

## Foreword to the Second Edition

The commentary by Luise Schottroff to *The First Letter to the Congregation in Corinth* appeared in 2013. Therein she offered an easily understandable, true-to-life interpretation of this letter, which directs attention to the living conditions of the Corinthian congregation, offers a political analysis of the power structures underlying the Roman Empire and reveals the daily struggle for dignity of the people in the messianic communities. This second edition offers in extensive sections the unaltered text of the first. The bibliography was enlarged with current publications—in keeping with the wishes of Luise Schottroff, whose concern was never completeness but relevance for a socio-historical, imperium-critical and gender-conscious rereading of Paul's writings in the context of ancient Judaism. Minor mistakes in the manuscript were corrected and a few additions were made. Her interpretation continues to be up-to-date and represents the present state of international Pauline research. Even after her death, Luise Schottroff is an important teacher for those who are seeking their own critical and life-serving access to theology and exegesis.

In 2013, on the occasion of the publication of the commentary, Luise Schottroff received the Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz-Prize of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) for her lifework. For this becomes clear: She puts to work in her interpretation of *The First Letter to the Congregation in Corinth* the yield of her more than forty-year research on Paul. The guidelines of the *Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament [ThKNT]* series, of which she is coeditor, are also the central themes of her own exegetical work since the late 1970s: social history, Christian-Jewish dialogue and feminist theology. Her works were and still are trailblazing for a comprehensive rereading of Paul's letters in the German speaking realm and also internationally. The appearance of the second edition of her commentary should, therefore, be taken as the occasion for a comprehensive honoring of her exegetical work in this field of research.

### 1. Social History

In the introduction, Luise Schottroff writes in 2013 that she will portray Paul's first letter to the congregation in Corinth from a socio-historical theological perspective. She assumes that the letter is addressed to specific people that Paul describes in this way: »not many wise, powerful or privileged by birth,« rather »uneducated ... weak, disadvantaged by birth, despised, things reduced to nothing« (cf. for on 1 Cor

1:26–28). This perspective determines how things will proceed: She thus bases her interpretation on a detailed investigation of the life-situation of the Corinthian congregation in the context of Roman-Hellenistic society in the first century, which was made up of people of diverse nations and languages, of enslaved and free, women and men. Based on her analysis, these people belonged principally to the lower classes. She does not understand the problems that are addressed in the letter as conflicts with »opponents,« but as discussions about how one lives, the backgrounds of which she develops in Basic Information Sections on themes like slavery, divorce, sacrificial meat—meat consumption, the theology of the body, eschatology. Thereby she comprehensively includes in her interpretation the open and subtle aspects of violence in the Roman Empire: crucifixions as a means of political deterrence, »games« as events for the masses in which people were tortured and executed, slavery as a structure that seizes power over people and their bodies. Paul sets in contrast to this the image of the congregation as the »body of the Messiah,« the concept of a collective body, with which God acts to effect liberation in the world (1 Cor 12:12–27) and which is not to be thought of in purely metaphorical terms. The congregation embodies the Risen One. The commentary's manifold socio-historical data, which are based on history of religions and archeological investigations, serve to direct the gaze on the difficult life-situations of a congregation within the structures of the Roman-Hellenistic world, on the oppressive situation of women, children, the poor and enslaved and, at the same time, to open an understanding of the attractiveness of the message of the gospel. The people experience themselves in their community as a messianic body, which promises them dignity as God's creatures and allows eschatological visions of God's just world to develop.

In a programmatic essay in 1979, Luise Schottroff has already set forth the theological foundations for this socio-historical work: »Sin's Reign of Terror and Liberation Through Christ According to Paul's Letter to Rome.«<sup>1</sup> Therein she shows that Paul's statements on sin, on the meaning of the Torah and on Christ's liberating activity are based on an analysis of the Roman Empire. The power of the texts then unfolds in a special way, when they are read in this way and questioned about their significance for people's everyday life in the cities of the empire. Her analysis shows that Paul's leading idea is that sin rules over all people as over slaves and Christ brings liberation from this dominion. The sphere of power of *hamartia* is the *kosmos*; its instrument of power is death. For the execution of its power, it employs the *nomos*. This word, according to Schottroff, does not mean the Torah but the compulsion that makes it impossible to do the will of God. Paul thinks about sin's rule over the world within the dimensions of the Roman Empire, which are first viewed by the believers. They recognize

