TRANSFORMING THE CATEGORIES OF WESTERN THEOLOGY:
A Critical Comparison between the Political Theology of
Johannes Baptist Metz
And the Feminist Theological Hermeneutics of
Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

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Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the transformative potential of theological categories within Western Christianity. In particular, this thesis explores the categories of *memory, narrative* and *solidarity* and their relationship to the broader categories of *history*; *language*; and *community*. The relationships between these categories are engaged by way of critically comparing and contrasting the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz and the feminist theological hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.

This thesis traces the roots of these categories from the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz and critically explores how the feminist theological hermeneutics of Schüssler Fiorenza both uses and develops them. This exploration reveals the debt feminist theologies owe to political theology for the critical and emancipatory articulation of memory, narrative and solidarity. It also reveals important connections between memory, narrative and solidarity and the broader categories of history, language and community. Accordingly, this thesis explores the implications of a feminist engagement with the relationships between: history and memory; language and narrative; community and solidarity. By way of an intensification of the particular a critical feminist perspective more clearly extends the theological potential of these relationships and so illuminates their importance in a vitally -- and even radically -- new way. In the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza this extension is most clearly expressed through her critique of the kyriarchal socio-religious structures of Western culture and society which she grounds by way of a particular focus the church as the *ekklēsia* of women. Accordingly, this thesis is divided into six chapters.

Chapter One positions feminist theologies within the broader tradition of Western culture and society.

Chapter Two briefly traces the historical, philosophical and theological heritage of political and feminist theologies as theologies of social critique.

Chapter Three examines the contemporary historical consciousness of Western society and deals with the concerns feminist theologies have with Western history. In understanding history as both the liberative and oppressive story of human agency this chapter explores the use of memory as a tool for the emancipation of Christian history.

In Chapter Four we look at the formative power of language as the medium through which humanity understands existence and reality. By way of a feminist critique, this chapter explores how language can operate to both facilitate and inhibit the liberative stories of the Christian tradition.

Chapter Five examines the basic vision and structure of community. Here, the conditions that help foster women's solidarity and contribute to the nurturing of authentic relationships and vital Christian communities are explored.

Chapter Six reviews Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's contribution to the transformative potential of the theological categories of memory, narrative and solidarity and offers two general critiques for further discussion. Chapter Six then concludes this thesis by engaging both Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza in a critical-rhetorical reading of their work.

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INTRODUCTION

David Tracy considers that true conversation requires both commitment and risk. Furthermore, he maintains that in conversations 'where the truth of existence' is engaged the risk may prove considerable.[1] This makes theological conversation a very risky business. Given that theological conversation in general is risky, and in light of the feminist backlash in contemporary Western culture and society, feminist theological conversation is not only a risky business, but also a marginal activity.

Although feminist theological conversations are considered risky and marginal they are an essential part of the ongoing interpretation of the Christian tradition. Indeed, it can be claimed that feminist theological conversations are important precisely *because* they are risky and marginal.[2] Bernard Lee maintains that, in times of significant social change, the 'margins are often more important than the main text, since futures lurk there.'[3] In coming from the margins of our tradition and, in responding to the uncertainties induced by significant social change, stories of women's religious experiences can rightly be called stories of the future of Western Christianity.

This exploration of the work of Johannes Baptist Metz and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza brings two important and formidable contemporary Western theologians into conversation. Johannes Baptist Metz and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza are both concerned with the future of the Christian tradition. They seek to offer a practical, liberative theological method that can engage the truth of

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[1]David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism,* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 154-156.

[2]Terry Veling, *Living in the Margins* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 136. As used here, a margin is a hermeneutical rather than a sociological category. It forms 'the site in "between" . . . that resists being pinned down . . . just as much as it resists being lost or forced off the page.'

