

## **A FUNDAMENTAL CONDITION FOR ETHICAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE TEACHING OF THE BIBLE BY WHITE MALE EXEGETES:**

**Recovering and claiming the specificity of our perspective**

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### **Introduction: the context and focus of our report**

This essay is a report on 'work in progress.' It is a critical reflection on a project that we have been developing for more than one year. Provisionally entitled, 'Teaching the Bible in Pluralistic Contexts: Ethical Accountability and White Male Exegetes', this collaborative project in its present form is the beneficiary of a year-long Lilly Endowment-sponsored planning grant which featured a major conference held in March 1991 at Vanderbilt University. In attendance were twenty African-American, Hispanic-American, and European-American women and men trained in biblical studies and ethics. Originally conceived to explore questions about the disciplinary relationships between ethics and biblical studies (both in teaching and research expressions), our project is now centered upon a specific two-fold ethical question: what is the nature of the ethical accountability of white (i. e. European-American) male teachers of the Bible toward students? and: what are the direct and indirect effects of our teaching and research upon students?

This issue is one of deep personal and professional importance to us as we struggle to understand from our perspective as white males the critical role the teaching of the Bible plays in contemporary culture - in the academy, the church, and society at large. While the Bible is a formidable force for social justice and personal liberation, we are painfully reminded by Mieke Bal and others that, from the perspective of many women and oppressed, the Bible and its interpretations 'kill'.<sup>1</sup> In other words, where the current practices of

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1. As Mieke Bal connotes in the titles of her important books, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) and *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). Her titles draw attention both to the act of killing as described in the biblical narratives and to the lethal character of their androcentric interpretations of the Bible in the experience of women.

the teaching of the Bible in Universities and Seminaries exclude, alienate, and/or co-opt all those who are not white males, they are to be judged fundamentally unethical. Moreover, where we as white males engage in these practices we are wittingly or not accomplices of and contribute to the maintenance of patriarchalism, racism, *apartheid*, and oppression in a variety of its psychological, social, economic, or cultural forms. This conception of the scope of the ethical dilemma confronting the field of biblical studies and white male exegetes specifically has been confirmed and richly clarified for us through our dialogue with South African colleagues. Their awareness that a post-*apartheid* 'New South Africa' demands a 'new', post-*apartheid*, pedagogy in biblical studies implies that current pedagogical practices - including ours! - may somehow be 'pro-*apartheid*'. Our ethical accountability - or the lack of it in this case - as teachers of the Bible is far from inconsequential: it has real, material effects upon those persons we teach and upon us as teachers. Addressing and correcting our lack of ethical accountability is an urgent moral imperative. Recognizing with Foucault, Bove and others that the universalizing nature of the intellectuals' ethical responses today has changed,<sup>2</sup> we are convinced that in our present historical context as white male exegetes we face a unique opportunity to understand critically the conditions of possibility that make for ethically accountable practices in the teaching of the Bible, and to engage in the difficult task of promoting them.

Our understanding of the current historical problem has been shaped, on the one hand, by an encounter with post-structural critique of culture, as focused especially through the lenses of feminism and liberation theology, and, on the other hand, by a general dissatisfaction with the lack of responsiveness of white males both conceptually and pragmatically to the problematic of marginalization, oppression and silencing experienced by others within the field of biblical studies. We ask ourselves: what is the nature of the ethical problems faced by white male exegetes? How are we to conceive ethical accountability today? As white male exegetes, what are some of the possible and appropriate 'strategies' for promoting ethical accountability in our pedagogical and research practices and in our cultural contexts? With this report we hope to encourage a wider dialogue about these issues, especially as they affect our practices as white male exegetes and teachers of the Bible.

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2. According to M Foucault, 'the intellectual can no longer be considered as a dispenser of the Law and Authority, the Romantic poet-priest-prophet, but is rather a humble detective, living, like all of us, under authority and the law, inside the contemporary metropolis' [The Political Function of the Intellectual, *Radical Philosophy* 17 (1977):12]; Paul Bove expresses it this way: 'For literary critics to join in this movement of forces opposed to tyrannical totalization and representation, they must begin by offering a thorough critique of the new ethics of professionalism that some leading figures and their followers now propel into the market of critical celebrity. Critical intellectuals will have to investigate the origins and contemporary fictions of those ethics in order to negate them; then perhaps the work of building more positive institutions and progressive ethical practices can go forward'. Paul Bove, *The Ineluctability of Difference: Scientific Pluralism and the Critical Intelligence*, in *Postmodernism and Politics*, (ed) Jonathan Arac. *Theory and History of Literature #28*, 3-25. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

From where we stand, this dialogue is a practical and necessary first step toward developing a broad-based collaborative engagement concerned with transforming the current state of biblical studies that fosters a lack of accountability. We believe this disciplinary and personal transformation can begin to happen only when we acknowledge and lay claim to our experiences and perspectives as white male teachers and exegetes.

### **Discovering, recovering and owning while male perspectives**

As an outcome of the 1991 Vanderbilt conference, we made a significant discovery: our initial conception of the ethical problem in biblical studies during the formative stages of our work leading up to this project (the formulation of the planning grant proposal, 1989-1990) confused the disease with its symptoms.

Initially, our sole preoccupation was with the symptoms that we took to be the disease: the devastating effects upon others, namely the exclusion and co-optation arising from patriarchalism, racism, and oppression which they experienced, was due to a lack of accountability on the part of white male exegetes. Consequently, following an altruistic path of attempting to 'free' others from 'their' predicament, we imagined that we could and should distance ourselves from these effects by treating them as 'objects' to be analyzed critically from the remote standpoint of ethical theories. Consistent with that view, we thought we must repent these inexcusable and unjustifiable behaviors by distancing ourselves from and renouncing our 'old practices', and by denouncing those irresponsible white male exegetes who would not repent and renounce their old ways. Our first thought was to disavow our privileged, central status as white male exegetes and stand alongside those who were marginalized and oppressed. We would engage the marginalized by actively 'listening to' them,<sup>3</sup> transforming ourselves into a *tabula rasa*, and thus learning from them what it meant to be ethically accountable in our exegetical and pedagogical practices.

