Abstract

"THE HEART OF THE MATTER IS THE MATTER OF THE HEART: RECONNSIDERING TRIBLE'S *TEXTS OF TERROR* AND JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER WITH AN AFFECTIVE READING"

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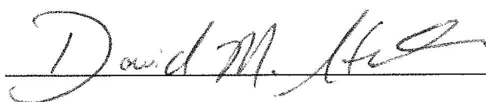
Thesis under the direction of Professor David Stark

This thesis explores the way that the Holy Scriptures, specifically the "texts of terror" identified by Phyllis Trible, can speak to and from our affections. By considering the human experience of pathos when reading, this hermeneutical endeavor seeks to demonstrate how our affective selves interpret the Holy Scriptures, ourselves, and the world around us. Instead of merely asking what a biblical narrative teaches us to believe (orthodoxy) or teaches us to do (orthopraxy), this method, dubbed "orthopathy," seeks to ask, "how does/should it make us feel?" and to understand our affective reaction in light of the Christian faith. This thesis proceeds by examining the reception history of Judges 11, the story of the daughter of Jephthah, and further demonstrates the differences gained by the feminist and womanist perspectives. Next, affective reading methods are examined alongside Martha Nussbaum's philosophy of the intelligence of emotions and Sarah Coakley's theology of the rationality of affections. Finally, an orthopathic reading of Judges 11 is offered, taking into account affections *in* the text, *of* the text, and *from* the text. This thesis concludes that when read orthopathically, terrifying texts can become venues of truth-telling, solidarity, compassion, and justice.

Approved  Date 04/19/2024

The Heart of the Matter is the Matter of the Heart: Reconsidering Trible's *Texts of Terror* and Jephthah's Daughter with an Affective Reading

by

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To the women of the College Women's Bible Study group,
North Cleveland Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

—Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent, *Book of Common Prayer*

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Preface

The ideas for this thesis began almost ten years ago in local church at a Bible study group for college-aged women. Taught by women their mothers' and grandmothers' ages, one semester they undertook the cliché theme of "Women in the Bible," and it turned out to be anything but cliché. On a Wednesday evening, a saintly woman, Peggy Land, taught with courage and trembling the story of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13. She opened by saying that while this was a terrible story, God could use it to bring comfort. As was our practice, after Peggy's lesson we broke into small groups. I sat with a table of five or six college women who, when asked for their initial responses to 2 Samuel 13, gave remarks that astounded and confused me. They made comments like, "It is a story of such great faith!" and "I want to be like Tamar!" I was not sure if we had heard the same story.

I asked them what the story taught about God: they came up short. I asked them about applying meaning to their own lives: their answers horrified me. They had been trained to force a positive spin on every story they heard 'from the Word of God.' It was this experience that showed me that there are some passages of Holy Scripture for which questions of doctrine and praxis are not the most beneficial for parishioners. I began to ask students a new question: How does this story make you *feel?* The world of pathos*,* the affections and desire, opened a whole new world for spiritual education and personal insight. I saw head and heart work together to make meaning of holy things and bring a sense of the nearness of God's love and salvation. With this "orthopathic" method,

talking about the story did for them what their ancient sister, Tamar, could not. Light had come into the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

As this thesis concludes and the work continues, I want to thank the hundreds of my university students and the local church parishioners who were my ‘guinea pigs’ for these theological and hermeneutical methods. A special thanks to my first reader, David Stark, without whose encouragement and editing this project would not have seen lift off or completion. I am indebted personally and scholastically to the person and work of Rickie Moore, who has “altared” my life and my ministry. With the deepest of affections, I thank my husband, Wade, without whose love and support the completion of this project would never have been undertaken. You double my joys and halve my sorrows.

CHAPTER 1

SHOULD WE MAKE JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER DANCE AGAIN?

Here is a story
to break your heart.
Are you willing?

–Mary Oliver, "Lead"

Introduction

In 1984, Phyllis Trible identified Judges 11 and three other pericopes as "texts of terror."[1] These are biblical stories in which women are treated like property or instruments and are not persons in the own right, but are victims of systemic and individualized oppression and violence for whom no divine intervention comes. Trible notes that these stories pose great risk to the reader, too. She says, "To tell and hear tales of terror is to wrestle demons in the night, without a compassionate God to save us."[2] Unfortunately such stories are not constrained to an ancient text but exist throughout Christian tradition, and persist in the Christian experience today. Abuse is never only a thing of the past. Ignoring the horrific events in our Holy Scriptures does not keep the Church from experiencing such today, and ignorance does not help in addressing such situations when they arise in our communities now. As Trible says, "To take to heart this ancient story, then, is to confess its present reality. The story is alive, and all is not well."[3]

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[1] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 2. The other three stories are Hagar's in Genesis 16:1–16; 21:9–21, Tamar's in 2 Samuel 13, and that of the unnamed woman in Judges 19.

[2] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 4.

[3] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 87.

Since the Church knows terror in her reality, we would do well to learn from these stories of old. The question, then, is how?

Through her feminist rhetorical criticism, Trible taught readers of the Bible to hear the cry of the female victim in the text. No longer could theologians and preachers gloss over the horror of the narrative to simply mine the male-centered plot points for something worthy of teaching or preaching. Feminist hermeneuts today continue to plead alongside Trible that the Church not sanitize texts of their terror, but rather recognize and grapple with the fact that they are tragic texts, especially in regard to the treatment of women. Since abuse *in* the text can lead to abuse *with* the text, the Church often thinks it is playing it safe by ignoring these passages.

But, perhaps something substantial—even liberating—can be gained by following Trible's lead and allowing these texts to unsettle and inform us. Indeed, Trible's work demonstrates that these texts can do more than offer a basis for lamenting patriarchy. When read through different hermeneutical lenses, these texts of terror can provide the Church with a faithful and helpful methodology to confront the terrors of life. This thesis seeks to do by examining how Judges 11, the story of Jephthah and his daughter, has been understood and employed historically, and it explores why it is worthy of consideration for the contemporary reader. Chapter one will provide an introduction to the hermeneutical questions and the application issues and possibilities for stories in Judges and other 'difficult' biblical stories, especially for Trible's "texts of terror." Chapter two examines ways that scholars and preachers across Christian traditions and across history have treated this text, oftentimes with abhorrent outcomes. Chapter three

focuses in on the too often marginalized voices of the feminist and womanist perspectives on Judges 11.

The second half of the thesis will build on the hermeneutical practices of feminists and womanists, combining their insights with recent philosophical attention to the affections. Chapter four defines and develops affective reading strategies and rationale. Briefly, affective reading is a way of engaging the text that pays attention to the both the pathos in the text and that which it causes in the reader. Within biblical hermeneutics it allows one to find significant spiritual meaning and formation from the affective response. To do this, the chapter examines Martha Nussbaum's philosophy of the intelligence of emotions and Sarah Coakley's theology of the rationality of affections. Chapter five concludes by applying affective hermeneutical lenses to Judges 11. This practical application, which I term an "orthopathic hermeneutic,"[4] seeks to offer a discipleship of the heart, leading one to be affectively moved by the text, to recognize one's desires and emotional state, and to allow one's affections to be further shaped in Christian virtues. By combining feminist and womanist hermeneutics with affective reading, former texts of terror can become places where those who have experienced terror can find solidarity. When the reader privileges the affective response to the text instead of mining it for a doctrinal or practical application, terrorizing texts can become places in which one can find meaning that is not explicit in the pericope itself, and the self is transformed.

[4] "Orthopathic" is compounded of *ortho* meaning correct, and *pathos* referring to the passions, affections, and emotions. NB: Following others, I will use the term 'affections' as a catch-all phrase for these distinguishable yet connected terms, also including pathos, emotions, feelings, and desire. For an introductory explanation of the complexity of categorizing these terms, see F. Scott Spencer's "Getting a Feel for the 'Mixed' and 'Vexed Study of Emotions in Biblical Literature," in *Exploring Emotions and Biblical Literature,* (Atlanta: SBL Press), 2017.

Judges 11 and the Lectionary

Judges 11 tells the story of a daughter whose celebration tragically leads her in a dangerous dance that twirls her toward death, but it says nothing about how to interpret the story that has left hermeneuts' heads swirling for ages. The chapter opens with Jephthah, an outcast half-brother who becomes the family hero after being rejected by those he will save. His brothers call upon him in their time of need to deliver them from the Ammonites. He agrees to help them, but only if they will agree to let him have the command. They consent, and Jephthah tries to reason with King Ammon, but Ammon will not listen to his messengers. Then "the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Jephthah," (Judg. 11.29) and he travels to make war. Next, the text says,

> And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, 'If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.' So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the LORD gave them into his hand.[5]

The text says the sons of Gilead are victorious over the sons of Ammon in battle, but the triumphalism is short-lived. As Jephthah nears his homestead his daughter, his only child, comes out to celebrate the victory and literally dances into her demise as she becomes the object of her father's vow.

Immediately Jephthah rends his garments, blames his daughter for what has happened, and says that she has "become the cause of great trouble to [him]" (Judg 11.35). When he tells her of his vow, the daughter responds that he should keep it since

[5] Judges 11.30–32.

God gave the children[6] of Ammon into his hand. She makes only one request: to be permitted a two-month journey in the wilderness to 'weep for her virginity' with her friends. The narrator simply says that she does this, returns, and then Jephthah "did with her according to his vow" (Judg. 11:39). The chapter closes by stating that the "daughters of Israel" spent four days lamenting her sacrifice, and this became a custom in Israel.

Theologians, biblical scholars, and preachers of all traditions and times have been perplexed with precisely how to treat this text. There are notably few commentaries on the book of Judges, and some have asserted that it lacks a certain spiritual appeal and is often considered offensive.[7] The reception history of Judges is meager and quite varied. Lee Roy Martin notes, "biblical scholars have shown little interest in the study of Judges as a theological document. Outside of Deuteronomic studies, attempts to read Judges theologically are quite sparse."[8] Judges 11 is correspondingly as unpopular as its larger corpus, both theologically and homiletically. It lacks the victorious ending of stories like Jael's and Sampson's. Judges ends with no king in Israel, and the people are still snatching dancing daughters in the last chapter as Jephthah does with his own in chapter 11.[9]

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[6] In a story about a father/warrior and a daughter who sacrificed, it should be noted that in Hebrew their deliberation includes much filial language that is lost in the English translation. For example, in Judges 11:36, when Jephthah's daughter speaks about the *children* (bēn) of Ammon, it is often translated as the "people" of Ammon (N/KJV), or "the Ammonites" (NIV, ESV, and NRSV). NASB translates it as "sons".

[7] Lee Roy Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God, A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges* in Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 32 (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2008), 7.

[8] Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God,* 47.

[9] Judges 21 records that as a way to ensure the tribe of Benjamin does not die out, the other tribes, "instructed the Benjaminites, saying, 'Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, and watch; when the young women of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and each of you carry off a wife for himself from the young women of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin…. The Benjaminites

Christian disagreements over the interpretation of chapter 11 are as old as the early Church. There are a few key narrative moments and theological points that garner the most attention historically. First, Jephthah and his vow have been the focus, particularly regarding the righteousness and intent of his oath. Throughout many modern Bible publications, the second half of Judges 11 is titled, "Jephthah's Rash Vow." The daughter herself is most often relegated to a mere prop in the story of her father, a supporting actress at best. A second issue of contention is whether the sacrifice of the daughter is a literal life-ending murder, or if allegorically it is a consecration of dedication to religious life in which she cannot marry. Preachers and scholars have long squabbled over where exactly things in the narrative went wrong.

Yet the lack of robust and sophisticated hermeneutical scholarship in the Church's history for Judges may feed the Church's homiletic neglect of Judges today. The only reading from Judges in the Anglican lectionary cycle is the calling of Gideon,[10] and the Revised Common Lectionary only contains the narrative of Deborah commanding Barack.[11] The Episcopal Daily Office and the Roman Missal have severely limited readings for Judges, and chapter 11 falls on a Sunday. It seems that since there is no general consensus on the meaning of the text nor any easy way to apply it, the story has receded into the background for parish ministry. Due to their absence in the lectionary,

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did so; they took wives for each of them from the dancers whom they abducted. Then they went and returned to their territory, and rebuilt the towns, and lived in them." (Judges 21:20–21, 23 NRSV)

[10] Judges 6.11–26a falls on Epiphany 5C.

[11] Judges 4.1–7 is RCL Proper 28A. Interestingly, the collect for the day reads: "Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen."*

one can almost never find an Anglican homily or meditation on any text of terror, save the second half of Hagar's story.

Of the four texts of terror identified by Trible, only half of one pericope is found in the lections of the Revised Common Lectionary (Hagar's story found in Gen 21 comes in Proper 7A). None of the texts appear in the Roman Catholic Lectionary for Mass. The weekday readings of the Roman Missal cover only selected portions from both chapters of Hagar's story (Gen 16 in proper 374 and Gen 21 in proper 379) and the story of Jephthah's Daughter (only in proper 422). The Daily Office covers three of the four texts, leaving out the narrative commonly known as the story of Levite concubine (Judges 19). In the Daily Office, Hagar's story is split between the Wednesday of Epiphany 3 and the Tuesday of Epiphany 4 in year 2. Interestingly, and apparently only by happenstance, the stories of Tamar (2 Sam 13) and Jephthah's daughter both fall respectively on the Sundays of Proper 14 in the opposing years. With these texts hardly making an appearance for Sunday readings, and with two of the three Daily Office texts falling on Sundays, there is certainly a slim chance of exposure to the average parishioner, and an even smaller chance of that parishioner receiving explanation or exhortation from clergy.

While it makes sense that lectionary scholars might see these texts as unsuitable for the pulpit since their content is certainly not suitable for all audiences, ignoring these texts does not make ministry, theology, or handling terrors of our own times any easier. To be clear, I am not calling for lectionary reform or inconsiderate preaching. I simply seek to demonstrate that texts of terror need not be feared or altogether ignored, and, further, that through a more holistic approach they may bring about faithful Christian spirituality. Alexander Schmemann says, "The Church is not an institution that keeps

divinely revealed 'doctrines' and 'teachings' about this or that event of the past, but is the very *epiphany* of these events themselves."[12] Schmemann notes the problematic disconnect between liturgy and theology.[13] He contends that theology is not just about learning, and liturgy is not just about 'doing.' They both are about transformation.

Schmemann adds further: the Church "can teach about [the events of the past] because, first of all, she knows them, because she is the experience of their reality. Her faith as teaching and theology is rooted in her faith as experience. Her *lex credendi* is revealed in her life."[14] Thus it is in the dance of liturgy and theology, for certainly the two cannot be separated, that we find the Church's true role in faith: curating the lived experience of faith. Faith is not just knowing what ought be believed or mimicking what is taught. Faith is what the Church is called to live. The Church is to actually *be* the community of faith, especially as a witness of hope to those who have suffered terror. Our teachings and our liturgies speak to our lives, both the good and the bad experiences, teaching the Church not only ethics, but who we are and who we should become. Can Judges 11 or any text of terror help us to do this? I believe so. In similar fashion, Joseph Jeter says of the book Judges,

> The reason for reading, teaching, and preaching from Judges is the mountaineer's rationale: because it is there, persistently there. The second reason is that we believe it to be important. We work with

[12] Alexander Schmemann, *Church, World, Mission* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), 134.

[13] In this text, Schmemann is speaking of the theological and liturgical "crisis" of the late seventies in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, but the detachment of liturgy and theolgy certainly cross place and time as a present matter for us today.

[14] Schmemann, *Church, World, Mission*, 134.

> scripture because we believe God's word lingers therein or close by. And we offer our praise and thanksgiving for that persistence.[15]

Judges 11 and texts of terror are *there,* still there, in our Church after all this time and terror, just like we who have experienced terror of any kind. We, too, are still here, still important, still hoping that "God's word lingers therein or close by," just as the Spirit hovered over the chaotic darkness and void of creation in Genesis 1.

Meaning-Making and Narrative

Judges 11 leaves much to the hermeneutical imagination. The text is ambiguous in places, but the meaning is even more so. Did Jephthah do well in a tough situation? Who is this daughter and why is she unnamed? I call her Batshama, because she is a daughter who helps us to hear.[16] But what might she want us to hear? Is she a role model? Was God pleased with her actions? The text never tells us directly. The narrator simply picks right up with the boys back at war. No commentary is given; no explanation is made. God never weighs in. The reader is left to deduce right and wrong. Susanne Scholz says,

> Biblical literature has a tendency to be ambiguous, and so readers create biblical meanings. Most, if not all, narratives are inherently open for interpretation and do not offer easy answers. Readers decide whether they

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[15] Joseph Jeter, *Preaching Judges* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 13.

[16] Like many women in the Hebrew Bible, the daughter of Jephthah is usually seen as a supporting role in the story, and the text bears no name for her. For ease of reading and writing, but also for the dignity of her personhood, I have chosen to name her in this thesis. We need not continue to refer to her as the object of her father. "Batshama" comes from the combination of the Hebrew words transliterated, *bat* ('daughter') and *shama* ('that we may hear'). Throughout Judges 11 and throughout Judges in general, the people of Israel do not hear, and therefore cannot heed, God.

> emphasize compliance with or outrage for stories that report great horror in a terse, dense, and factual style.[17]

To learn something from this text, the reader has to make quite a few theological assumptions. If Jephthah and his daughter have done rightly, this assumes that they pleased God and thus gave God what God wanted. This subsequently assumes that God prefers one's vow to be kept over the preservation of one's child. This is the position Bathshama seemingly takes.

Many Christians assume that Jephthah and Batshama chose well because the text does not argue otherwise. These characters are not clearly heroes like Deborah or villains like Delilah is often caricatured to be.[18] One may assume since Jephthah and Batshama kept the vow, they did not break the law, and breaking God's law is, of course, wrong. Thus one my figure they did rightly, even though it was hard. But what if in violating one of God's laws, one consequently breaks another? How should one decide which is the better route? Does God value a vow over the life of a person? Christians seem divided as to whether Yahweh accepted child sacrifice. Deuteronomy 12 suggests *no*, while Ezekiel 20 may argue *yes*. It seems, however, that the general consensus is that God is against it, especially in light of the binding of Isaac by Abraham in Genesis 22 and in light of Jeremiah 7.31: "They build the shrines… to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire—which I did not command, nor did it arise in my mind." However, the matter of

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[17] Susanne Scholz, "A Career as a Feminist Biblical Scholar." *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice, and the Study of the Old Testament* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2017), 87–88.

[18] Roy Heller makes a case that biblical characters, especially in the book of Judges, are not to be seen as 'good' or 'bad,' and certainly not always as role models. Heller says, "serve us best when the function like mirrors, giving us the chance to look at them and see ourselves in them— the good parts and the bad parts of ourselves together. This insight is particularly important when interpreting a tragedy such as we find in the book of Judges." See Roy L. Heller, *Conversations with Scripture: The Book of Judges* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2011), 81–82.

child sacrifice is further complicated if one expands the question to families outside of the Children of Israel, which are often destroyed at the prophet's utterance of Divine command.

Reading Biblical Narrative for Theology and Ministry

Ellen F. Davis argues that the modern Church has lost the "art of reading [scripture] attentively and imaginatively," and that the Church has suffered for it.[19] The beauty of reading Scripture as an art, however, gives a creativity within orthodoxy to respond imaginatively and yet still faithfully. Reading the Holy Scriptures "imaginatively" allows us to pull one pericope into conversation with other texts and permits a multi-dimensionally that comes from pulling ourselves into the story. As art, the Holy Scriptures can be experienced and can engage our participation as we remember both our tradition and the ways in which we make meaning in the contemporary world today.

The book of Judges itself is a hard book to judge. It certainly has what we might call 'good' and 'bad,' and is known for the 'ugly.' It has triumph and tribulation, tragic comedy and daring suspense, but the text seems to specialize in horror. Everett Fox says that some of the content details are not explicitly named because of the fact that they are 'unspeakable' evils.[20] Deuteronomistic narrative has been critiqued by these and even the

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[19] Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hayes, *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), xv.

[20] Everett Fox, *The Early Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014), 156. For contrast, Trible says that we get all the gruesome details, torturing us, with Isaac's binding because "the suspense is bearable since Isaac's life will be spared" (Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 105).

story-telling category of drama.[21] Judges crosses varying genres, and one might imagine that its original audiences would be moved to laughter, to cheering, to tears, to shock and to grimace. It seems it was made to evoke response from the hearer. We do not have to imagine that readers today can be affected in the same ways. It is full of "folklore, epic poetry, and humor."[22] Yet for contemporary readers, many things are lost in translation and there is frequently a lack of comprehension of the world behind the text. These difficulties complicate meaning-making today. Part of the appeal of narrative is its universality, its accessibility, and its relatability. Congregations are often told, "they were people like us," or "humanity never changes," and while that may ring true, when the world in the text is not relatable to the modern audience, there is great risk in application.

Some contemporary readers may feel no need to take meaning from this passage. Some readers of Christian traditions may have their minds made up concerning two things: a ridiculousness of this text and a biblical hermeneutic that does not demand any form of application for the Christian life. For some, it may be as simple as: human sacrifice is never a good nor an ethical option, and therefore this story is only instructive if taken as an anti-example. A "plain reading," however, is difficult since the narrative does not explain cognitive beliefs nor instruct the audience toward a certain ethic. The narrator does not suggest how this story factors into systems of theology, or how to act appropriately in regards to its horrors, especially since the narration does not act as if the

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[21] Lillian Klein*, Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice, and the Study of the Old Testament* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2017), 13.

