



**Imagined Memories of Her**  
An Evaluation of the Hermeneutical Method of  
Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

by

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**Abstract:** This paper takes a careful look at the presuppositions and hermeneutics of renowned feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and then presents an Evangelical response to her writings.

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# Imagined Memories of Her

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## I. Introduction

Sometimes it seems that the major movement in special interest theology is to “get back to the roots” of your group or mind-set. Feministic liberation theology is no different in that regard. It is searching for roots in order to be able to legitimately teach its doctrinal positions, which many of us men find very strange indeed.

The question of how they read the Bible the way they do, is something that has intrigued the author for some time. After often reading secondary literature about these women who, according to the people evaluating them, are “perverting” the message of Scripture, it was about time to see what these women themselves write, trying to do so critically, and yet trying not to throw the proverbial baby out with the bath-water, if indeed there is a baby to be saved.

In this paper we are going to evaluate this position through the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in particular her seminal book, *In Memory of Her*,<sup>1</sup> in which she outlines her hermeneutical method and states her goal of “reclaiming ... androcentric human and biblical history as women’s own history”<sup>2</sup> by “writing women back into early Christian history”<sup>3</sup> so creating memories that will in her mind help women to rise above their oppression.

In our study we will first of all try to frame how she goes about creating these memories by examining the presuppositions she brings to the text. Next we will take a look at how she forms these “memories” through her hermeneutic and finally we will evaluate her “memories” from an Evangelical perspective, that believes the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, right down to the jot and tittle, and that sees it as a guideline for every-day living in all aspects of life.

But before we discuss her presuppositions, we must take a brief look at the person of Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza. She is of Roman Catholic background and owing to the fact that she received training in Würzburg, Germany, and the spelling of her name is very German, it may be that she is originally from that country.<sup>4</sup> She currently the Krister Stendahl Professor of Divinity, M.Div at Harvard Divinity School. Bray mentions that she was teaching at Notre Dame and at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In all of these positions she taught in New Testament feminist critical liberation interpretation. She has written a whole plethora of books on feminist interpretation and extensively on the book of the Revelation of the Apostle John. It is also noted that she is the first female president of the Society of Biblical literature.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Construction of Christian Origins* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid*, p 29.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, p xvi.

<sup>4</sup>The the first part of her last name is distinctly German as is the first name of her daughter (*In Memory of her* is dedicated to Christina Marlene Schüssler Fiorenza -- see page following the cover leaf).

<sup>5</sup>Sources of biography: Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation Past and Present* (Downer's Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), p 510. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, eds., “Feminist Theology”, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed., Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), p 604. Cover of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus, Miriam's Son, Sophia's Prophet* (New York, NY: Continuum Publishing Company, 1995). “The Faculty of Divinity”, *Harvard Divinity School Catalogue*, [catalogue on-line] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard College, 1998); available from <<http://divweb.harvard.edu/catalogue/faculty.html>>; Internet; accessed December 12, 1998.

## ***II. Framing a Memory: Presuppositions***

The framework for building a hermeneutic is already a major clue of where the hermeneutic will be leading. As opinionated human beings we find ourselves trying to impose our opinions upon the texts that we read, be they biblical or otherwise. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is no different in that respect, owing that she brings her own presuppositions which are to guide her in her reading and exposition of the text.

The first and foremost of her presuppositions is stated in the introduction to her book:

Biblical texts are not verbally inspired revelation nor doctrinal principles but historical formulations within the context of a religious community.<sup>6</sup>

With this declaration she gives herself a *carte blanche* to place her own views as authoritative over the Scripture, her views which in her own admission are born of liberation theology, as she calls her view a “feminist liberation theology.”<sup>7</sup> For that reason she views the historical-critical method (HCM) as the way to exposit the Scriptures correctly -- while consciously keeping her liberation theological presuppositions in mind as she dissects the Word.

Interestingly her second major presupposition has to do with how she views men and women. It is not until the very end of the first section of her book that she mentions it, but it would be fair to extrapolate that she views the only difference between men and women as being biological. In other words, just because of the fact that men have one type of genital system and women have another type, they are different. Other than that they are equal in worth and for that reason in intellect, in roles that they can take.