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1 Schottroff, Luise. »Die Schreckensherrschaft der Sünde und die Befreiung durch Christus nach dem Römerbrief des Paulus.« In Schottroff, *Befreiungserfahrungen. Studien zur Sozialgeschichte des Neuen Testaments*, 57–72. Munich 1990. The article first appeared in *EvTheol* (1979), 497–510. Reprinted in *Befreiung vom Mammon. Liberation from Mammon, Die Reformation radikalieren/Radicalizing Reformation*. Edited by Ulrich Durchrow and Hans G. Ulrich, Band/Vol. 2, 76–94. Münster 2015.

that the ruler of the world makes use of the Torah. Luise Schottroff further asks what liberation from the power of sin means in concrete terms for people. Paul's principal concern is not an improvement in general living conditions; he is thinking apocalyptically: His hope is directed to God's final intervention, which has already begun with the resurrection of Christ. This hope in a final change of rule has had far-reaching political consequences. The people do not feel themselves loyal, in the first place, to the Roman Emperor as the Lord and his institutions, but to the God of Israel and to the Messiah God has sent.

With this interpretive framework, within which she also reads Paul's other letters, Luise Schottroff prepared the way for further studies of socio-historical exegesis in the German context and internationally in the context of studies of empire-critical Pauline research, which is now being carried on under the watchword »Paul and Empire.« There are available a multitude of publications by her in the area of social-historical biblical interpretation.<sup>2</sup> In 2009, together with Old and New Testament colleagues, she published the *Sozialgeschichtliches Wörterbuch zur Bibel*.

## 2. Christian-Jewish Dialogue

To the fundamental question that Luise Schottroff posed in 2013 in the Introduction, »Who was Paul?« there first followed the heading: »Paul the Jew.« In her publications it becomes clear that Jewish-Christian dialogue decisively determines her thinking. In the commentary on the letter to the Corinthian congregation she consistently reads Paul as a Jewish author who has remained true to his theological traditions as he came to faith in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. Thereby she positions herself within an international debate that, under the watchword »Paul within Judaism,« bundles Jewish and Christian investigations on Paul.<sup>3</sup> A central concern of her entire exegetical work is the overcoming of Christian anti-Judaism. Within the framework of a theology after Auschwitz, she sees it as an important task to recognize anti-Jewish stereotypes and ways of thinking and to develop alternatives—in recognition that in the German context there has not been until now a completely non anti-Jewish Christian theology.

Since the middle of the 1960s, there arose in New Testament scholarship the beginnings of an interpretation of Paul's writings in the context of ancient Judaism, which is now discussed under the title »New Perspective on Paul,« or »Post New

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2 A list of publications is printed in the *Festschrift für Luise Schottroff zum 80. Geburtstag*. Edited by Marlene Crüsemann et al. *Gott ist anders. Gleichnisse neu gelesen*, 381–404. Gütersloh 2014. As the first widely received publication can be named the book *Jesus von Nazareth. Hoffnung der Armen*. Stuttgart 1978, cowritten with Wolfgang Stegemann, which has since been reprinted frequently.

3 To the current publications belong, among others, the anthologies edited by Mark Nanos and Magnus Zetterhold, *Paul Within Judaism. A Post-New Perspective Approach to the Apostle*. Minneapolis 2014 and *Paul Within Judaism. Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*. Minneapolis 2015.

Perspective on Paul,« or »Paul Within Judaism.« For the debate in the German-speaking realm, the book by Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (1976), was fundamental; it appeared in translation in 1978 under the title *Der Jude Paulus und wir Heiden*. This understanding of the Jewish Paul was taken up by Luise Schottroff very early, and she consistently developed it further in her own work.

At the end of the 1980's, in the context of German-speaking feminist theology, the question of anti-Judaism in Christian theology was carried on publicly in a broad sphere, challenged, above all, by Jewish women theologians. They criticized the fact that even feminist theologians unreflectively perpetuate anti-Jewish stereotypes of Christian theologies, as, for example, the depiction of Jesus as the »new man,« who freed women from a patriarchal, women-oppressing Judaism. The volume, *Von der Wurzel getragen. Christlich-feministische Exegese in Auseinandersetzung mit Antijudaismus*, which was published in 1996 by Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, fashioned the subsequent exegetical discussions and their results. The essay published by Schottroff in this volume presented alternatives to the (often anti-Judaistically connoted) construct »law-free Gentile Christianity.«<sup>4</sup> She programmatically summarized this in 2013 in the introduction to *The First Letter to the Congregation in Corinth*:

Paul did not through his call become a Christian but a divine messenger, who spreads the liberating message of Jesus' resurrection. Paul proclaimed liberation from acting unjustly under the power of sin, not liberation from the Torah and the fulfilling of its instructions. So the issue is liberation to the Torah, not from the Torah.

