



# Out of the Shadows of Patriarchy: The Struggle for Women's Liberation in the Holy Bible

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## Abstract

In the interpretation of the Bible, feminists are often trapped by the method of progressive-subversive interpretation which considers the entire Bible to be written by a patriarchal culture which must of necessity be deconstructed. But through this paper, it is understood that in the Holy Bible it was not entirely written only for a pervading patriarchal culture, but indeed the Holy Bible, or at least a part of the book was written by women in their struggle for liberation. There is even a book that reverses patriarchal culture and turns it into a matriarchy, that the family is not "*beth-av*" (father's house), but the word family relates to the notion of a "mother's house" in the book of Ruth. There are of course numerous great women in the Holy Bible, inter-alia, Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus, Deborah, Ruth, Sarah, Priscilla, Rahab, Hannah, Esther and Miriam who was the archetype of the female prophetic tradition. The method used in this article is historical criticism and exegesis. It is through this method that the texts that are used as examples in this article are examined and there is indeed a feminist struggle for freedom. A feminist lens permits a look at text through the eyes of women and to analyze how women are depicted and presented when compared to men. There is a need to reinterpret patriarchal imagery and language usage about God, and we need to determine women's place in relation sacred texts that are studied and to liberate the fairer sex.

**Keywords:** Feminist Bible Interpretation, Liberation Theology, postcolonialist, Bible interpretation.

## Introduction

The books of the Bible were written by writers in what then was a very patriarchal culture, so there is often a discrediting of women in the Bible. In addition, the Bible has also been interpreted in patriarchal culture for a long time, so that its interpretations are often influenced by that culture. However, while the books in the Bible are written in a patriarchal culture, there are still struggles to fight for the liberation of women, even though sometimes they experience a very big cultural clash (Youke & Sirait, 2022). It is on this basis, that this article discusses the struggles for the liberation of women.

The method used in this paper is the feminist method (Zulaiha, 2016; Putrawan, 2020). But the feminist method in question is not a progressive-subversive method, that is, one that gives a 'judgment' to the Bible, that essentially the whole Bible contains persecution of women, because it was written by patriarchs alone, so that the whole Bible must be deconstructed. But basically in the Bible there are some texts that are the product of the struggle of women who are trying to break free from their confinement. Therefore, according to the author, interpreters do not need to use deconstruction in interpreting the Bible for feminists, but can still use historical methods in order to find the principles of the struggle of feminists at that time.



## The Struggle for the Liberation of Women Deuteronomists?

In the deuteronomistic writings, are there struggles for women? A book edited by Peggy L. Day (1993) reveals that deuteronomistic writings contain theological points that fight for the existence of women for gender equality (Bachmann, 2013; Mtshiselwa, 2015), including (specifically I focused on) the case of Jael in the book of Judges.

Discussion of Yael in Judges 4-5, the ambivalence between a man and a mother figure plays a key role, namely a woman who provides food and security to the Israelites by tricking Sisera and killing her (Niditch, 1989). At that time the strength of the Israelite army, which of course in a patriarchal culture consisted of men, was weakened and under the domination of the Canaanite power. In the midst of this crisis, there is a female hero with a deadly sexuality oriented strategy. Jael was present in the midst of this crisis and deceived and killed Sisera, the head of the Canaanite army. Day (1989) has commented, 'Jael has identification power for this audience because she represents the marginal's victory over the powerful.'

Specifically Niditch (1989) examines the *bên raglêhā* 'between two feet' in the text of Yael 'Blessed is Yael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite, above all other women, blessed is she, above the women that are in the tent. The man asked for water, but he gave her milk; in a beautiful cup he served curds. She reached out her hand to pick up the staff, and her right hand to take the hammer's hammer, and she struck Sisera, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple. Near his feet the man fell, lay dead, near his feet the man fell and died, where he fell, there the man was killed, divided.' (Judges 5: 24-27). Niditch explains, that the term *bên raglêhā* has a euphemistic meaning that is more geared towards sexuality. Also on the words 'Water was asked of the man, but milk he gave; in a beautiful cup he served curds' has the same motif as the term *bên raglêhā*, which is the motive of sexuality.

