

# **The Feminist Hermeneutics of Ruether and Fiorenza**

- With A Focus on Their Positions on The Norms -

**Jang, Do Gon**(Professor, Tongwon University)

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• ABSTRACT •

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## The Feminist Hermeneutics of Ruether and Fiorenza

Jang, Do-Gon

The purpose of this paper is to examine the position of feminist hermeneutics on traditions and trans-contextual norms. For this purpose, I compare and analyze the feminist hermeneutics theories of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, who are considered to be two of the most distinguished contemporary feminist theologians. Ruether professes the 'prophetic principle' as the most important norm for her feminist hermeneutics, while Fiorenza negates the existence of any value-neutral norm itself. Their positions on hermeneutic norms are different externally. In fact, the two scholars pointed out problems with each other's theories when they debated.

Nevertheless, I found important commonalities from their hermeneutics. The actual core of the prophetic principle, which Ruether advocates, turns out to be 'women's experience.' In reality, Fiorenza also employs 'women's experience' as the most essential and important ground for her hermeneutics. This shows that these two scholars seem to advocate different positions on hermeneutic norms theoretically, but in fact they hold the same position practically when they adopt the same norm of 'women's experience' as the most important ground for their hermeneutics. Their feminist hermeneutics, which reject the existence of any trans-contextual norms, expose a problem when they adopt 'women's experience' as a nearly-absolute norm. Though, it should be noted that they hold reformatory values which enlighten and support proper standings and roles for women in the church by breaking with patriarchal christian hermeneutic traditions and providing a new hermeneutic horizon.

**Key words:** feminist hermeneutics, Rosemary Ruether, Elisabeth Fiorenza, trans-contextual norms, women's experience, women-church

## I. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the position of feminist hermeneutics on traditions and trans-contextual norms. For this purpose, I compare and analyze the feminist hermeneutics theories of Rosemary Radford Ruether<sup>1)</sup> and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza,<sup>2)</sup> who are admitted as two of the most distinguishable contemporary feminist theologians.

Thiselton analyzes many strands of feminist theology by examining their use of socio-critical and socio-pragmatic hermeneutics. Thiselton seeks to demonstrate the methodological contrast between socio-critical and socio-pragmatic hermeneutics is not “objective” or “subjective,” but “trans-contextual” or “transcendental.”<sup>3)</sup> By utilizing Thiselton’s idea, I will explore the attitudes of Ruether and Fiorenza toward the traditions and norms in their feminist hermeneutics.

In a general sense, the hermeneutical methodology of Ruether and

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- 1) “Rosemary Radford Ruether [1936-] currently is Visiting Professor of Feminist Theology at Claremont School of Theology and Claremont Graduate University.” from Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosemary\\_Radford\\_Ruether](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosemary_Radford_Ruether). “Through her many works, Ruether intends to provoke questions about the stereotypes of Western Christianity.” Yet she also invites readers “to look at old sources in new ways and to explore unexplored sources to find a more viable, holistic theology.” Susan M. Trosky, *Contemporary Authors: New Revision Series*, vol., 39 (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1992), 327.
  - 2) Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza [1938-] is the Krister Stendahl Professor of Divinity at the Harvard Divinity School. She is the first woman president of the Society of Biblical Literature (1987). The information is taken from the cover page of her book, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).
  - 3) Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 440.

Fiorenza may be regarded as similar in that they employ deconstruction and reconstruction. They are different in that Ruether partly accepts the traditions and utilizes the “prophetic principle”<sup>4)</sup> as a norm while Fiorenza claims the total deconstruction of all traditions. This different attitude toward tradition and norm marks the origin of their hermeneutical divergence. In fact, the two scholars attack each other in writing.<sup>5)</sup> Accordingly, my main task in this paper is detecting their hermeneutical similarities and differences.

