouses and then harnesses to the process of immasculcation.

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid.. 28.
2. A Feminist Model of Reading

I propose to read the gospel of Matthew using a feminist model of reading based on concepts taken from Iser's theory of aesthetic response, and modeled on the three-step reading process outlined above; i.e., a feminist reader plays the role of the implied reader, and after critically analyzing her performance, chooses to take control of her reading experience, and then re-reads by way of resisting. The model has a dual purpose: first, to discover/reveal the complicity of Matthew's androcentric text with patriarchy, and second, to recuperate the female images embedded in the text for the benefit of women.

In order to discover the androcentric nature of the Matthean text, it is necessary to examine how the text, by means of the textual perspectives, directs a feminist reader to construct a meaning. A feminist reader plays out the assumed role of reader by entering into the dynamics of the discourse, and by interacting with the various perspectives (narrator, characters, plot) present in the text. Encountering them not all at once, but in temporal sequence, she uses the perspectives, or vantage points, to relate the patterns and the schematized views to one another, thereby setting the work in motion. As she reads, she constructs a meaning, and then discovers the significance of the meaning, i.e., she absorbs the meaning into her own existence.

When the feminist reader through critical analysis realizes that the text has structured her experience by controlling her, she decides to read it against itself, interpret it in a different key, enter it from a new direction. She enters into the process of responding to the repertoire of female imagery in the gospel which is sometimes foregrounded and which sometimes recedes into a
general context. She perceives the imagery from the continually shifting perspectives of narrator, plot, characters. As she focuses on any one female figure from one particular perspective, her attitude toward it is conditioned by the horizon established from past reading and from the other perspectives, which shade into one another as she reads. As she considers the female imagery from her wandering viewpoint within the text, her expectations are modified and her memories transformed. She constantly evaluates and perceives events and/or female imagery either expecting something of them for the future or reflecting on them against a background of the past. She discerns a multiplicity of interconnecting perspectives, and tries to establish some connections between various schemata, to find some patterns of relationship. During the process, and as a result of ideated mental images, she imaginatively constructs a meaning which has significance for her. As a result, she gains a new perspective on herself and on the text.

In sum, she reinterprets the significance of the female imagery. She chooses to re-appropriate and reclaim anything in the text which elicits in her a positive response. She reads/interprets the female imagery as affirmatively of her as a woman, for example, only if it supports her struggle to become self-identified within a patriarchal culture. She amplifies, expands, and enriches the imagery in order to provide women with symbols which mirror back to them their lives, their struggles and their liberation. She uses these transformed images to re-tell the gospel story in terms of women's story, in light of the conflicts, sufferings and struggles of

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60I refer here to imagery in the sense of the female figures in the gospel text such as metaphors and similes, and personifications, all of which function poetically. I sometimes use "figure" to refer to these poetic entities, but never to Iser's concept which is always called "image."
contemporary women, and in so doing she struggles to reclaim a salvific meaning for women today, a meaning which is a consequence of women's particular situation under patriarchy.

I have described the feminist model of reading I propose to use. In the next chapter I will discuss the role of the implied reader as "structured act," that is, I will outline the conditions under which a feminist reader interacts with the female images in the gospel text and formulates a meaning.
CHAPTER III
FEMALE IMAGERY AND THE IMPLIED READER

I now outline the conditions under which a feminist reader must interact with the Matthean text. That is, I describe Iser’s implied reader as “textual structure.” As was noted earlier in this study, Iser’s concept of the implied reader designates “a network of response-inviting structures” which impel an actual reader to grasp the text in a certain way, to play a role, so to speak. Any reader, “no matter who or what he [she] may be, is always offered a particular role to play, and it is this role that constitutes the concept of the implied reader.” In Iser’s transcendental model, there are two interrelated aspects to the concept of the implied reader; the reader as textual structure and the reader as structured act. The implied reader as textual structure is what concerns us in this chapter.

The concept of the implied reader as textual structure evolves from the text itself. A literary text represents a perspective view of the world put together by the author. The text is also composed of a variety of perspectives, generally four – those of the narrator, the plot, the characters, and the fictitious reader. These perspectives outline the author’s view and provide

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2 The reader as “structured act” will be described in Chapter 4. It is the role of the implied reader as it affects a real reader. The particular way in which an actual reader chooses to play the role of the implied reader depends on how/why s/he occupies the shifting vantage points and how/why s/he fits the diverse perspectives into a gradually evolving pattern. The role as described in this chapter simply offers a description of the possibilities of combination and/or organization to real reader.

3 Iser, The Act, 34, 33. “This is best exemplified by the novel, which is a system of perspectives designed to transmit the individuality of the author’s vision. As a rule, there are four main perspectives: those of the narrator, the characters, the plot, and the fictitious reader. . . . The
access to what the reader is meant to visualize. Since the world of the text is bound to be unfamiliar in varying degrees for its possible readers, they must be placed in a position which enables them to actualize the new view presented in the text. The position cannot be present in the text itself because it is a vantage point for visualizing the world represented in the text. The text must therefore bring about a standpoint from which the reader will be able “to view things that would never come into focus as long as [her] his own habitual dispositions were determining [her] his orientation.”

Meaning can only be brought into focus if it is visualized from a standpoint. The standpoint, or position of the reader, evolves during the reading process as the reader is guided by the textual perspectives which originate from different starting points, continually shade into one another, and eventually converge on a general meeting place, i.e., the meaning of the text. The text, which must be able to accommodate all kinds of readers, situates them in such a position that they assemble the meaning toward which the perspectives of the text have guided them. This role of the reader emerges from the interplay of perspectives for he find himself called upon to mediate between them.” Iser, 96. notes that narrative texts need not always deploy the full range of these different orientations. In the Matthean text, the fictitious reader is addressed in 24:15; 27:8; 28:15. passages not directly connected to the female images. I, therefore, do not include the fictitious reader as one of the perspectives.

4See below for a description of the implied author in Matthew.

5Iser. The Act, 35.

6Tbid.. 38. Iser observes that “by bringing about a standpoint for the reader, the textual structure follows a basic rule of human perception, as our views of the world are always of a perspective nature. ‘The ‘subject-object relationship’ merges into the perspective way of representation and into the observer’s way of seeing’. Iser’s implied reader “finds [her]/himself directed toward a particular view which more or less obliges [her] him to search for the one and only standpoint that will correspond to that view.”
description of the implied reader as textual structure really describes a role, itself pre-structured
by three basic components: the different perspectives given in the text, the vantage point from
which the implied reader joins the perspectives together, and the meeting place where the
perspectives converge.  

The concept of the implied reader as textual structure lays down lines for a real reader’s
actualization of a text by offering possibilities of an organization of attitudes. At this point in the
study it is not yet possible to sum up under the title “implied reader as structured act,” the specific
pattern(s) of meaning(s) which a reader may construct. It is possible, however, to indicate to
some degree at least, the reader’s position as laid out for her/him by the text, to identify the
textual perspectives (narrator, plot, character), in terms of their starting points, to describe some
of the various ways in which they continually shade into one another, and to point to possibilities
of their convergence. The goal is to clarify the various ways in which textual directions guide the
reader to construct possible meanings.

In order to describe the conditions under which a feminist reader of Matthew’s gospel is
instructed to “make meaning” of the female imagery, I will first identify the images, and lay out in
general terms the androcentric/patriarchal gospel story line. I will then discuss in detail each
female figure or group of poetic female images in the gospel from the textual perspectives of

\footnote{Ibid., 36.}

\footnote{Ibid., 35. Iser’s implied reader encompasses all the various perspectives which, when
taken together, impel a real reader to grasp the text as s/he occupies the shifting vantage points
provided by the perspectives and fits them into a gradually evolving pattern.}
narrator, plot and characters. I will indicate the various ways in which the different perspectives on the female imagery might intertwine with each other during the reading process, and point to possibilities for the convergences of the perspectives.

I. Matthew’s Androcentric Story

Any reader encounters three female images or groups of women in Matthew’s gospel. In the opening chapters of the gospel story, the foremothers of Jesus (1:3, 5, 6, 16), the grieving mother Rachel (2:18) and personified Jerusalem (2:3) make their appearance. In the central section of the gospel, Jesus replies to charges against John and himself using images of personified Wisdom “justified by her deeds” (11:19), and speaking of “the Queen of the South” who will condemn this generation (12:42). In a third instance, Jesus uses the simile of the mother hen who “gathers her brood under her wings” (23:37) to speak about himself in opposition to Jerusalem, personified as a mother unwilling that her children be gathered to him (23:37). It should be noted that the majority of the female images are drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures, a context in which they may function quite differently than in the Matthean text.10

9I should point out that in this study when I deal with the perspective of the characters, I want to clarify how the female imagery is linked to certain characters. Such use is justified because it helps me to see the imagery in relation to the various story characters. This is a deviation from Iser’s use of characters’ conversations with each other to reveal their perspectives.

10It is assumed that the role of the implied reader as “textual structure” includes a certain knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and therefore of the women’s stories, on the part of the fictitious reader. Iser, The Act, 36, notes that in the concept of the implied reader, “textual structure and structured act are related in much the same way as intention and fulfillment.” In other words, one presumes that the “author” of Matthew intended to influence intended readers by reference to the Hebrew Scriptures. One must therefore presuppose or at least allow for the implied reader’s knowledge of the women’s stories from the Hebrew Scriptures. It is also the case that any actual reader, ancient or modern, might play the role of the implied reader more or less
The gospel story considered as a whole forms the canvas against which, as I propose to demonstrate, the female imagery described above appears as especially meaningful for a feminist reader who assumes the role of the implied reader.\textsuperscript{11} The gospel’s story line, its ordered advance of action and ideas, is androcentric/patriarchal.\textsuperscript{12} The story opens with the narrator’s initial commentary in the form of a patrilineal genealogy (the women named are exceptions) which substantiates Jesus’ patrilineal claim to the titles given to him in the superscription and locates him in salvation history viewed essentially as a male enterprise.\textsuperscript{13} Male story characters carry the action forward. In the stories of Jesus’ birth and infancy, Joseph acts; he ponders Mary’s situation, receives angelic messages in his dreams, decides to take Mary to wife, and takes the

competently, to the degree that they are not familiar with these scriptures.

\textsuperscript{11}Commentators emphasize the difficulty of trying to determine any one ‘structure’ for the gospel. See Ulrich Luz, \textit{Matthew 1-7: A Commentary}, translated by W. C. Linss (Ausburg, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 35. I side with Luz, 37, when he notes that “Matthew obviously values a seamless course of narrative more than a clear distinction of major parts. This speaks in favor of assuming that the Gospel of Matthew, as far as genre is concerned, has to be understood as a connected \textit{narrative} and not as a collection of individual texts which could be used liturgically as pericopes or catechetically as texts for instruction.” Luz, 37, n. 1, observes that “this confirms the concern of Kingsbury, independently from his suggestion of structure.”


\textsuperscript{13}Initial commentary is a powerful rhetorical strategy. As David B. Howell, \textit{Matthew’s Inclusive Story. A Study in the Rhetoric of the First Gospel}, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 42 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 245, remarks, “The temporal, sequential nature of reading suggests that the order of incidents, characters and teaching in Matthew is not a matter of indifference as if the Gospel were ‘an essay in story form’ in which each occurrence of a word or concept were to be given equal weight by an interpreter.” The implied reader is therefore strongly influenced to accept the narrator’s androcentric point of view expressed in the initial commentary.
child and his mother to safety. King Herod and the Jewish authorities plot against the child, while Joseph cares for the child and the Magi worship Him. Mary is entirely passive, her extraordinary role circumscribed by the androcentric nature of the genealogy and birth story.

The narrator pauses at certain points in the story to comment to the reader, quoting passages from Scripture in which female imagery is present, e.g., the female images of Isaiah's virgin and the figure of the grieving Rachel. The female figures in the quotations do not, however, so much signal the significance of the women in themselves, as point to the significance of Jesus. At the end of the opening chapters, with the exception of Mary, the female figures disappear, never to be mentioned again. The adult Jesus is associated exclusively with male characters in the story of his baptism and temptation, and is named beloved Son of a God imaged as Father.

Predominantly male characters carry the action in the story of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus chooses only male disciples to help him. In Jesus' teachings as well as in narratorial comments, patriarchal marriage and inheritance customs are assumed (1:18-25; 5:31-32; 19:1-12; 21:33-43; 22:23-33, etc.). Women are never directly mentioned as part of Jesus' audience, as for example,

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in the Sermon on the Mount, which addresses its demands exclusively to men (5:28,32). Neither does the narrator include women in the missionary focus of Jesus’ preaching (14:21; 15:38).

In the middle chapters of the gospel Jesus engages in controversies with his male opponents, referring to female images, as for example personified Wisdom and the Queen of the South. The figure of Wisdom serves to illuminate Jesus’ significance, while the Queen of the South is portrayed as one who traveled far to listen to King Solomon’s wisdom. Jesus teaches in parables, in which invariably males are the key figures (one exception is 13:33). In the stories of Jesus’ ministry when women are mentioned, many times they are not portrayed as equal in status to men (9:18-19; 9:20-22) and inevitably women appear in isolated and self-contained episodes. The Canaanite woman or the woman with the hemorrhage, for example, although significant figures in the pericopes in which they appear, never reappear in the narrative as do the Jewish leaders, the disciples, or even the crowds, nor are women pictured as members of the inner circle of disciples.

Near the end of Matthew’s story, in the account of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus and the male disciples carry the story. The woman who anoints Jesus (26:6-13), has a limited role in the story. She does not rival the disciples, whom her actions put to shame, because, although she acts as a disciple of Jesus, she is never named as one. Jesus uses female imagery and speaks of “murderous Jerusalem,” but also makes use of the mother-hen simile to draw attention to his own sentiments of compassion (23:37). Women characters function most often as foils for the disciples (26:6-13). No women are referred to as “his disciples” (28:7), and no women are,

\[16\] The question of whether Jesus assumes Wisdom’s role/identity or simply speaks of Wisdom is a complex one debated by many. See below, Chapter 4.
mentioned as present at the great climactic scene of the Great Commission (28:16-20), although their gender allows them to function (without supplanting the disciples) as the means by which the disciples are reunited with Jesus and receive the Great Commission. Finally, the women at the cross and the tomb play an important part in the narrative, but their gender prevents them from being called disciples. They are depicted rather as an auxiliary group, a "stand-in" for the disciples. In sum, Matthew's story contains/constrains women characters and images of women within the boundaries of a model that assumes male gender as the norm and ensures even for extraordinary women a subordinate and auxiliary position.17

II. Female Imagery and the Implied Reader

The specific conditions under which the implied reader comes to a particular understanding of the significance of the female imagery in the gospel must now be described. Each female image or group of images will be considered in relation to the textual perspectives of the narrator, the plot and the characters, and then under the summary title of the implied reader's role.

III. The Foremothers and Mary (Matthew 1:3, 5, 6, 16, 18)

1. The Foremothers and Mary from the Narrator's Perspective

Let us begin by noting that the narrator of Matthew's gospel is reliable, that is, the narrator holds the same system of ideas and values that sustain the story.18 He begins the gospel

17See Senior, The Gospel of Matthew, 66, for a discussion of feminist perspectives, especially that of Elaine Wainwright, on discipleship.

18Anderson, "Matthew: Gender and Reading," 23, n.55 summarizes thus: "The narrator is undramatized, reliable, omniscient, and intrusive. He or she, in effect, serves as the implied author's voice. For all practical purposes their ideological viewpoints are identical. The narrator is
story with direct commentary to the reader.\textsuperscript{19} It is important to note that whatever information the narrator gives at the beginning of the gospel is significant information for the implied reader, since it forms the initial horizon against which s/he will view the rest of the story.\textsuperscript{20} It is also significant that in this case the information is given in the form of direct commentary to the reader, because direct commentary creates an immediacy with and reduces the distance between narrator and reader, and helps to impress upon the reader the significance of the information conveyed.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19}I use “story” to describe that which is narrated. See Seymour Chatman, \textit{Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film} (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1978), 19. Kingsbury, \textit{Matthew As Story}, follows Chatman’s lead in speaking of the gospel narrative as comprised of the ‘story’ of the life of Jesus and the ‘discourse’, the means whereby the story is told. R. A. Edwards, \textit{Matthew’s Story of Jesus} (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 9, notes that “The Gospel of Matthew is a story of Jesus, not an essay or a chronicle.” H. J. Combrink, “Structure of Matthew as Narrative,” \textit{Tyndale Bulletin} 34 (1983): 66, notes, “Matthew can be taken to be a narrative as it meets the two basic characteristics: ‘the presence of a story and a story-teller’. This does not mean that the distinctiveness of the Gospel form in which everything centers on Jesus, the vehicle of the kingdom of God, is discounted.”

\textsuperscript{20}Howell, \textit{Matthew’s Inclusive Story}, 115, “The initial information about the attitudes, characters, and narrative world which is projected plays a large part in the process of teaching readers the correct interpretive techniques for reading the text.”

\textsuperscript{21}Direct commentary is the most powerful vehicle, short of self-mention, that a narrator can employ to communicate her/his point of view to the reader and to shape the reader's response. See Chatman, \textit{Story and Discourse}, 228. In commentary, the narrator explicitly addresses the implied reader, thereby “contextualizing” the narrative text for the reader. Howell, \textit{Matthew’s Inclusive Story}, 180, notes that commentary also provides clues to the author’s view of reality: “The presence of commentary . . . presupposes the existence of an agreed system of general cultural codes or values held by people outside the text.”
The narrator introduces the foremothers of Jesus to the reader near the beginning of the "book of origins," Βίβλος γενέσεως (1:1). The women appear as exceptions in an otherwise patrilineal genealogy, which (together with the superscription) identifies Jesus as Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham. The narrator expands the information given about Jesus in the superscription by contextualizing the titles of the superscription within a genealogy which traces Jesus' ancestry from Abraham to David to Jesus, who is called Christ, and emphasizes his point of view regarding Jesus' identity and origins by repeating the titles within a pattern, "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1) and "Abraham . . . , David . . . , Jesus . . . who is called Christ" (1:2. 6. 16). In this way, the narrator encourages the reader to think of the significance of Jesus in terms of the twice-named male ancestors.

22Luz, Matthew, 103, argues for "register of the origin," referring to chapter one which provides a "loose association to the Old Testament." Patte, The Gospel According to Matthew, 16. reads the genealogy and 1:18-25 as a unit, which develops the single theme of the origin of Jesus. Anderson, "Matthew: Gender and Reading," 8, remarks that "the superscription and the genealogy set the stage for reading the rest of the gospel. This is true whether the superscription is understood as the heading of the entire gospel, the infancy narrative, or merely the genealogy."


24The figures of Abraham and David mentioned in the genealogy as ancestors of Jesus reappear in the gospel with different emphases. Abraham as the hope of the Jews is a notion severely challenged by the preaching of John the Baptist (3:9) in a passage that deconstructs the reference in the genealogy. Amy Jill Levine, The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, Vol. 14 (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 73, n.19, observes that "Abraham's Matthean prominence relies on his association with other figures in biblical history and not on his connection with the promise in Gen.12:3." David, on the other hand, reappears as a figure who illuminates Matthew's christology through association of Jesus' royal power with the Jewish people. Levine, 251ff, notes, "The people associate Jesus with sonship and with David the ideal king who himself is able to recognize Jesus' authority (cf 22: 41-46) . . . the people see a "son;" their "blind guides"see only a threat to
It is also the case, however, that the narrator makes a sharp break in the usual verbal sequence "male begot sons(s) out of" (ἐκ τῆς) plus a female name (1:3, 5a, 5b, and 6).25 The break is effected by and draws attention to the inclusion of four women, although (as is also the case for the male ancestors) their presence in the genealogy is not explained, nor is their significance elaborated upon. In the case of Mary, however, the narrator shifts the reader's focus of attention from Joseph, the male ancestor of Jesus, to Mary, the female producer, by describing Joseph as the husband of Mary, "of whom was born" (ἐξ ἡς ἐγεννήθη) Jesus" (1:16).26 This narratorial move draws attention to Mary and also raises the issue of the relation of the first four women to her as the fifth.27

The Matthean narrator interrupts the patrilineal pattern of the genealogy by mentioning these female ancestors of Jesus. In order better to interpret their possible significance(s) in the Matthean text, it will be useful to consider briefly the stories of these women in the Hebrew Scriptures. The first, Tamar, is portrayed in Genesis 38 as an eminently righteous woman (הָרוּם; their own power.)28


26Garland, Reading Matthew, 19.

27R. Brown, The Birth, 74; Luz, Matthew, 109, see the link with Mary as the “irregularity” of God’s salvific action. J. P. Heil, “The Narrative Roles of the Women in Matthew’s Genealogy,” Biblica 72:4 (1991): 542, speaks of the role of Mary as surpassing that of the others by reversing tragedy. Brown, The Birth, 71, n. 21, also discusses three main explanations for the presence of the women in the genealogy: they were regarded as sinners; they were regarded as foreigners; and third, there was something irregular or extraordinary in their union with their partners, and the women showed initiative in furthering God’s plan and so were considered the instruments of God’s providence or of His Holy Spirit.
cf. Gen.38:26), more righteous than the man Judah. Denied children by Judah, who refuses her the levirate privilege, Tamar acts to ensure progeny by veiling herself and placing herself in his path as he returns home from shearing sheep. Judah unknowingly impregnates his daughter-in-law. When threatened with death for prostitution by Judah and the townsfolk, the pregnant Tamar uses her wit to prevent her death. She publicly exposes the tokens she had demanded of Judah and appeals to him to recognize his responsibility, to own his denial of her levirate privilege, and to acknowledge paternity of her children. In the end, he declares that she is more righteous than he, but he does not take her to wife.

The second woman, Rahab, is in Matthew’s gospel, said to be the wife of Salmon and the mother of Boaz, although there is no evidence for this claim in the story in Joshua 2 and 6. In the book of Joshua, she is described as a Canaanite woman, a prostitute living in a house in the city wall in Jericho. Risking her life, she shelters two Israelite spies in her home. She ignores her king’s command to reveal their presence, and instead ensures their escape. Her reasons for such action are said to be first that she has confidence in Israel’s God who protected the Israelites in the desert, and secondly, that she believes that this same God will give the land of Canaan to Israel. She, in effect, has put her faith in Israel’s God and adopted the religion of Israel. In return, she is promised that both she and her family will be spared when Jericho is destroyed. In Joshua 6, the promise is kept. and it is said that “to this day” (Joshua 6:25) they, Rahab’s descendants, dwell in the land.

The third woman mentioned in the genealogy is Ruth, a Moabite woman whose husband brother-in-law and father-in-law all die. She is left childless and alone, except for her mother-in-law. Naomi, who is advanced in years. Ruth decides to give her loyalty to Naomi, and together
the two women leave Moab and return to Bethlehem, there to live among Naomi’s people and to worship Naomi’s God. They exist in Israel outside the social order until Ruth takes the risk of putting herself into a situation where she attracts the attention of Boaz, a kinsman of Naomi. Boaz eventually acts as Ruth’s redeemer and then marries her. Ruth gives birth to Obed, an ancestor of David.

The last woman mentioned in the genealogy is “she-of Uriah” whose story is recounted in 2 Samuel 11-12 and 1 Kings 1-2. She is wife of Uriah the Hittite, a prominent soldier in David’s army. David sees her bathing on her roof, sends for her and has intercourse with her. David then contrives to have Uriah killed and takes Bathsheba into his harem. God then sends Nathan the prophet to censure David. Later, Bathsheba gives birth to Solomon, and together with Nathan succeeds in persuading David to appoint Solomon as his successor.

From the narrator’s perspective, the women (as do all the persons in the genealogy) in some way give specific content to claims made about Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, but the precise nature of that content (except in the case of Mary) is not explained. The narrator gives no further information about the first four women, nor is it explained why these particular women rather than others, appear in Jesus’ genealogy. The story of Jesus’ origins and significance is an androcentric tale in which the reader is encouraged to interpret Jesus’ significance in terms of predominantly male ancestors, especially Abraham and David.