Luise Schottroff reads not only the letters of Paul but also the gospels in the theological context of Judaism. In her book about the parables of Jesus, which appeared in 2005 and is now in the third edition of 2010 [It appeared in English as *The Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis 2006; trans.], the New Testament parables, in comparison with rabbinic parables, are consistently interpreted from their Jewish backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> Posthumously published in 2019 were her interpretations of the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Feminist Exegesis

Also in this field of investigation, Luise Schottroff is one of the women pioneers. Already in an essay in 1985, she raised the question, »How justified is feminist

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4 Schottroff, Luise. »Gesetzesfreies Heidenchristentum—Und die Frauen? Feministische Analysen und Alternativen.« In *Von der Wurzel getragen. Christlich-feministische Exegese in Auseinandersetzung mit Antijudaismus*. Edited by Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, 227–245. Leiden, New York, Cologne 1996.

5 Schottroff, Luise. *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*. Gütersloh 2005, 2010 [English translation: *The Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis 2006. Trans.]

6 Schottroff, Luise. *Der Anfang des Neuen Testaments. Matthäus 1–4 neu entdeckt. Ein Kommentar im Dialog*. Edited by Frank Crüsemann, Claudia Janssen and Rainer Kessler. Stuttgart 2019.

criticism of Paul?«<sup>7</sup> and she analyzed therein a series of passages from his letters in which women are explicitly spoken about. She advocated interpreting these statements in the concrete context of each particular congregational situation, and to consider the history of interpretation separately (beginning with the Pastoral Epistles, continuing with the early church and up to the present). For treating Paul in the early phase of feminist theology, that was not self-evident. For, according to Schottroff, the history of discrimination against and oppression of women in Christianity is closely connected with the interpretation of the Pauline epistles. Many women have therefore rejected having anything to do with Paul, the »enemy of women,« for that would be »attempts to rescue oppressive texts incapable of being rescued.«<sup>8</sup> This attitude also continues to be nourished in many popular interpretations of Paul, for the cliché of the authoritarian apostle, hostile to women and the body, battling against the Jewish law, holds on tenaciously to the present time. Summing the situation up in the year 1985, Luise Schottroff said: »Compared with the self-understanding of the male church and of male theology today, Paul was a feminist pioneer« (246). Since then much has fundamentally changed, not least thanks to feminist investigations and their reception in wider theological and ecclesiastical contexts. Scholarly feminist exegesis arrived at a more differentiated perspective on Pauline theology. In her overview of feminist research on Paul, Luzia Sutter Rehmann summarized that the interest has shifted: The issue is no longer presenting the suppressed history of women in the Pauline churches but a critical deconstruction of androcentric writings and a new sketch of Paul and his letters.<sup>9</sup>

Feminist theology was an essential center of gravity for Luise Schottroff in the research realm and in university political work, in which she was very involved for the advancement and networking of feminist theologians. Thus in 1986 she was involved in the establishment of the European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR), an interreligious network for women theologians of all disciplines. In 1991 she co-published the *Wörterbuch der Feministischen Theologie*, which in 2002 underwent a thorough reworking and fundamental expansion. To the standard works in the German-speaking realm also belongs the *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*, which in 1998 was published by her and Marie-Theres Wacker. It offers a short commentary, with the focus on questions of relationships between

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7 »Wie berechtigt ist die feministische Kritik an Paulus? Paulus und die Frauen in den ersten christlichen Gemeinden im Römischen Reich.« In Schottroff, *Befreiungserfahrungen. Studien zur Sozialgeschichte des Neuen Testaments*, 229–246. Munich 1990; first published in the journal *Einwürfe* 1985.

8 Thus, for example, Schüssler-Fiorenza, Elisabeth. »Gleichheit und Differenz. Gal 3:28 im Brennpunkt feministischer Hermeneutik.« In *BTZ* 16 (1999), 212–231.

9 Cf. Sutter-Rehmann, Luzia. »Die aktuelle feministische Exegese der paulinischen Briefe. Ein Überblick.« In *Paulus. Umstrittene Traditionen—lebendige Theologie. Eine feministische Lektüre*. Edited by Claudia Janssen, Luise Schottroff and Beate Wehn, 10–22. Gütersloh 2001. For current research, cf. Janssen, Claudia. »Aktuelle Entwicklungen im Bereich Feministischer Bibelauslegung und Feministischer Hermeneutik. Forschungsüberblick mit dem Schwerpunkt: Paulusforschung. In *ThR* 83 (2018), 189–216.

the sexes, on all the biblical books, including the Apocrypha, and on selected extracanonical writings. In 2012 it was published anew in an English translation under the title *Feminist Biblical Interpretation. A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*.

