



## Feminist Biblical Interpretation through an Intersectional Lens: Diverse Developments in Theory, Methodology, and Practice

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**Abstract:** This paper traces the development of feminist biblical interpretation from its marginal beginnings to its current position as a mainstream academic approach. It examines the field's evolution through four historical phases: early enlightenment (late 19th–mid 20th century), systematic development (1960s–1980s), theoretical diversification (1990s–early 2000s), and contemporary intersectional analysis. It explores key theoretical frameworks, methodological innovations, and significant contributions that have shaped this field. Special attention is given to recent developments in intersectionality and Global-South Perspectives, which have profoundly enriched biblical interpretation through diverse cultural lenses. The paper also addresses the impact of digital humanities technologies on biblical scholarship. While highlighting feminist biblical criticism's achievements in challenging patriarchal interpretations and recovering overlooked female voices, the paper acknowledges ongoing challenges, including methodological debates and tensions with traditional approaches. It concludes by emphasizing feminist biblical interpretation's continued relevance and potential for promoting social justice.

**Keywords:** Feminist Biblical Interpretation, Gender and Religion, Hermeneutics, Intersectionality, Global-South Perspectives

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## Introduction

Originated from the feminist movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Feminist Biblical Criticism gradually developed into an independent and diversified academic field in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As an important branch of Feminist Theology, Feminist Biblical Criticism aims to challenge the traditionally male-dominated mode of biblical interpretation and to re-interpret the scriptures through a female perspective in order to show the subjectivity and position of women in the biblical text and the real society.<sup>1</sup> It is generally accepted that the feminist movement, women's theology and feminist biblical interpretation are intertwined with the common aim of promoting gender equality, social justice and human liberation.<sup>2</sup>

In recent decades, feminist biblical interpretation has gradually become an important direction in contemporary biblical studies. Especially in the context of globalization and multiculturalism, the introduction of feminist perspectives has brought about considerable changes in biblical studies, leading to a gradual transformation of traditional exegetical methods and concepts.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this study is to examine the development of feminist biblical interpretation from historical to contemporary times, focusing on its theoretical framework, methodological approach, and practical implications. The scope of this study is clearly set within the field of feminist biblical interpretation, and the methodology of literature analysis, and comparative study is employed to demonstrate the diverse development and significant contributions of the field by analyzing and comparing representative literature and scholars' perspectives at various stages of the development process.

It will firstly reviews the historical development of feminist biblical interpretation, including the early Enlightenment stage, the systematic development under the second wave of feminist movement, and the introduction of postmodern and pluralistic theories until the rise of intersectional analyses and the global South perspective since the 21<sup>st</sup> century; secondly, it discusses the core theoretical frameworks and research methodologies; next, it elaborates on its academic and practical contributions;

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<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 12–13; Rosemary R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 25–26.

<sup>2</sup> Letty M. Russell, *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 16–17.

<sup>3</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 17–18; Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), 82–83.

and finally, it puts forward challenges and controversies facing the field of study and makes concluding reflections. Finally, we will present the challenges and controversies facing the field of research and make concluding reflections.

### **Historical Development of Feminist Biblical Interpretation**

The development of feminist biblical interpretation can be roughly divided into four phases: late 19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as the early Enlightenment phase, 1960s–1980s being the second wave of feminist movement and systematization of relevant theories, 1990s to early 2000s as the postmodern and pluralistic theoretical turn, and the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of this century the contemporary phase.

An early example of feminist biblical interpretation was *The Woman's Bible* by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902), who criticized the patriarchal ideology that was deeply entrenched in traditional biblical interpretation, emphasizing that biblical interpretation had long been dominated by men and that it needed to be reinterpreted from a female perspective.<sup>4</sup> Despite the many criticisms of the book at the time of its publication, it undoubtedly symbolized the formal emergence of feminist biblical interpretation.<sup>5</sup> It is conceivable that this should have been a result of earlier female struggles. In early colonial America, women religious leaders such as Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643) and Mary Dyer (1611–1660) had already begun to challenge traditional religious authority. Against this backdrop, Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825–1921) became the first officially ordained female minister in the United States, setting a precedent for women's equal rights in the religious sphere.<sup>6</sup>

During the second wave of the feminist movement (1960s–1980s), feminist biblical interpretation became more systematic and academic. Phyllis Trible and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza are representative figures of this period. Phyllis Trible proposes “Depatriarchalizing Hermeneutics,” which seeks to remove patriarchal overtones from biblical texts and restore the dignity and subjectivity of women's roles.<sup>7</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, on the other hand, proposed “Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” which advocates a critical examination of power structures in biblical texts and emphasizes the restoration of women's contribution to early Christian history.<sup>8</sup> Other important feminist scholars

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (New York: European Publishing Company, 1895), i–vi.

<sup>5</sup> Marla J. Selvidge, *Notorious Voices: Feminist Biblical Interpretation, 1500–1920* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 27–28.

<sup>6</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 17–18.

<sup>7</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 34–35.

<sup>8</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 17–18.

such as Letty Russell, Luise Schottroff and Amy-Jill Levine also endeavored to promote the development of feminist interpretive approaches.<sup>9</sup>

In the last decade of the last century, feminist biblical interpretation began to incorporate multiple theoretical perspectives, including postcolonial theory, Queer theory, and eco-feminism. Among them, Kwok Pui-lan and Musa W. Dube outstandingly integrated postcolonial critique into feminist interpretation, exploring the intersection of colonial experience and gender oppression.<sup>10</sup> Queer theory, introduced by scholars such as Marcella Althaus-Reid and Ken Stone, challenges the biblical exegetical tradition of heterosexism.<sup>11</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, an eco-feminist, is concerned with the relationship between human and nature and advocates an eco-ethical dimension to biblical interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, intersectionality has become a mainstream methodology in feminist biblical interpretation. This analytical framework, which originated with African American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989,<sup>13</sup> has evolved from its roots in legal discourse to become an increasingly important tool in biblical criticism. Its ideological foundations can be traced to earlier Black feminists who articulated the experience of multiple, simultaneous oppressions.<sup>14</sup> Before Crenshaw coined the term, these scholars had already explored the interconnections between gender, race, and class, highlighting the need for a theory that addresses forms of oppression beyond a single category or perspective focused primarily on white women's experiences.<sup>15</sup> After Crenshaw provided a concrete framework in legal studies, the concept crossed disciplinary boundaries into the social sciences and spread to Europe and beyond during the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> The core of intersectional analysis is the understanding that an individual's identity is not merely a separate

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<sup>9</sup> Russell, *Household of Freedom*, 43–50; Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew*, 82–83.