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28In the case of Mary, 1:16 is further developed by 1:18-25. See Luz, Matthew, 118.
2. The Foremothers and Mary from the Perspective of the Plot

In terms of plot the foremothers of Jesus, with the exception of Mary, do not appear "in the story.""29 The narrator's expository commentary situates the five female figures in a time "before the beginning" of the story. Mary appears in the plotted story but she is portrayed as totally passive and in no way actively carries forward the action. As will be shown below, when the story does begin, the narrator has so structured the plot that Joseph, not Mary, propels it forward. The foremothers appear in the narrator's expository commentary given before the plotted story begins (never again to reappear). The women and their stories may be considered 'preparatory figures' because they help to illuminate something of the significance of Jesus as the Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. It is crucial, as noted above, that this knowledge is communicated to the implied reader at the very beginning of the plotted story, since the reader's first impression, i.e., an encounter with five women in an otherwise predominantly patrilineal genealogy and the tension which that engenders, will last until some new or other information comes along to modify the initial information.30

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29Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), 684, "the function of exposition is to provide necessary information concerning characters and events existing before the action proper of a story begins. Its emphasis is strongly explanatory."

30Howell, Matthew's Inclusive Story, 115, speaks of the "primacy-recency" effect defined by M. Sternberg, Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 93-94, as 'the proverbial tenacity and enduring influence of first impressions'. Howell observes that "Because of the 'primacy-recency' effect, . . . information will be retained and will influence interpretations of the subsequent narrative until it is undermined by new information."
3. The Foremothers and Mary from the Perspective of Story Characters

a. Mary

Mary is the only woman mentioned in the genealogy who reappears as a story character. The narrator begins (1:18-2:23) with a story of how Jesus' birth took place. The action in the subsequent series of stories and sub-stories is carried by the male figures, Herod and/or Joseph. Paradoxically, in the story of how the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place (1:18-25), which is focused almost entirely on Joseph, Mary emerges as significant in her own right. That is, Joseph's dilemma revolves around Mary as he confronts her unexplained pregnancy, which is the subject of the angel's message to him. As Karl Plank has noted, "Mary, who seemingly does not act in this birth story, exists as a crucial part of its setting. No neutral foil to set off Joseph's action, the otherness of Mary exists forcefully in the story as a reality with which Joseph must contend."31 The narrator thus makes clear that Mary functions as a pivotal character in the story of Jesus' origins.

In fact, tension and ambiguity permeate the narrator's presentation of Mary as a story character. For example, in the genealogy Joseph's identity had been defined in terms of "Mary, whose husband was Joseph," but later, in the story proper, the situation is reversed and Mary's identity is defined in terms of her role as Joseph's wife and Jesus' mother (1:20). From the perspectives of both the narrator and of the angel of the Lord, Mary is declared (1:18, 20) to be

the recipient of the divine power of the Holy Spirit. That is, the episode is narrated in such a way that the narrator's words, coupled with the reported speech of the angel, constitute a double witness to Mary's conception of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:18, 20). In a second instance, both the narrator and the angel of the Lord refer to "the child and his mother" (2:11, 13, 14, 20, 21) first as the focus of the Magi's visit, and secondly as the twosome whose safety concerns both Joseph and the angel. The narrator's coupling of the figures of the child Jesus and Mary, and the omission of the figure of Joseph, leads the reader to focus on Mary and Jesus who together are protected by God. It may also remind the reader that Jesus is Mary's son, as in 1:18-25. Is the implied reader to understand that Jesus as son of Mary is also Son of God?

On the other hand, despite Mary's crucial role, she remains nonetheless a passive character. Both in 1:18-25 and in the story recounting the events after Jesus' birth in Judea and Galilee (2:1-23), Mary neither speaks nor acts. She is one spoken about, μηστευθείσης, "when.

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32 The narrator's reporting of the angelic speech is not only "speech within (the narrator's) speech." but is also "speech about (angelic) speech." The angelic message is brought to earth, so to speak, by the narrator, and offered to the reader.

33 Luz, Matthew, 137 notes that the phrase "the child and his mother"(also 2:13f., 19. 21) is a formulation that indicates the special position of the virgin Mary in the sense of 1:18-25. See also Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According To Matthew, trans. David E. Green. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 45; R. H. Gundry, Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 31; Kingsbury, Matthew as Story, 45. Brian N. Nolan, The Royal Son of God. The Christology of Matthew 1-2 in the Setting of the Gospel (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1979), 41, finds a Davidic resonance in the phrase 'the child and his mother'.

34 R. Brown, The Birth, 142, "Joseph is the one through whom Jesus is begotten Son of David, and Mary is the one through whom he is begotten as Son of God."
. . betrothed;” εὑρέθη, “she was found.” No place or circumstance is named. Mary seems to be part of the background, hardly emerging out of the setting in a story concerned with angelic visions addressed to Joseph. Even the narrator's quotation from Scripture concerning Isaiah's "virgin” who “shall conceive and give birth to a son” (1:23) is employed more to point to the identity of Jesus as “Emmanuel” than to highlight Mary's virginity. Ultimately, Mary's significance, though real, is undercut or underplayed and thus displaced.

b. Jesus

Jesus is the main character. The female figures of the foremothers and of Mary his mother recede before the importance of the figure of Jesus. As we have seen, even in stories in which at least Mary's presence is required, such as those stories concerning Jesus' conception and birth (1:18-25), or the visit of the Magi (2:1-12), interest in Mary and/or Isaiah's virgin (1:23) in their own right is limited. The function of the female figures is to illuminate the significance of Jesus. In 1:18-25, an angel declares Jesus' conception to be of the Holy Spirit. The narrator uses quotations from the Scriptures to explain Jesus' name in terms of the salvation of his people (1:20, 21), and his conception is further interpreted as a fulfilment of scriptural prophecy from God (1:22-23). The passive voice emphasizes the agency of the Holy Spirit. So Gundry, Matthew, 21, and others. Luz, Matthew, 118, and R. Brown, The Birth, 124 note that this reference anticipates the angel's revelation in v.22; the reader knows already what Joseph does not learn until later.

36Luz, Matthew, 123.

37George M. Soares Prabhu, The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 19-20, remarks that the “formula quotations” or so-called “fulfillment quotations,” are perhaps better termed “Reflexionszitate” which function as ‘asides’ of the narrator. Scripture quotations function as the most prominent means by which the Matthean narrator illuminates for the reader significant aspects of Jesus' life and gives her/him
The narrator takes care to notify the reader in direct commentary, by translating the name "Emmanuel." that Jesus is "God with us" (1:23). This not only calls attention to the meaning of Emmanuel but also underlines for the reader the continuity of Jesus with the prophetic witness.\(^{38}\) In this story as in many others, it is Jesus who dominates, because although at this point in the story he does not act, the story action takes place because of him.

The narrator also shows Jesus the main character as intimately linked with the subordinate character of Mary. As has been shown above, Jesus and Mary are connected in the story of Mary's mysterious conception of Jesus which initiates the story action. Jesus is frequently presented in the presence of his mother: Gentile Magi enquire after "the child born King of the Jews" (2:2), and find not the child alone, but "the child and his mother;" Joseph cares for "the child and his mother" and brings them to safety in Egypt, and then back to the land of Israel. In these same stories, both the child-king and his mother stand in opposition to the venal king, Herod, who destroys the children of Bethlehem and seeks to destroy Jesus. The narrator shows us Mary and Jesus, together aligned in the power of God's Spirit and under the protection of the angel of the Lord, as not only contrasted with but also as those who ultimately vanquish King Herod and the religious authorities in Jerusalem.\(^{39}\)

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interpretive directions for reading the gospel. These references to Scripture serve to specify the real world which the narrative takes as its reference, i.e., the history of Israel as God's chosen people. The narrator instructs the reader to see Jesus as the fulfilment of Israel's prophecy.


\(^{39}\)But see Matt: 13:55, which refers to Jesus as son of the builder, whose mother is called Mary.
4. The Foremothers and Mary and the Role of the Implied Reader

After laying out the different textual perspectives on the women in the genealogy, we may now consider how these perspectives function as a "conditioning force" exerted upon a real reader who takes up the role of the implied reader and grapples with the continually shading perspectives in order to arrive at meaning(s).  

The position or vantage point from which the implied reader reads, evolves in part from the narrator's perspective, revealed in direct commentary to the reader at the beginning of the story in a predominately androcentric genealogy: Jesus is the Christ, the son of Abraham, the son of David. This perspective becomes more complex when the five female ancestors of Jesus mentioned in the genealogy are considered. Questions immediately arise. Why are the women included? Why these and not others? Are their commonalities or differences to be emphasized? What is their relation to each other and to Mary? Do they have any connection with themes in the rest of the gospel? What might the connection be? How do their stories play out in Matthew's story? In a word, how is one to interpret the significance of the women?  

When the women are considered in light of their significance/non-significance in terms of the plot of the gospel story and in relation to the story character, it becomes clearer to the implied reader that the women, since they are not story characters, play no role in the plotted story. In fact, they appear only in the genealogy, never to be mentioned again. The foremothers are

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40Iser, The Act, 36ff, reminds us that to speak of the implied reader is to speak not solely of a programmed reception of a text, nor simply to speak of discernible textual structures, but rather to consider the role of the implied reader as "a kind of conditioning force behind a particular kind of tension produced by the real reader" when s/he accepts the role. The fact that the reader's role can be fulfilled in different ways, according to historical or individual circumstances, is an indication that the structure of the text allows for different ways of fulfillment." (Emphasis author's).
significant not because they act in the plotted story but rather because they are figures who not only ensure Jesus' Messianic ancestry biologically, but also because their stories give content to the meaning of his Messiahship. Various strands of their multi-faceted stories in the Hebrew Scriptures provoke speculation, and offer any number of hints of possible meanings for those playing the role of the implied reader.

Mary's significance as an instrument in the conception and birth of the Messiah and her pivotal role as a story character are undeniable. The narrator underlines her importance by citing Scripture to refer to her role in Jesus' conception by the power of the Holy Spirit. Although Mary functions as an important story character, paradoxically, she does not speak or act to move the plotted story along, and remains undeveloped as a character. It is also the case that Mary and Jesus are presented as intimately linked, although it is clear that Jesus is the main character and that Mary is subordinate.

The implied reader is given one of the most significant clues to the narrator's perspective on the female images when they are introduced in expository material, that is, in narratorial discourse where although nothing much "happens" much is "revealed." What is revealed is the ambiguity of the narrator's perspective on the women, who are portrayed as paradoxically

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41 Levine. Social and Ethnic Dimensions, 59, notes that the women are more than ancestral markers. "Unlike those rare women present in earlier biblical genealogies (e.g., Gen 22:20-24: 25:1-6; 35:22b-26; 1 Chron.2:3-4, 18-20, 46-47), the five do more than distinguish between clans or tribes, or between the children of concubines and those of wives."

42 At this point it can be said that what is revealed is the narrator's concern to arouse the reader's interest in the women; they merit inclusion in the genealogy, but their inclusion is enigmatic. The fact that the women are mentioned in direct commentary to the reader at the beginning of the story reveals, among other things, that they are important to the narrator and that they possess potential to elicit a response from the reader.
significant and yet insignificant. While the reference to the presence of four women from the Hebrew Scriptures invites speculation regarding their significance for understanding the Matthean Jesus, that significance is not spelled out in the gospel, but must be constructed by each reader from within her/his particular life situation.43

Different interpretations of the women's significance abound. It may be instructive here to refer briefly to the readings of actual readers who, conditioned by their own life experience and/or interests/concerns, have chosen to dynamically interact with the role of implied reader as 'structured act'. W. J. Werem searches for a correspondence rather than a contrast between the four women and Mary, arguing that "their stories reveal how Israel's history would have been cut short prematurely had these women not seen it as their task to map out alternative pathways to the future."44 J. P. Heil takes seriously not only the biblical backgrounds of the women but also their respective structural positions and the sequence in which the implied reader experiences their naming. He concludes that the role of Mary greatly surpasses that of the previous women, but that each woman plays a distinctive narrative role in demonstrating how Jesus is the Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.45 Janice Capel Anderson notes that the variety of interpretations, indicates the important part the reader plays in creating textual meaning, and then offers her own interpretation: "The inclusion of the women in the genealogy foreshadows and explains Mary's role. It provides a means of pointing to and at the same time coming to terms with the female production of the Messiah. God has acted in a radically new way - outside of the patriarchal

43See chapter four for the present reader's interpretation of the women's significance.


In Elaine Waintwright’s inclusive re-reading, “The reader is invited to read the presence of the women into the silences surrounding the thirty-five begettings from which they are absent in the text. . . . The women’s presence functions . . . as a critique of patriarchy and introduces a point of tension into the narrative that must guide the reader as the story unfolds.” For Amy Jill Levine, the four women in the genealogy “overcome obstacles created by men in authority who were unwilling to fulfill their own responsibilities in salvation history. The women are socioeconomically and cultically powerless, yet they exhibit the faith by which the divine program is accomplished.”

IV. Rachel: 2:18

Φωνή ἐν Ραμά ἠκούσθη
κλαυθμός καὶ ὀδυρμός πολύς
Ῥαχὴλ κλαίουσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς,
καὶ οὐκ ἤθελεν παρακληθῆναι ὅτι οὐκ εἰσίν.

A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud mourning,
Rachel crying for her children;
and she would not be consoled, because they are no more (Matthew 2:18).

The Matthean passage is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:15. It will be useful to consider briefly the quotation in context in Jeremiah before dealing with it in Matthew.

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48 Levine, Social and Ethnic Dimensions, 82.

1. Jeremiah 31:15

The passage occurs within the context of what has been called “The Book of Consolation.” Jeremiah (30-31) depicting a time when YHWH’s love for his people would bring them back from afar and set them up in their own land, never again to be disturbed. The prophet breaks into lyricism on the afflictions of the northern kingdom, personified by Rachel, mother of the exiled northern tribes. Commentators have noted that within the context of consolation, YHWH responds to Rachel’s grief (31:16-17) by assuring her that there is a reward for her “work” and hope for her future, since her children shall come back to their own country. The juxtaposing of Rachel’s sorrow and YHWH’s reassurance modifies and transforms the note of inconsolable grief sounded in v. 15, so that Rachel’s despair over the death of her children is transformed into a word of hope for the future.

2. Rachel from the Perspective of the Narrator

The narrator introduces the reader to the figure of Rachel, one of the most dramatic and mysterious female figures in Matthew’s story, in an equally intriguing quotation. Soares Prabhu notes that this quotation “is surely among the most problematic of all those in Matthew’s gospel, [since] . . . the application of the quotation to the narrative is strained, and scarcely anything in the

Matthew (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 253-257; J. A. Emerton et al., eds., Matthew I-VII, International Critical Commentary, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 67. for discussion of the Matthean modifications of the text from Jeremiah. These questions form the background of this study, but are not directly pertinent for its purposes. The work of Gundry, Matthew: A Commentary, has been most helpful.

50 Other mysterious female figures are Wisdom, and the Queen of the South. They are, however, more clearly linked to the passages in which they appear than is Rachel.
narrative links up with the quoted text." R. France speaks of the surface meaning of the quotation as "simply not enough to explain why Matthew bothered to include it [the quote] at all." Most interpreters have assumed that there is something more here than can be derived from the words themselves, but as France observes, "the trouble is that they do not agree on what that 'something more' is." What is virtually certain, however, is that the quotation refers to more than what the text indicates on the surface.

The narrator introduces the figure of Rachel by quoting the words of the prophet Jeremiah. The reader "hears" two voices, that of the narrator in the introductory formula and that of the prophet Jeremiah, who is given voice by the Matthean narrator. Is it possible to know which voice predominates, or is "heard" more loudly than another, or is rendered most influential for the reader? Hendrikus Boers has pointed out that

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53 Ibid.

when an author quotes another, e.g., in support of what she or he is trying to say . . . the author in effect temporarily suspends her or his own act of linguistic performance in favor of such an act in the past by the quoted author or the tradition, in the sense of the author herself or himself becoming temporarily a reader/hearer, as if saying: 'Let us hear what so-and-so has to say in support of the matter.'

Just as the Matthean narrator “listens to” the words of the prophet Jeremiah which he reports, so too does the implied reader.

The quotation, for several reasons, attracts attention and engages the implied reader. First, the immediacy of the narrator's direct commentary reduces the temporal distance between the implied reader and the narrator and also between the implied reader and the words of Jeremiah. The temporal alignment achieved simultaneously between the reader and the narrator and between the reader and the words of the prophet draws the reader into the narrator's presence, and encourages the reader to adopt both the prophetic perspective itself and also the narrator's perspective on the prophet's point of view. The narrator's use of the present participle to introduce the words of Jeremiah creates and offers to the implied reader a scenario in which it becomes possible to "hear" not only the narrator's words, but also the voice of the prophet Jeremiah, λέγοντος, speaking as if in the present moment, and even, on a third level, of hearing Rachel weeping, κλαίουσα, as if in the present moment. That is, the use of the present participle aligns the temporal position of the implied reader with that of the prophet and even of

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56Anderson, “Matthew: Gender and Reading,” 24, notes the use of the present participle to reinforce the temporal alignment of the narrator, characters, and implied reader.
Rachel herself. Finally, as has often been noted, what the narrator wants to convey is made clearer by his introduction of this particular quotation not with ἵνα, “in order that,” but rather with τότε, “then.” The reader understands the narrator to be saying that Herod’s murder of the children did not take place in order to fulfill the word of the prophet, but rather that through its occurrence, the prophecy was in fact fulfilled.

In the prophecy the dominant figure is that of the metaphorical Rachel. A metaphor may be defined as “a figure of speech in which one thing, idea or action is referred to by a word or expression normally denoting another thing, idea, or action, so as to suggest some common quality shared by the two. In metaphor, this resemblance is assumed as an imaginary identity rather than directly stated as a comparison.” The Matthean narrator makes use of the figure of Rachel, who in Jeremiah 31 is already a metaphorical figure, the transhistorical, ancient mother of Israel, weeping over “her children,” represented by the northern tribes who have been carried off into Exile. The identity of the thing/idea/action to which/whom Rachel might refer in the Matthean passage, however, is not made explicit. Because there is no explicit figure to which

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57 See ibid., for a discussion on alignment of temporal perspectives. She points out that the importance of temporal alignment is that the words are directed to the implied reader; the narrator and the implied reader are contemporaneous during the exchange.

58 Soares Prabhu, Formula Quotations, 50.

59 Gundry, Matthew, 35, compares a similar use in 27:9-10, “another statement of Jeremiah in reference to the penalty paid for an act hostile to Jesus.” See also Luz, Matthew, 147; Garland, Reading Matthew, 30; Schweizer, The Good News, 41.

Rachel corresponds. she may be understood to function in Matthew 2:18, as an implicit metaphor.\textsuperscript{61}

In any case, Rachel as metaphor functions to create a new combination of ideas.\textsuperscript{62} That is, the narrator uses the metaphorical figure of Rachel to focus the reader's attention, to direct her/his gaze, and thus to provide the conditions which invite and enable the reader to "see" imaginatively more than what s/he might otherwise have seen in a more prosaic passage. Ultimately however, the narrator does not dictate what the reader is to imagine. Rather, he presents Rachel as a kind of symbolic figure who suggests "a direction, or a broad area of reference" beyond her/himself.\textsuperscript{63} What constitutes the direction or reference depends on how a real reader responds to the role mapped out for her/him as implied reader.

3. Rachel from the Perspective of Plot

Rachel appears in a static moment when the plotted story is interrupted by the narrator's direct commentary to the reader. The narrator's commentary in the form of a quotation from the prophet follows immediately his telling the story of Herod's slaughter of the innocents of Bethlehem. The proximity of the quotation to the preceding story leads the reader to understand the enigmatic Rachel as an illuminating figure who can help the reader better understand aspects

\textsuperscript{61}M. H. Abrams, \textit{A Glossary of Terms}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1971), 61, "in an implicit metaphor the tenor (the subject to which the metaphoric word is applied) is not stated, but is implied by the verbal context."

\textsuperscript{62}Baldick, \textit{The Concise Oxford Dictionary}, 134, "The use of metaphor to create new combinations of ideas is a major feature of poetry."

\textsuperscript{63}Abrams. \textit{A Glossary of Terms}, 168.
of the Herod story. What those aspects might be are, however, far from clear. There does not seem to be any exact correspondence at the level of plot construction between the quote and the story of the massacre of Bethlehem's children. Is Rachel to be understood as the mother of the murdered children? In what sense are Bethlehem's children the children of Rachel? Since the reference to Rachel in no way furthers the development of the plot, the narrator may well be indicating to the reader that Rachel is but another mysterious female figure, who as metaphor both “is” and “is not” what she seems, one who conceals as much as she reveals. Much like the other female images already encountered, Rachel provokes reader reflection and stimulates the construction of a meaning.

4. Rachel from the Perspective of Story Characters

Rachel's significance becomes more specified when the narrator indicates the relation of Rachel to the story characters, particularly the children of Bethlehem. The narrator links the prophetic and poetic evocation of Rachel weeping over her children at Ramah with the story of the slaughter of “her” children in Bethlehem who are no more. This linking of the story with the prophecy helps the implied reader to understand Rachel's grief over her children “who are no more.” as somehow also grief over the death of Bethlehem's children. The maternal Rachel mourning her lost children also echoes a previous mother/child motif. The plight of mother Rachel and her children who are no more is that of one endangered by malevolent external forces. Rachel's perilous situation parallels that of Mary and the child Jesus, endangered by Herod's

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⁶⁴Soares Prabhu. *Formula Quotations*. 256.
threat, and forced to flee for their lives. Rachel is also linked by contrast with the murderous Herod. In the story of the slaughter of the innocents, Rachel's heart-felt and grief-stricken cry contrasts with Herod's insincere speech to the magi and his murderous order to kill the babes of Bethlehem. The narrator thus encourages the reader, through the counter-symbol of Rachel, to see Herod in a negative light, and encourages empathy with Rachel who mourns the death of her children.

5. Rachel and the Role of the Implied Reader

The implied reader here occupies a rather uncomfortable position, metaphorically speaking. It is true that Rachel is introduced in the narrator's direct commentary in the context of a quotation from the Hebrew Scriptures as a figure who points to the significance of Jesus's story. It is also the case that like the foremothers of Jesus, Rachel does not further the action of the plot, but rather serves to stimulate the reader's reflection on the meaning of events and the significance of story characters. The convergence of these three perspectives on Rachel constitute a specific understanding of Rachel's significance for the implied reader. Rachel's tragedy is to be compared with that of Mary, who as a story character suffers on behalf of and with the endangered Child Jesus. Rachel's grief over "her children" contrasts with Herod's murderous designs on the Child Jesus and his execution of the children of Bethlehem. And yet ambiguity remains for the implied

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65 Patte, The Gospel According to Matthew, 38, notes that the exiled Jesus is the one who escapes death: if he had remained in Judea he would have been "no more," like Rachel's exiled children over whom she weeps. The massacre of the children evokes the Passion story where political authority kills the "King of the Jews."
reader because Rachel, as metaphoric figure, points to a reality greater than that described in the story. a fact which opens up a “gap” in meaning which an actual reader must attempt to fill.  

V. Sophia and the Queen of the South

The narrator introduces the first of these female figures to the implied reader in a report of Jesus’ speech to John’s disciples and to the crowds (11:4-19). Jesus speaks of John’s greatness and the perversity of this generation, and ends with a reference to Wisdom (Sophia) “justified by her deeds” (11:19). The significance of this personified female figure in the Jewish Scriptures cannot be underestimated, and since this knowledge will necessarily influence the interpretation of 11:19, an excursus on the figure of personified Wisdom is appropriate at this point.

66For an example of a contemporary reading of Rachel see especially Wainwright A Feminist Rereading of the Matthean Jesus, 64ff. Wainwright sees Rachel as standing “in the place of the erased women [of Bethlehem] and “in the place of divine compassion, likewise erased.” “Jesus [is] characterized in the lineage of Rachel, [as] endangered child and liberated liberator.” Unfortunately, this source came to my attention too late to include it in the dissertation except summarily.

67Howell, Matthew’s Inclusive Story, 200, 203, notes, “Jesus’ speech . . . shares the ideological point of view of the narrator, and is, in fact, the primary vehicle by which the author expresses his ideological point of view . . . . [When] an emphasis is placed on Jesus’ speech, which is also a medium for the implied author’s value system, Jesus addresses the implied reader together with the characters.”