## II. The Various Types of Feminist Theologians

There have been many different types of feminist theology. Ruether exemplifies five kinds of feminists: liberationists, counterculturalists, evangelicals, socialists, and reconstructionists.<sup>6)</sup> Fiorenza illustrates various kinds of feminists like neo-orthodox, socialist, biblical, post-biblical, and critical feminist.<sup>7)</sup> Rebecca Chopp categorizes feminist theology into three kinds of spaces: liberal egalitarianism, romantic expressivism, and

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4) Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983, 1993), 22-32.

5) An example of their debates can be seen in their articles, “Review Symposium” *Horizons*, vol. 11, No. 1, sp. 1984.

6) Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Disputed Questions: On Being A Christian* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 133-135. I perceive Ruether as a reconstructionist in that she partly adopts the deconstruction approach and claims the reconstruction of the traditions.

7) Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 17-29. Fiorenza presents herself as a critical feminist. She asserts the total deconstruction of the traditions through the critical examination of patriarchal history.

critical reconstructionism toward emancipatory transformation.<sup>8)</sup> It is not easy to offer the standard categorization of feminist theology. I would simply explain them from the left to the right in order to roughly introduce the theological position of Ruether and Fiorenza. According to Chopp, Mary Daly belongs to romantic expressivism, because she claims the “unique subjectivity of women” and suggests a separation.<sup>9)</sup> This means that Daly represents the extreme left position. Neither Fiorenza nor Ruether appreciate Mary Daly’s separationist approach.<sup>10)</sup>

Both Ruether and Fiorenza repudiate the extreme right approach of evangelical feminists who solely ground their thought on the Bible with no criticism. Even though Ruether partly recognizes the biblical tradition by accepting the prophetic principles, this does not mean that she shares the same opinion with evangelical feminists. Ruether is different from them, because she utilizes other sources, for her hermeneutics, like heretical Christian tradition, non-Christian philosophy, etc.<sup>11)</sup> It is obvious that Fiorenza rejects the extreme right evangelical feminists, because she claims that the biblical texts have the androcentric tendencies. They, however, suggest neither exclusion nor separation, thus they dis-

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8) Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Power To Speak: Feminism, Language, God* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 107-108.

9) *Ibid.*, 107.

10) Ruether criticizes radical feminists as follows: Mary Daly concentrates on a passionate expose of the inhumanity of males and their culture of rape, genocide, and war; The dehumanization of the other ultimately dehumanizes oneself. *Sexism and God-Talk*, 229, 231. According to Fiorenza, Daly excludes women who have not made the “qualitative leap” for the feminist movement. Fiorenza cannot accept this idea, because it rejects the history women together with patriarchal history. *In Memory of Her*, 25-26.

11) Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 21-22.

tinguish themselves from Mary Daly, an extreme left feminist. When all different kinds of feminist theologies are taken into account from the extreme left to the extreme right, Ruether will be located in the right of the center and Fiorenza in the left of the center next to each other. Neither of them belongs to the extreme right or the extreme left. Such centrist positions seem to be enough to represent the contemporary feminist hermeneutics.

### III. Ruether and Fiorenza's Hermeneutics

The main point of Ruether's hermeneutics is the "prophetic principle" while that of Fiorenza's is critical deconstruction and reconstruction. I will first examine these key hermeneutical methodologies of them in this section. After this main discussion, other hermeneutic related issues, their views on women-church and liberation theology, will also be discussed in order to compare their hermeneutical similarities and differences.

