

Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan

Number 66

November 2010

c/oKyofu Kaikan
Shinjuku, Tokyo, Japan
home page: <http://cftmj.cocolog-nifty.com>

Regular seminar (November, 2010)

Rethinking the Life of Mary the Mother of Jesus

Satoko Yamaguchi

Throughout the world, during the Christmas season, the “birthday” of Jesus Christ is widely commemorated and celebrated. But how many people think in any detail about the young person who conceived and gave birth to Jesus? I would like to invite you to meditate on the life of Mary of Nazareth.

1

I. The “Virgin Birth” : What if There Was a Pregnancy Without Sexual Intercourse?

At church, we are told that Mary conceived and gave birth to Jesus the Son of God as a virgin, without having had sexual intercourse with a man. Based upon this, the teaching of the “virgin birth,” Mary has been venerated as the “holy mother.”

It is said, especially when discussing the beliefs of the Catholic Church, that the more the image of the Divine was restricted to the one-sidedly masculine “God the Father and Christ the Son,” the more the veneration of Mary increased, complementing those images with a feminine representation of the Divine. And in the Protestant churches, while there is no veneration of Mary, the teaching of the “virgin birth” is still an important one.²

But, how many people really believe in the possibility of conception without sexual intercourse? And do they believe that God the Almighty can instantly create an “iPS cell” and therefore generate a state of pregnancy? Or do they think that for Jesus, the divine Son of God, it is required that he be born as the result of a pregnancy which has not involved sexual intercourse?

What kind of concept of the Divine and what kind of understanding of human nature leads to this kind of thinking? I cannot help feeling that there is a great danger in thinking in this way and that there is a great danger in this type of faith. I would like to talk about Mary, with these thoughts in mind.

Before we begin, let's pause a moment. I'd like to make a brief detour to consider the following question; what kind of pregnancy is a pregnancy which is not caused by sexual intercourse? There was a 19th century African American wo/man called Sojourner Truth, a former slave who couldn't read or write. One day, she spoke up against a clergy man who had objected to equal rights for wo/men, on the basis that Jesus was a man, not a wo/man. Sojourner Truth said, "Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with him." ³

Practically speaking, if Jesus Christ was born, by the will of God, from the wo/man Mary and the "holy spirit" (which is a feminine noun in Hebrew and a neutral noun in Greek), then the male element is totally absent both from Christ's conception and from his birth. Sojourner Truth's argument is a fitting objection against those church authorities who would admit only males to the clergy and the priesthood on the grounds that Christ was a male.

Against such sexism, it seems possible to argue that, because the conception and birth took place by the will of God and without male participation, it is logical to eliminate heterosexual men, at the very least, from Christian ordination. There is also an interesting biological reflection following from this. According to today's biological disciplines, if the virginal conception of Jesus is to be taken literally, then with the baby Jesus being a "male," the child would bear both the chromosomal identification of a wo/man and the phenotypic anatomy of a man. That is, the child would be androgynous.⁴

This makes Jesus a member of one of a diverse grouping of "sexual minority" persons. On the basis of this, how would those who insist, not only that Jesus Christ was definitely born from a virgin, but also that the clergy have to be male because Christ was male, make any logical coherence? Their logical conclusion would surely be as follows. "By the will of God, Christ was conceived by the holy spirit and a woman, eliminating male participation entirely, and being born a member of a sexual minority. Thus, the ordination to the clergy should be limited to wo/men and sexual minorities." Wouldn't it?

So, when the teaching of the "virgin birth" is taken literally, for anyone who feels indignant towards ecclesial sexism, we reach an interesting conclusion. However, it would be better to take this reflection, as a brief meditative detour.

In the village Ain Karim, meaning "spring of the vineyard", near Jerusalem, there is a drinking fountain called "Mary's Well" or "Spring of the Virgin." According to legend, this place is where the pregnant Mary visited Elizabeth who became the mother of "John the Baptist." A sign there warns visitors: "Do not drink! Water may be contaminated." ⁵

This warning may be pertinent for those who are attracted to the purity and cleanliness of the story of the "virgin birth." This teaching became established at around the time when Christianity had become an imperialistic religion. Furthermore, it was a teaching which contributed to consolidating and maintaining both the sexism and the kyriarchy of the church at that time. ⁶

It is enjoyable to use a charming legend or the sight of pure water as a springboard for our

imaginings, but to indulge in this while ignoring the real world is dangerous. So, let us try to look at what was really happening in Palestine in the first centuries and about how that reality may have shaped the life of Mary of Nazareth.

II. The Earliest Oral Traditions

The story, widely told by the church today, is that according to the bible, Mary became pregnant even though she was a virgin. However, neither the Gospel of Matthew nor the Gospel of Luke contain anything about virginal conception. Why then have we been taught this?⁷

Let us first think about the process of the formation of the biblical stories. It is thought that the stories in the bible were not written by their authors from scratch, but were based on oral traditions which had been transmitted orally among the common people.

Biblical authors, each with their own theological understanding, selected certain traditions from the numerous popular traditions, edited them, and formed them into symbolic narratives, in accordance with their own perspectives. Gospels such as Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John were written in such a way.⁸

The biblical Jesus' birth story, that is the story of Mary's pregnancy and birth, is not an exception. Behind the gospel stories of Jesus' birth, there were popular oral traditions. They were probably women's oral traditions based on historical facts, which went along the lines of; Mary became pregnant while she was betrothed to be married to Joseph, and it was a man other than Joseph who was the father of Jesus. Nevertheless, Mary was not in the wrong and Jesus' birth was brought about through the guidance of the holy spirit.⁹

What kind of people shaped these early traditions? It is said that oral traditions are told and transmitted by those who perceive truth and find hope in them, because of their own experiences.¹⁰

Therefore, we may imagine that the story was first told by wo/men in the Jesus movement. They participated in the Jesus movement within Jewish communities and under Roman colonial domination.

They sympathised with Mary's grief at her illegitimate pregnancy and understood her faith and courage. They also appreciated Joseph's decision, and became confident that Jesus' birth had been realised with the help of the holy spirit. We can imagine that they found hope in these events.¹¹

They would have reflected on Jesus' life, meditated on the events surrounding Mary's pregnancy, found positive theological meaning-making, and orally transmitted that message. And so, even if her pregnancy was outside marriage, Mary of Nazareth was not considered a "sullied" wo/man who was to be censured, and neither was her child to be despised. Through the holy spirit, God guided both Mary and her child in the midst of their adversity. In such a faith confession, the first oral tradition was born among wo/men.