[22]Everett Fox, *The Early Prophets*, 131. Drama here means that the Jephthah narrative was/ was read as a play.

activities therein are indeed horrific. These texts need interpretation. As Rowan Williams reminds us,

> One of the great tragedies and errors of the way people have understood the Bible has been the assumption that what people did in the Old Testament must have been right 'because it's in the Bible.'... But they are not in the Bible because God is telling us, 'That's good.' They are there because God is telling us, 'You need to know that that is how some people responded... things can go very wrong.'[23]

As with all Scripture, especially its narratives, interpretation is vital. Even though one would probably not make the case that Judges condones child sacrifice today, the fact that the text exists without condemnation poses a danger that demands hermeneutical and homiletical response.

The Danger of Strictly Reading for Orthodoxy and/or Orthopraxy

Bible readers, both professional and lay, often ask of a pericope, "how should this text function?" That is to ask in what way should we learn from it? One could classify the many answers for these questions into two simple categories: orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Hermeneutical orthodoxy means reading to learn what is right to believe. This kind of reading pursues true doctrine and intellectual explanation of ideas. Orthodoxy is what theology is made of: it births the kinds of sermons that teach listeners what or how to think. Orthopraxy, on the other hand, is the heartbeat of ethics. It leads to sermons of life-application. An orthopraxic reading comes away from the text with a list of right and wrong actions or virtues and vices, frequently creating lists of what to do and what not to

[23] Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 28-29.

do today. The story of Judges 11 speaks differently when read through the lenses of orthodoxy or orthopraxy.

When a certain pericope does not fit into one's set paradigms for orthodoxy, there is often an inclination to try to 'control' the text. It proves easy to theologically manipulate a passage to make Holy Scripture fit one's image of God or of goodness. If this cannot be easily accomplished, the other tendency may be to despair and ignore the text altogether. In the tiring process of trying to rightfully discern problematic passages, it is possible readers have tried to "sanitize" the text, to wipe it clean of the dirtiness that makes us uncomfortable.[24] The tendency is to focus on the 'good part' or a lesson that is easily learned.

Two things are possible when one sanitizes the text. First, the terror of the story may recede into the background in the re-telling until it has disappeared. This keeps the text from injuring the Church, or a church from using the text for injury, but it is not truthful to the witness of the text. This option is especially tempting with the passages that Trible called texts of terror. There is, perhaps, no greater biblical example of this than the text of terror in Judges 19, a story typically called 'The Levite's Concubine.' The story opens with a man who travels to a woman 'to speak to her heart,' but then is found pushing her toward abusers to protect himself, and ultimately butchers her body. This is

[24] This often looks like "taking a moral" from the story and not addressing that parts of the story that are difficult to interpret, apply, or understand theologically. This mode of sanitizing a story is especially easy in Judges, bringing to mind the "victories" of Jael or Samson, for example. On the other, Judges can offer stories that are harder to sanitize because of the graphic violence without an obvious moral. See for example, see Edgar W. Conrad, "Cynthia Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole: Composition and Purpose of Judges 19–21"* Ancient Israel and Its Literature 24 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016.) *RBL* Feb 2017. Speaking of Judges 19–21, Conrad writes, "Gang rape and death, young virgins given as trophy wives, the encouragement to ensure posterity by abducting young women who are enjoying the festivities at Shiloh, and the horrifying slaughter, including "the little ones" (21:11), are so repulsive that it is difficult to sanitize the literature by thinking about what an anonymous author and redactor might have been conjuring up in the sixth-century BCE." Ibid., 85.

truly a text of terror— chocked full of betrayal, dehumanization, gang-rape, violence, murder, and dismemberment. The Church has reasonably had a hard time saying, 'This is the word of the Lord' after such a reading.

Secondly, sanitization does not make the text disappear, but rather it tries to force the text to shine. It gets dressed up in a theology of excuses or a mismanaged application, and in doing so poses a great threat of injury to the modern Church. This is entirely possibly, or even especially probable, with a text like Judges 11 in Christian circles that demand that orthopraxic application must be made from every single story. This can lead the reading community to laud pernicious actions or characters. For Judges 11, this looks like believing that Jephthah is honorable for being a man of his word and that he should be praised for being faithful in the face of such a hard predicament. Such might be used to teach that God desires for all vows be kept no matter that cost. It could make Batshama into a role model for accepting a father's demands without question.

This forced orthopraxic reading makes the text say things it in no way offers. It should be noted that a forced application of orthopraxy is especially dangerous for women as they are victims in these texts.[25] If we strive for application, the best chance of an orthopraxic reading may teach that one should take great care in making vows. This is the most popular teaching point from Judges 11, and is perhaps cyclically connected as to why usually this pericope is titled by the publisher as 'Jephthah's Rash Vow.' Such an application is not inherently harmful, but may be used to say that God does not care about what is lost in the process of keeping a promise.

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[25] It is also interesting that many female readers find themselves first or only connecting to a female if one appears in a pericope, but men less often identify with female characters at all.

If searching the story for orthodoxy or doctrine about God, most lessons will have to come by means of assumption as this text is not didactically explicit at all. Scholars have pointed out that God never speaks in Judges 11, nor are we told what God thinks or feels. This is important because, as Abraham Heschel says, the affections or the pathos of God are consequential since we take them to be models or instructions for ourselves.[26] Jephthah and Batshama both speak of God as a listener and doer, but never they never claim that God has spoken. They do not hear from God; they listen only to each other. From their assumptions about vow-keeping, the reader may assume that God cares more about the vow than the daughter.

This analysis may lead the reader to conclude that the actions of Jephthah and Bathshama are commendable, and one can see throughout the reception history that this does occur. Again, this reading is especially dangerous for women.[27] In Genesis 22, God interrupts a child sacrifice, sending a messenger to tell Abraham not to lay a hand on his son, Isaac, and provides a ram as substitute. We must ask: why is there no ram for Bathshama? Why is there no angelic interruption, no divine intervention? Are girls of less value to God? The lenses of orthodoxy and orthopraxy might cause us to read the story as Jephthahs and Batshamas: no word of the Lord to be found/

The Effect of Affections and Need for Orthopathy

But there is at least one other way to read and preach these texts. Drawing on affective reasoning will lead to orthopathic interpretations and proclamations. The

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[26] Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 2001), 152. Heschel says this is the goal of the Scripture: to feel as God feels, so that we can learn the justice of God to be enacted on the earth.

[27] The danger is, of course, not limited to women, but extends to any marginalized minority in an oppressive system.

possibilities for meaning-making from Judges 11 expand for human flourishing when we change the questions asked of it in light of holy desire and other matters of the heart. Instead of asking, "What do we learn to think?" (orthodoxy) or "How do we ethically apply it?" (orthopraxy), what if readers ask, "How does it make us *feel*?" What is the affective response that occurs when hearing this story? What is the emotive reaction? And what does our pathos *mean?*

When a reading community identifies how the story makes them feel, new insights occur, insights to the narrative of Holy Scripture and to our own selves. This practice of affecting the text or being affected by it is not simply emotionalism or emotivism, but the hermeneutic of *orthopathy*: learning what is right to feel. The Church must be able to practice attention toward the texts of terror to find a sense of spiritual rationality. We do this by contemplating the text alongside our affections. Affections are the 'matters of the heart.' They include our senses, emotions, feelings, mood, passions, desires, and virtues. All such things are connected but not collapsible, and such are all ultimately rooted in our desires. It is important to note that affections are not anti-reason; they are not necessarily or inherently irrational. As we will see later, Sarah Coakley insists that affective reasoning is not only possible, but necessary and necessarily compatible with faith.

As Matthew Schlimm has argued, intersectionality between human affections and the Bible is in order for at least three reasons: Divine pathos, biblical ethics, and popular portrayals of God and the Bible.[28] First, whether literal or anthropomorphic, both

[28]Matthew Richard Schlimm, "The Central Role of Emotions in Biblical Theology, Biblical Ethics, and Popular Conceptions of the Bible," in *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions.* ed. F. Scott Spencer (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature), 2017.

testaments abundantly describe God as affective and emotionally relational. Secondly, Schlimm says the biblical authors are no different from other ancient philosophers who agree that "right living is both impaired and fostered by the emotions we experience."[29] Thirdly, opinions and depictions of emotions in and toward the Bible, whether by John Wesley or Jack Spong or Richard Dawkins, mean a great deal in the formation of popular theology and secular attitudes toward Christianity. Schlimm concludes by offering: "By investing time and energy into the dynamics of biblical emotions, interpreters can achieve key advances in the fields of biblical theology and biblical ethics. We may even have an impact on how the broader public thinks about the Bible, God and their faith."[30] It seems, however, that a beneficial step forward would be to engage how readers of the Bible participate affectively within the three arenas Schlimm has identified. We have noted the importance of both Judges 11 and styles of reading, so we will now turn our attention to a reception history of how the text has been treated in scholarship.

[29] Schlimm, "The Central Role of Emotions in Biblical Theology," 51. Importantly, emotions are not usually categorized as 'good' or 'bad.' For example, anger and fear are sometimes appropriate and sometimes inappropriate. Nonetheless, they are always revelatory concerning the individual and what/how one judges to be good/bad.

[30] Schlimm, "The Central Role of Emotions in Biblical Theology," 58.

CHAPTER 2

A RECEPTION HISTORY OF JUDGES 11[31]

When we consider it our moral duty to give full recognition to all the voices in the text (even those that morally repel us, and that we might finally part company with), we are practicing a dialogical ethic that one can hope has real life consequences.

–Carleen Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*

It is no surprise that a story like Judges 11 brings out the best and the worst interpretations. We have chronicles filled with varying opinions from famous Christian thinkers and Jewish voices of the past. Today the narrative of Jephthah and his daughter proves to be a playground for hermeneutical method. John Thompson demonstrates this, using Judges 11 for his case study in the Grove Biblical Series publication on reception history. Arguing against *sola scriptura,* Thompson claims that reception history helps Protestant people incorporate tradition into their worship. As opposed to exegesis alone, Thompson says, "we will understand a text better if we also understand how it has been received by others or how its perception has shaped the thoughts and practices of those who read it."[32] He lists six reasons why Judges 11 is particularly ripe for reception history: (1) its silence compels commentary; (2) it provides practice in allegory; (3) the lauding of Jephthah in Hebrews 11 demands it of us; (4) the interaction between Christian and Jewish scholars invites it; and (5) our tendency toward a typological or Christological

[31] This chapter will exclude voices that are explicitly feminist, as those will be examined in the following chapter.

[32] John L. Thompson, *Reception History: Why Should We Care What Earlier Christians Thought about the Bible?* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books Limited, 2013), 10.

reading; and lastly, (6) to aid in feminist critique.[33] For these reasons and to demonstrate how affections affect our reading, a reception history is in order.

Judges 11 is also particularly prime for reception history because the narrative lends itself to drastically different interpretations based upon theological or hermeneutical preconceived notions. One of the main differences when interpreting this text is whether the story is taken as literal historicity or as parabolic myth. Metaphorical blood on a hero's symbolic hands is much easier to justify, of course. Another key difference, often still connected to the givenness of historicity or myth, is whether the sacrifice of the daughter was a literal killing or a life-long dedication to temple service. The latter, again, is much easier for most people to accept and to teach. A third important difference concerns whom in the narrative that the hermeneut is willing to give blame or responsibility. These differences, theological deductions, and practical applications come not just from opposing historical/grammatical hermeneutic measures, but also by affections that are read into the characters' of the story. To see this, we turn our attention to a brief reception history spanning major contributors from early Judaism to today.

Early Jewish Voices

Whereas the biblical passage itself offers no commentary, explanation, or evaluation on the occurrences in Judges 11, midrashim and Aggadah seek to fill theological and narrative gaps. One of the biggest gaps is filled by one of the earliest sources as Pseudo-Philo names the unnamed daughter, calling her Seila.[34] *Biblical Antiquities* likewise

[33] Thompson, *Reception History,* 10–11.

[34] *Biblical Antiquities,* trans. M.R. James (New York: The MacMillan Co.), 1917. Why the author named her Seila has a difficult origin to prove, and the practice has not been popularly maintained in scholarship.

inaugurates the long-standing tradition of creatively expounding upon her journey to the mountains. The Pseudo-Philo offers that she went to seek God's will and in the wilderness experienced a theophany. Therein God says she is wiser than her father, and her death will be "precious" in God's sight.[35] She is willing to die so that her father's words will not be in vain, and her own feelings show as she says, "who can be sorrowful in their death when they see their people delivered?"[36] God's emotions and actions surrounding these events are likewise supplied. It is recorded that God is "wroth" regarding Jephthah's vow, scoffs in ridicule at the prospect of a dog fulfilling the vow, and thus fashions circumstances so it will be the daughter who greets Jephthah first.[37]

Jewish tradition varies as to where responsibility should lie. In the midrash *Tanhuma,* the rabbis say that Jephthah is famously ignorant of the laws that would have kept him from fulfilling such a vow. It reads: "He was no more lettered than a block of sycamore wood, and because of his ignorance he lost his daughter."[38] He could have been corrected, however, by a "high priest son of a high priest, called Phinehas."[39] Yet these two men were feuding and would not humble themselves to speak to one another, and thus the daughter pays the cost of their pride. The author of *Tanhuma* holds both men guilty for bloodshed. In much of the rabbinic literature, Jephthah's sin is not killing his

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She is, throughout history, also referred to as Iphis or Iphigenia, due to her story's similarities with the Greek goddess' tragedy.

[35] *Biblical Antiquities,* 193.

[36] *Biblical Antiquities*, 192.

[37] *Biblical Antiquities*, 192.

[38] *The Book of Legends, Sefer Ha-Aggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash,* eds. Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 109.

[39] *The Book of Legends*, 109. Sometimes spelled, "Phinneas."

child, but rather is his ignorance in vow-making. Shulamit Valler argues that the sages did not wish to pin the daughter's death on God, so they turn Jephthah into a corrupt man who helplessly "fell into his own snare."[40] She points out that *Genesis Rabbah* says Jephthah's true tragedy was that he "had the wrong perception of God,"[41] and that his lust for honor blinds him against doing right by his child.[42]

Another key difference for the rabbinic literature is that the daughter is given a stronger voice. In general, the Jewish literature gives much more attention to the daughter and paints her in a positive, martyrized, and self-actualizing light instead of like a mere possession or secondary story prop. For these reasons of agency, the rabbinic tradition becomes very important for the feminist interpretation. In the biblical text she is recorded as speaking, yet, she is merely supportive[43] of her father's vow, and her only request is to be given time to "go to the mountains" with friends. Some teachings in midrash say that this meant she journeyed to the Sanhedrin to find a way to be loosed from the vow.[44] In *Tanhuma*, however, she argues with Jephthah: "My father, my father, I came out to meet

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[40] Shulamit Valler, "The Story of Jephthah's Daughter in the Midrash," in *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bibl*e, second series, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 48–66. This is interesting because many Christians today do the opposite, assuming all of Jephthah's actions to be righteous and praising him or God for the ending of the story. See the section in this chapter on Evangelicals and Pentecostals for more.

[41] Valler, "The Story of Jephthah's Daughter in the Midrash," 53. Therein, Valler can call Jephthah a "victim" of his faith. (48) It may be that this falls harshly on feminist ears or those of anyone who thinks common sense and familial love should have won the day. Valler's point on Jephthah as a victim, however, may be helpful as long as one bears to two things: his victimhood but be held in tension alongside his daughter's whose must ultimately be memorialized, and secondly, one may see him as a victim in the faith due to his treatment from his brothers who cast him from their father home as is recorded in the prior chapter of Judges.

[42] Valler, "The Story of Jephthah's Daughter in the Midrash," 57.

[43]In action, at least, if not in sentiment.

[44] Valler, "The Story of Jephthah's Daughter in the Midrash," 61.

you full of joy, and now you slaughter me. Is it written in the Torah that Israel should offer the lives of their children upon the altar?"[45] She questions him both personally and theologically. The author says that Jephthah "did not heed her."[46] It is noteworthy to recognize that this rendition closes with a drastically different ending: the Spirit of God cries out at the moment of her death.[47]

Patristics

Exploring Patristic reception history can be dangerous ground for a feminist to tread, especially when the biblical text in question contains mistreatment of women. While difficult to speak of "the early church fathers" in sum, there is consistency among the major voices that God favors Jephthah over his daughter and thereby values the word of a man over the life of a woman. Many of the Early Fathers seem to suggest what Augustine explicitly states: Jephthah had to know his vow would implicate a human person, yet probably did not think it would be his own child.[48] Overall, there are themes of intertextual comparison to the *akedah* and sacrifice, and a general consensus that while God was displeased with the vow, God was causal in the daughter being the victim as

[45] *The Book of Legends*, 109.

[46] *The Book of Legends*, 109.

[47] *The Book of Legends*, 109. The Spirit is record as quoting Jeremiah 19.5, "At that moment, the Holy Spirit cried out in anguish: 'Have I ever asked you to offer up living souls to me? "I commanded not, nor spoke it, neither it came into my mind".'"

[48] Augustine, "Questions on Judges 49.6". *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel* in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Series, ed. John R. Franke (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 137.

punishment. Origen, Ambrose, and Augustine all agree that the vow was a human offering and literal burnt sacrifice.[49]

Concerning the vow itself, Ephrem the Syrian makes two interesting claims. First, he says that God had pity on Jephthah's rash vow because it was born of "affliction," and secondly, that God caused the daughter to come forth so that other people would be scared to make rash vows in the future.[50] These assertions make God out to feel sorry for a man who makes a bad decision, but not for an innocent young woman who can simply be killed as an example and warning. Jerome agrees that God caused the daughter to be the first to come forth, but he states that God did this so that Jephthah would learn his error.[51] Augustine observes that the book of Judges itself does not 'judge' Jephthah's vow. He does, however, suggest that Jephthah may have intended his wife to be its victim.[52] Augustine further reckons, "The Scriptures of God do not offer any commentary on either the vow or its fulfillment, so that our mind night be put to work to pass judgment on this matter and so that we might say that such a vow displeased God." [53]

Origen differs in approach. He acknowledges that if Jephthah is viewed as believing human sacrifice pleases God, this in turn displays God as cruel. He states, "We

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[49] The larger reception, both from the early Christian readings to the contemporary, present a mixed bag; David Gunn notes that Christians have presented Jephthah as a prototype of the sacrifice both God the Father and of Jesus, and also sometimes of the Church. See David M. Gunn, *Judges.* Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 139.

[50] Ephrem, "Ephrem the Syrian, Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 10.3." *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel* in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Series, ed. John R. Franke (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 136.

[51] Jerome, "Jerome, Against Jovinianus 1.2.3." *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel* in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Series, ed. John R. Franke (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 136.

[52] Thompson, *Reception History,* 16.

[53] Augustine, "Augustine, Questions on Judges," 138.

need a generous and perceptive spirit in order to refute the reproaches made against providence," yet he does not say what one ought believe in turn, except possibly viewing the daughter as a positive witness of martyrdom.[54] While Augustine makes it very clear that he thinks "some out of ignorant impiety oppose the Holy Scriptures and call this a misdeed," he is also clear that the sacrifice does not please God.[55] Chrysostom agrees but further states that since God did not intervene to stop her death, God gave "a striking example of providence and clemency, and it was in care for our race."[56] Again the daughter is used by God as a demonstration for the betterment of humanity.

It is the daughter herself that Ambrose lauds. He says the father cannot be blamed for fulfilling his vow, but praises the daughter for urging her father toward righteousness and for not letting her friends stop her. Thus Ambrose concludes that, "what was at first an awful chance became a pious sacrifice."[57] It is Augustine who appears to be the first to suggest the daughter as a prototype of the Christ sacrifice, and this theme continues throughout the Middle Ages. Peter of Abelard perhaps makes the most vibrant interpretation. He depicts Jephthah as crazed and the daughter as a courageous hero.[58] In a distinctive move, Isidore of Seville claims the team of Jephthah and his daughter

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[54] Origen, "Origen, Commentary on the Gospel of John 6.278". *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel* in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Series, ed. John R. Franke. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 138.

[55] Augustine, "Augustine, Questions on Judges," 138–139.

[56] John Chrysostom, "Chrysostom, Homilies Concerning the Statues," *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel* in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Series, ed. John R. Franke. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 139.

[57] Ambrose, "Ambrose, Duties of the Clergy 3.12," *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel* in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Series, ed. John R. Franke. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 140.

[58] Thompson, *Reception History,* 17.

represent Christ as both the one who sacrifices and the one who is sacrificed.[59] It is a much lesser known and later theologian, Denys the Carthusian, who later puts the typological emphasis specifically on the suffering of the Messiah, and also will accentuate the positive role of the daughter's friends.[60] As it is distinct from all others, Thompson calls Denys' reading one of sympathy for the daughter.[61]

Reformers

The Reformation era offers little commentary on Judges 11 explicitly, but many reformers' work on other biblical passages play host to more dialogue concerning Jephthah. Particularly, Jephthah is seen as both heroic and misguided in his steadfast obedience, and the daughter is viewed as heroic in regard to her father. These tropes from centuries ago remain popular in reformed authors today. Many Reformation writers read the daughter as "desirous to appease and mitigate his sorrow," as Arthur Jackson says, or even assume that she "dies without issue."[62] While Jephthah is portrayed as ignorant and foolish, his daughter seems to shine in the Reformation era with "excellent courage" and such "a rare pattern of obedience that few men's examples in the Bible may compare."[63]

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[59] Thompson, *Reception History,* 18.

[60] Thompson, *Reception History,* 19.

[61] Thompson, *Reception History,* 20.

[62] *Joshua, Judges, Ruth,* Reformation Commentary on Scripture Series, ed. N. Scott Amos (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 376–7.

[63] *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 377.

