

# *Metalogue*

## From Theory to Practice

Rather than calling this last chapter an “epilogue,” which usually consists of a summary and conclusion, I have decided to characterize it instead with the title “metalogue.” This is appropriate since a metalogue means a conversation *about* a theoretical subject, a communication about communication. This chapter is thus a communication about the communications that have taken place in the seminar. Although the term “metalogue” seems not to be in the dictionary, it nevertheless has a foothold in scholarly discourses. According to Karen Staller, metalogues are sites or locations where boundaries of acceptable scholarship are negotiated and standards of good scientific practices are articulated.<sup>1</sup>

In the preceding chapters I have critically explored the changes that intercultural, democratizing, and emancipatory criticism, as a new approach, seeks to engender in biblical studies. African, Asian, Indigenous, Latin American, Aboriginal, and Hispanic studies, along with feminist, Latina, black, queer, liberation the\*logical, postcolonial, and third-world studies, have begun to decenter the hegemonic paradigms of biblical studies. The theoretical and methodological challenges brought by these voices from the margins to the field of Christian<sup>2</sup> Testament/Early Christian Studies are shaping a new exciting approach

1. Cf. Karen Staller, “Metalogue as Methodology,” *Qualitative Social Work* 6, no. 2 (2007): 137–57.

2. I use “Christian Testament” and “Hebrew Bible” rather than “New Testament” and “Old Testament” in order to avoid Christian supersessionism.

in biblical criticism, one that points toward different didactic methods within the framework of the fourth paradigm of interpretation.

In this chapter, I want to move from pedagogical theory to concrete educational experiences and practices. Hence, I present a collaborative effort to reflect on the dialogues and discussions from my seminar on “Democratizing/Emancipatory Biblical Studies” at Harvard Divinity School, which brought us together in the fall semester of 2008. Eight participants gathered with me around the seminar table: one MTS student from Harvard, one MA student from Andover Newton, two MDiv students from Harvard Divinity School, and four doctoral students—three from Harvard and one from Boston College. I will outline the seminar description and process in short, then form a virtual roundtable, in which participants reflect on their learning experiences during the semester.

As a metalogue, this chapter is an attempt to stage a conversation about our seminar conversations and dialogues on biblical studies as a disciplinary field of inquiry. It also seeks to move from theory to practice by reflecting on the pedagogical practices and habits developed in the seminar. In short, this chapter was conceived as a metalogue about the content of the chapters of this book, as well as on the work of the seminar and of each participant in it.

### CREATING A RADICAL DEMOCRATIC SPACE: FORUM

In the summer of 2008 I was in the process of finishing a first draft of the chapters of this book and was acutely aware that its theoretical elaborations needed a didactic “gravity” that would ground the theoretical reflections in pedagogical praxis. To achieve this, I planned to adopt the Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI) didactic model discussed in the previous chapter and to modify it in terms of a critical feminist approach. I decided to test out this didactic model, which I had developed, at a feminist workshop site and in a graduate seminar at Harvard Divinity School.

The Summer Forum “Making the Connections: Claiming Our Past—Envisioning Our Future Together” took place in June 2008 and was sponsored by Feminist Studies in Religion (FSR, Inc.) and Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER). The Forum was interreligious and brought thirty young feminist scholars in religion from around the world to Washington for a week of exchange

and collaboration.<sup>3</sup> This gave me the opportunity to develop the Forum as a radical egalitarian interactive space.

I introduced the ethos of the Summer Forum as follows: This forum is envisioned as a radical democratic space, an assembly of equals who explore and debate the central questions of feminist theology and studies in religion for imagining a vibrant feminist future. As a pilot project it seeks to articulate a radical communal and intellectual space that enables us as sociocultural and religious subjects to speak as equals and to forge feminist alliances. Hence, we do not divide participants in terms of the academy into faculty and students. Rather, we understand ourselves both as colleagues, as participants who bring their rich and diverse experience and research to the table, and as resource persons who seek not only to have the responsibility to facilitate our conversations, debates, inquiries, and discussions but also to learn from each other.

The methods we have chosen are not those of the academy, lecture, seminar, and mentorship but those that enable us as cultural, social, and religious intellectual subjects to speak as equals, to forge alliances, and to create knowledge that fosters the well-being of wo/men. The primary methods we will use are group conversations and forum discussions. They seek to foster

- substantial conversations across generations, disciplines, religions, and cultures to develop feminist theologies and studies in religion as a common project;
- critical analysis and communication across theoretical and spiritual dividing lines;
- accountability to wo/men on the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid and engagement in feminist movements for change and transformation; and
- strategies for fostering academic survival, intellectual flourishing, forging alliances and friendships.

In order to enable each of us to share our variegated experiences and competencies and to work closely together, we have constructed two different group venues. The morning groups are selected on the principle of diversity, the diversity of social-cultural-geographical-religious locations, and the diversity of interests and competencies. Their task is to explore the site of feminist theologies/studies in religion from such

3. Resource persons were professors Judith Plaskow, Kwok Pui-lan, Mary E. Hunt, Deborah Whitehead, and myself. Unfortunately Professor Katie Geneva Cannon had to cancel at the last minute for family reasons.

different perspectives with the goal to articulate differences and at the same time to chart common ground. They are to articulate a group project envisioning how to articulate and institutionalize feminist the\*logies/studies in religion as “a radical space of possibility” (bell hooks), where feminist knowledge can be articulated for sociopolitical and religious change and transformation. We will share these projects with each other on Friday morning.

The afternoon groups are self-selected around important issues and problems that determine wo/men’s lives. The task is to explore the radical democratic space of feminist studies in religion/the\*logies in terms of our own work and research as well as in terms of questions and issues that are central to wo/men’s well-being. In this way we want to become conscious that our community of accountability is not just the academy or institutionalized religion, but also and especially wo/men in society and religion. Finally, the themes or *topoi* that are defining each day seek to focus our discussions in the mornings and afternoons in terms of history, institutionalization, resources, and futures of Feminist Studies in Religion. As a richly gifted group of intellectuals, we bring our variegated experiences, socioreligious locations, theoretical approaches, and work for change to this radical democratic space of wisdom. In short, the program seeks to instantiate the *ekklēsia* of wo/men as such a radical democratic space so that all can contribute to this forum in different ways but with a common goal: to engender knowledge that is emancipatory and life-giving.

### CREATING A RADICAL DEMOCRATIC SPACE: SEMINAR

In summer of 2008, I also needed to decide what I was going to teach after my study leave, which had been supported by a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning. Hence, it seemed beneficial to plan a graduate seminar on the same topic as the emerging book. I decided to seize this fortuitous opportunity and to offer a seminar that would put the ideas of the book manuscript into critical practice. By designing a syllabus that sought to translate the practices of a radical democratic ethos, which the work advocates, into didactic language, I took the risk of never being able to publish this work if the pedagogical design would prove to be a failure because students could not work with it.

To achieve an equal playing level, I determined to adopt again the Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI) didactic model discussed in

the previous chapter and to modify it in terms of a critical feminist approach. The TCI didactic model deconstructs the kyriarchal teacher-student relationship of the didactic triangle and replaces it with an equal-participant model. By allowing the rough drafts of my chapters to be seen as drafts of a seminar participant, rather than as authoritative chapters of a professor, my chapter drafts could thus function as a site for critical reflection and feedback.

Since Harvard Divinity School requires grading, I used the same method of contract grading that I have used for years in all my courses. I find that contract grading reduces competition and anxiety because students can decide for themselves toward which grade level they want to work. It also allows for constructive feedback since evaluation is based on the work done and not on a competitive grading scale. Finally, I asked participants to choose a study partner with whom to discuss their work. With their partner, they would give and receive evaluative feedback on the draft of the paper as well as on the final paper.<sup>4</sup>

In the syllabus, I summed up the envisioned pedagogical process and the goals of the seminar as follows:

- The seminar seeks to engender a collaborative radical democratic process of teaching and learning. Hence, all participants are equally responsible for its work and success.
- In the beginning, participants should identify the knowledge and skills they bring to the seminar as well as the areas of inquiry they want to work in.
- The seminar process employs the pedagogical model of TCI (Theme-Centered Interaction), that was developed by Ruth C. Cohn. This model has four factors: The “I” of each participant, who needs to be her/his own “chairperson” or moderator; the “We” of all the seminar members, who have to come together to work on the “It,” which encompasses the specific *topic* (e.g., historical paradigm) and the overall *theme* (democratizing biblical studies). Reflections and discussions have always to remain aware of the “Globe,” the contextual world in which we do our work.
- The six reflection papers should be critical, constructive feedback papers. Hence, I have chosen to offer drafts of my manuscript for such feedback. Feedback should be given from the perspective of your chosen area and as advice either from your own perspective

4. After semester end we had two additional “editorial meetings” to prepare the papers for publication on the accompanying Web site.

or from the viewpoint of an editor persona, from that of a teaching facilitator, or from that of a consulting expert.

