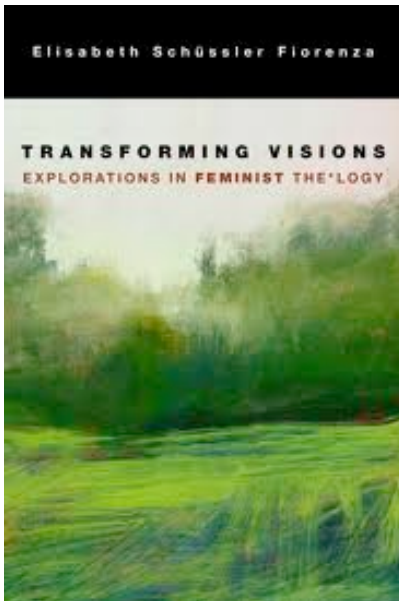


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**Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth**

***Transforming Vision: Explorations in Feminist  
The\*logy***

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*Transforming Vision* is a collection of essays previously published in journals and books to explore and to make vital proposals for feminist critical inquiry. The book is organized into four parts and subdivided into twelve chapters. The first part focuses on the struggles of women to articulate feminist theology adequately. The second extends the scope to deal with the challenges of women around the globe, where violence and prejudice are often the norm. The third brings the subject home to the author's ecclesiastical context, as a Catholic feminist theologian, to show the paradox of oppressive structures and liberating aspects of religion. The final part re-envisioning divine attributes such as "Wisdom" as a potential framework for feminist critical discourse.

The frame of political-liberation feminist inquiry is couched not as a philosophical inquiry but as a discursive that comprises diverse groups of women (of all races, class, age, sexuality) from sociocultural and political spectrums. Thus the term *kyriarchy* is employed to express an alternative to patriarchal framework. *Kyriarchy* is defined as "a sociopolitical and cultural-religious system of domination that structures the identity slots open to members of society in terms of race, gender, nation, economy, and sexuality and configures them in terms of pyramidal relations of domination and submission, profit and exploitation." (8) The liberation feminist agenda critiques such oppressive

structures in the quest to transform the status of women in society. Consequently, all women are encouraged to participate in what the author calls the “*ekklesia* or congress of women.”

The first chapter presents religion as an instrument of both domination and emancipation. The undoing of religious legitimation of “kyriarchal gender-systems,” Schüssler Fiorenza argues, may be formulated in four interconnected foci: “the sociopolitical, the cultural-symbolic, the bio-natural, and the linguistic grammatical levels” (37). The second chapter recounts modernity-postmodernity binaries in relation to a feminist theoretical frame to show that neither of these sufficiently reflects a helpful feminist stance. Pointing to the shortfalls of one particular philosophical, racial, or economic spectrum, Schüssler Fiorenza proposes dialogue in the “*ekkēlsia* of wo/men” as an alternative discursive site for exploration. “‘*Ekkēlsia* of wo/men’ constitutes itself wherever responsible people gather both to articulate, discuss, and celebrate their problems, visions, and goals and together decide on strategies and ways to political and religious self-determination” (51).

Methodologically, Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that feminist interpretation be approached as a rhetorical inquiry informed by critical interrogation of the text and its symbolic worlds. The interpreter may subject every form of hermeneutical method, language, and scholarship to critical scrutiny in this regard. Unlike traditional hermeneutical concepts such as “empathy, historicity, linguisticity, tradition, pre-understanding, fusion of horizons and classics with its notion of *effective history*” (62), Schüssler Fiorenza proposes *hermeneutics as metic* as a suitable approach for the feminist interpreter.

The beginning of the second part (ch. 4) invites women of diverse backgrounds to embrace biological, cultural, social, and religious difference in the quest for pragmatic overtures and transformation. Schüssler Fiorenza contends that the discourse must not be monolithic but a congress where contradictory values and shared interests are equally embraced. “The *ekklesia* of women ... as an ‘open-bounded’ space, can give voice to feminist community and historical continuity without denying the existing differences” (91).

