

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Anti-Judaism and Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation

THE DISEASE OF POSTCOLONIAL NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES
AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF HEALING

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The Disease

Systemic injustice is part of our ideological makeup, or, better put, what Pierre Bourdieu labels the “habitus,” and thus it invariably threatens to co-opt those who oppose it. For example, even as the Gospel of Matthew and the book of Revelation name the Roman Empire as “other” and proclaim its alternative, they reproduce its language and mimic its structures. Similarly, in their effort to name and so to overcome kyriarchal elements in their own cultures, feminist postcolonial biblical scholars often re-create the dichotomizing rhetoric of the Bible and many of its interpreters.¹ Specifically, these readers identify the evil of their own circumstance as an elitist Judaism, which both they and Jesus oppose.²

Anti-Judaism’s well-known legacy in historical-critical, early feminist, and liberation-theological biblical commentary still appears in both feminist and

This piece draws from my “Lilies of the Field and Wandering Jews: Biblical Scholarship, Women’s Roles, and Social Location,” in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Revisited*, ed. Ingrid-Rosa Kitzberger (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 329–52.

¹ Not all the authors considered here define themselves as feminist; I am using the term generally and artificially to name those who write from a liberationist stance and who have a particular concern for women’s lives.

² The Fall 1991 issue of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (vol. 7, no. 2) devoted a special section to “feminist anti-Judaism” (95–133). See, in addition to the bibliography there, Judith Plaskow, “Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation,” in *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 1, *A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 117–29; Susannah Heschel, “Anti-Judaism in Christian Feminist Theology,” *Tikkun* 5, no. 3 (1990): 25–28, 95–97; Kwok Pui-lan, “Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretation,” in Schüssler Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 1, 101–16; and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 116–44.

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nonfeminist studies.³ However, even while recognizing the stereotype of my impression, I once (naively) thought that feminists conscientized by colonialism—aware of how their cultures were negatively adjudicated by Western self-proclaimed norms; mindful of how their narratives, beliefs, and practices were rewritten or replaced by external hegemonic models; cognizant of the dangers of dividing marginal from marginal in the struggle for liberation—would recognize the same situation prevailing when the New Testament and its Christian readers define their “others,” the Jews. I was wrong.

In delineating the evils of colonialism (as well as the complicity of the indigenous male population), some feminist critics identify Jesus with their own self-articulated abject situations, and they identify those biblical peoples who do not follow Jesus—that is, “the Jews” (rarely the Romans)—with their oppressors. This recrudescence preserves the anti-Judaism of earlier historical-critical, sociological, and liberationist scholarship, and gives it new application and new audiences. From proceedings of the 1994 Ecumenical Institute of Bossey seminar “Women in Dialogue,” organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and others celebrating the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988–1998), we read, “Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ gave women their rightful place despite the heavy yoke of the Jewish culture weighing on them.”⁴ From other sources we learn that “Christ was the only rabbi who did not discriminate against the women of his time,” and that he was needed, given “the dehumanizing situation in which the women of the time were enslaved,” a situation in which “women had no standing in Jewish society.”⁵ Another writer explains, “In Jesus’ time, women were not allowed to read scriptures, not allowed to say prayer . . . not allowed to take any form of leadership, [and] not allowed to talk to men in public.”⁶ Quoting Leonardo Boff, still another writer regards Jesus’ relations with women as “not only in-

novative, but shocking,” because women were “not circumcised and hence could not be part of God’s covenant.”⁷

From bad history such material escalates to a theology that I as a Jew find tormenting. One writer in a WCC publication avers, “Jesus died as a result of the clash between his God and the god of Pharisaic Judaism. . . . Jesus’ crucifixion marked the temporal triumph of the patriarchal god of Judaism. . . . Christianity has fallen back to the patriarchal god of Judaism with even greater zeal. . . . The god of the clan will sanctify anything including militarism, war, sexism, apartheid, as long as it serves the interest of the clan.”⁸ Another writer in the same volume offers that the “God who cried out from the cross” was the one “who suffered under the oppressive Jewish tradition.”⁹ Explaining how and why “the Bible has been used to reinforce the position of inferiority in which society and culture have placed women for centuries,”¹⁰ such works find culpable “the Hebrew-Jewish lifestyle,”¹¹ the “Jewish patriarchal system”¹² (this particular phrase is a litany in such writings), and Paul’s “Jewish background.”¹³ In contrast to this monolithic Judaism emerges a Jesus either untouched by or deliberately rejective of his culture: Jesus “chose to ignore the traditional Jewish attitudes and instead treated women with compassion.”¹⁴ He “never tortured [women], nor segregated them, nor demanded purification rites.”¹⁵ This rhetoric is not new, of course: it can be found in equally pernicious forms throughout Western commentary and is promoted by means of a historical-critical method claiming objectivity.

(Ibadan, Nigeria: Daystar, 1990), 133. See also Tereza Cavalcanti, “Jesus, the Penitent Woman, and the Pharisee,” *Journal of Hispanic-Latino Theology* 2, no. 1 (1994): 29.

⁷ Maria Clara Bingemer, “Reflections on the Trinity,” in *Through Her Eyes: Women’s Theology from Latin America*, ed. Elsa Tamez (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 71, citing Leonardo Boff, *The Maternal Face of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 81.

⁸ Louise Kumandjek Tappa, “God in Man’s Image,” in Pobee and Wartenberg-Potter, *New Eyes for Reading*, 102. Note the capitalization of “his [Jesus’] God” and the lowercase treatment of “the god of Pharisaic Judaism.”

⁹ Kwok Pui-lan, “God Weeps with Our Pain,” in Pobee and Wartenberg-Potter, *New Eyes for Reading*, 92.

¹⁰ Elsa Tamez, “Women’s Rereading of the Bible,” in King, *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, 193.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹² Lloyda Fannsie, “Sexuality and Women in African Culture,” in *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 140: “The many setbacks faced by women in Christianity are usually rooted in the Scriptures that, for the most part, are a heritage from the Jewish patriarchal system.”

¹³ R. Modupe Owanikin, “The Priesthood of Church Women in the Nigerian Context,” in Oduyoye and Kanyoro, *Will to Arise*, 210, 215.

¹⁴ Bette Ekeya, “Woman, For How Long Not?” in King, *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, 145.

¹⁵ Rosemary N. Edet, “Christianity and African Women’s Rituals,” in Oduyoye and Kanyoro, *Will to Arise*, 37.

³ See Mary C. Boys, *Has G-d Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (New York: Paulist, 2000), 314–15, 134–35.

⁴ Marguerite Fassinou, “Challenges for Feminist Theology in Francophone Africa,” in *Women’s Visions: Theological Reflection, Celebration, Action*, ed. Ofelia Ortega (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches Publications, 1995), 9.

⁵ See, respectively, Grace Eneme, “Living Stones,” in *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World*, ed. John S. Pobee and Bärbel von Wartenberg-Potter (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1986), 30; Hisako Kinukawa, “On John 7:53–8:11: A Well-Cherished but Much-Clouded Story,” in *Reading from This Place*, vol. 2, *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 85; and Rajimi Rebera, ed., *We Cannot Dream Alone: A Story of Women in Development* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches Publications, 1990), 72–76, cited in Ursula King, ed., *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 201.

⁶ Alina Macente Machema, “Jumping Culture’s Fences,” in *Talitha, qumi! Proceedings of the Convocation of African Women Theologians*, ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro

The favorite passage in such studies is the account of the hemorrhaging woman (Matt. 9:18–26, Mark 5:21–43, and Luke 8:40–56; the story is conjoined with the raising of the synagogue leader Jairus's daughter). Although no version cites Leviticus, mentions impurity, expresses surprise at a bleeding woman in public, finds odd Jesus' touching a corpse, or portrays Jesus as abrogating any law, Western critics and their postcolonial counterparts import all this and more.¹⁶ Teresa Okure, who finds Luke's account "a cherished passage" for African women, summarizes: "It is treated by M. Kanyoro in *Talitha, qumi!* and by Elizabeth Amoah in *New Eyes for Reading*. Both works emphasize the woman's courage in breaking with crippling cultural taboos imposed on her so as to reach Jesus directly and be fully restored and integrated as a person with full rights in her society."¹⁷ Okure herself hails Jesus, who "touched and allowed himself to be touched by those who were legally classified as unclean, such as the woman with the issue of blood." Therefore, she continues, "to continue to exclude women from certain Christian ministries on the basis of outmoded Jewish taboos is to render null and void the liberation that Jesus won for us."¹⁸ Louise Tappa states that the hemorrhaging woman "is impure, which from a religious standpoint makes her an outcast," especially given that "in Leviticus one can find all kinds of taboos that were in effect during that period." She notes as well that Jairus "is a Jewish dignitary and it is precisely his task to make sure that this person who is socially dead stays in her place."¹⁹ Again, such commentary is nothing new; still, I was surprised to find it from those who write explicitly within a liberationist stance.

This is not only basic Western anti-Jewish argument, it is the colonizer's rhetoric. The empire characterizes the colonized culture as monolithic and static ("Jewish culture" as defined by Leviticus); distinguishes itself from indigenous values, practices, and theologies (Jesus is the *only* rabbi; the god of Judaism is tribal, militaristic, sexist, and apartheid-loving); exaggerates gender inequality to show its own beneficence (women in Judaism had *no* standing, were not *allowed* to pray, had *no* social roles); offers false or, at best, selective comparisons (Jewish purity laws are mentioned but those in Roman paganism

¹⁶ See my "Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman," in *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies*, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 1, ed. David R. Bauer and Mark Allan Powell (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), 379–97.

¹⁷ Teresa Okure, "Feminist Interpretations in Africa," in Schüssler Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 1, 82. See also Elizabeth Amoah, "The Woman Who Decided to Break the Rules (Reflection, Mk 5:25–29)," in Pobee and Wartenberg-Potter, *New Eyes for Reading*, 3.

¹⁸ Teresa Okure, "Women in the Bible," in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 55.

¹⁹ Louise Tappa, "The Christ-Event from the Viewpoint of African Women: A Protestant Perspective," in Fabella and Oduyoye, *With Passion and Compassion*, 32.

are not; positive statements attributed to Jesus are compared to negative rabbinic passages; women-friendly rabbinic materials and negative contemporaneous patristic as well as New Testament materials are ignored; misrepresents and ridicules cultural practices ("all kinds of taboos"); and avoids its own complicity in perpetuating inequity.

The Diagnosis and Course of Treatment

Although it has been argued that "anti-Semitism is as Christian as the New Testament and as American as cherry pie,"²⁰ this is not the case for Asia, Africa, Australia, and Latin America. The sources for feminist anti-Judaism are inherent neither in specific postcolonial cultural settings (save as a colonial residue) nor in the biblical text.

