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Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: Within or Beyond the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus?

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Abstract

The quests for the historical Jesus have seen a number of developments in the ways in which we study Jesus, and in the conclusions we come to about his life and influence. One of these developments has been the increased number of feminist publications, in part driven by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Schüssler Fiorenza's work looks to uncover the reality of Christianity's kyriarchal origins, and to encourage her peers to engage in historical Jesus research that is self-evaluating. These concerns are also evident in the work of other Third Quest feminist researchers who recognise the negative impact of continued patriarchal publications on the lives of women today. Through an evaluation of Schüssler Fiorenza's work on fundamentalism, feminism, and anti-Semitism, this dissertation situates Schüssler Fiorenza's work and that of other feminist researchers within the quests and asks whether the Third Quest was ready for the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. The reformative and critical work of Schüssler Fiorenza, like that of her fellow feminist researchers, often goes uncited, despite its value in problematising historical Jesus research. By comparing the work of prominent Third Questers with that of Schüssler Fiorenza et al., this dissertation finds cause to propose the existence of a Third Quest Critical-Stream, whereby feminist researchers not only contribute to malestream scholarship but also engage in work that looks to inform and improve the state of the Third Quest.

1. Introduction

Beginning the final year of my undergraduate degree in Theology and Religious Studies, I enrolled on a module called "The Life and Teaching of Jesus." Having already taken numerous New Testament modules, I was confident that I had the information I needed to get a good grade – this felt like a "safe" choice for me. Fast-forward one week, and the first seminar reading was the introduction to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation.*[1] My eyes were opened to a new aspect of research that I hadn't yet encountered – *women recognising that historically we've had a bad deal, but hoping that through improved biblical interpretation, it might not be too late to make up for it.* I arrived at my first seminar of the year excited to discuss my newfound interest with my peers. But alas, not everybody had enjoyed the article as much as I had; in fact, nobody had. As I listened to Schüssler Fiorenza's work being criticised for being "too engaged," "whiny," and "angry," I realised that I should have expected this reaction – this was a viewpoint that we hadn't encountered before, and for some students, it directly contradicted their beliefs and made for difficult reading. After class, I read reviews of Schüssler Fiorenza's article, and found that my classroom experience was similar to that of the wider community: Schüssler Fiorenza's work seemed to make people uncomfortable. I asked myself why this was, what was it about Schüssler Fiorenza's work that made it so distinctive from the quests for the historical Jesus, and why wasn't everyone as excited about her proposed methods as I was? These questions led me to this dissertation, which provides a selective summary of Schüssler Fiorenza's methodological contributions to Jesus research, an analysis of her uneasy place within the so-called Third Quest for the historical Jesus, and a reflection on the state of the field from a standpoint of intersectional feminist theology.

In the coming chapters I will consider the following:

1. The wider context of the Third Quest, including its key figures and themes. This chapter uses the Quest model as its frame of reference for discussing the work of historical Jesus researchers. It is by no means a detailed analysis of every piece of historical Jesus research since 1980; instead it looks to identify key themes in contemporary research and give examples of ways in which they have been studied.

2. This will then move to an analysis of Schüssler Fiorenza's work. I have attempted to categorise her work into seven key themes which I have seen mentioned across much of her published

[1] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (London: Continuum, 2001), 1-29.

work. Following this, I will show how each of these themes comes together to produce Schüssler Fiorenza's distinctive approach to historical Jesus research.

3. Finally, I have looked at how Schüssler Fiorenza's work shows similarity and distinction to that of other historical Jesus researchers. This chapter gives particular consideration to the work of feminist researchers who have used similar techniques to Schüssler Fiorenza, in order to come to equally similar conclusions about the state of historical Jesus research.

As such, this dissertation will attempt to answer the question, is Schüssler Fiorenza a Third Quester? My research has indicated that Schüssler Fiorenza's acknowledgment of hermeneutics, along with her awareness of the roles of context and impact in creating liberating or damaging historical Jesus research, is unparalleled in the malestream Third Quest. As such, this dissertation proposes that Schüssler Fiorenza's place in historical Jesus research would be better understood in relation to a Third Quest Critical Stream – a space in which feminist researchers in particular, are able to contribute to "traditional" historical Jesus research whilst continuing to be reflective and critical scholars.

2. Third Questers

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the work produced in the "Third Quest" period.[2] Broadly put, this period has seen a number of developments in the way in which historical Jesus research is conducted, and in the conclusions that are drawn. In this section I will explore a number of themes that have been covered in the Third Quest, including advancements in the study of Judaism, debates over method, and the significance of embedded biases. There appears to be consensus across most post-1980 historical Jesus research that a number of researchers are regarded as the most influential among the Third Questers. Helen K. Bond neatly summarises the work of these figures in her *Guide for the Perplexed.*[3] Key recurring names include Geza Vermes, E.P Sanders, Dale Allison, John Dominic Crossan, N.T Wright, Richard Horsley, J.P Meier, David Flusser, and J.D.G Dunn. The work of these authors will be addressed regarding the above themes, in order to provide a picture of the Third Quest, its developments and its downfalls.

2.2 Jesus the Jew

Undoubtedly one of the most significant changes in historical Jesus research in the last 30 years has been recognition of the first-century Galilean Judaism that was part of the community surrounding Jesus. As Anthony Le Donne writes, "from the 1970s to early 2000s Jesus' Jewishness was reconsidered, foregrounded, marginalized, and accepted as consensus."[4] The desire to embed Jesus research into Second-Temple Judaism has been a key strength of the Third Quest, with Meier noting

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[2] It should be noted early on that there has been some backlash towards the use of the 'quest' language in recent years. Whilst I accept that it might be the source of some "confusion and disagreement," I maintain that the concept of the 'quest for the historical Jesus' is useful in characterising some aspects of historical Jesus research, and I would argue that this makes historical Jesus research more accessible (Fernando Bermejo-Rubio, "The Fiction of the Three Quests: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Historical Paradigm," *JSHJ* 7, no. 3 (2009), 211-253). I agree that the naming of the "Old Quest" and "No Quest" are inaccurate and unfair, but to talk about the Third Quest is not to be complicit in this ignorance, nor is it to agree that "the first part of the twentieth century is a period devoid of research." Furthermore, when characterising research within the context of the quests, my intention is not to say, for instance, that historical research has *only* been used in the Third Quest, or that the Third Quest is *only* interested in historical research as opposed to theological. Instead it is to note that there has been a growing trend in historical research which has now become associated with a certain period of time. Schüssler Fiorenza is not the first to challenge researchers to look beyond what is recorded by biblical authors; more than 200 years ago Joseph Priestley was known for his "egalitarian tendency which sought to bring women and the socially marginalised within the fold" (Jonathan C. P. Birch, "Revolutionary Contexts for the Quest: Jesus in the Rhetoric and Methods of Early Modern Intellectual History," *JSHJ* 17 (2019): 35-80). This is not to say that Joseph Priestley is a "Third Quester" or that Schüssler Fiorenza's work is more suited to the "Old Quest." Reference to the "Third Questers" in this thesis is intended to juxtapose the work of Schüssler Fiorenza with that of her contemporaries in order to show how her work might be better suited to a 'Third Quest Critical-Stream.'

[3] Helen K. Bond, *The Historical Jesus: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark: 2012), 22-35.

[4] Anthony Le Donne, "The Third Quest in Retrospect," *JSHJ* 14 (2016): 1-5.

this as one of the main achievements of the period, and James G. Crossley opening his 2013 article with the statement "It has now become so obvious that it is a Good Thing to reconstruct a Jewish Jesus that it is simply part of scholarly common sense."[5] Vermes makes significant contributions in this area in his trilogy *Jesus the Jew*.[6] As Vermes looks to reverse centuries of anti-Semitic prejudice in historical Jesus research, he not only highlights the Jewishness that permeates the historical Jesus' concerns and audiences.[7] Vermes also stresses the importance of bringing in early rabbinic literature and other roughly contemporaneous Jewish sources appropriately, in order to learn more about the context of the historical Jesus, and the early Jesus movements.[8] In affirming the usefulness of such sources for modern historical Jesus scholarship, Vermes' work takes further steps to improve the interdisciplinarity of historical Jesus research. Vermes does not just label Jesus "the Jew" as though this made everything clear; rather, recognising the depth and breadth of Judaism, Vermes considers the diversity of early Jewish expressions in order to further understand Jesus' place within first-century Galilean Judaism: "Jesus did not belong among the Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots or Gnostics, but was one of the holy miracle-workers of Galilee."[9] Vermes' work indicates that despite earlier beliefs that Jesus' life and teaching were radically distinct from Judaism (perpetuated in part by the criteria of double dissimilarity), and that discrimination from Jewish authorities led to Jesus' death, Jesus in fact was well integrated in a first-century Jewish landscape, and rarely disobeyed or overtly flouted Jewish customs.[10]

Dunn also embeds historical Jesus research in the study of early Judaism. For Dunn, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was essential for understanding the diversity of Second Temple Judaism; he writes: "more than anything else [the Dead Sea Scrolls] have broken open the idea of a monolithic, monochrome Judaism, particularly as set over against the distinctiveness of newly emerging Christianity."[11] The scope for interdisciplinarity in conducting historical Jesus research is significant, particularly when studying the impact of Judaism; some Third Quest work now involves engaging in archaeological studies, such as that of Sean Freyne whose work identified evidence of an observant Jewish community in Galilee through the presence of many stone jars, *miqvaoth* (ritual baths) and

[5] John P. Meier, "The Present State of the 'Third Quest' for the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain," *Biblica* 80, no. 4 (1999): 459-487; James G. Crossley, "A Very Jewish Jesus: Perpetuating the Myth of Superiority," *JSHJ* 11, no. 2 (2013): 111-112.
[6] P. J. J Botha notes that Vermes is key to the growth in Jewish Jesus studies. P.J.J Botha, "Jesus the Jew: Some Reflections on Current Investigations," *Religion and Theology* 1.2 (1994): 187-190.
[7] Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM Press, 1998), 30.
[8] Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 7.
[9] Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 223.
[10] Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 35.
[11] James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 89.

other indicators of a community keen to adhere to "purity concerns."[12] The work of Vermes and Freyne, to name only a few scholars who have contributed to this field, has been significant in diversifying both the pictures of Jesus that the Third Quest produces, but also the methods that are used to get there.[13]

2.3 Objectivity and subjectivity

A further emphasis that appears across the work of these frequently-cited Third Questers is on the inevitability of subjectivity. Scholars of the Third Quest address a perceived tension between desiring to conduct objective research, but acknowledging that subjectivity will always be present. For Crossan, objectivity is "unattainable;" "my methodology does not claim a spurious objectivity, because almost every step demands a scholarly judgment and informed decision."[14] Wright disputes Crossan's rejection of objective research, claiming Crossan's *The Historical Jesus* "appeals to the old 'objectivist' values that he explicitly repudiates," particularly pointing to one of the book's headline claims, namely, that it is "The first comprehensive determination of who Jesus was, what he did, what he said."[15] Wright is correct to point out Crossan's seemingly hypocritical claims; with the book's endorsements indicating that Crossan has undertaken a quest for proof, his continued criticism of objectivity seems insincere. Like Crossan, Dunn, too, argues that to take an observation "from data to fact" "involves interpretation, [and] involves the interpreter, so that even if the observation of data can be likened in some measure to the old ideal of scientific research, the act and process in interpretation cannot."[16] For many Third Questers, the possibility of objectivity has, at least in theory, long been discarded, but in the work of others, the appeal to objective scientific research remains an important feature: "It should not be beyond the capabilities of an educated man to sit down and with a mind empty of prejudice read the accounts of Mark, Matthew and Luke as though for the first time."[17] However, publications in the last ten years have shown an increasing acceptance, and perhaps concern, that very little can be known about the life of Jesus. Arguments such as the pessimistic: "finding the historical Jesus is hopeless" and "the past is by definition bygone and lost," serve to

[12] Sean Freyne, "Galilee, Jesus and the Contribution of Archaeology," *The Expository Times* 119, no. 12 (2008): 55-78.
[13] Botha, for instance, also points to the influential work of Flusser, Sanders, Segal and Zeitlin. Botha, "Jesus the Jew," 186.
[14] John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark,1993), xxxiv.
[15] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 55.
[16] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered,* 108-9.
[17] Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 19.

highlight the reality of historical Jesus research in the Third Quest, and the realisation that every picture of the historical Jesus is an interpretation, as this next section will discuss in more detail.[18]

2.4 Hermeneutics and bias

Regardless of researchers' claims and assertions, the role of hermeneutics and approach in conjuring the lives of Jesus is, in my opinion, undeniable. The continued reference and occasional objection to the metaphor of reconstructing Jesus in one's own image (the "deep well") is central to understanding the significance of hermeneutics in the Third Quest.[19] Wright maintains that rather than seeing his own face at the bottom of the well, the face he ostensibly sees is one that is "disturbingly unlike my own."[20] This, he argues on the basis that the Jesus he portrays in his work is not "a university lecturer or an Anglican priest." However, I would argue that the well analogy (which Wright refers to as an "old jibe") is not about creating a Jesus *literally* in one's image, and as such is not about profession, but about beliefs and characteristics, similarities which Wright (perhaps with good reason) fails to draw attention to. Wright claims that his reconstruction is not a self-portrait, but that he wishes it were. [21] This is an inadvertent admission of hermeneutical bias, a bias which makes the potential for a self-portrait all the more likely, particularly considering Wright doesn't appear to have understood (or feigns incomprehension of) the "old jibe" in the first place.

Allison, on the other hand, freely admits to conjuring a Jesus who looks like him.[22] Similarly, Sanders discloses that he is not "neutrally canvassing the material" when conducting research into the life of the historical Jesus.[23] Sanders goes further in his admission, moving towards a pointed critique of his peers: "It is amazing that so many New Testament scholars write books about Jesus in which they discover that he agrees with their version of Christianity."[24] In his very small collection of "almost indisputable facts," Sanders' work appears to be rooted in a belief in the possibility of objective research, but as he develops his argument Sanders clarifies that he is simply looking to present "a good account (not the only one)" of the life of Jesus.[25] Sanders acknowledges the "very large number of hypotheses" regarding the life of Jesus, and as such challenges historians to be "self-suspecting" in

[18] Zeba Crook, "Matthew, Memory Theory and the New No Quest," *HTS Theological Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 1-11; Jens Schroter, "Memory, Theories of History, and the Reception of Jesus," *JSHJ* 16 (2018): 85-107.
[19] George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Crossroads* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1913), 44.
[20] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* xv.
[21] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* xv.
[22] Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 16-17.
[23] E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London, SCM Press, 1985), 13.
[24] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 330.
[25] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism,* 11; 58.

their reconstructions.[26] Like Sanders, Crossan finds the diverse number of Jesus' produced by historical Jesus researchers "an academic embarrassment" and links this plethora of constructions to his view that "historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, to do autobiography and call it biography."[27]

The significant number of Jesuses that have been produced is clearly a topic of concern for authors in the Third Quest, perhaps because in criticising the range of representations, they invalidate their own interpretations. However, whether historical Jesus researchers have actually created such a diverse array of Jesuses is doubtful. If scholars' reconstructions of Jesus are indeed based on the reflections of themselves at the bottom of a well, or rooted in autobiographical work, then it is quite unlikely that the Jesuses produced are all that diverse in character or action. Taking the year 2000 as a mid-point in the Third Quest (and working from the assumption that the quest began in approximately 1980), all of the influential Third Questers listed by Bond were between the ages of 45 and 83 in the year 2000, with half of them being in their 60s. Further, *all* of these scholars are white men, and all but one spent their academic careers in Britain or America.[28] Given the significant demographic similarities, it is unlikely that if each were to write about a Jesus based on their own reflection, these Jesuses would represent a particularly diverse number of characteristics or themes. Rather, I would argue that the Jesus produced by these scholars are very rarely divergent, and have much more in common than the scholars would care to admit.