68Wisdom (Hebrew: נְמוֹן, Greek: οοφία) is often referred to in the literature as “Sophia,” a transliteration of the Greek word for wisdom, and a proper name for Wisdom as the female personification of God’s self-manifestation in creation and in the history of Israel. Because Sophia as a proper name immediately suggests a person rather than a concept, I use this name interchangeably with Lady Wisdom or simply Wisdom. G. B. Caird, The Language and Imagery of the Bible (London: Trinity Press, 1980), 80, notes that “In every context in which οοφία is used to denote the personified wisdom of God it is used also of the practical understanding of life . . . in such a way that the two forms of wisdom are unmistakably identified.”
I. Personified Wisdom in the Hebrew Scriptures

"'Lady Wisdom' is the most remarkable personification in the entire Hebrew Scriptures ... (Proverbs 1, 8, 9; and cf. Job 28, Sirach 24, Wisdom 6-10)." She appears in Job as a treasure hidden from humans, and known only to God. In Proverbs 1 she is personified as a street preacher crying aloud in the market place, a prophet promising death to those who refuse to listen to her, and security to those who give her ear. In Proverbs 8, she again publicly proclaims her worth, her authority and her rewards, then describes her divine origins and her joyful role in God’s creative activity. In Proverbs 9 she appears as a compelling hostess, calling to all to leave their foolish ways and walk in her ways, to eat and drink at the table she has prepared for them. Lady Wisdom in Proverbs is “a personified figure who, while obviously transcendent, comes toward human beings, tests and challenges them. She is a beneficent, right-ordering power in whom God delights and by whom God creates; her constant effort is to lure human beings to life.” In Sirach 24, Wisdom sings her self-praise, describes her divine origin, her search for a resting place, and how the Creator instructed her to pitch her tent in Israel. She obeys, and ministers to the Lord in the Jerusalem temple. She concludes with a compelling invitation to eat her unusual meal, which increases hunger and thirst for her, and finally promises that obedience to her will preserve one from sin. The author of Sirach identifies Lady Wisdom with Torah, associating her with Israel’s history and its covenant law (24:23).

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In the book of Wisdom, the figure of personified Wisdom reaches its peak of development. In chapter 6, she is described as easily found, for she seeks out those who desire her. In chapter 7 she is depicted in a five-fold metaphor as intrinsically linked to the mystery of God: she is the breath of the power of God; a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; a radiance of eternal light; a flawless mirror of the workings of God; an image of divine goodness (7:25-26). She is everywhere omnipotent; she orders all things well, and can do all things. Her energy renews all things; she enters holy souls and makes them friends of God: evil cannot defeat her (7:27-8:1). Solomon desires Wisdom, who works with God, teaches virtue and gives good counsel, as his bride and teacher (8:2-21). Finally, personified Wisdom appears in the story of Israel's history as exerting the saving power of YHWH, as she brings about “the decisive revelatory and liberating events of her people Israel” and claims eschatological victory.71

2. Sophia and the Queen of the South from the Perspective of the Narrator

The Matthean narrator uses specific rhetorical devices such as reported speech and rhetorical questions to shape the implied reader’s role and guide his/her response to Jesus’ words concerning himself, John, and Wisdom. When the implied reader hears the reported speech of Jesus in 11:4-19, s/he has the illusion of being in the presence of Jesus, and of feeling that Jesus is speaking directly to her/him.72 Jesus’ rhetorical questions, “What did you go out to see...?” “Why

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71Ibid., 90. Personified Wisdom in Baruch appears upon earth and lives among human beings (3:37); and in the apocalyptic Book of Enoch she can find no dwelling on earth, and returns to heaven (41:1-2).

72Howell, Matthew’s Inclusive Story, 174, notes the narrator’s use of the rhetorical device of discourse which produces ‘the illusion of immediacy and presentness in the reader’.
then, did you go...?" "What comparison can I use...?" (11:7-10; 16, etc.) also have the effect of drawing the implied reader into the scene. Thus, the implied reader has the impression of "hearing" Jesus’ questions which demand her/his response. At the end of Jesus’ discourse, s/he also responds to Jesus’ enigmatic statement about Wisdom justified by her deeds, as if spoken directly to him/her. By means of such rhetorical devices, including the appearance of an enigmatic Sophia figure, the narrator impresses upon the reader's understanding the notion of Jesus' and John's integrity in the face of the perverse judgments of this generation, and encourages the reader to side with Jesus/John, and with Wisdom herself.

A second female image, that of the Queen of the South (12:42) appears, again in the context of the narrator’s report of a direct speech of Jesus. Jesus responds to the criticism of the Pharisees by justifying his disciples' conduct. He challenges the Pharisees' understanding and interpretation of Scripture and of Sabbath law, and confronts their attacks on his integrity. He ultimately refuses their demand for a sign and refers to the Queen of the South's coming judgment.

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71Goulder, Midrash, 358, notes that 11:19 (which forms an inclusio with 11:2), marks the end of the section with a "gnomic paragraph-closer" in the Matthean manner. Howell, Matthew's Inclusive Story, 224, n.1, notes that here as elsewhere in the gospel, the implied reader is addressed at the end of a discourse: "The tendency to open up the conclusion of the discourse to include the implied reader in addresses to characters in the plotted story . . . is consistently carried out throughout the gospel."

72The Queen of the South appears in 1Kings 10 and in 2Chronicles 9. The story is that of a foreign queen with fabulous wealth who comes to test Solomon with hard questions. Solomon bests her by answering her riddles, and then with due ceremony, sends her on her way. The two female figures of Sophia and the Queen of the South appear at different points in Matthew’s Gospel, i.e., chapters 11 and 12. They are presented together in this study because they are female, because both of them portray aspects of wisdom, and because both are introduced in order to speak of Jesus’ righteous position in the face of the hostility of his opponents.
and condemnation of this generation (12:42).\textsuperscript{76} The implied reader appreciates the Queen of the South as a royal figure who judges Jesus to be greater than King Solomon. The Queen who will, in fact, rise up at the judgment and condemn the generation that rejected Jesus, is perceived as a wise and powerful woman.\textsuperscript{77}

The narrator presents the figures of personified Wisdom and of the Queen of the South as personages (poetical and historical) who vindicate Jesus. They attain special significance for the implied reader first because they hear of them from Jesus in his own words, and secondly by virtue of their symbolic nature (Wisdom is personified, the Queen of the South is presented as a trans-historical figure). Both arouse the reader's interest and cause her/him to ponder their significance.\textsuperscript{78}

3. Sophia and the Queen of the South from the Perspective of the Plot

The two female wisdom images, i.e., personified Wisdom and the Queen of the South, do not move the plot forward by any action, but as the female figures in previous chapters, serve rather to illumine the meaning of plotted events. At this point in the story, opposition to Jesus moves the plot forward as the theme of conflict and persecution of Jesus and his disciples found in chapter 10 is developed in chapters 11-12. This opposition is portrayed in various scenes and in

\textsuperscript{76}Gouder, \textit{Midrash}, 334, sees the Queen of the South as a fitting feminine pair to the Ninevites.

\textsuperscript{77}Claudia Camp, "1 and 2 Kings," in Newsome and Ringe, \textit{The Women's Bible Commentary}, 102, "The queen . . . is Woman Wisdom, cast in narrative form."

\textsuperscript{78}Both figures may be considered as symbols because they function as a specially evocative kind of image, that is, they refer to a concrete action, etc., which also has some further significance associated with it. As symbols, their application is left open to suggestion.
both chapters is referred to in extended speeches by Jesus. In the opening scene (11:1-6) the narrator recalls to the reader Jesus' ministry of preaching and healing related in chapters 5-9. Jesus' reply to John's disciples' question ends with the declaration of blessedness for the one who "takes no offense at me," implying that there are some who are scandalized in face of Jesus' "deeds."

In Jesus' address to the crowds (11:7-15) he affirms that John is the forerunner of the Messiah by citing Scripture, but ends with a warning to "hear" what he says, indicating that some will either take offense or not understand. In 11:16-19 Jesus stresses again that both John's and his own ministry are perversely opposed by others, and this time, names "this generation" as adversaries. Jesus' declaration about Wisdom's being justified by her deeds in 11:19 forms an inclusio with the mention of the "deeds" of Jesus (11:2) and brings the episode to a climax. The action recommences in 11:20-24 with Jesus castigating the unrepentant cities for not having recognized his "mighty works." Finally, in 11:25-30 Jesus addresses the Father and then issues an invitation to an indeterminate audience, couched in metaphorical language, as he calls to "all" who labour and are heavy burdened, promising them rest, an easy yoke and a light burden.  

In chapter 12, the reader again encounters an explicit articulation of the theme of the rejection of Jesus. Within the context of a steadily growing hostility from the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, Jesus speaks of the struggle between Satan and the Spirit of God, and of the righteousness of the repentant people of Nineveh, who like the Queen of the South will rise up at the judgment to condemn this generation. The figures of personified Wisdom and the Queen of 

79 For a discussion of the possible links with Wisdom in these passages, see chapter four of this study.
the South shed light on the action of the plot, i.e., they illumine the righteous nature of Jesus' and John's deeds, and draw attention to the righteousness of the repentant people of Nineveh. Both female figures stand in judgment on the unrighteousness of those who oppose Jesus, i.e., this wicked generation. Both are drawn as vindicators of those who do righteous deeds.

4. Sophia and the Queen of the South from the Perspective of the Story Characters

The characters in this episode who are related in some way to the female images of the Queen of the South and Sophia are Jesus, this generation, and the cities.80

a. Jesus

The narrator's presentation of the relationship between Jesus (and John) and Wisdom is double-edged.81 On the one hand, Jesus' statement in 11:19 implies that his deeds (described in the previous section) are, like those of Wisdom, evidence of righteousness. The reader might

80Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 25, notes that any entity in narrative which can be personalized can be called a character. All of the characters in this section, except Jesus, do not act or speak to further the action of the plot. Rather, they are spoken about. They resemble what Chatman, 132, calls “flat” characters, i.e., “endowed with a single trait, or very few. They are capable of great vivacity or power, and their behaviour is highly predictable. They are distinctly remembered because there is less to remember, and that less is very clearly structured.” I treat Wisdom and the Queen of the South more as poetic images than as story characters because personified Wisdom is used as an example of justification, and Jesus uses the figure of the Queen of the South to illustrate the true wisdom which recognizes in Him something greater than Solomon.

81M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology and Law in Matthew’s Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 56 ff., observes that Matthew 11:2-19 concerns Wisdom, her representatives, and her rejection. In this section, “Matthew’s intention is to . . . reinforce John’s subordination to Jesus. Matthew intensifies both Q’s exaltation of John and Q’s subordination of the Baptist to Jesus.”
understand a simple comparison. Wisdom and Jesus are both justified by their deeds. On the other hand, the repetition of the word “deeds” might also lead the reader to understand Wisdom as doing what Jesus does in 11:4-5, that is, works of compassionate healing and preaching of the gospel. The deeds of Wisdom would be identified as being the deeds of Jesus. In another sense, the deeds might be understood as being not only those of Jesus, but also those of John, of whose ministry Jesus speaks so convincingly in 11:6-19. Still another possibility is the understanding of Jesus as doing the deeds of Wisdom, and perhaps even being identified with Wisdom. An “interpretational space” is thus opened up by the narrator’s ambiguous presentation of personified Wisdom. He offers to the implied reader the possibility of more than one understanding of the relationship between Jesus and Wisdom. How an actual reader resolves this ambiguity will be determined by the way she chooses to organize the various perspectives offered to her so that she might construct a meaning.

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82 Davies and Allison, A Critical Commentary, 265. As Davies notes, “If people still disbelieve, that is not Wisdom's fault, that is not Jesus' doing: the blame lies with those who have ears but do not hear. Were Wisdom to be brought to trial with the crime of not stirring Israel to faith, she would be acquitted. Her works, that is, Jesus' works, exonerate her by bearing testimony to her labour for others. Despite the poor response of the people, the works of God in Jesus have made plain to all Jesus' identity, and the need to respond to him favourably cf. (11:20-24).”


b. This Generation

This generation is characterized as disagreeable children who complain that others will not act according to their desires and expectation. Some of the teachers of the Law and some Pharisees are identified as representative members of this wicked and adulterous generation who ask for a sign. In contrast to Wisdom and the Queen of the South, this generation cannot bear testimony to Jesus as Messiah even though it has a certain knowledge of the Scripture and of the law. It stands over against the Queen of the South, for like her, it also tested a king, but unlike the Queen of the South, who could see the truth, it cannot. Although one greater than Jonah and Solomon has appeared, this generation fails to hear and respond in the present moment. Therefore, it will be condemned.

c. The Cities

The personified cities stand in opposition to personified Wisdom. While Wisdom is lauded as justified, they are castigated as perverse. The unrepentant cities stand in contrast to the repentant people of Nineveh, and also to the Queen of the South, for Jesus declares that while the cities shall be cast down on the day of judgment, both the Ninevite people and the Queen of the South shall rise up in judgment to condemn them.

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86 Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 129-30, notes that the response of the Galilean towns up to this point has not been portrayed as negative, and that furthermore, they have not committed the great sins committed in Sodom. The severe judgment on them is because of the deadliest of sins, that of rejecting Jesus.
5. Sophia and the Queen of the South and the Role of the Implied Reader

The role of the implied reader is shaped by means of rhetorical techniques such as the narrator's reporting of Jesus' direct speech, and also by the couching of that speech, in part, in rhetorical questions which demand a response from the reader. The reader, as well as the crowds, must consider the questions, "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? (11:7), and To what shall I compare this generation? (11:16). S/he also hears Jesus' declaration about Wisdom "justified by her deeds" (a phrase anticipated in the narrator's "the deeds of the Christ," 11:2). spoken at the final, climactic moment of his Jesus' speech. The implied reader recognizes, however, that the intimate relation between Jesus' deeds and the deeds by which Wisdom is vindicated, is emphasized without the exact relationship between them being spelled out. Even though the narrator's specific arrangement of the material encourages the reader to link Jesus' deeds and those of Wisdom, the exact correspondence between them is not determined.

The implied reader is guided to adopt the position that both the figures of Wisdom and the Queen of the South function as symbolic figures who do not so much further the action of the plot as provoke the implied reader's reflection on the meaning, and here, the consequences of acceptance/rejection of Jesus. The reader understands the characters, Sophia and the Queen of the South, to be on the side of Jesus and of all those who repent. That is, they are apprehended as standing in judgment on this generation and the unrepentant cities. The implied reader is guided by all the intertwining perspectives to appreciate Jesus at this point in the gospel as one focused on the unjustified hostility with which his deeds are met. The juxtaposition of the two female Wisdom figures with the figure of Jesus encourages the reader to understand the rejection of Jesus' deeds as the rejection of personified Wisdom and her deeds.
VI. Jerusalem (Matthew 2:3; 23:37-39)

1. Jerusalem from the Perspective of the Narrator

   The narrator first introduces personified Jerusalem, (grammatically feminine singular in 2:3) within the context of a story of Herod and the Magi (2: 1-12, 16-18, 19-23). 67 He describes the troubled reaction of Herod and of “all Jerusalem” to the Magi’s declaration that they mean to pay homage to the child born King of the Jews. 68 Jerusalem personified is thus implicitly identified with the Jewish leaders, the “chief priests and scribes of the people” (2:4), who themselves are depicted as sympathizers and servants of Herod.

   Later, in chapter 23, the narrator introduces once again personified Jerusalem this time in the reported speech of Jesus, when near the end of his ministry Jesus proclaims terrible woes on the scribes and Pharisees, and then laments over Jerusalem:

   Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her. How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not. See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord’ (23:37-39).

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67 Soares Prabhu, Formula Quotations, notes that only in 2:3b is Jerusalem, Ἱεροσόλυμα treated as a feminine singular, and not as a neuter plural.

68 Davies and Allison, A Critical Commentary, 238, “Πας in Mt. 2:3 stresses the guilt of the capital, which is here personified: broadly speaking, 'she did not repent' (11:20).” While I agree that it is possible to understand “all Jerusalem” as referring to all the inhabitants of the city, I contend with Davies, that it is likely that here the reference is to personified Jerusalem as an entity, particularly because of the feminine singular. She, like Herod, is “troubled” at the coming of the Christ. This interpretation is bolstered by the appearance of personified Jerusalem in 23:37. See also W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Volume III (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 320, “in our gospel ‘all Jerusalem’ has been complicit in the slaughter of infants (2:1-12), has sent Pharisees to oppose Jesus, and has been predicted as the place of the Messiah’s execution (16:21; 20:17-18).”
While previously the narrator had spoken about personified Jerusalem (2:3), here Jesus speaks to her (23:37). The narrator twice emphasizes Jerusalem’s malevolent character, depicting her as aligned with Jesus’ enemies, and later in Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem, as refusing Jesus’ repeated offers of compassionate protection for her children. Personified Jerusalem from both the narrator’s and Jesus’ point of view is portrayed harshly. The convergence of the two points of view induces the reader to adopt a negative perspective on the city.

2. Jerusalem from the Perspective of the Plot

Personified Jerusalem is twice introduced at key moments in which conflict breaks out between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. Near the beginning of the plotted story in chapter 2,

89 A. Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), 324. notes “the remarkable transitions from the address in the second person singular (Ἰεροσολυμία, Ἱεροσολυμία) to the third singular (αὐτῆν), thence back to the second singular (τὰ τέκνα σου), and finally to the second plural (ἡθελήσατε).” The change in pronouns supports the view that Jesus addresses both the Jewish authorities and also speaks to Jerusalem as a personified and maternal figure. In 23:37 only, Ἰεροσολυμία occurs; elsewhere it is Ἰεροοσλυμία.

The personification of Jerusalem creates a distinction between the city per se and its inhabitants, in this instance the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem who oppose Jesus. Later (cf. 23:34-36.37) . . . the implied reader encounters the image of a female Jerusalem who murders the prophets and those sent to her. S/he also hears Jesus’ words lamenting Jerusalem’s children. The mention of “children” whom Jesus longs to gather and whom Jerusalem will not give up conjures up for the reader the images of two mothers in conflict over the gathering of “their” children. Both Jesus and Jerusalem are maternal figures. There are more perspectives for the reader to combine, however. The reader remembers that Jerusalem has been previously identified with the Jewish leaders hostile to Jesus. Guided by this previous textual signal, the reader combines the image of a Jerusalem initially hostile to Jesus with the second image of Jerusalem as a mother resisting Jesus’ desire for her children. Jerusalem, in effect, becomes the doubly “bad” mother. It is also the case that a resisting reader, a feminist reader for example, might well reject the Matthean emphasis on Jerusalem as malevolent in 23:37, and see her rather as a misguided mother who seeks to protect her children even from well-meaning outsiders, in this case, Jesus.
personified Jerusalem figures prominently as a culpable player. Jerusalem, with Herod, is "troubled," when after Jesus' birth the Magi come seeking Jesus in order to adore him. The early account of conflict between Jesus and Herod and the chief priests and scribes of the people in chapter 2 foreshadows the hostility of the Pharisees toward Jesus which erupts publicly in chapter 9 and then hardens into irreconcilable opposition in chapter 12. Personified Jerusalem reappears as the object of Jesus' passionate lament in chapter 23 when the conflict between Jesus and the scribes and the Pharisees has reached the breaking point. In chapter 23, Jesus addresses the crowds and his disciples concerning the teaching and the hypocritical deeds of the scribes and Pharisees (vv.1-12). Jesus, while speaking to the crowds, rhetorically addresses a series of woes (vv.13-33) to the Pharisees, denouncing their hypocrisy. He then utters a threat against this generation (vv.34-36) characterized as murderous and guilty of righteous blood. Finally (vv.37-39), Jesus addresses personified Jerusalem directly, lamenting her perversity, and stating the consequences she must endure for her hostility towards him. In a final warning, he declares that she shall not see him again until and unless she acknowledges "the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

In a word, personified Jerusalem is implicitly identified with the hostile Jewish leaders. Jerusalem as a personified figure functions in chapter 2 almost like a character in the story, since she is actively involved in machinations against Jesus. In chapter 11, the personified cities, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, and even Tyre and Sidon, are all classified as evil and

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91Davies and Allison. A Critical Commentary, Vol. III, 323-24, dissent from the general interpretations in which the verse has been construed as either a declaration of unqualified judgement, or as holding out hope for Israel’s repentance. They opt for a conditional sentence, best understood as a promise of redemption.
unrepentant, and in that sense can be understood as similar to personified Jerusalem. These cities "take up the gospel stance against the establishment's ethos." In chapter 23 Jerusalem does not so much further the action of the story, as expose the perverse wickedness of the Jewish authorities with whom she is intimately allied, even identified.93

3. Jerusalem from the Perspective of the Story Characters

a. King Herod and the Jewish leaders

In chapter 2, King Herod and the chief priests and scribes of the people are closely associated with Jerusalem (2:3-4). In chapter 23, Jerusalem is linked with the scribes and the Pharisees (23:2), and with this murderous generation (23:36). Both the crowds and the disciples hear Jesus' words addressed to Jerusalem, so that they (as well as the reader) know that Jesus is in fact speaking about the Jewish leaders by speaking to Jerusalem.

b. Jesus

Jesus and Jerusalem are in opposition first from a distance. Jesus is born not in Jerusalem but in Bethlehem. The narrator then tells the reader that Jesus' birth troubles "all Jerusalem." In

92Levine. Social and Ethnic Dimensions, 135, “Like the personification of Jerusalem in chapter 2, the condemnations in Matthew 11 ultimately focus on issues of center and periphery, stasis and mobility, rather than . . . on ethnic origins.”

93The problems with feminizing locations, in this case the city of Jerusalem, lies in the fact first, that the female imagery in the gospel is dichotomized, or split into “good” and “bad” female figures who can be played one against the other, thus perpetuating the dualistic view of the female prevalent in patriarchal ideology. The feminization of the city of Jerusalem is problematic for the reader because it raises the question of the nature of Jerusalem’s malevolence. Is Jerusalem malevolent because she represents the Jewish leadership, or because she represents evil mothers?
chapter 23. Jesus engages his opponent at close quarters. He speaks in the heart of Jerusalem, in
the temple, where he castigates Israel's leaders and sorrowfully addresses the city for the last time.
But if the reader is led to understand Jerusalem as evil, it is also true that Jesus, rather than
cursing her, ultimately grieves over her fate. He laments her perverse behaviour, expressing near
the close of his mission a sorrow which wholly encompasses his words of prophetic judgment.

4. Jerusalem and the Role of the Implied Reader

The implied reader encounters personified Jerusalem, hostile and troubled at Jesus' birth
(2:3), and again hostile to the adult Jesus (23:37-39). The reader knows from the very beginning
of the plotted story that Jerusalem helps initiate Herod's and the Jewish authorities' evil plans
against Jesus. Near the end of the story and of Jesus' ministry, the reader perceives Jerusalem as
the embodiment of an attitude of unbreachable opposition to Jesus, who laments her unyielding
resistance to his efforts to gather her to himself. The reader weaves together these perspectives
with those of some of the story the characters, namely, Herod and some Jewish authorities, for
whom Jerusalem is seen as an ally in the plot against Jesus. Finally, the implied reader combines
with these insights the attitude of Jesus toward Jerusalem, i.e., the idea that from Jesus'
perspective, Jerusalem is not cursed, but rather lamented. The various perspectives taken together
provide the implied reader with a certain latitude in understanding and interpreting the nature and
function of personified Jerusalem; she is personified female, malevolent mother, ally of Jesus'
enemies and embodiment of certain of the Jewish authorities' hostility toward Jesus. These
perspectives on Jerusalem shade into one another, guiding the implied reader to adopt a viewpoint
in which the personified city is understood as both hostile to Jesus and antithetically opposed to
the positive female images encountered in Matthew's story.

VII. The Mother Hen (23:37)

1. The Mother Hen from the Perspective of the Narrator

The image of the mother hen appears within the context of Jesus' direct address to
Jerusalem (23:37). Jesus turns from the audience of crowds and disciples, and from his rhetorical
denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees, to speak directly to Jerusalem, twice naming her in a
dramatic apostrophe. He calls her killer of prophets, and laments over her refusal of his
compassion. Jesus compares his own repeated longings to gather Jerusalem's children to himself,
using the example of the mother hen's protective gathering of her chicks. The narrator thus
implicitly contrasts Jesus as the mother hen who gathers her chicks under her wings, with
Jerusalem, characterized as a malevolent mother unwilling that Jesus gather her children.

