

In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza

Crossroads, New York, 1992, copyrighted 1983

Introduction: In Search of Women's Heritage

1) "A fundamental methodological insight of historical criticism of the Bible was the realization that the *Sitz im Leben* or life setting of a text is as important for its understanding as its actual formulation." page xv

Return to the Table of Contents

Part I: Seeing-Naming-Reconstituting

1. Toward a Feminist Critical Hermeneutics

1) regarding various model of Biblical interpretation:

"The first model, which I will call the doctrinal approach, understands the Bible in terms of divine revelation and canonical authority. However, it conceives of biblical revelation and canonical authority in a-historical, dogmatic terms. In its most consistent forms it insists on the verbal inspiration and literal-historical inerrancy of the Bible. The biblical text is not simply a historical expression of revelation but revelation itself. The biblical text is not simply a historical expression of revelation but revelation itself." page 4

"The second model, that of positivist historical exegesis, was developed in confrontation with the dogmatic claims of Scripture and the doctrinal authority of the church. Its attack on the revelatory authority of Scripture is linked with an understanding of exegesis and historiography that is positivist, factual, objective, and value-free. Modeled after the rationalist understanding of the natural sciences, positivist historical interpretation seeks to achieve a purely objective reading of the texts and a scientific presentation of "facts." " page 5

"Although this scholarly detachment is historically understandable it is theoretically impossible. That latter insight was developed by the third model, that of dialogical - hermeneutical interpretation. This model takes seriously the historical methods developed by the second model, while at the same time reflecting on the interaction between the text and community, or text and interpreter. The methodological explorations of form and redaction criticism have demonstrated how much biblical writings are theological responses to pastoral-

practical situations, while hermeneutical discussions have elaborated upon the involvement of the scholar in the interpretation of texts." page 5

"The fourth and last model of biblical interpretation is that of liberation theology. The various forms of liberation theology have challenged the so-called objectivity and value-neutrality of academic theology. 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. Intellectual neutrality is not possible in a world of exploitation and oppression." page 6

2) Regarding Elizabeth Cady Stanton (ECS) and her *The Woman's Bible* ECS conceived of biblical interpretation as a political act. page 7

ECS outlined three reasons why a scholarly, feminist interpretation of the Bible is necessary: "

i. Throughout history and especially today the Bible is used to keep women in subjection and to hinder their emancipation.

ii. Not only men but especially women are the most faithful believers in the Bible as the word of God. Not only for men but also for women the Bible has a numinous authority.

iii. No reform is possible in one area of society if it is not advanced also in all other areas. One cannot reform the law and other cultural institutions without also reforming biblical religion which claims the Bible as Holy Scripture. Since "all reforms are interdependent," a critical feminist interpretation is a necessary political endeavor, although it might not be opportune. If feminists think they can neglect the revision of the Bible because there are more pressing political issues, then they do not recognize the political impact of Scripture upon the churches and society, and also upon the lives of women." page 11

3) "This hermeneutic-contextual model has not only established the canon of Scripture as the pluriform root model of Christian communities, but also has shown that the Bible includes often contradictory responses and that therefore not all biblical statements have equal truth claims and authority." pages 13-14

4) Referring to Letty Russell's book on liberation theology:

"Tradition [tradition with a capital T] refers to the total traditioning-process, while the tradition refers of Christ as the content of the traditioning-process. Traditions [tradition, plural] in turn are the facts and patterns constituting church authority. Since the biblical message was addressed to a patriarchal society, the form of the biblical promise is situation-variable and relative to its patriarchal

culture. Patriarchal imagery and androcentric language are the form but not the content of the biblical message. Since the content of the tradition is Christ, feminist theology must make clear "that Christ's work was not first of all that of being male but that of being the new human. " page 15

Return to the Table of Contents

2. Toward a Feminist Critical Method

1) Regarding: androcentric translations and interpretations:

"In other words, androcentric language is inclusive of women but does not mention them explicitly. Such androcentric inclusive language functions in biblical texts the same way as it functions today- it mentions women only when women's behavior presents a problem or when women are exceptional individuals. Scholars understand and interpret such androcentric language in a twofold way: as generic and as gender specific. ... Therefore, a historically adequate translation and interpretation must not only take the inclusive function of androcentric language into account but also the limitations of such language and reject the topical approach to woman in the New Testament as methodologically inadequate.

In addition, it must be recognized and made explicit that a good translation is not a literal transcription but a perceptive interpretation transferring meaning from one language to another, How much every translation is also an interpretation influenced by the contemporary perspective of the translators can be shown through a comparison of different contemporary Bible translations. For example, 1 Cor 11:33 in a word by word literal translation reads:

However, I want you [plural] to know that **the** head of every man is **the** Christ, however, **a** head of woman is **the** man, however, head of the Christ is **the** God.

the RSV translation reads:

I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

The New English Bible renders the verse as follows:

But I wish you to understand that while every man has Christ for his head, woman's head is man as Christ's head is God.

The Living Letters reads:

But there is one matter I want to remind you about: that a wife is responsible to her husband, her husband is responsible to Christ and Christ is responsible to God.

