

## 19. Sacred Yet Insufficient

### The Use of Scripture as a Source in a Mennonite-Feminist Approach to Sexual Ethics

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Claimed as scripture by the church, the Bible has special status and authority as a source for Christian ethics. As scholars Bruce Birch and Larry Rasmussen articulate, “Christians cannot escape the question of biblical authority because it is inherent in the claim that the Bible constitutes scripture for the church.”<sup>209</sup> Yet, determining the role and authority of scripture is not easy. This is particularly true for sexual ethics. The patriarchal nature of biblical texts and interpretations (i.e., the lack of women’s voices), the distance between the worlds of the text and the world today, and the absence of a coherent sexual ethic have made the Bible a stumbling block for a healthy, sex-positive, justice-oriented approach to sexual ethics. As Mennonites engage the topic of sexuality and pursue approaches to sexual ethics that are life-giving, the need to clarify the authority of scripture is paramount.

In the following paper I draw on key feminist theologians to clarify and critique Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings of the authority of scripture for the purpose of developing a Mennonite-feminist approach to sexual ethics that is justice oriented. I begin by looking at the authority of scripture in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. I then introduce key feminist theologians who critique traditional understandings of the authority of scripture. In conjunction, I demonstrate how feminist theologians function as resources and interlocutors for clarifying the use of scripture for a Mennonite approach to sexual ethics that values women as persons. My thesis is that scripture is a source of sacred wisdom for ethics that is not authoritative a priori, but must be evaluated in conjunction with the experiences of the oppressed and marginalized with the norms of love and justice, since it is in love and justice that God is known.<sup>210</sup>

#### **The Authority of Scripture in the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition**

Scripture is the primary source for theological and ethical discernment in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Unlike Protestant traditions that

draw more evenly on the Wesleyan quadrilateral of four sources for Christian ethics (scripture, reason, tradition, and experience), Mennonites, as stated by Article 4 of the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, believe this:

*We acknowledge the scripture as the authoritative source and standard for preaching and teaching about faith and life, for distinguishing truth from error, for discerning between good and evil, and for guiding prayer and worship. Other claims on our understanding of Christian faith and life, such as tradition, culture, experience, reason, and political powers, need to be tested and corrected by the light of Holy scripture.*<sup>211</sup>

In early Anabaptism, “[Scripture] alone was considered authoritative for doctrine and life, for all worship and activity, for all church regulations and discipline.”<sup>212</sup> According to Menno Simons, “the whole scriptures, both Old and New Testament, were written for our instruction, admonition, and correction. ... Everything contrary to scripture, therefore, ... should be measured by this infallible rule.”<sup>213</sup> Thus, it is clear that scripture is a primary source of divine authority in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.

The notion of the hermeneutic community (the community of faith as an interpretive body) is also significant in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, revealing a connection between scripture and experience that is not acknowledged in the above citations. Mennonite-Feminist theologian Lydia Neufeld Harder states, “Central to the way Anabaptist/Mennonites have expressed their approach to scripture interpretation has been an emphasis on the faith community as a hermeneutic community.”<sup>214</sup> It is within the faith community, a community of people committed to lives of discipleship modeled after the Jesus of scripture, that the revelatory truth of the biblical text is most readily discerned. Quoting Harder:

*[In Anabaptism] all members of the covenant community were to be responsible to participate in the process of determining the meaning of the Bible. Not the state, nor specialized theologians, nor hierarchical authorities were to be the final judge of the Bible’s meaning. Rather accountability was to the whole community of faithful followers of Jesus. A process of dialogue and mutual council was to enable a congregation to live out the practical implications of the gospel message. Faith experience (salvation) was thus closely linked to faith knowledge (revelation). Instead of a sole emphasis on the objective revelation of the past, there was a shift to include the present faith experience as important in the process of hearing the dynamic Word of the Bible.*<sup>215</sup>

Thus, scripture is not authoritative a priori in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, but is granted authority in the relationship between text and readers as members of the hermeneutic community identify their own lived stories with those recorded in the Bible and evaluate them together based on certain norms and criteria. In this way, it is important to ask: “Whose experience matters?” “What are the criteria for granting authority?” “Who participates?” and “Who decides?” To offer encouragement for beginning a critical reexamination of authority in the Mennonite tradition and to provide interlocutors for a Mennonite approach to sexual ethics, I bring in the voices of feminist theologians, who address these questions and seek to remain both within their faith traditions and also critical of them.