Non-Western settings are not the direct heirs of anti-Jewish ideologies or of church- or state-sponsored legislation restricting Jews to ghettos, forbidding them to hold certain jobs, or insisting they wear special clothes in distinction from their Christian neighbors. Nor is the Bible at fault, although the text certainly does contribute to anti-Judaism. "Reading with" women outside the academy tends not to yield anti-Jewish readings, as Malika Sibeko and Beverley Haddad's "Reading the Bible 'with' Women in Poor and Marginalized Communities in South Africa" demonstrates.²¹ Even when prompted by academic interpreters to label textual elements "racist," indigenous laywomen readers resist.²² Nor, finally, need anti-Judaism be primarily attributed to the teachings of missionaries. Although this component fertilized the ground, it has not yielded, as far as I am aware, much fruit in nonacademic settings.

In some cases anti-Jewish readings can be attributed to readers' limited access to information. Many a seminary library outside the West is stocked with volumes willed by retired or deceased ministers, and the anti-Judaism of those books remains potent. Such settings may also lack any works about, or even primary sources on, Judaism. Interpreters do what they can with what they have. However, many of the sources I have cited display familiarity with both con-

²⁰ Cornel West, foreword to *The Narrow Bridge: Jewish Views on Multiculturalism*, ed. Marla Brettschneider (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), xi.

²¹ Malika Sibeko and Beverley Haddad, "Reading the Bible 'with' Women in Poor and Marginalized Communities in South Africa," *Semeia* 78 (1997): 83–92; the pericope discussed is Mark's hemorrhaging woman.

²² See Musa W. Dube, "Readings of Semoya: Batswana Women's Interpretations of Matt 15:21–28," *Semeia* 73 (1996): 111–29. Although the questions addressed to Botswana women could easily produce anti-Jewish answers, the women refused this temptation: "We frequently had to push the respondents to address the specificity of Jesus' statement [Matt 10:5b–6]" (117); "Is this a story of racism between Canaanites and Israelites?" (119). On Matt. 15:21–28, feminist anti-Judaism, and ahistoricism, see my "Matthew's Advice to a Divided Readership," in *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study*, ed. David E. Aune (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 22–41.

temporary feminist theory and the study of Christian origins, and these sources are up-to-date and often theoretically sophisticated. Consequently, I doubt that complete Judaica libraries would eliminate anti-Jewish reconstructions: even when authors are aware of theological anti-Judaism, the problem remains. For example, after positively citing Judith Plaskow's work, one commentator asserts, "On the other hand, Third World women as gentiles or pagans are painfully aware of the ethnocentrism, rejection, and disdain of Jews toward the outsiders."²³

What, then, is anti-Judaism's source? It is a Western export. Anti-Judaism is what the postcolonial scholar educated in the West learned along with colleagues in the Western classroom and library. We Western scholars ship it out with our students; we fail to stop it when it returns, in more toxic form, in manuscripts to be published by Orbis Books, by the World Council of Churches, by Fortress Press, and by the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*; and then we praise it as indicative of multicultural voices and include it in our syllabi. Thereby we infect the next generation of students, and the infection is global.

One particularly nasty form of this disease appears when the feminist critical-hermeneutical approach is placed not in creative dialogue with the historical-critical method but in opposition to it. For some readers (perhaps especially those training in "sophisticated" Western methods), historical-critical work is seen as colonial in origin, arbitrary in practice, and irrelevant for the lives of people in believing communities. When an appropriate distrust of objectivist historiography turns into ahistoricism, anti-Judaism appears in its wake.

Such academically prompted anti-Judaisms are then exacerbated by pedagogical systems. Not all theological schools and PhD programs in Christian origins or New Testament require their students to be familiar with formative Judaism. Further, texts that insist that Jesus was Jewish often fail to provide content to the label; "Judaism" becomes an empty label onto which all sorts of specious characteristics can be inserted. Moreover, many academic programs lack Jewish faculty and students; it is much more difficult to castigate Judaism when Jews are in the room.

The condition is all the worse in new seminaries arising in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where there are fewer Jewish sources (let alone Jewish people) and where the entirely laudable concern for Palestinian rights easily correlates all Jews with Israeli hard-liners. A corollary to this approach is the move to distinguish the earliest followers of Jesus from Judaism. Peter, John, and James

²³ Kwok Pui-lan, "The Future of Feminist Theology: An Asian Perspective," in King, *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, 71.

thus become the ancestors of today's Palestinian (Arab) Christians; their Judaism is completely erased.

What, then, might we—"we" being all those engaged in the feminist enterprise—do, aside from insuring that our own teaching and writing do not promote the very thing we decry? We insist that anti-Judaism be included in the sins of biblical text and interpretation. For example, Gerald West and Musa W. Dube's introduction to "Reading With" insists on the "cry against biblical textual violence, its suppression of diversity—be it gender, race, class, ethnicity, [or] sexual and cultural orientations." Missing is the category of religion.²⁴

When collections on feminist and/or postcolonial biblical studies are organized, editors might include Jewish voices. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert's second volume of *Reading from This Place*, titled *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, appropriately includes a contribution from a Palestinian Christian but nothing that is written by or that mentions Israeli Jews (save as persecutors of those Christians). I suspect that had some Israeli Jews been present at the conference where the articles in the collection were first presented, several of them would read differently.²⁵

We might also imagine how our comments could be perceived. The 1999 "Letter to the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches" speaks of various organizations (e.g., Sisters in the Struggle to Eliminate Racism and Sexism [SISTERS] and the Ecumenical Network for Youth Action [ENYA]) "which seek to honour the biblical vision of a world where 'there is no longer Jew or Greek.'"²⁶ To the Galatian Gentiles, this statement may have been a signal of liberation; other ears will hear a desire that my people, Jews, cease to exist.

In like manner, Jean K. Kim's "reading of Revelation 17 from a postcolonial feminist perspective" never notes that the author of the apocalypse is a Christian, but she does speak extensively about how "the feminization of the city as a whore is due to nationalist (Jewish) ideology," how prophetic metaphors from Jeremiah and other books are aimed at "Jewish elite men,"

²⁴ Gerald West and Musa W. Dube, "How We Have Come to 'Read With,'" introduction to "Reading With: An Exploration of the Interface between Critical and Ordinary Readings of the Bible: African Overtures," special issue, *Semeia* 73 (1996): 15. For the explicit importance of the inclusion of the category of religion, see Musa W. Dube, "Toward a Post-colonial Feminist Interpretation," *Semeia* 78 (1997): 23.

²⁵ For example, Elaine Wainwright, in "A Voice from the Margin: Reading Matthew 15:21–28 in an Australian Feminist Key," in Segovia and Tolbert, *Reading from This Place*, vol. 2, 142n32, acknowledges removing anti-Semitic comments from an earlier draft of her essay in light of my conversation with her.

²⁶ "Letter to the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches from the Women and Men of the Decade Festival of the Churches in Solidarity with Women: From Solidarity to Accountability," *Ministerial Formation* 85 (April 1999): 64.

and how the whore of Babylon's "sexual potential threatens Jewish nationalist ideology."²⁷ Hosea wrote to "Israelites" and Jeremiah to "Judeans"; if we speak of the prophets as addressing Jews, then we must note that, given the Christian canon, they speak to those in the church as well. If John reflects a nationalist (Jewish) ideology, then Jewish texts should be cited along with Jewish counterviews. Next, New Testament material should be located not simply in comparison to Judaism (however defined) but also in light of the broader Hellenic culture, in which both "nationalist ideology" and the feminization of the "other" constituted popular discourse.

When Jewish practices are mentioned, their cultural value should be treated sympathetically. Specifically, the ever-popular Levitical mitzvot should not be reified and then viewed as either enforced by a Taliban-like Second Temple Jewish militia or even necessarily oppressive. Purity affected men as well as women; ejaculation as well as menstruation occasioned impurity. Moreover, to become impure was not a sin (the book of Tobit offers a perfect example of the importance of burying corpses). Purity is actually part of every culture, and those women who participate in it may celebrate rather than hate it. Although not from a feminist writing, the following example exquisitely demonstrates the problem. Commenting on the influx of Asians to American churches and the churches' goals of acculturation, the author observes, "Most of the mainline U.S. Protestant churches do not seem to realize that these [new immigrants] are the 'gentile' Christians who do not know and are not willing to accept 'Jewish' laws and practices." Reflecting on Acts 10, he argues for our "recognition of multiplicity of our cultures" but in the next sentence claims that "the Jewish regulations about clean and unclean are not valid, [and] indeed . . . they contradict the nature of God as the Creator of all living things."²⁸ In other words, for this author only some cultures are worthy of respect, and for him the Jewish tradition contradicts the nature of G-d.

Finally, we in the North Atlantic must be willing to risk our own reputations. When my essay "Lilies of the Field and Wandering Jews" appeared, in 2000, both Western and non-Western readers (none of whom spoke with me directly; the charges were conveyed secondhand) accused me of racism, and I fear the charge will be directed at me again after the publication of this article. In "Lilies" I explicitly noted the deep roots of anti-Judaism in both European and North American scholarship, delineated positive examples of postcolonial studies, and recognized distinct concerns expressed by different readers in dif-

²⁷ Jean K. Kim, "'Uncovering Her Wickedness': An Inter(textual) Reading of Revelation 17 from a Postcolonial, Feminist Perspective," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 (1999): 64, 72, 78.

²⁸ Chan-Hie Kim, "Reading the Cornelius Story from an Asian-Immigrant Perspective," in *Reading from This Place*, vol. 1, *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, ed. Fernando P. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 172-73.

ferent locations. But for some readers none of this mattered; the only matter of import was that I, a woman in a privileged position, was perceived to be silencing those who previously had been silenced. On the one hand, critique "from above" can be abusive; on the other hand, a history of marginalization need not grant a moral high ground.

I thank scholars such as Elaine Wainwright, Hisako Kinukawa, Kwok Pui-lan, and many others who help me confront my own prejudices even as they graciously listen to my concerns. Kinukawa did more for me than she can know in this extraordinary statement: "I am afraid an anti-Jewish interpretation has been unconsciously promulgated by those who have not been exposed to this issue [Christian feminist anti-Judaism], including myself."²⁹

The elimination of anti-Judaism, like the elimination of racism, sexism, and heterosexism, takes an initial step when biblical studies achieves a true dialectic. Musa Dube puts it best in her description of the "post-colonial feminist who reads for decolonization": this reader "will ask how the Christian texts [I would add Jewish texts as well] construct and legitimate encounter with people of different faith, race, gender, and sexuality" and will seek "to encounter and to dialogue with the different Other on a level of different and equal subjects."³⁰

RESPONSE

Kwok Pui-lan

I thank Amy-Jill Levine for taking the risk to begin a conversation on post-colonialism, anti-Judaism, and feminist reading of the Bible, and I thank the respondents for accepting the invitation to respond. In the United States, where any criticism of Jews can be labeled anti-Semitic and any criticism of the work of racial-minority and third-world women by white scholars can be labeled racist, it takes tremendous courage for participants of this roundtable to engage each other in a public and candid manner. Although Judith Plaskow, Susannah Heschel, and Levine have analyzed anti-Judaism in Western feminist work, Levine's article "Lilies of the Field," from which this piece is drawn, is, as far as I know, the first to discuss the problem of anti-Judaism in third-world women's writings.¹ The questions she raises are important ones: Given that the

²⁹ Hisako Kinukawa, "Looking at the Web: A Political Analysis of Personal Context and Its Relationship to Global Context," *Journal of Asian and Asian American Theology* 2 (1997): 58.