In *The Historical Jesus*, Crossan considers the problems that the illusion of objectivity has caused historically: "the way in which the nineteenth century dreamed of uncommitted, objective, dispassionate historical study should be clearly seen for what it was, a methodological screen to cover various forms of social power and imperialistic control."[29] Crossan is unambigious in his statement – objectivity has been used as a method of securing political control. The problem of authors and researchers manipulating the life of the historical Jesus is apparently so important to Crossan that he opens the first sentence of his first chapter by unmasking what Schüssler Fiorenza would describe as the "kyriarchal" reality of first century life in Galilee:

> The first century of the common era is obscured from our contemporary view by three giant filters. The past is recorded almost exclusively in the voices of elites and

[26] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism,* 58; 335.
[27] Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxviii.
[28] David Flusser was an Israeli scholar working at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Mordechai Beck, "David Flusser," *The Guardian*, 14th November, 2000, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/nov/14/guardianobituaries.
[29] Crossan, *The Historical Jesus,* 423.

> males, in the viewpoints of the wealthy and the powerful, in the visions of the literate and the educated.[30]

As much as I might agree with Crossan's statement, there is a problem with its scope. Crossan limits the influence of the above-mentioned kyriarchy to the first century, conveniently failing to acknowledge any ongoing power that it might wield over historical Jesus scholarship now. Dunn, on the other hand, extends his critique of author bias to the modern day, linking awareness of hermeneutics to postmodernity: "The main impact of postmodernism, however, has been to call into question the traditional hegemony of the author, to liberate the meaning of texts from their originating context, and to bring the reader to centre-stage in the hermeneutical process."[31] Dunn's view here shows remarkable similarity to that of Schüssler Fiorenza, which will be discussed later. Postmodernity has historically been blamed for historical Jesus research's problems, for instance in Allison's work, whereby postmodernity is responsible for the lack of consensus in contemporary historical Jesus research.[32] Dunn, on the other hand, is rare in linking postmodernism to a positive and "liberating" phase of research.[33] This view, in my estimation, shows greater awareness of the existence of hermeneutical bias across historical Jesus research, and recognises that this critique is not limited to Third Quest authors but extends back to the earliest historical Jesus research and biblical interpretation.

2.5 Uncertainty

A further interest of contemporary historical Jesus research is engaging in debate over what the Third Quest actually is, who can be a part of it, and whether it is worth being a part of at all. In describing the quest periods, Wright claims that he "invented the phrase 'Third Quest' to denote one particular type of contemporary Jesus research, namely, that which regards Jesus as an eschatological prophet announcing the long-awaited kingdom, and which undertakes serious historiography around that point."[34] When looking solely at Wright's work, this would appear to be a sufficient definition of the period, if not somewhat exclusionary; Wright is keen to point out that the Third Quest should not be used to refer to *all* current historical Jesus research. Where then, does that leave everyone else? In a Third Quest Critical-Stream? In a Fourth Quest? Wright doesn't clarify this issue. He does go on to say that he doesn't intend for the quest language to refer to "rigid 'periods'" but, like myself, sees them

[30] Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 3.
[31] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered,* 93.
[32] Allison, *The Historical Christ*, 10.
[33] Allison, *The Historical Christ*, 10.
[34] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* xiv-xv.

as useful "heuristic aids."[35] In doing his own historical Jesus research, Wright finds that his research does not compromise his Christianity.[36] Whilst this might have been intended to encourage Christian theologians to engage in historical research, it may also present Wright's own research bias; if his Christianity is uncompromised, is this because the research he engages with reflects his own interests?[37]

2.6 Method

A single "correct" method used to conduct historical Jesus research in the Third Quest is not universally agreed upon, but nevertheless a discourse around method itself is a crucial feature of this quest. While many see the Third Quest as an important step away from form criticism and the criteria of authenticity, the approach of others seems to continue using modified or updated versions of the criteria.[38] For instance, Dale Allison's work is indicative of a reliance upon the criterion of multiple attestation. Allison writes, "what matters is replication," and this is certainly the primary means by which he arrives at his conclusion that Jesus was primarily an exorcist.[39] In his explanation of the intentions of the Third Quest, Wright disputes any possibility that the Third Quest might continue to rely on criteria as the New Quest did, arguing instead that the Third Quest should rely on "serious historical method" rather than the "pseudo-historical use of home-made 'criteria.'"[40] The view that the criteria are an outdated method of historical Jesus research is attested to by Sanders as well. Sanders actively critiques the use of the criterion of double dissimilarity in particular, largely because

[35] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* 25.
[36] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, i.
[37] The work of N. T Wright is certainly apologetic in nature. In one of his interviews with *Christianity Today* Wright reflects on the impact historical Jesus research has had on his own Christian worldview: "Because I've done all that historical work, my view of the gospel and how it works out in the real world has been deepened and enriched in all kinds of ways that I would never have guessed 25 years ago when I was starting out writing about Jesus. So in *Simply Christian* there's a lot about justice, what it means to be human in the mandate to work, the putting to rights of God's world, generating beauty, alleviating poverty, working with ecology." Wright also admits that when studying the life and teaching of Jesus he wants to convey to his "contemporaries in the wider world, "This stuff matters; it's life transforming; it's world transforming."" For further details see: Tim Stafford, "Mere Mission," *Christianity Today,* 5th January, 2007, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/january/22.38.html.
Wright also provides biblical courses including his own teaching which aim to "renew minds through biblical teaching," see: https://www.ntwrightonline.org.
[38] For examples of those who look to move on from form criticism and/or criteria, see: Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* 87; Sean F. Everton and Daniel T. Cunningham, "The Quest for the Gist of Jesus: The Jesus Seminar, Dale Allison, and Improper Linear Models," *JSHJ* 18, no. 2 (2020): 156-189; Jordan Ryan, "Jesus at the Crossroads of Inference and Imagination: The Relevance of R.G. Collingwood's Philosophy of History for Current Methodological Discussions in Historical Jesus Research," *JSHJ* 13 (2015): 66-89; and Rafael Rodríguez, "Authenticating Criteria: The Use and Misuse of a Critical Method," *JSHJ* 7 (2009): 152–167.
[39] Dale C. Allison Jr., *Constructing Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 18-19.
[40] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* 87.

of the distorted Jesus it produces, namely a Jesus "biased towards uniqueness."[41] The creation of a unique or exceptional Jesus is not a new problem for historical Jesus research, but is still contested. Researchers have considered different ways in which Jesus can be contrasted or integrated with first century Jewish thought and practice. Regarding Jesus' social practice, Sanders maintains that Jesus and his followers were not "strange and unique," nor was Jesus "an uniquely good and great man."[42] However, this doesn't mean that other scholars concerned with Jesus' Jewishness have ignored the possibility that Jesus may have been special or unique. Vermes, whose work in integrating Jesus within the context of first century Judaism has been key to the development of the Third Quest, writes: "No objective and enlightened student of the Gospels can help but be struck by the incomparable superiority of Jesus."[43] As such it is not as simple as saying Jesus was or wasn't "exceptional," but instead about recognising the considerable diversity within first-century Judaism, and considering what we can know about Jesus in terms of his cultural and religious setting. The growth in interdisciplinary studies has certainly aided researchers as they move from making blanket-statements about Jesus and the environment in which he preached, to engaging with Jewish sources.[44]

The use of reconstruction as a method for the study of the historical Jesus has been another key aspect of Third Quest research. Texts can be reconstructed in a number of ways, however this dissertation will focus specifically on Schüssler Fiorenza's approach to reconstruction, for whom reconstruction is not about discovering new sources, but instead about "rereading the available sources in a different key."[45] Reconstruction is also a method prioritised by Crossan, who writes, "one cannot dismiss it [*The Historical Jesus*] or the search for the historical Jesus as *mere* reconstruction, as if reconstruction invalidated somehow the entire project. Because there is *only* reconstruction."[46] Memory is another method which has been used in the Third Quest, one which Schüssler Fiorenza again frequently engages with. Anthony Le Donne considers the use of "memory" as a method and points to the following two tenets of memory theory, "(1) the past is not preserved in the memories of individuals, but imaginatively reconstructed according to the needs of the present and (2) the cognitive reconstruction of the past is fundamentally spurred and constrained by social frameworks." Allison

[41] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism,* 16.
[42] Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism,* 319-320.
[43] Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 224.
[44] For instance, Robert Erlewine considers Hermann Cohen's work which looks to contradict the belief in "Christian triumphalism" for example, in considering the Talmudic injunction to martyr when understanding Jesus' existence as a martyr. Robert Erlewine, "Hermann Cohen and the Jewish Jesus," *Modern Judaism – A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 34, no.2 (2014): 210-232.
[45] Schüssler Fiorenza*, Politic*s, 49.
[46] Crossan, *The Historical Jesus,* 426.

actively critiques the use of memory in the first chapter of *Constructing Jesus*: "The frailty of human memory should distress all who quest for the so-called historical Jesus."[47]

The methods available to Third Questers are vast and diverse, and that means that the term cannot be used to refer to strict periods of time or themes. Wright's proposal that a Third Quester might respond to one or more of the following questions provides a useful alternative, by this method historical Jesus research would be understood in terms of its intentions:

- "How does Jesus fit into the Judaism of his day?
- What were his aims?
- Why did he die? How did the early church come into being, and why did it take the shape it did?
- Why are the gospels what they are?
- So What?"[48]

2.7 Conclusion

To conclude this section the Third Quest has seen a number of changes in the way in which historical Jesus research is conducted, particularly in terms of method and membership. This section has looked largely at the developments characteristic of the Third Quest, but this conclusion should acknowledge that there are scholars for whom the most recent quest has been a source of dispute.[49] The work of Fernando Bermejo-Rubio clearly articulates this issue, with considerations that the quest model has been a way of maintaining authorial power and privilege, and that it is ineffective to group historical Jesus research chronologically.[50] These arguments have been supported by many across the field, and are included in this conclusion to highlight the continued diversity of opinion within historical Jesus research. Whilst the language of the "quest" remains to some an exclusionary grouping, in my opinion it offers a user-friendly way of grouping historical Jesus research in order to better understand the above trends in scholarship. However, whether the work of Schüssler Fiorenza can be included in this category is debatable. The following section will point to several ways in which Schüssler Fiorenza's work contradicts the methods of the above-mentioned authors, and as such will continue to reflect on whether it is accurate to describe her as a "Third Quester."

[47] Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 1.
[48] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* 91.
[49] My own response to these arguments is detailed in the footnotes on the first page of this section.
[50] Fernando Bermejo-Rubio, "Theses on the Nature of the *Leben-Jesu-Forschung*," *JSHJ* 17 (2019): 1-34.

3. Schüssler Fiorenza

3.1 Introduction

The work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has spanned over five decades, the entirety of the "Third Quest" time period.[51] Schüssler Fiorenza's work has looked to further our understanding of the historical Jesus as have the scholars above. However, unlike many of the scholars mentioned above, Schüssler Fiorenza's work overtly considers the role of historical Jesus research's conclusions in shaping politics, religion, and the lives of women. As she makes distinctions between androcentrism (a "mind-set") and patriarchy (an oppressive "socio-cultural system") Schüssler Fiorenza demonstrates how Christianity in general, and Jesus research in particular, have been used to further the influence of patriarchal behaviours through the domination of a few men, over the rest of the population.[52] It is through a combination of an awareness of the existence of this source of oppression and a desire to promote change, that Schüssler Fiorenza's "Christian feminism" is created, a system which attempts to prompt reform "by seeking full citizenship for wo/men in church and society and by reformulating the study of scripture, tradition, theology, and community in feminist terms."[53] Whilst for many the concept of "equality" is a simple and fair goal, Schüssler Fiorenza takes care to warn readers that the term "feminism" can be used against women; as such, rather than being understood as a "gender theory" which reinforces patriarchal understandings of "women" and "feminine," feminism should be fluid, rather than fixed.[54] The way in which feminism is understood must therefore reflect the historical-political situation in which it is working, with the flexibility to adjust its focus in order that women's liberation is always prioritised; Schüssler Fiorenza writes "Feminist discourses are like the waters of the sea. They can be life-giving or life-destroying."[55]

The following section will consider Schüssler Fiorenza's approach to historical Jesus research, her unique theorising of the field, and her recommendations to other historical Jesus researchers. But before this, we must briefly note one of Schüssler Fiorenza's influences: Elizabeth Cady Stanton. American suffragist Cady Stanton fought for women's rights throughout the nineteenth century, and

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[51] This section will continue to engage with the "quest" language as is explained in my earlier footnote, but Schüssler Fiorenza's own opinion on the quest should be mentioned. Schüssler Fiorenza criticises Pamela Milne for understanding feminist theology in terms of a "linear progression" which develops to become more sophisticated. However, Schüssler Fiorenza does not dispute the use of the quest model in its entirety - "I am not arguing that we should not employ methods of periodization and categorization." (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 11-14).

[52] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology and New Testament Interpretation," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 7, no. 22 (1982): 32-46.

[53] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 4.

[54] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 37.

[55] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 39.

her work is discussed across Schüssler Fiorenza's *Sharing Her Word*.[56] Whilst Schüssler Fiorenza does not agree with all of Stanton's work, she does note that Stanton's influence is undeniable, noting four "rather ambiguous arguments" which Schüssler Fiorenza believes "have determined all subsequent feminist biblical interpretation."[57] These arguments are as follows;

1. "wo/men have the authority, right and duty to critically investigate and interpret Scripture."[58]
2. As the word of man rather than that of God, the Bible should be read both through a critical feminist lens, but also investigated with "objective scholarly methods."[59]
3. Feminist work is important because the Bible still guides the lives of men and women.[60]
4. The Bible is a source of oppression utilised by the political-right.[61]

Schüssler Fiorenza's engagement with Stanton's work is evident—as the following section will show—as she considers the role of women in interpretation, the ongoing influence of the Bible, and the relationship between the Bible, biblical interpretation, and politics. It is only regarding point two ("objective scholarly methods") where we see Schüssler Fiorenza diverge from Stanton; a positivistic approach to biblical interpretation is one which Schüssler Fiorenza disputes, in direct contrast to Stanton who suggests that researchers "shouldn't resort to metaphorical interpretation" which might "explain away" oppression.[62] For Schüssler Fiorenza, positivism in feminist interpretation has the potential to produce dualistic arguments which see the Bible as liberating *or* oppressive, rather than recognising its potential to be both.[63] One of Schüssler Fiorenza's key arguments – the significance of the *ekklesia* of women – is therefore developed in distinction to Stanton's work, and as such is better understood in terms of the work of Anna Julia Cooper whereby "race, colour and condition are seen as accidents, and not the substance of life."[64] For Schüssler Fiorenza, the full humanity of women is essential to Jesus' *ekklesia*, but it is patriarchal interpretation which has obscured this reality and denied women full personhood. The Bible can therefore continue to be of use to women, provided that these interpretations are recognised as such, and not as "fact" or the "word of God."[65]

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[56] Elizabeth Griffith, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), xvii; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 65-66.
[57] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 65.
[58] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 65.
[59] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 66.
[60] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 66.
[61] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 66.
[62] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 66.
[63] Amy-Jill Levine, "Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation," *The Journal of Religion* 83, no. 1 (2003): 110-111; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (London: SCM Press, 1995), 86-87.
[64] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 70-71.
[65] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 113.