- At the second session, each participant will choose a partner with whom to do teamwork. The partner should be interested in the same grade level and research area in order to be able to give critical feedback.
- The syllabus will be completed after all participants who intend to write a paper have submitted their paper topics and these are accepted. Papers can be theoretical or practical papers and contribute to an academic or professional research area. Topics should be discussed with your partner and with me. After we have settled on the paper topics, we will schedule the second part of the semester.

The conversations engendered by the drafted chapters in the first part of the semester are intended to serve as a model for future discussions of the other participants' papers in the second part of the seminar. To that end, I propose the following instructions as a format for critical constructive feedback: "In your response papers, please address the following:

1. Formulate a concise abstract of the chapter.
2. Discuss what you think is important and why.
3. Indicate what you think needs to be changed and why.
4. Articulate what you would add in light of your focus. (Please remember, you can adopt a persona or write in your own name.)"

To this instruction, I added the following postscript: "If you want to try out your hand at editing, I would be grateful, but this is not required."

In the first seminar session during Harvard's shopping period, I tried to spell out the goal and approach of the seminar as follows:

- The seminar's object of inquiry is not the Bible but the discipline of biblical studies.
- The seminar is interdisciplinary and metadisciplinary in method. It seeks to transgress and transcend disciplinary boundaries.
- The seminar has as a practical goal to introduce future ministers, religious leaders, and professors of biblical studies into the professional ethos and practices of the discipline.
- The seminar looks at the field from the perspective of the margins and asks how marginalized people and emancipatory studies can become fully enfranchised.

—Our goal is not to seek knowledge for knowledge's sake but to articulate emancipatory and radical democratic biblical knowledges.

To that end I delineated four areas of inquiry:

1. The self-understanding of the discipline that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when theories of colonialism, racism, sexism, and class struggle were developed. Moreover, the discipline is characterized by a dualistic self-understanding as either accountable to the academy or to communities of faith. Academic study focuses on what the text meant, and the\*logical/religious study focuses on what it means today. This dualistic self-understanding constitutes an embedded problem for graduate education.

2. Because of its location either in the academy or in religious communities, the discipline does not articulate any accountability to society either in its research programs or in its organization and pedagogy. The absence of research in the interest of democratic societies, however, is radically challenged by the discipline's "voices from the margins": feminist, black, Asian, postcolonial, queer, postmodern, intercultural, Latina, empire studies of the Bible, and many more. These studies insist that critical reflection on one's sociopolitical religious context and location is crucial for all emancipative knowledge. They have shown that because of a scientific ethos, both academic and the\*logical biblical studies are not able to educate biblical scholars, ministers, and religious leaders for work in a democratic society and global situation of domination and exploitation.

3. Hence, the voices from the margins seek to articulate knowledge that is emancipatory and transformative. However, insofar as they advocate a great array of differences but do not stress common strategies and goals, they are in danger of remaining fragmented, becoming embroiled in deconstructing each other, and competing for the few available resources. Hence, they cannot develop the intellectual power to change the discipline. Rather, they reinforce the malaise of a discipline that on the whole is fragmented into countless subdisciplines, with innumerable different analytics and methods. In short, this rich diversity of emancipatory biblical studies opens up great possibilities for the vitality of the field but also poses the problem of further fragmentation and the difficulty of collaboration and communication between its different directions.

4. This rich disciplinary diversity and fragmentation raises the question as to what constitutes basic competence and excellence in biblical studies, not only analytically but also pedagogically and professionally,

two areas that are widely discussed in the humanities but less so in religious and biblical studies. We are faced with an explosion not only of methods but also of knowledges, and graduate education becomes more and more functionalized. For this reason, we need to ask: What are essential requirements to achieve competence in biblical studies? What should a graduate program in emancipatory biblical studies look like if it is to foster the necessary abilities to do biblical studies in an ever more complex and globalizing world? What competence is needed to discuss and teach the Bible not only in the academy and communities of faith but also in the public square?

In order to stimulate a wide-ranging discussion on these critical points, I needed to decenter my own voice and open up a space of agency and collaboration. In a first assignment I therefore asked participants to post their reflections on the following questions:

- What are your goals and objectives for this seminar?
- How will you assess them?
- What expertise do you bring to the seminar process?
- Choose one site of exploration and research from the following four areas:

1. Academy/church/religion
2. Democracy/marginal voices
3. Communication in biblical studies
4. Pedagogy/professional education

As the reflection papers below and the posted research papers on the accompanying Web site indicate, the last point of this assignment was much too general. However, because of its unspecific character, it allowed participants to explore different possibilities throughout the semester.

At the end of the semester, participants were asked to reflect on their goals for the seminar, which they had formulated in the beginning of the semester. After the seminar had ended, we decided to add these reflection papers as a roundtable and discussed in an editorial session the following order.

#### A FORUM OF MANY VOICES / A KALEIDOSCOPE OF PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

To move from theory to practice, from the perspective of the instructor to that of the participants, I want to conclude this book with this

“Roundtable of Many Voices,” which seeks to display the theoretical questions and reflective practices that embody democratizing biblical studies. Rather than summarizing each contribution, I want readers to listen carefully to all the voices. These reflections on experience envision a variegated praxis of emancipatory biblical studies and promise a rich future for the profession.

### Roberto Mata

This “Democratizing Biblical Studies” seminar has been a challenging and transformative learning journey. In contrast to many other traditional courses, the purpose and pedagogy of the course encouraged me to speak from my own social location, to articulate my concerns, and to envision biblical studies as a democratic, welcoming, and liberating discipleship of equals. However, the seminar was challenging because I had to confront my own socialization into the hegemonic pedagogical models and the scientific-positivist ethos of biblical studies. Although I had taken similar courses before, I found myself at times fearful yet joyful, suspicious and yet hopeful.

After reflecting on these contrasting emotions, I realize that when one has been silenced for so long, even one’s own voice sounds foreign. Therefore, we must cross the borders in order to envision a healthier understanding of one’s self, the text, and the field. Thinking of biblical studies as borderlands and of its obstacles as borders—which can be crossed, subverted, and transformed—has helped me conceptualize the challenges and possibilities it holds for the marginalized. Hence, I have framed my experiences and engagement with the seminar in terms of the five stages of the border-crossing experience: critical awakening, journeying, crossing, negotiating, and transforming. Through these stages, I have also been able to envision biblical studies as truly democratic and inclusive, particularly of those voices that have been historically silenced.

#### Awakening

Critical awakening is actually a process of conscientization, since it involves naming one’s reality and taking action to transcend the sources of oppression, which Paulo Freire refers to as limit-situations. Through discussions of four major paradigm models in biblical studies, this course has helped me map the impact of the scientific-positivist ethos and its

socialization practices on minority students. Since the neutral and value-free ethos of the field can silence our voices and concerns, the questions we ask and the scholarship we produce has little to say to society, and much less to our communities. Considering these dynamics, the pursuit of a degree in this field can become meaningless. Such was my situation about three years ago, while completing the master of divinity program. Yet, on the brink of abandoning my studies, I encountered the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and other scholars, in whom I have found mentors and a community. With their invaluable assistance, I have been able to experience this critical awakening, which demands that I embark on a border-crossing journey to transform the field.

### Journeying

Through the “Democratizing Biblical Studies” seminar, I have been able to move from naming the Eurocentric ethos of biblical studies, to mapping strategies for its transformation. Because the border-crossing journey contains several perils (ideological, methodological, and practical ones), the task demands that one travels with other potential border crossers, *compañeras* and *compañeros*. In this seminar, these companions have helped me stay on course. They have challenged me to speak with my own voice, have patiently read my various paper drafts, and have shared their respective strategies to cross the hegemonic and Eurocentric borders of the field. Most importantly, they have shared their own transformative vision for biblical studies. As a journey, this seminar has also been a process of detoxification, of debunking the various theoretical and methodological fallacies that others and I have internalized, and this can be painful at times, but nonetheless necessary.

