

*Rebecca Todd Peters, Santiago Slabodsky, Carol J. Dempsey, Susanne Scholz*

## **Reviewing “The Bible as Political Artifact: On the Feminist Study of the Hebrew Bible” by Susanne Scholz**

### **A Panel Discussion at the SBL 2019 Annual Meeting in San Diego, CA**

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#### **Abstract**

Mit ihrem sorgfältig recherchierten, kreativen und provokanten Werk *The Bible as Political Artifact: On the Feminist Study of the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress Press, 2017) ist es Susanne Scholz gelungen, die Grenzen traditioneller Bibelwissenschaft zu überschreiten und Menschen in exegetischer Forschung und Lehre des 21. Jahrhunderts herauszufordern. Beim Annual Meeting der SBL 2019 in San Diego war das Buch Gegenstand eines Panels der Sektionen Feminist Hermeneutics of the Bible and Gender, Sexuality, and the Bible und wurde angeregt diskutiert. Die Beiträge des Panels und die Response von Susanne Scholz werden hier präsentiert.

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#### **Introduction to the panel by Carol J. Dempsey**

*The Bible as Political Artifact: On the Feminist Study of the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress Press, 2017) is a creative, provocative, and meticulously researched volume that pushes the boundaries of traditional biblical research and offers a compelling challenge to Bible scholars, teachers, and students for the twenty-first century. This work has piqued the interest of the scholarly community which prompted the SBL Feminist Hermeneutics of the Bible and Gender, Sexuality, and the Bible sections to sponsor a lively panel review of the book. Carolyn Sharp,

Professor of Homiletics at Yale Divinity School, presided over the presentations offered by Rebecca Todd Peters, Santiago Slabodsky, and Carol J. Dempsey. Susanne Scholz offered a lively response. The following papers capture the dynamism of collegial thought and interaction.

### ***Rebecca Todd Peters***

The set of essays presented in this book represent a clear and powerful call for transforming biblical studies in ways that de-center traditional models of biblical scholarship that continue to promote positivist approaches masquerading as objective under the guise of defining their work as critical-scientific inquiry.

As a scholar outside the field of biblical studies, I learned a great deal from this book about some of the specific internal struggles to transform biblical studies. That said, there was also much that is all too familiar in the struggles of feminist, queer, post-colonial, womanist and other minoritized scholars in transforming and updating the theories, methods, and agendas of our respective guilds. In fact, even the idea of scholarship as protected, controlled, and policed by guilds is a notion that signifies hierarchy, authority, and bygone eras of centralized male power and authority. Or perhaps not so bygone? Or, maybe just not as bygone as we would like them to be.

While my positionality outside the discipline of biblical studies might make my interest in these internecine wars seem curious, I read Scholz’s call for transformation to reach far beyond the boundaries of biblical studies. In fact, I think her interest lies in deconstructing many traditional boundaries altogether. For, as she states in the introduction, her aim is to “further the agenda of cultural criticism in biblical research from a feminist hermeneutical stance” (p. xvi). Reading her work as a feminist social ethicist, the project of cultural criticism that centers *The Bible as Political Artifact* is not just a project of Bible scholars.

In fact, if we take seriously Scholz’s attention to the importance of bringing “biblical literature ‘back’ into the intellectual debates on today’s social, political, cultural and religious issues, and to release the Bible from its academically isolated, undervalued, and privatized space” (p. 22) then it will require a far more collaborative, engaged, multi-disciplinary space that invites not only biblical scholars and ethicists to the table but also political scientists, feminist

philosophers and economists, sociologists, anthropologists, not to mention our activist friends and people who desire to read the Bible together for liberation and transformation. What could be more feminist?

Scholz’s scholarship is acutely relevant in the context of a postmodern world that is struggling to discern what it means to live in “a secular age.”<sup>1</sup> As questions of authority and truth roil across the political and social stages of many of the world’s people, the question of who and what hold authority for people today is a separate question from how moral and political authority have shaped the world in which we live. Even as we debate what role religion should play in our contemporary socio-political world, we cannot let that distract us from a deeper awareness about the role that religion, and particularly Christianity, has played in shaping our contemporary world.

In Western countries with a political and social history of Christianity, the influence of biblical stories, traditions, and traditional theologies associated with that Christian legacy are often not obvious or evident to people and communities that have become either more secular in orientation, values, and upbringing or that come from different religious backgrounds and cultural orientations. Nevertheless, the roots of Western jurisprudence are directly traceable to legal traditions, values, and practices associated with Christianity. Likewise, social and cultural norms and mores are also deeply influenced by Christian biblical stories, traditions, and values associated with them – even when contemporary publics are not aware of those connections.<sup>2</sup>

One of the fundamental principles of my work as a feminist Christian ethicist is that, unless and until we identify and make people aware of how the Bible is being used in culture and society, the Bible will continue to be used to restrain and oppress women in invisible and deeply damaging spiritual and material ways. Scholz’s scholarship on rape, which has sought to challenge traditional interpretations of biblical rape and to transform biblical scholarship on rape, is a clear witness to this principle.<sup>3</sup> While this type of scholarship will look different for ethicists than it will for biblical scholars, there is a great deal of room for partnership and collaboration along the way.

Even as there are many areas of contemporary life that have been impacted by traditionalist and misogynist interpretations of the Bible, there are few that have been as ignored by scholars as the debate about abortion in the United States. Regardless of the fact that abortion

is not mentioned in the Bible, the public debate about abortion in the US is deeply shaped and marked by how the Bible is and has been used in culture and society to shape attitudes about women and women’s social roles.<sup>4</sup>

Bringing the principle of critical cultural biblical awareness to bear on the topics of pregnancy, childbearing, and abortion allows us to see how valuable Scholz’s work of furthering critical biblical scholarship informed by minoritized perspectives is for our social and political world today. With this in mind, I will highlight three insights from her work that might be productive in helping to reshape the contentious debate about abortion in the United States.

First, Scholz’s ethical genealogies of Biblical interpretation can help trace how the framework of justification came to dominate and shape abortion discourse in the US (p. 181).

One critical task of feminist social ethics is to engage in social analysis that helps people recognize and identify the social problems and factors that shape situations of oppression. In analyzing the contemporary landscape of abortion politics and debate in the United States, identifying the dominant framework that shapes how we think and talk about abortion as a framework of justification allows people to recognize that this dominant framing of the discourse is biased against women from the outset.

The justification, which begins with the assumption that abortion is morally wrong, therefore requires women to offer *justification* for their decisions to end pregnancies. Historically, four reasons have generally been accepted as justifiable reasons for abortion, what I call the PRIM reasons - Prenatal health, Rape, Incest, and Mother’s life and health. The fact that abortion is morally acceptable in some cases means that the real social question is not whether women can have abortions, but which women and for what reasons? In this way, requiring women to justify their abortion decisions functions as a form of social control to policewomen’s reproduction and to deny women the same full moral agency and bodily autonomy that men enjoy.

One of the foundational beliefs supporting this position that abortion is morally wrong is the idea that women have a moral obligation to bear children. There are a number of cultural tropes associated with traditionalist interpretations of the creation stories in Genesis, tropes like:

- Women were created to attend to men’s needs

- God ordained that men should rule over their wives
- Women are deceptive, seductive, and sexual creatures
- Childbearing is women’s punishment for disobeying God

However, my strength as a social ethicist is focusing on the social analysis – tasks like identifying and naming the justification framework and deconstructing the cultural arguments that support it; and documenting the ways in which this framework is being used to harass and punish women, particularly poor women, young women, and women of color. While I identify and discuss aspects of how the Bible has been used in these debates, there is a great deal of opportunity for collaboration and deepening of my analysis and critiques that could come with the kind of ethical genealogical scholarship Scholz develops in chapter 8.