A central aspect of Schüssler Fiorenza's approach to historical Jesus research is her engagement with liberation theology. Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist theology draws on liberation theologies which recognise "that all theological interpretation and historical scholarship is engaged for or against marginal and oppressed people," and as such looks to challenge ways in which women are marginalised in and as a result of biblical interpretation.[66] In *Sharing Her Word* Schüssler Fiorenza proposes that scholars use a feminist liberation theory that uses the Bible in a deconstructive and a reconstructive way.[67] According to this method, we must engage with a number of hermeneutics, not just at the level of reading and interpreting a text, but also when considering how these interpretations have come to influence the world and wider ideology.[68] As such it should be recognised that these seven "hermeneutical moments" (left of Figure 1) operate at each of these levels of interpretation (right of Figure 1). If a researcher recognises each of these hermeneutics, then, for Schüssler Fiorenza, they have gone some way to challenging positivist approaches to historical Jesus research, an argument that will be discussed in the next section.[69]

[66] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology," 33.
[67] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 76.
[68] Figure 1 describes this proposed method.
[69] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 77.

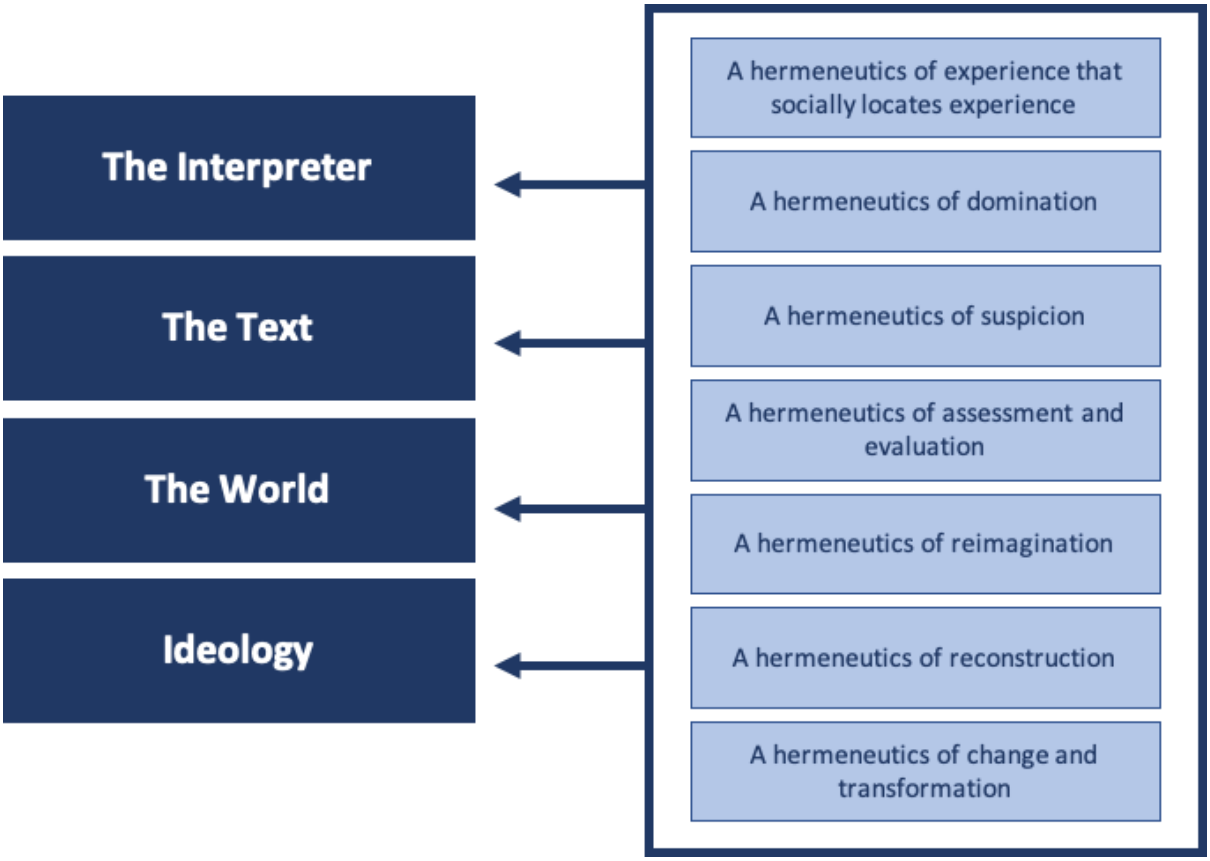


Figure 1. An illustration of Schüssler Fiorenza's hermeneutics proposal.[70]

3.2 Against positivism and "scientific" discourses

For Schüssler Fiorenza, the desire for historical Jesus research to be considered a "scientific" discipline (thought by some to be a liberating feature of the Third Quest over and against apologetics), has led to a problematic trend in positivism across the Third Quest. A "one truth" concept has developed, perpetuated by a desire for scientific enquiry.[71] Claims that there exists only one correct interpretation or meaning, which is objectively accessible to the careful scientific observer, are for Schüssler Fiorenza damaging to texts, individuals, and communities, not just in the modern world, but also when looking at biblical reconstruction. She argues that the growth of this method of study (or perhaps this belief/set of assumptions) was maintained through the continued exclusion of women from university, as such much of historical Jesus research is rooted in the perspective and interests of "elite, educated, mostly Western men."[72] Schüssler Fiorenza identifies within the newest quest for the historical Jesus, a pre-conceived notion that Christian identity must remain contingent upon some

[70] I created this image as a visual map of the ideas found in Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 76-77.
[71] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Politics,* 42.
[72] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 33.

form of scientific reconstruction of the historical Jesus.[73] One such 'scientific' reconstruction which has been particularly damaging to Jews is the view of Jesus as founding father and feminist hero, described by Sara Parks as the "supersessionist claims that Jesus ushered in Christianity, which then provided a glorious 'feminist' haven, over and against a rigidly patriarchal (and monolithic) Judaism."[74] These reconstructions along with dualistic rhetorics within historical Jesus research, create and reinforce androcentric and anti-Semitic behaviours, and promote right-wing politics and the marginalisation of wo/men.[75] Instead, for Schüssler Fiorenza a reconstructive approach should be used "to show that the historiography of early Christian beginnings was one of the theoretical-historical discourses of domination that was imagined and produced by contemporary scholarship."[76] As such, rather than reinforcing these discourses of domination through subsequent historical Jesus research, reconstructive methods have the ability to rewrite biblical texts and contemporary culture "by asserting the presence and agency of wo/men in kyriarchal texts, cultures, and religions."[77]

In *Bread Not Stone*, Schüssler Fiorenza identifies a number of approaches to historical Jesus research which perpetuate positivistic claims. One is the Historical Paradigm, whereby the Bible is studied as a book in the past and theological meaning and truth become identified with historical factualness.[78] As such there is no room for reconstruction (rereading and reinterpreting texts) in historical Jesus research, as historical events must be established as fact with objective accuracy in order to be true and worthy of study. Another approach is the Doctrinal Paradigm, in this instance the Bible is read as the direct revelation of God, with the potential for multiple interpretations becoming impossible due to the infallible nature of God's word.[79] Faced with these approaches to historical Jesus research, Schüssler Fiorenza claims that researchers should instead be asking the question "is neutral and uncommitted exegetical research possible in historical-critical scholarship?"[80] Through challenging "malestream standards of scientific and professional validation" the biased and partial nature of these approaches will be unmasked; in particular the "Eurocentric malestream paradigm that separates reason from feelings and emotions" will be recognised as an unattainable impossibility: "intellectual neutrality is not possible in a world of historical exploitation and oppression."[81] Schüssler Fiorenza challenges the false presumption, or "false consciousness," of social scientists regarding the

[73] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child,* 88.
[74] Sara Parks, *Gender in the Rhetoric of Jesus: Women in Q* (Lanham: Fortress Academic, 2019), 38.
[75] Levine, "Politics," 110; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 86-87.
[76] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Politics,* 48.
[77] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 105.
[78] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 29-30.
[79] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 28.
[80] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 32.
[81] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 45; 78.

objectivity of their data – just because you call a study scientific does not make it objective or true.[82] For Schüssler Fiorenza, the Third Quest must recognise and begin with the belief that "facts" are interpretations, or even contaminations.[83] The solution to the trend in positivism rooted in "scientific enquiry" is that historical Jesus research should shift into a rhetorical space for interpretation. [84] This space would avoid taking a positivistic approach to biblical and historical texts and instead of using exclusive historical and doctrinal paradigms to approach historical Jesus research, would use memory as a reconstructive paradigm.[85]

3.3 Against anti-Semitism

New Testament scholarship has long-faced criticism for perpetuating anti-Semitism, only becoming self-reflective about this problem in a post-Holocaust world.[86] As we saw in section 2.2 above, the Third Quest fashions itself as presenting a strong challenge to the previously anti-Semitic tendencies of historical Jesus research. Schüssler Fiorenza, however, continues to identify ways in which anti-Semitism is disguised within historical Jesus research in the period of the Third Quest—for instance in the work of Kathleen Corley who uses the label of Jesus as an "egalitarian," but rather than identifying a number of specific ways in which Jesus promotes equality, uses Judaism as its "negative foil."[87] In her 2001 book, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, Schüssler Fiorenza notes that both the Old and New Quests negatively portray Judaism in their efforts to emphasise Jesus' "radical ethics," for instance in the suggestion that Judaism (conceived of as an unnuanced monolith) promoted all that Jesus worked against, exemplified in his willingness to risk death in order to confront its "legalism."[88] The continued belief in the objectivity of data promoted by scientific positivism, and the kyriarchy that the enterprise of historical Jesus research itself continues to promote, both adversely impact Jewish women, for instance, when feminist historical Jesus research contrasts "Jesus the feminist" with the "depraved status" of first century Jewish women.[89] Having read Schüssler Fiorenza's *Politics,* Rosenblatt concludes that feminist anti-Semitism in historical Jesus research is "innate," writing;

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[82] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology," 34; Eloise Rosenblatt, review of *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Theological Studies* 63, no. 1 (2002): 204-205; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Politics,* 6.
[83] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 5.
[84] Medi Ann Volpe, "Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1938-)," in *The Student's Companion to the Theologians*, ed. I. S. Markham (New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2013), 515-517.
[85] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Politics*, 7.
[86] See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974); Terence L. Donaldson, *Jews and Anti-Judaism in the New Testament: Decision Points and Divergent Interpretations* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010).
[87] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Politics*, 128.
[88] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Politics*, 43.
[89] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child,* 70.

> Dismissal of Judaism happens when scholars oppose Jesus' liberating relationship with women against a false construction of "legalistic" ancient Israel. Feminists must carefully monitor their own interpretations for anti- Semitism.[90]

For Schüssler Fiorenza, most problematic is when feminist historical Jesus research promotes a single correct historical-theological reading as the normative criterion for being Christian, for instance, opposing "patriarchal" Judaism.[91] This alienates Jewish researchers, as well as Jewish readers, and perpetuates Christian stereotyping of Jews and Judaism. Schüssler Fiorenza proposes that one solution to this would be to recognise that Jesus was not the first challenge to the "dominant kyriarchal structures of society and religion in antiquity."[92] As such, historical Jesus research must acknowledge that its Christian roots are Jewish, and for feminist historical Jesus research particularly, that its foundational story is built on the work of Jewish women and their vision since in reality Jesus' first followers were Jewish women as well as men.[93] Schüssler Fiorenza's approach to historical Jesus research therefore sees Jesus as totally integrated into his time and culture – rather than in contrast to and against Judaism.[94] When scholars try to reconstruct "Jesus the feminist" "any feminist impulse detectable in the Jesus movement must be derived from Judaism, since Jesus and his first wo/men disciples were Jews."[95] In her own research Schüssler Fiorenza tries to contrast continued anti-Semitism by leaving space for Jewish feminist hermeneutics to develop, for instance, in *Bread not Stone*.[96] She also commends the work of Jewish scholar Tal Ilan, whose work considers the characteristics and roles we read about Jesus, such as his healing activity and accusations against him as possessed by evil powers. In doing this, Ilan identifies Jesus with Jewish women, who were most associated with healing, and most likely to be accused of sorcery.[97]

3.4 The Third Quest, the far right, and kyriarchy

The Third Quest has generally been characterised by the integration of Jesus and Judaism in historical Jesus research, evidenced in the influx of work titled as such, for instance *Jesus the Jew* and *Jesus and Judaism*, although we know this has not always been the case. For Schüssler Fiorenza, though, the perceived growth between the New and the Third Quest is not as significant as publicised, and

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[90] Rosenblatt, "Politics," 204.
[91] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 75.
[92] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation," *The Harvard Theological Review* 90, no. 4 (1997): 343-358.
[93] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (London: SCM, 1995), 107.
[94] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Politics*, 40.
[95] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Politics*, 117.
[96] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 4.
[97] Tal Ilan, "In the Footsteps of Jesus: Jewish Women in a Jewish Movement," in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Re-Viewed*, ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberg (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 115-136.

Christian feminist studies in particular are guilty of continuing to rely on anti-Semitic arguments to make statements about Jesus, with Schüssler Fiorenza pointing to the continued use of *The Women's Bible* as one example of where negative "Old Testament" commentaries are used to disparage Jewish claims.[98] One aspect of historical Jesus research which is responsible for this lack of growth is related to the continued assertion of Jesus' uniqueness. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that by continuing to contrast Jesus with his Jewish background, the discourses of Jesus can become intertwined with hegemonic and societal ideologies.[99] On this point, Schüssler Fiorenza cites Georgi, who locates the New Quest, "like the old one," with its "social location within the evolution of bourgeois consciousness."[100] Much of Schüssler Fiorenza's criticism of L. T. Johnson relates to this point, namely, that the Newest Quest for the Historical Jesus coincides with the "resurgence of the political right and the revival of religious fundamentalism" exemplified in the reactive formation of the Jesus Seminar.[101] As such, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the discourses surrounding historical Jesus research have become "kyriarchal," meaning that the Third Quest remains ill-equipped to engage in inter-religious dialogues because its reliance on positivist "scientific" modes facilitates political conservatism and the marginalisation of women.[102] As the dominant socio-political structure of the last five thousand years, patriarchy and its male pyramid of graded subordinations has led to the wide-scale acceptance of androcentric scholarship.[103] By taking "man" as the model human being, the texts used and created by historical Jesus research are compromised in their ability to accurately portray social realities. By challenging these trends and the violence against women that they produce, feminist movements have become "primary targets" for the far right, with anyone identified with the "feminist cause" being deemed "ideologically suspect and professionally discredited."[104] The threat that these movements pose to kyriarchal structures is likely one reason why the work of feminist scholars is ignored, uncited, and attacked.[105]

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[98] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 68.
[99] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Politics*, 42.
[100] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Politics," 346.
[101] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Politics," 349.
[102] Schüssler Fiorenza*, Miriam's Child,* 73.
[103] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 2.
[104] See A. W. Y. Yeung, A. C. Kay, and J. M. Peach, "Anti-feminist backlash: The role of System Justification in the Rejection of Feminism," *GPIR* 17/4 (2014): 474-484; K. van Wormer, "Anti-Feminist Backlash and Violence Against Women Worldwide," *SWaS* 6/2 (2008): np; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology," 106. On feminist and women's voices being systematically silenced in the study of early Christianity, see B. Stefaniw, "Feminist Historiography and Uses of the Past," *Studies in Late Antiquity* 4/3 (2020): 260-283; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 142.
[105] Schüssler Fiorenza is not cited in the major works of John P Meier (*A Marginal Jew* Volume 1 and Volume 4) or Dale Allison (*The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus*). Dale Allison's *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* dedicates whole sections to Jesus researchers and fails to mention any women in this list.

