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Sarah laughed: women's voices in the Old Testament

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political and social. Members of the covenant community will be characterized by justice, freedom, abundance, and compassion and will strive to transform the whole of society to reflect the same.

Part II, A Social Reading of Particular Texts, and Part III, A Social Reading of Particular Readings, are comprised of a series of four and eight essays respectively which demonstrate the practicableness of Brueggemann's theory.

Part II essays include, "Social Criticism and Social Vision in the Deuteronomic Formula of the Judges", " 'Vine and Fig Tree': A Case Study in Imagination and Criticism", "At the Mercy of Babylon: A Subversive Rereading of the Empire", and "A Poem of Summons (Isaiah 55:1–3) and a Narrative Resistance (Daniel 1)".

Part III essays are, "Israel's Social Criticism and Yahweh's Sexuality", "Theodicy in a Social Dimension", "The Social Nature of the Biblical Text for Preaching", "The Prophet as a Destabilizing Presence", "The Social Significance of Solomon as a Patron of Wisdom", "Rethinking Church Models through Scripture", "Reflections on Biblical Understandings of Property", and "Revelation and Violence: A Study in Contextualization".

I offer several quotations to pique your interest. In "The Social Nature of the Biblical Text for Preaching", Brueggemann argues that preachers are world makers: "An evangelical understanding of reality asserts... that all of our presumed givens are provisional and open to newness, a newness that may be enacted in the act of preaching" (p. 218).

In the apropos study "Rethinking Church Models through Scripture", Brueggemann asserts, "What must survive is an alternative community with an alternative memory and an alternative social perception rooted in a peculiar text, identified by a peculiar genealogy, and signed by peculiar sacraments, a community of peculiar people not excessively beholden to the empire and not lusting after domestication into the empire" (p. 274).

A Social Reading of the Old Testament with its wide range of texts and topics is ideal for discussion groups, and is a must read for pastors, who regularly engage in interpretation of both text and society.

Dennis Becker
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Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament
Trevor Dennis
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994
ix + 197 pp.

"Meaning is not to be found, so much as created," writes Trevor Dennis in the introduction to his book. This is what the book attempts to do. It

attempts to create meaning from Old Testament texts which have proved less than life giving for women in the past. The book was born out of the author's experiences teaching Old Testament exegesis. It is a response to the questions raised by his female students. As such it would provide a thought provoking counterpoint for introductory biblical courses. It is also written in such an entertaining manner that it would prove readable for anyone who is interested in theology.

Obviously the task of examining all the Old Testament passages which deal with women would be a work of monumental proportions. The author has therefore opted to deal with the stories of five women. These are Eve, Sarah, Hagar, Hannah and Bathsheba. He has also included a chapter devoted to the women of Exodus 1–4. This introduces some less well known female figures such as Shiphrah and Puah. They were the midwives charged by Pharaoh with executing his policy of genocide against the Israelites. Dennis highlights the delightful trickery of the women who manage to outwit the mighty ruler.

The exegetical approach is synchronic. Dennis states that he is not interested in discovering what may lie behind the text. The author primarily uses literary criticism. He occasionally refers to more traditional historical critical methods particularly with regards to the translation and corruption of the texts. He attempts to read the texts with fresh eyes. This produces some surprising results and an object lesson about the creation of meaning. For example, regarding Eve, Dennis describes what is not to be found in the text. Eve is not created from a mere rib. She is not portrayed as a wicked temptress. She is not guilty of hubris. She is not condemned as the root of human trouble.

Dennis is conversant with feminist biblical scholars. He favours the work of Ringe and Trible. He uses *The Women's Bible Commentary*, but unfortunately published too early to be able to access Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's, *Searching the Scriptures*.

Why would a man need to write a book trying to interpret these texts from a consciously female perspective? Radical feminists would argue that the attempt is useless. The answer lies in the underlying hermeneutical perspective of the author. Trevor Dennis' approach is what Carolyn Osiek would call revisionist. He accepts that the Bible has been written from a predominately male perspective. This is an historical given. However, the tradition is worth saving.

Part of the redemption involves the author's own awareness of his participation in the act of creating meaning. Unintentionally, perhaps, the book functions on two levels. The author produces a literary analysis on the professional level. On the personal level he strives to journey beyond

patriarchy. Having a male author attempt to deal seriously with his patri-
archal tradition is one of the first steps towards its salvation.

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The Phallacy of Genesis: A Feminist-Psychoanalytic Approach
Ilona N. Rashkow
Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993
144 pp. $22.00

Ilona Rashkow's study is representative of the "new" literary criticism
which sets aside questions about authors and the history of the text, and
attempts to read the Hebrew Bible by combining reader-response criticism
with psychoanalytic and feminist approaches. These methodologies were
developed in literary studies generally during the seventies and eighties
and are expected to influence the way we read the Hebrew Bible in this
decade.

Rashkow views interpretation to be based on a reader's personal re-
sponse, "assumptions and biases", and takes her own feminist stance as a
starting-point, granting "a privileged status to the experiences and inter-
ests of the female biblical characters". Though she tries to "read Freud and
the Bible concurrently", she sporadically submits the biblical texts to the
authority of Freudian theory (pp. 110–111).

Rashkow's application of Freud's psychoanalytic idea of "transference"
to the wife-sister stories (Genesis 12, 20; pp. 26–48) is forced and obscures
her discussion. Though she rightly stresses the importance of relating a text
to similar texts, she arbitrarily omits the third wife-sister story (Genesis
26). Biblical scholars, employing traditional literary criticism, have always
related the three stories, arguing that they are the work of different au-
thors. But Rashkow, following secular literary theorists, replaces the word
"authors" with "intertextuality" to reflect the dynamic interaction between
text and reader. She writes clearly and convincingly about Abraham's sex-
ual exploitation of his wife, identifying with Sarah who is "powerless" and
with the foreign rulers who are more "just" than a patriarch.

Rashkow applies Freudian "night dream" theory to Abimelech's dream
(Genesis 20) in order to resolve the contradictions in the story (pp. 49–64).
She argues that the dream sequence represents the conscious resolution
(20:4–7) of Abimelech's unconscious and unfulfilled desires to have sexual
relations with Sarah (20:3). Her analysis is intriguing and resolves the con-
tradiction in the dream sequence. However, it requires her to suppress the
literal sexual connotation by introducing a contrived distinction between
"taking Sarah" (20:2–3) and "taking a wife" (12:19).