[3]Bernard Lee, 'Afterword' in Terry Veling, *Living in the Margins*, 213.

human existence in a way that transforms the future of Western Christianity. They share a common socio-cultural heritage and are heirs to a similar critical philosophical tradition. While Schüssler Fiorenza owes a debt to the political theology of Metz, she engages three of his main theological categories -- those of memory, narrative and solidarity -- from a new perspective and so extends their transformative potential. Consequently, within their common heritage and shared tradition there is a difference in the prime focus of these two theologians that is radical enough to make the dialogue between them critical, stimulating and dialectical. Or, as Tracy would say, truly conversational.[4]

This thesis explores the fundamental link between the transformative theological potential of the categories of memory, narrative, and solidarity as used in the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz and the categories of history, language, and community from the critical feminist theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. More specifically, this thesis maintains that a critical feminist engagement with history, language and community offers a broader interpretative framework within which to access the transformative potential of the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity.

Chapter One situates this thesis outlining the role and place of feminist studies within the overall academic and religious life of Western history and tradition. It briefly locates Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's critical feminist theology of liberation within the general context of Western feminist theologies, noting the broader contours and diversity of perspectives that mark Western feminist theologies.

Chapter Two explores the foundations of critical Western feminist theologies as they emerge in relation to other theologies of social critique -- notably the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. This chapter outlines the historical and philosophical background of the Critical Theory of the early

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[4]Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination,* 178. In talking about genuine conversation Tracy notes that the reality of conversation is 'radically conflictual. Conflict, however, has a second meaning beyond the empirical reality: namely, the inevitable conflicts that emerge in genuine conversation as the dialectic of question and answer elicited by fidelity to the subject matter takes over.'

Frankfurt Institute that informs these theologies. It then sketches the movement of the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity from the philosophy of the Frankfurt Theorists to the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz.

Chapter Three situates the category of history within contemporary philosophical and feminist scholarship. It explores the critical edge of the category of memory and examines the role it plays in the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. The following section engages the relationship between memory and history through the feminist theological hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. This engagement reveals that a feminist perspective of memory highlights many serious flaws in a traditional value-free interpretation of history and tradition. This chapter shows that a critical feminist engagement with history offers the Western Christian tradition a more radical and inclusive framework within which to access its own ecclesial memory.

Chapter Four examines the use of narrative within current Christian theology with an emphasis on the narrative component in the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. It then explores the category of language and discusses feminist concerns with language. Through the critical feminist theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza this chapter demonstrates the inextricable link between language and narrative and illuminates the continuing need for a critical feminist assessment of the nature and function of the language that shapes our sacred myths and narratives.

Chapter Five examines the relationship between the categories of solidarity and community. It outlines the place of solidarity in the work of Johannes Baptist Metz and explores Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's critique of a traditional hierarchical understanding of Christian community. In light of this engagement vital questions concerning the praxis of Christian solidarity emerge and it becomes clear that effective Christian solidarity demands the traditional understanding of community be broken open and forged anew.

Chapter Six concludes this thesis with a review of its findings. It offers a critical-rhetorical reading of key insights from the work of Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza and offers some possibilities for future development.

CHAPTER ONE

The Emergence of FEMINIST STUDIES

Chapter One locates Western feminist studies within the wider socio-religious context of Western culture. Western feminist studies is a broad-based discipline that encompasses a diversity of perspectives. Such diversity does not reduce feminist studies to an exploration of personal particularities but marks them as a foundational part of the academic project. In providing a foundational critique to the socio-religious tradition of Western culture the importance of feminist studies to Western theology cannot be overlooked. As the 'master narratives' of Western culture, biblical texts are implicated in the creation and maintenance of what counts as reality.[1] By engaging Western culture feminist studies also engage Western biblical religions. This brief overview of the development of Western feminist theologies provides the setting for the critical feminist theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.

Feminist Studies

The genesis of 'Feminist Studies' can be found in the emancipatory movements of the late nineteenth century. Broadly speaking the women's movement was part of the rising 'civil-rights' consciousness that marked the social and cultural history of the post-industrial Western world.[2] Initially, the main concerns of the women's movement focused on the struggle to secure fundamental civil and legal rights for women in Western society. The early feminist movement fought for the civil right to vote, to pursue higher education,

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[1]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 34.