In examining three very different interpretations of Hosea 2:2-23, Scholz illustrates the value of tracing the ethical genealogies of biblical interpretation. In the first, grounded in historical criticism and linguistics, Hans-Walter Wolff presents a supersessionist interpretation of the text that focuses on God’s power to establish a new covenantal relationship creating what Scholz calls a “theo-culturally dangerous meaning of the Old Testament poem” (p. 183) The second, by feminist scholar Gale Yee focuses on the gendered aspects of the poem which allow Yee to highlight the insidious nature of describing the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as a battering relationship (pp. 183-185) The third interpretation, by post-colonial scholar Tania Mara Vieira Sampaio is developed in dialogue with Brazilian women who make their living as prostitutes. Reading from the perspective of prostitutes offers a radical rereading of this text that views the financial independence that accompanies prostitution as essential before husband and wife can reconcile and renew their covenantal relationship.

This model of tracing the ethical genealogy of interpretation could help shed light on and potentially challenge the power of these cultural tropes about women, women’s social roles, and traditional gender roles that can be traced back to the creation narratives in Genesis. Breaking the phallogocentric symbolic order of male sexual privilege that undergirds the dominant framework of justification that shapes abortion discourse in the US will require more work by Biblical scholars that seeks to speak to broader audiences in ways that challenge misogynist interpretations of these narratives and the cultural tropes that have arisen from centuries of patriarchal interpretations.

Second, examining the Biblical interpretations that the Christian Right make about abortion offers sociological insight into who anti-abortion Christian leaders are and what kind of world they seek to impose on American women (pp.180-181). The anti-choice movement is notorious for their use of the Bible in supporting their political position that abortion should be criminalized. Scholz has argued convincingly (following Bourriaud) that in our postmodern world, we cannot claim that interpretations are right or wrong (p.180). While we can certainly offer alternative interpretations of the texts that they use or even offer an entirely different theological argument for supporting women’s right to end a pregnancy, if we affirm the postmodern hermeneutic of interpretation, there isn’t really any legitimate basis for denouncing anti-choice interpretations as wrong.

However, I’m not sure that is really such a loss. In fact, Scholz offers much more interesting avenues for thinking about how to address the Biblical interpretation of anti-choice Christians. One of her claims is that interpretations provide sociological insights into the world of the interpreter. She says, “biblical interpretations are access points to examining who we are. Rather than telling us what the Bible says, they are sources for critical interrogations about the world” (p.180).

If we approach Right-wing Christian interpretation of the Bible from this perspective, we are able to see that their interpretations tell us precious little about scripture but loads about who they are and what kind of world they seek to impose on American women. Traditionalist Right-wing Christians believe that there is a divinely ordained sexual order where men are the heads of households, wives submit to their husbands, and sex belongs only in monogamous marriage. Russell Moore, President of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention has argued that, “Patriarchy is good for women, good for children, and good for families. . . the question for us is not whether we will have patriarchy, but what kind.”<sup>5</sup> Moore calls the faithful to more biblical patriarchy which he describes as “a loving, sacrificial, protective patriarchy in which the archetypal Fatherhood of God is reflected in the leadership of human fathers, in the home and in the church.”<sup>6</sup>

While it is certainly the case that Christianity has a deep history of patriarchy, racism, and misogyny, it need not be held captive to that past. Over the past century, feminists, people of

color, gender-queer minorities and other people who have chafed under the traditionalist white Christian vision of gender and social control have steadily challenged and rejected oppressive norms that harm people and violate human rights. It is the case that many people have left religion behind because of this traditionalism and the racism, sexism, misogyny, and intolerance they have experienced in organized religion and particularly within Christianity. At the same time, multiple movements of liberation theology have grown up within Christianity. These movements have shaped robust theological visions of Christianity that challenge the racism, misogyny, homophobia, and power of traditionalist versions of Christianity. In fact, there is such a stark difference between traditionalist Christianity and progressive Christianity that historian Marie Griffith has described these two versions of Christianity as “two virtually nonoverlapping religions.”<sup>7</sup> Scholz’s work helps make clear that the most influential battleground is not in determining who has the “right” interpretation of scripture but rather in helping broader publics recognize and understand how the Bible is being used by different groups of Christians and helping people to see how these different interpretations offer different visions of what is holy and sacred and how we are to care for each other and our world.

Third, reading the Bible with women who have abortions can offer a transgressive hermeneutic of empowerment. Much like Sampaio read the text of Hosea with Brazilian prostitutes (ch. 8), reading the Bible with women who have had abortions holds the key to recognizing the profound moral wisdom and care with which these women approach questions of pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting.

While I have not yet read the bible with women who have had abortions, I know that they have a lot to teach us about motherhood. Studies consistently show that women who have abortions weigh a wide variety of factors as they consider what to do when faced with an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy. In fact, 50% of women who have abortions report at least four contributing factors that they evaluated in considering their pregnancy.<sup>8</sup> Most of the women who have abortions do so precisely because they are acting responsibly in recognizing their inability to mother a potential child in ways that reflect justice, wholeness, and abundant life.

In saying no to a particular pregnancy, these women are often saying yes to other visions of wholeness and abundant life – sometimes for existing children, sometimes for families or

marriages, and sometimes they are saying “yes” to a vision of a whole and abundant future life for themselves. The fact that 60% of the women who have abortions already have children means that they know what it takes to mother. As one woman who already had two children stated, “There is just no way I could be the wonderful parent to all three of them and still have enough left over to keep the house clean and make sure the bills are paid and I’m in bed on time so I can be at work on time. It’s impossible.”<sup>9</sup> Most of the other 40% will go on to have children later in life. But what if they don’t go on to have children? There are a growing number of women (and men) who do not want to have children, who do not feel called to the sacred task of parenting or who do not feel that the world needs more children given our growing population.

Reading the Bible with women who had an abortion offers the opportunity of opening up multiple new ways of thinking about pregnancy, gestation, prenatal life, childbirth, adoption, parenting, and many other issues related to reproduction and reproductive justice. Reading the Bible with these women could offer important insight into new ways to interpret the scripture that could contribute in meaningful ways to the socio-political debates that are ravaging the United States and could provide important contributions to the essential task of changing how we think and talk about abortion. The criminalization of abortion will only harm the most vulnerable women and pregnant people in society. Elevating the voices of women who regularly experience cultural silencing, damnation, and violence as a result of their reproductive decisions has the potential to contribute to cultural transformation.

While my remarks here have focused on abortion, that is illustrative for my larger point. What is exciting about Scholz’s work is the invitation for collaboration and for reimagining the tasks and methods, not just of feminist biblical scholarship, but of our collective work as feminist/womanist/mujerista/queer/postcolonial activist-scholars who understand our work to be more about social transformation than academic respectability. The points I have highlighted offer glimpses into the value-added potential that we offer to each other when we think beyond the academy and allow ourselves to dream a new world together.

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eight books including her most recent book, *Trust Women: A Progressive Christian Argument for Reproductive Justice* (Beacon Press, 2018). Ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), she has been active denominationally and ecumenically for more than twenty-five years and has represented the PC(USA) as a member of the Faith and Order Standing Commission of the World Council of Churches for the past fourteen years. She received the 2018 Walter Wink Scholar-Activist Award from Auburn Seminary in recognition of her work on reproductive justice and poverty and economic justice and is currently a Public Fellow at the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI).