### Crossing

The seminar “Democratizing Biblical Studies” has also been a continuous border-crossing experience academically and socially. As framed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, the fourth paradigm of biblical studies demands that we engage in dialogue with those situated in other paradigms. Dispensing of any trash-and-burn approach, we are encouraged to understand the ways other paradigms function and to assess their implications for society. Because every crossing, or paradigm shift in this case, is a risky enterprise, there is an element of vulnerability, looming chaos at times, and uncertainty due to our unfamiliarity with the

terrain. However, here is where the work of intellectual coyotes—those who are familiar with the borderlands' terrain, perils, and safe places—comes into play. Apart from the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, I have found the work of Paulo Freire, Fernando Segovia, Henry A. Giroux, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Frantz Fanon particularly illuminating for the purposes of this study. Their critical reflection on pedagogy, paradigms of interpretation, borderlands, and colonialism has enabled me, and others, to evade the traps of *La Migra* (the border patrol), those gatekeepers for whom there is only one proper way of doing biblical studies. The intellectual vigilantes for whom the “truth” or “single true meaning” of biblical texts can only be obtained through methodologies forged in the furnaces of the West. Considering our background as ethnic minorities, we are unwilling to simply adopt their portrait of the “true biblical scholar” in order to be deemed competent. We must negotiate throughout all the borders before us.

### Negotiating

Crossing into the borderlands of biblical studies enabled me to see not only the possibilities, but also the extent of the marginalization of ethnic and racial minorities. Thus, as unacknowledged border crossers to this field, we must begin an arduous process of negotiation. In recent years, although racial and ethnic minorities have been granted admission into elite seminaries and divinity schools, the socialization practices of these institutions can either turn us into the idealized image of the Eurocentric scholar or drive us into academic attrition. These socialization practices are enforced through departmental requirements, hegemonic pedagogies, and formal interactions with our professors and peers. In order to gain agency, we negotiate the situation by deploying our bilingual and bicultural skills, for we must negotiate between the world of academia and our communities. Like other students, we are willing to meet program requirements, such as learning German or French, in order to assert our competence. Yet as we embrace the field, we gradually redefine its rules, develop new theoretical frameworks, and transform it into a space we can safely inhabit.

### Transforming

Through the “Democratizing Biblical Studies” seminar, I have also been able to envision how the fourth paradigm can enact the transformation

of the field and open up spaces for the voices in the margins. From this foundation, I have been able to frame ways to reconnect with my community of faith and to address issues that are relevant for the wider public as well. Furthermore, I have been able to devise ways to cross<sup>5</sup> the socialization practices of the field and to avoid attrition. Most importantly, I have had the privilege of embarking on this transformative journey under the guidance of an experienced border crosser, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, one of the leading biblical scholars in the field. For racial and ethnic minorities, her work and courses have served as both a map and compass, as a safe space, and as inspiration to remain in the struggle for the transformation of biblical studies.

### Michelle Chaplin Sanchez

On the first day of class, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza introduced us to the style of pedagogy she wanted to try out in her seminar “Democratizing Biblical Studies”—her own feminist adapted version of Ruth Cohn’s Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI). She explained that everyone in the class should understand each other as a situated individual, an “I” first and foremost. As an “I,” each person should speak from experience, training, and individual resources, but not be perceived as authoritative in any strong or fixed sense over any other “I”; nor should one “I” be pressured to conform to any other “I.” The group of “I’s” would work together to determine the “It,” the focus of our mutual interest, and the interaction between the “It” and the “I” would be mutually constructive. We would come to understand ourselves in relation to the topic of our concern, with certain elements of our personal resources being especially called to the fore by that topic of concern. Out of this could potentially, though not necessarily, emerge a group identity, or a “We.” Every week we returned explicitly to this model—discussing our “I,” discussing the “It,” determining whether or not a “We” had formed, and assessing what the impact would be on the “Globe.” Schüssler Fiorenza’s approach did amend Cohn’s TCI in several ways, one of which was of particular significance for my own thinking. Instead of framing our pedagogy as a mere reconstruction of the didactic pyramid, one that simply replaces Teacher/Student/

5. Crossing refers to the decentering or disavowing of the borders, socialization practices in this case, established by Eurocentric academic elites in biblical studies.

Knowledge with I/We/It, she reformed it as a circle *inside* a pyramid. “The world,” she told us, “is kyriarchal. It is shaped like a pyramid, with the powerful on the top and the powerless on the bottom. Our task is to create a democratic space inside of that pyramid.”

This specific model and Schüssler Fiorenza’s use of it was entirely new to me, though the idea of democratic education was something I had experienced before and found to be important. My undergraduate education took place at New College of Florida, a liberal arts college that practiced a radically alternative model of education. Grades were dropped in favor of detailed evaluations, and students were encouraged to take charge of their education, at times even designing their own majors and curriculum. This system worked exceptionally well for me and helped me to develop a sense that undergraduate and graduate education should not be about moving up a social ladder, not about simply bolstering one’s CV or graduating with honors. It should be a central component of a life practice—something that emerges out of interest in the world and a desire to impact the world in a positive way. Working through the feminist adaptation of TCI helped to provide for me the language to describe what I had already experienced and now continue to pursue.

My particular area of study is Christian theology, focusing on the intersection of philosophy of religion and constructive theology. In the years that I have been pursuing this work, I have maintained a connection to Christian ministry. I have always been convinced that keeping these two sources in mind was important to the quality and scope of my work, but at times it has felt like existing in the Bermuda Triangle—in some kind of fuzzy space where the connection between the academy and the church is mysteriously lost. Still, most of us live and have connections in broader society; most of us are involved in religious institutions to some extent. There *must* be some kind of connection.

Perhaps lack of communication between the academy and society persists so strongly precisely because we are discouraged from taking up our “I” in both the church and the academy. There has always been enormous pressure to align oneself to the hegemonic power of either the church’s tradition or the academy’s standards of rigor that have been accepted and internalized as “obvious.” Knowing myself, my “I,” as existing in the messy overlap of these worlds, I have long felt that my work should and *can* be relevant to my society, but have been searching for ways to make this a reality. In this class and with this language, I was able to explore some of the reasons for the academy/church split that

ordinary academic procedures fail to highlight. I was able to state my subject position explicitly, and use unusual resources to try to articulate an approach to both theology and the Bible that does not fit neatly in the division of academic subdisciplines.

Specifically, I came to this course as a theologian in training, concerned with the place of the Bible in my work. The Bible is, of course, the implicit or explicit interlocutor of much historic Christian theology, especially in my own broadly Protestant Reformed tradition. It has been my experience, however, that interaction with the Bible in the practice of theology is not only increasingly rare, but also difficult for a variety of reasons that are well documented in the “Democratizing Biblical Studies” discussion of the first, theological paradigm. This paradigm is in many ways a microcosm of the dual-discipline split between academy and church that plagues religious studies as a whole. As a theologian, this idea captured my attention by speaking to my experience of the difficulty of straddling such diverse commitments.

On the academic side, the positivist-scientific ethos of historical-criticism that has dominated scholarly engagement with the Bible for decades has pushed the first paradigm toward theology departments and away from biblical studies entirely. This in turn prevents theologians from engaging the Bible, because such engagement is too often seen as the proper task of the “disinterested” biblical scholar. Anything less, such an ethos suggests, will lack sufficient rigor. On the side of the community, however, the first paradigm has taken on a decidedly literalist-fundamentalist orientation in many public discourses, one that borrows much from the epistemological assumptions of positivism by insisting that the Bible proclaims univalent truth. This dichotomy has tragically suppressed many voices that would approach the Bible in a more creative, border-crossing manner, such as described by Roberto Mata (above).

In many ways, given this situation, the first paradigm is the most absent of all of the paradigms at work in biblical studies today. It is also perhaps most in need of being addressed if biblical studies is to have societal relevance and practice ethically responsible scholarship. While there are many ways to approach this area of lack and disjoint in biblical studies, it seems clear to me that one possible approach would be for theologians to again engage the Bible—and in so doing, engage directly in the discourses of *both* churches and biblical studies, providing a natural conversational link to break the dichotomy. This, however, requires theoretical and methodological rigor and an approach

that looks for and affirms collaboration with the other paradigms and with religious communities, even (or especially) in struggle.

Exploring what would be required to strengthen the first paradigm in a way that is informed by the critical lens of Schüssler Fiorenza's vision for the fourth paradigm, as outlined in chapter 3, became my project in the course. It was a topic that I had been interested in exploring for a long time, but I had never discovered the appropriate setting. Most university courses fit neatly into disciplinary and paradigmatic parameters, obscuring opportunities for challenging those parameters and creating spaces for new, collaborative approaches. In this sense, the pedagogical method described above provided me with a unique opportunity, one that I felt was rare for a student. I used it to approach the controversial issue of biblical authority from a standpoint rooted in the first paradigm, because this seemed to me to be the core point of tension dividing the first paradigm from the other paradigms, and largely excluding the first paradigm from academic discourse. What if authority, and the notion of truth that implicitly legitimizes authority, is formed by kyriarchal society and is not merely "given"?

