

## *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*

### **Discipleship of Equals: Memory and Vision**

“Living Communities” is a very controversial theoretical topic, and emotionally it is also an extremely difficult topic to negotiate. The notion of community is debated between libertarians and communitarians, but so too is its embodiment in feminist movements, which are often rapidly declared to be outdated. Moreover, the rhetoric of feminist theologies and of studies in religion regarding the history of feminist knowledge production tends to be framed in terms of progressivist development. This rhetoric, which constructs different waves of the feminist movement, does not seek to remember previous stages of it, but instead declares each subsequent phase of the movement to be more sophisticated than its predecessors, often forgetting altogether its debt to the intellectual struggles of its fore-sisters. Yet it is impossible to create “living communities” if the memory of their beginnings is not valued. The histories we choose to tell determine the logic of our present and the possibilities of our future.

#### **I. Creating Living Communities of Memory**

The Australian feminist Dale Spender argued a long time ago, that in the past 400 years – and I would add throughout written history – feminist knowledge has been trivialized, silenced, and forgotten.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the next feminist generations could not learn from the thoughts of their predecessors, but have been compelled to reinvent the intellectual wheel again and again. Moreover, the historian Barbara Caine has pointed out that it is not just the dominant kyriarchal<sup>2</sup> society and academy that fosters the forgetting of feminist knowledge. Such forgetting frequently occurs with each new generation of feminists

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas (And What Men Have Done to Them)* (ARK Paperbacks: Boston 1983).

<sup>2</sup> I have coined the neologism, *kyriarchy/kyriocentrism* (from Greek *kyrios* = domination by the emperor, lord, slave-master, father, husband, elite propertied colonizing male), as a synonym of empire in antiquity and modernity.

themselves, who find it hard to acknowledge the work of their feminist fore-thinkers. Often they feel compelled to distance themselves from the ideas of their feminist predecessors in order to prove the novelty and creativity of their own research by invoking the theories of the “great men” in the field. Caine diagnoses this feminist forgetfulness<sup>3</sup> as the difficulty of wo/men<sup>4</sup> to establish trans-generational, intellectual links:

... historians have to recognize that the frequent rejection of the term ‘feminism’ – and of any sense of connection with earlier feminists – by women who have embraced the notion of female emancipation indicates that women find it hard to establish trans-generational links or to set themselves up as legitimating or authoritative figures for each other or for future generations.<sup>5</sup>

Because feminists do not recognize themselves as authorizing figures, feminist movements have a problem of sustaining living communities over time because we do not recognize each other’s authorizing power and have rarely created feminist institutions for socializing the next generation into feminist theories, theologies and movements. Hence, we are not able to cultivate traditions of feminist knowledges and struggles, to create a living tradition, and to fashion

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<sup>3</sup> See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Der ‘Athenakomplex’ in der theologischen Frauenforschung,” in: Dorothee Sölle (ed.), *Für Gerechtigkeit streiten: Theologie im Alltag einer bedrohten Welt* (Kaiser: Gütersloh 1994), 103-111.

<sup>4</sup> In order to lift into consciousness the linguistic violence of so-called generic male-centered language, I write the term “wo/men” with a slash, in order to use the term “wo/men” and not “men” in an inclusive way. I suggest that whenever you read “wo/men,” you need to understand it in the generic sense. Wo/man includes man, “s/he” includes “he,” and “female” includes “male.” Feminist studies of language have elaborated that Western, kyriocentric (that is, master, lord, father, male centered) language systems understand language as both generic and as genderspecific. Wo/men always must think at least twice, if not three times, and adjudicate whether we are meant or not by so-called generic terms, such as “men,” “humans,” “Americans,” or “professors.” To use “wo/men” as an inclusive generic term invites male readers to learn how to “think twice” and to experience what it means not to be addressed explicitly. Since wo/men always must arbitrate whether we are meant or not, I consider it a good spiritual exercise for men to acquire the same sophistication and to learn how to engage in the same hermeneutical process of “thinking twice” and of asking whether they are meant when I speak of wo/men. According to Wittgenstein, the limits of our language are the limits of our world; hence, such a change of language patterns is a very important step towards the realization of a new feminist consciousness.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Caine, “Women’s Studies, Feminist Traditions and the Problem of History,” in: Barbara Caine, Rosemary Pringle (eds), *Transitions: New Australian Feminisms* (Allen & Unwin: Sydney 1995), 3.

a communal memory. Yet, people need memory to form bonds and we need the bonds of living communities to develop memory, because collective memory has its roots in the human drive to belong.<sup>6</sup> Feminists in religion need to articulate not only a feminist intellectual tradition but also a feminist religious one.

As communities of struggle, living communities, be they those of feminists within or outside religion, I argue, need to become communities of memory that appreciate their feminist past and scrutinize their founding narratives. In this day and age feminist communities, however, need to claim not only their local, national but also their global, international historical roots and heritage. Such a reclaiming requires critique for the sake of finding a “usable” common past rather than for immunizing ones local/national interests from those articulated internationally.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is important for feminist theologies – be they Christian, Jewish, Buddhist or Muslim – to articulate their common theoretical religious questions as well as to research the histories of their communities of struggle. Living communities are communities that retell their constitutive ecumenical and interreligious memories again and again in order to obtain sustenance in the struggles of the present and the future. The very identity and survival of living communities depends upon the constant retelling of the accomplishments of their fore-sisters. Feminist theologies and studies in religion, therefore, need not only to deconstruct the hegemonic narratives of their religious traditions but also to articulate a remembered past that funds the vitality of feminist communities in religion today. Hence it is important to reconstruct the memory of early Christian beginnings as one such founding memory for feminist communities of faith.

If feminist communities in general find it difficult to socialize the next generation into a living feminist tradition, it is even harder for feminists in religion to do so,<sup>8</sup> since religious identity is defined by its dominant traditions.

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<sup>6</sup> Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies* (Stanford University Press: Stanford 2006), 7.

<sup>7</sup> See the most recent issue of the Journal of ESWTR edited by Hanna Stenström and Elina Vuola, *Scandinavian Critique of Anglo-American Feminist The\*logy* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007) which features a critique of my work by Anni Tsokkinen, although I am neither Anglo nor American as though such national labels are adequate descriptions of the work of feminist the\*logy and studies in religion.

<sup>8</sup> Anni Tsokkinen, “But I Wonder What She Said. Some Contextual Remarks on Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s Feminist The\*logy,” *ibid.* 55-70. Under this ironic heading she labels my work as too theoretical and abstract and judges it as not usable in a Finnish context. One

Feminists in religion have to struggle against established kyriarchal traditions, while seeking to reformulate them in order to reclaim them. However, our efforts to reformulate religious traditions are frequently criticized by other feminists who reject religion as totally oppressive. Yet, to abandon these efforts of re-membering our religious traditions in a feminist key would mean abandoning the millions of wo/men who desire to belong to religious communities. As Caroline Ramazanoglu has pointed out, millions of women appreciate religion as a source of meaning for their lives. Religion is still

the dominant factor in the personal identity and cultural location of millions of women around the world. If religion is one of the most important and immediate factors which enable a woman to know who she is, and to give meaning to her life, an international feminist movement cannot afford to ignore religion.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, the Pakistani feminist Farida Shaheed argues that feminists must operate within the religious belief system of Islam if they are to be effective.