***Santiago Slabodsky***

Before starting my remarks,<sup>10</sup> I would like to acknowledge that I am one of the people who is today crossing the reified divide between AAR and SBL. So, I hope the reader is not expecting a critical engagement from a Biblical scholar because I will surely fall short. But I am writing this piece precisely because I am not a Biblical scholar. And because the work of Scholz, while very well anchored in the field, transcends what Afro-Caribbean thought has characterized as ‘disciplinary decadence’ and goes on to illuminate social, political, and epistemological problems, interrogations, and proposals that extend well beyond Biblical Studies.<sup>11</sup> While I, as a sociologist of global modern Jewish thought, may not be a priori the most logical respondent for a book on German and American feminist biblical studies, what Scholz has achieved in the book makes it possible for me to contribute my two cents.

Where is, then, the provocation of Scholz’s book? From the title and introduction readers can, it seems, recognize Scholz’s contribution very quickly. *The Bible as Political Artifact* is an attack against the essentialisms of both religious and positivist fundamentalisms. Instead of furthering classical readings, she employs feminist, post-modern, post-structuralist, and post-colonial tools in order to find a meaning in the redemptive power of interpretation, a move that will surely anger evangelical and scientific fundamentalists (pp. 1–11). And the attacks she has received from spaces inside and outside academia can only re-affirm her audacity.<sup>12</sup> The contribution Scholz offers is solid, innovative, persuasive and, above everything else, truly committed. There is no doubt, therefore, of the contribution she is making to the field of Biblical Studies.

The contribution of Scholz, however, goes well beyond her primary field. While there are truly remarkable elements throughout the text, I believe that her interdisciplinary contribution shines in the very last chapter. In this chapter, Scholz develops what can be categorized as a ‘barbaric proposal’ (305). She raises questions that are as necessary to grasp as they are difficult and complex to answer. It is in this section that she not only challenges the religious and scientific fundamentalisms mentioned earlier, but risks going well beyond comfortable geopolitical boundaries in order to build a critical community of intellectuals with socially engaged communities who may not recognize her as part of their collective. And it is precisely

this risk, this audacity, this creativity of her barbaric proposal that I would like to explore with you today.

This last chapter is entitled “Barbaric Bibles: The Scandal of Inclusive Translations.” In the text Scholz explores the political eruption that followed an “inclusive translation” of the Bible (the BibS) in Germany during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This project closely resembles Scholz’s interpretation of the Bible as a political artifact as it is more interested in the meaning-creation of the reception than in literalist and positivist fundamentalisms. The project, perhaps expectedly, was furiously attacked by traditional forces that argued that the authors were confusing interpretation with translation. Furthermore, as Scholz very well points out they are arrogating to themselves the naturalization of their geopolitical location as the universal space from which to interpret the text basing themselves on a characterization of translation as a technical, apolitical task. In this way, the author argues, they wind up reproducing a very common “colonial hierarchy” by declaring that their apolitical technical task should be understood as “high translation” and discrediting as “low barbaric” the audacious attempts of meaning creation that employs tools beyond positivism and literalism (pp. 302–304).

Since Scholz had already dismantled the narratives of a-politicism in Biblical interpretation earlier in her book, here she undertakes another task: she asks what to do with this accusation of “low barbarism.” This is where she makes a true contribution beyond Biblical Studies by studying different options that may amount to more provocative alternatives than a straight rejection of the accusation. One strategy, she argues, is to replace the accusation to the other side by accusing the accusers of barbarism (a strategy used by Marxists since the late nineteenth century). Another strategy, more in vogue today, is to deconstruct the accusation by analytically dismantling the binary (as Derridians and other post-modernists would do). She, however, prioritizes a third alternative that is a “decolonial” strategy employed by, among others, Afro-Caribbean Aimé Césaire and Tunisian Jew Albert Memmi: this strategy assumes the existing asymmetry of power, and takes pride in one’s barbaric role in disrupting the relation between Biblical misogyny and imperialism. So instead of replacing or dismantling the accusation of barbarism, they appropriate themselves of it, giving a positive connotation to the term and showing how alternative worlds can be created from the barbaric underside of history.<sup>13</sup> The Bible then becomes not just a book that shows a preferential option for the oppressed (pp.

304–310). Rather, in their reading of biblical texts, it is the oppressed who will bring their invisibilized traditions in order to give a meaning to the political artifact. In this way, and very provocatively, Scholz extends her hand as a German feminist in the U.S. to alternative Global South communities so that, together, they can build non-normative communities. This offers Scholz an excellent opportunity to create an epistemological alliance between German/US American feminisms and Global South decolonialisms through the reclaiming of a barbaric identity.

If the West, as Scholz argues, insists on the hidden misogyny and coloniality by rejecting and repressing the interpretation of the Bible as a political artifact, intellectuals committed to interrogating this invisibilization can find a common ground in rejecting any politics of recognition from the West. Instead, they can engage in what Latinx thought has categorized as “epistemological disobedience.”<sup>14</sup> This refers to the possibility of thinking from different words that have not been subsumed into the totality of a patriarchal system of modernity/coloniality. It is precisely this defiance that can create a true network of interpreting solidarities instead of trying to negotiate their epistemologies with those who have repressed them. This proposal is truly illuminating.

But there is a problem here, and Scholz is well aware of it. What is the problem? She lucidly points it out: “The problem is that global South Barbarians do not always recognize German barbarians as barbarians” (p. 311) And she is right. Absolutely right. While there are a number of Euro-American intellectuals who have been thinking from other places and were welcomed to decolonial communities, many times decolonial trends put in question the direct assimilation of Euro-American critical theory to the concert of decolonial epistemological disobediences.<sup>15</sup> But this is the moment when my reading of Scholz’s text ends, and I intend to follow Scholz’s example by beginning to create meaning with her. The problem of course, as she herself points out in the above quote, is recognition. But I still do not know whether the issue is the lack of recognition or that we are still aspiring for recognition. What I am arguing here is that in order to construct an alternative decolonial space for conversation we need to start questioning the hierarchical role of the struggle of recognition in Western thought in general and left-wing Hegelianism in particular. After all, the decolonial project revises the strategies of a left-wing Hegelianism that is still trustful of totalitarian projects of thought. Of course, for all of us trained

in critical Western thought, the idea of creating alliances, even supposedly horizontal alliances, without the possibility of recognition, is disorienting. Yet, if recognition implies, as it generally does within some of our more radical Eurocentric frameworks, imbalance of power, epistemological privileges, power of coercion, power of invisibilization, and, in the master-slave dialectics, even struggles to death, we may be able do without it.

Scholz is right again. She has renounced to the possibility and even the intention of obtaining recognition from both fundamentalisms, the literalist and the positivist. It is time to take Scholz’s line of thinking even further and start exploring transmodern projects where the need for recognition is not necessarily part of the equation.<sup>16</sup> So, a few questions follow this statement: what could be a project of epistemological subversion with conversations where the possibility of recognition is not a goal? How does abandoning the necessity for recognition constitute a decolonial and feminist epistemological disobedience? What are the implications of abandoning the necessity of recognition as a prelude for a truly horizontal conversation among different barbarisms with different levels of privileges, struggles, and oppressions? What would it look like when we transform our epistemological commitment into social justice actions? And finally, what criteria do we need to unlearn in order for the barbaric conversations without recognition to take place?

