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Gender in Theology and Religion: A Success Story?! Report from a Conference

In January 2011 some fifty women and a few men met at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands to reflect on the success of gender and gender studies within the disciplines of theology and religious studies.

Two experiences of the organizers, Mathilde van Dijk and Anne-Claire Mulder, were the immediate reason to organize this conference: one, the indignation of one of the organizers about (yet another) theological conference without women theologians and, second, the reaction of the other that such an exclusion of gender would not be possible within her discipline, medieval studies, because gender studies in general were a major specialism in that field and gender as an analytical tool had become mainstream. That is, this is true in so far as the international field of medieval studies is concerned, in which scholars from the United States and Britain dominate. In the Netherlands and other parts of continental Europe, the situation is different.

Mulder's and Van Dijk's experiences led to the central question of the conference, notably how to account for these differences in the integration of gender as heuristic and hermeneutical instrument in knowledge production, and of gender studies in general in the different disciplines of theology and religious studies both in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

The aim of the conference was to reflect on:

1. The contribution of gender studies to the different disciplines and to theology and religious studies in general.
2. The question why gender has become mainstream in one discipline and not in another.
3. What factors have contributed to the successful mainstreaming of gender in a discipline – or what hindered it.
4. How the future might look like for gender studies in theology and religious studies.

Senior and junior scholars, women and some men, addressed these questions in panels organized according to the six traditional disciplines of theology and religious studies in the Netherlands: Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, Systematic Theology, Practical Theology and Religious Studies. A seventh panel was devoted to the relation between the ecumenical women's movement, the academy and the church and the effort to mainstream gender issues in these relations. In each panel a Dutch and an international speaker painted a picture of how gender and gender studies became mainstreamed – or not – in their discipline, sometimes followed by the response of a junior scholar. The international speakers, some of whom worked in the Netherlands at the time or had worked there before, came from countries such as Belgium, Germany, Israel, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.¹

In the following pages we will present (many of) the reflections of the speakers on the issue of the success of gender in theology and religious studies, based upon the – mostly unpublished – papers of the speakers of the conference. As the speakers did not always give precise answers to the questions mentioned above, we have organized their reflections in three chapters: a) successes, b) ambiguities and c) recommendations to further the success of gender studies.

But before we present the outcome of this conference, we want to discuss the question of why it is important to reflect on the success of gender studies now.

The Need for Retro- and Introspection

A first interpretation of this move to ponder the question whether one could speak of the success of gender in theology and religious studies is that theologians – at least in Northern and Western Europe – are confronted with major institutional reorganizations changing the landscape of theology and

¹ Papers were offered by (in alphabetical order): Mirjam de Baar (NL, Church History), Angela Berlis (D/NL/CH, Church History), Athalya Brenner (Israel/NL, Hebr. Bible/OT), Pamela Couture (US, Pract. Theol.), Mathilde van Dijk (NL, Church History), Dorothea Erbele-Küster (D/NL/B, Hebr. Bible/OT), Ingeborg Löwisch (D/NL, Hebr. Bible/OT), Ruard Ganzevoort (NL, Pract. Theol.), Wietske de Jong (NL, Syst. Theol.), Anne Marie Korte (NL, Syst. Theol.), Volker Küster (D/NL, Cross-Cult. Theol.), Anne-Claire Mulder (NL, Pract. Theol.), Karin Neutel (NL, NT), Tineke van Nugteren (NL, Rel. St), Jorunn Økland (Norway, NT), Melissa Raphael (UK, Jewish Theology), Antje Röckemann (D, Ecumenical Women's Mov.), Joana Serrado (Portugal/NL, Church History), Kocku von Stuckrad (D/NL, Rel. St.), Caroline Vander Stichele (B/NL, NT) and Linda Woodhead (UK, Church History).

religious studies in important ways and also affecting the place of gender and gender studies in the new institutional arrangements. These changes push us to think about the role of gender and gender studies in the academy and about ways to keep these studies on the theological and religious studies agenda.

Another interpretation of this move to retrospection is the fact that a generational change is taking place – and that is an occasion for celebration and for taking stock: celebration that there is a younger generation interested in gender studies in these disciplines, as well as taking stock of what has been created in the last forty years. This generational change was manifest at the conference in the responses by junior scholars to the papers. They offered sparkling papers in which they pointed out in what directions gender studies would, could or should go. They also raised the question what future the older generation could offer them in terms of job opportunities.

Last but not least, this move toward retrospection was interpreted by Angela Berlis as a form of *Selbstvergewisserung*: a form of making sure that the basic principles are still similar to or in continuity with those formulated beforehand or – in case they have changed – of ascertaining that one is (still) on the right track.² The past paves the way for the future, it supports what has been done, and what will be done. Angela Berlis argued that this mode of re-collection is particularly apt in times when anniversaries are celebrated and/or in times of change. The Groningen conference was held in a period in which several anniversaries were celebrated. To name but a few: in 2010 ten years of the electronic exegetical journal “lectio difficilior” was celebrated; in 2011, several anniversaries: 35 years of the IWFT (the Dutch expertise center for gender and religion), 25 years of the ESWTR (the European Society of Women in Theological Research), 25 years of the German and Swiss feminist theological journals *Schlangenbrut* and *Fama*; in 2012: twenty years of *Feminist Theology*, the journal of the British and Irish School of Feminist Theology were celebrated and volume twenty of the Journal of the ESWTR was published.

