

**Feminist Biblical Interpretation and Theological Education  
for Future Ordinands in the United Methodist Church  
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**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In their book *Christian Identity and Theological Education*, Joseph C. Hough and John B. Cobb claim that the primary mission of theological education is to offer professional education for students to become practical Christian thinkers and reflective Christian practitioners or, in other words, to become clergy who are practical theologians.<sup>1</sup> Clergy as practical Christian thinkers should be able to help others relate to the world from Christian perspectives and through theological reflection. Reflective Christian practitioners should be involved in conversations with others as they are seeking the revelation of God in their many different experiences with people so that they will reflect theologically as they engage themselves in ministry. Hough and Cobb are convinced that the correlation of all theological studies with practical studies is essential in order to avoid dissonance between the role of the Master (Biblical, systematical, and historical studies) and that of the Manager (clerical skills and practices in ministry) in theological education.<sup>2</sup> Their colleague Edwin Farley has also asserted that the accomplishment of unity among the disciplines in theological studies depends on the recovery of *theologia*, which is the continual theological reflection of the self in relation to concrete historical, social, cultural, and political contexts. He urges us to relocate practical theology in a setting broader than that for educating clergy so that theological thinking will engage clergy and laity in the interpretation of situations.

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<sup>1</sup> John C. Hough and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico, CA: Scholarly Press, 1985), 81-94.

<sup>2</sup> John C. Hough and John B. Cobb, Jr., 17.

This endeavor would nurture the newly emergent generations of church leaders, especially ordained clergy. In increasingly diverse contexts, theological institutions need to provide a constructive theological education that is both sharpened by the critical analysis of biblical interpretations and shaped by human experiences. As a practical theologian John Wesley responded to the rapid ecclesial, cultural, social, and economic shifts of his time by paying more attention to particular human experiences, such as poverty, child labor, slavery, and education, and to the accountability of discipleship. Wesley challenged the Church to provide an alternate vision of cultural resistance and solidarity, especially among the oppressed and disadvantaged. According to Wesley's description of this vision, women are certainly a socially, culturally, and politically marginalized group.

Based on the importance of the unity of theoretical theological studies and Christian practices through theological reflection, which lies at the core of practical theology, this study explores a new mode of seminary education in biblical studies, that is, a mode of education that locates critical theological reflections and meanings in changing contexts: How can seminaries equip younger generations of ordinands, through biblical studies, to fulfill their calling to serve the needs of the present age that demands gender inclusivity in its theology and practice? This study seeks to develop a critical hermeneutics that highlights how women's social locations shape their ecclesial ideas and practices and how these ideas and practices can be taught in theological education. A review of the status of women in ministry in the United Methodist Church will provide a point of departure for this discussion. To be faithful to the prevailing cultural pluralism that demands diverse clerical leadership practices, it is necessary to reformulate theological education curriculum to keep the integrity of theological studies based on the denominational commitment of ecclesial inclusiveness. Including women's perspectives in

biblical interpretation is an effort to form an inclusive Christian community. In this study, to be “inclusive” means to accept gender, racial/ethnic, and cultural differences as God’s gifts to be embraced and celebrated. To be an inclusive faith community means openness, acceptance, and support of the total involvement of all persons at every level of ministry, including theological study, regardless of gender, race, ethnic background, economic condition or national origin.<sup>3</sup>

The Book of Discipline, the Social Principles, and the Board of Ordained Ministry Handbook all refer to this inclusiveness. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church states that “Both men and women are included in all provisions of the Discipline that refer to the ordained ministry”<sup>2</sup> The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church also support the rights of women:

We affirm women and men to be equal in every aspect of their common life. Therefore, we need to urge that every effort be made to eliminate sex-role stereotypes in activity and portrayal of family life and in all aspects of voluntary and compensatory participation in the Church and society. We affirm the right of women to equal treatment in employment, responsibility, promotion, and compensation. We affirm the importance of women in decision-making positions at all levels of church life and urge such bodies to guarantee their presence through policies of employment and recruitment.<sup>4</sup>

The United Methodist Church Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) Handbook, issued for the years 2000-2004 by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry,<sup>5</sup> states that “Everyone involved in the candidacy program should be trained regarding issues of women in ministry.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Discipline* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004), 22, 105.

<sup>2</sup> A footnote is needed for this quote.

<sup>4</sup> *The Book of Discipline*, 107.

<sup>5</sup> The General Board of Higher Education and Mission (GBHEM) of the United Methodist Church prepares and assists people to fulfill their ordained ministries, and provides general oversight for campus ministries and institutions of higher education. It leads the denomination in the recruitment, preparation, nurturing, education, and support of Christian leaders—lay and clergy—for the mission of Christ in the world. Its programs include training, consultation, research, and publications for all of its constituencies.

Since mentors will influence and provide guidance to candidates, such issues should be an important aspect of training of mentors.”<sup>6</sup>

However, in reality, the dissonance between these egalitarian ideals and the kyriocentric<sup>7</sup> practices of the Church create disharmony and dysfunctional stratification, even among clergy. This dissonance means that the policies and the practices in the United Methodist Church do not coincide with each other. Paula Nesbitt has emphasized that the first step toward the transformation from within is the recognition of discrepancies between policies and Christian values, discrepancies that diminish women’s contributions and participation in Church leadership.<sup>8</sup> Edward Lehman called upon male clergy and denominational administrators to educate lay members about validating clergywomen’s calls to ministry. Bishops’ Cabinets, whose members encourage the training of committees on pastor/staff-parish relations, should provide these committees information that women are an accepted part of the leadership of the United Methodist Church, including ordained ministry. Also, the Board of Higher Education and Ministry should require the members of the Board of Ordained Ministry and all other personnel to seek specific training to understand the issues facing women in ministry and the church. Lehman indicates that other social entities do a better job implementing their values of equal opportunity for women and men in their constituencies than churches do. He contends that discrimination against women in the church is incompatible with core Judeo-Christian values of

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<sup>6</sup> *The United Methodist Church Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) Handbook 2000-2004* (Nashville: The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001). *Kyriarchy* is a neologism coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. The term, derived from Greek, seeks to redefine the analytic category of patriarchy in terms of a multiplicative intersecting pyramidal system of intersecting structures of domination over women and other men. This term extends the concept of oppression over patriarchy since, for example, African-American men do not rule over Caucasian women in the U.S. social structure.