Employing the tools in "Democratizing Biblical Studies," I used a kyriarchal analytic to deconstruct the notions of truth that lend credence to a univalent understanding of biblical authority, and began to imagine how the first paradigm could function within the bounds of its theoretical commitments without using methods that reinscribe kyriarchy as if it were given, obvious, or natural. I found that becoming aware of the extent to which our notions of truth and authority derive from and reinscribe societal power structures could give us a way to look back at the Christian theological tradition and recognize divinity precisely in its tenuousness, its paradox, and its diversity. Much is at stake in our ability to face our conflicts without either artificially ignoring them or exacerbating them. By directly engaging with a kyriarchal critique, theologians can use the Bible, engage with the Bible, and discuss the Bible with fellow theologians as well as the public in a way that is wise to the way the Bible has been used, without feeling the pressure either to fully accept the Bible univalently or to reject it as a sacred text.

First, however, we must work to create an ethos where these problems, faced from our own individual situations, can be acknowledged with minimal pressure to conform or to deny our own experience. This is what this class allowed me to do, and I see in this kind of pedagogy the potential for an exciting step forward in thinking of creative solutions

to old divisions, both inside and ultimately beyond the boundaries of biblical studies.

### John Falcone

Protagonists of social change know how important it is to “think globally and act locally.” I embarked upon my PhD program to help religious educators use the Bible as a liberative and sustaining resource in their communities of practice. But—as Michelle Chaplin Sanchez suggests—the intersections of different biblical paradigms in theory and practice can complicate this task. Our seminar helped me to construct my own critical map of contemporary biblical interpretation; and it challenged me to make my own theorizing, learning, and future teaching more genuinely transformative and democratic. By analyzing the current paradigms of biblical interpretation through a feminist-TCI didactic, we used the seminar experience itself to experiment with rhetorical concepts and democratizing practices. We tinkered with the tools of transformation, acquiring a feel for their heft, their finesse, and their unavoidable double edges.

To themes like “analyzing,” “critiquing,” “changing,” and “fashioning” more democratic spaces for biblical education, I would add (with Roberto Mata), the idea of “negotiating.” For me, negotiating means finding a way forward with integrity when we are confronted with conflicting forces and values. Implicit in much of this book, negotiation played a central role in our seminar, as instructor, Harvard students, and visiting students together made the decisions and built the trust that moved our inquiry forward. As many feminist social scientists insist, negotiation is an ever-present fact of life. We cannot eliminate the contradictions in our learning, our teaching, or our living, so long as power differentials, insider/outsider identities, and other unegalitarian realities structure our experience: so long as kyriarchy pervades our psyches and our globe. But we can negotiate these contradictions with greater (or lesser) integrity in the concrete realities of our classrooms and our lives. Biblical studies reformers face this challenge in at least two ways: negotiating the “circle dance” of shared leadership, and negotiating the give-and-take of interparadigm conversation.

In a democratizing biblical studies classroom, both the instructor and the students develop the capacity to bring our challenging and messy negotiations to consciousness and to voice. Negotiating the focus

of our seminar is a case in point. On the first day of class, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza invited us to offer our own ideas about formats and formulations for the “It” of our work. At the same time, she bravely and generously offered to let us collaborate on her book, as an entry point into our exploration of biblical studies. While TCI dynamics played an integral part in our learning, a full-fledged process for discussing and selecting the “It” of our seminar might have taken several class sessions of trust building and discernment to complete. Also, class rosters at Harvard are not settled until the second meeting of the semester, after a weeklong “shopping period” is done. Would it have been fair—or attractive to student shoppers—to put off specifying the very topic of our biblical studies class until we had completed a month of group dynamics? Would it have been more fair—or even feasible—to fix the roster four weeks early, so that a chosen set of students and an unpaid professor could develop their common theme more democratically? As educational reformers, we can negotiate, but not eliminate, these types of contradictions.

Similarly, as a student I have been deeply pleased with my learning and growth in this seminar. On the one hand, engaging an established scholar in her own writing, and generating a collegial product, has been the epitome of effective and egalitarian education. As “situated learning” theorists argue, learning works best in settings like this: substantive activities structured in transparent and teachable ways. On the other hand, like all who seek sustainable social transformation, I took the exigencies of my own strategic positioning into account in negotiating our common “It.”

Whatever my particular intellectual interests at the inception of the seminar, I adapted to the developing foci of the group and to the offerings of the instructor. As a junior colleague who has not yet received his PhD, this negotiated process allowed me to collaborate with a senior scholar and thus to forward our group’s common agenda of democratizing the way the Bible is interpreted. Whether as tenured instructors or hopeful professionals in training, we cannot escape the micropolitics of learning and knowledge production. To the contrary, integrity demands that we take them seriously and use them to leverage as much democratic transformation as possible.

Negotiation also plays a role at the interface between biblical paradigms. As academics, ministers, or religious activists, we must wrestle with the values and the exigencies of the communities to which we are accountable if we hope to move the project of participatory

democracy forward. For example, as I compared Schüssler Fiorenza's paradigm analysis with the pastoral and political practices of people "on the ground," it became clear that grassroots Bible teachers and preachers often employ strategies of biblical interpretation in tangled and eclectic ways. Many committed religionists ground their preaching on historical-critical positivism; many liberationists appeal to norms of biblical theology; the combinations are easy to multiply. The danger of such "methodological promiscuity" is not so much its intellectual contradictions, but its blind spots—the ways it can mask oppression and consumerism in the very midst of our efforts to create more wholesome schools, churches, and social groups. By weaving back and forth in our discussions between theory and practical experience, our seminar helped me articulate all these dynamics in a much clearer way.

I came to biblical studies from an inner-city Catholic high school, a place of multiple negotiations. We taught our students the stories and symbols of their native cultures, their ties to family and history. We also taught them to read, write, and figure, to show up on time and to speak the dominant dialect of white American English. In a similar way, we taught biblical interpretation for both resistance and liberation, for both survival and transformation. For Catholic high school educators, framing our vision in this way underlines yet another tension to be negotiated—the one between community sustainability and critique. On the one hand, tradition and cultural cohesion can be powerful bulwarks against capitalist assimilation. Stubborn cultural particularities and unsubmissive memories can help us resist integration into the dominant consumer world. On the other hand, critical consciousness and a hermeneutics of suspicion are essential for unmasking and dismantling oppression. The Bible cannot be swallowed whole as an unproblematic text of liberation, but it must somehow remain a formative and normative text within Christian communities if those communities wish to draw on the cultural memory and sustainable practices of which that Bible is a part. Both liberation and the\*logy, both tradition and suspicion, remain necessary in the living tension that defines a Catholic school as a *religious* community of survival and justice, rather than a purely political or secular one. This was the tension I brought to our seminar each week.

Catholic Bible educators need a pedagogy that directs this tension in a meaningful and practicable way, a pedagogy that helps learners find their own creative and liberating "voice" in and through their particular cultural heritage. In such a vision, I've come to believe, *liberationist*

values and analysis must fix and focus the *theological* norm. Within this framework, the particularities of the biblical text—its symbols, gaps, indeterminacies, and preoccupations; its historical contradictions and narrative strangeness—can become sources for critique *and* cultural continuity. Through the coaching and healing of their teachers, students can learn to negotiate the intersections of tradition and critique, to transform their life settings with increasing integrity.

Schüssler Fiorenza's work deconstructs biblical studies in a way that helps religious workers, cultural workers, and their students to take up the pieces and build something liberative, something new. High school religion teachers and ministerial leaders deserve the kind of biblical studies education that will deepen their ability to "think globally and act locally" with the biblical text. Critically conscious professors in training deserve a similar kind of education in "negotiating" texts, learning spaces, and broader social contexts. Our seminar provided a setting for this type of work.

As any good teacher knows, the "explicit" curriculum of readings and assignments is only a small part of what really is taught and learned in a school. Just as important are the "implicit" and "null" curricula: what we teach through our methods and styles, through our prejudices, through our deafening silences. These curricula can be surprisingly powerful because they infiltrate our minds unnoticed, setting limits on what "can" be thought or discussed. In our seminar, professor and students together addressed the epistemological and academic challenges that the current clash of paradigms presents. By examining our pedagogies—our implicit and null curricula—we moved the conversation to an equally important but frequently neglected level. What, we asked, is the full range of "education" that is really transpiring in our efforts at biblical interpretation?

### Arminta Fox

From the beginning, this seminar with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza challenged me to actively engage my own learning. I was expected to read, reflect on the reading, formulate my own thoughts, and then contribute those thoughts to group discussions and ultimately to the larger project of the seminar: to democratize biblical studies. These expectations may seem fairly straightforward, but in reality trusting in one's own voice can be difficult when one is accustomed to the aggressive

ripping apart of arguments that is standard in the field. Fear of such attacks keeps scholars from taking risks with ideas and scholarship. In such a stifling of creativity, the kyriarchal system undermines the field of biblical studies, and perhaps the broader educational system, as my colleague John Falcone suggests. The privileged professional lives of a few scholars are maintained through the oppression of many others.