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reason given is that the notion of the *ekklēsia of wo/men* is too dependent on my Roman Catholic location, overlooking completely the radical democratic conception of the expression. Moreover, Tsokkinen neglects that *ekklēsia of wo/men* is also a hermeneutical concept seeking to articulate the theoretical space from where to do biblical interpretation and the\*logy. By parochializing this concept, she is able to reject it as not useful for Finnish Lutherans. The other argument as to why in her view my work can not be claimed as heritage for Finnish wo/men is my concept and writing of “*wo/men*”. She correctly observes that I almost never use this way of writing for woman in the Sg. and that I understand it as a social-theoretical construct. She criticizes, however, this theoretical procedure because it is not able to articulate how women and men differ from each other, overlooking that my intersectional analysis would not allow the articulation of such an essentialized bodily difference between *woman and man* since it neglects the corporeal impact of race or class. Moreover, Tsokkinen claims that this way of signifying wo/men can not pay attention to wo/men’s corporeality (again because of my RC location) conveniently overlooking my writings on the exploitation and violence against wo/men. On the basis of this misperception she goes on to argue that Irigaray’s notion of sexuate difference is much more appropriate for the Finnish context. I appreciate Tsokkinen’s careful delineation of my positions but wonder why her critique and prescription for the Finnish context needs to stereotype my location and misread my theoretical position. This is not the first or only time I encounter such a misreading of my work in order to reject rather than to correct it. Since this work belongs to that of the first generation of feminists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I point to Tsokkinen’s discussion as one illustration and example of how feminist heritage is discarded by other feminists when it is judged on national and confessional grounds. It would be interesting to see a research project on how feminist exclusivist discourses of national, cultural and social location undermine or strengthen a common feminist heritage.

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Ramazanoglu, *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression* (Routledge: London 1989), 151-152.

We cannot and should not make religious wo/men choose between feminism and their personal religious beliefs if we want effectively to advocate legal, economic or any other type of reform.

[A] women's movement needs to be perceived as rooted in the cultural reality of the society in which it operates ... [D]iscriminatory laws sanctified through Islam cannot be effectively countered with arguments which deny or discard Islam.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, feminist scholars in religion have to recover religious traditions that are not exclusivist or kyriarchal in order to transform their malestream inheritance while at the same time seeking to socialize the next generation into such radical egalitarian traditions. Moreover, we have to attempt to do so in a reactionary political – religious climate of postfeminism. In the past decade or so right-wing movements around the globe have insisted on the figuration of feminists either as signifiers of Western decadence and of modern atheistic secularism, or they have declared masculine power to be the expression of divine power.<sup>11</sup> Thus the struggles of wo/men for their own religious traditions and their full citizenship in religion and theology are not simply an inner-church or purely religious issue. Rather, these struggles must be remembered in terms of their socio-political location and function in an international context of globalization. Religious ideas and discourses are embedded in socio-political situations and sustain or combat certain trends and aspirations of their society.

In the face of global cultural and religious fundamentalisms,<sup>12</sup> religious feminists contend that theological debates on, for example, wo/men's histories,

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<sup>10</sup> Farida Shaheed, "The Cultural Articulation of Patriarchy: Legal Systems, Islam and Wo/men," in: *South Asia Bulletin* (1986), 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> See especially the declaration of the Division for the Advancement of Women on "International Standards of Equality and Religious Freedom: Implications for the Status of Women," in: Valentine M. Moghadam (ed.), *Identity Politics & Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective* (Westview Press: Boulder 1994), 425-438; Rebecca E. Klatch, "Women of the New Right in the United States: Family, Feminism, and Politics," in: Moghadam (ed.), *Identity Politics & Women*, 367-388. Most of the contributions in Moghadam (ed.), *Identity Politics & Women* are about women and Islam in different parts of the world. However, see Sucheta Mazumdar, "Moving Away from a Secular Vision? Women, Nation, and the Cultural Construction of Hindu India," in: Moghadam (ed.), *Identity Politics & Women*, 243-273, and Radha Kumar, "Identity Politics and the Contemporary Indian Feminist Movement," *ibid.*, 274-292.

<sup>12</sup> For the fundamentalistic tendencies in Roman Catholicism, see John Darcy May, "Catholic Fundamentalism? Some Implications of Dominus Jesus for Dialogue and Peacemaking," in: Michael J. Rainer (ed.), "*Dominus Iesus*": *anstößige Wahrheit oder anstößige Kirche?* (Lit: Münster 2001), 112-133.

wo/men's ordination or wo/men's right to decide whether to have children, are of significance not only for religious communities. At a time when public discourses again deploy biblical religions to deny wo/men's basic rights to sexual self-determination, economic equality, and full citizenship, it is crucial to recognize the entwinement of wo/men's struggles for liberty, equality, memory and well-being with wo/men's struggles in religion for theological authority, feminist traditions and full citizenship in churches, synagogues, and mosques. Emancipatory struggles in religions are thus part and parcel of the societal and cultural discourses that continue to argue for the democratic rights of all the people who are wo/men. They evoke the memories of radical democratic struggles for equal citizenship and full decision making powers of wo/men throughout the centuries.

## II. Memory and History

A critical feminist reconstruction of Christian beginnings seeks to articulate one such memory of struggle. It aims to redress the kyriarchal rhetorics at work in the Christian tradition without abrogating the liberating possibilities which are also inscribed in this tradition. Rather than taking "sexuate horizontal transcendence"<sup>13</sup> or gender as its theoretical framework, a critical liberationist historiography, as I have developed it, "advocates the horizontality of radical democratic citizenship," the *eκκλῆσία* of wo/men, modelled on but not limited by the discipleship of equals. Such a historical reconstruction does not argue that wo/men should remain in the Christian tradition nor that Christian truth is superior to that of other religions. Rather it seeks to articulate for Christian wo/men a vision of radical equality and full citizenship. It holds Christians accountable to and for the material-spiritual suffering in the world, recognizing that Christian rhetoric and politics of empire have wrought much violence throughout the centuries and still do so today. At the same time, it seeks to reconstruct Christian memory as a positive vision and force in the global struggles for liberation and wellbeing.

Over the past forty years feminist scholars have elaborated the ways in which the definition and practice of historiography have been shaped by gender and by an interest in nationalist domination. Malestream historical scholarship has prioritized men's history over wo/men's, white history over the history of people of color, the political history of Western domination over the

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<sup>13</sup> See Linda Jean Miller, *Divinity, Difference, and Democracy: A Critical Materialist Reading of Luce Irigaray's Politics of Incarnation* (ThD Thesis, Harvard Divinity School 2006), ch. 5.

history of struggles against it.<sup>14</sup> Thus malestream historiography has produced scientific historical “facts” in the interest of domination. If feminist historical knowledge has the task of fostering the self-recognition and self-determination of wo/men, then feminist scholars cannot just engage in a play of unending deconstruction but must also participate in re-constructing and re-envisioning “historical origins,” as an alternative discourse to that of domination. We need to remain aware that we do so in a global context not only of colonialism,<sup>15</sup> market commodification and positivist science but also in one of variegated movements for justice and change.<sup>16</sup> In order to bring about such change, scholars of “Christian origins” must abandon the Protestant Reformation historiographic myth of origins, which imagines an originary pristine moment of Christianity, a moment which was declared a priori to be unique, *sui generis*, original, and by definition incomparable, but which early on suffered fatal corruptions.<sup>17</sup> This myth has plainly served to inculcate Christian exclusivity and superiority.