Feminist, Womanist, Mujerist, African-American and Hispanic male participants to the Vanderbilt conference strongly objected to this initial conception of our project. According to them, it was fatally flawed from the start, because we replicated the very problem we sought to redress. Our first

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3. On the problematic character of 'listening to others' (as well as 'speaking for others'), see Gerald West's paper in this issue. West borrows these important categories (and the description of the description of the appropriate attitude 'speaking to them' or, better, 'speaking with them' from Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (eds) G Nelson and L Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), 271-313 (see especially, 295). These categories were proposed by Spivak in her study of the 'representations' (either political 'speaking for' [*Vertretung*] or artistic or philosophical re-presentation [*Darstellung*] following a 'listening to') of women as subaltern subjects in Colonial India by British authorities or artists and philosophers (as undeconstructed subjects). 'Speaking with' does not exclude representation, but takes place when the process of subject-construction (both that of the speaker and that of the one who is spoken to) and the 'interests' involved are made explicit.

reaction was one of surprise: we vehemently denied that it was so and we took great personal offense at the suggestion we were further co-opting them in the very act of trying to understand and change our conduct. It was only after grasping the 'structural' point of their critique that we came to recognize the truth of the charges levelled by our colleagues: our initial conception of the project in fact promulgated marginalization and co-optation.

In retrospect we now understand that our reaction - first anger and then assent - confirmed the profound conflict that exists between our practices and our *raison d'être* - what we call our 'vocation' - as critical exegetes. This conflict and our denial of it are the actual disease whose symptoms are the oppressive consequences upon others of our work as exegetes and teachers of the Bible. At root there is a 'distance' or rift between ourselves and our practices, between our vocation and what is supposed to be its implementation. With vocations shaped by deeply held humanistic values, we white males are called upon and committed to fighting discrimination, intolerance, and bigotry, in the forms of patriarchy, racism, and oppression; but ironically in our practices as teachers and exegetes we end up further promoting these ills. Instead of confronting this rift in an effort to bridge it, we ignore, suppress and ultimately deny it. Consequently, we live with a sort of ruptured identity embodied in all our practices and duplicated whenever we find new ways of distancing ourselves from ourselves and from others. Informed by a spirit of scientific inquiry and aided by positivist methods, we modern white male exegetes hold critical exegesis to be quintessentially an objectifying task whose goal is to distance ourselves even from the text and from the processes of interpretation. Along this trajectory, our pedagogical practices require of students that they learn the same thing by discarding their 'uncritical' ordinary readings of the Bible, which even more often than not are 'faith-interpretations' that are instrumental in the formation of their identities as individuals and as members of one or another religious, social, or cultural group. No wonder such practices are denounced by feminists and other liberation scholars as being alienating, patriarchal and racist!

As it turns out, our initial conception of a project aimed at correcting this devastating lack of accountability was structured by the same distancing from ourselves and others. In our very effort to bridge the distance from the oppressed, we vowed to distance ourselves even further from ourselves. We adopted a strategy that called for the preferential option for the oppressed and marginalized following the critical lead of liberation theologians like Sobrino and Gutiérrez. We sought to abandon our identities and perspectives as white male exegetes, in order to adopt a practice of biblical study defined essentially by marginalized women and men. But the latter were quick to point out that this initial conception of 'our' project was as thoroughly androcentric and Eurocentric as the practices we condemned, with the same alienating effects, although this time it took the subtle form of 'co-optation' rather than exclusion. As we now know, by vowing to join force with our feminist and marginalized colleagues before attempting to recover our own vocational ex-

periences, we effectively took over 'their' sense(s) of vocation and occluded our own. This was once again a colonization gesture of the margins which, this time, sought to establish the experiences and histories of marginalized women and men as the paradigm, the universal, the ones whose experiences were privileged over and above others. <sup>4</sup> We succeeded in finding a new center to replace the old one. This move replicated the binary structure of center/margin which always manages to keep someone in the margins because it necessarily projects a center. <sup>5</sup> For us, the bottom line was that in the end our efforts lead to the promoting and reinforcing of the very same structures of oppression that we intended to reject.

What does all this mean for becoming ethically accountable as white males? Our efforts and focus must be 'andro-critical', in clear and decisive contrast to an 'androcentric' <sup>6</sup> and also a 'Eurocentric' one. <sup>7</sup> An 'andro-critical' focus to our practices does not require that we abandon our male European perspectives and senses of vocation; just the opposite. It demands that we recover and claim them in all of their historical and contextual specificity. What is problematic about androcentrism and Eurocentrism is not the 'maleness' or 'Europeanness' of our perspectives and vocations, but their 'centrism' or privileged center position that are maintained at the expense of others. It is the implicit universalization and absolutization of the center which results in a enforced distancing from others and from ourselves. An unapologetic recovery and reclaim of our own perspectives and senses of vocation as white male exegetes are a fundamental condition for ethical accountability in our pedagogical and research practices.

This is the crucial lesson we have learned through the course of our planning year. In the process, we also have discovered something else critical to the problem of the lack of ethical accountability in our work. What makes the character of our practices as white male academic teachers of the Bible ethically problematic is not just that it is a personal issue of accountability toward our students who are negatively affected by our teaching; it is first and fore-

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4. See Patricia Mellencamp's insightful analysis of women as 'marginalized' as a result of the critical attention heaped upon them as 'marginal'. We must be extremely cautious about our choice of categories of analysis and ideological effect upon our thinking. 'Images of Language and Indiscrete Dialogue: "The Man who envied Women"', *Screen* 28:2 (1987):87-102.

5. See Steve Connor in *Postmodern Culture. An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) for discussion of the effect of the 'center/margins' metaphor in contemporary feminist and colonialist criticism.

6. This is the term put forward by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and other feminist critics to denote the patriarchalism or sexism associated with men. See, e. g. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroad, 1983.

7. This is the term used, for instance, by African-American and other liberation critics to denote the racism and colonialism associated with Europeans. See for instance the comments of African-American and womanist biblical scholars about the Eurocentrism of biblical criticism in Cain Hope Felder, (ed) *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, 6-7. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

most structurally a matter of personal and professional accountability toward ourselves as white male exegetes. It is the distance from our vocational call and our historical self-understanding that blocks accountability toward ourselves and subversively reinforces our lack of accountability toward others. This perception of the structural importance of vocation and of self-understanding forced a drastic reorientation of our efforts. For us, the task at hand now became one of recovering and claiming our sense of vocation in its historical specificity.