The narrator's use of Jesus' reported direct speech increases immediacy between narrator
and reader and between the reader and Jesus. It draws the reader into the narrative, making her
feel that she "hears" Jesus' words to Jerusalem. The narrator encourages the reader to imagine
various correspondences between the mother-hen image and Jesus, and also to note contrasts
between Jesus and Jerusalem as maternal figures. Ultimately, the mother-hen simile functions as a
vehicle to convey the narrator's perspective on some of Jesus' deepest feelings; judgmental, tender
and sorrowful, toward Jerusalem and her children.
2. The Mother Hen from the Perspective of the Plot

The image of the mother hen appears near the end of chapter 23 in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, which is in fact Jesus' farewell speech to the Jewish leaders. In his last words to the Jewish authorities, spoken just before the commencement of the passion, Jesus uses the image of the mother hen to speak of his thwarted longings to gather Jerusalem's children to himself. Precisely at the climax of his mission to Israel, Jesus compares himself to a mother hen, and speaks of his yearning and compassion for Jerusalem. The mother hen image thus stands as a middle term between Jesus' preceding castigation of Jerusalem as killer of the prophets, stoner of those sent to her, and his subsequent and final warning of Jerusalem's coming desolation. The following two chapters (24-25) develop Jesus' vision of coming destruction, judgment, and the necessity to discern the coming of the Kingdom.

3. The Mother Hen from the Perspective of the Story Characters
a. Jesus

The narrator has Jesus apply the female imagery to himself, comparing himself to the maternal hen. By means of the simile, Jesus thus sets himself up "as mother" in opposition to a

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\[\text{Davies and Allison, A Critical Commentary, Vol. III, 325, note that "When the threats give way to the image of Jesus as a mother hen lamenting her loss, the reader is reminded of the compassionate Son of 11:28-30. In this way the prophetic judgements are mingled with affection and Jesus becomes, like Jeremiah, a reluctant prophet." This statement, apart from giving weight to the female imagery, is interesting because of the throwaway remark about "the reader." Garland, Reading Matthew, 233, concurs with Davies' opinion, but without recourse to the image of the mother hen.}\]
maternal but also a malevolent Jerusalem. Jesus' love for Jerusalem and his compassion for her children are thus underscored. 95

b. Jerusalem

As has been noted above, the implied reader encounters Jerusalem not only as personified but also because of references to Jerusalem in the plural, as identified with the Jewish leaders. 96 The mother hen image pits Jesus not only against maternal Jerusalem, but also against the hostile Jewish authorities. Jerusalem, a malevolent mother who will not allow Jesus to gather her children, stands in stark contrast to the benevolent mother hen.

4. The Mother Hen and the Role of the Implied Reader

The attention of implied reader is caught by the narrator's use of directly reported speech in which Jesus uses the mother hen simile to identify himself as compassionate mother. The simile emphasizes Jesus' concern for Jerusalem's "children" who are lost to him. The reader perceives that the symbolic significance of the mother-hen image lies in its capacity not to further the plot, but rather to illuminate the significance of persons and events. These perspectives on the image of the mother-hen merge with the reader's perception of Jesus, the main story character, who identifies himself with the mother-hen, and who reluctantly judges Jerusalem, but also laments over her fate.

95Minear. The Teacher's Gospel, 119, in "vv.37-39 . . . the dominant notes are the love of the Messiah for this city, his grief over its blindness, and his undiminished desire for its salvation."

VIII. Summary and Conclusions

To sum up, the Matthean narrator shapes the response of the implied reader to the female imagery in a number of ways. The use of poetic figures such as personification, metaphor and simile encourage the reader to reflect upon the symbolism and even to imagine the images anew. Rachel is seen as a metaphor of divine compassion, Jerusalem personified is a malevolent mother and Jesus appears as both Wisdom and mother. The images appear in the narrator’s direct commentary, either in exposition or in quotations from Scripture, or in the reported direct speech of Jesus – all situations in which the implied reader has the illusion of being immediately present. The reader is thus drawn into scenes in which Jesus speaks for example, of personified Wisdom (Sophia) or reminds the scribes and Pharisees of the coming in judgment of the Queen of the South, or addresses personified Jerusalem in an apostrophe which condemns her, but then sorrowfully laments her fate, speaking of himself in terms of the simile of the mother-hen. The reader also takes special notice of passages where Jerusalem’s malevolent character is emphasized, as for example when the narrator’s and Jesus’ points of view converge.

The way in which the story is plotted also influences the reader’s response to the female imagery and aids in the construction of meaning. The female images of the foremothers, Mary and Rachel for example, are introduced early in the story in narratorial exposition or in reported direct speech, but never reappear. Female images do appear at strategic points in the plotted story, either at the beginning of Jesus’ life in contexts dealing with his identity and origins, or at moments of high drama and opposition to Jesus. Characterization also guides the reader in the construction of meaning; Mary, for example, is characterized as passive, and though central to the
birth stories of Jesus. always remains passive – a character who does not speak or act independently.

In sum, the reader is influenced by textual structures to adopt a certain standpoint regarding the significance of the female images. We have seen how by means of poetic figures of speech, of directly reported speech and of narratorial commentary, the implied reader is led to occupy a vantage point from which s/he imagines the convergence of the different perspectives and so constructs meaning. We now turn to the role of the implied reader as “structured act,” that is, to the task of investigating how a feminist reader plays the role of the implied reader.
CHAPTER IV
A FEMINIST READER’S RESPONSE

In Chapter III the conditions under which the implied reader was led to construct a meaning were laid out, that is, the role of the implied reader as textual structure was described. It is important to note, however, that in Iser’s concept of the implied reader, textual structure and structured act are joined together in the dynamic process of reading. That is, the concept of the implied reader considered wholistically encompasses the very act of reading in which a reader’s response to the textual structures is elicited. It is only for the sake of analysis that the reader as textual structure and the reader as structured act have been treated separately.

Now the reader’s role as ‘structured act’ will be described. First, a brief account will be given of the reading process in which a reader is affected by the textual structures. My particular response as a feminist reader to the role of the implied reader as “structured act” will then be laid out.

I. The Reader’s Role as Structured Act

The point at which the textual structures begin to affect a reader is the moment when an actual reader starts to read, i.e., to assemble the perspectives.1 Even though, as we have seen, the textual perspectives are given, an actual reader must imagine their gradual convergence and final meeting place in order to construct meaning. Iser describes the process as “ideation.”

1Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 36, “... the reader’s role as a textual structure ... will be fully implemented only when it induces structured acts in the reader. This is the point where the textual structure of his role begins to affect the [actual] reader.”
The instructions provided stimulate mental images which animate what is linguistically implied, though not said... A sequence of mental images is bound to arise during the reading process, as new instructions have continually to be accommodated, resulting not only in the replacement of images formed but also in a shifting position of the vantage point, which differentiates the attitudes to be adopted in the process of image-building. Thus the vantage point of the reader and the meeting place of perspectives become interrelated during the ideational activity and so draw the reader inescapably into the world of the text... The reader's own disposition will... form the background to and a frame of reference for the act of grasping and comprehending... as textual structures become transmuted through [the reader's] ideational activities into personal experience."

In order to describe as clearly as possible the interaction of a feminist reader with the text, and to speak of the effects produced by the text in the reader, it is necessary to clarify Iser's concept of meaning as an 'image'. Iser's notion of the 'image' derives from his understanding of meaning not as an object which the reader attempts to define in relation to a particular frame of reference, but rather as 'imagistic' in nature. That is, meaning is the product of an interaction between the textual signals and the reader's acts of comprehension. The activity stimulated in the reader by the text will link her to the text and induce her to create the conditions necessary for the effectiveness of that text. As text and reader merge, meaning emerges, not as an object to be defined but as an effect to be experienced.3

Iser's image is a way of grasping reality. The image is the basic element of passive synthesis, that is, of the subconscious, pre-predicative activity by which the reader experiences and comprehends a text. Experiencing a text involves imagining the meaning, which is not given, but must be produced. Thus, "the image relates to the non-given or to the absent, endowing it

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2Ibid., 36-38.

3Ibid., 9-10.
with presence." That is, the reader ideates, imagines, something which up until that moment had not yet existed, i.e., the meaning of the text.

Given the fact that Iser's image is said to adhere to perception in constituting the object, i.e., the meaning of the text, it may be permissible to speak of imaging as intuitive recognition of an aesthetic quality, etc., or as an immediate apprehension of meaning without reasoning; a kind of direct perception or immediate insight into the significance of a character, or some other element in the narrative. Ultimately, the image should be regarded not as a thing, but rather as a process, that is, "a way in which consciousness opens itself to the object, prefiguring it from deep within itself as a function of its implicit knowledge." The image is indivisible from the reader who produces the image, and who consequently is affected by, even absorbed into, what s/he has created. Thus, the reader absorbed into the image is able to perceive the world as an object, and in the moment of detachment, may be able to view the world anew, "as a thing freshly understood." In order to concretize the theory, it seems useful at this point to describe briefly the activity of a hypothetical feminist reader who takes on the role of Matthew's implied reader, and begins from a feminist position to engage in the process of relating the different textual perspectives to one another.

As the reader switches from the perspective of the narrator's initial exposition to that of the plotted story concerning Jesus' birth and infancy, s/he both remembers and expects. S/he remembers Jesus' foremothers and mother, whose presence forms the initial horizon against which

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4Ibid., 137.
5Ibid., 137.
6Ibid., 140.
s/he retrospectively views the plotted story. The foremothers' presence provokes questions and raises expectations about the relation of the female imagery to the various stories about Jesus. Did these women figure in the stories? Were they mentioned again? Did they prove significant in furthering the development of the plot? In fact, the women did not reappear. Only Mary figured in the story, yet in a paradoxical manner. The male characters, Jesus, Joseph, Herod, the Magi and the religious leaders of the people, occupy centre stage. While they figure prominently, Mary, the female character appears ambiguous.

The feminist reader next encounters the figure of Rachel, prefigured by the foremothers and Mary, whom the reader now views retrospectively in the light of Rachel's maternal grief. From this vantage point the reader recognizes that all the mothers are approved by God. At the same time s/he both realizes and fears the fact that they are encompassed by male structures and endangered by male power; the foremothers embedded in a patrilineal genealogy; Mary and her child endangered by the power of Jerusalem, Herod, and the chief priests and scribes of the people; Rachel reeling under Herod's vicious slaughter of "her" children in Bethlehem. The feminist reader visualizes and empathizes with Jesus' silent and passive foremothers given voice by Rachel, the first female figure in the gospel to speak, albeit in a cry of unutterable sorrow.

7 The story is narrated in such a way that many of the male ancestors of Jesus, as well as the Magi and Herod, do not reappear. It would seem that they, like the women, have served their purpose, either as illuminators of significant aspects of Jesus' ancestry or as significant story characters in tales about Jesus' infancy. The fact that the women do not reappear is of interest to a female reader precisely because she, as a reader, focuses her attention on the female images.

8 I underline the silence of the foremothers (although the men in the genealogy do not speak either) as well as their absence in the rest of the story, to emphasize that like Mary, these women are exceptions in a predominantly male genealogy and androcentric story. They are not emphasized as are the male figures, for example, of David and Abraham, even though later in the gospel, the significance of the latter seems to be somewhat undercut. It is also worth noting that
The reader hears Jesus' reference to Wisdom and her deeds in 11:19 as an "echo of the future." i.e., as a saying whose theme is taken up in the succeeding pericope concerning the Queen of the South (12:42). For the feminist reader, both personified Wisdom and the Queen of the South emerge as powerful female figures who embody the wisdom of the ages. They testify to Jesus' identity as God's Messiah, and as one greater than Solomon, because of his deeds of mercy and compassion. The reader also sees and understands Jesus' reference to the Queen of the South in contrast to the account of the testing of Jesus by the Pharisees, who stand out as perverse because of their refusal, despite their vast knowledge of the law, either to see and/or hear Jesus' greater Wisdom or to acknowledge his status as greater than Solomon. The reader remembers and associates this incident with the scene in chapter 2, in which knowledgeable scribes and priests inform Herod of Jesus' birth but do not act to prevent Herod's murderous plot. The reader then interprets the first scene in light of the second, and concludes that in both cases, a certain type of scriptural knowledge and cognizance of the Law proves inadequate for acceptance of Jesus.

The feminist reader faced with the polyvalent image of Jerusalem, makes associations on several different levels. S/he remembers the first appearance of troubled Jerusalem and then links that occurrence with the later appearance of the figure of Jerusalem, malevolent mother. The images coalesce so that Jerusalem becomes for the reader the very embodiment of the hypocrisy and murderous nature of both the chief priests and scribes aligned with Herod and of the

in the androcentric story proper, some men are portrayed as unequal to other men, and share in the subordinate status of the women. Joseph and the Magi, although they are important because they carry the story line are forced to flee, however, (as is Mary), or change their plans because of the actions of other men, in this case, King Herod and the priests and scribes. Their "powerlessness" to resist the power of other males is typical of patriarchy, understood as the domination of some men over other men, women and children. It is also what opens these male characters to the possibility of divine assistance.
Pharisees who oppose Jesus in his ministry. The reader views, against the previous horizon of Rachel the good mother grieving the loss of her children (2:18), the starkly contrasting figure of Jerusalem as a culpably uncaring mother (23:38). In yet another moment, in the reader's imagination the image of Rachel expands into an image of the grieving Jesus, who, like Rachel, mourns the children lost to him.

Personified and iniquitous Jerusalem is illumined for the reader yet again, by contrast, against the horizon of the images of Wisdom personified and the Queen of the South. While the latter recognized Jesus for who he was, the former cannot/will not do the same. Female image is played against image as the reader also recalls that in chapter 21 Jerusalem is associated with “the daughter of Zion” to whom her king comes, but whose “turmoil” (21:10) is evidence of her inability to recognize Jesus as “the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” The reader recalls that in that instance, Jesus enters the temple, and the multitudes and children welcome him, but the hierarchy is moved to indignation and want Jesus to stop the acclamation. Against this scene, Jesus' assurance (23:39) that until the Jewish leaders can themselves take up this welcome to Him they will never see Him as their Messiah, takes on greater significance. In this final instance, the reader realizes that Jesus' mission is closed, and that if the relationship is ever to be renewed, the initiative must come from the leaders.

The reader also remembers Rachel's unrequited yearnings for her children who are no more, as part of the background of Jesus' futile longing over Jerusalem's lost children. In retrospect, Jesus' chagrin echoes Rachel's sorrow, and Rachel's anguish anticipates Jesus' yearning. Their anguish is comparable: both Rachel and Jesus lose “their children” because of murderous opposition from Jerusalem and the Jewish leaders. The mother hen simile also brings
to the fore and emphasizes by contrast Jerusalem's (the Jewish authorities') hostility toward Jesus.

As well, Rachel's unwillingness (οὐκ ἡθέλειν) to be comforted for the loss of her children contrasts with another unwillingness (οὐκ ἡθέλησαντε), that of Jerusalem (the Jewish authorities) to accept Jesus' offer of salvation.

The clash of the female imagery reveals to the reader the narrator's emphasis on Mother Jerusalem's depravity. The fact that female images are played one against the other, however, concerns a feminist reader who resists the textual reading "instructions" and rejects Matthew's identification of personified Jerusalem, precisely as mother, with a Jewish leadership hostile to Jesus. She chooses, rather, to hold the image of Jerusalem as mother separate from the narrator's image of Jerusalem identified with the Jewish leaders. A feminist reader so assembles the perspectives that she understands Jerusalem as a genuinely caring mother, unwilling to give up her children to others, not even to Jesus. As caring mother, Jerusalem is similar to both Jesus and Rachel, who as loving and protective mothers long to gather "their" children, but grieve because they cannot.

A feminist reader might have expected or hoped for more positive emphasis in Matthew's gospel on the female characters. It is not given. What is given, however, as we have seen, are various "information gaps" about the female figures which I, a real reader, must attempt to fill in order to arrive at a meaning. It is also the case that I construct a meaning restrained not only within the limits set out by the textual perspectives, but also governed in my interpretation by the norms and values I profess.⁹ That is to say, whatever significance I as a feminist reader ascribe to

⁹The values and norms of the feminist and academic communities to which I belong have been spoken of in chapter 1. The implications of a feminist position are taken up and developed in chapter 5.
the female imagery in Matthew’s gospel depends, in the last analysis, on my response to the role I am asked to play. A response in which I both interpret the text and am interpreted by it.

Before offering my particular “feminist reading,” it may be well here to speak of some of the factors which come into play as I read. First, it is important to stress that although I am in large part guided by the instructions of the text, my literary, theological reading of Matthew is necessarily influenced by the specifics of my particular, historical, human experience. I read as a 20th century, white, middle-class Christian feminist, specifically, as an educated Catholic woman who looks to the Bible and to ecclesial tradition as sources and shapers of my faith in Jesus Christ. As I have indicated earlier in this study, it is because I take seriously my own social/ecclesial location that I am impelled to pose the theological question of the status of an androcentric and sometimes misogynistic Bible as word of God.

Second, it must be acknowledged that as a white woman of the middle-class, I am both privileged and powerless.¹⁰ I am privileged because among other things, I am educated, have gainful employment, adequate health care, freedom to practise my religion and study theology, and live in a democratic country. I also consider myself to be privileged because I am married to a feminist man. As privileged I am, however, in some sense also complicit in oppression, as for example when I internalize a demeaning view of myself as a woman or when I oppress others. It is also the case that I lack access to power precisely because I am a woman. I have become increasingly conscious of the fact that “the personal is the political,” that is, that the problems I thought were purely personal, especially problems regarding the exercise of power, are in fact

shared by countless other women. While my own life has followed a distinctive course, there is a
general pattern to women’s lives that unites us all. We inhabit a different culture than the one
inhabited by men. Our relationships with them are governed by certain unequal distributions of
power, whether educational, economic, social, political or physical. We live in a patriarchal
society in which on the part of many, our growth as women is resisted and our moral agency
denied.¹¹

Nonetheless, I take responsibility for my life as a moral agent by battling the oppression
which exists under my own skin. I begin my reading of the gospel conscious of the concrete
human struggles with women’s oppression, my own, and those of others. As I read, I struggle
with my own suffering. I remember how I have been hurt by patriarchy, especially by oppressive
church structures and by an androcentric and patriarchal Bible. Always present as background for
my experience of reading is an emotional connection with other women similarly wounded by
church and society—my own mother, aunts, and grandmother, my female friends and colleagues
heterosexual and/or lesbian, women of colour and poor women. These connections enable me to
empathize and identify with, to understand and feel their oppression. The concrete truths of my
life as a white. middle class Christian feminist, i.e., my experience of privilege and power. of
suffering and struggle, my memories, my values, my life-in-relation, form the substance for my
theological reflection on women’s lives, especially their suffering which is often justified/
legitimated by recourse to an androcentric Bible and its predominately male-centered
interpretation.

¹¹Sheila D. Collins, “The Personal is Political,” in The Politics of Women’s Spirituality:
Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement, ed. Charlene Spretnak
As I participate in the process of self-liberation and that of others, I generate a reading and understanding of the Bible different from androcentric readings, and I encounter a God different from the one offered by patriarchal religion. This is because the way I perceive and know the Bible, God and the world is influenced not by what patriarchy dictates, but rather by my capacity for responsible self-direction, i.e., my actions, the choices and decisions I make, the responsibilities and rights I claim. As a feminist, I am actively committed to the struggles of women as oppressed and marginalized by patriarchy, i.e., as those who struggle to claim their own lives in contexts that regularly ignore, undermine, despise and harm women. As a feminist reader of the Bible, I am enriched by the stories of the biblical women under investigation as well as by the readings of their stories by contemporary feminist scholars. Both the biblical stories and their feminist interpretations affect my reading because they work to correct my blind spots and raise questions about women who are different from as well as similar to me. They offer me another vision of who God can be for women.

I join my voice with theirs, reading Matthew’s androcentric gospel as a feminist reader and whenever necessary as a resisting reader, who chooses to respond to the role of the implied reader by reading against the androcentric grain, reading the text as it was not meant to be read. I focus the reader’s attention squarely on the female images, images which for the most part have been ignored and invisible, as have the women who read the gospel. What follows, therefore, is not only a resisting reading, but also an inclusive reading, carried out from a feminist perspective, in order to reveal the transforming power of the imagery.
II. The Foremothers and Mary: Anomalous Mothers? (Matthew 1: 3, 5, 6, 16, 18)

As noted in previous chapters of this study, I am told about Jesus' foremothers at the very beginning of the story. Their presence thus forms the horizon against which I view all further information. The five women appear in an otherwise patrilineal genealogy and they are all involved in somewhat irregular marital unions. They include women such as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba (and Mary), rather than the great matriarchs of Israel's history, or even the stereotypical barren women who give birth to significant sons. Matthew casts as foremothers of Jesus the widowed Tamar, she who ensures the messianic link despite Judah's culpable inaction regarding levirate obligations; the widow Ruth who pursues levirate obligations through unusual, and perhaps "sexual," means; Rahab the Canaanite prostitute whose faith in the God of Israel ensures her family's survival; "she of Uriah," taken in adultery by David; and finally, Mary, of whom Jesus is born, the woman with no named father for her child. All of these sexually marginalized women are portrayed as blessed by God, and as instrumental in ensuring the patrilineage of God's messiah.

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12 Raymond Brown, The Birth of the Messiah (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 71, n. 21. Brown discusses three main explanations for the presence of the women in the genealogy: they were regarded as sinners; they were regarded as foreigners; and third, there was something irregular or extraordinary in their union with their partners, and the women showed initiative in furthering God's plan and so were considered the instruments of God's providence or of His Holy Spirit. Brown favours the third.

13 Jane Schaberg, The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 34, notes that "four special pregnancies are chosen for emphasis; chosen rather than the difficult pregnancies of barren women like Sarah are the distasteful ones of fruitful women . . . .Mary's story is thus a story without precedent but not without preparation."

My first "wrestling" with the text focuses on the tension inherent in the women's stories. They are portrayed as troublesome women mere existence, and/or whose words and actions pose a threat to male control, and necessitates their being brought back under that control, but at the same time they are deemed to be approved by God. As Elaine Wainwright points out, from a feminist perspective such an explanation of their significance must be rejected because it supports a form of gender politics in which women are recognized only when they are problems.

To claim such "problems" as important within "God's plan" especially when that God is identified with patriarchy is to support the androcentric perspective of the biblical stories in which the four women's dangerous situation is brought back under patriarchal control. It also fails to recognize that in none of the women's stories does God intervene on behalf of the women as so often happens in the stories of the male biblical heroes.

In light of this observation, I choose to resist reading the stories they way they are told I consciously decide to view the women *neither* as dangerous *nor* as "problems" in need of being brought under male authority, but rather as women who in their own right, and *precisely as women*, not only both *image* God but also *effect* God's saving action. I resist the text's domestication of these "troublesome" women within patriarchal structures to embrace the tension, the anomalies, and the ambiguity surrounding them. This stance enables me to discover these women's initiative and deep faith, their solidarity with each other, their courage in the struggle for

the reader for a woman's irregular production of the Messiah outside of ordinary patriarchal norms and yet with God's overarching plans and an overall patriarchal framework."


life. The aim is to reveal them as models for women who seek to break through patriarchal barriers which hinder our self-direction.

I begin with the expectation that the tension in these stories of women who deviate from and yet are encompassed by a patriarchal norm will prove to be a fruitful tension, a fertile ambiguity. I proceed, always mindful of the influence on my reading of previous meanings constructed by other readers, particularly other feminist readers. I am aware also of the inevitable impact of my particular life experience on my reading. As I attempt to articulate on a conscious level just how I “make meaning” of the female imagery, I remind my readers of the difficulty of trying to explain conceptually the mysterious yet real import of subconscious associations and intuitive moves involved in the process of “ideation,” which, as Iser points out, constitutes this phase of the reading process. In any case, I begin from the only possible starting point – from where I am.

1. Tamar: Hungry and thirsty for justice (Matt. 1:3)

Tamar is portrayed as a righteous woman in Genesis. Her righteousness, however, proves to be problematic for Judah, first, because it forces him to acknowledge his fault, and second, because it frees her at least to some extent, from his moral authority. In fact, her righteous actions make of her a liminal figure, a woman unattached and therefore a dangerous anomaly in Judah’s patriarchal world. Even if, as the story is told, Tamar is proven to be in the right, nonetheless she
is assured a position which is at the same time legitimate and illegitimate: she is a woman with sons who, nevertheless, will never have a husband.¹⁷

Tamar’s righteousness is problematic for me and for other feminist readers because in the Genesis story her actions result in the domestication of her sexuality and its incorporation into a structure that subordinates her individual needs to a fulfillment of divine purpose.¹⁸ The story is narrated in such a way that Tamar is forced to use sex for a reason to exist, a situation less than ideal and not to be upheld as a model. I can not and do not ignore the androcentricity of the story nor the constraints imposed on Tamar. I do, however, choose to read against the androcentric grain of the story in order to focus on and emphasize Tamar as a liberating agent for women. Two themes emerge in such a reading: the clarity of Tamar’s moral vision, and God’s solidarity with Tamar.