### **Reexamining Authority in the Mennonite Tradition; Feminist Interlocutors for a Justice-Oriented, Mennonite Approach to Sexual Ethics**

Feminist theologians, who critically analyze the authority of scripture because they “continue to see the Bible as crucial for their understanding of the Christian faith” and “seek an interpretation ‘that will affirm women so that they are acknowledged as fully human partners with men, sharing in the image of God,’”<sup>216</sup> are valuable conversation partners for discerning the authority of scripture for a Mennonite approach to sexual ethics. Despite the fact that Anabaptist-Mennonite suspicion of theological and ecclesial traditions has, at times, resulted in a reluctance to accept feminist critique and/or incorporate feminist methods of biblical interpretation and approaches to ethics, several Mennonite theologians—for example, Lydia Neufeld Harder, Gayle Gerber Koontz, Carol Penner, and Denny Weaver—engage scholars in feminist ethics, affirming the value of these conversations for theology and ethics within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.

Perspectives within feminist theology and ethics are diverse. Yet, there remains a shared commitment to naming and dismantling intersectional structures of oppression such as sexism, racism, classism, ageism, and ableism. With regards to scripture as a source for Christian ethics, this includes a critical analysis of the authority of scripture and the importance of beginning with women’s experiences of struggles for justice as sources for Christian ethics.

Women’s experiences, understood as diverse and not universal,<sup>217</sup> are valued by feminist theologians as important sources of divine wisdom to be weighed and analyzed in community and against scripture using the norms of liberation and justice (meaning rightly-ordered relations of mutuality in the total web of our social relations<sup>218</sup>). Womanist<sup>219</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas

reminds us that by valuing women's experience, we are open to the work and potential of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, she argues, is present with us in our embodied lives (women and men). Just as in the incarnation God became flesh, God is with us in our flesh; there is wisdom there.<sup>220</sup> A good sexual ethic is thus open to the Spirit of God speaking to us through our bodies. In sum, experience, in the form of women's struggles for justice and freedom from oppression specifically, is an important source for ethics, which, like all sources of authority, must be tested in community using particular norms and criteria. All knowledge is mediated, including knowledge of God, through our bodies. Key questions are: Whose experience matters? Who are the moral agents? What is their power?

Feminist theologians, ethicists, and biblical scholars clearly stress that authority comes from the interaction between text and interpretive community. Harder clarifies this:

*Feminists ... assume that interpreters of the Bible choose to identify with particular communities of dialogue because they are committed to particular agendas. For Christian feminists, this agenda focuses on the full inclusion of women in the social and political interpretive process that yields authoritative interpretations for the church. These women are therefore forming particular communities of conversation that read the Bible in light of their own experience and vision.*<sup>221</sup>

Jewish feminist theologian Judith Plaskow is a clear example. She values the role of feminist communities in interpreting scripture and granting authority based on the experiences of communities struggling for transformation, liberation, and justice. According to Plaskow, authority does not reside in the text or tradition itself, but in the hermeneutic community, which wrestles with scripture and evaluates it using specific norms and criteria.<sup>222</sup>

Feminist liberative social ethicist Beverly Wildung Harrison names the Christian community as the place where moral discernment takes place, particularly "the Christian body of oppressed people birthing the Spirit together."<sup>223</sup> According to Harrison, authority is a relationship, a connection between text and persons who encounter in the text something life-giving.<sup>224</sup>

Feminist biblical scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza defines the center of biblical interpretation as the *ekklesia* of women, or women-church, which grants authority based on the experiences of women working for justice in the form of righting patriarchy.<sup>225</sup>

Each of these scholars names the relationship between scripture and experience as interconnected and views the authority of scripture as given and received in the dialogue between text and readers, particularly those who are oppressed and marginalized. As a result, they are prepared to articulate specific criteria for determining which texts and whose experiences are authoritative.

