From Kingdom to kin-dom:

Three Feminist Interpretations of the Kingdom of God

BY

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

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FROM KINGDOM TO KIN-DOM: THREE FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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VERNA ELIAS

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis works from two premises. The first is that the Kingdom of God functions as a concept of hope, hope for a better world, hope for justice, hope for wholeness. The second premise is that women's recent rereadings of the Kingdom of God are important and merit attention. My main search is to uncover hopes that women's interpretations bring to the Kingdom of God concept.

This thesis limits itself to the interpretations of three feminist theologians. I have chosen to study works by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Ada María Isasi-Díaz. First, I introduce their specific interpretive principles. Next, I use these principles as the basis for exploring their ideas concerning the Kingdom of God. I argue that the hopes brought by these feminist theologians stem from their interpretations of the values of *belonging, caretaking,* and *community.* From their interpretations I conclude that the re-interpreted Kingdom of God concept continues to function as a "project of hope," that from within the emerging feminist theology concerning the eschatological concept come great hopes for betterment of self and relationships, and, that there is good reason for letting old hopes die.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been accomplished with the help of many friends. I wish to thank some formally. Dr. Klaus Klostermaier for his encouragement to pursue the question whether women have internalized a masculinist concept of soul. That question led me to mine: "How is new hope brought to the Kingdom of God concept? Dr. Dawne McCance, my advisor, for making this thesis much more structured and even better than it was in my head. The committee members, Drs. Eleanor Stebner, Egil Grislis, and Kate Blackstone, for their encouragement. Kate Bitney for constant affirmation during my journey into feminist thinking. Brenda Dyck for our rich friendship and her well-timed phone calls. Victor Elias for strongly recommending that I become comfortable in my confusion. My family, especially my mother, Justina Elias (1923-2000). Your patience has helped me appreciate these lines by Sodo (1641-1716):

In my hut in spring

There is nothing ---

There is everything.

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Chapter One

From Kingdom to kin-dom:

A Survey of the Task

Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life,

Let me more of their beauty see, wonderful words of life.

Philip P. Bliss (1838-1876)

"Let me more of their beauty see, wonderful words of life," sang my grandmother. This favorite hymn (Wonderful Words of Life) gave voice to an unquenchable hope—a hope for more, more beauty, more depth.[1] "Wonderful words of life" refer, in part, to the longed-for Kingdom of God, a better world, a world of peace and justice. The main purpose of this thesis is to see more, more of that hope, that beauty, in the Kingdom of God concept. The search yields, for this thesis, insights about hope from three feminist theologians and their interpretations of the

[1] My grandmother's eschatological hope was rooted in her evangelical Mennonite teachings.

Kingdom of God concept. Further, the search affirms that women's understandings of the Kingdom of God need to be brought forward in order that the horizons of a better world not remain limited to men's descriptions alone.

The word, Kingdom, is no longer commonly used among feminist theologians because it, in part, represents an ideal monarchy—an inappropriate image for peoples striving to live in political democracy. Further, the *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* does not have a separate entry for Kingdom of God, confirming that Kingdom of God is not a common concern. The entry, "eschatology" suggested that some feminist theologians offer criticism and re-interpretations of Kingdom of God.[2]

My search for material on Kingdom of God by female scholars led to three contemporary Catholic female scholars. I think the emphasis on salvation in community from their Catholic roots influenced the continued interest in this eschatological concept. Protestant female scholars do not share the same degree of concern for community, but my goal is neither to compare nor to contrast Catholic/Protestant female thinking. My goal is to examine some of the diversity within female Catholic readings of the Kingdom of God.

In order to present the shift from Kingdom to kin-dom, this thesis explores how Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (biblical approach), Rosemary Radford Ruether (historical approach), and Ada María Isasi-Díaz (systematic approach) deconstruct received Kingdom of God concepts and reconstruct concepts of belonging, caretaking, and community. I argue that the process of deconstructing and reconstructing brings fresh hope--a fresh depth of awareness--to the Kingdom of God

concept. The thesis attempts to demonstrate that these feminist interpretations offer critical wisdom for the Christian religion about such values as belonging (inclusiveness and equality), caretaking (eternal life and dialogue), and community (charity and mutuality). In general, kin-dom points to new, mutual and life-giving relationships between persons and persons, between persons and animals and plants and rocks and water, between persons and Earth Mother, and between persons and whatever we have named God.

1. Why read the Kingdom of God concept through feminist theology?

Classical questions that shape the theological discussion of the Kingdom of God include the three notions of space, time, and activity. For example: Is the Kingdom of God transcendent or immanent? Is it internal or external? A reign or a territory? Present or future? Process or Event? Private or public? Much has been written in attempt to answer these classical questions.[3] My research question, however, asks what types of hope feminist theology brings to the Kingdom of God concept. Five reasons can be given for reading the Kingdom of God concept through feminist perspectives.

The first reason is that feminist theology, as a critical perspective, enriches standard theology. In 1974, Georgia Harkness, the first woman to teach Christian theology in an American seminary, wrote her final book, *Understanding the Kingdom of God.* The book reviews standard twentieth-century Christian males'

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[2] Letty M. Russel and J. Shannon Clarkson, eds. *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies.*

opinions about the Kingdom of God, and offers a response to Harkness' life-long question, "What does it mean when one prays 'Thy kingdom come?'" Although the work satisfied Harkness, I found it unsatisfying for my research because it does not take up gender ideas. Harkness does not ask: What are women's opinions about the Kingdom of God? Do women see it as "the reign of the redeemed?" How do women's opinions differ from men's? And how does this difference influence attitudes toward ourselves as women, toward men, toward whatever we name God? Because the feminist theology examined here does address these questions, it enriches the standard theology reviewed by Harkness.

A second reason for reading the Kingdom of God concept through feminist theology is that feminist theology recognizes the constructedness of meanings, including meanings about Kingdom and God. For example, the very word kingdom is problematic for feminists because its root 'king' suggests absolute male authority. True, the ruler rarely acts without consultation; yet, many feminist thinkers are disturbed about the image of a unique and a masculine leader as the ultimate, the ideal image. They are weary of an image that alienates and limits. While some may know that God is not male, the masculine nouns continue to flourish and to limit understandings of the word, God. Also, sexist and individualistic interpretations of the Kingdom of God reinforce the triumphalism of kingship language as well as the romantic, middle-class notions of a better society. Further, the notion of territory and people ruled by a monarch is not in keeping with contemporary egalitarian and democratic ideas. Therefore, a feminist reading, as it critiques the notion of ruler and

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[3] For example, two helpful sources for traditional male Kingdom literature are Norman Perrin (biblical approach) and Benedict T. Viviano (historical approach).

ruled in the Kingdom of God concept, can nurture the evolution of the meaning of the words, Kingdom of God. By extension, it can re-value persons and God.

A third reason for studying the Kingdom of God concept through feminist theology is closely related to the second reason. Meanings of symbols also evolve. The Kingdom of God as a shared symbol represents the end, or better, the telos, of all our seeking. Rosemary Radford Ruether says in *Sexism and God-Talk* that a symbol is authentic if it illuminates and interprets experience (12). Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza says in *Sharing Her Word* that, in general, Christian symbols reveal not mainstream thinking but malestream thinking (4).[4] These two statements about symbols emerge out of questioning whether male-designed symbols provide an authentic and suitable telos for women. I want to question, by way of the feminist lenses of the women whose work I consider, whether the Kingdom of God symbol, created by men, is authentic for women.

A fourth reason is connected to issues of justice and power. The idea of the Kingdom of God as implying a just world has been tremendously useful for effecting social change. Many Christian organizations, such as the Mennonite Central Committee, read Romans 14.17 ("For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost") and focus on justice and peace as key mandates of the kingdom concept. Further, much missionary activity is an effort to alleviate the injustices of illiteracy, poverty, and lack of housing and medical care. When, in order to create a less unjust world (the Kingdom of God), the lives and activities and bodies of women are taken into consideration, what is

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[4] Schüssler Fiorenza states, in the same text, that one of the tasks of feminist theology is to alter "the malestream knowledge about the Divine and the world" (4).

justice? Feminist thinking about the Kingdom shapes understandings of justice and how a just world is sought.

A final reason is that the practice of critically assessing a religion from within seems most urgent in the effort to move toward inter-religious respect and dialogue. I see feminist thinking as a critical tool in this endeavor. As a tool, feminist thinking offers hope and help--new consciousness--to the complexities of living an ethical religious life. Critical feminist thinking can point to ideas that need to be plowed under and turned over so that new (or deeper) values and visions can emerge. One of the ever-emerging deeper values is inter-religious dialogue. And a pre-requisite to inter-religious dialogue is self-assessment.

These five reasons motivate my search for feminist theology's insights into the Kingdom of God concept. Before I introduce my three sources, a context--however simplified—seems necessary since these three women's ideas are not unrelated to standard interpretations of the Kingdom of God.

2. Are there Historical Links?

Given the diversity, the historical complexities, and the sheer quantity of Christian thinking about the Kingdom of God concept, it is not possible to give a review here. Nor is it necessary; such a task is beyond the focus of my thesis. Yet, in order to show how feminist theology brings hope to the Kingdom of God concept, some general context, is required. Feminist theological interpretations are connected to, or emerge out of, classical questions and earlier work on the Kingdom of God.

Appreciation of connexions and relation to earlier work is necessary for an understanding of the present work of revisioning the Kingdom.[5]

Benedict T. Viviano's *The Kingdom of God in History* is helpful to this task. Viviano says the Kingdom of God is a great biblical theme which, as a force, has "energized and transformed the lives of people and communities" (30). Viviano describes how Jesus employed the word Kingdom and then describes four main streams or currents of interpretations by the Church Fathers. The four streams include an eschatological stream, a political stream, an ecclesial stream, and a mystical-spiritual stream. I will briefly outline each stream and will suggest how each can be related to the work of concern to me in this thesis.

The eschatological stream can be represented by St. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons. Viviano quotes from *Adversus omnes Haereses 5.33.3* as follows:

> (The blessing of Isaac) refers unquestionably to the times of the (messianic) kingdom when the righteous shall bear rule, upon their rising from the dead; when also the Creation, having been renovated and set free, shall bring forth an abundance of all kinds of food (simply) from the dew of heaven, and from the fertility of the earth (35).

The quotation continues with a description of spectacular fertility. For example, each vine shall have ten thousand branches, each branch, ten thousand twigs, each twig, ten thousand shoots, and, finally, every cluster, ten thousand grapes. Viviano

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[5] John Pairman Brown's "Kingdom of God" in Mircea Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion* shows how the Christian Kingdom of God concept emerges out of antecedents in ancient Near East, Israel, and Greece. Brown's work links the Christian concept with ideas beyond the boundaries of Judaism and Christianity. See Volume 8.

explains: "What is new here is the renewal of the earth and its extravagant fecundity. Irenaeus is important for our theme not because of this extravagance but because he clings with undiminished intensity to a this-worldly hope coming from God. He has not lost this gospel element" (35).

The intensity of a this-worldly hope can be seen in the work of each of my feminist thinkers. Schüssler Fiorenza argues for an intense new understanding of inclusiveness in biblical texts and communities in *In Memory of Her*. Ruether argues fervently for an end to hurting Earth Mother in order to bring in a New Creation in *The Radical Kingdom.* Isasi-Díaz argues for the development of small communities practicing an intense mutuality in *Mujerista Theology*. All three women are devoted to a this-worldly eschatology.

In the spiritual-mystical stream, Viviano writes that "the kingdom is identified either with some *present* spiritual good in the soul of the believer, like knowledge, contemplation, spiritual and intellectual illumination, or the practice of Christian virtue" (31). Or the kingdom may be "identified with a *future* blessed state of the faithful, whether conceived as the general resurrection, immortality and corruptibility, or eternal life with God—in a word, heaven" (31). Viviano chooses Origen as an early major representative. Viviano states that much of Origen's work dissolves history into a philosopher's desire for a tidy unity at the expense of social, territorial, earthly, justice-oriented connotations of the Kingdom of God (39,40,42). Nonetheless, writes Viviano, *Peri Archon, On First Principles* reveals Origen as a "great speculator of the *apocatastasis* or restoration of all creation (Acts 3:21)" (42).

Ruether's work, too, re-works the theme of immortality in terms of restoration--caring for life on this planet. Yet, Ruether's concerns differ from Origen's—Origen seems to be concerned with the individual soul, whereas Ruether is concerned about the individual planet Earth and its transformative renewal. Their speculation about "What form of immortality?" however, connects them, as does an emphasis on ethics, behavior, and the notion that transcendent and immanent are one.

The third stream of interpretation is the political one. This view, writes Viviano, "identifies the kingdom of God on earth with some political structure or program" (31). Viviano identifies Eusebius of Caesarea, the father of church history, Constantine's advisor, as the major theological apologist for the political view. Viviano draws attention to the astonishment of Christians living under a Roman emperor "who not only claims to have converted to their faith but who wants to turn the whole empire into a Christian empire" (45). Constantine the Great (d.337), in an effort to unify the empire in a new way, implemented a long-range plan of making Christianity the main religion of the empire, says Viviano (46). Eusebius reflected on the similarities between the Almighty Sovereign and the emperor and defended monarchy as the best form of government. The result of Eusebius' application of Scripture was a fateful creation of "a church-state tradition" (47). The notion of an imperial ideal dragged Christians into regrettable crusades and pogroms. Further, the notion of an imperial ideal forced Christians to share public responsibility and try to interpret biblical ethics in practical (versus utopian) terms (51). For example, Constantine "humanized the criminal law and the law of debt, mitigated the conditions of slavery, made grants to support poor children, removed unfair taxation,

and made Sunday a public day of rest" (51). The important point is that just government could no longer be seen as an unambiguous legislature. The work of Eusebius expresses a similtude between an earthly kingdom and a heavenly one, and the emperor "presents it to them as a worthy object of their hope" (51).

The intersection of good news and political structures is evident in all three of my chosen thinkers and especially in the work of Isasi-Díaz. However, she turns it upside down. The good news comes from below, not above. Isasi-Díaz in *Mujerista Theology* affirms that women's struggles for political needs are rooted in a project worthy of hope: a more just society.

The fourth stream of interpretation Viviano calls the ecclesial stream because it identifies the kingdom of God on earth with the church. Viviano explains that "this has been the most common view among Roman Catholics from the time of its first, cautious, proposal by St. Augustine in his massive work, *The City of God"* up to the mid 1900s (31). Viviano argues that the *civitas dei* (city of God) consists ultimately in eternal life with God in heaven, and that *civitas terrena* (city on Earth) is a place for struggles between empire and church. Viviano describes the "Augustinian transformation of the kingdom into the church militant and triumphant" and "the imperial ideology of the Christian empire as the kingdom of God on earth" (57).

I place Schüssler Fiorenza in the ecclesial stream. Both she and Augustine share an overarching question: Where is the Kingdom of God? Both scholars take the church seriously as an institution and see the church as an important partial answer to the question 'where.' Schüssler Fiorenza focuses on the church in terms of

basileia and how it can practice justice for women both in the church and in the broader society. The justice for women topic is not on the agenda for St. Augustine, but the church's role as a sign of the Kingdom is. Because of her emphasis on the role of the church, Schüssler Fiorenza's work is linked to an ecclesial stream of interpretation.

Feminist theology concerning the kingdom is not dissociated from male kingdom literature. The point could be made by other reviews of theological literature on the kingdom theme. Other connexions could be suggested. For instance, in Romans, Paul's term righteousness often suggests remarkable differences (such as diet or apparel or behavior) between male and female, between Jew and Gentile, between Christian and other-than Christian. It can be said, as Karl Ludwig Schmidt indicates in "*Basileia*," that in Paul's notion of kingdom *righteousness* conveys a mandate for conformity and "denotes an ethicising of the idea of the kingdom of God in the direction of an ascetic and dualistic ethics of perfection" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 1, 592). By comparison, Galatians 3.28 declares in the kingdom of Christ a definitive lack of differences between Jew and Greek, citizen and non-citizen, male and female.

I bring together these remarks on Romans and Galatians for two reasons. First, the remarks indicate that the New Testament Kingdom of God raises sociopolitical questions. Second, I note that both Schüssler Fiorenza and Isasi-Díaz take Galatians 3.28 to be the ideal sociopolitical goal, and I note that Ruether claims righteousness has to do with basic species commonality. All three of my

thinkers/scholars prefer the lack of differences approach to righteousness, yielding ideas about a new earth of peace and justice.

3. Bio-bibliographical Information

In the case of each of my three chosen scholars, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Ada María Isasi-Díaz, life experiences and scholastic developments inform Kingdom of God interpretations. For this reason, I will here introduce briefly and generally each author's works pertaining to the Kingdom of God theme. In order to deepen appreciation for each woman's work, I will give a short biographical introduction as well.

i. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (b.1938, Tschanad, Germany), previously Professor of New Testament and Theology at the University of Notre Dame, is currently Krister Stendahl Professor of Scripture and Interpretation at Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Schüssler Fiorenza is the past president of the Society of Biblical Literature. Her work is widely recognized.[6] Phyllis Trible writes in the *New York Times Book Review* that an important accomplishment for Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is to have searched for a women's history that male-dominated consciousness has virtually eradicated (28).

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[6] As an aside, in the early 1990s I heard her offer, in St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba, her feminist interpretations of two parables when her work *But She Said* was new.

Schüssler Fiorenza is best known for *In Memory of Her* (1984). The book searches the New Testament Scriptures anew for "wonderful words of life" to render women's liberation visible and possible. Asking what it was like for a woman in Palestine to be involved with Jesus, Schüssler Fiorenza constructs a new mirror in which women can see themselves by looking at how Jewish women fought injustice and created an egalitarian Christian community after the death of Jesus (99-104). The new way refers to the role of women in the creation of an egalitarian community. By contrast, the old way emphasized the role of Jesus' death. *In Memory of Her* searches for these types of insights regarding belonging and equality and diversity within a discipleship of equals.