At the end, after reading, enjoying, and learning from *The Bible as a Political Artifact*, I am left with a true urge for action. And this action can take different forms, but in my review I want to make one request not only from Scholz but from all of us. Her project is too provocative to be reduced only to scholastic discussions. Others can revise it; I want to push it forward. Just as she abandoned the intention of recognition from the West, I am proposing that we abandon the logics of recognition as a political tool altogether. In other words, I am asking Scholz and all of us to be more Scholzian by taking her challenge and moving it beyond the limitations of our own imaginations. In other words, what Scholz has done with the Biblical text is to create meaning well beyond traditional interpretations, without aspiring for recognition from either the literalist or positivist fundamentalism. So, let us take Scholz’s work and push forward our own meaning-creation beyond the necessity of recognition to build communities toward a different future.

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**Carol J. Dempsey**

The book *The Bible as Political Artifact: On the Feminist Study of the Hebrew Bible* written by Susanne Scholz is no ordinary text and represents no ordinary thought. *The Bible as Political Artifact* is a volume that has vision, and its vision presents a challenge to Bible scholars and teachers of the Bible if we scholar-teachers want to have an important participatory role in this unfolding twenty-first century, wallowing in climate crisis, political chaos, social injustices, species extinctions, and a lot of the US population on oxycodone, anti-depressants, and anti-anxiety meds. Our time and changing life on this planet is like no other experience in history, and we as scholar-teachers are either going to rise to the occasion to become catalysts of change and transformation or we will become extinct like the great northern white rhino, of which only two females now exist. Scholz’s vision in *Artifact* can no longer go unheard, nor can it go unheeded.

My comments concern three areas of Scholz’s book: first, the redesign of biblical studies curriculum, academic Bible teaching, and the future of biblical studies; second, historical criticism and the Christian (and Catholic) right; and third, the volume’s contributions to gender studies and the worldwide problem of rape, a topic of particular interest to me since in India, members of women’s religious congregations suffer rape by Catholic priests and bishops. I am a member of a women’s religious congregation, and I am Catholic (more little “c” than big “C”).

I offer my comments from the perspective of one who has been engaged in biblical research, scholarship, publication, and teaching for more than twenty-five years. I teach undergraduates at the University of Portland in Oregon, a Catholic institution founded by Congregation of Holy Cross. UP’s older “sibling” is the University of Notre Dame. I am an Old Testament / Hebrew Bible scholar, and I am a member of a Catholic religious Order known as the Dominicans. My Ph.D. is from the Catholic University of America, and thus I come out of a historical critical background, although the literary approach has always been my tool of dissection. My education and church culture trained me to read “with the text,” forever searching for the “meaning” of the text and the text’s illusive author, dating, and setting. For years I taught my Bible classes this way until I encountered *Artifact* and was

encountered by its author. For the past two years, my 19–20 years old undergraduate students have been reading *Artifact* in my introductory Bible classes (70–80 students each semester), and at the conclusion of their reading, they say to me, “Give us more Scholz.” *Artifact* speaks to their frustrations as learners; it connects with their lives and their world; it gives them hope; it has helped to transform our biblical studies curriculum and our entire Theology Department; and it has thrown everything in my life as a Bible scholar into question and turmoil while breathing new life into my intellect, my teaching and classroom, my scholarship, and my person whose charism has the Bible as one of its cornerstones. I share all this information with you because my lived experience, social location, and background shape my comments on *The Bible as Political Artifact*. And so I now offer you my comments.

### 1. Pedagogy: The Redesign of Biblical Studies Curriculum, Academic Bible Teaching, and the Future of Biblical Studies

In chapter 1, Scholz outlines the inside and outside challenges facing Biblical Studies today as a discipline and a field. Specifically, the field remains aloof from the world and is intellectually caught in literalist biblicism. Her discussion on Schleiermacher and his profound influence on shaping the teaching and study of the Bible in places of learning worldwide makes ever more compelling her argument for curricular changes at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Are undergraduate students of the twenty-first century engaged and interested in Schleiermacher’s way of studying the Bible? The simple answer is “No.” Should Ph.D. students continue to be trained in Schleiermacher’s nineteenth century way of studying and teaching the Bible? Again, the simple answer is “No,” not if they want to be effective educators in a twenty-first century globalized world, the world into which these students have been born and in which we are all living.

Furthermore, for too long the study of the Bible has been what Susanne calls, “PPS”—personalized, privatized, and sentimentalized. I wholeheartedly agree with Susanne that the Bible needs to be brought back into the academic world, but that academic world needs to encounter and be encountered by the present-day globalized world and all its social, political, cultural, and religious issues. Attuned to the planet’s struggles and attuned to the students in



the classroom, I can honestly say that the radical-democratic approach, first introduced to us by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and now heralded by Susanne, is the only approach that is going to work today if we desire education to be transformative for teacher, student, and the world. In conclusion to chapter 1, Scholz makes a bold statement and asks a pointed related question:

. . . it is time to develop a biblical studies curriculum on all levels of higher education that teaches biblical studies as an academic field of inquiry, needed for a comprehensive understanding of culture, politics, and religion. Can the biblical studies curriculum be reshaped to account for the social, political, religious, and intellectual struggles in our world today? (p. 26)

The simple answer is “Yes,” Susanne, the biblical studies curriculum can be and must be reshaped.

In chapters 2 and 3 Scholz illumines the need for curricular debate and accurately describes the influence of neoliberalism, the marginalization of the humanities, the corporate management principles by which institutions of higher education are guided and governed, the future marketability of biblical studies courses. Scholz is correct in her view that “the architects of corporate universities and colleges define education as a skill set that adapts students to the mainstream of the global economy” (p. 42). Have we taken a look at our Schools or departments of business lately? What is their “culture,” their “ethos,” their teaching, and who is funding them as they strive to “get ahead” and compete in the never-satisfied, ever voracious marketplace?

Prior to the death of David Koch, the *American Prospect* and *The Tablet* reported that, “the Kochs champion a far-right ideology that scoffs at climate change and workers' rights. After the business school at Catholic University announced its first \$1 million donation from the Koch Foundation three years ago, 50 Catholic theologians and scholars raised alarms.”<sup>17</sup> In 2015, *Huffpost* reported that scholars, in an open letter to the university, made the case that the Kochs help to “advance public policies that directly contradict Catholic teaching on a range of moral issues from economic justice to environmental stewardship.” The article went on to say that “the Koch brothers are nearly doubling their investment in the business school of Catholic University of America, which is overseen by the U.S. bishops. That’s despite the

fact that many Catholics — including Pope Francis — say the kind of unregulated capitalism that the Kochs promote runs counter to church teaching.”<sup>18</sup> By 2019, the money that the Koch brothers gave to the School of Business at the Catholic University of America amounted to \$10 million dollars.

In *Artifact* where Scholz comments on the state of higher education, Biblical Studies, and current markets, does she side-step her role as a Bible scholar or does she use her twenty-first century hermeneutical Bible tools and skills to deconstruct institutions, markets, systems of thought to split open our minds and make us realize that the focus and purpose of higher education is drastically and rapidly changing, that faith-based institutions and their church-related affiliations that once privileged the study of Bible, religious studies, and theology, have already a compromised mission for the market in a neoliberal world? Scholz confronts us with the reality that Biblical Studies is now marginalized, and as a field, discipline, and subject, it does not have market priorities. Scholz wonders if biblical studies courses should be a market priority and states that perhaps they should not be (p. 44). She is right. Unless the academic study of the Bible, as well as other disciplines in the arts and sciences, moves beyond the nineteenth century and into the twenty-first century, the Bible—along with its professors—will become more and more obsolete in the ever-changing world of education. And as long as Bible scholars remain in their silos without becoming public intellectuals who use new hermeneutical lenses and skills to speak to a globalized world, the world’s people will be left to the colonizing influence of a growing religious fundamentalism that takes the Bible literally and uses it for policy-formation and targeted discrimination of every kind. When Scholz states that “[i]t is high time then to occupy not only academic Bible teaching but also institutions of higher education as a whole. . . .” (p. 47), and then raises the question, “What ought the future of the Bible and biblical studies to look like in Western societies, beyond Christian fundamentalism revival efforts?” (p. 47), she is offering us a vision of what we need to do as scholars to reclaim the integrity and credibility of our work, but work that must be done in a new way to reflect diversity, inclusion, pluralism, freedom of thought, creativity, and imagination that leaves behind the “singularity of biblical meaning, whether such meaning is historical, literary, or religious” (p. 56). Are we listening?