Tamar’s righteousness gives rise to her clear moral vision regarding her oppressors. As A. Zornberg has noted, Tamar “sees” with a strong, empirical vision which leads her to unconventional but necessary action. She successfully appeals to Judah to recognize not only his pledge, but also to see her as a person. As a result of “seeing” the face of Tamar, Judah gains spiritual insight, is able to recognize his immoral blindness, and to acknowledge publicly that her behaviour was indeed justified.¹⁹ Zornberg also shows that ultimately, Tamar enables Judah to recognize himself in relationship to God. She points out that the two recognitions (that of

¹⁷Rose Sallberg Kam, Their Stories, Our Stories: Women of the Bible (New York: Continuum, 1995), 75.


Tamar’s righteousness and that of Judah in his relation to God) are intimately related as articulated in the Midrashic narrative in which Tamar pleads, “Recognize your Creator, and do not hide your eyes from me.”

In the biblical story as narrated in Genesis, there is no divine intervention on Tamar’s behalf. However, in the book of Genesis there are grounds for understanding Tamar as approved by God, not because she upholds Levirate law, but rather because of her very marginalization. As Susan Niditch has noted.

The God of Genesis, with whom the important value judgment lies, is partial to marginal people of both genders. On some level that god is the god of the tricksters who use deception to deal with the power establishment, whether the establishment is the elders of one’s family or non-Israelites. Although their positions are circumscribed by the men, Sarah, Rebekah, Tamar, Rachel and Leah exercise great power. . . in situations involving the family, children and sexuality . . . . It is . . . the women who are the critical ancestors for the proper continuation of the Israelites . . . . The women’s wishes and God’s wishes are one in this respect.

There is also within the tradition a long-standing view that God is with Tamar and sanctions her actions. It is significant for a feminist reader that Tamar and the God who approves her actions are situated not within patriarchal structures or attitudes, but rather in between the patriarchal authority structures. Tamar, the woman who because of her righteous actions must live outside

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20Ibid.


22Wainwright, Towards a Feminist Critical Reading, 163, notes the constant tendency in the Palestinian Targums, etc., to emphasize the role of God in the story of Tamar.

23Ibid., 25, “Paradoxically their [the women’s] roles as the people ‘in between’ can be powerful and critical for the development of the stories and for the progress of human civilization and Israelite culture as perceived by biblical writers.”
conventional marital structures, is blessed by the God of Jacob and Judah as a marker and creator of transition and transformation. Ultimately, the marginalized Tamar's righteousness reflects the righteousness of a God similarly situated outside of the patriarchal structures of Israel. To see Tamar's face is to glimpse the face of this gracious God who rewards a woman's struggle with blessing (Gen.32:10).²⁴

Tamar the righteous, resourceful outsider emerges from the patriarchal Genesis story and is ushered into Matthew's genealogy as a powerful Messianic foremother whose intrepid actions manipulate the religious, social and legal customs of her world to forge the future. Hungry and thirsty for justice she acts, and is vindicated by her deeds and proved righteous by her acts. In the following reading I identify and develop if only briefly, some strands of the scarlet thread of Tamar's courage and righteousness as it weaves itself not only through the story of her descendant Jesus, but also through contemporary women's lives. My reading is offered, of course, as only one among many other possible readings.

Tamar's story reminds me that God is always to be found with the disadvantaged. Tamar survives in a man's world in which she, as an unmarried widow with no social/economic status, literally has no status, no place in society, notwithstanding the fact that she ultimately triumphs over Judah's vengeance, escapes death by fire, and gains both children and her life. By her brave act of self-preservation, which is counted as righteousness, she continues David's lineage. Jesus,

²⁴Mieke Bal, Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 101-102. “More than an easy moral victory, as most readings suggest, the tale represents a struggle, not yet won, not yet accomplished, but significant in that it demonstrates the dependency of each subject on the other . . . . The woman is used for her indispensable share in the course of history, as the sidestep that restores broken chronology; she is also used to teach man insight into his own paralyzing neuroses.”
descendant of Tamar, also acts righteously within an authority system which has no place for him, either as Son of David or as Son of God. At the beginning of his life, Jesus poses a threat to and is hunted down by a troubled King Herod and the Jewish leaders. As Jesus’s ministry opens, however, his initial public act is to urge a reluctant John to “do all that righteousness demands” (Matt.3:15). i.e., to baptize him, as a devout and observant Jew in a rite of repentance and confession of sin. This action situates Jesus in potential opposition to the Jewish leaders. It also leads to Jesus’s being declared the “Beloved Son” of God (3:17), a title which underlines his messianic character not as a royal conqueror but rather as God’s Suffering Servant. But even as Son of David, compassionate and merciful healer, Jesus is scorned by the Jewish establishment. Because of their liminality, both Tamar and her descendant Jesus are endangered people, who nonetheless act boldly for the sake of righteousness.

Tamar’s story also focuses my attention on the issue of the use and misuse of authority and power in patriarchal society. Both Tamar and her descendant Jesus are endangered by and pose a danger to patriarchal society. Tamar is dangerous first because her righteous action clearly reveals the supposedly powerful Judah’s immorality. Her testimony challenges and vanquishes the power of the patriarch to put her to death. At the end of the story, Tamar’s status as a self-directed woman without a husband places her in a no-man’s land, under no man’s authority. Jesus, as descendant of Tamar speaks and acts with authority, and exercises the power to heal and to restore life, a power given to him by no man but by God. Surrounded by the crowds who bestow on him both moral and religious authority, He poses a threat to the authority of the Jewish leadership. Jesus and Tamar emerge as figures of righteousness, approved and aided by God, but suspect precisely because of their righteousness and the moral power that it gives them.
As a Christian feminist I look to Tamar’s courageous struggle and successful challenging of male irresponsibility and brutal disregard for life. I find her challenge to Judah echoed in Jesus’s challenge of religious, social and political customs oppressive to women and all those marginalized within Israelite society. I remember Tamar, the socially dispossessed, but steadfast foremother of Jesus. Her image forms the backdrop for my appreciating Jesus’ saying regarding the setting of our hearts not on earthly possessions and/or economic security, but rather on God’s righteousness (6:33). When Jesus warns the Pharisees that by their words they would be proved either righteous or unrighteous (12:37), castigates the Jewish leaders for their hypocritical unrighteousness (23:28, 29, 35), and declares that only the righteous who practice mercy will go to eternal life (25:37), Tamar’s clear moral vision re-echos in my imagination, and brings to mind the necessity to challenge not only Judah’s hypocrisy, but all patriarchal hypocrisy, whether political, marital or religious.

I am heartened by Tamar’s shrewd actions and ready wit, her “practical wisdom”, her resolve to act, and I rejoice at her ultimate vindication. I see this woman’s actions as a concrete embodying of Jesus’s declaration about Divine Wisdom proved righteous by her deeds (11:19). Tamar, ultimately rejected by her own, and Jesus, scorned by “this generation” (11:16) which took offence at him and his righteous deeds, stand together as models of a righteousness which helped to widen the cracks in Israel’s patriarchal power/religious structure. Both breach the narrative boundaries of the androcentric tales in which they are enmeshed, to reveal the life-giving and liberating power of an inclusively loving God, a God of Tamar and of Jesus, a God of a greater righteousness, a God who exceeds patriarchy.
As a Christian feminist, I read Tamar's story in the company of all those who seek justice for women, and who are not yet "satisfied." Tamar was hungry and thirsty for the justice which Jesus proclaimed. Jesus, as righteous descendant of Tamar, proclaims the centrality of justice for God's poor. These images grow out of my re-reading of the Bible and my re-visioning of the Catholic Church as places of transition and transformation, in which concern for women's well-being will one day be considered essential to living the Basileia which Jesus preached. I remember Tamar, isolated widow and mother, a marginal woman even after she obtained "justice" from a reluctant Judah, and I join with those women who suffer under the patriarchal double standard still applied to sexual and conjugal morality. I rejoice in the privilege of my own happy marriage, and feel called to solidarity with the struggle of those women who endure spousal abuse, and who must, like Tamar, often fight for their very lives. I deplore the fact that such abuse is often sanctioned by a reading of scripture or of Church teaching which doubly oppresses women by justifying, rather than challenging such abuse. I remember and place my trust in the gracious God of Tamar and of Jesus, the One in solidarity with women and men who continue to struggle to establish mutually respectful relationships.

2. Rahab: Happy are the merciful (Matt. 1:5)

The second woman mentioned in Jesus' genealogy, Rahab (Joshua 2, 6), is characterized as a woman of steadfast love, Ἴμα (cf. Josh. 2: 12). Rahab, a liminal figure "dwelling in the city wall" (Josh 2:15), has neither husband and children nor societal respectability. She is known by name to her king, but is portrayed not so much as his loyal subject as a tool for the Canaanites in the machinations of war. Her profession as a prostitute makes her useful to the Canaanite king,
and attracts Israel's spies to a woman they would have otherwise have killed, even as they plotted the violent conquest of her people. Used by both sides and a potential victim of both, Rahab seems trapped within the dynamic of male conflict.

Read from a feminist perspective, however, Rahab's story becomes a tale of a woman whose faith enables her to escape the snares of violent men and to challenge the notion of the holiness of war. As Danna Fewell has observed, the story of Rahab is one which emphasizes that "it is the recognition of holiness, not one's nationality, ...that identifies one with God's people [as] fluid identity boundaries render nationalistic categories ambivalent and call into question the obsession with annihilating outsiders."25

Fewell sees in Rahab's story "a subversive descant fostering ambiguity about identity."26 She points out that it is Rahab's faith which gives her her identity and makes of her an "insider" rather than an "outsider" in relation to Israel. Rahab has come to know and believe in the God of Israel before she encounters the Israelites spies. The nature of the God in whom Rahab comes to believe is best understood in light of the description in Joshua 5:13, a theophany in which God is associated neither with Israel nor with her enemies, but rather with holiness itself.27 It is in this God of "holiness" that Rahab puts her faith. Because of her faith in this God, she can welcome all with kindness, even her nations "enemies," the Israelite spies. It is her spiritual largesse, rather

25Danna Nolan Fewell, "Joshua," in The Women's Bible Commentary, 63, "The concern to define identity controls the logic of holy war in Joshua . . . all native inhabitants must be destroyed because they threaten Israel's identity. While this predominant logic polarizes insiders (Israelites) and outsiders (Canaanites), making nationality a defining factor, there is yet a subversive descant fostering ambiguity about identity."

26Ibid., 63.

27Ibid.
than her fear of Israel's God or of the Israelite warriors, which permits her to offer them a peaceful greeting and safety.

Rahab’s words and actions have often been understood/interpreted as a partisan act, the act of a woman selfishly focused on personal safety, or culpably unmindful of the consequences of her actions on the fate of her own people. In such readings, she acts simply “to save her own skin.” Read in light of Joshua 5:13, however, her declaration of faith in Israel’s God suggests another explanation for her actions. I adopt this perspective to read against the grain of the patriarchal narrative, to emphasize that amidst the trickery, spying and violence of the warring tribes, Rahab’s one concern is for life, not for military victory. She knows better than the men on either side of the conflict what is required for fullness of life. It is not violent conduct in which one should put faith, but rather a God “in heaven above and on earth below” (Josh. 2:11) whose holiness and mercy encompasses and surpasses the petty plans of warring tribes whether Israelite or Canaanite.

Amidst conflict, deceit, and war, Rahab recognizes neither the holiness of Joshua’s war, nor the rightness of “her side,” but clings to her faith in YHWH’s surpassing holiness. She becomes like that which she worships. The mercy and kindness for which she is remembered must therefore be understood as a reflection of the mercy and kindness of the God in whom she has come to believe. Her faith in the saving presence of Israel’s God is faith in One who dwells not within patriarchy, nor within conventional morality preserved by military might, but rather in the
hearts of any who recognize God's holiness. She is truly a woman of God's shalom (Heb. 11:31).²⁸

Happy is Rahab the merciful who showed mercy and had mercy shown to her (Matt.5:7). She recognized more clearly than many of the Israelites the nature of their God and the meaning of their law: that mercy shown to enemies is better than the sacrifice of human lives. Sustained by her faith in the God of holiness, she loved peace rather than war, and thus carried out more faithfully than the warriors of Israel the liberating demands of the law for mercy, faith and justice. Rahab thus reveals the human face of God's overarching mercy. The enduring image of Rahab is not that of the prostitute with the heart of gold, nor even that of the foreign woman, the outsider who sees more clearly than the native sons. It is rather that of a woman prodigal in love, whose body and whose actions reveal the human face of God's mercy.²⁹ The actions of Rahab, woman of mercy, reveal her as an image of the merciful God of Israel in whom she had come to believe.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.³⁰

²⁸In Hebrews 11:31, it is said that by faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies with peace, was not killed. The verb indicates that her welcoming them in peace is understood as the opposite of receiving them with the sword, or violence.

²⁹Fewell, “Joshua,” 66, notes, “... the spies go directly to a brothel and ‘they lay there’. The verb ‘lie’ is loaded with sexual overtones ... . Madame Rahab, a prostitute ... understands best the nature of Yahweh [sic]. Rahab’s faith and kindness raise serious questions about the obsession with holy war in the book of Joshua.”

Rahab’s story leads me to read Jesus’ story in its light, and to read Rahab’s story in terms of his. Jesus, Son of Rahab, practiced ḫiyn and desired to see it in the practice of Jewish leaders of his day, but found it lacking among many (9:13; 12:7; 23:23). Like the God whose ḫiyn Rahab embodied, Jesus desired mercy, not sacrifice (9:13). Like Rahab herself, Jesus, her son as well as David’s, showed ḫiyn to those in need (9:27; 17:15), and esteemed it as higher than any law (12:12). He taught his followers to do the same (18:33). Heir to his foremother’s courageous ḫiyn, Jesus learned during his ministry about the requirement of mercy from another woman much like Rahab in her courage and clarity. From the Canaanite woman, who begged for and wrested from him ḫiyn on behalf of the one she loved (Matt. 15:21 ff.), Jesus learned the priority of mercy over a restricted notion of mission.\(^{31}\) Jesus, Son of Rahab, he who desired and practiced mercy above all else, images through his life and teaching his foremother Rahab’s ḫiyn. No less truly do both Rahab and Jesus mirror the divine ḫiyn.

How does the image of Rahab as a woman of mercy and of peace function as a model for contemporary women? As a 20th century woman living in a time of violence, with two world wars and numerous other conflagrations to our credit. I look to Rahab’s merciful actions as to a beacon which lights the way for the many women active in the anti-war movements in our

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\(^{31}\) Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 11 ff. Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 82.ff focuses on the faith of the four “powerless” women in contrast to males in positions of authority who fail to take responsibility in salvation history. From this perspective, it is possible to see the Canaanite woman not so much as another Rahab as another Tamar first, because like Tamar, she overcame obstacles “created by men in authority who were unwilling to fulfill their own responsibilities in salvation history.” Secondly, she, like Tamar, although “socioeconomically and cultically powerless,” exhibited “the faith by which the divine program is accomplished.” I choose to link the Canaanite with Rahab because of the focus on the notion of mercy in the stories of the two women.
century, and indeed, for all who work for world peace. As we struggle for peaceful co-existence and seek peaceful relationships between peoples and countries, Rahab’s example throws into relief the absurdity of seeking peace by waging war. She walks ahead of and encourages us who seek our identity not in nationalistic blindness nor in military might, but in our faith in a God of surpassing holiness, as we seek to live in right relationship even with our “enemies.”

3. Ruth: She who practiced mercy (Matt. 1:5)

The story of Ruth is the story of a poor, widowed foreigner. It is at the same time the story of a strong, clever, and self-confident woman who acts, with the help of and in the company of other women, to preserve life, and thus to ensure the future of the Davidic line. Ruth breaks with family, country, faith, and even reverses sexual allegiance in her heroic struggle to create a future for herself and her mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth’s deeds of ἄνευ (3:10), performed within the confines of a man’s world, prove her a woman of worth (3:11), and a person in her own right. The man Boaz recognizes her ἄνευ (2:11), trusts himself to her judgments, and bows to her demands (3: 9-10). Her extraordinary story is thus a reversal of the patriarchal mode of story telling in which a masculine hero takes the initiative. For example, the story of her departure from her homeland recalls the story of Abraham, but with a difference, for while Abraham is called by God to leave family and prosperity and to go into the unknown on the strength of a divine promise, Ruth simply obeys her feelings of deep loyalty to Naomi. She leaves not prosperity, but death and displacement, to seek new life with another woman. Together they return to Israel where Ruth’s allegiance to Naomi leads to the accomplishment of the divine purpose. Ruth’s story is Israel’s story, played out in a female key. As J. G. Williams remarks,
The use of ancient Israelite story patterns and images and the place of Ruth as ancestress of David suggest that something essential is being said about the people Israel. Ruth is, among other things, the feminine representation of Israel's connection with the "foreign east" from which (like Abraham) it came.\(^{32}\)

The lineage of the Messiah is associated with a Moabite woman, a reminder of Israel's origins and identity, which suggests that masculine models alone are inadequate to articulate the meaning of Israel.

The enduring bond between Israel and YHWH is modeled on the loving relationship between Naomi and her daughters-in-law. When Naomi invokes the ḥāzān of YHWH on her daughters-in-law, she does so on the basis of their loving kindness towards her (1:8). These female foreigners exemplify divine pity, and as Phyllis Trible points out, "the past loyalty of human beings (foreign women, at that) is a paradigm for the future kindness of the divine being."\(^{33}\) Other women in the story also embody God's maternally loving presence. When Ruth seeks refuge under the wings of the God of Israel (2:12), she finds that comfort and safety lie not only under the cloak of Boaz, but also in the company of the women of Bethlehem who call down blessings on her and Naomi (4:14-17). Just as Ruth shows ḥāzān towards Naomi, so too do these women embody for Ruth the comforting wings of YHWH. Clearly, Ruth in her compassionate love for her mother-in-law and the Israelite women who bless them both, function as images of

\(^{32}\) J. G. Williams, Women Recounted: Narrative Thinking and the God of Israel (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982), 107.

the divine in the story of Ruth, "a comedy in which the brave and bold decisions of women
ebody and bring to pass the blessings of God."\textsuperscript{34}

Ruth, foremother of Jesus, bequeaths to her descendant the quality of \textit{τὸν}. The note of
loyal love, the love that Ruth bore to Naomi, echoes and re-echoes in the life and teachings of her
descendant, Jesus. On the solid rock of Ruth's loyal love (Matt. 7:24, 25) was founded Naomi's
lineage, the house of Perez, the blood-line of Jesus. Jesus recognizes in foreigners, and especially
in foreign women's great faith, the faith of Ruth, which was found not in Israel (8:10; 15:28), but
in the heart of an "outsider." Jesus is heir to Ruth's practical wisdom, a trait by which he declares
God's Wisdom vindicated (11:19).\textsuperscript{35} With no thought except love for Naomi, Ruth left all, her
heart set on righteousness (6:33), her words of fealty spoken from a heart abounding in
righteousness (12:37). Ruth, true Israelite and authentic daughter of the \textit{βασιλεία} (13:38),
embodies the qualities of all those who, Jesus declares, will gain the promised hundredfold reward
(19:29), fullness of life for self and loved ones. When Jesus speaks of the many heirs of the
\textit{βασιλεία} who will come from east and west to eat with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 8:11),
he speaks surely also of Ruth, with whom the righteous on the day of judgment will sit down to
feast. Like her, they have inherited the \textit{βασιλεία} (25:37), for their thoughts, like hers, were never
of reward but only of \textit{τὸν}. Finally, and perhaps most profoundly, Jesus the Christ, Son of Ruth,
reclaims for himself and his followers the God of Ruth when he offers to Israel's leaders the
maternal protection of Her comforting wings (23:37), the same blessed safety which his

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 195.

\textsuperscript{35}Ruth's alliance with Naomi is impractical by conventional standards. However, her
allegiance to her mother-in-law proves eminently wise and practical since she gains security and
respectability for both herself and Naomi.
foremother sought and found in the company of the women of Israel. In Matthew’s gospel, all of Ruth’s descendants are invited to seek and find in Jesus the divine refuge once graciously accorded to his foremother Ruth, the daughter-in-law faithful beyond death, the mediator of transformation to life.

I relate to the story on many levels, both personal and communal. As the daughter and grand daughter of women who fought to survive during the Great Depression without the financial and/or emotional support of husbands, I connect on an emotional level with their woundedness, but also with their enduring strength. I empathize with both the pain and the courage in the story of Ruth and Naomi, women separated from me in time but very close to me in terms of their experience. As a member of The Catholic Network for Women’s Equality I know the crucial importance of women’s solidarity with one another as we labour for the ordination of women in the Catholic church, for the acknowledgment of women’s gifts for ministry, for the crossing of barriers created by denominational and faith differences, for the acceptance of lesbian/gay lifestyles and for other related issues. A Christian woman, I take as patrons the Jewish women. Ruth and Naomi, who teach me the grace of loyal and steadfast love.

I read the story of Ruth and Naomi as an encouragement to all women to support one another in the struggle for women’s well-being. It is a story that presses the tradition to the fullness of its meaning by offering a new paradigm for God’s saving action in the world – that of one woman’s loyalty to another. Their story becomes my story, and as I turn with confident faith to the God of Ruth and Naomi, the maternal God under whose protective wings all women seek and find refuge, their story and mine become a tale of transforming power.
4. "She-of-Uriah:” Happy is she who mourns (Matt. 1:6)

The fourth woman in Matthew’s genealogy bears not her own name, but that of her husband, Uriah. In the story as told in 2 Samuel, the main character, King David, commits adultery with the woman and attempts to conceal it by arranging, with the complicity of his commander Joab, to have Uriah killed, and the death covered up. After having had the woman’s husband murdered, David sends and brings her into his house as one of his wives.

The story in 2 Samuel passes judgment on David’s actions. David uses the woman, shows no loyalty to faithful Uriah and no scruples in using Joab against him. He thinks and acts only to save himself from blame. The seemingly powerful king thus proves to be passive and cowardly. At the same time, the woman’s perspective is irrelevant. David’s crime is one against Uriah and against God as the protector of the patriarchal social order; it is not a crime against Bathsheba, who is defined solely in terms of her relation to Uriah. Since the woman’s point of view is never given, the insinuation is that she is somehow responsible. Such an ambiguous portrayal of her not only erases her as a subject; it also leaves her vulnerable to the charge of seduction. It is as if, as Cheryl Exum has pointed out, the woman is symbolically disrobed and raped before the narrator’s (and reader’s) voyeuristic gaze.

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37 Ibid., 173. Exum notes that Bathsheba’s point of view is never raised. “By denying her subjectivity, the narrator symbolically rapes Bathsheba, and by withholding her point of view, he presents an ambiguous portrayal that leaves her vulnerable to the charge of seduction.”

38 Ibid., 174.
In the story as told in 2 Samuel, the suffering woman is not aided by the God who ultimately punishes David. Rather, she is brought under the control of David, domesticated, encompassed by patriarchal structure. The suffering and oppression which is the legacy of “She-of-Uriah” is, however, not the whole story, for we are told that broken as she was, the raped woman still possessed the courage to mourn. Encompassed by violence, humiliated and degraded. “She of Uriah” grieved her murdered husband and lamented her dead child (2 Sam. 11:26; 12:24). She thus overcame crushing evil, from within. Her grieving love engendered healing and new life, however scarred, for herself, for David, and for her future son, Solomon. It is this mourning for husband and dead child that offers an image of the compassion and love of a God not spoken of in the story. This God is joined with the suffering and grieving woman in a common sorrow. As in the stories of the other women in Matthew’s genealogy, Bathsheba is a woman who grieves not alone, but in the company of the God of the marginal, the oppressed, the suffering, and the powerless.

