

Introduction

Toward a Radical Democratic Self-Understanding of Biblical Studies

This book continues my argument in *The Power of the Word*¹ that biblical scholarship has to become publicly accountable and to articulate biblical knowledge that sustains rather than undermines a radical democratic ethos.² Its main title, *Democratizing Biblical Studies*, is decidedly ambiguous. It can have “biblical studies” either as its subject or as its object of investigation. If biblical studies is understood as the subject of democratizing, it articulates the democratizing influence and impact of the Bible and biblical studies. If understood as its object, then the title points to the need for the pedagogical practices of graduate biblical education to be democratized. I understand the title in both senses and argue that we need to thoroughly consider and critically examine both possibilities.

The call for *Democratizing Biblical Studies* requires that biblical scholarship explore both the exclusionary spaces and the democratizing potentials of the Bible, that it becomes methodologically aware of its social

1. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

2. For the theoretical context of my argument, see for instance Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Chantal Mouffe, ed., *Dimensions of Radical Democracy* (London: Verso, 1992); Simone Chambers, *Reasonable Democracy: Jürgen Habermas and the Politics of Discourse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Jeffrey C. Isaacs, *Democracy in Dark Times* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Anna Marie Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus: Postmodernity, Feminism, and the Politics of Radical Democracy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, expanded ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

location in a democratic society, and that it reflects on its democratic sociopolitical contexts.³ In short, this work seeks to elaborate a view of democracy as a verb, as action oriented⁴ rather than as a static political concept. It also seeks to elaborate an intellectual space where biblical education for global citizenship⁵ can be engendered and practiced.

The subtitle “*Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space*” indicates the direction in which my arguments move. In postmodernity space has been rediscovered as an object of social discourse and as the possibility of an emancipatory critical practice. Spatiality as a social product and as a shaping force in life allows one to theoretically explore “how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology.”⁶ Thinking of Biblical Studies in terms of educational space and historically constructed spatiality allows one to investigate the geographies of exclusion that shape the theoretical space of Biblical Studies. It allows one “to examine the assumptions about inclusions and exclusions which are implicit in the design of spaces”⁷ such as the field of biblical studies or the cultural and political spaces constructed by Western democracy.

Since the Bible has had and still has enormous influence on the public political and educational spaces of the United States, it is necessary for American biblical scholarship to critically explore the impact of the Bible on American culture and life and to examine what it means for Scripture to have acted as both a conservative and a radical social force, to have provided a vocabulary for both traditional deference and innovative egalitarianism, and to have been a source for both stability in the face of anarchy and freedom in the face of tyranny.⁸

From its very beginnings the United States has understood itself as a biblical nation. Lawmakers assemble at the Capitol steps to sing “God Bless America,” American flags grace churches and synagogues, and cit-

3. For a the*logical perspective, see John W. De Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy: A Theology for a Just World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004). See also my article “A Discipleship of Equals: Ekklesial Democracy and Patriarchy in Biblical Perspective,” in *A Democratic Catholic Church*, ed. Eugene C. Bianch and Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

4. For such an understanding see also Morwenna Griffiths, *Action for Social Justice in Education* (Philadelphia: McGraw Hill, 2003).

5. See also the collection of essays by Nell Noddings, ed., *Educating Citizens for Global Awareness* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005).

6. See Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989), 6.

7. David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (New York: Routledge, 1995), x.

8. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark Noll, eds., *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 8.

izens acknowledge membership “in one nation under G*d.” The U.S. presidents, be they Jefferson, Lincoln, Carter, or Clinton, have freely quoted the Bible. More recently a strident biblical rhetoric has been deployed by President George W. Bush in the interests of nationalism. For example, in his oft-quoted 9/11 anniversary speech in September 2002, Bush paraphrased John 1:4–5, saying, “This ideal of America is the hope of all mankind. . . . That hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.”¹⁰ This paraphrase substitutes “America” for “Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of G*d,” and thereby divinizes U.S. imperialism as “the light of the world.”

The scriptural understanding of President Barack Obama is quite different. It is critically reflective, contextually aware, and understands the Bible as a “living word.” In his book *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama explicates the hermeneutic of his reading of the Bible:

When I read the Bible, I do so with the belief that it is not a static text but the Living Word and that I must be continually open to new revelations—whether they come from a lesbian friend or a doctor opposed to abortion. This is NOT to say that I am unanchored in my faith. There are some things that I’m absolutely sure about—the Golden Rule, the need to battle cruelty in all its forms, the value of love and charity, humility and grace.¹¹

The Bible is a democratizing book. It is a collection of writings spanning the G*d-experience of many centuries, a book in which a rich plurality of “citizen” voices argue with each other, complement each other, and keep alive the vision of divine justice, care, and well-being.¹² These voices are democratically enriched by the many contexts in which they are heard and interpreted.¹³ The word of G*d can only be heard as a Living Word by engaging creatively with this din of voices from very

9. To indicate the brokenness and inadequacy of human language for naming the Divine, in my book *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994) I have switched from the orthodox Jewish writing of G-d, which I had adopted in *But She Said and Discipleship of Equals*, to this spelling of G*d, which seeks to avoid the conservative malestream association that the writing of G-d provokes for Jewish feminists. For discussion of the term “God,” see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and Gordon Kaufman, “God,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 136–59. Consequently, I write the*logy/the*logical which means speaking about the Divine in a similar way.