In *But She Said* (1992) Schüssler Fiorenza "brushes against the grain" (35).[7] Marsha Hewitt explains in "The Redemptive Power of Memory" that *But She Said* searches for traces of women's biblical history that "counter the prevailing androcentric interpretations of Christian origin" (85). Rosemary Radford Ruether writes in *Women and Redemption* that *But She Said* analyzes kyriarchy (the rule of the lord) as a "multilayered system of top-down power, rooted in the religious hierarchy (which in Christianity sees itself as representing Christ as Lord)" (274).

Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet (1995) seeks "to create a 'women'-defined feminist theoretical space that makes it possible to dislodge christological discourses from their malestream frame of reference" (3). The unorthodox style of writing wo/men draws "to the attention of the readers that those kyriarchal structures that determine women's lives and status also have an impact on men of subordinated

[7] Schüssler Fiorenza says she reads texts against their kyriocentric, or master-centered, grain in order to dislodge the texts from their patriarchal frame.

races, classes, countries, and religions, albeit in a different way" (191, Note 1). Basically, *Jesus, Miriam's Child* analyzes domination in terms of christology as a master narrative.

Schüssler Fiorenza's works demonstrate that her commitment is to the liberation of women and men from a patriarchal society and culture. The titles and subtitles of her books illustrate her continuing conviction that the Bible must not be left to patriarchy. The major reference text, which I propose to read for Schüssler Fiorenza's interpretation of equality in the *basileia* of God, will be *In Memory of Her*. I will take special note of the image of a festive table.

ii. Rosemary Radford Ruether

Rosemary Radford Ruether (b.1936, st. Paul, Minnesota) is Georgia Harkness Professor at the Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. Ruether discusses the development of her worldview in "Eschatology and Feminism." Ruether says that her worldview was dramatically shaped during a work experience in 1965 (111). At the time, Ruether, as a civil rights worker, was registering Black voters. The Black context became her world, and a carload of white men became, for her, a sign of danger. In her pre-1965 approach to the white world, white men did not signify danger. In 1964, three civil rights workers had been murdered by whites in that area. Ruether says that those days in Mississippi profoundly shaped her critical perspective of society—one needs to put oneself in the context of the oppressed in order to have some real understanding of the large system we call society.

The third chapter of this thesis explores Ruether's reading of the Kingdom of God concept. Her interest in this concept is already evident in her first book, *The Radical Kingdom: The Western Experience of Messianic Hope* (1970). This book explores the subordination/domination structure in patriarchal teachings about hope. Ruether names racism, classism, elitism, and colonialism as oppressive elements within the dominant system of patriarchy. Patriarchal relationships do not provide for the well-being of individuals; patriarchy is the exploitative domination of some by others which leads to violence, hate, escalating oppression, and misuse of the earth.[8]

Sexism and God-Talk (1983), my primary source in Chapter Three and Ruether's landmark publication, examines anthropology, christology, mariology, ecclesiology, and eschatology with a focus on gendered meaning. Through these five theological topics, Ruether explores the links between woman/body/nature, as well as the ethical ramifications of the notion of "full personhood," in particular, of being woman fully (113-115). Phyllis Trible writes in *New York Times Book Review*: "By the time Ruether finishes [*Sexism and God-Talk*], systematic theology has undergone a radical critique from which it emerges transformed rather than simply modified or totally rejected." Trible also states that Ruether "has constructed a full-fledged feminist theology—the first within a Christian context" (28).

Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology (1985) testifies to Ruether's conviction that women need more than the androcentric Bible to satisfy

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[8] Ruether's carefully documented *The Radical Kingdom* contains many of the ideas expressed in her later works. See, in particular, *The Radical Kingdom's* final chapter for early ideas on ecology.

religious thirst. In a history-of-religions approach, *Womanguides* presents pagan traditions of antiquity with their visions of sacred nature as well as Hebrew and early Christian traditions with their socially critical prophecies. Ruether writes in *Women and Redemption* that *Womanguides* shows how both spiritualities are needed: "both prophetic social transformations and encounters with the sacred depths in nature" (222).

Women and Redemption (1998) further develops Reuther's central concern: sexual difference—the significance it has and how it reflects back upon an understanding of God. *Women and Redemption* is concerned about a New Creation, a new reign of God in terms of new ways of relating—woman to woman and man to man, communities to God, and communities to the earth. Ruether names this relating pattern 'biophilic mutuality' (223). *Women and Redemption* explores the potential for continual transformative renewal, specifically, in the renewal of our ways of caretaking the Earth and relationships.

Ruether's earliest opinions concerning eschatology expressed in *Sexism and God-Talk* remain relatively constant in her later work. She reiterates that conversion from domination and consumerism is required for continued existence on Earth. Therefore I use *Sexism and God-Talk* as my major text from which to elaborate understandings of Ruether's interpretation of the Reign of God/ess.

iii. Ada María Isasi-Díaz

Ada María Isasi-Díaz (b.1943, La Habana, Cuba) is professor of ethics and theology at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. Her research interests include

Christian ethics, particularly as it relates to the religious experiences of Hispanic women. She may not be as well known as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether.

Isasi-Díaz's vision of society is shaped in a distinctive way by her personal life experience of coming from Cuba to study in the United States as a political refugee when she was eighteen. Her studies in ethics in the church, education, and family is based in a religious concern for Hispanic community. She has been a parish minister in Rochester, New York, as well as in Lima, Peru.[9]

By way of introducing Isasi-Díaz, I will relate one story recorded in the notes to "The Bible and *Mujerista* Theology" in *Lift Every Voice*. In the 1960s Isasi-Díaz was in charge of two adult groups in a parish in Peru. As a 'spiritual advisor' in the community, she was asked to walk immediately in front of the image in a two-day procession promoting devotion to *El Senor de Los Milagros* (The Lord of Miracles). Isasi-Díaz could not, according to proper ritual procedures, turn her back to the image of *El Senor*. She therefore walked backwards for two days. In the process, she was converted. She came to realize the value of popular expressions of faith and how they are part of the unfolding of the kin-dom of God. From then on she has respected and has valued the religious understandings and practices of the people. She claims that it was not the gospel story but the faith of the poor people that taught her to say, "God, help my unbelief" (*Lift Every Voice*, 318).

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[9] I contacted Ada María Isasi-Díaz through e-mail and she shared some ideas about the kingdom by recording them onto cassette while she drove to work. This "real voice" contact provided me with a collegial sense of learning together.

Isasi-Díaz and others use the word *mujerista* to identify Hispanic/Latina women who consciously struggle for liberation instead of calling them Latina feminists.[10] Though not a widely used term, *mujerista* is used extensively in theological circles and is beginning to be used in other fields such as literature and sociology.[11] Isasi-Díaz is the first to offer a full-length *mujerista* theology.

Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church (co-authored with Yolanda Tarango, 1987) hopes that the stories of the lives and traditions of Hispanic women who struggle to survive on a daily basis, will continue and bear fruit. Isasi-Díaz explains in the "Introduction" that she uses ethnography as an element in her theological method in order to intersect liberation theologies, feminist theologies, and the theology of culture. *Hispanic Women* explores Latinas' religious beliefs and the role they play in their lives.

En La Lucha—In the Struggle: A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology (1993) again uses ethnography in order to explore the way Latinas make critical decisions. For Hispanic people, says Isasi-Díaz, "what is central to our self-understanding is not our suffering oppression but rather our struggle to overcome that oppression and to survive"(22). In order to protest dehumanization, Isasi-Díaz does not focus on the oppression alone but on the struggle to resist dehumanization.

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[10] For a useful bibliography of Hispanic/Latino theology see the anthology edited by Arturo J. Banuelas, *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from the Latino Perspective*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995.

[11] As a point of interest, the *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* was launched in 1993 under the aegis of ACHTUS (Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States). Some of the issues discussed include ecumenical theology, challenges of postmodernity, and dialogue between U.S. Hispanic and African American theologies.

As the struggle against evil is depicted in the life of Jesus, so, says Isasi-Díaz, is the struggle against evil continued in the struggle for liberation among the Latinas.

"Defining Our *Proyecto Historico*" in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (Volume 9, Spring-Fall, 1993) presents the historical project—in terms of justice, freedom, and faith community--needed to implement liberation (the kin-dom of God) in Hispanic communities. The essay explores Hispanic women's hopes and expectations as a key element in constructing a future reality "in which we can live fully." "Defining Our *Proyecto Histórico*" explains how salvation and liberation are intrinsically linked in *mujerista* theology.

Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the 21st Century (1996) adds to the many-splendored wonder of contextualization. Isasi-Díaz works toward a non-uniform feminism that is rooted in her world, in the well-being for Hispanic women, and that envisions a challenge to the macro systems of racism, sexism, and exploitation that govern the entire U.S. American social, and political system (13-17). Justice for all, the cry to redeem the self-worth of marginalized persons and communities, is the theme of *Mujerista Theology*. In order to explore Isasi-Díaz's interpretation of community based in solidarity and mutuality in the kin-dom of God, my major text will be her most recent book, *Mujerista Theology*.

4. Theory and Method—Interpretive Principles

Each scholar, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz, has a specific method. Through her specific feminist

hermeneutics each, in part, uncovers unethical aspects in received patriarchal Kingdom of God teachings. As well, with creative feminist insights, each imagines a better world and reshapes Kingdom of God images. Further, each offers hope and practical suggestions for working toward a new society.

Each thinker, Schüssler Fiorenza, Ruether, and Isasi-Díaz, rereads tradition through a "hermeneutics of suspicion." On one level of understanding, this means that the traditional starting point (the Bible as the inspired Word of God) is suspect. Using a hermeneutics of suspicion, one is inclined to suspect the traditional starting point. One starts, instead, from the position that the Bible is literature collected largely by men to be understood by men and used by men as authoritative Scripture. It follows that the Bible, as a male-authored book, must be reread today before its claims to universality can be accepted; what it calls natural and revealed must also be subjected to scrutiny. Does the Bible speak to women, to non-whites, to poor, to non-heterosexuals? Or is its message limited to men called to an ideal of celibacy? Using a hermeneutics of suspicion enables the three authors of concern to me to evaluate the extent to which the Kingdom of God is informed by male (so-called God's) intentions. Read from a perspective of feminist suspicion, the doctrinal interpretations of the Kingdom of God take on different ramifications.[12] Read from out of a hermeneutics of suspicion, the Kingdom of God can be understood in different ways. The purpose of a hermeneutics of suspicion is as much to reveal values and assumptions behind viewpoints, or starting points, as it is a lifelong quest

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[12] See, for example, *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Reason* by Darby Kathleen Ray. She shows how classical assumptions of atonement are used to justify unjust relations through the teachings of suffering, obedience, self-sacrifice, innocence, forgiveness, and death.

toward mutuality in appreciation of multiple viewpoints. The process of rereading tradition in order to uncover hidden viewpoints and values is, in part, the hope that feminist theology brings to the Kingdom of God concept and to religious studies overall.

In order to preview the structure of my next three chapters, I explain in what follows how the overarching hermeneutic of suspicion yields interpretive sub-principles for each author. These sub-principles demonstrate the double work of both critical engagement and reshaping that each author performs in order to offer hope to the Kingdom of God concept. Though I have separated them into sections for discussion purposes, these sub-principles are inter-related, closely affiliated, and used simultaneously.

i. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Schüssler Fiorenza explains her hermeneutics in *But She Said.* Following her text, I outline three interpretive sub-principles that flow from her hermeneutics of suspicion.

The first, a principle of remembrance, leads Schüssler Fiorenza to work from the premise that the New Testament scriptures can be read for feminist meaning-content. This principle inclines Schüssler Fiorenza to re-member, to forge interpretations that reveal emancipatory struggles. For example, the 'standard' interpretation of Luke 18.2-5 refers to the woman who begs the unjust judge for justice as a "poor and destitute woman." Schüssler Fiorenza, in *Sharing Her Word,* uncovers a pitfall in such an interpretation—it encourages 'victim thinking.' Instead,

Schüssler Fiorenza recasts the begging woman as an advocate of justice, a "bold, persistent, assertive" woman who does not tolerate injustice (157). Out of the principle of re-membering, of putting the story together again, Schüssler Fiorenza reconstructs the biblical story to encourage women to struggle toward a less unjust world.

Second, Schüssler Fiorenza adopts a principle of evaluation and proclamation. She evaluates androcentric dynamics inscribed in the structures of a text and determines the sociopolitical contextualizations. In the classic example of Mary and Martha, Schüssler Fiorenza questions the notions of self-sacrifice, the ministry of service, as well as the rights of women to study and read. Schüssler Fiorenza shows in *In Memory of Her* how one can re-evaluate and proclaim, from a biblical text, women's ministry in terms of a "democratic practice of solidarity with those who struggle for survival, self-love, and justice" (73).

Third, Schüssler Fiorenza adopts a principle of creative imagination and ritualization. Through this sub-principle, Schüssler Fiorenza seeks to articulate alternative liberating interpretations that are meaningful to the *ekklēsia* of women. The challenge here, writes Schüssler Fiorenza in *But She Said,* is to posit a metaphoric space as a "vantage point outside the cultural-religious sex-gender system" (103-104). Schüssler Fiorenza takes a position outside of patriarchal discourse. With the help of "historical imagination, narrative amplifications, artistic recreations, and liturgical celebrations," she works toward allowing women "to enter the text" (73). Such a space for creative imagination and ritualization becomes an opening for political action.

These three sub-principles guide Schüssler Fiorenza as she reads from the conviction that women as persons have had oppressive experiences from which they need liberation. By way of these sub-principles, I examine in Chapter Two how Schüssler Fiorenza reconstructs the *basileia* of God.

ii. Rosemary Radford Ruether

Elements of Christian tradition do not "ring true" for Rosemary Radford Ruether. She, too, works from a hermeneutics of suspicion. Ruether suspects the normative gospel narrative that woman was created second and sinned first and should keep silent in the church and will be saved through subordination and childbirth. This is not gospel for women. Ruether explains in *Sexism and God-Talk*:

> Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive. Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes or denies the *full humanity of women* must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption (18, 19). [Emphasis mine.]

This quotation shows that Ruether has asked: What behavior reflects a redemptive community? Since when is domination of persons 'natural?' What is a redemptive text for women?

First, in order to discover what is a redemptive text for women, Ruether employs an interpretive principle of meaning. A text is meaningful, according to her, if it furnishes redemptive powers for the full humanity of women. A key phrase

here is 'full humanity of women.' According to *Sexism and God-Talk*, "the promotion of the full humanity of women" is "the critical principle of feminist theology" (18). Crucial to this principle is the word *personhood*, as Carter Heyward has said. In "An Unfinished Symphony" Heyward writes that the theological power of *Sexism and God-Talk* "is rooted in Ruether's transparent desire for the affirmation of female personhood and her knowledge of the damage done to women by the historical streams of Christian misogyny which still flow strong and terrible" (106). Some of the damage that has been done to women involves the disregarding of their activities, presence, and experience. Ruether's principle of meaning seeks to affirm female personhood, or in Ruether's terms, the 'full humanity for women.'

The second sub-principle of Ruether's hermeneutics of suspicion upholds human experience as primary. Ruether writes in *Sexism and God-Talk*: "Human experience is the starting point and the ending point of the hermeneutical circle" (12). She explains that experience includes "experience of the divine, experience of oneself, and experience of the community and the world, in an interacting dialectic" (12). Ruether says that one argument for the use of feminist theology is that symbols must have the ability to interpret experience. Talk about God, the Bible and theology, has been based on male experience rather than on universal human experience. For too long, according to Ruether, the masculinist way of reading the world has been accepted as the sole way of seeing.[13] Therefore, a principle of human

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[13] See Ruether's questions in "Eschatology and Feminism" in *Lift Every Voice*, 114. For example, Ruether asks to what extent masculinist discourse has negated woman as birth-giver. Further she asks to what extent has the goal of eternal life diverted energy from authentic human tasks of protecting Earth Mother.

experience (instead of male-based experience) speaks to the need for women to interpret life as meaningful, just, and truthful.

A final sub-principle of Ruether's hermeneutics of suspicion is what I call a worldview correction. She uses it to address the worldview of alienation and to implement a new society. In "Motherearth and the Megamachine" in *Christianity and Crisis*, Ruether explains in that she works toward correcting the masculinist dualistic way of seeing the world.[14] The Platonic and Cartesian separation of mind/body, self/universe, spirit/nature, and male/female is unhealthy and unbalanced and an unnecessarily alienating worldview. Instead, Ruether reaches for a new mode of relationship--neither a hierarchical model that diminishes the potential of the other nor an equality defined by a ruling norm drawn from the dominant group; rather a relating based in caretaking, a mutuality that allows people to affirm different ways of being (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 20).

For Ruether the primary sexual symbolism (masculine/feminine) sums up the alienation of one from the other.[15] Through a new worldview principle, Ruether reads as if humanity, though "fallen" from oneness or *imago Dei* and alienated (from God, from body, from nature, and from self), can be redeemed into a new creation. Part of imagining a new creation is choosing to read God as God/ess (even though

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[14] The reference to alienation is from the reprinted article in J. Plaskow, C.Christ, *Womanspirt Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, San Franscisco: Harper and Row, 1979, 43-44.

[15] In an e-mail correspondence, Ruether indicated to me that difference, namely, gender difference, is fundamental to her worldview and that she believes "in a presupposition of a basic species commonality of humans within which one can allow a great variety of differences." This presupposition of "basic species commonality" defines what I have called a *worldview principle* which Ruether uses to read literature that alienates.

this may be awkward and not workable in liturgy); God/ess tends to disrupt the notion that there is one God, male, and unchanging. Another effort to imagine non-alienation is to read man and woman as wo/man. Wo/man reminds the reader that though males and females are different, they are variations of the same species. These examples of God/ess and wo/man show how Ruether's worldview brings together that which has been separated—masculine/feminine and all other dualisms. It is a way of reading that brings hope.