[2]Elaine Graham, *Making the Difference: Gender, Personhood and Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1995), 15.

and to seek paid non-domestic employment. This movement was also concerned with the lack of women's legal status. It demanded that the full citizenship of women be legally recognised; that they have the right to own property in their own name; and that they be granted legal guardianship of their own children.[3]

In the mid twentieth century the women's movement began to develop and consolidate its theoretical basis and entered the formal academic arena of the universities.[4] Once in the universities feminist studies systematically engaged in the examination and critique of the accepted social and cultural understanding of gender. Using an explicitly feminist perspective, feminist studies began to explore publicly and critically analyse the complex -- and often hidden -- expectations of men and women's cultural identity and social roles.[5] Not only were the more overt disparities of women's civil and legal status under examination but also the more subtle interpretations and expectations of gender roles and gender identity were being critically assessed from the perspective of women. Women had, in other words, become the subjects rather than the objects of feminist inquiry. As feminist studies continued to develop, its inter-disciplinary nature became more pronounced and the critical focus of feminist scholarship extended from the examination of sex and gender to that of power and difference.[6]

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[3]ibid., 1. 'Many women [in Western society] now possess a range of opportunities and expectations of which their great-grandmothers would never have dreamed; and virtually every aspect of our lives - work, legislation, politics, family life . . . reflects the transformation of attitudes and roles that have taken place in the past two generations.'

[4]The feminist movement had made various attempts to consolidate its theoretic basis which, owing to the tendency of most Western institutions to co-opt and diffuse the feminist critique, met with little success. Securing a public place in mid twentieth century gave feminist studies a small but vital space to take root a little more firmly. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 17-21.

[5]Rebecca Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 26.

[6]Graham, *Making the Difference,* 22-26; and Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 33-36. Both scholars chart the socio-political -- Graham -- and political-religious -- Schüssler Fiorenza-- impact of Western feminist studies. Graham notes how these studies have impacted on our understanding of gender identity, relations,

Elaine Graham maintains that because the 'foundations of gender relations and gender identity are complex and multidimensional' then gender theories and feminist studies are 'not simply a concern for 'women's role', but a central aspect of social relations, and thus of social theory.'[7] To reflect its proper roots and maintain its proper focus, most feminist scholars believe that feminist studies in the academy must continue to be sustained by the women's movement in society. So, while the movement into the formal academic arena did serve to develop and consolidate the theoretical basis of feminist studies, it is still important for the academic side of feminism to maintain a connection with its 'grass-roots' origins of women discussing women's experiences. In other words, feminist studies in the academy do not replace social feminist studies; they seek to complement and articulate them.[8] This relationship between the academy and the community -- a relationship that can also be articulated as the theory-praxis relationship -- [9] is a vital one because it secures and protects two of the most tensive yet creative hallmarks of feminist studies, that is, diversity and relevance.

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and representations in the last thirty to forty years. Schüssler Fiorenza stresses the danger of allowing the category of gender studies in religion to 'accommodate themselves to the reigning theoretical paradigm' as this may serve to sever their political concerns and so obscure the power relations of malestream theories.

[7]ibid., 26. I wish to acknowledge the difference between gender theories and feminist studies. When in focusing on the question of how gender effects the socio-economic-political-religious situation of people it is useful to position them together.

[8]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 20-21. In being co-opted by malestream academic theories Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that feminist academics risk having their work cut off from those in whose interests this work is being done. This means that a communication gap occurs between 'academic wo/men and other wo/men, especially those with less education.' In the late 1970's and early 1980's the women's movement was bridging this gap 'by fashioning a shared language of analysis and interpretation.' See also S. Jay Kleinberg, in 'Introduction' in *Retrieving Women's History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society* (ed. S. Jay Kleinberg, Oxford: Berg Publishers Inc. 1998), x.

[9] Theology and Liberation Theology: an inquiry into their fundamental meaning' in *Liberation, Revolution, Freedom*, (ed. T. McFadden, New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 5. The theory praxis relationship connects political and Western feminist theologies through political theologies concerned with 'elaborating a new hermeneutic of the relationship between theory and praxis.' Like liberation theologies, feminist theologies are also concerned with elucidating the 'meaning of the symbols of Christian faith' as they impact on the concrete situation and praxis.