III. Gospel Stories of the “Birth of Jesus”

In writing a gospel, a narrative of Jesus’ life, both Matthew and Luke thought about how to transmit the inherited oral traditions of Jesus’ illegitimate conception. Each of them decided to edit the story into one which symbolically conveyed the message that they wanted to be inherited in their respective faith communities.

These two gospel stories turn out very differently, but share many commonalities, reflecting a situation in which there were widespread and numerous oral traditions behind the gospels. The major three commonalities are:¹²

1. Jesus is Mary’ s child.
2. Mary became pregnant during the betrothal period with Joseph.
3. Joseph is not Jesus’ biological father.

I would like now, to pay some attention to certain features of each of these gospels.¹³

A. Matthean Text (1:18-25) ¹⁴

1. Five Wo/men in the Genealogy

Matthew begins with a genealogy which includes four wo/men before mentioning the mother of Jesus. This is rare in traditional Jewish genealogy.¹⁵ Why did Matthew include those four wo/men? One commonality among the four is that their lives were outside of the kyriarchal social norm. Matthew sees fit to put this genealogy in as a way of leading into another story of a wo/man whose life was outside of the social norm.

2. Shattered Pattern in the Genealogy

There is a consistent pattern in the genealogy. It is a kyriarchal pattern which focuses only on the succession from father to son. It reads, “A begot B, B begot C, ... ,” . The word used is “gennan” which denotes, “(a father) begets” . This pattern is repeated 39 times. Then, where the expression “Joseph begot Jesus” is expected, suddenly the pattern is broken. Here, it is written, in the passive voice, “of her (Mary) was begotten (ex hē segennē thē) Jesus” (1:16). This clearly indicates that Mary’ s husband Joseph is not the biological father.

3. Allusion to Deuteronomy

It is written that Joseph resolved to divorce Mary because she became pregnant while they were betrothed (1:19). The expression used here that “Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly” implies Deuteronomical illegitimacy behind the pregnancy.¹⁶

According to Deuteronomy (22:23-27), when it becomes clear that a betrothed wo/man has had sexual relations with a man other than her husband, and that it has been judged at a public hearing that it was not a rape but an illicit affair, a death penalty of stoning is the expected result. It is

questionable whether such a death penalty was actually enforced or not in the first century under Roman colonial rule. That being so, the difficulty of proving rape is well known even today. In that time, when such an incident happened, both mother and child became the objects of discrimination.

4. “Begotten through the Holy Spirit”

In Jewish tradition, the expression “conceived through the holy spirit” (1:20) was an expression of faith for a conception in a difficult situation. This expression did not in any way deny the existence of a biological father.¹⁷

5. “Behold, A Virgin Shall Conceive”

This is a quotation from Isaiah, and is a prophecy of hope for the Israelite community, saying that “a virgin shall soon conceive and shall give birth” (7:14). This text tells of a conception and birth brought about by God, but there is no suggestion that human sexual relations did not occur or that there was not a biological father.¹⁸

In sum, Matthew utilised an ancient faith expression and announced the hope that this conception and birth-giving was brought about by the holy spirit, and that God is with this mother and her child (= *immanuel*; Isa.8:10). However, in telling the story, Matthew focuses only on Joseph from the beginning to the end, with Mary almost totally ignored and in the background without any “voice” at all.¹⁹

The wo/ men’ s oral tradition which focused on Mary was, in Matthew’ s written text, transformed into a male story, and all the suffering, struggle, and solidarity among wo/men was erased.
20

B. Lukan Text (1:20-56, 2:1-7)²¹

1. Angelic Annunciation

Luke begins the story with an angelic annunciation. Angelic annunciations regarding pregnancy and giving birth in the Hebrew Bible are composed of three elements:

(1) the woman’ s plight, (2) the annunciation, and (3) the fulfilment of the conception and birth.

Actually, this Lukan text strongly implies Mary’ s turmoil concerning the pregnancy; she was “greatly troubled” (1:29), she “considered in her mind” (1:29), and she asked, “how will this be” (1:34).

2. “The Holy Spirit Will Come Upon You … The Child to Be Born Will Be Called Holy, the Son of God”

The angel announces that Mary will be overshadowed by the great power of the holy spirit, that is, she is not sullied by the pregnancy and is protected by God. This way of relating the event utilises the image of the “holy marriage” (*hierogamos*) of Greco-Roman legends. There, the pregnancies of the mothers of heroes, such as Plato, Pythagoras, Heracles, Alexander, Octavianus, Augustinus etc., are told as stories of miraculous divine conceptions within “holy marriages” participated in by the

power of the Divine. These legends of “holy marriage” did not deny the existence of biological fathers either.²²

3. Mary’s Song of Praise

In the Magnificat, Mary sings, “He has put down the mighty, he has filled the hungry with good things.” This declares that God heeds the impoverished and the downtrodden, and will overturn their miserable, bitter situation. This sings of the hope for social justice, and is a popular liberation song.²³

Why, however, does Mary sing a popular liberation song right at this moment? In this song, there is a verse, “He has regarded the humiliation (*tapeinōsis*) of his servant” (1:48), which seems to be Luke’s insertion.

In Japanese, this is translated as “low estate.” However, the verb “*tapeinoō*” is used in the LXX for the sexual humiliation of a woman. That is, Mary sings, “God has seen the humiliation I have experienced.” Thus, here again Deuteronomy is implied, with Luke adding the idea of Divine protection. Only when we recognise the Divine’s regard for the plight of a poor humiliated wo/man, can we understand why Mary sings a popular liberation song here.²⁴

4. “The Son, As Was Supposed, of Joseph”

Luke details the genealogy of Jesus right after Jesus was baptised and received the recognition of the heavenly voice, “You are my beloved son” (3:22). This genealogy, in contrast to Matthew’s, begins with Jesus and progresses through his ancestors, but like Matthew’s, the pattern is broken at the mention of Jesus and Joseph. Instead of saying, “the son of Joseph,” it says “thought to be (*enomizeto*) the son of Joseph.”

