

IV. Christianity

Gender research in Christian theology is based on the presupposition that gender identity is not innate, but rather acquired through socio-cultural and discursive attributions. Although it might not always be clearly distinguished from feminist theology, it does not share some of its premises: in gender research the analytical categories are not “the woman” or “femininity,” but gender as a historically-variable phenomenon. Even the so-called biological gender (sex) initially considered non-relocatable is meanwhile being deconstructed (Butler 1990). Joan Scott already pointed out that knowledge referring to biological gender is likewise variable with regard to history and culture (Scott 1988; Scott 2001).

Aside from this, a differential feminist gender research remains obligated to a “traditional,” rather compensatory or additive female historiography, insofar as it is concerned with the female thinkers and actresses within the Bible and church history, and with female protagonists of Christian practice, which aims to integrate it into research. Thus, e.g., Monika Fander stresses the “imitation of the passion and serving” in the Gospel according to Mark and interprets them – within the narrative – as substantially female and as the true imitation of Christ (Fander: 511). Unlike the constructivist approach, however, this approach assumes that women can be clearly distinguished ontologically or essentially from men. This gap between constructivist gender research and differential feminism can be bridged by the *habitus* concept and the idea of “doing gender”: differences can be generated, varied, and overcome by habitual repetition and performance (Butler 2004; Bourdieu).

Thus two different approaches have to be distinguished: one (1) that maintains a difference – of any kind whatsoever – between men and women, to which mainly feminist exegesis and feminist theology are committed; and one (2) that puts more emphasis on the constructional character and can lead to a relativization of gender. Gender, hence, describes the historicity of sexual identity, i.e., it views masculinity and femininity as historical and time-bound constructions that are variable. Such an understanding of gender is neither principally subject to liberation theology nor does it generally include a critique of the patriarchy or the verdict that a research concerned with women can only be performed by women (Ammicht-Quinn).

Rather, a view from gender perspective should raise awareness as to how a binarity of gender is constructed in Bible, theology, and church, from which power relations are derived that aim to emphasize the subordination of women while likewise stressing the spiritual equality of females. In this context, conceptions of god, their construction, and implications have frequently been analyzed (Schün-

gel-Straumann). The advantages gained through a gender sensitive perspective are those of a differentiated perception of “masculinity” and “femininity” as constructions (Gause 2006). If gender is perceived as mainly socially and culturally constructed, it sharpens the view for diversifications, e.g., when different ideals of “masculinity” and “femininity” can be ascertained within a century and according to social status. Thus, a dualistic juxtaposition of the genders that has long served to stabilize power relations “through the ultra-consistent affirmation of the primacy of men” (“sur l’affirmation ultra-conséquente du primat de la masculinité”; Bourdieu: 4) is deconstructed. In addition, this deconstruction and the awareness of a variability and polyvalence of gender constructions prevent the reduction of gender differences to simplifying categories and antagonisms such as victim vs. perpetrator, reason vs. emotionality, culture vs. nature etc. This theory, however, does not attempt to defend a historical equality, albeit differences (women). Rather, it focuses on an analysis of the relations between men and women (Rippl). The categories of gender are time-bound and procedural, not universal. Research is aggravated by one’s own gender conceptions that – internalized as a *habitus* – influence the perception of the past. Beyond the feminist-theological frame gender research is also concerned with “masculinity/ies.”

Since the 1980s some research areas comprise so-called men’s studies. Inspired by female and gender history, the homosexual movement and in a productive tension with feminism was first oriented sociologically and psychologically (Dinges: 7-28). Male research/history “is concerned with what has been lost due to the relativization of man to human and attempts to explore men not as neuter (normal) human beings, but as sexual beings with specific experiences and identities” (Bausteine: 5).

When “being male” and “masculinity” is constructed in juxtaposition to “being female” and “femininity,” as it has mainly been the case since the end of the 18th century, we have to deal with polar constructions of gender characters that live off the antagonism. I.e., to women are attributed a multitude of characteristics considered “typically female,” while men are assigned a variety of attributes regarded “typically male.”

Studies focusing on the period before the 18th century have shown that this polarity of gender roles was not prevalent in the centuries preceding the 18th century. Thus, the conceptions of gender represent ideas that were then used to establish or justify the roles and scope of actions ascribed to men and women respectively. This polar gender system is mostly constructed asymmetrically: male abilities are contrasted with female deficiencies. These efficacious constructions were supported by church, theology, and lived religion. The discourses

of the constructions have to be traced; their modifications within the social evolution have to be pursued. The area of military masculinity has always been accompanied by ministers. Agendas for soldiers in war could be sources, in which a special kind of Christian and military masculinity might be discovered.

Perceptions of “masculinity,” just as perceptions of “femininity,” have to be historicized – Christian ones and non-Christian ones alike. They are no more supra-temporal and self-evident than their female counterparts. Furthermore, the leading ideas (*Leitbilder*) stand in a tense relation to their acquisition and to individual biographies. Following the current periodization of masculinity in male history, the question arises whether Protestant theology and the Church support such leading ideas or whether they provide alternative or modified conceptions. Apart from this level of construction, we would then also have to look for testimonies that respond to or immunize against the above constructions.

Another conception of male history, developed by the Australian sociologist Robert William Connell in 1987, namely the concept of “hegemonic masculinity,” requires further investigation (Dinges 2005). According to Connell, “hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender related practice that represents the currently accepted answer to the issues pertaining to the legitimacy of the patriarchy and that guarantees (or aims to guarantee) the male dominance and the subordination of the female” (Dinges 2005: 8). To what extent this conception, with which the term “patriarchy” again shares certain premises of feminist research, might be viewed as more productive than the broader area of men’s studies remains to be seen. If the spectrum of masculinity/ies is sufficiently apprehended when understood hegemonically, seems doubtful (Lücke). When crises of masculinity, broken or rivaling masculinities are concerned, dimensions of research are addressed that portray men in the role of the victim. Hegemonic conceptions of “masculinity”/“femininity” excluded homosexual orientation. Thus, a queer sensitive gender research focuses – amongst other things – on the fact that the churches have been involved fundamentally in the condemnation of homosexuality. The biblical legitimation structures allowing for this condemnation and the socio-cultural context of biblical sexual morality and the conceptions of sexuality are discussed both in OT (Trible) and NT (Loader) scholarship.

Primary studies have shown just how broad the spectrum of religious masculinity is. In the long term those studies are likely to undermine the idea that men were responsible for the public, women, on the other hand, for the private domain and thus for religion. Piety is, indeed, a phenomenon of men

and may, in certain centuries, even be regarded as an attribute of masculinity. Further aspects of the research on masculinity that are influenced by religion and the church concern the wide area of ethical misconduct, e.g., the admonition of excessive alcohol consumption addressed to the male which in Pietism became the absolute rejection of alcohol (Frank).

With regard to theological gender studies it is also important not to eliminate the corporeal aspect as object of investigation. This concerns the perceptions and conceptions of the body that are reflected in the biblical texts as well as the church historical conceptions of body and corporeality. Samuel Tongue exemplifies these “difficulties of representing human and divine male bodies” on the basis of Gen 32:22–32 (Tongue: 20). The several discrete studies that are concerned with corporeal concepts, ideas of purification, discipline or asceticism, marriage and sexuality, call attention to the fact that epochs of religious awakening, for example the Reformation or Pietism, could lead to profound changes in the individual perception of corporeality (Gause 2013).

Theological gender research attempts to enter into discussion with historical, cultural, and social scholarship and its methods concerning gender and diversity. The concepts of hegemonic masculinity, of queer studies, and intersectionality are received/adapted.

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