#### 1. Ruether's Hermeneutics: The Prophetic Principle

Ruether finds the main resource for her hermeneutics in the "prophetic principle" of the Bible, and maintains that "the prophetic-liberating traditions can be appropriated by feminism only as normative principles of Biblical faith which, in turn, criticize and reject patriarchal ideology."<sup>12)</sup> This means that she does not necessarily embrace all the

prophetic texts as norms for her hermeneutics. Ruether maintains that feminism “appropriates the prophetic principle in ways the Biblical writers for the most part do not appropriate them.”<sup>13)</sup> In other words, she urges us to use this prophetic principle mainly for the “promotion of the full humanity of women” by declaring “whatever diminishes . . . the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine.”<sup>14)</sup> Ruether, if we understand her generally, presents the “prophetic-liberating tradition of Biblical faith as a norm through which to criticize the Bible,” but if we examine her more specifically, the norm of her feminist hermeneutics is “feminism’s appropriation of this norm [the prophetic principle] *for women*.”<sup>15)</sup> Thus, prophetic faith “goes beyond the letter of the prophetic message to apply it to women.”<sup>16)</sup> The real meaning of “The Word of God” can be found through “Rediscovery of prophetic content, and its discerning re-application to new social situation.”<sup>17)</sup> Ruether’s contention is that the new meaning of the text will be developed in the new context.

In addition to this biblical prophetic norm, Ruether finds four more usable sources for feminist hermeneutics: marginalized or heretical Christian tradition, classical Christian theology, non-Christian philosophy, and post-Christian world view.<sup>18)</sup> According to Ruether, all of

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12) Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, 22.

13) *Ibid.*, 23.

14) *Ibid.*, 19.

15) *Ibid.*, 24.

16) *Ibid.*, 31.

17) *Ibid.*, 31.

18) *Ibid.*, 21-22.

these traditions are usable for feminist hermeneutics with the correction of their sexist traditions. Thus, she develops different terms to express the divine of such different traditions: Gods and Goddesses for the divine of ancient Near East, God for Judeo-Christian male God, and God/ess for representing fuller divinity combine both masculine and feminine.<sup>19)</sup>

## 2. Fiorenza's Hermeneutics: Synthetic Acceptance of Four different Models

The distinctiveness of Fiorenza's hermeneutics is found from her critical and synthetic acceptance of four different biblical interpretation models, the hermeneutics of suspicion, the hermeneutics of proclamation, the hermeneutics of remembrance, and the hermeneutics of creative actualization:

A feminist critical interpretation begins with a **hermeneutics of suspicion** rather than with a hermeneutics of consent and affirmation. It develops a **hermeneutics of proclamation** rather than a hermeneutics of historical factualness ... Rather than reducing the liberating impulse of the Bible to a feminist principle or one feminist biblical tradition, it develops a **hermeneutics of remembrance** that moves from biblical texts about women to the reconstruction of women's history. Finally, this model moves from a hermeneutics of disinterested distance to a **hermeneutics of creative actualization** that involves the church of women in the imaginative articulation of women's biblical story and its ongoing history and community.<sup>20)</sup>

19) *Ibid.*, 45-46.

The synthetic hermeneutical approach of Fiorenza should be further explained. First, Fiorenza seeks the total deconstruction of the tradition by utilizing a hermeneutic of suspicion. Fiorenza believes that biblical texts are androcentric, because they were written by men and they view reality through androcentric terms. Fiorenza recognizes the achievement of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Through its critical deconstructive characteristic,<sup>21)</sup> the hermeneutics of suspicion refuses to accept the tradition as is, and searches for women's lost traditions: "It has cleared away many androcentric mistranslation, patriarchal interpretation, and one-sided reconstructions."<sup>22)</sup>

As a supplement of the hermeneutics of suspicion, Fiorenza describes a task of the hermeneutics of proclamation as assessing "the Bible's theological significance and power for the contemporary community of faith."<sup>23)</sup> This hermeneutics of proclamation examines the misused feminist-neutral or even feminist-positive texts that are taught in order to assure patriarchal order. For example, "if a battered woman is told to take up her cross and to suffer as Jesus did in order to save her marriage, then the feminist-neutral biblical motives are used to reinforce

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20) Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 15. The bold faces are my emphasis.