Third, she believes that women during Christianity and all ages have been increasingly oppressed by the “patriarchy” and to this day are only beginning to decisively throw off those bonds. Though there are examples of women having tremendous freedoms in the past, she believes that these were only precursors to today and so displays a definite victim mentality<sup>8</sup>.

Her fourth presupposition is that Christianity is in and of itself an egalitarian religion in the radical sense, in that everyone is equal in every respect (gifting, intellect, wealth) and that those who presume to

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<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p xv.

<sup>7</sup>Liberation theology is a subset of a sociological interpretation of the Bible. It is mainly political in nature and tries to interpret the teaching of Jesus in merely temporal views, such as emphasizing the “kingdom of God” aspect, “by which he meant an age of happiness and freedom when the bondage of the past would be forgotten” (G. Bray, *ibid.*, p 518) according to liberation theologians. Bray writes that “Liberation theology is rooted in a particular situation which calls for social action on the church's part.” (Bray, *ibid.*, p 518)

Feminist Theology is a nuanced version of liberation theology, which has taken the “language of oppression” of the liberation theologians and “has adapted [it] to feminist concerns, sometimes in a way that is rather incongruous.” (Bray, *ibid.*, p 519) Their outset is the fact that women's roles in the church have been “undervalued”, and -- even we must honestly admit -- that women have been discriminated against in the past. In their approach many feminists try not only to change the church but also the Bible while they are at it. Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza is a prime example of such an approach.

“From a feminist perspective, biblical history should be read as two great moments -- creation and redemption - - at which women and men were fully equal. Following each of these, however, women lost their equality with men and declined in status.”(Bray, *ibid.*, p 520)

<sup>8</sup>Fiorenza, *ibid.*, p xvi

not be so must be pulled down and corrected<sup>9</sup>. In a like vein of this she seems to suppose that family and “God-given” order of the Bible are patriarchal and imposed on Christianity by the “patriarchy.”<sup>10</sup> One of her conclusions underlines this egalitarian view of Christianity:

Finally, they [feminist sociological models] show that the definitions of sexual role and gender dimorphism are the outcome of the social-economic interactions between men and women but that they are not ordained either by nature or by God.<sup>11</sup>

Thus she presupposes that the Christianity of today is a tainted version of what “God intended” that cries out to be purged, something that Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza and her compatriots will gladly do, since it will further their own aims. Or, to put it in a more positive light, she sees Christianity as essentially a social, historical and cultural process that is to be adapted to our time and culture.

Finally she quotes Gordon Leff, who summarizes her view of what she supposes “historical objectivity” to be, namely the interrelation of the facts and data with the “unifying vision” of the interpreter!<sup>12</sup> From the context, “unifying vision” appears to be the views that the interpreter holds, thus making the interpreter the final authority and not the Bible itself or even God authority.

These presuppositions are the ones that are very clear in her writing. She does seem to think that God as revealed as male is something imposed by the patriarchy as well, though she doesn’t directly come out and say it. Her words are: “a biblical feminist hermeneutics ... must learn from them [i.e. post biblical feminist views] in order to come to a fuller understanding of the liberating biblical impulses for women’s struggle against patriarchal biblical sexism.”<sup>13</sup> In the passage beforehand she deals extensively with the theory of the post biblical feministic view that “Goddess” worship, the symbol of female power, was suppressed by the Bible.

Perhaps a better, more fair rephrasing of this presupposition is that she will keep an open mind to anything liberationist and / or feminist that will support her views.

The final and perhaps most far reaching presupposition that she has is that in early Christianity women have been in leadership roles in the church, which she tries to substantiate. She postulates that they were then pushed out of this role.

### ***III. Forming a Memory: Hermeneutic***

**I**t is difficult to describe Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza’s approach to hermeneutics. For, though she states that she is laying out the guidelines of this hermeneutic, her book seems to do all but firmly lay them down.