Richard Rogers says he will not even hold her "nature nor sex" against her because she was "so filled with grace."[64]

Unfortunately, no commentary portions or sermons on Judges 11 survive from Martin Bucer or John Calvin, however they both comment on Jephthah in connection to other biblical texts.[65] In his commentary on the epistles to the Hebrews, Calvin says,

> Jephthah rushed headlong into making a foolish vow and was over-obstinate in performing, and thereby marred a fine victory with the cruel death of his daughter. In every saint there is always found something reprehensible. Nevertheless although faith may be imperfect and incomplete it does not cease to be approved by God.[66]

Here Calvin implies that though Jephthah commits a 'reprehensible' act, it has divine sanction. In the *Institutes* he goes further to say that the death of the daughter is punishment to Jephthah for his vow.[67] Calvin also makes the move found in all generations: to focus on the act of vow-making. He is not against vows in a general sense, but he uses Jephthah's rash vow to argue specifically against vows of celibacy.[68] In a noticeably divergent opinion for his time, Peter Martyr Vermigli differs from the consensus about the sacrifice pleasing God, and he is both certain and explicit that Jephthah sinned.[69]

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[64] *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 377.

[65] N. Scott Amos, "'Do to Me According to What has Gone Out of Your Mouth': A Reformation Debate on the tragedy of Jephthah and His Daughter," in *Reformation & Renaissance Review* vol. 21 no.1, (2019), 17.

[66] John Calvin, *Hebrews and I and II Peter,* Calvin's New Testament Commentaries. trans. W.B. Johnston (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), 182.

[67] Calvin, *Institutes,* 4.13.3.

[68] Gunn, *Judges*, 142.

[69] Amos, "'Do to Me According to What has Gone Out of Your Mouth,' 19. cf Vermigli *In Librum Iudicum,* 141.

Martin Luther is also clear that Jephthah sinned by fulfilling his vow. Thompson notes that while Luther is one of the few in the Reformation period to comment on Judges 11, he does so very sparingly and mostly seems to be rehashing Augustine.[70] Luther finds comparison between Jephthah's daughter and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 14, arguing that if Jonathan could be released from his father's vow, Jephthah's daughter deserved the same. Luther sees the vow as impious and dishonorable to the law, arguing that any righteous person would have tried to dissuade him from keeping it. While Luther believed the sacrifice of the daughter was literal in the ending of her life, the later Lutheran consensus has become that she only had to sacrifice her potential for marrying; perhaps this was Jephthah's intention or perhaps it was his concession to save her mortal life.[71] Luther does make an interesting theological move, reordering the events of the narrative and asserting that Jephthah's vow came before the Spirit came upon him.[72]

Early Evangelical Influences

As British nonconformist preaching made its way to the United States, there was a different style and goal for the homiletical approach, and as such called for a different hermeneutical approach. Homilies made use of story-telling long before 'narrative criticism' became popular in the academy and in the United States during the 1700s led

[70] John L. Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs: Women in the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 155.

[71] Thompson, *Reception History,* 21.

[72] Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs,* 156. Thompson makes a striking note that, while Luther never mentions this connection himself, there is an interesting correlation in that Luther himself was no stranger to making a rash vow, at the age of twenty-one committing himself to monastic vocation in what Thompson calls a "thunderstorm-induced vow." cf. Luther, *Tischreden* 2753a.

to a type of revival of enthused preaching. The fervor of Matthew Henry's commentaries, John Wesley's applications, and Jonathon Edwards' oration have influenced generations of Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal preaching for generations including later popular animated revivalists like George Whitefield, Aimee Semple McPherson, and Billy Graham who were focused on change of heart.

The popularity of Matthew Henry's commentaries for twentieth century evangelicals beckons a look, and it makes clear the opinion of its namesake concerning Judges 11. Interestingly, in his "complete" series the introductory abstract for chapter 11 does not once mention the daughter or Jephthah's sacrifice. Henry's explanation of the events sanitizes the text in favor of a positive moral application and turns the daughter into a model icon for notions absent from the text. Ultimately Henry determines that Jephthah did literally sacrifice his daughter, although he says Jephthah should not have. The path Henry takes to this conclusion, however, is problematic. He contradicts himself by stating both that "there was no remedy" for the vow, and also that Jephthah was simply not bound to vow because it violated the sixth commandment.

Like so many authors, Henry focuses on an orthopraxic reading for application, principles of vow-making, and the model piety of the daughter. He lists eight "good lessons" to be learned from the chapter, including that all vows to God must be fulfilled and that "it well becomes children obediently and cheerfully to submit to their parents in the Lord."[73] He also adds that the daughter thought it an honor to die for the well-being of her people and considered her death a "thank-offering," as "she cheerfully submitted to

[73] Matthew Henry, "Judges," *Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary (complete),* vol. 2, Joshua to Esther (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 195–198.

the performance."[74] Troubling also is Henry's quoting of "*volenti non sit injuria"*—that no injury is done to a person as long as he or she is consenting to the action.[75] The issue of consent brings up many questions, not just for the narrative, but for application today. How old was this daughter? As a minor, perhaps, or even if a woman, was it at all possible in her patriarchal society to dissent? Is "consent" ever truly consent when it is demanded from the other side of a power/authority difference?

John Wesley says unfortunately little concerning Judges 11. In his *Notes on the Bible,* Wesley's single note on Hebrews 11:32 is that "Jephthah escaped the edge of the sword."[76] He follows, admittedly, in the footsteps of Matthew Poole and agrees that it gave birth to the legend of Iphigenia since the Greeks "used to steal sacred stories."[77] Wesley plainly states that "Jephthah's daughter was not sacrificed, but only devoted to perpetual virginity."[78] Wesley's elaboration comes by way of extending what the daughter meant when she said "do unto me what you have vowed." He says she meant: "Do not for my sake make thyself a transgressor; I freely give my consent to thy vow."[79] One might have hoped that he whose heart was 'strangely warmed' would have been moved to make more of this story.

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[74] Henry, "Judges," 196.

[75] Henry, "Judges," 197.

[76] John Wesley, "Hebrews 11," *Bible Commentary Notes.* https://ccel.org/ccel/wesley/notes/notes.i.xx.xii.html.

[77] Wesley, "Judges 11."

[78] Wesley, "Judges 11." His reasoning is that her virginity is her cause for lamentation.

[79] Wesley, "Judges 11."

Jonathan Edwards makes it plain that he is against the daughter's death.[80] His rationale, however, is a bit different than anything noted yet. One of Edward's reasons is simply that the situation is so horrific, God would not have allowed it. This presses one to ask or assume much about the multitude of horrific things that have happened, both then and now, and also how this interacts with Edward's famous *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.* Gunn says that "Edwards was deeply wedded to typology serving a Christo-centric evangelical faith. Like many others, Edwards badly needed a less heinous outcome."[81] Gunn also says that for Edwards the biggest hang-up is the tie to Hebrews 11 which he understood to mean the most important thing was obedience and therefore Jephthah had divine approval.[82] While Wesley, Edwards, and Henry took different approaches, one can still see their convictions in Pentecostalism's reception history of Judges 11.

Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism is worth noting not only because of the size of the pentecostal-charismatic global church, but also because of Pentecostalism's distinct approach to the Bible. Pentecostals are not often in danger of neglecting or rejecting a text. Their risk, rather, may be protecting a text. The insistence on the voice of God to speak through the Bible, especially when coupled with Evangelical doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy, can lead Pentecostal readers to take the entire canon literally, positively, and often prescriptively.

[80] Gunn, *Judges*, 149.

[81] Gunn, *Judges*, 150.

[82] Gunn, *Judges*, 145.

Oftentimes Pentecostal readers cannot distinguish between a voice in the text and the voice of God speaking through the text. This leads to a proclivity to sanitize the passage or to force a positive reading of it. When it comes to Judges, Pentecostalism is drawn to the action of the Spirit and to the vibrant narratives, but theologically, there is a hard time reconciling how the Spirit could empower persons with such unsanctified personal lives. Pentecostal scholar Lee Roy Martin says, "We have mixed feelings about the charismatic heroes who journey into the extraordinary as the Spirit of the Lord moves upon them, but who wander into failure as they follow their faulty desires."[83]

The impetus to read for orthopraxy has often led Pentecostals to dangerous conclusions. The number one application of this text for Pentecostal denominations was orthopraxical: to prohibit dancing. Sermons and articles cite Batshama's customary homecoming welcome as an example of the "evil uses of the power of music and dancing."[84] A prominent twentieth-century Pentecostal leader wrote that Jephthah and his daughter are great role models for contemporary Christians. He says, "Let honor rest with that splendid girl! How noble! Her submission is one of the most touching examples in the Bible. Let honor rest with Jephthah! He did not draw back from doing what hurt him most, if it meant fulfilling a promise made to God."[85] A 1961 *Pentecostal Evangel* extrapolates five suggestions in light of the chapter's "practical considerations,"

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[83] Lee Roy Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God: A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges,* Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplemental Series. (Dorset, UK: Deo Publishing, 2008), 5.

[84] Phil Kerr, "Music in Evangelism," *The Foursquare Magazine* vol. 30 no. 5 (May 1957), 19.

[85] Charles, W. Conn, "An Estimation of Vows, *The Church of God Evangel* vol. 37, no. 47 (Cleveland, TN: The Church of God Publishing House, 1947), 5.

including that “Jephthah’s fidelity was pleasing to God.”[86] Of the daughter, the author continues: “Notice her unquestioning obedience, parental respect, and self-forgetful devotion to that which is right! What an example to children young and old today!”[87] A 1967 *Evangel* celebrates the June edition as “Children’s evangelism month” and ironically selects Judges 11—19 as the texts to read with children and talk about “God’s word.” The article features an image of a young family sitting around the Bible together smiling.[88]

Yet many Pentecostal scholars today are willing to struggle with terrors of the text, and to see that struggle itself as fulfilling divine purpose for both reader and text. The Pentecostal hermeneutic of “Spirit-Word” says that God can speak to the reader even if God is silent in the text, and because of this, that the community can still make meaning from texts that are troublesome.[89] This type of reading evokes the creation story and the Spirit who still hovers creativity over that which is void and chaos, waiting to bring new life from the dark deep. Rickie Moore’s contribution of Pentecostal reading as an “altar hermeneutic”[90] and Cheryl John’s emphasis on brooding with the Spirit in

[86] Bashford Bishop, “Jephthah, A Zealous Leader,” *The Church of God Evangel* vol. 15, no. 14 (Cleveland, TN: The Church of God Publishing House, 1961), 14.

[87] Bishop, “Jephthah, A Zealous Leader,” 14. Yet surely this example is not necessary to teach children to obey their parents. And what might this say for children whose parents are not righteous?

[88] “Read the Word,” *Pentecostal Evangel* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, June 1967), 11.

[89] Using feminist and Pentecostal hermeneutics, Abby Greves zeroes in on Jephthah and Batshama, offering us that as Spirit-Word we can read the daughter as being courageous instead of simply victimized. She notes that the daughter’s voice critiques her father, and that in her self-sacrifice of child-bearing, she actually mothers all women to come. See, Abigail Greves, “Daughter of Courage: Reading Judges 11 with a Feminist Pentecostal Hermeneutic. *JPT* 25 (2016) 151–167. My fear is that Greves has still sanitized the text, and has not filtered the story through the lens of a Christocentric pathos.

[90] Rickie Moore, “Altar Hermeneutics: Reflections of Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation,” *PNUEMA* 38, no. 2 (2016): 148–159.

troubling texts,[91] have laid a foundation for the reader to see herself as the subject being interpreted in scriptural engagement. Especially with troubling texts, Christians learn to wrestle with the Bible, therein wrestling with God and also with the self. Chris Green's latest work reinforces this hermeneutic by offering that when we suffer through Scripture we suffer with Christ, and this process sanctifies us by re-ordering our loves.[92]

Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Commentaries

Since Judges 11 is not found in most lectionaries, homiletical helps almost never make even a reference to the narrative. The pericope is, of course, covered in biblical commentaries on the book of Judges, and commentary series are what most evangelical pastors pull from for sermon aid. Other theological texts written on the topic of violence and the Hebrew Bible also often work with the Jephthah story. A recent attraction toward "tricky texts" has brought a bit more attention to Judges.[93] A sampling of these materials is helpful to understand the connotations surrounding Judges 11 today. John C. Yoder says, "Because the figures in Judges are unacceptable companions for people espousing contemporary Western values, they have been ignored, or worse yet, recreated in a way

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[91] Cheryl Bridges Johns, "Grieving, Brooding, and Transforming: The Spirit, the Bible, and Gender," *JPT* 23 (2014): 147–152.

[92] Chris Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness and Scripture*, Cleveland, TN: 2nd ed. CPT Press, 2020.

[93] For example, see *Wrestling with the Word: Preaching Tricky Texts.* eds. Kate Bruce and Jamie Harrison. (London: SPCK), 2016.

that is less jarring for modern sensibilities."[94] Nonetheless, the story is still jarring and sometimes the perspectives on it are even more so.

One of the ways that modern commentaries try to make sense of this "jarring" story is by offering that the daughter survives the vow. They posit Jephthah does not take her life in death, but rather, that her sacrifice is that of devotion to God, similar to a Nazarite vow. She must remain a virgin and abide in temple service all her days. This argument can be made grammatically, rhetorically, or theologically. This reading has been made in Christian interpretation since Nicholas of Lyra in the twelfth century, and was especially popular in Puritan communities.[95] The majority of recent commentaries speak of the storyline of Judges as something akin to a "downward spiral" for which the Jephthah story is a key portrait for representing societal decline.

Klaas Spronk compares Judges 11 with the stories of Gideon and Abimelech and also Saul and Jonathan. Ultimately Spronk argues that Judges is written with Kings in mind, and that the Jephthah story should be read as "a call for a better leader: one who does not put the life of his child at stake on dubious grounds."[96] Further, he beckons for it to become a text that calls one's community, even one's children, to correct foolish leadership.[97] The inclination to read for intertextuality has become a helpful theological

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[94] John Yoder, *Power and Politics in the Book of Judges: Men and Women of Valor* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 5–6.

[95]Gunn, *Judges,* 141. Gunn interestingly notes that while the daughter's "survival" interpretation continues throughout Christianity, the medieval manuscript and Renaissance illuminators always depict her literal death.

[96] Klaas Spronk, "Jephthah and Saul: An Intertextual Reading of Judges 11:29–40" *Hebrew Texts in Jewish, Christian and Muslim Surroundings.* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2018), 35.

[97] Spronk, "Jephthah and Saul," 35. Spronk notes a comparison of Jephthah's daughter to Jonathan who criticizes his father's vow in 1 Samuel 14.

move in some ways but, like the characters of Judges, most commentators today still follow in the ways of their forefathers. Some still wish to ameliorate the text.

In the Westminster Bible Commentary series, Carolyn Pressler says, "To be sure, the themes of divine justice and divine mercy continue," as she focuses on Israel in the pericope rather than the father and daughter.[98] Interestingly, Pressler comments that "the pathos of the situation is increased" by the fact that the sacrifice will be his only child.[99] While he does of course rend his clothing and say he "has been brought very low," Pressler makes another observation: while the daughter accepts the vow and her fate, she does not accept the blame that her father put upon her. The daughter reminds him, "You have opened your mouth to the LORD."[100] She concludes her commentary on Judges 11 by ultimately saying scholarship is split on whether or not Jephthah was a righteous man, and both sides still offer Christian perspectives. While perhaps unhelpful, it is still more useful than the Cambridge Bible Commentary Series that simply says nothing in regard to the vow or the daughter's fate.[101]

Some commentaries make interesting assumptions that one would have a hard time proving historically or even theoretically to presume. Among these is Cyril J. Barber who paints Jephthah as a very righteous man based upon his additions to the textual narrative. He states, "After his daughter's birth, Jephthah's wife was unable to bear him

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[98] Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth,* The Westminster Bible Companion Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox), 2002.

[99] Pressler, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth,* 203.

[100] Pressler, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth,* 204.

[101] James D. Martin, *The Book of Judges* in The Cambridge Bible Commentary Series (New York: Cambridge University Press), 1975.

other children. Instead of following the culture of his day and taking other wives or concubines… he contented himself with his little family."[102] Barber is also an example of male-centered reading. Of the daughter's grief for the loss of her future, Barber writes she expresses "sorrow over never being able to give her father a grandson."[103] In the Word Biblical Commentary series, Trent Butler carries out a well-rounded approach, but has a glaring patriarchal misstep. In comparing Judges 11 to the *akedah*, Butler points out as many authors do that God did not mandate this sacrifice, therefore God does not intervene. He ties this to God's non-coercive love, but only in regard to Jephthah. He says, "It shows that God in his love will not coerce obedience."[104] It seems this love does not apply to the daughter or her obedience would not have been demanded.

Tammi Schneider takes a different approach in her book in the Berit Olam series. She focuses on the daughter, but not as merely an instrument of reproductive value. Rather, she argues that by the arc of the narrative of Judges, the emphasis is not on women as mothers, but rather focuses on sexuality. The overarching connection to the other women in the text, therefore, is that there is a link of her sexual status to her death, as opposed to her loss of birthing a child.[105] By again comparing her to the other women in Judges, Butler notes that in male-female interactions, "the one who speaks wisely

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[102] Cyril J. Barber, *Judges: A Narrative of God's Power* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 149. There is, however, no historical backing for this whatsoever.

[103] Barber, *Judges,* 149.

[104] Trent Butler, *Judges* in World Biblical Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 292. This is the same argument Daniel Stulac makes in chapter 5 of his book, *Gift of the Grotesque: A Christological Companion to the Book of Judges,* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books), 2022.

[105] Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* in Berit Olam (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Inc., 2001), 181–182.

when Yahweh's rule is at stake is a woman."[106] This does not, however, explicitly extend to Batshama herself.

In the Biblical Illustrator series, author Joseph Exell adds to the biblical text by calling Jephthah's mother "a wicked mother, a woman of abandoned character… his childhood must have been very dreary. No good example, no holy home, no mother's affection."[107] Exell also makes an interesting application of this text for Christians. He uses the example of Jephthah saying he cannot go back on his vow to state that Christians "cannot apostatise the faith" after having "opened our mouth to the Lord" and "avowing to be His disciples".[108] For Exell, the daughter becomes the Christian exemplar:

> think of her– how pure, how unworldly, how unselfish, how noble in Spirit! Think of her patriotism, think of her self-sacrifice, that you may also abhor all that is mean and selfish, and worldly and untruthful; and that you may cease to grudge the sacrifices your Father in heaven requires in love and wisdom, and for your own deliverance and safety.[109]

Exell is concerned for the "deliverance and safety" of his parishioners, but not for– or perhaps even at the expense of– the woman in the text. He gives her no agency at all; indeed for Exell every mention of sacrifice is credited to the father. To him, she is but a possession of her father, his object to do with as he sees fit, and therefore Exell can also

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[106] Butler, *Judges,* 209. Here he notes Deborah, Jael, Manoah's wife, and in similar fashion, Hannah and Michal in 1 and 2 Samuel respectively.

[107] Joseph Exell, *Deuteronomy-Judges*, The Biblical Illustrator Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing House, 1975), 177.

[108] Exell, *Deuteronomy-Judges,* 181–182.

[109] Exell, *Deuteronomy-Judges*, 183.

do with her as he sees fit. Ultimately, Exell uses her to give parenting advice and to praise the Christlikeness of Jephthah.[110]

The Latest Offerings and Sermons

In the last twenty years, the story of Judges 11 has become a kind of archetype for biblical scholars in dealing with difficult or uncomfortable texts. "As sad as it is notorious," John Thompson calls it.[111] Like most contemporary theologians, Thompson advises that although the text offers no rebuke of this narrative, it is hard to imagine the story as endorsed. It is the citing of Jephthah in Hebrews 11 as a hero, however, that makes these matters difficult for Christians. After doing a reception history of his own, Thompson makes a fascinating move: using Judges 11 as a type of 'poster child' for the need for reception history. As he acknowledges that "this tale bewilders everyone," is purposefully omitted from lectionaries, and hardly a reasonable sermon text, Thompson says reception history of this pericope ends up commending it for worthwhile study.[112] Thompson says a reception history allows us to see how the story elicits probing questions for faith and allows the community of faith to fill a void of silence in the Bible. From the pre-critical period, one can find both sympathies to and the obvious need for the feminist theories that will develop. It seems that Thompson wants to say that even if the

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[110] Joseph Samuel Exell (b. 1849) was a Wesleyan minister and the author or editor of four extremely popular Biblical commentary series geared for preachers: *The Biblical Illustrator*, *Men of the Bible*, *The Preacher's Homiletical Commentary*, and *The Pulpit Commentary*. He also edited and contributed to *Clerical World, Homiletical Quarterly,* and *Interpretation Monthly.* These seven works widely reached across Anglican and Evangelical circles, both in Britain and the US.

[111] Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs,* 100.

[112] Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs,* 10.

Bible does not tell us what to do with the story, reception history shows us what we do *not* want to do with it.

Pamela Tamarkin Reis starts her chapter on Judges 11 with a story of a women's bible study struggling with this text. She describes what the women ask, feel, and surmise. She herself summons an image of the daughter that is that of a spoiled child. Reis imagines that the daughter *did* know of the vow before she danced out, never envisioning that she might be held to anything against her own desires. Viewing the daughter as a prototype for a spoiled child, Reis works to make sense of the oddities of the story. Her father seems shocked and is angry at her when he sees her because he cannot believe she would proceed after knowing of the vow.[113] She makes a ridiculous demand that her father concedes to.[114] She is not literally burned to death, but rather gets to continue for the rest of her life as a pampered girl without responsibilities. Reis concludes that although the daughter appears powerless to the modern reader, she has ultimately manipulated her father and that is worthy of her girlfriends' commemoration.[115]

Barbara Miller uses the story of Judges 11 to bring ancient Jewish Midrash and contemporary feminist theology into conversation. She demonstrates similar hermeneutic methods in the rabbinic style. She notes the feminist values that are displayed in the Midrash: concern for justice, female bonding, compassion, responsibility, respect to

[113] Pamela Tamarkin Reis, *Reading the Lines* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 117.