### **Two male European-Americans' assessment of the nature of their vocation**

In summary, we can say that the problem of ethical accountability as we see it is: (a) our pedagogical and exegetical practices are ethically problematic, in that they contribute to, sustain, and reinforce patriarchalism, racism and marginalization; (b) this is a problem of accountability which must be understood foremost in structural terms (the issues of distancing, of the center/margin binary structure), and not in personal terms, although clearly personal praxis concerns never fully stand apart from structural ones; and (c) for the two of us as white male exegetes, this is a problem of lack of accountability toward ourselves: our *raison d'être* (namely, our vocation) is in deep conflict with our practices. To underscore once again, these are 'our' conclusions, that is, the views of two male European-Americans who have sought to recover their root experiences as teachers of the Bible. In order to recover our own perspectives and to lay claim to them, we have had to ask: 'How do we know this?' More specifically: 'How do we understand patriarchalism and racism as structures of oppression, which contradict our vocation as white males teachers and scholars?'

The experience of being directly confronted by feminists and other marginalized scholars operating with liberation theological models has been instrumental in forcing this realization. Without conflictual dialogue (before, during and after the 1991 Vanderbilt conference), we would not have been made personally aware of problems not only with our teaching and other scholarly practices, but also with our ways of conceptualizing those practices. The value of dialogic encounter, as Bakhtin insists, is that it underscores the necessity of each position in relation to each other in the search for understanding.<sup>8</sup> Yet, it is not just the marginalized's experience that informs us. As white male exegetes, we have our own complicated experiences of patriarchalism, racism, and *apartheid* as structures of oppression and of ourselves as oppressors, that we must analyze, recover and claim. Because marginalization

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8. This is so for Bakhtin because in principle 'All true understanding is dialogical ... Understanding is in search of a counter-discourse to the discourse of the utterer.' *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Tr L Matejka and I R Titunik. New York: Seminar Press, 1973, 122-23. The feminist dialogical partner is necessary in order for 'our male voices' to acquire their historical particularity.

is a condition of the 'center' as well as of the 'edges', the experiences of those who occupy the center are equally important for understanding the problem as those who are marginalized. We need, therefore, to scrutinize our own situation and to view ourselves in dialogic relationship with others.

As two white male exegetes, we find ourselves working in theological contexts, or to put it another way, we understand our vocations to be coded theologically. Those who teach in a seminary context at times acknowledge this by identifying themselves explicitly as 'theologians'; more often than not, however, we ignore or remain silent about this feature of our personal identities<sup>9</sup>, especially if we teach in an undergraduate environment. Thus, we tend to suppress the cultural theological code that shapes our interests, commitments, and identities as white male exegetes, as if our interpretations of the Bible shaped by modern biblical studies could avoid having theological implications and advocating particular theological perspectives! The historical relationship between theology and exegesis is a basic feature of the development of modern biblical studies that has left an enduring imprint upon the field, its discourses and its practices.

In spite of differences in theological perspective - we may be evangelical, liberal, Protestant, Catholic, and the like - it is clear that in thought and practice we are children of the Enlightenment. Shaped by the grand meta-narratives of individual liberty and speculative knowledge<sup>10</sup> that characterize modernity, we have come to believe that the fundamental human predicament as modern persons is that of 'obscurantism' and 'ignorance'. The religious forms of obscurantism, expressed variously as dogmatism, fundamentalism, integrism, and the like, we treat as basic religious ailments in need of cure. In more traditional religious terms, we can refer to the affliction of epistemological obscurantism as a bondage of the will and/or intellect, a bondage that is to be explained as the result of a certain type of 'idolatry of knowledge'.<sup>11</sup> Expressed theologically, human beings are constantly caught up in and in need of being freed from obscurantism: we moderns constantly risk falling back into the bondage of ignorance. Our vocations as exegete-theologians and teachers, then, contribute to the overcoming of 'obscurantism' in its various forms, by delivering the 'knowledge goods', a task that has for us the force of

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9. We think of identity here in composite, not essentialist terms. Julia Kristeva is an important feminist voice for us in the critique of a 'monolithic' or essentialist understanding of identity. Her anti-essentialism leads her to argue for a heterogeneous understanding of male and female identities which are defined in large measure by their 'places' within the structures and distribution of power (between center and margins, for example) rather than by some intrinsic, 'natural' features. See 'Women's Time'. *Signs* 7, 1981: 13-35.

10. Jean-François Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

11. Modern biblical scholarship was shaped by a modernity that wedded the scientific impulse with a drive to free the autonomous self born out of one grand meta-narrative of individual freedom and sustained by the other grand meta-narrative of speculative knowledge. At the heart of modern thinking is the familiar theological discourse of freedom from bondage that has a home in both secular and religious contexts.

a moral imperative,<sup>12</sup> in response to the disastrous social consequences of obscurantism: bigotry, intolerance, discrimination, oppression, war, and genocide. The theological is one way to code the fundamental value of and commitment to heterogeneity, plurality and difference. These observations begin to suggest that we can speak of our vocation as intellectuals in theological terms even outside of a seminary teaching context and without loss to the modern concern to value scientific legitimacy and knowledge. We can not only acknowledge the fact that we are modern and theological at one and the same time, but also claim both together as good. This was a major discovery of modern biblical criticism since the seventeenth century even as it has been a source of significant tension within the field.<sup>13</sup>

This 'good' conception of the basic human predicament as that of 'obscurantist idolatry' then lies at the heart of many white male exegetes' experiences. It is precisely within a theological framework that we can recognize patriarchalism and racism for what they really are: concrete manifestations of our own bondage-idolatry which absolutizes features linked to a specific white male perspective (comparable to the way a particular experience of Torah was transformed into an idolatry according to Paul - the appeal to Paul could not be more theological, modern or male!). Our 'good' conception of obscurantism as the basic problem is one of the foundation blocks that ultimately produced what Timothy Reiss calls the 'analytico-referential' perspective, which, once it was absolutized, and coded theologically, was instrumental in shaping the colonial expansion of Europe and America from the sixteenth century onward.<sup>14</sup> We are ourselves in bondage to an idolatry (i. e., an absolutization of what is not absolute), and as such we extend that bondage to others even as we attempt to liberate them from bondage-ignorance; we act like 'knowledge-oppressors', if you please. The point we want to make here is that we must first be freed from our own bondage-idolatry before we can begin to imagine contributing to the liberation of others,<sup>15</sup> at least in the sense of freeing them from the oppression we force upon them. For this, we must first recognize that an absolutization of liberating know-

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12. Thus, for instance, Harvey analyzes the 'morality of knowledge' of the historian interpreter of the Bible. See Van Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: A Confrontation Between the Modern Historian's Principles of Judgment and the Christian's Will-to-Believe*. New York: Macmillan, 1966.

