

REMEMBERING THE HISTORIC JESUS— A NEW RESEARCH PROGRAM?

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The article argues that a new research program is emerging, one that shifts the focus from the quests for the “historical Jesus,” a person in the past, to recovering the “historic Jesus,” the person remembered by his followers. It finds that Jesus’ historic significance is and should be the center of Jesus research. It argues that the works of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, James D. G. Dunn, and Larry Hurtado are key contributions that indicate the shape of this research program.

THE THIRD QUEST for the “Historical-Jesus”¹ has matured as a research program. Moreover, major counterresponses to the contemporary quests for the Historical-Jesus have emerged in the last decade. Like the responses that unmasked the pretensions of the first quest in the 19th century,² the contemporary responses directed against the second (1953–

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¹ I adopt this term coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza to signal that the “historical Jesuses” “discovered” by scholarship are actually constructs of scholars. See her *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2000) 2 n. 3.

² Three different works are usually credited with bringing about the collapse of the first quest (although it must be noted that one of the classic expositions of the Historical-Jesus that emerged from the hand of the liberal questers, Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* [New York: Putnam, 1901; 1st German ed., 1900] was published at the height of these attacks). Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York: Macmillan, 1910; 1st German ed., 1906) undermined the liberal quest by recovering the apocalyptic element in Jesus’ teaching. Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, ed. Charles E. Braaten

1985) and third (roughly 1985–present) quests,³ especially the “neo-liberal” version of the latter associated with the Jesus Seminar, take various forms. But they all share a common insight analogous to the counterresponses to the first quest: the historic Jesus, the man from Nazareth, is the Jesus remembered, imitated, and worshiped by the disciples whom his actions and words empowered. The individual human being abstracted from all that, the Historical-Jesus, is not only a creation of the quest, often in the quester’s own image,⁴ but also *historically* insignificant—without Jesus’ historic impact, how could anyone ever take this itinerant healer, exorcist, teacher from an outpost of the Roman empire in the first century to be historically interesting?

(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964; 1st German ed., 1892) argued that distilling a Historical-Jesus so isolated him from the historic significance his disciples’ faith had given him that the Jesus thus found was insignificant. Wilhelm Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (Cambridge, U.K.: J. Clarke, 1971; 1st German ed., 1901) showed that the Synoptic tradition yielded gospels that were not only documents of faith, but were so structured by their authors’ theological motifs as to undermine them as historical sources, almost as much as John’s Gospel (more obviously theological) had been undermined earlier. Regrettably, seldom mentioned is Alfred Loisy, whose *The Gospel and the Church*, trans. Christopher Home (London: Isbister, 1906; 1st French ed., 1902), anticipated Schweitzer’s criticism and clearly recognized the Gospels as documents written in and for a community of faith.

³ N. T. Wright was the first to use this term. He finds the quest beginning earlier, as he finds a group of four works the “climax, thus far, of the Third Quest”: Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979); A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982); Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1984); and E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985); see Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861–1986*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University, 1988) 381. However, Wright also recognized that *Jesus and Judaism* “refuses to begin with the sayings, and starts instead [with] his action against the Temple” (N. T. Wright, “Quest for the Historical Jesus,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 3:801). It is this shift to *actions* done by and to Jesus in the context of late Second Temple Judaism, rather than Jesus’ *teaching*, that marks the decisive orientational shift that I find most significant in the third quest. While the other authors also move away from the second quest into a more socio-historical approach, I find Sanders’s move to be the breakthrough.

⁴ The sharpest formulation of this point was given in a book first published in 1909 by the Catholic Modernist George Tyrrell. He commented on the work of liberal Protestant theologian Adolf von Harnack as follows: “The Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well” (*Christianity at the Cross-roads* [London: Allen & Unwin, 1963] 49). Tyrrell’s point applies *mutatis mutandis* to many contemporary questers. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza makes a similar point in *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 13; a brief account of her position is her “Jesus of Nazareth in Historical Research,” in *Thinking of Christ: Proclamation, Explanation, Meaning*, ed. Tatha Wiley (New York: Continuum, 2003) 29–48.

I argue that a new historical research program is also emerging, possibly to supplant the third quest. I discern a major shift in the field provoked especially by the work of three scholars.⁵ This shift has three components: a shift from the “great man” approach to Jesus to a “first among equals” approach (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza); a shift from a focus on Scripture as written text to a focus that takes seriously the orality of the tradition (James D. G. Dunn); and a shift from understanding the acceptance of Jesus’ divinity as a late, even Hellenized, accretion to an early recognition (Larry Hurtado). Overall, the new program shifts from constructing theories about the Historical-Jesus to understanding the practices in which Jesus was remembered.

The first section of this article details some of the dissatisfactions with the quests. The middle sections detail the contributions from the authors considered and some of the implications that shape what I see as a new research program. The final section explores the significance of this historical work for Christology, especially for developing a “practical” Christology that focuses on how the Jesus movement constitutes itself, at least in part, by embodying practices that Jesus was remembered as empowering his disciples to engage in.

DISSATISFACTION WITH THE LATEST QUEST

Luke Timothy Johnson has been one of the toughest critics of the “neo-liberal” quest for the Historical-Jesus.⁶ What the questers do, finally, is not “history” but “theology,” the construction of a Jesus to believe in—but a Jesus not presented in the tradition carried by the church. Moreover, most of these scholars have explicit or implicit agenda that include “presenting” the Historical-Jesus in a way that enables contemporary audiences to appreciate him (usually over against “stale” traditional views). But in so doing, they risk making Jesus appear not as strange to us as someone from that distant time and place must be.

The Historical-Jesuses are constructed not for merely historical pur-

⁵ Obviously, numerous scholars can be seen as working in this way. Many will be cited in what follows, but the three enumerated here offer paradigmatic examples of this new program.

⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996). Walter Wink (“Response to Luke Timothy Johnson’s *The Real Jesus*,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 [1997] 1–16) portrays Johnson and the questers as opponents in a boxing match he referees. I discuss some of the problems with the quest as a historical enterprise in *History, Theology, and Faith: Dissolving the Modern Problematic* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2004), chap. 9. See also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1995) 82–88 for a feminist critique of the neo-liberal quest.

poses, but to give Christians a new identity in the present. As Paula Fredriksen put it: “To regard Jesus historically . . . means allowing him the irreducible otherness of his own antiquity, the strangeness Schweitzer captured in his closing description: ‘He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside.’ It is when we renounce the false familiarity proffered by the dark angels of Relevance and Anachronism that we see Jesus, his contemporaries, and perhaps even ourselves, more clearly in our common humanity.”⁷ Jesus does not fit our familiar categories; we need to acknowledge his strangeness to us. The quests for the Historical-Jesus all too easily fall prey to the desire for relevance.

Moreover, what does rigorous historical research yield as historical facts, not reconstructions? E. P. Sanders lists eight historical facts that are almost indisputable:

1. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist.
2. Jesus was a Galilean who preached and healed.
3. Jesus called disciples and spoke of there being twelve.
4. Jesus confined his activity to Israel.
5. Jesus engaged in a controversy about the Temple.
6. Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem by the Roman authorities.
7. After his death Jesus’ followers continued as an identifiable movement.
8. At least some Jews persecuted at least parts of the new movement . . . and it appears that this persecution perdured at least to a time near the end of Paul’s career.⁸

Minimal as they are, even these items are not perfectly stable as historical conclusions. Fredriksen has argued rather persuasively that nos. 1–5 cannot be certainly sequenced in that order, and that no. 5 cannot be affirmed on historians’ grounds to be a cause of no. 6.⁹ Other scholars might reformu-

⁷ Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Knopf, 1999) 267–68.

⁸ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* 10–11; I think Jesus not merely a healer but an exorcist, a point too often downplayed in the quests for relevance. Compare Norman Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1974) 277–78, for a similar list by a scholar sympathetic to the second quest. These factoids are not sufficient for writing a biography of Jesus.

⁹ Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University, 2000) xxii. Fredriksen, against a very wide consensus, argues that the cleansing of the Temple (the key action signified in item 5) never actually occurred, but should be attributed to the early church. I am not persuaded that she can sustain her argument (see my “Teaching Christology: History and Horizons,” in *Christology: Memory, Inquiry, Practice*, Annual Publication of the College Theology Society 48, ed. Anne M. Clifford and Anthony J. Godzieba [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003] 275–76 n. 18), but the Temple incident clearly is a floating pericope that the authors of John and Mark placed into their texts at different points.

late no. 3 (to exclude reference to the Twelve) and no. 4 (as not quite as reliable as the others). Of course, the list might also be expanded.¹⁰

Even if these eight items were completely reliable as historical facts, they are not enough to warrant a reconstruction of a Historical-Jesus. They are but parts of a skeleton that scholars have unearthed and that they imaginatively expand by adding more bones they think “must have been” part of the skeleton and by layering on flesh to give their readers a portrait the readers can recognize. In doing so, scholars often fail to portray the significance of the historic Jesus. The quest cannot reach the goal of portraying objectively the actual man Jesus in any substantive way—the data are simply not there, even if it were possible to “reconstruct” a person from his dry bones.