Feminist theology was for Luise Schottroff inextricably connected with liberation-theology oriented social history and questions of Jewish-Christian dialogue, which is shown in an exemplary way by her book *Lydias ungeduldige Schwestern. Feministische Sozialgeschichte des frühen Christentums*.<sup>10</sup> [A year after its publication in German in 1994, the English translation appeared as *Lydia's Impatient Sisters. A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*. Louisville, Kentucky 1995; trans.] In the present commentary Luise Schottroff takes up her own interpretations from earlier times and changes them, in part fundamentally, as, for example, the interpretations of 1 Cor 11:2–16 or 1 Cor 14:34–38. From these examples it can be seen that she always took up current literature and always self-critically engaged with her own perspectives.

The three perspectives that marked the work of Luise Schottroff: social history, Christian-Jewish dialogue and feminist theology determine also the concept of the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (2006, 2011), of which she was one of the editors. Therein she is responsible for the translation of the Gospel of Matthew and also of the First Letter to the Congregation in Corinth, which she developed further in the present commentary and whose backgrounds she extensively developed.

I myself have worked together with Luise Schottroff for many years and discussed current projects. Thus I was able on a continuing basis to accompany the origin of this commentary, and I am especially happy, therefore, that it is now appearing in a second edition. Almost ready for the publisher is an English translation of the commentary, which will also enable its international reception. I deeply hope that in the long run the commentary will find women and men readers who will engage deeply with Luise Schottroff's interpretations, which are careful, inspiring, often surprising, and always borne along by a deep spirituality, and that these readers will be inspired by her interpretation of Paul's theology.

For their support in updating of commentary I thank Dr. Marlene Crüsemann and Prof. Dr. Carsten Jochum-Bortfeld.

Wuppertal, August 2020  
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10 Cf. Schottroff, Luise, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters. A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*. Louisville, Ky. 1995.

## Foreword

Work on this book has led me on a journey of discovery into the life of a large Roman-Hellenistic city, Corinth. Paul was a tour guide into the history of the early Roman Empire. In his First Letter to Corinth it becomes evident how hard daily life in this city was, including for Paul himself. In the midst of this city a resistance community has come together, made up of Jews and those of other nations, a community that has, and lives from, a great vision. From the Torah they have learned this: Israel's God wants all people and the whole world to experience fullness of life. Paul shares this community's way with enthusiasm and passion. Through this letter Paul became a source of inspiration for me: it is possible, even under conditions such as those he faced, to construct a common life and to orient yourself daily on the vision of God's justice for the whole world.

On this journey of discovery, I was accompanied by a group of faithful women companions, who shared with me curiosity about a different Paul and the surprise of unexpected discoveries. Without the continuous exegetical and spiritual dialogue that I carried on with Claudia Janssen, this book would not have come into being. Marlene Crüsemann accompanied the work from the beginning and developed new ideas about the Second Letter to Corinth that are fundamental for understanding 1 Corinthians and Paul as a whole. Finally, she took upon herself the laborious task of a full editorial reading. Ute Ochtendung gave the manuscript her thorough and competent attention. Her support and sound judgment again and again gave me the courage to carry on this work. I have the great joy of being able to work regularly with a group of five women colleagues on the further development of translations in the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*. Dietlinde Jessen, Luise Metzler, Friederike Oertelt, Susanne Paul and Cathrin Szameit participated with me in the considerations that went into the translation of 1 Corinthians into German—from the details about how to translate individual words to the fundamental questions about the relevance of such texts for 21<sup>st</sup> century congregations. Our common work was and is inspiring, encouraging and always enjoyable. During walks together in the Dönche [a large nature reserve in the city of Kassel, translator], I experienced many attempts to find clarity during the course of my work. Ariane Garlichs posed creative and challenging questions from the perspectives of pedagogy and psychoanalysis.

The members of the »Heidelberger Arbeitskreis für sozialgeschichtliche Bibelauslegung« have constructively and critically discussed theses and first drafts. How necessary and constructive it is to understand the New Testament and Paul from the perspectives of the Old Testament and of the history of God's dealings with Israel became more and more clear to me during these discussions.

Obtaining the literature I needed for this project lay principally in the hands of the team of the state church library in Kassel, especially in those of Mr. Thron. He tracked down mountains of new works, as well as rare and older titles. The work of the whole team was a great source of support for me. Benjamin Porps brought me, even in the snow and on icy streets, big bicycle bags full of books. I could rely on his bibliographic competence. My heartfelt thanks go to the women and men at Kohlhammer Verlag, especially Herr Florian Specker from the editorial office, who also produced the information about the illustrations.

From the bottom of my heart I thank all those who accompanied me on this journey. It was a wonderful time.