[114] Reis, *Reading the Lines,* 120.

[115] Reis, *Reading the Lines,* 130.

tradition, and commitment to liberation.[116] Miller brings about another collaboration, something she calls "modern midrash." She draws contemporary Jewish midrash alongside the theological musings of her own students. By causing these two streams of imagination to dance together, Miller's work takes part in the continuation of the young women's commemoration of their friend.[117] Ultimately, time spent with Jephthah and his daughter causes the modern reader to have greater sensitivity to not only the Scriptures, but to issues of justice in the world of the reader.

In *Wrestling with the Word: Preaching Tricky Texts,* Richard Briggs offers a short homily on Judges 11.[118] His premise is that this biblical narrative is supposed to make the reader tremble. His sermon opens with, "Welcome to Lent… Meet Jephthah," and therein immediately sets the tone of the homily to match that of the text. He paints the ancient scene with modern day story-telling elements, and supplements the background with contemporary noises and sounds.[119] Briggs also updates the story by interweaving the liturgy with it:

> Time freezes… It's his daughter.
> Kyrie eleison– Lord have mercy–
> Christe eleison– Christ have mercy–
> Kyrie eleison– Lord have mercy–[120]

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[116] Barbara Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain: The Daughter of Jephthah in Judges 11* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 100–104.

[117] Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain*. See chapter 7, "Modern Midrash– An Ongoing Dialogue," 106–119.

[118] Richard Briggs, "Terrifying," in *Wrestling with the Word: Preaching Tricky Texts.* ed. by Kate Bruce and Jamie Harrison. (London: SPCK), 2016.

[119] For example, "There's the sound of tambourines and CNN is on in the background…" in Briggs, "Terrifying," 65.

[120] Briggs, "Terrifying," 67.

In retelling the story, Briggs uses his sermon to talk about the Bible itself and how it is that an ancient book can speak to modern lives.

In April 2020, a Baptist professor and pastor, Brian Kaylor, used Judges 11 to extol communities not to follow their governors who were re-opening businesses after initial lockdowns and stay-in-place orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Kaylor referred to the governors of Georgia and Texas as "Governor Jephthahs," who were impiously committed to the rash reopening plans, even if it meant sacrificing the vulnerable. He urges pastors not to return to in-person services, saying,

> And while the text in Judges doesn't say if anyone criticized or protested Jephthah's plan, we have that freedom in our society. Love of our neighbors demands we not follow our political Jephthahs in a rash move to reopen… Let's not join our politicians in sacrificing the vulnerable. Just because a Governor Jephthah made a rash vow to reopen doesn't mean we must also turn our pews into bloody altars in the Valley of Hinnom.[121]

Analysis

One can see that history provides a true mosaic of biblical, theological, and homiletical scholarship in regard to Judges 11. Perhaps most notable is the male-centered reading lens. Of all the works sampled in this chapter, I would argue that only three are concerned with the daughter in any way that is not simply using her as a prop in her father's story, and those three sources are written by women in the last twenty-five years.[122] Of the remaining sources in this chapter, only one levies that the sacrifice (not to

[121] Brian Kaylor, "Don't Let Governor Jephthah Sacrifice Innocent Lives" wordandway.org April 29, 2020. https://wordandway.org/2020/04/29/dont-let-governor-jephthah-sacrifice-innocent-lives/.

[122] Those authors are Tammi Schneider, Pamela Tamarkin Reis, and Barbara Miller.

be confused with the vow) of the daughter was sin, and that is Peter Martyr Vermigli. It seems that the attention the daughter does receive is to ‘pietize’ her, praising her for selflessly “[making] light of her own life like a noble heroine,”[123] and then implicitly or explicitly becoming a model for women or children. While the majority of the approaches we examined in the chapter were focused of Jephthah’s ethics, they usually are readings focused on orthodoxy, making claims about God and God’s desires that are not in the biblical pericope. The exception to this is the early Pentecostal readings which do take a direct orthopraxical approach regarding dancing and child behavior.

Ultimately, we see that the renderings of Judges 11 leave little to love. This is not to say however, that these sources are not trying to inform or direct our loves as Christian readers. There is flamboyant pathos and imagination in the content and style of many of these authors. Such passion and creativity, however, bear some of the worst misogyny that biblical studies has to offer. It is no wonder that after reading religious literature like that surveyed, some women reject the Bible as patriarchal and find Christianity to be a religion of oppression. Intersecting with the Christian savior does not ‘fix’ these ‘Old Testament’ sorrows. In fact, the pairing often makes a Christian application even more problematic. The majority of the works in this chapter can be sited as examples of what feminist scholars were up against, and they mostly demonstrate the striking contrast against the work for which Phyllis Trible pioneered the path.

[123] Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, 196.

CHAPTER 3

THE FEMINIST AND WOMANIST RECEPTION OF JUDGES 11 FROM TRIBLE TO TODAY

> The father owns her absolutely, having even her life at his disposal. We often hear people laud the beautiful submission and the self-sacrifice of this nameless maiden. To me it is pitiful and painful. I would that this page of history were gilded with a dignified whole-souled rebellion. I would have had the daughter receive the father's confession with a stern rebuke, saying, 'I will not consent to such a sacrifice.'
>
> –Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Women's Bible,* 1895

Not All Women-centered Readings are Created Equally

In his book *Preaching Judges,* Joseph Jeter said, "If it were not for feminist scholars, I suspect that Judges would be all but ignored today."[124] The burgeoning of women in biblical and theological scholarship and homiletical practice has produced a new and rapid interest in female characters, feminist hermeneutics, and women-focused application over the last fifty years. This shift in academic attention has provided a new platform for the women of Judges, and specifically yielded regard in the 1980s thanks to Phyllis Trible, and, in more recent years, thanks to postcolonial readings.

When reading in biblical scholarship, one must remember that works by and for women are not all created equally. Vast theological and hermeneutical differences cause "women's readings" to vary drastically. A survey of women's readings of Judges 11 demonstrates profound discrepancies, some variances occur within the feminist spectrum and some prove outside it altogether. This chapter will demonstrate the differences of

[124] Joseph Jeter, *Preaching Judges* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 2.

women-centered approaches for Judges 11, then survey the work of Phyllis Trible and other early feminist scholars, move to womanist readings, and conclude by surveying interdisciplinary approaches.

The reception history of Judges 11 demonstrates that a woman-centered approach to the Jephthah and daughter narrative can both be guided by and can produce theology that either helps women flourish or, conversely, potentially brings them harm. Being woman-centered is not the same thing as deconstructing patriarchal dominance. Many of the works surveyed in the last chapter give prominence to and even exalt the female character, but do it in a way that only reinforces patriarchal values, theology, and hermeneutics. The woman is exalted in a way that victimizes her further and glorifies her subordination. Cheryl Exum has argued this is the reason Jephthah's daughter is remembered so often and in such favorable fashion, saying that "Praising the victim can, however, be as dangerous as blaming the victim."[125]

To this point, Exum compares the unnamed daughter to the Daughter of Saul, Michal, in 2 Sam 6. Both women are minor characters, known only for their relation to the men about whom the stories are really about. Their stories are strikingly similar: they both depict the danger women experience outside the home as they publicly become entangled with the powerful men in their lives. Both stories are concluded with notes on their childlessness. Yet Exum points out that, unlike Jephthah's daughter, Michal

[125]Cheryl Exum, "Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative." *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts,* ed. Alice Bach. (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 60.

"unflinchingly asserts herself,"[126] and is not deterred by the "futility of protest."[127] Jephthah's daughter can be laudably commemorated in patriarchal Church memory because she offered no rebuke of the patriarchal system. Michal, however, did and therefore is reduced to a reproachful woman and remembered unsympathetically. Exum summarizes the often unnoticed bias: "Submission is rewarded; opposition, punished."[128]

Christians must acknowledge that the 'reward' or 'punishment' of women from biblical narrative is often not contained to the women *in* the narrative. Hermeneutical means for the biblical text have a fast way of becoming applicatory to those around us. That is to say, how one judges a woman in the Bible can become a standard for how one judges the women around them. This can be honorific; this can be horrific. Exalting the female character in the text is not inherently a feminist move, nor does it ensure a feminist reading or application. Works written by women or explicitly for women likewise do not ensure feminist hermeneutics.

InterVarsity Press (IVP) offers a *Woman's Bible Commentary* that allows us to see this distinct difference. The focus of the commentary and its theological application are centered upon redeeming Jephthah as an "example of faithfulness to God."[129] Jephthah is described as "an outlaw bandit with every reason to have sadism in his psyche [who] engages in diplomatic initiatives on the basis of historical background and

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[126] Exum, "Murder They Wrote, 45.

[127] Exum, "Murder They Wrote, 55.

[128] Exum, "Murder They Wrote," 59.

[129] Alish Ferguson Eves, *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary.* eds. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 139.

careful, Yahweh-centered reasoning."[130] When the daughter dances to meet him, the commentary author says it is "the end of all *his* joy, the end of *his* hopes for a future and a name, for descendants to carry on *his* memory."[131] Even what is said of her really is about him.

The commentary goes beyond being male-centered to offer an affective reading from the father's perspective. The author describes: "As he tells his daughter [of his vow] he treats her as a person in her own right, loved by him."[132] His disposition toward the daughter is assumed and is positively reinforced. The commentary offers further means of affective narratology in regard to the text itself, arguing, "The narrative intent is to arouse pity for such a misdirected but honorable father and admiration for such a loving and obedient daughter."[133] Again, here we have nothing akin to the feminist task of hearing the voice of the daughter. The IVP Women's Commentary remains father-centered and honors the woman only for her relationship to the man. She is glorified in her victimization.

As feminist Bible scholars have pointed out, the glorification of women's victimization is closely linked to glorification of their sexuality. Athalya Brenner observes that we readers are often eager to fill the Bible's "gaps" when it comes to female characters, and have regularly done so with overly sexualized and stereotyped

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130 Eves, *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary,* 138.

131 Eves, *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary,* 139. Italics my own.

132 Eves, *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, 139.

133 Eves, *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, 139.

details of the female form.[134] While there is nothing relationally sexual in the text between father and daughter, the emphasis on her virginity has led readers to make erotic claims about her for centuries. This is perhaps no better on display than in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Women in Sacred History* wherein she offers a collection of famous poems about Jephthah's daughter. The first lines of Nathaniel Parker Willis' poem declare,

She stood before her father's gorgeous tent,
To listen for his coming. Her loose hair
Was resting on her shoulders, like a cloud
Floating around a statute, and the wind,
Just swaying her light robe, reveal'd a shape
Praxiteles might worship. She had clasp'd
Her hands upon her bosom, and had raised
Her beautiful, dark, Jewish eyes to heaven,
Till the long lashes lay upon her brow.[135]

While nothing is known textually or historically regarding the daughter's age, appearance, or disposition, liberties are often taken to eroticize her. What is further interesting about Stowe's collection of poems is that they demonstrate the move from mere erotic and physical depiction, to physical assumptions that make affective or even theological claims. Lines of Lord Byron's "Song of Jephthah's Daughter" read:

Since thy triumph was bought by thy vow—
Strike the bosom that's bared for thee now!...

If the hand that I love lay me low.
There cannot be pain in the blow!...

[134] Athalya Brenner, "Afterword," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 231–235.

[135] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Women in Sacred History: A Series of Sketches Drawn from Scriptural, Historical, and Legendary Sources.* (New York: Fords, Howard, and Hulbert, 1873), 127.

I have won the great battle for thee!
And my father and country are free….

Forget not I smiled as I died.[136]

Not only is her body romanticized, so are her emotions, motives, and actions. As Louisa Southworth said in 1895, "So much glamor has been thrown by poetry and song, over the sacrifice of this Jewish maiden, that the popular mind has become too benumbed to perceive its great injustice."[137] In the reception history of feminist literature that is now to come, we shall see quite a different route taken.

Phyllis Trible

Phyllis Trible and her 1984 book, *Texts of Terror,* forever changed the landscape for feminist and literary readings of biblical texts in general, not only the story of Jephthah's daughter or the other three biblical narratives the book explores. Trible sees her "pilgrimage of storytelling" as a partner to its predecessor, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality.*[138] For decades now, her methods have demanded that scholars pay attention to details regarding women in the Scripture that were largely overlooked. Recently her methods for "texts of terror" have been extended to other portions of Scripture, not simply those explicitly containing violence done to women.

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[136] Stowe, *Women in Sacred History*, 130.

[137] Louisa Southworth, *The Woman's Bible,* 27.

[138] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* xiv.

Her rhetoric-based process allows her to offer a reader-response-like approach that is not wholly dependent on the world of the reader. There is no doubt that Trible saw her work not simply as an act of uncovering history, but also as a prophetic aid for the church in changing history.[139] She understood that the terrors of these texts were not contained in history, and therefore they were worthy of being explored for those women therein *and* women in the contemporary world. Though she does not devote much length to this process, she suggests that by encountering the horrors of these tales, we might also encounter something divine and thereby be changed. In the introduction, she names the Genesis 32 story of Jacob's wrestling at Jabbok as "a paradigm for encountering terror," and, therefore, as a model for her methodology.[140] Yet, Trible was not under any illusions of false hope that encountering these stories would guarantee peace or comfort. She remarks, "as we leave the land of terror, we limp."[141]

Trible writes "in memoriam" of the four women her chosen Biblical texts are centered around. Her goal, therefore, is not to "resurrect" them, not even in light of the resurrection of Christ. Her way of reading is pure lament. She says bluntly at the beginning: "Sad stories do not have happy endings."[142] While she does connect the texts of terror to the story of Christ, she warns strictly against a Christian chauvinism that is triumphalist. She argues against redeeming the story, and, rather, argues for redeeming

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[139] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 3. Feminism, Trible says, inherently critiques the status quo, "pronouncing judgment and calling for repentance."

[140] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 4.

[141] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 5.

[142] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 2.

the time.[143] This means bringing to light the details in the stories of these abused women that have been forgotten, neglected, or repudiated. By doing so, something ironic occurs: in being terrified *by* them, we do not have to be afraid *of* them.

After chapters on Hagar in Genesis 16 and 21, Tamar in I Samuel 13, and the Unnamed Woman in Judges 19, Trible finally turns in her last chapter to Judges 11 and the story of Jephthah's Daughter. Trible retells the story in scenes, paying attention to the rhetoric in Hebrew, implicit theological statements, repetition, and geographical identifiers. Importantly, she reads Jephthah's vow not simply as a rash act, but as an act of unfaithfulness and doubt. She interprets that, "Jephthah desires to bind God rather than embrace the gift of the Spirit."[144] She places the daughter's greeting "in the ancient and noble company of women" who have danced to receive men home from war like Miriam and the throngs of women who greeted Kings David and Saul.[145] She contrasts the characters of Judges 11 with those of the Akedah, noting the discrepancies of faith and of family.[146] Trible is probably the first to say that the father saying the daughter has 'brought him low' is victim shaming.[147] She names the daughter as both courageous and says that her desire to lament is not for her death, but rather, for her "unfulfilled life."[148]

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[143] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 3. This is, hopefully, what an orthopathic hermeneutic accomplishes.

[144] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 97.

[145] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 100.

[146] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 101–2.

[147] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 102.

[148] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 103–4.

Trible points out that while death is natural, the daughter's is unnatural because it is premature, violent, will leave no heir, and is premeditated murder.[149] She receives no solace in her death, yet Trible does draw out that she is not isolated as she spends her final days "in the company of other women who acknowledge her tragedy."[150] The silence of God, however, is noted. As Trible comments on the daughter drawing her final breath, she states, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken her?"[151] To conclude her insights on the text itself, Trible makes an interesting grammatical insight regarding the last verse of the pericope. Whereas it is often translated "*it* became a tradition," Trible notes that due to the gendered nature of Hebrew's pronouns, the feminine here being translated as 'it' is "certainly legitimate—but it may not be perceptive. Indeed grammar, content, and context provide compelling reasons for departing from this translation. After all, the preceding clause has *she* for the subject of its verb."[152] Trible herein argues that while the vow's sentence is not altered, the daughter's sisters have, essentially, produced an heir by establishing a recurrent memorial. *She* became a tradition.

To conclude her chapter, Trible offers remarks regarding the intertextuality of Judges 11 across the Scriptures, and finally, her own poem of memorial and lament. She notes that Jephthah is praised and his daughter is forgotten in the Old Testament,

[149] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 104.

[150] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 105.

[151] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 106.

[152] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 106.

Apocrypha, and New Testament.[153] She critiques the Scriptures, saying, “Unfaith has become faith. Thus has scripture violated the ancient story, and yet that story endures to this day for us to recover and appropriate.”[154] This leads her to call for readers' responses, imaginatively being able to offer a lament. She closes out her chapter by offering one herself, mourning the sacrifice of her “little sister” and beckoning all hearers of this story, “tell it… publish it…”[155]

Texts of Terror has not, of course, been without its critiques. Some scholars have accused Trible of not going far enough into the patriarchal critique for the feminist agenda, and Womanist scholars have criticized her for ignoring social factors aside from gender. These concerns and further uses of Trible's original insights have been recently addressed in the 2021 SBL publication *Terror in the Bible.*[156] Thirteen authors from across the globe offer chapters that expand Trible's methodology to reach across both Testaments and into interdisciplinary fields, addressing issues of race, class, sexuality, and trauma alongside gender and violence. In *Terror in the Bible,* Judges 11 is revisited by Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon to cross analyze Judges 11 with the Indian caste system by examining the possible psychological impact of Jephthah's heritage against that of

[153] In Judges 12, Jephthah goes on to lead more military victories, giving the Gileadites victory over the Epraimites, and judges the land for six years. In the New Testament, Hebrews 11:32 lists Jephthah as one who by faith was righteous, but says nothing of the daughter.

[154] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 108.

[155] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 108.

[156] *Terror in the Bible: Rhetoric, Gender, and Violence.* eds. Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon and Robyn J. Whitaker. (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press), 2021.

Dalit author Sharankumar Limbale.[157] Trible wrote the book's forward and commends the expansion of facing terrifying biblical texts, noting the profound impacts that such have had and may continue to have on people who allow the Spirit to appropriate them to their lives.

First Feminists Following Trible

Mieke Bal

Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal was the first to follow Trible and pick up Judges 11 from a feminist perspective, offering a narratological reading in her book *Death and Dissymmetry,* published in 1988.[158] Bal is the first to name the daughter of Jephthah, simply referring to her by her role as "Bath," the Hebrew transliteration of "daughter." Many scholars follow in Bal's naming footsteps, carrying on the same nomenclature, or as Cheryl Exum does, adding to it her father's name, specifying her by calling her, "Bat-jiftah."[159] Bal's primary focus is the way Judges 11 attributes virginity to the daughter and how it functions differently from other cases of virgins in Judges.

Bal's first argument is that she reads the two mentions of Bath's virginity as two different connotations that get conflated. She states that calling her a "virgin" actually emphasizes her transitional stage of "nubility," whereas the phrase, "she had not known a

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157 Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, "Gender Violence, and the Dalit Psyche: The Jephthah Story (Judges 11–12) Reconsidered. In *Terror in the Bible: Rhetoric, Gender, and Violence.* eds. Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon and Robyn J. Whitaker. (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2021), 215–234.

158 Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press), 1988.

159 Cheryl Exum, "Bat-jiftah (Judges 11)", Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature. eds. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 119–120.

man" refers to her past and that her time of nubility is up.[160] Secondly, Bal argues via Freud that virginity has always been and still is an "inherently contradiction of male concerns"[161] that necessitates a ritual in a society, and that Jephthah has entangled himself with his daughter as a failed would-be 'father-surrogate-husband.'[162] Bal sees that Bath's ownership by her father means that her virgin status is a gift of Jephthah's that he can give, but in doing so the warrior Jephthah has now brought death's sword upon his own self "as one castrated," because in killing his daughter he cuts off his own line of progeny.[163] For Bal, the legacy of Bath ultimately lies in the fact that she did what she could do in her limited means and brought the other virgins together in solidarity, lament and commemoration.[164]

Cheryl Exum

Cheryl Exum's first published work on Judges 11 is the aforementioned comparison of Jephthah's daughter and Michal, the daughter of Saul.[165] Herein she discusses these two women's stories as being mere parts of the overarching stories of men told by a male narrator, and describes the feminist task as the need "to reconstruct a version of their

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[160] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry,* 46–45.

[161] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry* 51.

[162] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry* 58.

[163] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry* 64–65.

[164] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry,* 50 and 68.

[165] Cheryl Exum, "Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative," in *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts.* ed. Alice Bach (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 45–67.

stories from that voice."[166] As mentioned, she argues that Jephthah's daughter has been favorably remembered because she posed no threat to patriarchy, whereas Michal was a woman of protest and therefore has been held historically in contempt. Exum also compares Jephthah's daughter to her father. She argues that neither are fully guilty nor innocent in the life sacrificed.[167] Yet, "unlike her father, she has companions that share her distress."[168] Exum points out that Jephthah teaches us that words can kill, but if we read these stories from the view of the woman and remember them differently, then words can also offer healing.[169]

Exum writes at greater length about the life and death of these words in the 1993 *Feminist Companion to Judges*.[170] She argues that while remembering the story cannot undo the words spoken and save the daughter from death, "to recount the story of Jephthah's daughter is to make her live again through words."[171] Exum further notes the way that words of dialogue demonstrate subtext. For example, recurringly Jephthah and his daughter speak to each other by saying, "my daughter" or "my father." But their last words to one another display the breakdown that has happened. His last words to her are simply, "Go," without endearment or blessing, and hers to him are "my companions,"

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[166] Cheryl Exum, "Murder They Wrote," 46.