Both in our class together and in this book, Schüssler Fiorenza pushed the limits of biblical studies scholarship by calling attention to the ways in which kyriarchy rears its ugly head in graduate education. The previous chapters are a testament to the work that needs to be done to democratize biblical studies. Schüssler Fiorenza works toward this goal in several ways: she names the problems, describes their contexts, envisions solutions, and works toward those solutions in a collaborative model. I was fortunate to be a part of such a collaborative effort as a student in her course. In this capacity, I also had to recognize the problems in the educational system and find ways to be a fully engaged, democratic participant in the field, beginning with our class. Experiencing Schüssler Fiorenza's theories in the classroom environment allowed me to see the impacts of this kyriarchal system on my own academic work.

Our first written assignment for the seminar was a reflection on our goals and the ways we envisioned our background knowledge contributing to our discussions. For the latter, I listed my background in psychology and trauma studies, which I thought might be helpful in facilitating discussions. Realistically, I was not sure how this background could be of any real use in a course on biblical studies education. However, I would soon realize that this previous work and knowledge was important in large part because it was *not* a reproduction of the skills acquired in biblical studies. Additionally, rather than trusting in my own thoughts, I searched the work of my classmates for clues in formulating my own goals. Once again I was drawing from a system that promotes the reproduction of previous scholarship. Thus one of my first projects became learning to rely on myself and formulate my own voice, which could then contribute to the community.

One way in which Schüssler Fiorenza encouraged us to be self-reflective was by asking us to keep a portfolio of our experiences with the course. This portfolio would include the first assignment of our individual learning goals, our responses to each chapter of the book, the ways in which each reading and class session helped us to think about our final papers, and our final reflections. I decided that I would

also keep notes regarding my class preparation and participation. These notes reflect my initial difficulty in relying on my own ideas. During a particularly difficult night when I was attempting to write a response, I typed out my anxieties in the hopes of moving past them and later learning from them. Most of my thoughts involved fears that my posting on the Web site would not meet the standards set by my fellow classmates. I was worried about what they would think of me if I failed to understand part of the reading, or if the language I used was not as technical or theoretical as the language of others. After recording my frustrations and fears, I wrote out thoughts to encourage myself again and to get through the assignment. By focusing on the knowledge and skills I knew I possessed, I was able to recognize that my contribution was unique and important. This was true even when I had to be vulnerable by showing that I did not know everything, or when I needed to encourage myself to overcome my fears that I knew nothing.

In this seminar, I had to trust that it was OK to engage the material and contribute my voice. In other words, I had to form the “I” from the feminist TCI model for myself. Once I had done so, I was able to concentrate on the group, the “We.” As a group, we were not as effective at the beginning of the semester, when many of us were still learning to formulate and trust in our own voices. The twofold nature of responses—first, posting responses on the course Web site, and second, discussing materials in class—allowed time for us to reflect on the course materials; we formulated both the “I” and the “We” as we responded individually and together. Because of our various backgrounds, we had different strengths and weaknesses. In working together, we had the opportunity to learn from the experiential knowledge of each class member rather than replicate the same knowledge separately in order to be judged and graded on our ability to fit a mold. By the second half of the semester, I found that as a group we were able to accomplish much more than we could have accomplished individually.

Coming from a background in psychology and counseling, my reflections and contributions often centered on the formation and maintenance of the communities of our classroom, our field, and our world. In my final paper, I explored the ways in which an understanding of the traumatic aspects of biblical studies can provide new avenues for envisioning the transformation/healing process of democratizing biblical studies. In addition to drawing on my experiential knowledge, this paper came out of my reflections on the course materials and class discussions. Drawing from Schüssler Fiorenza’s analysis of kyriarchy in

biblical studies education and her proposed “I,” “WE,” “IT,” “Globe” pedagogical model, I explored these concepts in terms of the trauma and recovery processes that impact our learning communities. I found that many people in the field of biblical studies suffer from institutionalized trauma, which must be addressed proactively in the classroom.

Continuing the idea of collaborative learning, Schüssler Fiorenza paired us together, based on our interests. My partner and I frequently met over coffee and lunch to discuss the course materials and our final papers. This partnership was another way in which we explored the use of our own voices in working toward the goals of the course. It was helpful to have honest feedback, which gave me encouragement and constructive criticism. Additionally, I enjoyed the opportunity to engage the materials of the course and my own voice in my encouragement and critiques of my partner’s work. Once we had written our first drafts, our partners and other classmates offered their responses. This editing process enabled us to engage the material in nine different ways rather than simply through the professor, or the teaching fellow, as in other classes.

By organizing this seminar in such a way, Schüssler Fiorenza allowed us to experience many of the arguments she makes in this book. In my struggle to write, I realized that I was afraid to express myself and to fully engage the material because of the competitive nature that I had observed in the academic setting. Contrasting my experiences of this seminar with others I have taken, I learned that the current system is constructed in a way that does not encourage students to learn from each other. This is a great loss to the field.

Through my own and others’ papers, I saw firsthand the importance of interdisciplinary work and diverse interests that can expand our understanding of course materials. For example, by allowing my previous work with trauma, recovery processes, and Quaker pedagogical principles to inform my experience of the course, I was able to see the trauma present in biblical studies education and to envision ways for a healing transformation. By challenging me to engage my own learning, this course has encouraged me to produce meaningful scholarship that has power in its interdisciplinary and diverse character. Articulating this project with my own background ensures that it is both personally meaningful and bears integrity. Most importantly, learning about the need to democratize biblical studies in such an experiential and hands-on way equipped me with the tools and motivations to democratize biblical studies in my future work.

## Jason Bachand

Reflecting upon my initial learning goals and the knowledge I hoped to acquire from this course, it is clear that much has changed. In formulating my learning plan, I began with a distinctively third-paradigm perspective, drawing on a recent field study experience in India and, specifically, encounters with Dalit (oppressed) Christians. I spoke of what liberation theology does for the Dalits, using the language of James Cone in citing the “preferential option for the poor.” Yet even without much foreknowledge of the emerging fourth paradigm, I stated that “no system of belief operates beyond the influence of context, and every category of faith begins with an emotional (and to a much lesser extent, intellectual) assent to preconditioned assumptions.” At the time I had only this vague understanding of location with which to engage the hermeneutical task. I would soon see what progress has been made in the fourth paradigm toward raising consciousness about how sociopolitical location forms the biases and presumptions of biblical and academic study.

At the onset it was my intention to seek a hermeneutic of biblical studies derived from Dalit liberation theology and the Hindu concept of *darśan* (seeing the divine image). Now, I understand how such a hermeneutic, while perhaps intellectually or spiritually interesting, could have become yet another piece of an already fragmented field of study. My own presuppositions and biases would be manifested as a paradigm seeking legitimacy through kyriarchy. Whether or not I would have avoided the pitfalls of imperialist thinking—hoping to show that my paradigm was more humane, compassionate, logical, or “true” than others—cannot be certain. What I believe to be true now, however, is that a radical democratic space in biblical studies will not be created via the introduction of additional, competing hermeneutics. As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has demonstrated in this book, new voices and old voices engaging in equal dialogue toward genuine understanding are the means needed to arrive at that end. Ultimately the gradual realization of my own imperialist modes of thought dramatically altered my learning goals, which were, I must concede in hindsight, decidedly biased toward justifying my own views at the expense of others. After all, it is this “critical” pedagogy that dominates in the academy, not just in divinity schools and seminaries, but also in many fields of inquiry across public and private institutions. Prior to this course, the “banking model” or the “master-disciple” models were the only pedagogies I had encountered in any teaching environment.

I came into class feeling very comfortable as self-identified liberationist with a disdain for the fundamentalist variety of first-paradigm thinking. I introduced myself in class as a “proud enemy of the religious right.” To say that I was oblivious to my own location is a bit of an understatement. I hadn’t previously turned the hermeneutical lens inward, to become aware that the “value-free” knowledge I proudly claimed from the second-paradigm, and liberationist convictions drawn from the third, had become a tool of self-repeating dominance. In claiming a superior or “better” perspective, I was fully engaged in the perpetuation of kyriarchy.

At the close of the semester, I still believed in liberation theology’s objectives, and my beliefs about the Bible remain greatly informed by the historical-critical perspective. But I’m also reminded, even as I seek to flourish in my space and be guided by my own understanding of the divine, to be self-aware and articulate about why I believe as I do. The realization that no perspective on the Bible is value-free tempers my theological thinking and humbles my sometimes zealous passion for justice. My respect for different epistemologies runs deeper, and I am fully convinced that complex thought is defined in part by the ability to hold many ways of knowing in an appreciative, uncritical light.