And finally the Good News for Modern Man really brings out the good news for modern males:

But I want you to understand that Christ is supreme over every man, the husband is supreme over his wife and God is supreme over Christ.

By dropping the definite article before Christ and God the translators have smoothed out the text theologically while, at the same time, interpreting it in terms of patriarchal hierarchy.

Finally, because contemporary translators share in the androcentric-patriarchal mind-set of Western culture, they cannot do justice to texts that speak positively about Christian women and integrate these texts into their constructive model of early Christian beginnings. Because they generally presuppose that men, and not women, developed missionary initiatives and exercised central leadership in early Christianity, texts that do not fit such an androcentric model are quickly interpreted in terms of an androcentric perspective. " pages 45-47

2) "However, since the Gospels were written at a time when other New Testament authors clearly were attempting to adapt the role of women within the Christian community to that of patriarchal society and religion, it is all the more remarkable that not one story or statement is transmitted in which Jesus demands the cultural patriarchal adaptation and submission of women." pages 52-53

3) After presenting several examples where Origen, Chrysostom, and the Monanists acknowledge that women preached in the early church but reject any further teaching of women, SF says, "Therefore, the canon reflects a patriarchal selection process and has functioned to bar women from ecclesial leadership.

The acid polemics of the Fathers against the ecclesial leadership of women and against their teaching and writing books indicate that the question of women's ecclesial office was still being debated in the second and third centuries C.E. It also demonstrates that the progressive patriarchalization of church office did not happen without opposition, but had to overcome various forms of early Christian theology and praxis that acknowledged the leadership claims of women." page 54

"The attacks of Tertullian indicate how prominent women's leadership still was toward the end of the second century. Tertullian is outraged about the insolence of those women who dared to "teach, to participate in theological disputes, to exorcise, to promise healings and to baptize." He argues that it is not permitted for women "to speak in the Church, to teach, to baptize, to sacrifice, to fulfill any other male function, or to claim any form of priestly functions." He substantiates this exclusion from all ecclesial leadership roles with a theology that evidences a deep misogynist contempt and fear of women. He accuses woman of the temptation not only of man but also of the angels. According to him woman is the "devil's gateway" and the root of all sin. Finally, Jerome attributes to women the origin not only of sin but of all heresy.

Such patristic polemics against women as the source of heresy must be seen in the gradual development of the concept of "orthodoxy" in early Christianity. This development became necessary because there was "never a single, pure, authentic Christian position as later "orthodoxy" would have us believe." Insofar as the

writings collected and accepted in the New Testament canon were selected and codified by the patristic New Testament church, the canon is a record of the 'historical winners.' " page 55

Return to the Table of Contents

3. Toward a Feminist Model of Historical Reconstruction

1) "If a feminist reconstruction of history can no longer take patriarchal texts at face value but must critically interpret them in a feminist perspective, the notion of history as "what actually happened" becomes problematic. Although scholars have widely abandoned this notion, it still dominates religious instruction, dogmatic books, and ecclesiastical statements. The psychological strength of fundamentalism is derived from such an understanding of the Bible as a historically accurate record of God's will. Yet biblicist certainty is based not only upon an outdated theological understanding of biblical revelation but also on a historicist misunderstanding of what the Bible is all about. As a historical account of the ministry of Jesus or the life of the early church, the biblical writings do not tell us how it actually was but how its religious significance was understood.

Our understanding of early Christian beginnings is usually monolithic. It is much determined by the Acts of the Apostles, which pictures a straightforward development from the primitive community in Jerusalem founded on Pentecost to the world-wide mission of Paul climaxing with his arrival in Rome, the political center of the Greco-Roman world. The Pauline epistles are understood not so much as historical sources reflecting a much more multifaceted early Christian situation fraught with tensions but as theological treatises expounding and defending the doctrine of justification by faith." page 68

2) "In discussing the social constituency of early Christianity, however, Gager accepts the consensus among classicists on the social question which is contrary to his assumption of the short life expectancy of a sect. This consensus maintains that, on the one hand, "for more than two hundred years Christianity was essentially a movement among the disprivileged" and, on the other hand, "its appeal among these groups depended on social as much as ideological considerations." Thus the social conditions and appeal of early Christianity as a sectarian protest against the existing social order did not change for more than two hundred years." page 77

3) Regarding Theissen and his love patriarchalism: "He concedes that this love patriarchalism was enacted with more violence than love against those who did not comply; nevertheless, he declares it a social, historical necessity for the survival of Christianity. To state it crudely: the church is not built on prophets and apostles, who as charismatics belong to the "radical" tradition, but on love

patriarchalism, that is, on the backs of women, slaves, and the lower classes. Not only is history written by winners, it is also made by them." pages 79-80

4) "Unlike the orthodoxy-heresy model, this interpretative framework does not justify the patriarchalization process of the early church on theological grounds but argues for it in terms of sociological and political factors." page 80

5) "For the most part, official Christian history and theology reflect those segments of the church which have undergone this patriarchalization process and theologically legitimated it with the formulation of the canon." page 83

6) "In my opinion, this emancipatory function and not their sexual-social marginality as childless women or widows attracted women to the oriental cults, among them Judaism and Christianity. While the a-sexual and a-familial ethos of early Christianity is often misunderstood as antisexual and antiwomen, it actually is an indication of a "role-revolt" which allowed women to "legitimately" move out of the confines of the patriarchal family and to center their life around the spiritual self-fulfillment and independence that gave them greater respect, mobility, and influence.