These anniversaries offer the opportunity to look back and take stock. By calling this form of recollection a form of *Selbstvergewisserung* Berlis pointed out that this looking back is not a sentimental remembering of the good old days (although this might be part of it), but rather the awareness of a given “continuity” with origins and original ideas/aims/primary intentions in the context of today. It is also more than gathering up the achievements of the past

² Cf. Angela Berlis, *Gender Studies in Theology and Religion: A Success Story? – A Conclusion*, unpublished paper. Anne-Claire Mulder has elaborated upon that paper.

or a way of overcoming amnesia; it is more than re-membering and not forgetting, although these are very important aspects of both celebrating anniversaries and reflecting about the success of gender studies within theology and religious studies, as Pamela Couture showed in her paper for the conference. Rather these anniversaries, these moments of recollection, serve as a means to secure the future, as moments of taking stock of past achievements and of thinking about the future, of reflecting about what will be handed over to the next generation. It is also a form of honoring new developments in gender theory elsewhere that influence gender studies in theology and religious studies: queer studies, post-colonialism, intersectionalism, performance and performativity, to name but a few of the “more recent” developments in feminist reflection. In this respect, this conference was also a form of “celebration”: a celebration combined with the affirmation that those persons in women’s and gender studies in theology and religion are doing right; an affirmation also that this past at least is really theirs. Seen in this light, one of the “successes” of gender studies is that it is possible to discuss this issue, thereby giving those reflecting upon it the opportunity to celebrate and to use this celebration of what has been achieved as empowerment for future action.

Success of Gender and Gender Studies

Discussing the issue whether gender in theology and religious studies is a success story or not demands a description of what counts as success or what is measured as the success of gender. The speakers gave a number of different descriptions of what they see as success of gender and gender studies. Many of the definitions can be subsumed under the broad label “achievements”. Some of these achievements are almost self-evident, intertwined as they are with what counts as success in the academic world: publications, dissertations, establishment of research centers, students, job opportunities (of which more will be said later), whereas other achievements are more “immaterial” and perhaps also more tenuous, such as the success in changing a tradition, either a religious or a scholarly tradition or, occasionally, both. But in describing “success”, the different speakers also touched upon material and immaterial conditions that contribute to the success of gender studies in theology. Discussing these conditions it became clear that it is especially in this area that there is “space for improvement” to quote the title of Antje Röckemann’s paper.³

³ Antje Röckemann, *A Success Story with Space for Improvement. Feminist Theology within the Triangle of Church, Movement and University*, unpublished paper.

In the following pages we will present some of the achievements of gender studies in theology and religion: publications, the dissemination of knowledge through teaching, networks, changing the agenda of the study of theology and religious studies.

Publications

Looking back, the achievements of the last forty years have been impressive. If we put the spotlight on the category “publications”, it is a cause of celebration (and awe) to realize that in only forty years the (textual) productions of gender studies in theology and religious studies can fill a library. We will focus on some of the books and projects in this varied library, because they were presented during the conference. Moreover, each of these books represent a different form of the success of gender studies.

Athalya Brenner presented the European project *The Bible and Women. An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History* (projected 22 volumes)⁴ and the 60-volume *Wisdom Commentary Series*⁵ published in the United States, as markers of the success of gender studies: feminist scholars have reached and joined the elite of biblical scholars now that they are writing commentaries and encyclopedias about female interpreters of the Bible – a genre reserved to the elite – male – guild members of biblical studies for hundreds of years, and large publishing houses are publishing these series, which means that they expect this venture to be profitable.⁶ She also argued that this success was prepared for and built upon the success of other series such as *A Feminist Companion of the Bible* and *A Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writing*,⁷ and other highlights such as *Women in Scripture*, *The Women’s Bible Commentary* or the *Kompodium Feministische Bibelauslegung*.⁸

⁴ Jorunn Økland, Irmtraud Fischer, Mercedes Navarro Puerto et. al. (eds), *The Bible and Women. An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History* (SBL/Brill: Leiden [English]; Kohlhammer: Stuttgart [German]; Editorial Verbo Divino: Estella [Spanish]; Il Pozzo di Giacobbe: Trapani [Italian]).

⁵ Sr Barbara Reid OP (series editor), *The Wisdom Commentary Series* (Liturgical Press: Collegeville).

⁶ Athalya Brenner, *Quo Vadis Domina? Reflection on what we have become and what we want to be*, unpublished paper.

⁷ Athalya Brenner (general editor), *A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (First & Second Series (Continuum Press: London); Amy Jill Levine (general editor), *A Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writing* (Continuum Press: London).