In this genealogy, Luke indicates that Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus. At the same time, by his editorial placement of this genealogy right after the baptism of Jesus, Luke invites readers think that Jesus, the Son of God, was thought to be the son of Joseph. Thus Luke muddies any thoughts about Jesus’ illegitimate conception.

In sum, Luke uses Jewish faith expressions, popular song, and Greco-Roman heroic legends, and thus suppresses the scandal of illegitimate conception. Differing from Matthew, Luke focused on the wo/man Mary, and Mary is given “her voice.” However, by emphasising the image of the protection of the holy spirit and of Mary’s faith, Luke obscures the reality of Mary’s indignation, her bitterness, and her struggle from readers’ attention.²⁵

IV. Later Literature

A. Proto-James²⁶

The rumour and criticism that Jesus was a child born through an illegitimate pregnancy continued for a long time and was dispersed widely in Jewish rabbi literature as well as in gentile literature. Alongside this phenomenon was the Christian development of the myth of Mary’s

“virginal conception.”

That is, against the rumour of Mary’s illegitimate conception, gospel writers told stories, based on wo/men’s early oral traditions, which obscured the illegitimacy and emphasised the agency of the holy spirit. Because of this, some Christians misunderstood the gospel stories as describing a virginal conception. Besides this, there were escalating mythologizing interpretations of the birth stories as stories of a divine miracle.

Behind such mythologization processes was a quite influential book called *Proto-James*, which was written in the middle of the second century. This book is little known today, but was familiar to Origen, Justin, Clement of Alexandria, etc., and seems to have had a great influence on the formation of Christian dogma.

It focuses wholly on the life of Mary. However, the author’s interest is not at all on the historical person of Mary of Nazareth. The purpose of this book is to argue that Jesus is the “Son of God” who was born of an unique miraculous virginal conception. For the purpose of this argument alone, the author created a narrative to prove the virginal purity of Jesus’ mother.

According to *Proto-James*, Mary never had any opportunity to engage in sexual relations. Mary was not born of a poor family in Nazareth, but of a Davidic wealthy family near Jerusalem. At the age of three, Mary’s parents offered her to the Temple. So she lived in the Temple and was raised there under the protection of the temple priests. At the age of twelve, that is the age suitable for marriage, she was married to Joseph, a man older than herself, in accordance with decisions made by the priests. In this way, she was placed under the protection of Joseph as well as of God.

Through her marriage, she did not become the wife of a poor carpenter but of an architect. She engaged in spinning work, not for a living, but was assigned to the prestigious work of spinning to make the temple curtain.²⁷

Mary then conceived a child, Jesus, without having had any sexual relations with her protector Joseph, and gave birth without pain or blood, keeping her virgin hymen intact. Mary’s virginity is vouched for repeatedly by the angel Gabriel, the high priest, Joseph, God, the midwife, and Salome.

It seems that, on the one hand, through the influence of *Proto-James*, the mythologization of Mary’s conception continued to develop, while on the other hand, the denunciation of and rumours about Mary’s illegitimate pregnancy continued to rage. And in response to the strength of these rumours, the opposing mythologization further escalated.

B. From Myth & Controversy to The Formation of Doctrine

Through debates from the 2nd to the 3rd century, the myth of the “virgin birth” developed into a central Christian doctrine. Among the debates, certain arguments of Origen (185-254), made in “Against Celsus” (248), deserve special attention. This book was written as a response to the 2nd century philosopher Celsus’ book “True Doctrine” (178) which had attacked Christianity 50 years previously.²⁸

First, according to Celsus’ argument, Mary became pregnant in her betrothal period by a man who was not her husband, but she was not saved by divine intervention. She was a “poor country

woman who earned her living by spinning,” and the biological father of Jesus was a Roman “soldier named Panthera” (1:69).²⁹

In Origen’s dispute with Celsus, Origen basically accepts Celsus’ statement regarding Mary’s illegitimate pregnancy. Origen does not deny it. What Origen does deny, in opposition to Celsus, is that Jesus “gave himself the title of God” (1:28) and that Mary “was driven out by the carpenter to whom she was betrothed, since she had been convicted of adultery” (1:32).

Origen, on the other hand, states that it is more “appropriate” for the mother of *Immanuel* (God be with us) to have had not an ordinary conception through sexual intercourse with a man, but a miraculous, pure and virginal conception with the Divine.

Such a theological reflection on what kind of conception is “appropriate” for the *Immanuel* Jesus Christ utterly ignores and is detached from the actual historical situation. But it was accepted, it flourished, and was then developed in the Christian literature of the church fathers.

Among them, in the literature of Justin Martyr (ca. 110-166), Irenaeus (ca. 120-202), Tertullian (ca. 150-240), and Jerome (ca. 342-420), the mythologizing doctrines escalated. By the end of the 3rd century, the earliest tradition of Mary’s illegitimate conception was almost totally erased in Christian circles.³⁰

Seven ascending stages of mythologization have been identified as follows:³¹

1. Jesus was conceived illegitimately during the time Mary was betrothed to Joseph but by her intercourse with another man.
2. Joseph and Mary were Jesus’ biological parents.
3. Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but had no sexual intercourse with him until after Jesus’ birth. He was not the biological father of Jesus.
4. Mary conceived Jesus virginally.
5. Joseph was a decrepit old man at the time of his betrothal to Mary. His children were all by a former marriage. He was really Mary’s guardian rather than her husband.
6. Mary’s virginity was not destroyed by the birth of Jesus, nor by any intercourse or childbirth afterwards.
7. Joseph was virgin as well as Mary. The “brothers” of Jesus were really his cousins.

V. The Transformation of “Mary the Mother”

In the history of the Catholic Church, Jesus’ mother Mary became a great figure and an object of worship. However, there are very few remarks about her in the bible.

Outside of the canon, *Proto-James* (2nd century) and its clone, the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (6th century), focus on Mary, Jesus’ mother. However, as we have seen, their interest is not in the life of the historical wo/man Mary of Nazareth. It is quite clear that their purposes are to prove the purity and virginity of the mother Mary in order to argue for the unique divinity of Christ.