<sup>8</sup> Paula Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 173.

justice, freedom, and other-centered love.<sup>9</sup> His observations validate the importance of providing biblical interpretations from different perspectives in the discipline of biblical studies in our seminaries in order to widen perspectives on God's people and to broaden visions of their places in creation.

Strategies for how each seminary can implement the commitment towards creating an inclusive Christian community should be intentionally made. I suggest that one way is for each seminary to require students seeking ordination to take a comprehensive feminist<sup>10</sup> biblical interpretation course.

## **B. METHODOLOGY OF THE PROJECT**

As a case in point, this study will examine why requiring a feminist biblical interpretation course for all ordinands in the United Methodist Church could be one practical method to reduce the dissonance between policy and practices related to gender inclusivity in theological education as the Church responds to the present context. First of all, a description of the practices of the Church related to clergywomen will provide the status of women's leadership in the United Methodist Church. The empirical studies on clergywomen and stratification factors within the United Methodist Church, such as parish ministry, role strain, salary, race/ethnicity, and appointment, will be explored in this section.

Description of the curriculums in the thirteen United Methodist theological seminaries will provide insights into the reality of theological education since this description will aim to include courses pertaining to women's theological perspectives in biblical studies. This description will lead us to theologically engage in evaluating whether the present theological

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Lehman, Jr., *Pulpit & Pew: Women's Path into Ministry: Six Major Studies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Divinity School, Fall 2002), 42.

<sup>10</sup> The term "feminist" in this paper includes Caucasian women's perspectives, womanist perspectives, and other racial/ethnic women's perspectives.

curriculum is responding to the needs of the constituency whom ordinands will serve and whether seminary education is responding to the plural and complex cultural contexts of the present age.

Theological reflections on the above findings will be especially based on Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's theories on feminist hermeneutical methods. The problems of pedagogical epistemology and communication that we observe in theological education will lead us to discuss how we ought to prioritize a rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm as a method for interpreting biblical texts from cultural, ethical, and sociological perspectives. This examination will lead to strategic recommendations on the educational process, ones that use feminist biblical interpretation in biblical studies in the curriculum for theological education.

## **II. REVIEW OF THE STATUS AND PRACTICES OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH RELATED TO WOMEN IN MINISTRY**

### **A. STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Liberalism and socialism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have raised the consciousness that class, race, and gender are social constructs. This understanding propelled women's claims to be cultural agents and theological subjects.

According to the gender information of the United Methodist Church General Council on Finance and Ministry in June 2007, from a total of 6.8 million members in the United States, 3.86 million are women and 2.94 million are men. These statistics show that women comprise about 56 to 57% of the membership in the United States.<sup>11</sup> The 2004 Statistical Review of the United Methodist Church reports that among 8,141,099 lay members in the United States,

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<sup>11</sup> Discussion with Scott Brewer, Director, Office of Analysis and Research, General Council on Finance and Administration of The United Methodist Church, June 29, 2007. Brewer provided this information as a response to my inquiry.

235,709 are members of United Methodist Men and 765,724 are United Methodist Women.<sup>12</sup>

The number of United Methodist Women has more than tripled from 2000 to 2003 in comparison to the membership of United Methodist Men.

Edward Lehman argues that women's ordination is one of the most significant recent developments in American religion, fostering change in churchgoers' attitudes toward women in leadership and expanding the concept of ministry beyond the local congregation.<sup>13</sup> The 1956 General Conference of the Methodist Church declared that "women are eligible for all orders of the ministry and full conference membership."<sup>14</sup> In 1968, women's clergy rights were affirmed at the conference that united the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church, two former entities of the United Methodist Church. In 1976 the General Conference established the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) as a standing commission to deal with discrimination against women at all levels of the denomination and to challenge the Church to commit to the full participation of women in the life and mission of the church.

In 1980 the United Methodist Church elected its first woman bishop, Marjorie Matthews, and in 1984, the United Methodist Church elected the first African America woman bishop, Leotine T. C. Kelly. During the 1990s, the number of women serving as local church pastors increased by about two hundred a year.<sup>15</sup> As of 2005, more than half of the Annual Conferences had 19% or more clergywomen among their total number of clergy. Eight percent (19) of all

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<sup>12</sup> "Statistical Review: THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH" (Nashville: The General Council of Finance and Administration, 2004). The 2004 Statistical Review reflects data reported by all sixty-three annual conferences for the calendar year ending December 31, 2003. (Also available at [www.gcfa.org](http://www.gcfa.org))

<sup>13</sup> Lehman., *Pulpit and Pew*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia J. Thompson, *Courageous Past Bold future* (Nashville: The Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church, 2006), 28.

<sup>15</sup> "Clergywomen," *United Methodist News Archives*, October 1, 2001, <http://archives.umc.org/umns/backgrounders.asp?mid=905&story=98A5A7A6-C462-4BDC-9FA9-DAED368F7BA1>.

bishops, active and retired, are women.<sup>16</sup>In the 2000 statistics, approximately 75% of the 595 diaconal ministers within the United Methodist Church were women, and 70 % of 882 deacons in full connection were women.<sup>17</sup> In the year 2006 the United Methodist Church celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of clergy rights for women in the Methodist tradition. At the end of 2006, there were 8,892 (27%) United Methodist clergywomen among 32,742 clergy.<sup>18</sup> As of May 2007, 1,051 of them are racial-ethnic minority women, and 128 (15%) of the elder clergywomen are serving as district superintendents.<sup>19</sup>

The number of women in the Master of Divinity, that is, the M. Div. degree program at the thirteen United Methodist seminaries makes up over 50 % of all M. Div. degree students, and yet the number of ordained women is still very low—less than 18 %.<sup>20</sup> According to the 2002–2003 Fact Book on Theological Education of the Association of Theological Schools, the number of women attending seminary for the M. Div. degree had increased from the total enrollment of 10, 070 in 2002 to the total enrollment of 31,994 in 2003, while women are the majority (55%) in master’s degree programs other than the M. Div. degree program.<sup>21</sup> The number of women enrolled in the thirteen United Methodist-related theological schools increased

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<sup>16</sup> General Commission on the Status and role of Women in the United Methodist Church. (2005). “Number of Clergywomen grows, but growth not uniform,” *The Flyer* 36 (January-March 2006): 6-7. In Michelle Fugate, *Clergywomen’s Local Church Appointments: 2006* (Nashville: The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, March 2007), <http://www.gcsrw.org>.