⁸ Carol Meyers, Toni Craven and Ross Shepard Kraemer (eds.), *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical*

The new edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* is another example of the mainstreaming of gender. Ursula King described how her gender-critical review of the first edition edited by Mircea Eliade, led the new editors to approach her to work as a consultant on the issue of gender and religion.⁹ This resulted in a long entry on “gender and religion” in the new edition and to the analysis of twenty religions under the perspective of “gender and religion”, which again generated much new material and knowledge on the subject. King pointed out that although an *Encyclopedia* does not represent the cutting edge of research, it provides an overview of the “state of the art” of approaches and perspectives used in a discipline.¹⁰ To be included in such a venture is an important step into the direction of becoming “mainstream” and recognizes the importance of gender as a heuristic and hermeneutical key.

Mirjam de Baar highlighted a third form in which gender can become mainstream: reaching the textbook level and thereby becoming a self-evident part of the intellectual luggage of students in theology and religious studies. By way of example, she presented Linda Woodhead’s book *An Introduction to Christianity*:¹¹ “by far the best textbook we have ever used in our Bachelor courses on the cultural history of Christianity”¹² among others because the results of feminist history in the field of religion have been fully integrated in the text. In this respect, the book forms a stark contrast to recent Dutch publications in Church History in which gender is either absent or reduced to the status of “add a chapter on women and stir”.

Books, and the New Testament (Houghton Mifflin: Boston and New York 2000); Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, expanded version (Westminster John Knox: Louisville 1998); Luise Schottroff and Marie-Therese Wacker (eds.), *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung* (Guetersloher Verlaghaus: Güthersloh 2007).

⁹ Unfortunately, Ursula King had to withdraw as one of the speakers at the conference at a very late stage. She was so kind as to send us some papers she had previously given on the subject of the conference. Anne-Claire Mulder presented one of these papers in abbreviated form at the conference, because it fitted the subject of the conference so well. This paper was published as: Ursula King, “Gyno-critical and Gender-critical Turns in Theology and Religious Studies: A Paradigm Shift or Dead End?”, in: Simon Oliver and Maya Warrior (eds.), *Theology and Religious Studies: An Exploration of Disciplinary Boundaries* (T&T Clarke: Edinburgh 2008), 193-209, here 204.

¹⁰ Cf. King, “Gyno-critical and Gender-critical Turns”, 204.

¹¹ Linda Woodhead, *An Introduction to Christianity* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2004).

¹² Mirjam de Baar, *What about Gender? Church History and Religious History in the Netherlands*, unpublished paper.

Last but not least, the Bible translation *Die Bibel in gerechter Sprache* should be highlighted as one of the successful projects described during the conference. This project is a success not only because of the dissemination of gender-critical scholarship through the translation itself and in the debates that followed, but also because it was rooted in a large community of individual women and men and of associations which supported this project financially, both the costs involved in the translation and the publication. This explains the success of this translation and its influence in the spiritual life of many.

Dissemination of Ideas through Teaching and Contact with the Ecumenical Women's Movement

In many ways, the present generation of women teaching gender studies at universities have been very successful personally as they have managed to force their way into the universities. In the Netherlands as well as elsewhere in north-western Europe and the United States, this was achieved in the 1980s through collective (also societal) pressure on university boards to create positions for women's studies in different disciplines, including theology, and use affirmative action to appoint women to university positions.¹³ Through their teaching a generation of students was educated in gender studies in theology. The fruits of this education can be found within and beyond the academy: in the new generation of women (and increasingly men) who write a PhD in theology and religious studies from a gender perspective; in the dissemination of gender critical scholarship through the education of generations of ministers, priests, pastoral workers and rabbis working at parish level as well as in other positions in churches, religious organizations, press and broadcasting companies and more. The influence of this can be seen in liturgical texts, prayer books, published sermons as well as in the criteria formulated for a good liturgy.¹⁴ It thereby influences the daily religiosity of parishioners.¹⁵

¹³ This struggle to integrate women's and gender studies in Dutch theological departments and universities was documented in 1984 in: Jonneke Bekkenkamp and Freda Dröes (eds.), *Van Zusters, Meiden, Vrouwen. Tien jaar feminisme en theologie op faculteiten en hogescholen in Nederland* (IIMO: Leiden/Utrecht 1984).

¹⁴ Cf. Röckemann, *A Success Story with Space for Improvement*.

¹⁵ Both Jorunn Økland and Melissa Raphael mention this as a success of gender studies; cf. Jorunn Økland, *Feminist Exegesis of the NT: Status/success: Liberation Project, Cultural Critique and Cultural Memory Work*, unpublished paper. Melissa Raphael, *Are there any Jewish Feminist Theologians out there? The Indeterminate Place of Feminist Theology in the*

Changing a Tradition...

However, during the conference the achievements of gender studies in theology and religion were not only described in terms of production and recognition, but also in scholarly terms. As cutting-edge research, it was praised for its power to generate “trouble”: troubling the categories that are used to generate knowledge¹⁶, to challenge existing paradigms¹⁷, to introduce new assumptions to (pastoral) theology and/or “categories that help us understand constructs in pastoral and practical theology for the attributes that deem persons deserving or undeserving of support”¹⁸, to contest the theological tradition and claim one’s own stance and vision.¹⁹

Some speakers highlighted the fact that queer and masculinity studies were made possible amongst others through the way women’s studies changed time and again in response to internal debates. Doing this, “feminist studies have changed the world of legitimate scholarly enquiry”.²⁰ Volker Küster also described a genealogical connection between women’s and gender studies in theology and intercultural theology. According to him “first generation feminist theology from the West provided the theoretical and methodological tools for Intercultural Theology”, and now women theologians of the Third World are the ones who provide the tools to further develop this theology.²¹

As became clear in the different papers, gender studies in theology and religious studies have continuously evolved, because they are open both to intellectual debates in other disciplines than theology and to social and cultural

Academy as both a Threat to its Development and a Promise to its Creativity, unpublished paper.