He killed Sisera after he first conquered her in sexual matters, and from there Jael (Yā'ēl) could easily kill Sisera. Jael is the name of the heroine who delivered Israel from the army of King Jabin of Canaan according to the Book of Judges of the Hebrew Bible. In this case there is a very clear contrast, that the male strength in the Israelite army could not defeat Sisera's Canaanite army, but with the emergence of Jael with her feminine strength, she managed to conquer Sisera with ease, and of course - or there should be cheers of the people like David who defeated Goliath: 'Saul defeated thousands of enemies, but David was tens of thousands.' (1Samuel 18:7). This is a contrast between David and Saul, because David managed to kill the leader. The same motive certainly exists in the case of Yael, because Yael had killed the leader. More firmly, this motif is a gender motif, namely the contrast between men and women. That is why Deborah in her song praised Jael's heroism: "Blessed be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, above women, blessed is she, above women in the tent."

So in the story of Yael there is a motive, that the heroes of Israel are not only male dominated in gender orientation, but there are also numerous female heroes who are of service to the people. At least then, in the deuteronomistic writings there is also a motive for the struggle for the liberation for women, which of course was written by a woman.

### Out of the Shadow of the Patriarchy

This article and the subject of this section are entitled 'Out of the Shadows of the Patriarchy'. I took this title from an article written by Johanna W.H. Bos (1988:37-67) entitled Out of the Shadows, and an article by Tamara C. Eskenazi (1992:25-43) entitled Out from the Shadows: Biblical Women in the Postexilic Era. In particular I will focus more on the second book already mentioned, which is about the situation in the post-exilic era. During the exile there was a movement initiated by the priests in exile. This movement by experts is called the Theology of the Reformed Priesthood. This movement of priestly reform theology produced a great work called Pg (Jer.: Priesterliche Grundschrift). One part of Pg is Genesis 1. What is interesting for discussion in this article is the story of the creation of man with an interesting pun:

*So God created **man** in His own image,  
according to the image of God He created **Him (t)**;  
**male (m)** and **female (f)** He created **them (g)** (Genesis 1:26f)*



From the quote from Pg's creation story, it can be seen that the author's puns are played. The first time the author explains about human existence in general. The word human here represents all human beings created by God. A more detailed explanation is in verse 27, and that the author describes the creation of a human. Human here is understood by all humans, and it is used in the singular, namely human – he. Then the author describes that humans in this world consist of two groups, namely men and women. Then the author changes the personal pronouns used, namely from him (singular) to them (plural). From this play on words, it is implicitly undeniable, that this movement has a struggle for gender equality, in that humans, both women and men, are God's equal creations. Both have the same value and dignity before God. Nothing is lower or higher. So all are equal before God, in that they are all human beings, and God's creation. So theologically, the priestly reform theology movement that was in exile had a struggle for gender equality on its hands.

However, after they return to their homeland, they practically face a formidable challenge from a patriarchal society that has long been rooted in the pattern of practical life of Israelite society. This challenge was faced by these reforming theologians until the era when they returned from exile, namely in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. In this very tight situation, priestly reform theologians tried to compromise between their struggles and the practical challenges of their highly patriarchal society. They re-edited the *Pg* and combined it with the Law of Chastity and added the points of their theology, and the result of this editing was the priestly text or what is known as the *P* text. The *P* text is the result of compromise, so sometimes the additions made by them often have a partial tone to the patriarchal tradition that was deeply rooted in the life of the Jewish community at that time.