What marks contemporary critics of the quests is not merely their opposition to the questers’ goal and methods. Indeed, sometimes that opposition is almost ironic, since many of the techniques the critics use and positions they take are possible only because of the quests. Rather, the contemporary critics seek not to construct a Historical-Jesus but the historic Jesus who led a faction in Second Temple Judaism that eventually became a distinct faith tradition.¹¹

“FIRST AMONG EQUALS”

It is a shame that the questers give so little weight to the insights of feminist historian/theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In the context

¹⁰ In his more popular *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993) 10–11, Sanders expands this list. He adds Jesus’ year of birth, his childhood in Nazareth, his preaching the Kingdom of God, his going up to Jerusalem for Passover about the year 30, an arrest by Jewish authorities, and writes more extensively about the effect of the disciples’ seeing Jesus after his death. In the second edition of Perrin’s *The New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982) 411–12. Dennis Duling also made a similar expansion. Even these expanded versions are not sufficient to give a biography of Jesus.

¹¹ For a recent analysis of the process of the development of Christianity as a separate tradition, see Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004). Boyarin argues that the ways between Judaism and Christianity were not “parted,” but that leaders among the Apostolic Fathers and the rabbis “partitioned” a religiously and theologically diverse whole. Rabbis eliminated “binitarianism” as a live option by labeling those who held for two powers in heaven “minim,” and the Apologists labeled those who rejected the form of binitarianism of the logos incarnate as “heretics,” thus partitioning the diverse multitude that formed “Judaeo-Christianity.” It is not clear what effect this analysis has on Hurtado’s work, discussed below, save that it suggests that the binitarianism he notes was not unique to Jesus’ followers. Apparently, unique to Jesus’ followers was the notion that the logos or wisdom of God was incarnate in a particular human being, a point Boyarin recognized (89–111), but perhaps underemphasized.

of reporting Catherine Keller's response to John Dominic Crossan's work and Crossan's rejoinder, Schüssler Fiorenza noted the lack of reference to her (and others') feminist works in the writings of the third quest. Crossan alleged that he did not find many feminist resources to work with. Perhaps so, but Schüssler Fiorenza noted that he fails to refer even to her own major methodological work, *In Memory of Her*, "although he ends his 'big Jesus' book as well as his 'little' one with the headline, 'In Remembrance of Her,' which seems an unmistakable allusion to it."¹² The omission of feminist authors with relevant insights from third quest authors' publications, however, is not her main point of contention. Nor is it that they construct the Historical-Jesus in their own image.¹³ Rather, she seeks "to render problematic academic biblical discourses on Jesus and to interrogate them as to whether they support or do not support the rhetoric and structures of domination."¹⁴

Key to Schüssler Fiorenza's argument is discourse analysis. She identifies the quests for the Historical-Jesus as an identifiable practice of academic discourse.¹⁵ Her key point: "Discourses do more than designate things;

¹² Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 63; see also 32–33. She cites John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1994) 190 and refers to her *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Catherine Keller, "The Jesus of History and the Feminism of Theology"; and John Dominic Crossan, "Responses and Reflections," both in *Jesus and Faith: A Conversation on the Work of John Dominic Crossan*, ed. Jeffrey Carlson and Robert A. Ludwig (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994). Schüssler Fiorenza's own contribution was *Jesus: Miriam's Child*. More startling is Larry Hurtado's omission of any references to her work in his *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), as her work is clearly relevant to his. Schüssler Fiorenza has noted that ideas generated by feminist reconstructive work like hers can be co-opted and used in ways that support the very structures of domination she opposes (*Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 134). Whether the present work does so is not for me to decide, but I have tried not to co-opt her work, but to dialogue with it and use it creatively.

¹³ "Whether they imagine Jesus as an existentialist religious thinker, a rabbinic teacher, an apocalyptic prophet, a pious Hasid, a revolutionary peasant, a wandering Cynic, a Greco-Roman magician, a healing witch doctor, a nationalist anti-Temple Galilean revolutionary, or a wo/man-identified man, the present flood of Historical-Jesus books and articles documents that, despite their scientific positivist rhetoric of facts and historical realism, scholars inescapably fashion the Historical-Jesus in their own image and likeness" (Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 6).

¹⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 11.

¹⁵ For a sketch of what a discourse practice looks like, see my *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1991) 31–32. Of course, one (relatively) nondiscursive way to show the referent of a discourse is to point at it, but Jesus is unavailable for pointing at.

they are practices that ‘systematically form the objects of which they speak.’”¹⁶ The Historical-Jesus is just such an object. The actual man Jesus is not the Historical-Jesus; the Historical-Jesus is a construct of the discourse, just as the actual planet denominated “Venus,” “the morning star,” or “the evening star” is not completely a construct of our discourses, but can be talked of only *as* a construct of our discourses. That discourses construct objects does not make the objects in some sense phony or deny the reality of what is objectified in the discourse. That there was an actual person¹⁷ Jesus is not an issue; the question is whether the image or understanding of that man in the discourse is harmful or helpful to following him in realizing the *basileia tou theou*. Such discourses need to be tested and assessed—not by comparison with a nondiscursive object (“Can you tell me what you are talking about without putting it into language?”) but by assessing the reliability of the discourse, including the effects it has.¹⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza finds that the focus on the Historical-Jesus is shaped by an unacknowledged methodological focus and has had some deleterious effects.

Focusing on the Historical-Jesus takes him as a “genius” or a “great man.” This is nowhere clearer than in the tactics of the second quest which sought to separate Jesus from his own Judaism and from the movement in which he participated by using a criterion of dual dissimilarity. Schüssler Fiorenza quotes Dieter Giorgi to great effect on this point: “This view that

¹⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 15, quoting Michèle Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1991) 130.

¹⁷ I use the rather bland “person” here in part because Schüssler Fiorenza also problematizes “man” and “woman,” the very words we use as constituents of discourse constructs about sex. She claims that the modern versions of these categories with which we habitually and not unreasonably work are quite different from ancient and medieval categories (*Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 9–11). Sandra Schneiders distinguishes between the actual Jesus (both the man who was born in Nazareth—what most scholars mean by the “actual Jesus”—and the one we encounter today), the historical Jesus constructed by historians, the proclaimed Jesus (the actual Jesus as witnessed to and believed in by Christians), and the textual Jesus rendered in the New Testament books (*The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1999] xxi–xxx). Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, makes a similar distinction with even more theological verve, finding the *real* Jesus to be the one encountered in and through the practices of the Christian community. I differ in nomenclature, following Van Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (New York: Macmillan, 1966) 268, regarding the distinction between the actual Jesus as the man who lived and died in Second Temple Judaism and the historians’ construct. I would also underline the plurality of proclamations and textualizations of Jesus more strongly than Schneiders does.

¹⁸ For one view of the criteria to be used in such assessment, see my *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000) 156–70.

Jesus had been a genius of some sort became the dominant view in the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, not only in Germany but also in Western Europe and North America, among both Protestants and Catholics.”¹⁹

Why did Jesus become viewed as a “genius”? Part of the reason likely has to do with dominant historiographical trends and a version of the “great man” view of history. But another factor could also be the waning in the credibility of the Incarnation in the face of the more general collapse of the credibility of miracles.²⁰ As Jesus was presumed to be only a man, not God incarnate, how could “his” deeds and words inspire a movement that became Christendom?²¹ The answer is easy, too easy: he was an original genius, a great man. No longer believable as the incarnate one, the best way to think about him, then, was as the best and greatest of men whose genius could not be reduced to ambient Judaism or developing Christianity.²² Why did the leaders in Jerusalem reject him and the early church “corrupt” his message? To answer a bit baldly: The former did not understand or rejected his genius. The latter had to routinize, and thereby corrupt, his charismatic leadership. Given these views about miracles, late Second Temple Judaism, and the development of that early Catholicism (seen even in the later texts of the New Testament) so repugnant to liberal Protestant noses, almost naturally the “scientific historical liberal Jesus research understands Jesus as the exceptional individual, charismatic genius, and great hero”²³: hence, a trajectory begun in the first quest and continued in the second and third quests—and a reflection of the ideology of the “great man” even if not of the image of the questers.²⁴

¹⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 61, quoting Dieter Georgi, “The Interest in Life of Jesus Theology as a Paradigm for the Social History of Biblical Criticism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 85 (1992) 76. The prominence of the “original genius” who created novelty and broke old rules, as found in 18th-century esthetics and romantic philosophy may also be an influence, but I have not found documentation of such.

²⁰ For a sketch of this factor, see my *History, Theology, and Faith* 71–76.

²¹ Of course it is possible that this strategy is an unacknowledged and inappropriate seepage of the concerns of theological presumptions into the practice of historians. Then, the “great man” approach would seem to give some historical weight to the religious belief in the Incarnation, as if that act of God, discernible in faith, was more significant for understanding history than the discoverable historical facts about Jesus’ environment or the Jesus movement, including its central figure.

²² This notion may be a development of Schleiermacher’s Christology. See F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart, translation of 2nd German ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928; German ed. 1830) 377–90.

²³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 60.

²⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza connects the issues of the myth of pristine Christian origins

This strategy creates two problems: separating Jesus from his environment and separating him from the Jesus movement. The third quest made real headway on the former problem,²⁵ but the latter one remains. Modern and contemporary scholarship tends to neglect the significance of the circles of disciples that formed the Jesus movement; it still focuses on understanding Jesus as if he were an isolated individual to whom the movement responded—and as if that response were not important. Moreover, some scholars still tend to focus on Jesus' teaching as if it was not one of his practices; as Schüssler Fiorenza put it, "feminist liberation theologians in general have asserted that it is Jesus' historical practice and humanity that is theologically important."²⁶ Separating Jesus from his practices as the disciples either carried them on or abandoned them is another way that questers can separate Jesus from his environment and his historic significance. It is as if this one man were so utterly important that we—as historians, not as disciples—have to understand *him* without regard to his movement. As Schüssler Fiorenza and Johnson have noted from rather different perspectives—echoing a point Martin Kähler made a century ago—the construction of the "historic event" of the man Jesus *as an historical figure* (and as effectively more significant than the much more historically significant Jesus movement) is a function not of the man Jesus, but a creation of the questers' discourse.²⁷ It is unwarranted for historians to separate the Historical-Jesus from the movement that remembered and imitated him in its distinctive practices.