Ruether's interpretive principles allow her, she explains in *Sexism and God-Talk*, to rethink the Reign of God as if women mattered, as if the caretaking of relationships--between Earth and people and between persons and persons—mattered. Chapter Three explains more.

iii. Ada María Isasi-Díaz

Mujerista theology's method challenges traditional theologies because their "relevance to what is going on in our world today is waning" (*Mujerista Theology*, 75). Isasi-Díaz explains in "Defining Our *Proyecto Histórico:*"

> *Mujerista* theologians refuse to reduce theology to a formal, disciplinary discourse in which adequacy is defined by certain intellectual criteria as they are understood by those who control the cultural and academic apparatus. *Mujerista* theology is indeed an attempt to deconstruct the dominant normative understanding of theology as a disciplinary method, in order to place theology at the heart of Latina's daily life where the norm is *hacer lo mejor que se puede aunque no sea necesariamente lo màs bueno*--to do what

> one is able to do, though it might not always be the best thing—in order to survive (28).

Theology, for Isasi-Díaz, must be more than an academic enterprise if it is to be relevant. How are traditional theologies relevant if they do not "take seriously the religion of the people" but seem "to prefer the doctrines and dogmas of the church?" How are they relevant if they are "content with seeing themselves as accountable only, or at least mainly, to the institutional churches" (*Mujerista Theology*, 75, 76)? This suspicion, the relevance of traditional theology, led Isasi-Díaz to elaborate *mujerista* theology in terms of reflective *praxis* (*Mujerista Theology*, 73).

Isasi-Díaz presents her three interpretive principles, grounded in this hermeneutics of suspicion, in two essays: "The Bible and *Mujerista* Theology" in *Lift Every Voice* and "*La Palabra de Dios en Nosotras*—The Word of God in Us" in *Mujerista Theology*. I will use the latter essay because it is more recent and its structure is more refined.

First is the sub-principle of need. *Mujerista* theology reads biblical stories in terms of need—Hispanic women in the struggle for survival relate to biblical stories because they know the book is important ("*Palabra*," 152). They need the biblical stories because the stories are a source of hope. The heart of Latina daily life in which religion plays an important role is the struggle to survive. *Mujerista* theology (talk about God) reflects upon Latinas' 'struggle to survive' structure and experience. *Mujerista* theology says that, in order to change the reality of poverty for Hispanic women, intellectual theology must be reshaped. The ambitious theological project "challenges oppressive structures which refuse to allow Hispanic

women to be full members of society while preserving their distinctiveness," Isasi-Díaz writes in "Solidarity" (31).

In "*Palabra,*" Isasi-Díaz states that "Latinas use Bible stories hoping to find someone in the story who will be a source of hope" (151). She explains that "Hispanic women have traditionally listened to and told Bible stories as a source of strength, in order to understand what is happening to us" ("*Palabra,*" 151). Biblical stories make "us part of a much wider community of struggle" and biblical stories encourage positive contributions to the revolutionary activity of struggling for liberation ("*Palabra,*" 153). The interpretive principle of need means that one begins where one is. For many Hispanic Christians, "heavily influenced by the Catholicism of the *conquistadores*, a religious practice with little biblical content" exists ("*Palabra,*" 149). Therefore, the principle of need addresses the minimal usage of the written Bible among Hispanic women and it addresses the reality of Latinas—their struggle for liberation from oppression.

Perhaps a word about salvation and charity in terms of need is in order here. Isasi-Díaz refers often to Gustavo Gutiérrez and his liberation theology. According to Gutiérrez salvation occurs in history and is intrinsically connected to liberation (both are something here, now, and in the present).[16] Salvation, for Isasi-Díaz, means being related to God and being related to God means loving one's neighbour (doing kind deeds). Salvation also means having self-worth--loving oneself. Salvation as a here and now need is a guide for Isasi-Díaz to determine whether a text is liberative, whether it is the Word of God for women. Through the interpretive

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[16] For a helpful definition of liberation "salvation," see Gustavo Guttiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990, 116-21.

principle of need, Isasi-Díaz challenges traditional notions about salvation, liberation, and charity.

A second interpretive sub-principle has to do with vision for the future, living into a preferred future. Isasi-Díaz reads with a purpose of creating something new and she describes the *proyecto histórico*. Living into a preferred future means, for example, that interpreting the Bible, and contributing to the interpretations of the Bible, is a revolutionary activity. Further, living into a preferred future means that church structures will be reconstituted as the elitism of hierarchical privileges is exposed as oppressive. Also, living into a preferred future means that person is always "understood as a human being in relation to a community" ("*Palabra,*" 157). The *proyecto histórico* is to create spaces for self-determination. Self-determination means, for Isasi-Díaz, to have the power to create spaces to "engage in building a future society with different values" ("Defining Our *Proyecto,*" 20). The interpretive principle of vision helps find, create, and recognize the community as the birthplace of the 'self-determined' self. Isasi-Díaz reads as an exile who understands the need for liberation and presents her viewpoint as the view of a remnant—a group who can bring about peace with justice in the world.

I need to note that an important part of her vision means that Isasi-Díaz chooses not to read the word kingdom in the phrase Kingdom of God. Neither does she use the word reign, as Ruether does. Instead, Isasi-Díaz substitutes kin-dom for kingdom. This indicates devotion to the understanding of community that is reflected in many Latina families. As a *mujerista* she is aware of the power of language to perpetuate a picture in which the ideal is male. In this act of

substitution, Isasi-Díaz en-visions new values. Any shift away from a hierarchical arrangement to an egalitarian one metaphorically shrinks the distance between those who have power and those who must be empowered if genuine engagement is to take place. Isasi-Díaz insists on the fundamental contradiction between a God thought of chiefly in terms of power and a peaceful world. Through a principle of vision Isasi-Díaz reads texts for their ability to establish a preferred future.

Third, through a principle of liberative praxis, Isasi-Díaz understands the core of the gospel message to be justice and love. This translates into relational values in community. *Mujerista* theology is a hybrid born of the intersection of feminism, Hispanic culture, and the struggle for liberation. Justice and love are imagined as working among the people within the community. The important principle of liberative praxis in *mujerista* theology allows for the study of the experience of the body as a primary site of both oppression and liberation for Hispanic women. Reading biblical stories through a principle of liberative praxis rests in the core ethic--the struggle to survive in community.

For example, Hispanic women read the story of Shiphrah and Puah, the two midwives who help ensure the continuation of the Hebrew people found in Exodus 1.15-22. The two women, because of the 'fear of God,' defy the pharaoh's decree to kill Hebrew male babies. This fear of God is interpreted as relation to God and suggests wisdom about life, about birthing and mothering a history of a people. This story speaks of hope to the Hispanic women in need of liberation from oppression, people who have a vision for justice and fulfilled lives (*"Palabra,"* 161-165). Using

the three principles of interpretation outlined above, Chapter Four explores the kin-dom of God concept in terms of bringing hope to the community.

5. The Thesis

In the next three chapters I explore each scholar's interpretation of the concept called Kingdom of God. Each chapter is structured by the specific theologian's hermeneutics of suspicion and the sub-principles derived from this. First, I describe what the thinker defines as unethical and denounces, what each is suspicious of; second, I investigate the new hopes, the new utopian visions of a redeeemed society that derive from each theologian's feminist hermeneutic; third, I probe for an ethical, practical application of this hermeneutic. In sum, in order to see "more of their beauty" in the "wonderful words of life," I examine the evidence for shifting from Kingdom to kin-dom (the project of blessed hope).

In the thesis conclusion I tie together the dominant themes--belonging through equality and diversity, caretaking as dialogue and eternal life, and, community based in charity and mutuality—that bring hope in shifting from Kingdom to kin-dom.

Chapter Two

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Reconstructing Kingdom of God as *Basileia* of God

"But it's always interesting when one doesn't see," she added.

"If you don't see what a thing means,

you must be looking at it wrong way around."

Agatha Christie (1891-1978)

This chapter explores how Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza brings hope to the Kingdom of God concept. My primary text is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her*. It points to new levels of consciousness in the value of belonging. It also points to inclusive wholeness in the kingdom of God concept. I also examine some of her more recent work in the final section of this chapter which addresses the question, How to proceed now that we see inclusive wholeness, or belonging, in this way?

In general, three elements in *In Memory of Her* are immediately remarkable. The most obvious element is language. Instead of using the word kingdom, Schüssler Fiorenza retains the Greek word *basileia* (*In Memory of Her*, 118). Schüssler Fiorenza does not use kingdom for New Testament discourse. kingdom is reserved for Old Testament ideas. The power of the word, "kingdom," rests, to some degree, in the picture of a triumphant king and territory. Schüssler Fiorenza allows an alternative image to emerge by staying with *basileia* which is usually translated as kingdom, realm, dominion, or reign. For Schüssler Fiorenza, the Greek word inclines toward more inclusive language, a better image of the reign of the Messiah, a reminder of the 'nearness of the liberator.' She writes that following Jesus is "an engagement in early Christian faith perspectives" (*Memory*, 103). When Schüssler Fiorenza uses the word *basileia*, she evokes the notion of a discipleship of equals. She means that those people who share "the vision of Jesus" and his "commitment and praxis as we know it from the remembrance of his first disciples" are included (*Memory*, 103).

The second obvious element is that Schüssler Fiorenza carefully constructs Jesus as one who came with a view toward a Jewish discipleship (*Memory*, 105, 106). Therefore, the Jewish women who got involved with the vision and movement of Jesus are the key characters—they are the foresisters with whom Schüssler Fiorenza seeks solidarity.[17] This point is important both because it changes the character development of Jesus; he is constructed, not as a Savior, but as a teacher

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[17] Elizabeth Castelli explains in "Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza On Women in the Gospels and Feminist Christology" that Schüssler Fiorenza's project is to restore women to the biblical tradition and to restore women's biblical tradition of egalitarian community to women themselves.

who gathers a discipleship of equals. This point also changes the focus of interest so that women disciples are in the centre of the stage, not Jesus.

The third obvious general element is the key image. In her "Introduction," Schüssler Fiorenza refers to Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* which underlines the importance of women's heritage as a source for women's power. Schüssler Fiorenza writes: "She [Judy Chicago] created *Dinner Party* as a symbolic history of women's past 'pieced together' from the scanty information gleaned from cultural-religious channels" (*Memory*, xix). Schüssler Fiorenza, then, uses this image of 1038 women around a dinner table to depict the *basileia* of God as a festive table. I present these three elements (Greek term, Jewish discipleship, and festive table) in preparation for seeing "another way around," that is, to see how Schüssler Fiorenza deconstructs the "kingdom of priests and holy nations" concept in order to construct the concept of inclusive wholeness in the *basileia* of God.

Before I turn to the subject of inclusive wholeness, however, it is necessary to identify and discuss some of the categories involved in the notion of equality, because of its assumed proximity to inclusiveness. Gregory Baum's, "Feminism and Christian Theology" explains that there are several ways to approach the notion of equality from within feminism.[18] Baum says that the liberal branch of feminism affirms equal rights for all human beings and therefore demands equal opportunity for women. The radical branch regards patriarchal subjugation of women as the primary oppression that "pits men collectively against women" (3). For a radical

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[18] Baum's categorical divisions are one starting point among many. Another writer, Susan Frank Parsons in *Feminism and Christian Ethics* sees three categories as paradigms: liberal, social constructionist, and naturalist.

feminist, writes Baum, 'the personal is political' means that the "struggle for personal liberation from patriarchal domination attacks the root cause of all social evils and that therefore this personal struggle is politically fully responsible"(7). The socialist branch of feminism views patriarchy as an economic organization that pits the patriarchs, the powerful men, against women, children, and dependent males. In general, says Baum, Christian feminist literature reveals an affinity with socialist feminism because "solidarity with the poor sisters and the poor and the marginalized everywhere" is a central tenet of Christian feminism (11). Using Baum's three categories, I would place Schüssler Fiorenza's notions of equality under the socialist umbrella.[19]

Schüssler Fiorenza's position as a socialist feminist is noteworthy because she argues for revolutionary solidarity with people who are long dead--the women of the earliest Christian community. She explains equality in terms of participation in the struggle toward freedom from patriarchy. She writes in *Bread Not Stone*:

> We participate in the same struggle as our biblical foresisters against the oppression of patriarchy and for survival and freedom from it. We share the same liberating visions and commitments as our biblical foremothers. We are not called to "empathize" or to "identify" with <u>their</u> struggles and hopes but to continue <u>our</u> struggle in solidarity with them. Their memory and

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[19] Another helpful picture of various understandings of equality in feminism is given in Naomi Black's "Virginia Woolf: The Life of Natural Happiness," in *Feminist Theorists*, edited by Dale Spender. Black uses two categories: feminist political organizations are concerned with equal rights and feminist social organizations with maternal matters. This information helps push equality beyond horizons of equal rights, wages, and sameness.

> remembrance—rediscovered and kept alive in historical reconstruction and actualized in ritual celebration—encourage us in historical solidarity with them to commit ourselves to the continuing struggle against patriarchy in society and church (115).

This quotation indicates that equality for Schüssler Fiorenza has little to do with sameness of persons. Rather, equality has to do with sameness of goal—"changing the social reality of the Christian churches in which the religious oppression and eradication of women takes its specific historical patriarchal forms" (*Memory*, 30). Schüssler Fiorenza explains that women are equal in the sense that they have been robbed of their freedom to be self-determining persons (*Memory*, 31-33). Women, she indicates, have been defined in terms of roles dictated by their association with father, husband, son, and the heavenly patriarch. How are we equal? is an important question because it helps delineate the boundaries of inclusive wholeness: sameness of goal.

The above quotation about solidarity in struggle previews all four sections of this chapter: first, suspect that biblical interpretations nurture false consciousness; second, evaluate liberating visions and remember biblical women; third, proclaim the structural wrong in society and church (patriarchal and hierarchical) and restore the blessed hope that is contained in the vision to keep alive the struggle against oppressive structures; fourth, imagine anew the work of a discipleship of equals and through the work of transformative ritual *posit* a place of wholeness. These four sections demonstrate how Schüssler Fiorenza deconstructs the "kingdom of priests and holy nation" and reconstructs a *basileia* in its place.

1. Suspecting False Consciousness in kingdom Language

In order to show how Christianity's key symbol, Kingdom of God, can be deconstructed, Schüssler Fiorenza reflects on the Old Testament ethos in relation to the religious life of Jesus.[20] Schüssler Fiorenza stresses that Jesus was a Jew since too many Christians want to claim him as originarily a Christian (*Memory*, 105, 106). The separation between Jew and Christian did not happen in the lifetime of Jesus, Schüssler Fiorenza points out. Further, Schüssler Fiorenza identifies the key symbols for first century Judaism as Temple and Torah (*Memory*, 110). Schüssler Fiorenza puts under suspicion Temple and Torah: Were they welcome words for all Jews? In other words, she suspects whether the two key symbols for first-century Judaism were inclusive symbols for all Jews; that is, she suspects whether the key symbols reflect and illuminate mainstream significance. Perhaps the symbols had more 'malestream' significance.

Jesus lived in the "kingdom of priests and holy nation."[21] What did the "kingdom of priests and holy nation" look like? Schüssler Fiorenza shows that in the "kingdom of priests and holy nation" many groups of religious Palestinians anxiously shared the symbol, Kingdom of God. For those who, like myself, have never lived under military or political or religious occupation, *In Memory of Her* brings to light a new way of understanding Jesus and his followers: they were a

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20. Schüssler Fiorenza makes a disclaimer about lack of sources for pre-70 Judaism that is worth noting: "The following must therefore not be misunderstood to be even a partial reconstruction of women in pre-70 Judaism. It only points to some 'shades' that allow us to see the overall colors in a somewhat different light" (*Memory*, 110).

[21] This phrase is taken from Exodus 19:6 which records the Sinai events three months after the children of Israel have left Egypt. Moses, on the Mount of Sinai, hears God: (". . . if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, . . . you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation").

renewal movement--a religious group formed in the desperate and ambitious hope that release from Roman occupation was possible. There were many renewal of hope groups, explains Schüssler Fiorenza following the work of Sheldon R. Isenberg's "Power Through Temple and Torah in Greco-Roman Palestine." Schüssler Fiorenza explains their purpose: "All Jewish groups and factions of Greco-Roman Palestine were concerned with Israel's life and existence as God's holy people who were entrusted with the commandments of the covenant, a whole system of *mitzvot*, the revealed rules for salvation" (*Memory*, 110).

In order to underline the theme of inclusiveness, I want to consider how one belonged to the "kingdom of priests and holy nation?" It depended on a particular group's interpretation of working out the commandments in order to be holy. For example, the Essenes, writes Schüssler Fiorenza, "established separate communes in towns and cities throughout the country, held everything in common, employed a different ritual of purification, devoted themselves to agricultural labor, and were very strict in their interpretation of Torah" (*Memory*, 112). "The community of Qumran withdrew into the desert to create a 'holy people' to replace the Temple with its illegitimate rituals and priesthood until the Temple's sacredness would be restored and Israel would be liberated in the final 'holy war'" (*Memory*, 112). The Essenes, then, offer a picture of separate 'holy people' in the desert.

For another example, the Pharisees, Schüssler Fiorenza writes, "did not separate from the people but sought to realize their vision of a 'holy people of priests' by transferring cultic purity and priestly holiness to everyday life" (*Memory*, 112). The Pharisees were well known for their concerns about the Sabbath, purity

laws, Levitical and priestly tithes, cultic purity of the table community and the observation of the dietary laws, explains Schüssler Fiorenza. The Pharisees and the Essenes, provide evidence that various religious movements existed at the time of Jesus and that each group had its own entrance requirements derived from Torah interpretations. The important point is that there were entrance requirements. One belonged because one adhered to certain regulations. The purpose of these groups was to "hasten God's intervention on behalf of Israel by scrupulously doing the will of God" (*Memory*, 113). Schüssler Fiorenza puts cultic holiness under suspicion.

I mention these two renewal of hope movements as examples, further, to depict that power is tied up with interpretation. Schüssler Fiorenza says that Isenberg's work shows how interpretations of Torah translate into power--control of *redemptive media*. Each group was concerned "with how to realize in every aspect of life the obligations and hopes of Israel as the kingly and priestly people of God" (*Memory*, 113). Redemption through holiness offers the security of being a nation, a group, an identifiable people. The notion of control of redemptive media in order to form an identifiable group of believers is very significant. Take, for example, the emancipation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. Many Jews today still interpret this event as a dramatic heroic moment for Yahweh and redemption for their people. A group outside of Judaism could see the same story as the unfortunate perpetuation of tribal religion. Consider, for another example, that feminist thinking is also a form of redemptive media and it separates believers from non-believers. The disturbing question remains: Who benefits from a given interpretation? The question is important, even if it is not my main question for this thesis.