³⁰ Dube, "Post-colonial Feminist Interpretation," 22.

¹ Amy-Jill Levine, "Lilies of the Field and Wandering Jews: Biblical Scholarship, Women's Roles, and Social Location," in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Revisited*, ed. Ingrid-Rosa Kitzberger (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 329-52.

cultures in the third world are not inherently anti-Jewish, why do feminist scholars use anti-Jewish rhetoric? Is this a kind of colonial mimicry, a reinscription of what they have learned from Western scholarship, including the works of early feminists? Instead of pitting themselves against one another, how can Jews, who have been constructed by European colonists as "outsiders within," collaborate with the formerly colonized, who are the "outsiders without," to work for mutual empowerment and healing?

In order for dialogue to take place, one has to listen sympathetically to the concerns of one's dialogical partner. I want to affirm Levine's concerns of anti-Judaism in the biblical text and in the history of interpretation by both feminists and nonfeminists. Such anti-Jewish biases have been exported to other parts of the world through standard reference books and New Testament scholarship, creating a prejudice detrimental to the well-being of the Jewish people. But, although these issues are pressing for Levine, they are not the priority issues for third-world women in the ecumenical gatherings that I have participated in or in the conference proceedings I have consulted. For them, abject poverty, globalization and capitalist greed, and deeply entrenched patriarchal practices both in the church and society are their primary issues. And when issues concerning the Jewish people have been brought up, many third-world theologians—women and men—have expressed their sympathy with the plight of the Palestinians, who are oppressed by the State of Israel with the help of the United States government.

There have not been many opportunities for dialogue between third-world feminists and Jewish feminists, because of their different social locations and circles of networks. In third-world countries with local Jewish populations, Judaism and Christianity exist as two separate religions, each with its own sphere of activities. Those third-world feminist theologians I have spoken with said that they have had too few contacts with Jews or sustained conversations with Jewish feminists to know how they feel about Judaism. I welcome Levine's invitation to read the Bible with those who are different from us, so that we can confront our prejudices and strengthen mutual understanding for our common struggle for greater peace and justice in the world.

My encounter with Jewish people went through several stages. Born and raised in Hong Kong, I have had few contacts with Jews, even though some of them went to Hong Kong after being refugees in China to escape from the Nazis during the Second World War. The only contact I had was when my college professor of Old Testament brought the students to visit a Jewish synagogue in order to meet with the rabbi and to see the Torah scrolls. Then, in the mid-1980s, while doing graduate work in the United States, I was exposed to the work of Judith Plaskow, who called attention to anti-Judaism in Western Christian feminist interpretation. I had read the writings by Leonard Swidler and other feminists claiming "Jesus was a feminist" before I came to the States,

and I saw the relevance of Plaskow's critique.² During this period my response was limited to a Jewish-Christian feminist dialogue; as a Christian theologian, I felt that I had a responsibility to examine the Christian heritage, for I participated in the Christian discourse. While heeding Plaskow's challenge, I also expressed my reservations about certain exclusionary practices of Jews toward Gentiles in the Hebrew Bible and in some Jewish circles that have contributed to Christian exclusivist claims. I want to quote what I wrote in 1992 so that readers will have a fuller understanding of my thinking at the time:

In the [past] work of women theologians of the Third World, the issues of anti-semitism and the Holocaust were rarely discussed. . . . In the attempt to find some security in their Christian identity, many continued to emphasize that Jesus was a feminist, while condemning Jewish culture as irredeemably patriarchal. There is little effort to recognize the leadership roles of Jewish women in their synagogues, then and now, nor the kind of transformation going on in Judaism as a result of the feminist critique. On the other hand, Third World women as gentiles or pagans are painfully aware of the ethnocentrism, rejection, and disdain of Jews toward the outsiders. The exclusive Christian claims can be traced in part to this Jewish legacy.³

Among my third-world colleagues, I was one of the first to call attention to anti-Judaism. I agree with Levine, however, that I should have spelled out more clearly who are the Jews I was referring to, lest my statement create an impression that all Jews are ethnocentric.⁴

In the 1990s, when I began to read seriously postcolonial theory and literature and to acquaint myself with the works of Jewish scholars—including Susannah Heschel, Laura Levitt, Miriam Peskowitz, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, Daniel Boyarin, and Jonathan Boyarin—I became aware that anti-Semitism was an integral part of the colonialist discourse used to oppress colonized peoples. I articulated the intersection of anti-Judaism, sexism, and colonialism in my first published essay on postcolonial criticism and called for a multiaxial framework of interpretation that takes into consideration not just gender but also race, class, culture, and colonialism.⁵ As I continued to learn from the Jew-

² Leonard Swidler, "Jesus Was a Feminist," *Catholic World* 212 (January 1971): 177–83. This was translated into Chinese. For a critique of Swidler and other feminist works, see Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation," in *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 1, *A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 117–29.

³ This is from my essay "The Future of Feminist Theology: An Asian Perspective," first published in the *Auburn News* (Fall 1992): 1–9, and reprinted in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 63–76; the quotation is on pp. 70–71.

⁴ Levine, "Lilies of the Field," 345.

⁵ Kwok Pui-lan, "Woman, Dogs, and Crumbs': Constructing a Postcolonial Discourse," in *Discovering the Bible in the Non-biblical World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 76–79.

ish Diasporic experience, I discovered that, besides conforming to the Jewish-Christian axis of dialogue, there are other ways of framing the conversation, such as Jewish-Chinese or Diasporic Jewish and Diasporic Chinese perspectives.⁶ Such an awareness leads me to ask, Can we imagine a social and cultural space in which postcolonial Christian feminists can sit around the table with Jewish feminists without letting Eurocentric issues and concerns drive the agenda, and together can we work to dismantle the colonialist and anti-Jewish discourse?

I find it interesting that Levine considers the authors she critiques to be doing “postcolonial New Testament studies.” Levine has used “postcolonial” in a narrow sense, referring to the fact that these authors were writing “after” colonialism. But most people in postcolonial studies identify “postcolonial” not in a chronological sense but as a reading and discursive practice developed by theorists such as Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha.⁷ The majority of the authors Levine cites would not identify themselves as postcolonial theologians; and I wasn’t writing self-consciously from a postcolonial perspective in my articles she cites. And, as R. S. Sugirtharajah has written, there are notable differences between the postcolonial and liberationist approaches to the Bible.⁸

I argue that postcolonial theory will illuminate the multilayered nature of the problems Levine identifies. The claim that Jesus was a liberator of women who broke from Jewish tradition was first introduced to the third world not by Western academic scholarship but by missionaries who wanted to convert “native” women to Christianity. The subordination of women in the “native” traditions was regarded as symptomatic of the inferiority of their cultures, and “saving brown women” was a part of the Christian colonialist discourse, masquerading as “civilizing mission.”⁹ Many “native” women who leave their tradition to become Christians believe that Jesus does not discriminate against women and that Christianity offers women a better chance for life. Because of this long history of hailing Jesus as an iconoclastic hero in missionary and also “native” Christian women’s discourses, I am not persuaded that only Western-educated third-world feminists are making anti-Jewish remarks and that “ordinary readers” are not. I also want to point out that what we read about “ordi-

⁶ Kwok Pui-lan, “Historical, Dialogical, and Diasporic Imagination in Feminist Studies of Religion,” in *The End of Liberation? Liberation in the End! Feminist Theory, Feminist Theology, and Their Political Implications*, ed. Charlotte Methuen and Angela Berlis (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2002), 72–78.

⁷ See R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11–42.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 103–23.

⁹ Kwok Pui-lan, “Unbinding Our Feet: Saving Brown Women and Feminist Religious Discourse,” in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*, ed. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 62–81.

nary readers” is filtered through the lenses of the trained elites, and there is always the temptation to valorize the masses, the poor, and the uneducated. Since “ordinary readers” tend to read the Bible more literally, it is difficult to believe that they would not be influenced by anti-Jewish statements found in the text itself, especially in the passion narratives.

Levine suggests that, given that anti-Jewish ideologies are not inherent in non-Western societies, the reproduction of anti-Jewish discourse by third-world feminists can be interpreted as a colonial mimicry and a reproduction of what they have learned from their Western teachers. I do not underestimate the influences of missionary, colonialist, and early feminist discourses, but I want to highlight the “ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*),” which Homi Bhabha has theorized with both rigor and subtlety. Bhabha emphasizes the indeterminacy and double articulation of mimicry: on the one hand, it may reinscribe colonial authority (trying to be white); on the other hand, it may be a complex strategy to challenge identity and difference constructed by “normalized” knowledges “(*but not quite*)” and to appropriate, fracture, and displace the dominant discourse for resistance.¹⁰ Whereas Levine looks at mimicry as a repetition and reinscription of Western Christian anti-Jewish discourse (trying to be white), I want to probe in what ways third-world feminists’ writings are different (“almost the same but not white”)¹¹ from those of their colonial masters and mistresses.

Levine has quoted only sentences and parts of paragraphs in which authors have made either unfavorable or questionable remarks of Jewish culture and religion; then, by putting a string of quotations from different authors together, she creates an impression that these writers harbor strong anti-Jewish attitudes. The broader contexts of the authors’ statements have to be scrutinized in order to understand why such rhetoric is deployed and for what purposes. For example, Teresa Okure’s article “Feminist Interpretations in Africa,” which Levine cites, aims to elucidate how African women are interpreting the Bible for the survival of the people of the continent. She talks about the way African women have risen up against the male-dominated church and theological educational institutions. Toward the end of the article, she cites the works of African women theologians on the woman with blood (Luke 8:40–56), who breaks “with crippling cultural taboos imposed on her so as to reach Jesus directly and be fully restored.”¹² Reading the statement in context helps us to see that Okure and other African women theologians are encouraging African

¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 85–92.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹² See Teresa Okure, “Feminist Interpretations in Africa,” in Schüssler Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 1, 82.

women to rise up and seek wholeness in their lives; they are not primarily concerned with putting down the Jewish tradition.