¹⁶ Cf. Dorothea Erbele Küster, *Tell Me More about Gender Trouble in Old Testament Studies*, unpublished paper.

¹⁷ Cf. Linda Woodhead, *Gender Studies and the History of Modern Christianity: A Partial Revolution*, unpublished paper.

¹⁸ Pamela Couture, *Aging, We Lose Our Short-term Memory: A Perspective on Gender, Sexuality and Practical Theology from the US and Canada*, unpublished paper. Couture mentioned four current societal and pastoral issues that could be understood with the help of categories developed in gender studies. The attributes that deem persons deserving or undeserving of support are one of these.

¹⁹ Cf. Anne Marie Korte, *Reflections of Interdisciplinarity: Feminist Systematic Theology in the Netherlands*, unpublished paper. Anne Marie Korte showed how this understanding of women’s studies in theology had been very productive in the past in the Netherlands, especially in systematic theology, but that it has lost its usefulness.

²⁰ Brenner, *Quo Vadis Domina?*.

²¹ Volker Küster, *Cross-cultural and Cross-gender Perspectives*, unpublished paper.

developments. This makes it such an innovative discipline as well as an interdisciplinary one. Two junior scholars, Ingeborg Löwisch and Wietske de Jong underlined this.²² Löwisch called gender studies in theology a transshipment site, underlining its location on the boundaries of gender studies in the humanities and those of the different disciplines of theology. Moreover she showed the relevance of this location for the innovations within the disciplines of theology, in her case Old Testament studies. Doing research in such an interdisciplinary and intercultural context, Löwisch and de Jong challenged the dominant habit of ordering theology along disciplinary lines – reproduced in the conference – pointing out that this constituted a (potential) obstacle in the development of gender studies.²³

Ambiguities

This list of achievements of gender studies in theology and religion did not prevent the participants of the conference from asking critical questions about the success of gender and gender studies in theology and religious studies. Is it indeed possible to speak about the mainstreaming of gender, in the sense that gender and the results of gender studies have become fully integrated in the different theological disciplines? The answers to that question were more ambiguous than the above mentioned achievements of gender studies would warrant. To some extent this had to do with what we would call the material conditions that both indicate success and contribute to it. The material conditions mentioned by the speakers were: a critical mass of scholars engaged in gender studies, strong networks and infrastructure among scholars,²⁴ jobs and job opportunities and powerful positions. When these conditions for success are taken into account the picture of the success of gender studies becomes more ambiguous and ambivalent.

²² Cf. Ingeborg Löwisch, *Where Energy Sparkles in Hebrew Studies Today: Response to Athalya Brenner and Dorothe Erbele Küster*, unpublished paper; Wietske de Jong, *Response to Three Lectures on Feminist Theology*, by Melissa Raphael, Anne Marie Korte and Volker Küster, unpublished paper.

²³ Cf. De Jong, *Response to Three Lectures*.

²⁴ In her description of policies and the policy-making processes of the first fifteen years of the Dutch Ecumenical Women's Movement, Anne-Claire Mulder showed that strong networks need an effective internal structure to be successful in effecting institutional change. These are a safeguard against concealed differences in power and authority within the network; cf. Anne-Claire Mulder, *The Dutch Ecumenical Women's Movement Strengths and Weaknesses of the Network Model in Changing the Churches*, unpublished paper.

Three themes kept returning in the discussions: the institutional position of gender studies within universities, the place of the discipline of theology in the ever-changing landscape of the university, and the “missing men”. The latter concerns both the paucity of male scholars in gender studies and the absence of research on men and masculinity as the subject of scholarly inquiry.

Institutional Position of Gender Studies within the Universities

The position of gender studies in universities can be described as indeterminate – not easily pinpointed or pigeonholed. This indeterminacy can be analyzed and interpreted in different ways. First, it can be seen as marker of the position of women and gender studies scholars as insiders and outsiders at the same time, both in the present as in the sources they work with. It is moreover a corollary of the main characteristic of gender studies as troubling the categories wherewith perceptions are ordered and observations are interpreted. From this perspective, the aim of changing traditions produces a spatial and temporal in-between that is both creative and productive as well as potentially dangerous for established scholarly, cultural and social practices.

Secondly, this indeterminacy can be described in terms of objective with respect to the institutional position: either integration in a discipline or the formation of one’s own tradition. This “either-or” can be seen as the heritage of an old discussion about the institutional position of women’s studies, the predecessor of gender studies, that was dominant in the last century. This discussion has never reached an unequivocal conclusion, perhaps because it was perceived as a false dilemma inspired by a dualistic habit of thought. However, in practice most scholars chose for the “both-and” option: participation in the networks and discussions of their discipline *and* participation in the networks of women’s studies and later gender studies colleagues, thus retaining the critical edge that feminist perspectives offer. But the corollary of this choice is an insider-outsider position for the individual scholar. It also doubles the workload for the individual scholar as she (or he) is expected to be fully conversant in both disciplines. Usually, the opposite does not apply.