S. Johansson has shown that the misogynist polemics of male writers, theologians, and historians must be understood as expressions of middle-class men whose psychic and economic reality were heavily determined by daily competition, and who therefore sought to maximize the "natural" difference between women and men in order not to be replaced by women. While in aristocratic society women of the upper classes were expected to substitute for men during times of war or death, middle-class men did not depend on the loyalty and resources of women of their class, but on using family resources with maximum effectiveness. Since masculine identity for middle-class men of urban cultures is produced by intensive socialization and expensive education, "temperamental and occupational similarity between women and men threatened the economic, psychological, and social security of middle-class dominated families." While middle-class men produce symbolic and literary expressions of gender dimorphism and misogyny, peasant and working-class life is commonly shot through with symbolic manifestations of male superiority....Men who experience daily humiliation and frustration because of their economic and social disadvantages find their most important form of solace in looking down on and abusing women. This psychological cushion against oppression makes class exploitation more bearable; perhaps as some feminists argue, it makes it more durable." pages 90-91

Return to the Table of Contents

Part II: In Memory of Her: Women's History as the History of the Discipleship of Equals

1) "The Christian missionary movement had already developed before Paul and was joined by him. Paul has become its most important figure because his letters have survived oblivion, but he was neither its initiator nor its sole leader." page 101

Return to the Table of Contents

4. The Jesus Movement as Renewal Movement Within Judaism

1) "Therefore, to reconstruct the Jesus movement as a Jewish movement within its dominant patriarchal cultural and religious structures is to delineate the feminist impulse within Judaism. The issue is not whether or not Jesus overturned patriarchy but whether Judaism had elements of a critical feminist impulse that came to the fore in the vision and ministry of Jesus. The reconstruction of the Jesus movement as the discipleship of equals is historically plausible only insofar as such critical elements are thinkable within the context of Jewish life and faith. The praxis and vision of Jesus and his movement is best understood as an inner-Jewish renewal movement that presented an alternative option to the dominant patriarchal structures rather than an oppositional formation rejecting the values and praxis of Judaism." page 107

2) "The following methodological rules for a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion also apply, therefore, to the interpretation of texts speaking about women in Judaism.

Texts and historical sources- Jewish as well as Christian- must be read as androcentric texts.

The glorification as well as the denigration or marginalization of women in Jewish texts is to be understood as a social construction of reality in patriarchal terms or as a projection of male reality.

The formal canons of codified patriarchal law are generally more restrictive than the actual interaction and relationship of women and men and the social reality which they govern.

Women's actual social-religious status must be determined by the degree of their economic autonomy and social roles rather than by ideological or prescriptive statements. " pages 108-109

3) "It is the festive table-sharing at a wedding feast, and not the askesis of the "holy man," that characterizes Jesus and his movement." page 119

4) "Since the reality of the basileia for Jesus spells not primarily holiness but wholeness, the salvation of God's basileia is present and experientially available whenever Jesus casts out demons (Luke 11:20), heals the sick and the ritually

unclean, tells stories about the lost who are found, of the uninvited who are invited, or of the last who will be first." pages 120-121

5) "However, this future is mediated and promised to all members of Israel. No one is exempted. Everyone is invited. Women as well as men, prostitutes as well as Pharisees." page 121

6) "The earliest gospel strata assert again and again that Jesus claimed the basileia for three distinct groups of people: (1) the destitute poor, (2) the sick and crippled; and (3) tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes.

1. Jesus announces that the basileia is given to the impoverished, while Q already claims the "beatitudes" for the Jesus community. ...

2. The basileia of God is experientially available in the healing activities of Jesus. ...

3. While the sick and possessed are easily seen as belonging to the poor and starving to whom the basileia is promised, exegetes usually see the moral but not the social predicament of tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes." pages 122-126

7) "This God is a God of graciousness and goodness who accepts everyone and brings about justice and well-being for everyone without exception." page 130

8) "Although Jewish (and Christian) theology speaks about God in male language and images, it nevertheless insists that such language and images are not adequate "pictures" of the divine, and that human language and experience are not capable of beholding or expressing God's reality. The second commandment and the unspeakable holiness of God's name are very concrete expressions of this insistence. To fix God to a definite form and man-made image would mean idolatry. Classical prophetic theology, often in abusive language, polemicized against the pagan idols and thus rejected goddess worship, but it did not do so in defense of a male God and a patriarchal idol. By rejecting all other gods, prophetic theology insisted on the oneness of Israel's God and of God's creation. It therefore rejected the myth of the "divine couple," and thus repudiated masculinity and femininity as ultimate, absolute principles. But in doing so, it did not quite escape the patriarchal understanding of God, insofar as it transferred the image of the divine marriage to the relationship of Yahweh and Israel who is seen as his wife or bride." page 133