There are other books that refer to Mary, but she herself is not the focus. Rather her status as

the “mother of Christ” was used to justify the argument for a kyriarchal church. Here, we will roughly follow the process of the transfiguration of “Mary the Mother” in the literature as follows:

1. The biblical Mary who does not understand Jesus.
2. The extra-canonical Mary who replaces Mary of Magdala, a central disciple of Jesus.
3. Mary the Mother who takes an authoritative role in order to heighten male authority and to silence and subjugate wo/men.

A. Mary the Mother, Not Understanding Jesus

In the canonical gospels, Mary is depicted as not understanding Jesus’ way of life. For example, we are told that Jesus’ parents travelled to Jerusalem every year, but that one year, when Jesus was twelve years old, while they were on the journey back home, they noticed that Jesus was not with them. They sought him for three days, and found him in dialogue with teachers in the Temple. Mary reproached him, saying, “Child, why have you done these things to us?” (Lk2:48). To this, Jesus replied that he was in his father’s house. But his parents did not understand the meaning of his words (Lk2:50).

In the three synoptic gospels, there is a story where Jesus’ mother and brothers come to the place where Jesus is speaking to a large crowd. They called him over to talk to him, but he rejected them (Mk3:31-35; Mt12:46-50; Lk8:19-21). He said, “whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother,” thus replacing the family relationship of blood kinship with that based on faith. Here, Mary is a member of the kinship family, none of whom understand Jesus.³²

In the bible, there are some other descriptions that show Jesus’ conflicts with his kinship family. All four canonical gospels recount Jesus’ words, “A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house” (Mt6:3; Mt13:53-58; Lk4:16-30; Jn6:42). Thus, his mother Mary, as well as other family members, did not understand Jesus’ missionary work, at least during his lifetime.³³

Luke, at the beginning of the Acts, writes about Mary. After Jesus’ ascension, when the “apostles” gathered together in Jerusalem, Mary was with them (Acts1:14). It is thought to be historically possible that Mary joined the earliest Christian community *ecclesia*, but is not clear when exactly she did so.

What we know is that Luke’s descriptions of Mary are of a wo/man who, even when she could not understand, “kept all things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk2:19, 51), and who prayed together with Jesus’ disciples after his death. That is, a wo/man appropriate to Luke’s idealised notion of wo/men’s virtue. Other than these, there is almost no mention of Mary in the bible.

B. Mary the Mother, Replaces Mary of Magdala, a Central Disciple of Jesus

In the extra-canonical writings from the 2nd century, there are stories featuring Mary Jesus’ mother and Mary of Magdala, together with Jesus. Mary of Magdala is attested in all four canonical gospels as being the first witness of Jesus’ resurrection, and has a very important position in the early history of Christianity.

In many extra-canonical writings, Mary of Magdala is depicted as the one who understood Jesus' teaching best, as his leading dialogue partner, and as his closest and most intimate partner.³⁴ In several extra-canonical writings, Jesus' mother is mentioned alongside Mary of Magdala, and is depicted as participating in Jesus' missionary work as one of the central disciples.³⁵

Moreover, while Mary of Magdala is always mentioned first among the wo/men followers in the canonical gospels, in some texts from the 2nd century, Mary the mother is mentioned first. Furthermore, in some texts describing the appearance of Jesus after the resurrection, where Mary of Magdala alone had been mentioned, Mary of Magdala has been erased and Mary the mother is mentioned instead of her.³⁶

There were three who always walked with the Lord: Mary, his mother, and her sister, and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion. His sister and his mother and his companion were each a Mary (*The Gospel of Philip*, 2.3).

and he [resurrected Jesus] appeared first to his mother and to his other women, and Peter and John the first of my co-disciples, then also to us the twelve ... (*Acta Thaddaei*).

Why did the Lord say to his mother Mary, "Do not touch me?" (*Quaestiones et responsiones ad Orthodoxos*).

She said to him with joy: "Rabbi, teacher, my lord, and my God, and my son, you have risen, you have really risen." ... But he stopped her and requested her, "My mother, do not touch me ... Know these things, oh Mary my mother ..." (Coptic Revillout Fragment 14).

C. Mary the Mother, Performing the Role of Enhancing Male Authority and Contributing to Female Silence and Obedience

In the texts where Mary of Magdala was replaced with Mary the mother, Mary the mother became the person who had followed Jesus from the beginning of his ministry, and is given special authority as "the mother of the Lord." One thing noteworthy here is that, in these texts while the figure of Mary of Magdala in the leadership position is eliminated, Peter's position and authority are elevated.³⁷

In some texts, Mary the mother praises Peter, and says that men should be the representatives and leaders of the community, and that wo/men should be submissive to men. Furthermore, Mary, who has special authority as the "mother of God," is informed by Jesus of what is referred to as 'the mystery', but at the same time is commanded by him to keep silent about it.

In many other texts, Mary of Magdala is depicted as the most beloved disciple of Jesus, who asks many questions and often takes part in dialogues with Jesus as the representative of his disciples. In contrast, Mary the mother, who replaces Mary of Magdala, declines the chance to speak to Jesus when she is pushed forward and prompted to do so, insisting that Peter should speak to Jesus instead.

But Jesus appeared quickly and said to Mary, “Utter not this mystery, or this day my whole creation will come to an end. And the apostles were taken with fear lest the Lord should be angry with them” (*Questions of Bartholomew*, 2.32).

[Peter to mother Mary] You who are highly favoured, entreat the Lord to reveal to us the things that are in heavens” ... [Mother Mary to Peter] You are the image of Adam; was not he first formed and then Eve?” (*Questions of Bartholomew*, 4.4-5).

In short, Jesus’ mother Mary was given special authority as a result of being simply the “mother” of Christ. She replaced the first resurrection witness, Mary of Magdala, in order to eliminate her in her position as a prominent leader figure, and was used to elevate Peter’s/male authority and make wo/men silent and submissive, based on her authority as the “mother.”

In this way, the church became more and more kyriarchal, God became an absolute, transcendent God and a severe judge, Jesus Christ became more and more divinised, and thus divinity became consolidated in the male image. In such a process, it is said that Mary the mother was used to play the role of complementing the all male image of the Divine.