In response to the Third Quest's continuation of kyriarchy, Schüssler Fiorenza proposes a politics of interpretation approach to historical Jesus research, which looks to demystify ideologies of domination and the Western logic of identity.[106] A hermeneutics of suspicion is therefore essential for contemporary feminist historical Jesus research, in order that the automatic use of the male gender is challenged and the reality of historical women is recognised. Schüssler Fiorenza proposes a feminist biblical hermeneutics to question and critically analyse androcentric texts and constructions of biblical history. [107] As part of its theology, feminist historical Jesus research should recognise and reject malestream hermeneutical frameworks, "rather than seeking to reinterpret the historical maleness of Jesus in humanist and liberationist terms."[108] In doing so, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the role of women in the New Testament would be better appreciated and understood, meaning that the position of women now would also be improved. [109] The Third Quest is in a position to break the cycle of kyriocentric behaviours, providing it acknowledges the impact it has, not just on religion, but also on Western politics; in order to do this, historical Jesus research must tackle its own internalisation of hegemonic knowledge about Jesus.[110] However, the contributions of scholars who have attempted to disrupt this kyriocentric cycle, like Schüssler Fiorenza, are often left out of mainstream historical Jesus research, for instance, because they are not perceived as being rooted in the appropriate method and reconstructive framework. [111] For Schüssler Fiorenza, the Third Quest will be able to distance itself from the continued pattern of kyriarchy perpetuated by androcentric historical Jesus research if and when it acknowledges its biases and employs the hermeneutical method illustrated in Figure 1.

3.5 Impact, relevance and the politics of interpretation

The politics of interpretation are key to Schüssler Fiorenza's unique approach to historical Jesus research. At the heart of this development is the need for researchers to be more aware of the impact their work has on religious communities and wider society. A politics of meaning or interpretation approach sees historical Jesus research in light of this impact, with the result being that "a biblical theology that is conceptualized as a rhetoric of divine justice and well-being is able to demystify ideologies of domination and subordination inscribed in biblical texts and scholarship." [112] Throughout the quests for the historical Jesus there have been references to "biblical ethics"; this has then been adopted in Western politics and, in many cases, is used as a source of domination over women,

[106] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 179-180.
[107] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 85.
[108] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 88.
[109] Volpe, "Schüssler Fiorenza," 712.
[110] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Politics*, 42.
[111] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Politics," 348.
[112] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 179-180.

regardless of their religious beliefs. For instance in the oppressive "pro-life" policies (a movement born out of the National Council of Catholic Bishops) which continue to call for women who have an abortion to be "punished".[113] Historically, appeals to a single "biblical ethics" have been disastrous, for instance in the burning of "witches," the slave trade, and the Holocaust.[114] For Schüssler Fiorenza, this is why a politics of interpretation approach to historical Jesus research is crucial. One aspect of this approach is recognising that biblical translations are not simply literal; instead they are "perceptive interpretations transferring meaning from one language context to another."[115] As such, researchers and politicians alike are mistaken in their reference to religious "facts;" these facts should be regarded as an interpretation, or even a distortion of the original situation.[116]

The politics of interpretation response involves taking responsibility, for instance by stating one's bias/hermeneutics. It is also crucial that the responsibility and agency of biblical authors is recognised; the biblical "traditioning" process must be scrutinized along with other aspects of the Christian tradition in order to determine whether passages and interpretation serve to oppress or to liberate.[117] As part of the politics of interpretation, authors should assess the impact and relevance of passages, recognising that "not all texts speak to all situations and to everyone."[118] Biblical writings are pastoral-theological responses to the situations and problems of their own times, so we must expect that not all writings are of the same theological significance for us today.[119] The litmus test is then to evaluate the *function* of texts.[120] Biblical interpretation cannot limit itself to what the author or text meant – it must consider theological significance today. Schüssler Fiorenza proposes that a politics of interpretation approach to historical Jesus research should involve researchers assessing their work against four key questions;

- Is an anti-Jewish bias being maintained/reinscribed?
- Does this reconstruction paint an accurate picture of historical women?
- Does it acknowledge colonial or Western presuppositions?

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[113] Jennifer L. Holland, "Abolishing Abortion: The History of the Pro-Life Movement in America," *Organization of American Historians* (November 2016), https://www.oah.org/tah/issues/2016/november/abolishing-abortion-the-history-of-the-pro-life-movement-in-america/.
[114] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 66.
[115] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 46.
[116] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 5.
[117] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 62.
[118] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 35.
[119] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 39.
[120] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, xiii.

- Does it account for the fact that globalisation "promote[s] the politics of exclusivity, inferiority, prejudice and dehumanization in cultural or religious identity formation?"[121]

A feminist politics of interpretation approach must therefore use its own canonical criteria in order that women might be liberated from "oppressive sexist structures, institutions and internalized values."[122] Key to transforming women's lives at "grassroots" level and ministerially, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, is a critical exploration of the way in which women are dehumanized through theological tradition, sacred language and the politics of exclusion.[123] In using this criteria, feminist theology must maintain that if the Bible is not to continue as a tool for the oppression of women, "only the non-sexist and nonpatriarchal traditions of the Bible and the nonoppressive traditions of biblical interpretation have the theological authority of revelation." However, this approach is not without its difficulties; whilst Schüssler Fiorenza proposes using a hermeneutics of proclamation as part of her approach to historical Jesus research, this hermeneutics would indicate that sexist texts (such as the commands that women must submit to their husbands found in Colossians 3:18 and Ephesians 5:22-24) should not be used in religious ceremonies, but this fails to acknowledge the question, can sexist texts transcend their patriarchal contexts to have deeper meanings?[124] Moreover, is it responsible to veto the use of any texts with sexist undertones when they might provide useful lessons for readers? The use of hermeneutics in feminist research can produce numerous conclusions and perspectives, and so in order to avoid clashes and misunderstandings "feminist studies in religion must therefore rearticulate again and again its categories and lenses of interpretation in particular situations and social contexts."[125]

A politics of interpretation rooted in assessing the impact and relevance of texts and traditions effects not just modern society, but also our understanding of historical people. For instance, in taking a politics of interpretation approach rather than a fundamentalist or liberationist one, Jesus is conceptualized not as the exceptional man, but as a part of the Divine Wisdom movement.[126] The politics of interpretation are also key to Schüssler Fiorenza's theory of memory in the discipleship of equals, enabling individuals and communities to reclaim the Bible as an enabling resource and to use the Bible as bread, not stone.[127] Schüssler Fiorenza is keen to establish that the phrase "discipleship

[121] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Politics," 352.
[122] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 60.
[123] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 41.
[124] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 18-19.
[125] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 40.
[126] Schüssler Fiorenza*, Politics*, 21.
[127] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, xvii.

of equals" is not intended to advocate "sameness under the guise of universality," rather it is used to highlight what Schüssler Fiorenza believes to be the "central ethos" of discipleship: equality in diversity.[128] As a feminist model for historical reconstruction the politics of interpretation provides authors with the framework necessary to identify textual incoherencies and inconsistencies and to point to instances where androcentric texts have had political-theological functions.[129] By continually failing to identify these inconsistencies, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that scholars misinterpret women's history: "because of their androcentric model of reality scholars understand the biblical injunctions for women's subordination as descriptive and not as prescriptive attempts to reestablish patriarchal reality."[130] As Schüssler Fiorenza encourages feminist theology to explore and utilise the politics of interpretation she points out that "a feminist biblical future relies on critical exploration of the continuing effects of the household code trajectory in our own time and democratic society;" feminist theology is key to uncovering and disrupting the impact of kyriarchal texts and traditions.[131]

3.6 Reconstruction and rediscovery

As we have already seen, Schüssler Fiorenza critiques the use of problematic paradigms in historical Jesus research, the Doctrinal and Historical being two in particular. A further reason for this critique is linked to the inability of these paradigms to leave room for a tool which, for Schüssler Fiorenza, is central to meaningful historical Jesus research, reconstruction. The Doctrinal and Historical paradigms are flawed in their refusal to reconstruct the claims to faith that we see in biblical texts.[132] This inhibits rediscovery as researchers are then unable to question a text's significance and authority today. Schüssler Fiorenza's critique of these paradigms is tied to her promotion of an alternative reconstructive framework for historical Jesus research; one which addresses the questions of today and is clear in stating its preferred hermeneutics.[133] As such, Schüssler Fiorenza's preferred model, the Pastoral-Theological paradigm seeks to evaluate texts according to the needs, questions and insights of Christian communities today.[134]

Schüssler Fiorenza's reconstructive historical Jesus research is rooted in the fact that the Bible does not just exist as a piece of Scriptural revelation, but also as a source of domination and violence, as shown by various liberation theologies. As such, the Bible should be used as a prototype ("critically

[128] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 113.
[129] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 113.
[130] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology," 34.
[131] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 88.
[132] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 30.
[133] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 88.
[134] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 40.

open to the possibility of its own transformation") in historical Jesus research, rather than as a normative, immutable archetype.[135] This theory is at the heart of *Bread not Stone;* scripture should not be read as unchanging tablets of stone, but as bread, which nurtures and sustains the religious community.[136] By looking at Jesus' teachings in terms of what they might have meant for the people listening, Schüssler Fiorenza advocates the view that is for her, at the heart of Jesus' teaching, that all people are equal.[137] This is done by putting practices, systematic structures and wo/men in the centre of historical reconstruction, which ultimately helps us to better understand the Jesus movement.[138] Closely linked to memory in the discipleship of equals, this new feminist model for historical reconstruction looks to break the cycle of androcentric interpretation by recognising that the Bible and its related traditions have been created from the perspective of elite males (the kyriarchy), and they therefore do not reflect the female experience: "none of the early Christian writings is free from "theological tendencies.""[139] Despite this, for Schüssler Fiorenza the role of feminist interpretation should not be to defend the Bible against feminist critics, "but to understand and interpret it in such a way that its oppressive and liberating power is clearly recognised"; through careful, self-aware reconstruction.[140] Schüssler Fiorenza uses this point to out the difference between her own critical feminist interpretation for liberation, and a Christian "apologetic" method of biblical interpretation. Key to this distinction, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, is that apologetic approaches, like "dualistic" gender studies approaches, "do not problematize their preconstructed religious and cultural gender lenses of interpretation" - they are not sufficiently self-aware.[141] The either/or attitude promoted through dualistic approaches are a problem Schüssler Fiorenza identifies with much of Third Quest historical Jesus research, and also within feminist approaches. One such concern relates to the dualism between being reconstructive and deconstructive. Schüssler Fiorenza identifies a perceived need for critical feminist hermeneutics to be deconstructive based on the argument that to "reconstitute the world" is to lose the critical edge of feminist inquiry and "rehabilitates the andro-kyriocentric language world of the text."[142] This critique, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, is rooted in a misunderstanding of the function of the hermeneutics of suspicion: "In my own view a hermeneutics of suspicion does not have the task

[135] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology," 44; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 61; xvii.
[136] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, xiii.
[137] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 74.
[138] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Politics," 354.
[139] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 74; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 113; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology," 37.
[140] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, x.
[141] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 79.
[142] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 88.

of unearthing or uncovering historical or theological truth, but of disentangling the ideological workings of andro-kyriocentric language."[143]

In *Jesus: Miriam's Child*, Schüssler Fiorenza makes clear that the book is not intended to be of profound Christological value, but rather it is an attempt to scrutinize the way in which historical Jesus research has been done, through lenses which perpetuate inequality.[144] This is in contrast to much of the research conducted in the Third Quest, again indicating that Schüssler Fiorenza's work in *Miriam's Child*, which works to situate feminist theological discourses in wo/men's struggles and movement for justice and wellbeing, may be better suited to a self/community-aware Critical-Stream.[145] For Schüssler Fiorenza, a central commitment of feminist theology should be the women that are affected by religious groups. Schüssler Fiorenza's proposal for a feminist theology uses as its toll the hermeneutics of remembrance, enabling her to move from talking about women in biblical texts, to the reconstruction of women's history.[146] Without a hermeneutics of remembrance, women's biblical history is misunderstood as a history of patriarchal oppression, but through careful reconstruction rooted in the knowledge of the kyriarchal authorship, women's history is reconstituted as a history of liberation and religious agency.[147]

Feminist interpretation must therefore go back and explore all the dimensions of a text and its traditions if it is to do justice not just to historical women, but also to contemporary women as it assesses each text's influence.[148] Scholars should "broaden the sources" they use for reconstructing early Christianity, because, for Schüssler Fiorenza, "Early Christian history and theology has to become ecumenical, i.e inclusive of all Christian groups" and texts should be judged according to how well they transmit a message of "apostolic inclusivity and equality" in order that feminist reconstruction might transcend its patriarchal beginnings.[149] By looking at the Jesus movement in terms of contemporary social movements, the Bible is reconstructed in such a way that the 'silences' created by centuries of kyriarchal scholarship are exposed, and the reality of women's roles and realities are recognised. If the Bible is to remain relevant in the future it must be used in such a way that its patriarchal history is denounced and its power as a source of liberation and emancipation is highlighted through careful reconstruction and the rediscovery of women's history.[150]

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[143] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 90.
[144] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child,* ix.
[145] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 4.
[146] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 15.
[147] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 20.
[148] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 14.
[149] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology," 42.
[150] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 60.

3.7 Memory

According to Medi Ann Volpe, the recovery of women's voices in a distinctively feminist-theological key, is at the core of Schüssler Fiorenza's work.[151] In order for this to be achieved, improved historical consciousness and proper biblical remembrance are what is required, as opposed to what has generally been characteristic of the quests for the historical Jesus, an increased volume of antiquarian information.[152] Rather than searching for religious "facts," Schüssler Fiorenza proposes moving away from positivism as a method for historical Jesus research into memory as a reconstructive paradigm.[153] For Schüssler Fiorenza, using memory as a method for historical Jesus research involves acknowledging that canonical and extracanonical gospels focus on Jesus, not on collecting antiquarian information.[154] This is because there is a politics of meaning-making underlying these texts in order that the author might cater to their own audience. As such, Schüssler Fiorenza places "critical practices, systemic structures, and the agency of wo/men" at the centre of historical imagination, rather than narrowing in on the "sayings and proclamations of Jesus" as many historical Jesus researchers are inclined to do.[155] If the Third Quest were able to use 'memory' as it's research framework then its focus would be able to shift from studying Jesus as an exceptional man, to memory in the discipleship of equals, a consequence of this being that the role of women in the Jesus movement and subsequent traditions must be acknowledged.[156]

Memory, particularly in the discipleship of equals, is therefore key to feminist historical Jesus research, with Schüssler Fiorenza's central argument being that if the role of historical women were recognised, then the position of women now would be improved.[157] This can be done through improving our understanding of what the Jesus movement meant to people then, and using this to acknowledge how the movement affects people now. This unique approach to research involves putting "practices, systematic structures and wo/men in the centre of historical re-construction."[158] The detail of Schüssler Fiorenza's recommendations for historical Jesus research will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but key to this section is her use of the hermeneutics of remembrance.