It must be acknowledged here, that the diversity of feminist studies is not without problems. Diversity can make cohesion within the feminist movement difficult and, at times, it can render the discernment of and commitment to particular common goals complex. Furthermore, the rapid movement of feminist scholarship into even broader and more diverse fields is further increasing this complexity. Consequently, questions of maintaining cohesion and commitment can serve to tempt feminist scholars into a universalisation or reification of feminist concerns. In turn, this temptation to universalise can lead feminist studies into a dangerous re-inscription of dualistic attitudes. At a fundamental level, dualistic frameworks and attitudes are responsible for many of the traditional negative attitudes about women that feminist studies are trying to redress. However, even if problematic, the diversity of the feminist movement is certainly one of its great strengths.

Diversity can nurture attitudes of inclusivity and encourage the possibility of unity-with-difference. Diversity can broaden horizons.[10] The diversity of Western feminist studies is a reflection of different 'feminist perspectives' that engage most aspects of contemporary Western life. Women are not a separate social group nor do they occupy a singular social position. Rather, they are scattered throughout every socio-economic group and cultural-religious level of Western society. This means that the experiences and critiques of women are broad-based and multi-faceted -- they necessarily engage and reflect experiences from within every socio-economic and cultural-religious level.[11] Consequently, feminist studies are able to engage in a broad based critique of society that is both vertical or external -- extending from one particular group to another -- and horizontal or internal -- operating within the groups themselves.

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[10]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 38-39. A problem of fragmentation occurs when 'such systemic contradictions [are primarily seen] as an intra-feminist problem.'

[11]Graham, *Making the Difference*, 26. 'Gender is a ubiquitous phenomenon in culture and society' which needs a broad-based 'interdisciplinary perspective'. Being so involved with gender concerns and identity feminist studies must critique and analyse gender relations 'from the realm of individual subjectivity, through relationships of cathexis and kinship, to the structural organisation . . . of the social order, and the historical, symbolic and philosophical foundations of any given culture.'

The ability of feminist studies to engage at both the horizontal and vertical level gives the feminist project the ability to maintain its relevance. This makes the feminist critique a foundational rather than a representative project. While various groups within feminist studies will obviously reflect regional positions, the overall goals and larger vision still mark feminist studies as foundational. Feminist studies remain a systematic perspective that critically engages relationships of elitism and domination while still recognising ambiguity and difference. By examining the specific historical and concrete conditions of women's lives, feminist studies claims that both the broader contours of oppressive structures and the ideologies that have maintained them are revealed. As Mary Daly claimed in her groundbreaking book *Beyond God the Father* 'the becomming of women implies universal human becomming.' [12] Accordingly, the claim of many non-feminist scholars -- that this focus highlights only one of a myriad of oppressive situations -- can be clearly refuted. Given that over half the poor and hungry in the world are women and the children dependant on them for survival this focus is indeed foundational.[13] It enables various expressions of the will to dominate and marginalise to be recognised in their various social guises and different historical expressions. Because the relationship between Western culture and biblical religions is both formative and inter-dependent, the feminist critique is as vital to Christianity as it is to Western society.

> Just as feminist studies in general have affected all areas of academic inquiry, so also feminist theology has worked for the transformation of theology. It seeks to integrate the emancipatory struggles for ending societal and ecclesial patriarchy with religious vision, Christian faith, and theological reflection. . . . If theology, as Karl Rahner puts it, has the vocation to engage the whole church in self-criticism, then feminist theology has the task to engender ecclesial self-criticism, not just of the church's androcentrism but also of its historical patriarchy.[14]

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[12]Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 6.

[13]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Daughters of Vision and Struggle' in in *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklēsia-logy of Liberation* (London: SCM Press), 310-312.

[14]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The Silenced Majority Moves into Speech' in *Discipleship of Equals,* 253-254.