Another example is my own piece "God Weeps with Our Pain." In this short article I condemned female infanticide brought about by China's one-child policy, sexual tourism, and other exploitations of Asian women, and articulated Asian women's hope for the dawning of a new society. I wrote: "Because the suffering touches the innermost of her [the Asian woman's] being, she feels the pain of a suffering God: a God who cried out on the Cross, who suffered under the long Jewish tradition, the God who was put to death by the military and political forces, who was stripped naked, insulted and spat upon."¹³ Writing in Hong Kong around 1984, I was not aware of the anti-Jewish criticism in the United States, and I was certainly influenced by the works of Bultmann and other scholars, which I now see as deeply biased against Jewish people. But even as I blamed the Jewish tradition, I also mentioned the forces used by the Roman military and political machine. When I read Levine's "Lilies of the Field" and checked what I had written, I was surprised to find that either the editors or the publishing house had changed "long Jewish tradition" to "oppressive Jewish tradition" without my knowledge when reprinting the article!¹⁴

I cite these two examples to invite Levine and other Jewish feminists to enter into conversation about the kind of pain and suffering of the majority of women in the world as described by the authors she cites. I do not want to underestimate the pain that Levine feels when the Jewish tradition is portrayed as monolithically patriarchal and oppressive and used as a negative foil to make Jesus look like a countercultural radical who heals and liberates women. But I invite Levine to see that, in critiquing patriarchy in Jewish culture, third-world feminists may not be merely trying to make Jesus look good but are trying to bring into sharp relief patriarchy in their own cultures. Jesus' critique of his Jewish culture (some aspects of it, not all) can be used as an example to encourage other women to reform their own cultures. As Elsa Tamez has written,

The sometimes sharp criticism that Jesus thrusts at his own Jewish culture does not reflect an anti-Jewish stance. As we know, Jesus is a Jew and therefore places himself in a position of self-critique with respect to the patriarchy of Judaism and Roman culture as enacted in oppres-

¹³ Kwok Pui-lan, "God Weeps with Our Pain," *East Asia Journal of Theology* 2, no. 2 (1984): 230. The essay was reprinted in *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World*, ed. John S. Pobee and Bärbel von Wartenberg-Potter (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 90–95.

¹⁴ This is not a single incidence, for other third-world women have told me that their poetry or writings have been used, cited, excerpted, or edited without their permission.

sive practices. Importantly, in this same way, women today engage in constructive criticism of their religious and social culture.¹⁵

From a liberationist perspective, third-world authors also criticize colonialism, neocolonialism, and militarism. Thus, these third-world feminists may not have engaged in a simple kind of colonial mimicry but may have tried to refashion the dominant colonial discourse in order to create a language of resistance that challenges both patriarchy in native cultures and imperialism at once.

Levine has noted that third-world feminists have identified "the Jews" transhistorically and transculturally with their oppressors, but rarely with the Romans. One plausible reason is that, in a colonial setting, the oppression of the colonialists is often not felt intimately and immediately, for the colonialists, as members of the upper class, rarely mix with the people. It is the disciplinary power of the indigenous elites employed as colonial agents and accomplices that is most keenly felt. At this juncture postcolonial criticism may provide a corrective to a one-sided blaming of "the Jews," because postcolonial biblical studies focuses on the impact of the empire, both ancient and modern, and on its representations in the text. For example, postcolonial feminist studies of the Bible can examine how Roman imperial rule had shaped and changed Jewish cultures and customs, especially regarding gender relationships and women's roles in their faith community. And, if the conflicts of Jesus with the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders were not Christian-Jewish conflicts but intra-Jewish contentions, it would be productive to explore the political implications of such conflicts under the shadow of the empire. Furthermore, the Jesus movement must be recognized as a movement within the context of Judaism, and postcolonial feminists are interested to know whether this movement provided opportunities for Jewish women to challenge not only patriarchy but also imperial rule.

I support many of Levine's strategies for conscienciating people about anti-Jewish biases in biblical and theological studies: learning more about Jewish history, avoiding making generalized negative statements about Judaism, including Jewish voices in anthologies, updating libraries (especially in the third world) with Jewish resources, and naming the problem when we see it. Related to this process are pedagogical issues regarding teaching the body of third-world feminist writings. Levine is concerned that the teaching of these multicultural voices with anti-Jewish content will infect the next generation of students, and the infection is global in this case. I think these third-world writings must be taught with an understanding of the history and cultures of their contexts and the rhetorical strategies they use. The questions Levine raises and the responses of some of the authors of such writings need to be discussed with

¹⁵ Elsa Tamez, *Jesus and Courageous Women* (New York: Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church, 2001), viii.

students while respecting the particularity and specificity of the different voices. I am concerned that Levine's and other white female scholars' critique of anti-Judaism in these writings might lead to the further marginalization of these voices. At a time when American imperialism is on the rise, those of us teaching in the United States must insist on including voices outside the United States to challenge the "sanctioned ignorance" perpetuated by the dominant white educational system, the mass media, and the state apparatus. This roundtable can be used to help students understand the complex and multifaceted dimensions of the issues and to illustrate that feminists are not afraid to dialogue on difficult issues across differences.

RESPONSE

Musimbi Kanyoro

In her article Levine has made a case identifying anti-Semitism in the writings of many different women, but I will limit my comments to her claim of anti-Semitism in the writings of African women. I must admit that, the first time I read her article, her claim struck me as strange, if not false. Reflecting further, I am very impressed by the fact that Levine has taken time not only to read the works of non-Western feminists but more particularly to include those from Africa. I am intrigued when feminists from other parts of the world engage in dialogue with African women's writings. African feminist theological writings are still new and few, and a dialogue with them feels good, irrespective of the subject matter. There is a need for dialogue between African women and other women. On this aspect I applaud Levine for taking on the African women, even though it appears that she is reading herself into a fight where it does not exist.

I am sympathetic to Levine's concerns in regard to anti-Semitism in the writings of African women; however, I disagree with her stated case. I understand Levine to be saying that rural women in Africa are not anti-Semitic, but that so-called Western-educated women have acquired anti-Semitism from their Western Christian teachers who are anti-Semitic. Such a conclusion seems to me to be only circumstantial, arising out of Levine's own view of the world. It is also patronizingly apologetic on behalf of theologically trained African women for buying into the anti-Semitic trap without even realizing it. For starters, the question of anti-Semitism is nowhere on the agenda of African theologians, whether women or men. Second, if indeed there is anti-Semitism, the women have a choice to learn to see through it and reject it. I would not lay the blame elsewhere. All the references that Levine has used come from women who are members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theolo-

gians. As a member myself, I think I need to give a context of this organization in order to ground my case that anti-Semitism is not their fight.

African women inaugurated the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, in 1989, as a space in which to do communal theology based on their religious, cultural, and social experiences in Africa. The imperative of Circle members is to reflect on these experiences in the light of the theology of their particular religions. Circle members are African women of diverse professions, races, and languages. They are rooted in African indigenous religions, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. To be a member of the Circle is to make a choice to engage in dialogue with cultures, religions, sacred writings, and oral stories that shape the faith of women in the African context. The ultimate goal is to discover the place of women within these confines and to reflect theologically on the status of women in Africa and on how religions contribute to or diminish women's liberation in Africa.

The Circle has over five hundred members on the continent and abroad. The major criterion for membership is an authentic African experience and a commitment to research, reflection, writing, and publishing on issues affecting women in Africa with culture and religion as the framework. White South African Jewish women, Arab Egyptian Christian women, black Ghanaian Muslim women, and African women practicing African indigenous religions are members, although they are in the minority. Christian women (black, white, and Indian) are still the majority. Black African Christian women founded the Circle, and they invited everyone else.

Despite a history of working together for over ten years, Circle members have not yet engaged in a critique of one another's religions. There has been a lot of mutual learning so that now Circle members have some limited and vague ideas of feminism from the eyes of African indigenous women, African Muslim women, African Jewish women, and African Christian women. We have mainly been concerned with how these religions deal with women's agenda in Africa, such as violence against women, HIV/AIDS, conflicts, war, peace, and race relations. Because we are still new to each other and our meetings are few and far between, we have managed only to keep mutual respect with no critique across religions.

Given this background, I argue that reading anti-Semitism in the writings of Circle women is a preoccupation of Levine and her context rather than an agenda of the African women. Most of the works coming from the Circle are very critical of African cultures and patriarchal biblical cultures. Christian women in Africa read the Bible (both the Old Testament and the New Testament) as part of their own heritage; whether this appropriation is correct or not, it is a fact. While they are aware of the current Israeli-Palestinian crisis, not many relate to events of the Second World War, which are the basis of

strong anti-Semitism. In fact, the history taught in Africa about that period has more sympathy for the Jewish people than for non-Jews.

Moreover, the close attachment to the Bible creates a dilemma for African women in regard to the Middle East conflicts. Many see the Christian faith as having its roots in Judaism and thus identify more with Jewish than with non-Jewish people. Perhaps this identification is the problem, because they critique Jewish biblical culture in the same way they critique African culture. This appropriation of another people's culture can implicitly be dangerous if it gives a license to provide critique, which the owners of the culture in question understand in a different way. I think this is what may be happening in Levine's reading.

African women are much too preoccupied with a local agenda of threats to life on the continent, and anti-Semitism is not on the list. HIV/AIDS, violence against women and children, poverty, and tribal, ethnic, and political conflicts causing wars comprise the nearest agenda. Cultural practices such as polygamy, widow inheritance, female circumcision, domestic violence, and economic violence form the experiences of women upon which they base their theological reflections. On the continent there is much lamentation for loss of life and for violence. People lament because they no longer can trust religion or tradition. The continent of Africa is host to many religions, but none of them have saved women from such harsh lives; a multiplicity of religions has but covered the pain of women. By and large, the rubrics that once held African communities together have been shredded by a money economy, technology, and Western culture. Strong currents of modernity and conversion to new religions have been superimposed on traditional morality and in certain respects have wiped it out.

African women theologically reflect on African society on two levels. First, they comment on observable overt actions such as corruption, violence, theft, robbery, sexual irresponsibility, and diminishing communal accountability. Some people in Africa argue that the traditional society was kinder, even if its cultural practices were unfair to women. There was no intention to massacre people even in times of war. Fighting communities conquered and captured each other, but they did not extinguish each other. Property belonged to the whole community, and therefore communities ensured discipline in taking care of the property and the environment. Accountability for one's behavior, both in personal life and in communal life, was a phenomenon taken for granted and applied to everybody without exception.

Sexual behavior, it is also argued, was not a reckless pleasure but a controlled and disciplined affair. In this context polygamy was understood not as a sexual exploit but as a culturally sanctioned form of marriage. All those involved, including the wives, the husband, the children, and the extended family, were recognized and legitimized by the community. Even in death the re-

sponsibility of the community would not cease. Widows were to be inherited to ensure that widows and orphans had a home. Many Africans closely compare these aspects of traditional African life with the stories of the Hebrew people in the Old Testament; and when the Old Testament does not meet people's idea of liberation, then the shift to find liberation in the New Testament through Jesus is a natural development.

Yet at another level African women critique African cultures vehemently, as well as those of the Old Testament Hebrew people which compelled women to go through their lives obeying customs and fearing taboos. It is in this respect that they call upon the Jesus of the New Testament to save them from their indigenous cultures and their biblical heritage, as well as from the ills of modernity. Jesus is understood as having saved other women, the New Testament women whom he healed from cultural taboos or physical illness.

African women realize that today many of the indigenous practices, no matter how close they are to the Old Testament, don't hold water. Not only have they become unstable in the community's adherence to them, but also other ways of analyzing cultural-cum-religious practices are now challenging the African belief system. Many of the rituals and practices formerly considered positive for keeping the community together are today killers in the age of HIV/AIDS and poverty. Today women are questioning these practices and saying no to them.

The analysis of the present crisis often lends itself to looking for answers in the scriptures, and that renders itself to critiquing the scriptures when they are found to be too close to the African culture. The Old Testament (completely unknown in Africa as the Jewish Bible) has many similarities with African practices and beliefs. All the food taboos, the rules about body cleanliness and sex, and the tribalism and clannishness are very familiar and almost make people feel at home in the Old Testament. But women see through the patriarchy and critique it mercilessly when they find the Old Testament and the New Testament in community cultures.

