

Feminist Criticism

Experiencing the Gospel of Mark

FEMINIST CRITICISM

What is Feminist Criticism?

- Variety of approaches, but shared assertion that gender is an important analytical category
- “A common resistance to all the different forms of male domination” (bell hooks)
- “The affirmation... of our right and our ability [as women] to construct, and take responsibility for, our gendered identity, our politics and our choices.” (Linda Alcoff)

Cf. “Feminist Criticism” by Janice Capel Anderson in *Mark & Method*

FEMINIST CRITICISM

What is Feminist Criticism?

- Feminist ***Critique***
- Feminist ***Construction***

FEMINIST CRITICISM

Feminist Biblical ***Critique***

1. Critique of the androcentric and patriarchal character of the Scriptures
2. Critique of the androcentric and patriarchal character of biblical scholarship
3. Countering passages that legitimate or have been used to legitimate oppression with counterpassages or liberating interpretations of such passages

FEMINIST CRITICISM

Feminist Biblical ***Critique***

1. Critique of the androcentric and patriarchal character of the Scriptures
 - Androcentrism sees all things from a male perspective: God, women, culture
 - Women viewed ambivalently: Eve/Mary
 - If even a woman, how much more...

Recognizing that the Bible was written by a bunch of guys from a guy's perspective

FEMINIST CRITICISM

Feminist Biblical ***Critique***

2. Critique of the androcentric and patriarchal character of biblical scholarship
 - Focus on male interests: war not birth; sin as pride rather than lack of self-esteem
 - Resistance to non-male readings: creation; “deacon” in Rom 16.7
 - Archaeological focus on preserved ‘male’ institutions

Recognizing that for the most of its history, those who studied and written about the Bible have been guys and have written from a guy's perspective

Feminist Biblical *Critique*

3. Countering passages that legitimate or have been used to legitimate oppression with counterpassages or liberating interpretations of such passages
 - Inferiority of / Domination over women
 - Creation
 - Role of women in authority

Recognizing that the Bible cannot be selectively used to legitimate oppression of women

Feminist Biblical *Construction*

1. Recovering attention to the feminine and to women in Scripture
2. Reconstruction of the historical and sociological background of the text with reference to the category of gender
3. Recovering the history of women interpreting the Bible
4. Examining readers' responses with reference to gender

Feminist Biblical *Construction*

1. Recovering attention to the feminine and to women in Scripture
 - Female images of God
 - Stories of women both as agents and as victims

Feminist Biblical *Construction*

2. Reconstruction of the historical and sociological background of the text with reference to the category of gender
 - Rewriting the history of Israel and of the early Church apart from a male, elite perspective

Feminist Biblical *Construction*

3. Recovering the history of women interpreting the Bible

Feminist Biblical *Construction*

4. Examining readers' responses with reference to gender
 - What difference does it make if the reader is a woman?
 - How does a woman read an androcentric text without being 'immasculated' and constructing herself as 'other'?
 - How can a woman be empowered reading a biblical text?

Mark 14.3-9

- Who are the characters?
- What is the context? What does the setting look like?
- Who has power?
- What do you make of the conclusion?
- How does a woman read this differently than a man?

Mark 14.3-9 and Parallels

³ While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.

⁴ But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way?" ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her.

Mark 14.3-9 and Parallels

⁶ But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the good news¹ is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Mark 14.3-9 and Parallels

Mark and Matthew are basically the same

Luke: Dinner is at a Pharisee's house; "And a woman in the city, who was a sinner..." > discussion about who loves more

She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

John: at Lazarus' house; Mary (the sister of Lazarus) is key figure; issue of Judas and money

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them(1) with her hair.

Mark 14.3-9 and Parallels

- Which of the Gospel accounts appears most sympathetic to women? Least sympathetic?
- How do wo/men respond to each?
- How would you depict this scene?



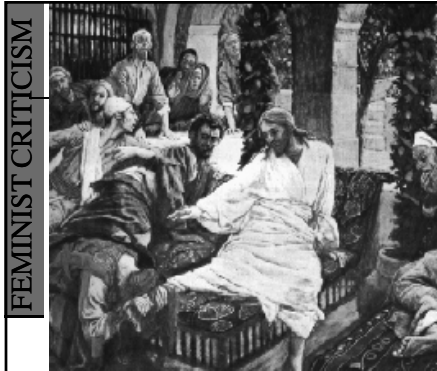
UNKNOWN; Illustrator of Petrus Comestor's 'Bible Historiale', France, 1372 in Matthew
http://www.mnemosyne.org/mmw/thumbs300/mmw_10b23_480r_min.jpg



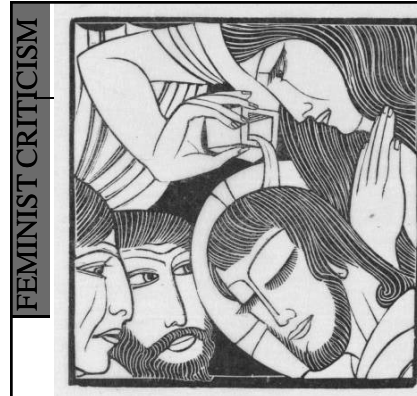
Magdalene anoints the feet of Christ
FROMENT, Nicolas - 1461
<http://gallery.euroweb.hu/art/f/froment/lazar.jpg>



Jesus is anointed at Bethany by Mary Magdalene
CAROLSFELD, Julius Schnorr von - 1851-60
<http://www.pitts.emory.edu/woodcuts/1853BibID/00011551.jpg>



Mary Magdalene's jar of very expensive ointment
TISSOT, James - 1886-96
<http://kcm.co.kr/bible01/jpg/BIB135.JPG>



Mary Magdalene
GILL, Eric - 1926
<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgrouoid=999999961&workid=5297&searchid=4721&tabview=image>



Mary anoints Jesus's feet
KENDALL, Dinah Roe
<http://www.thinplace.com/medialarge/438/mary-anoints-jesus>



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