Burton Mack and his students<sup>18</sup> have taken up Foucault’s critique of origins and forcefully questioned not only the myth of “pristine Christian origins” but

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<sup>14</sup> For a feminist account of the development of scientific history as a discipline, see Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women and Historical Practice* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge 1998). Uta C. Schmidt, *Vom Rand zur Mitte: Aspekte einer feministischen Perspektive in der Geschichtswissenschaft* (eFeF-Verlag: Zürich-Dortmund 1994). For antiquity, see the excellent collection by Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Amy Richlin (eds), *Feminist Theory and the Classics* (Routledge: New York 1993).

<sup>15</sup> See Kwok Pui-Lan, “Jesus/the Native: Biblical Studies from a Postcolonial Perspective,” in: Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (eds), *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy* (Orbis: Maryknoll 1998), 76.

<sup>16</sup> For an excellent critical analysis of the involvement of religion in these global struggles, see especially the work of the late Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People* (Penguin: New York 1982); *In Banks We Trust* (Penguin: New York 1986); and her last book before her untimely death, *People of God: The Struggle for World Catholicism* (Penguin: New York: 1989); Robert B. Reich, *The Work of Nations* (Vintage Books: New York 1992); Joan Smith, “The Creation of the World We Know: The World-Economy and the Re-Creation of Gendered Identities,” in: Moghadam (ed.), *Identity Politics & Women*, 27-41; see also Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Beacon Press: Boston 1993), 176, who writes: “A new wave of exclusivism is cresting around the world today. Expressed in social and political life, exclusivism becomes ethnic or religious chauvinism, described in South Asia as communalism. ... As we have observed, identity-based politics is on the rise because it is found to be a successful way of arousing political energy.”

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), 143.

<sup>18</sup> See his *Festschrift*, Elizabeth Castelli and Hal Taussig (eds), *Reimagining Christian Origins* (Trinity Press: Valley Forge 1996).

also the search for origins as such. The “myth of Christian origins,” as they rightly point out, is related to the Protestant reconstructive historical model of uniqueness and its attendant anti-Judaism. Like its Catholic counterpart, the developmental “myth of seed and growth,” it functions to maintain cultural and ecclesiastical relations of domination. Because of this intrinsic connection between religious origins and discourses of power and domination, scholars of “Christian origins” must abandon both Roman Catholic and Protestant forms of the historiographic myth of origins.<sup>19</sup> Both forms of the myth have plainly served to inculcate Christian hegemony, anti-Jewish prejudice, notions of Christian superiority, and exclusivist identity.

A feminist historical-rhetorical construction of the origins of Christianity on feminist methodological grounds and with explicit feminist theological interests at heart has also been accused of producing a “feminist myth” of origins because it stresses wo/men’s historical-religious equality and leadership. The “entire focus on origins within feminist discourses of theology and biblical interpretation” allegedly participates in the production of the myth of Christian origins.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, some feminists argue, the contemporary “impulse to equality” stands on its own and does not need to be projected into the first century or to appeal to biblical writings and authority.

While I agree with the critique of the “myth of origins,” it does not in my view give an adequate account of the feminist search for origins. Not every search for roots and memories of belonging is pernicious. Rather, the myth of origins is pernicious because of its kyriarchal ideological frameworks, such as anti-Judaism, clericalism, or Christian hegemony. If the search for historical origins is always also a search for identity, memory, and a guiding vision, then those marginalized and silenced by hegemonic traditions must engage rather than abandon historical memory. Whereas hegemonic religious communities construct exclusivist origins, feminist communities seek to trace alternative genealogies, which connect the lived-experiences of marginalized communities to their founding religious narratives.

In other words, the “myth of origins” valorizes not only the historical identity of those in power but also that of marginalized groups and people who have been excluded from the historical record and do not have a written

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<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (University of Chicago: Chicago 1990), 143.

<sup>20</sup> Kathleen E. Corley, *Women & the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* (Polebridge Press: Santa Rosa 2002), 147, note 7, with reference to Elizabeth Castelli.



history. If the search for historical origins is always also a search for identity, memory, and a guiding vision, then those marginalized and silenced by hegemonic traditions must engage in constructing such memory rather than abandon the search for it. Whereas for hegemonic religious communities the myth of origins is a legitimization of exclusivist origins, conceived as pristine and absolute, for feminist communities it entails the construction of alternative genealogies, which connect the lived-experiences of marginalized wo/men to their founding religious narratives.

Rather than rejecting the memory of origins out of hand, the social location of those engaged in such a search for origins and their contemporary interests in memory need to be investigated. Hence the critique of the myths of Christian origins as exclusivist and supremacist does not apply to the critical feminist search for wo/men as historical agents in Early Christian beginnings and to the attempts to trace their struggles in the beginnings of Christianity. It is not the search for Early Christian origins, agency, memory, and history, but the rhetoric of exclusivist Christian uniqueness, negative boundary drawing and claims to *sui generis* status that feminists must reject.

Moreover, we can avoid reproducing the myth of pristine origins only if we shift our research focus from the texts to the disciplinary practices of scholarship on early Christianity. Only after a critical deconstruction of the positivist scientific practices of the discipline are we able to engage in a critical analysis of the sites at which the “facts” of early Christian origins have been constructed. As the historian Michel de Certeau has pointed out: “Every ‘historical fact’ results from *praxis* ... It results from procedures which have allowed a mode of comprehension to be articulated as a discourse of facts.”<sup>21</sup>

Feminist historians have argued that history must be rewritten not just as the story of elite Western men but also as the story of wo/men from all walks of life who have made history. In order to accomplish this project, much of feminist historical analysis has first focused on texts about wo/men and on the reconstruction of wo/men’s history. My own early work insisted that a feminist reconstruction of Christian origins must abandon such a topical gender approach on “women in the bible” and critically investigate androcentric (or more precisely, kyriocentric) language and theological hermeneutics as well as the positivist assumptions of historical, sociological, and theological biblical scholarship that are contained within the scientific models of reconstruction.

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<sup>21</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (Columbia University Press: New York 1988), 15.

Early Christian history must be written as the memory of the struggles between those who envisioned and practiced a “discipleship of equals,” and those who advocated the kyriarchal order, between those who sought to realize the *ekklēsia* of wo/men and those who championed church as the kyriarchally organized imperial household, stratified by gender, status, ethnicity, slavery and religion, as part of the divinely ordained “natural order” of the universe.