Schüssler Fiorenza finds that an effect of the questers' discourse is to continue to support structures of domination and oppression, rather than movements for liberation. She makes sweeping claims about the guilty

and anti-Judaism more extensively in *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 128–44. Some have attacked as anti-Jewish Christian feminist interpretation of early Christianity as "egalitarian." She notes that some of her language in *In Memory of Her* might have been less careful than it could have been, and that some of the "Jesus and women" writing others have done has led to unwittingly anti-Jewish or supersessionist writing. However, she argues that her feminist interpretation and reconstruction rejects the myth of a pristine earliest Christianity that is the root of anti-Judaism (and perhaps of supersessionism); also see 153–54. For another example of a thoroughly Christian theological work that both is feminist and assiduously avoids anti-Judaism and supersessionism, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

²⁵ See especially Sanders's watershed text, *Jesus and Judaism*.

²⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child* 48. She is here arguing against the typical presumption of the alleged importance of Jesus' maleness and the downplaying of his liberating praxis.

²⁷ See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 42–47, and Johnson, *The Real Jesus* 81–86.

entanglements of much “malestream” scholarship in the oppressive political, economic, and social structures, and calls for scholars to disentangle themselves. She urges a shift in theoretical focus from the individual man to the movement that made him a historic figure and revered as God incarnate.²⁸

Whether Schüssler Fiorenza’s overall indictments of academia in general and of the history of early Christianity in particular are sustainable is beyond the scope of the present article.²⁹ Yet at least one critical point is clearly sustainable and one strategy commendable. The critique of sexism is sustainable. Traditional Christian doctrine, some feminist theology, popular religious culture, and the discourse of the Historical-Jesus all presume the maleness of Jesus. A running motif through *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* is that this presumption of those discourses is not necessarily benign. At least four issues are involved.

First, the presumption of Jesus’ maleness tends to conflate biological male sex with socially constructed men’s roles.³⁰ Jesus is a (biological) male, so he is a man (a social role). Both terms, “male” and “man,” are considered to be at least relatively stable with at least a core meaning that does not change. This is debatable; it is not clear that having male genitalia is either necessary or sufficient to make one a “man.”

Second, it is unwarranted, even wrong, to presume that the male Jesus was a “man” in the sense of ancient society. Ancient discourses constructed “man” far differently from modern discourses. To put it broadly, for ancients the “other” of “man” was not (as in the present popular dualist anthropology) “woman.” “Man” was primarily the property-holding head of household and “man’s” “other” was his property, whether human (slaves, children, spouses, dependents, servants) or nonhuman (land, cattle, trade goods, etc.). Obviously, this characterization is simplified, as different ancient societies constructed “man” and “his other” differently. Schüssler Fiorenza’s point can be sustained if something like this characterization is a “core meaning” of “man” in relevant ancient societies. I see no reason to think something like this characterization cannot be sustained. Egalitarian movements, in any social context of the ancient world, were counter-cultural. There is no reason to think that any ancient society was egalitarian. This fact about human cultures supports the plausibility of the wide application of the generalization, as does the limitation of the right to vote

²⁸ See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 21.

²⁹ See *ibid.* 4–5 and *passim*.

³⁰ While I am aware of the problems with separating issues of anatomy and physiology from the social construction of gender, some distinctions need to be made. Until a better set is constructed, the familiar biological sex/social gender roles will have to do.

in some of the original United States to property-owning white males over 21 years of age. Jesus evidently did not own property, did not head a household, etc., so he may well not have been a “man” in that context.

Third, the ranking of a man was determined by his status, especially his property status. A nonpropertied, independent man, if there were such, would not be much of a man in such a society, and might not be treated as a real man by other men. Hence, Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that it is possible to construct a Historical-Jesus, as part of the underclass, as a “wo/man.”³¹

Fourth, the function of the maleness of Jesus for women is to support a modern, “traditional” man/woman anthropology.³² The Christian right is an obvious focus for this criticism of the ahistoricism of this concept, but the more generalized claim applies beyond that discourse. Schüssler Fiorenza put the attractiveness of the man Jesus this way: “On the religious Right, for example, the combination of Protestant revival methods with the cultural romance narrative—Jesus loves me so!—seeks to secure the loyalty of Christian wo/men. Jesus becomes commodified and commercialized in terms of heterosexuality and wo/men’s desire for the perfect man, the knight in shining armor who will rescue and truly love them.”³³ Jesus becomes “the answer” for women, even a proto-feminist who loves women. Hence, at least on the count of “sexism,” the claim that contemporary scholars fail to problematize the construction of gender and that this can contribute to perpetuating patriarchy is sustained.

³¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 12. At this point, she writes “Jesus” rather than “Historical-Jesus,” but she does place this usage in scholarly discourse; thus, given what she has written about discourses, “Historical-Jesus” is appropriate. She uses the term “wo/men” for two purposes: first to interrupt (/) our habitual thinking about “woman” and “women” and our presuming that those terms have a stable meaning rather than being socially constructed; second, to recognize and include those men who are also subordinated along with women (see *ibid.* 4 n. 10).

³² This function of Jesus’ maleness creates the problematic that Schüssler Fiorenza identifies as “Jesus and women” (*ibid.* 34–41).

³³ *Ibid.* 145. The material in this quotation seems to me to fail to take seriously enough the social construction of gender roles by writing “wo/men” instead of “women.” Those persons are socially constructed as women, not as wo/men, or they would not be so vulnerable to seduction by the romance, whether fundamentalist, liberal, or feminine feminist. Schüssler Fiorenza relies on Donna Minkowitz, *Ferocious Romance: What My Encounter with the Right Taught Me about Sex, God, and Fury* (New York: Free Press, 1998). It is also not clear, as I argue below in reliance on feminist theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson, that Jesus is always invoked as a knight in shining armor. We need to see how “Jesus” functions in the particular discourses; Schüssler Fiorenza’s point applies to many, but not all, constructions of Jesus.

For instance, when Dunn writes that “there is no hint in the Jesus tradition that Jesus thought of women as disadvantaged as a class in the way that the ‘poor’ and ‘sinners’ were,”³⁴ his readers may well take the reference to “women” to be unproblematic—because he has not problematized the term as Schüssler Fiorenza has. The readers take the text to mean what they ordinarily mean by “women,” that is, “women” as constructed in the modern dual gender anthropology where the difference in reproductive equipment is taken to be “essential” and other differences “accidental,” or at least “less important.” We “take it for granted.” It is “common sense” that women are women, no matter where or when.

And that is the problem. Of course there is no concern for women’s place in Jesus’ work, if one takes “women” in the modern sense, because *there just were no such people at that time*. Nor was Jesus a protofeminist. He simply could not have such a concern at that time because *there just were no feminists at that time*. Women, as constructed in the discourses of modernity, did not exist. Females’ social identity was constructed otherwise then and there than here and now. It is not that Dunn wants to perpetuate discrimination against women in the churches or society³⁵—far from it. His point is that women were full members of the Jesus movement (with the corollary that the refusal to ordain women based on Jesus’ practice is simply unwarranted). But if one fails, as he does, to problematize the construction of gender and the differences between ancient and modern constructs, one’s text can be read in such a way that it continues to support oppression even if one would oppose it. Hence, Schüssler Fiorenza’s point about scholars’ (often unwitting) entanglements in a sexist culture continuing to perpetuate gender stereotypes unless they problematize gender as a construct of discourses is a point well made.

Schüssler Fiorenza summarizes her recommended strategy by arguing that Historical-Jesus research “must develop a reconstructive social-scientific model patterned after grass-roots social movements for change”³⁶ in order to do justice not only to the freedom that scholarly work gives the scholar but also to extending that freedom to other groups beyond the academy in contemporary culture. She states her vision for making Historical-Jesus discourses emancipatory as follows: If they “are to position themselves not in the spaces of domination but in the critical alternative

³⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, Christianity in the Making 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003) 537.

³⁵ See especially the whole section on women in *Jesus Remembered* 534–37.

³⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 27; I have quoted selectively, as her language at this point presumes more familiarity with previous material in the chapter than I can provide here.

spaces of emancipation, I argue, they need to shift their theoretical focus and frame of reference away from the Historical-Jesus, the exceptional man and charismatic leader, to the emancipatory Divine Wisdom movement of which he was a part and whose values and visions decisively shaped him.”³⁷ Her argument requires a shift from questing for the “great man” in Historical-Jesus studies to discerning the memories and practices of the Jesus movement and Jesus as a “crucial member”³⁸ of that movement.³⁹ She construes that movement as a “discipleship of equals.”⁴⁰ The key is remembering:

To understand Jesus research as a critical practice of *re-membering* . . . rather than as a quest for certainties, engenders a shift from a rhetoric of scientific or theological positivism that seeks to produce scientific certainty to one that aims at critical retrieval and articulation of *memory*. *Memory* and *re-membering* as a re-constructive frame of meaning do not require one to construe a dualistic opposition between history and theology, objectivity and interestedness, Jesus and Judaism, Jesus the exceptional individual and Jesus shaped by his community; between the

³⁷ Ibid. 21. For a more nuanced statement of her approach see 165–67. In *Jesus: Miriam's Child* 49 she put it this way: “Jesus’ practice as a Galilean prophet who sought to renew the Jewish hope for the reign of G*d, his solidarity with the poor and despised, his call into a discipleship of voluntary service, his execution, death and resurrection, in short, Jesus’ liberating practice and not his maleness is significant.” The focus on Jesus’ maleness, whether ancient or contemporary, misses the point. Schüssler Fiorenza has, in recent writing, adopted the convention followed by some contemporary Jews of writing “G*d” for “God.”