10. Jeffrey S. Siker, “President Bush, Biblical Faith, and the Politics of Religion,” *SBL Forum* (n.p.: cited May 2006), <http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?articleId=151> (accessed April 4, 2009).

11. Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 265.

12. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Whose Bible Is It? A Short History of the Scriptures* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

13. For the understanding and use of the Bible in the African American community, see Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

different political contexts, voices searching for freedom, equality, justice, and well-being in times of violence and empire. Such a radical democratic understanding of the Bible requires an equally far-reaching democratizing of biblical studies.

A similar point is made by the editors of *The Bible in the Public Square*. However, they argue not with reference to the struggles around the world for radical democracy, but with reference to the biblical call for “reading the signs of the times”:

To read the Bible in the public square in these times is to take on a challenging task. Issues of hunger, poverty, and violence are urgent and call for our response. . . . It follows that Biblical scholars can and do have a role to play in the public square, an ecumenical, plural, democratic space that is neither the church sanctuary nor the classroom. They carry out this obligation in different ways depending on what model they employ, their own location, their audience, and their area of expertise. For all of them, however, responsible Biblical scholarship requires reading “the signs of the times.”¹⁴

In other words, rather than just learning how to interpret texts, study history, or reflect on the Bible theologically, future biblical scholars need also to learn how to read “the signs of the times” (Matt. 16:3). To do so, biblical scholars must become schooled in societal, ecclesial, and cultural analysis capable of naming powers of injustice and dehumanization. Such analysis must be careful, though, not to limit but rather to keep open its conception of the public.

In his book *Democracy and Tradition*, Jeffrey Stout has drawn attention to the problematic meaning of “the public square” if it is understood statically as a place. Instead, Stout proposes that the “public square” be understood as a dynamic “public” sphere characterized by a compelling religious vision of how citizens can reason with each other and hold each other accountable.

One is addressing the public whenever one addresses people as citizens. In a modern democracy, this is not something one does in one place or at once. Wherever two or three citizens are gathered whom one might address as citizens, as persons jointly responsible for the common good, one is in a potentially public setting. . . . If you express theological commitments in a reflective and sustained way,

14. Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, and Jonathan A. Draper, eds., *The Bible in the Public Square: Reading the Signs of the Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 1.

while addressing fellow citizens as citizens, you are “doing theology” publicly—and in that sense doing public theology.¹⁵

Wherever two or three citizens are gathered to study the Bible, its democratizing power as the Living Word can be experienced. This requires an understanding that biblical studies has the function of enabling citizens to recognize that their coming together constitutes a public in which they are responsible for articulating the Living Word in their different sociopolitical religious contexts. Democratizing graduate biblical education would then mean that scholars recognize and elaborate as the “home spaces” of biblical studies not only the academy and the church but also democratic society, with its variegated citizenship. The emerging fourth paradigm—an *interculturall/interreligious–emancipatory-radical democratic paradigm*—of biblical studies, I argue, is in the process of articulating such a radical democratic space of biblical interpretation.

However, as indicated by Dale Martin’s recent study of the discipline, which is based on interviews at ten theological schools and surveys of the Web sites of others, the discipline is still engaged in the modern turf war between historical-critical and theological-doctrinal studies. Martin points out that “the dominant method of interpretation students are taught, just about everywhere, is traditional historical criticism.”¹⁶ Michael Joseph Brown’s primer *What They Don’t Tell You: A Survivor’s Guide to Biblical Studies*¹⁷ confirms Martin’s observation of the dominance of historical criticism in graduate education: again and again he stresses that biblical studies does not mean “Bible study” and warns his readers not to engage in eisegesis. His “Rules of Thumb” include the following, for example: “Be careful not to read your modern assumptions into ancient texts. A translation is only as good as its translator. An overactive imagination can get you into trouble.” These rules seek to explicate the survival skills necessary for students who want to pursue biblical studies, while making it clear that the discipline is understood primarily in terms of historical-critical scholarship.

Neither Brown nor Martin seems to be concerned with educating graduate students to “read the signs of the times” by learning how to critically analyze their own sociopolitical cultural-contextual locations and the function of the Bible in these contexts. In line with the “new

15. Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 113.

16. Dale B. Martin, *Pedagogy of the Bible: An Analysis and Proposal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 12.

17. Michael Joseph Brown, *What They Don’t Tell You: A Survivor’s Guide to Biblical Studies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

traditionalists,”¹⁸ Martin argues for a curriculum of biblical studies that values the theological and doctrinal function of Scripture in the church and places it at the center of theological education. He argues that graduate education, now almost universally focused on the historical-critical method, needs to foster the study of premodern biblical hermeneutics and postmodern theories of text.¹⁹

While I agree with the insistence of Dale Martin that a critical theological education and sophistication is absolutely necessary for biblical ministry education, I do not think that “the new traditionalism” in theology will solve the problem. Nor do I think that theological literacy should be restricted to Master of Divinity (MDiv) students. Rather, I am concerned here with theological education in general and the education of future biblical scholars and leaders in theories of interpretation, hermeneutics, and ideology critique. Unlike Michael J. Brown, I am not concerned primarily with articulating ideas for surviving historical-critical biblical scholarship. Rather than trying to persuade students to adopt the dominant historical paradigm, I seek to marshal arguments for changing graduate biblical education into a radical democratic space of critical inquiry, sociopolitical ethical exploration, and creative religious re-visioning.