To avoid reproducing the myth of Christian origins as a golden age, it is necessary to shift not only to an investigation of contemporary scholarly reconstruction sites but also to an exploration of the historical agents and the emancipatory social movement of which Jesus and Mary of Magdala were a part and whose values and visions shaped them as much as they shaped it. In other words, it does not suffice to critically explore the kyriocentric rhetorical site of the gospels for feminist reconstruction. Rather what is necessary is a shift of attention to the practices of the historical agents active at this site. The scholarly search for beginnings cannot simply focus on texts but must pay attention to the rhetoric of those who produced and canonized these texts. Such a shift in research-focus requires that reconstructions of “Christian beginnings” articulate an alternative scientific ethos of biblical inquiry that can transform the scientific discourses of domination. It calls for a redefinition of historical research in the interest of emancipation. However, such re-visions of early Christian historiography must not be limited to an esoteric circle of scholars but should be discussed widely, especially by social movements for change.

### **III. Reconstructive Models: *Ekklēsia* of Wo/men and Discipleship of Equals**

Our understanding of early Christian beginnings is usually monolithic and determined by the Book of Acts, which depicts a linear development from the first community in Jerusalem to the world wide mission of Paul, culminating in Rome, the capital of the empire. For instance, according to the Roman Catholic understanding of Christian origins, Jesus instituted the church; the apostles, who were all men, continued his mission and codified this “apostolic tradition” in the New Testament as Holy Scripture. This ideological construct of unbroken apostolic tradition has been used throughout history to delegitimize other churches as heretical and to exclude wo/men from the leadership of the church. However, this ideological construct of early Christian origins is no longer scientifically acceptable; it is the\*logically destructive not only of the self-affirmation of Christian wo/men but also of that of Christian communities.

If neither the historical-positivist nor the the\*logical-exclusivist model of early Christian beginnings is satisfactory, then a new approach is called for. In my book *In Memory of Her*, I argued that early Christian source-texts should be understood not as historical scientific accounts but as paradigmatic remembrances. The *basileia* movement must be remembered, discussed, interpreted, accepted or rejected in order to comprehend the impact and impulse of this movement. The gospels are not transcripts of the life and words of Jesus but rhetorical interpretations and proclamations for the emerging early Christian movements.

In good kyriocentric fashion, the gospel writers center on Jesus and his male followers but speak of the wo/men disciples only in passing. Hence, the story of early Christian beginnings must be rewritten not only “in Memory of Him” but also “in Memory of Her.” Early Christian history and the\*logy, like all subsequent history and the\*logy, is best understood as a remembered past and interpretive remembrance. In order to reconstruct early Christian beginnings as a feminist memory, it is methodologically necessary to deconstruct, with a hermeneutics of suspicion, the production of malestream canonical tradition and authority, to problematize androcentric or, as I would now say, kyriocentric language and texts, and to construct heuristic reconstructive models that can retell early Christian texts and traditions as the remembered past of both wo/men and men.

The recent discovery of cultural memory-theory in early Christian Studies<sup>22</sup> has confirmed my approach to historical reconstruction as memory, although as usual those who hail this new field of studies do not recognize such prior feminist<sup>23</sup> work. When writing *In Memory of Her*, which appeared in 1983, critical feminist historical work was available but not memory-theory. Memory theory is based on the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) and was revived, as well as modified, by Aleida and Jan Assmann only in 1983.<sup>24</sup> But

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<sup>22</sup> See e. g., Alan Kirk / Tom Thatcher (eds), *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (Semeia Studies 52; SBL: Atlanta 2005). It is interesting that they do not explicitly focus on the ideological uses of the past in Early Christian studies, although they rightly deconstruct especially the methods of source- and form criticism and question the understanding of “tradition” in historical critical studies. See especially Alan Kirk’s introduction, “Social and Cultural Memory,” and the contribution of Werner H. Kelber, “The Works of Memory: Christian Origins as MnemoHistory. A Response,” 221-248.

<sup>23</sup> For the interest in memory theory and analysis see “Gender and Cultural Memory,” in: *Signs* 28/1 (2002), which is however focused on contemporary history and not on the ancient past.

<sup>24</sup> See Aleida Assmann / Jan Assmann / Christof Hardmeier (eds), *Schrift und Gedächtnis: Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation* (Fink: München 1983).

whereas Assmann understands his work in line with “Hans-Georg Gadamer’s formula of the ‘ontological turn in hermeneutics’ as ‘ontological turn in tradition’,”<sup>25</sup> I worked with feminist historical theory and the Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz, who in turn was inspired by Walter Benjamin and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. However, these theoreticians did not understand “that without the liberation of women, human liberation cannot achieve even the status of a utopian dream.”<sup>26</sup> In contrast, I have insisted that political and cultural memory must recognize the reality of wo/men and remember not only the historical suffering and oppression of wo/men but also their agency and leadership in the early Christian movements.

Halbwachs’ theory of social memory, rather than the cultural hermeneutics of Assmann, has greater affinity to such a reconstructive goal. The theory is succinctly summarized by Werner H. Kelber as follows:

It remains the significant intellectual accomplishment of Halbwachs to have (re) discovered the past as remembered past and to have defined it as a social construction that consolidates the symbolic and historic group identity within the social framework (cadres sociaux) of the present.<sup>27</sup>

The past is never discovered but always reconstructed. Memory theory dynamically links the present and the past with the future. Whereas the social framework of the present shapes the remembered past, “the past itself constellated by the work of social memory, provides the framework for cognition, organization, and interpretation of the experiences of the present.”<sup>28</sup> For this reason the remembered past is a rich resource of traditions, models and visions for living communities today and in the future. If memory shapes individual and collective identity, then it is important to scrutinize the reconstructive models and images that scholars use to tell the story of the remembered past. Historical objectivity does not consist in “pure” facts or data but in the dynamic interrelation between the information gleaned from the source and the unifying vision of the interpreter. Hence, for their “intellectual re-creation”<sup>29</sup> of the

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<sup>25</sup> Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, IX.

<sup>26</sup> Marsha Aileen Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion: A Feminist Analysis* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis 1995), 170.

<sup>27</sup> Werner H. Kelber, “The Works of Memory,” in: Kirk / Thatcher (eds), *Memory, Tradition, and Text*, 223.

<sup>28</sup> Alan Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory,” in: Kirk / Thatcher (eds), *Memory, Tradition, and Text*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon Leff, *History and Social Theory* (Doubleday: New York 1971).

remembered past scholars need to articulate theoretical models and heuristic frameworks that open up the past to the present and the future. Such models and frameworks need to be tested not only as to how much they can make visible wo/men as historical agents, but also as to how much they are able to transform our kyriarchally defined collective memory. Only the presumption of wo/men's historical and the\*logical agency will allow us to read the slip-pages, ambiguities, gaps, and silences of androcentric, i.e. grammatically masculine texts,<sup>30</sup> not simply as properties of language and text but as the inscribed symptoms<sup>31</sup> of historical struggles.