21) In a similar manner, Seung-Gap Lee argues that Derrida's deconstructive discourse is a "life-affirming strategy." He believes that it is a "message of transforming social, political situations." For details, refer to "Derrida's deconstruction as a life-affirming strategy: a theological reflection" 기독교사회윤리학회(The Society of Korean Christian Social Ethics). 『기독교사회윤리(Christian Social Ethics)』(경기: 선학사, Gyunggi: Sunhaksa, 2007), 331-332.

22) Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 16.

23) *Ibid.*, 18.

patriarchal values.”<sup>24)</sup>

The hermeneutics of proclamation, Fiorenza maintains, must be balanced “by a critical hermeneutics of remembrance that recovers *all* biblical traditions through a historical-critical reconstruction of biblical history from a feminist perspective.”<sup>25)</sup> This remembrance should be based not on the experience of biological sex but on the common historical experience of women as collaborating participants so that women can be accepted as a center of biblical community and theology.

This memory should be fortified by a hermeneutics of creative actualization that “expresses the active engagement of women in the ongoing biblical story of liberation.”<sup>26)</sup> While the hermeneutics of remembrance is interested in historical-critical reconstruction, the creative actualization hermeneutics “allows women to enter the biblical story with the help of historical imagination, artistic recreation, and liturgical ritualization.”<sup>27)</sup> Fiorenza’s conclusion shows her synthetic attitude accepting all four models of hermeneutics in which each complements the other: “A feminist biblical interpretation therefore must be not only critical but also constructive, oriented not only toward the past but also toward the future of women-church.”<sup>28)</sup>

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24) *Ibid.*, 18.

25) *Ibid.*, 19.

26) *Ibid.*, 20.

27) *Ibid.*, 20.

28) *Ibid.*, 20-21.

### 3. Women-Church and The *Ekklesia* of Women

Ruether and Fiorenza's feminist hermeneutics starts from women's experience which centers at women-church (Ruether) or the *ekklesia* of women (Fiorenza). In order to authorize the role of women's experience in feminist hermeneutics, Ruether presents her logic as follows: women's experience is a human experience; "what have been called the objective sources of theology, Scripture and tradition, are themselves codified collective human experience"; hence, women's experience which had been omitted should be included in the interpretation of the Bible.<sup>29)</sup>

In order to carry out this mission, Ruether, first, renounces the structures and values of churches with patriarchal traditions, because "they have become all too often occasions of sin rather than redemption, place where we leave angry and frustrated rather than enlightened and healed."<sup>30)</sup> Since the patriarchal church has been destroyed the full humanity of women, women should have a new alternative community in which women can assure the continuous communication for full redemption of women. Hence, she develops the idea of women-church which has new structures and missions which are different from those of patriarchal church. Ruether explains that the key concept of women-church is an exodus church as follows:

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29) Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 12

30) *Ibid.*, 5.

As Women-church we claim the authentic mission of Christ, the true mission of Church, the real agenda of our Mother-Father God who comes to restore and not to destroy our humanity, who comes to ransom the captives and to reclaim the earth as our Promised Land. We are not in exile, but the Church is in exodus with us.<sup>31)</sup>

According to Ruether, the full redemption of women's humanity is possible by establishing women-church which is in exodus with women.

In order to advocate the concept of the *ekklesia* of women, Fiorenza negates the "image of Eden" in which women are falsely depicted as "homemaker" and brain washed to have "self-sacrificing love and self-effacing gentility in order to `save the family.'"<sup>32)</sup> Consequently, she introduces "the image of the Exodus that "had inspired radical feminism, calling us to abandon the oppressive confines of home and church."<sup>33)</sup> In the image of Exodus, women move away from the patriarchal slavery of family and church and live 'in a new space and time.'" To have this new space and time, she suggests the building of the "grassroot organizations of the *ekklesia of women*."<sup>34)</sup> Through the *ekklesia* of women, Fiorenza writes, women "can claim the apostolic tradition of our fore-sisters and example of Jesus for their own feminist vision and praxis of equal discipleship."<sup>35)</sup>

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31) Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 72.

32) Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 348.

33) *Ibid.*, 347-348.

34) *Ibid.*, 349.

One may misunderstand that this term, women-church or the *ekklesia* of women, as an expression of women's exclusiveness. They, however, intend neither exclusion nor separation with these terms. Both women and men are included in this women-church. Fiorenza description for women-church is helpful in understanding this inclusive characteristic: women-church is "the movement of self-identified women and women identified men in biblical religion."<sup>36)</sup> According to Fiorenza, these terms are mainly used in a political sense in order to express the opposition to the patriarchal social order. Women-church seeks to explore the structural sin of patriarchal sexism. In this women-church, both Ruether and Fiorenza maintain, the Bible is understood as a historical prototype rather than a mythical archetype. Fiorenza defines the terms, prototypes and archetypes as follows:

While both archetype and prototype "denote original models," an archetype is "usually construed as an ideal from that establishes an unchanging pattern," ... a prototype is not a binding, timeless pattern, but one critically open to the possibility, even the necessity of its own transformation.<sup>37)</sup>

This paradigm shift in understanding of the Bible enables women-church "to make connection with women's own experience, historical struggles, and feminist options in order to create visions for the

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35) *Ibid.*, 351.

36) Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xiv.

37) Rachel Blau Dupless, "The Critique of Consciousness and Myth in Levertov, Rich, and Rukeyser," *Feminist studies* 3 (1975): 199-221, 219. quoted by Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 61.

future from these interconnections.”<sup>38)</sup>

#### 4. On Liberation Theology

It is not easy to represent liberation theology as one unified thought, because it has many different varieties. Nevertheless, Ruether and Fiorenza generalize the main characteristics of liberation theology and compare them with feminist theology as if it is one line of thought. Their main concern is whether the acceptance of biblical norms in liberation theology is proper or not.

Ruether perceives liberation theology positively, and identifies feminist theology with it. With such an identification, Ruether does not question the ways the liberation theologian uses the Bible, she just describes the properties of liberation theology. Ruether's understanding of liberation theology can be summarized as follows: the root and the starting point of liberation theology is historical Jesus, specifically, Jesus' liberating praxis; restoring the kingdom of God for the poor and oppressed in this historical realm is the center of their message; the kingdom of God is present in the acts of healing and love, but it is absent under the acts of oppression; “liberation theology become possible only through a profound repentance of the church.”<sup>39)</sup> Ruether's understanding of liberation theology shows that both liberation and feminist theology have the same purpose of liberating the oppressed and the same methodology of reconstruction.

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38) Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 14.

39) Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 93-99.

Ruether's only caution for liberation theology is related with the possibility of using counterviolence in response to the violence of the oppressors. She, however, understands the different reality of Latin America in which one cannot "keep one's hand clean."<sup>40)</sup> What she really worries about is that the poor simply seize the power and wealth through a revolution, and that they become the new rich and make others poor.<sup>41)</sup>

Fiorenza criticizes liberation theology mainly because of its critical partiality toward the Bible. According to Fiorenza, liberation theology should critically identify "whose human existence is meant and whose God is found in biblical symbols and texts"<sup>42)</sup> before declaring God's option for the poor and oppressed. Accordingly, she urges the need of critical reflection against the advocacy position of liberation theology for the scriptural tradition. For example, Juan Luis Segundo is criticized in that he claims our obedience toward a "hermeneutics of consent" without considering the possible distortion of the content of Scripture. Fiorenza maintains that "Segundo's model does not allow for a critical theological evaluation of biblical ideologies as 'false consciousness.'"<sup>43)</sup> Fiorenza also asks the question doubting "whether the historical man Jesus of Nazareth can be a role model for contemporary women."<sup>44)</sup> All traditional interpretive paradigms are questioned and denied by

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40) *Ibid.*, 106.