[167] Cheryl Exum, "Murder They Wrote," 60.

[168] Cheryl Exum, "Murder They Wrote," 63.

[169] Cheryl Exum, "Murder They Wrote," 54.

[170]Cheryl Exum, "On Judges 11," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*. ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 131–145.

[171] Cheryl Exum, "On Judges 11," 132.

demonstrating her shift in connection.[172] These themes are succinctly repeated in Exum's entry on Judges 11 in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation,* published in 2012.[173] She summarizes the hermeneutics of her narratology by saying of Bat-jiftah, "Her speech transports her symbolically from the domain of her father who will destroy her life to that of her female friends, who will keep her memory alive. This image is too powerful to be fully controlled by the androcentric interests of the narrator."[174] Read this way, the text says much more to us than the daughter can.

Esther Fuchs

The *Feminist Companion to Judges* hosts another chapter on Judges 11. While endeavoring for and achieving a feminist hermeneutic, Esther Fuchs takes quite a different approach from Phyllis Trible. Both agree that the text marginalizes the daughter. Essentially, Fuchs sees the narrator as trying to protect Jephthah from being seen as a villain.[175] Whereas some (including Trible) see the ambiguity of the narration as a lack of care for the daughter, Fuchs reads it as trying to help us sympathize with Jephthah. The patriarchal lens of the text does not want us to see Jephthah as an evil villain who murders his daughter, and therefore must also clearly demonstrate that the daughter

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[172] Cheryl Exum, "On Judges 11," 134–135.

[173] Cheryl Exum, "Bat-jiftah (Judges 11)". Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature, eds. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 119–120.

[174] Cheryl Exum, "Bat-jiftah," 120.

[175] Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges,* ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 116–130.

cooperated with her father to willingly go to her end.[176] The same can be said for the way the story centers around Jephthah and the way each detail about the daughter tells us more about her father than her.[177] Ultimately for Fuchs, the goal is that the text be resisted unlike Trible whose goal is that the daughter be mourned.

Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (1999)

In Athalya Brenner's second edited work of feminist readings of Judges, two chapters are again offered on Judges 11. First is Shulamit Valler's chapter on midrashic reception and use.[178] She notes the differences among the midrashim and their variances from the Scripture. We see clearly that the midrashic authors were trying to provide reasons behind the story's difficult plot, many of them ranking Jephthah's sins.[179] She finds that the midrash argues the Scripture shows us Jephthah going from bad to worse and God repulsing silently. Valler concludes the overarching message is that Jephthah's "story begins with a mistaken vow, continues with his obstinate intent to carry it out, and concludes with the daughter's death, which is entirely Jephthah's own distorted decision."[180]

Phyllis Silverman Kramer writes the following chapter on Judges 11, centered on

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[176] Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing," 121.

[177] Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing, 128–129.

[178] Shulamit Valler, "The Story of Jephthah's Daughter in the Midrash," in *Judges*: *A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 48–66.

[179] Shulamit Valler, "The Story of Jephthah's Daughter in the Midrash," 57–64.

[180] Shulamit Valler, "The Story of Jephthah's Daughter in the Midrash," 66.

interpretation of the text alongside artistic renderings of its plot points.[181] The story has received much artistic attention, and Kramer says the three most popular scenes depicted are: 1) the daughter greeting Jephthah at his arrival; 2) the daughter lamenting with her friends; and 3) the sacrifice.[182] Kramer contrasts these artistic interpretations with midrashic interpretation. Artistic portrayals demonstrate the same variances and tendencies as the midrashim, although Kramer points out they stick closer to the content revealed in Scripture. She notes that in keeping with distinctly Jewish exegesis, all the visual renderings display an actual sacrifice as the narrative's outcome; nowhere is she depicted as entering religious dedication for the vow's fulfillment.[183] Kramer concludes by noting that the emotions which are glossed at best in Scripture are not communicated in the art as she expected. She says, "It is as if the biblical gaps are repeated by the artist's brush."[184] What does show up in the art, that is left out of the Bible and the midrash, is the community during the horrific scenes.[185] In contrast to the seemingly private nature of the story that exists only between Jephthah and the daughter, paintings often include more observers in portrayals of the dance, vow discussion, or sacrifice.[186]

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[181] Phyllis Silverman Kramer, "Jephthah's Daughter: A Thematic Approach to the Narrative as Seen in Selected Rabbininc Exegesis and in Artwork," in *Judges*: *A Feminist Companion to the Bible*. ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 67–92.

[182] Phyllis Silverman Kramer, "Jephthah's Daughter," 67.

[183] Kramer, "Jephthah's Daughter," 87.

[184] Kramer, "Jephthah's Daughter," 89.

[185] Kramer, "Jephthah's Daughter," 88.

[186] In seeing an artistic rendering of community members, it may more natural for people to ask, 'Why did no one intervene for Jephthah's daughter?'

Womanist Readings of Judges 11

Womanist theology and hermeneutics continue the work of feminist scholars, but do so in a way that considers more than simply gender. Womanists work from the Black experience and take into account race, class, and other social categories that cause further marginalization, prejudice, or 'second-class citizenship'. For biblical scholarship, this has been important to make distinctions not only between male and female, but amongst women themselves. This hermeneutic is key, for example, in the text of terror that involves Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar.[187] Just because Sarah and Hagar are both women does not mean their plights are the same. For Judges 11, this emphasis is especially crucial. The womanist perspective draws us outside the relationship of Jephthah and his daughter and asks us to examine the larger community. It questions the societal norms that led to such a situation and those which will proceed from it, and asks us to do the same for our world today.

Renita Weems

Renita Weems chapter on Judges 11 starts with a warning label before the text begins: "*WARNING: This story may be deceptive*."[188] She begins by describing how at first glance, the story is one of devotion, obedience, and religious integrity; however, "somewhere nobility turns into a nightmare, devotion turns into death."[189] Unlike many

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[187] Genesis 17 and 21.

[188] Renita Weems, "A Crying Shame," in *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988), 53–69.

[189] Weems, "A Crying Shame," 53–54.

other authors, Weems views Jephthah's vow as an act of ambition and ego.[190] As all feminist authors do, she emphasizes that this story is so important because of the patriarchy that still persecutes women today. Weems, however, gets specific with examples she has just seen on the news of abused women that very day.[191] She emphasizes that Jephthah's projection is victim blaming, and she asks her reader to reflect on how the daughter must have felt in that moment.[192] Weems says, "We have a right to ask these questions…We have a right to use our imaginations."[193]

Using imagination, Weems pushes further into what most white feminists comment on as important but do not delve into: the communal female mourning. She says, "There is a sorrow known only to women," a sorrow that only women can help one another bear.[194] Weems brings in the ancient tradition of professional mourning, noting that this is the one sacred profession that women were believed to be suitable for and permitted to do.[195] She poses that perhaps Jeremiah the prophet was able to lament and weep the way he did because as a youth he saw his mother take the pilgrimage for the commemoration of Jephthah's daughter.[196] She considers that the girlfriends gathered in those two months mourned more than just Jephthah's daughter's virginity: they mourned, too, because they knew what was happening to her could happen to any of them at any

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[190] Weems, "A Crying Shame," 55.

[191] Weems, "A Crying Shame," 61, 63.

[192] Weems, "A Crying Shame," 56.

[193] Weems, "A Crying Shame," 57.

[194] Weems, "A Crying Shame," 58.

[195] Weems, "A Crying Shame," 58–9.

[196] Weems, "A Crying Shame," 60.

time.[197] She ends by noting the conclusion of the story is not death, but the women's commemoration. Weems says they wept not just over the past, but for the future: "Weeping helped to clarify their vision."[198]

Valerie Cooper

Valerie Cooper's chapter, "Some Place to Cry," is a prime example of a Womanist reading of a text of terror.[199] Here she reads Jephthah's daughter as the daughter of a marginalized man, and therein she experiences both her gender and other social constructs working against her as a type of "double jeopardy." Cooper considers that Jephthah's status as a bastard and his exile to a land of criminals also works against his daughter in "ways that Black women are sometimes sacrificed as Black men seek to shore up their places in still-racist, still-patriarchal society."[200] This emphasis on the life of Jephthah does not, as some fear, take away from the feminist prominence of the daughter.

Instead, Cooper seeks to understand how society's treatment of his second-class citizenship affects her. Differing from most authors, she sees the rashness and foolishness of Jephthah's vow as part of the tragic "bargains Black men sometimes [make to] strive

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[197] Weems, "A Crying Shame," 60.

[198] Weems, "A Crying Shame," 66.

[199] Valerie Cooper, "Some Place to Cry: Jephthah's Daughter and the Double Dilemma of Black Women in America," in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 181–191.

[200] Cooper, "Some Place to Cry," 182.

to solidify their place in the world."[201] This in no way, however, makes Jephthah less culpable or wrong. Instead, it holds society to a higher standard. Cooper also holds the society as guilty for their role in allowing the sacrifice to take place.[202] She also reads the daughter's commitment to the vow through the lens of African American women today, saying, "They accept choices that may ultimately mean death to them if it will 'save face' for the men they love,"[203] and, "They must choose between that which will hurt the men they love and that which will hurt them."[204] She concludes her chapter by saying that the daughter "did a wise thing in gathering the women of her community to mourn with her,"[205] and that what we believe about her reveals much about who we are and what we believe about society and God.[206]

Vanessa Lovelace

Vanessa Lovelace joins the Womanist conversation on Judges 11 to interpret from a different perspective: by focusing on the mother of Jephthah.[207] She wants readers to be cautious of the way that prominent "family values" can lead to political rhetoric that blames Black single mothers for the "downfall of society" and immediately seeing their

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[201] Cooper, "Some Place to Cry," 187.

[202] Cooper, "Some Place to Cry," 186.

[203] Cooper, "Some Place to Cry," 187.

[204] Cooper, "Some Place to Cry," 188.

[205] Cooper, "Some Place to Cry," 190.

[206] Cooper, "Some Place to Cry," 191.

[207] Vanessa Lovelace, "We Don't Give Birth to Thugs," in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press), 2016. The mother of Jephthah's daughter, of course, is absent from the biblical narrative.

sons as “potential criminals.”[208] She argues that since Jephthah can be seen “as a thug, lacking traditional family values and a threat to society because he is the son of an unmarried woman, he along with his mother, is racialized black.”[209] She notes that the way scholars translate the conjunction in Judges 11:1, and the way they decipher the connection between Jephthah being a warrior and/but the son of a prostitute can reveal more about their family values than the Hebrew grammar.[210] She displays how commentators have been quick to suggest Jephthah’s illegitimate birth inherently makes him unfit for leadership, and that the idealized nuclear family means unwed mothers are incapable of passing values to their children. Readings like Lovelace’s do not simply help us understand the text or the world of the text, but also offer application and insight into the world around us.

Other Women’s Readings for Consideration

Before closing this chapter on women’s readings of Judges 11, two other areas of study are worth brief attention. First, there is the up-and-coming field of child-centered hermeneutics. This is a socio-historical approach that seeks to bring visibility to children in the Biblical text and agency for children today, particularly regarding situations of violence, and this approach is considered a “child” of feminist hermeneutics. In the flagship book for child-centered Biblical reading, editor Kristine Henricksen Geroway says that the methods of the child-centered approach are essentially what Phyllis Trible

[208] Lovelace, “We Don’t Give Birth to Thugs,” 240–242.

[209] Lovelace, “We Don’t Give Birth to Thugs,” 243.

[210] Lovelace, “We Don’t Give Birth to Thugs,” 248.

put forth regarding Jephthah's daughter in *Texts of Terror.*[211] Unfortunately, Geroway's book does not offer a reading specifically on Judges 11, but one would look forward to the work there is to be done within this field specifically. One might imagine that with this child-centered approach, Geroway might expunge the daughter of both piety and guilt, noting the adult lens through which we read this daughter's decision-making.

Secondly, biblical and theological scholars would do well to look inside the world of Bible study books for laity. It is no secret that women today often tend toward female characters in the Bible for study. While Judges 11 does not offer the type of inspiring tale of the typically paraded Biblical women like Esther, Ruth, Deborah or Mary, there is a certain pull to the distinctiveness and dynamism of Jepthah's daughter. These Bible study sources get readers to analyze their own lives in light of the texts. Many include a retelling of the story followed by life-application questions for the reader's world. In her book that gives discussion questions, Lynn Japinga offers: "Jephthah is celebrated as a hero of faith in the book of Hebrews, yet his faith held only destructive consequences for his daughter. In what ways have you seen religious belief yield toxic fruit for people you know?" [212] In Rose Sallberg Kam's book, she asks her readers questions about mourning with friends, teaching children about abuse, women letting go of rage toward abusers, and about how one can keep from acting like Jephthah herself.[213]

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[211] *Children and Methods: Listening to and Learning From Children in the Biblical World,* ed. Kristine Henricksen Geroway and John W. Martens. Brill's Series in Jewish Studies vol. 67 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 2019.

[212] Lynn Japinga, *From Widows to Warriors: Women's Stories from the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2020), 74.

[213] Rose Sallberg Kam, *Their Stories, Our Stories: Women in the Bible.* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 104.

Resources for the stories like the texts of terror have a way of introducing the stories, themes, and textual relevance in a manner that does not always translate well from the pulpit. They not only keep women like Jephthah's daughter in memoriam, they create space to talk about realities that still exist in the world today. Such stories are not always appropriate from the pulpit, but these stories are important to pass down to women and all people in the Church today. Telling the canon's stories about violence done to women can, when done the right way, foster solidarity that may bring emotional and spiritual healing to women who themselves have experienced such trauma. In the next chapter, we explore philosophies, hermeneutics and approaches that help us tell these stories in faithful ways.

CHAPTER 4

PROPOSING AN ORTHOPATHIC HERMENEUTIC: AN APPEAL TO AFFECTIVE READING FOR FAITHFUL SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

If your heart breaks with mercy, you are already whole.

–Unknown

The Heart of the Matter is the Matter if the Heart

In 1982 when Phyllis Trible gave the Beecher lectures on the manuscripts that were to become *Texts of Terror,* one of her opening remarks concerned the nature of these texts, that they must be read without anyone to 'save' the women therein that are so horridly abused. Yet those women in the Biblical stories are not the only ones to face their abuse. We readers wrestle with their stories, with God, with their demons and with our own. She says, "Hence we shall wonder about the name of the demon. Our own names, however, we shall all too frightfully recognize."[214] While those terrifying portions of Holy Scripture do not provide us with many answers, texts of terror provide us with opportunity to see ourselves and the "demons" we face.

From the reception history, we see that Judges 11 is a text that seems to call for a reader response. For centuries, this ancient story has been used to substantiate doctrine and to promote practices. From it, murder has been justified and dancing has been banned. Generations have tried to make meaning and make sense of it in order to have something to say. Yet what if the Scripture in this case is not so much trying to instruct us

[214] Phyllis Trible, "Texts of Terror: Unpreached Stories of Faith," Beecher Lectures, lecture 1, (Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT), 1982.

as much as it is trying to reveal us to ourselves? What if that which it teaches us is not primarily concerned with orthodoxy or orthopraxy but rather serves to *move* us to a place in which we can better examine our affections and the world around us?

The survey of feminist and womanist readings demonstrates that in the company of grieving women, the Spirit can still speak through a damned text. By reading the daughter's story *in memoriam*, women have been moved in solidarity with the ancient woman in the Holy Scripture and with each other, and the Church can better critique the misogyny in the world today. Judges 11 does something to and for those readers who are not afraid to pull its darkness into the light. We must not forget Jephthah's daughter. We must not reject her story, and we must not allow it to be sanitized of its horror. This text, in and of and with all its terror, has something to offer God's people. What has certainly been a theological stumbling block for many can somehow become a faithful beacon of hope. Ironically, when we are horrified *by* the story, we do not have to be terrified of it.

Methodology and Terminology

This way of reading requires a hermeneutic that does not see the Bible merely as a historical archive, theological document, or ethics manual, but rather as a place where the reader his or herself becomes that which is analyzed. In this way, it is not just the Bible that is scrutinized, but we ourselves become the story in which God's redeeming truth can be found. As Rickie Moore says, "Approaching biblical hermeneutics in this light illuminates the realization that it may not be the biblical text as much as my own self that needs interpreted, that is, that we need Scripture to interpret us more than the Scripture

needs us to interpret it."[215] No longer are we simply working on the text, but God is working in us. This approach is not looking to redeem the text, rather it is looking for a God who redeems us. It is important to note that this affective approach in no way tries to liberate the Holy Scripture of its horror or tragedy. It does not offer a triumphalist Christian reworking or conclusion. Trible was clear from the start that this is not what she was doing and was not asking for such to be done.[216] An orthopathic hermeneutic does not seek to create a 'happy ending' or offer false hope. Rather, it serves as a way to get one's heart rightly oriented toward God and neighbor, even and especially in tragedy and trauma.

A 2021 article by a collection of researchers declared that we are now in in the age of affectivism after long-standing preferences for behaviourism and cognitivism.[217] The question for such researchers and thinkers has been: "What is the relationship of affect to cognition and judgment-making?" Our task now is to ask: "How does the relationship of affect and judgement-making affect theological education and biblical hermeneutics?" Since the 1980s, terms like 'emotional intelligence' and 'emotional regulation' have increased in popularity, yet it is certainly not the case that the role of human pathos has only recently become important. From the prophet Isaiah to Aristotle to the medieval mystics to Wesley to African American preaching, we have always known that that the appeal to emotion is at the core of the human experience and that it

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[215] Rickie Moore, "Altar Hermeneutics: Reflections of Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation," *Pneuma* 38 no. 2 (2016): 155.

[216] See also Gale Yee's comment concerning Trible's commitment to this point in *Texts of Terror,* 40th Anniversary edition, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2022), x.

[217] Daniel Dukes, Kathryn Abrams, Ralph Adolphs, et al. "The Rise of Affectivism," *Nature Human Behavior* 5 (2021), 816–820.

can be harnessed for good or for abuse. Even though we have long recognized the power of pathos, passion has not often carried a favorable or virtuous reputation, nor a key role in academic education.

Affectivity has often been ignored for not appearing intelligent enough, scoffed at for being irrational, put off for being unreliable and unmanageable, or even shamed for being sinful. Such is the case across all fields and disciplines, and yet it is hard to say whether religion has been the most welcoming space for the affections or if it has done the most harm for the reputation of the heart.[218] Psychologists, scientists, and philosophers argue about how categories of "emotion" or "feeling" ought to be defined, and how they are/ are not biologically different from bodily sensations and thoughts or beliefs. Most conclude that "feelings" are more bodily-sensed and less cognitive than "emotions."[219] For our purposes now, the distinction or overlap of the categories of feeling, emotion, passions, or mood, are unnecessary since we mean to refer to them all under the umbrella term of *affect* and will only be parsed out when necessary. Two

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[218] In Christianity, "the heart" is often disparaged as being "of the flesh" in ways that do not seem compatible with the sanctifying power of salvation. This is often thanks to and emphasis and misapplication of Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?" An interpretation of Jeremiah 17:9 that pits us against our own feelings and desires somehow see the heart as if it is always sinful and not both recipient and conduit of God's grace and redemption. Additionally, we must understand that the Hebrew *lev*, often translated "heart" in English, was used by the ancients as a way of talking about what we differentiate as the "mind." It was the center of meaning for oneself, or the inner life, but not a dialectic in the way we often create a dualism for ourselves today.

[219] Studies in neuroscience and psychology have given new credibility and understanding to emotions. MRIs, for example, have helped reveal human emotion to be both objectively measurable and scientifically accessible. Emotions and feelings are then, too, of the brain, not just 'the heart'. Even though the affections are in part cognitive, to reduce them to such is a misstep. An emotion is not simply a thought. Emotions are marked by physiological changes, like nervous system changes and autotomic motor activity, like blood flow, sweat gland activity, and cross-cultural facial expressions. Often "feelings" is used more colloquially than scientific, and based—as is evidenced by the name—in what one feels or senses bodily without full cognitive comprehension or explanation. For more, see Jenefer Robinson, "Emotion: Biological Fact or Social Construction?" in *Thinking about Feeling*: *Contemporary Philosophers About Emotions*, ed. Robert C. Solomon, Series in Affective Science (New York: Oxford Press), 2004.

important criteria are worth noting, however. First, myself and the authors I utilize will heavily lean into an understanding of affect that is substantially connected to desire. As both Sarah Coakley and Martha Nussbaum will demonstrate, affections are bound up with longing. They reveal, form and are formed by our deepest desires. Secondly, we also assent to the camp which finds the experience of emotion to hold value judgements or make appraisal. When it comes to understanding one's emotions as value judgements, it is important to note that this stands in disagreement to the popular notion that emotions are distinct from, opposing to, and less intelligent than beliefs, thoughts, and cognition in general. Orthopathic hermeneutics hold that there is important overlap between affect and belief that cannot be conflated or denied.

The last few decades have seen a rise in scholastic and scientific attention to emotions and feelings thanks to the now ever-expanding fields in psychology. This has in turn increased popularity for the emotions in philosophy and ethics, which often looks like a return to an emphasis on virtues. In the last five years, attention to affective reading has swelled. For theological and biblical studies, most of that attention has surrounded emotions *in* the text, most often the New Testament. In terms of reading for teaching and preaching, the contributions I would like to make are as follows: (1) how theological and biblical studies can intersect with Martha Nussbaum's philosophy of the intelligence of emotions, (2) how with Sarah Coakley's theology of the rationality of passions aids us hermeneutically, and (3) how reading affectively, which I term 'orthopathic hermeneutics,' aids our discipleship and reading, specifically in regard to texts of terror.