Returning to the idea of religious groups and the key symbols of Temple and Torah: both the groups and the symbols informed and formed the common ethos or life praxis of Palestine. Schüssler Fiorenza says that the sacred Temple in Jerusalem stood as a witness to Israel's enduring covenant with God. The liturgies and rites connected to Temple worship separated the Israelites from the pagans who governed them. And the Israelites separated themselves from one another into groups with particular interpretations of Torah. The "kingdom of priests and holy nation," with its key symbols, differentiated the Palestinian Jewish population. Schüssler Fiorenza has constructed a picture of the kingdom for us. It is a picture of Jews among Palestinians and Jews among Jews demarcated by various rules of holiness (relating). Schüssler Fiorenza says that Jesus came into the Temple system of worship and brought a different view on holiness and its power to separate (*Memory*, 113).

2. Evaluating Liberation and Remembering the Women

For all of the Jewish population, the Roman occupation of Israel was understood, in various ways, as offensive to "God's rule and empire established in the covenant with Israel" (*Memory*, 111). Liberation, that is, the imminent departure of the Romans, was a sincere hope among the Palestinian Jews, states Schüssler Fiorenza. Certainly, it was hoped that God would intervene and set them free from non-Israelite rule (*Memory*, 111). Through Torah interpretation, the Roman structure was understood as a hindrance to true Jewish freedom as promised by God.

What did liberation from the Roman rule mean? Schüssler Fiorenza explains some of the hopes and expectations expressed in this "kingdom of priests and holy nation:

> Jews expected either the restoration of the Davidic national sovereignty of Israel and abolition of Roman colonialism or an apocalyptic universal kingdom of cosmological dimensions with the holy city and Temple as its center. Many groups hoped for both at the same time (*Memory*, 111).

Jewish hope was an apocalyptic vision of being set free, a vision for national liberation and sovereignty. "Regardless of differences in lifestyle and theological outlook" writes Schüssler Fiorenza, "all these groups were united in their concern for the political existence and holiness of the elected people of Israel" (*Memory*, 113). These hopes for liberation were expressed in the prayers of the people.

Schüssler Fiorenza mentions the Kiddush and the Lord's Prayer. She indicates that each prayer highlights the pleas for both national liberation and sovereignty, as well as for transformation of the whole creation by God's intervention.[22] Also, she says, the prayers indicate that the symbol of kingdom evoked a powerful political plea concerning personal freedom "in near time."

The Kiddush, as one example of the prayers, is not uncommon among religious writers: "Magnified and sanctified be his great name in the world which he created according to his will. And may he establish his kingdom [*yamlikh malkhuteh*] during your life and during your days and during the life of the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time" (*Memory*, 112). Why was the nearness of

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[22] By contrast, Rosemary Radford Ruether sees the transformation of creation as central to the creative work of humans. See my next chapter.

the kingdom so dear to the minds of Palestinian Jews? In order to answer this question (and I think the question is related to the concept of *wholeness*), I need to go beyond the work of Schüssler Fiorenza.

John Pairman Brown helps us see from what the Palestinians needed liberation "in near time." One form of oppression was crimes against the person—four crimes which in the Hebrew Bible are described as a "profanation" of God's name:

debt-slavery (Amos 2.6-8)

prostitution (Amos 2.6-8)

enslavement (Jeremiah 34.14-16)

murder (Leviticus 18.21)

This list reveals the personal side of "national sovereignty." These crimes demonstrate domination and violence against personhood. It is especially noteworthy that these crimes are understood as violence against God's name. Schüssler Fiorenza's picture of Old Testament ethos does not mention these crimes against personhood. I bring them to this discussion from John Pairman Brown's "Kingdom of God" in Mircea Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion* because this list of crimes against persons helps envision the kingdom of God in terms of wholeness of personhood. The four crimes treat the human being as a commodity which can be used and destroyed. The biblical references show that the dehumanizing of persons is linked to disrespect for God.

Crimes against persons continue today. In the United States slavery has been abolished. However, the frequency of violence against women demonstrates a

continuing prevalence of the enemy—inhumanity. Schüssler Fiorenza puts "thy kingdom come" under scrutiny: "thy kingdom come" in the Lord's Prayer does perhaps not focus on territory or reign but rather on the wholeness of the people (*Memory*, 113). Freedom from non-Israelite rule, suggests Schüssler Fiorenza, is perhaps not the only goal appropriate to that time. Crimes against persons share no resonance with the goal of wholeness of persons.

The role of women in Temple and Torah ethos is one more form of oppression from which liberation could be offered in the Jesus movement. Schüssler Fiorenza writes that sources offer no direct information--women's roles were probably defined according to the written Torah (*Memory*, 113). Very little evidence regarding women's roles is clearly spelled out--either the information was not important or it was assumed to be common knowledge that did not require investigation. In the Torah references are made to cultic purity rules for worship and to marriage legislation. Schüssler Fiorenza is helpful when she asks the reader to be cautious about interpreting anti-marriage literature as anti-woman (*Memory*, 114). For example, the Qumrans, inspired by the notion of holy war, wanted to establish a male military camp; therefore, marriage was not deemed desirable. The Essenes, were also anti-marriage, according to the work of Josephus, because women distracted men from their primary duty—being for each other (*Memory*, 114). Anti-marriage does not necessarily mean anti-woman.

Yet, Schüssler Fiorenza basically agrees with Jacob Neusner that the *Damascus Rule*, the *Manual of Discipline* in Qumran, and the Mishnaic system are androcentric in how they define what 'in the nature of things' means. These two

manuals declare that "women—like the earth, time, fruits, bed, chair, table, and pots—are sanctified through the deeds of men" (*Memory*, 115). The concept, that woman is naturally created to provide and maintain men's pleasure is what Schüssler Fiorenza puts under suspicion and evaluates. She asks what is natural about this.[23] One is reminded again of the prayer for personhood. The idea that women's work or title is valuable only as extensions of men's labour is, in principle, unjust. Schüssler Fiorenza's method of reading in these pages reminds us that the 'holiness' of a woman, as defined by a man's view of her behavior in the Temple and in marriage, is not natural at all (*Memory*, 114, 115). She argues that androcentric ideas of what is natural for woman creates false consciousness for a woman. Androcentric ideas are rooted in control of women by men. Women need to ask whether their ideas are rooted in similar soil.

In the process of remembering the women in this history of the "kingdom of priests and holy nation," Schüssler Fiorenza has shown that the role of women in the Old Testament ethos is largely determined by behavior: as a person who worships and as a person who marries. As a worshipper and as a spouse, says Schüssler Fiorenza, women's behavior was closely observed in terms of 'holiness' by those who knew and upheld the rules.

Into this mixed milieu of little groups of Jewish people hoping to be liberated from non-Israelite rule and into a world of androcentrically defined natural women,

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[23] Susan Frank Parsons' *Feminism and Christian Ethics* also contains a discussion of the naturalist paradigm. She asks what is natural (or moral) about the domination/subordination relationship between men and women, people and Earth. See pages 122-147.

Schüssler Fiorenza says Jesus brought his vision of a *basileia*. For her, it means he brought a new consciousness concerning inclusive wholeness.

3. Proclaiming and Restoring the Vision of *Basileia*

Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that Jesus takes people beyond the Temple and Torah horizon (*Memory*, 119). She writes that Jesus separated from the group around John the Baptist because of a "prophetic-visionary experience" as recorded in Luke 10.18: "I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (*Memory*, 118). Some of the important signs of the nearness of the *basileia* include the healing of the blind, deaf, and the lame, the raising of the dead, the cleansing of the lepers, and the preaching of the good news to the poor (Luke 7.22). All of these experiences are images of wholeness—a restoration of humanity to individuals. Schüssler Fiorenza takes these experiences and notices that the nearness of the awaited future is the present: "the *basileia* of God is in the midst of you" (*Memory*, 119). In order to understand this imminent *basileia* as something different from, something set beside or reaching beyond the Temple and Torah kingdom, one needs to understand the nature of the enemy. In the cultic Temple and Torah focus, the enemy was non-purity according to a given set of rules. In the imminent *basileia*, the enemy is non-wholeness.

Schüssler Fiorenza explains that Jesus goes beyond the cultic Temple and Torah horizon when he uses the image of feasting. She has chosen to highlight this image because it describes a lifestyle—feasting instead of fasting (*Memory*, 119).

She explains that Jesus and his movement can be characterized by "festive table-sharing at a wedding feast, and not the *askesis* of the 'holy man.'" By placing the emphasis on the gathering around the table, sharing food and drink, Schüssler Fiorenza is opening up the notion of "holy nation of priests" and expanding it to table of whole outsiders. This shift in meaning has deep implications for women and others who could not be holy men. Schüssler Fiorenza writes:

> The central symbolic actualization of the *basileia* vision of Jesus is not the cultic meal but the festive table of a royal banquet or wedding feast. This difference in emphasis was probably one of the major conflict points between the Jesus movement and the Pharisaic movement. None of the stories told by or about Jesus evidences the concern for ritual purity and moral holiness so typical of other groups in Greco-Roman Palestine. While Jesus shares their vision of Israel as the "elect people and nation of Yahweh" (Exod.19.5f), he does not share their understanding that the "holiness" of Temple and Torah is the locus of God's power and presence (*Memory*, 120).

Schüssler Fiorenza argues for a workable unifying new image of the *basileia* of God. A festive table is what she uses to indicate that the symbol of Temple and Torah has a further interpretation in the view of Jesus. The new interpretation does not invalidate the Temple and Torah but expands it to show an inclusive symbol—the festive table. Schüssler Fiorenza has in mind the work mentioned in my introduction to this chapter by Judy Chicago, *Dinner Party*, which honors many historical women for their vision of a better society.

Who is included at the festive table? Because I have stated that Schüssler Fiorenza's main theme is inclusive wholeness, one might assume that no one is excluded from the festive table. However, Schüssler Fiorenza says that the parable of the Great Supper (Matthew 22.1-14 and Luke 14.16-24) jolts the reader by warning that only those who were first invited and then rejected the invitation will be excluded (*Memory*, 121). This is significant because it reminds the reader that wholeness for all remains, at some level, not all. At some level, wholeness is a matter of choice, a matter of recognizing Life's invitation.[24] The whole notion of inclusion/exclusion remains problematic—can one step away from it? Those who reject an invitation are not included at the festive table.

For whom is the *basileia* proclaimed? Schüssler Fiorenza names three distinct groups of people: the destitute poor, the sick and crippled, and the tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes (Memory, 122). These three groups, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, were in need of new hope in the time of Jesus and, by extrapolation, today. I will give brief descriptions of each because the social perspective of sin is necessary for an understanding of the desire for liberation.

The poor are the socially impoverished Schüssler Fiorenza takes a social approach. She understands poverty as social injustice. As long as poverty is seen as a personal failure, then the poor person can be despised. This is where feminist thinking can help to see poverty from "another way around." When poverty is

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[24] John Sanford's *The Kingdom Within* shows a different perspective. Sanford examines the kingdom in terms of Jungian personality development. In this sense there is no inside or outside the kingdom. There is, instead, a map of various depths of consciousness--the kingdom of God.

understood in terms of injustice, then the failure rests in the hands of the people who set up the unfair system.

Schüssler Fiorenza connects the notions of poverty and injustice. She writes that "the power of God's *basileia* is realized in Jesus' table community with the poor, the sinners, the tax collectors, and prostitutes—with all those who 'do not belong' to the 'holy people,' who are somehow deficient in the eyes of the righteous (*Memory*, 121)." The struggle against unjust structures that keep people socially poor is a struggle to affirm the right of wholeness for each human being, the right of personhood. The festive table affords food to satisfy hunger and provision for crying children. According to Exodus, the *basileia* theme is based on the covenant that God is the rightful owner of the land and that God's people are inheritors. For Schüssler Fiorenza, the inheritors are all—hence, poverty is evidence of socially structured injustice.

The second group of people for whom the *basileia* is proclaimed include those who need healing (*Memory*, 123). Schüssler Fiorenza is concerned with the vision of being human and whole.

> The exorcisms of Jesus acknowledge that there are dehumanizing powers in this world that are not under our control. However, Jesus is not so much concerned with their polluting power as with their debilitating dehumanizing power. What we today call oppressive power structures and dehumanizing power systems, apocalyptic language calls "evil spirits," "Satan," "Beelzebul," demons (*Memory*, 123).

This is bold language.[25] Wholeness means life in terms of social relations. An example is the woman with seven demons. According to whose regulations is she a sinner? She is ostracized from the Temple. Another example is the woman with the flow of blood for twelve years. Also unwanted in the Temple. Who declares her unclean? And with what intent?

Another question concerning wholeness centres on the meaning of keeping the Sabbath. The two who were healed on the Sabbath (the woman bent double for eighteen years and the man with the withered hand) and the disciples accused of eating on the Sabbath demonstrate the question of what it means to celebrate God (*Memory*, 125). Healings and eating make it possible for people to be human. In social terms, illness and lack of food dehumanize individuals. The vision of *basileia* as festive table proclaims a fresh understanding between holiness and wholeness. In simple terms, healings and eating allow life to be restored.

> Everyday life must not be measured by the sacred holiness of the Temple and Torah, but Temple and Torah praxis must be measured and evaluated by whether they engender the wholeness of every human being. Everydayness, therefore, can become revelatory, and the presence and power of God's sacred wholeness can be experienced in *every* human being (*Memory*, 120).

Schüssler Fiorenza is saying that keeping the Sabbath and everydayness are linked by the measure of wholeness, instead of holiness.

The third group of people for whom the *basileia* is proclaimed includes those who are usually condemned on moral grounds: the tax collectors, sinners, and

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[25] This quotation reminds me, in some ways, of Luther's work; he had favorite colorful phrases for those who did not see things as he did.

prostitutes. Schüssler Fiorenza says that looking at this group from a holiness perspective is not liberating. She emphasizes their social predicament (*Memory*, 126). Socially, prostitution is an "essential function of patriarchy" and tax collectors engage in "dishonorable" activities in order to survive (*Memory*, 127). People who are badly paid and often abused prove "the oppressive character of the societal-religious system." Calling these persons sinners is not what Jesus did. He invited them to his table community and declared that in his outrageous vision, "the tax collectors and harlots go into the *basileia* before you" (Matthew 21:31).

By looking at these three groups of people the way Schüssler Fiorenza does, the concept of sinner and forgiveness can be appreciated from "another way around." Repentance from patriarchal relationships and hierarchy is needed. Since the so-called scum of Palestinian society was invited by Jesus to experience the *basileia*, the whole notion of Jesus as savior of sinners can be revised. And this is the point toward which Schüssler Fiorenza has been working. The saved/unsaved division is wrong, Schüssler Fiorenza argues.[26] Social stratification must be seen as a social construct, not as divine mandate (*Memory*, 108,109). Understanding the ethos of Jesus helps show the only way to see Jesus is not as a man who can take away individual sins.

Remembering that the death of Jesus was not a sacrifice and was not demanded by God but brought about by the Roman political structure is a very

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[26] See also Susanne Heine, *Matriarchs, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 153, 154. In an interesting argument, Heine holds that 'wholeness' is an anxiety-less atmosphere in relationships that include the feminine beyond the walls of bedroom and kitchen. She wonders whether it has been agreed that women at the conference table can show tenderness.

important point that Schüssler Fiorenza makes. The patriarchal political, social, cultural structure of his time killed Jesus (*Memory*, 130). Capitalist structures also tend to kill women because value is limited to capital which is usually in the hands of a few men. Schüssler Fiorenza shows that androcentric frameworks yield a worldview that is not acceptable.[27]

Schüssler Fiorenza names C.Ochs as representative of the school which describes the God of Jesus as one who demands human sacrifice. It is this picture of a patriarchal God of Abraham who sacrifices his only son that *In Memory of Her* questions. Who benefits from the sacrificial interpretations? Schüssler Fiorenza recommends staying in the Greco-Roman Palestinian culture for an interpretation of Jesus' death because the atonement for sin doctrine developed much later (*Memory*, 130). Schüssler Fiorenza says that women can see that in a manner similar to the death of Jesus, the patriarchal political and cultural structures still silence women. Therefore, the whole picture of Jesus dying in order to redeem one into the Kingdom of God is put into question by Schussler Fiorenza's work of proclaiming and restoring the vision of *basileia*. The festive table image does not need a Savior who dies. Once that hope for a Savior has died, as well as that picture of a God who demands his son's death, then there is room for a different type of working hope.

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[27] See Daphne Hampson, *After Christianity*, 93. She questions a religious sacrificial worldview. Hampson cites Ronald Fairburn as one object-relations theorist who thinks that the concept of the good father and his law is internalized by many. It means the individual takes on the bad in order to maintain a belief in the goodness of authority. Schüssler Fiorenza seems to suspect whether the doctrine of atonement is ethical. For me, this is the most fascinating insight I gained out of her presentation of the *basileia*. If an individual thinks that her sins have killed Jesus, what does the

4. Imaginatively Positing a Space Outside Patriarchy

How does one work toward a festive table world? Of course, this question assumes that Schüssler Fiorenza is working within a universalist view. Is Schüssler Fiorenza a universalist? My sense is Yes, for biblical communities. In typical theological feminist style, the praxis for working out one's values is what counts. In this section, I discuss Schüssler Fiorenza's notion of women-church as one method for reconstructing the *basileia* of God.

Schüssler Fiorenza's work raises critical consciousness about the people of God (*Bread Not Stone*, xiv). Feminist theology, says Schüssler Fiorenza, demands acknowledgement of injustices, acknowledgement and reception of female God-language and symbols, and acknowledgement of a new understanding of the community of God. It is this final item, the new understanding of the community of God that interests me for this paper. Women-church is Schüssler Fiorenza's metaphorical space outside of patriarchy.