³⁸ Ibid. 136.

³⁹ Ibid. 167 finds that the “part” Jesus plays is that of “*primus inter pares*” in the movement. Missing here is advertence to the fact that any movement has different roles that one rather than another person may be fit to play. They may well not be on a par with each other in every respect. More importantly, Fredriksen notes that it was *only* Jesus who was crucified—his followers were not, and evidently were not even pursued with any great vigor by any authorities (see her *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews* 8–10). It is Larry Hurtado’s amply documented thesis (discussed below) that the worship of Jesus began very early in the tradition. Certainly his role was “crucial,” but much of Schüssler Fiorenza’s justifiable focus on the Jesus movement seems to make it difficult to see why he *alone* was executed, unless his role was “crucial” enough to merit crucifixion, and why he *alone* became worshiped in a religiously monotheistic culture. I will return to this point.

⁴⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza’s understanding of early Christianity as a “discipleship of equals” has received significant corroboration from John Howard Yoder’s different methodological and ideological perspective. In *The Politics of Jesus: Vincit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 188–92, Yoder also finds an egalitarian movement at the beginning of the Jesus movement, but (apparently also influenced by Schweitzer) he seems to think that Schüssler Fiorenza argued for the “declination” of early Christianity into patriarchy, an interpretation of her own work she has rejected (see n. 24 above).

pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Jesus, the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ.⁴¹

Schüssler Fiorenza is not alone in calling for the re-membering of the Jesus movement as a historical task. Indeed, Dunn's monumental *Jesus Remembered* is one example of such an approach done in dialogue with and opposition to the patterns found in contemporary Historical-Jesus research.⁴²

JESUS REMEMBERED: THE HISTORIC JESUS

Many theologians do Christology from a "faith perspective." Some even recognize that we cannot know anything about Jesus except as he was remembered by those who had faith in him, as Dunn demonstrates.⁴³ Both historians and theologians must recognize that there are no facts about Jesus separable not merely from the disciples' perspectives, but also from

⁴¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 75. She attributes the term "re-membering" to Mary Daly and goes on to note a key implication of this approach: "If the memory of Jesus' suffering and resurrection, understood as an instance of unjust human suffering and survival, is at the heart and center of Christian memory, then the critical ethical and theological line must be drawn between injustice and justice, between the world of domination and a world of freedom and well-being" (75–76). In *History, Theology, and Faith*, I argued that history is a professional practice with role-specific responsibilities for the historian and that faith is a person-specific practice with person-specific responsibilities for the believer. The theologian as a person of faith and also a professional has (among others) the role-specific responsibility to mediate between historians' work and faithful practice, including belief. Hence, I would take a different view of the "history and theology" matter from Schüssler Fiorenza's, fully agreeing that they are not opposites, but noting that they must be related in a way that does not undermine the legitimate autonomy of the historians' work. But I would also note that theologians' articulation of faith claims cannot be limited to validation in the ecclesial community, but must be enlightening and defensible in the academy as well.

⁴² As noted above, Dunn does not problematize gender issues clearly, which makes it crucial to use his work carefully.

⁴³ See Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 128–35, for an exemplary formulation of this point. Nor did this faith begin with the resurrection. As Edward Schillebeeckx put it, "There is not such a big difference between the way we are able, after Jesus' death, to come to faith in the crucified-and-risen One and the way in which the disciples of Jesus arrived at the same faith" (*Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* [New York: Seabury, 1979] 346). Roger Haight interprets Schillebeeckx to mean that there is an analogy between the disciples' faith in Jesus before and after their experiences of his resurrection (*Jesus Symbol of God* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999] 128). In *The Disciples' Jesus* (forthcoming from Orbis) I argue that the continuity of the practices of the disciples is a key to understanding the continuity of their way of faith.

their reactions to him—including their speaking and writing about him. A “Historical-Jesus” in some way “as he actually was” apart from those perspectives is a chimera.⁴⁴

We have no texts authored by Jesus, but only the record of the impact Jesus’ actions, including his teaching, had on his followers. What we have are memories of him carried in the practices of discipleship, practices the disciples attributed to his initiation.⁴⁵ Moreover, these memories are necessarily partial. Whatever he may have been, he is far more as a human being than the impact he had on his followers. Even I am far more as a human being than the impact I have on my students and that they might record. If even as a mere human I am different from how I appear to my students, why should we think that how Jesus appeared to his disciples for a year or so can be sufficient evidence to show us who he is apart from the impact he had? And as is frequently noted, the memories of Jesus were recorded by males who were literate Greek-speakers. We have only a partial picture, as the voices of other disciples, females, illiterates, and Aramaic speakers are preserved only in the texts we have. Even as we try to appreciate him as he was in the Jesus movement, our imaginations will be necessarily partial—both because of the available data and because our location in a particular time and place shapes our imagination and understanding. Nonetheless, as Dunn ably demonstrates, the quest for knowledge of a Historical-Jesus apart from the community that remembered him in faith, however limited that memory, is at best quixotic and at worst deceptive.

The limitations of memory have led scholars to assume a “gap” between Jesus and his followers. Christopher Tuckett has discussed the problem of that “gap” as follows: “At the risk of making a sweeping generalization, one might say that the existence of a possible gap between Jesus’ self-consciousness and later Christian claims about him has been felt to be more of a problem for English-speaking scholarship and/or theology than it has

⁴⁴ The actual person of Jesus, the man who lived in “the world behind the text” is historically inaccessible to us. We can only “get to” him through “the world of the text,” a world, as Schüssler Fiorenza notes, that is constructed in the realm of kyriarchy. Nonetheless, we can make arguments about which memories are accurate, which distorted. The results of those arguments can provide touchstones, if not formal criteria, for linking our present practices with those inaugurated in the Jesus movement (which at the beginning, of course, included Jesus). That the disciples included females as well as males seems obvious from New Testament studies; that Jesus’ practice can warrant the practice of limiting leadership roles in the community to males is untenable if Jesus’ practice is to be the touchstone or criterion for contemporary practice.

⁴⁵ For a similar point about memory, see Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam’s Child* 90.

been for German-speaking theology.”⁴⁶ While I do not think we can say much about Jesus “self-consciousness,” the presumption of a huge gap between Jesus and his disciples that has pervaded much biblical scholarship to the point of suggesting that there was little, if any, connection between Jesus and the other members of the Jesus movement is untenable.⁴⁷ Both Schüssler Fiorenza and Dunn recognize the partiality without assuming there is a gap. Jesus was present to his disciples and is remembered by them. That there is partiality is inevitable; that there is a “gap” is an unnecessary construct.

The key point that we can take from Dunn’s work is that he takes orality seriously. He argues for a change in “default settings” from presuming that the Gospel texts are literary creations like novels to presuming them to be transcriptions of oral performances: “The default setting means that when you want to create something different, you need constantly to resist the default setting, you need consciously to change or alter it. But when you turn your attention elsewhere, the default setting, the pre-set preference, reasserts itself.”⁴⁸ In so doing, he focuses on the performance practice of the Jesus movement.⁴⁹ Scholars recognize, for example, the “breathless” quality of Mark’s Gospel. They understand that Mark wove together oral sources. But they do not seem to take seriously the possibility that Mark is a *script*, not a generic text.⁵⁰ It is a script built from memories of oral performances, a script recording the tradition and setting it for the future. As Dunn put it, “Mark’s Gospel may be *frozen* orality, but it is frozen *orality*.”⁵¹ Hence, the primary interpretive category for discerning the materials Mark used to form his narrative is *not* the normal “default” of literary criticism, that is, “layers of tradition” that are revised in various editions of a written text of which Mark is a “final” one (though one used

⁴⁶ Christopher Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 228.

⁴⁷ See Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament* 227–33.

⁴⁸ Dunn’s methodology is explicated in “Altering the Default Setting: Re-envisioning the Early Transmission of the Jesus Tradition,” *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003) 139–75, at 140.

⁴⁹ Dunn is not unique in this focus. Bruce Chilton and J. I. H. McDonald, *Jesus and the Ethics of the Kingdom*, Biblical Foundations in Theology, ed. James D. G. Dunn and James P. Mackey (London: SPCK, 1987), e.g., highlight the concept of performance: “‘Performance’ . . . refers both to the activity which results in the telling of a parable, and to the activity which may attend the hearing of a parable” (16). Chilton and McDonald, however, do not develop this insight as extensively as Dunn does.

⁵⁰ The entire Gospel of Mark, save for a bit of repeated material, can be declaimed in a two-hour performance (with an intermission), as American actor Frank Runyeon has shown in his one-man chancel play performed in numerous colleges and churches in the United States.