<sup>17</sup> The United Methodist Church has two orders in ordained ministry: deacons in full connection and elders. Deacons are ordained to a lifetime ministry of Word and Service to the community and their congregations. In this capacity, they lead the church in relating the gathered life of Christians to their ministries in the world, thus connecting the church’s worship with its service in the world. Elders are ordained to a lifetime ministry of Service, Word, Sacrament, and Order. They are authorized to preach and teach God’s word, to administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and to order the life of the church for mission and ministry.

<sup>18</sup> Fugate, “Clergywomen’s Local Church Appointments,” 1..

<sup>19</sup> , Internal Report, General Council on Finance and Administration and Office of Clergy Supervision and Accountability of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry May 2007.

<sup>20</sup> *The United Methodist Church Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) Handbook 2000-2004*, Chapter 11, 4.

<sup>21</sup> *2002-2003 Fact Book on Theological Education* (Pittsburgh: The Association of Theological Schools in The United State and Canada, 2003), <http://www.ats.edu/resources/ArchivedFactBooks.asp>.

over the men in the fall of 2000. A total of 1,483 women were enrolled in the Master of Divinity programs at the United Methodist theological schools, compared with 1,293 men in the same programs. The total number of women in all programs at the seminaries was 2,690, compared with 2,823 men in the same year.<sup>22</sup>

The changing gender composition of leadership in the Church demands that theological schools educate female and male students to function effectively as religious leaders in an increasingly pluralistic and inclusive cultural context. The above statistics show that women have made up the larger part of church membership. Their participation in clerical leadership also has consistently increased during the last fifty years. Nevertheless, stratification between men and women clergy with respect to salary and under representation of women clergy in executive church leadership positions continue.

## **B. PRACTICES OF THE CHURCH RELATED TO WOMEN IN MINISTRY**

### **1. Parish Ministry**

*The United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study*<sup>23</sup> was conducted by the Anna Howard Shaw Center at Boston University School of Theology because of the concern that female clergy were increasingly absent in local church ministry. This study reveals that the stratification process and structures originated with cultural, economic, and political inequalities based on gender, income, and race/ethnicity.

According to this study, nearly one-third of United Methodist clergywomen in full connection were not serving local churches at the time that the survey was conducted.<sup>24</sup> Women

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<sup>22</sup> "Clergywomen," *United Methodist News Archives*.

<sup>23</sup> The United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study was started in 1994, and the report was received in 2000 at the Northeastern Conference. The 1,386 clergywomen who participated in this study served in five jurisdictions: the Northeastern, North Central, Southeastern, South Central, Western Conferences.

<sup>24</sup> A clergy in full connection means that he/she finished all the steps of the ordination process and has obtained the legal right to vote.

were leaving local church ministry at a rate ten percent higher than male clergy were. Twenty-five percent of the participants in *the United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study* gave the response “to look for another type of ministry” or to look for a “secondary labor market” within religious organizations as the primary reason for leaving the local church ministry.<sup>25</sup> Looking for a “secondary labor market” includes taking one of these few options: a leave of absence to serve as a hospital chaplain, as a campus minister, or in ministries outside the local church.<sup>26</sup> Joy Charlton interviewed female seminarians twice, once at the beginning of their seminary life and then twenty years after that interview. Her findings coincide with the findings of *the United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study*. At the time of their second interview, half of these women had left parish ministry, some had taken temporary leaves at some point, and many others were contemplating leaving parish ministry.<sup>27</sup>

## 2. Role Strain

One factor that causes clergywomen to suffer is “role strain.”<sup>28</sup> The “role strain” of clergywomen results from “role hegemony.” “Role hegemony” or “role overload” results from unrealistic expectations from laity because they understand the role of clergy as a calling rather than a job. What makes being a clergywoman more difficult is that “role hegemony” for her includes stereotypes of certain gender roles that provoke overt discrimination and a lack of acceptance.<sup>29</sup> As “tokens,” clergywomen are more closely observed and scrutinized by people than men are.

## 3. Salary

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<sup>25</sup> *The United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study* (Anna Howard Shaw Center, Boston University School of Theology, 2000), Chs. 2 & 7, <http://www.bu.edu/sth/shaw/retention/chapter-one.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Patricia M. Y. Chang, “Female Clergy in the Contemporary Protestant Church: A Current Assessment,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (1997): 565-627, 568.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia M. Y. Chang, *Clergywomen: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 56.

<sup>28</sup> Lehman, *Pulpit and Pew*, 22..

<sup>29</sup> Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang, *Clergywomen: An Uphill Calling*, 23, 189.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, among full time workers, the ratio of women's median weekly earnings to men's median weekly earnings increased from 78% in 2002 to 80% in 2003.<sup>30</sup> This figure shows that since 1979 the gap between women's and men's earnings narrowed steadily from that of 63%. However, the wage gap still continues in the Church. Barbara Brown Zikmund and her colleagues studied clergywomen's career paths among sixteen denominations in terms of placement and salary in 1998. They found the pattern that the average salary of clergymen exceeded that of clergywomen in all sixteen denominations.<sup>31</sup> The findings about salary differences revealed that clergywomen in the United Methodist Church earn roughly 9% less than their male colleagues as of 2007.<sup>32</sup> This unequal salary pattern has not changed since the study on clergywomen that Edward C. Lehman conducted in the 1980s. In Lehman's study clergymen received salaries that were 25% higher than that of clergywomen.<sup>33</sup>

#### **4. Appointment**

Compared to men whose career tracks move forward fairly automatically, women have a more difficult time being placed in parish ministry even after ordination. In terms of appointment, women will eventually receive their first appointment in the United Methodist Church, but they experience less upward mobility in their career trajectory for the second and third appointments. There are two distinct factors that women have to deal with in receiving their appointments: one is the sacred image of clergy, and the other is the separation of Church

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<sup>30</sup> "Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2003, Report 978" (U.S Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2004). This report presents earnings data from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS is a national monthly survey of approximately 60,000 households, which is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<sup>31</sup> Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang, *Clergywomen: An Uphill Calling*, 73.