“She-of-Uriah,” silent victim of David’s lust and Joab’s negative solidarity with David is the tragic female figure par excellence in Matthew’s genealogy. Her legacy is that of her “radical suffering,” which “is present when the negativity of a situation is experienced as an assault on one’s personhood as such . . . . [It is] degradation, . . . a suffering that yields no discernible good but rather violates and destroys human dignity, . . . a more or less attenuated form of death. There is nothing redemptive about it.”39 It is also the case that this woman’s sorrowing love points to certain aspects of Divine Love only hinted at in Nathan’s parable: her grief over the fate of her

loved ones is an image of divine pity which the text directs toward David; a generous God (12:8) who considered David’s actions “evil in his sight” (12:9), and yet “put away” (12:13) his sin. If the violated woman’s sorrowing love is the very image of the love of a compassionate God. One in solidarity with the suffering, Comforter of those who grieve (Matt. 5:4), in an unspeakable way this woman also images the crucified Jesus, in whose grievous suffering something of the mystery of God is darkly manifest. Both she and Jesus descended into a pit of unintelligible darkness. Both were silent before their persecutors (27:12); both were filled with sadness and great distress (26:37 and 2 Sam. 11:26), a sorrow unto death (26:38), unrelieved by divine consolation (27:46), and yet both turned their grief outward to lament not their own misfortune, but the fate of the innocent (23:37). In “She-of-Uriah” and in Jesus, her son, we meet the beloved ones in whom a loving and co-suffering God is well pleased (3:17). Each in their distress is an imago Dei, an image of the living God whose presence, even when darkly intuited in the mode of absence, offers new possibilities to the situation from within. Both Jesus and his foremother show us a God who “transforms suffering, not mitigating its evil, but bringing in inexplicable consolation and comfort.”

This woman’s story angers, sickens, and comforts me. My anger is the anger of a woman who has not suffered the indignity of rape or physical assault, but who is familiar with psychological and emotional abuse from males in my family and from male abuse of power in the workplace. I know also the effects of sexual/physical abuse on battered women in our cities. My anger makes me rage against a biblical story in which a woman’s violation is of no concern to God, and in which the woman’s situation is dismissed without comment to focus on the male

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40 Ibid., 267, 269.
perpetrator of the crime, focused only on his ultimate repentance and forgiveness. From my vantage point, the last becomes meaningless if the first is neglected.

The story arouses my anger toward patriarchal religious institutions in which battered women are counselled to submit to physically/sexually abusive husbands, and where women’s shelters must protect their clients from pastors who encourage them to return to such a husband or partner. The violation of Bathsheba continues in every woman forced into sexual relations. And yet the story is a source of comfort. I take hope because of Bathsheba’s courage to mourn and thereby be healed. I mourn with her for all my hurts, and for the woundedness of all violated women. I join them in shedding healing tears, and in so doing know that we are close to a God I call She-Who-Suffers-With-Us. I know myself and my suffering sisters to be images of this God who renews even our deepest despair and gives us the means of perpetuating life.

5. Mary: “of whom Jesus was born” (Matthew 1:16)

As noted above, Mary appears in the genealogy as not only similar to the other women, but also as unique. Since Joseph is identified as “husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born” (1:16), Mary, unlike the other women, is not linked with a specific human father for her child. Questions immediately surface. How did Mary produce the Messiah? What was God’s role? How can Jesus trace his descent as Son of Abraham and Son of David through Joseph? As Janice Capel Anderson has noted, the following story of Jesus’ birth answers these questions. In 1:18 the reader learns that Jesus was conceived, ἐκ πνεύματός ἀγίου, by the power of the Holy Spirit, but before any sexual relations of Mary with Joseph. Clearly, Mary conceives in an anomalous state outside of marriage. The angel of the Lord reiterates the manner of Jesus’ conception, and
exhorts Joseph to take Mary as his wife. Joseph thus legally becomes the father of Jesus, and Jesus becomes a descendant of Abraham and of David. Jesus is portrayed as a product of God's creative and prophetic action (cf. 1:22-23), a portrait underlined by an authoritative scriptural quotation which confirms Mary's mysterious conception of Jesus and declares him to be Emmanuel.

Despite the answers provided, tension and ambiguity remain. While Mary is an essential character around whose presence the action of the plot at this point revolves, she nevertheless appears as a marginalized character, silent, with no point of view. There is much ambiguity concerning the issue of God's control of Mary's reproductive powers and the manner of her conception of Jesus. Are Mary's identity and power to give birth defined and controlled by a divine male Patriarch, or do they have an independent integrity beyond the complete control of man? "In Mary's case, the ambiguity of God's control of the womb is writ large since she conceives without a husband and since God is not portrayed as a male sexual figure."

Since the God portrayed here is not unambiguously patriarchal, it would seem that Mary's role in the production of the Messiah is one independent not only of human male patriarchal control, but also blessed by a God who rejects the claims, powers, and structures of this patriarchy. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary conceives her child outside of the structure of patriarchal marriage. Mary's son is Son of God. Joseph's doubts recede before the angelic declaration that Mary's pregnancy is by the power of God's Spirit, and he accepts the

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"Ibid., 190, 195. If God is the ultimate patriarch, then his control of the womb reinforces other elements of patriarchal dominance in the scene. If the reader focuses on God's control rather than that of male or female, then patriarchal control is undermined. Whatever reading is followed, it is not the husband that ultimately controls women's reproductive powers."
proffered assurance of God's continued protection to the child and his mother during the ensuing terrors of Herod's persecution. Matthew thus explicitly portrays the endangered woman and child as always approved of and protected by a God who sides with those endangered by patriarchal power. Despite the narrator’s ultimate “domestication” of Mary and her unborn child within the confines of a (more or less) conventional marriage, Mary’s conception of Jesus remains a powerful critique of the androcentric point of view from which the story is told.

Mary reappears in the gospel story when Jesus, told that his mother and brothers seek him, points to his disciples, saying, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (12:46). Jesus identifies the disciples, that is, those who do the will of his Father in heaven, as his family. Since fathers are not mentioned, it may well be the case, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has noted, that “the discipleship community abolishes the claims of the patriarchal family and constitutes a new familial community, one that does not include fathers in its circle.”42 The family Jesus points to is a non-patriarchal family which includes Mary, the mother whose conception of Jesus outside of patriarchal family structures first signaled the divine action which produced the Messiah. Mary, who conceived her child in a sanctified relationship with God, independent of the values and norms of patriarchy, truly can be said to have done the will of the Father in heaven, and now

merits to be portrayed as a model disciple. Ultimately, a disciple is to Jesus as is his own mother or brother or sister.

If in this instance Jesus exalts his mother and non-patriarchal family as models for discipleship, later the uncomprehending crowds attempt to explain away Jesus’ extraordinary reputation by emphasizing his humble origins (13:55-57). Ironically, they claim that because they know who his mother is, they know all about Jesus. In reality, they are ignorant about the identity of both Jesus and his mother. Both are more than the crowds know. Jesus is the Christ, Son of God. Mary is the one by whom Jesus is son of God. While the crowds consider both Jesus and Mary ordinary, in reality their ordinariness is really extraordinary, because sanctified by God. But the crowds take offense, echoing the offense the birth of a child evoked earlier in the gospel in Herod and some of Jerusalem’s leaders, those who seeing, did not perceive, and hearing, did not listen (13:13).

6. Summary and Conclusions

The five women of the genealogy are presented as dangerous anomalies within a patriarchal world. From a feminist perspective, however, they appear not so much as anomalies as images of a living God who stands in opposition to patriarchy. In this sense, their so-called anomalous situations prove to be theologically normative, and patriarchal structures are revealed

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Douglas R. A. Hare, Matthew, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 145, “We cannot say that Jesus rejects his family because of their lack of faith in him; Matthew does not say Mary and the brothers are relegated to ‘this generation’. The single point of the story is that for Jesus, a new spiritual family takes priority over his natural family.” In this view, Mary would seem to be a member of this spiritual family as well.
as the anomaly. The realities of these women's lives challenge a patriarchal view of God, war, family structures, sexuality, and marriage.

Tamar, the righteous woman wronged, exposes Judah's unrighteousness and gains the blessing the patriarch would have denied her. She acts in the power of a gracious God unknown to Judah until revealed to him through his relationship with Tamar. Rahab, a woman on the outer limits of respectability, places herself squarely in the center of the conflict surrounding her. In opposition to the prevailing ideology of war and death, she practices ṭǝrī, merciful love, as authentic response to Israel's covenant call to holiness and life. Ruth's loyalty to Naomi is an innovative model for YHWH's love for Israel. The bold and unconventional actions of a displaced woman on behalf of another woman bring about God's blessings for them and for future generations. "She-of Uriah," sexually degraded and defiled by David, illumines the mystery of a suffering God whose love transforms suffering and death into life. In contrast to David, who needs to repent, this wronged woman grieves the victims of David's sin, and in so doing, heals the wounds caused by his iniquity. Finally, Mary, wrongfully considered guilty of grave sexual misconduct, proves to be the bearer of God's Son and Messiah, Jesus. God acts in the power of the Holy Spirit not constrained by patriarchal structures, but freely, within a woman independent, in this instance, of patriarchal control.

The stories of Jesus' foremothers, liminal figures situated "in-between" patriarchal boundaries, and on the sidelines of the patriarchal story, reveal the uneasy fit between a patriarchal God and other aspects of the divine present in Israel's story. As the women struggle for justice, dedicate themselves to the preservation of life, show merciful love to others, and redeem even their own unutterable suffering under patriarchy's rule, they reflect an image of a
God who is more creatively powerful than patriarchy. The identity of Jesus, Son of Tamar, Son of Rahab, Son of Ruth, Son of “She-of-Uriah,” Son of Mary, and ultimately Son of God is in part defined and significantly illumined by the reality of His foremothers’ initiative, courage and deep faith.

III. Rachel: Sorrowful Mother (Matthew 2:18)

Φωνή ἐν Ῥαμᾶ ἡκούσθη
κλαυθμός καὶ ὀδύρμος πολύς
Ῥαχήλ κλαίουσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς,
καὶ οὐκ ἠθελεν παρακληθῆναι ὅτι οὐκ εἰσίν.

A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud mourning,
Rachel crying for her children;
and she would not be consoled, because they are no more (Matthew 2:18).

Rachel, the weeping mother enters Matthew’s story at a tragic moment, i.e., the slaughter of Bethlehem’s innocents (2:16). The narrator, in one compact, emotionless sentence, recounts the story of Herod’s massacre of the children (2:16). He then inserts a personal reflection on this incident by quoting the emotional and poetical passage recounting Rachel’s lamentation over her children (2:18). Gundry has shown that an ab/ab parallelism in the Matthean version of the quote from Jeremiah makes the motif of Rachel’s sorrow the central focus. The narrator thus draws attention to Rachel and focuses the reader on her grief. In this instance I read not so much as a resisting reader as one who desires, in the service of women’s liberation, to amplify and

44R. Gundry, The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel, NTS 18 (Leiden-Brill. 1967). 36. “The first three phrases, A voice . . . wailing and loud lamentation, . . . Rachel weeping for her children, are in apposition. “Wailing” corresponds to “weeping;” “She refused to be consoled, for they were no more” corresponds to “loud lamentation.”
emphasize certain traits of the Rachel of Matthew’s quotation. My reading is in large part inspired by the work of two commentators on the Rachel of the Hebrew Scriptures, Phyllis Trible and Avivah Zornberg. Their insights guide my reading of the significance for women of Matthew’s Rachel.

Zornberg ponders the peculiar prestige of Rachel’s tears. She asks, “What is Rachel’s power of intercession? Why does God instruct Jacob to bury her so that it is her tears that will restore her children from exile?”\(^{45}\) Zornberg considers Rachel’s personal drama indicative of metaphysical reality. Rachel is buried between fixed places of human concourse in a no-man’s land, which is the metaphysical space her children will traverse on their way into exile. Rachel meets them, as it were, at the border, where they move off into not-being. She is a liminal figure, and as such she can respond to her children’s pain at their point of dispersal.\(^{46}\) “At that border, her eternal yearning for her children will generate redemptive force. Her tears will win a response from God: her children will not disappear into the night. Through the sheer power of her yearning for her children, ‘who are not’ (lit. who are gone) . . . Rachel will bring them back into real, coherent being.”\(^{47}\)

Zornberg sees Rachel’s “labour” as simply her tears. Her longing for her lost children paradoxically engenders in Rachel a stubborn hope because her children’s absence is situated in the refracted, limited perspectives of this world. Rachel’s sense of “what is not” engenders


\(^{46}\)Ibid., 305.

\(^{47}\)Ibid., 213.
imaginings beyond the visible; these are the “labor” of her tears, a labour of hope, enacted in her weeping. Her entreaties win God’s ear as no other intercession succeeds in doing. God listens to the weeping of Rachel, a woman “most personally tutored in the pain of incompleteness,” and her weeping teaches Him about the world He has created. Rachel reflects back to God the split reality of a human being, and moved by this woman’s reinventing the world in the shape of her own experience, God promises reward for her “labor” — hope for ultimate integration.

In Zornberg’s interpretation Rachel emerges in all her heroic complexity as a figure of tragic optimism. Rachel’s holiness translates pain into strength — it intuits “the strength within the pain, the coherence within chaos.” Rachel in her pain radiates hope and integrative energy.

Phyllis Trible sees an intimate relation between Rachel and YHWH developed in Jeremiah. 31:15-17, where voices organize the structure. While both Rachel and YHWH speak, attention is focused on the grieving Rachel, whose voice carries over from v. 15 into vv. 16-17. Trible has also noted that in v. 20, when YHWH’s voice does dominate the scene, it is the voice of YHWH the mother. Like Rachel mourning her children, YHWH declares sorrow for a “darling child.” Trible’s translation of v. 20 demonstrates that the maternal image of Rachel is extended by association into an image of YHWH.

Is Ephraim my dear son? my darling child?  
For the more I speak of him,  
the more do I remember him.  
Therefore, my womb trembles for him:

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48Ibid., 214.

49Trible, God and the Rhetoric, 41, notes that Rachel’s voice carries into vv. 16-17, where the divine voice of consolation emphasizes neither the deity nor the sons but rather the woman.
I will truly show motherly-compassion on him.\(^{50}\)

Trible states.

The rhetorical question calling Ephraim “a darling child” suggests that God identifies with Rachel’s caring for her children. The motivational clause recalls Rachel remembering her lost sons with tenderness. And the conclusion makes explicit the maternal metaphor for God. As Rachel mourns the loss of the fruit of her womb, so YHWH from the divine womb mourns the same child.\(^ {51}\)

Rachel then can be understood to weep not only over the death of Bethlehem’s children but as weeping eternally, for all who suffer. As Trible remarks, “Directed to no one in particular, and hence to all who may hear, the voice of Rachel travels across the land and through the ages to permeate existence with a suffering that not even death can relieve (cf. Matt.2:18).”\(^ {52}\) The voice of Rachel, a liminal figure situated on the border between past and present, earth and heaven, is heard even by God. Her weeping echoes God’s grief. And that divine sorrow is, as Trible has shown, a maternal grief. Mother God shares Rachel’s anguish that the death of innocents must mark the coming of Jesus the Messiah into a fragmented world. Rachel’s anguished love also mirrors God’s redeeming compassion; Mother God’s beneficent tears mingle with those of Rachel as both grieve over children “who are no more.”

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\(^{50}\) Ibid., 45. 56. notes that the root מָרַג “inner parts,” can also be read womb, so that “an exclusively female image extends its meaning to a divine mode of being.” Trible traces “the semantic movement from the wombs of women to the compassion of God.”


\(^ {52}\) Trible, God and the Rhetoric, 40.
This reading of Rachel's weeping as maternal grief/dive grief expressed over the ages finds support in the work of Samuel Noah Kramer who sees the metaphorical figure of Rachel as *Mater Dolorosa*, an archetypal symbol that derives its meaning from contexts that are virtually universal.\(^5^3\) Rachel is a “representative mother of Israel,” the feminine aspect of the Jewish nation. She is also the archetypal “weeping mother” in the genre of the “weeping goddess” figures, Ningal, Inanna, Gestinanna, and Ninhursag, who weep for their dead children or for the destruction of their cities and temple. It has been noted that in Kaballistic literature Rachel is also linked with the Shekinah, or presence of God, sorrowing over her people in Exile.\(^5^4\)

In my reading, the weeping Rachel bears witness to the fact that God sides with the suffering and apparently powerless, exemplified in the stories of Jesus' foremothers and mother; and in the suffering of Bethlehem's grieving women and murdered children. These figures are images of Rachel's and YHWH's grief. They stand in judgment on Herod and all those who collude with him in opposition to Jesus. The brave struggles and courageous faith of these innocent women wronged, and even the tragedy of children's lives cut off prematurely, are redeemed by the “holy work,” the tears of a compassionate God imaged in Rachel's inconsolable weeping. Their weeping is heard throughout the gospel. Rachel's cries will not cease until her children return, until life is fully restored to the poor, the marginalized, the helpless. until all look, listen. understand with their heart, and return to the Lord (13:5); until the blind see and the lame walk. the deaf hear and the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news preached to them


(11:4-5): until all say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" (23:39). As poetic metaphor, Rachel bears the weight of all these meanings, "carrying across" the themes and motifs from one entity to another. In Matthew's gospel she weeps on the border between life and death, sorrow and joy, and the now and not-yet of God's reign. As universal sorrowing mother, Rachel carries not only the weight of the foremother's sufferings, and of all mothers' pain, but also the very pain of God herself. Rachel also bears the weight of Jesus' own sorrow when, near the end of his ministry, he like Rachel before him laments the fate of his cherished children (23:37-39).

When I began writing this thesis, I encountered in Matthew's gospel the figure of Rachel, grieving mother, a figure who through the years drew me ever closer to her and ultimately led me to the suffering maternal Jesus near the end of Matthew's story. Both powerful, archetypal mother figures formed an inclusio, a circle of meaning, in my consciousness. From this initial image of two maternal mother figures, Rachel and Jesus, I was drawn to investigate the other maternal imagery, and so was born this study. The origins of my attraction to these figures is unknown to me in a conscious way, but as was argued at the beginning of this study, it has something to do with the fact that we are in need of female images of God in order to see our reality as women reflected back to us. I am not a mother physically. But I have an earthly mother, and perhaps because of my relationship with her, I am drawn in a very powerful way to seek God-mother, imaged as divinely compassionate womb, in prayer and worship.

My comments on the way I read Rachel in Matthew's gospel bring to the fore Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's conviction that feminist interpretation of scripture necessarily includes
celebration as well as textual analysis. As an educated, middle-class feminist, I experience such celebrations as an integral part of my reading of Rachel. I therefore take time to describe some of my experiences of feminist liturgies which support and enrich my study, rituals in which Rachel’s tears and Jesus’ grief echo in the cries of countless women.

My Catholic women’s spirituality group makes use of ecumenical resources for our readings and liturgical celebrations. I highlight two that we have used; Gertrude Lebans’s work Out of the Fire, and Colleen Fulmer’s musical compositions published under the title Cry of Ramah which provides music and dance for rituals. In Lebans’s work, the Good Friday liturgy states, “We do not want to recreate the historical moment, but make it the focus of opposition to violence and violation by corrupt systems.” The music which accompanies and ends this particular service of remembrance and of resistance to oppression is Ann Turner’s song entitled “Rachel’s tears.” The song emphasizes our resolve to stand in solidarity with the suffering just as Jesus suffered in solidarity with all who live with integrity and with all involuntary suffering.

A voice is heard in Ramah. Rachel weeps again,
Her children, her children are no more!
Where is hope?

We sing the songs of gladness,
Raising shouts for peace,
A still, small voice of justice will be heard.
Where is truth?

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57 Lebans, Out of the Fire, 100.
We seek the One who gives the stars,
the moon, our earth.
Who touched the heart of Rachel in her grief.
Where is love?58

Colleen Fulmer’s music, “Cry of Ramah.” “Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo” and
“Rahamim” emphasize the anguish of mothers whose children have gone from them, and offer an
opportunity for dance and song by which we can express our own sorrow and our solidarity with
them. I quote just one verse of “Cry of Ramah.”

A voice is heard in Rama,
Hiroshima, Salvador,
Women refusing comfort
For their children who are no more;
No garland of lovely flowers
Can dispel the ancient grief
Or silence the anguished voices
That abhor the war machine.59

As we participate in these liturgical celebrations, my reading of Rachel is taken into
personal experience, and shared with other members of my feminist community. Intellectual
analysis joins with an experience of prayer to provide a fuller and richer reading, and to join us
with women who suffer from war and work for peace.

58 Lebans, Out of the Fire, 162-3.
59 Fulmer, Cry of Ramah, 9.
IV. Personified Wisdom (Matthew 11:19)

καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς.

Before offering my reading of the text it is necessary to consider two underlying questions: first, the relationship between Jesus and Personified Wisdom, and secondly the relationship of Wisdom to God in the Hebrew scriptures.

First, is Jesus identified with Wisdom? There has been a long standing debate on the nature of the relationship between Jesus and Wisdom in Matthew. The remarks of R. Pregeant, who takes a “reader-response” approach to the question, prove useful. Pregeant identifies several options that readers might take.

The reader will hear in the reference to Wisdom’s deeds an echo of ... 11:2, and will know that it is Jesus’ mighty works that testify to his identity ... But what will the reader make of the reference to Wisdom? A reader who recognizes the saying in 11:19 as an existing aphorism will understand it as an analogy, and a reader who already thinks of Jesus as Wisdom incarnate will understand it as Jesus’ direct self-reference. A reader with neither of these specific bits of knowledge might conclude that the deeds of Jesus, Messiah/Son of God, are deeds

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60 The question of the extent to which Matthew’s christology is influenced by Wisdom has been the focus of debate since the publication of redactional studies by M. Jack Suggs, Wisdom, Christology and the Law in Matthew’s Gospel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970). and Felix Christ, Jesus Sophia (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1970). The debate centers on the question of whether Jesus is identified with Wisdom, or whether an analogy is being drawn between the “deeds of the Christ” (11:2) and Wisdom’s deeds (11:19). The problem is that the narrator gives no explicit directions to the reader to interpret Jesus as personified Wisdom. All of the evidence could be interpreted in the opposite direction; it could be supposed that the implied author is directing the reader to substitute Jesus for Wisdom, to focus on Jesus, not as identified with Wisdom, but as replacing her. A majority opinion supports the thesis that Jesus appears in Matthew’s gospel as the incarnation of personified Wisdom. But see M. Johnson, “Reflections on a Wisdom Approach to Matthew’s Christology,” CBQ 36 (1974): 44-64; D. Orton, The Understanding Scribe: Matthew and the Apocalyptic Ideal, JSNT: Supplement Series 25 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academy Press, 1989); R. Pregeant Christology Beyond Dogma: Matthew’s Christ in Process Hermeneutic, Semeia Supplements 7 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978). 93.
commissioned by Wisdom — whether the latter is understood in a fully mythological sense or as a metaphor for God’s self-expression at creation.  

In any of the cases described above, it is evident that the reader’s disposition and/or knowledge or ignorance influence his/her reading. I agree with Pregeant that these different readings are possible, and not only possible, but also called for. Such a position is congruent with Wolfgang Iser’s understanding of the text as allowing different readings, and of the reading process as a reader’s imaginative calling forth of intuitive associations as s/he assembles the textual perspectives.

This line of thought suggests the following interpretation. In 11:19 Jesus declares, “Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.” The narrator has previously (11:2) spoken of Jesus’ deeds as “the deeds of the Christ:” τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Jesus’ declaration about Wisdom’s vindication stands out against the horizon not only of the narrator’s remark concerning Jesus’ deeds, but also against the background of Jesus’ reference to his own deeds of merciful healing (11:4-6). Jesus’

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61 R. Pregeant, “The Wisdom Passages in Matthew’s Story,” SBL 1990 Seminar Papers (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 482. Pregeant finds no evidence that the narrator has prepared the reader to render a judgment on Jesus as Wisdom outside of 11:25-30. I suggest that Pregeant’s quest for such explicit instructions may not be the most useful way to proceed. Iser’s focus on reading as a process involving the reader as ‘structured act’ offers a better means of investigating the question because it allows for the construction of meaning by a real reader.