⁵¹ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 202.

in later editions by Matthew and Luke). Rather, the default position should be that the Markan and other Gospel texts are transcriptions, that is, “records of performances.” Such an approach recognizes that the tradition develops into a text rooted in the audition of multiple oral performances by those who told stories of what Jesus did and said and how he was treated.⁵²

Dunn shares the basic counterresponse to the quests identified at the beginning of this article: the only reasonable object of historical research is Jesus remembered by and in the Jesus movement. His main methodological contribution is a theory of the oral transmission of tradition. Like the third quest, Dunn assumes that Jesus makes sense only in his social environment; the more we know about that environment, the more we can understand the significance of the Jesus movement’s memories of him (not his significance alone apart from the movement). Like Schüssler Fiorenza, Dunn assumes a real continuity between Jesus and the Jesus movement. Given that assumption, he writes, “Sociology and social anthropology teach us that such groups would almost certainly have required a foundation story (or stories) to explain, to themselves as well as others, why they were designated as ‘Nazarenes’ and [later] ‘Christians.’”⁵³ Jesus’ disciples remembered him as a teacher, an exorcist, a healer; their stories told of their preserving his teachings and imitating his doings. Eventually, these memories were organized into gospels, a distinctive form of ancient biography.⁵⁴ Dunn concludes that the Jesus movement would have wanted to remember the Jesus tradition and that the spread of the Gospels attests to an interest in “knowing about Jesus, in preserving, promoting, and defending the memory of his mission and in learning from his example.”⁵⁵

This conclusion may be true, but Dunn finds that there clearly was

⁵² The pervasive “written text” default setting can be illustrated from numerous authors. One example is Luise Schottroff’s important *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. Linda Maloney (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2006) which has reshaped my understanding of the parable tradition. Her point is to understand the text in its socio-historical context. Hence, she writes, “Attempts to discover pre-Lukan material in the Lukan text remain hypothetical and do not help us to understand the text” (132). But the shifted default setting makes the text not the object of interpretation, but a tool for understanding the Jesus movement then as a key for understanding how we can live in and live out that movement now.

⁵³ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 175.

⁵⁴ Dunn notes that the stricture against taking the Gospels as biographies applied to modern forms of biography (ibid. 184–85). Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 277–80, canvases the scholarship that has led to the conclusion that the Gospels are like ancient *bioi* or *vitae*.

⁵⁵ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 186. The more usual modern approach is to take the writings of the Gospels as a narrative of an event, rather than as frozen oral stories of memories of actions. For example, Haight wrote, “I presuppose the principle that all contact with God is mediated historically, and that for the Christian faith Jesus is the event in history where that encounter occurs” (*Jesus Symbol of God* 88). The

“prophecy” in the early church, that is, that inspired disciples would speak in Jesus’ name after his death. One might say that they “channeled” Jesus. Did this practice corrupt by distorting the disciples’ memories? Many scholars are wary of the effect of such prophecy and assume that it obscures the original memories. Dunn notes, however, that the Jewish communities, including the Jesus movement, had to discern false from true prophecy—a challenge that likely continued as Christianity developed into a distinct tradition, growing out of one of the two factions of late Second Temple Judaism that endured in some way long after the destruction of the Temple (the other being rabbinic Judaism). On what grounds would one judge prophecies? Dunn ingeniously describes how this process likely went and draws out important implications about the reliability of the process:

First, . . . *any prophecy claiming to be from the exalted Christ would have been tested by what was already known to be the sort of thing Jesus had said.* This . . . implies the existence in most churches of a canon . . . of foundational Jesus tradition. But it also implies, second, that only prophetic utterances which *cohered* with that assured foundational material were likely to be accepted as sayings of Jesus. Which means, thirdly, that—and the logic needs to be thought through here carefully—any *distinctive* saying or motif within the Jesus tradition as we now have it is likely to have come from the original teaching of Jesus, since otherwise, if it originated as a prophetic utterance, it is unlikely to have been accepted as a saying of Jesus by the church in which it was uttered. In other words, we have here emerging an interesting and potentially important fresh criterion for recognizing an original Jesus tradition—a reverse criterion of coherence: the *less* closely a saying or motif within the Jesus tradition coheres with the rest of the Jesus tradition, the *more* likely is it that the saying or motif goes back to Jesus himself.⁵⁶

While such prophecies might elaborate on the tradition, any that would

problem is that Jesus is not an event, but a person—and a person seen as especially an *agent* of God who *acted* (not merely was present to be “encountered”) in and through Jesus. Moreover, it is not the individual “event” or person that is the locus of encounter, but the Jesus movement, even during his lifetime, is what mediates the action of God. As I hope to argue in *The Disciples’ Jesus*, the insights discussed in this article are incomplete. We must move not only from textuality to orality as our default, but to action rather than text or event as our default mode of understanding the significance of Jesus and the Jesus movement. For a discussion of the significance of distinguishing acts from events, see my *History, Theology, and Faith* 49–54, 60.

⁵⁶ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 191–92. For a recent reformulation and defense of the criteria, see Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 115–21. However, given the critiques of Schüssler Fiorenza noted above, Theissen and Merz’s confidence “that it is humanly possible to be *certain* in dealing with the historical Jesus that we are not engaging in ‘dialogue’ with a product of our imagination, but with a concrete historical phenomenon” (121; emphasis added) may be too strong. See also Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Louisville: Westminster John Knox,

change it in significant ways would likely be accounted “false prophecy.” Hence, the presence of prophecy in the early church does not count against the fidelity of the oral traditions of the remembered Jesus, but makes possible the use of a new, and benign, form of a dissimilarity criterion unlike the one used by the second quest and properly rejected by the third quest.

Oral transmission does not produce a series of literary layers, but is a set of distinct performances. The significance of this point is crucial, for scholars have usually used tools of literary criticism rather than analyses of performance practice to explore the development of the tradition. Undoubtedly, these performances began while Jesus was alive (see Lk 9:1–10; 10:1–17); the notion that “tradition” began only after the resurrection is untenable. For example, Mark could not have used the “messianic secret” motif unless people were remembered as talking about Jesus’ words, deeds, and significance. And these performances were heard and replicated by other narrators.

An implication of recognizing the orality of tradition methodologically is that “audience response” criticism has a fundamental role to play. For the transmission of tradition orally requires both a speaker and a hearer who then becomes a speaker for new hearers—a pattern that is of prime importance for understanding moral traditioning. Memories are preserved in performance. Tradition is carried in such performance practice. The audience’s response—in both hearing the stories told as authentic and retelling those authentic stories themselves (and being unable to pass on inauthentic stories)—is intrinsic to the process.

It is a commonplace of speech act theory and reader-response criticism that the audience has to “fill in” gaps in what they read or hear with their previous understandings—a point illustrated above in discussing how modern readers might fill in the understanding of “women” with modern constructs when they read texts about wo/men in the ancient world (to borrow Schüssler Fiorenza’s interruptive term).⁵⁷ We hear and read what others say and write, and fill in the meanings we understand from our culture and traditions. Dunn applies this point to ancient practice: “Oral traditional texts imply an audience with the background to respond faithfully to the signals encoded in the text, to bridge the gaps of indeterminacy and thus to

2002) 210–12 for their summary of criteria of historical plausibility, which they see as a “correction” to the criterion of dissimilarity.

⁵⁷ An influential version of this practice of filling in the details is H. Paul Grice’s notion of “conversational implicature,” developed in lectures in the 1960s and published in his *Studies in the Ways of Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1989); for a development of this concept to account for both “implicit” and “implied” senses, see Kent Bach, “Conversational Implicature [sic],” <http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~kbach/implicature.htm> (accessed February 22, 2005).

‘build’ the implied consistency.”⁵⁸ Following Richard Horsley, Dunn notes that “Q should be seen as the transcript of one performance among many of an oral text, ‘a libretto that was regularly performed in an early Jesus movement.’”⁵⁹ But did the audience that heard the story then tell the story just as they heard it? Did they write the story they heard? Dunn develops interesting answers to both questions.

It has been a commonplace that stories “expand” as they are retold in an oral traditioning process. Many scholars believe that this embellishment may have happened to the stories of miraculous feedings in the Gospels. However, following Kenneth Bailey, Dunn notes that in oral societies there seem to be three patterns of communicating tradition: First, “formal controlled tradition” is rigid; the text is set as if it were in writing; the narrator may not deviate; poems and proverbs may fit best in this class. Second, “informal, uncontrolled tradition” (Bultmann’s concept) is free; there is no set text or “right way” to tell jokes or communicate news. However, a third pattern, “informal, controlled tradition,” allows some flexibility in performing the text, but also significant control by the community that “knows” the story it is hearing: “The central threads of the story cannot be changed, but flexibility in detail is allowed.”⁶⁰ Typically this material is composed of memories of “parables and recollections of people and events important to the identity of the community.”⁶¹ Much of the Gospel tradition, then, is informal, controlled tradition.

One example of informal, controlled tradition would be the empty tomb narratives. The constant would be the fact that the empty tomb was found by women disciples. Which women, whom they saw, and what they said to whom varied (so this is not a strongly controlled narrative). But the constant of women finding the tomb empty, not men, suggests that there was a crucial control even for these varying performances of the “news.” Throughout his text, Dunn recognizes that code words and narrative structures seem to work as cues for the various performances of telling the stories about Jesus and his doings.

Memories preserved in the Jesus movement are best understood as communicated in informal, controlled tradition—from the beginning when

⁵⁸ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 205.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 205, citing Richard A. Horsley and Jonathan A. Draper, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1999) 160–74. I suspect that it might be more accurate to talk of performances, texts, and movements in the plural rather than in the singular.

⁶⁰ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 207, citing Kenneth E. Bailey, “Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 5 (1991) 42–45.

⁶¹ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 207.