There are hints here and there and though she uses terms like “critical analysis,” one is left at a loss for

<sup>9</sup>Judge Robert H. Bork describes how this radical egalitarianism affects all venues of American life in his book *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1996). Because radical egalitarians think in terms of groups and not in terms of individuals, they tend to view a whole group, which is supposedly discriminated against, as those who are the victims and who must to be lifted up. Feminist theologians are no different in this respect, making women out to be that group.

<sup>10</sup>What must be noted here is that the patriarchy is not the honorary term that Christian scholars have titled Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Job with, but “a sociological term meaning 'male domination.'” (Bray, *ibid.*, p 520)

<sup>11</sup>Fiorenza, *ibid.*, p 91

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p 69.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p 18.

finding out exactly what she means by them. Perhaps her method is simply not meant to be understood by the male mind.

Basically she works to use the HCM methods that are both historical-critical and textual-critical to promote the center on the liberation of women, since the Bible is seen as both an oppressive and an empowering document for women of our time<sup>14</sup>.

In her methodology she neither wants to totally reject nor totally accept the Biblical text, but she will analyze each of the passages for their “androcentric implications,”<sup>15</sup> which she seems to want to do away with, since this critical reconstruction must be “based on an alternative biblical feminist vision,” as she is attempting to change the social reality of the Christian churches “in which the religious oppression of women takes its specific historical patriarchal forms.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, any traditional biblical interpretation is to be rejected. She even affirms this clearly:

Biblical revelation and truth are given only in those texts and interpretative models that transcend critically their patriarchal frameworks and allow for a vision of Christian women as historical and theological subjects and actors.<sup>17</sup>

Now as to what exactly these texts and models that “transcend ... their patriarchal frameworks” are is not defined. It sort of becomes a fill-in-the-blank game where she can put in anything that she feels is appropriate for reaching her goals at that moment.

In connection with that she advocates that we must “reject those elements within *all* biblical traditions and texts that perpetuate, in the name of God, violence, alienation, and patriarchal subordination, and eradicate women from historical-theological consciousness.”<sup>18</sup> But what are these texts and traditions that must be rejected? She does not delineate this, once more giving her opinion the upper hand as authoritative factor in the exegetical process.

Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza views the Bible in the HCM light as a document that was created over a long period of time. For that reason she believes that this “androcentric” and / or “patriarchal” view of the Bible was something that was added by later redactors. At the end of the second and throughout the third chapter of her book she goes into detail about HCM reconstructions of what people think happened in the inception of Christianity and its growth from the “Jesus-movement” to the church. It would seem then that she assumes a *very* late date of the New Testament corpus without laying down any arguments for it.

What is also a very important -- perhaps *the* most important -- piece of her hermeneutical method is the “tool” of imagination.

Such a feminist critical method could be likened to the work of a detective insofar as it does not rely solely on historical ‘facts’ nor invents its evidence, but is engaged in an imaginative reconstruction of historical reality.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p 35.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p 13.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp 30-31.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.* p 30.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.* pp 32-33.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p 41.

An “imaginative reconstruction of historical reality” that is based not only on facts, seems to be more of the stuff that is used for a historical novel rather than for the exegesis of the Word of God. Here it would seem that she is resurrecting allegorical interpretation to some extent, but clothing it in the robes of feminism and calling it “historical.” Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza even goes so far as to use imaginative creations to try to get her students to “break out” of the androcentric mindset<sup>20</sup>. For her the “imaginative-theological” aspect is what the critical feminist theologian must use to build “theoretical frameworks” of the Bible. It does not seem that she is interested in true facts at all, since, as stated above, true objectivity results only in the interaction of the “facts” with the interpreter, which in reality ends up being totally subjective.

Because the androcentric mindset is even part of our language, the term “man” and the masculine pronoun being able to mean both the male or a mixed group, she demands that

any interpretation and translation claiming to be historically adequate to the language character of its sources must understand and translate New Testament androcentric language on the whole as inclusive of women until proven otherwise.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, we’ve got to retranslate the Bible, as some have already done, to not say merely “man,” but “woman and man.”

The model that she wants to use in her hermeneutic is one “of social interaction and religious transformation, of Christian ‘vision’ and historical realization, of struggle for equality against patriarchal domination.”<sup>22</sup> In other words it is totally anti-everything that really makes up Christianity.