Another topic that receives much criticism is the colonial era, and this has resulted in very important new work on postcolonialism. Many people in Africa argue that during colonization ethnic diversity was made more complicated by new concepts such as individual education, Christian denominationalism, and an emphasis on personal achievement. Women's traditionally powerful role at religious events was taken away from them, because the foreign religions wanted men as the leaders of religions and women got away with a raw deal in everything. It is therefore argued that in the challenges facing African women today, with regard to their status in society in the midst of ethnic pluralism, conflicts are not entirely of an African making. The West has to accept its responsibility not only with regard to the present errors of sustaining certain unworthy systems but also in having played a role in demoralizing the Africans in

the name of religion and civilization. When this argument is taken, the Bible is seen as a Western product, never a Jewish product. The messenger, who brought Christianity to Africa is the one who gets blamed—sometimes rightly so, other times unjustly.

Many Africans today have embraced the Christianity with sincerity and might. But the depth of their belief is always challenged by circumstances. In times of real challenges Christianity is shelved for a bit and then picked up again. In illness and death the Christian faith is most put to the test. With the current challenge of so much death from wars and HIV/AIDS, a new theology is emerging, which is not covered in the articles that Levine reviews. There are many for whom HIV/AIDS is nothing other than God's punishment for the evils done by society. When people understand AIDS in this way, they do not address the scientific facts connected with the disease but rather look to religion and culture for answers.

Many people in Africa are explaining AIDS as witchcraft or a curse from God. Which God is this? For Christians, it is the God who is most aligned to things African and who is introduced to Africa through the Bible, specifically the Old Testament. Although the link between AIDS and sexual behavior is now scientifically well established, still in many parts of Africa a change in sexual behavior does not follow suit. It is difficult to convince society that polygamy and widow inheritance increase the number of sexual partners, thus making more people vulnerable to AIDS infection. After all, these practices are found in the Bible, and the God of the Bible healed people from pestilence and other things that would otherwise harm them. This reasoning should not be understood as anti-Semitism. In fact, this is a case where regard is high for Judaism; therefore it is actually a pro-Semitic stance.

What, then, is my conclusion? Let me make a wayward comparison. There is something needy about how we each view our issues and advocate them to the rest of the world. The events of September 11, 2001, are a recent and good example to illustrate my point. In many places people have long lived with and been surrounded by terrorism, violence, and death on a scale as great as or greater than that of September 11. Although so many people around the world agree that September 11 was a terrible and shocking event, they consider the U.S. obsession with it, including the assumption that it is the defining moment of history for everyone, to be self-indulgent and egotistic. Of course September 11 has become a defining event within the United States, but people elsewhere resent being forced to regard it as defining their history.

Similarly, no one can minimize the horrendous suffering of the Jewish people due to anti-Semitic practices over the years and especially during the Second World War under the Nazis. But this event cannot and should not become the basis on which all theological works are read. In fact, one way to fight anti-Semitism could include showing greater empathy for what non-Jews have

suffered and suffer now. I would like to see Levine and other feminist theologians engage African women on the subject of African pain instead of only reading their own pain into African women's theological literature.

Levine argues that the Middle East crisis fuels global anti-Semitism. I agree with that. The whole world longs to see peace in the Middle East, because the lack of it affects all of us, no matter where we are. The degree of the crisis is felt most in the Middle East, but the rest of the world is not left unscathed. Backed by the United States, I think, Israel is the stronger power and can lead the peace effort. For this reason it could help the whole world if there were some comments from Jewish women theologians presenting a rationale for the restrained exercise of power by Israelis in their dealings with Palestinians. How one's own suffering helps in preventing more suffering to oneself and others is a question begging to be pursued by people who have suffered so much and survived.

I think Levine's pain as a Jewish woman can make her see anti-Semitism where it does not exist. One way to shift that pain is to listen to the pain of African women through their writings and to consider ways she can use her own sad history to empathize with their pain. Empathizing with other people's distress is the beginning of raising consciousness about the reality of one's own situation. To be able to say, I understand because I too have suffered, is a much better way to begin healing than to simply draw attention to one's own suffering and not hear other people's suffering. Empathizing helps us take a stand not to harm others and hopefully to consider helping them. Advocating a change in their condition in due course also communicates the change we long for as individuals, groups, and communities. Empathy leads to compassion. Compassion is about love, not pity. It is about revolutionary sympathy. The word *compassion* comes from the Latin *cum-*, meaning "with," and *pati*, meaning "to suffer." To practice compassion means to be willing to suffer with others.

A question that I would ask Levine if this roundtable were a live debate is, How can Jewish people, who have indeed suffered so much, express compassion for the suffering of other peoples today without ignoring their own suffering? Perhaps if we stay long enough, talking at this table, Levine and I might learn together to have compassion for each other's suffering.

RESPONSE

Adele Reinhartz

Amy-Jill Levine's comments support one of my long-held intuitions: that we doctors of philosophy often attend to illnesses that may be more subtle, and more pervasive, than many of those seen on a regular basis by doctors of med-

icine. Levine diagnoses the illness of anti-Semitism from which some post-colonial feminist exegetes and theologians suffer, and prescribes a course of treatment that aims to eradicate the symptoms of this disease and to move the patient toward recovery.

The symptoms include bad history ("Jesus was a feminist"), bad theology (Jesus decried the patriarchal God of Judaism), bad exegesis (the hemorrhaging woman suffered from impurity), and bad rhetoric (the misrepresentation and ridicule of another culture's beliefs and practices). The causes of the illness are several: limited access to information, infection by Western anti-Judaism, ahistorical methodologies. Treatment entails, in the first instance, an acknowledgment of the illness, that is, "that anti-Judaism be included in the sins of biblical text and interpretation." Also important is the inclusion of Jewish voices in anthologies of essays. Writers should consider how their words might affect Jewish readers and should treat Judaism, Jewish theology, and Jewish practice sympathetically, particularly the issue of Levitical purity. Finally, Jewish scholars and those who oppose anti-Judaism must be willing to speak out.

Implicit in Levine's analysis are two other ideas. First, the disease of anti-Judaism that is manifested in some feminist postcolonial exegesis is a strain of bacterium that periodically infects not only the field of New Testament studies but also human discourse and interactions. Second, there is no cure for this disease but only treatments that may control its spread and may mitigate its insidious effects on the individual and society. My comments will reflect upon these two points.

Anti-Judaism, and its modern substrain, anti-Semitism, are both persistent and contagious. During a recent family trip to Poland, I was struck by the pervasiveness of anti-Semitic graffiti. Our Polish contacts assured us that this graffiti was not directed toward Jews as such but reflected the fierce rivalry between two local soccer clubs. Nevertheless, it was disconcerting, to put it mildly, to see Stars of David painted on the walls and to feel the stares of passersby as they took in the skullcaps worn by our two sons. At least some form of anti-Semitism thus persists even in a country that now has almost no Jewish population.

The contagion of anti-Semitism is evident in the ways in which anti-Zionist rhetoric makes use of standard anti-Semitic tropes. The current intifada and the events of 9/11 have led to an increase of anti-Semitic words and deeds in many locations around the world. Anti-Semitism has also become incorporated in theologies and worldviews from which it previously was absent. As Emran Qureshi notes in a recent review of Bernard-Henri Lévy's *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?* Saudi Wahhabism has fostered anti-Semitism in contradiction to traditional Muslim thinking, by "regurgitating" the anti-Semitic Christ-killer motif. This motif, according to Qureshi, is "an import from the Christian world that has percolated into the Islamic world thanks to Saudi Wahhabi missionary or-

ganizations which disseminate *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and other anti-Semitic tracts. This, needless to say, is a rupture with received tradition."¹

The presence of anti-Jewish statements, however inadvertent, in some feminist scholarship is disturbing in itself, but it is even more so in the context of current global tensions. Indeed, in my view, feminist New Testament studies should contribute to the eradication of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism rather than adopt their norms and presuppositions. As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has taught us, feminist issues go beyond gender and women, extending to all oppressed, whether on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, class, sexual orientation, ability, or any other factor.²

Yet Jews are often excluded from such consideration. One may hazard two guesses as to the reasons. First, Jews in North America are seen as white, economically advantaged, and privileged in terms of education. Like all stereotypes, this one is true of some Jews and not true of many others. Second, people often view the current Palestinian-Israeli conflict in highly polarized terms, according to which Israelis are cast in the role of the "bad guys." It is easy, but ultimately wrong and even dangerous, to conflate the actions of the Israeli government with the views of all Israelis and, by extension, all Jews. Such conflation is factually incorrect and fails to acknowledge the complexity of the situation, its causes, and its history, as well as the diverse ways in which Israeli Jews, non-Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, and Palestinians perceive themselves and one another.

As a Jewish feminist, I hope for support from Christian feminists in the struggle against anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, and in many cases such support is freely forthcoming. Where feminism falls short, additional aspects of the treatment are in order. It can be effective, for example, to take seriously the notion of Jesus' Jewish identity, upbringing, and context. Doing so might well lead to a shift in perspective. Rather than seeing Jesus as standing over against Judaism, one would see him as standing firmly within the Judaism of his time. Thus, Judaism could and indeed should be seen as a positive context for Jesus that allowed him to develop his ideas. Jesus' acceptance of female disciples would, in this way, be seen not as a liberation from the oppressive bonds of Judaism but one possibility within the varieties and diversity that we know to have characterized ancient Judaism, as they do Jewish theology and community today.

Given the tendency of anti-Semitism to flare up in different places, under a variety of circumstances, and over a lengthy period of time, a cure does not

¹ Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?* trans. James X. Mitchell (Hoboken, NJ: Melville House, 2003). Emran Qureshi's review of the book *The Man Who Knew Too Much* appeared in the *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), August 30, 2003.

² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 113.

seem to be in the offing. Yet it seems to me that a serious commitment to historical criticism would be an important step in this direction. The basic principle of historical criticism is that texts must be understood in their historical, cultural, religious, polemical, and literary contexts. We must acknowledge that the New Testament texts do not provide factual, dispassionate, and clinical accounts of Jesus' life and death; rather, the gospel writers filtered received traditions through their own religious and political beliefs to tell the story of a Jesus not necessarily as he was but as he was seen by an individual or group some time after his death.