<sup>32</sup> "Did you know: A few facts and statistics indicating the status of women in the U.S. United Methodist Church" (Chicago: The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, 2007), <http://cosrow.org/research/research.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Lehman, Jr., *Women Clergy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985), 15.

and State. The sacredness of clergy is traditionally associated with patriarchal images in the church. The lower rate of labor participation for women in ministry (10%) compared to that of lawyers (25%) and medical doctors (21%) reflects this difficult factor.<sup>34</sup>

The other factor, the separation of Church and State, leaves churches to establish their own criteria for the acceptance of women in the parish ministry.<sup>35</sup> In the case of the open itinerancy of the United Methodist Church, the denominational policy of equal opportunity of appointments contributes to the narrowing of the gap between male and female clergy. Open itinerancy means that “appointments are made without regard to race, ethnic origin, sex, color, marital status, or age, except for the provisions of mandatory retirement.”<sup>36</sup> One benefit of the appointment system of the United Methodist Church is that its policies grant congregations opportunities to accept female clergy as their pastors regardless of their opinions. However, even within the United Methodist Church, clergywomen tend to be placed in smaller congregations at the beginning of their ministry. As a case in point, only 1% (64) of clergy serving as lead pastors of churches of 1,000 members or more are women while 6% of all lead male pastors are appointed to the large membership churches.<sup>37</sup> Even though the United Methodist Church appointment system eliminates some initial resistance that clergywomen have to face in the local church, this elimination does not mean that clergywomen do not have to deal with members’ resistance once they are appointed to the local congregations.

Patricia M. Y. Chang has pointed out that active members of the church are usually the ones who resist having female clergy the most.<sup>38</sup> They are usually men who are active and

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<sup>34</sup> Chang, “Female Clergy in the Contemporary Protestant Church,” 570.

<sup>35</sup> Lehman, *Women Clergy*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Book of Discipline*, 289.

<sup>37</sup> Fugate, “Clergywomen’s Local Church Appointments,” 3.

<sup>38</sup> Chang, “Female Clergy in the Contemporary Protestant Church,” 569.

biblically conservative. They are concerned that accepting a clergywoman will cause tension, decrease membership, and create conflict within the church. After all, they are concerned about the church's viability as an organization.

### **5. Gender and Race/Ethnicity**

Gender and race are interacting systems that affect people's access to power and privileges. They influence social relationships and the ways that people construct social meanings. When one of these two dimensions is analyzed without the other one, the study can distort people's experiences since people experience inequality as a whole person with a certain gender, race, and class. However, the resistance to racial inequality may mute gender inequality even within the ethnic minority community.

According to the *Clergywomen Retention Study*, Caucasian women may find acceptance somewhat easier in local churches than women from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds. A larger portion of racial/ethnic minority women are no longer in local church ministry in comparison to the number of Caucasian women. In fact, 37% of racial/ethnic minority participants were not serving local churches at the time of the survey, whereas only 29 % of Caucasian women were no longer serving in local church ministry.<sup>39</sup> When racial/ethnic minority women discontinue their ministry in the local church, they tend to leave ministry permanently.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Thirty-five percent of the Asian women in the study decided to leave the local church ministry. Among African American women participants, 41% were not serving in local churches. *The United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study*, Ch.2 under Ethnic Background.

<sup>40</sup> In the sample only 12% of the racial/ethnic minority women who had left local church ministry decided to return later, while 17 % of the Caucasian women in the sample did decide to come back. *The United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study*, Ch. 2 under Ethnic Background.

The study titled *The Status of Racial/Ethnic Minority Clergywomen in the United Methodist Church*,<sup>41</sup> written by Jung Ha Kim and Rosetta Ross in 2004, also reveals disparities in appointments, compensation, and leadership opportunities among racial/ethnic clergywomen in different segments of the United Methodist Church. This study indicates that racial/ethnic clergywomen in the United Methodist Church experience no substantive support from their denomination. They struggle with lack of opportunities for appointments and visible leadership roles. They also experience financial disparities due to receiving salaries that are lower in comparison to the salaries of their male and female European-American peers and their male racial-ethnic peers. Kim and Ross also report that racial/ethnic clergywomen feel that the denomination does not appreciate their work and that “they pay an unexpectedly high price for being faithful to the call.”<sup>42</sup>

### **III REVIEW OF CURRICULUMS IN UNITED METHODIST THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS**

The thirteen United Methodist seminaries offer training for those preparing for the ministry and other church professions. They include Boston University School of Theology, Candler School of Theology at Emory University, Claremont School of Theology, Drew Theological School, Duke Divinity School, Gammon Theological Seminary, Garrett Evangelical-Theological Seminary, Iliff School of Theology, Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, Saint Paul School of Theology, United Theological Seminary, and Wesley Theological Seminary.

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<sup>41</sup> Jung Ha Kim and Rosetta Ross, *The Status of Racial And Ethnic Minority Clergywomen in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Jung Ha Kim and Rosetta Ross, *Status of Racial and Ethnic Minority Clergywomen*, 56.

For the ordained ministry these seminaries require courses in New Testament, Old Testament, Church history, Theology, Mission of the Church in the World, Worship and Liturgy, United Methodist Doctrine, United Methodist Polity, and United Methodist History, plus twenty-four semester hours of electives.<sup>43</sup> Would these requirements be enough to equip younger generations of ordinands, through biblical studies, to fulfill their calling to serve the needs of the present age that demands gender inclusivity in its theology and practice?