13. In affirming the positive value of the modern in this way we take exception with a particular form of post-modern critique that claims modernity is synonymous with patriarchy, oppression and marginalization. See Jurgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity.' *New German Critique* 22, 1981:3-18.

14. Timothy J Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

15. With such a view of the human predicament, our male European-American theological stance entails a context-specific view of 'liberation'. For us, social and cultural bondage are grounded upon the more fundamental bondage of 'idolatry'. Thus, liberation from social and cultural bondage must first be preceded by a liberation from the idolatry that produces them. Yet, this white male view of liberation needs to be clarified by further analysis of our situation as white male exegetes who enter a 'liberation theological process'.



ledge (our idolatry) is a bondage for us, and therefore something from which we need liberation.

As we suggested above, in and of itself a white male perspective (which shapes our understanding of our vocation as critical exegetes) if not 'holy, just, and good' (as Paul says about Torah in Romans 7), is at least 'all right', so much so that as white males we should not be ashamed to claim ownership of our perspective and experiences. Like Paul, we find ourselves in a perplexing situation: we have a sense of vocation, but our practical implementations of it contradict or are in tension with that vocation. Our practices may be purposeful and governed by a sense of vocation based upon our theological commitments; we may be convinced that we do 'the good'. But, when confronted with the experiences of women and others interpreted within a liberation framework, we discover that our very practices more often than not 'produce the wrong' that we ironically seek to fight. How we are to understand the status of the relationship between vocation and practices, health and sickness, is the problem.

This loose paraphrase of Paul's profound conceptual and practical dilemma in Romans 7 suggests once again the value for us of thinking the problem in theological terms as one of idolatry. From a theological perspective, our vocation and our *raison d'être* have been compromised and rendered powerless to truly shape and govern our practices whenever we assert their transcendental, universal status.<sup>16</sup> In the process, they are absolutized, fetishized, and thus removed from history. Although as intellectuals we may have originally denied the specificity of our vocation and absolutized some aspects of modern life, it is the 'absolutized construction of that vocation' that now exercises power over us, structuring us to deny its historical specificity, 'obscuring' its genuine 'liberational' character from us, making itself idolatrous. Simply put, we find ourselves alienated from our own vocation by a structure which ironically holds us in bondage to an absolutized ideal of itself.<sup>17</sup> It therefore comes as no surprise that our pedagogical practices foster marginalization of others and bondage for us. It is a situation that calls for strategies of 'liberation'.

### **Strategies for acknowledging and claiming our vocation and perspectives as white males**

Acknowledging and claiming the specificity of the perspectives that inform and structure our pedagogical practices as white male exegetes is suppressed

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16. This takes the form, for instance, of an assertion of the independence of reason or freedom or theology from gender, class, or culture - encouraged by the grand metanarrative of speculative reason which situated 'reason' and 'history' in that ultimate role of determiner of freedom.

17. In the language of Derrida's logocentric critique, our vocation has become a transcendental signified which effectively suppresses the heterogeneity, plurality and difference made possible by difference'. 'Difference', in *Margins of Philosophy*, 1-27. Tr.by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

by an idolatry of liberating knowledge. This is not, however, something that can be overcome either by a simple act of the will (as Paul in his own way discovered - we already want to do good, but this does not help!), or by accumulating more knowledge about it (we would be equally tempted to take this new knowledge in a universalizing way, instead of keeping it context-specific). Recalling that it is out of the dialogic encounter with feminists and other liberation scholars that we have become aware of the nature of the problem suggests a strategy: employing a liberation theological process constructively to unsettle transcendental schemes and universalizing constructions. After all, what we need is 'conscientization', the first moment in that spiral-like liberation theological process that leads to analysis, theologizing, and strategizing for liberation praxis.

Yet, we cannot simply duplicate the liberation theological processes employed by feminists and other liberation scholars, because our alienation or distancing is largely self-inflicted (rather than being imposed by others) and because quite clearly from a certain material perspective we are not oppressed. As white males who occupy the 'center' we exercise privilege. Thus, in our case, the liberation theological process, and more specifically, the moment of conscientization, needs to be conceived in terms appropriate for our historical context and experience. Our conscientization as white males must therefore be different from that of oppressed people, if it is to yield a 'conscientization for liberation'.

As we understand it, in the case of women and other oppressed persons, conscientization starts with becoming conscious of the alienation and oppression of which they are the victims at the hands of others. For us, white males, the situation is markedly different. Our conscientization cannot start with becoming conscious of our alienation and oppression at the hands of others, because the central features of our experience are exactly the opposite: control over our lives, being supported and aided materially by institutions, wielding power, and using that power to maintain our privileged position by marginalizing others. We cannot employ the kind of conscientization that women and other oppressed people use, because it is not consistent with our historical experiences. Rather, we need a different kind of conscientization, one that is designed to aid us specifically in coming to an understanding of the specificity of our own perspectives in micro and macro terms. For white males this means taking from our experience and discourse those tools which are indigenous to our experience - the tools of speculative thinking in particular - to help critique and rethink our binary ways of organizing the world that contribute to the center/margin way of constructing the roles of others in the world. To help make the point about the difference in conscientization, it is useful to compare that process as certain women describe it and then suggest an analog appropriate for particular white male exegetes.

### **A process of conscientization for women: the individual story**

As Isasi-Diaz and Tarango describe the experience of some women<sup>18</sup>, the process of conscientization involves (a) the voicing of diverse experiences in the form of personal stories, and (b) a corollary affirmation by other women standing in support of each individual woman's different story.

The stories that are told and contribute to the building up of community by and for women are of a specific sort - those which, beyond their particularities, have the potential for reflecting the collective experience of a particular group of women. These may be stories of oppression and alienation, concomitant stories of struggle against oppression and alienation, and eventually stories of liberation. In general, these stories prove painful to tell; women find the encouragement and support needed for this purpose in one another. The appropriate context for the telling is an empathic group of women.

Affirmation of individual stories and experiences by such groups of women is a crucial step in their conscientization. According to Isasi-Diaz and Tarango, women's story-telling has the following dynamic.

Regarding the role of the individual woman and the effects of telling her story:

(1) The affirmation by other women transforms a woman's perception of her story as idiosyncratic in a negative sense, valueless, and without legitimacy, into a perception of her story as similar to the stories shared by other women; thereby she is affirmed and her story is legitimated and esteemed.

(2) This affirmation is an essential part of the process of establishing each individual woman's moral agency (of which she was deprived by patriarchal alienation and oppression); she is put in a position of re-claiming power, authority, and control over her own actions and history by speaking and interpreting the Bible authoritatively as a woman.