The use of memory through the hermeneutics of remembrance means that rather than abandoning the memory of women's sufferings, we reclaim their struggles through the subversive power of the

[151] Volpe, "Schüssler Fiorenza," 712.
[152] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 114.
[153] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Politics," 354.
[154] Schüssler Fiorenza*, Politic*s, 7.
[155] Schüssler Fiorenza*, Politic*s, 77.
[156] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 74.
[157] Volpe, "Schüssler Fiorenza," 712.
[158] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Politics," 354.

remembered past.[159] Without the hermeneutics of remembrance women's biblical history is misunderstood as a history of patriarchal oppression (or worse, abandoned altogether), but with it, women's history is reconstituted as a history of liberation and religious agency. Whilst the declaration of 1 Timothy 2:12 is rarely forgotten regarding women's leadership in the Church, the numerous women who served with Jesus, for instance as deaconesses, are virtually ignored (Romans 16). As Schüssler Fiorenza points out, androcentric language means that women are only mentioned (in biblical texts and today) when they are problematic or exceptional; the legacy of "ordinary" women is erased.[160] As such, feminist interpretation is reliant on the hermeneutics of remembrance because it depends on the faithful remembrance of the oppression and liberation of women in biblical history.[161] This might involve 'reading the silences' for instance, whereby you look for the gaps in androcentric texts to provide clues to the egalitarian reality of the Christian movement.[162] As Schüssler Fiorenza writes, "oppressed people do not have a written history. They remain invisible in the reality-construction of those in power."[163] Feminist interpretation doesn't seek identification with certain biblical texts and traditions, instead it searches for solidarity with women in biblical religion.[164] By using memory as a research framework, the reality of women's existence is revealed and better understood, as well as the reality of their oppression; one of Schüssler Fiorenza's discoveries using memory is in the development of androcentric Christian tradition - "although the canon only preserves remnants of a nonpatriarchal Christian ethos, these remnants indicate that such a 'patriarchalization' process was not inherent in Christian community but progressed slowly and with difficulty."[165] The role of memory is not limited to improved women's studies.[166] Rather, it improves the breadth and quality of historical Jesus research; for instance, through memory in the discipleship of equals, we remember Christianity's Jewish origins, hopefully helping to reduce the rate of anti-Semitic practice in the quests for the historical Jesus.[167]

3.8 The Bible

For Schüssler Fiorenza, central to using the Bible in historical Jesus research is using it as a historical prototype, not an archetype. As we have already seen, the contents of the Bible and later

[159] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 19.
[160] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology," 36.
[161] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 88.
[162] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 41.
[163] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology," 32.
[164] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 14.
[165] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone,* 20.
[166] As Parks has written, "scholarship ignorant of the role of women and the construction of gender is simply poor scholarship," "'The Brooten Phenomenon': Moving Women from the Margins in Second-Temple and New Testament Scholarship," *The Bible & Critical Theory* 14, no. 2 (2018): 46-64.
[167] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 107.

developments are produced based on subjective interpretations and hermeneutics. For instance, researchers often fail to note the Aristotelian ethics which likely encouraged some patriarchal New Testament traditions.[168] As such, when conducting historical Jesus research, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that "a good translation is not a literal transcription but a perceptive interpretation transferring meaning from one language context to another."[169] By recognising that much of the household code trajectory recorded in the New Testament takes its origins from Aristotelian thinking via Roman social mores, feminist historical Jesus research is able to challenge the religious and political traditions to go back to the early Christian vision and praxis of coequality in community.[170] For Schüssler Fiorenza, the Greek "*ekklesia*" is central to understanding and reconstructing biblical references to the "church." Schüssler Fiorenza believes that the continued translation of "*ekklesia*" as "church" is misleading, instead "*ekklesia*" should be read in the context of a radical democratic vision for equal citizenship, whereas "church" derives from the Greek "*kyriake*" (lord/master/father/husband)."[171] For Schüssler Fiorenza, the translation process used in adjusting the meanings of these words prioritised the desire of translators for the Church to be ruled kyriarchally and hierarchically, rather than for it to represent a "democratic congress or discipleship of equals."[172]

Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist interpretation acknowledges that the Bible *is* a patriarchal collection, it's not just that some texts are patriarchally *misinterpreted* as apologetic feminist interpreters such as Ben Witherington might hope.[173] Thus, it is not the role or responsibility of feminist interpretation to defend the Bible against charges of misogyny.[174] Rather, feminist interpretation seeks to understand and interpret the Bible so that others can recognise both its oppressive and liberating power. Historical Jesus research should therefore recognise that historically the Bible has been used not just as a resource, but also as a weapon.[175] The Bible is frequently used as a weapon against women by the political right. But the political right do not *just* misquote the Bible; they are able to utilise some of the texts precisely because they are patriarchal in their original function and intention.[176] For instance, when the Bible renders God male and determines ultimate reality in male terms, women are made invisible and marginalised.[177] Historical Jesus research must recognise the use of the Bible as the

[168] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 91-92.
[169] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 46.
[170] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 91-92.
[171] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 112.
[172] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 113.
[173] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, xii; see Ben Witherington III, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[174] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, x.
[175] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, x.
[176] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, xii.
[177] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, xi.

model for Christian life, as well as recognising that the Bible is a political book; it informs the self-understanding of American and European "secularized" societies and cultures, and as a result, in a rapidly-shrinking world, all women are impacted.[178]

The feminist approach advocated by Schüssler Fiorenza involves reclaiming the Bible, not just abandoning it, because it has also inspired, not just oppressed.[179] It must therefore establish a canon, preferably by adhering to a politics of interpretation rooted in assessing impact and relevance. What is fundamental is that the canon and the evaluative norm by which it is decided cannot be universal, but "must be specific and derived from a particular experience of oppression and liberation."[180] In *Feminist Interpretation: The Bible in Women's* Perspective, Schüssler Fiorenza is described as a proponent of the "hermeneutics of liberation," based on her book *In Memory of Her* which "serves to give Christian women today a feminist theological foundation for their liberation – seeking faith and action."[181] Part of reclaiming the Bible involves reading the "silences" hidden therein, and recognising when women are also included. For instance, the use of "brothers" to refer to members of the Jesus movement is frequent in the New Testament. However, generally speaking, researchers are confident that women were a part of the early Christian community and that the Jesus movement was not comparable in this way to the Mithras cult for instance. This has implications for the way that we read other parts of the Bible, Schüssler Fiorenza writes: "Thus we no longer can simply assume that only 1 Cor 11:2-16 speaks about women prophets, while the rest of chapters 11-14 refer to male charismatics and to male prophets."[182] By reading the "silences" the potential for female agency in the Bible is significantly increased, providing opportunities for memory and reconstruction frameworks.

Schüssler Fiorenza devotes relatively little time across her works to discussing the question: was Jesus a feminist? This is likely because she finds there is little evidence to support the theory. Jesus does not explicitly address or protest gendered structures of oppression.[183] Instead his message subverts them by envisioning a different future for the people of Israel, who are elected by Jesus' Sophia-God. The question of whether Jesus was a feminist can be complex; some biblical references can be suggested to support this view. For instance, in his challenges to patriarchal marriage structures (Mk 10:2-9; 12:18-27), the a-familial ethos of the Jesus movement (which allowed women to break free from an

[178] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 14; xi.
[179] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, xvii.
[180] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 60.
[181] Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer and Marie-Theres Wacker, *Feminist Interpretation: The Bible in Women's Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 45.
[182] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 45.
[183] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 142.

identity exclusively *in relation to* a dominant man), and in Jesus' sayings about domination-free relationships in the community of disciples.[184] Overtly, Schüssler Fiorenza finds, Christianity has condemned oppressive and exploitative attitudes towards women, but covertly Christianity "promotes, in the name of G*d and love, such patriarchal – kyriarchal practices of victimization as Christian virtues."[185] Schüssler Fiorenza writes that researchers would be "ill-advised" to attempt to prove that the Bible is either oppressive or liberating given that it is not possible to do so methodologically; biblical texts are written in a "socio-symbolic" manner and as such cannot be used to "prove" either argument.[186]

3.9 Schüssler Fiorenza's theory

Schüssler Fiorenza seeks to endorse and create a critical feminist theology of liberation; one which recognises that gender is constructed and allows "Christian women to explore theologically the structural sin of patriarchal sexism."[187] It relies upon using a number of hermeneutics which challenge the language and history of androcentric texts in order to expose alienating trends, and combines the "critical analytical methods of historical biblical scholarship on the one hand and the theological goals of liberation theologies on the other."[188]

The first hermeneutics used is of suspicion. The hermeneutics of suspicion is essential to feminist theology as it recognises that biblical texts have been written in kyriarchal and exclusionary language. The hermeneutics also applies when studying contemporary research, which has likely also been influenced by androcentric constructs and political institutions – women are studied separately in the first place because they are considered "other" whereas men are the norm.[189]

Schüssler Fiorenza's theory then moves to a hermeneutics of proclamation. This is as opposed to a hermeneutics of historical factualness. Whilst factualness perpetuates positivistic historical Jesus research, proclamation recognises that the Bible is still used by millions of people on a regular basis, and should be treated as such.[190] With no one "correct" interpretation being possible, interpreters must consider what their interpretive choices *do*.

[184] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 143.
[185] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 147.
[186] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 120.
[187] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 7.
[188] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 85.
[189] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 16; xii.
[190] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 15.

This is followed by the hermeneutics of remembrance, an essential part of Schüssler Fiorenza's unique feminist theology rooted in memory. This hermeneutics aims to shift the research focus towards identifying women in biblical texts, and then using these findings to aid the reconstruction of women's history.[191] Remembrance is essential for ensuring the continuation of feminist research, as it consciously searches for women in texts and attempts to move beyond a text's androcentric interpretation in order that the text is not abandoned, and with it, the lives of our foresisters. A key part of remembrance involves reclaiming biblical texts despite centuries of androcentric language and behaviour. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that this can be done "through the subversive power of the "remembered past.""[192]

Finally, Schüssler Fiorenza's model contrasts a "hermeneutics of disinterested distance," a hermeneutics based on misleading beliefs in the objectivity of "scientific" data, towards a hermeneutics of creative actualisation. This hermeneutics looks to engage the church of women in "the imaginative articulation of women's biblical story and its ongoing history and community."[193] Adherence to this hermeneutics can involve a number of feminist approaches to religious texts and traditions, such as womanist biblical retellings and the reformulation of biblical visions and rulings in the language of the discipleship of equals.[194]

Schüssler Fiorenza's approach to historical Jesus research is interested in changing the way that researchers conduct historical Jesus research, but also in the lives of women that have been affected by patriarchal biblical texts and traditions in the ancient and contemporary world. Schüssler Fiorenza's research is rooted in her responses to the needs of modern women. In *Sharing Her Word* she notes two instances where challenges from women encouraged her to "set out to respond to the need of the wo/men's movement for clarification of these texts."[195] Her feminist "*basileia* vision" looks to bring women into the heart of religious communities, a place from which they have historically been excluded. Schüssler Fiorenza provides an explanation of this vision in *In Memory Of Her*;

> 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. It knows of the deadly violence such a vision and commitment will encounter. It enables us not to despair or to relinquish the struggle in the face of such violence. It empowers us to walk upright, freed from the double oppression of societal and religious sexism

[191] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 15.
[192] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 19.
[193] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 15.
[194] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 21.
[195] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 8.

> and prejudice. The woman-identified man, Jesus, called forth a discipleship of equals that still needs to be discovered and realized by women and men today.[196]

Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist *basileia* vision is not exclusionary, as some questers would deem her research. Rather, it actively seeks to involve men in this vision for the religious community. It is particularly important that male historical Jesus researchers engage with Schüssler Fiorenza's proposal for historical Jesus research. At first this might simply involve maintaining an "advocacy stance," which then encourages researchers to be publicly accountable in their research, aiding the hermeneutics of proclamation.[197] For Schüssler Fiorenza, a hermeneutics of proclamation is key to ensuring accountability in historical Jesus research; it calls researchers to consider not just their own cultural location, but also that of their audiences (particularly those who "credit the scriptures with divine authority") and to assess the impact and effects of their biblical interpretations accordingly.[198]

In describing her research aims Schüssler Fiorenza writes "I seek to develop a feminist biblical hermeneutics, that is, a theory, method, or perspective for understanding and interpretation."[199] This hermeneutics looks to liberate women from an inherently androcentric text, and its subsequent patriarchal practices. However, as a Catholic, Schüssler Fiorenza is keen to ensure that women are not alienated from God, and as such her approach works to identify these oppressive texts, to identify their patriarchal influences as that of individual authors, distancing such texts from the claim that they are the Word of God; to claim that oppressive texts are the Word of God is to proclaim that God is the oppressor.[200] Schüssler Fiorenza's theory ultimately looks to demystify the kyriarchal constructs which negatively impact women's experiences in both religion and wider society.[201]

3.10 Conclusion

As this section has hopefully illustrated, Schüssler Fiorenza's approach to historical Jesus research puts women at the centre and looks to improve their experience both within and outside religion through appropriate and ethical biblical interpretation. As was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the overarching thrust of Schüssler Fiorenza's argument is influenced by womanist scholar Anna Julia Cooper. The following quote from Cooper provides a metaphor for why Schüssler Fiorenza believes

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[196] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 153-154.
[197] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 62.
[198] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 138.
[199] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, x.
[200] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, xiii.
[201] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals*, *A Critical Feminist Ekklesiaology of Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 11.

that bringing the lives of women away from the margins of society is beneficial to men and women alike.

> The world has had to limp along with the wobbling gait and one-sided hesitancy of a man with one eye. Suddenly the bandage is removed from the other eye and the whole body is filled with light. It sees a circle where before it saw a segment. The darkened eye restored, every member rejoices with it.[202]

As well as illustrating the importance of recognising the role of women in history and in modernity, Cooper also illustrates the significance of hermeneutics in a researcher's biblical interpretation. When we understand hermeneutics in terms of "reading glasses" it is easy to see how using a certain hermeneutics or having a particular bias will obscure or exaggerate parts of the original text. By engaging with a number of different hermeneutics, a researcher is able to draw multiple interpretations and conclusions from a single passage. This interdisciplinarity and creative fluidity is central to Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist approach to biblical interpretation, which looks to unveil the previously hidden lives of women by adapting the "Western idealist hermeneutical frameworks" which have so often served political needs by further marginalising the oppressed.[203] By engaging with the above-mentioned suggestions that she makes to historical Jesus researchers, Schüssler Fiorenza intends that women will reclaim their early Christian history, and remember that "the church is built on women prophets and apostles."[204]

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[202] Anna J. Cooper, *A Voice From The South* (Xenia: The Aldine Printing House, 1892), 122-123, quoted in Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 194.
[203] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 78.
[204] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology," 44.

4. Situating Schüssler Fiorenza

The work of women and feminist authors in the field of historical Jesus research has been rich and varied, although neglected. This section will look at the work of a small selection of those authors and identify areas where their underlying themes and methods show similarity or distinction to that of Schüssler Fiorenza. As such, I will consider a number of the key aspects of Schüssler Fiorenza's work, as discussed in the previous chapter, and make some comparisons, recognising, as Schüssler Fiorenza does, that no work is done in a vacuum. The authors mentioned in the following section were largely selected based on scholars that Schüssler Fiorenza cites in her own work (either in agreement or disagreement) and feminist researchers who have published recently. To attempt to mention every feminist Third Quest researcher would have been an unrealistic goal for this dissertation, and as such only a handful of authors have been referenced.