Schüssler Fiorenza further provides concrete accounts of violence against women and a wide range of issues confronting them in chapter 5. The use of scripture among the political right to subjugate women is particularly underscored. Religion has played a significant role in constructing the measure of what constitutes feminine decency, sometimes to the disadvantage of women. The author locates the roots of biblical view of women in the patriarchal norms of Greek, Roman, and Jewish antiquity. These biblical texts are utilized often to call for submission, love, or forgiveness even when (domestic) violence is being perpetrated against women. The urgency of women to unite in the quest

for liberation is revisited in chapter 6, where Christian prejudice against Jews is condemned as damaging to achieving the goals of feminism.

The third part begins in chapter 7 by recounting the role of religion in the struggles of women. While public feminist discourse previously rejected biblical religion, in part due to its patriarchal framework, it is argued here that religion has also been instrumental in shaping the identity of women in significant ways. The *ekklesia* of wo/men is therefore exhorted to pursue emancipatory and democratic paradigms in biblical interpretation.

Fiorenza indicts (ch. 8) the lack of women in the top leadership of her own denomination and characterizes it as “structural sin of sexism and misogyny.” She shows, however, a growing interest of Catholic women to engage in critical discourse in theological disciplines. She asserts, “only if Catholic theology remains positioned in the open global space of divine Wisdom will it be able to sustain its rich catholicity and to maintain its intellectual freedom” (180).

The reader meets the epitome of creative imagination when the author imagines herself in dialogue with the successor of Pope John Paul II, nicknamed “*papa feminista*,” to re-envision the struggles of women in order to enact positive changes. The feminist pope is named Miryam IV after the legacy of three significant “Miryams” in biblical tradition. As aptly imagined, “I saw Miryam, the sister of Moses, Miryam, the mother of Jesus, and Miryam, the apostle to the apostles, clapping hands with you, Miryam, Keeper of the Rainbow Covenant, who were now leading the dance of G\*d’s saving grace. And all the wo/men went out after you with tambourines, dancing and singing” (192). Such was to alert the pope about real struggles of people in our world and to invite him to champion the feminist cause. Chapter 10 follows to explore the place of Mariology in the feminist quest for transformation. The notion of Mary as the archetype and “mother,” on the one hand, and the patriarchal structures debarring women from ordination and other privileges, on the other, is deemed problematic. Thus, the church may endeavor to promote what Schüssler Fiorenza calls *discipleship of equals*.

Furthermore, the question of masculine monotheistic Father-God in religious studies vis-à-vis an inclusive polytheism is carefully analyzed. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the issue “must not be approached as an ontological one, but must be analyzed as a dualistic rhetoric and reformulated in terms of the\*logy critique” (221). God must be reconsidered afresh in feminist discourse to conceptualize “all-encompassing divine Harmony” that transcends monotheistic categories and structures of domination. Finally, Schüssler Fiorenza recounts the ubiquitous embrace of spirituality in the workplace as the platform to point to feminist inquiry into “Wisdom” spirituality, one that “sustains rather than mutes struggles for survival and liberation” (229).

This is a thoughtful and comprehensive theorizing of the framework of feminist critical discourse. Schüssler Fiorenza's impressive knowledge in the subject matter is evident in the bibliographical references and the scope of analyses extending to Islam and Judaism. The reader is furnished with concrete statistical data from outside the field of theological studies to substantiate claims made in the discussion. Non-Western readers would particularly appreciate how Schüssler Fiorenza engages perspectives from the two-thirds world and teases out differences of the challenges facing women in different cultures and regions. The book is stimulating, challenging, persuasive, and thought-provoking depending on one's stance on the place of women in church and society.

One area that would have strengthened this work would be a clear articulation of how women may engage interested men in the dialogue or exploration. The realization of the transforming vision for women would perhaps be accelerated if women were encouraged to work in concert with men in achieving this noble aim. The book is accessible mostly to graduate and academic readership. I recommend this book not only to female readers but also to men across Christian denominations to read, ponder, and explore how they might participate in the efforts to mitigate any form oppression against women.