

Contemporary Womens Issues
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The first issue of JFSR, published in 1985, featured a review essay by Carter Heyward discussing several recently published books on Christian feminist theology. She included the following academic monographs in the review: Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her*, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott's *The Divine Feminine*, Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk*, and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki's *God, Christ, Church*. These books, published within one year of each other (1982-83), were written by women who were "white, Christian, and academic." (1) Yet Heyward did not stop with these four. She incorporated Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* in her review of the theology of white Christian feminists. Heyward's juxtaposition of a novel by a black woman with theological texts written by white women was--and continues to be--both striking and fruitful. In her review of these texts, Heyward confronted issues of racism, androcentrism, whiteness, christocentrism, and theology.

Last semester, I assigned *The Color Purple* as the final reading for a freshman core curriculum religion class. Like Heyward did thirty years before me, I found that the novel incorporated relevant theological issues while the novelistic form allowed students to discuss these issues honestly. As a white woman who grew up in the "Bible Belt" south, I found that many of the class discussions affected me personally because of the representations of southern life present in the book. Likewise, my students connected with characters and situations presented in the novel in ways beyond what the primary texts allowed. One student even used the final paper in the class to write her own "letter to God," mimicking the epistolary form of the novel. Moreover, Walker's theological contribution, as Heyward observed, "expands our christological sensibilities beyond all traditional Christian affirmations." (2) Heyward's inclusion of a popular novel in a review of scholarly academic books is an excellent example of the ways that JFSR seeks to ask critical feminist questions in distinct ways.

As a junior scholar looking back to this first issue of JFSR, I am exhilarated and encouraged by the determination that the founding mothers of this organization showed at its beginning and continue to show today. Twenty years after the founding of JFSR, Judith Plaskow wrote: "We intended to be a serious academic journal in which feminist scholars could proudly publish, and which would 'count' for tenure and promotion. Yet we wanted the scholarship we published to come out of some kind of commitment to social and religious change." (3) One concrete way that this commitment can be seen is through the Feminist Studies in Religion blog *Feminism in Religion*, which provides a space for feminist writers to respond immediately to current events. Along with the blog, I have found that the articles and roundtables published in the journal are extremely helpful as I begin my vocational path as a teacher and scholar. The accessibility of the blog, the breadth and variety of the articles, and the honest relevance of the published roundtables are beneficial for my personal scholarship as well as classroom resources.

I have been honored to be a part of the JFSR community as the submissions editor for the past two years. Even as a junior scholar, my opinion is sought and respected by all involved in the journal, even (and especially) senior scholars. Our yearly board meetings are a prime example of this mutual respect as students and senior scholars gather around a table to discuss the journal. The current roundtable is yet another example of the ways in which JFSR encourages junior feminist scholars and seeks to foster an inclusive and open conversation. Going forward, I hope that JFSR can continue and even increase its support for feminist graduate students and new scholars.

Recently, JFSR has experienced an increased number of article submissions from scholars studying, teaching, and writing from countries other than the United States and United Kingdom. In fact, one third of all new submissions in 2013 were from these countries: Turkey, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Hungary, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, and the Philippines--an exciting statistic. I am encouraged that JFSR is attracting work from around the globe; yet many of these authors lack current scholarly resources as well as editorial assistance for their writing. Another hope I have for JFSR is that we might find alternate ways to encourage these international religion scholars in their study and writing. The JFSR board is currently brainstorming ways to support these scholars, and I am eager to see where this opportunity will lead us.

Heyward's review article from JFSR's inaugural issue incorporated a widely read novel that addresses feminist concerns with academic theological scholarship. As an avid reader of fiction, I find Heyward's model appealing and insightful. Representations of women, gender, feminism, religion, race, and sexuality are constantly being explored and challenged through novels, television, and movies. As Heyward did in the first issue, perhaps writers in the next decades of JFSR could further compare and contrast the theologies presented in literature and film with the work of the academy? The JFSR poetry section (*In a Different Voice*) is one way the journal is already creatively exploring the intersections of nonacademic writing with scholarship; the blog is another venue for this exploration. As Heyward did in the first issue, perhaps writers for JFSR can also address the theologies present in these narratives as compared to the work of the academy. The final line of Heyward's article rings true, even thirty years later: "feminist theology is most fertile whenever and wherever we are able to hear the symphony of multicultural, multicolored sounds and recognize the voices as at once human, female, and divine." (4)

(1) Carter Heyward, "An Unfinished Symphony of Liberation: The Radicalization of Christian Feminism among White U.S. Women: A Review Essay," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1, no. 1 (1985): 91-118, quotation on 99.

(2) *Ibid.*, 118.

(3) Judith Plaskow, "A Short History of JFSR," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 21, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 103-6, quotation on 104.

(4) Heyward, "Unfinished Symphony of Liberation," 118.