In my own work I have suggested two such heuristic models or frames<sup>32</sup> for the "intellectual re-creation" of the collective memory of early Christian beginnings: "discipleship of equals" and "ekkḗsia of wo/men". While these frames are elaborated in Christian the\*logical language, they can be used as re-constructive formal socio-political<sup>33</sup> models whose content can be articulated in various religious languages and traditions. They are theoretical frames and guiding images which seek to contribute to a collective feminist memory that can inspire living religious communities to feminist action in the present

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<sup>30</sup> Dennis Baron, *Grammar and Gender* (Yale University Press: New Haven 1986); Robert H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics* (Longmans: London 1979); Casey Miller / Kate Swift, *Words and Women: New Language in New Times* (Anchor Books: Doubleday 1977); Gloria A. Marshall, "Racial Classifications: Popular and Scientific," in: Sandra Harding (ed.), *The "Racial" Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1993), 116-127; for a comparison of sexist and racist language, see also the contributions in: Mary Vetterling-Braggin (ed.), *Sexist Language: A Modern Philosophical Analysis* (Adams and Co.: Littlefield 1981), 249-319.

<sup>31</sup> For the elaboration of such a "symptomatic reading," see especially the work of Rosemary Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* (Routledge: New York / London 1993).

<sup>32</sup> According to Halbwachs "frame is a shorthand reference to the way invocations of the past confer meaning on present experience." Alan Kirk, "Social and Cultural Memory," in: Kirk / Thatcher (eds), *Memory, Tradition, and Text*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> This is the fundamental theoretical difference between Luce Irigaray's and my own work. See her remarks on *In Memory of Her* in her essay "Egales à qui?," in French: Luce Irigaray, "Egales à qui?," in: *Critique* 43 (1987), 420-437. Her essay was translated into English by Robert Mazzola and published in: *differences. A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 1 (1989), 59-76. Whereas Irigaray stresses sexuate difference as an anthropological rather than a socio-political frame, I argue that such an ontological sexuate difference frame is always already constructed and determined by the socio-political kyriarchal frame in terms of race, class, gender, and imperialism. This theoretical difference has far-reaching implications for the construction of feminist communities.

and the future. Discipleship of equals harks back to the language of the gospels, whereas *ekklēsia* of wo/men seeks to correct and radicalize the Greek democratic political tradition that has left its marks in the Pauline literature. The two expressions are like the two sides of the same coin of an early Christian collective memory which can also be used in the reconstruction of other religious traditions.<sup>34</sup>

Initially, in the 1980s I coined the notion of the *ekklēsia gynaikōn* or women – church as an in-between space that sought to overcome the dualistic feminist alternative between “exodus” from church and religion or claiming church and religion wholeheartedly as “home,” that is between the dichotomy of either feminist or religious. By introducing the radical democratic notion of the “*ekklēsia of wo/men*”<sup>35</sup> as a religious symbolic space and biblical image alternative to those of “exodus” and “paradise/home,” I sought to reframe theoretically the feminist “either/or” binary towards religion, which simply re-inscribes the dualistic division between religion and culture, religion and democratic rights, or religious and secular wo/men’s movements. In addition, I suggested the *ekklēsia of wo/men* as a political hermeneutical site for the overcoming of the dualistic evaluation of the bible as either liberative or oppressive.<sup>36</sup>

The imaginary of the *ekklēsia of wo/men* is conceptualized as a decolonizing space and feminist horizon, a vantage point from which it is possible to interpret and adjudicate biblical texts and interpretations in general, and the biblical

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<sup>34</sup> Since my new book *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis 2007) elaborates again the reconstructive model “*ekklēsia of wo/men*,” I will focus here on “discipleship of equals”. See also my article “Patriarchale Herrschaft spaltet/Feministische Verschiedenheit macht stark: Ethik und Politik der Befreiung,” in: Angela Berlis et al. (eds), *Women Churches: Networking and Reflection in the European Context* (Yearbook of the European Society of Women in Theological Research 3; Matthias-Grünewald: Mainz 1995), 5-29.

<sup>35</sup> Jännine Jobling, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Theological Context: Restless Readings* (Ashgate Publishing Co.: Burlington 2002), 32-59 and 142-162, esp. 143, discusses the concept of the *ekklēsia* of wo/men but chooses “*ekklēsia*” without the qualification of “wo/men” as her hermeneutical key concept in order to restrict the concept to the Christian feminist movement. In so doing she re-inscribes the division between the Christian and the so-called secular women’s movements which I sought to overcome with this radical democratic, counter-kyriarchal image.

<sup>36</sup> For the realizing practices of the *ekklēsia* of wo/men, see Mary E. Hunt, “Feminist Catholic The\*logy and Practice: From Kyriarchy to Discipleship of Equals,” in: Fernando F. Segovia (ed.), *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza* (Orbis: Maryknoll, NY 2003), 459-472, and Marjorie Procter-Smith, “Feminist Ritual Strategies: the *Ekklēsia Gynaikōn* at Work,” *ibid.*, 498-515.

descriptions of empire in particular. It picks up the early Christian communal self-designation “*ekklēsia*” and qualifies it with “wo/men,” in order to express the radical equality of the Spirit-Wisdom community. All members have received the gifts of the Spirit but not all are the same. The members of the body of Christ/Messiah – the messianic corporation – are all equal, and at the same time different, because of their manifold spiritual gifts. However, this theoretical proposal for conceptualizing living feminist communities has not been widely discussed either in malestresam interpretation, probably because of the qualifier “wo/men,” or in feminist circles probably because it is assumed that “*ekklēsia*” means church. Often those who are interested in church are not interested in wo/men and those engaged in feminist critique are not interested in church.

*Ekklēsia* is historically and theoretically conceptualized as the alternative but not as the counter or anti-space to empire because it is constituted not by super- and subordination but by egalitarian relationships. Elizabeth Castelli has rightly likened the notion of the *ekklēsia of wo/men* to a utopian space of “texts, institutions and worldviews that critique the historical or contemporary situation and promote an alternative vision of social and individual existence – generally a vision committed to more egalitarian and just stances.”<sup>37</sup> With *ekklēsia of wo/men* I have in mind a heuristic and hermeneutical construct influenced by Hannah Arendt’s notion of the *polis*, as a space for “acting and speaking together”<sup>38</sup> which has affinities to what Chandra Talpade Mohanti has called “the imagined community of Third World oppositional struggles”. She envisions it as the kind of space that provides

political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. Thus it is not color or sex which constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather it is the way we think about race, class and gender, – the political links we choose to make among and

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<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth A. Castelli, “The Ekklesia of Women and/as Utopian Space: Locating the Work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in Feminist Utopian Thought,” in: Jane Schaberg / Alice Bach / Esther Fuchs (eds), *On The Cutting Edge: The Study of Wo/men in Biblical Worlds. Essays in honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza* (Continuum: New York 2004), 36-52, esp. 38.