Within the mainstream, including the "malestream," of New Testament studies, this idea is generally accepted. But this is not the case for those outside the mainstream, including lay readers as well as members of Christian groups and denominations that explicitly reject a nonliteral reading of the New Testament. As one example, I cite a recent entry in the prerelease furor over Mel Gibson's new film, *The Passion*. In the August 14, 2003, edition of the *National Post*, a Canadian national newspaper, Ezra Levant mocks scholars who say that "the *New Testament* is not a reliable source for what happened to Jesus." He continues: "These busybodies tried to edit Mr. Gibson's film. Now they want to rewrite the Bible itself. The Book of Matthew recounts the fateful conversation between the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and the assembled Jews. . . . 'Then answered all the people, and said, 'His blood be on us, and on our children.''" According to Levant, "That is unambiguous language, reporting an incontrovertible fact: A Jewish court condemned Jesus for blasphemy. Of course they would have done so—he was leading a new religion. . . . Mel Gibson's attackers are not just labelling a movie as anti-Semitic. They are calling the Bible anti-Semitic—or at least, their own malicious interpretation of the Bible."³

Levant is quick to add that Jesus died not because of the Jews but because of the sins of humankind. Yet, to many of us, the sort of literal reading that he advocates is chilling. This effect is not undone by appealing to a theological justification of Jesus' death. What most New Testament scholars advocate is not rewriting the Bible but placing it in its historical context. The passion story must be understood in light of other information we have about Judea under Roman rule, including the widespread Roman practice of crucifixion, the experience of Roman persecution that the early church underwent, and early Christians' need to show that they were not enemies of Rome. Whether or not the Jewish authorities had a role in the process leading up to Jesus' death, one can by no means ground a reading of John 8, in which Jesus declares that his Jewish audience has the devil as their father, in an understanding of the New Testament as "a reliable source for what happened to Jesus." The only cure for

³ Ezra Levant, "Don't Crucify 'Mad Mel,'" *National Post* (Toronto), August 14, 2003.

anti-Judaism is to repudiate claims that such statements are the divine word. This is a radical approach, but one that has, in effect, already been taken by many Christians, whether they acknowledge it or not. The way to accomplish it is to situate the New Testament within human society and to recognize the role that human emotions, the tussle for identity, and a variety of other very human factors affected the ways in which the New Testament writers articulated their message. This may be a frightening prospect, as it opens the way for testing certain elements of the texts against human rights principles that we consider fundamental.⁴ Nevertheless, in my view it is the only hope of a cure that we may find not only for anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism but also for many other attitudes whose destructive force has been evident in Western history and society.

RESPONSE

Hisako Kinukawa

On September 16, 1996, at a conference in Kyoto, Japan, titled "The Segregating Structure of the Contemporary Society and the Liberating Gospel," I gave a speech on how we might overcome the harsh discrimination against the "other" in our country. I chose the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21–28 as an example of a very powerless individual. I said Jesus' disciples "impeached" the woman when they tried to rid her from the scene. Afterward, during a discussion period, a man who was of the Buraku, the people who are the most hidden and unknown to the world at large and the most bitterly segregated within Japan,¹ stood up and reproved me for my careless use of the word *impeached*. Instead, he said, I should have used the word *accuse*.

This man pointed out that the word *impeach* in Japanese should be used only when one is ready to transform the person who made a serious mistake, by walking with the person for another mile, listening to the pain, agony, and suffering of the person, and then working together to remove the cause. Therefore, *impeach* is not appropriate to be applied to the disciples in this case. Simply "accusing" the mistake of a person is quite different, however.

⁴ This is not an exercise limited to the New Testament, of course. Many Jews exercise similar judgment when it comes to specific parts of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., the prohibition of homosexuality) and get around them by seeing them as aspects of a past culture's mores that are no longer acceptable in our own time.

¹ See Barbara Rogers, *Race: No Peace without Justice; Churches Confront the Mounting Racism of the 1980s* (Geneva, Switzerland: Programme to Combat Racism, World Council of Churches, 1980), 29.

The disciples accused the woman for her inappropriate behavior. It seems true that those in power often do accuse those who do not behave according to their standards.

The Buraku man was very brave to stand up in public in front of a large audience and impeach me. People of the Buraku have had an unbearably long history of being abandoned, ignored, rejected, and despised by the Japanese. Out of such experiences, the Buraku people have risen to impeach their fellow Japanese, like me, who are ignorant, careless, and unconsciously biased, even though I have always intended to live in solidarity with the other in our society.

When I first read Amy-Jill Levine's article, it seemed as if she was accusing me, but after a while I could acknowledge that it was more significant for me to accept her paper as impeaching me. I thought I might have unconsciously offered anti-Semitic interpretations of the scriptures. I appreciate her tenacious efforts to point out the mistakes, biases, and prejudices given to Judaism either consciously or unconsciously.

As a woman, I have identified myself as being heavily oppressed in my patriarchal/hierarchical society and have often stood against those in power in my own country and sometimes in my small circumstances such as in my school and in my church. I do so as I have simultaneously dreamed of bringing some form of transformation or liberation, even if it may be very small. Yet the voice of this Buraku man stayed in my mind for a long time. His voice has taught me that it is not easy at all to stand where I should stand, even in my society, and to see what I should see. I thought I was on his side, but I was made aware I had not really known the reality of his segregated life. Just as his voice has been a continuing challenge as I do my feminist liberation theology in my country and as I do my interpretation of the scriptural texts, Levine's voice has been another big challenge to me. Her article has led me to try pushing myself into an unfolding process of becoming a truly postcolonial reader and interpreter, which also means that I should not be prevented from practicing my critical reading of the scriptural texts.

I do believe that my reading of prophetic voices in the scriptures and of Jesus' life as transformative in Jewish society is representative of some of the Jews of that day. I have never considered Jesus as separate from his society. Neither have I considered Jesus the only exceptional champion who worked for the marginalized. The social, political, cultural, religious, and economic analysis of his context has always been my basic interest to research and to know as a reader of the texts. Moreover, my own social, political, cultural, religious, and economic contexts surely define me as being oppressed as well as oppressing. I can never be free from the history of my country's having invaded Asian countries, colonizing them, and making use of them. The social location not of either/or but of both/and has kept my reading stance complicated and multilayered.

I know I cannot be removed from continuously learning why the texts or stories are told as we find them in the scriptures. The social, cultural, political, economic, and religious reconstruction of the times when the texts were edited, when the stories were told, and when the incidents took place must be done carefully and continuously.

It seems, however, that it is far beyond my capacity to do all the research on my own. It is regretful to say now, but the resources I had to depend on when I wrote some of my essays in the past were not critical enough to caution me about falling into anti-Jewish interpretations. I am afraid there was also a tendency for me to read the texts or stories more in their literary senses, which showed the Jewish society hedged in with laws and which, ironically, helped me see more clearly the parallel reality of our Japanese society, which is male-centered, group-oriented, and bound by conventional customs based on religious laws. Prophetic voices in the scriptures and Jesus' actions offer the best models and energy for creating transformative schemes for my society and my church. But this does not imply, at least in my mind, that I am making the Jews "other." The Jews have been to me the individual persons who worked with prophetic voices and with Jesus for a transformative movement.

As I do my feminist liberation theology in my context, I still wonder if the Judaism of Jesus' time was completely free of producing the "other" in its society. I wonder if the laws—especially the purity laws—were set up only for occasions related to temple activities and so had no influence on the routines or the mentality of people's daily lives. I have to wonder also whether "elitist Judaism" was not influential on the ordinary life of the people because it consisted of the religious "powers that be." I raise these questions because a society that has a hierarchical power structure is rarely, if ever, free from having an "other." At least I can say that I see this is very true in my own context. However, as I have stated already, I am not intending to say that Jesus is the only one who fought against the social illness in his Jewish society and identified, in Levine's words, "the evil of [his] own circumstance as an elitist Judaism."

I have never been able to experience firsthand the real life of contemporary Jews. I only learned about their history at school and through books and media. I have, of course, knowledge about the Holocaust, and I know how horrible and inhumane it was. To be honest, I have never been able to make direct connections between the Jews in the scriptures and modern Jews, just as I do not consider the Japanese people described in classic volumes the same as Japanese living in the contemporary world. It is also true that I cannot feel personally guilty about what the Japanese imperial military did to Asian countries during the Second World War, though I feel responsible as a Japanese for what Japan continues to do by refusing to completely acknowledge the past aggression. If I am prejudiced against contemporary Jews, it may come from my in-

tensive experience of spending two weeks in Palestine in 1993, exposing myself to the bitter life the Palestinians have endured since the new Israel was built in the same land.

In the summer of 1995, when I first sat in on a workshop led by Amy-Jill Levine and Adele Reinhartz at a conference in Stony Point, New York, titled "Beyond Patriarchy," I naively responded to their teach-in with my horrible experiences in my country, explaining how oppressive the Japanese people have been to those whom we have intentionally made other and to those in Asian countries. But, before I had said more than a few words, I was interrupted and could not finish my stories. I felt like I was slapped in the face by their critique. I felt like I was told I should keep my mouth shut because what they were saying was far more important. Both women appeared too involved with their own issues to listen to an Asian woman unknown to them. A dialogue or dialectic did not take place there. That was my first raw personal encounter with modern Jewish women. I learned only then what a serious and big issue it was and that the anti-Judaism of anti-Jewish interpretations of the scriptures had been hovering all along in the Christian Testament and its interpretations.

It was more surprising to discover later that the resources written by Euro-American theologians that I mainly depended on for my basic information on the scriptures were not free from fault either. Furthermore, very recently I was most shocked when my interpretation of a story in the Christian Testament from my social location was criticized as being "harshly anti-Jewish" by a white American feminist theologian.² Not only is she not a Jew, she is actually one of those who produced the first layers of feminist interpretation that cannot claim to be completely free from anti-Judaism and cannot claim to have avoided touching the issue. There are so many different challenges to understanding what the other says and to know what we can say to the other.

I have been hoping the personal encounters that help us all understand the contexts and histories of others so that we may experience what Musa W. Dube calls creative dialogues "with the different Other on a level of different and equal subjects" will take place. I am glad to see that the dialogues seem to have begun. At least Amy-Jill Levine is inviting us to the table to eat, drink, and talk together so that she can also listen to us.

² Sharon Ringe, "A Gentile Woman's Story, Revisited," in *A Feminist Companion to Mark*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 93–94. See my article "De-colonizing Ourselves as Readers and the Story of the Syro-Phoenician Woman as a Text," in *Distant Voices Drawing Near: Essays in Honor of Antoinette Clark Wire*, ed. Holly E. Hearon (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2004), 131–44.

RESPONSE

Elaine Wainwright

[T]here should be no illusion that "just because the dominant epistemological order is subject to contest, the material force of this dominant order will not prevail," nor should it be assumed that "multivocalism" means that all voices are equally represented.

—Ann Brooks¹

Amy-Jill Levine's article "The Disease of Postcolonial New Testament Studies and the Hermeneutics of Healing," like her "Lilies of the Field and Wandering Jews: Biblical Scholarship, Women's Roles, and Social Location," presents a radical and courageous challenge to Christian feminist biblical scholarship and its desired liberationist stance.² She demonstrates that awareness of one's own oppression and theoretical understandings of oppression, colonialism, and the construction of the other do not necessarily mean that Christian feminists will necessarily avoid constructing the Jew as "other."

Such a challenge is not new for me, nor is it new coming from Amy-Jill Levine (she and I have been engaged in conversation around this challenge in person and in print since at least 1993). It is, however, still a radical challenge for both of us, I suspect, and one for which I am grateful. I know from her a little of the courage that it requires to publicly critique one's colleagues and friends, just as I know from my own experience that similar courage when I must critique interpretations of my respected male colleagues and friends whose work is male-centered, often rendering women invisible more than constructing them as other.³ As one critiqued, I also know the sense of failure in

I thank Amy-Jill Levine not only for her courage in "risking her reputation" for the sake of a better world but also for her collegiality and friendship, which enable both critique and constructive dialogue to take place. And I thank Kwok Pui-lan for the invitation to participate in this roundtable discussion. I am grateful for the opportunity it has provided me to uncover further layers of my own anti-Jewish psyche.