Martha Nussbaum

American philosopher Martha Nussbaum has led her field in thinking and writing on why emotions matter for one's moral development and for political justice, and is leading many fields in the acceptance of the intelligence of emotions.[220] Her accentuation of ancient Roman and Greek philosophies has led to a position on emotions that is a form of Neo-Stoicism with an Aristotelian flair. At first glance, one might find it odd that she presents a positive case for emotions from a Stoic starting point, but she suggests they had part of their position right with regard to how passions are evaluative judgements. She will depart from their thinking that passions are lesser urges that must be overcome. Additionally, she employs literary and musical criticism and devices to proffer a way to analyze emotions and human flourishing. She, unwittingly, of course, makes a strong philosophical argument as to why texts of terror like Judges 11 have value for the Church.

Nussbaum's Neo-Stoicism

Rejecting the idea that emotions are animalistic or base impulses, Nussbaum argues that emotions are intelligent ways that humans make sense of the world and make value judgments. She sees the ancient division of "bodily" versus "mental" to be outdated, and instead holds that emotions are tied up with cognition.[221] Her Neo-Stoic approach finds four key differences from the original Stoic position and find affect to be

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[220] Of note particularly is her book, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) which will be discussed here alongside other pertinent publications.

[221] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 27.

more connected to thoughts.[222] First is the notion that emotions are *about* something. That is to say, emotions have objects or they are directed toward something. Second, their object is something *intentional* from a person and is intimately connected to how one interprets the world. Third, the object of the emotion is not just a material article, but rather is a host or "family"[223] of complex *beliefs* concerning that object and one's relationship to it. And lastly, because they are made from beliefs and one's connectedness, emotions come from and reveal value and are therefore inherently concerned with human flourishing.

Beliefs are not just "casual prerequisites" to emotions; Nussbaum argues they are integral parts that constitute emotions.[224] Since emotions always involve "appraisal" or judgment, she terms her approach as a "cognitive-evaluative view." This necessitates a more generalized understanding of cognition. By cognition she means "nothing more than 'concerned with receiving and processing information.'"[225] She holds that while we have used words like cognition, logic, and rationalization for the assumption of thought, what we have really been referring to is verbal linguistic communication. She argues that thoughts are not bound to linguistic expression, and that "language does not hold a

[222] Nussbaum, *Upheaval of Thought,* 27–30.

[223] Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity,* 29.

[224] Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity,* 28.

[225] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 23.

monopoly on cognitive sophistication, pointing to infancy, visual art, and music," as exemplar evidence.[226]

Because emotions are cognitively tied to intentional objects, this means that emotions can themselves be appraised as reasonable or unreasonable.[227] Nussbaum says that a judgment is "an assent to an appearance," and therefore emotions, just like beliefs, can be true or false based upon the reality of what one perceives.[228] It may be helpful or more commonplace for one to refer to the "appropriateness" of emotions, although Nussbaum says we are more specifically looking for "value-correctness."[229] Within the disciplines of biblical and theological studies, this is of note. This judgment-making is happening every time one reads the Holy Scriptures, but it is crucial for those who exercise a 'plain reading.' Moreover, sentiments like, "You can't tell me what to feel," are common, but Nussbaum's argument means there is a way to assess how Christians may be able to call an emotional appraisal "Christlike," "sanctified," "righteous," or the like. To be clear, Nussbaum is not arguing that there is one right way to feel in any given situation. Rather, she defends that the validity of the beliefs, the veracity of the intentional object, and the personal history or narrative of the person come together to (1)

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[226] Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice,* (Cambridge, CT: Harvard University Press, 2013), 402. See also Chapter 5, "Music and Emotion" in *Upheavals of Thought* for Nussbaum's argument on how music both has emotive qualities and breeds emotions in the listener.

[227] Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity,* 30.

[228] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 46–47. N.B. that here "false" in no way means less sincere. False refers to the veracity of the perceived object in reality. Nussbaum gives the example of someone grieving at the news of the death of a loved one. If that person is not actually dead, however, the grief is both "false" and still yet real. This connects to Judges 11 regarding the ambiguity and the disagreement about the fulfillment of the vow and the daughter's fate. We have seen in the reception history that those who do not believe her to be murdered show less negative emotion toward the story.

[229] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 47. This allows less subjectivity and a more objective standard.

provide a range of possible appropriate reactions and (2) to evaluate the values revealed in those emotions.[230] This means that orthopathy does not simply approve of every or any emotion revealed in response to a text, but rather seeks to first reveal and then to assess it.

The Double Need for Narrative

Nussbaum has argued that emotions are learned similarly to how beliefs are, in that they are formed by exposure to society and societal norms. She notes that they differ, however, in that while beliefs are usually constituted by propositional truths, emotions are learned from stories.[231] She says it is not enough to be told or taught about emotions, but that it is inherent in human nature for the form of narrative itself to evoke emotional activity and structure.[232] By the telling and the receiving of stories, we learn our society has "standards of correctness" for emotions, and she says that stories invite us to consider the origins of our feelings.[233] She explains that this is not necessarily for every emotion that exists, but rather for the ones connected to our important beliefs and values. She comments that, "literary study has too frequently failed to speak about the connectedness of narrative to forms of human emotions and human choice."[234] If this is true of literary

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[230] *Hiding From Humanity,* 67–69, and *Upheavals of Thought,* 37–48, 243. Nussbaum's insights to value-correctness and how it reveals one's vulnerability and issues with control are particularly interesting for hermeneutics, in that we see are ourselves not just wrestling with a text when we do not "like" it, but further, wrestling with ourselves, our theology, and ultimately God. Our method of hermeneutics reveals how vulnerable we are willing to be or how much we feel the need to control doctrine. (42–43)

[231] Martha Nussbaum, "Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love," *Ethics,* vol. 98, no. 2. (January 1988), 225–254.

[232] Nussbaum, "Narrative Emotions," 236.

[233] Nussbaum, "Narrative Emotions," 226. She comments also, that since emotions are socially formed, they can, like beliefs, be manipulated (252).

[234] Nussbaum, "Narrative Emotions," 230.

study in general, in the way Nussbaum means, then it is even more apt for literary criticism in biblical studies. If emotional attunement is formed by the social telling of stories, this must make us see that we do our society no favors by keeping the 'hard' stories secret. If we are unwilling to talk about stories like the texts of terror, we do not help each other with how to respond to those situations in our own world.

So why do some within the same society find a Biblical text blasé, while some find it entertaining, and some find it terrifying? It may have less to do with doctrinal belief and more to do with personal history. This is the second level of importance for narrative, emotions, and value. Nussbaum argues we must follow the narrative arc of a personal history to understand the emotive reaction to a text. There is both a universal or ubiquitous nature to emotions, like a cultural grammar, and also a personal role that comes from individual circumstance which normally causes intensity of the experienced emotion to fluctuate.[235] This is why it is so important for Christians to read in community, to be able to experience the reactions of others to the text, to see the way the Spirit works in others to provide insight, and to have the opportunity to share how one's own story intersects with the biblical narrative.

Cultivating Compassion by Reading Tragedy

As we have just noted the importance of narrative for emotional exposure and evaluation, Nussbaum argues that there is a particular genre that warrants extra attention due to what emotion it can cultivate: tragedy and compassion.[236] Of course, not all

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[235] See Chapter 3, "Emotions and Human Societies" in *Upheavals of Thought.*

[236] See "The Interlude," in *Upheavals of Thought,* 238–248.

philosophers have looked favorably upon compassion, with some considering it a weakness for a person and for society. But for Nussbaum, compassion is the key emotion for societal well-being. Surely no case needs to be made for the Christian on the value of compassion. What is of hermeneutical note here is Nussbaum's discourse on compassion's connection to literary works. Works of tragedy create a space where painful content can be explored with enough space for one to feel like they can manage it at a safe distance. If we see texts of terror as "tragedy," these ancient Bible stories become places for us today to find compassion, solidarity, and healing.

Nussbaum notes that Aristotle taught that "we seek out painful literary experiences," and she also likens such to the genre of horror film.[237] She contends that by reading of tragedy, the reader develops his or her empathy and forms the virtue of compassion in a "context of safety" in which we are "encouraged to have a range of emotive reactions."[238] Of hermeneutical import is what she further notices: Emotions about the story do not stay in the world of the tale. They carry over into the way we view our actual world. She describes compassion as "a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person's undeserved misfortune."[239] Thus compassion alone is not enough to change poor circumstances, but Nussbaum says it is the emotion that moves us towards a willingness to act on behalf of another.[240] Compassion conspires with our other

[237] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 244–246.

[238] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 246. Interestingly, here Nussbaum mentions her own experience of watching the movie *Psycho* and feeling fear for the character in the shower and then for all women in her own world who are attacked.

[239] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 301.

[240] It is worthy to note that she names four other emotions which are the most likely "impediments" to compassion: shame, resentment, envy, and disgust. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 299.

passions, concocting a plan for justice and *eudaimonia*.[241] If the reading of tragedy develops compassion, then I contend this is a chance to experience affective sanctification coupled with hope for societal betterment, and that alone gives the Church a reason to read texts of terror.

Sarah Coakley

The affective reasoning of Sarah Coakley offers a theological foundation for an orthopathic hermeneutic, and she demonstrates in her own preaching how passion, reason and faith work together to make meaning from the biblical text, even when "at the heart of the extraordinary story is this crash of meaning."[242] To hold passions in tension—specifically suffering and love— allows one not only to stop the hermeneutical control-despair cycle, but also offers one the opportunity to be transformed to the image of Christ. One goal of Coakley's *théologie totale* is to "resist the divides between belief and practice, between thought and affect."[243] Just as an orthopathic hermeneutic does not abandon intellect or logic for fleeting feeling, affective reasoning demonstrates that one's affections and thoughts work together for spiritual betterment.

Coakley identifies such affective reasoning in Gregory of Nyssa. In regard to his dialogue concerning death and resurrection, Coakley says that Gregory is trying "to

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[241] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 31. Nussbaum follows the Greek understanding of eudaimonia to mean the desire for a person's flourishing.

[242] Sarah Coakley, "Sacrifice," in *The Cross and Transformation of Desire Meditations for Holy Week on the Drama of Love and Betrayal*, Grove Spiritual S128 (Cambridge, England: Grove Books, 2014), 22.

[243] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity,*(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 91.

persuade Macrina that some sort of *integration* of passion with intellect is a positive good."[244] She describes their conversation as a "distinctive approach to the spiritual senses… starting from philosophical questions about ordinary sensation and cognition, and then drawing ethics, ascetics, and spiritual practices inexorably into their train."[245] She says that Gregory is "activated by the crisis of the deaths of his siblings," and that he shares "the impossibility of repressing grief" and resistance to "accepting mere 'biblical commands' as conversation-stoppers."[246] Gregory is employing affective reasoning; he faces, recognizes, and sits with his affections in the wake of tragedy, despite advice from biblical commands. Coakley identifies that for Gregory there is "the emerging sense of an epistemological continuum between ordinary sensation and perception (which is subject to the effects of the fall) and 'spiritual sensation' as it leads us into the transformed life of resurrection."[247]

Yet we recall Trible's insistence that the resurrection of Christ not lessen the horrors, suffering, and death of the women in the texts of terror. It does, however, seem proper to look for the Resurrection's mercy in *our* lives. But before we can even begin

[244] Sarah Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity.* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46.

[245] Sarah Coakley, "Gregory of Nyssa," *Rethinking Gregory of Nyssa,* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 36.

[246] Coakley, "Gregory of Nyssa," 45–46.

[247] Coakley, "Gregory of Nyssa," 45.

that hope, Coakley says, "First, the horror has to be faced— in ourselves, as well as in others."[248] Coakley says,

> We accompany [Christ] in horror because evading it evades the quest for meaning which we must go on asking for, even as ordinary meaning dies. We accompany him in horror too because we know that we are implicated in it: for horrors are not just strokes of evil fate from somewhere other than our own lost humanity.[249]

If we are going to be people of the resurrection, we must first learn how to face death, and face it without a toxic positivity that is so prevalent in the theology and hermeneutics of some parts of the Church. Christians "practise death… until we are no longer *afraid* of death."[250] We can do this because our affections teach us the paradox of God-With-Us: suffering and love can co-exist. Reading texts of terror helps us faithfully practice death, not only for ourselves to Christ, but to the Holy Scriptures and to each other.

The Role of Théologie in Via

Coakley says, "Theology *in via*, as I have called it, is founded not in secular rationality but in spiritual practices of attention that mysteriously challenge and expand the range of rationality, and simultaneously darken and break one's hold on previous certainties."[251] The Church must be able to practice attention toward texts of terror to find a sense of spiritual rationality. We do this by contemplating the text alongside our

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[248] Coakley, *The Cross and Transformation*, 15.

[249] Coakley, *The Cross and Transformation*, 14.

[250] Coakley, *The Cross and Transformation*, 27.

[251] Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender, and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), 33.

affections. Coakley insists that affective reasoning is not only possible, but necessary and inherently compatible with faith. She states of religious studies: "the widespread assumption that it was the modern period that produced a new and stark disjunction between feeling and rationality is, as repeatedly shown, flawed."[252]

Coakley notes that the relationship between psychology and religious philosophy has been as convoluted as the relationship between the head and the heart. She points toward Thomas Dixon who explains that due to a "shift in nomenclature and association in the late nineteenth century…as a secular psychological category, "emotion" swallowed up and encompassed all the earlier and subtler distinctions between passion, affect, feeling and sentiment which for the most part had originally had a religious locus."[253] Coakley conclusively remarks: "It is the delicate philosophical distinction between different kinds of rationality and of feeling which should thus exercise us, just as did the ancients and the scholastics, and not the false presumption that 'emotion' necessarily distorts and impedes a reasonable faith."[254]

Redefining Power

Texts of terror not only demonstrate abuses of power, but unfortunately they can be used for abuse of power today. Yet Coakley argues that a Spirit-led ascetic of desire

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[252] Coakley, *Faith, Rationality and the Passions,* 9.

[253] Coakley, *Faith, Rationality and the Passions,* 7.

[254] Coakley, *Faith, Rationality and the Passions,* 10.

can actually purge the misdirected longings that lead one to the abuses of power.[255] In *Powers and Submissions*, Coakley argues that while white Christian feminism has shied away from vulnerability, a "defense of some version of *kenosis* as not only compatible with feminism, but vital to a distinctly Christian manifestation of it."[256] Coakley utilizes Cyril's understanding of kenosis that emphasizes an assumption to Christ's humanity and all its humanness, instead of a negation of his divinity. She states of kenosis, "the divine Logos's *taking on* of human flesh in the incarnation, but without loss, impairment, or restriction of divine powers."[257] Coakley shows how Cyril argued that Christ "permitted his own flesh to experience its proper affections, and permitted his human soul to experience its proper affections," [258]

Such a view of kenosis not only affects Christology, but as Coakley argues, has implications for gender power struggles because of the human and divine relation. Ultimately, vulnerability need not be seen as weakness, nor as particular to women only. Coakley is clear that she is not simply arguing that kenosis is merely vulnerability or that vulnerability is without danger. Instead, she suggests that "there is another… danger to Christian feminism in the *repression* of all forms of vulnerability, and in a concomitant failure to confront issues of fragility, suffering or self-emptying except in terms of

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[255] Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, 15.

[256] Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 4.

[257] Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 14.

[258] Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 15. (Cyril, *De recta fide*, 11.55.)

victimology."[259] Coakley then proceeds from a kenotic Christology to a "spiritual expansion of Christic kenosis" or a way of *practicing* kenosis.[260] She does this through the discipline of prayer, but certainly her ideas and methodology can be applied to hermeneutics. A kenotic application to Judges 11 would encourage us to see the vulnerability of Jephthah's daughter, and allow us to be vulnerable to without falling victim to the story itself. A self-emptying read is what makes space for the Spirit to abide in our grief and give room for Divine power which does not abuse.

A kenotic practice of reading the Bible would not cause one to fall victim to the text. It would, rather, permit one to experience the text with all their emotions such as Christ permitted himself in his incarnation. Such a hermeneutic would empower the reader to recognize his or her affections and desires stimulated by the text, and analyze how his or her affections and desire affected their reading. Texts of terror are prime biblical real estate for testing this orthopathic hermeneutic. As Coakley says of prayer, "we can only be properly empowered here if we cease to set the agenda, if we 'make space' for God to be God."[261] Texts like Judges 11 disarm the Church as a reading community by demonstrating the dangers of vulnerability to the text, to God, and to one another. Vulnerability to the Holy Scriptures causes a delay in meaning-making from the text. In that space, possibilities expand, and we are vulnerable, not to the denouement of

[259] Coakley, *Powers and Submissions,* 33.

[260] Coakley, *Powers and Submissions,* 34

[261] Coakley, *Powers and Submissions,* 34.

that story, but rather to a critique of our own human experiences. The silence of God in the text is broken by the open invitation for the Spirit to speak to us. Thus, as Coakley says of prayer, so it is true with the Holy Scriptures:

> But whilst risky, this practice is profoundly transformative, 'empowering' in a mysterious 'Christic" sense; for it is a feature of the *special* 'self-effacement' of this gentle space-making—this yielding to divine power which is no worldly power—that it marks one's willed engagement in the pattern of cross and resurrection, one's deeper rooting and grafting into the 'body of Christ'…. This form of vulnerability is not an invitation to be battered; nor is its silence a silencing. (If anything, it builds one in the courage to give prophetic voice.) By choosing to 'make space' in this way, one 'practises' the 'presence of God.'[262]

Now, not only has the reader unsilenced the voice of the victim in the text, but also the voice of the Spirit to speak *through* the text.

Desire and Affective Reading

Perhaps the quickest route to orthopathy is to imagine oneself as a character in the text. One beautiful aspect of storytelling is that we are not bound simply to one character with whom to identify. When we imagine ourselves in the story, the character with whom we identify tells us a lot about ourselves. To ask 'what would you do in the story?' is to ask 'what do you want to happen?' James K.A. Smith says, "What do you want?" is the "first, last, and most fundamental question of Christian discipleship."[263] Via Dionysius, Coakley reminds us that we yearn because the Divine yearns.[264] Desire has often been

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[262] Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 35.

[263] James K. A. Smith, *You are What You Love,* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 1.

[264] Coakley, *God, Sexuality and Self*, 314.

seen as an unreliable tool for truth, most often because of its connection to sexual impropriety; however, Coakley says that Freud must be flipped:

> It is not that physical 'sex' is basic and 'God' ephemeral; rather, it is God who is basic, and 'desire' the precious clue that ever tugs at the heart, reminding the human soul– however dimly– of its created source… desire is more fundamental that 'sex'… But in God, 'desire' of course signifies no lack-– as it does in humans. Rather, it connotes the plentitude of longing love that God has for God's own creation and for its full ecstatic participation in the divine, trinitarian, life.[265]

Coakley says that, "*unredeemed* desire is at the root of each of these challenges to the systematic task."[266] This is also true for the hermeneutical task. When we cannot make meaning from a narrative of Holy Scripture, it is often because it did not conclude in a way that we desire it to. Further, when doctrine or application are drawn from the Holy Scriptures in ways that abuse the message of the Gospel, it reveals that our desires need purged. Sometimes a reader does not recognize his or her desires until they confront their emotions caused by the text. Our desires and our reactions reveal much about our theology and ethics. By recognizing and befriending our aptitude for desire, we gain new insight for interpreting ourselves against a text, and we receive an invitation for the ever-present opportunity to enter into the dance of Divine life. Thus when orthodoxic or orthopraxic lenses do not lead to a message of Good News, reading the text *in via* with our affections may help.

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[265] Coakley, *God, Sexuality and Self*, 10.

[266] Coakley, *God, Sexuality and Self*, 52.

Our desires reveal much, but they guide, too. Smith says, "We are oriented by our longings, directed by our desires."[267] Desire in and of itself is not inherently trustworthy; of course it can be sinful, and of course it can be redeemed. The heart and its desires have a bad rap for being selfish, but Coakley insists that they can be trained as they are met by the Spirit. She says, "The Spirit may just as much be encountered as that which *checks* human desires, and stops their triumphalism."[268] She reminds us that if we bear in mind and model the Trinity, we cannot only desire our own good. The Spirit is the Spirit of the Crucified One, and thus the Spirit of the Son teaches us against misdirected longings and abuses of power.[269] By the model of Christ, the self-giving One, our affections and desires may be what lead us to compassion when no explanation is found for or from a text.

To be clear, an orthopathic hermeneutic does not simply pat one on the head for recognizing feelings or suggest that one interprets in light of whatever one wants; it also *tests* desires and feelings. It makes room for the Spirit to transform our affections by asking what is faithful in light of Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God. Our affections are not merely 'of the flesh;' they are products and producers of our spirituality. They sculpt our decision-making and they, too, can be formed and transformed. All desire is

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[267] Smith, *You are What You Love,* 11.

[268] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 14.

[269] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 14–15. "When one thinks rightly of God as Trinity, the Spirit cannot bypass the person of the Son, or evade thereby his divine engagement in Gethsemane and Golgotha."

judged in light of desire for God, Coakley writes.[270] Reading the Holy Scriptures *in via* with our affections and desires presents us with a chance for discipleship.

Thus, the hermeneutical question may not be, “How does this text function?” but rather, “How ought *we* to function in light of the text?” Like Ignatian Lectio Divina, an orthopathic hermeneutic does not just look for information, but stops for contemplation. We invite the Spirit to draw close and hover over the chaos in our own hearts. Coakley contends, “When we invite the Spirit into our prayers, we risk having our desire chastened and purified, intensified and purged.”[271] In the Spirit’s working, affections and desires are not simply refined as in merely distilled down to a smaller portion. Ultimately, they are purified to be redirected in ways that lead to compassion for the marginalized. Coakley argues, “the ascetic practices of contemplation are themselves indispensable means of true attentiveness to the despised or marginalized ‘other.’”[272] It seems our affections and passions may not draw us selfishly into ourselves, but rather into the divine care for the ‘least of these.’