41) *Ibid.*, 106.

42) Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 45.

43) *Ibid.*, 51-52.

44) *Ibid.*, 61.

Fiorenza. This again shows that no trans-contextual norm is acceptable for Fiorenza.

#### IV. Debates between Ruether and Fiorenza

Ruether and Fiorenza have criticized each other in their writings, mainly because they have different views on the tradition and norm. Ruether accepts a part of tradition, the prophetic principle, as a norm for her hermeneutics, and this become a main point of Fiorenza's critiques. Fiorenza calls Ruether's position is "neo-orthodox" and "feminist romanticism."<sup>45)</sup> On the other hand, Ruether disagrees with Fiorenza as she advocates the rejection of utilizing any traditions and norms for her hermeneutics.

Examining the "book review symposium"<sup>46)</sup> between Ruether and Fiorenza will be helpful in understanding their main points of critiques. Ruether first defends herself from Fiorenza's charge of neo-orthodoxy by expressing the prophetic principle as "liberating dynamic," and writes:

I do not believe that such a liberating 'dynamic' exists as timeless truth, either as some select group of texts that one can locate as a canon within scripture (or Marx). . . . Rather this liberating dynamic only exists in and as the **historical experience of communities** [my emphasis] engaged in lib-

45) Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 14, 19, 28.

46) "Review Symposium" *Horizons*, vol. 11, No. 1, sp. 1984.

erating praxis.<sup>47)</sup>

As a next step, Ruether identifies with Fiorenza as if both having the same interpretative norm. Ruether asks:

Does not Fiorenza have a fairly similar “prophetic-liberating norm” by which she judges what is truth and falsehood, good and bad, in early Christian texts, once it is clear that what we are both talking about is not “timeless truth,” but **community based experience** [my emphasis] in historical contexts?<sup>48)</sup>

This means that the actual norm for Ruether’s feminist hermeneutics is the community based experience of women. If we accept such a depiction of Ruether literally, we may find no difference between Ruether and Fiorenza. In a pragmatic sense, both of them utilize the experience of women as the main key of their critical hermeneutics. Their difference is found in a theoretical sense only in that Ruether claim the prophetic principle as a norm of her hermeneutics while Fiorenza refuses the existence of any norm from the beginning. Ruether concludes her critique of Fiorenza by representing her main practical methodology as an “imaginative reconstruction.”<sup>49)</sup> Such a methodology resembles Fiorenza’s hermeneutics of creative actualization.

Ruether’s main questions for Fiorenza are: “what exactly is her socio-

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47) Ruether, *Horizons*, 148.

48) *Ibid.*, 149.

49) *Ibid.*, 150.

logical model of early Christianity?"; and what is her critical norm and textual 'canon'?"<sup>50)</sup> Fiorenza answers Ruether's questions by emphasizing the need of understanding pluralism, the specific situation of the present world, and it can be summarized as follows:

(1) I have criticized the neo-orthodox attempt as constructing or positing an archimedean normative point in the sea of cultural-historical-ecclesial pluralism, and this is the only sense in which I use it; (2) To isolate a liberating principle, dynamic, tradition, or horizon does not allow one to get hold of the historical richness and pluralism of early Christian writings; (3) if one does not want to reduce the prophetic-messianic tradition to a normative abstraction one has to show historically that and why it alone represents such a "liberating dynamic" in feminist terms.<sup>51)</sup>

While Ruether identifies with Fiorenza, in a pragmatic sense, by pointing out their resemblance which highly focuses on "women's experience," Fiorenza still distinguishes her position from Ruether's, in a theoretical sense, by opposing Ruether's idea of having the prophetic principle as a norm.

Steven Knapp's response to Fiorenza's article, "Theological Criteria and Historical Reconstruction," is helpful in understanding the possible problems of Fiorenza's hermeneutics. Knapp perceives that Fiorenza presents the total destruction of the Bible and patriarchal tradition through a hermeneutics of suspicion, and that she suggests the re-

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50) *Ibid.*, 147.