Accordingly, this thesis maintains that feminist perspectives seek to broaden the horizon of traditional Christian theology by re-interpreting key theological categories. This re-interpretation engages new insights and, in turn, reveals new ways within which to interpret humanity's relationship with each other and the divine. In other words, feminist theologies offer traditional theologies new critical perspectives. These perspectives are not only *able* to bring a broad-based perspective to the traditional interpretation of the human-divine relationship but are also *willing* to engage structures and attitudes that have protected and supported the marginalisation of so many of its members.[15]

The Context of Feminist Theologies

The expression 'feminist theologies' covers a diverse field. However, the fundamental objectives of this movement are essentially unified. Feminist theologies seek to promote the full dignity and humanity of all people with particular attention being paid to nurturing the agency of women within their own religious traditions.[16] Accordingly, feminist theologies focus their attention on the oppression of women as this impacts on their specific historical contexts and particular concrete situations.[17] In light of the formative influence scripture has had on the development of Western culture, and because the imagery and language of the biblical traditions have supported a sexism of 'faith and culture that few have questioned,' feminist theologies engage both the religious and the

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[15]Marsha Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion: A Feminist Analysis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), xi.

[16]Ann Loades, *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (London: SPCK, 1990), 1. This thesis uses the plural form for feminist studies and feminist theologies.

[17]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 16-17. It is important here to note my own social location as a white Western -- albeit Antipodean -- feminist theologian and acknowledge that the main body of this study explores the work of white Western theologians. As such, I acknowledge the comment made by M. Shawn Copeland in her essay 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity' in *Women & Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995) 'A critical Christian feminist theology will never neglect the experience and thought of white feminist theologians, yet such a theology will emerge only in the attentive, humble listening *and* honest speaking -- the collaboration of red, brown, yellow, black, and white women.' 31-32.

social context of biblical traditions.[18] Critical engagement is necessary not only for the liberation of women, but also for the ongoing life and transformation of church and theology.

The 'but also' is important here because feminist scholarship still meets with a certain amount of suspicion and resistance. In contemporary academic and religious institutions, feminist scholarship continues to occupy a marginal - and often ambiguous - position.[19] Many are genuinely encouraged at the new perspectives and possibilities feminist scholarship brings to the understanding of human life. Others tend to be more pragmatic and see it as an unavoidable reflection of the pluralistic nature of contemporary Western culture and religions. There are also those who consider feminist scholarship has nothing valuable to offer serious scholarly debate because it has no academic or theological foundation. However, as feminist studies developed they crossed the more formal boundaries of Western academic disciplines. They are now an important part of all contemporary cultural-intellectual inquiry. Accordingly, their impact is felt in even the more traditionally gender-exclusive areas of biblical and theological studies.[20] Sandra Schneiders claims that, whatever else the feminist movement may be, it is a 'powerful world-wide phenomenon which is deeply affecting all social reality.'[21] So, in light of both the influence and the contribution made by feminist scholarship to the socio-religious life of contemporary Western culture, it would seem somewhat imprudent to disregard it.

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[18]Loades, *Feminist Theology: A Reader,* 1.

[19]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 2-3. In discussing the feminist backlash Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that: 'Feminism has found diverse theoretical articulations and both "feminism" and "feminist theology" still (or again) are considered by many to be "dirty words," associated with ideological bias and heresy. . . . It has again become a liability for scholars and theologians to be called feminists or to identify themselves as advocating feminism, because the term continues to be both contested and shunned as either too political or too ideological.'

[20]Maryanne Confoy, 'Freedom, Entrapment and the Experience of Other' in *Freedom and Entrapment: Women Thinking Theology,* (eds. M. Confoy, D. Lee & J. Nowotny, North Blackburn, Victoria: Dove Publications, 1995), 17-18.

[21]Sandra Schneiders, *Beyond Patching* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 5. and Graham, *Making the Difference,* 2-3.

Two fundamental realities support the inclusion of feminist thought's distinctive and critical contribution into Western Christianity's social and religious institutions. The first concerns the formative relationship between Western culture and biblical religions. The second is related to the essentially public and historical nature of Christian theology itself.