Examining the 2006–2007 catalogues of the thirteen United Methodist theological seminaries clarifies what courses pertaining to women’s roles are taught in the field of Biblical Studies in these seminaries. Candler School of Theology offers “Feminist Interpretation of Bible” and “Feminist Interpretation of the New Testament.” Iliff School of Theology and Drew Theological School offer courses on “Feminist Biblical Interpretation” and “Feminist Interpretations of the Gospels.” Duke University Divinity School offers “Necessary Women: Biblical Representations of Women in Judges and Ruth,” and “Women, the Bible, and the Biblical World.” Gammon Theological Seminary, which is an African-American school, offers “Womanist/Feminist Interpretation.” However, none of these seminaries require these courses for the M. Div. degree.

Other schools offer courses related to women’s issues from historical, missional, social, ethical, or psychological perspectives. They emphasize the study of women as laity and as clergy, and relate women’s issues to Christian family life by focusing on issues of gender and cross-cultural mission.<sup>44</sup> Eight schools<sup>45</sup> offer “Feminist Theology or Feminist/Womanist

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<sup>43</sup> Some conferences, for example, the Baltimore-Washington Conference, require an evangelism course.

<sup>44</sup> The following course listings related to women in ministry were found in their catalogues: **Boston University School of Theology** offers “Women in Diakonia and Mission,” “Women in Mission,” and “New Testament Seminar: Gender and Family in Early Christianity,” “Women and American Religion,” “Women’s Spirituality for Ministry,” “Women in Parish Ministry.” **Drew Theological School** offers “Gender and Sexuality in Ancient Christianity,” “Sexuality and Family Life in American Religious History,” “Vision and Valor: Women and Mission,” “Feminist Theology,” “Women and Religion,” “Ethical Responding to Violence Against Women,”

Theology” or “Third World Feminist Theology” courses. Most of these schools offer these courses as advanced courses. Claremont School of Theology is the only school that offers “Goddess and God-She, Feminist Ethics” and “Women in the Book of Genesis” in the field of biblical studies. Duke University Divinity School and Candler School of Theology offer a certificate in Women’s Studies.

This research affirms that feminist perspectives on theology, and especially on biblical interpretations, have not been in the center of biblical studies in theological education, probably due to androcentric myths in Christianity and patriarchal practices in the Church. The unity of

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“Ethical and Religious Themes in Women's Literature.” **Claremont School of Theology** offers “Moral Agency of Women,” “Women's Development in Communities of Faith,” “Engendering Experience: Women in Islamic Traditions,” “Introduction to Women’s Studies in Religion, Process, and Feminist Theologies,” “Feminist Liturgy and Preaching,” and “Gender and Religious Education.” **Candler School of Theology** offers “Women in Radical Protestantism,” “Christian Feminist Ethnics,” “Gender in American Religion,” “Pastoral Care of Women,” “Women and Preaching,” “Women as Prophetic Pioneers,” “Women in Religious Leadership and Administration.” Candler has Women in Theology and Ministry courses, including “Women in Theology and Ministry Reflection Seminar,” “Women in Theology and Ministry Certification Colloquy,” “Global Feminisms and Christian Theology,” and “Women in Theology and Ministry Retreat.” **Duke University Divinity School** offers “Women in the Medieval Church,” “Women, Theology, and the Church,” “Feminist Theory in Christianity,” “Black Women, Womanism, and the Church,” “Women’s Voices from the Third World,” “Women and Ministry,” “Gender and Theology in Congregations,” “Women and Evangelism,” “Women and the Word.” **Gammon Theological School** offers “Women's Ways of Preaching,” “Black Women in Church,” “Womanist Studies in Religion,” “Women & Men: Cross-Cultural Ministry Seminar,” “Seminar: Women in History of Christianity.” **Garret Theological Seminary** offers “Faith of Israel's Daughters,” “Male-Female Images in History,” “History of American Women in Ministry,” “Women in Methodism,” “Psychology of Sin and Transformation in Feminist Theology,” “French Feminisms & Psychology of Religion,” “Women In Ministry: Claiming Authority.” **Iliff School of Theology** is the only school that offers “Women in Early Christianity,” “Religious Autobiographies of American Women,” “Women in American Religious History,” “Feminism,” “Psychotherapy and Pastoral Theology, History and Practice of Preaching from the Women's Perspective,” “Feminism, Psychotherapy and Pastoral Theology,” “The Role of Women in American History,” “Women and Development,” “Seminar in Feminist Theory: Sex, Gender, Language and Identity.” **Methodist Theological School in Ohio** offers “Gender, Culture, and Pastoral Care,” “Women in American Christianity,” “Gender and Theology.” **Perkins School of Theology** offers “Advanced Feminist Theory,” “The Book of Esther,” “Women in World Religions,” “Feminist, Womanist, Mujerista Theologies,” “Women and Worship,” “Feminist Emancipatory Preaching,” “Pastoral Care and Counseling of Women,” “Women’s Spiritual Quest,” “Women in Ministry,” “Preaching Biblical Wisdom Literature.” **St. Paul School of Theology** offers “Feminist/Womanist Issues and Methods in Pastoral Care and Counseling,” “Women and Leadership,” “Women in the Early Church,” “Feminist and Womanist Ethics.” **United Theological School** offers “Women in Christianity in North America,” “Women and Religion,” “Women’s Ministries in the Ancient and Medieval Church,” “Justice in the Wisdom Tradition.” **Wesley Theological Seminary** offers “Readings in the Christian Tradition: Women’s Writings,” “Women in Early and Medieval Christianity,” “Women’s Leadership in the Church,” “Feminist and Womanist Perspectives to Pastoral Theology and Care,” “Women Preachers,” “Feminist Liberation Theologies.”

<sup>45</sup> Drew, Duke, Claremont, Gammon, Garrett, Iliff, Perkins, and Wesley.

theory and practice based on biblical understanding of women in the Church, therefore, is very much needed.

So far my research has revealed the discrepancy between the policy of inclusivity and actual practices of the Church, which is also based on kyriocentrism. How can seminaries help to narrow this gap so that future ordinands may be equipped to preach and teach about the importance of gender inclusivity in theological terms?