(3) As a result of this affirmation, the woman gains a first glimpse of the specificity of her perspective as a woman; this is the birth of the feminist perspective for her.

(4) As a consequence, this individual woman is in a position, not only to acknowledge, but also to claim (to 'own') her specific, idiosyncratic story as a woman's story.

Regarding the role of the group of women in this process:

(5) The group affirms her individual story, because of the [positive] suspicion that each woman's story can be affirmed as legitimate in its idiosyncrasy.

(6) The group views each particular story as an expression of something shared by all women. Yet, this is not a reduction of the particular to the gene-

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18. We take as an example, the process of conscientization practiced by Hispanic women and presented by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Yolanda Tarango in *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

ral in an effort to identify and then reify the experiential common denominator of all women. Rather, this is an affirmation of each woman's story in its particularity; its very specificity (its difference from others) informs the feminist perspective. The specificity of each story is at least as important as what it has in common with other women's stories. Thus, the group affirms the legitimacy of both what is held in common and what is specific to each of the women's stories, because what is 'common' to women (the 'woman' [or feminist] perspective) is a structural reality actualized in specific contextual manifestations. There is no binary opposition which localizes center and margin. In this respect the difference from white males' attitudes could not be more clear and dramatic.

### **A process of conscientization for liberation of white males**

We have suggested above that in order for white males to engage a liberation theological perspective as a way 'through' conscientization 'toward' ethical accountability, it is crucial that we not only acknowledge, but also claim ('own') our perspective and thus our white male experiences and stories - as feminists and other practitioners of liberation theology do (# 4 above). For this, we need a first glimpse of the specificity of our white male perspectives (# 3 above).

Yet, we find ourselves in a peculiar position. Our individual stories (broadly defined as our exegetical works, pedagogical endeavors and the like) are 'affirmed', yet with the opposite effect: we are prevented from recognizing and thus from claiming our individual experiences and perspectives, and also from perceiving what is true and legitimate in the contextual particularities of each of our stories.<sup>19</sup>

How are white male stories affirmed? It is through the white male dominated institutions - academic institutions, guild, church and other communities of faith - that the importance, legitimacy, and value of our teaching and work is affirmed. This is comparable to what happens in the case of certain women (see # 1 above); our stories are also affirmed by 'others'. The affirmation of our stories by other men is biased in favor of white males; it is based on the [positive] suspicion (presupposition, bias) that individual stories (proposals, efforts, actions, works) of white males are legitimate despite their idiosyncrasies, because they are those of white males (as in the case of women; see # 5 above). This affirmation would also appear to play an important role in establishing the shape of the moral agency of white males, by legitimating our power, authority, and control over our own actions, and by putting us in a position to speak and interpret the Bible authoritatively not only for ourselves but for others (see # 2 above).

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19. This is especially true when it comes to affirming individual interpretations or exegeses by white males. The need to universalize a 'particular' reader's experience of the biblical text, for example, and thus to make 'his' interpretation dominant is a feature of modern biblical criticism.

This is particularly apparent in the classroom, where we teach authoritatively and with the self-confidence that our particular teaching is important, valuable, and legitimate - an authority and self-confidence established, at least in part, by the affirmation and support provided to us by the white male group as articulated through its various institutions and members.<sup>20</sup>

In sum, we are suggesting that the process of affirmation of white males' individual stories is structurally analogous to that of women as described by Isasi-Diaz and Tarango. Here, there is nothing ethically problematic (unless one wants to criticize feminists and other liberation groups for doing the same - a point we had a difficult time understanding at the Conference) with the affirmation of the moral agency of white males, so that we might claim power, authority, control over our own actions, and be put in a position to speak and interpret the Bible authoritatively as white men (cf # 2, above). There is nothing wrong with an affirmation of each of our individual stories by a group of white male exegetes which is based on a [positive] suspicion that each can be affirmed as legitimate (even if this sounds like the 'old boys' network'! cf # 5, above). Men also need support too. What is problematic is that, instead of resulting in a 'conscientization for liberation', this affirmation prevents us from recognizing and thus from claiming the specificity of our perspective as white males. We are led to androcentric and Eurocentric practices in our teaching of the Bible, whose devastating consequences are already well attested. The question remains, why are the consequences in this regard for women positive but for white males negative?

A first possible reason is that the discourse most frequently used by white males and affirmed by groups which render support to us is quite different from the discourse used by women and affirmed in their groups. We tend to express our experiences in the form of stories of success; these are stories in which we enjoy control of what happens, that is, stories in which we are the 'agents' (subjects) of the action, at the center rather than on the periphery; our stories reflect our experience of being in a position of control and power. Could it be that this is what blocks the 'conscientization for liberation' specific to women and other marginalized individuals? Are we telling the wrong stories? In the wrong groups? Should we perhaps be telling stories of failure, stories of alienation and oppression, stories in which we experience ourselves as the 'objects' of someone else's action? (For example, stories about the failure of conferences or grant proposals or promotional efforts?) After all, this is also something that we do experience! Is this the way to recognize and claim our own specific perspectives as white males?

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20. This is further shown in the cases of white males who, for a variety of reasons (religious, ideological, methodological, etc), are deprived of the authority to teach (excluded from the teaching profession) or are at risk of losing their positions, because of a failure to teach authoritatively and/or of poor pedagogy (related to a lack of self-confidence).

Some have argued this way, that white males should mimic the liberation process of women and other oppressed people.<sup>21</sup> But, we are persuaded that this is an inadequate analysis and the wrong direction to take. We need to return to our root experiences in the world as white males. Even though it might be salutary for us to tell stories of failure and of our experiences of alienation and oppression, we have to acknowledge that our 'common' experience as white male exegetes (as privileged subjects) is not that of being victim of alienation and oppression at the hands of others, but rather of being 'in control'. It is these latter stories that parallel the stories that women tell in their own process of conscientization, since these stories are the ones which give us a collective identity and help to shape our individual moral agency.<sup>22</sup>

We must, therefore, look for other reasons that explain why the affirmation of our stories and experiences by other men does not lead immediately to a conscientization for liberation. As we view the situation, this is so either because we deny altogether the role of affirmation in the establishment of our moral agency and identity, or because we deny the specificity of the group which affirms our stories. In both cases there is a binary logic working which looks upon the structural relationship between the particular and the general as oppositional; this logic reinforces the tendency to treat either individual or group in transcendental terms.<sup>23</sup>

The notion that affirmation by others plays a significant role in the establishment of our moral agency is counter-intuitive for many white males. Is it not true that one's moral agency is before all else an individual matter and thus does not need affirmation by any one else? The bottom line is that as autonomous and free individuals we do not need to have our 'stories' evaluated and affirmed by others, because their validity is assured by each male in his own right. It should be clear that our moral agency is defined within the rationalist, liberal tradition in libertarian terms and that determines the way we have been socialized to think about the individual rational choices we make within the field of all possible choices.<sup>24</sup>

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21. See, for instance, Sam Keen, *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991); and John Stoltenberg, *Refusing to be a Man. Essays on Sex and Justice*. New York: Meridian, 1982.