The patriarchal atmosphere became even stronger when another major tradition emerged within this priesthood group which strongly supported the patriarchal tradition. This great tradition by experts is called the chronistis tradition which is usually abbreviated Chr, and this tradition produces a great work called *Chronistisches Geschichtswerk* in German (abbreviated ChrG) or can be translated *Chronicles Historical Works* or *Chronicles*. The main focus of this group's struggle is the realization of 'real Israel' (Oeming, 1990; Douglas, 2002; Maccoby, 1996). The 'original Israel' group (a pure Israel) is referred to by Smith (1971) as the 'Yahweh Alone' movement or by Blenkinsopp (1989) as the *haredim*. Because this struggle is fighting for 'original Israel', in their struggle, sometimes or often there are very serious violations of 'human rights', especially against women, especially foreign women who are not Israelites who live around them (Smith-Christopher, 1994; Washington, 2003; Santoso, 2015). On the basis of legitimacy, this was the order of the Persian king, and they made these violations very systematic.

In this situation, where there was a systematic discrediting of women, many of the women intellectuals who fought for this injustice to end (Sugianto & Maranatha, 2019), who usually come from the wisdom tradition, tried to discuss this issue intensively and fight for equal rights and gender equity for women. These struggles for gender equality produced many books and these were presented to the women of the time. The flood of feminist books occurred in the post-exile period by fighters who cared about the 'fate' of these women. So at this time there is a struggle 'out of the shadows'. For so long women had been in the shadow of men, in darkness. But the fighters were fighting for women to get out of these shadows. They fought for gender equality in their era.

### **Job's wife who is often cornered**

In general, the position of Job's wife in the world of interpretation and translation is seen in a negative position. The existence of Job's wife is often considered a *diaboli adiuatrix*, this has existed since the book of Paul's Apocalypse, in which the devil speaks as Job's wife says in 2:9. Also Saint Ambrose even gave the nickname of Job's wife as the *supervatrix diaboli* (Baskin, 1981). Even a 15th-century painting depicts when the devil struck Job, Job's wife with her hands on her hips stood beside him. The text below the painting reads: 'Satan hit Job with a stick and Job's wife beat him with words.' Of course, in the eyes of the interpreter, the position of Job's wife in the case of her husband's illness is a very bad position, because as a wife she should protect and strengthen her husband. Job's wife prompts her husband to doubt God's use of divine powers and she thus intensifies his knowledge and opens his eyes. Even so she is visibly absent from Job's ending (Baskin, 1981).



There are also many Bible translations that put the position of Job's wife in a negative way which translates Job 2:9 'So his wife said to him, Are you still steadfast in your godliness? Curse your God and die!' (TB-LAI; and also many other translations that are similar to this). From this translation, the translator indirectly discredits the position of Job's wife who invites her husband to curse his God who has brought him to endless suffering, then invites him to commit suicide.

His wife cannot bear her husband's blind acceptance of the calamities that happen to them. Of course, the attention to Job's suffering tends to ignore the fact that she is also a victim of divine tests in addition, she sees him in anguish (19:17). To Job's wife perfect devotion to a perfect God is bad when reality says otherwise. She suggests his "integrity" has no deep value. So Job must challenge God who has afflicted him so, even if he dies because of this (Pardes, n.d.). Similar to Eve, Job's wife encourages her husband to doubt God's use of His divine powers. But she disappears after her brave statement. She is then only mentioned in passing once more when Job is debating with his companions (Pardes, 1992).

So the main issue is the translation of the verb *brk*, whether this verb should be translated with 'blessing' (literal meaning) or with 'curse' (euphemistic meaning). What saddens me is that many of the women theologians who support this verb are interpreted more euphemistically which means curse, where Job's wife is not a good wife, a wife who does not support her husband, a wife who does not accompany her husband who is suffering, he is not a friend at that time. sorrow, but only friends in times of joy, when Job experienced glory because of his abundant wealth. Or perhaps the language of today's youth can be used, that Job's wife is a '*materialistic girl*'. The female theologians I know when there are international discussions about the Book of Job who continue to translate this way, for example Pezzoli-Olgiati (2005) who view Job's wife's suggestion very negatively, are a pragmatic and very immanent solution (Santoso, 2007).