Progressing through this seminar, together, I have been compelled to consider the sociological and political history that formed my paradigmatic prejudice. I began the class ready to stake out my place in the landscape of biblical studies, and discovered instead that I never really knew where I was in the first place—or why. It was rather like the story from the Upanishads of ten students, out on a walk in the forest, who in the course of their promenade had to cross a river. The leader of the students attempted to count to make sure all were present after the crossing, only to repeatedly come up one short. Several students helpfully counted and each in turn came up one person short. At length, the group came to the sad conclusion that one of them must have been lost in the current during the crossing, until a wise man passing by pointed out to the group that each counter had failed to include oneself in the reckoning! This, perhaps, is the folly of any reductionist epistemology of biblical studies, that in seeking to create a more pure, a more accurate, or even a more sacred reading of Scripture, we invariably fail to count ourselves, and our ancillary prejudices, in the theologies we create.

Thus, I have acquired a sense of urgency regarding the need to engage all paradigms from time to time as I journey through life academically and as a spiritual seeker. I’m moving forward, too, with an

appreciation for the fourth paradigm's hermeneutic of location, that it is indeed OK to proudly locate oneself in a paradigm of choice within biblical studies, provided that determination is made honestly and with a critical self-regard (always making sure, you could say, to include oneself in the count!).

In addition to stating some learning objectives for the seminar, we were asked at the onset to develop an analytical self-matrix. I stated that my analytic would "hopefully come from participation and mutual seeking with all of the members of this class. We bring a wealth of experience, joys, pain, knowledge, and wisdom to this seminar, and from that tapestry I hope to draw inspiration and personal/professional development." Perhaps again reflecting a third paradigm perspective, I wanted my analytic to be a hermeneutic of the collective stories of our class, and I remain committed to this idea. The Theme-Centered Interaction model of didactics that we used as a class brought out, at least for me, a little bit of the *trauma* that comes with graduate studies, in biblical studies specifically.

My colleague, Armint Fox, discussed trauma in her paper and a bit in the previous reflection, and I want to thank her for giving me that word and a broader vocabulary to speak of one product of kyriarchy in academic study. We wrestled with our own pain in our sessions and in doing so understood, in a real way, why biblical studies and educational theory are in need of a new democratic vision. For me, faith and the study of it are ultimately about people and what their convictions do for them. How does belief help or harm? How is it used for both healing and abuse? For others, of course, it's about discerning the other way: out of the self, through the Bible, and toward God. I am less convinced that the Bible has as much to say about God as it does about our own profound fears and needs. I'm willing to own that as one bias I have in biblical studies. Yet I also believe, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza does, that biblical studies needs a department of "public health" to examine how our beliefs about the Bible are formed, sustained, and—hopefully—challenged from time to time.

From the point of view of my own self-analytic, I feel that the class was an unqualified success. The work we've done together pushed me outside of my own narrow vision. Though I'm sure I originally envisioned a dialogue that would edify my profession and spiritual identity, the rhetorical-emancipatory analytic put to use in class worked as it should work, and my beliefs were problematized rather than justified. I learned to think differently about both knowledge itself and the way it

is disseminated. I had to step outside of my own confidence. My experience, though by no means normative, might speak to other aspirants of a democratic space in biblical studies or other fields of inquiry, and sincerely wish that others might be blessed with the same opportunities for self-awareness and growth that Schüssler Fiorenza has proposed in this book.

I have to confess, however, that this class made me very anxious from the onset. Try as I might to be “cool” about taking a class at Harvard with Schüssler Fiorenza, it took me several weeks to get over the sheer terror of, well, taking a class at Harvard with Schüssler Fiorenza. Coming from Andover-Newton to Harvard Divinity School each week felt like an astronomical shift in worlds. The ethos of Harvard—its history, its reputation—is weighty, to say the least, and I felt that pressure each week. I was unsure: Would I be accepted here? Would I be viewed as inferior since I come from an institution with nowhere near the renown of Harvard? I wanted to be valued and respected, to know that my academic experience and personal history mattered. Every week I felt the terror of operating under kyriarchy: What if I got a poor grade in a course at Harvard? Wouldn’t that surely be a blow to my professional aspirations? What would my classmates think of me?

This subjective experience of trauma helped me to quickly appreciate what Elisabeth is calling for in this book. My initial fears were allayed with time and the gradual understanding that our class sought to be different. Yet that anxiety gave me an appreciation of *why* we need a radical democratic space in biblical studies—in the academy, church, and public. I’m a very privileged white, male, middle-class student pursuing graduate education, and in a wider perspective my trauma is quite negligible. How much more urgent is a democratic space for those more severely impacted by biblical texts, the traditions and prejudices around them, and the very practical way they are often implemented? How much more urgent is radical democratic space for voices long silenced, for those whose abuse and terror is legitimized by biblical authority?

And yet how important, too, is a radical space for the voices of peace and compassion given poetry and grace by the Bible. How important the democratic space for the millions who call it life’s instruction book, and their stories of faith and joy. We need to hear them, too.

I hope this exercise in self-analysis helps convey why democratizing biblical studies is a matter of healing and hope. Far from just a flourish for my CV, this seminar and Elisabeth’s book have informed my faith

and theology in ways I did not anticipate, and it is my hope that the vision of a democratic space will go with me into whatever personal and professional context I move. I imagine now what I was once unable to see: the discursive space that can create emancipation and peace not only in biblical studies but also wherever complex, integrated knowledge is sought. Thus I feel compelled to offer the prayer that Meister Eckhart wrote would be enough even if it were the only one ever spoken: “Thank you.”

### Tyler Schwaller

The seminar’s exploration of paradigms provided sites for struggle that led to intellectual and, dare I say, spiritual growth. While Jason Bachand discovered that wrestling with his position within the paradigms of biblical studies deepened his faith and theology, tussling with the notion of paradigms more generally allowed me to better articulate the variegated spaces of the discipline and the authority of the methods located therein. My prior experiences in biblical studies had tinted much of my reading and interpretation in terms of the fourth paradigm, but over the course of the semester, I came to realize that locating the specific paradigm out of which scholarship functions—recognizing the assumptions invested in the frameworks employed—is important if one is to understand the particular disciplinary language being spoken. With competence in the various paradigms, we scholars and scholars-in-training can engage one another with sensitivity toward and understanding of one another’s terms, and only then can we find meaningful points of contact for creative collaboration.

In my sophomore year as an undergraduate student, I had the rare and exciting opportunity to participate in a biblical studies class that was fashioned as a radically democratic space along the lines of that envisioned in *Democratizing Biblical Studies*. This class did not depend upon attendance requirements to enforce presence or regular examinations to ensure that students had read the materials; instead, the pedagogy of collaboration encouraged and facilitated full engagement on the part of all participants. A variety of creative educational tools were employed; yet on some days conversations would begin with the professor simply asking, “So what did you think of the readings?” Students were called upon to take responsibility for drawing out the arguments of those scholars whose work had been presented, to address the topic at hand. Through

regular reflections and discussion, class members were trained to think critically, using their learning as well as their own experiences to respond to the key issues raised in the class. Still today I can recall with specificity the readings, conversations, debates, and presentations from that semester of study; I had engaged with the material and with my colleagues so fully that the personal and academic growth was permanent. I had never learned so much or retained it so completely.

Once I had experienced just how effective collaborative education could be, I began to wonder why all professors did not employ such pedagogy. Why didn't instructors expect students to take greater responsibility for their learning? Why were students not encouraged to participate as experts—in training but still capable of critical thought and significant intellectual contribution? Interested in biblical studies and passionate about education, I started to imagine how I might, in my own future classrooms, follow the example of the radically democratic model for learning that I had come to appreciate. Now as a master of divinity student at Harvard Divinity School, I have been in a small but noteworthy number of classes in which the professors have explicitly identified their pedagogical approach as informed by frameworks and methodologies that decenter traditional hegemonic methods of education. However, I am not convinced that many ever realize the radical notion of a democratic space; discussion sections, at their best, theoretically establish a forum of many voices, but most often the master-disciple model is the reality. Why is it that graduate education in biblical studies remains essentially unchanged even with increasing recognition that the dominant pedagogical practices are problematic and not necessarily the best?