<sup>10</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 57–58; Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 18–19.

<sup>11</sup> Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 12–13.

<sup>12</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 25–26.

<sup>13</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–1299. See also the related paper earlier, Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): 139–167.

<sup>14</sup> Hanna-Maria Mehring, "The Samaritan Woman as a Quick-Witted Border Crosser in John 4," *Religions* 14, no. 10 (October 2023): 112; Gale A. Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally: Gender, Race, Class, and the Etceteras of Our Discipline," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139, no. 1 (2020): 136.

<sup>15</sup> Claudia Janssen, "Intersektionale Bibelanalyse und Gegenwart," *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* 25, no. 49 (2022): 51; Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, "'Asking the Other Question': An Intersectional Approach to Galatians 3:28 and the Colossian Household Codes," *Biblical Interpretation* 18 (2010): 25.

<sup>16</sup> Mehring, "The Samaritan Woman," 113–114.

collection of categories such as gender, race, and class, but rather results from their interplay and co-construction; multiple systems of oppression operate simultaneously and reinforce each other, creating unique impacts on individuals.<sup>17</sup>

In biblical studies, intersectionality has been applied in a comparative deal to analyze power relationships and marginalized experiences in texts, connecting ancient scriptures with contemporary social justice issues.<sup>18</sup> The introduction of intersectionality as an explicit analytical framework in biblical studies, particularly New Testament studies, took place primarily in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> Although some scholars employed intersectional approaches before the term gained popularity,<sup>20</sup> figures such as Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, Joseph A. Marchal, Mitzi J. Smith and Jin Young Choi, and Gale A. Yee have been identified as important pioneers in formally introducing intersectionality into biblical scholarship.<sup>21</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza's work, while using the term "kyriarchy" to describe multi-layered power structures in ancient societies, also significantly advanced understanding of the intersections of race, gender, class, and empire in early Christianity.<sup>22</sup> As intersectionality has gained traction, it has proven particularly valuable for revealing cultural complexity in biblical texts,<sup>23</sup> and for encouraging researchers to move beyond single perspectives to consider how multiple social categories interact, with special attention to marginalized experiences.<sup>24</sup>

Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the use of intersectionality in biblical studies has increased and diversified significantly. For example, scholars analyze cultural complexity and power structures. Kartzow has made extensive use of the intersectionality framework, particularly in her study of the relationship

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<sup>17</sup> Julie Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion: Elizabeth and Other Mothers," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 46, no. 3 (2024): 7; Mlamli Diko, "Oppressive Incidents of Women in the Old Testament and the South African Context: An Intersectional Approach," *Old Testament Essays* 36, no. 3 (2023): 61; Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally," 132.

<sup>18</sup> Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion," 14; Diko, "Oppressive Incidents of Women," 58; Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally," 132.

<sup>19</sup> Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion," 7, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion," 6.

<sup>21</sup> Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion," 7, 16. Among the notable contributors to this field also stands Mitzi J. Smith and Jin Young Choi eds., *Minoritized Women Reading Race and Ethnicity Intersectional Approaches to Constructed Identity and Early Christian Texts* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Mehring, "The Samaritan Woman," 116. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's research, see "Introduction: Exploring the Intersections of Race, Gender, Status, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies," in Laura Salah Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza eds., *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 1–23.

<sup>23</sup> Kartzow, "Asking the Other Question," 23, 29; Christy Cobb, "Enslaved Women, Women Enslavers: Kyriarchy and Intersectionality in the New Testament," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 40, no. 1 (2024): 140.

<sup>24</sup> Diko, "Oppressive Incidents of Women," 62; Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally," 132.

between Galatians 3:28 and the Colossians family code, suggesting that intersectionality is an effective way of understanding the cultural complexity of the ancient Roman Empire, revealing how social spheres intersected with each other and co-constructed identity and class.<sup>25</sup> Her “asking another question” approach encourages researchers to go beyond single-category analyses and examine how different categories interact with each other.<sup>26</sup> She believes that intersectionality is a useful tool for revealing the cultural complexity of ancient societies and prompting interpreters to take the complexity of the contemporary world seriously.<sup>27</sup> A special issue edited by Denise Kimber Buell et al. attempts to extend the scope of intersectionality analysis to dimensions such as the body and locality for the study of the Jesus Movement.<sup>28</sup>

Marginalized groups and social justice issues are also important concerns. Scholars apply intersectionality to examine the experiences of marginalized figures in biblical texts and connect them to contemporary social justice issues.<sup>29</sup> Yee advocates “thinking intersectionality” in biblical studies, arguing that it can help to expose multiple oppressive power relationships in the text and uncover marginalized voices that have been ignored or silenced.<sup>30</sup> She points out that intersectionality applies to everyone, including privileged groups who should reflect on their privilege.<sup>31</sup> South African scholar Mlamli Diko employs intersectionality to analyze women’s oppression in the Old Testament and South African contexts, exploring the complex intersections of gender, race, class and history.<sup>32</sup> He emphasizes that intersectional analyses can reveal the complex oppression that women face in the Old Testament due to the interweaving of gender, social status, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds.<sup>33</sup> Ndikho Mtshiselwa also explores the intersectional perspective of Exodus 1–15 in relation to the oppression in South Africa.<sup>34</sup>

Intersectionality is also used for in-depth analysis of specific biblical characters and their complex identities. Hanna-Maria Mehring conducted an

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<sup>25</sup> Kartzow, “‘Asking the Other Question,’” 19–21.

<sup>26</sup> Kartzow, “‘Asking the Other Question,’” 19–20.

<sup>27</sup> Kartzow, “‘Asking the Other Question,’” 29.

<sup>28</sup> Denise Kimber Buell et al, “Introduction: Cultural Complexity and Intersectionality in the Study of the Jesus Movement,” *Biblical Interpretation* 18 (2010): 309–312.

<sup>29</sup> Newberry, “Age, Maternity, and Allusion,” 14; Diko, “Oppressive Incidents of Women,” 58; Yee, “Thinking Intersectionally,” 139.

<sup>30</sup> Yee, “Thinking Intersectionally,” 132–138.

<sup>31</sup> Yee, “Thinking Intersectionally,” 137.