Perhaps we could summarize her methodology as a rejectionistic approach to the Bible that throws out everything it doesn’t like, and fills the gaps with imaginative constructs that have only very little bearing on reality. That sounds pretty much like everything that historical-critical “theologians” have been doing in the past and even her goal is similar to that of the original purporters and builders of the HCM: it is to change the center of authority and through it society. Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza wishes to change the church, so that women and men have equal roles in every respect, which is commendable, but not quite biblical.

#### ***IV. Evaluating This “Memory”: An Evangelical Response***

**A**fter we have tried to some extent describe her approach to the text, now we should evaluate it from a conservative evangelical approach, which assumes that the Bible is the Word of God in the fullest sense, namely that He divinely inspired authors to write infallible Scripture, that is infallible to the letter, without overriding their personalities. It views what is put down in the Bible as ultimate truth that is normative as well as descriptive, thus having an impact on our daily lives.

In this section we will first evaluate Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza’s presuppositions and then her hermeneutic.

##### **A. Evaluating the Framework of Her Memory**

Perhaps the most painful thing to the evangelical mind is her rejection of the inspiration of the Bible. Once the basis of an infallible, inspired Scripture is dropped, then any external authority is gone and there is absolutely no limit to what you can do to it. From the very beginning Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza pulls out

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p 61. See also the example of such an “imaginative document” on pp 61-64. It is very clear how the historical-critical and feministic presuppositions have guided the imagination of the student who wrote this “apocryphal” letter to make some assumptions which have very little to do with biblical teaching.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p 45.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p 92.

all stops and gives herself the liberty to do anything she wants with the text. Her acceptance of the HCM is simply another subset of this rejection of biblical authority.

As liberation theology is basically an implanting of your own agenda upon the corpus of Scripture, and a picking and choosing of “relevant” texts, it will naturally grow out of a rejection of authority. It ends up laying words into Jesus’ mouth that He never spoke, or twisting what he and others said to a measure that it has very little to do with the intelligible meaning of Scripture. These people forget that the Bible tells the Christians that they must suffer (see for instance, Jn 16:18-21) and that we are called to witness Christ under suffering. It is not speaking about social egalitarianism, the way some people would like to make it sound. And these liberation theologians are not doing anything new. During the time of Martin Luther there were groups of farmers who called upon the Scripture to support their fight against their superiors. It all ended in a rather bloody battle.

Feminist theologians are doing pretty much the same thing in trying to “liberate” women. If we go back far enough, we will find that the feminist agenda is basically anti-family, which is the most coherent unit of the biblical viewpoint. Using the Bible to destroy that is something that is definitely *not* biblical. The misuse of Scripture is nothing new.

We must concede, however, that Scripture *has* been misused in the past to bash women and to subordinate them in unscriptural ways. But the way that this was done, was in exactly the same way that the feminist theologians are working: only selective passages of Scripture were read, and the authority lay not just on the Bible, but also on the Tradition of first the rabbinical interpretation and then on the Tradition of the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox church, none of which taught the full extent of Scripture, but neatly circumvented things that they didn’t want to accept. Though she wouldn’t admit it, Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza is doing precisely the same thing.

There is no excuse for the oppression of women, and it is true that in Christ there is no difference between man and woman, but this is in a *spiritual* sense only, not in a physical sense or in view of their divergent roles in everyday life. Men and women’s being equal before God is no question. Their having exactly the same roles before God *isn’t*. As a man reading this book written by a woman, the author must note that there are certain things in her logic that he does not understand. That is because women do see things differently from men, as men see things differently than women. This does not mean, however that we cannot see eye-to-eye. It simply means that we have a different perspective of life that compliments the other and, if used properly, helps us to understand life better.

Gen 2:18 describes woman as a “helper” to a man in his task as the image of God upon earth. This passage does not seem to imply that they have the same roles, nor does it say that because woman is a “helper” she is any inferior to man<sup>23</sup>. Dr. McDaniel notes that this term for helper (*‘ēzer*) is predominantly used of God elsewhere in Scripture<sup>24</sup>.

