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The Women's Bible Commentary

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The Women's Bible Commentary

Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, editors

Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1992

396 pp. U.S. \$24.00

Some one hundred years after the publication of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible*, a diverse and gifted group of forty-one female theologians from several denominations and traditions has collaborated in the writing of *The Women's Bible Commentary*. In the introductory pages the editors explain that there can be no single "woman's perspective". They have pluralized the word "woman" in recognition of the fact that women's perspectives are many and varied as a result of individual experience shaped by culture, class, ethnicity, religious community and other social factors.

The *Women's Bible Commentary* is described by the editors as "the first comprehensive attempt to gather some of the fruits of feminist biblical scholarship on each book of the Bible" (xv). Some male scholars who have read the book, and offer endorsements on the paper cover, describe it with adjectives such as "informative", "provocative", "welcome", "daring", "stimulating and refreshingly different". I concur with their assessment and, as a female reader, add the words "affirming" and "empowering".

Every book of the Bible is addressed in this commentary. Each author begins with an overview of the book, significant issues and concerns related to its writing and message, and a brief summary of its content. What follows is description and comment on the presence or absence of female characters, social, religious and legal concerns relevant to women, symbolism, and any other matters which are judged to be of interest to women or have some bearing on the relationships of women and men. Unlike most other commentaries, this is not a chapter by chapter, verse by verse presentation.

In addition to the introduction and the commentary on each of the biblical books, there are several brief articles with a wealth of information and helpful insight. There are synopses of everyday life for women in both the Old and New Testaments, discussion of the apocryphal and early extracanonical writings (with comment on the portrayal and experience of women in them) plus a very fine overview of the varied approaches of feminist interpreters. This particular article prompted me to consider to what extent the ways in which I had heard some texts and stories interpreted in the past (from a male perspective and understanding) continue to influence how I hear them now. So it was that on numerous occasions I found my own thinking challenged by a particular writer's interpretation (for instance, Jane Schaberg's insights on Luke's valuation of women), and at other times I had a serendipitous experience of "aha!" (as I read Joanna Dewey's differentiation in 1 Timothy between "widow" as Christian minister and "widow" as welfare recipient).

It is my opinion that *The Women's Bible Commentary* is a long-awaited, much-needed, eye-opening resource. It should be on every pastor's

desk, within arm's reach, as a complement to other exegetical resources. With just a few minutes of reading there is the potential of an insight or observation which could make the Sunday morning sermon more inclusive, uplifting and life-giving for all who come to worship. Seminary students will find this commentary helpful in evaluating their own experience, understanding their own interpretive stance and visioning their future roles and responsibilities as preachers, teachers and pastoral care-givers. For men and women, lay and ordained, who are involved in Bible study, this book will be a tremendous asset.

I commend the authors and the editors of *The Women's Bible Commentary* for their scholarly research, for the honesty and sensitivity of their writing. Also to be appreciated are the brief, but excellent, bibliographies at the conclusion of each writer's work. Although I would have preferred the articles on the everyday life of women to precede, rather than follow, each of the Testaments, it is easy for me to suggest that readers may wish to read those first.

This book raises questions, challenges assumptions, and encourages reflection. It is, indeed, "informative", but also insightful and invigorating. Buy it and read it. You'll see!

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Expanding the View: Gustavo Gutierrez and the Future of Liberation Theology

Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro, Editors

Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990

xiv + 226 pages

This volume is a mini-version "festschrift" of *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*. It appeals to a wider audience than the latter—in particular, that of the classroom. The work is divided into three Parts: "Liberation Theology After Twenty Years"; "Interpretations, Disputed Questions"; "Looking Toward the Future".

Part I contains only one essay, penned by Gutierrez himself—which also appeared in his 1988 edition of *A Theology of Liberation*. This piece is vintage Gutierrez! He writes of God, his faith, the gospel, his people and church with passion, clarity and inspiration. In a word, it is a "tour de force"!

Leonardo Boff understands liberation theology as one of conflict, i.e. always at odds with power elites. In this sense, it is a kindred spirit to the biblical prophetic tradition. According to Boff, reflection upon historical action is still a very delicate, problematic question for the critics of liberation theology.