<sup>32</sup> Diko, “Oppressive Incidents of Women,” 57–61.

<sup>33</sup> Diko, “Oppressive Incidents of Women,” 61.

<sup>34</sup> Ndikho Mtshiselwa, “Resistance of Oppression in Exod 1–15 and Southern Africa: An Intersectional Perspective,” *Old Testament Essays* 34, no. 2 (2021): 71.

intersectional analysis of the Samaritan woman in John 4, focusing on her gender, ethnicity/religion and other identity dimensions, and exploring power structures in the text, historical background, and interpretive history.<sup>35</sup> Julie Newberry combines intersectionality and intertextuality analyses as a means of studying Elizabeth in Luke 1. She argues that this approach deepens understanding of the text and highlights its relevance to contemporary issues of social justice.<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth's complex identity is viewed as embodying the intersection of multiple identities with which intersectionality is concerned.<sup>37</sup>

Intersectional analysis has gradually incorporated more dimensions, such as age, disability, nationality, religion, etc.<sup>38</sup> Scholars have also begun to focus on children, viewing children's experiences as a category requiring intersectional analysis and recognizing their diversity.<sup>39</sup> Religious belief itself is also explored as a dimension that can intersect with other categories.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, Christy Cobb applies intersectionality to analyze slavery relationships in early Christian literature, revealing the complex experiences of female slaves and female slave owners.<sup>41</sup> Cobb's analysis highlights how these female slave owners occupied complex positions, experiencing oppression as women within patriarchal structures while simultaneously participating in and benefiting from the broader system of kyriarchal domination by exercising power over their slaves through their social status and privilege as property owners.

Cross-cultural and regional applications are also a trend that cannot be overlooked. Although the term originated primarily from American scholars, intersectional thinking and research methods have received positive responses in non-Western regions. For example, in India, although the term "intersectionality" is not always used, scholars naturally address the intertwined effects of caste, gender, religion, and class when focusing on local contexts, which is viewed as a default position in local biblical studies.<sup>42</sup> In

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<sup>35</sup> Mehring, "The Samaritan Woman," 111, 123.

<sup>36</sup> Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion," 1, 3, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion," 7.

<sup>38</sup> Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion," 7; Carol J. Dempsey, Rachel Adelman, Shelley Birdsong, and Holly Morse, "Reviewing *The Oxford Handbook on Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*," *lectio difficilior*, no. 2 (2024): 85; Mehring, "The Samaritan Woman," 120.

<sup>39</sup> Diko, "Oppressive Incidents of Women," 55.

<sup>40</sup> Janssen, "Intersektionale Bibelanalyse und Gegenwart," 51; Mehring, "The Samaritan Woman," 119.

<sup>41</sup> Christy Cobb, "Enslaved Women, Women Enslavers: Kyriarchy and Intersectionality in the New Testament," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 40, no. 1 (2024): 140; Christy Cobb, "Travelling Thomas: Slave Trade and Missionary Travel in the Acts of Thomas," *Religions* 14, no. 12 (2023): 30.

<sup>42</sup> Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "Widows: Tamar (Gen 38), Judith, Etcetera," *The Bible & Critical Theory* 17, no. 1 (2021): 148–149.

South Africa, intersectionality is also used to analyze phenomena of oppression and is combined with local perspectives such as African feminism.<sup>43</sup>

Scholars have also reflected on the methodology of intersectionality analysis, emphasizing its value in revealing cultural complexity.<sup>44</sup> The Discussions include how to avoid oversimplifying or distorting the position of intersectionality analysis as rooted in Black feminism and critical race theory.<sup>45</sup> The application of contemporary frameworks to the interpretation of ancient texts poses a challenge, as scholars attempt to calibrate their interpretations by combining historical research, literary analysis, theological reflection, and intertextuality analysis.<sup>46</sup> The researcher's own social position affects interpretation, so reflection on the interweaving of their own identities becomes an important orientation.<sup>47</sup> Reflecting the importance of intersectionality in the study of Hebrew biblical feminism, the *The Oxford Handbook on Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* edited by Susanne Scholz covers analyses of multiple structural oppressions and has been cited as a marker of a shift in the field.<sup>48</sup>

As can be seen, from the introduction of the concept in the late 20th century until today, intersectionality in biblical criticism has evolved from a relatively marginal method to a key tool for analyzing complex identities, power relationships, and inequalities in texts.<sup>49</sup> It encourages researchers to move beyond single perspectives and consider the interactions between multiple social categories, with particular attention to the experiences of marginalized groups.<sup>50</sup> Through combination with other methods, such as intertextuality, and reflection on researchers' own positions, intersectional analysis continues to deepen understanding of biblical texts and their relevance to contemporary social justice issues.<sup>51</sup> Despite methodological discussions and challenges, the

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<sup>43</sup> Diko, "Oppressive Incidents of Women," 57, 63; Mtshiselwa, "Resistance of Oppression," 71.

<sup>44</sup> Kartzow, "'Asking the Other Question'," 23, 29; Cobb, "Travelling Thomas," 140.

<sup>45</sup> Mehring, "The Samaritan Woman," 115; Gregory L. Cuéllar, "Reading Yee's Intersectionality as an Intervening Counterdiscourse to Whiteness," *The Bible & Critical Theory* 17, no. 1 (2021): 66; Melanchthon, "Widows," 147.

<sup>46</sup> Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion," 13; Mehring, "The Samaritan Woman," 122.

<sup>47</sup> Janssen, "Intersektionale Bibelanalyse und Gegenwart," 54; Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally," 132; Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion," 13.

<sup>48</sup> Dempsey et al., "Reviewing *The Oxford Handbook*," 85, 101. This article documents a panel discussion reviewing Susanne Scholz's edited volume, in which the reviewers characterize the book as a marker of a shift in the field of Biblical Feminist Criticism.

<sup>49</sup> Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion," 14; Mehring, "The Samaritan Woman," 115.

<sup>50</sup> Diko, "Oppressive Incidents of Women," 62; Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally," 132.

<sup>51</sup> Newberry, "Age, Maternity, and Allusion," 14; Mehring, "The Samaritan Woman," 116; Yee, "Thinking Intersectionally," 139.



influence of intersectionality in the field of biblical studies continues to grow, promoting more inclusive and socially conscious exegetical practices.