4.1 Similar to Schüssler Fiorenza

Beginning with work that shows a significant likeness to Schüssler Fiorenza's, we will consider how the Bible is used and understood by fellow feminist historical Jesus researchers." One example would be the acknowledgement that the Bible is a patriarchal collection.[205] Rosemary Radford Ruether considers the influence of "divine patriarchy" and finds that rather than patriarchy being instituted by the divine, it is a social rather than a religious model. As such, Ruether finds that the "religious imagery is an ideological projection of the patriarchal social order," so that rather than disposing of the Bible altogether as Daly might advocate, she finds ways in which women might continue to engage with Christianity.[206] Like Schüssler Fiorenza, Ruether also recognises the influence of earlier patriarchal figures on the androcentrism of the Bible. Both women name Aristotle, who repeatedly propounded the inferiority of women and whose views were picked up by early Christianity, as a particular catalyst for these themes, with Ruether acknowledging the influence of Aristotelian thinking on presenting an objective justification for patriarchy; "with the adoption of Aristotelian biology in medieval scholasticism, this antiwoman use of Christology is argued not only on the plane of symbol but on the plane of biology."[207] Adela Yarbro Collins explores this in her *New Testament Perspectives,* with her conclusion being, like that of Schüssler Fiorenza*,* that the Bible is a patriarchal collection, but at the

[205] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xii.
[206] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion: Principles of Ideological Critique of the Bible," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 7, no. 22 (1982): 54-66.
[207] See Aristotle, *Politics* 1.5, translated by H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944); see also Lilli Alanen and Charlotte Witt, eds., *Feminist Reflections on the History of Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2004); Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 5; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 125.

same time one which can be used to challenge such discrimination.[208] Like Schüssler Fiorenza, Collins writes: "the Bible presupposes sexist cultures and its own language and vision to a considerable extent reinforce sexist attitudes and structures," but, also like Schüssler Fiorenza, she recognises the potential for the Bible to be used as a source of liberation.[209] Ruether also looks at ways in which the Bible might be used to reclaim the lives of women. She gives the example of Matthew 23:1-10, where one of Schüssler Fiorenza's key areas of historical and theological study, the discipleship of equals, is explained in terms of the disciples' relation to God. In her understanding of this passage, Ruether writes: "these traditions reverse the symbolic relation between divine fatherhood and sovereignty and the sacralization of patriarchy."[210] Rather than pointing to Jesus' discussion of the Pharisees in this passage, which has the potential to lead into anti-Semitic academic argument, Ruether, like Schüssler Fiorenza identifies inclusivity, where others might be inclined to highlight division.[211] Ruether also looks at rewriting gospel material in order to promote memory in the discipleship of equals; in her version the disciples discuss the way in which Jesus speaks to the community; she writes: "He tells us to act like servants, but he tells women that they don't have to serve, that they can join the discipleship of equals!"[212] Ruether's evident belief in the reality of the discipleship of equals is just one of the ways in which her work and that of Schüssler Fiorenza share significant similarities.

A further significant similarity between Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza is in Ruether's use of a "politics of interpretation" approach to reading and using the Bible—somewhat of a canon-within-the-canon. Like Schüssler Fiorenza, Ruether argues that those sayings which serve to marginalise and oppress women should be ignored, on the basis that they do not "reflect the divine."[213] Ruether goes as far as to say: "many aspects of the Bible are to be frankly set aside and rejected."[214] This too relates to the desire of both scholars to reclaim the Bible for women, Ruether writes that the aim of feminist scholarship should involve creating "a new society for gender justice."[215] By arguing that God recognises the full humanity of women, Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza look to create an equal and inclusive space for women in biblical religion.[216]

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[208] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xvii.
[209] Adela Yarbro Collins, "New Testament Perspectives: The Gospel of John," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 7, no. 22 (1982): 47-53.
[210] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 65.
[211] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 4.
[212] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 6.
[213] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 19.
[214] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 23.
[215] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* xii.
[216] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 41.

Another scholar of early Jesus movements whose work builds on Schüssler Fiorenza's, is Karen Jo Torjesen. In my view, Torjesen's work both agrees with and elaborates on Schüssler Fiorenza's connection between Christ and Sophia.[217] For Torjesen, it is John 1:1 that best highlights the link between Jesus and Sophia, with this idea being present in the work of Paul too (Col. 1:15).[218] Whilst for many, myself included, this relationship is complex, Torjesen highlights a few additional similarities between the two conceptual figures, for example, the idea that both are "divine and pre-existent," which make *understanding* Schüssler Fiorenza's argument all the more possible.[219]

For Schüssler Fiorenza, an awareness of the kyriarchal practices that have long silenced and marginalised women is key to reclaiming the Bible for women.[220] Whilst Schüssler Fiorenza is unique in her coining of the term "kyriarchy" there is certainly evidence that other scholars have taken up a similarly intersectional view in attempting to understand the absence of women from history, if not always taking up the same language.[221] Grant cites the work of Ruether, which argues that sexism should not be understood as "the ultimate oppression," and that the roles of racism and classism need to be better researched.[222] Grant also finds that "the social context in which orthodox theology arose can be characterized by the term "patriarchy,"" tying, as many feminist authors do, the development of early Christian traditions, to the patriarchal worldviews in which they developed.[223] Similarly, Torjesen writes that Christianity has been "mired" by the patriarchal social system that it "inherited."[224] Grant also cites the *95 Theses* (compiled by the Task Force on Women in the Presbyterian Church) in order to further her point; "the experience and contributions of women to Christianity and Church History have been ignored, distorted and repressed with a patriarchal bias substituted."[225] The consequence of this patriarchy is, as Schüssler Fiorenza has argued, that women have almost entirely been erased from early Christian history, and even when they are mentioned,

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[217] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 142.
[218] Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 262.
[219] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 262.
[220] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 19.
[221] Kyriarchy is used to more broadly understand the oppression faced by women and non-elite men at the hands of a few elite men. As such in this section I have included instances where writers cite "patriarchy" as a cause of women's oppression. Schussler Fiorenza's 'kyriarchy' is on par, for Biblical Studies, with the influence of Crenshaw's 'intersectionality' for most disciplines; see Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139–168.
[222] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 125, quoted in, Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: The American Academy of Religion, 1989), 134.
[223] Grant, *White Women's Christ,* 68.
[224] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 268.
[225] Judy Gere and Virginia Mills, "95 Theses on Patriarchal Oppression of Women," compiled by the *Task Force on Women in the Presbyterian Church*, *Moving Toward Full Personhood: A six-session seminar on the Changing status of women,* quoted in Grant, *White Women's Christ,* 69.

the description of women that we receive does not necessarily reflect the reality of women's experience.[226] Parks credits Tal Ilan with the insight that, in Parks' words, "most of our evidence for women is filtered through what ancient men thought about them; what was seen as evidence for women's behaviours may often instead represent the behaviour of women in the fantasies of men."[227] As Torjesen says, whilst hierarchical patriarchy may not be "intrinsic" to Christianity, it is certainly significant when unpacking the texts that claim to recall the beginnings of this religion.[228]

It is at this point that Schüssler Fiorenza's work on reconstruction becomes significant. As we have seen, for Schüssler Fiorenza, reconstruction is key to relating memory in the discipleship of equals, to the lives of modern women, religious or not.[229] This desire to improve the lives of women today through reconstruction is also shared by Ruether and Helen Bond. Beginning with Ruether, she is keen to emphasise that the "point of reference for Biblical faith is not past texts;" instead, recognising that many of these texts do not serve women, the focus should be on "new futures" rather than remaining within the social limits that the text was originally written in.[230] For Ruether, this is particularly possible because Christianity is a prophetic faith, one which Ruether claims "critiques all religious sanctifications of patriarchal, hierarchical and oppressive social relationships."[231] The potential for perfection is key to the "reign of God" and makes the struggle against these relationships all the more important and, for Ruether, critiquing sexist structures is therefore "fundamental."[232]

A second, and contested aspect of reconstruction, is the role that imagination should and does play. For Bond, imagination is "necessary" for reconstructing the lives of women, and in particular, imaginative reconstruction should be embraced because imagination is key to making a reconstruction more plausible. [233] Bond points out, as Schüssler Fiorenza and Ruether do, that all historical Jesus research is subject to opinion and author bias, but goes further, claiming that imagination "is the only way I can think of that helps to neutralise our heavily interpreted primary sources - not to mention our own modern bias."[234] Modern bias is the subject of another of LeDonne's interviews with Bond, with Bond warning of the potential for self-projection in historical Jesus

[226] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 74.
[227] Parks, "'The Brooten Phenomenon,'" 52.
[228] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 268.
[229] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 15.
[230] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 32-33.
[231] Ruether, "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion," 65.
[232] Ruether, "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion," 65.
[233] Parks, "The Brooten Phenomenon," 52.
[234] Helen K. Bond, "Interview with Helen Bond," interview by Anthony Le Donne, *The Jesus Blog,* September 17, 2012, http://historicaljesusresearch.blogspot.com/2012/09/interview-with-helen-k-bond.html; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 45.

research, and with no easy solution, she recommends that scholars are "continually on their guard" in order that they avoid creating, as many Third Questers have pointed out/denied, "a Jesus who holds my own views."[235]

This brings us to another central aspect of Schüssler Fiorenza's proposed approach to historical Jesus research: the rejection of the possibility of objectivity and the recognition that all research about the life of Jesus is subject to hermeneutical bias.[236] Parks describes Schüssler Fiorenza's position on objectivity in her article *The Brooten Phenomenon,* and particularly engages with the accusation that feminist work is somehow *more* subjective and biased. Parks writes, "a central obstacle to the integration of women's scholarship and scholarship about gender [is] the stereotype that 'malestream' scholarship is *objective*, whereas feminist scholarship is 'engaged' and therefore somehow unscientific."[237] In agreement with Schüssler Fiorenza, Parks goes on to point out that feminist work is no more 'engaged' than malestream historical Jesus research, in its presumption that being "male, white, Western, and Christian or post-Christian is an acceptable neutral "default.""[238] The view that historical Jesus research that operates under this notion of 'neutrality' might be objective is, for Parks, "problematic at best, and violent at worst," as Parks further develops Schüssler Fiorenza's argument to show how the male as 'default' is not just misleading and oppressive, but also dangerous for women and non-binary people today.[239]

Ruether also agrees with Schüssler Fiorenza on the impossibility of conducting objective research. Like Parks and Schüssler Fiorenza, Ruether uses an argument made against feminist research, that it is rooted in "experience" rather than "objectivity," and shows that it is not just feminists that work from experience, everybody does; this includes Scripture and tradition, the so-called "objective sources of theology," which Ruether argues are in fact an example of a "codified collective human experience."[240] Current historical Jesus researchers Sarah Rollens and Anthony Le Donne acknowledge that the gospels "might tell us more about the 'limited perspectives of the authors' than they do about the life of Jesus."[241] They also recall Reimarus, who implied that the same process is at work in the gospel

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[235] Helen K. Bond, "Interview with Helen Bond (Part II)," interview by Anthony Le Donne, *The Jesus Blog,* September 18, 2012, http://historicaljesusresearch.blogspot.com/2012/09/interview-with-helen-k-bond-part-ii.html.
[236] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 78.
[237] Parks, "The Brooten Phenomenon," 53.
[238] Parks, "The Brooten Phenomenon," 53.
[239] Parks, "The Brooten Phenomenon," 53; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xi; 16.
[240] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 33; Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 12.
[241] Sarah E. Rollens and Anthony Le Donne, "The Life and Times of Historical Jesus Scholarship," *Cambridge Companion to the New Testament,* ed. Patrick Gray (unpublished manuscript, April 22, 2020), Word document, 3. Many thanks to Sarah for sharing resources with me, including this paper.

material when he wrote: "I find great cause to separate completely what the apostles say in their own writings from that which Jesus himself actually said and taught."[242] Similarly, Ruether argues that "everything is written in context" and that the selection of the biblical canon was no exception to this rule.[243] Ruether shows - like Schüssler Fiorenza does through her politics of interpretation approach - that the canonisation and early Christian writing processes were not only done in service of the individuals who controlled these processes, but also as a way of suppressing and marginalising the views of others.[244]

As Schüssler Fiorenza has shown, the prioritising and kyriarchal interpretation of gospel material is done in service of worldviews, social and political groups and individuals. One way in which this is done is through individuals interpreting Jesus in their own image, most commonly known as "the well" metaphor. Whilst this is often portrayed as an innocent glitch in historical Jesus research, as Ruether, Parks, and Schüssler Fiorenza all illustrate, its consequences can be destructive. Rollens and Le Donne include this criticism of historical Jesus research in their article, pointing to the work of "polymaths" who have "attempted to reframe Jesus to make him more relevant to their own studies," and also illustrating one way in which the function of the well phenomenon is promoting political views: "[Craig] Martin views the Jesus of many modern Americans to be one who tacitly acquiesces to capitalist forces."[245] The view that is perhaps most similar to Schüssler Fiorenza's though, is that of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. Sakenfeld warns that researchers should be conscious of their personal agenda, not only in their conclusions, but in the bias behind the formulation of their questions.[246] Further, she notes the tendency among feminist scholars to struggle between two arguments; one, to exaggerate women's suffering in the Old Testament - which Schüssler Fiorenza would out as an anti-Semitic argument – and two, to engage in apologetic work and interpret the Bible through rose-coloured glasses.[247] Like Schüssler Fiorenza, Sakenfeld admits that avoiding the pitfalls of either method is a difficult task, one that she has battled with herself, but an important one all the same.[248] Claudia Janssen and Regene Lamb also note the problematic trend in feminist interpretation to promote inadvertent anti-Semitism. Janssen and Lamb give the example of Bernadette Brooten, who tackles this trend by utilising inscriptional sources which indicate that women in the Judaism before Jesus' day were sometimes active participants in synagogue worship and that they served in various

[242] Rollens and Le Donne, "The Life and Times," 4.
[243] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 14.
[244] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 40.
[245] Rollens and Le Donne, "The Life and Times," 32; 3.
[246] Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Old Testament Perspectives: Methodological Issues," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 7, no.22 (1982): 47-53.
[247] Sakenfeld, "Old Testament Perspectives," 15.
[248] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 75.

leadership roles.[249] Tackling anti-Semitism is key to Schüssler Fiorenza's proposal for Jesus scholarship and biblical interpretation, and it is evident that she is not alone in this endeavour.