¹ Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory, and Cultural Forms* (London: Routledge, 1997), 107.

² Amy-Jill Levine, "Lilies of the Field and Wandering Jews: Biblical Scholarship, Women's Roles, and Social Location," in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Revisited*, ed. Ingrid-Rosa Kitzberger (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 329–52.

³ One vivid memory of such an experience was the inclusion in my *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel according to Matthew*, *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 60 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 147, of my critique of a position taken by Donald Senior in relation to the *dramatis personae* of Matthew's passion, which, I believed, rendered the women of that narrative invisible. Senior was both a teacher and a respected colleague, and the distance between his writing and mine had, I knew, brought changes in his perspective as feminist biblical scholarship expanded. His text, however, endured in the scholarly arena and needed critique, I believed, because of its capacity to perpetuate the invisibility of women.

the very task that is at the center of my interpretive work, namely, liberation, attentiveness to the multivocal female voice, and a reading of gospel texts that is ethical in the context of multiple oppressions. Such awareness, however, is neither a cause for morbid self-absorption nor a catalyst for the radical rejection of my critic. Rather, it is an invitation to search more deeply for the root cause of the anti-Judaism that can creep into my feminist biblical scholarship despite a conscious awareness of the anti-Judaism within Christianity generally and feminist biblical scholarship in particular. (I too have been reading the texts cited in note 2 of Levine's piece, as well as the even earlier work of Judith Plaskow and other Jewish feminists.)

The invitation to respond to Levine's piece, therefore, has provided an opportunity for me to explore the diagnosis and course of treatment that is proposed in response to the anti-Judaism still present in Christian feminist biblical scholarship. I want to do this from both a personal and a theoretical perspective as I struggle to understand Christian anti-Judaism, especially as it has emerged in a feminist context, in order to avoid it. I also want to explore it further because I am not convinced that its root cause or source is, as she writes, "what the postcolonial scholar educated in the West learned along with colleagues in the Western classroom and library," even though I recognize this factor as contributory. Nor do I find her claim that women from nonacademic settings are likely to be less anti-Jewish than their academic sisters to be convincing, even given Levine's two examples that support it. I think this latter claim needs to be tested much more widely, and it may be that it will demonstrate that anti-Judaism is much more fundamental in Christianity than is the impact of Western-trained academics. It may be that anti-Judaism is so deeply embedded in the Christian psyche or consciousness that its uprooting happens not spontaneously but only layer by layer.

Conscious that Levine's critique arose from her own experience, and having reread how Katharina von Kellenbach's experience affected her awareness of anti-Judaism in feminist religious writings, especially those of biblical scholars,⁴ I was challenged to explore my own experience for possible roots of anti-Judaism. Like Kellenbach, I was an adult before I met a Jewish woman or man in person. Growing up in rural Queensland, Australia, my only contact with Judaism and "the Jews" was by way of construct within the Gospels and the preaching and teaching of priests and women religious. "The Pharisees" and their legalism were the antitheses of Jesus and the Christianity that he established over against Judaism. On reflection, it is extraordinary to realize that this consciousness-shaping was taking place at a time when Catholicism could have been characterized as sharing in the very legalism that it constructed as Jewish

and from which it had supposedly been liberated. This anomaly was never alluded to, since Catholicism was claimed as the truth and Judaism had been superseded. It was only later, as I encountered the documents of Vatican II and commenced my biblical studies, that I began to understand the rich heritage of Judaism and its continuance as a major world religion from the first century to our own day.

As my studies continued, I learned in person from Jewish rabbis such as Hayim Goren Perelmuter,⁵ and, during two years of study in Israel and repeated return journeys there, I have participated regularly in synagogue rituals for Shabbat and other religious festivals. I have come to know Jewish women and men within their vibrant and contemporary religious tradition. I have also learned, over almost two decades, to engage critically with rabbinic Judaism in the study of women in rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity and with Jewish scholars who are colleagues and friends. Why, therefore, I ask myself, have traces of anti-Judaism remained in my scholarship?

Some time ago I heard Rosemary Pringle, professor of women's studies at Griffith University in Queensland, speak of the "patriarchalization of the psyche" and the need for the deconstruction of the layers of such patriarchalization. Even though she does not use this exact phrase in the article that resulted from her lecture, the following statement is particularly relevant to my exploration of the deep cause of Christian anti-Judaism: "[I]t may be part of our current predicament that we retain a 'patriarchal unconscious,' even though patriarchal social relations have been substantially dismantled. It is important therefore not to conflate the psychic and the social. It may always be necessary to deconstruct the patriarchal symbolic while treating gender relations in the social world as more amenable to change."⁶ Just as gender relations in the social world can be changed more readily and visibly than the patriarchalized psyche can, so too, it seems to me, can understandings of Judaism become more informed and interpreters become more aware of its uniqueness while the profound anti-Judaizing of the psyche yet remains intact for much longer. Deconstructing the anti-Jewish symbolic is, I suggest, a more fundamental course of treatment for the disease that the antidotes Levine suggests might alleviate. These antidotes will not, however, heal the disease completely; that work will need to be undertaken by individuals and in dialogue with their communities of faith in contexts of worship, teaching, and scholarship, where the disease has also permeated perniciously.

It is this deep level of the psyche that prevents total awareness of feminist

⁵ See Hayim Goren Perelmuter, *Siblings: Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity at Their Beginnings* (New York: Paulist, 1989), for an example of his perspective.

⁶ Rosemary Pringle, "Destabilising Patriarchy," in *Transitions: New Australian Feminisms*, ed. Barbara Caine and Rosemary Pringle (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 199.

⁴ Katharina von Kellenbach, *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings*, AAR Cultural Criticism Series 1 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1994).

anti-Judaism in gospel interpretations despite new encounters with Jewish women and men and new knowledge and feminist theory. For me this deep level was informed by exclusive Catholic truth claims and a christological supersessionism that can be detected in the Gospels themselves, especially when read from a perspective that is already anti-Jewish as a result of centuries of such interpretations.⁷ Not only my psyche but also that of many, many Christians has been shaped as anti-Jewish. I suspect that many of those women who have not been influenced by Western scholarship share a similar fate, because anti-Judaism has accompanied Christianity; it has been built into the truth claims of Christianity apart from any explicit desire or choice to be anti-Jewish.

However, feminist scholars like me and the many other women named in Levine's article, have, as she indicates, been immersed in and consciously shaped by feminist and postcolonial theories, which should have developed a critical awareness of any construction of the other as "other," especially a demonized "other." I want to track here briefly, in dialogue with some of the feminist theoretical shifts, those stages of emerging feminist consciousness which can, little by little, uncover the layers of psychic anti-Judaism.

In the early stages of developing Christian feminist consciousness within second-wave feminism, the focus was on gender as the key category of analysis, with an attendant focus on women. The analysis of the difference between women and men that accompanied feminist readings of biblical texts participated in what Rosi Braidotti has called "Level 1 Sexual Difference."⁸ Prior to establishing the participation of women in the Jesus movement and the emergence of early Christianity, scholars first read and understood gospel women as excluded from, silenced in, or stereotyped in a text whose central focus was male characters: Jesus and both his disciples and opponents. Christian feminists like me at this stage critiqued the male disciples and opponents, but we protected Jesus by our unconsciously held religious or christological beliefs informed by supersessionism and a liberation perspective. Who needed liberat-

⁷ There is much discussion of this topic within contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue and Jewish and Christian collegial engagement in New Testament studies. Levine herself has participated in such discussion and scholarship; see "Anti-Judaism and the Gospel of Matthew," in *Anti-Judaism and the Gospels*, ed. William R. Farmer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 9–36, in which she concludes that, even though "[t]he gospel of Matthew need not be, and has not inevitably been, read as anti-Jewish," she finds herself "reluctantly concluding the opposite: Matthew's text reorients and redefines Jewish symbols in a christocentric manner; Matthew's text, addressed to both Jews and Gentiles, is more than prophetic polemic according to categories of audience, tone and genre; Matthew's text offers baptism as the initiation rite into the community of those bound in heaven."

⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 159.

ing? Clearly, women. And what from? The gender oppressions of their context, which we constructed as Jewish.⁹

The post-second-wave emergence of voices of women of color and of women from different ethnic, racial, economic, sexually oriented, and religious contexts brought an awareness of differences among women, Braidotti's "Level 2 Sexual Difference."¹⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza developed her model of Greco-Roman society—which she called "kyriarchy"—which recognized that gender is but one mode of oppression within a system of multiple oppressions. Elizabeth Grosz represents but one feminist voice acknowledging the implication of all women within some form of patriarchy when she writes, "There can be no feminist position that is not in some way or other involved in patriarchal power relations; it is hard to see how this is either possible or desirable, for a freedom from patriarchal 'contamination' entails feminism's incommensurability with patriarchy, and thus the inability to criticise it."¹¹ This is a challenging recognition and one that takes courage to acknowledge personally.

It was during the 1990s that many of the voices of Christian feminist biblical scholars from around the world began to emerge and to be heard. Such a time of finding one's public voice, especially from within a colonial context of multiple oppressions, is not necessarily the time of the greatest awareness of one's own implication within some form of patriarchal oppression. Christian feminist voices from locations other than the European–North American nexus needed to resonate in their speakers' own ears for a time and to be heard in

⁹ I recognize here my negative construction of the Jewish purity laws as oppressing to women in my 1991 study, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading*. I want, however, to draw attention to the contribution of developing scholarship by scholars profoundly versed in particular aspects of Judaism or early Christianity, which can break through previously held beliefs and hence possibly shift layers of the anti-Judaized psyche. One such work is Shaye J. D. Cohen's "Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity," in *Women's History and Ancient History*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 273–99, which was published subsequent to my study and is, as Cohen himself claims, one of the few historical studies of menstruation in ancient Judaism and early Christianity. It has been added to recently by an excellent study by Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). These works, together with Amy-Jill Levine's "Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman," in *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies*, ed. David R. Bauer and Mark Allan Powell, SBL Symposium Series 1 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), 379–97, will enable, I hope, a return to texts like Matt. 9:18–26 with another layer removed from one's Christian anti-Jewish psyche. Hence, while Levine rightly critiques the work of Christian feminist biblical scholars and our negative construction of first-century Judaism because, like the work of Senior that I noted earlier, it continues to shape the consciousness of its readers, I would ask too that she allow for our repentance in the face of sharpened consciousness and advanced scholarship, as she does for her own; see note 70 in "Lilies of the Field."

¹⁰ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 162.