9) "To sum up, the Palestinian Jesus movement understands the ministry and mission of Jesus as that of the prophet and child of Sophia [wisdom] sent to announce that God is the God of the poor and heavy laden, of the outcasts and those who suffer injustice. . . . The suffering and death of Jesus, like that of John and all the other prophets sent to Israel before him, are not required in order to

atone for the sins of people in the face of an absolute God, but are the result of violence against the envoys of Sophia who proclaim God's unlimited goodness and the equality and election of all her children in Israel." page 135

10) "Thus at an early stage some members of the Galilean Jesus movement justified their inclusive table community with pagans by reference to Jesus' own praxis and the fact that many non-Jews had become disciples of Jesus.The same difficult problem is discussed theologically in the pre-Markan miracle story in Mark 7:24-30. Surprisingly, the major theologian and spokesperson for such a table sharing with gentiles is a woman. " page 136

11) "Women were the first non-Jews to become members of the Jesus movement." page 138

12) "Galilean women were not only decisive for the extension of the Jesus movement to the gentiles but also for the very continuation of this movement to gentiles but also for the very continuation of this movement after Jesus' arrest and execution. Jesus' Galilean women disciples did not flee after his arrest but stayed in Jerusalem for his execution and burial. These Galilean women were also the first to articulate their experience of the powerful goodness of God who did not leave the crucified Jesus in the grave but raised him from the dead. The early Christian confession that "Jesus the Nazarene who was executed on the cross was raised" is, according to the pre-Markan resurrection story of Mark 16:1-6, 8a, revealed in a vision first to the Galilean women disciples of Jesus.

In all likelihood, the Galilean disciples of Jesus fled after his arrest from Jerusalem and went back to Galilee. Because of their visionary-ecstatic experiences, the women who remained in the capital came to the conviction that God had vindicated Jesus and his ministry. They, therefore, were empowered to continue the movement and work of Jesus, the risen Lord." page 138

13) Regarding marriage and divorce: "As long as patriarchy is operative, divorce is commanded out of necessity. One is not allowed to abolish it within the structures of patriarchy, However, Jesus insists, God did not create or intend patriarchy but created persons as male and female human beings. It is not woman who is given into the power of man in order to continue "his" house and family line, but it is man who shall sever connections with his own patriarchal family and "the two shall become one sarx." Sarx ("flesh") has a broad meaning: body, person, human being, everyone, human nature, human descent, that which is natural or earthly, human life in general, social relationships, earthly history. As opposed to spirit, flesh can also mean earthly, sinful human attitudes and behavior, but it never has solely sexual connotations. Therefore, the passage is best translated as "the two persons- man and woman- enter into a common human life and social relationship because they are created equals." The text does not allude to the myth of an androgynous primal man but to the equal partnership of

man and woman in human marriage intended and made possible by the creator God." page 143

14) "Jesus' response states flatly that they are wrong. They do not know either the Scriptures or the power of God, because they do not recognize that "in the world" of the living God patriarchal marriage does not exist either for men or for women. They neither marry nor are given in marriage but are "like the angels in heaven." The last expression is often understood to mean that their being as angels are" implies asexuality or freedom from sexual differentiation and sexual intercourse. There is no doubt that this interpretation has claimed a long tradition but it has no basis in the text. The eschatological being of men and women "like the angels or heavenly messengers" must be understood with reference to the first part of the sentence. It is not that sexual differentiation and sexuality do not exist in the "world" of God, but that "patriarchal marriage is no more," because its function in maintaining and continuing patriarchal economic and religious structures is no longer necessary. This is what it means to live and be "like the angels" who live in "the world" of God." page 144

15) "In God's world women and men no longer relate to each other in terms of patriarchal dominance and dependence, but as persons who live in the presence of the living God. This controversy, which reflects the social world of Palestine and of the Jesus movement, ends therefore with the flat statement that the Sadducees have "erred much" in assuming that the structures of patriarchy are unquestionably a dimension of God's world as well. So, too, all subsequent Christians have erred in maintaining oppressive patriarchal structures." page 145

16) "Gerd Theissen has pointed to the a-familial ethos of the Jesus movement in Palestine. However, by choosing Luke 14:26 (Q) as the oldest text for this contention he turns the Jesus movement into a movement of itinerant charismatic men who have left not only house and children but also wives, while local communities of "sympathizers" did not live such a radical ethos. Although he never clearly spells out the assumption that the wandering charismatics were male, nevertheless he unreflectively suggests that this was the case: "Probably many families had the same feelings about their sons who had joined the Jesus movement as did the family of Jesus . . . the tradition says nothing about the way in which the families who have been abandoned are to find a substitute for the earning power which they have lost." " Those left behind include the house, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, children, lands, and finally, wives. page 145

17) "Without question the discipleship of Jesus does not respect patriarchal family bonds, and the Jesus movement in Palestine severely intrudes into the peace of the patriarchal household. To claim that such a radical a-familial ethos is asked only of the male wandering charismatics but not of the local sympathizers is a serious misreading of the texts.