#### **IV. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM**

##### **A. LACK OF CONSCIENTIZATION**

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza proposes four elements necessary for seminary education: epistemology, pedagogy, didactics, and communication.<sup>46</sup> Epistemology is the discipline of what we know and how we can know what we know. Communication refers to critical reflection on how we make known what we know and how we exchange these ideas. In theological education epistemology and communication are problematic since the theological materials and the curriculums have been malestream<sup>47</sup> or kyriocentric and Western oriented. Women have been excluded not only from the praxis of the Church but also by the theological interpretation of the Bible. As a result biblical knowledge has been taught and dominated by clergymen and constructed by mainly Western male perspectives.

Schüssler Fiorenza affirms that the task of feminist biblical interpretation is conscientization. Conscientization aims to deconstruct the public discourses of dehumanization and prejudice by analyzing inscribed male domination in order to understand biblical texts.

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<sup>46</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Pedagogy and Practice: Using Wisdom Ways," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 6, no. 4 (2003): 208.

<sup>47</sup> This term refers to all academic scholarship, including theological studies, that have been constructed by elite males and defined by Western male perspectives. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 212.

Locating women as subjects of biblical interpretation, feminist biblical interpretation exposes the fact that the existing social, cultural, and biblical interpretive discourses are malestream, hegemonic discourses. Therefore, the examination of institutional structures and patterns of domination in society is necessary to develop a social analysis of domination and liberation in biblical texts.<sup>48</sup>

Fiorenza emphasizes that conscientization is the first step for women's liberation. This analytic process starts from a clear understanding of the subjectivity of a subject. Many times women's self understandings are constructed by their *structural positions* that are situated by their birth within a social structure. Women's *subjective positions* enable them to interpret and respond to their *structural positions* within a social formation.<sup>49</sup> This context means that *subjective positions* of understanding "who they are" can provide variable and changeable understandings of women's subjectivity. Understanding *subjective positions* is only possible by a critical analysis of the socio-cultural practices of a culture. This process nullifies the definition of women based solely on its gender relation since it will include a socio-systemic contextualization.

## **B. PRESENCE OF KYRIOCENTRIC ROADBLOCKS**

Schüssler Fiorenza has identified barriers that have prevented the Church from engaging in feminist perspectives in theological studies. She calls them "kyriocentric roadblocks."<sup>50</sup> Evidently, these roadblocks constructed the internalized authorities that prevent seminaries from also fully engaging in emancipatory hermeneutical exercises in their curriculum.

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<sup>48</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 102-107.

<sup>49</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 106.

<sup>50</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 53-74.

The first roadblock results from a misconception of the word feminism. For Schüssler Fiorenza, “feminism is the radical notion that women are people.”<sup>51</sup> Feminism seeks to change the socio-cultural and communal-religious structures of the domination and the exploitation of not just women, but all people. The second roadblock is the assumption that feminist interpretation is just for women. Actually, feminist interpretation seeks to change a grammatically androcentric language system. This spiritual-intellectual exercise of reversing usual linguistic practices can also be used by men who care about women who have been forced to internalize and identify with male domination as they read the Bible. The third roadblock is the assumption that women and feminists are all the same. Ignoring the diversity of feminisms will result in the narrowing of feminisms’ effects on biblical interpretation.

The fourth roadblock is the recommendation by some feminists that the Bible be rejected since it is a patriarchal product. We should continue to consider reinterpreting the Bible rather than rejecting it, since it influences women’s lives. The fifth roadblock is the relegation of biblical study to the scholarly domain. However, when we think about the prevalent use of the Bible in everyday public life, the interpretation of the Bible is an essential task for all people. The sixth roadblock is the notion that the Bible is a book from Western culture rather than an interpretation of a selected set of ancient Christian writings. This notion causes anti-Semitism and overlooks the diversity of Christian biblical writings.<sup>52</sup>

The seventh roadblock is the belief that the Bible is the direct word of God as opposed to the understanding that the Bible is “the inspired rhetorical response of biblical writers to specific problems arising in particular socio-rhetorical locations.”<sup>53</sup> The eighth roadblock is a literalistic and positivistic understanding of the Bible as a unitary text. The Bible needs to be interpreted

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<sup>51</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 56.

<sup>52</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 64-65.

<sup>53</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 68.

with multiple methods that produce a variety of meanings that take into account the relations of domination and power. The ninth roadblock is the notion that malestream and feminist hermeneutics do not differ. Feminist hermeneutics differs radically from malestream hermeneutics in its seeking to empower women by undoing kyriarchal mystification and the dehumanization of women. The tenth roadblock is the emotional turmoil that comes from the mystical oppressive power of the Scripture that we have internalized. Fear of wrongly tampering with the Holy Scriptures prevents women and men from interpreting the Bible critically and creatively.<sup>54</sup>

Another roadblock might be the prevailing ignorance of the importance of sociolinguistic analysis in biblical interpretation. Sociolinguistic studies focus on the identification and analysis of linguistic variations related to ethnicity, class, age, and gender. From the sociolinguistic perspective, language addresses the speech community's social reality.<sup>55</sup> For example, sociolinguistically, in the field of biblical studies, languages other than English and Western European languages have been considered as less important than other languages since these other languages have been understood as symbols of cultural and economic inferiority in the North American educational system. This attitude towards other languages prevents biblical interpreters from acknowledging potential political signs of solidarity and possible resistance of women and men on the margins.

It is critical that theological educators consciously recognize these kyriocentric roadblocks that prevent feminist biblical interpretation from becoming an integral part of biblical studies for ordinands.

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<sup>54</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 71.

<sup>55</sup> Marcyliena Morgan, "The African-American Speech Community: Reality and Sociolinguists," *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 85.

### **C. IGNORANCE OF THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN**

According to Schüssler Fiorenza, the choreography of the oppression of women can be described in seven categories: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, systemic violence, silencing, deprecation, and vilification.<sup>56</sup> Women are vilified, maligned, and slandered if they do not adapt to the patriarchal ethos of malestream society. The prevailing image of women is that they should be meek and reserved. James Polling refers to the choreography of oppression as “the institutional and structural embodiment of the realization of evil.”<sup>57</sup> Therefore, the choreography of oppression against women is structural sin that has been legitimized and presented as common sense through cultural ideologies, religious symbols, ethical systems, and public educational discourses.