To those knowing how difficult it is to change entrenched institutional habits, such a transformative vision might sound like an impossible pipe dream that cannot be realized. However, as a radical democratic dreamer, I do not envision that change is going to take place from the top down but only from the bottom up. Whether we are contemplating entering into biblical studies, whether we are studying for ministry in the church or for working in the media or schools, whether we are undertaking doctoral studies or are professors teaching these students, whether we are administrators of theological schools or recruitment officers—each one of us can contribute to this radical democratic transformation. To do so, we must turn away from positivist scientific scholarship, functionalist skills orientation, or fundamentalist anxiety; instead, we must envision and claim a radical democratic ethos and pedagogical space.²⁰ This book’s metalogue and the student

18. Jeffrey Stout, who has coined this term, counts among them Stanley Hauerwas, Alasdair MacIntyre, and John Milbank, who proclaim “radical orthodoxy” (cf. *Democracy and Tradition*, 92–179).

19. Dale Martin, *Pedagogy of the Bible*, 29–70.

20. Stephen Protero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn’t* (New York: Harper One, 2008), points out that American college students are more religious than Europeans but also much more ignorant about religion. Hence, he has developed a “Dictionary of Religious Literacy” in order to answer the question, “What does a U.S. citizen need to know “to understand and participate in religiously inflected public debates?” (185).

papers on the accompanying Web site are examples of such a pedagogy and research.²¹

CONTEXTUALIZING ARGUMENTS FOR A RADICAL DEMOCRATIC EDUCATIONAL SPACE

Such a *radical* (from Latin *radix* = *root*), that is, *grassroots*, democratic space is carved out today by social movements for change. I suggest that biblical scholars must learn from them. Grassroots movements for justice have initiated processes of democratization around the globe that allow people to determine their lives, to participate in decision making, and to contribute to the creation of a just civil society and religious community. In my usage, however, democracy does not denote representative formal democracy. Neither am I concerned with governance. Rather, I envision a profoundly egalitarian space where citizen interpreters of the Bible are accountable to a global citizenry.²²

Three broad understandings of democracy²³ and democratization can be distinguished: liberal democracy, Marxist/socialist democracy, and direct participatory democracy. *Liberal democracy* entails a shift from the direct rule of the people to representative government, which protects individual rights, equal opportunity, constitutional government, and separation of powers. *Marxist/socialist democracy* argues that effective participation of citizens in the political process is prevented by class and other inequalities. Human emancipation is only possible with the overthrow of the capitalist system. However, socialist democrats increasingly seek to incorporate pluralism and multiculturalism into a Marxist theory of democratization.

Participatory democracy insists on a literal understanding of democracy as the “power of the people.” It distinguishes itself from other forms of democracy by the conviction that such a “people democracy”

21. See also the important and path-breaking collection of student essays *The Bible and the American Myth: A Symposium on the Bible and Constructions of Meaning*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), which is a paradigmatic example for what I envision.

22. See David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); and the important argument of Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), for an ethical space that enables a flourishing of cosmopolitanism in which people can give expression to a multiplicity of identities while also creating a radical democratic community through discovery and dialogue.

23. For an overview, see Alex Demirovic, *Demokratie und Herrschaft: Aspekte kritischer Gesellschaftstheorie* (Münster: Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1997); Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick, eds., *Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

is *actually realizable*. It entails equal opportunities for all to take part in decision making for matters affecting not only the political realm but also the workplace, the community, and interpersonal relations. Participatory democracy also encourages people to take control over the course of their lives and supports structural arrangements that motivate citizens to exercise self-determination, to respect the rights of others, to take part in debates about the “common good,” and to create new institutions that are truly participatory and egalitarian. This participatory understanding of democracy recognizes that

democracy needs to continue to undergo a process of re-creation and that a more active and substantial participation can only take place as a result of experimentation with new and different ways that seek to enhance citizen involvement and discussion. In a sense, democracy can never be achieved in any final form—it has to be continually re-created and renegotiated.²⁴

Democratic grassroots movements are the embodiment of such ongoing democratization processes. These community-based initiatives, base groups, or people’s organizations address practical everyday problems; they are committed to improving living conditions in a particular location and to promoting values associated with local radical democratic politics. Such movements work toward a transformed, more just society by seeking to create and to expand spaces for democratic decision making, consciousness raising, individual self-development, group solidarity, and more effective public participation. Wo/men²⁵ are and have been at the forefront in creating and shaping such global processes of democratization.

24. Jill M. Bystydzienski and Joti Sekhon, eds., *Democratization and Women’s Grassroots Movements* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 9. This book analyzes the variety of ways in which wo/men from sixteen different countries struggle “for more control over their daily lives while simultaneously creating and extending opportunities for greater participation” (18).