A similar critique of "natural" family claims and bonds is expressed in the double corrective macarism or beatitude in Luke 11:27f- a text which Luke derived either from Q or his special source (SL). A woman in the crowd cries out: "Happy [or blessed] the womb that bore you, and the breasts you sucked." But (corrective) he said, "Happy rather those who hear the word of God and keep it." Faithful discipleship, not biological motherhood, is the eschatological calling of women." page 146

18) "The saying of Jesus in v. 35 [Mark 3:35], "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother," which could have been circulated originally without the narrative context of vv. 31-34, is similar to Luke 11:28. Those who live the gracious goodness of God are Jesus' true family, which includes brothers, sisters, and mothers, but, significantly enough, no fathers. The exclusion of fathers from the "true family" of Jesus cannot be explained by biographical references or by reference to God as the true father of Jesus, since Mark 10:30 also omits fathers. However, "mothers and sisters," that is, women, are clearly included among the followers of Jesus." page 147

19) "This new "family" of equal discipleship, however, has no room for "fathers." Whereas "fathers are mentioned among those left behind, they are not included in the new kinship which disciples acquire "already now in this time." Insofar as the new "family" of Jesus has no room for "fathers," it implicitly rejects their power and status and thus claims that in the messianic community all patriarchal structures are abolished." page 147

20) "As a feminist vision, the basileia vision of Jesus calls all women without exception to wholeness and selfhood, as well as to solidarity with those women who are the impoverished, the maimed, and outcasts of our society and church." page 153

Return to the Table of Contents

5. The Early Christian Missionary Movement: Equality in the Power of the Spirit

1) "That more prominent women than men became Christians is especially reflected in the second- and third-century attacks against Christians, which speak of the problem of these women often being forced to marry pagans or to live with Christian slaves in a kind of "common-law marriage." Since this was prohibited on Roman civil law, it was acknowledged by the church only by Callistus, who was himself a slave before becoming bishop of Rome at the beginning of the third century." page 167

2) "The exceptional contribution of prominent women of wealth and social status to the Jewish as well as Christian missionary movements is more and more acknowledged in scholarship." page 169

3) "The rich convert to Christianity, therefore, probably understood herself/himself as entering a club, and expected to exercise the influence of the patron on this club. Without question the house church, as a voluntary organization, was structured according to this patron-client relationship." page 181

4) "Why would rich persons like Phoebe join the Christian movement? . . . Well-educated women in particular, with independent resources of wealth, could develop leadership and have influence in this movement - options denied them in society at large. " page 182

5) "It is true, that by joining religious associations, clubs, or the Christian movement women did not achieve such political influence; they did gain religious influence and power, however. By joining the Christian movement and by building up the church in her house, a women could derive religious authority and personal self-worth, both of which compensated well for the fact that the Christian community did not honor her as a rich person.

As mentioned earlier, Gerd Theissen has argued that the early Christian missionary movement outside Palestine was not in conflict with its society but was well integrated into it. The radicalism of the Jesus movement was assimilated by the urban Hellenistic communities into a family-style love patriarchy, which perpetuated the hierarchical relationships of the patriarchal family in a softened, milder form. He overlooks the fact, however, that the egalitarian community structures of private collegia or cultic associations provided the model for the early Christian movement in the Greco-Roman world, not the patriarchal family! This movement not only accorded women and slaves equal standing and the possibility of patronage, but- as a religious cult from the Orient- was suspect to the Greco-Roman authorities. Consisting of equal associations it stood in conflict with Greco-Roman society just as the Jesus movement with respect to that of Palestinian." page 183

6) "In conclusion: The Pauline literature and Acts still allows us to recognize that women were among the most prominent missionaries and leaders in the early Christian movement. . . . True, we have only occasional remarks in Acts or the letters that allow us to glimpse the leadership and ministry of women in the Christian movement. Yet, the same is true for male leadership and ministry, as we have seen in the example of Barnabas. One could say that the more independent a woman missionary was from the Pauline mission the less chance she had to be remembered in history, since only the Pauline letters break the silence about the earliest beginnings of the Christian missionary movement. However, our sources still allow us to see that this movement was not structured after the Greco-Roman patriarchal household and did not espouse the love patriarchy by which the later church adapted itself to the structure of its society." pages 183, 184

7) "Yet Paul does not understand the crucifixion in concrete political terms as the outcome of the conflict of Jesus' vision with that of the established powers of this world. This fact has far-reaching consequences for Pauline theology, which attempts to spell out the newness of Christian life in the context of history in order to prevent the evaporation of the Christian vision into a mere dream of fanciful ideology. However, whereas Jesus died on the cross because of his deviance from, and opposition to, the religious-social order of his time, the cross of Jesus becomes, in Paul's' thought, so universalized that it applies to al human frailty and mortality.