51) Fiorenza, *Horizons*, 155-156.

construction of feminist tradition through a hermeneutics of remembrance by seeking “to move beyond the androcentric text to the life and struggles of women in early churches.”<sup>52)</sup>

Knapp’s first question is “if total acceptance and partial recovery are both ruled out, why not just say that the proper aim of criticism is strictly destructive or iconoclastic?”<sup>53)</sup> Knapp maintains that this iconoclastic model of criticism seems adequate only for her task of the hermeneutics of suspicion, and that the reconstruction effort of Fiorenza is ineffective.<sup>54)</sup> To support his argument above, Knapp illustrates that Fiorenza’s assertion below is a contradiction: “a feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation reclaims [Knapp’s emphasis] the whole bible as the legacy and heritage of women-church”<sup>55)</sup> Knapp’s point is that the total acceptance of the Bible after the total rejection of it is contradictory, because “rhetorical efficacy of the biblical images depends on a belief in the Bible’s theological authority, which Fiorenza denies from the start.”<sup>56)</sup> Knapp’s second point is that “the claim that theological authority, if there is such a thing, can only have its basis in the present [women-church] seems to me incontestable.”<sup>57)</sup>

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52) This is a brief summary of Fiorenza’s article. Refer to Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, “Theological Criteria and Historical Reconstruction: Martha and Mary, Luke 10:38-42” ed. Herman Waetjen, *Protocol of The Thirty-Third Colloquy* (Berkeley: CHS, 1987), 1-12 for details.

53) Steven Knapp, “Response by Steven Knapp” ed. Herman Waetjen, *Protocol of The Thirty-Third Colloquy* (Berkeley: CHS, 1987), 14.

54) *Ibid.*, 14.

55) Fiorenza, *Colloquy*, 13.

56) Knapp, *Colloquy*, 15.

57) *Ibid.*, 14.

I can answer the first question of Knapp partly as follows: Fiorenza claims the total deconstruction of patriarchal tradition of the Bible and total reconstruction of feminist tradition of the Bible based on women's experience; she denies the Bible's theological authority in rejecting the patriarchal, but accepts it in reconstructing the feminist tradition. For the second point of Knapp, one can answer it only when one accepts the pluralism in which women-church has the interpretative authority.<sup>58)</sup> Fiorenza should be aware that one is always influenced by the tradition in which one lives. However hard one may try to deny the tradition, one is already a product of that tradition. Feminist theology is a part of a tradition. This is the reason that Thiselton asks Fiorenza: "To what extent can a given tradition undergo transformation before it ceases to be *this* tradition, and from where do we derive norms appropriate to answer this question?"<sup>59)</sup> To establish her hermeneutics effectively, Fiorenza should answer these questions.

## V. Conclusion

Ruether and Fiorenza start from different presuppositions: Ruether, the prophetic principle as a norm and Fiorenza, no norm. Their hermeneutics can be summarized as follows: (1) in a theoretical sense, their hermeneutics are different in that Ruether believes the existence of a

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58) I already explain that Fiorenza upholds pluralism openly for her hermeneutics as a widely spread phenomenon in this present world. Refer to *Horizons*, 155-156.

59) Thiselton, 449.

norm, the prophetic principle, while Fiorenza reject the existence of any value neutral norm; (2) in a pragmatic sense, they are similar in that their hermeneutics start from and center on women's experience.

Ruether recognizes the value of the prophetic principle as the norm of her feminist hermeneutics. This means that she admits the existence of trans-contextual norms epistemologically in the beginning, even though she denies the existence of timeless truth eventually.<sup>(60)</sup> She almost denies the prophetic principle by emphasizing women's experience. Ruether's problem is that she starts her theory from an epistemological presupposition that claims the prophetic principle but ends up pragmatic resolution of suggesting a reconstruction based on women's experience.