The way man and woman are made, makes sure that they cannot exist without each other, which naturally presupposes that man and woman are different in their make-up. The immensely popular secular book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*<sup>25</sup> clearly delineates this and it is a pity that these women can’t understand that this diversity in roles is something that is “very good”, as God put it in Gen 1:31.

It is true to some effect that Christianity is an egalitarian religion, though not in the radical sense of egalitarianism. What Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza is trying to get Scripture to say is that the equality of men and women spans roles as well as worth. The Bible itself teaches difference in the roles of the sexes,

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<sup>23</sup>It is interesting to note that the word translated as “suitable” in English is mentioned in the NASB footnote as literally being “corresponding to him”, which the German translations support in footnotes.

<sup>24</sup>Chip McDaniel, *Old Testament Theology* (Columbia, SC: Columbia International University, 1998), p 30.

<sup>25</sup>John Gray, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: a practical guide for improving communication and getting what you want in your relationships*. (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992).



though not in worth. As mentioned above, the favorite passage of Gal 3:28 is taken to spread into all life against the point that Paul is trying to make. He is pointing out the position of believers in Christ as children of God. The reason he uses “sons” is to denote that Christians are full heirs to the blessings of God. There is no mention of roles in that chapter. Once more it is a reading of ones own views into the text.

Perhaps the most striking problem she has is where her authority lies. It lies within herself and within her views. The authority has been moved from the Bible to the individual, with the result that the Bible gets changed rather than the one who reads it! This is the next logical step of rejecting the Bible as inspired and so it should not be surprising that she would do such a thing. However, from an evangelical viewpoint it is untenable, since the Bible is viewed as authoritative over the person.

Finally we must address the issue of her presupposition that women were once in leadership in the church and later forced out. The examples cited are always the same: Phoebe in Ro 16:1, Priscilla (or Prisca), the wife of Aquila of Acts 18, and perhaps the Junia (or Junias) of Ro 16:7.

Priscilla is always mentioned in conjunction with her husband Aquila, and so they find themselves as a coherent unit, functioning as a role-model to present day married couples of how they should work together in ministry, so undermining the feminist argument.

Phoebe can be explained simply as a servant of the church in Kenchrae, though if the deaconess position existed, it would be similar to that of a deacon's: namely to wait on tables and handle the every-day logistical things in the community. It would not necessarily presume leadership, though a good example would be mandatory. Aside from that fact nowhere else in Scripture is there an undisputed reference to the office of “deaconess”, thus making it untenable to argue that Phoebe would have been a leading figure in the church, especially if it is only done from this one passage.

As to whether this Junia is male or female, would make a more difficult argument to refute. If Junia were a “she”, she would be the only woman to be titled an apostle. But as this person is mentioned in conjunction with Andronicus (who is unquestionably male), it could be argued that they formed a coherent unit such as Priscilla and Aquila were, thus making another example of husband and wife working together. But other than this argument it is too sketchy to base anything on the one verse, which seems to be what the feminist theologians are doing.

*In summary:* All of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's presuppositions are out of line with evangelical thinking. The only possibly redeeming factor would be that her calling for equality among men and women in the Church would be embraced to teach the equality of worth and also to define in what way Christianity might be an “egalitarian” religion from a biblical perspective as an answer to her criticisms.

### **B. Evaluating the Form of Her Memory**

Her methodology is also counter to what evangelical Christianity would use. Her simple acceptance and use of HCM is a logical result of not believing that the Bible is inspired at any rate. If we could summarize our answer to her hermeneutic, it would be that she is using faulty tools to achieve an anti-Christian goal. This may seem a bit harsh to say, but the author by no means wishes to discredit Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza as a person. This is merely a judgment of her methodology. Let's then take a look at the components of her methodology.

What must be commended, however is that she does view the Word as powerful. However her view of power is the wrong kind. The Bible is not power to subvert anyone, whether woman or man, but it is power to change lives for their good and for the goals of God.

First of all she neither wants to fully reject nor totally accept the Bible. The not wishing to reject the Word of God is commendable. It is also understandable as she searches for something that she can hold on to, so that she can still be part of the society she is in, which is the academic circles of liberal Christianity. However, her rejection of parts of the Bible, due to her presupposition is something that is not tenable from the perspective of people who regard every word as authoritative. To reject that authority is to reject God and what He says.