However, the history of Mary’s veneration in the process of imperialistic kyriarchalization of the church is also the history of discrimination against wo/men, denying wo/men’s sexuality and autonomy. It is important to examine the various functions the veneration of Mary as “the mother of Christ” played in church history.³⁸

VI. Telling the Story of Mary of Nazareth

A. Questioning the Image of “Mary the Holy Mother”

Mary of Nazareth is usually portrayed as a mother embracing the baby Jesus. Her portrayals give a strong impression of female passivity; pure, clean and in quiet meditation. There is no image here of a woman who is poor, grieving, struggling, and trying to survive with only the resources of her own character and willpower. Is it because she was a quiet, passive woman? Or, is it because she was confined to that female image by the bible and the messages the church wanted to promote? I believe that the latter is more probably the case.

According to folklore research, when oral traditions transmitted by wo/men were edited by men into written texts, wo/men’s roles were changed. Often times, wo/men who had been lively and autonomous subjects became men’s assistants or the recipients of male protection.³⁹

A famous example is the story of “Little Red Riding Hood.” In the early stages of the oral traditions, the girl saves herself by her own wit and effort, and punishes the wolf. It was a story that helped girls develop their self-reliance and independence. However, when it was written down, the girl was helpless in facing the trouble she was confronted with, and was either killed by the wolf or rescued by some form of male power, such as a hunter. The story was altered into one that imbued girls with

self-unreliance and obedience.⁴⁰

When read with such a consciousness, the gospels contain fragments of the figure of a woman who has the power to start and to continue her own actions.

Therefore, in order to give our “historical imagination” a bit more flexibility and free it from the conventional kyriarchal mindset, let me tell a story describing another possible Mary of Nazareth.⁴¹

B. A Storytelling: “Mary of Nazareth”

I am Mary, born in Nazareth in Galilee. I thought that I would have an ordinary life, marrying a man chosen by my father. That is, a life of spinning, weaving and making clothes, of tilling the soil and growing vegetables, and of bearing and raising children.⁴²

But when I was 12 years old, just before I was married to my betrothed, something unexpected happened.

Well, actually, it was not utterly unexpected. Our lives were lived under Roman Imperial colonial rule, and the Roman soldiers were oppressive, doing whatever they wanted. The Judean “king” Herod not only identified himself as an Emperor worshipper, worshipping the Roman emperor, his priority was on maintaining his kingly status, and as such, he did not hesitate even in killing his own kin. In such a society, there was violence in every aspect of our daily lives and village people like us were victimised in many different ways.⁴³

Despite this, I never imagined that such a disastrous thing could happen to me. Days passed when I could not really believe or accept what had happened to me. Then I noticed that I was pregnant. I didn’t know what to do. I was about to be united in marriage with Joseph. In agony I kept saying to myself, “how will this be?” (Lk1:34).

Then, I decided to visit my aunt Elizabeth. I left home and, as though fleeing from terror, I “went with haste into the hill country” (Lk1:39), going up and down the ridges and slopes, my breath ragged, my body dripping with sweat, as I wended my way along the rough road.⁴⁴

As soon as I met aunt Elizabeth, she understood. We hugged each other, talked and prayed together, and in those heart-warming days, I was empowered. I praised God who watches over the poor and the humiliated (Lk1:48). Elizabeth blessed me. After we had spent three months together, I was determined to go on. I returned home to Nazareth (Lk1:56), even though it was now a place of bitter memories.⁴⁵

I rallied my spirits and talked with Joseph, revealing the agony I had experienced, and asking him if we could overcome this hardship together. My wish was that we live together with the baby in my womb, and make a family in faith rather than in kinship.

For Joseph this must also have been agonising, but he made the decision to live a life of commitment with me. That is, we were going to have an untraditional family, but we believed in God who would surely be with us and keep watch over our lives.⁴⁶

However, the situation, when it arrived, was much worse even than the scenario we had been preparing ourselves for. Our son Jesus was called “the son of Mary” (Mk6:3) or ridiculed as “born

of fornication” (Jn8:41). Both Joseph and I have learned how it is to live a life being reproached from all sides. In a poor, small village, it was almost always us who were made a target of suspicion whenever anything unpleasant happened. We became inclined to wish that our children would not cause any trouble that might be used as another occasion for our disgrace.

Jesus was a gentle, kind, and warm hearted person, and became known to have “hands of healing.” When he touched a sick person with his warm hands or embraced a weakened person, their pain seemed to fade away. He was a compassionate child, but then, gradually he became strange, with various behavioural peculiarities that were difficult for us to understand.

When he was almost 30 years old, and I was wishing that finally he might settle down, he became a disciple of John the Baptist, a prophet who lived in the desert. Then, John was arrested, and Jesus began to gather people around himself, and started his own *basileia* (reign of God) movement.

It seems that some people became followers and sympathisers or supporters of the movement, but it had a bad reputation in our neighbourhood. Sometimes Jesus was denounced as “a glutton and a drunkard,” “a friend of tax collectors and sinners,” or labeled as a “eunuch” that is to say “male but not a man” (Mk2:16-17. Mt9:10-13; 11:19; 21:31-32. Lk5:30-32; 7:34). Finally he was arrested and crucified by the Roman authorities as a political criminal.⁴⁷

However, when I was in misery and grief in my old age, a woman called Mary of Magdala, a companion of my son, treated me kindly. While people despised me as the mother of a crucified criminal, she told me, “Your son was not a person to be despised, but a truly wonderful person. Please be proud of him.” Although I was the mother of Jesus, I felt that she understood my son much, much, better than I did.

Mary of Magdala was a woman who had marvellous power and integrity. Because of Jesus’ crucifixion, his companions were in terror and desperation, worrying about what would happen to them. But she was calm. As the first witness of Jesus’ resurrection, she was the person who stood at the front of every attack. Nevertheless, she did not lose her integrity, had firm trust in God, and encouraged her companions to persevere with the movement. I respected her from the bottom of my heart, and sympathised with her views, sharing at least some of her thought.⁴⁸

Being physically close to her struggle and way of life, I felt as if something like scales had fallen from my eyes. I began to understand what my son had lived for, even at the cost of his life. And something of my own past experience rose up, as if it had been freshly uncovered. I remembered that crucial time in my life, when in distress, and losing heart, I was encouraged and inspired by talking with Elizabeth, until finally I became determined to live my life trusting God. And now I made up my mind to live the remaining days of my life, within the circle of Mary of Magdala and the *basileia* movement.