## 2. The Politics of Method: Historical Criticism and the Christian (and Catholic) Right

In her comments on chapter 4, “Tandoori Reindeer: Exegesis: On the Limitations of Historical Criticism and Two Alternatives,” Susanne makes some striking observations about historical criticism, the school of thought in which I was “trained” and the school of thought that remains foundational to Catholic biblical interpretation, once heralded by the renowned Catholic biblical scholar, Raymond E. Brown. Scholz notes that the method of historical criticism became “part of the standard curriculum in Protestant theological studies” in the twentieth century (p. 74) and “Catholic and Jewish institutions eventually accepted it as the standard for biblical interpretation” (p. 74). As Scholz notes, historical criticism was once considered innovative, “subversive” (p. 72). It countered the excessive doctrinal approach and interpretation of “Scripture” and liberated biblical scholars from “religious and academic status quo” (p. 72) Today, however, this method serves conservative purposes, as Scholz observes. Contemporary Bible scholars tend to naturalize the historical critical approach: this is what the text meant then, and therefore, this is what the text means today. The text-fetish approach obsesses over the quest for authorship and dating, a text's historical origins, such as the time and place in which the text was written; its sources; and the events, dates, persons, places, things, and customs that are mentioned or implied in the text. Historical criticism's primary concern is the world *behind* the text. The method is not concerned with the world in front of the text or the agency of meaning making by interpreters who use meta-methods for interpretation and who meta-commentate on interpreters' interpretations.

The historical critical approach reads “with the text” and not “against the grain of the text.” Historical criticism is not concerned with the social location of interpreters and their interpretations and their biases. The method thus perpetuates a disconnect between reader and text; it works against reading the Bible from the perspective of the contemporary globalized world. The way scholars use this “objective, value-neutral” method today allows them to keep the text frozen in the past. In their interpretations of texts, these scholar-interpreters do not expose cultural attitudes and mindsets of gender and sexual orientation discrimination, hegemony, misogyny, racism, classism, ableism, patriarchy, kyriarchy, xenophobia, homophobia, ethnocentrism, androcentrism, and anthropocentrism that shaped these texts and

which continue to shape our world today and our reading of the Bible. Instead, these exegetes keep hegemonic cultural attitudes and mindsets covered up, hidden, and undisclosed while they reinforce simultaneously the unjust status quo.

We know that the Bible is a product of a male-centered culture, and it is one of the texts that actively created this culture in the past and continues to legitimate it today. Women, as gendered and constructs of the male imagination, are essentialized and mostly erased from the text. The historical critical approach deals with none of these elements, no wonder the approach is opposed by the margins, as Scholz points out in rigorous detail (pp. 74–84). In other words, the historical critical approach fails to bring the Bible into the twenty-first century, and it does nothing to address the pressing issues and crises of justice in our world today. In reading with the text, those who use this method usually endorse male privilege and male power and keep the margins marginalized and the intellect and spirit of readers colonized and controlled. I know this experience to be true because I am the product of Catholic Higher Education, taught by all males in an institution that adheres to Vatican teaching per its mission: “to teach and to offer academic degrees by the authority of the Pope. At the School of Theology and Religious Studies, we don’t just teach about the Church; we teach for it.”<sup>19</sup> Many of the younger John Paul II and Benedict XVI Catholic scholars who come through programs like this one I mentioned are the new breed of the Catholic right influenced by the Christian right and embrace the so-called “new evangelization.” They take the Bible literally, and in their work, they are clueless about hermeneutics. Such is the way and state of Catholic biblical scholarship today (with a few exceptions), whose scholars are steeped in an historical critical approach that present-day students find oppressive, colonizing, and meaningless.<sup>20</sup>

Scholz recognizes all these issues involved in the historical critical approach, especially when historical critics naturalize this approach. In response to the situation, she proposes cultivating alternative ways of reading biblical literature. She advocates using a cultural studies approach which is an interdisciplinary approach. I find this suggestion on target for students today whose learning is already interdisciplinary. They bring this lens to their reading of the Bible easily. They also incorporate ideas from new learnings gleaned from gender studies classes, political science classes, and other classes as well. The students born

in the twenty-first century have been born into an interdisciplinary world. This is not the world of many of us Bible scholars, but we need to advance our own knowledge and approach the text in interdisciplinary ways which may not be natural to us but which is natural to contemporary students. A solid education and foundation in the Humanities is certainly indispensable for today’s biblical interpretation. Thus, the demise of the humanities is another concern of Scholz’s, which should also be a general concern for all humanities scholars, including in biblical studies. Scholz’s rigorous critique of historical criticism shows how some scholars who use this approach of interpretation not only keep the Bible frozen in past time but also use and interpret the book in such a way as to advance certain political, social, cultural, and religious agendas that often serve malestream hegemony. *Artifact*, however, not only deconstructs thought and methodology but also engages thought on contemporary global topics related to gender studies, one of which is rape.

### 3. Contributions to Gender Studies and the Worldwide Problem of Rape

Without a doubt, *Artifact* makes a substantial contribution to gender studies and a much needed and crucial conversation pertaining to rape. Several essays in *Artifact* that focus on these two topics are but a wisp of Scholz’s lifetime work and expertise related not only to the Bible but also to the cultural world. Drawing on the pioneering work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Scholz pushes the boundaries of biblical scholarship that for decades has worked against a radical democratic model of doing biblical studies. The ways that many scholars have been doing biblical studies research and teaching have left generations of people and students intellectually colonized and spiritually bankrupt, whether or not they know it. And certainly, these ways have neither liberated or transformed anyone nor brought the Bible into the globalized world. These attitudes and norms are still pervasive today, with Bible’s stories, poems, and extracted theologies being used to essentialize not only women but also men and to reinforce oppressive structures, attitudes, and mindsets.

With respect to the topic of rape and the Bible, Scholz is a leading experts in our field. In my reading and research for this response, I discovered that she presented a paper on rape in the Bible at an international conference in Switzerland that brought together scholars and

professionals in all fields of study and work to begin talking about the sexual abuse crisis that is plaguing all religious denominations and its clergy presently.

In chapter 12 on “How to Read Biblical Rape Texts with Contemporary Title IX Debates in Mind,” Scholz aptly covers a lot of ground. In this chapter, she is not reading or interpreting Bible rape stories in light of Title IX, nor is she correlating biblical material on rape with contemporary rape issues or with Title IX content. Scholz’s goal is simple: “This essay explores whether the Title IX debate on US campuses ought to shape feminist scholarship on sexual violence and rape in the academic field of biblical studies” (p. 261). At the end of the essay, she states her own clear position: “I endorse an explicit connection between biblical interpretation on the one hand and feminist theories and practices on the other hand” (p. 277).