Schüssler Fiorenza uses the phrase *ekklesia gynaikon* or women-church to portray the new understanding of community of God--"the movement of self-identified women and women-identified men in biblical religion." The phrase, *ekklesia gynaikon* is not an exclusionary term for her. She uses it as a "political-oppositional term to patriarchy" (*Bread Not Stone*, xiv). Patriarchy, for Schüssler Fiorenza, is the classical Aristotelian "male pyramid of graded subordinations and exploitations" that oppresses in terms of class, race, country, or religion of the men

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individual do with the moral guilt? As a festive table, the *basileia*, perhaps, has no need for atonement.

to whom the nonpersons 'belong' (*Jesus, Miriam's Child,* 14).[28] Forms of exploitation and dehumanization in patriarchy are the evils that women must struggle against (*Bread Not Stone*, xiv). Knowing that "common concerns" bind people into groups, I will discuss three that bind people in women-church and reveal women-church as a working model of the community of God.

People in women-church must first *metanoia* (turn away) from separation. This process has to do with liberation from patriarchal self-alienation. Men must turn away from seeing themselves as the norm and become women-identified. Daphne Hampson in *Theology and Feminism* says that women must turn away from identifying themselves in terms of how much respect they give to men and become self-respecting (128).[29] This is an interesting argument based on the idea that "women have been socialized to respect and identify with men" (*Bread Not Stone*, xv)." Schüssler Fiorenza says that self-affirmation for women can occur when we turn away from separation. The separations include divisions between:

> white and black women, middle-class and poor women, Jewish and Christian women, Protestant and Catholic women, nun-women or clergy-women and laywomen, lesbian and heterosexual women, First World and Third World women (*Bread Not Stone,* xv).

Schüssler Fiorenza sees alienation between these groups of women as an alienation from oneself. This argument touches on a mystical outlook—the notion that we are the same (equal) in being one with everything. This type of conversion appears to be

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[28] Schüssler Fiorenza has supplemented "master-rule" and "master-centered" for 'patriarchy' in order to point to the ancient social system in which the power of the father/master is the organizing principle of family and social relations.

[29] Hampson argues for salvation (for women) in terms of "coming to value herself."

a humble conversion and it interests me. Humble conversion means one stays open (with enthusiasm) to future conversions.

A conversion into women-church, as the quotation above shows, is first a turning away from separation; it is a turning toward a oneness among women and women-identified men. The quest for oneness, for the inclusive *basileia*, is therefore a development of an awareness of unity in order to overcome alienation.

Second, a conversion into women-church is an acceptance of the principle of struggling for liberation from patriarchal oppression. Schüssler Fiorenza quotes Marcia Westkott who declares women to be "united first in unfreedom" (*Bread Not Stone*, xvi). This principle is the motivation for evaluating biblical texts, for building women-church as a model for the "transformation of the patriarchal church" (*Bread Not Stone*, xvi). The vision of women-church is useful because it inspires a vision for a life of wholeness. The vision is not legitimate because it has divine authority; the vision is legitimate because it comes out of the experience of women and men who have struggled against patriarchal oppression. Unity of purpose in the struggle holds women-church together. Schüssler Fiorenza writes that women-church is about working toward a time of belonging, about working toward a time when "social-religious distinctions between Jews and Samaritans, women and men no longer have any validity" (*Memory*, 329).

Third, a women-church model implies a particular understanding of the Bible. The issue is, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, seeing the Bible as a "timeless archetype" or as a "structuring prototype" (*Bread Not Stone*, xvi). The difference between archetype and prototype is critical for theology. Schüssler Fiorenza says

that the Bible is a prototype of the ongoing history of salvation; therefore, women-church is possibly 'one more stage of development' in a long process of working toward egalitarianism. This is the ultimate goal. It is her telos, "a discipleship of equals that still needs to be discovered and realized by women and men today" (*Memory*, 154). Schüssler Fiorenza argues for seeing the Bible as "an open-ended paradigm that sets experience in motion and structures transformations" (*Bread Not Stone*, xvii). The key word is transformations—how to structure the transformation from patriarchy. Salvation in terms of egalitarianism is the way Schüssler Fiorenza reads the festive table at work in today's society. Women-church is one possible festive-table—a place for birthing the hope for re-humanization of people.

Women-church testifies that solidarity with women (such as, Jewish women of biblical times, poor women, prostitutes, and women-identified men of today) is more important than identification with certain texts and traditions. Wholeness, for Schüssler Fiorenza, means a set of relationships for "emancipatory praxis" (*Bread Not Stone*, xvii). The emphasis is on deliberative equality—sameness of right to struggle toward discipleship of equals as exemplified in the vision of Jesus (*Memory*, 103).

The model of women-church upholds Schüssler Fiorenza's earlier argument for a *basileia* of inclusive wholeness and shows that the "kingdom of priests and holy nation" can be transformed into a sustaining vision for those who choose to struggle towards a less unjust society, named the community of God. The *basileia* of God at some level suggests home—a place for me and each one. Considering the banquet invitations in Matthew 22.2-14 and Luke 14.12-24 as central images for the

basileia, as Schüssler Fiorenza does, affords a deconstruction of a holy nation and a reconstruction of an inclusive *basileia*.

Chapter Three

Rosemary Radford Ruether

Recreating Kingdom of God as Reign of God/ess[30]

Some set more by such things as come from a distance,

but I rec'lect mother always used to maintain that folks

was meant to be doctored with the stuff that grew right about 'em.

Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909)

This chapter explores some of the ways in which Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk* revisions the Kingdom of God concept. *Sexism and God-Talk* identifies the Kingdom of God as an eschatological concept basic to feminist ethics. Ruether holds that the Kingdom of God refers to a New Creation

[30] Ruether uses the phrase, reign of God. "Reign of God/ess" is my appeal to text to mark the end of time—the end of God-as-male time. The word God/ess is awkward in speech, but very helpful in text to remind the reader that the unchanging male God is no longer a useful image. Further, Ruether employs the word God/ess in her work; therefore, I think I have not overstretched her ideas.

marked by the harmony of "bodies in right relation to each other." She writes in *Sexism and God-Talk*:

> To return Home: to learn the harmony, the peace, the justice of body, bodies in right relation to each other. The whence we have come and whither we go, not from alien skies but here, in the community of earth. Holy One, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will done on earth. All shall sit under their own vines and fig trees and none shall be afraid. The lion will lay down with the lamb and the little child will lead them. A new thing is revealed; the woman will encompass the warrior. Thou shalt not hurt, thou shalt not kill in all my holy mountain (266).

This quotation makes it clear that hope for no more hurting is the telos toward which Ruether works. A hope for no more hurting brings to the foreground the value of **caretaking**. Further, a hope for no more hurting opens up ethical questions. Also, the quotation draws focus to this earth, shifting the focus away from "alien skies." This change of focus, from transcendent to immanent life, is crucial to the theme of new creation in *Sexism and God-Talk*.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) suggests that patriarchal society shapes (or mis-shapes) sexuality and enforces male domination/female subordination behavior. Ruether, in *Sexism and God-Talk*, asks how a transcendent standpoint contributes to this male/female heterosexual order. Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk*, not unlike *The Second Sex*, is an effort toward a transformed society (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 232-234).

For Valerie Saiving Goldstein in "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," the temptation of hierarchical order is twofold: elevate the self beyond the common reality to usurp God's place or denigrate the self into less than a free agent. Transcendent theology was written, says Saiving, "by men who lived amid the tensions of a hypermasculine culture."

> [T]his modern era can be called 'the masculine age par excellence,' in the sense that it emphasized, encouraged, and set free precisely those aspects of human nature which are particularly significant to men. It placed the highest value on external achievement, on the creation of structures of matter and meaning, on self-differentiation and the separation of man from nature . . . by these and many more innovations, the modern era presented a heightened challenge to men; and, by the same token, it increased their natural sense of insecurity and anxiety ("The Human Situation," 107).[31]

I mention de Beauvoir and Saiving to point out that, along with Ruether, other scholars address the question of what it means to be human and female and ethical in relation to an "end-time" vision. This chapter situates Ruether's analysis of the situation of women in patriarchy in the context of eschatology and redemption. The first section demonstrates how Ruether puts the notion of conversion under suspicion. She asks, "Conversion from what?" and in connexion to this, she addresses the question of evil. The second section considers the notion of immortality and describes Ruether's research into women's experience and end-time

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[31] Since the publication of this article, the author has changed her name to Valerie Saiving.

conceptions. The last section draws on Ruether's more recent work and asks, "What to do now?" The overall purpose of this chapter is to argue that *Sexism and God-Talk* presents an end-time vision that upholds the value of caretaking. An analysis of an end-time vision is especially important for women because, as Ruether suggests, men's end-time visions, although oppressive, have been internalized by women.

1. Finding Meaning in Conversion

Conversion has to do with a turning around, a changing of one's attitudes or beliefs, a shift in one's worldview. Ruether uses the Greek word *metanoia* because it expresses literally the sentiment that after-thinking can effect a change of attitude. *Metanoia* from 'after' and 'frame of mind' suggests that one thinks one way in order to think afterward in a different way. In theology, the word *metanoia* carries the notion of repentance--reversing or reforming the past. My favorite recent example of *metanoia* concerns the change in thinking that comes after a feminist reading of creation. Eve, in traditional understandings, is a helper for Adam; she is his property, and responsible for sin and death in the world. With feminist lenses, one begins to see that Eve is the one in search of wisdom. Eve, the tree, the serpent—these elements of the creation myth can be redeemed from patriarchal denigration in the process of *metanoia.*[32]

One very important aspect of *metanoia* is its association with one's identity.

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[32] For further consideration of the use of creation myths to legitimate male dominance see Anne McGrew Bennett's *From Woman-Pain to Woman-Vision*, 51-55.

If, for example, one converts from a Mennonite to a Pentecostal denomination, one remains Christian. However, the convert's attitudes toward miraculous healing and speaking in tongues change from suspicion to acceptance. Further, the convert's self-identity changes—deep spiritual experiences reshape one's notion of selfworth. Also, the convert's social identification changes; she belongs with a particular group.

In this Mennonite to Pentecostal example, there is no turning from evil—both denominations are 'good.' The call of Jesus to turn from evil is, in Ruether's work, a much more profound matter.[33] In Ruether's work, *metanoia* for Christian women is turning away from sexism. She names sexism, a massive, historical system of male domination and female subordination as "wrong, evil, and sinful" (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 173). She explains that naming sexism evil is necessary in order to bring "about the total collapse of the myths of the female evil."

The female has been known, historically, as the 'other,' the one who is something other than male. And male has been the standard by which what is human is judged. This standard is too limited. Sexist thinking is unjust from a feminist point of view. Sexist thinking does not recognize female as human—she is something other, something other than me (where me is the known, the male). Ruether sees that female as 'the other sex' supports depersonalization (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 173, 174). Because it discredits or ignores or disregards a person's personhood, sexism must be turned away from. Ruether writes: "Sexism as sin

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[33] Pamela Dickey Young in *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology* cites Herbert Braun who in *Jesus of Nazareth* underlines the notion that Jesus did not come to give information about the end of time but to *summon* people to it. Young suggests that this notion fits Ruether's call to the end of sexism (86).

centers on distorted relationality" (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 174). Sexist thinking leads to a distorted self-image for women.[34]

The question whether there was a time of non-sexist thinking is a pressing one for many who seek "an original point of unblemished integrity," as Ruether says in "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism." In this article, Ruether examines the historical-cultural mould within which Christianity was formed. She finds that dualistic thinking—body separated from soul, female separated from male, and nature separated from spirit—belongs to Christianity from the start, and is derived from a diverse otherworldly apocalypticism.

> The fact is that every religion in antiquity—Babylonian, Canaanite, Persian, Greek and Jewish—passed from a naturalistic to an otherworldly religious hope in the period from approximately the sixth to the second centuries B.C. Egyptian religion made this transition even earlier, as it changed from the life-affirming religion of the early Kingdom to the death-centered religion of the imperial New Kingdom. Greek religion was transformed from the Apollonian celebration of the body of the Hellenic world to a Platonic flight from the body, after the *polis* lost its freedom and was absorbed into the empire of Alexander the Great. Judaism also was changed from a naturalistic religion of this-worldly hope to one of apocalyptic despair as it lost its

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[34] Mary Daly in *Beyond God the Father* concurs that sexist thinking gives a distorted response to the question: What is a self-actualizing person? (146). The interesting point is that Daly thinks women's liturgy may not enhance self-actualization if it remains static. After all static liturgy reinforces false memory. Thus sexist liturgy, also, needs *metanoia*.

> national autonomy and passed under the yoke of the Persian, Greek and Roman empires. After the fall of Jerusalem, in 70 A.D., apocalypticism changed into an esoteric subculture of Jewish gnosticism and mysticism. Even the ancient cults of the Earth Mother, with her rain-and-vegetation consort, such as Baalism and its counterparts in the worship of Astarte, Magna Mater and Isis, moved from naturalistic celebrations of the renewal of bodily fecundity to eschatological religions of the salvation of the soul after death. Christianity, born in Jewish apocalypticism and nurtured in the world of Hellenistic syncretism, drew together all the streams of religious consciousness from antiquity, Greek, Jewish and Oriental, but precisely in their *alienated, anticosmic stage of development*! [emphasis is Ruether's] ("Misogynism," 151).

Ruether, in the above quotation, does not say that there was an original non-sexist period in history. She says that Christianity originated in a period when there was a huge shift in thinking. Imperialism brought with it an "alienated, world-fleeing view of redemption which expressed a pessimism about the world and its possibilities" ("Misogynism," 151). Indeed, most versions of early Christian Gnosticism, according to Ruether, saw this world as a mistake, created through an error. They taught that one's true home was an otherworldly, spiritual realm far removed from this evil material world (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 80). The interesting point for my discussion is that one's view of creation informs one's view of redemption--and both are informed by one's political situation. Beneath all this, not to be forgotten, lies the foundation of a sacrificial religion.

The connexions are amazing. One's hopes about life eternal or abundant life are largely connected to how one thinks about creation,[35] and by the weight given to the idea of the fall into sin. The gnostics, not unlike Plato, taught that the world is wrong, and that something much better is way out there. Therefore, one strives not to remain connected to this earth, but to something far removed from this evil material world. Traditional Christian teaching has taught that the soul is better than the body, the life hereafter better than the one here, and that spirit is better than nature (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 80, 81). Perhaps these Christian teachings neglect, ignore, and discredit the "stuff right about us," *Sexism and God-Talk* demonstrates.

The notion that one wants to go to something far removed from this evil material world brings us to the matter of evil and conversion from it. Knowledge of what is constructed as evil is the beginning of consciousness says Nel Noddings. This means that an awareness of evil leads to self-knowledge, consciousness. Perhaps, as Ruether puts it, "consciousness of evil, in fact, originates in the process of conversion itself" (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 159). In the process of conversion, one learns about evil. So what is evil? Nel Noddings in *Women and Evil* points out that the so-called problem with evil, as historically constructed, is that it is "thoroughly suffused with male interests and conditioned by masculine experience" (2). Saiving, too, and others would agree.

Ruether argues that the academic problem with evil lies largely in the hands of those who create the definition (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 190, 191). The many

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[35] A similar connexion that Mary Daly makes is that the search for ultimate meaning and reality (another name for God) has everything to do with the transformation of human consciousness, in particular, the transformation of becoming woman or becoming human. See *Beyond God the Father*, 6.

stories of how evil began yield notions of how one situates oneself over against evil. The fall of Adam and Eve is but one of these stories, but of particular interest to me because my context is Christianity. If Eve is evil, then in separating from evil, one situates oneself against women. It is important to understand that knowing what is evil in these stories indicates that one has already disaffiliated oneself from that reality. Ruether explains in *Sexism and God-Talk*:

> One constructs stories of "how evil began," whether it is Eve's "tempting" of Adam through the serpent or the crushing of matriarchy by patriarchy. This does not mean that evil has no objective historical reality. It simply means that we can't lose sight of the fact that the center of the drama is the human person situating itself in opposition to perceived falsifications of its own being in the name of a transcendent possibility of a good self (159).

This quotation offers another angle from which to consider what is central in the story of how evil began. The human person is central, for Ruether. This quotation says that "in the name of a transcendent possibility of a good self," the human person situates itself in opposition to perceived falsifications of its own being." The ramification is that if the postulated good self, and by extension, good God is out-there, far-removed, then, it can be argued that the bad is also somewhere out there. What this means is that the values good and bad are situated elsewhere, not within. From a woman's perspective, it often appears as though the bad out there has been projected onto herself. The point is that the value caretaking demands conversion from this 'woman is evil' alienating perspective.

One can ask whether women who have internalized the system of identifying evil with women (and by extension, Earth Mother) also feel alienated from other women. This question points toward Ruether's deepest concern—the alienation between women and women, the alienation between men and men, not only alienation between the sexes. Alienation between persons perpetuates hurting and, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, no more hurting is Ruether's telos. How a oneness (caretaking) between persons is possible Ruether considers in her section on the female and male journey toward new creation (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 184-192). The struggle against sexism is the journey toward a new creation with right relations, a more humane world, a Reign of God/ess (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 191).

To see the historical view in simple terms, one could say that as the soul flew upward to God, the body flew away from sensuality and woman, and political identity flew toward far-away Rome. Little wonder 'man' constructed himself as lost or separated, and woman internalized the notion of lostness. With feminist insights, one can re-examine separation or lostness as an evil.

According to Ruether, conversion from sexism is a breakthrough—"an incursion of power and grace beyond the capacities of the present roles, an incursion of power that puts one in touch with oneself as a self" (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 186). Ruether describes a conversion from depersonalization into personhood for women: salvation is breaking away from a style of thinking that always asks how she can put others first; salvation is breaking away into a style of thinking that frees a woman to ask herself again who she is and what she will do in the image of God when God is

more than an authoritative male (*Sexism and God-Talk, 186)*. This breakthrough opposes sexism.

Metanoia, for Ruether, is a journey.[36] The journey is from an "egoistic self modeled on male individualism" to a "grounded self which is related to others and to mutual service" (*Sexism and God-Talk,* 188). This journey, as Ruether explains in *Gaia and God*, reshapes one's consciousness about separation between persons and, further, one's consciousness about individuals and home—planet Earth.