62 I differ from Pregeant because I treat the “reader” not solely as an intratextual entity, nor as a first-time reader, but rather as a real reader with a knowledge of Jewish Wisdom speculation and a grasp of Matthew’s redaction of Q. I do not focus on discussion of the redactional activity of the author of Matthew; I wish simply to make clear that a real reader’s knowledge influences the way in which s/he follows or does not follow the narrator’s directions.
words concerning personified Wisdom, therefore, not only link His deeds with those of Sophia, but also establish an intimate link between himself and Lady Wisdom.\(^{63}\)

It must be allowed that I as a real reader know that, as Suggs has noted, Wisdom's words as spoken in Q differ from the Matthean version.\(^{64}\) This suggests that in the Matthean text as we have it, Jesus's deeds are portrayed not only as Wisdom's deeds, but also that Jesus is identified with Wisdom. This idea is reinforced when in 23:34, another Q passage, Jesus (in the Matthean version) speaks words formerly attributed to Wisdom\(^{65}\). Furthermore, in 23:37-39, Jesus laments over Jerusalem, speaking once again as Wisdom, the trans-historical Sophia, eternally longing to gather Jerusalem’s children to herself.\(^{66}\) Finally, in 11:25-27 Jesus speaks as intimate son of God the Father. The exclusive and intimate knowledge which characterizes Jesus' relationship with God in this passage is, however, elsewhere attributed only to Sophia.\(^{67}\) Therefore "it is not so much the son tradition but the wisdom tradition that underlies the affirmation of revelatory intimacy between Jesus and his Abba."\(^{68}\) Jesus speaks here, therefore, as Sophia. When in 11:28-

\(^{63}\) The fact that the narrator has Jesus utter the aphorism gives weight to this understanding, for if the remark had been that of the narrator, at a remove, so to speak, from Jesus, it would not have had the weight of a personal reflection of Jesus.

\(^{64}\) Suggs, *Wisdom*, 55, notes that in the Q version (Luke 7:35) Wisdom is justified by all her children, which is understood to refer to Jesus and John the Baptist as messengers of Wisdom.

\(^{65}\) In the Q passage (Luke 11:49) Jesus speaks of Wisdom, quoting her declaration that she will send prophets and apostles, etc. In the Matthean version, Jesus speaks the words of Wisdom, stating in the present tense rather than in Wisdom's future tense, that he sends prophets, sages and scribes, etc.


\(^{67}\) Cf. Job 28:1-27; Sir. 1:6, 8; Bar. 3:15-32; Prov. 8:12; Wis.7:25 f, 8:3 ff., 9:4, 9. 11.

\(^{68}\) E. Johnson, *She Who Is*, 96, "Given its roots in the style and content of the wisdom tradition, such an insight does not essentially need the male imagery for its christological
30 Jesus utters an invitation to those who labor, and speaks of the rest and the easy yoke they can expect. The vocabulary, as often noted, is again that of Wisdom. Jesus again appears not simply as "a transcendent figure . . . in somewhat undefined terms," but rather as personified Wisdom herself. The theme of wisdom is picked up yet again in 12:42, when the wise and renowned figure of the Queen of the South recognizes Jesus as even wiser and greater than Solomon. I imagine, against the horizon of the previous portrayals of Jesus as Sophia, that the Queen of the South, herself a wisdom figure, recognizes Jesus as Sophia. Wisdom personified.

At this point it is necessary to consider the question of the relationship of Sophia to God. The precise identity of "Lady Wisdom," or "Sophia" in the Hebrews Bible has been long debated. Given the impossibility of applying any one interpretation to all the various texts, it is nonetheless worth noting Elizabeth Johnson’s remark concerning the activity of Lady Wisdom throughout the literature. Johnson argues that the functional equivalence between the deeds of Sophia and those of the biblical God, plus the fact that Jewish monotheism was not amenable to the idea of more than one God, makes the proposition that Sophia is Israel's God in female imagery "most reasonable."

. . . if the breadth of Sophia's activity in the wisdom literature is taken stringently into account. . . . her actions in creation and salvation are obviously divine ones. . . . Sophia is a female personification of God's own being in creative and saving involvement with the world. The chief reason for arriving at this interpretation is the

affirmation."

69 Suggs, Wisdom, 77 ff., for example, finds parallels between Sirach 51 and Matthew 11:25-30.

70 Pregeant, "Wisdom Passages," 483, sees Jesus' invitation in 11:28-30 as adding to the transcendent quality of his person, but no evidence that the narrator wishes the reader to make a judgment about Jesus as Wisdom.
functional equivalence between the deeds of Sophia and those of the biblical God. What she does is already portrayed elsewhere in the Scriptures as the field of action of Israel's God under the revered, unpronounceable name YHWH.71

The figure of personified Wisdom thus emerges as the product of the theological imagination of Israel's sages who conceived of YHWH's energy, and/or the powerful deeds of divinity, and expressed these realities in the concrete form of personified Wisdom. The vivid personification of Wisdom is a fluid concept of which the Jewish authors made use as “a way of speaking about God. . . of expressing God's active involvement with his world and his people without compromising his transcendence.” “Lady Wisdom” is Israel's God in female imagery, or as Schüssler Fiorenza states, “Divine Sophia is Israel's God in the language and Gestalt of the goddess.”72

I therefore understand that Wisdom's deeds of which Jesus speaks are the very deeds of Sophia. God herself. Previously in the gospel the narrator has identified Jesus as son of God (1:22-23; 2:15; 3:17). Now in my imagination I apprehend Jesus not only as son of Mary, son of

71E. Johnson, She Who Is, 91.

72Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, 133, “Wisdom theology is not characterized by fear of the goddess in its apologetic ‘defense’ of monotheism. Rather it is inspired by a positive attempt to speak in the language of its own culture and to integrate elements of its ‘goddess cult’. especially of Isis worship, into Jewish monotheism.” Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Wisdom Theology and the Christological Hymns of the New Testament,” in Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity, ed. Robert L. Wilken (South Bend, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1975), 17-42. summarizes the debate concerning the female gender of personified Wisdom as the result of the influence from religious cults and philosophies in which female hypostases or deities were venerated. She speaks of Israel's wisdom theology as reaction to neighbouring influences as "reflective mythology" in the sense that it uses elements of goddess-language in order to speak of Israel's God.
God. but also as Sophia/God. I visualize Jesus both as Mother and as Sophia, as God/Sophia and God/Mother. 73

To sum up, my response to 11:19 involves a creative reading, sparked by the text, and guided by previous scenes containing female imagery. These scenes form the horizons against which I view and interpret Jesus' reference to personified Wisdom in which Jesus appears as intimately related to Wisdom. Jesus speaks as eternal Sophia, warning, promising, threatening and lamenting over Jerusalem and her children in chapter 23. The understanding of Wisdom as God, garnered from an interpretation of Wisdom in the Jewish Scriptures, enables me to understand Jesus, already identified as Son of God in the gospel, as God/Sophia, as Sophia incarnate. Finally, in 11:25-27 the intimate relationship of Jesus with the Father echoes Sophia's union with God. In the invitation uttered by Jesus I hear Sophia's words. Various images of Jesus and of God emerge, change, and re-emerge: Jesus, son of God, Jesus, Sophia/God, Jesus, Mother/God herself. These images form the horizon against which I read future passages.

V. Jerusalem: Malevolent Mother? (Matthew 2:3; 23:37)

Jerusalem appears at several points in the gospel. Personified Jerusalem is mentioned in 2:3 and 23:37-39. In both cases she is portrayed as hostile to Jesus. In 2:3 all Jerusalem is troubled, along with Herod, at the news of Jesus' birth. The image of a hostile Jerusalem is expanded when later, during Jesus' ministry, Jerusalem is designated as the place where he must suffer. Jerusalem's hostility emerges once again, when, near the end of Jesus' ministry and during Jesus' last appearance in the city (23:37), Jesus declares his often-felt but thwarted desire to gather Jerusalem's children under his protection. Jerusalem's own unwillingness, however, prevents this. Jesus then utters a prophetic judgment on the city, and admonishes her. Jesus' absence from Jerusalem will endure from now until He is acknowledged as "the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

Jesus' reference to Jerusalem and 'her children' implicitly identifies personified Jerusalem as a mother. In contrast to Jesus, who himself is identified as mother through the simile of the mother hen to which he refers, Jerusalem appears as an evil mother who will not allow (οὐκ}

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74In 2:1, 3, Jerusalem sides with Herod against Jesus; in 3:5 it is the people of Jerusalem who go to John for baptism; in 4:25 great crowds from Jerusalem follow Jesus; in 5:35 Jerusalem is spoken about as the city of the great king; in 15:1 Pharisees and scribes come to Jesus from Jerusalem; in 16:21 Jerusalem is the place where Jesus must suffer. In 20:17, 18 Jesus indicates Jerusalem as the place where the Son of Man will be handed over. In 21:1 Jerusalem is Jesus' destination. and in 21:5, the city is called Daughter of Zion; in 21:10 Jesus enters Jerusalem, and the whole city is in turmoil over his identity. In 23:37, Jesus addresses Jerusalem and castigates her for killing the prophets, laments her fate, and warns of coming destruction. In 27:53, reference is made to the resurrected ones who enter the Holy City.

75Donald P. Senior, The Passion Narrative According to Matthew (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975), 20, notes that Matthew reveals a marked awareness of Jerusalem and its fate, and emphasizes the Holy City as the guilty city.
Her children to be gathered by Jesus. This portrayal of a maternal Jerusalem is astounding in its negativity, for never in the preceding tradition is “mother Jerusalem” ever portrayed as turning against her children. As Mary Callaway has shown, images of Jerusalem as mother functioned best precisely in those times when Jerusalem itself was devastated, but never is the “mother” city herself guilty. “Jerusalem is either weeping for her children who have been sent away in punishment for sin, or she receives them upon her breast. But in no case is Jerusalem as mother responsible for the destruction or guilty of sin.”

O. Steck also notes that the apostrophe to Jerusalem as perpetrator of crimes in Matthew’s gospel is conspicuous. Generally when Jerusalem is portrayed as a mother, and even as a sinner under judgment, she always grieves that her children must suffer, and is desolate on account of her children’s fate. In Lamentations 1:5, 6, 8, 11, 14, 16, 18, for example, Jerusalem is a widow and a mother who grieves that her children suffer. In later evidence, the sinners are not Jerusalem, but her children: Baruch 4:9, 12; 4 Esdras 10:6 ff. In Tobit 13:9, Psalms of Solomon 2:3; Apoc. Bar. (syr) 3:1 ff.; 10:16, Jerusalem herself either laments or is betrayed.

76 P. Bonnard. “Matthieu, educateur du peuple chretien,” in Melanges bibliques en honneur de R. P. Beda Rigaux (Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), 343, “On sait l’importance du verbe vouloir dans la narration matthéene; il désigne ici le dessein du Christ et la mauvaise volonté des juifs... Jesus et les juifs sont caracterisées, non par ce qu’ils sont mais par ce qu’ils veulent ou ne veulent pas; ou plutot, ils sont ce qu’ils veulent.”

77 Mary Callaway, Sing, O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash. SBL Dissertation Series # 91 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 89, notes that in Third Isaiah, Baruch, and 4 Ezra, Jerusalem as mother appears as mother of the exiles, and in poems of comfort Jerusalem is a mother comforting her children: Isaiah 56-66, esp. 66:10-12; or she is a desolate woman comforted by God, as in Baruch 4:11, 12, 16, 19, 20. In 4 Ezra 10:8, the sorrowing woman, Sion, “the mother of us all,” is transformed into the beautiful city.

The Matthean narrator's use of the image of "mother" Jerusalem is therefore a singular and unusual portrayal in which the idea of Jerusalem as hostile mother is separated from the actual inhabitants. In view of the fact that chapter 23 deals principally with the perversity of some of the Jewish leaders, and given that in the gospel as a whole it is members of the leadership, and not the people, who are consistently portrayed as hostile to Jesus, it would seem that "mother Jerusalem" in Matthew functions as a metaphor for that portion of the leadership who revile Jesus, while "her children" represent the people themselves. The image of the mother who does not care for her own reinforces the portrait of leaders (and anyone else) who will not (οὐκ ἦθελον) remove the burdens they impose on their people (23:4), who shut up the kingdom of heaven, and even prevent those who would enter the kingdom from so doing (23:13), who neglect mercy (23:23), and who shed innocent blood (23:34).

When I view 23:37 against the horizon of previous instances in which the narrator portrays Jerusalem as opposed to Jesus, I realize that the personified figure of Mother Jerusalem, which elsewhere in the Bible is portrayed positively, is distorted almost beyond recognition. I read and recall that in 2:3, "troubled" (ἔταραχθη) Jerusalem conspires with Herod and "all the chief priests and scribes of the people" against the child Jesus. I also recall 21:10 where the narrator alerts the reader to the earth-shaking turmoil (ἔσείσθη πᾶσα η ἀντικαταλύοντας ἁπάντα) into which "all the city" is thrown on account of Jesus. Finally, in 23:37 I hear Jesus' last words to mother Jerusalem, words of accusation and of sorrowful lament, words of admonition and warning. I must conclude.

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79Callaway, Sing, O Barren One, 89-90, "Third Isaiah and his successors developed the ancient myth of Jerusalem as religious idea. It represented the beginnings of the world, the presence of the deity, and the life in Eden. The prophets and poets of the Second Temple period . . . separated the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the idea of the city itself . . . (and) recaptured the idea of Jerusalem as mythic space."
therefore, that the traditional, positive “root image” of maternal Jerusalem as a caring mother is essentially distorted by the narrator’s use of it as metaphor for the malevolence of some teachers, priests and elders of the Jewish people. The Matthean image of Jerusalem functions to emphasize the degenerate and uncaring nature of Jerusalem as mother as it develops the theme of the leaders’ culpability and their bad faith expressed in opposition to God’s plan realized in Jesus Christ.

As a feminist reader, faced with an image of Mother Jerusalem as the antithesis of the other maternal images in the gospel (i.e., Jesus’ foremothers, Mary, Rachel, Sophia, and the Queen of the South) who resists Jesus’ own longings as Sophia incarnate to save her children, I must question the Matthean distortion of the ancient image of a compassionate and loving Mother Jerusalem. This is a particularly poignant realization since I know that in other literature, Jerusalem is pictured not as the antithesis of other female figures, but as their sister image. Jerusalem, like Rachel, is weeping and sorrowing for her children (Baruch 4:11), left desolate without her sons (4:12, 16, 19), and grieving without comfort.⁸⁰ I also remember Jerusalem speaking like Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9, with words of instruction (Baruch 4:18). There the message of comfort is not necessarily restoration, but rather the knowledge that the suffering of the people is not meaningless and is in the control of YHWH.⁸¹ I know there can be no more effective an image of evil than that of a malevolent mother, but at the same time I regret the Matthean (ab)use of so noble an image. I am also moved to interpret 23:39 not as a judgment, but

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⁸⁰Calloway, Sing, O Barren One, 82, notes that with the Jews in exile and their city destroyed, Jerusalem is like Rachel weeping for her children; when the Jews return, Jerusalem will be like Sarah giving birth, or like the bride whom YHWH takes back to himself.

⁸¹Ibid.
more in line with the thought that Jerusalem the good mother may yet comfort her people in the
day they welcome Jesus/Sophia.

VI. The Mother Hen: Compassionate Mother (Matthew 23:37-39)

In 23:37 Jesus compares himself to a mother hen: “How often have I desired to gather
your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” In
the simile of the mother hen, Jesus himself, for the first time in the gospel, explicitly refers to
himself by means of a female image. In a passage immediately following Jesus’ oracle of doom
over those who persecute and kill the ‘prophets, wise men and scribes’ (23:34-36). Jesus declares
his longing to gather Jerusalem's children under “his” sheltering wings.82 I know that the reference
to the sheltering wings conventionally depicts various aspects of God’s relationship to Israel:
God's saving deeds in the Exodus (Deut. 31:11); the shelter offered to proselytes (Ruth 2:12; 2
Baruch 41:3-4); God’s protection of Jerusalem (Is. 31:5); and in the cultic context of the psalms,
the notions of God’s protection from enemies (Ps. 17:8, 57:1, 61:4); God’s steadfast love (Ps.

82Suggs. Wisdom, 66 f., notes that the metaphor in Q requires a heavenly, even a divine
being, and that the speaker is Sophia. Wisdom bemoans the murder of her envoys, and since it is
precisely in Jerusalem that ‘the prophets and those sent to you’ have been killed, and that
Wisdom’s graciousness has been rejected, She leaves her earthly abode in the temple in Jerusalem.
The punishment of Jerusalem is attributed to the rejection of Wisdom. In Matthew, the Wisdom
saying is transferred to Jesus, and the last verse (39) is historicized so that it refers to the
parousia.
36:7); God as a source of joy (Ps. 63:7). and most strikingly for our context, in Psalm 91 the conviction that God protects the faithful (91:4): “he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.” I am also aware that Jesus speaks of himself using a female image ordinarily used to speak of God. I understand that the maternal image points to Jesus’ compassion as God’s compassion, his presence as God’s presence, and later, in vv.38-39, his judgment as the very judgment of God.

Jesus’ declaration of “how often” he had longed to gather Jerusalem’s children “as a hen gathers her brood under her wings” evokes in me a sense of some trans-historical divine figure who has sought Israel’s love in vain throughout generations.83 While the reference to maternal “wings” certainly evokes the idea of God’s protective presence, it also calls up the image of the Shekinah, a circumlocution to express the reverent nearness of God to the people. The Shekinah is not only feminine grammatically, but is personified as a woman.84

The compassion of the female Shekinah is evident in the statement “When man [sic] is in trouble, there is heaviness in the head and arms of the Shekinah.”85 Another example is found in the statement that “When the Shekinah left the sanctuary, she returned to caress and kiss its walls

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84 Raphael Patai, The Hebrew Goddess (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1967), 151, notes that “both in Hebrew and Aramaic the gender of the subject plays a much greater role in the sentence structure than in Indo-European languages,” so that “without any explicit pronouncement to the effect that the Shekinah was a female divine entity, her sex was kept in the forefront of consciousness by every statement made about her.”

and columns, and cried and said ‘Be in peace, O my sanctuary, be in peace, O my royal palace, be in peace, O my precious house, be in peace from now on, be in peace’.”

The compassionate aspect of the Shekinah is balanced by her punitive aspects; the Shekinah exercises the wrathful and punishing aspects of the Divine as well as the nurturing ones. Against the horizon of such images as the sheltering wings and the wings of the Shekinah, I understand Jesus’ words to Jerusalem as the words of God’s Shekinah herself.

If Jesus in this passage speaks as Shekinah, God’s presence in female form, does he also speak as Sophia? As we have seen, Suggs and others support the interpretation that Jesus speaks authoritatively in 23:34-36 as Sophia, i.e., she who sends prophets to a murderous Jerusalem. since Jesus speaks in language the reader recognizes as reminiscent of Sophia. It is the imagery of Jesus’ simile of the mother hen, however, which as Arvedson remarks, “is thoroughly appropriate in the mouth of the maternal Sophia,” and which most directly identifies Jesus with Sophia. The mother hen image thus conjures up for me the portrait of a maternal Sophia (Wisdom 7:12) who dwells (cf. Sirach 1:15) or “nests” among her children.

Jesus’ use of such a powerful maternal image for himself presents me as a feminist reader with a veritable kaleidoscope of intimately related female images. The image of the lamenting

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86Patai, The Hebrew Goddess, 151, quoting Lam. Rab., Introduction.

87M. Johnson, “Reflections on a Wisdom Approach,” 53, admits that although “there was no pre-Christian motif of the goddess Sophia sending her envoys with revelation for men.” yet “it must be acknowledged that [the book of] Wisdom does indeed speak of Wisdom, ‘entering’ and ‘passing into’ holy souls . . . . We must leave open the possibility that later Wisdom writers could have read into this the idea of Sophia inspiring her envoys to speak revelation.”

Jesus not only echoes that of the maternally compassionate figures of Sophia and Shekinah; it also calls up memories of Rachel, who in her grief foreshadowed their maternal sorrow. I also remember that Jesus laments the loss of Jerusalem’s children, just as Rachel grieved her children. As I read them, Rachel and Jerusalem have a complex relationship. I see them as similar in that they are both mothers who want the best for their children. Jerusalem longs to protect her children who are in danger, and refuses to let even Jesus dissuade her. They are also different, for while Jerusalem refuses (οὐκ ἡθελησατε) Jesus’ attempt (ἡθελησα) to protect her children, Rachel, by contrast, refuses to be consoled (οὐκ ἡθελεν παρακληθηναι) for the loss of her children. In both cases, however, the mother figures are connected to their children through maternal love and their refusal to relinquish motherly concern. Finally, since Jesus speaks as maternal Sophia in 23:37-39, I see his previous reference to Sophia in 11:19 even more clearly as an assertion that Jesus not only performs the actions of Wisdom, but is personified Wisdom who acts.

If Jesus embodies the maternally compassionate aspects of Sophia and Shekinah, it must not be forgotten that Jesus in 23:38-39 regretfully pronounces the destruction of those who refuses to the very end to accept him and his message. Jesus/Sophia foretells the desolation of Jerusalem’s house. In the Matthean understanding, the positive mother image is split, as a maternal Jesus laments over the ruin of mother Jerusalem, and expresses divine chagrin at her coming destruction. It would seem that Matthew’s Jesus must threaten where he would bless.89

However, if Matthew’s Jesus/Sophia sorrowfully judges ‘Mother Jerusalem’ and grieves for her children, it is also the case that both mothers show solicitude for their own. Nonetheless, it

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89 M. Plath, “Der neutestamentliche Weheruf über Jerusalem,” Theologische Studien und Kritiken 78 (1905): 457. remarks the parallel here with the prophet Jeremiah’s anguished impotence because he cannot save a guilty city.
would seem that the children of the three mothers, Jesus, Jerusalem and Rachel, are in the end tragically divided against themselves on Jesus’ account. As a feminist Christian reader I hear, in the eschatologically oriented verse of 23:39, a note of hope for everyone who would acclaim Jesus in faith, welcoming him as “He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

VII. Summary

As a feminist reader I value the female imagery as theologically significant. Inevitably, I understand the gospel differently than do those for whom the imagery is seen as tangential to the meaning of Matthew’s gospel. While it would be beyond the scope of this paper to attempt a full-scale analysis of the entire gospel from a feminist perspective, it is possible to offer some thoughts on the difference a feminist appraisal of the female imagery might make for a reader’s construal of the meaning of certain parts of the gospel of Matthew.

The first major movement in the gospel traces Jesus’ origin in stories about his birth, his infancy and his encounter with John (1:1-4:16). Commentaries on this section of the gospel of Matthew invariably focus on Matthew’s use of a genealogy and scriptural quotations to speak of Jesus as the Messiah, and as one in whom Scripture is fulfilled. These features are also important in a reader-response approach to the gospel, in which the initial exposition by the narrator in the form of genealogy and scriptural quotations is seen as an important way in which the narrator attempts not only to convey to the reader the significance of Jesus’ origins, but also to persuade the reader to adopt the narrator’s ideological point of view regarding Jesus. A feminist literary

90Levine, The Social and Ethnic Dimensions, 221, notes that the lament does not testify to abandonment or rejection for the people. It is both a threat of judgment and an opportunity of salvation.
reading of Matthew, such as the Iserian reading offered in this study, considers both the
genealogy and the quotations from Scripture as significant elements of Matthew’s story for all of
these reasons. Above and beyond such concerns is the feminist concern to critique the
androcentric focus of the stories as narrated, by paying attention to gender, that is, by putting at
the centre of attention the images and persons of women in the genealogy and in the stories,
namely, the foremothers of Jesus, Mary, and Rachel. In this way the androcentric ‘frame of
meaning’ which determines how the gospel is read is problematized. The androcentric language
which sustains the presumption of male superiority is unmasked as destructive for women. The
oppressive dynamics of the text are thus undermined by a feminist reading in which the text is
entered from a different direction, read in a feminist key, so to speak.

In this way a feminist perspective opens up new vistas of textual meaning. If what we see
depends on where we stand, the stories of the foremothers, Mary, and Rachel seen from a feminist
perspective, become paradigmatic for the story of Jesus. Jesus’ foremothers, his mother Mary,
and Rachel, representative mother of Israel, offer clues to the reader concerning Jesus’ identity.
The feminist reader recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, for example, not only as Son of Abraham,
Son of David, but also as Son of the foremothers Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and She-of-Uriah. The
reader sees the mothers stories’ as giving shape and content to Jesus’ identity as Messiah.
Ultimately, the stories of the foremothers of Jesus not only reveal to the feminist reader aspects of
Jesus’ story, but also make clearer the shape and direction of her own life story.