But in fact, the verb *brk* should be translated literally 'bless your God' or in the case of the Book of Psalms it is often found translated 'praise your God'. Precisely in the midst of that difficulty, Job's wife was a faithful wife who accompanied her husband who was seriously ill. She was a faithful and kind companion, who could not bear the condition of her husband lying limp on the bed, with a emaciated body (see Job 19:26). As a faithful wife, of course, she could not bear to see her husband who was seriously ill and almost died. Therefore the best advice is for Job to praise his God and then surrender his life to Him. Death is the best way when her husband is experiencing very heavy suffering, but this suggestion does not mean a suggestion to commit suicide. This is more clearly seen in the longer Septuagint translation of the MT text. Also the picture of the positive role Job's wife had in the early church can be seen in the Testament of Job or the Book of Job's Testament which describes the existence of Job's wife as a faithful companion, or as a deacon servant who faithfully cares for someone who is seriously ill (Seow, 2006). For clarity I will quote a paraphrase from Oeming (2001: 43) 'I admire you, Job, because you are in all these trials that are too very difficult, (but) you still hold fast to your faith in your Lord. But now, I will advise you: Always be at peace with your Lord!, remain firm in your faith, for your death is near.'

From this it can be seen, that the existence of Job's wife is not as negative as the opinions of theologians who are under the shadow of the patriarchal tradition. So it is time for feminist theologians to come out of this shadow and fight for gender equality by not discrediting women, as in the first example, discrediting the role of Job's wife in negative interpretations of him.

### **The Book of Ruth as a Fighter for Deliverance**

Most scholars think that the book of Ruth was written in the post-exilic era, and not during the exile and before. This is based on several reasons: 1) In the Hebrew Bible this book is placed in the Ketubim section. But this is not a strong reason to prove that the book of Ruth is a young tradition. So it still needs to be given other reasons. 2) From a linguistic point of view, in the book of Ruth there are many words derived from Aramaic as well as terms that have a late Hebrew character (Zakovitch, 1999:35-37). For example: *lāhēn* (1:13); *ʿāgan* (1:13), *mārāʿ* (1:20), *wayyisʿu lāhem nāsyim* (1:4); etc. 3). Most likely the book of Ruth was written at the same time as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were written. This is based on evidence, a) that at that time there was a character in the role of women in decision-making in the life of the congregation (Nehemiah 5; 8), the participation of women in the work of building cities; b) and in contrast to a), there is also the struggle of women against the patriarchal tradition that was driven by Nabiah Noaja (Ne 6:14). From the evidence a) and b) it can be concluded that the role



of women is starting to be taken into account in the congregation (Fischer, 2001:90; Blum, 1995:24-42; Willi, 1999:75-98).

Because of the knowledge of legal texts and their use in the situation, it can be seen that the author comes from an educated circle. Most likely the author wrote his book at the same time as the writing of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The author of the book of Ruth places his position against tradition in Ezra and Nehemiah. If in Ezra and Nehemiah it is revealed about the separation of the people of Israel from the infidels (non-Israel) and against the desire to propose to pagan girls, then in the book of Ruth this tradition which corners the pagans and women is strongly opposed. In this respect I am opposed to Holland and Steinhof (2002:241), Williams (1982:65), Bal (1987:76), Ostriker (2002:344), Landy (2001:227), dan Frisch (2001:532) who think that the problem of mixed marriages did not exist at the time this book was written. Hertzberg (1985:258) and Hubbard (1988:35f) view correctly that this book contains polemics against Ezra-Nehemiah. The motives of resistance to chronistic theology in this book, for example, in the study of Ruth 1:4-5.