The Pauline school uses the cross as a symbol to justify religiously the suffering of those oppressed by the present order of slavery or patriarchy (thus 1 Peter and Colossians)." page 187

8) "While the Jesus movement, like John, understood Jesus as the messenger and prophet of divine Sophia, the wisdom christology of the Christian missionary movement sees him as divine Sophia herself." page 189

9) "Gal 3:28 is a key expression, not of Pauline theology but of the theological self-understanding of the Christian missionary movement which had far-reaching historical impact." page 199

Return to the Table of Contents

6. No Male and Female: Galatians 3:28- Alternative Vision and Pauline Modification

1) 'Hewett explicitly approves Crouch's judgment that the household-code's concern "was with the excesses of women and slaves," which threatened the "stability of the Pauline churches." However, in Colossians "the balance between equality and sexual differentiation is lost" in the argument against androgyny. Paul then "was struggling to maintain two seemingly contradictory points: differentiation of sexual identity on the one hand and equality of honor and role on the other hand." "page 206

2) "This struggle of Paul for equality between gentile and Jewish Christians had important ramifications for Jewish and gentile Christian women alike. If it was no longer circumcision but baptism which was the primary rite of initiation, then women became full members of the people of God with the same rights and duties." page 210

3) "As such, Gal 3:28 does not assert that there are no longer men and women in Christ, but that patriarchal marriage- and sexual relationships between male and female- is no longer constitutive of the new community in Christ. Irrespective of their procreative capacities and of the social roles connected with them, persons

will be full members of the Christian movement in and through baptism. This interpretation is also supported by the noncanonical tradition." page 211

4) "Gal 3:28 not only advocates the abolition of religious-cultural divisions and of the domination and exploitation wrought by institutional slavery but also of domination based on sexual divisions. It repeats with different categories and words that within the Christian community no structures of dominance can be tolerated. Gal 3:28 is therefore best understood as a communal Christian self-definition rather than a statement about the baptized individual. It proclaims that in the Christian community all distinctions of religion, race, class, nationality, and gender are insignificant." page 213

5) "As an alternative association which accorded women- and slave- initiates equal status and roles, the Christian missionary movement was a conflict movement which stood in tension with the institutions of slavery and the patriarchal family. Such conflict could arise not only within the community but even more within the larger society, since Christians admitted to their membership women as well as slaves who continued to live in pagan marriages and households. This tension between the alternative Christian community and the larger society had to cause conflicts that demanded resolution, often in different ways. The Pauline exhortations and the household-code tradition within the New Testament testify to these tensions." page 216

6) Regarding marriage of Christian women with pagan men: "However, "in Judaism it is invariably the woman who is consecrated as spouse by the man. . . . His [Paul's] extension of consecration is totally untraditional." Paul thus ascribes here to Christian wives the same consecrating power bestowed traditionally on husbands.

However, Paul's insistence that the pagan partner had the final decision about the continuance of the marriage must have been more difficult for Christian women than for men. Moreover, the early church seems not to have adhered to it. The apocryphal Acts are full of stories about women who became converts to Christianity and left their husbands. Moreover, more upper-class women than men seem to have converted to Christianity, since this is one of the constant points of attack by pagan writers against Christians. The apologist Justin, writing one hundred years after Paul, still knows of the problem. He tells of a Roman matron converted to Christianity who, against the advice of her Christian counselors, divorced her husband because she could no longer share his licentious ways of living. Subsequently, she was accused in court by her husband as a Christian. When she asked the emperor to postpone her trial until she had ordered her estate and economic affairs, her husband also denounced her teacher Ptolemy as a Christian. This case indicates how difficult it must have been for Christian women to participate in the pagan lifestyle and social obligations of their households. On the other hand, poor women who became Christians risked being divorced by their husbands and, as a result, losing their economic sustenance. Paul tells them

not to prohibit such a decision by the unbelieving husband. By leaving the decision to the unbelieving spouse, for missionary reasons, Paul sacrifices the right of the Christian to determine his or her marital status. This is even more astonishing since Paul on the whole prefers the marriage-free Christian life over the married state." pages 222 -223

7) "It is therefore important to note that Paul's advice to remain free from the marriage bond was a frontal assault on the intentions of existing law and the general cultural ethos, especially since it was given to people who lived in the urban centers of the Roman empire." page 225 (see pages 223-225 for explanation)

8) "The community rule of 1 Cor 14:34-36 presupposes that, within the Christian worship assembly, wives had dared to question other women's husbands or point out some mistakes of their own during the congregational interpreting of the Scriptures and of prophecy. Such behavior was against all traditional custom and law. However, the text does not say that wives should subordinate themselves either to the community leadership or to their husbands. It asks simply that they keep quiet and remain subdued in the assembly of the community.

Paul's major concern, however, is not the behavior of women but the protection of the Christian community. He wanted to prevent the Christian community from being mistaken for one of the orgiastic, secret, oriental cults that undermined public order and decency." page 232

9) "In Conclusion: In the preceding analysis I have attempted to argue that the Pauline injunctions for women in 1 Corinthians should be understood in the context of Paul's argument against orgiastic behavior in the worship of the community. On the other hand, 11:2-16 does not deny women's prophecy and prayer in the worship assembly but insists that in the Christian community women and men are equal. They are not to exhibit in their behavior the symbols of behavior of orgiastic worship. The community rule of 14:33-36, on the other hand, has a specific situation in mind, namely, the speaking and questioning of wives in the public worship assembly. Here, as in 7:34 and 9:5, Paul appears to limit the active participation of wives in the "affairs of the Lord." His concluding rhetorical questions indicate that he does not expect his regulation to be accepted without protest by the Corinthian community which knows of wives as leading Christian apostles and missionaries. Yet Paul is more concerned that order and propriety be preserved so that an outsider cannot accuse the Christians of religious madness. In both passages, then, Paul places a limit and qualification on the pneumatic participation of women in the worship service of the community. We do not know whether the Corinthian women and men accepted his limitations and qualifications. However, the love patriarchalism of the deuterio-Pauline household codes and the injunctions of the Pastorals are further developments of Paul's argument, developments that will lead in the future to the gradual exclusion of all

women from ecclesial office and to the gradual patriarchalization of the whole church." page 233

