psychological, or age-related reasons? And, if falling numbers for the priestly vocation are reflected in a rise of Permanent Diaconate, what might their non-celibate experience have to offer to those thinking about vocations? Indeed, if celibacy means being unmarried, and continence means abstinence from sexual relations (47), then, indeed, is not the secular world strangely celibate?

That this book raises — if not answers — these questions, is testimony to the stimulus of the book; now the hard work begins.

Durham University, UK

MARCUS POUND


Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is one of the best known names in feminist biblical scholarship. Her work has been foundational for the discipline as she has forged a path through previously uncharted territory and encouraged others to follow in her wake. Her strategies for a feminist hermeneutic of liberation have challenged old prejudicial models of biblical interpretation and created new ones, and over the forty or more years of her career she has earned the respect of both her supporters and her detractors. The present volume is the second of a planned three-volume series in which she collects a number of her previously published writings on various aspects of the feminist hermeneutical task; the first volume, also published by Fortress in 2011, is entitled Transforming Vision: Explorations in Feminist Theology. The present volume is a collection that traces the progress of Schüssler Fiorenza’s exegetical and hermeneutical work from its early days, allowing the reader to follow the development of her thought in this area and to read seminal pieces of hers that might otherwise be difficult to locate. It is divided into two main sections: the first, consisting of nine pieces, is methodological and theoretical, and the second, containing ten pieces, is more practical, offering examples of how the exegetical and hermeneutical principles set out in the first section can be applied to the biblical text. The pieces are not presented entirely unaltered: Schüssler Fiorenza has carried out a certain amount of editing to reduce duplication and to allow the pieces to sit together comfortably in their new context. She has also added some extra annotations, including commenting from her current perspective on the ideas expressed in the historic pieces so as to enable the reader to see the roots of the mature exegete’s thinking in the burgeoning conceptions of the younger academic. In addition, two of the pieces have also been translated from non-English originals for inclusion in this collection. The pieces are from a variety of contexts; some are journal articles, some are essays in edited collections, at least one is a sermon, and another a dictionary entry, and the intended audiences for the various publications are equally varied between lay, academic and ecclesial. To have them all together in one place therefore gives a sense of the broad sweep of Schüssler Fiorenza’s work and of its enormous impact.

In the course of the book, and particularly in the methodological first part, the views and approaches for which Schüssler Fiorenza is known can readily be identified. In particular, her rebranding of patriarchy as “kyriarchy” to take account of the multiple intersecting systems of discrimination that oppress women in addition to sex and gender-based discrimination is implicit in earlier pieces (e.g. 74, 102–103) but explicit in several of the later ones (e.g. 18–19, 195, 246). This reformulation is significant for reminding the elite white women who have championed feminism in the name of womankind that men are not the only oppressors, that womanhood is not monolithic, and that white women are themselves implicated as oppressors in the kyriarchal pyramid by means of which women of different social status, ethnicity, race or sexuality have been subordinated. Schüssler Fiorenza has also employed certain typographical devices in order to challenge readers’ gendered assumptions about what is normative. Thus, instead of using the term “men,” she uses the form “wo men” as both a female gender-exclusive and a generic designation. She explains:
Wo/men must always think at least twice . . . and adjudicate whether we are meant or not by so-called generic terms such as “men . . .” To use “wo/men” as an inclusive generic term invites male readers to learn how to think twice and to experience what it means not to be addressed explicitly (20 n. 5).

Similarly, she has adopted the forms the*logy, the*logical, and G*d in order to highlight the gendered assumptions that are made about the deity, since the standard forms of the word “theology” are based on the masculine noun theos and thus imply a male god (20 n. 2). Such typographical devices disrupt the reading experience, but by so doing they are a constant reminder of the unthinking gendered assumptions that are normally made, but which cannot be made so glibly in the presence of these “spoilers.”

Another element of vintage Schüssler Fiorenza that appears in these essays is the description of the Bible as a prototype rather than an archetype, and thus as resource rather than as source for women’s struggle for liberation (80–81). This is a very helpful way of tackling the problem of biblical authority which can so easily be claimed in order to legitimize kyriarchal systems of oppression. For Schüssler Fiorenza, the authority is with the egalitarian church of women who experience the presence of God in their struggle for liberation, in the course of which they assess all of Scripture for its liberative or oppressive potential. Scripture provides an historical model for biblical life and faith, she argues, but is not the final word on these matters, because revelation is ongoing. Ironically, such a position is probably more similar than it appears to be to that adopted by the majority of Christian believers, who, regardless of their stated convictions about the authority of Scripture, in practice often decide on the basis of their own socio-cultural and religious context which parts they regard as authoritative and which parts they will disregard. The difference is that the feminist liberatory paradigm is open about its view of Scripture, and is ready to acknowledge the historical contingency of scriptural positions that conflict with paradigms of liberation.

The exegetical pieces in Part 2 range widely over the Christian (New) Testament, and end with a global survey of feminist biblical studies. There is no room here to go into all ten pieces individually, but they all demonstrate how adopting a feminist hermeneutics (sic) of liberation is not simply an academic exercise, but has profound consequences for wo/men. Particularly striking are Schüssler Fiorenza’s devastating critique of what she terms “servanthood ecclesiology,” that is, the valorization of notions of service and servanthood, for its demeaning effect on women and its shoring up of the kyriarchal pyramid in ecclesial structures (ch. 13); her debunking of claims that the Twelve and the apostles are the same all-male group who were archetypal founders of a leadership succession that by definition excludes women — when the text is read attentively, the apostles are a different group from the Twelve, there is in fact no succession from the Twelve, and according to Mark at least the apostles included women (ch. 14); and the sermon in which she demonstrates how the role of Mary Magdalene as a leader in the early church has been denied and degraded by Christian tradition from antiquity onwards by turning Mary into an emotionally dependent sinful female Jesus-groupie (ch. 15). And in a different key, her description of the techniques she has used to introduce students to the issues and practices relating to feminist liberation hermeneutics (ch. 10) is invaluable for educators in a wide range of contexts.

In sum, then, this is a valuable collection. It is densely argued and for this reviewer not always easy to read, but certainly always challenging and visionary, and filled with the ardour of an evangelist in proclaiming the good news of liberation for women as well as in the frank exposure of harmful and oppressive elements both in the biblical text itself and in its interpretations. It is a collection to savour, to return to time and again, and as a summary of key elements in Schüssler Fiorenza’s exegetical and hermeneutical thought it is greatly to be welcomed.

Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture, Regent’s Park College, UK  
Deborah W. Rooke