Thirdly, the indeterminacy of the position of gender studies can be interpreted again through its position as both disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies. On the one hand, this follows from the previous point, as the choice between integration into the traditional disciplines or building a tradition of women’s and gender studies theology could also be described as a choice between disciplinary or interdisciplinary theological studies. For women’s and gender studies in theology have been interdisciplinary studies from their very beginning; studies in

which scholars cooperated and entered into dialogue across theological disciplines and the other disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, for instance by using hermeneutical tools developed in these other disciplines. On the other hand, the current form of this dilemma between integration or building one's own tradition is new, as it has come up with the changing place of theology within the university. For example in the Netherlands, most departments of theology have been disbanded and/or reorganized as departments of religious studies within the institutional context of departments of humanities. This offers the opportunity for new forms of interdisciplinary cooperation across former disciplinary and departmental boundaries.²⁵ But it also raises the question how these changes affect the institutional embedding of gender studies.

Fourthly, the indeterminacy of gender studies can be interpreted from the perspective of the audience. Who is its audience, or one step further, to whom are the scholars working in gender studies accountable: fellow – female and male – scholars, the students they train for a professional career, the ecumenical women's movement, women and men in the church? These questions bring into relief the triple relationship of scholars in gender studies: with academia, with the women's and LGBT liberation movements, in which those studies are genealogically rooted, and with theology's connection to the education of ministers, priests, and pastoral workers in different churches and church-related professions. Antje Röckemann speaks of a "velvet triangle of church, movement and university."²⁶ This triple bind explains in a different way the insider/outsider position of many gender studies scholars. As they have "only one body", as Riet-Bons Storm once said, their full participation in all three is impossible. Yet their political engagement with the women's and LGBT movement also works as a reminder to keep asking critical, self-reflective questions as to what is so essential that it should never be given up? Liberation? Flourishing for everyone? Care for the "undeserving poor"?²⁷

The position of theology in the ever-changing landscape of the universities

As mentioned above, the position of theology in the landscape of university is changing. The disbandment of independent departments of theologies went

²⁵ Cf. Caroline Vander Stichele, "Is Doña Quixote Fighting Windmills? Gendering New Testament Studies in the Netherlands", unpublished paper. De Jong, "Response to three lectures, unpublished paper.

²⁶ Röckemann, *A Success Story with Space for Improvement*.

²⁷ Couture, *Aging We Lose Our Short-term Memory*.

hand in hand with the dissolution of contracts of cooperation between these departments and church-related theological training institutions. In these reorganizations, the Netherlands follow developments in the United States and the United Kingdom, but these reorganizations also reflect a shift in the interest in religion in the Netherlands and in (north-western?) Europe, namely on the one hand a diminishing interest for the Christian tradition and on the other hand a growing interest in religious phenomena per se.²⁸

Several speakers described the (potential) consequences of these developments for the success of gender studies. Anne Marie Korte, Ingeborg Löwisch and Wietske de Jong emphasized the creative possibilities of engaging with other disciplines in the humanities. Korte suggested that this would bring about a particular form of systematic theology, notably an inclusive one with particular attention to “lived religion”.²⁹

Athalya Brenner, Caroline Vander Stichele and Jorunn Økland described the effects of these changes upon the position of their discipline, biblical studies. This position changes with the shift to the context of religious studies: biblical texts as foundational texts now become cultural texts. Although this change offers creative possibilities for reading the texts in conjunction with other cultural products, at first glance the dominant effect is one of loss – the most important loss being the marginalization of these studies, for instance because at the moment students are more interested in studying Islam and religious phenomena than in studying the foundational texts of the Jewish and Christian tradition. Their lack of interest reflects a loss of status of the Bible in society at large,³⁰ and especially in countries which are highly secularized or relatively gender equal such as the Netherlands or the Scandinavian countries. Jorunn Økland described it like this: “If a society at large is relatively gender equal, it is extremely difficult to find the liberating potential of

²⁸ Angela Berlis, Athalya Brenner, Anne Marie Korte, and Caroline Vander Stichele all remarked upon these Dutch reorganizations and the consequences for gender studies. Jorunn Økland discussed the status of theology in the different universities she has worked in and the consequences of this status for her discipline, NT exegesis; cf. Økland, *Feminist Exegesis of the New Testament*.

²⁹ Korte, *Reflections of Interdisciplinarity*.

³⁰ According to Jorunn Økland, gender studies contributed to this loss of status of the Bible in the public sphere, adding that “Feminist exegesis as a liberation project for women who are still at home within the church is clearly epistemologically unpersuasive when carried out within a context where social structures are far more egalitarian than the Bible can ever hope to be.” (Økland, *Feminist Exegesis of the NT*).

the Bible.”³¹ It is therefore a challenge to find the relevance of gender studies within these disciplines on the one hand, although it offers opportunities for gender studies on the other hand, for instance to function as the transshipment center of methods and viewpoints and to prove itself to be on the cutting edge of knowledge production.