In addition, the rise of the global-south perspective and the development of digital humanities technologies have led to further diversification and methodological innovation in the field.<sup>52</sup> The “global-south perspective” is a loosely defined term referring to approaches emerging from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and other regions outside North America and Western Europe. This perspective challenges Western academic hegemony by offering readings rooted in local cultural, historical, and social experiences. Christians in the global South identify powerfully with the biblical world, an agricultural society marked by famine, plague, and persecution, giving Scripture a vividness unavailable to most believers in the industrialized North.<sup>53</sup> These interpretations often yield both fundamentalist and socially liberating readings, particularly regarding women’s rights and social justice. Huffard notes that as Christianity’s demographic center shifts southward, biblical scholarship increasingly reflects these diverse perspectives.<sup>54</sup> Korean Minjung theology, represented by Kim, interprets texts through the experience of the oppressed masses, connecting ancient liberation narratives with contemporary struggles.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Tamez’s work combines feminist concerns with liberation theology, reading biblical texts from the perspective of the economically marginalized in Latin America.<sup>56</sup> These approaches prioritize ordinary readers’ experiences, connect interpretation directly to social justice issues, engage indigenous cultural resources, and recognize the Bible’s complex role in both colonization and liberation.

Digital technologies also have significantly transformed biblical studies through innovative methodological approaches. Researchers are now employing artificial intelligence and computational tools to analyze the scripture in unprecedented ways. Lima et al. developed an AI-based system for contextual biblical citation recommendations from the New Testament, demonstrating how natural language processing can extract semantic meaning from complex religious texts.<sup>57</sup> Digital approaches have also prompted

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<sup>52</sup> Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 88–95.

<sup>53</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 68–70. His views are condensed in an article, cf. Philip Jenkins, “Reading the Bible in the Global South,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30, no. 2 (2006): 67–73, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/239693930603000204>.

<sup>54</sup> Evertt W. Huffard, “When Scholarship Goes South: Biblical Scholarship and Global Trends,” *Restoration Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2006): 65–72.

<sup>55</sup> Yong-Bock Kim, *Messiah and Minjung: Christ’s Solidarity with the People for New Life* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 2013), 78–92.

<sup>56</sup> Elsa Tamez, *The Bible of the Oppressed*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1982), 25–38.

<sup>57</sup> Bruno Cesar Dos Santos Lima et al, “Use of Artificial Intelligence in Biblical Citation Recommendations

theological reflection, as Herzfeld explores in her examination of AI's implications for understanding human nature and the image of God.<sup>58</sup> These technological developments expand access to biblical scholarship while creating new interpretive possibilities ahead.<sup>59</sup>

### **Theoretical Framework and Main Methodologies**

At the heart of feminist biblical interpretation lies a critical “deconstruction” of established interpretive traditions and a “reconstruction” from the perspective of women and the oppressed, in order to reveal the impact of patriarchal structures and to seek an emancipatory understanding.<sup>60</sup> This methodological distinction distinguishes feminist interpretations from “women’s studies,” which merely describes biblical women, or “academic gender studies,” which seeks objectivity.<sup>61</sup>

### **Deconstruction and Reconstruction Based on Women’s Experiences**

Critical feminist interpretation for liberation asserts that the Bible must be read in the context of women’s struggle to change patriarchal structures of oppression in religious, cultural and social institutions.<sup>62</sup> This interpretive approach challenges the view that feminist approaches to liberation theology do not respect conservative women’s experience of reading the Bible. Through the use of critical feminist hermeneutics, it is able to reject biblical texts and interpretations that promote kyriarchal values. The aim of this critical approach, which has been labelled as “biblical essentialism,” is not to disrespect conservative women’s experience of deriving meaning and self-esteem from reading the Bible, but rather to point out that if these readings fail to transcend the doctrinal, male-dominant (malestream) interpretation of the Bible, they should not be taken as a sign that the Bible should not be read. Rather, it points out that if these readings do not go beyond the doctrinaire male mainstream (malestream) framework of biblical interpretation, they remain trapped within it.<sup>63</sup>

The central theory of feminist biblical interpretation lies in the dual action

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in the New Testament,” *Revista Científica Multidisciplinar Núcleo do Conhecimento* 7, no. 2 (2023): 125–130.

<sup>58</sup> Noreen L. Herzfeld, *In Our Image: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit, Theology and the Sciences* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 18–30.

<sup>59</sup> Kirolos Eskandar, “The Digital Apostle: Exploring the Impact of Technology on Bible Study and Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Религия. Церковь. Общество* 13 (2024): 140–145.

<sup>60</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 154–155.

<sup>61</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 154–155.

<sup>62</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 154–155.

<sup>63</sup> Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 155.

of deconstruction and reconstruction. The purpose of deconstruction is to reveal gender bias in traditional biblical interpretation.<sup>64</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's "Hermeneutics of Suspicion,"<sup>65</sup> and Phyllis Trible's "depatriarchalising hermeneutics," are typical approaches to deconstruction. Deconstruction also involves critically investigating the theoretical frameworks and scientific methods we have adopted from mainstream male biblical studies,<sup>66</sup> and questioning the established norms and practices of biblical studies.<sup>67</sup> This involves exposing the inscription of the biblical text by a dominating ideology.<sup>68</sup>

Reconstruction aims to restore the diverse aspects of biblical texts themselves.<sup>69</sup> It attempts to reconstruct women's status in early Christian history, which requires shifting from male-centered texts to the experiential authority of women in liberation struggles.<sup>70</sup> Reconstruction work includes rebuilding historical narratives through the use of additional literature and the incorporation of social science models with gender perspectives.<sup>71</sup> Sometimes, even simply reading the prescriptions in biblical texts can enable reconstruction through "reading against the grain."<sup>72</sup> For example, prophetic condemnations of goddess worship can be understood as traces of sixth-century BC Israelite women's religious practices. Similarly, reading extremely patriarchal and androcentric texts like the Pastoral Epistles can inversely infer the existence of active female leadership groups. Reconstruction is not only historical but also concerns articulating a biblical spirituality and liberative vision for justice and well-being for all people.<sup>73</sup> This reconstruction work is viewed as part of "rebuilding history,"<sup>74</sup> and is an important component in the three-step

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<sup>64</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 154–155.

<sup>65</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 53–55, 136.

<sup>66</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Interpretation: De-centering Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 1 (1988): 3–17, 103.

<sup>67</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Interpretation," 3–17, 13, 103.

<sup>68</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 96, 117.