Hearers of the Heart

To speak of Nussbaum and Coakley for an approach to orthopathic hermeneutics is not to forget that others long before, and also in our time, have been practicing a

[270] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 9.

[271] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 13.

[272] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 47.

hermeneutic of the heart. As psychology and Biblical Studies continue to collide, the role of affective reading will continue to bloom as it has in just the last few years.[273] Once accustomed to the language and style of affective biblical reading and theological application, one notices that emphasis on human and divine pathos has been a steady stream in Christianity amongst the raging rivers of other academic and practical approaches, arguably since the Hebrew prophets. Affective reading and application are prevalent in church spaces where it has or needs no name, and it can be found more popularly in certain subcultures of the Church, like Black preaching, Latin American liberation theology, and Wesleyan circles. Likewise, there are some that have always been willing to trek into the darkness of difficult texts and bring them into collaboration with the crises of the day. There are different reasons why and many styles for delivery, but the effect remains the same: allowing people to bring their whole selves into Divine participation and be transformed by the presence of the crucified and risen Lord. What follows now is a mere sampling of such.

John Chrysostom

Blake Leyerle has recently published a book that will hopefully bring much attention to and desire for affective reading in theology and preaching. Her work explores the prominent role of emotion and narrative in the preaching of John Chrysostom.

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[273] See *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions: Exploring Emotions in Biblical Literature,* ed. F. Scott Spencer (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press), 2017; and *Reading With Feeling: Affect Theory and the Bible*, ed. Fiona Black and Jennifer L. Koosed (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press), 2019.

Leyerle herself seems well versed in Nussbaum's philosophy of emotions and sees Chrysostom as falling in line. She says that Chrysostom's impetus for preaching affectively with narrative was twofold: he saw the Holy Scriptures "with its implicit endorsement of a wide range of feelings and great intensity in their expression," coupled with the human difficulty for growing in virtue.[274] Leyerle describes the ways in which he "amplified" the biblical narrative, diligently worked to bring his listeners into the mood of the Bible's stories and have listeners imagine the emotions of the character or see themselves therein.[275] His goal was to produce in his hearers a response of zeal that motivated them to respond with feeling that led to virtue and reflection that led to action, even action that was a change in cognitive belief. Of particular interest is that he believed that all emotions could be felt for positive change against spiritual indifference, and so Chrysostom did not stray from anger, grief, or fear, and nor did he shy from stories that demonstrated or provoked such.

John Wesley & Greggory Clapper

Perhaps of all preachers and theologians, John Wesley[276] is known best for using language of the heart. Gregory Clapper has extensively applied Wesley's methods to his own practical theology for ministry. While using Wesley's language of "holy affections,"

[274] Blake Leyerle, *The Narrative Shape of Emotion in the Preaching of John Chrysostom* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 4.

[275] Leyerle, *The Narrative Shape of Emotion,* 8–10.

[276] Wesley, of course, took this from Jonathan Edwards. See Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections,* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications), 2016. *Religious Affections* was first published in 1746.

"spiritual senses," and "heart religion," Clapper terms his approach as "orthokardia," or Wesley's vision of a heart rightly oriented. Wesley was known not only for preaching about the affections, but for preaching with them, something that gave him a reputation for being obnoxiously pious in his day. With common history and use of Wesley throughout Anglicanism, Pentecostalism, and Methodism, Wesley is a perfect point of connection to affections and to other Christian traditions, and Clapper makes a great introduction to the language and application of the affections for the local church level. Clapper says that a great way for churches to begin exploring the role of the heart in Christianity is to start with the liturgy and ask what doctrines and values are being expressed, akin to Don Saliers theology of worship.[277] Clapper says this helps parishioners catch Wesley's vision of Christianity as "first and last a form of life, not merely a form of thought."[278]

Abraham Heschel

Perhaps the most prolific writer at the intersection of Holy Scripture and pathos is Abraham Heschel. While he does not use the same definition of terms or contemporary affect theories, he makes the most advanced case for the affections as being necessary for justice. Heschel grounds his notions of human pathos as sympathy for divine pathos, or being moved as God is moved for humanity. This "emotional solidarity" with God is

[277] Don E. Saliers, *Worship As Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press), 1994.

[278] Gregory S. Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 103.

what gives humanity the compassion that desires God's goodness for creation.[279] With compassion leading the way, emotions become the basis for how we partner with God for social justice.[280] Heschel calls for a return to reading the Hebrew prophets so that we better understand, "When we sit in the darkness, God is our light."[281] The prophets show us how God's anger and compassion come together to right wrongs, and we must learn to do the same.

Jon Sobrino

Latin American liberation theology is, of course, rightly known for being primarily praxis-oriented. Yet the relationship between transformative action and transformation of the heart should not be overlooked. In ways somewhat similar to Coakley, Jon Sobrino situates his case for orthopathy in his own and other Latin theologian's emphasis on the humanity of Christ. Sobrino levies that the arguments for Christ's divinity have historically led to a lessening of his humanity and to the recurrence of Gnosticism and Docetism.[282] The 'feeling Christ' is monumental to the Good News for humanity and how we find ourselves in relationship with God in Christ. Sobrino theologically defines orthopathy as "the correct way of letting ourselves be affected by

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[279] Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001), 60, 74. *The Prophets* was originally published in 1962.

[280] Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets,* 260.

[281] Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets,* 129.

[282] See especially chapter 17, "A Human Christ: The Pathos of Reality," in Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 2001.

the reality of Christ," and mentions that this dimension of Christianity has largely been "relegated to the realm of piety."[283] He says that the meaning of *euaggelion* cannot be properly understood by orthodoxy and orthopraxy alone, and it is by orthopathy that we come to properly understand Jesus' "manner of being" and find our own manner of being.[284] For Sobrino, the role of orthopathy is to teach us how to rightly relate to God, neighbor, and the world. He argues that theologies of Christ's saving work have focused on Christ's deeds and taken for granted the salvation found in his *manner* which is essential to the identity of Christ.[285] The liberation of the God-Who-Is-Love is liberation not just from deeds, but of joy and from shame, particularly, he notes, for women and all oppressed and marginalized people.[286]

Luke Powery

Black Theology as Liberation Theology is known for being primarily praxis-oriented. But Black spirituality, liturgy, and preaching is essentially affection based. Luke Powery encapsulates this specifically in regard to preaching and death. While he does not explicitly connect his method to texts of terror, it is beautifully applicable. Powery demonstrates that special attention to pathos surrounding the Holy Scriptures– both in the

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[283] Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator, A View from the Victims* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 210, 213.

[284] Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator,* 210.

[285] Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator,* 213–214.

[286] Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator,* 211.

text and in the congregation– is needed to provide proclamation that is not afraid to encounter death in the Bible and in culture. He says, "Sounding the mood of death and hope requires intensified interaction of logos, *pathos*, and ethos."[287] He makes a strong warning against cheap hope, looking back in the cultural memory of slavery to the spirituals of groaning, and uses the prophet Ezekiel to note "the presence of the Spirit in a domain of death."[288] Powery makes an important theological claim for the practical side of ministering for the context of death: that to be able to generate hope, one need not use the word 'hope' and one cannot be the "generator" of that hope. The minister merely collaborates with the Spirit who brings hope as the gift of God which "stirs life in the valley of dry bones," and, Powery might agree, in the *texts* of dry bones.[289]

Otis Moss III

In ways intimately related to Powery, Otis Moss III demonstrates how Black preaching (and, therein, hermeneutics) are particularly situated for handling the pain of life and painful biblical texts.[290] Moss describes his Blue Note hermeneutic as when one "dares to reach into the imagination with an artistic lens" to find "what seems like an

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[287] Luke A. Powery, *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 71, emphasis added.

[288] Powery, *Dem Dry Bones,* 53. He also says, "The Spirit brings him to the place of death and contamination to preach, to take a risk for the life of the community; if one is not ready to face death, one is not ready to preach because preaching is a matter of life and death." (62)

[289] Powery, *Dem Dry Bones,* 80.

[290] Otis Moss III, *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015). It's of worthy note that Moss mentions remembers that his father drew from Abraham Heschel in his preaching (ibid., xi).

impossibility" which is the coupling of sorrow and joy that both blues music and the gospel are known for.[291] Moss recalls the first time he knew he had to preach the text of the terror that befell Tamar (2 Sam. 13), which he now does annually at his church. He says, "she sat down next to me one time in my imagination," and "she simply asked me, 'Just do this, Otis, just tell my story to the Church,'" and so he did.[292] He recounts her violations and paints her act of wearing sackcloth and ashes. He invites his listeners to join her in this political and prophetic act of mourning, but he tells them Tamar says, "Tell everyone in the Church to have a change of clothes."[293] This preaching moved congregants to see the connection of the Biblical world and their own lives, and they were able to find healing because of it, feeling like God was more aware of their own situations. If we read like Moss, a text like Judges 11 can become "the rivers of Babylon where we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion" (Ps. 37:1) *and* "the river whose streams make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46:4).

Looking Forward

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[291] Moss III, *Blue Note Preaching,* 35.

[292] Moss III, *Blue Note Preaching,* 30. Moss also recalls (ibid., 58) preparing to preach on David and having to sit with the story of David, Absalom, Amnon, and Tamar– one of Trible's texts of terror– before writing his sermon manuscript. He knew he would have to speak to David's failures as a father, and so he imagines David himself speaking to the congregation and asks, "What would he say to those on the South Side? That he gave his entire life for the kingdom, and he destroyed his family? What would say, that Absalom and Amnon actually learned their behavior from him? What would he say, that his daughter never talked to him, and he never spoke up for Tamar?"

[293] Moss III, *Blue Note Preaching,* 31.

From the reception history, the intersectionality of philosophy for affective reading, and a brief survey of affective influences, we bear witness to a readiness for the Spirit to speak through texts of terror. What can and ought we feel, and how will the Church be moved when bravely encountering Jephthah, Batshama, and our own hearts? In the final chapter we explore Judges 11 affectively, offering a reading of the text that seeks how one might encounter life because of the text of death. By personal application, reflection and a willingness to lament, we see that healing, solidarity, compassion, and a desire for justice are made possible in the Spirit who does not abandon those who weep.

CHAPTER 5

THE BINDING OF JEPHTHAH: AN ORTHOPATHIC READING OF JUDGES 11

"I tell you this
to break your heart,
by which I mean only
that it break open and never close again
to the rest of the world."

–Mary Oliver, "Lead"

Loosing Our Affections

Affectivity within the narratives of Holy Scripture is most easily found, of course, within the characters of the drama. Sometimes the emotions or affective action of biblical characters are obvious and at the forefront of the text. Examples may spring to mind of Jesus weeping, the woman who rejoices at finding her lost coin, or the jealousy of the prodigal's brother. Sometimes the Holy Scripture's narration gives the reader only a peek inside the heart of a character. Sometimes we are not given any affective insight into the heart of a person. Yet we must be cautious in regard to making claims about affective historicity in the ancient world. Perhaps we may uncover pathos a bit by a character's behavior, but we need to be doubly cautious in this. Actions do not always reveal the emotion or other affections that we might expect, especially when desire is hidden. While there are many people who see ubiquity and global continuity regarding emotions, today we might label emotions or feelings in ways that vary from the ancients or were not

available then. This is not a difference of experience, but rather of the modernity of language and culture.[294]

When we imagine the affectivity of biblical drama, we are doing just that: imagining in ways that make sense to our modern culture, and not making historical claims. As David Brown says, “Imagination builds upon history to say something rather different from what the original human authors intended,” and it is this kind of “rewriting,” not “explicit logical argument,” which generates “insights that the Christian may legitimately regard as revelation, not merely human responses but divinely motivated.”[295] This is a helpful spiritual discipline because when we name biblical characters’ emotivity, we may be able to sympathize with them in a way that befits self-critique that cannot occur with actions alone. For example, from Judges 11, one cannot share the experience of being physically sacrificed by a parent; yet many can probably identify with the feelings that come with one’s parent sacrificing their due time, attention, et. cetera in the name of religion or career.

Yet an orthopathic hermeneutic is not only concerned with affection *in* the text; it asks us to ‘read’ and ‘interpret’ our own emotions and desires. Paying attention to affectivity in the texts allows the reading community to run the full gamut of emotions, not just the ‘positive’ ones. Orthopathic hermeneutics are certainly not just a pursuit of

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[294] For example, Gideon may be analyzed today as what we call ‘anxious’, although the Holy Scripture does not use that terminology for him. Things like personality, attitude, and moods are not conceived of or constructed in all the same ways today. Yet identifying emotionally is exactly what allows some people to feel personally connected to people in a time and culture that is otherwise altogether foreign.

[295] David Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31.

happiness. Holy Scripture gives us the example of Christ who gets angry, sad, and frustrated. The Psalms speak of despair, indignation, disappointment, and vexation. This helps us to understand in our own lives when such affections are appropriate or not; and further, this may help us understand that the so-called 'negative' emotions do not keep us from God. Jesus comes to Martha in her anger, to Mary Magdalene in her tears, to Peter in his audaciousness, to Paul in his disgust. Perhaps God will come to us to share in our emotions; perhaps God will come to us to rebuke and transform them. Yet, either way, they have not prohibited God coming to us.

The premise of Coakley's *théologie totale* is "a vision of God's Trinitarian nature as both the source and goal of human desire."[296] This means that as we seek the Triune God for meaning in all that we try to become, Coakley can incorporate Christ into *our story of* the stories of Holy Scripture, even texts of trauma. We find Christ, not in the story itself, but in the workings of the Spirit in our own hearts. Orthopathy brings Jesus *to* every story, although not *into* every narrative. Instead of placing a messiah where one is not, orthopathy calls us to imagine how Jesus would feel hearing this story or how he might interpret it for us. With an orthopathic hermeneutic, every passage is the Road to Emmaus. When Christ interprets the Scripture for us, we become like the Emmaus disciples whose 'hearts burned within them' (Lk 24.42). Jamie Smith says, "Jesus is a teacher who doesn't just inform our intellect but forms our very loves. He isn't content to simply deposit new ideas into your mind; he is after nothing less than your wants, your

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[296] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On The Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2013.

loves, your longings."[297] By paying attention to the affections, one can allow the Spirit to use all texts to transform heart, mind, and actions to the image of Christ.

The orthopathic hermeneutic is not so much concerned with forming the interpretation for application as it is with transforming *us*. The text does not have to be "redeemed" if in its death we are reminded of *our* resurrection. We might ask ourselves how the Risen Lord might want the ending of Judges 11 to unfold. This is to ask: in light of our faith, what do we think is right? How should the revealed love of God inform our decision? Surely we cannot imagine Jesus advising Jephthah to go through with his vow. In Matthew, Jesus' desire for mercy and not sacrifice is immediately followed by a story of another father whose daughter's life is hanging in the balance. But this ruler comes begging for Jesus to heal his daughter. The Holy Scriptures say that this father "knelt before him, saying, 'My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.' And Jesus rose and followed him" (Matt. 9:18–19). Christ follows the father who wants his daughter to live.[298]

Coakley's Orthopathic Homiletic

In a publication of ten Holy Week meditations, *The Cross and the Transformation of Desire,* Coakley constructs short homiletic essays that demonstrate the double entendre of the collection's title. She demonstrates that viewing the stories of the cross through the

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[297] James K.A. Smith, *You are What You Love,* 2.

[298] It is worth noting that this passage in Matt. 9 can evoke feelings, especially in women, concerning Christian traditions that do not ordain/fully ordain women to the highest level ministry. The story is not about ordination. Yet still from it we can take a sense that the Gospel author is showing us something significant about Christ's heart and his desire for the flourishing of women. This is the only mentioning in the entire New Testament that cites Jesus following another.

lens of desire transforms not only their meaning to us, but also transforms our desires. Not only are her homilies full of descriptions of emotions, desires, and passions, but they are written in a way to cause the reader an affective experience; she is not simply delivering information. The narratives of Holy Scripture are recounted in ways that Coakley herself may call 'sensual' or 'erotic,' as she, sometimes in midrashic fashion, describes the inner affections of anguish or ecstasy. She also writes her commentary to both display and evoke emotive connections. She tells us of the woman who anoints Jesus "fling[ing] herself bodily at a beloved in grief and gratitude,"[299] and of how tradition sees Judas as "the almost pathetic pantomime whose guts burst open as he fell headlong in his tainted field of blood… satisfyingly humiliated."[300] She makes sure we read the Passion in ways that are passionate. She is not merely trying to be dramatic, but rather, is calling us into a deeper experience of the drama of which we are already a part.

In these writings, Coakley displays use of her own *théologie totale*. She says that "a *théologie totale* refuses to *reduce* doctrine to a mere effect of social, political, or patriarchal conditions,"[301] and so she also does with the reading of Holy Scripture. In the opening meditation she remarks,

> Holy Week is an invitation… to a story of divine love so exquisite as to exceed and upturn all justice as we know it; not to a theological conundrum to be solved, but to a dangerous and life-threatening journey: a journey of pain, death, discovery and new life. This is a journey that can

[299] Coakley, *The Cross and the Desire for Transformation*, 6.

[300] Coakley, *The Cross and the Desire for Transformation*, 8.

[301] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 84.

> only be *undergone,* and it can only start with a profound lament for our ongoing resistance and aversion to its strange meaning.[302]

She can interact with the narratives of Holy Scripture in such a fashion because she trusts that whatever theological doctrine they produce, they can cause personal transformation.[303] Coakley says that theology involves the "*epistemological* task of cleansing, reordering, and redirecting the apparatuses of one's own thinking, desiring, and seeing."[304] One way we engage this epistemic-theological task is through wrestling with Holy Scripture. Coakley notes that the Church also engages in this practice through the role of iconography. She states, "iconographical material presses one towards an ascetic test: the chastening of fallen desire, the darkening of previous certainties, and the reimagination of God's trinitarian relation to the created order."[305]

By painting narratives so vibrantly with affectivity, Coakley captivates readers into imagining the Passion scenes unfolding. In doing so, Coakley has created a type of artistic meditation or homily, something that engrosses the senses and imagination like she says icons do. Remembering, speaking, contemplating, and waiting can offer meaning without offering explanation. By naming the horror and not its justification, these uncomfortable texts do what Coakley says of art: it "in its own distinctive way, can

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[302] Coakley, *The Cross and the Desire for Transformation*, 4.

[303] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 88.

[304] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 20.

[305] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 21.

be ‘apophatic’ (it can say by unsaying).”[306] Coakley offers a way for the Church to do that which Trible asked: remember these texts so that we remember their victims and thereby remember those victimized today. Coakley has gifted us with ways to remember well.

Coakley’s Affective Reasoning & the Akedah

Worth particular attention now is Coakley’s meditation on the binding of Isaac simply entitled, “Sacrifice.” Coakley begins her approach to this narrative where “religious meaning dies” with her own anecdote of teaching the story to thirteen year old pupils at church who were hearing it for the first time. They were “shocked,” silent, “puzzled and embarrassed,” confused and full of passionate questions.[307] She notes that they were particularly concerned with God’s desire. She remarks that she was “touched by their righteous desire to move this story quickly back into a realm of human order and meaning.”[308] They, like rabbis for centuries, tried to justify the actions in the text. But Coakley explains that while this text is so upsetting, both Jewish and Christian traditions have had to see the text as “purposive, purgative, and transformative.”[309] We cannot change it; it changes us. Essentially, stories of suffering purge our affections and produce in us transformed desires. Their injustice stirs our heart to long for justice.

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[306] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 22.

[307] Coakley, *The Cross and the Desire for Transformation*, 21.

[308] Coakley, *The Cross and the Desire for Transformation,* 21.

[309] Coakley, *The Cross and the Desire for Transformation*, 22.

Coakley writes that we experience such "authentic spiritual terror" at the Akedah story that it sometimes leaves us feeling binary options as our available responses. "I can walk into the dread… or I can retreat."[310] She feels the tension between succumbing to that "nightmarish" picture of God, or neglecting the text altogether. But Coakley offers a third response: realizing that the "heart of the Akedah story" is also the "heart of the cross." That is to say, God desires our desire. Thus from such a narrative, what we conclude is not about the text, but rather that one must sacrifice the false idols constructed from the text to protect our own image. Coakley concludes by stating, "So the religious problem of the binding of Isaac, and the religious problem of the cross of Jesus, are not 'solved' by any theory or cleverness, but mediated in the story, lived out, sweated out, in the lives and prayer and waiting of those willing to be taken into unmeaning and beyond idolatry."[311] From Coakley's example with the Akedah, we now move to an orthopathic reading of the sacrificial binding that happens in Judges 11.

Orthopathic Hermeneutics and Judges 11

As we saw in the reception history, over the centuries the story of Jephthah and Batshama has been emotively exaggerated, for better or for worse, in many ways that the biblical text itself only provides notions. Midrashim, too, details the emotions and the passions of God, and the desires of the characters are described vibrantly on Judges 11.

[310] Coakley, *The Cross and the Desire for Transformation*, 22.

[311] Coakley, *The Cross and the Desire for Transformation,* 23.