“Missing men”, or: the Ambiguity of Gender Studies in Theology

One of the subjects that returned time and again was the ambiguous relation with male theologians. The ambiguity came to the fore in the preparation of the conference. At a rather late stage in the process the organizers, Mathilde van Dijk and Anne-Claire Mulder, discovered that they had “forgotten” to invite male speakers to address the issue of the success of gender in theology and religion.³² This blind spot is indicative of the way many scholars in gender studies are still caught up in the ways of thinking typical of women’s studies, especially the habit of thinking of gender studies as “a room of one’s own”, thereby repeating the mistake of equating “gender” with “women”. On the other hand, many male colleagues seem to have missed the gender-critical turn taking place in theology and religious studies and to have failed “to recognize that gender studies always concern men as well as women.”³³ What Ursula King – in an understatement – calls the “considerable cognitive dissonance between women’s and men’s understanding of ‘gender studies’”,³⁴ can be explained by the fact that male theologians indeed equate gender with women, but also by the fact that they have failed to keep up with developments, to begin by reading what their female colleagues have written. Anne Marie Korte painted a bleak picture of the reception of the work of feminist (systematic) theologians in the Netherlands by their male colleagues in systematic theology. They are rarely cited and the themes and methods of their inquiries hardly circulate among male colleagues.³⁵ Other speakers painted a similar picture of

³¹ Økland, *Feminist Exegesis of the NT*.

³² Luckily, the male theologians we did invite were so generous as to accept our late invitation and be present as guests or presenters; one of them referred to himself as the “Excusus Truus” (token man) of the conference. The organizers also invited several colleagues of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies to chair a number of the sessions. Nevertheless, it was ironic and humbling to discover that we had nearly repeated the mistake that was one of the reasons to organize this conference, just in inverted form.

³³ King, “Gyno-critical and Gender-critical Turns”, 194.

³⁴ King, “Gyno-critical and Gender-critical Turns”, 194.

³⁵ Cf. Korte, *Reflections of Interdisciplinarity*.

the reception of gender studies in theology, with the tradition remaining a malestream one.

Ruard Ganzevoort made the “missing men” in gender studies (practical) theology the central topic of his paper.³⁶ He interpreted the ambiguity of the success of gender studies in (practical) theology as the difficulty to engage hegemonic men in gender studies. That would mean that hegemonic men would have to engage critically with the hegemonic (heterosexual) masculinity operative in their discipline and with the ways their subjectivity is informed by this hegemonic masculinity. Ganzevoort explained that this critical engagement consists of two paradoxical steps: first, unlearning the voice they thought was their own, and second, discovering their own subjectivity. He also showed that even if one was aware of the gendered nature of one’s subjectivity, there remained the issue of when to bring this subjectivity into the text, because it would mean a challenge to privileged subjectivity – masculine, heterosexual – and the danger of discrediting one’s scholarship as too subjective.

Success of Gender Studies: Recommendations

Ganzevoort used Tracy’s distinction between three streams in the self-understanding of theology as a discipline, based upon the (imagined) audiences of the discipline: church, academia and society. This distinction might be helpful to explain why gender studies has been more successful in becoming mainstream in some disciplines than in others.³⁷ Thus a theology whose primary audience is the church and that is oriented upon ministerial formation with its long patriarchal and androcentric tradition will be more resistant to gender studies than a theology that is oriented upon society and especially the experiences of marginalized persons, their subaltern voices and perspectives. The same argument goes for a theology that is oriented upon academia with its normative ideas about the rigors of scholarship. In both streams of theology the discourse about and the perspective upon theology are moulded by and intertwined with hegemonic masculinity.

This might explain why in the Netherlands gender studies in practical theology never took off after the retirement of Riet Bons-Storm as professor in pastoral theology in Groningen: the discipline is so marked by the clerical and the academic discourse – often intertwined – that there is hardly any space to articulate

³⁶ Cf. Ruard Ganzevoort, *Missing Men: The Ambiguous Success of Gender Studies in Practical Theology*, available online: http://www.ruardganzevoort.nl/pdf/2011_Missing_men.pdf (9 June 2013).

³⁷ Cf. Ganzevoort, *Missing Men*.

a gender perspective or to integrate it into a larger project. It also helps to explain the fact that systematic theology, a discipline that is intimately connected to the masculine identity of the church, is also resistant to gender studies in theology and why it is necessary to look for a different interlocutor or even for a different way of situating those studies to develop them further.³⁸ Or, taking up Mirjam de Baar's example, it explains why a gender perspective is absent in a textbook on Church History written by university professors of a university closely connected with an orthodox Protestant church, while in an institution that is not church-affiliated the perspective is integrated.³⁹ It also illuminates the fact that in departments of biblical studies that are located in a religious studies environment those who study the Bible from an interdisciplinary and gender perspective are well sought after, not only because those studies are at the cutting edge of biblical and theological scholarship,⁴⁰ but also because they "legitimate" biblical studies as a discipline in a context where they have lost their former legitimation. This also implies that it will be easier to engage men in gender studies in such a context, because it will be attractive to become associated with cutting-edge scholarship, something that is in keeping with the academic ideal.