With these questions in mind, I was thrilled when I saw that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza was offering a seminar titled "Democratizing Biblical Studies" to explore these very pedagogical issues pertinent to the field. The seminar provided an opportunity to once again experience a collaborative classroom, and the insights into the discipline, explored through the diverse perspectives within the group, provided the tools to more fully understand and reflect upon the field so as to better consider its transformation. In my initial seminar reflection paper, I stated my hope "to better articulate the malestream history of biblical studies that has excluded voices from the margins, and to more thoroughly understand the rhetoric that has functioned in both institutions to maintain dominance of the elite." Most helpful in this regard was Schüssler Fiorenza's delineation of the paradigms that constitute biblical studies.

I found this particularly useful since it allowed me personally to more specifically consider what is at stake in scholarly work.

I have had the benefit of learning with scholars who have primarily located themselves within the third and fourth paradigms, and so my default assumption is to read texts with multiple meanings that can lend themselves toward the work of justice. I recall one time in an undergraduate class when the professor asked if a certain reading would be considered feminist. I answered affirmatively because I had read the ends to which the argument could be taken as supporting feminist claims. However, the author himself never identified as a feminist, nor did he state that he had feminist interests in mind; his work on its own did not seek to achieve the kind of feminist vision of equality that I had pushed it toward. Through the work of the seminar, I now would be able to name the scholarship as a third-paradigm effort at destabilizing traditional interpretations.

Over the course of the semester, I wrestled with the question “Does it really matter if one is able to locate the paradigm out of which scholarship functions?” In light of previous experience and the competence gained through this seminar, I ultimately came away answering affirmatively. I find myself invested in the fourth paradigm’s struggle for justice, but not every scholarship that can be employed in efforts for equality works toward justice on its own. Though it is possible to use what is produced within another paradigm in fourth-paradigm efforts, it would be a mistake to conflate paradigms. By thinking explicitly about the frameworks and methods behind scholarship, it is possible to recognize where different approaches lead to distinct results. While third-paradigm work might helpfully destabilize traditional assumptions and create space for new meanings to occur, it does not necessarily seek justice. In fact, a problem encountered in the seminar is that the third paradigm’s proliferation of interpretive possibilities denies the opportunity for subjugated peoples to name themselves as subjects and envision the truth of an alternative reality. An understanding of the paradigms prepares scholars to ask specific questions that can draw out the frameworks and approaches of particular work. In recognizing the starting points of scholarship, it is possible to acknowledge and appreciate parallels and to challenge and engage in the spaces where divergence occurs. For those in the fourth paradigm, only with the realization that work stops short of justice can there be a call forward.

Some of the most challenging and yet profound moments of the seminar came in the recognition that people were approaching a

question or issue out of divergent paradigms. Through these experiences, I realized that even when the goals are similar, the authority invested in a particular paradigm can unintentionally lead to exclusion of other thoughts and ideas. Exclusivity comes in that paradigms are generally conceived as able to replace other competing approaches; their methods are constructed as authoritative. The trouble in communicating across different paradigms is that what is authoritative for some is not necessarily authoritative for others. Failure to recognize foundational differences results in an inability to address people on terms that are meaningful to them. Within the seminar, there was often a shared commitment to justice, and the spirit of collaboration meant giving full consideration to different voices. We learned, though, that the methods toward justice sometimes differed, and understanding the paradigm from which a person worked was necessary in order to know what was authoritative to that person. By identifying individual frameworks and approaches, we could pinpoint commonalities, as well as respect the values at the heart of another's work without being immediately dismissive or ultimately exclusive.

I imagine that a question that arose at times during the seminar will be asked in response to the book: "What does a transformed biblical studies look like? How *exactly* can collaboration occur?" This is the unspoken challenge of Schüssler Fiorenza's work. Deconstruction is the easy part. Reconstruction requires imagination. Though we envisioned possible manifestations of a radical democratic space, the seminar realized that for any scholar to singularly establish concrete steps and to paint a clear picture of the destination would be to re-create a kind of hegemony. To realize a collaborative discipline, the field must actually practice organic, spontaneous, dynamic, thoughtful, *creative* collaboration. The United States educational system—from primary to graduate school—teaches that pedagogy is a road map to be followed. Passage from one point to the next depends upon ability to prove that one has acquired the prescribed skills for moving forward. Even when desiring to imagine something different, it is an ingrained instinct to expect clear expectations. This is why some professors state that their pedagogy is informed by a nontraditional philosophy, and yet their classes look only vaguely nontraditional. To transform biblical studies, scholars will have to resist the urge to seek or develop concrete answers and instead harness their imaginative energies, being wildly creative as they produce new approaches to graduate education. The operative word in fashioning a radical democratic space for biblical studies

is *practice*. The seminar was a practice in collaboration, in identifying different frameworks and valuing different approaches while working together around a common set of issues and questions. The result was a proliferation of ideas for transforming biblical studies, some reflected upon in this metalogue, others presented in papers posted online, and more spoken and still unspoken. What was practiced for a semester in the seminar, this book seeks to inspire in order that even more alternatives to malestream educational approaches might spring up. With its thorough explication of the problems, resources for reconceptualizing the discipline, and clear call to take up the dynamic forces of imagination and creativity, *Democratizing Biblical Studies* makes a significant contribution to the field and has the potential to move conversation forward and inspire pedagogical innovation.

### Elizabeth Gish

I was drawn into biblical studies because I saw how much the Bible matters to people, and how profoundly biblical interpretation shapes our world today. Biblical stories and verses bring comfort to us in our darkest moments, inspire us to do better, and urge us to live a life filled with love and hope. As John Falcone notes in his roundtable contribution, biblical interpretation has the potential to support communities in “resistance and liberation, for both survival and transformation.” At the same time, the Bible has been used to do great harm, and it continues to be used to justify violence and oppression. Its stories are used to condemn and judge; its verses are wielded like swords. I am intrigued by a collection of texts that hold such different meanings for such a wide range of people across cultures, continents, and centuries—intrigued that these texts have been and remain the source of much good, and at the same time, immense harm. Ultimately, my interest in biblical studies comes not from the perspective of a detached observer or curious interloper, but rather from my position as a feminist, scholar, and ordination candidate committed to the ways that we might transform our faith communities and, ultimately, our world. How can we bend the arc of history toward justice and equality? And what can we discern from ancient texts about the ways that faith communities have negotiated the challenges of living together with difficult questions, conflicting theologies and ideologies, and structures of kyriarchy over many centuries?

While these questions seem so pressing to me, and as I have learned from our class, also drive others' interests in biblical studies, Schüssler Fiorenza eloquently outlines for her readers the ways that the dominant approaches to biblical studies rarely attend to the role that biblical texts continue to play in shaping our world. Rather, the discipline is typically understood and practiced as a "value-neutral" science, where the emphasis is on acquiring the proper knowledge and language skills, and arriving at the best determination of *the* right theological or historical meaning of the text. Attention to the ways that the Bible is understood and used today is often, at best, left for footnotes. At worst (and most typically), it is not addressed at all.

Thus, our seminar, "Democratizing Biblical Studies," and engagement with Schüssler Fiorenza's book with the same title, presented a unique opportunity not only to think about the ways that biblical studies might be transformed as a discipline, but also to begin to frame research questions that might be possible within a transformed field. How might we begin to think about and enact biblical studies as a republic of many voices where scholars, students, the public, and faithful people can reflect together about the public and personal meanings of the biblical texts?

My goals for the class centered on exploring the ways to invite conservative communities situated in the first paradigm into new ways of reading the Bible that are more radically democratic and emancipatory. Although my religious background and experiences are rather heterogeneous, an important part of my childhood and adolescent years was influenced by conservative parts of the religious-theological-scriptural paradigm. This is no longer my spiritual or academic home, but I have remained committed to thinking about ways that biblical studies, as an academic discipline, can speak to the concerns of those who understand the Bible as sacred Scripture and believe that biblical texts represent the revealed, authoritative Word of G\*d. How can we shape a republic of many voices that is truly democratic, creating safe space at the table for a range of voices across all of the paradigms?

Throughout our time together in class, some key themes emerged that helped me to better clarify my approach to this question. One of central issues we returned to repeatedly was David Damrosch's reminder in *We Scholars* that "any proposal for reform must locate itself between two poles: a change should be as substantial as possible while realizable in a significant number of situations." While taking time to think about how things *should be* is central to any reform project, another

important part of our work focused on *how* to get there. What is possible in both the short and long term? Or as Tyler Schwaller asks in his roundtable contribution, “How *exactly* can collaboration occur?”

Through our discussions in class and in reading and providing feedback on the research of my classmates, three themes emerged that helped me to move closer to my goal of articulating realizable approaches to inviting more conservative parts of the first paradigm into ways of reading the Bible that are radically democratic and emancipatory.