<sup>38</sup> Jennifer Ring, *The Political Consequences of Thinking: Gender and Judaism in the Work of Hannah Arendt* (NYU Press: New York 1997), 259, argues that the text evokes “the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the Jewish diaspora ... The physical space that held the ancient Jews together was destroyed in fact, but the people lived on by means of ‘organized remembrance’.” She also points out that “The communal energy each time the congregation meets closely resembles Arendt’s concept of action in the Human Condition and freedom in her discussion of the French resistance,” 282.

between struggles. Thus potentially, women of all colors (including white women) can align themselves and participate in these imagined communities.<sup>39</sup>

Within the context of social movements for change,<sup>40</sup> one can theorize the *ekklēsia of wo/men* not only as a virtual utopian space<sup>41</sup> but also as an already partially realized space of living community and radical equality, as a site of feminist struggles to transform social and religious institutions and discourses.

The notion of “discipleship” is also important here. It is rooted in the language world of religion and education in general and the gospels in particular. The genitive “of equals” introduces a philosophically loaded and highly contested concept<sup>42</sup> of rhetorical power. Whereas discipleship implies relations of superiority and dependency, its qualification with “equals” seeks to correct such tendencies. However, equality is often misunderstood as sameness. Yet, whereas identity means sameness, equality signifies a “correspondence” between a group of different persons or things that have the “same quality in at least one respect but not all respects” – that is, they differ in many respects. Equality has close links with justice. It expresses the fundamental moral principle or idea of equal dignity, that is, the equal worth of all persons and equal respect for all persons.<sup>43</sup> Equality does not imply the adaptation or assimilation to a standard kyriarchal (i.e., the rule of the emperor, lord, father, slave master, elite propertied) male norm but it is rather a radical democratic challenge to it. The reconstructive frame “discipleship of equals” thus signifies living communities of persons with equal worth and respect who follow a common vision.

In *In Memory of Her*, I still followed the narrative lead of the gospels which puts “Jesus and his movement” at the center of the story, although I sought to portray Jesus of Nazareth as “first among equals” in the movement which

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<sup>39</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanti, “Introduction: Cartographies of Struggle,” in: Chandra Talpade Mohanti / Ann Russo / Lourdes Torres (eds), *Third World Wo/men and the Politics of Feminism* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1991), 1-47.

<sup>40</sup> See Jill M. Bystydziński / Joti Sekhon (eds), *Democratization and Women's Grassroots Movements* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1999).

<sup>41</sup> See Elizabeth Castelli, “The Ekklesia of Women and/as Utopian Space,” 39. Feminist fictional utopias literally map “the possible options for utopia in different conceptual and ‘lived’ spaces; elsewhere, in the borderlands between the ‘real’ and the ‘possible,’ and in the in-between space of the not-yet.”

<sup>42</sup> For early Christianity, see Mary Ann Beavis, “Christian Origins, Egalitarianism and Utopia,” in: *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23/2 (2007), 27-49.

<sup>43</sup> See the comprehensive article by Stefan Gosepath, “Equality,” in: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2007, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/equality>



was later named after him. However, such an interpretation does not sufficiently problematize the cultural kyriocentric gender frame that places elite man, the lord and master, at the center of attention and defines wo/man in relation to Him as either subordinate or as marginal; rather it re-inscribes it. Moreover, this kyriocentric frame distances Jesus, as the alleged founder of the “Christian” movement, from Judaism.

“Christian Origins” discourses that seek to position themselves not in the spaces of domination but in the critical alternative spaces of emancipation need to shift their theoretical focus and frame of reference away from the Historical-Jesus,<sup>44</sup> the exceptional man and charismatic hero, and imagine him as a leading member of the *basileia*-discipleship of equals.<sup>45</sup> In order to avoid a misreading of the movement in terms of gender as well as in terms of anti-Judaism, it is necessary to situate the movement in which Jesus and Mary of Magdala among others participated within and in the midst of first century Jewish reform movements. The discipleship of equals, of which Jesus of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala were a part, was a movement that placed the Jewish vision of the *basileia* – i.e. G\*d’s<sup>46</sup> “other” or different world of wellbeing<sup>47</sup> – at the center of its attention.

#### IV. *Basileia*: Religious-Political Critique and Vision

The central symbol of the discipleship of equals, the *basileia* of G\*d,<sup>48</sup> expresses a Jewish religious-political vision that spells freedom from domination and is

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<sup>44</sup> See my book *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (Continuum: New York 2000).

<sup>45</sup> See my article, “Re-Visioning Christian Origins: In Memory of Her Revisited,” in: Kieran O’Mahony (ed.), *Christian Beginnings: Worship, Belief and Society* (Continuum International: London 2003), 225-250.

<sup>46</sup> In order to indicate the brokenness and inadequacy of human language to name the Divine, I have switched in my book *Jesus, Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (Continuum: New York 1994), from the orthodox Jewish writing of G-d, which I had adopted in *But She Said* and *Discipleship of Equals*, to the spelling of G\*d with an asterisk, which seeks to avoid the conservative, malestream association which the writing of G-d has for Jewish feminists. Since the\*logy means “speaking about G\*d” or “G\*d-talk,” I write it in the same way.

<sup>47</sup> For the utopian character of the *basileia*, see Mary Ann Beavis, *Jesus & Utopia: Looking for the Kingdom of God in the Roman World* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis 2006).

<sup>48</sup> For a comprehensive review of the meaning of this expression in contemporary Judaism, see Anna Maria Schwemer, “Gott als König und seine Königsherrschaft,” in: Martin Hengel / Anna Maria Schwemer (eds), *Königsherrschaft Gottes und himmlischer Kult in Judentum, Urchristentum und in der hellenistischen Welt* (J.C.B. Mohr: Tübingen 1991), 45-118. For the

common to all the different movements in first century Israel. It is difficult to translate the Greek term *basileia* adequately because it can mean either kingdom, kingly realm, domain or empire, or monarchy, kingly rule, sovereignty, dominion, and reign. In any case, *basileia* has not only monarchic but also masculinist overtones.

According to Dalmann, the Hebrew equivalent of *malkuth* when applied to G\*d always means kingly rule and has never the territorial sense of kingdom. Following him most exegetes translate *basileia* with “kingly reign” and understand it as G\*d’s all-overpowering initiative and sovereign ruling. Moreover, most reviews of scholarship on the meaning of the expression *basileia* of G\*d do not even discuss its political significance, even though, in its original context, people must have thought of the Roman empire when they heard the word *basileia*.

To lift the political meaning of *basileia* into consciousness, I suggest that the word is best translated with expressions such as “empire,” “domain,” “commonweal” or G\*d’s “different world.” Such renderings of the word *basileia* underscore linguistically the oppositional character of the empire/commonweal of G\*d to that of the Roman empire. Since such translation is generally not understood, however, in an alternative sense but rather as ascribing to G\*d imperial monarchic power, I have tended not to translate the Greek word *basileia*. Instead I use it as a tensive symbol that evokes a whole range of meanings and, at the same time, seeks to foster a critical awareness of their ambiguity.<sup>49</sup> Such a use of *basileia*, as a tensive symbol, seeks to bring to the fore its political impact and eschatological significance in the first century C.E. while at the same time problematizing its kyriarchal politics of meaning.