In verse 1:4 explains that the author of this book has a theological view that is contrary to the Deuteronomistic theological view, or rather he is contrary to the Chronistic theological view (the theological view that developed at the time of the author's life, namely the theological view that wrote Ezra-Nehemiah-Chronicles, which opposes mixed marriage and struggle for the realization of 'real Israel'). I translate using the word 'take' because I am using the usual word: 'to take a Moabite woman as a wife'. But we need to look further into the Hebrew language used. The author of the book of Ruth does not use the usual language, namely *lqh 'sh* ('took the woman' cf. 4:13), but uses *ns' 'sh* ('to pick up the woman'). The term *ns' 'sh*, in concordance research, is widely used in 2 Chronicles. This term is used of marriages with 'concubines' and 'concubines' at 2 Chronicles 11:21; 13:21; also used for illegitimate marriages, for example in 2Ch 24:3 where the priest Joyada took two wives. This term is also used of the deprivation of women in Judges 21:23. This term is also used in Ezra 9:1-2,12; 10:44 and Nehemiah 13:23-25 which refers to intermarriage which is prohibited by Chronicists. So from this concordance study, the term used in other books has a negative meaning, especially in the chronicle language, namely mixed marriage. However, the author of the book of Ruth deliberately uses this term which, according to Chronistic language, is very negative and is perceived in a positive sense as a critical language of Chronistic theology.

They were married for 10 years and were not blessed with a child. "It is not explicitly said that the sons are incompetent and punished with no children and death (maybe because they married foreign women) ..." (a) that at that time there was a character in the role of women in decision-making in the life of the congregation (Nehemiah 5; 8), the participation of women in the work of building cities; b) and in contrast to a), there is also the struggle of women against the patriarchal tradition that was driven by Nabiah Noaja (Ne 6:14). From the evidence a) and b) it can be concluded that the role of women is starting to be taken into account in the congregation (Fischer, 2001:90; Blum, 1995:24-42; Willi, 1999:75-98). This is a parallel with the story of Sarah who for 10 years also had no children (Petermann, 1999: 106). If a couple has not had children for 10 years, then the wife will be said to be barren and will not have children again. To this day the Jewish tradition uses this time limit to determine whether a woman is barren or not. According to patriarchal tradition all the guilt of not having children is always blamed on the wife, and that is a curse from God. However, with his criticism, the author of this book indirectly states that this mistake is also on the part of men, because it is proven that Ruth could have children with Boaz.

In verse 1:5, the theme of death occurs again in this verse, and this time it befalls Naomi's two sons. Zenger (1986:35) views that according to Jewish tradition, this is an extraordinary disaster that befell Naomi. In a patriarchal world, people will always corner Naomi's position (Trible, 1993: 192), that she has been punished by God. But in the narrative it looks very programmatic, that the author has his own view of women, and most likely he is a woman. The perspective of the story has now changed not to Elimelech and his two sons again, but to Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, namely the perspective to three women (Comp. Berlin, 1994:83f). And even Ruth who is a foreigner and a woman who has a marginal position in the patriarchal world suddenly enters the mainstream, namely being the ancestor of the Davidic dynasty.



Because of the hard struggle of the author and his group for women that appears in the book of Ruth from the beginning to the end, there are consequences in terms of perspective on women (Fischer (1996: 1-6)).<sup>1</sup> This proves that the author of this book is a woman (Goitein pada tahun 1957: comp. Goitein (1988: 31). Followed by other experts, for example Campbell (1975: 22-23); Jost (1992: 9), Brenner (1993: 70-84), Bledstein (1993: 116-133), van Dijk-Hemmes (1993: 134-139), Meyers (1993: 85-114), and Fischer (2001: 94) who fight for her rights (or at least a man in the framework of fighting for women's rights).<sup>2</sup> But unfortunately, again this book was re-edited by editors who came from the patriarchy and inserted 4:18-22 which ignores the true femininity of this book. Ruth has been described as "an elegantly wrought classic version of the rags-to-riches story, of hard work and proper reward, told from the point of view of women" (Tischler, 1993: 151).

### **The Song of Solomon: The Struggle for Gender Equality**

In the traditional view the Song of Solomon is thought to have been written by Solomon. It is based on Kid 1:1 'Song of Solomon' and is a song. However, historical-critical research proves that this book is not actually a complete book, but is a collection of songs, like the book of Psalms. Most commentators today think that the Song of Solomon is not an allegorical song that describes the love between God and His people, but is purely a love song. The question here is, does this song consists of only one song, or is a collection of songs.