Jesus was alive until they were frozen into written texts. Dunn's conclusion brings out the significance of this approach:

In particular, the paradigm of literary editing is confirmed as wholly inappropriate: in oral tradition one telling of a story is in no sense an editing of a previous telling; rather, each telling starts with the same subject and theme, but the retellings are different; each telling is a performance of the tradition, not of the first, or third, or twenty-third "edition" of the tradition. Our expectation, accordingly, should be of the oral transmission of Jesus tradition as a sequence of retellings, each starting from the same storehouse of communally remembered events and teaching, and each weaving the common stock together in different patterns for different contexts.⁶²

The hearers likely know the stories being recited; the teller will want to be a good communicator of the tradition. While there will be performance variants (and probably exaggerations), reciters who go off track should be corrected by, if nothing else, not having their story survive in the tradition because it fails to accord with the rest of the tradition.

This approach clarifies remarkably the process of the composition of the written Gospels and our understanding of minor and major variations. To illustrate this process, consider an analogous case. In the mid-20th century, musicologists and folklorists collected Appalachian folk music that might otherwise have been lost. They went out into the country, listened to performances, and recorded them—not on phonograph records or tape, but as sheet music with tune and lyrics. They might have heard the same song performed a number of different ways on different occasions by different performers. They could then either write down the variants or combine them into a collected or critical or "frozen" version. Another musicologist in another part of the country might hear different songs or variations of the same song the first musicologist heard. When asked which version is right, they could respond that each is rightly a record of a performance.

The Gospel writers did something similar. Mark and the compiler of Q composed their texts from the performance or performances they heard, perhaps using some written materials. When Luke and Matthew worked from those written texts, they likely knew oral traditions in their own community that they had heard performed and then substituted them in their own narratives or revised the ones they received according to their own oral performance tradition or included both stories (in Luke, for example, the sending of the Twelve and of the seventy look remarkably like different performances of the same story). John transcribed different performances and probably included material that was more fully developed in oral lore than the Synoptics' material; yet the differences and

⁶² Ibid. 209.

parallels in some of the material, for example, the passion narrative, and the inclusion of synoptic-like stories, for example, Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:3–11) clearly suggest that some of the oral performances the author(s) of John heard were related to those of the tradition that led to the Synoptics.

As with the modern musicologists, so with the ancient evangelists: we can assume that they strove hard to get things right. When asked which of them is “right,” we can first note that they would claim to record rightly the performances that kept alive the memories of Jesus. While we may propose that some of the performances are innovations or that one remembered and recorded performance is better than another, our proposals put questions to the text that we can raise in our day but would not be raised by the hearers and transmitters of the word.

If this account is basically correct—and I think it must be—it enables us to discern the performances that were frozen into Scripture. It also provides another reason to think that we cannot “get back” to the Historical-Jesus—for all we have are records of performances of the Jesus movement. What we get is the historic Jesus, Jesus remembered in and through the practice of the tradition that he is also remembered as having initiated by his own powerful and empowering practices.

What Dunn has surfaced, however, is an important factor in understanding the Jesus movement. The movement’s performances did not merely keep the memory of Jesus alive, but *constituted* the memory of Jesus. Dunn naturally focuses on the memories of Jesus’ sayings and doings. What falls out of his picture are the other kinds of actions the Jesus movement performed—and the radicality of the challenge of this movement to the authorities, who certainly do not fall into our presumed categories, which facily distinguish “religious,” “political,” “social,” and “intellectual” authorities, a point made far more clearly by Schüssler Fiorenza, among others.

GOD’S SAVING AGENT

One of those actions downplayed by both Schüssler Fiorenza and Dunn (at least so far)⁶³ is the practice of the worship of Jesus. In his monumental *Lord Jesus Christ* Hurtado argues that devotion to Jesus as in some sense God incarnate originated very early in the Jesus movement, *contra* the position of many of the various questers for the Historical-Jesus who thought it a late development.⁶⁴ Hurtado recognizes a remarkable “inten-

⁶³ *Jesus Remembered* is the first volume of a 3-vol. work, *Christianity in the Making*. The second and third volumes are not yet announced.

⁶⁴ Hurtado follows Hengel in having to posit “a virtual explosion” of devotion to

sity and diversity of expression” in the practice of devotion to Jesus. He sees this worship practice as not contradictory to, but developed as a variant form of, Jewish monotheism.⁶⁵ He also wants to bring those who do Christology to recognize that it is not merely belief but devotional practice that is relevant to our understanding of the development of the earliest tradition in Christology.

Hurtado writes to oppose two approaches, a naive ahistorical approach, and a form of the “history of religions school” approach. The anticritical apologists refused to take historical analysis of the materials seriously because “the theological and religious validity of traditional Christian devotion to Christ would be called into question if it were really treated as a historical phenomenon.”⁶⁶ The history of religions approach found that devotion to Christ was merely an instance of “the deification of heroes and the emergence of new gods rampant in the Roman world” that corrupted the simple movement “in which ideas of Jesus’ divinity could not have appeared.”⁶⁷ Hurtado successfully argues that “the chronological data do not readily support a claim that devotion to Jesus as divine . . . emerged in

Jesus before AD 50. See *Lord Jesus Christ 2*. He cites Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 283–84; and Hengel, “Christology and New Testament Chronology,” *Between Jesus and Paul* (London: SCM, 1983) 30–47. Hurtado has also published a more accessible version of his argument as the first four chapters of *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005). The other four chapters reprint scholarly studies.

⁶⁵ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ 2–3*. Hurtado opposes the prevailing assumption that the worship of Jesus arose late in the tradition. See, for example, Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*: “Jesus was interpreted as sharing various degrees of divine election and closeness to God. Some time in the course of the first and second centuries, Christians began to worship Jesus” (206). What Hurtado makes clear is that Jesus is very early seen not as a symbol of or mediator for God, but as God’s agent who, as such, participated in the very divinity of God, a point Haight acknowledged. Haight also notes that the results of Hurtado’s earlier analysis, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), show that this worship can be explained by and is consistent with both later orthodoxy and later Arianism: “The New Testament remains ambiguous” (256 n. 27). The New Testament may be ambiguous theologically, but it is, on Hurtado’s account, very clear in terms of the religious responses to Jesus it portrays and the devotion it alludes to. Hurtado has offered a strong argument for his claim that the mutation of monotheism that allowed devotion to Jesus as divine may well have been a major factor in the opposition of other Jewish factions to the Jesus movement and thus in the parting of the ways (see Hurtado, “Early Jewish Opposition to Jesus-Devotion,” *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?: Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005] 152–78).

⁶⁶ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ 5*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 6.

the late first century.”⁶⁸ His argument dates striking devotion to Jesus to within a few years of his death—as evinced by the intensity of Paul’s conversion and the evidence from Paul’s letters (supported by other New Testament texts) that “the really crucial period for the origin of remarkable beliefs about Jesus’ significance is ‘the first four or five years’ of the early Christian movement.”⁶⁹

Hurtado finds that the early traditions recorded in various sources support the claim that the practice of worshiping Jesus is early in the tradition. When we recognize that what the Scriptures preserve is based in oral performances, including devotional performances, the diversity is not surprising. But why is there such intensity, unlike the intensity of the devotion to or worship of other divine agents in Judaism or of the various gods of the Greco-Roman world? Hurtado’s answer is clear:

Early Christians saw Jesus as the *uniquely* salvific agent of the one God, and in their piety they extended the exclusivity of the one God to take in God’s uniquely important representative, while stoutly refusing to extend that exclusivity to any other figures. . . . Both the “privileging” of Jesus over any other figure in their beliefs and religious practices and the characteristic definition of Jesus with reference to the one God show recognizable, indeed identify, influences of the Jewish “monotheistic” tradition.⁷⁰

Given that Israel was monotheistic, the worship of Jesus obviously raises questions about the fidelity of Jesus’ early followers to Jewish monotheism. As Hurtado put it, given “the exclusivist monotheism of Roman-era Judaism . . . are we to think of this constraint [of monotheism] only as maintained or as ‘broken’ in early Christian circles, as some scholars . . . have formulated the question?”⁷¹ This “break,” however, was not occasioned by the introduction of Hellenistic categories, but by the practice of devotion to Jesus that amounted to worship.

In contrast, Hurtado proposes that the Jesus movement developed “an apparently distinctive and variant form of exclusivist monotheism” based in a “binitarian” pattern of worship.⁷² It is “binitarian” because

. . . there are two distinguishable figures, God and Jesus, but they are posited in a relation to each other that seems intended to avoid a ditheism of two gods, and the devotional practice shows a similar concern (e.g., prayer characteristically offered to God *through/in the name of* Jesus). In my judgment this Jesus-devotion amounts to a treatment of him as recipient of worship at a surprisingly early point in the first

⁶⁸ Hurtado, *How on Earth?* 19.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 37, quoting Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul* 44.

⁷⁰ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 204–5.

⁷¹ Ibid. 51.

⁷² Ibid. 52.

century, and is certainly a programmatic inclusion of a second figure unparalleled in the monotheistic tradition of the time.⁷³

In developing—very quickly—such a worship practice, the faction of Jews (and including Gentiles early on) that formed the Jesus movement created an innovative pattern of “monotheistic” worship performance.

The questions that this analysis raises are significant. First, why did the earliest Christians develop such a practice? What in their corporate life evoked it? Second, what does it mean? What are its theological implications? What are its implications for understanding the shape of the Jesus movement? A third set of questions about the Jesus movement’s relationship to other factions in Judaism could also be addressed, but extensive discussion of that issue is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that, if Hurtado is correct about the early emergence of this pattern of worship, evidence shows that members of the Jesus movement participated in Temple worship alongside their Jesus movement worship. Perhaps, but not surely, this practice was one reason why the Jesus movement early on clashed with the Temple authorities.