If we ask who decides what to accept and reject, there is only one answer left: the expositor of the Word. So the focus of Authority shifts once more from the Word of God to the mind of woman. Her rejection of all traditions and texts “that perpetuate, in the name of God, violence, alienation, and patriarchal subordination, and eradicate women from historical-theological consciousness”<sup>26</sup> shows what she wants to blot out parts of the Scriptures so they will conform to her view. Who is the person that decides what perpetuates violence, alienation, etc.? It is the exegete.

There is no hint whatsoever in Scripture that the command of God to destroy the Caananite civilizations, for example, is something that would be unbecoming to God. It is a clear example of his justice. The view that YAHWEH is only the God of the oppressed is expressed by liberation theologians<sup>27</sup>, but that view is found nowhere in Scripture. YAHWEH is both the God of the rich (Job) and of the oppressed (Lazarus in Lk 16). It seems to the author that the liberation theologians, including feminist theologians, have an incomplete view of God, projecting their wish for a particular god or goddess into the clouds, and not taking time to compare it to the LORD of Hosts, King of the earth, in the Bible.

As a part of the acceptance of HCM, it is logical to assume that the Bible was created over long periods of time. Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza, as a scholar of New Testament studies, assumes this, as is clear from her descriptions of early Christian reconstructions. She will even go so far as to say that the New Testament was redacted to include these patriarchal views. For her the pastoral letters never came from the pen of Paul<sup>28</sup>.

For an evangelical such a view cannot be held and still stay true to the belief that the Bible is inerrant. If inspiration is true, then Paul must have written the corpus that is attributed to him. Also there is a more or less significant argument by German papyrologist Carsten Peter Thiede, that especially the Synoptic Gospels were written at an earlier time in history than assumed.<sup>29</sup> The Gospels are among the most contested documents around. If Thiede’s theories are true, then it would deal a very severe blow to the redaction criticism surrounding the creation of the Synoptic Gospels and would rob the feminist theology of one of their prized extrapolations of how the texts came to be so “patriarchalized.”

While Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza is careful to point out that Christ was egalitarian, she never mentions that He speaks very highly of marriage (which she views as “patriarchal”) as a God-given design (see Mt 19:4-6 and parallel passages). Once more texts are omitted, because they don’t fit the agenda.

Another very dangerous “tool” that Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza uses is the “imagination.” Where there are gaps, they must be filled, and it is true that the imagination of the human being is powerful enough to do so. What results, however is fiction, *even if* it is based on fact. This can get very dangerous, because the exegete can then spin any tale he or she wishes to without regard to whether it was really true or not.

Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza’s goal of building theoretical frameworks rather than relying on the biblical texts is simply an extension of her using imagination as a tool. Fact becomes unimportant. What becomes important is building up the other. If someone is encouraged by a lie, the lie remains untrue, no matter how good it makes the person who has been “picked up” feel. Truth is essential and truth will then correspond to fact, whether this fact must first be apprehended by faith before it is comprehended by

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<sup>26</sup>Fiorenza, *ibid.* pp 32-33.

<sup>27</sup>“The basic insight of all liberation theologies, including feminist theology, is the recognition that all theology, willingly or not, is by definition always engaged for or against the oppressed.” (Fiorenza, *ibid.*, p 6)

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p 55.

<sup>29</sup>This argument is heavily contested by liberal theologians. There is a good, brief summary of it to be found in John Elson, “4/8/96 Eyewitnesses to Jesus?”, *Time Magazine*, vol. 147, no. 15 (April 8, 1996) [article on-line]; available from <<http://cgi.pathfinder.com/time/magazine/archive/1996/dom/960408/archaeology.html>>; Internet; accessed December 15, 1998.

reason or whether it is first comprehended by reason so as to produce faith. We cannot build faith upon “theoretical frameworks that” will topple, we must build it on truth.