As the above work of Martin and others shows, Schüssler Fiorenza and many others who fall under the alleged time period of the Third Quest aren't just looking to unmask patriarchal behaviours vis-à-vis gender. Ruether et al. are clear that feminist work shouldn't just address androcentrism, feminist analysis "must also criticise all other forms of chauvinism: making white Westerners the norm of humanity, making Christians the norm of humanity, making privileged classes the norm of humanity."[250] Recognising times where the privileged are treated as the default, even when they may feel like the oppressed, is one way in which Ruether, like Schüssler Fiorenza, challenges feminist scholars to acknowledge when they are in a privileged position.[251] Ruether's work here is clearly influential, as Sakenfeld cites Ruether as the inspiration behind her recognition of the "cultural and functional inseparability of racism, sexism and classism," bringing her to the conclusion that the three "isms" are often disconnected in historical Jesus research, and that there is "more work to do in this area."[252] Rollens and Le Donne also indicate that historical Jesus research has a long way to go if it is to become an inclusive and representative discipline. Having mentioned that "voices from non-white, majority-world scholars are rare" they evidence this claim in their footnotes; having looked through the *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, they write:

> We have failed to name even one African-American, female scholar in the field of historical Jesus research. This may speak to the relative lack of African-American women doing research related to Second Temple Judaism and/or Christian origins. It may also speak to systemic gaps in our own reading/awareness.[253]

Whilst Rollens and Le Donne give two possible explanations for the scarcity of Black and African-American women in historical Jesus research, I think that the two are most likely related. Systemic racism and a lack of awareness of its impact are likely part of the reason why African-American women are unable to have their work published, and when it is, they might be more likely to go uncited.[254]

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[249] Bernadette J. Brooten, "Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues," *Brown Judaic Studies* 36 (1982): 1-281, quoted in Claudia Janssen and Regene Lamb, "Gospel of Luke: The Humbled Will Be Lifted Up," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 645-659.
[250] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 20.
[251] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 5.
[252] Sakenfeld, "Old Testament Perspectives," 19.
[253] Rollens and Le Donne, "The Life and Times," 34-35.
[254] On under-representation and/or under-citation of non-white scholars, see Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "Tell the Next Generation: Racial and Ethnic Minority Scholars and the Future of Biblical Studies," JAAR 69/3 (2001): 649-671

Finally in this section, I will note a few occasions where feminist scholars have warned against the risks of falling into anti-Semitic argument. In *The Brooten Phenomenen,* Parks highlights the work of two women who have done just that. First, she points Amy Jill Levine's work, in which Levine highlights a popular trope within early Christian studies according to which "ancient Judaism was hopelessly patriarchal until Jesus came along and emancipated everyone."[255] This is very much in keeping with Schüssler Fiorenza's argument that Jesus was not the "exceptional man" that feminist researchers in particular are keen to present, in order to amplify Jesus' gender-levelling message.[256] Similarly, Parks notes the work of Alicia Batten, with Parks summarising Batten's relevant argument as follows:

> While Jesus' sayings material may contain gender-levelling rhetoric, it did not pop spontaneously from a vacuum, but was in keeping with a number of diverse shifts in gender dynamics in the surrounding Mediterranean, involving Jews and non-Jews alike.[257]

Here Batten's work appears again similar to that of Schüssler Fiorenza, with Schüssler Fiorenza writing that a reformer doesn't have to be "God striding over the earth" to have an emancipatory message.[258] Ruether also points to places of anti-Semitic practice, giving the example of how the Church has suppressed the "social justice dimension" of Jesus' teaching - which Ruether argues is "fundamental to the entire Biblical prophetic tradition of messianic hope" - not just to silence women, but also to sever the "continuity between the Jewish understanding of the Messiah and the Christian use of the term Christ."[259] Ruether observes that the Christian church consistently down-plays Jesus' interest in social justice as a way to support "dominant social hierarchies"; this continues the reign of kyriarchal and anti-Semitic practices in and beyond the walls of the church. Like Schüssler Fiorenza, Ruether's careful attention to the politics of interpretation is helpful in understanding how feminist researchers should monitor their translations and reconstructions.[260] Rollens and Le Donne give the example of Susannah Heschel, whose work highlights just what can happen when anti-Semitic biblical interpretations go unchecked. Heschel's work considers how Nazis used Jesus as a vehicle for their political ideology, with the conclusion being that not only did some prominent figures in 1930 begin

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and Celine-Marie Pascale, ed., *Social Inequality and the Politics of Representation: A Global Landscape* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2013).

[255] Parks, "The Brooten Phenomenon," 50.

[256] Schüssler Fiorenza*, Politics,* 21.

[257] Parks, "The Brooten Phenomenon," 54; Alicia Batten, "More Queries for Q: Women and Christian Origins," *BTB* 24/2 (1994): 44-51.

[258] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Politics," 354.

[259] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 31.

[260] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 1.

to argue that Jesus could "transcend his Jewish heritage and become Aryan," but also that the remnants of these arguments still exist in historical Jesus research today.[261]

4.2 Somewhat similar or supplementary to Schüssler Fiorenza

This next section will consider work that shows some similarities to Schüssler Fiorenza's, or appears to be supplementary. Much of the scholarship discussed in this section again comes from Ruether, but this time includes work that rather than consciously agreeing with Schüssler Fiorenza, uses similar themes to come to its own conclusions. We will begin by considering Ruether's and Torjesen's work concerning the impact of patriarchy on women – but this time these authors discuss the impact of patriarchal work on areas which are not fundamental or central aspects of Schüssler Fiorenza's theory. For instance, Ruether looks at the impact of dualistic and damaging worldviews on the citation of women's work, particularly considering how these dualisms are manifested in societal and religious norms ("the self and the world, the hierarchical concept of society, the relation of humanity and nature, and of God and creation") and are used to continually marginalise women in academia.[262] Ruether's work finds that to break down the above dualisms is to disrupt seemingly universal norms and structures, and concludes, like Letty M. Russell, that feminist work goes uncited because of the threat it poses to this dualism.[263] Here Ruether provides an alternative way of coming to a similar conclusion to Schüssler Fiorenza, and this section will look to explore more instances where feminist work follows this pattern.[264]

The question of how patriarchy came to influence Christianity and biblical texts is difficult and controversial. As such, some feminist scholars have looked at how different elements of Christianity are influenced by patriarchal thought, and have made attempts to understand its origins. Ruether and Torjesen both point to the suppression and decline of female symbols and imagery. Ruether looks at goddess history, contrasting the period of goddesses (she looks specifically at 2800-1200 B.C) with the modern world ruled by dualisms.[265] According to Ruether, goddess imagery points to a world where gods and goddesses are "equivalent, not complementary:" the female image is enough in itself. Torjesen cites the work of Gerda Lerner who considers the early goddess traditions and how these images were replaced by male gods by the time of the emergence of monotheism.[266] Ruether argues

[261] Rollens and Le Donne, "The Life and Times," 26.
[262] Ruether, *New Woman,* 3-4.
[263] Letty M. Russell, "Feminist Critique: Opportunity for Cooperation," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 7, no. 22 (1982): 67-71.
[264] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals*, 11.
[265] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 52.
[266] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 199-211, quoted in Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 257.

that it is through this subordination of goddesses that a "symbolic hierarchy" is established of God-male-female.[267] According to this structure, women are connected to God only through interaction with men, and Ruether points to the Hebrew Bible's male heads of families as evidence for this argument. The existence of divine female actors, and their suppression through patriarchalization in Judaism and then in Christianity, is central to Ruether's argument. Whilst Schüssler Fiorenza does not discuss goddesses at length, she and Ruether are making similar interpretive moves when Schüssler Fiorenza discusses the suppression of Sophia (Wisdom)'s identification with Christ by early Christians.[268] A further difference in the method Schüssler Fiorenza takes to come to her conclusions on the subordination of divine female imagery, is that unlike Ruether, she does not point to Judaism as the initial cause for this subordination, and is often careful to avoid the potential for anti-Semitic conclusions to be drawn from her work.[269]

Torjesen goes on to look at patriarchal influences in the early centuries of the Common Era.[270] For instance, she points to the influence of Tertullian and his argument that stories of Thecla were not written by Paul simply because they portray women in positions of leadership. [271] Torjesen highlights Tertullian's work to expose the reality of deep-rooted patriarchal popular thought in the second and third centuries CE. (Note that Tertullian had no problem attributing Pauline authorship to the notoriously misogynistic Pastoral Epistles.)[272] As a prolific author we can assume that Tertullian's work was widely received and taken seriously in early Christianity. Torjesen also notes his problematic views on Christian women in relation to chastity, particularly that a woman could only be considered chaste if she had "no impact on male sexuality."[273] She notes that Tertullian goes on to argue that women should obscure their beauty, so as to avoid impacting men. As mentioned above, writing about women by ancient men is not necessarily descriptive, but often merely prescriptive; Torjesen argues that "Christian women, however, did not in fact feel responsible for male sexuality, nor were they particularly concerned to present an overwhelming appearance of chastity by abandoning personal grooming."[274] Whilst Torjesen suggests that women of the day were largely uninfluenced by Tertullian's writing, due to the longevity of his work it would be hard to argue that his way of thinking

[267] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 53.
[268] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Towards a Feminist Wisdom Spirituality of Justice and Well-Being," *Lieve Troch Felicitation Volume* (2009): 1-17.
[269] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child*, 88.
[270] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 159.
[271] Tertullian, *De Baptistimo* XVII, trans. Rev. S. Thelwall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869).
[272] See his *Adversus Marcion,* 5.2-21, trans. Ernest Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) and also Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).
[273] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 171.
[274] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 171.

has not influenced later Christian thought.[275] Torjesen's consideration of the impact of patriarchal thought on women between the third and fifth centuries CE is also relevant to this section, as Torjesen points to powers which Schüssler Fiorenza would describe as kyriarchal, when discussing claims that women should not be ordained.[276] It is in the polemical writings of this time period that Torjesen claims we first see arguments relating to the religious role of women, with Torjesen giving the following examples:

> The arguments that Jesus appointed only male disciples and therefore women cannot be ordained; that Paul instructed women to keep silent during public discussions and thus women cannot teach; that if Jesus had wanted women to baptize, he would have been baptized by his mother Mary.[277]

These beliefs about women, Torjesen argues, were supported and enabled by a dualistic society "divided into two domains, the polis (city), a male domain, and the oikos (household), a female domain."[278] However, Torjesen finds that this dualism is not entirely detrimental to women's livelihoods; whilst its initial attempt may have been to segregate women, in reality this system also gave women a great deal of power and influence over their families' private lives.[279] Like Schüssler Fiorenza, Torjesen identifies occasions where the reality of women's lives is not suitably transmitted, and discovers more about the hidden lives of early Christian women; for instance in her study of excavations of Old Europe she finds "the largest and most central sleeping platform, located on the east side of houses and shrines, belonged to the woman of the household."[280] This is one example of an occasion where the reality of biblical women's lives is hidden, and because this truth was ignored and neglected, assumptions about women's lives were and continue to be inaccurately founded.

Ruether also considers instances where assumptions made about women have been used to continually suppress and marginalise them. For instance, Ruether's work on original sin looks to uncover instances where patriarchal ideas became biblical truths. Just as Schüssler Fiorenza encourages feminist scholars to ignore that which promotes the subordination of women, Ruether argues "women must reject a concept of the fall that makes them scapegoats for the advent of evil and uses this to 'punish' them through historical subordination."[281] Considering that the relationship

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[275] Here Torjesen may be referring to Christian women before and during the time of Tertullian's writing. If this is the case then the argument about the longevity of his work does not apply to these women, but instead to women living after his writing had become part of popular thought.
[276] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 40.
[277] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 6.
[278] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 6.
[279] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 6.
[280] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 253; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* xi.
[281] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 37.

between women (as opposed to humans) and original sin developed much later than the text of Genesis (only coming to flourish in the patristic period), Ruether finds that when the "Hebrew myth of Eve" first developed, Hebrew thought did not take the story literally and that "it is never referred to at any other place in Hebrew Scripture as the basis of the etiology of evil."[282] Ruether argues that Christian use of this myth has served to deny the redeemability of women, and that it is through the repetition of this warping of the myth across generations, that women are denied participation in the image of God, and marginalised from positions of power in society.[283] Schüssler Fiorenza's concern with the dangerous use of biblical ethics is replicated in Grant's work, for example in the similarities she identifies between Mary Daly and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex.*[284] Grant finds that both women "attribute the oppression of women largely to religion, Christianity and the Church."[285] This is similar to the starting points of much of Schüssler Fiorenza's work, before she begins to identify ways in which Christianity might also liberate women.[286]

Another way of understanding the existence of patriarchy in Christianity is as a cultural reaction to the socio-political communities Christianity developed in. Torjesen argues that patriarchy developed as Christianity entered the public sphere. The Greco-Roman society that they entered as they developed away from Judaism had already marginalised women in religion, and male leaders in Christianity began to demand the same treatment, including that women's role be restricted to the domestic sphere.[287] In order that they might gather followers rather than detractors, Torjesen argues that Christianity began to assimilate into Hellenistic culture, gradually adopting Greco-Roman conventions. For Grant, feminist Christology must respond to "traditional male-articulated christologies" by pointing out, as Torjesen has done, how Christianity developed "to keep women in their place."[288] This is evidenced in that the (majority Jewish) movement inherited by Paul was already full of women in every sort of position, from financial patrons to leaders to missionaries, as had surrounded the historical Jesus, whereas the later texts of the New Testament, which reflect majority-non-Jewish communities, vocally demand women's subservience.[289] Grant argues that only once this decline of women in early Christianity has been acknowledged can feminist Christology begin to provide liberating opportunities

[282] Tertullian calls women 'the devil's gateway' and says that women 'destroyed Adam' in *On The Apparel of Women* 1.1, trans. Rev. S. Thelwall (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885); Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 166.
[283] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 169.
[284] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 66.
[285] Grant, *White Women's Christ,* 151.
[286] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 147.
[287] Batten, "More Queries for Q," 49-51; Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 38.
[288] Grant, *White Women's Christ,* 82.
[289] For instance, compare Romans 16 with 1 Timothy 2:12.

for women, particularly through the "liberation of Jesus from oppressive and distorted interpretations."[290]

Torjesen furthers this argument by considering the use of symbolism in excluding women from ministerial positions historically and in modernity. Similar to the "original sin" argument above, Torjesen shows how women have been systematically excluded from leadership roles in Christianity because of Greek philosophical and Christian theological depictions of God. This combined with the apparently inherent sexuality of women (portrayed by these male-centred traditions) has served to distance women from the divine because of their association with birth, "the fragility and vulnerability of life, mortality, and contingency."[291] To associate these characteristics with the feminine is to draw from the age of polytheism and "bring sexuality back into the realm of the divine;" when men have already been symbolically associated with "rationality and control," the potential for a respectable role for women is eradicated. Torjesen gives the example of the 1976 Vatican document, "Declaration on the Question of Admitting Women to the Priesthood" which justifies the exclusion of women on the basis that their bodies do not resemble "the male body of Christ," bringing women's sexuality into the argument through the unbelievably inaccurate belief that a woman (but not a man) is "inseparable from her sexual nature" and because of this, women would taint the realm of the sacred.[292] Ruether had made this argument in *Sexism and God-Talk,* recalling that the so-called inability of women to represent Christ is rooted in descriptions of Jesus "as the male disclosure of a male God whose normative representative can only be male."[293] Further arguments regarding divine maleness will be discussed in the following section regarding arguments distinct from that of Schüssler Fiorenza, but the above arguments have been included at this point due to the emphasis on the exclusion of women from Christian leadership roles, which Schüssler Fiorenza looks to overturn in the reclaiming power of "women-church."[294]

Using the Bible as a source of liberation is another important aspect of Schüssler Fiorenza's approach to historical Jesus research, in order that the Bible might be more than an oppressive text for women.[295] This is a method also utilised by Ruether and Torjesen, who both consider ways in which memory in the discipleship of equals can be promoted through careful reading of the Bible. Torjesen, for instance, looks at the translation of *diakonos,* finding that when the title is associated with a male

[290] Grant, *White Women's Christ,* 82.
[291] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 266.
[292] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 3.
[293] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 125.
[294] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone,* xvii.
[295] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, x.

actor, it is translated as minister, but when it is used to describe a woman, it is translated as deaconess, a role which in modern Christianity carries fewer opportunities and responsibilities.[296] Similarly, Torjesen looks at how rereading parts of the writings of Paul could highlight a more important role for women. She uses the example of Paul's letter to the Romans, pointing out that "of the twenty-eight prominent people whom Paul considered it polite to greet, ten were women."[297] Whilst we might initially find that women are hidden or obscured from texts, Torjesen points to an instance where women are not the wallflowers that later biblical interpretation has painted them as.

Another author whose work discusses similar themes to Schüssler Fiorenza's is Jane Schaberg. Schaberg however, is distinct in publishing about the verbal abuse and threats of violence she received in response to her historical Jesus research, in her poignant article, "A Feminist Experience of Historical-Jesus Scholarship." Schaberg's article recalls the backlash and vilification she endured because of her work concerning Mary. She notes the media reaction which painted her as an "angry, uncredentialed, loose-cannon feminist, dogmatically preaching 'the gospel according to Jane.'"[298] Schaberg's findings affirmed what she already knew, and what Schüssler Fiorenza has consistently argued in her politics of interpretation approach: feminist findings are ignored in service of fundamentalism and hierarchy.[299] Whilst critics of Schaberg imply that her research is self-serving, Schaberg notes that they continually ignore the biases and motivations of male interpretation, arguing "all of our reconstructions are—at least partially—mirrors. All of our reconstructions have political uses" and acknowledges that women's historical Jesus research is interested in finding a useable past and future for women.[300]

Parks' work also discusses similar themes to Schüssler Fiorenza, as she points to the role of kyriarchy in keeping feminist work out of mainstream historical Jesus research.[301] Parks likens the perception of women's studies to a "side quest;" "they can be fun, and they are interesting for the quester, but they are easily compartmentalized and do not fundamentally affect the real game or other characters in the main quest."[302] She evidences this claim with the example of Lee Levine's *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* which "almost completely compartmentalized" its chapter on Women in the

[296] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 5.
[297] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 33.
[298] Jane Schaberg, "A Feminist Experience of Historical-Jesus Scholarship," in *Whose Historical Jesus?* ed. William E. Arnal and Michael Desjardins (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 146-160.
[299] Schaberg, *A Feminist Experience,* 156; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 113.
[300] Schaberg, *A Feminist Experience,* 159.
[301] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 142.
[302] Parks, "The Brooten Phenomenon," 47.