25. To lift into consciousness the linguistic violence of so-called generic male-centered language, I use the term “wo/men” and not “men” in an inclusive way. I suggest that whenever you hear “wo/men,” you understand it in the generic sense. Wo/men includes men, s/he includes he, and fe/male includes male. Feminist studies of language have shown that Western, kyriocentric—that is, master, lord, father, male-centered—language systems understand language as both generic and as gender specific. Wo/men always must think at least twice, if not three times, and adjudicate whether or not we are meant by so-called generic terms such as “men, humans, Americans, citizens.” To use “wo/men” as an inclusive generic term invites men in the audience to learn how to “think twice” and to experience what it means not to be addressed explicitly. Since wo/men always must arbitrate whether we are meant or not, I consider it a good spiritual exercise for men to acquire the same sophistication. Men must learn how to engage in the same hermeneutical process of “thinking twice” and of asking whether they are meant when I speak of wo/men. Since, according to the philosopher Wittgenstein, the limits of our language are the limits of our world, such a change of language patterns is a very important step toward the realization of a new feminist consciousness.

In modernity most of the social movements for change have been inspired by the dream of radical democratic equality and equal human rights. The Western democratic ideal has promised equal participation and equal rights to all, but in implementation has restricted power and rights to a small group of elite propertied gentlemen; hence, those who have been deprived of their human rights and dignity have struggled to transform their situations of oppression and exclusion. However, it must not be overlooked that radical grassroots democratic struggles are not just a product of modernity. Neither is their ethos and vision of radical democracy restricted to the West.

The role and contributions of intellectuals in radically democratic social movements is greatly debated. Cornel West has responded by calling for intellectuals who understand themselves as cultural critics to become involved in a “cultural politics of difference.”

The new cultural politics of difference are neither simply oppositional in contesting the mainstream (or *malestream*) for inclusion, nor transgressive in the avant-gardist sense of shocking conventional bourgeois audiences. Rather, they are distinct articulations of talented (and usually privileged) contributors to culture who desire to align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized, and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action. . . . This perspective impels these cultural critics and artists to reveal, as an integral component of their production, the very operations of power within their immediate work contexts (i.e., academy, museums, gallery, mass media).²⁶

West acknowledges the feminist roots of the cultural politics of difference and observes that the decisive push toward it has come not from male intellectuals of the left, but from black wo/men of the African diaspora. Cultural critics have the task to align themselves in solidarity with those who are dehumanized by the relations of domination and to spell out the operations of power in such relations. However, I wonder whether the responsibility of such intellectuals is best characterized as “empowering and enabling social action.” In my view, intellectuals will be able to articulate knowledges and visions that engender and empower sociopolitical action and the change of relations of domination only if and when we as participants in a sociopolitical movement

26. Cornel West, “The New Cultural Politics of Difference,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. S. During (New York: Routledge, 1993), 204.

for justice attempt to “hear into speech”²⁷ the theoretical problems and challenges of people involved in grassroots democratic struggles.

I do not want to be misunderstood. I do not propose an emphasis on theorizing and vision above social action. Rather than continuing to question the “role” of intellectuals in social movements, I propose refocusing our attention on what these movements themselves contribute theoretically to the articulation of what is considered as knowledge. Such a shift underscores the significance, creativity, and initiative of grassroots movements for articulating emancipatory knowledges and wisdom over and above that of the talented intellectual and privileged advocate. Instead of seeking to empower and enable people at the grassroots level, public intellectuals must first *learn from* the politics and values of grassroots movements for justice and well-being.

The abolitionist movements of the nineteenth century and the liberation movements of the 1960s—the antislavery, workers’ rights, civil rights, anticolonialist, gay, antiwar, and radical democratic student movements, and last but not least, the wo/men’s liberation movement—constitute the social location of, and have provided the language and discourses for, a radical democratic biblical interpretation. These movements have impacted biblical studies so as to initiate the emergence of a new fourth emancipatory paradigm of interpretation in the academy.

A critical emancipatory pedagogy and ethos not only has to critically focus on the dehumanizing power of oppression and its effects as “power over,” but also to hold open the possibility of transformation. Far from reinscribing the binary dualism between oppressor and oppressed, emancipatory discourses insist that the humanity of both oppressor and oppressed is severely deformed and damaged by the powers of domination, which liberation theologians have named as structural sin. Emancipatory theory is an account of the oppressive workings of power whereby oppressive power or domination is seen as the ability of one person or a group to dominate and exploit the other. Further, emancipatory theory and theology distinguish between two modalities of power: power as “power over” or as “domination” on the one hand, and power as “power for” or as energy and creativity on the other hand. Hence, the transformation of unjust situations is central for emancipatory theory and theology. It presupposes a principled opposition to domination and exploitation in the name of justice.

27. Nell Morton, *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

Emancipatory theory articulates biblical interpretation in terms of an ethics or morality of radical equality and justice. This ethics of the irreducible value of human beings who are wo/men is the central moral truth in emancipatory studies. One's self-worth and dignity depend on oneself and are not derived in competition with others. There is something absolute about the value of human beings, who are all equal before G*d. This moral truth is completely at odds with the ways our societies and communities are organized and structured around marginal status and relations of domination. It also rejects all arbitrary privilege and relations of dependence, which generate all kinds of repression, equivocation, and uneasiness.