First, I came to better appreciate the need to articulate the current challenges that biblical studies faces as a field, particularly from the perspective of the fourth paradigm, which understands biblical studies in ethical, rhetorical, political, cultural, emancipatory terms and biblical studies scholars as transformative, public intellectuals working toward a more just and equal world. In my own desire for change and action, grounded in the fourth paradigm, I can be too hasty in wanting to move from thinking and discussing to taking action. Yet it was very helpful for me to take the time, with the class, to discuss further and better articulate the issues at hand before making suggestions about what should be *done*. This ultimately helped to shape my class project, which emphasized the value of conversation and critical engagement around difficult questions as a key part of reform.

Following this, our work together throughout the class helped to clarify the ways that change and reform do not hinge only on better explaining our own perspective well enough to others or making the case for our position clearly enough. We must also be engaged more holistically: with our bodily presence and our emotions. Many inhabit the place in their particular biblical studies paradigm not only intellectually or cognitively, but also emotionally and bodily, and in seeking change we must find ways to better take this into account.

Finally, while much of my focus remains on opening up space for change within the conservative parts of the religious-theological-scriptural paradigm, our work in this class helped me to better recognize the way that both liberal and conservative parts of all the paradigms struggle (or rather, should struggle) with the ways that they perpetuate kyriarchal structures. The manifestation of kyriarchy is perhaps most overt in conservative parts of the first paradigm, but in some senses, it makes such kyriarchal structures easier to identify and, thus, address. In the other paradigms, particularly liberal parts, the kyriarchal structures are often more covert. So while lip service may be given to equality or feminism, and while overtly racist language may not be used, the

structures of marginalization and oppression are still quite present. It seems to me that often it is more difficult to address manifestations of kyriarchy in contexts where people fancy themselves liberal, and somehow immune to sexism, racism, heterosexism, and classism. Thus I have been challenged to broaden my perspective in thinking about the ways that kyriarchal structures can be addressed throughout the various paradigms in biblical studies, and to remain attentive to the ways that I am implicated in the perpetuation of such structures. I have been moved to better address how we might dismantle the kyriarchal pyramid throughout biblical studies, which has, I believe, profound implications for the wider world that the discipline inevitably impacts.

Ultimately our work together in this course, and engagement with Schüssler Fiorenza's book, has helped me to be clearer about the ways that democratizing biblical studies is not "just" about reforming the way that biblical studies is taught to future scholars and future ministers, but that it has sweeping implications for the ways that we, as a society—as a democracy—live our lives, build our worlds, and nurture and create intellectual and faith communities.

### Hannah Hofheinz

What would it be like to participate in a democratizing, emancipatory form of graduate education? How might this be envisioned? What would be the qualities of a radical democratic learning space? What pedagogical, personal, and intellectual benefits would be gained through a republic of many voices? What elements are required to achieve this liberative space? What persisting and transient systems and structures currently hinder, challenge, or simply refuse this type of inclusive learning? What systems and structures cry out for its realization? What practices draw together the learning communities in which I participate now and in the future? How, as a full person—thinking, heart-beating, interacting, learning, growing person—am I implicated, encouraged, challenged, and responsible for the transformative production of democratizing dynamic knowledge?

This course opened the door for me to step beyond the threshold of my assumed pedagogical practices and internalized educational experiences. With the seminar as my guide, I walked into a space shaped by these conscious and critical questions, a space that enveloped me in a rich, diverse, and deep collection of theoretical and human resources

for life-affirming educational models. As demonstrated in the reflections above, this space, on the one hand, offered an intimate opportunity for self-reflection and coming to consciousness even as, on the other hand, it pushed us outward into the academy and world. It is a space that, as Elizabeth Gish stated, undeniably “has sweeping implications for the ways that we live our lives.”

As a student in theology, I entered into this seminar, “Democratizing Biblical Studies,” with a series of assumptions, questions, and curiosities. I assumed that I would engage with a substantive body of (hopefully) enlightening information that (hopefully) I would be expected to critically integrate into the toolbox of theory, experience, and methods that doctoral course work is supposed to provide. Instead, I engaged in a dynamic process of collaborative learning vastly broader than the original syllabus and more dynamic than any toolbox is equipped to handle. I questioned whether my more extensive background in theology and less extensive background in biblical studies would prove sufficient. I found that I was able to beneficially offer my unique background, my driving interests, and my full self to the pursuits of the course and the learning community. In addition, the similarly unique preparations, commitments, and resources of the other participants correspondingly expanded and challenged my own. Unlike my experience in other seminars, I leave this course convinced that *each* and *every* member of our learning community uniquely contributed, challenged, and furthered my education. Should even one person have been absent, our conversations and resources would have been fundamentally different, leading in turn to different educational results. For our particular experience, I thank each member of the seminar.

This course offered a collaborative and communal performance of democratizing biblical studies, a critical praxis far exceeding the text written into Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s manuscript. As offered in the first chapter, this praxis recognizes that graduate biblical education (and graduate education in general) is accountable to (1) excellence within the academy, (2) a commitment to truth and justice within religious communities, and (3) the public ideals of human rights and democracy in society. As we progressed through the semester, I felt challenged individually and as a member of the learning community to successfully weave these three elements into a mutually informing dynamic. I attempted to meet this challenge (with variable success) by seeking to braid intellectual rigor, honesty, integrity, and accountability in the communal interactions inside the classroom and beyond—to

braid them with a willingness to dream and imagine transformation transcending any kyriarchally determined boundaries of known reality. In inventorying this experience, I wonder whether, in order to be successfully internalized, an encounter with democratizing biblical studies requires the type of performance experienced in our classroom, or whether a text alone, such as this book, can sufficiently open the richness of transformative possibility.

*Democratizing Biblical Studies* recognizes that an essential element in re-envisioning and transforming biblical studies is the delineation of the ideologies and discourses shaping the four paradigms and thus endeavors to do just that. So also, this course supported and encouraged me to self-critically and self-reflectively question the ideologies and discourses that shape my intellectual and personal interactions. The third chapter's insistence on recognizing and maintaining the essential diversity of critical perspectives within the fourth paradigm exemplified an intimate challenge to my own ability to recognize and to hold within myself the diversity of elements informing my identity as a scholar, woman, and accountable community member. Because the course was fundamentally active rather than receptive or passive, this required not just thinking and reflecting internally but also *actively practicing* how I might seek to more transparently engage through the complexity of my identity in the community of learning.

In my experience, our version of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's "circle dance" did indeed create a flourishing space of radical democratic equality. While each of us brought unique and important resources into the room, it was through our community *together*—that is, our interaction and mutual engagement in imagining the possibility of a liberative, radical-democratic model of education—that I stepped across the threshold of the established and entered into the space of new possibility. Put differently, I gained a great deal as an "I" through the "We" that we formed in our mutual commitment to imagine democratizing biblical studies. I believe that as time continues, the value that I place on our relationships and interactions will only increase, even as I learn to critique and reevaluate some of the substantive material both constituting and constituted by this course experience. The sustaining value of meaningful relationships endures change, and I do believe ours is a meaningful relationship. This is not, however, to discount the depth, breadth, and importance of the substantive knowledge gained over the last four months.

Our discussions of sexuality challenged me to better understand not only the bodiliness of biblical interpretation and the educational

enterprise, but also the ways in which the treatment of bodies in general and sexuality in particular illuminates a critical nexus of socially effective kyriarchal ideology, to be countered by a liberative model of cross-paradigm interaction in biblical studies. The insistent vocalization of experiences from the margins and of a continued silencing, dehumanizing, or ineffective inclusion of marginalized perspectives in the academy—all this required my focus on the importance of a transformed model of education for concrete and complicated lives. The seminar's direct confrontation with questions of trauma in the academy opened a space not only to weave these conceptual elements into my understanding of a re-envisioned biblical studies, but also to recognize my own position in the contexts of hurt and healing.

Throughout the semester, our work reinforced the importance of remembering the strength of theological authority and conservative, fundamentalist, and liberal religious conviction to either hinder or help with transformation through dialogue and interaction. I was pragmatically and consistently challenged to attend to forms of biblical studies outside of the academy, and to push the conversation into worldly precision, practicality, and clarity. These challenges illuminated how often I wrongly naturalize an imprecise generality about which I am myself unclear. When I was stuck and couldn't quite figure out how to formulate a question, a quiet yet strong voice would arise from somewhere in the room to pinpoint the issue. Collaboration was an essential element in my learning, and I am endlessly grateful. Most important, the learning facilitated by democratizing biblical studies is never simply for learning's sake. The dynamic and persistent passion for justice that overflowed in our seminar room rightly challenged me to ensure that my engagement with our materials moved beyond theory and intellectual engagement. No less than life itself is at stake in this pursuit. Desire and love are immediately and essentially involved in the re-envisioning of biblical studies.