Fiorenza denies the existence of any norm for her hermeneutics. There is no such a thing like value neutral norm in this pluralistic world. If there is any norm for Fiorenza, it is woman's experience. She believes that women's experience alone can critically review the falsification of the patriarchal tradition. This idea constitutes the strength and weakness of Fiorenza. Understanding and utilizing the experience of women will reflect the need of women in this present pluralistic society. On the other hand, Fiorenza should be careful not to go to the extreme of Pluralism. When pluralism goes extreme, it becomes relativism.

The controversy over the issue of traditions and trans-contextual norms has been continued in the field of social sciences over the last several decades, and has yet to be resolved.<sup>(61)</sup> Even Ruether and

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(60) Ruether, *Horizons*, 148.

Fiorenza, who may be categorized largely in the same group of feminist theologians sharing close thoughts, have attacked each other when they debated in terms of their hermeneutic norms. More concrete research should be done in order to verify the effectiveness of such theories in reflecting the real context.<sup>62)</sup> Such efforts of polishing feminist hermeneutics concretely will awaken people to understand the diverse positions of our diverse contemporaries and lead them to promote the flourishing of humanity, both women and men.

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61) One of the examples is the debate between Jurgen Habermas and Richard Rorty.

62) Sang-Hoon Lee's research which seeks a proper balance between individuals and community may be an example of such concrete research. He exposes the problems of stereotypical gender roles in the Korean context and, at the same time, indicates the limit of the egalitarian ethos. His suggestion is to find alternatives which exhibit "respect for community as well as for individuals." For details, refer to "An Aristotelian analysis of gender role stereotypes in the Korean context" 기독교사회윤리학회(The Society of Korean Christian Social Ethics). 『기독교사회윤리(Christian Social Ethics)』(경기: 선학사, Gyunggi: Sunhaksa, 2011), 213-240.

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• 국 문 초 록 •

## 류터와 피오렌자의 여성해석학

장도곤

이 논문의 목적은 전통과 초맥락적 규범에 대한 여성해석학(feminist hermeneutics)의 입장을 살펴보는 것이다. 이를 위하여 필자는 현시대 가장 대표적인 여성신학자로 손꼽히는 류터(Rosemary Radford Ruether)와 피오렌자(Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza)의 여성해석학 이론을 비교 분석한다. 류터는 선지자적 원리(prophetic principle)를 여성해석학의 중요한 규범으로 표방하고, 피오렌자는 모든 가치중립적 규범의 존재 자체를 거부한다. 해석 규범에 대한 이들의 표면적 입장은 차이가 있으며, 실제로 두 학자는 서로 논쟁을 하며 상대의 이론의 문제점을 지적하기도 했다.

하지만 이들의 여성해석학은 중요한 공통점을 공유하고 있다. 류터가 표방하는 선지자적 원리의 실제적인 골자는 '여성의 경험'으로 귀결된다. 피오렌자도 현실적으로는 '여성의 경험'을 가장 중요한 해석의 준거로 수용한다. 이는 두 학자가 이론적으로는 해석 규범에 대해 서로 다른 입장을 주장하지만, 실제적으로는 공통적으로 '여성의 경험'을 가장 중요한 규범으로 수용하며 같은 입장을 고수하고 있음을 보여준다. 이들의 여성해석학은 '여성의 경험'을 거의 절대적 규범으로 수용하는 문제를 노출하고 있지만, 동시에 가부장적인 기독교의 해석 전통을 탈피하여 새로운 해석의 지평을 제공하며 교회에서 여성의 적절한 지위와 역할을 조명하며 지지하는 개혁적 가치가 있음을 주목해야 할 것이다.

**주제어:** 여성해석학, 로즈메리 류터, 엘리자베스 피오렌자, 초맥락적 규범, 여성의 경험, 여성-교회