22. But we must be prepared to tell the stories in which control is made problematic - not failure but problematized control. This enables us to see that one of the different features of our experiences is the post-modern experience in which local and particular stories, not universal and grandiloquent schemes, dominate. See Neville Wakefield, *Postmodernism: The Twilight of the Real*. London: Pluto Press, 1990.

23. Here we see the effects of the modern episteme which, as Reiss (21-108) describes it, celebrates autonomy and individuality by making them effectively transcendental signifieds that give meaning to the way we as white males understand our individual experiences. We take them to be universal, unique, and to be imitated by others.

24. See Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel. The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents*. Boston: Beacon, 1988, 220-242. Stoltenberg, however, argues that there are ways for males to be true both what is central to their experience (particularly of women) and to stand in solidarity with them.

It is certainly true that many factors besides an affirmation by others contribute to the establishment of one's moral agency. But the case of the women described by Isasi-Diaz and Tarango above suggests (see # 2, above) that being affirmed within a group is an essential part of the establishment of women's moral agency, because it discloses deep structural features undergirding women's experience. For men, by contrast, being affirmed in the same manner discloses nothing about the deep structures of relationships that govern white male identities in the West. As long as men pretend that as individuals we already have immediate and direct access to universal views, values, and norms (a 'universalizing individualism'), our conscientization can neither be structurally comparable to conscientization for women nor can it lead to 'liberation'. We, white males, need to recognize that to the extent that we treat our experience as transcendental truth and do not find ways to problematize or deconstruct the discourse of a 'universalizing individualism', we will remain finally unable to grasp either the concrete experiences of others or what historically grounds our own experiences (an important part of our identity, which we tend to deny and occult). Only when our experiences as white males are problematized by a foundational critique analogous to what women experience in terms of the structure of their individuality (#1 and #2 above) will we be in a position to recognize the roles of others in our experiences, including the establishment of our moral agency.<sup>25</sup>

But making this point and intellectually assenting to the fostering of a genuine acknowledgement of the role of others in the establishment of our moral agency and identity are two different things: after all, we are dealing here with an 'idolatry'! Indeed, even when we do acknowledge the importance of what is other (persons, stories, experiences, histories, etc.) in the establishment of our moral agency, we fail to acknowledge (because we do not see and recognize it) that it is a specific group, the group of white males, which affirms our stories. We take it to be an 'absolute' and universal affirmation, because we view white male institutions as embodying universal views, values, norms (as is confirmed for us by the fact that women and 'minorities' join white males in this affirmation - although we overlook the fact that they have been co-opted along the way into doing so). We are structured to forget the fact that the center feeds on the margins. This universalizing interpretation of the affirmation of our stories has the effect of preventing our conscientization for liberation; that is, of preventing us from perceiving, acknowledging, and consequently from 'claiming' the specificity of our perspectives and experiences as white males.

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25. We see the issue, along with Habermas, as a 'crisis of legitimation' in which the modern conditions for knowing (which have been shaped in large measure by a universalized white male experience) are being contested. See *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, 51-74. Fredric Jameson offers a more positive assessment of the role of postmodern critique in this regard in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Post-Contemporary Interventions. Stanley Fish and Fredric Jameson, eds. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.

We emphasized above the disastrous consequences of this universalizing, especially when it takes the form of 'universalizing individualism', in our relations toward others: these relations are perverted and take the form of patriarchy and racism. Yet, the relationships among ourselves as white male exegetes are no less fractured and perverted: far from forming a community (do we even 'know' the sense of this term as women experience it?), we 'bite and devour one another' (as Paul the apostle bemoans and as Paul DeMan's ethics sadly illustrate). Indeed, as a consequence of being affirmed by other white males (and white male institutions), our moral agency is established. But, this self-confidence that we know what characterizes good and legitimate teaching (or exegesis) of the Bible (even if our implementation of it is flawed) leads us to object to, and to reject as worthless and illegitimate, pedagogical or scholarly endeavors which significantly depart from this ideal. Our habits are well entrenched. In other words, even though we can envision the possibility that there are different ways of implementing this universal ideal, we usually proceed to a critical evaluation of different pedagogical or exegetical endeavors, in the negative sense of proceeding with the negative suspicion that these are to be rejected as betraying what 'we' individually know to be the ideal. Thus, while we are brought together by the affirmation of our individual stories (pedagogical and exegetical endeavors) by other white males, as soon as we are together our habit is to turn against one another, fighting for universal individual recognition with all the more passion because it is for the sake of 'universal truth' that we do so.

Patriarchal and racist structures and their destructive effects (at the individual, social, cultural and religious levels) are very much a tragedy for us, white males, although as in the case of women oppressed and alienated by patriarchal structures, we are not fully cognizant of this tragedy; we are most often numb to the 'problems', unaware of their causes. Like women, we too need to be 'conscientized'. Although we are not in need of liberation from oppression by others, we are in need of liberation in relation to our own self-alienation and self-bifurcation so that we stand a chance of reconciliation with each other and with others.

For this, the 'structure' of the mutual affirmation of our stories (exegetical works, pedagogical endeavors and the like) among us white males needs to be recognized, challenged and corrected. A very different dialogical model needs to be encouraged. What is structurally problematic with the process of white male affirmation comes to light when we compare it with the comparable process in feminist and other liberation groups. The difference is located primarily in the way in which this affirmation occurs in relation to the group (# 5 and 6, above). Our affirmation tends to head in the opposite direction, in an individual, reductive direction. Practically speaking, in our experience a white male exegete's work (story) is affirmed on the basis of a negative critical analysis: does he demonstrate that he meets the standards of the guild, especially its methodological norms? The presumptive judgement from the start is that he probably does not and that he must prove himself. Does his



work exemplify, at least to some extent, the 'minimum common denominator' of legitimate knowledge acceptable to the guild members? The particularity or difference of his work is discounted as idiosyncrasy and tends to be tolerated only insofar as it does not prevent his participation in the larger quest for universal truth; otherwise he risks being rejected by the guild. Instead of affirming the legitimacy of 'both the commonality and the particularity' of each white male's story (see # 6, above), our inclination is merely to affirm the commonality of these stories.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, what needs to be corrected is the 'structure' of affirmation by white males of our discourses (exegetical works, pedagogical endeavors) in such a way that the legitimacy of both the commonality and the specificity of each of our experiences is affirmed. We need to find dialogical models that affirm difference and not subordination of the common to the particular. We need to discover ways to critique fundamental structures in ways that open up new opportunities to see the other both inside and outside of us.