<sup>69</sup> Kristin De Troyer, *Rewriting the Sacred Text: What the Old Greek Texts Tell Us about the Literary Growth of the Bible* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 121, 154; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 154; Eugene Ulrich et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996/1999), 3.

<sup>70</sup> Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, KY: Chalice, 2000), 5.

<sup>71</sup> Martin J. Buss, *Biblical Form Criticism in Its Context* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 7; Ulrich et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, 3; De Troyer, *Rewriting the Sacred Text*, 121; De Troyer, *Rewriting the Sacred Text*, 154; Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 154.

<sup>72</sup> Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 9.

<sup>73</sup> Kristin De Troyer, "'And They Did So': Following Orders Given by Old Joshua," in Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner eds., *Her Master's Tools: Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 154.

<sup>74</sup> Buss, *Biblical Form Criticism in Its Context*, 7; Ulrich et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, 3; De Troyer, *Rewriting the Sacred Text*, 121, 154; Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 154.

process of feminist work: “critique, reclaim, reconstruct”. The ultimate goal is to transform oppressive structures, achieving profound social change with political and social revolutionary significance.<sup>75</sup> Effective hermeneutics must be based on faith’s response—it is a hermeneutics of life, liberation, and justice that challenges the status quo.<sup>76</sup>

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza proposed a complex model of critical feminist interpretations of emancipation,<sup>77</sup> which consists of four interpretative strategies: suspicion, reconstruction, evaluation and imagination.<sup>78</sup> These strategies are not independent, step-by-step steps or rules of methodology, but rather, they are interacting, simultaneous interpretive practices in the interpretation of biblical texts or any other cultural text. This model attempts to overcome the hermeneutical split between meaning and understanding, interpretation and apprehension, critique and recognition, distance and empathy, reading “behind” and “before” the text, present and past, interpretation and application, reality and imagination.<sup>79</sup>

### **Application and Innovation of Interdisciplinary Methods**

The innovation of feminist biblical interpretation at the theoretical level is characterized by interdisciplinary exploration and application.<sup>80</sup> The social scientific method plays an important role.<sup>81</sup> In addition to traditional historical-critical,<sup>82</sup> and literary approaches,<sup>83</sup> feminist biblical interpretation also employs social science models,<sup>84</sup> and engages with methods such as cultural

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<sup>75</sup> Caroline Vander Stichele, “Murder She Wrote of Why Translation Matters: A Response to Mary Phil Korsak’s ‘Translating the Bible’,” in Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten eds., *Bible Translation on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century. Authority, Reception, Culture and Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2002.), 147–155.

<sup>76</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 29.

<sup>77</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 157; Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 51–76, 195–218.

<sup>78</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 157.

<sup>79</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 157.

<sup>80</sup> Susanne Scholz, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), xlix.

<sup>81</sup> Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 12; Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 70, 73; Luise Schottroff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters: Feminist Social History of Early Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 60–79.

<sup>82</sup> Augustine A. Stock, “The Limits of Historical-Critical Exegesis,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13 (1983): 28–31; Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 285.

<sup>83</sup> E. V. McKnight, “The Contours and Methods of Literary Criticism,” in Richard A. Spencer ed., *Orientation by Disorientation: Studies in Literary Criticism and Biblical Literary Criticism presented in honor of William A. Beardslee* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1980), 53–69.

<sup>84</sup> Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 70, 73; Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 53–80.

studies and cultural criticism.<sup>85</sup> Cultural criticism focuses on the interactions between the text and the reader.<sup>86</sup> Its methodology is heterogeneous, driven by diverse factors including class, culture, and ethnicity.<sup>87</sup> This makes it necessary for the interpreter to be attentive to the specific context in which they find themselves.<sup>88</sup>

Contemporary feminist biblical interpretation significantly incorporates intersectionality analysis.<sup>89</sup> As described by Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, intersectionality is a way of understanding the world, individuals, and the complexity of human experience, which recognizes that social inequality is not shaped by a single factor (such as gender, race, or class) alone, but is constituted by multiple intersecting axes of influence.<sup>90</sup> Examining biblical literature under social categories such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, disability, and geopolitical domination,<sup>91</sup> helps reveal and dismantle the “rhetoric of empire” that prevails in today’s world.<sup>92</sup> The term feminism itself also serves as a broad umbrella term, encompassing numerous kyriarchy-critical perspectives and approaches including gender, womanist, liberationist, postcolonialist, Asian, African or indigenous, Latina, queer, interreligious, and transnational studies.<sup>93</sup>

Specifically, the interdisciplinary application is demonstrated through various methodological approaches: Queer Theory and Queer Biblical Criticism provide insights for analyzing gender in the Bible.<sup>94</sup> The combination

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<sup>85</sup> Tat-siong Benny Liew, *What Is “Asian American” Biblical Criticism?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008), 211–231.

<sup>86</sup> McKnight, “The Contours and Methods of Literary Criticism,” 53–69; Sharon H. Ringe, *Wisdom’s Feast: Hearing the Voices of Women in Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 136–151.

<sup>87</sup> Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 70–73; Schottroff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters*, 60–79; Liew, *What Is “Asian American” Biblical Criticism?*, 211–231, 211–231.

<sup>88</sup> Ringe, *Wisdom’s Feast*, 136–151; Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000); Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 289.

<sup>89</sup> Susanne Scholz, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, xlix.

<sup>90</sup> John W. Fadden, “Justifying (Feminist) Biblical Studies in a Neoliberal Age,” in Susanne Scholz ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, 195; more details see Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016).

<sup>91</sup> Scholz, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, xlix.

<sup>92</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 79.

<sup>93</sup> J’annine Jobling, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Theological Context* (London: Routledge, 2020), 57; Scholz, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, 11, 102, 573; Kwok Pui-lan, “Feminist theology as intercultural discourse,” in Susan Frank Parsons ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 31; Hannah Bacon, *What’s Right with the Trinity Conversations in Feminist Theology* (London: Routledge, 2009), 34.