Return to the Table of Contents

Part III: Tracing the Struggles: Patriarchy and Ministry

7. Christian Mission and the Patriarchal Order of the Household

1) "As we have seen, the early Christian vision of the discipleship of equals practiced in the house church attracted especially slaves and women to Christianity but also caused tensions and conflicts with the dominant cultural ethos of the patriarchal household." page 251

2) "What comes to the fore in the household code form of the New Testament is the option for "an ethically softened or humanized notion of domination and rule." " page 254

3) "Western misogyny has its root in the rules for the household as the model of the state." page 257

4) "It is apparent that the author conceives of the household code as a form of apologia for the Christian faith. However, unlike Josephus or Philo who write such defenses for the attackers of the Jews, the author addresses Christians, who are powerless and without legal recourse, urging them to adapt to the *politeuma* of Rome and its ancestral customs. In this way, the author does not lessen the tension between the Christian community and the patriarchal society, since this tension is created precisely by the abandonment of the religion of the *paterfamilias*. The author wants to strengthen their rejection of the "old religion," but he does so by relinquishing the new freedom of those slaves and women who became members of the new priestly people." page 262

5) "The wives' submission and quiet behavior is a strategy for survival in this precarious situation ("let nothing terrify you") but it also has missionary interests at heart. By submitting to the order of domination, wives might win over their husbands to Christianity "without saying a word." " page 262

6) "The accusation of second-century pagan writers that Christianity destroys the household by attracting especially women, slaves, and young people can thus not just be pushed aside as unfounded slander but must be taken seriously. Nisbet points this out with respect to women.

There is some ground in fact for regarding this religion during the first century in any event, as involved in a kind of women's liberation: from the powerful patriarchal and masculine orientation of the traditional family. To succeed in disengaging women from their family ties. . . . it was necessary at one and the

same time to denigrate the family and to proffer Christianity itself a family - the highest of all types of families." page 263

7) "The patriarchal familia was the nucleus of the state. Not enthusiasm but conversion of the subordinate members of the house who were supposed to share in the religion of the paterfamilias constituted a revolutionary subversive threat.

Judaism had been attacked for its infringement upon the religious patriarchal prerogatives of the paterfamilias, insofar as it admitted slaves and women of pagan households as godfearers and converts. How deeply the Romans resented the social disruption wrought by proselytism is evident in the following statement of Tacitus:

For the worst rascals among other peoples, renouncing their ancestral religions, always kept sending tribute and contributions to Jerusalem. . . . Those who are converted to their ways follow the same practice [i. e., of hating other people, being immoral, adopting circumcision], and the earliest lesson they receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account. [History V.5] " page 264

8) "Whenever slaves or wives converted to Judaism, to the Isis cult, or to Christianity, the order of the household was endangered and with it, therefore, the political order of the state. The Isis cult, in particular, was considered a threat to Roman civil life because Isis was proclaimed as the one who makes women and men equal." page 264

9) "That Christians were suspected of political subversion and of threatening the societal order and institutions of the patriarchal house comes again and again to the fore in pagan attacks against Christianity in the second and third century. Even Jesus was accused of this." page 265

10) "Christian slaves and wives, by being submissive and obedient to their "lords," can prove that the slanders against Christians are unjustified. Christians are not enemies of the Roman political order, but they support it.

Naturally this "defense" could not establish that Christians did not disrupt the Greco-Roman order of the patriarchal house and state, since, by abandoning the religion of their masters and husbands, they in fact did so. However, this strategy for survival gradually introduced the patriarchal- societal ethos of the time into the church. As a result, in the long run it replaced the genuine Christian vision of equality, by which women and slaves had been attracted to become Christians. However, whereas in pseudo-Peter this patriarchal order of domination does not apply to either Christian marriage or to the Christian community, the letter to the Ephesians interprets Christian marriage in light of it, and the Pastoral Epistles identify it with the structures of the Christian community." page 266

11) "The theological and christological utilization of the patriarchal submission pattern leads to a dualistic ecclesial praxis: true religious women are no longer women but have progressed to the "perfect man," while Christian married women remain "women" and therefore have to suffer the "curse" of patriarchal marriage. Nevertheless, within the context of the patriarchal church even those women who had become like "males" could not exercise leadership functions because they were still women. Since it was restricted to the soul, the discipleship of equals could neither transform patriarchal marriage nor prevent the formation of a patriarchal church and the elimination of women from its leadership." page 278

Return to the Table of Contents

8. The Patriarchal Household of God and the Ekklesia of Women

1) "The struggle against Montanism, however, indicates that what was at stake was not a doctrinal issue but a competition between radically different church structures and Christian self-understanding. The Montanists, as well as many other groups, stressed the authority of the Spirit, that is, the authority of the prophets or ascetics, over and against the authority of noncharismatic local officers." pages 302-303

2) "Equality is to be achieved through altruism, through the placing of interests of others and of the community first.