In the late 18th century the German literary scholar J.G. Herder (1778) called the *Kidung Agung* a collection of love songs which was then followed by other researchers, such as H.H. Rowley (1965:195-245), G. Gerleman (1965), R. Gordis (1974), O. Keel (1994), and H.-P. Müller (1992:1-90).<sup>3</sup> The songs collected were of course not composed in the same time and context. However, it has the same theme song, namely "love" (Murphy, 1979:436-43). Because of this same theme, these songs were selected, collected and edited. The addition of the title at 1:1 by the editor shows that the editors of this collection of songs come from the wisdom tradition. The sages of that time wrote much for the young people guidelines for life. Therefore, the Song of Solomon is a guidebook for young people to know the world of love (Bühlmann, 1997:11). Scholars today prefer this interpretation model, but what is still being debated is this book's *Sitz im Leben*, whether these songs are songs from the seven-day wedding ceremony (J.B. Bossuet [1693], E. Renan [1860], K. Budde [1894, 1898], E. Würthwein [21969], Horine (2001)<sup>4</sup>, etc.) or are common love songs (Gerleman, 1965; Keel, 1994; Müller, 1992;).

I refer to this model of interpretation (the Great Song is a collection of love songs), and argue that this book is both a collection of common love songs, as well as songs at weddings, in other words, within this collection of songs. includes love songs and in it are also found wedding songs, for example section 3: 6-5: 1 is a collection of wedding songs. Undoubtedly, although composed of stand-alone songs, in their final form, these songs were collected by the editor and arranged in such a way as to form an orderly composition (Crüsemann, 2004: 141-57).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Goulder rightly (1986:2) says, that the songs in this book are "a rather continuous sequence". But what's interesting here, what the editors collect is songs that have the same main theme, namely about love, so it can be said that this book is a collection of love songs.

If you look closely, almost all of these songs were composed by a woman. As well as the opinion of Stadelmann (1992); Brenner (1993: 86-97); Bekkenkamp and van Dijk (1993:67-85); Exum (1998:230-1), that in the Song of Songs, most of the songs have a feminist perspective. One example I'll take in Kid 1:5 which I took from my book which is currently under publication: *I am black and beautiful*, – The singer introduced herself, that she was black and beautiful. In this clause, the word black is often interpreted to have a negative assumption, because black skin is usually also associated with dry and ugly skin (Job 30:30; Lamentations 4:8). But this is contrasted with the word beautiful which has positive assumptions (Arminjon, 1988:126; Kaiser,

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<sup>1</sup> As evidence can be seen in 1:8 about "the mother's house". Whereas what is commonly expressed is "father's house."

<sup>2</sup> Gender roles and role identity are the most frequently discussed topics in this book (Berquist, 1993:23-37).

<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Müller (1997:557-74) assumes that this book is a collection of *travesti*.

<sup>4</sup> Horine thinks that this book was written for a wedding.

<sup>5</sup> Crüsemann suggests viewing the book as a whole as a "whole composition" including the title in 1:1. What is meant is that the parts of these songs have been neatly arranged and composed by the editors, and are inseparable from each other.

2000: 153-63).<sup>6</sup> Apparently the audience at that time thought that black was something negative, but in this case the singer denied and rejected that opinion. If a girl has black skin, then she is not necessarily not beautiful, because black skin is not a factor to reduce beauty. Even black skin can be a symbol of beauty, as in the iconography below (which is a fresco on a tomb in Theban dating from the 14th/13th century BC depicting the beautiful Queen Ahmes Nefertiti), that in this painting black is a symbol of beauty (Keel, 1994:48).



Figure 1: Queen Ahmes Nefertiti

Therefore it is better if this clause is translated as *i am black and beautiful*<sup>7</sup> and beautiful and not with *i am black but beautiful*.