The kyriarchal²⁸ discourses of domination in turn engender an ethics of inequality that requires relations of superiority and inferiority between human beings. Some people are held to be more important and valuable than others. In the ethics of domination, one's sense of importance, goodness, and worth depends on the negation of such qualities of someone else, who must therefore be in some way comparatively insignificant and inferior. Discourses of domination not only socialize us into the ethos of superiority/inferiority but also pressure us into identifying and colluding with those who have status and power. A pedagogy of domination compels us to recognize the importance of those in power and to disassociate and distance ourselves from those who are "unacceptable" and without power. The economic, psychological, social, and political costs are high if one refuses to collude in this pedagogical ethos of domination. Students lose their initiative of thinking, creative imagination, and sociopolitical commitments in an academic model of competitive knowledge production.

Insofar as human beings have a fundamental need to be recognized and respected by other human beings, domination psychologically and socially deforms people, and these deformations in turn maintain dehumanizing power relations. The antagonism of oppressed people toward each other is the underside of this fundamental need for recognition.²⁹ It keeps relations of domination in place by channeling aggression away from the powerful and onto the oppressed. Internalized shame and

28. I have coined the expression kyriarchy/kyriocentrism/kyriarchal in order to name the system of domination that goes back to antiquity and is still at work today. Kyriarchy is derived from the Greek *kyrios* = emperor, lord, slave master, father, head of household, elite propertied educated male, and *archein* = to rule and dominate. See my introduction to *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies*, ed. by Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

29. On the importance of recognition, see Nancy Fraser, "Mapping the Feminist Imagination: From Redistribution to Recognition to Representation," *Constellations* 12, no. 3 (2005): 295–307. For a fuller development of this argument, see my book *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 7–34.

antagonism of the marginalized against each other is engendered by the discourses of domination. It is a sign that even feminists have internalized the general cultural prejudice that considers wo/men to be “lesser” human beings. This ethos of superiority/inferiority is the psychological mechanism that sustains most relations of domination.

The fundamental need to be recognized as human is constitutive of what it means to be human. This definition of being human needs no specific content other than the satisfaction of this need itself. The need for unconditional recognition and respect as a human being is prior to any other need. Emancipatory theory and theology considers the worth of human beings to be absolute, unchangeable, and not subject to comparison or competition. Such radical equality is not sameness but only the absence of any qualities and pressures to subordinate persons as inferior in order to subject them to the control of the more powerful.

Consequently, it is in the course of personal and political struggles and resistances against domination that the drive for respect and love becomes a drive for autonomy and self-determination. Resistance has two phases or moments that are interdependent: the abolition of relations of domination, and the struggle for autonomy and respect. The possibility of genuine human respect, love, and equality can only be achieved when relations of domination are resisted and transformed into relations of equality. The social character of being human requires that the liberation of one human being from domination is intrinsically dependent on all others attaining it too. This demands a transformation not only of oppressive structures but also of individual consciousness. In consequence, emancipatory biblical interpretation has to focus on such a transformation of consciousness.

TOWARD A RADICAL DEMOCRATIC PEDAGOGY OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

From the nineteenth into the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries, the Bible has been used both as a weapon against emancipatory struggles for equal citizenship in society and church and as a resource for emancipatory struggles for liberation.³⁰ Biblical interpretation, I

30. For theoretical contextualization, see Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996); Becky W. Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi, eds., *Beyond a Dream Deferred: Multicultural Education and the Politics of Excellence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); bell hooks,

propose here, is best conceptualized as an integral part of emancipatory struggles for survival, justice, and well-being. If the Bible has been used both against and for wo/men in their diverse struggles, then the goal of biblical interpretation cannot be just *to understand* and *appropriate* biblical texts and traditions. Rather, an emancipatory biblical pedagogy has the task *to change* biblical interpretation and its Western idealist hermeneutical frameworks, individualist practices, and sociopolitical relations of domination. In reclaiming the authority of wo/men as religious-theological subjects who must claim their own spiritual authority for shaping and determining biblical religions, my own feminist work has attempted to reconceptualize the act of biblical interpretation as a moment in the global struggles for radical democracy.

Hence, an emancipatory pedagogy seeks to develop new ways of reading the Bible (and other culturally influential texts) in order to prevent biblical knowledge from continuing to be produced in the interest of domination and injustice. Usually it is assumed that biblical knowledge and reading practices are developed by academic or ecclesiastic leaders and then “translated” into the vernacular language of the “common reader,” who in turn is expected to appropriate and apply such knowledge to everyday life. I argue to the contrary, that wo/men struggling for change and recognition as full citizens in society, the academy, and synagogues, mosques, or churches articulate emancipatory knowledge and liberating insights that need to be recognized by scholars and ministers.

Hence, graduate biblical education must enable future biblical scholars, ministers, and religious leaders to attend to such emancipatory biblical knowledge. Future academic and ecclesiastic leaders have to prepare for the task of “translating” such knowledge into academic and religious discourse so that such emancipatory knowledge can become public knowledge and inspire research in the interests of justice for all. In other words, emancipatory biblical interpreters have the task not so much to translate the methods and results of biblical scholarship to a wider audience, but rather to learn from and to cast their lot with wo/men struggling for survival and change in order to be able to translate wo/men’s quest for self-esteem and justice into the language and research goals of the academy.

Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (New York: Routledge, 1994); Madeleine Arnot and Jo-Anne Dillabough, eds., *Challenging Democracy: International Perspectives on Gender, Education and Citizenship* (New York: Routledge, 2000); bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Alan M. Olson, David M. Steiner, and Irina S. Tuuli, eds., *Educating for Democracy: Paideia in an Age of Uncertainty* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004).

Long before postmodern theories, liberation theologies of all colors have not only recognized the perspectival and contextual nature of knowledge and interpretation but also have asserted that biblical interpretation and theology are—knowingly or not—always engaged for or against the oppressed. Intellectual neutrality is not possible in a historical world of exploitation and injustice. However, such a position does not assume the innocence and purity of the oppressed. Neither does it see the oppressed only as victims and not also as agents for change.

Moreover, such a shift from a modern Western malestream to a critical emancipatory frame of reference engenders a fourfold change:

- a change of interpretive assumptions and goals,
- a change of methodology and epistemology,
- a change of individual and collective consciousness, and
- a change of social-religious institutions and cultural-religious formations.

Consequently, a critical emancipatory interpretation does not commence by beginning with the text and placing the Bible at the center of its attention. Rather, interpreters begin with a reflection on their experience and sociopolitical religious location. For such a reflection, interpreters utilize a critical systemic analysis of the kyriarchal³¹ oppressive structures that shape our lives and are inscribed in biblical texts and interpretations. In reading biblical texts, a critical emancipatory pedagogy must enable scholars and religious leaders to take their “stand” with wo/men who struggle at the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid of domination and exploitation because their struggles reveal both the fulcrum of dehumanizing oppression threatening every wo/man and the power of Divine Wisdom at work in our midst.

The challenge today, I argue, is to open the hermeneutical conversation as widely as possible and to enable biblical interpreters to enter this conversation in the interest of struggles for justice. This challenge comes at a time when the paradigm of emancipatory biblical studies is developing its own highly specialized vocabulary and allegiance to the academy or institutionalized religions. Hence, emancipatory biblical

31. Rather than advocating a dual systems analysis—imperialism and feminism—as anti-imperial studies and some feminist postcolonial studies seem to do, I have developed a complex analysis of interstructured and multiplicative dominations and have coined the neologism *kyriarchy/kyriocentrism/kyriarchal* (see n. 28). This neologism seeks to express the intersecting structures of dominations and to replace the commonly used term “patriarchy,” which is often understood in terms of binary gender dualism. As an analytic category, kyriarchy articulates a more comprehensive systemic analysis of empire, in order to underscore the complex interstructuring of dominations, and to locate sexism and misogyny in the political matrix—or better, “patrix”—of a broader range of dominations.

studies are in danger of becoming “disciplined” and of deriving their theoretical frameworks or taking their measure from the malestream discipline of biblical studies rather than from grassroots movements for ending wo/men’s second-class citizenship.

In short, a critical emancipatory pedagogy does not derive its lenses from the modern individualistic understanding of religion and the Bible. Rather, it shifts attention to the politics of biblical studies and its sociopolitical contexts of struggle.³² Hence, at the center of attention it places wo/men as subjects and agents, as full decision-making citizens. To that end a critical emancipatory pedagogy develops and engages not only a deconstructive but also a (re)constructive approach to interpretation. It struggles to elucidate the ways in which biblical symbols, practices, and texts function in the creation and maintenance of ideas about sex/gender, race, colonialism, class, and religion. It also examines how social constructions of sex/gender, race, colonialism, class, and religion have influenced and shaped theoretical frameworks, theological formulations, and biblical interpretations. A critical emancipatory pedagogy understands the Bible and its own work of interpretation and education as a site of struggle over meaning-making, authorization, and symbolic power.

The pedagogical method to achieve the cultural and religious transformation of relations of domination into relations of radical equality that was developed by the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1970s is consciousness-raising, a process and reflection on experience through which participants grow in feminist awareness. Feminist consciousness insists on wo/men’s full citizenship and their freedom for self-definition, self-determination, self-respect, self-esteem, and self-affirmation. Feminist awareness begins with the recognition that wo/men’s “lesser” being, inferiority, and oppression are structural and not the result of personal faults. Coming to consciousness is the discovery of structures of socioeconomic domination and the recognition that one belongs to an exploited and oppressed group even if one is individually privileged and well-off. It is the discovery that the personal is political.³³

However, consciousness-raising must be distinguished from conscientization. Conscientization is a term derived from the Portuguese *conscientização*. It was introduced by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire to

32. For an excellent analysis of the “politics of Biblical Studies,” see Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

33. See Jane Kenway and Helen Modra, “Feminist Pedagogy and Emancipatory Possibilities,” in *Feminism and Critical Pedagogy*, ed. Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore (New York: Routledge, 1992), 138–66, esp. 156–57.

designate a learning process in which groups become skilled at recognizing forms and experiences of social, political, cultural, religious, and economic oppression and dehumanization. Such a process of conscientization was developed in literacy training programs for poor Brazilian peasants in order to teach them how to “decode” their situation of poverty and exploitation with the help of systemic sociopolitical analysis.

According to Freire, conscientization means learning to *name* and *change* oneself and one’s situation. Freire asserts that humans “*are* because they *are* in a situation, and they will be *more* the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it.”³⁴ Those who become conscientized see through the sociocultural myth of superiority/inferiority that keeps them in situations of oppression. When people recognize and acknowledge that they are exploited and oppressed, they are empowered to achieve liberation. They do so by becoming committed to their own liberation as well as to that of others and by transforming themselves and their oppressive situations. Conscientization is a critical process, a spiraling dance that is never ending.