It is also significant for a feminist critique of this section of the gospel that Rachel appears
in a quotation from Scripture. A feminist reading of this passage recognizes the weight a
scriptural reference gives to the narrator’s commentary about Jesus. It focuses attention, however,
not directly on any reference to Jesus, but rather on the female figure in the quotation, i.e., the poetic female figure of Rachel who in Jeremiah embodies a maternal God's compassion for the lost children of Israel. This shift in focus allows me as a feminist reader an opportunity to view Jesus' significance through a feminist lens, and to gain a new understanding of the quotation in Matthew. Rachel, who in the Jeremiah context functions, in effect, as an image of God maternal, foreshadows a reality that is related only later in the gospel story, i.e., the fact that Jesus himself will grieve as a mother grieves, over the lost children of Jerusalem. I thus see the figure of Rachel as proleptic of the image of Jesus as Mother God herself, weeping over Israel's children.

In the central section of the gospel (11:1-16:20), Matthew shows varying responses to Jesus, as Jewish opponents reject him and the faith of the apostles glimmers. Commentators focus on the incredulity and hostility with which Jesus is met. Attention is paid to the inclusio between 11:2 and 11:19 in terms of the "deeds" of Jesus and those of Wisdom. The deeds of Jesus as Messiah are presented as deeds of healing and blessing. For many commentators, the precise relationship between Jesus, John, and Wisdom personified continues to be a long and much debated issue. From a feminist perspective, attention is focussed on the two female figures in the section, i.e., on Personified Wisdom and the Queen of the South. From my feminist point of view it is significant that Jesus himself speaks of these female figures in relation to himself, thereby establishing a relation between them and himself. Both female images are poetic figures who are used by the narrator to point to the significance of Jesus as one who does Wisdom's deeds, is justified by these deeds, and is to be acknowledged as greater than even the wisest of Israel's kings. The female figures thus give content to Jesus' identity as Messiah and as Wisdom.
Although from the narrator's perspective, the male Jesus replaces female Wisdom, from a feminist perspective Wisdom and the Queen of the South emerge as paradigms of wisdom, and models for the wisdom of Jesus. Personified Wisdom is the traditional image of the divine presence, while the Queen of the South, although a royal figure, embodies humility in her search for and acknowledgement of greater Wisdom than hers. It is not just a question of replacing a male Jesus with a female Wisdom figure; rather a feminist interpretation of Wisdom and of the Queen of the South leads me as a feminist reader to a rearticulation of their symbolic significance on behalf of and in the context of women's experiences and theological struggles.

Commentaries on Chapter 23 in Matthew focus on its position as a conclusion to the controversy-stories and as an introduction to the eschatological discourse which follows. Its character as invective against the Scribes and Pharisees is stressed, and many commentators are of the opinion that Jesus' apostrophe to Jerusalem and prediction of the desolation of her house represents Jesus' final judgment and condemnation of an Israel that has rejected him. Most commentaries simply ignore the passage in which Jesus makes use of female imagery, i.e., the mother hen image and that of personified Jerusalem. In contrast to such an approach, my reading of this passage focusses attention on Jesus' use of the images of personified Jerusalem and on the simile of the mother-hen, maternal images which provide another perspective from which to view the harsh words uttered by Jesus against the Jewish leaders. In my reading, the chapter is understood not only as a series of woes, warnings, and condemnations, but also as an occasion for the narrator to present Jesus as one who laments the necessity of such severity, and expresses great love for all who are lost. The mother-hen simile, reminiscent of God's sheltering wings over Israel, focusses attention on the compassionate aspect of Jesus' address to Jerusalem. As mid
term between 23:34-36 and 38-39. 23:37 softens the preceding harsh condemnation of a
murderous Jerusalem and mitigates the severity of her desolation in 23:38-39. The last image of
Jesus in his public ministry is thus that of one who mourns. Like Rachel at the beginning of the
story, Jesus as gentle and caring mother, grieves her lost children.

It remains to examine the implications of such a reading for feminist readers, scholars, and
Christian believers, the task to which I now turn.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Summary

Chapter One of this study begins with a proposal to explore the dynamics of a feminist reading of a portion of Matthew's gospel containing female imagery. A particular model of reading is used as a heuristic device to determine what happens to contemporary feminist readers when they read an androcentric/patriarchal biblical text. The feminist theological reading of Matthew as scripture focuses on the passages in Matthew which contain female images: Jesus' foremothers, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and She-of-Uriah and Mary, the mother of Jesus (1:3, 5, 6, 16, 23); Rachel (2:18), Personified Wisdom (Sophia) (11:19) and the Queen of the South (12:42), personified Jerusalem (2:3, 23:3, 7) and the simile of the mother-hen (23:37).

This literary-feminist Christian reading of Matthew is situated within the context of current feminist literary criticism, conceived of as a form of cultural politics in which male-dominated ways of reading/writing are deconstructed. Following the lead of feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter, a "feminist critique" of the gospel of Matthew is carried out first, in order to highlight the androcentrism of the biblical text and second, to attempt to discover and/or recover/recreate positive images of women and attitudes toward women in Matthew. The study makes use of a "revisionist" model of feminist biblical interpretation in which the biblical tradition is seen as both oppressive and liberating for women, and which in its patriarchal form is historically but not theologically determined, and therefore open to new readings/interpretations.
The work of two feminist scholars, Phillis Trible and Janice Capel Anderson, guides the interpretational approach. Trible’s close reading of the biblical text inspires a similar attempt to continue to press the issues opened up by her treatment of biblical women’s stories. While Anderson’s use of Iserian reader-response criticism, especially the concept of the “implied reader” to examine gender issues in Matthew, encourages the attempt to determine how an actual reader who is also a feminist, might play the role of Iser’s implied reader, and to consider what the consequences of such a reading might be. Iser’s theory is chosen because of its focus on the interaction between text and reader as a process in which meaning is produced, a concept which opens up the possibility of analyzing the response to the biblical text of a “real” reader, in this case, a feminist reader. That is, Iser’s phenomenological model offers a useful, if limited, tool with which to focus on a particular experience of reading. Iser’s somewhat individualistic model is supplemented with the concept of an “interpretive community,” since from a feminist point of view, a solitary reader is not representative of a feminist reader who reads not as an isolated individual, but as linked to other members of the feminist movement.

Chapter Two discusses hermeneutical presuppositions and presents in detail the feminist model of reading which is used. It is assumed, first, that the scriptures are foundational texts which constitute a touchstone of faith and of reality. As such they witness to God’s revelation and as human testimony to an experience of God’s self-gift, they call out for interpretation. A feminist reader who engages an androcentrically biased biblical text finds it oppressive, but at the same time possessing a power for transformation. Her reading thus becomes an experience of struggle. Such a reader embraces a hermeneutic of suspicion toward the text, and engages in acts
of creative imagination in order to re-appropriate "feminist remnants" present in the androcentric texts.

A second assumption, derived from reader-response criticism, is that the starting point of all interpretation is the interest of the reader. All reader-response theory focuses, although with different emphases, on the three poles of author, text, and reader. While for some the text remains an essential element, for others the reader, or the reader's consciousness, is the focus of interest. Reader-response theories derive from various philosophical/hermeneutical positions, but all of them approach texts as poetic structures and conceive of interpretation as the act of 'interested' parties. Although it is often considered to be a 'subjective' approach to reading, as opposed to 'neutral' or 'objective' approaches, reader-response theory rather makes clear the impossibility of any such neutrality, and offers an opportunity to be up-front about our 'subjectivities'.

Feminist contributions to the discussion suggest that current reader-response criticism is utopian, unrelated to the harsh realities of life, and reflective of the privileged position of its theorists. Feminist theorists introduce the categories of gender and politics in the hope that women's and other marginalized peoples' voices might be heard, that literature might become an arena of struggle, and interpretation an opportunity to change the world. Feminist criticism brings to the fore the reality of women's having been for too long forced to read as males, and urges women readers to resist "immasculation" by male texts by engaging in a reading, whenever possible, with a dual hermeneutic; one which unmasks androcentric ideology, and another which aims to recover and cultivate women's culture.

Women's experience is posited as the starting point for the literary-feminist reading of the Bible carried out in this study. Wolfgang Iser's concept of the implied reader, a term rooted not in
any real reader’s experience but rather in the text itself, is the primary interpretational tool. Iser conceives of the reader as both ‘textual structure’ and ‘structured act’, dynamically joined together. The text is a set of instructions which activates the reader to assemble the ‘aesthetic object’ or meaning of the text. Reading, the dynamic interaction between text and reader, is stimulated by information ‘gaps’ or ‘blanks’ which the reader fills with projections, or ‘images’. In a process of selection and combining of textual perspectives, the reader produces a meaning, and in the production is taken outside of herself. By formulating a meaning, she also formulates herself. A feminist reader constructs a meaning of Matthew’s androcentric text not by accepting uncritically the role of the implied reader assigned to her (a destructive process), but rather by taking control of her reading, reading the text as it was not meant to be read, reading it against itself. In a second moment, she recuperates the female images embedded in Matthew’s androcentric gospel for women’s benefit.

Chapter Three outlines the conditions under which a feminist reader reads Matthew’s gospel. In other words, the role of the implied reader as ‘textual structure’ is laid out. Matthew’s story is an androcentric tale in which various female images are used to speak of the theological significance of Jesus, and/or his teaching. Each female figure is observed from the textual perspectives of the narrator, the plot and the characters. The reader must assemble a meaning as s/he occupies the shifting perspectives in the story in order to arrive at a point where all the perspectives converge. Only then can the reader understand the significance of the female images. One example of how the process works would be a situation in which the reader encounters female figures who appear at strategic points in the plotted story, but contribute nothing to the action of the story. The implied reader, who also knows the narrator’s perspective on the female
figures. understands that they nonetheless reveal much about Jesus because some of them, for example, appear in the narrator's quotations from the Hebrew scriptures, where the narrator takes pains to emphasize his point of view to the reader.

Chapter Four deals with the implied reader as 'structured act', that is, as the role of the implied reader when it begins to affect a real reader, in this case, a feminist reader. A contemporary feminist reader's imaginative response to the narrator's instructions, i.e., how a real reader plays the role of the implied reader, is described. This description of "a reader reading" could be called "a story of reading," for the hero of the story in this case is the reader, whom we follow in her/his journey through the text, noting the twists and turns and the reader's final arrival at the destination, i.e., the particular meaning s/he constructs.

II. Implications for Feminist Biblical Scholarship

It is useful at this point to revisit some of the theological and methodological issues with which this study began, and to consider implications for biblical scholarship in general and feminist biblical scholarship in particular. One theological issue which bears elaboration is the assumption that the scriptures are foundational texts, a notion which has been understood in various ways and has led to very different understandings of the Bible. As noted earlier in this study, interpretational models, feminist or otherwise, have been generated by different foundational beliefs regarding the Bible, revelation, and the Christian life. For reasons which I have outlined, I have adopted a "revisionist" interpretational stance which avoids the two extremes of biblical liberalism and/or biblical fundamentalism. Although these positions function
as viable alternatives for some. I do not consider either of them helpful for feminists' efforts to understand and explain not just what the Bible says, but what the scriptures mean for us today.¹

First, if the Bible is considered to be a book just like any other, there is no need to wrestle, as does a feminist interpreter, with the problem of its authority, because it has none. Biblical presuppositions about women, for example, are considered no longer credible or relevant, and therefore do not have to be either accepted or refuted. Second, a fundamentalist (broadly defined) perspective is even more problematic because of its conviction that the Bible is literally the Word of God. I agree with Sandra Schneiders, who outlines three presuppositions which she considers not only false in themselves, but also false because they cannot deal with scripture as do feminist interpreters, i.e., as morally problematic. First she notes the faulty theological presupposition of verbal inspiration, which is refuted by the evidence garnered by scholars over almost two centuries of modern biblical criticism. Second is the erroneous presupposition that one can read a text at 'face-value' without any interpretation. The refusal to interpret is but another kind of interpretation, and one which human experience of texts and the process of reading does not justify. A third faulty presupposition is the adoption of a quasi-magical view of the Bible which attempts to make God a figure who responds to our felt needs, especially a disordered human need for absolute certitude. Those holding such a position are not likely to struggle with the questions that feminist interpreters put to the biblical text. Rather they will stop at the answer to the question of what the Bible says, an answer which often is damaging for women.

As a feminist interpreter of the Bible, I reject such positions. It should be emphasized that the particular reading attempted in this study is not so much a matter of personal preference or even of the interests, needs and desires of a feminist reader, as it is an attempt to read within a network of reasons which entitle feminist persons to self-representation as legitimate readers/interpreters of the Bible.² In other words, my choice to read the Bible as a feminist is constrained not solely by a specific ideological context, but rather by a network of public associations which establishes meaning. The network of reasons which supports my feminist reading of Matthew’s gospel has to do first with what it means to read, and second, what it means for a 20th century white, middle-class, Christian feminist to read the Bible. I read under the constraints of the particular reading strategy employed, utilizing Iser’s form of ‘reader-response’ criticism, and within the context of the norms/values of the feminist, academic and faith communities to which I belong.

A second point for discussion is the fact that in this study a certain kind of theological reading of Matthew’s gospel as scripture is attempted, an enterprise which in turn opens up the larger question of the discipline known as biblical theology (theology which takes scripture as its matrix). Phyllis Trible presents the ‘doing’ of biblical theology in terms of a conversation between an old treasure called biblical theology and a new one called feminist hermeneutics.³ I find useful and stimulating her suggestion that the two topics, far from being either removed from each other

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or even mutually opposed, can rather meet, wrestle, and effect a blessing for feminist scholarship. Trible characterizes biblical theology as a 'flawed treasure' for many reasons, not least of which is its history of having been used by white Christian male scholars whose interpretations have skewed or neglected matters 'not congenial to an androcentric point of view'. I agree with Trible that biblical theology, which has been kept apart from hermeneutics, must now face the challenge of feminism which introduces an interpretive stance that counters traditional thinking.

I hope that the present study accomplishes, in some measure, what Trible identifies as the three tasks of feminist interpretation; to identify sexism and patriarchy, to oppose the paradigm of domination and subordination in all forms, and to seek a healing vision for humankind in pursuit of the goal of wholeness and well-being, specifically gender redemption. I recognize with Trible that these tasks are part of what constitutes the prophetic character of feminism. Feminist interpretation is an advocacy position which exposes patriarchal bias. If the feminist reading undertaken in this study is prophetic in that sense, it is also true that the limitations of this particular reading serve to stimulate self-critical reflection. In no way can this one reading of Matthew address the multiple perspectives of feminist readers of a different time, place, culture, class, race or experience. It may, on the other hand, accomplish what Iser identifies as the goal of his theory of response, i.e., the facilitation of intersubjective discussion of individual interpretations. In feminist terms, this means dialogue between 'sisters' whose particular values/reading strategies yield different expressions of a shared interest.

Trible notes that whatever their differences, feminist scholars use conventional methods to study the biblical text. In feminist hands, methods traditionally tied to patriarchal interpretation are now producing different results. The present study, from a "revisionist" theological perspective,
employs literary critical analysis to do a close reading of the text, which in turn provides an exegetical base for further theological reflection on the significance of Matthean female imagery. It is therefore an example, if not a perfect one, of what Trible calls reliable scholarship which not only provides data for the theologian, but also spells out in feminist fashion, hermeneutical connections between life and work. In other words, this study exemplifies feminist scholarship defined as scholarship in which life experiences that prompt both scholarly writing and choice of methods profoundly affect theological discourse. This study represents a step toward doing biblical theology through exegetical labour focused on reinterpreting familiar texts and highlighting neglected ones. As an experiment in feminist interpretation, it is in microcosm what Trible describes in larger terms; feminist biblical theology as an undertaking primarily constructive and hermeneutical, carried out in diverse communities and employing a variety of methods to harness the subject, namely an articulation of faith as disclosed in Scripture.

It is necessary at this point to discuss the choice of an Iserian reader-response approach and to evaluate its effectiveness as a tool for a literary-feminist theological reading of Matthew. In my opinion, the greatest advantage of using Iser’s model is its capacity to teach us how to read and how to reflect on what is involved in the act of reading. Iser’s ability to stimulate reflection on what reading is, is not only interesting in its own right, but also becomes particularly influential for a biblical essay such as this one which departs methodologically from more traditional models for biblical studies. The present study admittedly focuses primarily on the world of the text and

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4 John Dominic Crossan, “Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Biblical Criticism,” Biblical Research Vol. 22 (1977): 39-49. As Crossan observed more than twenty years ago, “we no longer speak of biblical studies as a discipline but rather as a field of disciplines, built on the twin axes of historical and structural methodologies, with the structural [literary] axis logically prior to the historical.”
on its effect on a contemporary reader, rather than on the pre-history of the text or a history of its interpretation. Iser’s concept of the implied reader as both textual structure and structured act, however, does allow for the introduction of some historical factors because a real reader’s playing the role of the implied reader is always influenced not only by the text, but also by her/his own knowledge of the pre-history of the text, her/his feminist values, etc. Thus in this study, the literary and historical approaches are to some extent in dialogue with each other.

Another issue is that of the place of a real reader in reader-oriented biblical studies. As noted previously, Stephen Moore highlights the fact that in most biblical reader-oriented studies, a real reader of a biblical text is not the usual object of attention. For the most part biblical studies of this sort focus only on the intratextual reader, sometimes insisting on the role of the text to shape the reading experience of every perceptive reader, ancient or modern, and at other times attempting to give the individual contemporary reader a role. This last objective is seldom satisfactorily achieved, since most of the ‘contemporary’ readers offered for consideration prove to be ‘repressed readers’, stunted versions of regular reading, personages of ‘flat affect’. As Moore observes, on encountering these rather colourless readers’ supposed reactions to the text, he is impelled to ask, “Why do I experience none of these things when I read the text?”5 This study presents the responses not of a repressed reader, but of an actual, flesh-and-blood, feminist reader who feels deeply and thinks long and hard about her experience of reading. At the same

time. what is offered here is, for many reasons which could and probably should be discussed in the future. "just enough of the reader but not too much." 5

In the end, does the model of reading which I have chosen, really work? In my opinion, it does. First, Iser’s concept of the implied reader allows for an investigation not only of a reader-in-the-text, but of also of the role as played out by a real reader. It enables me to speak in a controlled and systematic fashion of how a feminist reader of the Bible responds to that role, and of how/why she may choose to play it, influenced by feminist perspectives, personal disposition, background, etc., in effect, how she responds in a way not unlike that of many Christian feminists and feminist scholars who share feminist concerns/values. Second, Iser’s understanding of meaning as imagistic in nature encourages an attempt to articulate an imaginative understanding of the scriptural patterns and images so meaningful to Christian feminist readers in search of suitable and new images for God and for Christ.

The naming of our experience of feminist reading as legitimate, i.e., at once personal, scholarly and spiritual, also gives rise to a number of questions. A suggestion with which I fully agree is that as feminist theologians who inhabit and move between the discourses of theology, feminism, and science, we must become bilingual, “speaking the languages of our intellectual-theological ‘forefathers’ as well as the dialects of our feminist ‘sisters’.” 7 We should not have to choose between academic scholarship and the women’s movement. Taking our stand within the feminist movement, we must rather try to integrate both into our life and our work. As we take

5Ibid.

public responsibility for our own scholarship as feminists, and for the social consequences of our research, we contribute to what Schüessler Fiorenza identifies as the task of "raising ethical-political and religious-theological questions as constitutive of the interpretive process." This study is one step in that direction.

III. Implications for Feminist Spirituality

Feminist scholars in the academy are revising the biblical tradition and creating an alternative body of theological reflection which reveals traditional academic theology as only "half the tradition." This expenditure of energy has begun to have a transforming effect, not least in the area of feminist biblical spirituality. It may not be out of place here to reflect briefly on how a feminist reading of Matthew may contribute to the task of revitalizing feminist spirituality.

A feminist reading of scripture, such as the one presented in Chapter Four recontextualizes the gospel message, taking it beyond the printed word and situating it within a feminist perspective. It is an example of how a feminist member of a believing community can reinterpret a tradition of another time and of other circumstances, and by understanding it differently than the way it was originally understood, allow it to function salvifically in a new context. In Iser’s version of reader-response theory it is understood that as a reader reads, interprets, interacts with any text, (here it is an ancient biblical text), it is possible for a new revelatory event to occur, an event which both opens the text to new interpretations and also

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challenges the reader to possibilities of transformation. The text has the potential to become revelation in contemporary reinterpretation.

Ultimately then, reading Matthew’s gospel has the potential to become not only a process of discovering the healing and affirming character of the female images; it can also become a process of self-discovery. For those feminist readers who experience such a transformation, it is no longer possible to accept a God who is, for the most part, envisioned by analogy with the male human being. No longer does imagery taken almost solely from the roles and relations of men speak to their hearts. They reject a text in which female reality has been stereotyped as unsuitable as a reference point for God, and refuse allegiance to the graven image of a male God it has fashioned, an image which denigrates the human dignity of women.

Feminist readers of Matthew must also wrestle with the question of the viability of a male saviour figure, i.e., a male Christ, in their struggle to achieve spiritual liberation for women and men. The image of God as Mother, Shekinah, Divine Sophia derived from a feminist reading of the Matthean text may better serve to affirm women’s theological identity as imago Dei, the image of God. Those women who recognize that maternal imagery for God retrieved from the scriptural texts is equivalent, and not complementary, to the paternal image for the Divine, know

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9See especially discussions in Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983). Ch.5. A discussion of alternate Christologies is beyond the scope of this study. I only note the models which include androgynous and Wisdom Christologies. Ruether offers a revolutionary concept as she searches for a new redemptive disclosure of God and of human possibility in female form, in an encounter with a Christ whose identity is continued in the Christian community. If Christic personhood continues in our sisters and brothers, we can encounter Christ in the form of our sister. Schüssler Fiorenza, on the other hand, embraces a non-androcentric Christology modelled on the Hebrew figure of personified female Wisdom, applied to the person of Jesus in the Christian scriptures.
also that women in their human reality offer as totally appropriate a metaphor for speaking about God as do men.

Of all the Matthean female images, it is perhaps the image of Rachel which can speak most powerfully to many a feminist reader who mourns the plight of the marginalized under patriarchy. The concrete symbol of Rachel, grieving mother, as metaphor for God's maternal relationship with the world, provides a glimpse of an alternative to dominant patriarchal language about God, by reminding us that

. . . it is women whose bodies bear, nourish, and deliver new persons into life and, as society is traditionally structured, are most often charged with the responsibility to nurture and raise them into maturity, [so that ]language about God as mother carries a unique power to express human relationship to the mystery who generates and cares for everything. 10

Rachel embodies an image of a God, origin and nurturer of life. Rachel in her grief brings to the fore a sense of God not only as a maternally creative source of life, as ongoing power that cares for life, but especially as a suffering God who grieves over the harm done to her beloved creation. 11 The images of Rachel weeping for her children, and of a maternal Jesus lamenting the fate of a divided Israel, evokes the reality of a maternal God who grieves for all, filled with a divine pity and a profound compassion for the pain of the world. This theme is echoed in the


11 It is of course possible that real mothers have the potential to abuse, and that God as mother may not be a positive image for everyone. Situations in which a mother cannot nurture, for example, or when she dies in childbirth, as does Rachel, diminish the ability to speak theologically of a mother God. See for a fuller discussion, Johanna Kohn-Roelin, “Mother - Daughter - God.” in ed. Anne Carr and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Motherhood: Experience, Institution, Theology (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 64-72.
images of Rachel and Jesus as Shekinah, weeping over the destruction of her people. The imagery reminds a feminist reader that suffering women are truly *imago Dei*, not because the imagery glorifies women's suffering, nor even because it may console those women who grieve, but rather because they strengthen women bowed by sorrow to resist it. Women's experience of suffering thus brings about a new articulation of divine mystery.

The female imagery for God and Christ in the gospel of Matthew offers a feminist reader a wholistic model drawn from women's experience and given back to women in affirmation of their dignity as *imago Dei*. While the gender fluidity present in the Matthean Christological symbols offers a suggestive point of departure for the development of an inclusive Christology, it remains to develop, explicate and expand all aspects of the female images of the Christ in a feminist key. In order for the female images of Christ as the incarnation of Divine Sophia, of God-Mother, and of Shekinah to function salvifically for women, it is therefore essential that we “respeak” theology and christology and allow its inclusivity to shine through. Ultimately, we have no adequate name for the “I am who I shall become.” and intimations of such a name will only appear as we emerge from a false naming of the divine modeled solely on patriarchal alienation and begin to tell a story of reading which is faithful to the liberating dynamics present in the gospel. This study of the female imagery in Matthew’s gospel attempts to tell such a story in the hope that it will continue to challenge the contemporary patriarchal society in which women and men struggle to transform their vision of God and of each other.
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