Synagogue.[303] By keeping research by or about women "hermetically separate" from the rest of historical Jesus research, gender is treated as an added extra, not compulsory or relevant to the "proper" (read: "malestream") historical Jesus research. In her criticism of the side-lining of women's studies, Parks notes a number of times where she has uncovered the answers to "man questions" (research that fits into malestream scholarship) whilst studying ancient women.[304] Parks' adopts key elements of Schüssler Fiorenza's theory, and goes on to develop and expand these themes to address the experience of feminist researchers in an environment that, despite Schüssler Fiorenza's best efforts, continues to adopt malestream arguments.

4.3 Distinct to Schüssler Fiorenza

This final section will consider ways in which the work of feminist authors shows difference to the work of Schüssler Fiorenza, for instance by addressing different themes and topics in their feminist historical Jesus research. One key difference I noticed through my research was that for many other feminist researchers the maleness or femaleness of God played a significant part in formulating their approach to the life of the historical Jesus and its impact on women. The "male = divine" argument has been briefly noted already, but this section will explore the more radical elements of this argument that we do not see discussed by Schüssler Fiorenza.

Grant discusses attitudes which point towards a male = divine tradition in Christianity, as well as considering biblical examples which subvert this imagery. Firstly, Grant cites Paul Jewett who argues that there should be fellowship rather than hierarchy in religion, but that the possibility of this is obscured because "an affinity between maleness and divineness remains the basic assumption behind every argument from the nature of God for the exclusion of women from the office of the ministry."[305] Jewett's solution to this issue is, according to Grant, "to recognize the male and female as the image of God."[306] At this point, Grant begins to consider imagery pointing to an androgynous God, particularly citing the work of Virginia Mollenkott to point to examples supporting this presentation. Grant gives Mollenkott's example of Isaiah 46:3-4 which she argues shows that the male pronouns used to describe God do not literally mean that God is masculine, because God is described as "a midwife and a nurse maid."[307] This leads Grant to the following conclusion: "The fact that the Bible speaks of God in both feminine and masculine imagery is evidence that the traditionally accepted

[303] Parks, "The Brooten Phenomenon," 50.
[304] Parks, "The Brooten Phenomenon," 55.
[305] Paul Jewett, *The Ordination of Women*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 35.
[306] Grant, *White Women's Christ,* 96.
[307] Grant, *White Women's Christ,* 97.

masculine imagery of God must be rejected."[308] Whilst Schüssler Fiorenza critiques biblical authors for "rendering" God as male, this is as far as her argument goes, largely exploring the implications of a male God, rather than the causes or counter-arguments.[309]

Leonard Swidler on the other hand, argues that a mistranslation of the Nicene Creed has meant that Jesus has been understood as "God becoming male" rather than "God becoming human" (male and female).[310] Grant goes on, in *White Women's Christ,* to point to Swidler's examples of occasions where the descriptions of Jesus share characteristics across various constructions of gender ancient and modern, for instance in expressing emotion, eg. weeping (John 11:33-36). Swidler and Grant are not alone in noting biblical occasions where the divine is described in terms of typically feminine attributes. Sakenfeld argues that the sheer variety of imagery used to describe God has only recently been recognised, and with that there has been "fresh and systematic attention to a number of feminine metaphors for God."[311] Torjesen points to images of God as a "mother hen" (Ps. 17.8; 36.7; 91.4) (Lk 13.34-35) and to examples from *Revelations of Divine Love* by Julian of Norwich which describe "precious Mother Jesus" and suckling children.[312] An aspect of femininity that Schüssler Fiorenza more typically engages with is the connection between the feminine Wisdom/Sophia and Jesus. Yarbro Collins discusses feminine imagery in John in her article "New Testament Perspectives: The Gospel of John." As part of this article Yarbro Collins points to passages, particularly in John's prologue, which show similarity to the Wisdom tradition, as well as in Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman and teaching on the last day of the feast of Tabernacles.[313] Collins shows that whilst these passages could have functioned to "masculinize the wisdom tradition," they could also have been intended to present the feminine Jesus through the use of images that remind readers "of personified Wisdom who is female."[314] For Collins, such an interpretation would affirm that there exists a feminine aspect of the divine and therefore indicates that "the feminine experience is significant and meaningful." Swidler, Torjesen, Sakenfeld, and Collins, despite coming to conclusions similar to those of Schüssler Fiorenza, all utilise an argument that Schüssler Fiorenza seemingly avoids, in order to promote memory in the role of women in Christian tradition.

Ruether's work on Jesus' maleness also shows difference from the work of Schüssler Fiorenza. For Ruether, patriarchy in religion is a form of idolatry through "the idolizing of the male as representative

[308] Grant, *White Women's Christ,* 97.
[309] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xi.
[310] Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Women*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 281.
[311] Sakenfeld, "Old Testament Perspectives," 16.
[312] Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests,* 260; 267.
[313] Yarbro Collins, *New Testament Perspectives,* 50.
[314] Yarbro Collins, *New Testament Perspectives,* 51.

of divinity."[315] As such, to argue that men are more "like God" than women is idolatrous, as is using God's image or name to justify patriarchal practices. This argument, Ruether argues, also extends to language used to describe God, with words like "Father" being used to describe God's maleness literally rather than metaphorically also being a form of idolatry, setting a human construct up as something divine and worthy of worship.[316] For Ruether then, the maleness of the divine is unimportant to prophetic religion; Jesus' gender is therefore irrelevant to his ability to save, with this role instead relating to Jesus' renouncement of systems of oppression and domination.[317] Further, the dualism of "male Saviour" and "female saved" is also found to be inaccurate, as Ruether argues that men and women are continually making up the redeemed community, in a dynamic relationship with God that is open to all, and a redeemer that cannot be encapsulated "once-for-all" in the historical Jesus.[318]

Further instances where feminist work shows distinction to that of Schüssler Fiorenza includes Delores S. Williams' work on identifying instances where the oppressed do not come first in the Bible. Whilst Schüssler Fiorenza is well known for using a hermeneutics of suspicion, her research rarely identifies points in the Bible where the message, not just the interpretation or authorship, is patriarchal. Williams on the other hand, studies the action of God in the Hagar-Sarah texts in Genesis and Galatians, and concludes that these texts "demonstrate that the oppressed and abused do not always experience God's liberating power."[319] Ruether also, despite sharing a number of methods and conclusions with Schüssler Fiorenza, points to another way in which women's rights are obscured from the Bible. Ruether argues that the closing of the canon itself was a political move, in order that revelation was said to be "closed," and anyone who continued to argue that they were speaking in the name of God was deemed a "heretic" (Ruether gives the example of the Montanists).[320] This meant that the only people who could claim to speak from God were bishops, a group which was for a long time, exclusively male. For Ruether, the experience of women in the Church is othering and alienating, and whilst Schüssler Fiorenza believes that feminist interpretation will liberate women, Ruether is concerned that "the increasing conviction that an alternative is a more authentic understanding of the Gospel [will] make all the more painful and insulting the reality of most historical churches," and that women will therefore become more distant from organised religion.[321]

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[315] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 23.
[316] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 66.
[317] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 137.
[318] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 138.
[319] Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (New York, Orbis Books, 1993), 144.
[320] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 123-124.
[321] Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 193.

The argument over whether Jesus was or was not a feminist is one that Schüssler Fiorenza is keen to avoid answering explicitly, although she does list a couple of passages which may allude to a feminist Jesus (Mark 10:2-9 and 12:18-27).[322] One reason for not actively engaging in this debate, is likely that feminist research has the potential to endorse anti-Semitic arguments in creating an exceptional Jesus.[323] Contrary to this view, Grant gives the example of Mollenkott, who claims:

> The more we find out about the cultural conditions of rabbinic Judaism, the more we realize that in situations like the conversations with the Samaritan woman, Jesus was deliberately breaking rabbinic customs that were degrading to the self-concept of women.[324]

Whilst Mollenkott is trying to give a liberating example of Jesus' interactions with women, her words are still oppressive. Her language could have been improved simply by being more specific about the group she claims Jesus is rebelling against, rather that retrojecting evidence from the later Rabbinic/Patristic period back onto the diversity and polemics within first century Judaism. Regardless, this is an example of exactly what Schüssler Fiorenza is trying to warn later feminist writers about.

Schüssler Fiorenza's concern with hermeneutical bias is well-documented above and, as such, I found that this section on "the well" metaphor by Rollens and Le Donne seemed appropriate. However, unlike Schüssler Fiorenza, Rollens and LeDonne find that liberal theologians, particularly those who consider "contemporary socio-political issues that are important to modern Christians" are most likely to see their own faces gazing back at them at the bottom of the well.[325] Schüssler Fiorenza's research, on the other hand, has indicated the opposite, that it is the work of right-wing theologians that we should be particularly concerned about.[326]

4.4 Conclusion

To conclude, in this chapter I have looked to begin situating Schüssler Fiorenza's work in terms of the context in which it was written and in which it was received in feminist scholarship. There have been a vast number of publications in the field of historical Jesus research since Schüssler Fiorenza's first

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[322] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 143.
[323] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Miriam's Child,* 70.
[324] Virginia Mollenkott, *Women, Men and the Bible*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), 13, quoted in Grant, *White Women's Christ,* 103.
[325] Rollens and Le Donne, "The Life and Times," 13-14.
[326] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 66.

article was published in 1975, and to consider the relation of each of these texts to that of Schüssler Fiorenza's would be an impossible task! As such, I hope to have touched on a small number of authors who have engaged with, have used similar methods to, or have come to similar conclusions to Schüssler Fiorenza. This is done with the intention of showing how despite often going uncited, Schüssler Fiorenza's influence and the themes which are important to her work continue to be discussed and developed in service of feminist thought.

5. Conclusion

Having singled out several key features of the Third Quest, provided a breakdown of Schüssler Fiorenza's approach to historical Jesus research, and compared her work to some of her feminist contemporaries, I will now consider Schüssler Fiorenza's place within the Third Quest for the historical Jesus. Despite a growing number of female researchers being represented in the Third Quest, there are still a number of ways in which the work of the "prominent Third Questers" is distinct to that of Schüssler Fiorenza, which brings into question whether her work can be grouped within this quest or not. Schüssler Fiorenza's theoretical and hermeneutical acuity and awareness of the impact of interpretive bias on wider society is unparalleled in the Third Quest.[327] Despite an awareness of the pitfalls of "the well" metaphor, the key scholars discussed in the second chapter fail to analyse (or sometimes even recognise) the extended negative impact of bias in reconstructions of the historical Jesus, beyond that of simply being 'inaccurate.' In order to better illustrate my understanding of the difference between the work of Schüssler Fiorenza and the work of prominent Third Questers I have designed the following figure.

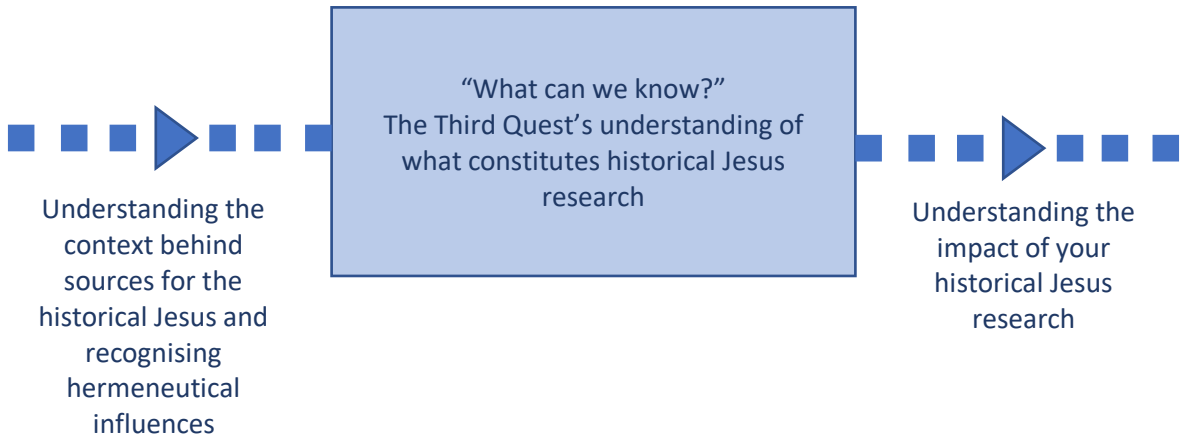


Figure 2. An illustration of the stages of historical Jesus research

Figure 2 illustrates Schüssler Fiorenza's broader understanding of the term "historical Jesus research." For Schüssler Fiorenza, historical Jesus research should move through all of the above processes, understanding context and influence, conducting research on the life of Jesus, and then considering

[327] The work of Crossan and Dunn touches on arguments relating to context and influence, but these arguments are not particularly well developed or discussed in any detail.

the impact of these insights. The Third Quest has seen some engagement with the first step, for instance in the improved recognition that Jesus was Jewish, and in the proclivity to wrestle with the problem of bias. For the most part however, the work of Third Questers is limited to finding "what we can know" about the life of Jesus, and largely fails to consider the impact of this research. Schüssler Fiorenza's work, on the other hand, is committed to increasing awareness of kyriarchal contexts past and present, and recognising the impact of the "politics of interpretation." Further, Schüssler Fiorenza engages with the middle section of Figure 2, as she looks to learn more about the life and teaching of Jesus through her memory approach which aims to uncover the reality of the *ekklesia* and the discipleship of equals.

Schüssler Fiorenza is not alone in engaging with these aspects of historical Jesus research. As was illustrated in 4.1, Collins also considers the role of patriarchal contexts and their later influences, and similarly, Parks points to occasions where focussing on the lives of ancient women, has taught us more about mainstream (malestream) historical Jesus research. The work of these authors, as well as Grant, Ruether and Schaberg to name a few, shows a number of similarities to that of Schüssler Fiorenza, in particular, their awareness of Christianity's patriarchal origins.

This brings me to the question, does Schüssler Fiorenza belong in the "Third Quest?" As we have seen, Schüssler Fiorenza's work, with its critique of objectivity, is markedly different in tone and genre to that of the prominent Third Questers. However, it is somewhat similar to aspects of the work of a handful of her peers, who agree that attention should be given to careful reconstruction in order to endorse reformative biblical interpretation. As such I would be inclined to place Schüssler Fiorenza in what I suggest we call a Third Quest Critical Stream; one which acknowledges modern changes in historical Jesus research, but allows for researchers to continue to challenge scholars to better themselves and their research through an increased awareness of kyriarchal context, authorial bias, and interpretive influence. To be placed in the Critical Stream does not mean that one's contributions to historical Jesus research must be kept separate from the rest of the Third Quest. Rather, scholars in the Critical Stream, like Schüssler Fiorenza and Ruether, not only provide insights into the life of the historical Jesus, but are also critically aware of their contemporaries' work and build on this in order to promote methods which not only inform readers, but serve equal and inclusive behaviours, ethics and politics.

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