In contrast, the scientific ethos of biblical studies insists that readers must silence their interests and abstract from their sociopolitical situation in order to respect the “alien” character of the text and the historical chasm between the contemporary reader and the biblical text. This rhetoric of disinterestedness and presupposition-free exegesis silences reflection on the political interests and functions of biblical scholarship. Its claim to public scientific status suppresses the rhetorical character of biblical texts and readings and obscures the power relations through which they are constituted and kept in place.

Such a suppression of present-day theological socioecclesial locations and religious-theological interests is due largely to the prevailing assumption that the form of exegetical commentary demands scientific objectivity and disinterestedness rather than a self-conscious reading/hearing that is engaged and perspectival. To respect the *rights* of the text, biblical interpreters have to suppress their own questions. Biblical interpretation is here construed in kyriarchal terms insofar as readers have to *submit* themselves to the unequivocal meaning of the text that is established by biblical scholars or religious authorities. Moreover, this scientific model of biblical studies shares in the pathology of modernity, which, according to Jürgen Habermas, splits off expert cul-

34. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), 100; see also idem, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998); idem, *Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

tures from everyday cultural practices and life. Finally, by understanding the “first” or historical meaning of the biblical text as a deposit of the definitive meaning of the author, historical biblical interpretation runs the risk of “shutting up” the “meaning” of the text in the past and turning it into an artifact of antiquity that is accessible only to the expert of biblical history or philology.

Theologians and ministers in turn are interested in the religious, “spiritualized” meaning of biblical texts for today. Through “application” they seek to liberate the text from its “historical captivity” in order to rescue the message of the Bible for contemporary Christians. One form of this rescue and liberation of the text is accomplished by “updating and actualizing” aspects of it: by “translating” and rendering its mythic images into contemporary frameworks of meaning, by selecting the passages that still speak to us and illumine our own questions, by reducing its world of vision to theological or ethical principles and themes.

Another form of theological “application” of biblical texts is achieved by the method of correlation. This method draws a parallel with the text’s discursive situation and present-day religious problem situations. Theological liberals frustrated by the mythological content or outdated injunctions of the Bible look for commentaries that enable them to “squeeze” the living water of revelation and theological truth out of the hard stone of ancient biblical facts; biblical fundamentalists insist on the inerrant literal sense of the text as a “given fact.”

Insofar as scientific exegesis tends to foreclose the text’s multivalent meanings and does not acknowledge that we always interpret texts from a particular sociopolitical religious location, it is contrary to the practice of conscientization. It overlooks the reality that the practice of interpretation does not simply understand and comprehend texts and symbols (hermeneutics); it also produces new meanings speaking from different sociopolitical locations and from changed rhetorical situations (rhetoric). A rhetorical conceptualization of text and interpretation situates biblical scholarship in such a way that its public character and political responsibility become an integral part of our literary readings and historical reconstructions of the biblical world. Hence, it can function as a practice of conscientization.

This understanding of rhetoric/rhetorical³⁵ as a communicative practice that involves interests, values, and visions must be carefully distinguished from the popular use of the expression. Popular parlance often

35. See my book *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

labels certain statements as “rhetoric/rhetorical” when it believes them to be “mere talk,” stylistic figure, deceptive propaganda—any clever form of speech that is not true and honest and also lacks substance. Rhetoric is often misunderstood as “mere” rhetoric, as stylistic ornament, technical device, or linguistic manipulation, as discourse utilizing irrational, emotional devices that are contrary to critical thinking and reasoning.

When I reclaim the term “rhetoric” for a critical emancipatory pedagogy as a practice of conscientization, I do not use it in this colloquial sense. Indeed, I seek to utilize rhetorical analysis not as one more way of literary or structural analysis, but rather as a means to analyze how biblical texts and interpretations participate in creating or sustaining oppressive or liberating theo-ethical values, sociopolitical practices, and worlds of vision for their respective audiences.

Biblical interpretation understood as a rhetorical or communicative practice lends itself to conscientization insofar as it seeks to display how biblical texts and their contemporary interpretations are political and religious discursive practices. Authorial aims, point of view, narrative strategies, persuasive means, and authorial closure, as well as audience perceptions and constructions—these are rhetorical practices that have determined not only the production of the Bible but also its subsequent interpretations. Moreover, a critical rhetoric of conscientization insists that context is as important as text. What we see depends on where we stand. Our social location or rhetorical context is decisive for how we see the world, construct reality, or interpret biblical texts.

Insofar as emancipatory conscientization seeks to transform academic as well as ecclesial biblical interpretation, it must always have both a theoretical *and* a practical goal. This praxis orientation locates an emancipatory biblical interpretation and pedagogy in the context of radical democratic grassroots movements in society and religion as well as at the intersection of critical emancipatory theories and liberation theologies. Since feminist decolonizing studies, in distinction to functionalist gender studies, are explicitly committed to the struggle for changing kyriarchal structures of oppression in religious, cultural, and societal institutions, they are able to disentangle the ideological (religious-theological) functions of biblical texts for inculcating and legitimating relations of domination.