Whereas post-Pauline writers advocate adaptation to their society in order to lessen tensions with that society and thus to minimize the suffering and persecution of Christians, the writer of Mark's Gospel insists on the necessity of suffering and makes it quite clear that such suffering must not be avoided, especially not by adapting the structures of Christian community and leadership to Greco-Roman structures of dominance and submission." page 318-319

3) "Scholars agree that Mark's portrayal of the leading male disciples is rather critical and almost negative. Not only do they misunderstand Jesus and his mission, they also misconstrue his nature and identity. Finally, they betray, deny, and abandon him during the time of his arrest and execution. Despite Jesus' special instructions and severe reprimands, they fail to comprehend both Jesus' suffering messiahship and his call to suffering discipleship. While some exegetes attempt to soften the critical features of the Markan portrayal of the leading male disciples, others suggest that this redactional criticism aims at correcting a false christology on the part of Mark's "opponents" who understand Jesus either as a great miracle worker or a political Messiah, but reject Jesus' teaching on suffering. Such a christology might have been advocated by the leadership of the church in Jerusalem, but Mark advocates for his community a different christology.

Such a characterization of Mark's "opponents" in terms of a false christology fails to account sufficiently for the fact that the three predications of Jesus' passion are not ends in themselves but climax in the call to suffering discipleship and domination-free leadership. What is at stake is right leadership. This interpretation is supported by the whole Markan context which addresses other problems of communal life and Christian praxis. The christological statements in this section on discipleship function theologically to undergird the Markan Jesus' insistence on suffering discipleship and ministerial service. Domination-free leadership in the community and being prepared to undergo sufferings and persecutions are interconnected.

The misunderstanding and incomprehension of suffering discipleship exemplified by the twelve turns into betrayal and denial in the passion narrative. Judas betrays Jesus, Peter denies him, and the 11 male disciples abandon him and flee into hiding. But while the circle of the twelve male disciples does not follow Jesus on his way to the cross for fear of risking their lives, the circle of women disciples exemplifies true discipleship. " page 319

"Though the twelve have forsaken Jesus, betrayed and denied him, the women disciples, by contrast, are found under the cross, risking their own lives and safety. That they are well aware of the danger of being arrested and executed as followers of a political insurrectionist crucified by the Romans is indicated in the remark that the women "were looking from afar." They are thus characterized as Jesus' true "relatives." " page 320

"A similar indirect polemic against the male disciples is also indicated in the beginning and end of the passion narrative. It is a woman who recognizes Jesus' suffering messiahship and, in a prophetic-sign action, anoints Jesus for his burial, while "some" of the disciples reprimand her. Further, it is a servant woman who challenges Peter to act on his promise not to betray Jesus. In doing so she unmasks and exposes him for what he is, a betrayer. Finally, two women, Mary of Magdala and Mary (the mother) of Jesus, witness the place where Jesus was buried (15:47), and three women receive the news of his resurrection (16:1-8). Thus at the end of Mark's Gospel the women disciples emerge as examples of suffering discipleship and true leadership. They are the apostolic eye-witnesses of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection." page 321

4) "While Mark's instructions on discipleship center primarily around the necessity of suffering messiahship and suffering discipleship, the Johannine discipleship instructions focus on the motif of altruistic love and service, though this topic is also found in Mark's discipleship instructions." page 323

"The Johannine Jesus celebrates his Last Supper not just with the twelve but with all the disciples." page 325

Referring to the resurrection story in John: "In contrast to Mark 16:8 we are unambiguously told that Mary Magdalene went to the disciples and announced to them: "I have seen the Lord." She communicated the message to them which he had given to her. Thus she is the primary apostolic witness to the resurrection." page 332

5) "Since the tradition of Mary Magdalene's primacy in apostolic witness challenged the Peterine tradition, it is remarkable that it has survived in two independent streams of the Gospel tradition. Moreover, later apocryphal writings - as we have seen - reflect the theological debate over the apostolic primacy of Mary Magdalene and Peter explicitly." page 332

6) "Most of our New Testament literature was written in the last third of the first century and addressed Christian communities of that time. These communities seem to have experienced tensions, troubles, and even persecutions from their Jewish as well as their gentile environment. Although the post-Pauline literature seeks to lessen these tensions between the Christian community and Greco-Roman society by adapting the alternative Christian missionary movement to the patriarchal structures and mores of their Greco-Roman society and culture, the primary Gospel writers insist that such suffering and persecutions cannot be avoided. Whereas the authors of the Epistles appeal to the authority of Paul or Peter to legitimize their injunctions for submission and adaptation to Greco-Roman patriarchal structures, the writers of the primary Gospels appeal to Jesus himself to support their alternative stress on altruistic love and service, which is demanded not from the least and the slaves but from the leaders and the masters - and I might add, not only from the women but also from the men.

While - for apologetic reasons - the post-Pauline and post-Petrine writers seek to limit women's leadership roles in the Christian community to roles which are culturally and religiously acceptable, the evangelists called Mark and John highlight the alternative character of the Christian community, and therefore accord women apostolic and ministerial leadership." page 334