The primary criterion for feminist theologians in discerning the authority of particular biblical texts is that the text is experienced as liberative by all. Three examples of women theologians who exercise this criterion and who serve as good interlocutors for a Mennonite approach to sexual ethics are Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Kwok Pui-lan, and Kelly Brown Douglas.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is a leader in feminist biblical interpretation. For Fiorenza, discussions of authority are guided by a hermeneutics that challenges oppression and empowers us to seek justice, freedom, and well-being.<sup>226</sup> She is known for establishing a process and method for a feminist political reading that empowers women to learn to read against the grain of the Bible and the faith community's patriarchal rhetoric.<sup>227</sup> According to Fiorenza, malestream biblical studies are destabilized and critiqued by the *ekklesia* (a public assembly of Christians), which she constructs as a feminist center and public sphere from which feminist biblical rhetoric can speak. This is where biblical interpretation takes place and whose experiences, namely those of women working for justice, ought to guide the use and interpretation of the Bible. Her criterion for interpreting scripture and considering it authoritative is that the text is liberative by transforming interlocking systems of oppression as tested by the question: Can this text be deconstructed and reconstructed in terms of a global praxis of liberation for all wo/men?<sup>228</sup>

To determine an answer, Fiorenza's hermeneutical strategies for biblical interpretation begin with experience and naming one's social location as an interpreter, move to suspicion and critique of the biblical text and the tradition, and finish with reconstruction of the text by "recontextualizing the text in a socio-political-religious historical model of reconstruction that aims at making the subordinated and marginalized 'others' visible,"<sup>229</sup> and transformative action for change that works "for a different and more just future."<sup>230</sup>

Fiorenza's work is not without its critics. Postcolonial feminist Musa Dube is wary of the term *ekklesia* for the women's hermeneutical circle since it evokes imperialism and therefore needs to be opened up more broadly.<sup>231</sup>

Others have pointed out that “by relating church so closely to an identity of liberation defined by white American females, feminist theology can be perceived as denying an identity of church and discipleship to those with different experiences and convictions.”<sup>232</sup> Thus, while Fiorenza remains an important contributor to the field of feminist biblical interpretation, it is important to view her work with the same suspicion with which she views the biblical text and the interpretive tradition. As Harder articulates, suspicion of power ought to be carried over from suspicion of gender relationships to a suspicion of the hidden agenda within the feminist community.<sup>233</sup>

Critiques notwithstanding, the questions Fiorenza raises and the methods she develops offer critical questions for discerning the use and authority of scripture for a liberatory approach to sexual ethics. What if, for example, Mennonite approaches to sexual ethics weighed biblical passages and interpretations in terms of their ability to be liberative for all, which can only be measured in the dialogical relationship between the experiences of the most oppressed and marginalized and the text? If we affirm and accept patriarchal and oppressive texts as authoritative, then we believe in a God who is patriarchal and oppressive. Confronting the oppressive influences in the Bible and the tradition and breaking silence on the topic of sexuality is thus an important part of developing a justice-oriented approach to sexual ethics. In order to do so, and to guide the use of scripture for ethical discernment, safe spaces and opportunities must be created for Mennonite women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) persons to share their stories.

A hermeneutics of suspicion, which grants greater transparency and examines the frameworks used for decision making, is an important tool for accomplishing this goal.<sup>234</sup> A particular example of where and how it could be utilized is with regards to Mennonite Church Canada’s current process of discernment on scripture and sexuality, entitled “Being a Faithful Church.” The “Being a Faithful Church” (BFC) process is a multiyear effort to “strengthen our capacity as a church to discern the will of God through the church’s efforts to interpret the Bible for our time,” paying particular attention to matters concerning sexuality.<sup>235</sup> The church is currently engaging Part 5: “Between Horizons: Biblical Perspectives on Human Sexuality.”<sup>236</sup> While the BFC process acknowledges the need to clarify the authority of scripture in the Mennonite tradition with respect to sexual ethics, which is encouraging, it fails to name the presuppositions of the hermeneutic community and, in particular, the authors of the material (in this case, three white male leaders<sup>237</sup>). In addition, by focusing

primarily on scripture as a source for ethics, it does not acknowledge the ongoing ability of the Spirit to be present in the embodied experiences of the marginalized and oppressed. Or, as Harder explains, at times a closed hermeneutical circle has been created in the Mennonite community when “experience and biblical text interact in such a way in the interpretive process that transformation of the community is cut off and the status quo maintained.”<sup>238</sup> Hence the need to begin with a hermeneutics of experience that dispels the search for objective truth, followed by a hermeneutics of suspicion, which assesses whether or not in the mediation of God’s authority (in the Bible and in the church), God is “affirmed as being in solidarity with the movement of freedom and liberation, a movement of those committed to the discipleship of equals.”<sup>239</sup>