Commenting rabbis often also make their own affective interpretation known. The Holy One is "provoked" by Jephthah, and the Spirit will "cry out" after the daughter's death.[312] Interestingly, the same Talmudic reading that gives voice to the Spirit also privileges a confrontational voice of the daughter. This suggests a connection between hearing the lamenting daughter and the lamenting Spirit. Perhaps when we listen close enough to hear the cry of the Spirit, we will also be able to hear the cries of daughters. Or maybe it is the other way around, as the midrash displays: when we listen to the voice of victims, we understand that their pain grieves God, too. The daughter's attitude in midrashim is displayed as active instead of passive. She says, "My father, my father, I came out to meet you full of joy, and now you slaughter me. Is it written in the Torah that Israel should offer the lives of their children upon the altar?"[313] Here she displays an urge toward orthopathy, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy. Her value-correct display of emotion—joy at victory—should not warrant her death. Yet since her father will not be moved by her righteous affection, she turns to use the law.

The rabbis record that "Jephthah was no more lettered than a block of sycamore wood, and because of his ignorance he lost his daughter."[314] He has no sound doctrine or examples of the tradition to fall back on. Could an orthopathic hermeneutic for his

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[312] *The Book of Legends, Sefer Ha-Aggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash*, ed. Bialy, Hayim Nahman and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky (NY: Schocken Books, 1992), 109.

[313] *The Book of Legends,* 109.

[314] *The Book of Legends,* 109. The rabbis place Jeremiah 19:5 in the mouth of the Spirit as response, saying, they have "gone on building the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it enter my mind;" (NRSV).

situation have saved his daughter? Perhaps his desires and affections could have persuaded him that her sacrifice was unjust, but perhaps not. Perhaps it was his crude heart and misdirected desires that got them into this situation in the first place. Yet Jephthah is not the only one that midrashim hold responsible for the death of the innocent daughter. They likewise blame Phinehas, a "high priest son of a high priest," a man who not only would know the law and the history of traditions, but also be able to absolve Jephthah of his vow. The midrash offers that the two men knew of each other, but neither would humble himself to go to the other. Therefore, "between the two of them, the hapless one perished from the world, and both men were held liable for her blood."[315] For these rabbis, Jephthah's problem is not his knowledge or his lack of community, but instead, lies with his affections.

Affections in *the Text*

While Judges 11 is a text that provokes much emotion, it does not provide much detail into the passions it mentions. This biblical narrative itself is, however, a story of a great pendulum swing in affectivity, both communal and individual, as it is bookended by a community's celebration of joy turned to mourning and lament. From the introduction of Batshama on the scene, we see her jubilation disjointedly clash with her father's grief, and it is this emotional mismatch that first clues her and her community to the fact that something is gravely wrong. Jephthah is the only character whose emotionality is shown

[315] *The Book of Legends,* 109.

in any detail. Upon seeing his dancing daughter, verse thirty-five records that he rends his garments and cries out, accusing his child of "bringing him very low" and "being among those who trouble [him]." Some ancient manuscripts also record him as saying to her, "You have become a stumbling block to me."[316] Upon his expressions of grief, he immediately doubles down on his action and belief, saying, "I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it." His strong affections of distress do not lead him to question or alter his beliefs or undertakings at all. Instead of exploring the rationality of his anguish, he binds himself again to his vow, binds God from any action, and binds his child to the altar of sacrifice. He creates a nightmarish Bible story that becomes a stumbling block to the faith of many.

While Jephthah seems to be a man of strong passion, not much is said at all regarding the affectivity of Batshama or the rest of the community assumed therein. The reader must choose how to interpret this, and one's hermeneutic and one's beliefs about feelings will come to bear on such. Is her seeming quietness due to her own demeanor, the demands of patriarchal culture, or the hand of the writer? Her limited voice has been interpreted both as filial loyalty and as patriarchal silencing. Some have assumed that her attitude and emotions are not told in detail because her grief might have caused too much sympathy from the reader for a minor character, taking away attention from Jephthah.[317]

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[316] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 102.

[317] For example see, Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing," 43; and Angela Yarber, *Dance in Scripture: How Biblical Dancers Can Revolutionize Worship Today,* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 27.

Because her story begins with dancing and ends with call for collective "bewailment," perhaps we can assume that this young woman is capable of great affective reasoning and emotional value-correctness, despite the narrator's lack of those details.

Certainly the most expressive thing we see of her is the action of dancing, and yet much of what we believe that may have looked like comes from other biblical and historical accounts, not this pericope itself. We must assume many details on this act, too. Verse 34 paints no other women with her, although we might be able to assume she was in company because of historical precedence. She is, at least, dancing in the company of women like Miriam who have gone before her, using their bodies to express passion that cannot be expressed in spoken word alone. Her public celebration at her home turns to outcasted lamentation in exile. Her name is not remembered, but her call to lament is. She could not save her life, but she did preserve a culture's need and right for emotional expression in suffering. She paved the way for women, and for us all, then and today, to find solidarity in mourning. When knowledge could not be ascertained and actions could not be altered, she and her community leaned into each other and into the solace of their manifested pathos. Then the only thing she swayed was her body, but today she compels us to be moved in Divine pathos.

Judges 11 is not just a story about two people; this is a story about community, even if only apophatically. As womanist scholars have pointed out, this is a text that calls the whole church and larger communities to accountability. The text, of course, provides us with questions instead of answers, ones that take great emotional fortitude and humility to answer. Where are those who will stand up for the ones who cannot bring

justice for themselves? Who are those that call into question problematic theology? Are we those who can say because of our anguish, "There must be another way?' To whom will we turn to ascertain what God really desires? To ask for our ancient sister, 'Why did no one intervene on her behalf?' is to ask ourselves, 'Who needs intervention today?' and, 'Are we brave enough to be that voice?' When imagining this story orthopathically, we must also be willing to sit and do the hard emotional work with those who need to ask: Where is this daughter's mother? Is she absent or is she voiceless because she is simply powerless?

The smaller community of the daughter's sisterhood provides for us the example of an orthopathic community as they gather in the wilderness for solidarity and lamentation. While these women cannot correct doctrine nor change the course of action, they offer their sister what they can: their hearts. They share in her pathos and embody their emotions to bring her the gift of solidarity. While they cannot save her, as Trible says, "they do not let her pass into oblivion. They establish a testimony… in a special place."[318] In privileging the sisterhood's affective response, we establish a testimony– a testimony not only for our sacrificed sister, but for much more. Our hearts, transformed by the suffering of Christ, teach us that we will not sacrifice our children for false doctrine, we will not sacrifice the true God of Israel for a blood-hungry idol, and we will not sacrifice the Holy Scriptures as a text that sanctions us to do these things. Judges 11 becomes the "special place" for this testimony.

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[318] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 107.

The voices and lives found in Holy Scripture are not only human; God's own self is given voice in the text. We will not take the time in this essay to defend whether or not God feels affectively or what that might mean for immutability and the like. We must, however, note the extreme and abundant language of God's pathos in the Holy Scriptures and recognize that doctrine of God is inherently connected to this language. Furthermore, while we know that God did not write the Holy Scriptures, some doctrines of inspiration connect God to the authorship of the text in ways that make God a type of 'implied narrator' to steal a term from Nussbaum.[319] Even if we do not ascribe authorship to God, often God is somehow still theologically implicated by the content of Holy Scripture in the way that the texts read to us. It is as if God is the divine spectator to the contents in their historical context and our reading in the present moment.

Contemporary scholars have pointed out that the book of Judges portrays God as extremely passionate, and its narratives do so in such a way that depict God as conflicted between anger and compassion and grieving in the tension.[320] In the pericope of Jephthah and his daughter, however, no insight is ever given as to how God feels. As Trible says of it, "And through it all, God says nothing."[321] God's emotions are not made explicit for God's people to find value-correctness. In fact, God never speaks, is never described, and also never acts. The only exception is before the vow and the daughter are on the scene: Judg. 11.29 says when "the Spirit of the Lord rushes upon Jephthah," and this will be

[319] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 241.

[320] Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God,* 216– 226.

[321] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 102.

dealt momentarily.[322] Yet Nussbaum notes that readers are given to feeling sympathetic with both implied authors and implied spectators.[323] For many Christians, God spectating without intervening means divine approval. Lee Roy Martin, however, argues that the silence or the "unheard voice" of God in the book of Judges may be taken as the displeasure of God.[324] Doctrine and praxis are built upon these experiences of assumed affective knowledge, particularly divine pathos and knowledge. As Heschel says, "Justice is not simply an idea or a norm, but a divine passion."[325] The logic of God is bound to God's heart, and so it needs to be with us.

Affections of *the Text*

While not often considered a "character" in the story, there is another voice coming from the text: the narration of the text itself. When we begin to pay attention to *how* the narration unfolds, we pay more attention to what it does and does not say. With orthopathy, we find that form criticism gives insight into the affect of a narration and its word choice, not just a non-biased recounting of drama.[326] Regarding Trible's other text

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[322] See page for this discussion "124–125".

[323] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 241.

[324] See Lee Roy Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God*, 5. Nussbaum offers an interesting quote about silence in narrative that may be appropriate here: "And what emotion, if any, does the silence express? Could there be a form of love in the silence, in the act of not structuring, not writing? Or perhaps the absence of emotions, of story contraction, that is itself more loving still than love has ever been?" Nussbaum, "Narrative Emotions," 254.

[325] Heschel, *The Prophets,* xviii.

[326] It is obvious but important to note that this can change drastically from the original language to the English or subsequent language, and even amongst varying English translations.

of terror in Judges, trauma specialist Janelle Stanley says that Judges 19 reads in a way that directly mimics the report of a traumatic experience from an abused person.[327] She notes that the literary mechanisms employed (repetition, lack of detail, loss of focus on the central character, namelessness, change of speed, and truncated telling of the trauma itself) are all coping mechanisms of trauma narratives. We see all of these mechanisms employed in Judges 11 as well.[328] While the author or narrator of Judges gives no commentary on the story, perhaps in the way it is told, grief is underlying the whole time. It is as if the Holy Scripture itself knows how awful its attestation is and has a hard time recounting the tale. Perhaps in noting this, we can see this as the Spirit's grief, too. While of course recounting trauma narratives can be triggering, Stanley also tells us that they can be healing. She says, "Telling the story stops the fragmentation process. It allows a victim of trauma to begin re-associating events and emotions, sensation and memory. No matter how traumatic the story is, the ability to tell it heals."[329] When the Holy Scriptures tell such texts of trauma, perhaps they do so not to terrorize us, but to give us the safety, solidarity, and courage to tell our own.

[327] Janelle Stanley, "Judges 19: Text of Trauma," in *Joshua and Judges,* ed. Athalya Brenner and Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 275–290. This is the pericope often called "The Levite's Concubine".

[328] Notice the repetition of "child" language throughout the chapter and the repetition of "only daughter" and "virginity" in the daughter's section. Almost every plot point is told with ambiguity, and of course her name is left out. Jephthah's emotions and words are on full display, yet the entire two-month lamentation is summed in a non-descriptive sentence, and the sacrifice itself is a mere mention that is cryptic at best.

[329] Stanley, "Judges 19," 288.

There is another important point to be made which is how contemporary and second language readers interpret the grammar and the sequence of the narration as connecting the events therein. Perhaps nowhere is this more important than in Judges 11.28–30. One might argue that the pericope particular to the daughter begins with the Spirit of God rushing upon Jephthah in verse 29, and therefore many Bible publications have a section break and new heading here that creates a disjuncture, cutting the one story into two. Thus the Spirit rushing upon Jephthah is seen as the beginning of Batshama's story and is viewed as the precursor to Jephthah's vow. From this, we could make an important orthopraxic point: those who are anointed by the Spirit are still capable of extremely foolish actions. Perhaps the Church is able to sympathize with such a sentiment.[330] Yet if we erase the published divide and rejoin Batshama's story to the larger narrative, we see another option. What if the Spirit is not a harbinger of the vow to be made, but rather one who comes as a response to what has just *happened* in the story?

When the Spirit comes upon Jephthah, King Ammon has just refused to listen to Jephthah who has challenged him for many reasons, last of which is of particular interest. We read, "While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages… why did you not deliver them within that time?" (11.26) Here most translations ask why Ammon did not save their villages, or what some translate as 'towns.' But the Hebrew uses here a personification: *banoth*– the word for "daughters." While we might

[330] Sympathizing with Jephthah's failure does not permit us to sanitize his action. Rather, it demonstrates we recognize he has done wrong. In our empathy toward him, we also empathize with how God feels toward Jephthah and we are moved toward forgiveness for the perpetrator, and with the recognition we cannot excuse ourselves or own leaders for injustice.

unknowingly gloss this in English, surely the original audience would be moved as Jephthah asks, 'Why did you, for over 300 years, not care about saving your daughters?' What ironic foreshadowing they would hear in this play on words. Thus perhaps it is to this neglect and marginalization, this desire for war, and this refusal to listen that now the Spirit, who has been brooding over it all, comes to Jephthah. Verse 28 says the King would not listen, and immediately, "Then the Spirit comes to Jephthah" in verse 29. Verse 29 continues on after the announcement of God's Spirit, saying, "and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites." It is only after all of that space and time that then verse 29 will say that Jephthah made a vow. Rather than directly causing the vow that leads to the daughter's demise, Gods' presence rushes in as a response for those unrescued "daughters", not to cause Jephthah's vow from which he refuses to save his own daughter. Perhaps the Spirit here is not the Mover but the one most moved.

Affections from *the Text*

When encountering misogynistic texts, there are some people, particularly women, who might feel about the Bible as midrash has described the daughter dancing to her father: "I came out to meet you full of joy, and now you slaughter me."[331] The book that was glossed as teaching us God's love for us no longer makes sense. We experience the same confusing clash of disparity when our celebration of discipline meets this text's anguish. That experienced incongruity can lead to a creativity for meaning that we might

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[331] *The Book of Legends,* 109.

not have otherwise pursued, but without an affective option, it may, like Coakley wrote, lead us to retreat from a text that we cannot control. Recognizing our affections and desires that arise from the text, and subjecting them to the work of the Spirit opens us to new ways we can dance or lament with the Holy Scripture, each other, and with God.

Perhaps our reasoning kicks in when we read this and are filled with rage, confusion, and anguish. Emotions and feelings rush to the surface of our cheeks and our minds. Moods change and desires begin to make their demands, often in the form of a one-word question: 'why?' When the violence of this narrative is given permission to affectively move the reading community, intelligent and meaningful discipleship can occur. In remembering the sacrificed daughter, we keep ourselves from sacrificing the Holy Scriptures and also our own lives. We remember and we remind victims: you are not alone. Not only must the story be told truthfully, but it must be told with proper emotions so that virtues and vices are clarified and ignorance and uncertainty are admitted. Herein readings of "toxic positivity,"[332] false orthodoxy, and unhelpful orthopraxy are not propagated. To be clear, an orthopathic hermeneutic does not seek one particular emotion or desire from any given text, but primarily calls for truthfulness of how one feels to be revealed and then allows for a range of proper affectivity or value-correctness that fits within the Christian experience and the culture at hand. We can explore those possibilities now.

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[332] Thomas Dixon, *The History of Emotions: A Very Short Introduction* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 2023), 63.

As we noted with Coakley's homily, ancient and contemporary audiences may have another historical comparison in mind with Judges 11: Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac. God interrupts that sacrifice, sending a messenger to tell Abraham not to lay a hand on him, and provides a ram as the substitute. We must ask: why is there no ram for this child? Why is there no angelic interruption, no divine intervention? We can muse over literary differences, theological distinctions, and textual dating, but the orthopathic hermeneutic calls us to critique our own selves. First there is the positive revelation: desire for her salvation reveals a compassionate heart. It reveals belief that God can save and the understanding that God should save. Hopefully, that compassion is also the emotion that leads us to the courage needed to take action when similar situations take place in our own world. Yet, we must not be so quick to only assume our whole selves righteous.

It is so easy to hate Jephthah in this text, especially when we are moved with desire to save Batshama. But orthopathy demands we look through other points of view to see ourselves. We are not always only the daughter, nor are we always only Jephthah. This is one way in which an orthopathic hermeneutic partners well with feminist interpretation: readers are not limited to identification with their gender alone. Therefore as individuals and communities, we must be willing to critique ourselves based not only on the text's victims, but also its perpetrators. This can be exceptionally difficult yet important for women, as most can so easily identify as the victim, forced by the systems of patriarchy to pay the price for another, when the whole time they simply wanted to celebrate God's victories alongside brothers. But the Church must also take care to see

our own capacity toward wrong-doing. We, corporately and as individuals, must see that we have been both the brothers who reject and the sisters who remember.

Orthopathy pushes us to ask ourselves hard questions. How often do we beg God to bless our ministry, but at the sacrifice of those in our own homes? When have we waited for divine interruption, when we already knew right from wrong? How long will we search the bushes of this world for a ram to sacrifice and not see that the Lamb is caught in the thicket of our thorny hearts? Perhaps Jephthah, too, should have known better because of the story of Father Abraham, but what if he did not know that history because the brothers of Father Gilead cast him away from home where such formation could have happened? Which brothers have we cast out of our Father's house, claiming they are not pure enough, only to be troubled later by the wrong they choose? Who have we rejected as unworthy for the inheritance, only to be shocked at their behavior which is perhaps attributable to our own deficiency? From this story, anger and compassion are wed to give us clarity and courage. Perhaps this text can be the altar where we sacrifice our self-idolatry, and maybe orthopathy can be how we fulfill Christ's command: "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice'" (Matt 9:13).

Conclusions

Truth-telling

I would like to argue that orthopathic hermeneutics and affective theology offer the Church important assistance in recognizing, naming, and telling the truth about the world. There is a specific truth-bearing application that is garnered, especially by

attention to affect *in* and *from* the text. Identifying emotion causes us to respond theologically, not just in doctrine about God, but practically, too. We naturally ask of a text, "How does this apply to my life?" even if subconsciously. There are two ways in which this is helpful. First, it gives permission to the Christian to be honest about their emotions. One is only likely to repent of sinful affections if they are able to honestly recognize and process it. Additionally, there is a notion that haunts Christian society which says one must always be positive or forcedly cheerful, even in circumstances of injustice. Yet, when Holy Scripture teaches us to 'rejoice always,' it does not mean we need to fake that everything is okay when it is not. Feigned satisfaction is the inhibitor of joy. Forced readings of toxic positivity lead communities to false doctrine and hurtful ethics. Honest affectivity allows one to experience the true joy of being delighted or satisfied in that which delights or satisfies God. This allows joy to come in the mourning.

Secondly, there are lessons to be learned for the cause of justice and freedom. First is the apophatic lesson that suggests if one's hermeneutic or theology allows them to make excuses for evil that happens in the Bible, one may do so also in their own life and the greater world.[333] Sometimes the simple occurrence of something in the Bible, especially in a narrative text, will cause one to think its mere existence in the canon means that God approves and the Church does, too. An orthopathic hermeneutic makes

[333] The theological (mis)application often goes like this: "God *let* Tamar be raped in the Bible, so God had a plan for letting it happen to *me,*" or "God was *glad* Jephthah followed through with his vow, so keeping our word in more valuable to God than human suffering." So often this belief takes the form of believing something like, "God caused me evil for his purpose," over something like, "God is working all things to my good."

us pay attention to Christian understanding of value-correctness and holy affectivity, and thus we must be also aware of what the Holy Scriptures do *not* attribute to God's affect. One with his or her heart theologically tuned in to God's affections is less likely to look around the world and blame abuse on God. Secondly, this is of extreme value for victims of trauma and abuse. When we do not cite God as the 'pleased mover,' we might see God as the *moved* Emmanuel. This allows us to be comforted by God's with-us-ness in our sorrow. This gives us the blessing to mourn and lament, to cry and be angry. When the Church has the freedom to lean into these affections and emotive-acts, we are more likely to recognize and do something about injustices in the world. Telling and hearing the story of this nameless daughter helps the Church tell and hear the stories of countless other victims today. Ultimately, affective pedagogy helps us to know God and to be conformed to God's likeness as we relate to our neighbors. As Ted Runyon said of John Wesley's belief, "Changes in lives, not precision in formulation, was the test of true doctrine. Orthopathy produces new creatures."[334]

Our Passions and the Passion

As we seek biblical understanding, sometimes we think we know nothing, yet our hearts race or we cry or we smile, and maybe those reactions are intelligent. In some cases, perhaps, they are even Spirit-led. When we read Judges 11 and we do not know

[334] Ted Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 232.

what to *think* about God or Jephthah, Batshama or the Bible, perhaps it is hermeneutically and theologically sufficient if we are angry or distressed and we long for a world in which such never happens again. Maybe therein we and the Spirit and the Bible have all done our jobs as God meets us, not on the page, but in our tears that stain them. Certainly, the occurrence of affect-appraisal does not ensure sound doctrine, Christlikeness, or what Nussbaum called "value-correctness." The orthopathic hermeneutic does, however, give us an opportunity for experience-based learning that does not require the privileged tools of academic scholarship. Quite frankly, to insist upon an intellectual elitism that demands a certain set of rules, information, and abilities not afforded to the majority of the world, is something we scholars with our education-salvation complexes do well to keep in mind. Proper affectivity is, like doctrine and ethics, something that Christian communities can teach, strive for, and grow in, but loving with our heart is also something that equalizes us.

Affective reasoning interrupts our biblical hermeneutics to interpret ourselves. A heart-conscious theology reminds us that the Holy Scriptures are not just for indoctrination or application, but for transformation. When it comes to deciding how God wills us to interact with each other, we no longer need a ram, in the woods, caught by his horns; we have the Lamb, on the wood, crowned in thorns. Christ, God's eternal Word, was himself sacrificed for us. As Hebrews says, the sacrifice of Christ allows the Spirit to bear witness that God will write God's law on our *hearts* (10.15–16). May our affections and desires be formed to the compassion of Christ, so then we can say with the Psalmist: "In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but ears you have dug for me. Burnt

offering and sin offering you have not required… I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart*”* (Ps. 40.6, 8).

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