¹¹ Elisabeth Grosz, "A Note on Essentialism and Difference," in *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*, ed. Sueja Gunew (London: Routledge, 1990), 3–42.

their own contexts for the liberation of their sisters. When such a process is linked to deep-seated anti-Jewish conscientization, which I have suggested most contemporary Christians have encountered, it is not surprising that Christian women seeking liberation from multiple oppressions within their Christian story constructed Jesus as liberator and the women of their foundational religious story as liberated, unaware consciously of their construction of Judaism as a negative "other." This analysis is not intended to be a dismissal of the disease that Levine identifies. Rather, it is an attempt to understand the presence of the disease and why the antibodies of critical theory were not able to eradicate it before its appearance.

Reflecting on my own scholarly journey during the 1990s, I recognize that my focus was around these very issues as I struggled to develop a way of reading the Jesus of Matthew's gospel from a feminist perspective.¹² I use the word *struggled* advisedly, because the development of a framework for reading was the most difficult task of my project, as it entailed confronting five key issues that feminists had named as problematic in developing Christology, one of which was its anti-Judaism. This confrontation had to happen not only at the academic, theological level but also within myself, in my own psyche. For me this was an experience of the "Level 3 Sexual Difference" that Braidotti elaborates, awareness of the differences within each woman.¹³ This level of difference recognizes the multiplicity in oneself, the split and fractured nature of the self, one aspect of which is a deep anti-Jewish Christian psyche together with a conscious awareness of an anti-Judaism that most Christian feminists would seek to avoid. My seeking to hear the different communities of interpretation within the Matthean Jewish-Christian community brought with it a greater awareness of differences within rabbinic or formative Judaism. This was my participation in the recognition of "situated knowledges."¹⁴

Recently, however, I encountered Mary E. John's critique of Western women's attempts to articulate their fractured reading positions in response to the voices of women of color and other colonized women. John points to the need for each feminist to continually historicize both reading positions and knowledges even in the face of the frightening prospect "that the culture she was raised in may embody nothing worth saving."¹⁵ For the feminist scholar of early Christianity who stands within the contemporary Christian tradition, such a possibility may indeed be frightening, since the tradition being studied is not

just a historical artifact but the living tradition that may have nurtured her spirit and in aspects of whose gospel tradition she may continue to find meaning. One's understanding of and interpretation of Jesus lies at the very heart of this meaning-making for many. The critique may become still more frightening or more challenging if one is struggling with multiple oppressions that need to be deconstructed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert makes a similar point in relation to the Judaism and the texts she loves: "The ongoing challenge . . . is to find a critical balance between commitments, between the commitment to texts that one loves with all their faults, which have sustained and continue to sustain identities of communities and individuals, my own no less, and the commitment to making this world a better world, for men and women alike."¹⁶

Both Jewish and Christian feminist interpreters of sacred texts that emerged from the early centuries of the Common Era share a common goal, it would seem, of making this a better world for women and men alike. Feminist theory reminds us that we will not achieve this perfectly, because of our implication in layers and layers of patriarchy and other forms of global oppressions. I have suggested in response to Amy-Jill Levine's call to diagnose and heal the powerful disease of anti-Judaism in Christian feminist biblical interpretation that recognition needs to be given to the anti-Judaizing of the Christian psyche, a process which has influenced not only individuals but also Christian communities over millennia. Critiques like hers are important catalysts to alert us to the deep problem; and the antidotes she suggests, especially respectful dialogue and relationships and attentiveness to the ethics of all our interpretations, our scholarship, and our teaching, will be significant for shifting consciousness and beginning the uncovering of subconscious layers. Deconstructing the anti-Jewish Christian psyche is, however, a task that will involve collaboration among people with a wide range of skills beyond biblical scholarship, as well as a call to each Christian to a journey of deep conversion. It will, indeed, be lifelong.

RESPONSE

Amy-Jill Levine

I am grateful for the respondents for taking the time to engage in the dialogue. As Adele Reinhartz details, although anti-Semitism is a global problem, often those who have perpetuated it deny complicity: they didn't "intend" bigotry, or they were simply following the Bible, or—to extend her list—they were merely remarking that Jews really are behind every social ill, as the prime min-

¹² Elaine M. Wainwright, *Shall We Look for Another? A Feminist Rereading of the Matthean Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998).

¹³ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 165.

¹⁴ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988): 575–99.

¹⁵ Mary E. John, *Discrepant Dislocations: Feminism, Theory, and Postcolonial Histories* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 21.

¹⁶ Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 6–7.

of family purity may just as easily boast in her piety as feel shamed by it. I do not, for example, get the impression that the Virgin Mary felt shame upon delivering her firstborn son.

Just as Kinukawa rhetorically reintroduces the “purity is bad” model, so her speculation on Judaism of the “powers that be” maps purity onto class. Purity and class are not complementary: the poor widow in the Temple is ritually pure; the high priest who has just had an ejaculation is not; both Pharisee and tax collector go to the Temple to pray, so both are ritually pure. When she talks about the Jewish “powers that be,” we want to know, Who are they and what is it about their “Judaism” that grants them status? Is the discussion about the religious practices of the Herodian family? the high priest? Is religious practice something that should not be granted recognition? Without an example, with only a vague rhetorical wondering, I am precluded from responding, and conversation again stops.

Next is the Jewish monolith, for example, Kinukawa holding prejudice against “contemporary Jews” because of two weeks she spent with Palestinians. I do appreciate her honesty in locating this source of her reaction. I would also have appreciated a deeper reflection. She offers no study of history; no contact with Jews whose families have been in the region for centuries; no conversations with Jews expelled from Arab countries in 1948 or those fleeing persecution in Syria, the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, Yemen, and now France; and no meetings with those Israelis whose family members were blown up by people acting in the name of Allah. Yes, the situation in Palestinian areas is horrible. But by failing to distinguish “contemporary Jews” from Israelis, let alone Israeli hard-liners from Israeli doves, she condemns all Jews. Nor, other than by expressing solidarity with Palestinians (here, by implication, monolithically benevolent), does Kinukawa offer her own political solution or explain how, beyond condemning Jews, she is working for peace. Kwok too notes that third-world theologians are concerned with the plight of the Palestinians (as we all should be), but she correctly avoids the sequence Jew = Israeli = oppressor of Palestinian, even as she indicts not “Jews” but “the State of Israel” and the “United States government.” Better would be “current Israel policy”—but I am being picky.

Kanyoro also appears unaware of diverse Jewish reactions to Sharon’s government. Thus, she asks for Jewish women theologians to raise their voice against current Israeli policy. Jewish women have been prominent in the “peace now” movement; Jewish women are working both in Israel and in the United States (and Canada, and elsewhere) for an equitable settlement. Jewish women’s opposition to present Israeli policy is easily found, but I have not been able to find where Kanyoro or her colleagues have condemned anti-Jewish (note: anti-Jewish, not anti-Israeli) teachings in Muslim Africa, or in their own churches.

I appreciate Kanyoro’s positive view of the Old Testament, and I understand the implicit Marcionism that results from seeing the deities of the testaments as having different personalities. But the exculpatory route of equating high regard for the Old Testament with a high regard for Jews is hopelessly flawed. The two are not equivalent; we have not been doing animal sacrifices for millennia, for example, and the Jews who engaged in polygyny were Jews living in areas where it was legal according to the prevailing (non-Jewish) culture. Judaism as practiced today operates not out of a *sola scriptura* Old Testament but out of biblical traditions as understood by the Mishnah and Talmud and extending through to commentaries being written today. Further, the “Old Testament” is part of the tradition of the church; it is not a text, therefore, under Judaism’s special domain.

Making this monolithic picture even worse is Kanyoro’s observation that within her African context the impression is that the “Old Testament Hebrew people . . . compelled women to go through their lives obeying customs and *fearing taboos*. It is in this respect that they call upon the Jesus of the New Testament to *save them* from their indigenous cultures and *their biblical heritage*” (the emphases are mine). The negative stereotypes remain. Jesus is again against Jewish custom—even though the Gospels nowhere have him address any custom specifically related to women, and even though no evidence of purity as restrictive to women outside the Temple is mentioned. The problem is not the Old Testament; the problem is selective readings of it. I remain to be convinced that the end (the liberation of women from cultural taboos) justifies the means (skewed readings, ahistorical projections, and Christian apologetics), especially if the means threaten to carry anti-Judaism.

Speaking of the reading of the Old Testament, Kwok mentioned to me that African Christian women think the Old Testament is a part of their heritage (especially when they find similarities with their culture), and they do not think they are criticizing something not their own. I agree with her. But that observation does not resolve the problem, since the terms of discussion still perpetuate the bad Judaism—good Jesus model (especially if “Judaism” is associated, as in Kanyoro’s argument, with “Old Testament”).

Finally, Kanyoro, rather than acknowledging the problem of anti-Judaism in African writing, shifts the question to her own issues. Rather than engage my argument, she labels it “patronizingly apologetic.” Rather than the insult, I would have appreciated a direct engagement with the argument itself. The writers I quote were academically trained on or influenced by the European-Western model, cite Western scholars in the Western style of footnoting, and use Western categories of analysis. Kwok even notes how a Western press changed her article as well as other writings by her non-Western colleagues. So how is my conclusion wrong? As for being patronizingly apologetic, when I first encountered *in my own education* the “misogynist Judaism/feminist Christian-

tions) as reading, or living, strategies. But Kwok is correct: the majority of authors I cite do not identify themselves as postcolonial or even feminist, I have thus imposed vague labels, and inappropriately so.

Finally, I will respond to Wainwright's question as to whether I acknowledge the changes made by Christian feminists who recognize their complicity in perpetuating anti-Judaism. Yes, indeed I do, and I have even expressed in print explicit appreciation for changes made not only by Wainwright herself but also by Kinukawa and Kwok.

I thank Kwok for convincing me to participate in this roundtable (for all my protestations and fears, I have to admit that she was right: this was a good thing to do) as well as for the gracious invitation to me and to other Jewish feminists to enter into conversation with women from the two-thirds world. I've been trying to gain access to this conversation for well over a decade, despite the continual barrage of anti-Jewish rhetoric (the recent conference on racism in Durban, South Africa, being just one of numerous examples). I—and I am hardly alone among Western women—have been attending closely to the work of Asian, African, and Latin American women, and not merely attending, but also publishing, assigning in the classroom, citing in my own work, and advocating. The collaborative work is simply too important not to do: it prevents us from staring only into a mirror; it keeps us humble by recognizing that we can never have a complete understanding of scripture—or life; it shows the magnificent diversity of the human community; and it forces us to recognize that we all have a responsibility to those outside our immediate family or group, however defined.

Perhaps Wainwright and Reinhartz are correct: perhaps not only Christian texts but also the Christian psyche, or all human interactions, need to be interrogated for anti-Judaism; perhaps all we can do is alleviate the manifest symptoms and continually apply booster shots where needed. Perhaps understanding is an eschatological dream. Yet the responses to this roundtable indicate that the inoculations can work, and they show as well why some strains of anti-Judaism are more resistant than others. Perhaps even those readers who deny there is a problem will take a second look the next time they read, or write, something about “Jewish taboos” or “Jewish patriarchalism” or the “Jewish G-d” who kills; perhaps they will learn to distinguish Judaism from a reified Leviticus, and “Jew” from “Israeli hard-liner.” All would be steps in the right direction.