What we must take into consideration, however is the fact that our language is to some effect what she calls “androcentric.” It is true that masculine pronouns are used to address a mixed group (such as “guys” can be used of women in the northern states). However, though this consideration is necessary for exposition, knowing where the mixed group is meant rather than just the men, it must be remembered that just about every language will do just that: use masculine pronouns for a mixed group.<sup>30</sup> This is especially true of the greater European and Semitic languages, of which Greek and Hebrew are two. If the feministic theology wishes to change the English language so as to accommodate for women, so be it<sup>31</sup>, but they must also remember then, that there are cases in the *original* language that may seem ambiguous, since that language uses the same system of plurals that ours does now. A literal translation of the Bible (such as the New American Standard Bible) will not change where it says “brothers” to “brothers and sisters,” because that is precisely against the idea of literal translation. Perhaps a paraphrase (such as the New International reader’s Version) may do that, but we must remember that *it is not* written thus in the original texts and the paraphrase should at least remark that in the footnote.

When Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza’s views are summed up, they are essentially anti-Christian, even though she denies it. The reason for this harsh statement is that, when taken as a system, liberation theology has little in common with Christianity. It would certainly figure with Christendom, but not within the locus of Christianity, which is those who believe in the death and resurrection of Christ as the only way to restore the relationship to God. When you substitute this “metaphysical” salvation for the physical, earthly salvation of the individual as seen by liberation theology, or even deny that God reaches into the world or even exists, as most historical-critical and textual-critical scholars do, then you are not Christian any more.

As Christ Himself said: “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” (Mt 12:30) The Pharisees -- that is the scholarly class of Christ’s time -- were certainly not with Him, judging from all their strange injunctions upon the Tanakh corpus and their lack of heart-faith. The author would go so far to say, that most liberal and liberationist scholars, including Dr. Schüssler Fiorenza are not believers, and so not for Christ. Thus they would be scattering.

#### ***V. Conclusion: Was It Even a Memory?***

**W**e must conclude that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s goal to reconstruct early Christian history is a valiant attempt, but severely misguided, due to her presuppositions and her methodology which results from her frame of mind. She unfortunately lets her view of the world dictate her attitude towards the Scripture, rather than letting Scripture dictate her view of the world.

However, studying her work can give us some insights about what is moving the feminist community at the time and give us impulses about where to search the Scriptures for better formulated answers. The answers that are found there will in the final instance have to be backed by the fact that we view all of the Bible as authoritative, even the parts that feminists would reject as “androcentric” or “patriarchal” and thus not pertaining to reality. In that sense it might even be considered a losing battle to try to argue the

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<sup>30</sup>The exception to this are the languages who have no grammatical gender, such as Turkish and probably also its related languages, such as Korean. Perhaps such a language should be the language of choice, since we would all have an even more difficult time determining whether groups are mixed or not. It would certainly quell a lot of angry voices demanding a gender equal Bible.

<sup>31</sup>Bork complains that radical feminists have been weakening the English language by creating alternate spellings of words (see Bork, *ibid.*, p 217). This would be another instance of imposing such a weakening not only on the English language, but also on the Koinē Greek, though it is not quite as apparent, since the feminists aren't changing the spelling, but insisting on broadening a meaning which could finally result in an expansion in places where it is not meant to be so!

Scripture before the world. The bottom line about the understanding of the Word of God is, to quote Anselm of Canterbury, "I believe in order to understand." If you don't accept the claims of the Bible in faith, you won't understand the claims of the Bible to be Truth. You may not even understand them at all and end up with such strange heresies (from a biblical perspective) as feminist liberation theology.

However, in contrast to the non-Christian "Christian" theologians, we have the possibility of going before the Throne of Grace and pleading for their eternal souls. Their views may subvert and damn for eternity, but true faith in the true Christ of the Bible will save. Would it be that the All-wise would cut through their foolishness and show them that the folly of God is greater than the wisdom of man (1Co 1:25).

*So we follow God's own fool,  
for only the foolish can tell.  
Believe the unbelievable  
and come be a fool as well.<sup>32</sup>*

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<sup>32</sup>Michael Card, "God's Own Fool", *Scandalon*, as re-released on *Michel Card, The Early Years*, Sparrow SPD 1539.

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