<sup>94</sup> Jeremy Punt, “Queer Bible Readings in Global Hermeneutical Perspective,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, 65–80; Nadav Tamber-Rosenau, ““A Queer Critique of Looking for “Male” and “Female” Voices in the Hebrew Bible,” 479–493.

of Animal Studies and feminist studies can be used as a framework for interpreting biblical texts, revealing the dynamics of gender, kinship, and power within them.<sup>95</sup> Postcolonial Feminist Biblical criticism analyzes biblical texts from a postcolonial perspective.<sup>96</sup> Womanist and Mujerista/Latina Feminist interpretations focus on the experiences of African American women and Latina women,<sup>97</sup> while Asian Feminist Theology/Interpretation combines Asian culture and traditions to interpret the Bible.<sup>98</sup>

Interreligious approaches emphasize learning from the history and interpretive methods of other religions, placing dialogue within the context of transformative reading.<sup>99</sup> This helps broaden perspectives and recognize that no neutral interpretation exists when reading religious texts. Some scholars also rediscover traditional reading practices from Jewish feminist perspectives, such as interpretive practices of Jewish texts, while African women theologians employ African reading practices.<sup>100</sup>

This interdisciplinary and pluralistic methodological orientation of feminist biblical studies transcends mere academic exploration, seeking instead to transform both individuals and oppressive structures while connecting with women's social movements for change.<sup>101</sup> It advocates for a liberative paradigm shift that views biblical studies as a rhetoric and ethics of inquiry and transformation,<sup>102</sup> aimed at overcoming the binary oppositions between

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<sup>95</sup> Ken Stone, "Animal Studies, Feminism, and Biblical Interpretation," in Susanne Scholz ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, 543.

<sup>96</sup> Tan Yak-hwee, "Postcolonial Feminist Biblical Criticism: An Exploration," in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza ed., *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century Scholarship and Movement* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 281–292; Scholz, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, 573.

<sup>97</sup> Susanne Scholz, "Stirring Up Vital Energies": Feminist Biblical Studies in North America (1980s–2000s)," in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century Scholarship and Movement*, 58–63; Hannah Bacon, *What's Right with the Trinity Conversations in Feminist Theology*, 34, 121.

<sup>98</sup> Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "Toward Mapping Feminist Biblical Interpretations in Asia," in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century Scholarship and Movement*, 105–119; Scholz, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, 573–574. Some related works, see Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980); Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990); Kwok Pui-lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000).

<sup>99</sup> Rita M. Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, 58–78; Simone Sinn, Dina El Omari, and Anne Hege Grung, eds., *Transformative Readings of Sacred Scriptures: Christians and Muslims in Dialogue* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017).

<sup>100</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 98; Funlola O. Olojede, "Toward an African Feminist Ethics and the Book of Proverbs," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, 131–132.

<sup>101</sup> Scholz, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, 55, 79, 589; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 211; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 29.

<sup>102</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 29; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 158–159; Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1983), 26; Scholz, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to*

theological and scientific, literary and historical, and sociopolitical and religious approaches. Through this comprehensive framework, feminist biblical interpretation continues to challenge established hermeneutical boundaries and opens new pathways for understanding Scripture in service of justice, liberation, and social transformation.

### **Contributions and Implications of Feminist Biblical Interpretation**

Since its emergence, feminist biblical interpretation has had a profound and multifaceted impact on the field of biblical scholarship and church practice.

#### **Academic Contributions: Reshaping the Biblical Interpretation Methods**

The primary contribution of feminist biblical interpretation lies in its in-depth challenge to the traditional patriarchal mode of biblical interpretation. Traditional biblical scholarship has long been dominated by male scholars, unconsciously reflecting patriarchal cultural values, resulting in the neglect and even marginalization of women's presence and role in biblical narratives and the early Christian movement. Feminist interpreters have endeavored to uncover patriarchal or broader structural biases in textual and traditional interpretations,<sup>103</sup> the latter of which Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has called "kyriarchy," which encompasses intersecting oppressions of gender, race, class, and so on.<sup>104</sup> To counter this prejudice, feminist interpretation has developed and applied a number of innovative methodological approaches.<sup>105</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza proposes a critical feminist hermeneutics of liberation.<sup>106</sup> She combines historical-critical methods and social-critical analysis to reconstruct marginalized and suppressed voices and traditions in early Christianity.<sup>107</sup> She explores the issue of women's historical agency in early Christianity by tracing its history, and rewrites the origins of early Christianity from a feminist perspective in *In Memory of Her*, a monograph that has been recognized as one of the most important works of feminist hermeneutics of

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*the Hebrew Bible*, 55, 79.

<sup>103</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 210–211; Priscilla Geisterfer, "Full Turns and Half Turns: Engaging the Dialogue/Dance between Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Vernon Robbins," 133; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Biblical Interpretation and Kyriarchal Globalization," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, 1–20.

<sup>104</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 210–211; Shelly Matthews, "Feminist Biblical Historiography," in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza ed., *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 233–248; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Biblical Interpretation and Kyriarchal Globalization," 1–20.

<sup>105</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Between Movement and Academy: Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century," in idem ed., *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, 1–17.

<sup>106</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 151–152.

<sup>107</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 70.

liberation. This work is considered an important milestone in feminist hermeneutics, demonstrating how critical biblical scholarship can lead to a new understanding of Christian origins.<sup>108</sup>

Phyllis Trible, on the other hand, employs a literary-critical approach, especially rhetorical criticism, to analyze the biblical text itself, revealing its oppression and violence against women.<sup>109</sup> She contrasts methodologically with Schüssler Fiorenza, who focuses more on historical reconstruction, while Trible focuses on the text itself, J. Cheryl Exum's work also uses literary analysis to explore the fragmented image of women in biblical narratives.<sup>110</sup>

Feminist biblical studies have also challenged the "objective science" perspective by pointing out that the social and political stance of the interpreter inevitably affects her understanding and reconstruction of the text.<sup>111</sup> Feminist hermeneutics is therefore seen as a hermeneutic with a dual orientation of "suspicion" and "reconstruction," criticizing oppressive elements in the text while seeking to reconstruct emancipatory visions or suppressed stories.<sup>112</sup> The reassessment of the role of women in Luke-Acts, and the interpretation of Paul's epistles, have challenged the underestimation of women's leadership in traditional scholarship.<sup>113</sup> Luise Schottroff's socio-historical research also provides an important contribution to understanding the situation of women in early Christianity.<sup>114</sup>

### **Practical Contributions: Impact on the Church and Social Change**

The influence of feminist biblical interpretation extends beyond the academy to make practical contributions to theology, church life, and the pursuit of social justice.<sup>115</sup> It is closely tied to the women's movement and is rooted in the struggle for the dignity and equality of women in society and the church.<sup>116</sup> This hermeneutic is seen as a liberative praxis that seeks to promote greater equality and justice.<sup>117</sup> It emphasizes the need for the interpretation of

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<sup>108</sup> Susanne Scholz, "'Stirring Up Vital Energies,'" in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, 53–70.