Known for her postcolonial feminist approach to biblical interpretation, Kwok Pui-lan recognizes that biblical interpretation is imbued with issues of authority and power. Thus, like Fiorenza, she argues that biblical truth cannot be prepackaged but is found in the interactions between the text and the particular historical situation of the interpreter. For her, biblical authority is fluid. There is room for dialogical imagination, conversation, listening, talking, and two-way traffic. It is never just “what does the text say to us,” but also “what do we say to the text”?<sup>240</sup> Thus, like Fiorenza, Kwok Pui-lan argues that the critical principle for biblical interpretation lies not in the Bible itself, but in the community of interpreters.<sup>241</sup> Within the community of interpreters, she reads the Bible from the experiences of those whose lives have been marginalized and oppressed by the Bible.<sup>242</sup> For her, the criteria for discerning authority is whether or not the text lessens human suffering and builds a community that resists oppression in the church, the academy, and society.<sup>243</sup> In order to be a community that resists oppression, it must be a place in which biases and prejudices are confronted together and individuals come to see how their social location influences how they read scripture. Within community, diversity is an effective tool for accountability since it creates tensions that can lead to dynamic conversations in which claims to truth are relativized, but also listened to. In particular, Kwok emphasizes the importance of listening to voices outside the West when engaging in biblical interpretation to offer greater diversity.<sup>244</sup>

Kwok’s emphasis on the importance of accountability and transparency between individuals in the hermeneutic community is reminiscent of the emphasis on mutual accountability in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. The central themes of discipleship and community in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition include an emphasis on accountability and mutual

admonition built on the principle of the “rule of Christ” (Matt. 18), in which Jesus gives his disciples the responsibility to “bind and loose.” This principle has led to the practice of the ban (exclusion from the community), a largely failed attempt to bring about forgiveness, resulting in brokenness and division. In addition, the patriarchal nature of the community, present in Mennonite practices of accountability and mutual admonition (as male leaders act on behalf of the community), has largely escaped critique and thus led to increased oppression rather than restoration and *mutual* accountability.

An example of how mutual accountability continues to function in a problematic manner in the Mennonite Church is the statement released February 17, 2014, by the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board titled, “Moving Forward.”<sup>245</sup> In this document, the board responds to Mountain States Mennonite Conference’s decision to grant a ministerial license to Theda Good, “a pastor in a same-sex committed relationship.” Caught between the “strong emotions” in the church for and against this decision, the Executive Board “prays that the missional commitments expressed in the Purposeful Plan [a plan accepted by churchwide delegates in Pittsburgh in 2011 to nurture missional congregations in line with church statements of vision and priorities<sup>246</sup>] will be able to unify us all in the Lordship of Christ, the authority of scripture, and covenants of mutual accountability.” Using feminist hermeneutics of suspicion, we note several concerns. First, the term “Lordship,” while biblical and given new meaning in its association with Jesus, who was a very different kind of “lord,” requires further analysis and ought to be used with caution since it remains a male and authoritative descriptor that can be experienced as oppressive. Second, the authority of scripture is not named in conjunction with the role of the hermeneutic community, which risks an uncritical acceptance of the current relations of power present in the hermeneutic community, allowing certain people’s interpretations to be understood uncritically as the “Word of God,” and assuming that there can be a neutral, objective reading of scripture. As a result, committing all to “mutual accountability” is suspect as a cover for the submission and accountability of some, namely those who are already marginalized and oppressed, to others, namely those with power and privilege.

Kwok’s work serves as a reminder and an example for the kind of accountability and transparency required within the Mennonite tradition and hermeneutic community. Instead of allowing certain individuals, for example, white male leaders, to hold other members of the community accountable to their interpretations of scripture and approaches to ethics,



each member of the community must confront their biases and presuppositions in order to prevent misuses of power, to deconstruct structures of oppression, and to understand the way experiences shape interpretations of scripture.

Womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas is another valuable resource for evaluating the use of scripture in a Mennonite approach to sexual ethics. In *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*, Douglas engages black experiences of white power (oppression) and their impacts on black sexuality in order to develop a sexual discourse of resistance, which enables the black church and black community to reclaim their sexuality, transform relationships, and challenge existing oppressive structures of white heterosexist and racist culture. According to Douglas, particular social, historical, cultural, and political contexts are significant as they influence the questions asked or not asked with regards to theology.<sup>247</sup> It is experience that guides our discourses. She also draws on the authority and interpretation of scripture in the black biblical tradition in order to critique existing notions of black sexuality and to develop theology as a sexual discourse of resistance. Key scriptural texts and theological images Douglas uses are Jesus as God's radical embodied revelation, which emphasizes God's presence with us in our humanity,<sup>248</sup> and an understanding of human beings and bodies being created "good" in the image of God from Genesis.<sup>249</sup> In this way, she does not abandon scripture, nor does she grant it undue authority for sexual ethics. Her criterion is that texts and images promote human flourishing by affirming black bodies and are thus justice and freedom oriented.

Douglas's work demonstrates how scripture can be both sacred, yet insufficient as a source for Christian sexual ethics rooted in an understanding of authority that recognizes the relationship between experience and scripture and values the experiences of the oppressed first and foremost. By her example, she makes it possible to envision a justice-oriented approach to sexuality and sexual ethics within the Mennonite tradition. That she draws on existing scriptural emphases and key images within her tradition serves as an encouragement for Mennonites that there might already be liberative and justice-oriented themes in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition upon which we can draw for sexual ethics. How might Anabaptist-Mennonite theologies of peace, for example, guide our conversations about sexuality?

## Conclusion

The Bible is a sacred source of God's wisdom in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. At times this has led to a false dichotomy of scripture and expe-

rience that does not resonate with the Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the hermeneutic community. The challenge for Mennonites now is to read scripture in light of the experiences of the marginalized and to weigh all sources of authority with the norm of liberation from oppression for all, particularly women, since they often experience multiple forms of oppression. With regards to sexual ethics, I am proposing that the Holy Spirit's presence with us in our embodied experiences is valued as an important source for moral discernment in conjunction with scripture.

As I mentioned in my introduction, this paper is part of a much larger project, namely my doctoral research, on forming a justice-oriented, Mennonite-feminist approach to sexual ethics. In my larger work I address related issues in greater detail, such as the compatibility of Mennonite and feminist approaches to ethics, the characteristics of Mennonite social ethics, and theologies of power. It is my hope that in this paper on the use of scripture for a Mennonite-feminist approach to sexual ethics, I have clarified authority in the Mennonite tradition and offered important critiques and resources from the work of feminist theologians for Mennonite ethical discourse and analyses that seek to nurture healthier attitudes and behaviors toward current concerns regarding sexuality within the Mennonite church and community.

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Her studies explore three key areas of concern in Mennonite ecclesiology and sexual ethics: the authority of scripture and the role of experience, how power is distributed/shared in the hermeneutic community (where scripture is interpreted and granted authority), and how Jesus functions as a norm.



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209. Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1989), 141.
210. Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Carol S. Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 263.
211. General Conference Mennonite Church and Mennonite Church, “Article 4. Scripture,” in *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995).
212. Harold S. Bender, “Bible,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Bible&oldid=107164>.
213. J. C. Wenger, ed., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 160.
214. Lydia Neufeld Harder, “Hermeneutic Community: A Feminist Challenge,” in *Perspectives on Feminist Hermeneutics*, ed. Gayle Gerber Koontz and Willard Swartley, Occasional Papers No. 10 (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1987), 46.
215. Ibid.
216. Lydia Neufeld Harder, *Obedience, Suspicion, and the Gospel of Mark: A Mennonite-Feminist Exploration of Biblical Authority*, Studies in Women and Religion (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1998), 66.
217. The understanding of a universal “women’s experience” in feminism has been deconstructed and critiqued by a variety of women who note the diversity in the experiences of women, particularly as a result of each woman’s experience of class, race, sexual orientation, and gender. Postmodern feminists, for example, “reject the traditional assertion about experience within feminism that women form similar identities through the reality of the experiences that they share,” arguing that there is no concrete “women’s experience” from which to construct knowledge. Janice McLaughlin, *Feminist Social and Political Theory: Contemporary Debates and Dialogues* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 108.  
  