This point about the connection between biblical interpretation and feminist theories is important. Scholz employs feminist theories to interpret biblical rape texts. She also utilizes feminist theories to critique rape text interpretations, specifically those derived from the use of an historical-empiricist epistemology that accepts objective, value-free, and universally valid reconstructions of the biblical past. As a feminist cultural critic, Scholz sees all interpretive approaches as “constructs of real readers” (p. 226). She examines these constructs to identify the views and agendas of the readers. This examination is a carefully laid out hermeneutical process that involves feminist theories and approaches. She uses this process in her discussion on how to read contemporary rape texts with Title IX in mind, the topic of chapter 12. This process allows the deconstruction of “the kyriarchal conventions, habits, and argumentation structures that have been produced in extensive interpretation histories of the Hebrew Bible” (p. 277).

Scholz’s goal and agenda, then, are quite different from exegesis and interpretation rooted in scientific-empiricist epistemology. If we misread Scholz and if we do not understand her use of hermeneutics—feminist theory and cultural criticism—her process of analysis, the positions she takes, and the vision that emerges from it all, it is because our minds have been locked into the scientific-empiricist epistemological world. This situation keeps us aligned to the oppressive and hegemonic cultural attitudes and mindsets that perpetuate interpretations advancing the perspectives of power. For example, some

contemporary scholars read “with the text” and unabashedly accept that in biblical times women were male property and that if a woman is raped, then the real violation is against the male and not the female because “his” property was violated. Those scholars who employ various methods to read texts this way is indicative of what I call “ethical depravity” in scholarly thought and methodology. Such readings reflect on biblical studies that has spawned into readings, interpretations, and methods that ignore the perspectives of victim-survivors. To read from “the perspectives of victim-survivors and deconstruct kyriarchal conventions, habits, and argumentation structures as they have been produced in the extensive interpretation histories of the Hebrew Bible” (p. 277) is Scholz’s goal, and this goal should be the goal of every biblical scholar who has the responsibility to read and interpret texts ethically. Forget dating, authorship, original texts. Our world is coming apart at the seams socially, politically, environmentally, and even religiously. We Bible scholars need to step up to the plate, step into the twenty-first century world, and get on board with the vision embedded in *Artifact*.

#### Concluding Comment

In sum, *The Bible as Political Artifact* is a rare and beautiful gem in the field of Biblical Studies. As a biblical scholar and as your colleague in the field, I thank you, Susanne, for the time, effort, and thought you have put into creating this book that my undergraduate students and I cherish. Most of all, my students and I thank you for the vision embedded in this volume, one that calls us to task as scholars and readers of the Bible. Your vision breathes new life and possibilities into our slowly fading field. Would that the field of biblical studies embrace *Artifact* wholeheartedly and move with its vision so that it leads Bible scholars into a process of gender transformation anywhere.

And P.S.: The only thing *Artifact* needs is a conclusion.

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*Susanne Scholz*

### Toward a Missing Conclusion: A Response

I would like to begin by thanking the panelists for agreeing to review my book, as well as the section chairs and their committee members for organizing this panel. I truly appreciate your willingness to focus on my book that reflects my thinking on biblical studies and feminist Hebrew Bible studies since I first came on the scholarly scene twenty years ago. Perhaps you picked up in my introduction of *Artifact* that the idea for this volume was not my own. I owe it to a young enthusiastic acquisition editor who asked me to meet with him over coffee at our regional Southwest SBL and AAR meeting in Irving, Texas. Since he hailed from what I would classify as a Christian-right publishing house, I was surprised that he had contacted me, but since I always love talking to acquisition editors, I accepted his invitation for coffee. When it turned out that his senior publishing board did not want to publish a feminist biblical book, I had a proposal but no publisher. I was delighted when Fortress Press contracted the volume and published *Artifact*. I thank all of you, as well as the acquisition editor from a few years back. Two parts structure my response. It begins with replies to the panelists and then discusses three “golden threads” that hold together the fourteen essays of *Artifact*.

First, Toddie (Rebecca Todd Peters), you are absolutely right: we are forged from the same metal although we have pursued our feminist intellectual and activist work in different fields. But then I think the segregation of academic fields is part of kyriarchal practices and theories, and I would find it impossible to study biblical texts without interdisciplinary conversation partners in mind and in the flesh. I trust you find the same is true for you as an ethicist. Moreover, I do have a degree in Christian ethics and, as you remember, I did hang out with the feminist ethical crowd at Union Theological Seminary and your doctoral advisor, Beverly W. Harrison. Those were the days! I feel well understood in your discussion of the “three insights” articulated in *Artifact*. Indeed, I am convinced that biblical scholarship needs to shift its methodological focus from “what the texts meant and who were the authors of those texts” to, first, the ethical-political genealogies of biblical interpretation; second, an examination of biblical interpretations on ethical issues; and third, the development of biblical readings with

“ordinary readers,” including women, to offer a transgressive hermeneutic of empowerment. Since we spent the month of July together at the Coolidge Fellowship sponsored by CrossCurrents at Auburn Seminary, working on reproductive justice, I have much to say on the contribution of biblical scholarship to discussions on abortion, although the topic of abortion is, of course, too narrow to address the issue of reproductive justice. Suffice it to say that *Artifact* engages the issue of reproductive justice in terms of sexual violence because lots of my work has dealt with this pervasive issue in our world. I also would like to indicate that I often find Christian ethical references to the Bible too narrowly focused on conventional biblical approaches. My hope is that our scholarly collaboration might include the nurturing of a two-way street.

Second, I would like to thank Santiago Slabodsky for his perceptive review, with special attention to the essay on “Barbaric Bibles: The Scandal of Inclusive Translations.” I always love your phrases. “Disciplinary decadence”! This phrase articulates so well what is going on in much of biblical scholarship: as if there were no need for cross-disciplinary conversation beyond historical, archaeological, or linguistic conventions. What decadence much of biblical research is in our era of impending ecological devastation! You call my proposal a “barbaric proposal.” This phrase is another great one, especially since the last sentence in *Artifact* has been my favorite sentence of the book all along. The sentence proposes: “Barbarian (feminist) Bible translators and exegetes unite!” You observe a “low barbaric” political maneuver in my argumentation, namely that we barbarians of various geopolitical origins (and I want to add our various gender, racial, ethnic, religious, and ideological stances) “take over the accusation of barbarism” and give it positive meaning to explore “how alternative worlds can be created from the underside of history.” Yes, this is how I define my project in feminist biblical studies: creating alternative visions of the world and exploring why it has been so bad for so many people living on the underside of history.

You also affirm my sense about German barbarians as not being recognized by global South barbarians. I did not intend the meaning of “recognition” in terms of status and authority but rather in terms of being in solidarity with. You seem to think of “recognition” as a more or less formal process related to status and authority, whereas I wonder more generally why some global South barbarians talk about the North and the West as if within the empire there had not

also lived and struggled many barbarians. I think class analysis might be helpful in this regard. Perhaps a better verb for “recognize” would be “identify,” “see,” “discern,” or “perceive.” I would translate the verb “to recognize” in German “(als Gleichgesinnte) anerkennen” or “wahrnehmen” in the sense of recognizing someone as a fellow struggler for justice, peace, and liberation.

But perhaps it makes sense that people from the barbarian global South are suspicious of those who speak, dress, and look like the oppressors although they do not talk like them. Are we trying to trick you from the global South into believing we are all in the same boat? I can understand the suspicion, although at this point I believe all of us have experienced neoliberal feminists, neoliberal black preachers, neoliberal womanists, or neoliberal barbarians in general who pose as the oppressed and gain status, authority, and power within the structures of empire and domination. I know colleagues, who shall remain unnamed, posing as global South identified barbarians while they advance personal, institutional, or even intellectual neoliberal agendas. The so-called Rahabs exist in abundance everywhere, inside former and present colonies *and* empires. It is complicated out there. Still, we cannot give up. Thus, I repeat my favorite last sentence of *Artifact* again: “Barbarian (feminist) Bible translators and exegetes unite!”