### Esther as a Feminist Model for Diaspora Jews

The book of Esther is one of the only two books in the Bible named after a woman, and the result is that the text is open to gender analysis (Hatzaw, 2021). In the article "Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel", Sidnie Ann White (1989:161-177) briefly describes the contents of the book of Esther which she considers a feminist model for the Jews in the Diaspora. White was able to identify the feminist character in this book, and it seems that this book has a feminist character like the story of Jael discussed above. Jael and Esther have almost the same background, in that the Israeli or Jewish society at that time was in a weak situation, and there was not one strong male character who could fight against the foreign power. If in the situation of Jael, the Israeli people at that time were under the subordination of the Canaanites, in Esther's situation the Jews were also under the subordination of other nations, in that the Jews at that time lived in the Diaspora, in minority status and politically under the influence of the Gentiles. White thought that Esther was a character who fought for the struggle to continue Jewish life in the midst of an insecure world at that time, as did Jael's position. White argues and strongly disagrees with the interpreters who have said that the main character in this book is Mordecai, who succeeded in saving the Israelites from this situation of insecurity. In fact, Mordecai's position was very weak, and at that time, just like in the case of Jael, there really was nothing that could 'save' this nation. It was in this weak situation that Esther emerged, who with her 'shrewd' diplomatic and negotiating skills managed to save the Jews in the midst of a

<sup>6</sup> Arminjon says that the adjective 'beautiful', *yafe*, is often used to describe a person's appearance. Furthermore, Kaiser views, that "beauty" is a gift from God.

<sup>7</sup> Translation *šeHôrāh 'anî w<sup>e</sup>nā'wāh* a hermeneutical debate. Fox (1993:1002) notes, that this clause is better translated as "black but beautiful" (also TB-LAI; Goulder [1986:10,74]; band. also Gledhill who takes the middle ground: "Black me, but beautiful") rather than "black and pretty". However, this translation is strongly opposed by feminist theology and Black Theology. In commenting on Origen's interpretation, Hood (1994:73) says: that the Septuagint translates it as "I am black and beautiful; but Jerome rejected the Septuagint translation, and Jerome translated it with *nigra sum sed formosa* (I am black but beautiful) and he did not translate (as in the Septuagint) *nigra sum et pulchra* (I am black and beautiful). So Hood controversially said that Origen was "the first black Apostle". Snowden (1983:66) and Scott (2006:82-3) carefully comment on Hood's controversial opinion, that of course Origen was not "an apostle to the first black people", because at that time there was no racial debate between black people. black and white. However, the translation by the Septuagint can be a good consideration for translating this section, so as not to have an impact on racial and gender problems.



crisis. So that it is women who can actually solve problems in the midst of a national crisis, just like Jael and Esther.

## **How Women Should Read the Bible: Fundamentals of Feminist Theology**

### **Diversity of Images of God**

If women begin to read the Bible through a feminist perspective, and if they consciously ask: 'What does what I read or each story mean to me, to us women in our concrete situation?', then they find surprisingly unexpected things and viewpoints read in a completely new way..

For example, they will find that God is shown to us not only in male depictions, such as Father, King, but also in feminist depictions, for example as a mother caring for and educating her child (Isaiah 49:15). God is also a Mother who loves His child, Israel. God is also described as a Woman who seeks 'His' lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). It has been a long time since when the Bible was written in the situation and context in which it formulated and put together (Timo & Putrawan, 2021; Timo et al, 2020). That was by men who dominated in the depiction of God as the Father, and this stance has been continued for over two thousand years. However, with the reading of the texts mentioned above (and of course also with readings on other texts), it is evident that it is time for the domination of masculine people to end a purely masculine depiction of God, because in the Bible God is at times also depicted as a woman. Since God is described in the Bible as well in terms of femininity, there is nothing wrong with women praying: 'Our mother in heaven ...' (Mollenkott, 1985). From this understanding it will be even more enriching, that God is actually more than just a Father or Mother (Voß-Goldstein, 1988:67). 'Father' or 'Mother' are only personifications used to more easily explain to limited human beings, the essence of God. God is more than that, more than just a Father and Mother, He is a good parent, who loves all His people. And God is in fact far more than that, which reason cannot attempt to explain. Since 'Father' is only a personification for God, then men should not dominate this masculine image to women who wish to personify God in a feminist image as a 'Mother'. St. Clement of Alexandria (150 CE - 215 CE) spoke of God's motherly and fatherly characteristics, although he never referred to God with any feminine language or pronoun usage. (Clement of Alexandria (n.d.). St. Augustine of Hippo also often used feminine metaphors, but no feminine pronouns (Saint Augustine of Hippo, 1961). The prophet Isaiah provided feminine imagery to depict God, and he compared God to a woman in labor in various verses throughout the book. He also also referred to God as a 'nursing mother' (Isaiah, 66).