Around that time, as Jesus became renowned, the dirty rumours surrounding my pregnancy rose up again. The rumours were elaborated on and widely spread. Against such rumours of calumny and slander, the wo/men of the *basileia* movement started telling their own story.

That story went; “The holy spirit rescued the mother and child in distress. No one can say that a conception outside of a legal marriage sullies the mother and child.” It was as if, at the very end of my life, I was truly experiencing the warmth of family, not in kinship but in faith.

However, my story did not end with my death. Things which were told and written as being from my own life, were astonishing to me. These stories about me had been told by wo/men in order to hold me in a warm embrace and to convey their whole-hearted compassion and support for me as well as for all those who were downtrodden. But the message of their story was rapidly and completely distorted.

On the one hand, among the people who opposed the *basileia* movement and the early Christians, the nasty rumours were exacerbated. On the other hand, theological meaning-making which utterly ignored the historical reality developed. Both sides goaded each other, and the arguments escalated.

In the meantime, Christian communities of *ecclesia* (later churches) were also changing. At the beginning, the *ecclesia* was an inclusive egalitarian gathering where no one would discriminate or be discriminated against.

However, there began to appear churches which, adjusting to Roman imperial society, began preaching kyriarchal customs. And then, the movement’s mainstream teachings became, “men should be church leaders, and wo/men should be silent and obedient.”⁴⁹

In such sexist churches, I was said to have borne the son of God, Jesus Christ, and that I had been a virgin. It was also reported that I had been born in the Davidic family line.

Thus, I became a woman of high status, a holy mother who had given birth without pain, who had given birth as a virgin, a mother of Christ. I became an object of worship like a god. A woman of high status, a holy and virginal mother, is a person with no resemblance to me, and to the real life that I lived. As a result, I was totally cut off from those whose lives were like my own, that is, poor wo/men, exposed to violence, but living their lives looking forward, struggling and helping each other.

Furthermore, I was soon to replace Mary of Magdala, the great leader. But this new fabrication of who I was, was not of a great leader. Not at all. What happened was that the stories of Jesus and Mary of Magdala were changed to those of Jesus and his mother Mary. The leading figure of Mary of Magdala was erased, while I was made to play an absurd role in which I praised male leadership and authority and taught female silence and submission.

This means that I was used as a tool to erase the figure of the great leader Mary of Magdala whom I respected and thanked from the bottom of my heart, and to erase and deny the female figures of church leadership. In direct connection with this, I was also used as a tool to heighten Peter and male authority and to lower or even reject female power, by pressing wo/men to stay quiet, passive, and submissive.

I am a woman who was moulded to be the “mother of God” and the “holy virgin mother”, but that is not who I am. I myself, Mary of Nazareth, did not give up when humiliated and suffering. I did not remain in miserable passivity. I sought wisdom and support from my female companions, made my own decision, put my own plans into action, struggled, and forged my own path.

In opposition to this path, in the books written several decades after my death, my own figure is totally distorted, painted into a symbol of passivity, silence, obedience, virginity, and motherhood.

Wo/men' s storytelling which was originally done on my behalf promoted the message of seeking justice for the downtrodden, and encouraging solidarity among wo/men in suffering. But the stories told of me in the later kyriarchal churches were those which would further humiliate real wo/men, while adoring "virginity" and "motherhood" , ideas which conveniently served men.

In those kyriarchal stories, I am no longer a companion of mothers and children who live their lives in the midst of violence and injustice in the real world. Rather, I was devised as a figure hostile to those wo/men who are struggling to change society into a better, kinder, more just place. This is something that truly makes me angry and makes me grieve.

Now, finally, I am beginning to feel redeemed from this bitter grief by many wo/men, because the historical reality of my life has been unearthed in their studies. I do hope that my story will be recovered as one that brings the message of God' s grace and justice, especially for those who are striving to survive in the midst of violence and injustice.⁵⁰

I' ve learned that some of your churches celebrate November 21st as "the day of the infant Mary." I hope this day might be remembered as "the day of Mary of Nazareth." On that day, I hope you will remember me, not as a theologically invented or distorted virgin mother, but as a real historical woman.

At the same time, I hope you will remember and think about the reality that so many girls face, exposed as they are to the various kinds of violence in the world, that you will meditate on the power of wisdom and action, and that you will stand in solidarity with those who are regarded by in our societies as being of less value.

It would be wonderful to make that day the occasion for critically and creatively remembering the history of faith communities connected to Jesus' life as well as the later historical transformations. Then, I will surely be there smiling among you. ⁵¹

Endnotes

¹ This paper was first presented in November 2010 at a seminar of our Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan (which was published in Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan Letter no.66, 2010, pp.1-20).

When I made this presentation at our center seminar in Tokyo, Japan, there were very few people who knew the argument Jane Schaberg had made in her book, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, and the various discussions around it. This means that I presented this paper in such a context, very conscious of my audience at that time in Japan. So, I hope English readers remember that, in a different context, I am sure I would have spoken very differently about this theme. However, the message expressed in the last sections of this paper would remain the same, regardless of where and when my speech was made.

This is a shortened version of that paper, translated by myself into English from the original Japanese. Here I would like to express my sincere and deep gratitude to my friend the writer Alison Gray in Scotland who kindly edited my translation.

² Here I mention the general tendency of Catholic and Protestant churches, and not each person' s

understanding. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision.” Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus, Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet*, 165-177.

3 Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 186. Regarding the terms “wo/man” and “wo/men,” see Laura Beth Bugg, “Explanation of Terms (Glossary).”

4 Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Ominigender: A Trans-Religious Approach* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003) From Robert E. Goss, “Luke.”

5 Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 4.

6 See note no.2. Regarding the term “kyriarchy,” see Laura Beth Bugg, “Explanation of Terms (Glossary).”

7 We may assume that there were changes in the tradition. That is, in the processes of the story’s oral transmission, editing, writing, interpretation, and teaching, the story itself and its teaching were gradually changed together with the changes of the ages. Satoko Yamaguchi, “Historical Jesus Study from Feminist Theological Perspectives” (in Japanese); “Re-reading of the ‘Virgin Birth’ Story” (in Japanese); *A New Study of the Bible*, 104-120 (in Japanese).