We are not saying that the existing affirmation of white male exegetes' works and pedagogical endeavors as actualization of 'commonly accepted' views, standards, norms of the guild, should be rejected as illegitimate or worthless; nor should its effects be rejected, namely the establishment of our moral identity, and the control, power, and authority (self-confidence) this affirmation gives us over our own actions.<sup>27</sup> But, this affirmation must be transformed; it must be complemented by a further affirmation (a 're-affirmation' if you will) of these 'affirmed' works and pedagogical endeavors as an expression of the legitimacy of their distinctiveness and difference.

### **Some concrete strategies for the future: the critical teaching of the Bible by white male exegetes as a case in point**

We can first illustrate this essential point about the need for an alternative dialogical model that can affirm difference in reference to ongoing exegetical debates occurring in biblical studies. Such an illustration also applies to teaching, even though an examination of pedagogical endeavors will force us to broaden the acceptable range of discourses and actions that would need to be 're-affirmed' within this dialogic model.

On the exegetical side, for instance, in Matthean studies, a number of critical works have been affirmed within the white male guild because of their methodological and exegetical rigor: they successfully meet the standards and norms established within the guild; they have been published by 'respectable' presses; they are used in exegetical classes; they have been reviewed by peer

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26. For Dussel, this ontology of 'sameness' is at the basis of our 'centered' practices. See Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy Of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis books, 1985). Similarly, for Habermas, 1990.

27. Ours is not a position taken against power or control, only against the totalization and idolatry that can come when analysis is not substantial and regular.

scholars, etc. Differences - in method, but also and more significantly in exegetical results (regarding 'the meaning' of the gospel) - are recognized and acknowledged; however, in the last analysis, they are not affirmed. These differences are critically debated in order to determine their relative worth and ultimately to single out which one reading offers 'the' legitimate interpretation. Take, for example, two recent 'guild-affirmed' interpretations of Matthew by Strecker and Luz. From the prevailing traditional perspective, the two cannot both be right, because they draw opposite conclusions at a number of places, especially on Matthean discipleship. Thus, their differences must be overcome, either by the rejection of one and the acceptance of the other, or by the production of a new synthetic interpretation that overcomes the limitations of both in the form of a Hegelian *Aufhebung* that overrides their differences.

If this type of debate were replaced instead with an affirmation of the legitimacy of the differences among guild-affirmed interpretations, the entire structure of affirmation (and ultimately of conscientization) would be transformed. To begin with, an affirmation of the legitimacy of their differences leads to a number of questions: how did Strecker's and Luz's work come to be affirmed by the guild in the first place? What counts as legitimate knowledge in this instance? What is it about the text that allows or perhaps encourages such differences in reading? These kinds of questions and this sort of preliminary analysis would have the effect of bringing up to consciousness more precisely that which is common to white male exegesis, in the form of norms, criteria, and epistemological (i.e. methodological) presuppositions that transcend the array of exegetical methods used in the works affirmed in one way or another by the guild.

Yet, more is needed. So that the affirmation of the legitimacy of the differences among guild-affirmed interpretations be recognized by the white male guild and its members and become a structural feature of our pedagogical (and other) practices, this affirmation must itself be based upon a 'common epistemology', but an epistemology that is deconstructed at the deepest level. This involves a close re-examination of our methodologies aimed at discovering how they presuppose (although this is concealed from and ignored by us) the possibility of a plurality of legitimate interpretations - for instance, by presupposing that a given text can be read with a focus on different historical levels (e. g., different strata, each with its own *Sitz im Leben*; or as different kinds of histories, such as history of the redaction, history of traditions, history of religions), or on different semio-literary levels (different meaning-producing dimensions of the text, each of which can be the basis for a distinctive construction of the 'meaning of the text' by readers with different concerns and ideological commitments).<sup>28</sup> Returning to our

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28. Among the places in biblical studies today where these questions are being sharply raised we could point to feminist criticism, semiotics, poststructuralist criticism and postmodernist criticism.

example, the conflicting interpretations by Strecker and Luz would no longer be seen as necessarily mutually exclusive of each other (or as inevitable complementary parts of a synthetic ideal interpretation), but rather as two equally legitimate interpretations which can be affirmed in their difference. We can envision the possibility of an indeterminate number of legitimate interpretations from the perspective of our white male methodologies.

When the possibility of a plurality of legitimate interpretations is acknowledged as a result of these methodological reflections, another set of questions can be raised: why did each white male exegete choose one legitimate interpretation over others? What is at stake in this more or less 'natural' choice by the exegete? What are the concerns and interests addressed by this choice? In which way is the pursuit of these concerns and interests a particular implementation of the white male exegetes' vocation? How are these concerns and interests related to those of a specific group or community in a specific social, cultural, religious context? To what extent is this given legitimate interpretation an 'efficient' and 'effective' fulfillment of our vocation in a specific contemporary context? The 'interested' as opposed to 'disinterested' character of each given 'critical' interpretation is here made explicit. Each of our interpretations reflects and addresses interests and concerns of white males. Our different interpretations manifest the diversity of white male interests and concerns - a diversity that reflects different social, cultural, religious and theological contexts in which we practice critical exegesis. This is also to say that the above questions already raise 'praxis' issues. But, it is in our pedagogical practices that the implications of the structure of affirmation for praxis fully appears.

Turning explicitly to the 'teaching of the Bible', what are some of the implications of this process of recovery of experiences for the teaching of the Bible by white male exegetes? First, we will find ourselves in a position to present to our students different interpretations by white male exegetes of a text that are equally legitimate. Furthermore, we will be in a position to underscore the importance of the specific historical context of each legitimate interpretation, that all are 'interested' readings, and that it is appropriate or valid for particular communities of readers. In so doing, we will need to acknowledge, make explicit, and claim without apology the distinctive 'white male' character of each of these interpretations, and of our teaching as white males.

