

The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment.

By Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Fortress, 211 pp., \$11.95 paperback.

Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation.

By Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Beacon, 182 pp., \$17.95.

These two books by Notre Dame's Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza remind me of my medical condition, binocular autonomic strabismus: at any moment, one eye dominates, but the next moment the other eye—beyond my control—takes over. *The Book of Revelation* sees mainly through the scholar's eye, seeking and expounding truth, with occasional reference (as the subtitle indicates) to justice. *Bread Not Stone* sees mainly through the partisan's eye, pleading for justice for women. Here Schüssler Fiorenza uses her scholarly tools as weapons in a power struggle.

Three cheers for *Revelation*, one cheer for *Bread*. The former is a model of historical-critical biblical scholarship, gathering and integrating previously published essays in the area of the author's doctoral and postdoctoral studies. Nothing more up-to-date or stimulating has been written on the Book of Revelation.

Revelation is nowhere pedantic or antiquarian or dry or lazy or dull. The author's excitement about the Bible's last book involves the reader in her passionate conviction of its here-and-now relevance to the struggle for a more faithful church and a more human world.

Readers of Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her* will expect her feminist paradigm of critical interpretation to influence and even control her connecting of the biblical then and the contemporary now. They will not be surprised that she, like so many post-Holocaust German scholars, is intensely committed to the humanization of power, which (with Ernst Käsemann) she sees as the central issue in apocalyptic. Nor that, observing that "the images of a patriarchal God and all-powerful Lord in heaven legitimate and perpetuate patriarchal domination on earth," she struggles, using all of her considerable critical acumen, to squeeze out of *Revelation* a transpatriarchal Word of God for present and future.

Bread, however, is a tedious diatribe for "women-church" feminism, repeating ad nauseam what will be obvious to most readers who plow all the way through it—viz., we should be free in the Bible, knowing it; free with the Bible, using it in private and public life; and free from the Bible, transcending it, as Jesus did, in the interest of a more humane church and world. Not by way of rejecting feminism, but in the interest of improving it, I must ask these questions:

1. Why has Schüssler Fiorenza not applied her critical tools and critical consciousness to "patriarchy" and "feminism"? A Catholic woman, she has created a "feminist critical theology of liberation" that is "indebted to historical-critical scholarship, critical theory, and political as well as liberation theology." And she calls for biblical scholarship as "a critical historical-theological undertaking." Why, then, her simplistic-moralistic, uncritical acceptance of women's-movement buzzwords, both negative ("patriarchy," "oppression") and positive ("feminism," "equality")?

Yes, movements need banner words, audiocues to boo and applaud, holo-phrastic weapons, slogans. But scholars within any movement betray their high calling if they do no more than boo and applaud. To fail to be critical of as well as in a movement is the action of a partisan rather than a prophet, or an uncritical advocate instead of a detached-engaged scholar. Rightly, Schüssler-Fiorenza challenges Christian communities and the biblical guild to be self-critical: why has she exempted the feminist movement?

2. Why is the author's etiological myth for human misery only male ("patriarchy") instead of human ("sin")? Assuming that she grants the moral equality of the sexes, recognizing that woman-evil is as great potentially as, under the old patriarchy, man-evil has been actually, why no critical warning against increasing woman-evil concomitant with increasing woman-power in "woman-church" and woman-world?

3. Why the denigration of biological factors? Schüssler Fiorenza exhausts hermeneutical theory and looks hopefully toward all the human sciences, but suspects biology ("nature") and puts the whole load of "gender dimorphism" on nurture, as though nothing relevant has happened in hormonal and genetic research, twined as the new helix. Why

not a liberation theology for this helix: Honor thy and thy neighbors' hormonal-genetic helix? Discover and release the gifts God has given each human being in both helixes, and respect the limits and weaknesses of each. Men and women are also bodies, not only "persons."

4. Is Schüssler Fiorenza gynocentric (woman-centered) as a midpassage between androcentrism (male-centered history, language, society) and anthropocentrism (human-centeredness)? I'd like to believe so, but in *Bread* she doesn't help me to know.

5. In narrowing her hermeneutic to gender-analysis "critical" thinking (parallel with Marxist class-analysis "critical" thinking), is Schüssler Fiorenza being rhetorical—that is, temporarily making a witness from a single perspective—or is that it for her? From *Bread* I get the impression that this paradigm is not rhetorical but doctrinal, even ideological. This would explain *Bread's* disdain for critics of the Inclusive Language Lectionary.

6. Who is the God whose authoritative Word Schüssler Fiorenza discovers through reflection on women's experience? Tillich's God beyond God? And can she honestly eisegete this idealized deity into a Bible she's bowdlerized by expurgating it of "patriarchy" in heaven and on earth?

While *Bread Not Stone* worthily aims to free the Bible to be better news for humanity, we must wait a little longer for a critical feminist biblical hermeneutic that is more balanced than adversarial, more conciliatory than shrill, and so more useful to women and men in shaping, together, a more human past, present and future. *Bread* nudges us in that direction, but it is more feminist than biblical and more polemical than critical.

Willis Elliott.

*The editor dropped the indication that this is my wording, not S-F's.... Also, the editor tamed, toned down, both style and substance--though I was temperate (for me!)...Hit-me-again uncritical patronism is a disservice to any movement, but the friendly critic gets pegged as enemy.

IN THIS BOOK, WILLIS
didnt you use your considerable
critical acumen on, ~~as well as~~ in the service of, the feminist movement?
rather than only