Jewish feminist theologian Judith Plaskow recognizes “women’s experience” as both an important and problematic phrase. While it is useful for referring to the “daily, lived substance of women’s lives, [...] ‘women’s experience’ is primarily a product of culture rather than some innate female nature,” and as a result, it is “not unitary or definable.” Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 11.
218. Harrison, 253.
219. The term *womanist* was introduced by Alice Walker in her book, *In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt, 1983), and is claimed by black women who seek to expand feminism beyond its

concern for the problems of white middle-class women to the well-being of all of humanity.

220. Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 118.
221. Harder, *Obedience and Suspicion*, 4.
222. Judith Plaskow, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972–2003*, ed. with Donna Berman (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 19–20.
223. Harrison, 261.
224. Ibid.
225. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 8.
226. Ibid., 4–5.
227. See Fiorenza’s books.
228. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 166.
229. Ibid., 183.
230. Ibid., 186. Fiorenza articulates her approaches to hermeneutics differently in her different books. In *Wisdom Ways*, she articulates seven hermeneutical moves/strategies for biblical interpretation (169). Elsewhere she incorporates aspects of these moves under the title of a “critical emancipatory hermeneutics” See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons: Explorations in Feminist Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).
231. Musa Dube, “Toward a Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,” *Semeia* 78 (1997): 11–23.
232. Harder, *Obedience and Suspicion*, 85.
233. Ibid., 92.
234. Plaskow, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972–2003*, 217–18.
235. “Being a Faithful Church: Scripture Discernment and Feedback Tool,” Mennonite Church Canada, 2011, [http://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/14676/BFC\\_Discernment&FeedbackWeb.pdf](http://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/14676/BFC_Discernment&FeedbackWeb.pdf).
236. Since the presentation of this paper, Mennonite Church Canada has progressed through the “Being a Faithful Church” (BFC) process and has arrived at BFC 7: “Summary and Recommendation on Sexuality (2009–2015).” See BFC 7 online: [www.commonword.ca](http://www.commonword.ca).
237. The authors of the BFC documents are primarily Robert J. Suderman, Mennonite Church Canada General Secretary; Rudy Baergen, co-chair of the Being a Faithful Church Task Force; and Willard Metzger, executive

director of Mennonite Church Canada. The Being a Faithful Church Task Force itself is larger and also includes Andrew Reesor MacDowell, Hilda A. Hildebrandt, and Laura Loewen.

238. Harder, *Obedience and Suspicion*, 53.
239. *Ibid.*, 71.
240. Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 11.
241. *Ibid.*, 19.
242. *Ibid.*, 121.
243. *Ibid.*, 31.
244. *Ibid.*, 99.
245. “Moving Forward: A Statement from the Executive Board,” Mennonite Church USA, February 17, 2014, <http://mennoniteusa.org/news/moving-forward-a-statement-from-the-executive-board/>.
246. “Our Purposeful Plan: Desiring God’s Coming Kingdom: A Missional Vision and Purposeful Plan for Mennonite Church USA,” Mennonite Church USA Executive Board, 2012, <http://mennoniteusa.org/resources/purposeful-plan/>.
247. Douglas, 5.
248. *Ibid.*, 111.
249. *Ibid.*, 112.

## 20. Feder

250. Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works of Saint Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications: 1980), 283.
251. Though the castle is Teresa’s dominant metaphor in this text, it is not the only one. She also uses the image of a palmetto tree to describe the organization of the rooms that sprawl out from the “tasty” center part where the King resides (291), and the image of sun shining its divine light from the center chamber and illuminating all the others (288–89). Whatever set of metaphors she uses to describe the layout, the imagery follows a basic format: the center is a singular unity, while the preliminary dwelling places are plural, i.e., there are many first dwelling places scattered among second dwelling places, followed by multiple third dwelling places, and so on.
252. Spanish, *moradas*. Teresa describes the soul using the metaphor of a castle with “many dwelling places: some up above, others down below, others to the sides; and in the center and middle is the main dwelling place where the very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place” (284).