8 Regarding the wo/men and shaping of tradition, see Satoko Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*, 80-96.

9 Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 145-156.

10 Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy*, 154-155.

11 Regarding the background situation of wo/men around the time: Luise Schottroff, *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters*. Masahiro Yamaguchi, *Dawn of the Birth of Jesus*, 81-105 (in Japanese); *World and History of the Christian Testament*, 53-72 (in Japanese). Regarding the rumour about Jesus’ illegitimacy, partially shown in Mk6:3/Mt13:55/Lk4:22; Jn8:19, 41; Gospel of Thomas105; Acts of Peter2:3. Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 156-165.

12 Cf. Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 145-1148.

13 This whole section is based on Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*.

14 Mostly based on Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 20-77.

15 The four wo/men are Tamar (1:3), Rahab (1:5), Ruth (1:5), and the wife of Uriah (1:6).

16 Regarding Matthew’s implicit and indirect reference to sexual violence, cf. Elaine Mary Wainwright, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 171-176.

17 Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 3.

18 Cf. H. C. Waetjen, “The Genealogy as Key to the Gospel According to Matthew.”

19 Cf. Janice Capel Anderson, “Gender and Reading. Julian Sheffield, “The Father in the Gospel of Matthew.”

20 Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 74.

21 Mostly based on Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 78-144.

22 See Boring, Berger, Colpe eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament*, 33-41, 188-190.

23 Cf. Richard A. Horsley, *The Liberation of Christmas*, 107-123.

24 See also Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 171-174. Cf. Vasiliki Limberis, “Mary.”

25 Cf. Brigitte Kahl, “Reading Luke Against Luke.” Turid Karlsen Seim, “The Virgin Mother.”

26 *Proto-James* = *Protevangelium of Matthew* was originally titled *Birth of Mary, Apocalypse of*

James. See Jane Schaberg, "The Infancy of Mary of Nazareth."

27 We can identify not only sexism but also classism in this writing.

28 Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 165-169.

29 See Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 169-178. Satoko Yamaguchi, "Historical Jesus Study."

30 Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 178-194. See also Satoko Yamaguchi, *A New Study*, 117-118.

31 Schaberg, "The Infancy of Mary." Quoted from p.709.

32 Satoko Yamaguchi, *Rainbows Among Us*, 304-306 (in Japanese).

33 Jn7:5; Mk3:21, 31. Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 154.

34 *Gospel of Thomas. Gospel of Mary. Gospel of Philip. Sophia Jesu Christi. Pistis Sophia. Dialogue of the Redeemer. Great Questions of Mary*, etc. Cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 304-307. Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*, 140-142. Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. Satoko Yamaguchi, *Rainbows Among Us*, 273-280; *A New Study*, 188-195.

35 *Sophia Jesu Christi. Gospel of Philip. Dialogue of the Redeemer*, etc. Cf. Satoko Yamaguchi, *Rainbows Among Us*, 274-275.

36 Brown et al eds., *Mary in the New Testament*, 166. Brock, *Mary*, 129-142, 166-167.

37 Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 304-307. Brock, *Mary*, 129-142, 166-167.

38 Cf. A critical comment of Miyako Demura, "Translator's Postscript" of Maria-Sybilla Heister, *Maria aus Nazareth* (1987), Tokyo: Shinkyo, 1988, 168-171 (in Japanese). See also L. Schottroff, "Virgin Birth." Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk*, 139-158.

39 Satoko Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*, 93-96.

40 I have a personal experience of the myth of female receptivity. At the time when I married, it was considered common sense that a wife should stay at home while her husband worked. Soon after the marriage, I realised that this 'common sense' idea was a problem for me. I decided I would abolish the gender role system of "male outside, female inside," at least in our home.

I talked with my husband and gave him the choice of whether to divorce or to change our lifestyle so that we would work equally both outside and inside our home. Without understanding my rationale or my intentions clearly, he chose the latter and our difficult discussions and struggles began. I was challenged by various obstacles both inside and outside of our home, but supported by friends, I continued my struggle which resulted in my husband's consciousness-raising, his consent, and his active support.

At that later time, however, when people learned that my partner had been sharing with me all the housework including child-rearing, almost everyone said, "You are a very lucky woman, having such an extraordinary sweet and understanding husband." It was as if they were saying that a woman's determination, actions and effort, as well as her long struggle to forge such a process, were almost nothing, and that everything depended on the man. Such a thing as this seems also to be part of the old myth that "females are weak and cannot do anything without male help."

Because of my own experiences, as well as numerous discoveries in works of feminist research, I am suspicious of the quiet and passive image of Mary of Nazareth.

41 To perform a variety of stories, which expand our historical imaginations and together with continuing critical studies, helps us to liberate ourselves from the conventional historical imagining

tamed by the “historical winners.” Such performances also help us expand our visions and energies to transform the kyriarchal society and preserve our subversive and “dangerous memories” among “wo/men.” See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus*, 187. Schaberg points out the importance and necessity of building a new Mariology, which would be based on a figure who sings the popular liberation song, and breaks the “silence” of “silent night” toward the liberation of the humiliated. Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 198-199.

42 Satoko Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*, 13-19.

43 Masahiro Yamaguchi, *Dawn of the Birth of Jesus*, 81-105; World and History of the Christian Testament, 53-72. Horsley, *The Liberation of Christmas*, 74. Bohache, “Matthew.”

44 CF. Vasiliki Limberis, “Elizabeth.” Goss, “Luke.”

45 This story of Mary and Elizabeth is written only in Luke. Scholars widely recognize that Luke probably knew many more stories which originated with wo/men than Matthew and Mark (See eg., Schaberg, “Luke”). I think it might have been these wo/men’s oral traditions which became the basis of the Lukan story of Mary and Elizabeth.

46 Every year during the Christmas season, churches decorate halls with Nativity scenes and perform beautiful pageants. I hope we become more conscious of the situation of the “holy family” which was one of bitterness, tears, and determination. I also hope that we become clearly conscious of the reality of the “holy family” as a reality of non-traditional families. Still today, everywhere in the world, and close by too, there exist various non-traditional families. Yuki Nagao, a seminary student of my class at Japan Biblical Theological Seminary in 2010, wrote a paper saying, we now know that Jesus was a child born through a pregnancy that society had repudiated and within a family that was non-traditional. This recognition offers us a firm basis to make a Christian statement against any discrimination against extramarital children. See also Bohache, “Matthew.”