Hurtado argues that four forces or factors are relevant to answering the question of why the disciples worshiped Jesus. The first factor is Jewish monotheism: the earliest Christians were not Roman polytheists, but committed Jewish monotheists. Hurtado finds that, rather than being influenced by Greco-Roman patterns, Christians tended to resist them even when considering Jesus divine. Second, Jesus’ impact was significant. Just as opposition to him was extreme, so those who followed him were extremely positive about him. Whatever his status, he and his movement were persecuted. His followers strongly bonded, at least partly in response to this opposition. They exalted his name above every other. Third, they had “revelatory religious experiences, which communicated to circles of the Jesus movement the conviction that Jesus had been given heavenly glory and that it was God’s will for him to be given extraordinary reverence in their devotional life.”⁷⁴ Whatever one thinks of the historicity of the resurrection, followers of Jesus were convinced that their experiences of seeing him after his death grounded their devotion to him. Fourth, the movement had to distinguish its practices both from the other factions in Judaism and from the Greco-Roman religious environment. Hurtado argues that the distinctiveness of Christian worship of Jesus can be explained by the profound response to Jesus and his practices in a context shaped by these four factors.

According to Hutardo, Jesus’ words and deeds led his followers to regard

⁷³ Ibid. 53. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, shows that there were parallels in other strands of contemporary Judaism.

⁷⁴ Hutardo, *Lord Jesus Christ* 78.

him as God's salvific agent. But in what did they find "salvation" to consist? Two fundamental factors seem to have influenced the disciples' sense of "salvation" from Jesus. First, they were empowered to engage in the same sort of practices Jesus did. The early Christian communities remembered that any "dispute regarding questions of status and hierarchy was roundly rebuked by Jesus: the model of discipleship is precisely *not* the stratified hierarchy of typical social organisations and national structures."⁷⁵ It is a commonplace that, as disciples, they were in the role of students to Jesus' role as teacher.⁷⁶ But it is usually thought that Jesus taught *about* the reign of God. However, what Jesus did and taught was not merely *about* the *basileia tou theou*; it *was* the reign of God! He did not merely model it or teach about it, but showed his disciples *how* they could live in the *basileia*, how to serve actively in it, how to be the *basileia*.

For example, Jesus was remembered as an exorcist and healer as well as a teacher; indeed, that he was a healer-exorcist is exceptionally well attested in the New Testament.⁷⁷ When the other members of the Jesus movement went out, they too exorcized, healed, and taught (see Lk 9:1–2; 10:16–17).⁷⁸ They remembered him as "sending" them, and they marveled at the power of his name over the demons—as if Jesus' name was as sacred and powerful as God's. The disciples continued what Jesus began.⁷⁹ He had empowered them to do so, and they were so overwhelmed at their empowerment that they came to worship him. It is not that he was merely God's agent; they too became agents of God in spreading the commonweal of God through their own practices—which were also Jesus' practices. Hurtado highlights the disciples' awe in the face of Jesus' words and deeds, but he consistently sees these experiences as something "received," not enacted. However, Hurtado focuses so strongly on cultic or religious (in the modern sense) experience that he neglects to consider the active responses of disciples in spreading the reign of God. While Hurtado writes of the experiences that lay at the root of the disciples' developing worship of Jesus, he leaves the content of these experiences undetermined.⁸⁰ The adherents of the movement would remember and worship Jesus not merely

⁷⁵ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 607. In particular, Dunn notes, "There is no suggestion of the twelve functioning as 'priests' to others' 'laity'" (607 n. 292).

⁷⁶ Ibid. 556–57.

⁷⁷ See *ibid.* 673–83.

⁷⁸ See Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 203–6.

⁷⁹ Let it be thought otherwise, I am not suggesting that Jesus was unique as a healer, exorcist, or teacher. Just as there were other emancipatory movements in late Second Temple Judaism, as Schüssler Fiorenza noted, so there were other exorcists, healers, and teachers. In these roles, Jesus is not a unique or unsurpassably "great man."

⁸⁰ See Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 64–74.

because he affected them, but because they perceived him as empowering them: he gave them his power, including the use of his name to cast out demons.

What grew over the decades of early Christianity was not only devotion to Jesus as God's own divine salvific agent, an agent "more divine" than other divine agents found in Judaism such as angels or prophets, but also an attempt to account for this devotion in the context of monotheism and in light of the philosophical concepts available in late antiquity. Hurtado put it this way:

In the doctrinal language that began to be favored in the second century and thereafter, the Son shares the same divine "nature/being" (Greek: *ousia*) with "the Father." Of course, in the classic expression of Christian teaching about God, the doctrine of the Trinity, the "Holy Spirit" comes to be included as well, as the third constituent of the divine triadic unity. But the main concerns in this long and complex disputation and development of the Christian doctrine of God were to express Jesus' genuinely divine significance and status, and, equally firmly, to maintain that God is "one." In this latter concern especially, we see the continuing influence of Second-Temple Jewish monotheism.⁸¹

The later doctrinal developments, then, were not rooted so much in apologetics or religious practices in the Greco-Roman world as in the actual religious life of the Jesus movement from its beginning—perhaps even in the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth.

Like Schüssler Fiorenza and Dunn, Hurtado dethrones the regnant patterns of interpretation of the early Jesus movement. Schüssler Fiorenza highlights the significance of the movement. Historically, Jesus can be understood as the first among human equals. Theologically, he can be seen as empowered by the divine in the movement "of which he was a part and whose values and visions decisively shaped him"⁸² into the person the movement in turn kept in memory. That memory was transmitted in practice, especially the oral practices of telling and listening and retelling—some of which, at least, is "informal, controlled tradition" that allows us to see how the historic Jesus was construed and remembered by the early movement, possibly even during his lifetime, as Dunn notes. Part of that construal, of course, was a reaction in a devotion so intense that it required a mutation of Jewish monotheism in practice and in theory.

While not agreeing in their methods of analysis or in the aims of their scholarship, these three scholars represent a new and significant research

⁸¹ Hurtado, *How on Earth?* 55.

⁸² Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 21. For a more nuanced statement of her approach see 165–67. See also the quotation from her *Jesus: Miriam's Child* in note 37 above. A focus on Jesus' maleness, whether ancient or contemporary, misses the point.

program that has two foci: (1) not the historical Jesus, but the historic Jesus; not the Jesus constructed from the thin results of critical scholarship, but the Jesus who matters as a historic person; and (2) the historic community that began to worship Jesus as divine from the beginning. If I have accurately described a new research program, what are its theological implications?

REMEMBERING THE HISTORIC JESUS AND CHRISTOLOGY

Among the theological implications of this new program, I would single out the following: First, remembering the historic Jesus supports the christological pattern discerned by Reginald Fuller.⁸³ I suggest that this pattern—a very early one, if Hurtado is right—also stands behind the classic orthodox Christology of later centuries. It begins with the earthly Jesus that the disciples knew, remembered, and emulated. He is a human being whom they knew, but they found that he drew out of them wisdom and power as no other person ever had. Whether they were wo/men or men, marginal or elite, poor or wealthy, urban or rural, Jesus crystallized for them how to live in and live out the coming reign of God.

Second, if Jesus was all that, then the one the disciples remembered as empowering them must have been sent from God in a special way. It is a commonplace of New Testament scholarship that Jesus was perceived as “more than” a prophet or “other than” a pretender to the Davidic throne. He was remembered as an anointed one, but a messiah who was different from what was expected. He is imagined as being with God even before he was sent, of being God’s wisdom or word or son, even before he became the human being they remembered.

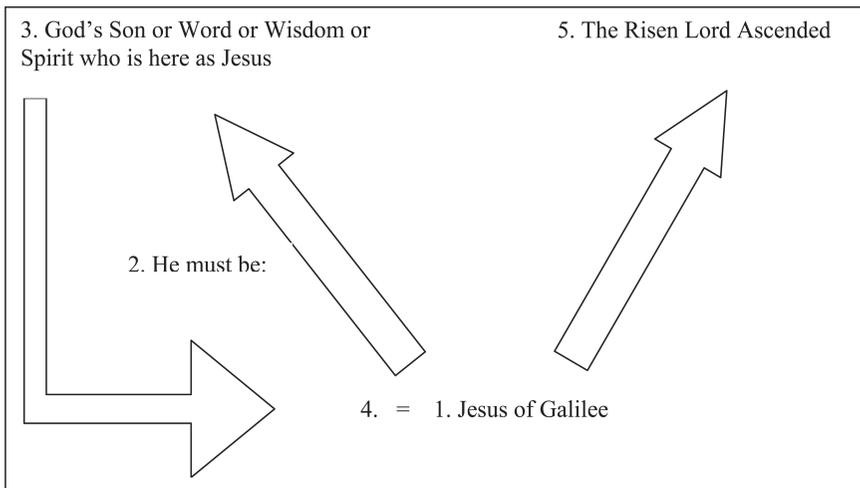
Third, for what he gave to them and drew from them, he was construed not as a “genius” or a “great man” but as the incarnate presence/power of God, who brought God’s power and empowerment to and from the Jesus movement. Some followers construed Jesus as God’s son (though the Creator does not have procreative equipment) or as God’s word (though the unoriginate One does not have vocal cords) or as God’s wisdom (though

⁸³ Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London: Collins, 1976), discerns the “descending-ascending pattern” that is the basis of my comments here. I have developed that to bring out the obvious “step one.” The implication that this is a very early pattern results from reading Fuller’s work in the light of Hurtado’s analyses. Fuller’s work is especially helpful in overcoming the dichotomies in Christology over the last 50 years, especially among Catholic theologians, of “Christology from above/Christology from below” and “ascending/descending” Christologies. These terms are not antithetical. Also see my *Story Theology* 117–46, for another way of understanding this issue, specifically in narrative terms.