Exegetes agree that the Roman form of imperial domination signified by the term *basileia* has determined the world and experience of all Jewish movements

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discussion of the *basileia* discourse in early Christianity, see Helmut Merkel, “Die Gottes-herrschaft in der Verkündigung Jesu,” in: *ibid.*, 119-161. See also Marinus De Jonge, “The Christological Significance of Jesus’ Preaching of the Kingdom of God,” in: Abraham J. Malherbe / Wayne A. Meeks (eds), *The Future of Christology: Essays in Honor of Leander E. Keck* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis 1993), 7: “Notwithstanding the intrinsic difficulties in reconstructing Jesus’ message concerning the kingdom, there is a surprising consensus” in understanding it as meaning “the time and place where God’s power and kingly rule will hold sway.”

<sup>49</sup> The translation of the Greek term *basileia* with “kindom”, which has been suggested by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, expresses a feminist meaning but eliminates the political meaning of *basileia*.

in the first century including that in which Jesus of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala among many other Jewish wo/men participated. This discipleship community of, wo/men and men, sought for the emancipation and well-being of Israel as the people of G\*d, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6). They announced the *basileia* (commonweal/empire) of G\*d as an alternative to that of Roman imperialism.

The *basileia*/commonweal of G\*d is a *tensive* symbol<sup>50</sup> not only of ancestral range, proclaiming G\*d's power of creation and salvation. It is also a political symbol that appealed to the oppositional imagination of people victimized by the Roman imperial system. It envisions an alternative world free of hunger, poverty and domination. This "envisioned" world is already anticipated in the inclusive table-community, in the healing and liberating practices, as well as in the ideal of the domination free kinship community of the discipleship of equals which found many followers among the poor, the despised, the ill and dispossessed, the outcasts, prostitutes, and sinners.<sup>51</sup>

In short, discipleship does not mean that the wo/men of the movement followed the great male master, but it means that they engaged in the vision of the *basileia* and struggle for the "other" or "different" world of G\*d. It does not mean that discipleship is to be understood in anti-Jewish supersessionist terms, but rather that such a discipleship of equals derives its meaning from its Jewish roots and imagination. It must not be overlooked that the "discipleship of equals" is an ideal-type that was only partially realized in early Christian beginnings.

Therefore, feminist re-constructions of the remembered early Christian past cannot limit themselves to an investigation of texts about wo/men and Jesus or simply focus on gender relations. Rather they must conceptualize early Judaism and early Christianity in such a way that it can make marginalized wo/men visible as central agents who have shaped Jewish and Christian history and religion. This requires a reconsideration of the theological reconstructive framework that – as Rosemary Radford Ruether has put it – produced Christian anti-Judaism as the left hand and divine masculinity as the right hand of christology. Only an emancipatory feminist model of historical and

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<sup>50</sup> For this expression see Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia 1976).

<sup>51</sup> For a similar account see also Alan F. Segal, "Jesus, the Jewish Revolutionary," in: James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus' Jewishness: Exploring the Place of Jesus Within Early Judaism* (Crossroad: New York 1991), 212-214.

theological reconstruction can do justice both to our common struggles for transforming religious kyriarchal structures and to our particular historical struggles and religious identity formations that are different.

Such a theoretical framework or hermeneutical model makes it possible to understand early Christian beginnings as shaped by the agency and leadership of Jewish, Greco-Roman, Asian, African, free and enslaved, rich and poor, elite and marginal wo/men. Those who hold the opposite view, for instance, that slave wo/men were not active shapers of early Christian communities, would have to argue their point. If one shifts from a kyriarchal preconstructed frame of reference to that of the discipleship of equals, one no longer can assume, for instance, that wo/men were not leaders or even members of some early Christian communities.<sup>52</sup> If one cannot prove that wo/men were not leaders or members, so my argument goes, one needs to give the benefit of the doubt to the textual traces suggesting that they were. Rather than to take the kyriocentric text at face value, one must unravel its politics of meaning.

The objection that this is a circular argument applies to all hermeneutical practices. For instance, social scientific studies which presuppose the “pre-constructed”<sup>53</sup> dualistic opposition of “honor and shame” as given “facts” of Mediterranean cultures will read Early Christian texts “about wo/men” within this theoretically “pre-constructed” kyriocentric frame of reference.<sup>54</sup> Their narratives may appear to be more “realistic” and “objective” than feminist

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<sup>52</sup> For such an assertion with respect to membership in the community, see Amy Jill Levine, “Who Caters the Q Affair? Feminist Observations on Q Paraenesis,” in: *Semeia* 50 (1990), 145-161.

<sup>53</sup> For this concept see Michel Pécheux, *Language, Semantics, and Ideology* (St. Martin's Press: New York 1975). In any discursive formation the “preconstructed” produces the effect of an “always already given,” the “common sense” meaning, or “what everyone already knows.”

<sup>54</sup> See for instance Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (John Knox: Atlanta 1981); and Bruce J. Malina / Jerome H. Neyrey, “First-Century Personality: Dyadic, Not Individual,” in: Jerome H. Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, MA 1991), 67-96. For a critical assessment see Mary Ann Tolbert, “Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods,” in: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures* (Crossroad: New York 1993), I: 255-272; for a critical assessment of the anthropological construct of “the Mediterranean,” see especially the articles by Michael Herzfeld, “The Horns of the Mediterranean Dilemma,” in: *American Ethnologist* 11 (1984), 439-455 and “‘As in Your Own House’: Hospitality, Ethnography, and the Stereotype of the Mediterranean Society,” in: David Gilmore (ed.), *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (American Anthropological Association: Washington 1987).

ones because kyriocentric discourses function as ideologies, that is, they mystify the “constructedness” of their account of reality. Therefore such hegemonic narratives of how the world of early Christianity “really was” are considered to be “common sense”, “objective”, “scientific” historical accounts although they are as much a “construction” as feminist ones are.

Undergirding the re-constructive frame of the discipleship of equals are four basic assumptions:

*First:* The assumption of anti-Judaism is contrary to a Christian feminist theology of liberation because such an historical assumption does not recognize that Jesus, and the movement of which he was a part, were Jewish wo/men. They were *not* “Christian” in our sense of the word. Rather, as Jewish Galilean wo/men they gathered as the discipleship of equals for common meals, theological reflection and healing events. They did so because they had a “dream” and followed a vision of liberation for everyone in Israel.

*Second:* Who Jesus was and what he did can only be glimpsed in the interpretations and memory of the discipleship of equals understood as a first century Jewish movement. The gospels are encoded memories of this movement shaped by the theological interests of their rhetorical situations. They reflect the conflict with the Judaism of a later time. Moreover, one must keep in mind that just as there was no unified early Christianity, so also no “orthodox” singular Judaism existed yet in the first century C.E.<sup>55</sup> Orthodox Judaism, like orthodox Christianity, emerged only in subsequent centuries.

*Third:* This emancipatory movement of Galilean Jewish wo/men must be seen as a part of the variegated basileia and holiness movements that in the first century sought for the “liberation” of Israel from imperial exploitation. The concrete political referent of these movements was the colonial occupation of Israel by the Romans. Hence, it is no accident that in this political context they invoked the covenant promise of Ex 19:6. Some of them, such as the Pharisees or Essenes, stressed the notion of “priesthood and holy nation”. Others, such as the apocalyptic prophetic movements – among them the Jesus movement – stressed the political notion of the basileia (empire/commonweal) of G\*d as counter-term to the Roman Empire.