There is a big push in some modernistic Christian traditions to use different pronouns to describe God as opposed to the masculine ones that have been traditionally applied. The rediscovery of the feminist dimension in some of the above depictions of God helps women in their personal spirituality not to depend on a masculine notion, but to live together and be more spirituality together with men. The Bible is the primary reading for all Christians. If there is a question to ask it is, is it justifiable if women pray and call their God 'Mother': 'Our mother in heaven ...', then back to the understanding of the text above, that the Bible never sees only through the eyes of one different person. Even though the Bible has long been written in a dominant patriarchal world (Moltmann-Wendel, 1983), there are still feminist images for God, as in examples discussed above. Therefore, God should not only be described as Father, or only as Mother, but there are various descriptions of God. One cannot dominate and marginalize one at the expense of the other. We should also not lose sight of the original important role of women as ministers in the churches (see Nicolaidis, 2005; 2016).

### **Jesus' Struggle to Free Women**

Jesus' ministry in the world was not confined to men alone. It was not only the twelve who listened to Jesus' sermons. Indeed, sometimes He devoted his sermons to them, but yet most of those who surrounded Jesus were also women, that is, all were included, both men and women. There were several women around Jesus whom Jesus healed, some of whom were anonymous, for example the woman who was bleeding (Mark 5:25-34). There were also those who wanted to sacrifice something for Jesus, for example a woman who anointed Jesus' head with pure nard (Mark 14:3-9) and also a woman who anointed Jesus' feet with perfumed oil and wiped them with her hair and anointed them with perfumed oil (John 7: 36-50). Three important women were also around Jesus, namely three Mary's who each faithfully accompanied Jesus. So what was around Jesus was not only a crowd of men, but also a crowd of women



(Moltmann-Wendel, 1980). Jesus' work of liberation is not only for men, but for women as well in all ages (Voß-Goldstein, 1988:70). In the Orthodox first as well as in Roman Catholicism, the Virgin Mary is considered to be the First among the Saints, stressing the role of women as being very important (Nicolaidis, 2016). It is also argued that "The history of the Christian church, since its inception, has denied women, their rightful place. This is notwithstanding, the critical reading of scriptural text, that reveals multitudes of women, who played a significant role in church history, but remain unacknowledged" (Dweba, Mbali & Rashe, 2020).

### **Conclusion: Hope for the Development of Feminist Theology**

As explained above, the struggle for a 'together life' is paramount. Men should not dominate women with their patriarchal theology. Women also should not arbitrarily want to establish their own church, or create a women's church with its special theology. Women also cannot arbitrarily replace all patriarchal words in the Bible with feminist words. What is important here is the coexistence of men and women as beings created by God. Gender equality is the ultimate struggle for feminist theology. Feminist theology requires a sound biblical interpretation and it requires a good understanding, spiritually speaking of past and present experiences of women in the world. It should guide women and men helps better understand God's desire for all of humanity going into a troubled future. It is critical in the current world that women have freedom, equal opportunity, and a good measure of control over their lives. So women should be able to have autonomy, freedom of choice, and be empowered towards good engagement.

The first hope is that ecclesiastical positions are not only dominated by men, but also filled with women. Even though there are now many women who have filled important positions in the church, it is still felt that their role in ecclesiastical ministry is still under-emphasized. Another hope is that there is still a lack of solid female and male theologians entrusted with teaching at the theological colleges as faculty.

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