Darby Kathleeen Ray in *Deceiving the Devil* also identifies egocentrism as a problem which theology needs to address. But she goes further. Ray asks whether "the one-sided conceptions of sin as disobedience, rebellion, and willfulness do justice to the gamut of human destructiveness" (28). Ray writes:

> What we need is not the elimination of traditional notions of sin and evil but their contextualization and relativisation. Within certain contexts, rebellion *is* demonic, pride *is* destructive, and wilfullness *is* hurtful; but within other contexts, these qualities can literally save lives (*Deceiving the Devil,* 29).

Ray quotes Ruether as support for her argument that some notion of sin is healthy for the development of communities. The basic theological insight that must be upheld in discussions of evil is that humanity has become radically alienated from its true relationship to itself, to nature, and to God. This insight is useful because it reminds people that brokenness, suffering, and injustice must be seen as serious aberrations of possible wholeness and justice. Putting traditional conversion from sin (getting

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[36] Carol P. Christ in "Embodied Thinking" by comparison, explains that a journey is, in many ways for women, a commitment—a commitment to continue dialogue (13).

the soul into heaven) under suspicion, for Ruether, yields a picture of the alienation in sexism as evil as well as a new hope to struggle toward "bodies in right relation."

2. Redeeming the Notion of Redemption for Human (not only Male) Experience

At a deep level, redemption means bringing together again something that was separated; in simpler terms, it means recovering possession of something by payment of a price or service. In Christian terms, redemption has to do with the deliverance from sin through the incarnation, sufferings, and death of Christ on the cross. For some, redemption means a denial of mortality—life forevermore in heaven. Like most theological topics, redemption appears most rational within its own system and remains an issue of faith.

Ruether's approach to this last group (those who hope for life in heaven) is especially relevant to my discussion. Ruether asks, in the chapter, "Eschatology and Feminism," whether texts concerning belief in immortality are meaningful and ethically acceptable in feminist thinking. Some notion of heaven, it seems, has always been. The desire to be like the gods (immortal) is at least as old as Greek mythology.

It is possible, says Ruether, that the desire for the soul to continue after physical death is "the apogee of male individualism and egoism" (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 235). Another writer who questions whether the belief in immortality is ethical for a feminist is Pamela Dickey Young. In *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology* Young holds that a belief in immortality is not primarily what Jesus taught—he

called people to love, i.e., love self, neighbour, and God with one's whole being (86). I bring to my discussion this reference to Young's work because it, like Ruether's points forward to love, that is, caretaking. Young understands redemption in terms of the response to this call to love. This call to love means to demonstrate loving behaviour toward one's self and toward one's sex (when it has been either scorned or venerated, but hardly approached as 'equally acceptable') (Young, 87). This last sentence is weighty—love one's sex when it has been seen as 'wrong.' The continuation of the soul does not seem to bear much weight when balanced against the 'demonstrate loving behavior' commandment.

The key, then, for redeeming redemption, is the matter of relationship. Ruether explains that Jesus' reversal message (the first shall be last and the last first, the mighty put down from their thrones, and the prostitutes entering the Kingdom of God ahead of the Scribes and Phairsees) is a radical vision that will bring "to all a new relationship of mutual enhancement."

> In God's Kingdom the corrupting principles of domination and subjugation will be overcome. People will no longer model social or religious relationships, or even relationships to God, after the sort of power that reduces others to servility. Rather they will discover a new kind of power, a power exercised through service, which empowers the disinherited and brings to all a new relationship of mutual enhancement. Jesus' image of God and Christ as Servant transforms all relations including relations to God. All power and domination relations in society are overcome by overcoming the

> root metaphor of relationship to God modeled on king-servant relations (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 30).

This quotation points to the significance of "the root metaphor of relationship to God modeled on king-servant relations." This metaphor, for Ruether, is the key to texts. Does the text uphold "king-servant relations?" If so, for Ruether, the text is not redemptive. The quotation also raises the difficult and awkward question of how one relates for the sake of mutual enhancement. The matter of "power over" as distinct from "power with" is a complex one. Ruether says that domination, "the sort of power that reduces others to servility," is unjust and carries no redemptive meaning. Power which brings "mutual enhancement" is redemptive. The critique of power relationships is inherent in Jesus' message, suggests Ruether, and women need to reread texts for their king-servant relationship model. The notion Ruether rereads is the notion of immortality.

In order to show that beliefs in immortality between Christian men and women vary, Ruether cites two authors who have approached eschatology in terms of life in the hereafter (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 234, 235). Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *His Religion and Hers* (1923) outlines men's experiences in terms of hunter and warrior. Man's deepest spiritual experiences were situated in killing animals or other humans and in the (closely related) fear of being killed. Gilman concludes that man's religion became "blood-centered" and concerned about escaping death. By contrast, woman's deepest spiritual experiences were situated in nurturing the helpless and giving birth. Women's religion became "life-giving centered." Ruether uses this material to underline the notion that masculinist thinking tends toward a

degree of "abstractionism from real-life processes that feminist consciousness should reject" (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 236).

The other author Ruether cites is psychotherapist Anne Wilson Schaef. In her work, *Women's Reality* (1981), Schaef classifies her male clients as White-Male System persons and female clients as White-Female System persons. Schaef found that White-Male System persons firmly believe they can live forever--as God does. Consequently, the issue of immortality interested them greatly and frequently. By contrast, the White Female System persons doubted strongly the possibility of immortality. If they thought about life in the hereafter, they thought about it in terms of meeting loved ones again. The conclusion that Schaef draws, says Ruether, is that women are concerned about the perpetuation of relationships whereas men are concerned about self-perpetuation (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 235).

The rigid dichotomies of male and female thinking patterns may seem too essentialist in both Schaef's and Gilman's work. Nonetheless, such black and white pictures can invite discussion of the grey areas. One such grey area is the matter of hope. What do we know about religious hopes?

Ruether examines history for different patterns of religious hope and finds it depicted in three types of religion. The first, Babylonian nature religion, shows a strong belief that the key to the constant hope for renewed life is grounded in the renewal cycles observed in nature and during the individual's lifetime on earth (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 242). The second, Hebraic historical religion, shows a strong belief in military defeats and victories leading toward a "final era of world history" (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 243). An age of blessedness will come when the Messiah

defeats all enemies.[37] In the Hebraic world, this age of blessedness could be implemented as social renewal in the Jubilee Year. (Ruether considers this a workable model.) The third, late Jewish apocalyptic religion, shows a strong belief concerning the final defeat of the Devil at the end time when ancient promises are fulfilled. The hopes in this religion (as expressed in the Book of Revelation) include the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the eternal Kingdom of God beyond the end of history (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 242-245). What is new in the Roman Catholic and later evangelical Christian view is the focus on the predicament of the soul in purgatory, punishment or glory in a realm transcendent to this present finite world.

These three types of religion with different foci of hope reveal that in Babylonian times, hope was indeed closely related to seasons and time. In contrast, the Christian idea seems more closely related to space. Ruether writes that the eschatology of space seems to have triumphed over the eschatology of time (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 245). The significance of this insight, especially in terms of gender, has to do with the matter of entrance requirements. If heaven is a place outside of time, then terms of inclusion and exclusion can be constructed; however, if heaven is an idea that remains in the here and now, then every creature is inherently involved and responsible.

Ruether examines these three historical religions because biblical religion seems to support a worldview based on a "linear view of history as a single universal

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[37] It is interesting to note that Ruether thinks it possible that within this large pattern of hope for a time of peaceful living, the notion of the resurrection of the dead arose in order to offer "meaning" for untimely deaths and sufferings.

project leading to a final salvific end point" (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 252). There are some so-called benefits to this. A linear view of history allows science and education to be constructed as saviors to eliminate disease, hunger, and injustice.[38] A linear view of history also allows social and economic relations to be constructed as saviors leading the evolution toward a kingdom of freedom. History in both systems is a story of "infinitely expanding technological prosperity" (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 253). Ruether, using Vine Deloria's *God is Red*, points out errors in these so-called benefits in a linear worldview (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 250).

According to Ruether, feminist insight notices what is overlooked. In the case of a linear worldview, finitude and the present are overlooked, discredited and disregarded. Ruether points out that hopes and respect for an unrealized future can crush out (quench) respect for the present, for the body, for Earth, and for all relations that are impermanent.

Ruether's work on the notion of power and hopes for the future is significant as a basis for non-binary human relations. She points out that devaluing the person is connected to devaluing Earth and that eschatological hopes do not arise from a quest for better relationships in the now and here, nor from the quest for knowledge of the self and justice. From my overview, it is clear that Ruether argues for a feminist consciousness in which "thy kingdom come" refers to one's primary responsibilities to create justice and peace now and here, not in a far-off land of perfect rest. "Thy kingdom come" within Ruether's feminist consciousness means an end to the absolutizing of the infinite and a *metanoia* toward the "total community of being" (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 257).

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[38] Often recognized as liberal teachings.

The end-time vision for women, Ruether sees as a "total community of being." Ruether describes this "total community of being" in terms of the Jubilee pattern and visits it again as a working model in her newest work, *Women and Redemption,* to which I turn in the next section.

3. Recreating a worldview—How to approach the now?

Because both feminism and Christianity are ethical systems, an emphasis on praxis is integral to each. How does one build a new community, a new reign of God/ess? In her descriptions of the vision and hopes for deliverance among the Jews and Christians of Biblical times, Ruether uses the phrase, Reign of God. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, as my next chapter shows, does not see enough of a shift away from the notion of power in the word reign. For Ruether, the word reign has to do with 'new rules for a new community.' The rules have to do with words and their meanings, as I will outline briefly here.

The first rule is that the hierarchical separation of male and female is a fundamental social evil that hinders the reign of God/ess. Ruether explains the unholy versus the righteous system:

> One can say that the outer limit of the division between holiness and unholiness was the division between Jew and gentile, Israel and the "nations," while the inner and most intimate division between the holy and the unholy divided male from female. Not only the social relations but also time and space were regulated to divide holy from unholy, the Sabbath from

> ordinary days, the Holy of Holies in the temple of Jerusalem from its various levels of inner and outer courts (*Women and Redemption*, 17).

To bring in the Reign of God, says Ruether, Jesus felled these divisions within Israel. Those who had been collectively referred to as the poor were united in their unholy status vis-à-vis the righteous. Through his teachings and actions, Jesus created a new community for the so-called unholy persons.

The second rule is that forgiveness and healing bring together a new community. The traditional family group (mother and brothers in Jesus' language) extends to those who experience newness of life in a new family structure which does not duplicate patriarchal relationships. Ruether explains:

> Those who wish to be "great" are not to "lord" it over each other "like the gentiles" (Roman imperialists?), but should be like "servants" to each other, and like "little children" who lack power and trust entirely to the goodness of those who love them (*Women and Redemption*, 19).

True relatives are those who have taken on new roles—servants and children—in the messianic community.

The third rule has to do with iconoclastic reversals of social-sacral relationships. Ruether reviews Jesus' reversal sayings in order to demonstrate the Reign of God as a community.

> [It is] likened to unlikely small things, such as a mustard seed (a weed for peasant farmers) that grows into a sheltering bush (Mark 4:30-32; Matt.13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19); like a leaven that a woman sows in a measure of flour that leavens the whole (Matt.13:33; Luke 13:20-21),

> reversing the holiness of unleavened bread; like an old woman sweeping her floor to search for a lost coin (Luke 5:8-10) or a shepherd who uncharacteristically leaves his ninety-nine sheep to search for the one that is lost (Matt.18:10-14; Luke 15:3-7). Entering the reign of God reverses the patterns of righteousness. The last shall be first, the tax collectors and the harlots will go into the reign of God before the chief priests and elders (*Women and Redemption*, 19).

These teachings of Jesus break down social discrimination and anticipate status reversal. These teachings concerning the reign of God are liberating, generating a community of equals from below—the poor, the maimed, the sinners, those on the fringes, including women in all categories.

All three rules display the characteristics of the reign of God/ess in terms of community—good news for the poor, new family structure, and reversal of social status. These same teachings identified Jesus to the Romans as a revolutionary agitator.[39] For both Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether the teachings are similarily revolutionary today. Both see his Kingdom theme as useful for encouraging women politically and spiritually to come into their own. The point that Ruether makes clear is that the new community teachings reveal a new way of understanding relationships; the Jesus' movement showed that the holy/unholy division could be undone. Ruether's argument is for women today to move toward a

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[39] To paint Jesus as an apolitical figure is to ignore reality. Pamela Dickey Young, among other scholars, says that in his political action, in his defense of the oppressed, Jesus radicalized the view of God's reign current at his time. See her *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 38.

similar transcendence of the male/female separation. She upholds the androgynous state as an ideal.

For workable examples that show a new community in which women (and other marginalized persons) are redeemed, Ruether points first to the sixteenth century humanist Agrippa von Netesheim. Agrippa, she says, "argues that male monopoly of ministry belonged to the old order in which Jew was set above Greek, but in the new age of redemption brought by Christ, 'there is neither male nor female but a new creation'" (*Women and Redemption*, 130). Further, Agrippa states that male domination is due to "man's hardness of heart" and that male tyranny is unjust. He thinks women in earlier pagan times had dignity and power. Agrippa pleads that the laws, which keep women from education and politics and pronounce them to be of baser condition than all men, be dissolved so that women can be involved in political and cultural affairs. Ruether identifies Agrippa as a key person who turns the traditional biblical arguments about Eve's creation and fall upside down. His insight, she says, came from his starting point: "in their inner spiritual nature or soul, women and men were created equally in the image of God and destined for equal glory in heaven" (*Women and Redemption*, 129). Ruether finds in Agrippa's treatises support for her argument that domination of women is a fundamental evil that can be superseded with a corrected understanding of the reign of God/ess as a new creation, a new set of rules for a new community.

For her second example of an acceptable new community model, Ruether writes that the Society of Friends, or Quakers, begun by George Fox in 1647, is an excellent source for a theology of spiritual equality of women and men in creation.

Quaker life and discipline encouraged literacy among members. They believed that the Spirit "annuls all social hierarchies of class, education, and gender;" therefore, the power of the Lord empowers all who speak, whether female or male. Ruether, following Margaret Fell's tract (1666), says that the Quakers' worldview divides humanity between two seeds—those who are redeemed are in the light and those who are not redeemed are in the dark. The important point here is that the Quakers did not adhere to a male/female division. Their redeemed/unredeemed worldview is important because it meant women as well as men needed to speak in order to hinder the growth of the seed of darkness. Not only do the Quaker writings address social relations, but also, the nature of the soul, Ruether maintains. For them the soul is deep—deep below the gendered self. The true self is "dissolved into a pregendered soul rooted in God" (*Women and Redemption*, 142). This view is important for women who want to ask themselves about their nature uncluttered with cultural wrappings.

The next example for an acceptable model of a new community to which Ruether points is the shift from an otherworldly to a this-worldly view of redemption that took place between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. She says that the problem with the otherworldly position was that it concentrated too much on the individual fallen soul. The fallen soul, it was taught, could be reunited with God through Jesus on the cross, through baptism, and through virtuous struggle in order to reach "eternal contemplative union with God" when it rejoined the body in the resurrection (*Women and Redemption*, 273, 274). Ruether agrees with Ivone Gebara that this patriarchal teaching is wrong because it separates spirit and matter. God,

from the spiritual realm, comes into a material world devoid of spiritual life. Why teach that the material world lacks spirit? This teaching of the fallen soul or the spiritless world, Ruether holds, has to be rethought. A this-worldly redemptive hope does not alienate God from the soul. Instead, it teaches that the human self is "defined through its primary identity as image of God" (*Women and Redemption*, 275). Reuther advocates a consciousness-raising of this view of the soul because it locates divine power in mutual relationality between all creation. Hope lies in the recognition of this potential to reconstruct relations that are just and loving. The important point about the this worldly redemptive hope is responsibility. Jesus on the cross cannot redeem; salvation means we redeem ourselves and one another when we construct relations that do not distort the image of God that is within. Ruether's point that the relation between soul and salvation is a determining factor for the development of a meaningful "New Creation" symbol is significant. It points to a dismantling of the soul/body dualism and it gives fresh reason to struggle for salvific relationality.

I have mentioned the above three examples because they converge on the important question of how to experience the reign of God/ess. The teachings of Agrippa and the Quakers point out the sinfulness of women's subordination and imply spiritual equality. The this-worldly teaching of soul and salvation point out the errors of personal hope for life after death and direct action for transforming unjust relationships to bring about justice and peace within history. Nineteenth and twentieth century social gospel and liberation theologies build on the this-worldly teachings and work towards realizing the reign of God/ess in the here and now. For

Ruether, each time period presents new challenges to the earlier understanding of the reign of God/ess.

Some problems remain for us to consider. One is that Jesus was male. Ruether says that the story of Jesus can be normative for women if Jesus is distinguished, not for his maleness, but for the quality of his humanness—one who loved others and opted for the vulnerable and the oppressed.[40] The problem with this distinction is that a male opts for the weaker ones. The weaker ones are not agents who liberate themselves and others. Therefore, says Ruether, the story of Jesus as normative remains problematic (*Women and Redemption*, 277, 278). A female Jesus is basically empowering for women, but remains as limited for men and other non-Christian cultures, she adds.

Another important problem, according to Ruether, is the challenge to the standard symbol of God itself. How is the reign of God/ess symbol applicable in a plural society? In multireligious contextualization, writes Ruether in *Women and Redemption*, "Christian symbols are one resource among others," along with Shamanism and Buddhism, or indigenous African and Latin American religions, for example (280, 281). To apply the reign of God/ess symbol globally means death to the Christian view that there is only one God. I point this out here to emphasize that Ruether points to the need for an end to imperialist thinking.

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[40] Jesus passed judgment on cultural constructs that excluded or subordinated some people and raised others to pride of place. His relationship to God, says Pamela Dickey Young, is one of "mutual love and care." *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology*, 38.