### **D. FAILURE TO ADDRESS THE CONCEPT OF KYRIOCENTRISM IN THEOLOGY**

*Androcentrism*, which refers to “male-centeredness” and the linguistically and socially produced gender system, not only constructs dualistic gender differences but also articulates the power relation between genders. Meanwhile, *patriarchy* articulates structural and institutional relations of domination. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that understanding the system of oppression as patriarchy is problematic because patriarchy understands women as helpless victims and absolutizes the power of men over women. Patriarchy also neglects the power struggles among women.

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<sup>56</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 109-110.

<sup>57</sup> James Polling, *Deliver Us From Evil: Resisting Racial and Gender Oppression* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 66.

The concept of *kyriarchy* articulates the complexity of oppressions of different groups of women and the multiplicative interdependence of gender, race, and class stratifications. Kyriarchy represents oppressive social systems that consist of patriarchy, ideology, and capitalism. Kyriarchal democracy like in the United States of America allows the superordinants to exploit subordinants economically, culturally, and with naturalized oppression. A theory of kyriarchal democracy justifies the incapacity of certain groups of people in need as due to belonging to a servant class. For example, as capitalism expanded after the Civil War, the oppressed provided cheap labor in the United States of America.<sup>58</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the contradictions between the logic of democracy and historical, socio-political, and kyriarchal practices have produced the kyriocentric logic of identity.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the Western, kyriocentric symbolic order allows the systems of oppression to continue and in so doing contradicts the democratic logic of radical equality for everyone. In addition, as an ideology, kyriocentrism operates in a global sense on four levels: grammatical-linguistic, symbolic-cultural, ideological-cultural, and social-institutional.<sup>60</sup> Kyriocentrism in theological educational systems prevents women's engagement from *subjective positions* as authentic people of God.

## **V. A HERMENEUTICAL METHOD OF FEMINIST BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: A RHETORICAL-EMANCIPATORY PARADIGM**

Feminist hermeneutical methods denounce three hegemonic paradigms of biblical interpretative methods, which originated from modern rationalism and European colonialism. The first is the doctrinal-revelatory paradigm of reading, which focuses on the literal, typological, allegorical, and analogical meaning of a text. The second is the scientific-factual

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<sup>58</sup> Polling, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 66.

<sup>59</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 123.

<sup>60</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 124.

paradigm of reading, which is Eurocentric and tends to deny socio-historical location and political or ecclesiastical interests. Lastly, the hermeneutic-cultural paradigm criticizes modernity and recognizes complexity, particularity, and political corruption of reality, but cannot address globalized inequality.<sup>61</sup>

Schüssler Fiorenza proposes that the rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm for feminist biblical interpretation “investigates the ways in which biblical texts exercise influence and power in social and religious life.”<sup>62</sup> This radical, egalitarian, and cosmopolitan model of biblical reading affirms the “subordinated others” as subjects of knowledge and wisdom. It helps people to understand authority as enhancing, nurturing, and enriching creativity.<sup>63</sup> It interprets the Bible from an ethical, rhetorical, political, cultural, and liberal perspective. Its goal is the conscientization of subjects by helping them to question kyriarchal power relations in the biblical text and its functions that benefit Western culture and capitalistic interests.

Schüssler Fiorenza proposes seven critical hermeneutical moves to effectively accomplish the rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm in feminist biblical interpretation: a hermeneutics of experience, domination and social location, a hermeneutics of suspicion, critical evaluation, creative imagination, a hermeneutics of re-membering and reconstruction, and a hermeneutics of transformative action for change.<sup>64</sup>

Exploration of women’s experiences and the placement their experiences in the center of biblical interpretation will shed a different light on biblical texts. A hermeneutics of domination and social location analyzes how socio-cultural and religious locations construct our experiences. This exercise deconstructs the kyriarchal domination of the biblical texts. A hermeneutics of

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<sup>61</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 43.

<sup>62</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 44.

<sup>63</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 49.

<sup>64</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 165-190.

suspicion challenges a hermeneutics of consent by disentangling the ideological functions of the kyriocentric structures of domination that are inscribed in biblical texts. A hermeneutics of critical evaluation seeks to adjudicate cultural-religious kyriocentrism and to explore the counter-cultural alternatives in biblical texts.

A hermeneutics of creative imagination allows women and men to conceive changes and to explore the possibilities of a new reality of justice by using creative methods such as art, dance, and bibliodrama. A hermeneutics of re-membering and reconstruction seeks to reduce the distance between historical positivism and contemporary readers by increasing historical knowledge and imagination. A hermeneutics of transformative action for change is the goal and climax of the critical interpretative process. It explores avenues for transforming kyriarchal relations in biblical texts and social-cultural contexts.

Feminist biblical interpretation that uses a rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm will help younger generations of ordinands to construct global dimensions of equality and justice through biblical studies. The critical interpretative process will trigger them to explore the hidden possibilities of a just society. Especially, the hermeneutics of transformative action for change links theoretical theology into the everyday practices of Christians.

## **VI. WHY FEMINIST BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION FOR ORDINANDS?**

There are two reasons that I want to propose that feminist biblical interpretation must be included in the theological education of ordinands: the importance of leadership and the significance of Scripture.

Anthony B. Robinson asserts that “no single factor is more important to congregational vitality than leadership.”<sup>65</sup> Clergy need to know who they are and what their convictions are so that they can keep the vision of a creative God for the world in front of the people all of the time. Clergy should be able to identify the challenges of their times in biblical terms and to mobilize people to confront those challenges through theological reflection. An ordained clergy person is more than just a chaplain of a congregation but is called to be a leader of the Church who equips people by preaching, teaching, participating in sacramental ministries, and providing pastoral care. To equip clergy to be faithful to this calling, theological institutions need to provide them appropriate space for spiritual and ministerial formation.