47 Regarding the centrality of healing in Jesus’ ministry, Satoko Yamaguchi, *New Study*, 124-134.

Regarding “eunukos,” Satoko Yamaguchi, *Rainbows Among Us*, 236-239. Regarding the crucifixion, Satoko Yamaguchi, *New Study*, 136-137.

48 Regarding Mary of Magdala, Satoko Yamaguchi, *New Study*, 188-195.

49 Regarding the kyriarchalization process of the church, see also Satoko Yamaguchi, *New Study*, 159-166, 209-223.

50 When we recover the story of “Mary’s extramarital pregnancy” originally told by wo/men, what kind of influence will it have? First, it will shatter to its foundations the understanding that extramarital pregnancy is not “appropriate” for the *immanuel*. Instead, in the midst of the lives of those who are made objects of disdain or discrimination, who are downtrodden and suffering, there will be the hope and dignity of *immanuel*. When those early stories of Mary’s extramarital pregnancy are told as the faith testimonies of wo/men, the God spoken of is not the almighty God who creates miracles through his absolute power. Rather, this Divinity is one who does not “possess” the power to control. This God, however, will not abandon each of those who is suffering and seeking for justice and life, and will abide with each of them, respond to their prayers and lead them, somehow, out of the darkness and into life. Regardless of human judgment, no wo/men or child would not be labelled as “inappropriate.” And we may notice that a fresh and rich encounter with God is waiting for each of us. As Jane

Schaberg has shown in her book, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, to speak the truth of the silenced ones will lead us nearer to speaking the truth of the lost aspect of the Divine. See Satoko Yamaguchi, *New Study*, 118-120.

⁵¹ After this presentation at our center seminar in Japan in 2010, it seems that some were offended. However, some expressed their support of this presentation wholeheartedly, saying that they felt healed and/or encouraged. Later, I used this paper in my classes, and many university students as well as seminary students, both Catholic and Protestant, said that if churches had sincerely appreciated the early wo/men's oral tradition, Christianity might have become totally different and that it would have been much more attractive, inspiring, and empowering for so many people in the world.

Selected Bibliography

- Anderson, Janice Capel, "Matthew: Gender and Reading" (*A Feminist Companion to Matthew*. Amy-Jill with Levine Marianne Blickenstaff eds., Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001) pp.22-51.
- Bohache, Thomas, "Matthew" (*The Queer Bible Commentary*. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona Wes and Thomas Bohache eds., London: SCM, 2006) pp.487-516.
- Boring, M. Eugene, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1995.
- Brock, Ann Graham, *The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Brown, Raymond E., Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and John Reumann eds., *Mary in the New Testament*. New York: Paulist, 1978.
- Bugg, Laura Beth, "Explanation of Terms (Glossary)." (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, Maryknoll, New York: Oribis, 2001) pp.207-216.
- Demura, Miyako "Translator's Postscript" of Maria-Sybilla Heister, *Maria aus Nazareth*, Tokyo: Shinkyo, 1988 (in Japanese).
- Goss, Robert E., "Luke" (*The Queer Bible Commentary*. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West and Thomas Bohache eds., London: SCM, 2006) pp.526-547.
- Horsley, Richard A., *The Liberation of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives in Social Context* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).
- Kahl, Brigitte, "Reading Luke Against Luke: Non-Uniformity of Text, Hermeneutics of Conspiracy and the 'Scriptural Principle' in Luke" (*A Feminist Companion to Luke*. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff eds., Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001) pp.70-88.
- Limberis, Vasiliki, "Elizabeth" (*Wo/men in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Wo/men in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer eds., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) pp.73-74.
- , "Mary" (*Wo/men in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Wo/men in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer eds., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) pp.116-119.
- Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey, *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach*, Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003.
- Pagels, Elaine. *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Random House Inc., 1979.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford, *Sexism and God-Talk toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon, 1983.
- Schaberg, Jane, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

- , "The Infancy of Mary of Nazareth." (*Searching the Scriptures: Volume Two: A Feminist Commentary*, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza ed., New York: Crossroad, 1994)pp.708-727.
- , Schaberg, "Luke." (*The Women ' s Bible Commentary*. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe eds., London: SPCK, 1992) pp.273-292.
- Schottroff, Luise, *Lydia ' s Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, "Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision" (*Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow eds., San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979)pp.136-148.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, *Jesus Miriam ' s Child, Sophia ' s Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology*. New York: Continuum, 1994.
- , *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. N. Y.: Crossroad, 1983.
- Seim, Turid Karlsen, "The Virgin Mother: Mary and Ascetic Discipleship in Luke." (*A Feminist Companion to Luke*, Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff eds., Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002) pp. 89-105.
- Sheffield, Julian, "The Father in the Gospel of Matthew." (*A Feminist Companion to Matthew*, Amy-Jill Levine et al eds., Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001) pp.52-69.
- Waetjen, H. C., "The Genealogy as Key to the Gospel According to Matthew." (*Journal of Biblical Literature* 95, 1976) pp. 220-230.
- Wainwright, Elaine Mary, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel According to Matthew*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991.
- Yamaguchi, Masahiro, *Dawn of the Birth of Jesus*, Tokyo: United Church of Christ Japan Publisher, 2002 (in Japanese).
- , *World and History of the Christian Testament*, Tokyo: United Church of Christ Japan Publisher, 2005 (in Japanese).
- Yamaguchi, Satoko, "Historical Jesus Study from Feminist Theological Perspectives" (*Historical Jesus Study*, Migaku Sato and Takashi Onuki eds., Tokyo: United Church of Christ Japan Publisher, 1998, in Japanese), pp.352-376.
- , *A New Study of the Bible* (Tokyo: Shinkyo Publisher, 2009, in Japanese).
- , *Mary and Martha: Wo/men in the World of Jesus*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002..
- , *Rainbows Among Us* (Tokyo: Shinkyo Publisher, 2008, in Japanese).
- , "Re-thinking What Happened to Mary the Mother of Jesus." (*Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan Letter* no.66, 2010)pp.1-20, in Japanese.