God's wisdom is God's presence). All these appellations have antecedents in the Judaism of Jesus' time.

Fourth, God was seen as so strongly present in the one who empowers the Jesus movement that the Spirit, Wisdom, or Logos of God is seen as descending to be present in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Miriam's son.

Fifth, Jesus is exalted or raised up to return to God.⁸⁴ Thus the sequence of the disciples' reflection can be understood as follows: (1) We encounter and remember the empowering Jesus, so transforming of our own lives that we (2) find that he must be divine, as we recognize the divine acting in and through him and cannot but think that (3) he came from God and was with God as God-in-action, who (4) descends to be what we recognize in Jesus whom we know and (5) who is no longer captive of the earth but exalted by God despite his execution, and whose empowering presence—*The Real Jesus*—is yet with us in the movement.⁸⁵



⁸⁴ One of the confusions regarding Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God* is the criticism that he denies or downplays the Resurrection. Haight locates Jesus' exaltation in the crucifixion (124–26) and does minimize the “legends” surrounding the empty tomb. This, however, is not a denial of resurrection, but a claim about the best way to understand Jesus' being raised up (in itself a metaphorical image). The claim, of course, is arguable: there may be better ways to image God's raising Jesus to new life, but merely asserting that it is equivalent to exaltation (and recognizing the “Easter experience” as valid) is not denying the Resurrection.

⁸⁵ Of course, this is the pattern of the christological hymns of the New Testament, like the kenosis hymn in Phil 2:5–11. Such hymns arose quite early in the history of the Christian tradition, dating from the first decades, perhaps even the first years,

If this sequence is accurate, then there is no such thing in the New Testament as “Christology from above” or “Christology from below.” The adherents of the Jesus movement began their Christology “where they were,” that is, with their practices of remembering Jesus. They remembered Jesus in what they did, including their practice of “binitarian” worship, and in where they imagined Jesus the Christ to be. Indeed, *every* Christology follows this pattern. The common disjunction between Christology from above/from below obscures the fact that Christology always arises in disciples’ imaginations. We start with Jesus as he is perceived and imagined on this earth. *We* start his story here even if we imagine or infer that it really began in heaven. If the “binitarian” worship⁸⁶ of Jesus is the community’s recognizing in him the unique and profound agency of God in and through the movement God constituted as the Jesus movement, and if this worship is quite early, then the pattern of Christology charted above is also probably quite early.

One obvious objection to this approach might be made based in the work of Schüssler Fiorenza. In a “kyriarchal social system and kyriocentric world view, Jesus is understood not only as the divine son and extraordinary man but also as the lord and master over the world.” By “kyriarchy” Schüssler Fiorenza means “the domination of the lord, slave master, husband, the elite freeborn educated and propertied man over all wo/men and subaltern men.”⁸⁷ If kyriarchy were inscribed in our traditional worship practices, then simply continuing traditional practices may be implicitly supporting the same sort of social structure that crucified Jesus and continues to damn true emancipatory movements.

However, in the first quotation in the previous paragraph, Schüssler Fiorenza writes in the passive voice, thereby obscuring the agents of understanding. Of course, she presumes the agents are elite, academic males. And—unless we (for I am of that tribe) can work to subvert the discursive formulations that perpetuate this unjust social structure she calls “kyriarchy”—we are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

But what if it were oppressed women who used the notion of the Lordship of Jesus and the power of his name to resist and counterbalance the

of the movement’s life after Jesus’ resurrection. See Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* 146–49 and *passim*. The allusion, of course, is to Johnson’s work.

⁸⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* 96.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 95. Schüssler Fiorenza is more concerned with texts and discourses than with worship. When she writes of the cult, e.g., the worship reflected in Phil 2:5–11, she presumes that early Christian claims were influenced by Greco-Roman religions and formed a “foundational mythology that created its own cult” (*Jesus: Miriam’s Child* 148). This is an area of contention. That the discourse of worship could be bent in kyriarchal ways seems undeniable; that it is based in a kyriarchal myth is not so clear.

lordship of husbands and other males whose roles are constructed by the kyriarchal discourse Schüssler Fiorenza seeks to undermine? Could it be that buried in the tradition is a notion—altogether too prone to abuse—that God as Lord of creation and Jesus as Lord can empower resistance to the lords of this world? In one contemporary discourse practice, that is exactly the case: some Appalachian Christian women use what is available and powerful in the kyriarchal discourse that constructs them as subservient and dependent in order to resist the lordship of their husbands and other dominant males. They appeal to their Father in heaven against the power of their fathers and husbands on earth. They can use pertinent passages in Scripture—recognized as an authoritative source by the dominant men of their culture—to undermine patterns of their domination. If there is no other Lord but Jesus, then there is an opening in that discourse for oppressed subalterns to practice resistance to the earthly lords who control women’s lives and to find rays of emancipatory light in a dreary situation.⁸⁸

I do not suggest that we are or can be or should become Appalachian wo/men. Nor do I suggest that their strategic reading practices can resolve the problems created by the social structures inscribed in their discourse. Nor do I want to challenge Schüssler Fiorenza’s approach of finding traces of suppressed discourses and changing the basic presuppositions regarding gender for interpreting the texts. Rather, I first suggest that, if we can understand the subversive practices of resistance that create “other possibilities” in the nooks and crannies of the system, if we can discern how to use the power of the Name to create leverage for resistance even when it is not possible to overthrow the system of oppression, then even we educated elite can learn from the discourse practices of the oppressed. We can learn not only something about how the confession “Jesus is Lord” has been abused in the past and is abused in the present to support “kyriarchy,” but also how to critically reconstruct, theologize about, act in the service of—and even pray to—the Lord Jesus in our own discourses in a manner like that of the Appalachian wo/men to whom Fulkerson gives a voice. Yet we can never forget how easy it is to tame or hijack a practice of resistance and emancipation that uses the Lord’s tools to deconstruct the lords’ controlling discourses.

Second, in this way it is possible to see that the “binitarian” worship pattern discerned by Hurtado in the very early Jesus movement may not be a practice that oppression creates, but a worship practice that subverts

⁸⁸ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women’s Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 239–98 develops this point. Fulkerson, a theologian working out of the reformed tradition, warranted her claims about this “subaltern” discourse in part by ethnographic fieldwork.

oppressive structures. This dangerous pattern of worshipping Jesus as the empowering agent of the one God was likely in tension not only with other movements in late Second Temple Judaism, but also with the Greco-Roman social structures that provided the matrix for developing Christianity both before and after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Those matrices could then be seen as the context in which the resistant practice was tamed by “default” habits of practice and thought in those cultures, as the tradition developed, into a pattern supportive of a dominant class. With Schüssler Fiorenza, I find no reason to think that this repressive “default” habit was not present from the beginning. There was no time when the power of oppression was not. It has always been a factor in the communities of disciples, a factor to be resisted.

Third, none of our authors sets out to discuss the full range of practices that constitute the exercise of Christian faith in Jesus. Bearing one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2), living so as to be worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27), and a host of other practices that also define discipleship are not within their purview. Nor should they be: each focused on one central and often misunderstood practice that shaped the texts we have. For Schüssler Fiorenza, the issue is re-forming the patriarchal discourse practices that shaped the texts. For Dunn, the key is privileging oral performance as a practical vehicle of memory. For Hurtado, the practice of binitarian worship is crucial. The fundamental methodological point we can take from their work is crucial: practices like living in and living out the *basileia tou theou*, worship, and remembering in the community do not merely count in understanding the significance of christological claims, but in fact constitute the context of discipleship, the context in which the imaginative and faithful christological claims in the developing tradition can even have significance.

All the scholars discussed in this article regard the practices of the early tradition as a resource for Christology. But my point is more radical. These linked practices *are* Christology. When John’s messengers in Luke 7:18–23 ask Jesus whether he is the one who is to come, he responds that they should tell John “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news brought to them”—precisely what the Jesus movement effects. The question about Jesus’ identity is answered by “what has been and is being done.”⁸⁹ Just as the practices of transmitting the oral tradition are remembering (or misremembering) Jesus, and the practices of worship are the “presencing” of Jesus, so the practice of imaginatively confessing Jesus as

⁸⁹ That this response echoes 4Q521 suggests that Jesus and/or the transmitters of the tradition knew this passage from Qumran and applied it to the work of the messiah. See Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 447–52.

ho christos is both a rejection of the lords of this world and a declaration of allegiance to the Lord whom Jesus makes present in his own empowering practices—practices that led and lead to reconciliation and the construction of a community that lives in (even if proleptically) the *basileia tou theou*. What Schüssler Fiorenza perhaps overstates—in response to the “great man” assumptions of the academic Historical-Jesus discourse, that Jesus was “*primus inter pares*”⁹⁰ in the Jesus movement—is an important insight for my thesis: that the historic Jesus was and is the first person among those who recognized the empowering presence of God, the prophet of Sophia who teaches the members of the movement not what is wise, but how to exercise wisdom in practice; who reveals not truths, but draws out from them insights that help them to see how to live truthfully; who graces the movement not by infusing its members with something from on high, but by surfacing the creative grace in the movement and helping shape an ongoing movement of creative grace; who refuses to make the disciples into wholly dependent patients who respond to God’s powerful Agent in passive acceptance, but empowers them to become creative and graceful reconciling agents of the commonweal divine.

Developing these claims into a constructive essay in Christology, however, is work for the future.

⁹⁰ See n. 41 above.