Scripture as the primary source for theological reflection requires us to ask what kind of methodology we will use for its interpretation, which is critical in understanding how God’s self-disclosure has been revealed in different times in human history and diverse cultural contexts. Robert Neville emphasizes the importance of the “hermeneutical circle” that aims to connect the original cultural context and the interpreter’s own cultural context so that a new revelation of God will be exposed as a new insight. Neville proposes four essential elements that must be involved in the hermeneutical circle: Scripture, the interpreter’s historical tradition, the interpreter’s experience, and reason.<sup>66</sup> From this perspective, Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutical tool, that is, the rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm is a valid tool for understanding women’s interpretation of Scripture. For example, how the “choreography of the oppression of women” is reflected in racial/ethnic women’s understandings of Scripture and how their Biblical interpretations inform their ecclesiology will be much different from how most U.S. Caucasian citizens understand Scripture and its shaping of ecclesiology.

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<sup>65</sup> Anthony B. Robinson, *Transforming Congregational Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 122.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Cummings Neville, *A Theology Primer* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 15.

Feminist biblical interpretation attempts to explore an open-ended prototype rather than to confirm a fixed archetype in biblical texts. Biblical interpretation can provide a radical democratic model of education by allowing opportunities for the recognition of a multiplicity of interpretative methods, including the detection of feminist voices. It uses a dialogical method that empowers people to think critically and invites them to engage themselves in self-determining decision-making processes. Feminist biblical interpretation acknowledges all women and men as competent biblical interpreters. It denounces traditional malestream pedagogical models of learning, such as banking, master-apprentice, and consumer models. It seeks the re-distribution of power from the master/teacher to people/students through theological reflections on biblical texts. Diverse theological perspectives on biblical understanding will widen their theological perspectives as they respond to what the present is calling them to do.

## **VII. CONCLUSION: STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

The curriculum of the thirteen theological schools of the United Methodist Church reflects that they take women's issues seriously in their curriculum. These curricula also consider women's study primarily from cultural, social, and ethical perspectives rather than locating women as subjects for biblical studies in theological education. This tendency exposes these courses to the risk of repeating androcentric biblical interpretations and colluding with kyriarchal social and cultural structures. However, whether these courses in fact fall prey to this risk requires further research on the methodologies used in current courses in biblical interpretation. The current curriculum structure may not permit sufficient opportunities for students to participate in theological reflection that is emancipatory and transformative.

Feminist biblical interpretation based on the rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza proposes intends full inclusion of women and men in our biblical understandings, especially those women and men who are on the margins of church and society. It explores “what it means to engage in a critical reading of scripture for emancipation.”<sup>67</sup> It calls candidates for ordained ministry to provide prophetic voices to the Church and to society in their preaching, teachings, and ministries, prophetic voices that free people from social, cultural, political, and economic bondages.

One recommendation for the curriculum of United Methodist seminaries is to place human experience in the center of biblical interpretations. Experience is an inward assurance of an objective reality in Wesley’s theology. Wesley said, “But for the proof of every one of these weighty truths, experience is worth a thousand reasons.”<sup>68</sup> According to Robert Neville, experience provides the “ground for relevance in theological assertions.”<sup>69</sup> Feminist biblical interpretation reflects Neville’s comment because as important sources for criticizing or weighing Scripture, tradition, and reason, particular social and cultural locations of individuals add different perspectives that general experiences may lack. This perspective is especially true for women, particularly racial/ethnic women, because their experiences of the church cannot be explained by so-called normative theological assumptions that are based on malestream experiences. To put the marginalized as subjects for biblical interpretation, Schüssler Fiorenza’s rhetorical-emancipatory paradigm and its movements force Christians to explore not just textual, but also empirical, analysis of biblical interpretations. In doing so, they become partners in God’s work of healing, reconciliation, and liberation.

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<sup>67</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, “Pedagogy and Practice,” 210.

<sup>68</sup> Frank Baker, ed., *The Works of John Wesley: Letters I (1721 – 1739)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), V: 25, 403.

<sup>69</sup> Neville, *A Theology Primer*, 16.

The ordained ministry functions to serve people and to assist them to create a church with hope. The theologian Jurgen Moltmann was convinced that the future of God begins within the people of God. This perspective means that every person should be included in the center of biblical interpretation. Again, Schüssler Fiorenza prophetically affirmed that “feminism is the radical notion that women are people.”<sup>70</sup> The new generation of clergy is called to reveal a new reality in the midst of people that frees them from the bondage of oppressive power. They have responsibilities to detect Kyriocentric roadblocks in our daily lives that sustain malestream dominance and keep women from cultural and religious consciousness and public participation. Without an opportunity to be exposed to an emancipatory hermeneutical method, such as feminist biblical interpretation, they will not be able to work towards changing oppressive structures of domination and oppressive values in the Church and society.

Hough and Cobb also argue that the aim of theological education and pedagogy is to be a theological institution that helps professional church leadership understand what it is to be a Christian community in the world.<sup>71</sup> Feminist biblical interpretation is about ushering a solid theological thinking towards hope in the practical life of the Church. It brings possibilities of changing the human situation, which must be nurtured and cultivated with hope.

Schüssler Fiorenza introduces the “*ekklesia* of women” as a new paradigm for the Church and asserts that it is only possible through a rhetorical-emancipatory hermeneutical circle of biblical interpretation.<sup>72</sup> “Ekklesia of women” is a virtual space for women and men to transform patriarchal, racial, gender, cultural, and other status inscriptions of societal and religious institutions into radical, egalitarian visions of human community through critical biblical interpretations. The “*ekklesia* of women” promotes a culture of debate and discussion,

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<sup>70</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 56.

<sup>71</sup> John C. Hough and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education*, 49-76.

<sup>72</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 127-130.

and it best enables the detecting of the hidden choreography of domination. “Ekklesia of women” understands the reign of God from the universal understanding that God’s reign embraces all human reality. The ordained ministry is a calling to represent the hope for an alternative human community at its service, not yet fully realized but surely existing among people. From this perspective, it is imperative that the United Methodist Church urge its thirteen seminaries to include a feminist biblical interpretation course in their curriculum as a required course for its future clergy.

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