Third, thanks to Carol Dempsey for her enthusiastic, thoughtful, and detailed comments on *Artifact*. When I first read your sentence, “Give us more Scholz,” I was laughing out loud. May every author find a colleague who articulates and teaches so well what one hopes to communicate! On top of that, you relate my concerns so directly and unapologetically to your own Catholic social location and inner-Catholic politics. Never before did I enjoy the appreciation of a colleague like you have generously expressed it for my work. So, I am *not* crazy after all! Thank you. You are also correct in uplifting three major areas of concern as they appear in *Artifact*: the curricular design, the issue with historical criticism, and the global problem of sexual violence and rape. These are three areas of huge significance in my research of the past twenty years. I am delighted to have you join those of us in biblical studies who do so much more than produce narrowly defined linguistic, historicized, and text-fetishized biblical retellings. Let’s indeed step up to the plate and engage in our scholarly work and teaching the serious problems so blatantly apparent in the early twenty-first century. In sum, it is wonderful to be with all of you, and it is my sincere honor and privilege to call you my colleagues and friends.

Following is the second part of my response. In a review of *Artifact* in the journal *Horizon*, Carol mentioned that she misses a conclusion pulling “together the golden threads of each chapter while pointing us to where the field still needs to go.”<sup>21</sup> It had never crossed my mind to add a conclusion to the book, but I wish it had. It is a great idea, and so the following offers three “golden threads”—to use Carol’s phrase—that hold the fourteen essays of *Artifact* together.

The first “golden thread” pertains to my conviction that exegetes need to address their hermeneutical and epistemological assumptions openly and explicitly in their work. All of us who live on the so-called margins of the field have insisted on this point for decades. During the past twenty years, I have disclosed my hermeneutical and epistemological assumptions in the scholarly discourse on biblical sexual violence and rape. My scholarly contributions began with Genesis 34 and the observation that biblical scholars do not critically interrogate their historical and linguistic explanations and claims of objectivity, universality, and value neutrality when they assert that it is anachronistic to interpret Dinah’s story as a rape story.<sup>22</sup> Many factors, such as employment conditions, tenure review pressures, or even journal requirements, complicate scholarly work. The fact is that the hegemonic discourse of biblical studies rewards the betrayal of rape victim-survivors whether they appear behind, within, or in front of the text. The betrayal does not only pertain to scholarship but also to academic institutions, even when they are guided by Title IX legislation, especially since the latter are currently morphing into legalistic practices that protect institutions rather than sexually violated or harassed people. To come to the point: hermeneutical and epistemological consciousness-raising is still much needed in our field, and several essays in *Artifact* illustrate this need.<sup>23</sup>

The second “golden thread” relates to my interest in critically analyzing biblical interpretation histories in geopolitically specific, intersectionally sophisticated, and intellectually comprehensive and interdisciplinary ways. I charge in several essays that the retellings of biblical texts are insufficient because they disguise inherent exegetical assumptions and socio-political convictions. Such retellings also feed into popular fundamentalist-literalist belief systems, whether they are religious or secular. In my work I have tried to join those who expose the historical, cultural, and political context-specificity of any biblical interpretation, not only when marginalized voices read the Bible, but also when the inventors and nurturers of

hegemonic historical criticism do so, including the white, male, German, mid-twentieth century Old Testament exegete Gerhard von Rad,<sup>24</sup> or the US-Christian right interpreters adapting the Eve and Adam story to contemporary socio-political sensibilities.<sup>25</sup> This is also the case when feminist scholars interpret biblical texts since the 1970s,<sup>26</sup> or when African film maker Cheick Oumar Sissoko presents Dinah’s story in a Mali-African setting.<sup>27</sup> Every interpreter reads within a particular social location that needs to be critically analyzed because we do not need more laundry lists but critical analyses of biblical interpretations. Again, opportunities abound in moving the field of biblical studies into this wide open, creatively inspiring, and exegetically eye-opening area of research, going far beyond microscopic elaborations of this or that biblical half verse or chapter. It is difficult to understand why not every single Bible scholar would want to engage in this kind of research project.

The third “golden thread” relates to my work as a teacher of the Bible. This thread focuses on pedagogy and raises questions about teaching “the Bible” to undergraduate and graduate students living in the twenty-first century. In my view, we need to redesign the curriculum in biblical studies. The task is certainly burdensome in light of the overall diminished societal investment in the study of the humanities, religion, and sacred texts, such as the Bible, at neoliberally oriented colleges and university. Still, burdensomeness should not get the final word, and so several essays in *Artifact* encourage us to move the teaching of biblical studies “from curricular apathy to a radical-democratic practice that educates students toward an understanding of the complexities and challenges in our world and toward an increase of ‘knowledge, values and skills that will prepare them for active and effective participation in society’” (p. 26). The essay on “Redesigning the Biblical Studies Curriculum” (pp. 3–27) outlines the enormity of the task. Countless courses and textbooks in biblical studies follow the Schleiermacher design, still dominating the conventional Bible curriculum at many universities and colleges, if such institutions have not yet abandoned the academic Bible curriculum altogether, as is often the case with both Christian right schools and secular religious studies departments—though certainly for entirely opposite reasons.

Yet the difficulties of successfully developing a redesigned curriculum is not only grounded in inner-disciplinary teaching and research habits. The difficulties must also be related to the socio-political and economic conditions of neoliberal precarity structuring daily teaching

conditions at institutions of higher education.<sup>28</sup> Since little money is being made with a redesigned curriculum of the Bible, little investment is made in developing one. Nowadays, money is made in analyzing data of people’s online searches, purchases, activities, or Facebook likes. In contrast, biblical studies do not promise sufficient ROI (Return of Investment) in this unstable “second modernity,” a phrase coined by Shoshana Zuboff.<sup>29</sup> She uses it to characterize the current moment with its “distinct commercial logic” (p. 29) that is focused on “accumulation” (p. 14). This is the era of “surveillance capitalism,” “rogue capitalism” (p. 17), or “information capitalism (p. 13) in which people are the raw materials of “capital” (p. 16) in “a digital-age production process aimed at a new business customer” (p. 500). We have become like “Nature” which has already been exploited to the breaking point of ecological collapse (pp. 11-12). Thus, if somebody invented how to make money off the academic study of the Bible, we would see an explosion of curricular innovation in biblical studies. Yet this kind of curricular innovation would certainly not be the kind of curricular design based on the three learning goals I mention in *Artifact*. The three key goals I suggest aim to develop in students “intellectual-religious maturity,” “historical-cultural understanding,” and “literary-ethical engagement.”<sup>30</sup>

Until then, the teaching and exegesis of biblical texts is in the process of accommodating to neoliberal-authoritarian powers, requirements, and expectations. Said differently, an intellectual alignment to neoliberal-authoritarian structures is currently taking place in biblical teaching and research. This is not news, as Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood explain in their book, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*,<sup>31</sup> in which they describe the emergence of the academic study of the Bible as part of the construction of the nation state, Western colonialism, and institutionalized Christianity in Europe during the nineteenth century. Nowadays, such a process is occurring under the varied conditions of surveillance capitalism. In my view, we need to develop a curriculum that resists surveillance capitalism. Students need to learn how biblical meanings have adapted to hegemonic power politics in the past and present so that they become equipped to develop alternative visions of resistance to socio-political, economic, and cultural injustices and oppression.