In short, an emancipatory pedagogy for graduate biblical studies seeks to transform the scientific-positivist ethos of biblical studies into a rhetorical-ethical one. It thereby creates a grassroots democratic space in which feminist and other critical readers/hearers can participate in

defining and debating the meaning and significance of biblical texts in contemporary social-political locations and cultural-religious rhetorical situations. Such democratizing deliberations from within particular struggles and political coalitions acknowledge the multiple locations from which emancipatory voices manifest themselves in a diversity of intellectual constructs and competing interest groups.

To the extent that different emancipatory publics articulate their critical analyses, proposals, and strategies differently, it becomes necessary to adjudicate not only between different interpretations of a biblical text but also between competing definitions of the world and alternative constructions of symbolic universes. Such diverse analyses and divergent articulations of emancipatory visions are not simply right or wrong; they are not to be construed as dogmatic positions but are best understood as strategic practices of conscientization and deliberation.

By constantly engendering critique, dispute, and debate with the malestream discipline as well as collaboration with each other, emancipatory biblical practices of radical democratization and conscientization seek more adequate strategies and visions for constructing a different understanding of reality. In so doing, they always must privilege the theories and strategies of those who speak from within the experience of multiplicative kyriarchal oppressions. Clarifying and adjudicating contested concepts and proposals, critical emancipatory biblical studies and pedagogies engender biblical interpretation as a process of grassroots democratization, moral deliberation, and practical solidarity in the midst of diverse and often competing but potentially collaborative emancipatory struggles.

To conclude: The following chapters seek to develop the contours of such an emancipatory pedagogy for graduate biblical studies. This does not mean that they are only of interest to graduate students, professors, and administrators of theological schools and not to readers outside the academy in churches, synagogues, schools, and study groups. Rather, these chapters might be of interest to all who care about the Bible and social justice since they focus on transforming graduate education in the interests of grassroots movements and struggles for justice. They are of significance not only to the academic community but also to all those who desire to realize the kind of contributions graduate biblical education can make to the ethos and vision of a radical democratic society and religious community.

Unlike Dale Martin, I am not so much concerned with the predominance of historical biblical criticism in theological education. Rather,

I am concerned with the use of the Bible in public religious discourses. My central question is this: How are biblical scholars, theologians, preachers, teachers, and communities of faith best educated for participating critically and responsibly in public discourses that use Scripture and biblical rhetoric for unjust undemocratic ends? How do currently existing educational practices teach (or fail to teach) biblical scholars critical self-reflexive and constructive accountability? How, through the resources of the fourth emancipatory paradigm, can future biblical scholars, theologians, and scholars in religion be educated to participate responsibly in public discourses and *to transform* those that deploy the Bible for undemocratic ends?

Even a cursory survey of the discipline of biblical studies and its pedagogical practices indicates that biblical education does not currently equip students for such a task. To check this cursory impression, I joined with Kent Richards, the executive secretary of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), to chair a five-year seminar on graduate biblical education at the annual national and international meetings of the society.³⁶ The contributions of international, senior, and junior scholars not only confirmed the above negative diagnosis; they also indicated increasing interest in changing the standard curriculum of graduate biblical education in order to prepare students, scholars, preachers, theologians, and teachers for radical democratic engagement in both society and organized religion. Hence, this book does not so much focus on how to change curricula, choose methods of interpretation, or analyze texts; rather, it focuses on investigating and transforming the overall frameworks and paradigms of biblical studies on the one hand and the pedagogy and didactics of graduate biblical education on the other.

The first chapter seeks to chart the rhetorical space of graduate biblical studies by articulating the need to transform the discourses of biblical studies and by exploring proposals for such a re-visioning. The second chapter focuses on paradigm criticism and seeks to redescribe the four paradigms that I have developed and refined again and again in my work over the years. I elaborate the fourth emancipatory paradigm in the third chapter, reflect on the discursive struggles within it, suggest a common analytic, and propose a pedagogical model of agency and conscientization. The fourth chapter seeks to articulate further ways in

36. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Kent Harold Richards, eds., *Transforming Graduate Biblical Education: Ethos and Discipline* (Atlanta: SBL, forthcoming).

which malestream pedagogical models can be transformed into those that create a radical democratic space and ethos.

Such a pedagogical project, if it is not to remain abstract and underdeveloped, depends upon benefit from multiple different voices. The metalogue seeks to convey an impression of a radical democratic pedagogy in action. It gathers the voices of eight graduate students (four doctoral and four MDiv/MA level) from Harvard Divinity School, Andover Newton Theological School, and Boston College, who were participants in my seminar on Democratizing/Emancipatory Biblical Studies in the fall of 2008. Both their reflections on the seminar process and their research papers contribute crucial insights to the articulation of an emancipatory pedagogy that the preceding chapters do not fully develop or even address.

Since the pages of a book are limited, it was only possible to include the reflections of the seminar participants here. Their articles appear on the Web site that complements this book. Without the inclusion of the voices of these emerging scholars, ministers, and teachers, talk about a radical democratic ethos would remain just that—talk. The work of the seminar participants opens up the possibility of a different horizon for graduate biblical education. I hope many readers will join in this important work of developing a radical democratic space and a thoroughly egalitarian educational ethos.