<sup>109</sup> Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 159, 288; Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 160, 289.

<sup>110</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 14–15.

<sup>111</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, "Between Movement and Academy," 1–17; Priscilla Geisterfer, "Full Turns and Half Turns," 129–144.

<sup>112</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 19.

<sup>113</sup> Clarice J. Martin, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *Searching the Scriptures Volume Two: A Feminist Commentary* (London: SCM, 1994), 770.

<sup>114</sup> Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters*, 46–50.

<sup>115</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Congress of Wo/men: Religion, Gender, and Kyriarchal Power* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear, 2016), 147; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Between Movement and Academy," 1–17; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Biblical Interpretation and Kyriarchal Globalization," 1–20.

<sup>116</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, "Between Movement and Academy," 46–49; 175–178.

<sup>117</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 151–152; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Between Movement and Academy,"



texts to be linked to the emancipatory struggles of the community and encourages the church community to re-evaluate which texts should be used in worship and teaching, prioritizing those with an emancipatory vision.<sup>118</sup>

Feminist biblical interpretation has had a direct practical impact on biblical translation by promoting the use of non-sexist or inclusive language.<sup>119</sup> This is seen as an effort to move towards a just language that better reflects the value of equality in the gospel and avoids marginalizing or erasing the presence, agency and contribution of women.<sup>120</sup>

Contemporary feminist biblical studies have increasingly emphasized intersectionality, recognizing the multiple oppressions that arise from the intersection of gender and race, class, sexuality, disability, colonialism and so on.<sup>121</sup> This has led to a broader perspective, incorporating voices and experiences from the Global South, post-colonialism, and different cultural contexts, which we have already touched on in Part 2. This cross-cultural dialogue enriches interpretive possibilities and situates feminist biblical studies within a global movement of change.<sup>122</sup> Despite multiple challenges, feminist biblical studies is committed to deconstructing kyriarchal structures and opening up different spaces for biblical interpretation and meaning-making.<sup>123</sup>

## Challenges and Controversies

### Issues of Methodological Legitimacy

As feminist biblical interpretation expands in academia and church practice, questions and criticisms of its methodology have surfaced. One of the most frequently raised issues is the controversy over the subjective and selective reading of feminist biblical interpretation. Critics have argued that feminist biblical interpretation tends to be informed by contemporary values of gender equality, selectively highlighting texts that conform to its position and ignoring or downplaying those that conflict with it.<sup>124</sup> This mode of interpretation, criticized as “ideology first,” has been accused of lacking

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<sup>118</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xii.

<sup>119</sup> Claudia Janssen and Hanne Köhler, “A Long History of Sowing, from Which Miracles Occasionally Grow: Bible Translations in Language That Is Just,” in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century Scholarship and Movement*, 339–363; Carol J. Dempsey, “Catholic Androcentric Bible Translations as Global Missionary Tools?,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, 37–52.

<sup>120</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 19.

<sup>121</sup> Susanne Scholz, “Reading the Hebrew Bible with Feminist Eyes: Introduction,” xlviii– xlix.

<sup>122</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, “Feminist Theology as Intercultural Discourse,” 23.

<sup>123</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, “Between Movement and Academy,” 1–17.

<sup>124</sup> Poythress, Vern S. “Two hermeneutical tensions in evangelical feminism,” *Verbum Christi: Jurnal Teologi Reformed Injili* 6, no. 2 (2019): 147–158.

objectivity and methodological rigor, and has even been seen as projecting contemporary values onto ancient texts, thereby distorting the original meaning of the Bible.<sup>125</sup>

The use of modern theoretical frameworks has become another point of contention in feminist biblical interpretation. Critics have pointed out that approaches employing postcolonial theory, queer theory, ecofeminism, and other contemporary analytical frameworks face methodological challenges when applied to ancient texts. According to Anthony Thiselton, these frameworks were not originally designed for biblical studies, and their direct application to ancient texts may result in methodological misalignment and potential misreadings of textual meanings. Thiselton argues that the significant temporal and cultural distance between contemporary theoretical paradigms and ancient texts requires careful methodological calibration to avoid anachronistic or projective interpretations that distort the original contexts and meanings of biblical passages. Such concerns highlight the importance of maintaining historical awareness while engaging with contemporary critical approaches in biblical interpretation.<sup>126</sup> For example, when interpreting biblical texts within the framework of contemporary agency theory, it is important to consider the historical context in which the text was produced and the original meaning of the text, otherwise it is prone to overly subjective or projective interpretations.<sup>127</sup>

However, advocates of feminist biblical interpretation have offered robust responses to the aforementioned criticisms. First, Schüssler Fiorenza emphasizes that no hermeneutical method can be entirely neutral or objective, as all interpretive activities inherently embody the interpreter's position and ideology. Thus, feminist interpretation is not exceptionally subjective; rather, it openly acknowledges and actively examines its standpoint and values, which constitutes a strength rather than a weakness of feminist hermeneutics.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, scholars note that the application of modern theoretical frameworks does not involve direct transplantation but rather creatively constructs a dialogical relationship between the text and the interpreter while fully respecting the textual context, thereby making interpretations more relevant to contemporary concerns.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 147.

<sup>126</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 320–335.

<sup>127</sup> Michael E. Cafferky, "Teaching the Gospel from Agency Theory in the Bible," *Christian Business Academy Review*, 9 (2014): 19–28, <https://doi.org/10.69492/cbar.v9i0.28>.

<sup>128</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 10–15.

<sup>129</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 445.

## Conflict and Dialogue with Traditional Biblical Interpretation

While challenging the traditional patriarchal model of biblical interpretation, feminist biblical interpretation inevitably leads to conflicts with traditional biblical interpretation in terms of methodology, understanding of biblical authority, and core theological concepts.