In conclusion, I would like to mention another point that is dear to my heart. In October 2019, a New York Times article reported that a Lloyd taco truck served lunch to ICE workers outside of an immigration detention center in upstate New York.<sup>32</sup> The truck and the

company found themselves soon embattled by critics who challenged the company for serving Mexican food to ICE workers while Central and Latin American people were detained inside the ICE center. Immigration advocates and left-leaning residents accused the company of “collaborating with ICE.”<sup>33</sup> After the Lloyd-company owners apologized for agreeing to station themselves outside the detention center, they apologized again later for offending law enforcement after a Republican state senator complained: “In what world does a company feel the need to apologize for serving food to federal law enforcement officers who work in dangerous conditions?” The taco company owners defended themselves by asserting: “We serve all communities, we go to all neighborhood, we are not political....” They also asked: “How can any business choose sides in our politically divided country and ever hope to succeed?” And then came the punch line: “We make tacos—not war.” This is a great line, but the executive director of Justice for Migrant Families of Western New York, Jennifer Connor, offered the key ethical insight, saying: “There is no aspect of immigration detention that can survive without for-profit businesses.... I think businesses have to decide what their values are and what kinds of stands they are going to take. There is no not-political stance.”

“There is no not-political stance.” The worst one could become is a bystander, a *Mitläufer*. This truth also applies to the Bible. Yet many Bible scholars around the world still defend the possibility of biblical scholarship as a non-political activity. I regard my work as a researcher and teacher of the Hebrew Bible as a counterargument to this pervasive position. *Artifact* thus aims to contribute to the body of scholarship that demonstrates the impossibility of producing apolitical interpretations. We must expose this delusional position for what it is: an intellectually colonizing, indefensible, and destructive stance that has contributed to suffering, injustice, and oppression in the world. It is high time to expose this assumption and to offer alternative exegetical approaches. Since the Bible is a political artifact, we must elaborate on our epistemological and hermeneutical assumptions, critically analyze the multitude of interpretation histories, and redesign the biblical-studies curriculum so that students understand who they are, where they are coming from, and where they want to go to change the world toward justice and peace.<sup>34</sup> This is an urgent task in light of the threats of ecological and nuclear devastation and annihilation, and the academic study of the Bible ought to have a place in this urgent task.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> One of the most important tasks in Christian social ethics has been to examine how scripture has been used to enact, reinforce, support, and continue the oppression and subjugation of women and other minoritized groups of people. In fact, this work has been an essential aspect of liberation and social transformation in the work of various forms of liberation theology.

<sup>3</sup> Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible*, Minneapolis: Beacon, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Todd Peters, *Trust Women: A Progressive Christian Argument for Reproductive Justice*, Boston: Beacon, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Russell D. Moore, “After Patriarchy, What? Why Egalitarians Are Winning the Gender Debate.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society; Lynchburg* 49, no. 3 (September 2006): 576.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., “After Patriarchy, What? Why Egalitarians Are Winning the Gender Debate.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society; Lynchburg* 49, no. 3 (September 2006): 575.

<sup>7</sup> R. Marie Griffin, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics*. New York: Basic Books, 2017, ix.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence B. Finer, Lori F. Frohwirth, Lindsay A. Dauphinee, Susheela Singh, and Ann M. Moore. “Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives.” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 37, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 113.



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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 116–117.

<sup>10</sup> At the 2019 annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Carol Dempsey gathered a provocative group of diverse scholars to engage with the work of Susanne Scholz.<sup>10</sup> It was an honor for me to participate in the panel and now to revise my comments for publication at *Lectio Difficilior*.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> See, just as one example, the following article:

<https://legalinsurrection.com/2019/06/universitys-queer-bible-hermeneutics-course-examines-queerness-in-the-church/?fbclid=IwAR3MxdeJUkUhjzFBD26sGujpOj99LdL2rVyzSZON12wIn9h2HgOadv2NC>  
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<sup>13</sup> I am proud that Scholz here cites my own work, Santiago Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism: Triumphal Failures of Barbaric Thinking* (New York: Palgrave, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Walter Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom” in *Theory, Culture and Society* 26.7–8 (2010): 159–181.

<sup>15</sup> Among the decolonial trends, decolonial Feminisms have been particularly insightful on this regard. Some of the best examples include Maria Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism” *Hypatia* 25.4 (2010): 742–759 and Houria Bouteldja, *Whites, Jews and Us: Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love* (Boston: MIT Press, 2017), 73–99.

<sup>16</sup> The potentiality of transmodern projects of conversations can be found in Enrique Dussel, “Transmodernity and Interculturality,” *Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1.3. (2012): 28–59.

<sup>17</sup> See [https://prospect.org/culture/koch-brothers-latest-target-pope-francis/#.Xo\\_Q-ICDiwg.email](https://prospect.org/culture/koch-brothers-latest-target-pope-francis/#.Xo_Q-ICDiwg.email) and <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/15277/the-university-the-koch-brothers-and-the-right-kind-of-catholic>

<sup>18</sup> See [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/02/koch-brothers-catholic-university\\_n\\_6594834.html?ncid=engmodushpimg00000006](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/02/koch-brothers-catholic-university_n_6594834.html?ncid=engmodushpimg00000006)

<sup>19</sup> See the website for the Catholic University School of Theology and Religious Studies: <https://trs.catholic.edu/>.

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<sup>20</sup> To be noted, not every historical critic engages the historical critical approach in the way that has been described. There are some exceptions. For example, some feminist biblical scholars such as Phyllis Bird and Carol Meyers, among many others, do use historical criticism for their gender reconstructions in ancient Israel.

<sup>21</sup> Carol Dempsey, “Review of The Bible as Political Artifact: On the Feminist Study of the Hebrew Bible,” *Horizon* 46.1 (June 2019): 199.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Ellen J. van Wolde, “[Does ‘innâ denote rape? A Semantic Analysis of a Controversial Word](#),” *Vetus Testamentum* 52.4 (2002): 528–544; Alison L. Joseph, “Understanding Genesis 34:2: ‘innâ,” *Vetus Testamentum* 66.4 (2016): 663–668.

<sup>23</sup> See the *Artifact* essays “Back Then It Was Legal” (pp. 93–121), “Was It Really Rape in Genesis 34” (pp. 223–238), “How to Read Biblical Rape Texts with Contemporary Title IX Debates in Mind” (pp. 259–278).

<sup>24</sup> See the *Artifact* essay “*Lederhosen* Hermeneutics: Toward a Feminist Sociology of German White Male Old Testament Interpretations,” 123–142.

<sup>25</sup> See the *Artifact* essay, “The Forbidden Fruit for the New Eve: The Christian Right’s Adaptation to the (Post)modern World,” 143–166.

<sup>26</sup> See the *Artifact* essay “Discovering a Largely Unknown Past for a Vibrant Present: Feminist Hebrew Bible Studies in North America,” 193–222.

<sup>27</sup> See the *Artifact* essay “‘Belonging to All Humanity’: The Dinah Story (Genesis 34) in the Film *La Genèse* (1999) by Cheick Oumar Sissoko,” 239–258.

<sup>28</sup> See the *Artifact* essay “Occupy Academic Bible Teaching: The Architecture of Educational Power and the Biblical Studies Curriculum,” 29–48.

<sup>29</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> See the *Artifact* essay “Redesigning the Biblical Studies Curriculum: ‘Radical-Democratic’ Teaching Model,” 3–27.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Christian Goldbaum, “A Taco Truck in Buffalo Served Lunch to ICE Workers. Then Came the Backlash,” *New York Times* (October 28, 2019):

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/28/nyregion/lloyd-taco-truck-controversy.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> See the *Artifact* essay “Tell Me How You Read This Story and I Will Tell You Who You Are: Post-Postmodernity, Radicant Exegesis, and a Feminist Sociology of Biblical Hermeneutics,” 167–190.

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