These remarks highlight one of the outcomes or insights of the conference, notably that the many differences in the way theological and religious studies disciplines are institutionally embedded explain the differences in success of gender and gender studies in theology. During the conference it became clear that contexts differ locally, nationally and internationally within and between disciplines and that the disciplines of theology and religious studies are in flux. These differences made it difficult to formulate recommendations to further the success of gender studies that would be helpful for all disciplines. On the other hand, this also provided the first recommendation: namely to analyze your/our social and academic locations to determine the options for intellectual or strategic movements. Analyzing the implied audiences of (the discipline in the context of) an institution can be one way of explaining the reasons behind the (lack of) success of gender studies in a discipline.

Engaging men in the project of gender studies was a second recommendation of the conference. This entails looking for male researchers in gender studies and masculinity studies both within theology and religious studies and in other related disciplines and making them allies in order to strengthen gender studies

³⁸ Cf. Korte, *Reflections of Interdisciplinarity*; Wietske de Jong, *Response to Three Papers*.

³⁹ Cf. De Baar, *What about Gender?*.

⁴⁰ Cf. Löwisch, *Where Energy Sparkles*.

in theology and religious studies. Engaging men in gender studies implies explaining that “gender” is not a substitute for “women”, but serves to overcome other binary dichotomies as well. Moreover it implies that gender studies scholars do not use gender as a synonym for women themselves, and that they become aware of the grammar of alterity that they use to describe differences with others.

A third recommendation was to embrace the cultural turn in religious (and theological) studies and engage creatively with the changing role of religion in contemporary society. This entails on the one hand to look for different research partners, for interdisciplinary collaborations and/or to join forces with others. This route towards more interdisciplinary cooperation was recommended as a promising route for gender studies in religion because it would offer possibilities to develop new concepts in that new situation for theology and religious studies. It means on the other hand trying to interest a different (more secular) audience in the research of gender studies in theology and religious studies. This entails greater presence and involvement in public discussions about religious issues as such discussions are often shot through with gender issues, and this would in turn heighten the visibility of gender studies in theology and valorize them.

A fourth recommendation was to write down the history of women’s and gender studies in theology and religious studies, in order “not to lose our memory now that we are aging”. That means that women’s and gender studies scholars not only search for their foremothers in a distant past in order to generate a tradition of women in theology and of women’s theology, but that they should also pay attention to their own history and conserve the history of the generation immediately before them.

And last but not least, the participants were reminded that it remains important to analyse whose perspective they follow and authorize through their way of looking at theology, religious studies and at gender studies in theology themselves. This is especially important when taking stock and developing strategies for furthering the success of gender studies in theology and religious studies.

The organizers want to express their thanks to all the speakers and participants. It was an exciting conference, self-critical, supportive, creative, and one in which the achievements in the last forty years were not only mentioned but also celebrated.

En Enero del 2011 unos 50 investigadores, la mayoría de ellas mujeres, se reunieron en Groningen, Países Bajos. El título era “Género en teología y religión ¿ una historia de éxito?” Se trataba de analizar los factores que influyen en la integración

exitosa del género en la disciplina teológica y reflexionar sobre el futuro de los estudios de género en teología y en los estudios de religión. Diversas conferenciantes destacaron los logros de los estudios de género en teología y en los estudios religiosos, así como el poder de estos para interpelar a estas disciplinas y a sus categorías heurísticas; su contribución al desarrollo de otras disciplinas, tales como los estudios queer y los estudios poscoloniales; la gran cantidad de tesis doctorales realizadas; el número de significativas publicaciones aparecidas en los últimos años. Todo ello indica que los estudios de género en teología y en los estudios religiosos han madurado. No obstante, las investigadoras también señalaron la ambigüedad de este éxito si nos referimos a los estudios de género en la academia: la indeterminación de la posición institucional facultades y el lugar (o no lugar) de los estudios de género en los seminarios, departamentos y universidades; así como la falta de participación de académicos varones en los estudios de género, que se manifiesta a través de su ausencia en estos estudios y/o la baja referencia de las publicaciones de estudios de género en sus disciplinas. Estas ambigüedades, según las participantes en el encuentro, representa un peligro para los estudios de género. Para un mayor éxito de los estudios de género en teología y religión se hicieron las siguientes recomendaciones: analizar el lugar que ocupan estos estudios en las instituciones, desde la perspectiva de la audiencia implícita (iglesia, academia, teólogos ordinarios); involucrar a los varones en los estudios de género, incluir el giro cultural en los estudios religiosos; desarrollar la interdisciplinariedad con estudios de género de humanidades; comprometerse creativamente con los cambios de rol de la religión en la sociedad contemporánea; analizar que perspectiva uno sigue y legítima en la percepción de la teología, los estudios religiosos y los propios estudios de género; hacer memoria de la historia de las mujeres, de los estudios de género en teología y la religión y honrar y celebrar sus logros.