The conflict in methodology is mainly manifested in the principles and approaches of interpretation. Traditional biblical interpretation is usually centered on the Historical-Grammatical Method, which emphasizes a return to the original historical context and grammatical structure of the text, in order to reconstruct as objectively as possible the original intention of the biblical author.<sup>130</sup> In contrast, feminist biblical interpretation places greater emphasis on the experience and subjectivity of the interpreter, and tends to create an interactive dialogue with the text from the perspective of the contemporary interpreter.<sup>131</sup> This difference has led to the frequent criticism of traditional interpreters that feminist interpretations have ignored the objectivity and historicity of the original meaning of the text, while feminist interpreters have argued that traditional interpretations have been too narrow, ignoring the realistic meaning and emancipatory potential of the text.<sup>132</sup>

The understanding of biblical authority has also become another important point of contention. Traditional churches usually regard the Bible as absolute and ultimate authority, emphasizing the literalness and authority of the text.<sup>133</sup> Feminist interpretations, on the other hand, tend to understand biblical authority as dynamic rather than static, emphasizing the historical and contextual nature of biblical revelation, and arguing that biblical authority should be constantly reinterpreted and reinterpreted in the context of the interpreter's interaction with the text.<sup>134</sup> This difference has led to frequent difficulties in reaching consensus between the two sides and has challenged feminist biblical interpretation in the more conservative church environment.

Conflicts in core theological concepts should not be overlooked. For example, while the traditional theological understanding of God is usually based on patriarchal or male metaphors, feminist theologians have criticized

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<sup>130</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 67.

<sup>131</sup> Stella Baltazar, "When Women Unite! Celebrate Our Differences as the Cause of Our Unity," in Silvia Schroer & Sophia Bietenhard eds., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 160; Priscilla Geisterfer, "Full Turns and Half Turns," 135.

<sup>132</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 13.

<sup>133</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 62.

<sup>134</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 105–106.

this unisex image of God and proposed a more inclusive and pluralistic theological expression.<sup>135</sup> This shift in core concepts has often provoked strong reactions and resistance to traditional theological positions.

Despite these conflicts, dialogue and integration are not entirely impossible. Many scholars have argued that the two modes of interpretation can learn from and complement each other. Specifically, the rigorous historical-grammatical analyses of traditional interpretations can help feminist interpretations to more accurately grasp the original meaning of the text, whereas the subjective experiences and practical concerns emphasized in feminist interpretations can help traditional interpretations to more effectively respond to contemporary social issues.<sup>136</sup>

### Internal Diversity and Disagreements

Feminist biblical interpretation is not a single and unified theoretical system, and there are obvious plurality and differences within it, especially in the theological stance, cultural background, and understanding of core concepts, which also constitutes an important challenge within feminist biblical interpretation.

Firstly, in terms of theological position, feminist interpretations can be divided into radicals and moderates. Radicals advocate the complete overthrow of patriarchal structures and even the re-construction of the foundations of biblical theology.<sup>137</sup> Moderates, on the other hand, tend to make adjustments and reforms within the framework of the established church and biblical theology.<sup>138</sup> Secondly, differences in cultural backgrounds also led to internal divisions. Womanist and postcolonial feminist interpreters emphasize the intersectionality of race, culture and colonial experience in gender oppression, which is in marked contrast to Western white feminist interpretations.<sup>139</sup> And finally, there are also differences in the way core concepts such as “liberation” and “female experience” are understood, which complicates the integration within feminist biblical interpretation.

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<sup>135</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 40–55.

<sup>136</sup> Jacqueline M. Hidalgo, “Struggling with Mindsets of Domination,” in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century Scholarship and Movement*, 200; Athalya Brenner, “Epilogue: Babies and Bathwater on the Road,” in *Her Master’s Tools*, 334.

<sup>137</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 35–37; Astri Hauge, “Feminist Theology as Critique and Renewal of Theology,” *Themelios* 17, no. 3 (1993): 8–12.

<sup>138</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, xviii; Emily Pennington, *Feminist Eschatology Embodied Futures* (London: Routledge, 2017), 3.

<sup>139</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 15–20; Jobling, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Theological Context*, 131.

In response to these internal divisions, many scholars have proposed integrative strategies, such as “integral hermeneutics”, which emphasizes dialogue and integration from multiple perspectives, in an attempt to form an inclusive consensus based on respect for difference.<sup>140</sup>

### Conclusion

This paper systematically explores the diverse development of feminist biblical hermeneutics from its origins in the late nineteenth century to its contemporary manifestations. The theoretical core of feminist biblical interpretation lies in the dual movements of “deconstruction” and “reconstruction.” Deconstruction reveals the gender bias in traditional biblical interpretation through methods such as Schüssler Fiorenza’s “Hermeneutics of Suspicion” and Tribble’s “depatriarchalizing hermeneutics.” Reconstruction actively recovers women’s subjectivity through frameworks such as Russell’s “partner theology,” Ruether’s eco-feminism, and feminist theology. These theoretical innovations are enhanced through interdisciplinary methods, including social science methods, literary criticism, postcolonial theory, and more recently, digital humanities techniques.

Feminist biblical interpretation challenges the hegemony of patriarchal interpretation, restores marginalized female voices and roles, and introduces pluralistic and cross-cultural perspectives into biblical studies. On a practical level, it inspires the reform of church rituals and language, promotes gender equality within religious institutions, and advocates inter-religious dialogue and social justice.

Nevertheless, the field still faces significant challenges. The problem of methodological legitimacy persists, with critics arguing that feminist interpretations tend to be subjective, selective, or overly dependent on contemporary theoretical frameworks which conflicts with traditional biblical interpretation methods, biblical authority, and core theological concepts remain unresolved. In addition, the internal diversity and disagreements between radical and moderate positions, Western and non-Western perspectives, and different understandings of key concepts contribute to the complexity of the field itself.

However, these challenges also conceive research opportunities. The growing use of intersectional analysis offers methods for studying the complex interactions of gender, race, class, and other identity factors in biblical texts. The expansion of global-South perspectives brings new interpretive

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<sup>140</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 200–210.

perspectives from different cultural contexts. Digital humanities technologies create new possibilities for textual analysis and expand the scope of biblical scholarship.

The value of feminist biblical interpretation goes beyond academic innovation to address practical issues of gender equality, social justice, and human liberation. The critical perspectives and liberating visions it provides remain very important in our increasingly globalized and multicultural world. Feminist biblical interpretation continues to be important for academic research and social transformation by continuously engaging in dialogue with traditional interpretive models while embracing internal diversity.

Through this research, we have seen that feminist biblical interpretation is not simply a specialized academic pursuit but a vibrant field that connects rigorous scholarship with practical commitments to justice and equality—a connection that will continue to shape biblical studies and broader social discourse in the years ahead.

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