This means that we will no longer be in a position to demand that our students (who come from a variety of social, cultural, and religious backgrounds) appropriate our distinctive white male critical interpretations and our specific way of practicing exegesis as their readings. Precisely because we can affirm the distinctive character of white male exegeses and of our teaching, we will be in a position to include other interpretations and other readers without at the same time denying the legitimacy of our own interpretations. We will be in a position to accredit as legitimate (with a positive suspicion) other interpretations, e. g., by feminists and other

liberation scholars; their readings and experiences of the biblical text are to be affirmed as viable readings among other possible readings. This does not mean every reading is the same, acceptable or to be given the same weight, but that the conditions for determining what is legitimate and therefore acceptable will reflect the fact that other readings are to be evaluated, not on the basis of transcendental or universalized criteria of legitimacy, but on the basis of criteria peculiar to historical readers and groups of readers.

Furthermore, even though we are not in the habit of equating 'ordinary' (non-scholarly) readings of the Bible with critical interpretations, we will find ourselves with a different attitude toward the sort of 'ordinary' readings that our technically unsophisticated students bring to class. We will treat these ordinary readings with the sort of positive suspicion that begins with the presumption that they are inherently legitimate and affirmable. Indeed the entire question of the relationship between critical exegeses and ordinary readings is in need of being re-examined in light of a critique of difference.<sup>29</sup> Could it be that critical exegeses are themselves to be reconceived in a complementary and propaedeutic fashion as bringing to critical understanding ordinary readings?<sup>30</sup> Critical readings may then enter into a new relationship with non-critical readings: no longer as the replacement for the latter but as systematic and rigorous demonstrations of the possibility of the legitimacy that ordinary readings have in their own right and of the different experiences of the text that all readers bring to their reading (for example, as a specific kind of response to textual evidence or a specific meaning-producing dimension of the text).

If the relationship between critical exegeses and ordinary readings were to be rethought along these lines, and we believe it can be, although we cannot argue it fully given the limits of this essay, the main goal of our teaching of the Bible as white male European-American exegetes would be envisioned in a correspondingly different way. We would no longer see critical readings as an effort to bring students to reject their uncritical ordinary readings by regarding them as naive and wrong, in order to adopt a sophisticated, true, critical exegetical reading; but rather as an attempt to teach students how to bring to critical understanding their own ordinary readings, by studying a variety of critical exegeses as 'models' of what has been done by others in other historical contexts, by affirming the differences between readings as positive not negative. But, these 'models' are not simply to be imitated. Their difference has also to be acknowledged and affirmed. For students, this would mean that their 'disagreements' with the critical readings presented (be they white male, feminist, African-American, or African readings) have to be assessed with a

29. Following the path opened by Gerald O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991).

30. Since an ordinary reading of the Bible is usually a 'faith-interpretation,' this bringing to critical understanding of our ordinary reading could be considered a theological endeavor, according to Anselm's definition of theology, *Fides quaerens intellectum*.

positive suspicion as signaling characteristics of their own readings, which even though they are 'ordinary readings' are legitimate in their own right. Thus, by teaching these critical readings from this perspective, we would help students to bring to critical understanding their own ordinary readings, that is, to become critical exegetes-theologians. In so doing, we would no longer relegate our students' ordinary readings to the margins along with that of women and other minorities in order that a center may be maintained. It would mean affirming differences in a non-hierarchical way. Our pedagogical practices would be transformed, although they would be no less critical or rigorous. We would see this as a recovery of the fundamental value of 'difference' that lies at the heart of our vocation. In short, it would mean laying claim to our vocation as teachers and scholars, as white males.

If we are correct, we are at the threshold of being able to envision alternative ways of conceiving and implementing new kinds of critical teachings of the Bible. We are certain that pedagogically it will take many different forms appropriate to readers and hearers in many different contexts, with different needs and historical experiences. When that begins to happen we will as white male exegetes begin to be accountable to those whom we teach. We will begin to be ethically accountable. With difference affirmed at the heart of our pedagogical practices, the rift between our sense of vocation and our actual practices which undermines our very *raison d'être* will be bridged, although not entirely overcome. The mark of that divide will always be with us in the history of our discourse and relationship with others, a history that must be recounted and shared with our students in order to exorcise it of its idols. Furthermore, as we affirm the legitimacy of our different critical interpretations, we, as white male exegetes, will stand a chance of being reconciled with each other instead of biting and devouring each other. Only if we can stand each other can we expect to be able to stand with others in new and constructive relations, with feminists and liberation scholars from other oppressed groups, with our students, with our public officials.

This euphoric vision is not utopian.<sup>31</sup> But bringing it into existence in our practices will not be easy. Many obstacles will need to be addressed and overcome. Many suspicions quieted; many objections answered. First, we can anticipate that there will be great resistance on many sides to conceiving of a plurality of different, and possibly contradictory, and at the same time 'legitimate' interpretations. Much will have to be done to foster an atmosphere where genuine plurality of interpretations exists and is supported. Second, an even greater effort will have to be made to bring males to recognize the degree to which their readings are race and gender coded. We have

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31. Or better, it is 'utopian in the Christian sense of the term: a vision of one part of the eschatological kingdom which is, if one knows how to look, already among us transforming the social world. See Gabriel Vahanian, *L'utopie chretienne* (Paris: Desclé de Brouwer, 1992), 21, passim.

to understand the historically interested nature of our interpretations and that in recognizing that fact we are being true to our vocation as modern, trained critics. Third, in quite practical terms much work lies ahead of us in order to develop adequate text-books and other pedagogical tools - which will need to be diversified so as to be appropriate in different cultural, social, economic, and religious contexts.

All these are matters concerning further 'conscientization' of white male exegetes, 'analyzing' our concrete pedagogical situations, 'theologizing' by envisioning our pedagogical task as a theological task (in modern and post-modern forms) calling our students to become 'theologians' themselves, and 'strategizing' in order to determine the most effective way to bring about such a transformation in the pedagogical practices of white male exegetes. The conflicts and oppositions which Biblical Studies as a discipline embrace, we think, can be an important voice and force for change and liberation of people in cultures, including, not least of all, white males. Not by becoming the dominant model, the central discipline, the final word, the transcendental truth, but by recognizing itself as one of many different disciplinary voices engaged in the production of truth's'. Much remains to be done! We believe we have seen some of the key issues. We know we have discovered and recovered something true about our own vocation and historical experiences as a result of the Vanderbilt conference. We invite others to join with us in conversation from their different contexts.