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<sup>55</sup> See Bruce Chilton / Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the New Testament: Practices and Beliefs* (Routledge: New York 1995), 10-18 for a critique of Ed Parish Sanders [E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE - 66 CE* (SCM Press: London 1992)], for constructing a single unitary Judaism attested by a coherent canon.

*Fourth:* This emerging variegated, predominantly Galilean, movement may have understood itself as a prophetic movement of Divine Sophia-Wisdom.<sup>56</sup> That it named itself after Jesus, the Christ, was probably due to the conviction which had emerged after Jesus' execution that he was the Vindicated or Resurrected One. This conviction, I have argued, had its base in the wo/men's tradition of the "empty tomb" which centered around the proclamation "that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee," the site where the antimonarchical prophetic traditions of the Northern Kingdom were still alive.<sup>57</sup> This tradition manifests the self-understanding of the inner-Jewish, Galilean basileia (empire/commonweal) of G\*d movement as an ongoing and inclusive movement of prophets and messengers sent to Israel by Divine Wisdom. The discipleship of equals as basileia movement is thus best understood as a prophetic Wisdom/Sophia movement whose members, as for example John the Baptizer and Jesus, can be quite different in their strategies and life-styles while having in common their desire to make present and experientially available G\*d's different world of well-being (Lk 7:35).<sup>58</sup>

To sum up my argument: An egalitarian re-constructive model, I submit, is able to place the beginnings of the Galilean prophetic-wisdom – basileia movement within a broader historical frame of reference. This frame allows one to trace the tensions and struggles between emancipatory understandings and movements in antiquity inspired by the democratic logic of equality, on the one hand, and the dominant kyriarchal structures of society and religion, on the other.

Ancient movements of emancipatory struggles against kyriarchal relations of exploitation do not begin with the movement around Jesus. Rather, they have a long history in Greek, Roman, Asian, and Jewish cultures.<sup>59</sup> The emancipatory struggles of biblical wo/men must be seen within the wider context of cultural-political-religious struggles. Such an historical model of emancipatory struggle sees the Jesus of history, and the movement that has kept alive

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<sup>56</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Jesus – Messenger of Divine Wisdom," in: *Studia Theologica* 49 (1995), 231-252.

<sup>57</sup> See the fourth chapter of my book, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (Continuum: New York 1994).

<sup>58</sup> See especially the work of Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, *Jesus Among Her Children: Q, Eschatology and the Construction of Christian Origins* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. 2005), 46-62.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Barbara H. Geller Nathanson, "Toward a Multicultural Ecumenical History of Women in the First Century/ies C.E.," in: Schüssler Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures*, I: 272–289.

his memory, not over and against Judaism but over and against kyriarchal structures of domination in antiquity.

This reconstructive frame of discursive memory, therefore, is misunderstood when it is read as implying that the Jesus movement was the *only* reform movement at the time and that Jewish or Greek wo/men who did not join this movement suffered from a “false consciousness.”<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, if read in a preconstructed frame of meaning that maintains the uniqueness of Jesus, the expression “Jesus movement” suggests not only Christian particularity and exceptionality but also superiority. For that reason, one cannot stress enough that the *basileia* movement named after Jesus must be understood as *one among several prophetic* movements of Jewish wo/men who struggled for the liberation of Israel. Such a framework, I submit, is able to conceptualize the emergent *basileia* movement and its diverse articulations as participating in popular movements of cultural, political, and religious resistance. This collective feminist memory of early Christian beginnings enables us to see the discipleship of equals as embodied in the ongoing feminist struggles for justice and to “mend the world”.

Living communities as communities of memory and vision are communities of struggle for justice and well-being. The *ekklesiā* of wo/men as a discipleship community of equals is to be articulated and realized, again and again, within the emancipatory struggles for the vision of G\*d’s *basileia* that spells well-being and freedom for all without exception. Hence, religious feminist identity is to be articulated within contemporary emancipatory struggles for the “restoration of the world,” of *tikkun olam*,<sup>61</sup> as the social, political and religious transformation of kyriarchal structures of injustice and domination. The one G\*d of Jews, Christians, and Muslims still calls living religious communities today to engage in Divine Wisdom’s vision of justice, freedom, love and well-being. This vision has inspired our historical predecessors in their religious-political struggles for a more just world, and still energizes religious feminists today, and hopefully will do so in the future to come.

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<sup>60</sup> For such a [deliberate?] misreading see Ross Kraemer’s reviews of *In Memory of Her* in: *Religious Studies Review* 11/1 (1985), 107 and in: *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104/4 (1985), 722. See also my response to her in the introduction to the 10th anniversary edition of my book, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (Crossroad: New York 1994).

<sup>61</sup> “Tikkun-to mend, repair and transform the world” is the programmatic motto of the progressive Jewish journal *Tikkun* which is published by the Institute for Labor and Mental Health.

Este artículo estudia el debate crítico del concepto de “discipulado de iguales” y su memoria y visión en las primeras comunidades cristianas. En él se cuestionan y aclaran los conceptos de igualdad, discipulado, el “mito de los orígenes” y la memoria sociopolítica histórica, elementos todos objeto de controversia tanto en los estudios bíblicos de la corriente masculina o “malestream” como en los feministas. A mi modo de ver, resulta fundamental la articulación de la lucha en favor de la visión y la práctica del discipulado de iguales y la “ekklesia of wo/men”, tanto en el pasado como en el presente, para que podamos convertirnos en “comunidades vivas” en términos sociales y religiosos. La “ekklesia of wo/men” materializada como un discipulado de iguales es al mismo tiempo histórica y utópica. “No existe lugar” para ella dentro de las estructuras jerárquicas, pero constituye un punto activista de la lucha cuyo fin consiste en subvertir las jerarquías y crear comunidades en que impere una igualdad radical.

Der Artikel untersucht die kritische Diskussion des Konzeptes der “Nachfolgegemeinschaft von Gleichgestellten” sowie sein Gedächtnis und seine Vision in den früh/urchristlichen Gemeinschaften. Dabei werden die Bedeutungen von “Gleichheit”, “Nachfolgegemeinschaft” sowie die Anfangsmythen und die historisch-sozialpolitische Erinnerung, die weder in der malestream- noch in der feministischen Bibelwissenschaft einheitlich sind, benannt und geklärt. Die Auseinandersetzungen für die Vision und Praxis der Nachfolgegemeinschaft von Gleichgestellten und die Ekklesia von *Frauen* in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart zu artikulieren, ist von zentraler Bedeutung, um zu “lebendigen Gemeinschaften” innerhalb von Gesellschaft und Religion zu werden. Die Ekklesia der *Frauen* als Nachfolgegemeinschaft von Gleichgestellten ist zugleich historisch realisiert und utopisch. Sie hat keinen Platz in kyriarchalen Strukturen, aber sie ist eine aktivistische Seite der Kämpfe, um Hierarchie zu unterwandern und Gemeinschaften radikaler Gleichstellung zu gründen.

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