The promise of the reign of God/ess in feminist liberation theology is a human project, not a Christian project, according to Ruether.[41] She emphasizes that a multicultural world is authentically rooted in many local contexts. This means that revisioned religious symbols must be subject to criteria of justice and creativity. Ruether's hope that the diversity of persons will be appreciated in New Creation is based on the persistence of intuitive sensibilities for which the *imago dei* is still fundamental. Ruether explains in the article, "Dualism and the Nature of Evil in Feminist Theology" that, like leaven, in some personalities "intimations of healthy and life-giving relationality" remain. Around this centre, better relations may be constructed. She identifies these centres with the eschatological breakthrough made by Jesus who proclaimed the eschaton "not as a spiritual principle unconnected with social reality," but as "leaven" which recreates a just society (*Studies in Christian Ethics*, 5:1, 1992, 39).

Ruether, speaking about praxis, suggests that sisters around the world who engage in multireligious dialogue are such leaven, participants in meaningful immortality who reinterpret and envision anew peace and justice for a new creation in which just relationships are the focal point (*Women and Redemption*, 281). For Ruether, in the new creation, human dialogue in search of justice is immortality—caretaking. Such an end-time vision yields a new hope for women announcing a worldview of no more hurting.

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[41] The emphasis on human project is to underline human responsibility. The masculinist view has often given or left the responsibility to God.

Chapter Four

Ada María Isasi-Díaz

Reframing Kingdom of God as kin-dom of God

It's the frames which make some things
important and some things forgotten. It's all only frames
from which the content rises.
Eve Babitz (born 1942)

This chapter explores how Ada María Isasi-Díaz revisions the Kingdom of God concept in *Mujerista Theology* and related publications. I begin with some explication of the phrase kin-dom of God. The balance of the chapter contains three sections derived from her interpretive principles: the first section concerns the reinterpretation of charity; the second section considers salvation and living into a preferred future; the third section shows how Isasi-Díaz re-imagines justice and

love—liberative praxis--when woman's body, moral agency, and family, are central to the picture.

At the onset, let me offer some explication of the word, kin-dom. Via cassette tape, Professor Isasi-Díaz shared with me some of her ideas about kin-dom. She explains that although many English writers prefer the phrase reign of God, for her, it leans too strongly toward hierarchy and aristocracy and an elite who control. Isasi-Díaz says that kin-dom of God is a phrase she first heard from a Franciscan nun, Sister Georgine Wilson. For Isasi-Díaz, there was an immediate resonance with the imagery of kin-dom because the type of love among Franciscans and among *mujeristas* seemed so meaningful to her. Both peoples invite others to share their space. Both peoples emphasize the importance of family and extended family.

Isasi-Díaz meditated again on Matthew 25 which describes being hungry, in prison, naked. When she read, "whatever you do to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you have done to me" she thought that family of God depicted this notion from Matthew 25 much better than Kingdom of God.

Of course, as Isasi-Díaz recounts, family is not a single-definition word. Family hardly means mother, father, and two children in today's Americas. Family can mean lesbian or homosexual couples with children, single parents with children, or guardian with child/children. The heterosexual couple with two children family structure is definitely not the norm in Latino culture. The norm where Isasi-Díaz lives is more likely four or five children and, often, single mothers. Further, family may include rich or distinguished godparents who help the children. And aunts and uncles who may or may not be blood related. Isasi-Díaz says that in her classes there

is always someone whose family has taken in 'another' and brought that child up as their own or there is someone whose parents have had to give a child away. The sense of extended family is an institution indispensable in Latino culture.

Isasi-Díaz adds that when she asks her students to reflect on the main functions of the family, they usually respond with the notion of protection—protection of the weak, the elderly, the children—protection for those who cannot take care of themselves. Another frequently mentioned function is to socialize children into the language and culture. A third function is to demonstrate how to deal with reality.

The understanding of community that is reflected in many Latina families is the image Isasi-Díaz uses to describe the kin-dom of God. In Scripture, she says (on tape), Kingdom functions as an image of those who have embraced the gospel message of justice and peace. An emphasis on justice is one element. Another element is oneness between sisters and brothers in peace. She writes:

> the concept of kingdom in our world today is both hierarchical and elitist—which is why I do not use the word *reign*. The word *kin-dom* makes it clear that when the fullness of God becomes a day-to-day reality in the world at large, we will all be sisters and brothers—kin to each other ("Solidarity," 103, Note 8).

Isasi-Díaz refuses to use the word reign to open up the biblical term kingdom. The image, King, implies a male leader, and reign implies hierarchical structure, elitist rule, aristocratic domination, oppressive economics, and non-democratic government. Though it was a working image for Jesus, it is not a good image for us

now, says Isasi-Diaz. With feminist thinking tools, the concept of king/kingdom and ruler/ruled can be examined for its usefulness as a model of a better world. The notion of family, sisters and brothers, however, is not unproblematic, either.[42]

Commonly, sisters and brothers are very capable of alienating and dominating. Therefore, Isasi-Díaz calls for a deep level of self-knowledge--know yourself in responsible relationship to community. An indispensable aspect of family friendship requires a "willingness to do something for or about" the common commitment to members of the group.[43] The all-too-common practices of alienation and domination is not the caring *family* image Isasi-Díaz has in mind when she uses the word kin-dom.

What binds sisters and brothers on this deeper level is a vision of liberation, writes Isasi-Díaz ("Defining Our *Proyecto,*" 17). The friendship is held together by multiple factors and a vision of liberation is paramount. One binds oneself to the other because each is committed to an eschatological glimpse of a liberatory vision. She writes: "We are guided and motivated by our hope for a future in which we can live fully" ("Defining Our *Proyecto,*" 17).

Isasi-Díaz reframes the Kingdom of God concept by changing the word from kingdom to kin-dom. This shift from kingdom to kin-dom allows for a more

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[42] For example, the Latina philosopher, Maria Lugonez, says that "family" is not an appropriate term to describe Kingdom of God because family is not of one's choosing.

[43] The value placed on family and family behavior by Isasi-Díaz reminds me of the hopes Barbara Bodichon (a pioneer of university education for women) placed in young women. Jacquie Matthews writes that Bodichon saw "that the most urgent need of women students was confidence in their own abilities and potential, taking responsibility for themselves, taking part in creating a new environment and new values." See article by Jacquie Matthews in *Feminist Theorists*, edited by Dale Spender.

complete (albeit, a more complex) view because kin-dom brings the whole notion of family dynamics into the centre, not excluding political dynamics. This transition is exciting because the challenges have to do with a search after character more than with controlled obedience to a leader. In particular, relationality is in the centre of the picture with the word kin-dom. Changing the word can considerably alter the concept for women because their experiences (relationality, in particular) are not forgotten or silenced or dismissed or ignored or assumed. The content of the picture appears more immediate and more personal with the word kin-dom than with the word kingdom. Suddenly, description of the kin-dom of God seems to welcome more entries, including my own, rather than remain limited to a few from the elite crowd. It helps to remember that Ada María Isasi-Díaz built *mujerista* theology using the lived experience of Hispanic women who experience less than full humanity and who struggle to bring peace with justice into their lives.

1. Recognizing the Need: Charity/Solidarity

At the conclusion of "Defining Our *Proyecto Histórico,*" Isasi-Díaz writes that *mujerista* theology aims "to deconstruct the dominant normative understanding of theology as a disciplinary method" (28). *Mujerista* theology, by contrast, purports to go to "the heart of Latina's daily life" where religion plays a role in the struggle to create a future in which to live fully.

In order to show how Isasi-Díaz makes a text applicable to the heart of Latina's daily life where religion plays a role, I choose to use her critique of charity,

or love of neighbour. In general theological terms, love of neighbour is a path to peace, to the Kingdom of God, to ethical living. Love is the way, most Christians have been taught. According to the Buddha, compassion is the path to nirvana. For Isasi-Díaz, the path to the kin-dom of God is, indeed, love your neighbour. However, her way of understanding "love your neighbour" can be an eye-opener for those who rarely move beyond the confines of comfortable middle-class surroundings. In her critique of charity, "Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the 1980s," later revised in *Mujerista Theology* as "Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the Twenty-First Century," Isasi-Díaz explains that, yes, love of neighbour is the answer. However, for a Latino, love in terms of charity has certain unethical connotations and Isasi-Díaz shows how deconstructing Christian charity leads toward liberation. I will follow her argument using the revised version.

How does, in *mujerista* theology, the ethic of charity work itself out in terms of "love of neighbour?" Isasi-Díaz writes that charity often means almsgiving or giving of one's leftovers: "a one-sided giving, a donation almost always, of what we have in abundance" ("Solidarity," 88). Charity, of course, means more but "in general vernacular, this is how the term is understood and used ("Solidarity," 88). Charity, for Isasi-Díaz, as an ethics goes deeper. Ethics is based in consciousness. Giving of one's excess to those less fortunate is something many Christians have practiced and often with a deep sense of thankfulness. It is this consciousness of gratitude that Isasi-Díaz opens up. One feels good because one can give to those who do not have. One is thankful that one can give of one's excess. Perhaps we give because we have been conditioned to think we need to feel grateful in order to

feel Christian. Is charity, perhaps, a self-centered activity? Charity often gratifies the giver's need and ignores the recipient's deeper needs. This attitude of gratitude Isasi-Díaz challenges or brings into better light through the value of personhood.

In her examination of the commandment to love your neighbour translated as give to the poor, Isasi-Díaz questions Christianity's understanding of the ethical value of personhood. She quotes from Gutiérrez: "Concretely, to be poor means to die of hunger, to be illiterate, to be exploited by others, not to know that you are being exploited, not to know that you are a person" ("Solidarity," 91). The last phrase is the significant one for Isasi-Díaz. She is not condemning the action of giving as much as the action of perpetuating non-personhood. This is helpful criticism of Christianity. It is wrong to perpetuate women as non-persons or as persons without personhood. It is wrong to perpetuate the image of poor people as persons without personhood. It is wrong to perpetuate "nonliberative theological understandings" of persons, especially women.

Personhood is a complex value. It tends to describe, rather than define, a respect that is of primary importance to the building of society, of community, of individuals. Personhood is connected to justice and the meaning of what it means to be human. Isasi-Díaz points to a matter of being Christian that is particularly relevant in the notion of kin-dom, namely, the matter of caring for one another and the matter of caring for one another's personhood. Isasi-Díaz describes this level of caring and how charity is an ethical behavior "only if it is understood and carried out within the context of solidarity" ("Solidarity," 88). Solidarity, writes Isasi-Diaz, "has to do with understanding the interconnections that exist between oppression and

privilege, between the rich and the poor, the oppressed and the oppressors" ("Solidarity," 89). "It also refers to the cohesiveness that needs to exist among communities of struggle," she adds. The term solidarity has been diluted in Isasi-Díaz's opinion:

> Solidarity is the union of kindred persons "arising from the common responsibilities and interests" [. . .]. Solidarity moves away from the false notion of disinterest, of doing for others in an altruistic fashion. Instead it is grounded in "common responsibilities and interests," which necessarily arouse shared feelings and lead to joint action ("Solidarity," 89).

Isasi-Díaz then links solidarity to salvation. She says that salvation as the goal of Christianity arises from the gospel mandate that we love our neighbour. And solidarity arises from love of neighbour. Isasi-Díaz explains: "From a Christian perspective the goal of solidarity is to participate in the ongoing process of liberation through which we Christians become a significantly positive force in the unfolding of the kin-dom of God" ("Solidarity," 89). Love (salvation) flows from God and this salvation is worked out in terms of love relationships "between God and each human being and among human beings." "This love relationship is the goal of all life—it constitutes the fullness of humanity" ("Solidarity, 89). Her description of how solidarity looks can be aided by looking at obstacles to solidarity.

Isasi-Díaz writes that "the main obstacle to the unfolding of the kin-dom is the alienation from God and from each other experienced by all in and through the oppressive societal categories and structures that cause and sustain oppression" ("Solidarity," 90). She states that this alienation is what *mujerista* theology refers to

as sin, both personal sin and structural sin. She quotes Gutiérrez: "Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation" ("Solidarity," 90). This definition of sin is far removed from a simple separation from God due to disobeying the command "Thou shalt not eat." Understanding sin in terms of alienation through "ism" categories such as sexism, heterosexism, classism, and militarism, leads, then, to "an ongoing personal conversion that involves effective attempts to change alienating societal structures" ("Solidarity," 90). This is the struggle.

Like Schüssler Fiorenza and Ruether, Isasi-Díaz denounces the systems of sexism, racism, and classism which are "interconnected parts of a worldwide system of domination in which the few oppress the many" ("Solidarity," 91). Isasi-Díaz says that in charity, often, the few oppress the many. As such, charity is a form of control and domination. Seeing charity as a form of control changes the picture frame of charity. As a form of oppression, one-sided charity alienates people from God and from each other and from oneself. One-sided charity can be seen as a form of control because it ignores the value of personhood, the value of ideas within persons, and the notion of God within.

Isasi-Díaz explains that the poor and the oppressed are not morally superior or more innocent or purer in their motivations than anyone else. But they have a point of view that is worthy of consideration. She quotes José Míguez Bonino, and writes:

> The preferential option at the heart of solidarity is based on the fact that the point of view of the oppressed, "pierced by suffering and attracted by hope,

> allows them, in their struggles, to conceive another reality. Because the poor suffer the weight of alienation, they can conceive a different project of hope and provide dynamism to a new way of organizing human life for all." This contribution, which they alone can give, makes it possible for everyone to overcome alienation. The preferential option for the poor and the oppressed makes it possible for the oppressors to overcome alienation, because to be oppressive limits love, and love cannot exist in the midst of alienation ("Solidarity," 91).

Isasi-Díaz understands the poor and oppressed to have a huge responsibility—to conceive of a reality without oppression. And the oppressors, in giving value to the project of hope also contribute to the unfolding of the kin-dom. Isasi-Díaz opens up a deep level of understanding of the complex relationships among poverty, charity, oppression, injustice, and personal responsibility to a vision of hope.

As an aside, one wonders how much of the understanding of one-sided charity for Isasi-Díaz is influenced by American monetary contributions to the political unrest in Central America. Further, as a missionary for three years in her religious order, it is possible that the injustices of ecclesial authority and 'the have giving to the have-not system' influenced her.

Isasi-Díaz's critique of charity deconstructs its normative understanding. Giving to the poor looks different when seen in terms of personhood and solidarity. For Isasi-Díaz gets to the heart of Latina's daily life and her analysis of one-sided charity supports her deep concern to give opportunity to salvation--peaceful relations that do not hinder self-determination—among the poor and the oppressed.

2. Living into a Preferred Future in terms of Relationality

In order to bring together the notion of alienation with the notions of salvation and mutuality, I choose now to discuss the terms sin and evil before I present ideas concerning mutuality/relationality. It is necessary to know from what one wants to be liberated when one's religion is grounded in experience and one wants to live into a preferred future. In other words, what sort of evil is absent in the preferred future?

I begin with two examples which enrich the social structure meanings of sin and evil already presented. In her work, *Women and Evil*, Nel Noddings (not unlike Isasi-Díaz) regards evil as relational. Noddings maintains that the basic states of consciousness of pain, separation, and helplessness are associated with evil. She writes that "moral evil consists in inducing, sustaining, or failing to relieve" pain, separation, and helplessness. Like disease, evil needs to be controlled. Like dust, she says, evil cannot be eradicated. Therefore, we need to learn to manage with as little of it as possible. Her remedy is a literacy of evil in school classrooms, skills and tools to shun evil and do good. Isasi-Díaz, by contrast, claims that a deep level of friendship (solidarity) is a remedy for having as little evil as possible. Both writers look for a way to manage the extent of evil in the preferred future.

The second example comes from John A Sanford. In *Evil, the Shadow Side of Reality*, he defines evil as forms of pain, loss of meaning, and destructive or threatening forces. As a follower of Jung's thinking, Sanford holds that psychology can help manage evil (*Evil, Shadow Side of Reality*, 65). Through an examination of the territory within--the soul, including the thief within, the liar within, the violent

one within--Sanford says that the soul can be healed through self-knowledge. The shadow and the Self can be properly aligned. Both Sanford and Noddings believe that a known method for working with evil is important for building society, a preferred future, a community that does not hold consumerism as its main *raison d'être.*

Isasi-Díaz sheds further light on the issues of evil and sin. She describes the intimate relationship Hispanic women enjoy with the divine and declares sin to be that which hinders relationships with the divine and with the community. In "Defining Our *Proyecto*" Isasi-Díaz quotes from her earlier work: "Sin is not a matter of disobedience but of not being for others. Not going to church is not a sin. But not to care for the children of the community—that is a sin, a crime" (23)! She continues, "For grassroots Latinas sin is first and foremost whatever negatively affects us as members of a community and the community itself." Isasi-Díaz borrows from Gutiérrez and states that an analysis of oppressive structures will help us understand that sin is "according to the Bible the ultimate cause of poverty, injustice, and the oppression in which [we] . . . live" (23). Therefore, an analysis of oppressive structures is a starting point for seeing that sin is a personal and not a private matter.

The topic of sin is important especially in religion because it invites dialogue. Isasi-Díaz suggests that sin is something one can do something about: one can do something about that which hinders community. Evil tends to be corporate, larger systems that are in place for which no one in particular is wholly responsible. Also, the question is important because it underlines pluralism. Different women define

sin differently.[44] Sin is not monolithic. The question also helps us identify sin's opposite, ethics, or justice, for the kin-dom of God.

Because an image of that which can be conceived is hard to explain or describe or define in positive terms, one says what the kin-dom of God is not. In general terms, the kin-dom of God suggests the absence of evil, freedom from that which hinders community: sexism. Sexism is evil; sexism is oppressive. Sexism hinders the kin-dom, the community, and individual human fulfillment.

Isasi-Díaz writes from a sociocritical perspective and underlines the need for social analysis. She maintains that one needs to know the sources of oppression. From such knowledge, power to denounce evil can arise. She writes in "Defining Our *Proyecto*:"

> Our struggle for liberation has to start with an analysis of the root causes of our oppression. Such an analysis will show our oppression to be multifaceted—an intersection of ethnic prejudice, sexism, and economic oppression, all of which are intrinsic elements of patriarchal and hierarchical structures. Only after a deep analysis of its causes are we able effectively to denounce our oppression (19).