In January 2011 some fifty scholars from different parts of Europe met in Groningen, the Netherlands for an expert meeting entitled *Gender in theology and religion: a success story?!* to analyze the factors that contribute to the successful mainstreaming of gender in a theological discipline *and* to reflect on the future of gender studies in theology and religious studies. Different speakers highlighted the many successes of gender studies in theology and religious studies: its power to “trouble” the disciplines and their heuristic categories; its contribution to the development of other disciplines such as queer studies and postcolonial studies; the many PhD studies produced; the number of significant publications that had appeared over the last years. All indicate that gender studies in theology and religious studies have matured. But the participants also pointed towards the ambiguity of the success of gender studies in the academy: the indeterminacy of the institutional position and positions of gender studies in the theological disciplines in seminaries, departments faculties and universities; the lack of male scholars’ engagement in gender studies, which is expressed by their absence in these studies and/or the low reception of

gender studies publications in their disciplines. Both ambiguities represent a danger for the future of gender studies, according to the participants in the meeting. In order to further the success of gender in theology and religion they formulated the following recommendations: to analyze the position of these studies in their institutions from the perspective of the implied audience (church, academy, ordinary theologians); engage men in gender studies; embrace the cultural turn in religious studies; develop interdisciplinary cooperations with gender studies in the humanities; engage creatively with the changing role of religion in contemporary society; analyze whose perspective one follows and authorizes in the perception of theology, religious studies and gender studies themselves; record the history of women's and gender studies in theology and religion, and honor and celebrate the successes.

Im Januar 2011 trafen sich etwa 50 Wissenschaftlerinnen aus ganz Europa zu einem Expertinnenreffen über "Gender in Theologie und Religion: Eine Erfolgsgeschichte?!": zum einen, um die Faktoren zu analysieren, die in einer theologischen Disziplin zu einem erfolgreichen Gender-Mainstreaming beitragen, zum anderen, um über die Zukunft der Gender Studien in Theologie und Religionswissenschaften nachzudenken. Mehrere Vortragende hoben den großen Erfolg der Gender Studien in verschiedenen Bereichen hervor: ihr Vermögen, Disziplinen und der heuristische Kategorien „durcheinander zu wirbeln"; ihr Beitrag zur Entwicklung neuer Fachgebiete wie die Queer Studies und die Postcolonial Studies; die vielen entstandenen Dissertationen; die über die Jahre große Zahl bedeutender Veröffentlichungen. All dies weist darauf hin, dass sich die Gender Studien in der Theologie und in den Religionswissenschaften gemausert haben und reif geworden sind. Die Teilnehmenden zeigten aber auch die Ambivalenz des akademischen Erfolgs auf: Die Unbestimmtheit ihrer Position innerhalb der einzelnen Institution sowie die Positionierung der Gender Studien in den einzelnen theologischen Disziplinen in Seminaren, Departementen, Fakultäten und Universitäten, das Fehlen des Engagements männlicher Wissenschaftler auf dem Gebiet der Gender Studien, was in der Abwesenheit von Männern in diesem Forschungsbereich zum Ausdruck kommt bzw. darin, daß männliche Forschende Veröffentlichungen aus dem Bereich der Gender Studien kaum in ihren eigenen Arbeiten wahrnehmen. Beide Ambivalenzen stellen den teilnehmenden Wissenschaftlerinnen an der Konferenz zufolge einen Gefahr für die Zukunft der Gender Studien dar. Um deren Erfolg in Theologie und Religionswissenschaften auch zukünftig zu gewährleisten, wurden folgende Empfehlungen ausgesprochen: die Position der Gender Studien in ihren Institutionen aus der Perspektive des beabsichtigten Publikums (z.B. Kirche, Hochschule, gewöhnliche Theologinnen und Theologen) zu analysieren, Männer verstärkt in Gender Studien einzubeziehen; den *cultural turn* in die Religionswissenschaften zu integrieren, interdisziplinäre Kooperationen von Gender Studien innerhalb der Geisteswissenschaften zu entwickeln; sich mit der veränderten Rolle von Religion in der heutigen Gesellschaft auf kreative Weise auseinanderzusetzen; zu analysieren, wessen Perspektive in der Wahrnehmung von Theologie,

Religionswissenschaften und Gender Studien verfolgt und damit autorisiert wird, die Geschichte von Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung in Theologie und Religionswissenschaften nachzuzeichnen und deren Erfolge zu würdigen und zu feiern.

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Mathilde van Dijk studied history in Groningen, specializing in medieval history. In 2000 she gained a PhD with a thesis entitled *Een rij van spiegels. De heilige Barbara als voorbeeld voor religieuze vrouwen*, Uitg. Verloren: Hilversum [Into the looking glass. Saint Barbara as an example for religious women]. Van Dijk is a university lecturer in the History of Christianity and Gender Studies at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Groningen. She is currently working on a monograph on the reception of the Church Fathers. Her publications include *The Encroaching Desert. Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West. Special Issue Church History and Religious Culture* 86 (2006), with Jitse H.F. Dijkstra (University of Ottawa) and a special issue of *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 80/3 (2009). Title: "Naar voorbeeld van de vaders. De moderne devoten en hun bronnen" [Following the Fathers. The adherents of the Devotio Moderna and their sources] with Prof. Dr. Thom Mertens (Ruusbroecgenootschap, Antwerp).

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