Sexism is therefore evil, as is ethnic prejudice, and economic oppression. Perhaps both ethnic prejudice and economic oppression fit under the umbrella of sexism because both afford the notion of "I am better than you because I have something you do not have." That "something you do not have" can be skin color, wealth,

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[44] For comparison, sin for Virginia Woolf was that which hindered self-reform. She often attacked social evils (*Three Guineas*). She also argued for conditions for women which would afford the freedom to be creative (*A Room of One's Own*).

health, body parts, heritage, connexions, power, and so on. A structure of society in which the elite are at the top, and are admired for being there, supports the "I am better than you" prejudice. To analyze the structure of society from a perspective other than an elite position is one of the tools that post-modern philosophy has produced. Defining evil from the position of colored, underprivileged women requires opened eyes or deep analysis.

In "*Un Poquito de Justicia*—A Little Bit of Justice" Isasi-Díaz indicates five modes of oppression. Knowing the modes of oppression helps to understand the goal, the struggle for justice. Isasi-Díaz identifies exploitation (both economic and ecclesial), marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and systemic violence as the five faces of oppression that need to be studied so that effective means of working toward justice can be articulated ("*Un Poquito,*" 108-115).

Rosemary Radford Ruether helps explain what is evil for Isasi-Díaz among Hispanic women. Ruether writes in *Women and Redemption* that in *mujerista* theology evil is defined in three aspects: first, as "structures and attitudes that assault Hispanic women physically, culturally, psychically, and spiritually;" second, as "poverty and violence and diminishment of [women's] sense of dignity and self-worth," and third as institutionalized religion which "sacralizes demands for women to be passive and maternal servants of men" (237). Ruether's three-pronged explanation of Isasi'Díaz's evil is relevant because it shows how grossly different evil is from personal disobedience to an all-seeing, all-powerful God who said "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" (as is often the case in fundamentalist teaching). I will look briefly at the three prongs.

While many structures and attitudes assault the Hispanic women,according to Ruether, it is primarily the Anglo community. It is they who exploit the labour of the poorly educated ones; it is the Anglo community who disregard the culture and language of the Hispanic women (*Women and Redemption*, 238). Isasi-Díaz does not point the finger to the Anglo society as directly. Isasi-Díaz rather repeats the phrase, "struggle to survive" suggesting diplomatically that the structures in place prevent and hinder survival. Ruether's clarity is helpful. Both authors uphold the needs for labour, culture, and language as primary needs basic to human fulfillment. Exploitation also comes from within the Hispanic community and families when men exploit the labour of the women, "abuse them sexually, and reduce them to sex objects, baby machines, and maternal nurturers, often with little economic means to carry out these many demands on their bodies and spirits" (*Women and Redemption*, 238).

The Hispanic women's sense of self-worth is another oppression and is related to cultural imperialism. This is an important issue for those who interpret the Ten Commandments as saying that pride of personhood is the greatest commandment—one needs to be proud of oneself, one's experiences, one's accomplishments. Then one can love others and God. Self-worth is diminished not only from external factors but also from internal factors. Isasi-Díaz writes:

> But the most destructive aspect of cultural imperialism—of ethnic prejudice and racism—is not what it does to Latinas but what is makes Latinas do to our own selves. Little by little we internalize the way the dominant culture see us—when it sees us—for we are always obliged to act according to the

> image society has of us. Little by little our own culture and our self-understandings become as invisible to ourselves as they are to the dominant culture. And that invisibility finds expression in a rejection of our cultural customs and values, in a rejection of ourselves as Latinas that is all the more insidious because of how imperceptible it is, even—perhaps mainly—to ourselves (*Un Poquito,* " 114).

The phrase "struggle to survive" takes on a deeper meaning—a Hispanic woman's fight for life seems especially difficult if she is unaware of rejecting her own cultural customs and values.

Evil exists within the church.[45] Feminist theology is most helpful as a tool with which to analyze the church. In particular, feminist theology helps us see that the Roman Catholic Church, as all churches that I know of, enforces rules of marriage and sexuality. The Church, as Ruether writes, judges women to be sinful who turn to "prostitution, marriage without benefit of clergy, divorce, or separation, birth control, and abortion" (*Women and Redemption,* 238). In the picture of woman, it seems the Catholic Church has failed to see beyond the frame of woman as servant. To see and understand women as persons is what feminism is all about.

Turning to the Protestant institution, Ruether helps us see evil in it because it gives clerical power to pastors who can "deprive Hispanic women of their culture and sense of autonomy and self-determination" (*Women and Redemption,* 238).

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[45] In time, it is becoming increasingly clear to me that when information is filtered through the church, whole communities are persuaded to believe things as extraordinary as 'women are witches,' or 'pigmentation contains strange properties' or 'women should work in factories because a war is in progress.' See Dale Spender's article, "Modern Feminist Theorists: Reinventing Rebellion" 369.

There are many examples of Protestant pastors and/or missionaries who, in authoritative positions, demand that women change their personal appearance, their clothing habits, their eating habits, and their style of living. Feminism asks whether these types of changes are healthy for women from women's perspectives. Feminism asks whether the rules of institutional churches contribute to an understanding of what it means to be a woman "made in the image of God."

Ruether's three-pronged look at evil in *mujerista* theology helps delineate the analysis of the five modes of oppression that Isasi-Díaz presents. Knowing what needs to be eliminated while living into a preferred future allows one to better understand Isasi-Díaz's notion of mutuality.

Once one is aware that there is something suspicious about one's oppressed condition, a process of conscientization (a term from Paulo Freire and liberation theology) will involve praxis. Part of the praxis is mutuality. Isasi-Díaz explains the term mutuality"in terms of friends. First, the oppressed need to change the way they see themselves and each other and recognize their dependence on the oppressors.

> To even begin to envision the reality that is possible when they stand in solidarity with each other, the oppressed have to be willing to stop looking for and accepting the "charity" of their oppressors. To turn from the "charity" of the oppressors to solidarity among themselves requires great willingness to take risks. This going beyond the isolated self is followed by creating strategies to carry out their struggle for liberation. Implementing these strategies keeps hope alive and, together with the vision of their own

> liberation, gives the poor and oppressed the courage to risk that sustains the struggle ("Solidarity," 95).

After this act of mutuality (refusing one-sided charity) is begun, the oppressors, too, need to change their views of their desire for wealth and control. The oppressors need conscientization of their "domination and possession of the world and even of the other" in order for mutuality to be established in the evolution of justice. Commitment to the struggle toward a preferred future has possibilities for revolutionary politics, says Isasi-Díaz, and this begins to make liberation present. "Actions born out of commitment to mutuality are 'eschatological glimpses' which clarify the vision of liberation that will become a reality in the kin-dom of god and which will make faithfulness to the vision possible" ("Solidarity," 99-100).

Isasi-Díaz's understanding of the centrality of justice and personhood has helped her look for ways of implementing the command to love one's neighbor that do not stop with giving out of abundance. Mutuality, as expressed by Isasi-Díaz, takes into consideration the significance of persons and their roles in an effective infrastructure of families who protect and give caretaking abundantly.

3. Doing Liberative Praxis—Justice and Love and Body

In simple terms, salvation from alienation is kin-dom. Isasi-Díaz writes that at "the centre of the unfolding of the kin-dom is the salvific act of God" ("Solidarity," 89). She explains salvation—the goal of all life—in terms of a love relationship. This love relationship is a gift, a result of love which is the very

essence of God. Isasi-Díaz is traditional in her understanding of love as the essence of God. Her particular feminist slant on it, however, emphasizes that salvation is love relationship. This is an extension from the fundamentalist school that holds salvation limited to the individual soul's escape from eternal damnation. She writes that this love relationship constitutes the fullness of humanity. Fullness of humanity means active involvement, according to Isasi-Díaz. "Therefore, love sets in motion and sustains the ongoing act of creation in which the person necessarily participates, since love requires, per se, active involvement of those who are in relationship" ("Solidarity," 89-90). At the centre is creation or active participation.

An important word in the work of Isasi-Díaz is unfolding. She writes about the unfolding of the kin-dom of God in terms of liberative praxis. Unfolding is not unlike the opening of a bud or leaf. Unfolding is also the process of becoming a whole or full person. The opening of a bud transforms its tiny world. The opening of a person can transform that person's world and so much more. When a person struggles for love relationships, one changes oneself and one's world. For Isasi-Díaz, unfolding "is both cause and effect of the struggle to have a love relationship with others, including God." Family and unfolding is the process of becoming whole.

Isasi-Díaz's theory of liberative praxis is significant in that it contains the catholic notion of salvation in the sense that it encompasses both individual and community. She follows Gustavo Gutiérrez who also sees salvation in terms of building community.

Sin as social and personal alienation implies that a liberative praxis means the struggle to lift social structures that silence a person's voice for self-determination. Liberative praxis means creative love relationships within the family or community. Liberative praxis means the prejudice, exploitation, and ecclesiastical restrictions that Hispanic women experience daily be eroded.

The significance of friendship between women cannot be overstated in the matter of relationships and the matter of understanding one another.[46] Isasi-Díaz is aware of the complexities of the human capacities. She says the church is a place where people's gifts can be recognized and where these gifts can minister to expressed needs. Isasi-Díaz wants Christians to look seriously at their role in liberative praxis, in the commandment to love one's neighbour. She argues against control and domination over others. She argues for a process of liberation through friendship. Friendship is the path to personhood, the path to the kin-dom of God. Friendship, most importantly, does not take women's bodies as commodities.

To honour one' s personhood is a value higher than giving of one's excess. Isasi-Díaz's work has pointed to the necessity of rethinking charity within the framework of kin-dom of God because friendship is central. Within deep friendships there is trust and affirmation of individual worth. One's experiences, visions, and hopes affirm one's personhood. Therefore, in order to become all that they can, Hispanic women through friendship participate in the kin-dom of God, the family of

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[46] The idea of sisterhood is probably as ancient as women and affirmed by Margaret Fuller, a major inspiration of the American feminist movement. She suggests in *Woman of the Nineteenth Century* that no matter how noble the man is, or how good his intentions are, he cannot understand a woman's needs or adequately represent her. For this reason, women need to band together to help, to "save" each other and oneself.

God, and become a significantly positive force, a remnant who make a difference in their world. Personhood, as a value, experienced through friendship, liberates and saves.

Mujerista theology strives to create space for self determination. Self-determination is a key element in liberation from oppression, says Isasi-Díaz. She writes that self-determination includes having the vision "to transfer the skills of everyday survival to the task of building our preferred future" ("Defining Our *Proyecto*," 22). Further, she says that unfolding the kin-dom includes putting justice into practice in do-able ways. This section will list some of her liberative praxis.

Isasi-Díaz gives some specific moral options to change oppressive structures. She identifies the powerful myth about the possibility of success in the "promised land" of America as a problem. She writes in "Defining Our *Proyecto*:"

> This myth is constant and pervasive. It contributes significantly to the negative self-image of Hispanic women who cannot get ahead, not because we do not try hard, but because of socioeconomic realities that militate against us in all areas of life. A negative self-image is indeed oppressive but this myth is insidious because it fills us with fear and often robs us of even envisioning our *proyecto histórico*" (22).

People have been deceived into believing that if they work hard they can benefit from the present order and gain the material privileges this society claims to offer. Isasi-Díaz says that this myth hinders liberation and robs the dream of community in family. Instead, people need to become conscious of the fact that if one succeeds in the present order it is because someone else fills that place at the bottom of the

socioeconomic-political ladder. Isasi-Díaz does not advocate an individual overcoming oppression; she says communities are to overcome it. This is in opposition to the prevailing American dream of making it alone. Isasi-Díaz's commitment to liberative praxis in terms of solidarity of community has certain concerns around which to congregate.

The list of concerns is grounded in present day problems in which people can take active roles. Her encouragement to Hispanic women speaks to a larger group of people, I think, who conceive of another reality where pursuit of economic prosperity and political domination is not the main reason for living. The list of things to achieve, in however small ways, includes bringing about in the United States a national commitment to better balance financial, medical, educational, and cultural experiences for all communities. Some of the items have been on agendas for a long time, especially the financial matters. Others, such as the changes to the economics of the family address more current concerns. I include this list because it identifies how Isasi-Díaz understands "taking responsibility for the unfolding of the kin-dom." She writes in "Defining Our *Proyecto*" that Hispanic women, in whose lives religion plays a role, can unite to bring about:

- full employment and an adequate minimum wage
- redistribution of wealth through redistributive inheritance and wealth taxes
- comparable remuneration for comparable work regardless of sex, sexual preference, race/ethnicity, age

- economic democracy that would transform an economy controlled by a few into the economy of a participatory community
- available health care for all with an emphasis on preventive health care
- changes in the economics of the family that will encourage more "symmetrical marriages," allow a better balance between family and work for men and women, and make parenting a less difficult and imporverishing act for single parents
- Hispanic culture and Spanish language in schools
- public financing of public education structured so that its quality does not depend on the wealth of the neighborhood served by a given school
- more diverse images in public communication, including entertainment TV and movies, so that the values of the Latinas can begin to influence the culture of the nation at large (27).

This list outlines an ambitious undertaking. It is not fully developed into a societal model, but it does identify some moral imperatives and attempt a basis for moral norms and values. The list extends the sense of community to include the nation, and it shows that the source for envisioning the kin-dom of God is lived experience. Based on Hispanic experience, Isasi-Díaz's list of desired political changes identifies liberative praxis or what needs to be done in the struggle for liberation. It also hints at the meaning and goal of life—communities of active participants responsible for justice-seeking praxis, and the unfolding of the kin-dom.

Chapter Five

From Kingdom to kin-dom:

Conclusions

Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life;
Let me more of their beauty see, wonderful words of life.
Philip P. Bliss (1838-1876)

This thesis has examined some unquenchable hopes for a better world, the longed-for Kingdom of God, as revisioned by three feminist theologians. Each one echoes the hope for justice and peace. To use an expression from Martin Buber, hope "imagines the real." David Augsburger in *When Enough is Enough* writes that true hope visualizes what should be the potential for all humankind, since "hope cannot be achieved alone" (18). The shift from Kingdom to kin-dom is made for the sake of women and other

silenced persons. The sense of community, though problematic, is emphasized in kin-dom.

I have come to five tentative conclusions which are related to my study of the Kingdom of God revisioned as feminist kin-dom. I now see "more of their beauty" in these "wonderful words of life."[46] I finish with suggestions for further work and a final personal statement.

First, feminist theology brings a richness to the standard theology I found described in Georgia Harkness's *Understanding the Kingdom of God*, John Bright's *The Kingdom of God*, and Norman Perrin's *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, to give a few examples. The richness involves the up-front inclusion of women's hopes and women's experiences. The richness brings a freedom to explore and express the values of gender differences, relationality, personhood, caretaking, and belonging in a world of community. The richness gives opportunity for changes of attitude about ourselves, non-human life, and Earth Mother.

Second, the search for words and meanings of words, such as *basileia*, reign of God/ess, and kin-dom, leads to deeper questions and different images. The notion of king/servant is significantly different from the notion of community/participant, as Isasi-Díaz points out. The best part is that as the writers carve away at the evolution of the word Kingdom an image of personhood is exposed. The idea of salvation that emerges is a matter of deep self-awareness for the betterment of kin and community. The study of kingdom becomes a study of self. The study of kingdom, of hope in

feminist theology, seems to draw an interpretive circle; a study of hope is also a study of self and all life in the sense that we are each of the same universe. Further, a study of self is, in a theological sense, a study of the divine, the imagined One. And with a deeper awareness of gender issues and personhood, the imagined One is set free to evolve as well.

Third, the symbol of *basileia* (festive table), of reign of God/ess (New Creation), of kin-dom (family of God) illumines and is illuminated by deep desires for inclusiveness, caretaking, and for community. Feminist theology brings relationality into the foreground, both social relationality and ecological relationality. Emphasizing these relationships helps to push back the horizon of the telos, the purpose of life.

Fourth, justice remains an issue of many facets. One can say that when personhood is upheld, the imbalance of power is a given; for example, because of various differences in capability and capacity, there is no such thing as a community of equals. This study suggests, however, that there is such a thing as a community of people struggling for a shared goal of self-determination (as Isasi-Díaz names liberation). In such a reframed sense of community, there need not be the competition for a balance of power. Rather, in a reframed community the imbalance of power may be opportunity for courtesy and consideration of how best to help each other uproot the enemy, inhumanity.

Fifth, feminist hermeneutics, with its critical questions, brings fresh hope to the ambitious possibility of inter-religious dialogue. Seeing how

different Christian hopes can be for men and women is preparation for seeing how various religions can respond to various needs.

Many feminist Christians embrace the new kin-dom of God as a useful concept for effecting change. At the same time, the Kingdom of God may not suit some women at all. I see now how those who want to step beyond patriarchy have no more need for this concept. As Mary Daly states in *Beyond God the Father*: "I suggest that as long as we are under the shadow of a *kingdom*, real or symbolic, there will be no creative justice" (128). The childhood notions of Kingdom theology need to die so that hope can be reborn. Feminist theology gives reason to hope for this death.

More work remains to be done especially on the theme of family. Family is where one often learns about belonging, caretaking, and contributing to community. Family, as well, is where one often is hurt and wounded in these values. The function of family and its role in churches, politics and culture, begs for deeper study.

The theme of justice, especially in terms of forgiveness, also needs further work. Sharing space on planet Earth in light of a member of the Universe worldview requires a plan of forgiveness. This matter of wanting to live together in peace and harmony is not for the faint-hearted, as the specific goals listed by Isasi-Díaz affirms. For example, I know the John Templeton Foundation with Desmond Tutu is doing research in the area of forgiveness. As much as I see the necessity of political change, I also see the need for

heart changes (forgiveness) as a worthy project of hope for the continued unfolding of personhood in community.

This study of the shift from Kingdom to kin-dom has helped me see more of the beauty and depth in the concept because I now have choices from among interpretations and re-interpretations. I did not realize that I had choices other than my childhood theology and I was quite unaware of its power. Although the concept remains useful to some persons to effect change, the Kingdom of God concept, for me, has been plowed under and can become compost. Kin-dom of God is a sincere effort to move toward developing a society in which whole human beings express a range of behavior, interest, capacity, and feel good in relationship. Whether God and the Bible are necessary ingredients for individuals in community to develop personhood and feel good in relationship is doubtful.

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