Firstly, the formative relationship between Western culture and biblical religions means that the intellectual and theological traditions of Western society share much common ground when it comes to theories and attitudes about women.[22] Indeed, Marsha Hewitt claims that 'the pejorative images of woman as less-than-human portrayed [by the Western intellectual tradition] bear striking similarity to those unfortunate naturalised attributions imposed on women by Christian theology.'[23] The interdependent nature of this relationship means that just as Western society acknowledges the valid contributions feminist scholarship makes to its history and tradition so, too, must Christian theology. The claim, that because feminist scholarship did not originate within the academic or ecclesial forum and therefore has no legitimate place there, ignores the reality of contemporary life and impoverishes the possibilities of social, political and religious transformation.[24] Accordingly, the social and political implications of feminist thought and vision for Christian theology are vital ones. They cannot be so readily dismissed as merely secular or simply culturally conditioned and, thereby, ignored as theologically irrelevant. Rather, feminist thought is deeply implicated within the religious fabric of Western culture.

The second reason relates to the theological relevance of women's experience. This question concerns the historical and public nature of theology. Schillebeeckx describes Christian theology as the process whereby Christians engage in critical reflection, interpretation and articulation of their faith tradition.[25] This critical reflection and interpretation of the human-divine

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[22]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 35-36.

[23]ibid.

[24]Schneiders, *Beyond Patching,* 5

[25]Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroads, 1991), 47-77.

relationship is not a foregone conclusion but an ongoing process. This means that theology must resist the temptation of being identified with a particular historical time or collapsing into a particular theological method.[26] While theology is deeply imbedded in the social and historical reality of its tradition, it must also strive to remain constantly open and answerable to the Biblical promise and judgement of God. Metz names this openness to the ongoing transformation of our world and its history as the *eschatological proviso* of Christianity. The promise of Christian salvation is not a private or individual concern but a public responsibility that 'cannot be retracted nor dissolved'.[27] Consequently, the kingdom stories -- stories of freedom, justice and well-being for *all* humanity -- continually serve to challenge us to 'a renewed critical relationship to our world.'[28] However, given that the relationship of Christianity to the world has never been simple, it is hardly surprising that a Christian feminist perspective is also somewhat complex and ambiguous.

Marsha Hewitt maintains that one underlying reason the feminist critique is a complex process lies in the complex and multi-layered structure of Western society. Western culture is not ordered along the lines of simple gender discrimination. It operates within a multitude of interconnected axes supported by a series of social, political, economic and religious power relations.[29] Furthermore, the roots of these relationships are often hidden in the ideologies that support many of these oppressive relationships. The structuring of Western society along this hierarchy of relationships has long been considered a natural feature of both Western culture and Western Christianity. As such, it is claimed to be both neutral and value-free.[30] In being unconsciously accepted as the natural and right order of life and reality these relationships are considered

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[26]This 'methodological warning' must, of course, be applied to feminist theologies.

[27]Johannes Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), 113-114.

[28]ibid., 113-115, the emphasis here is mine.

[29]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion*, 15-16.

[30]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'For Women in Men's World: A Critical Feminist Theology of Liberation' in *The Power of Naming,* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 5-7.

beyond critique.[31] So, even when some of these structures are acknowledged as oppressive, the attitudes and principles that inform and support them have essentially become invisible. Consequently, many oppressive attitudes and principles have gone unnoticed and unexamined which means that the connections between them remain operative.[32]

However, since the principal subjects of feminist theologies are women and their experiences, and because women occupy every level of our social structures, feminist theologies move across single barriers like race, class and religion into the multiple levels of a community's social, political and economic locations. In so doing, feminist theologies are inevitably forced to engage the foundational presuppositions of our society.[33] This makes the feminist critique a broad-based foundational project. So, even within the diversity of feminist perspectives, the larger feminist project is still able to engage and critique various relationships of elitism and domination from every socio-economic and religious-political level. Hence feminist theologies both uncover the broader contours of oppressive structures within our religious tradition and illuminate the attitudes and ideologies that have maintained and perpetuated them.[34] Accordingly, feminist contributions to the ongoing life and theology of the Church cannot be seen as an 'interesting' addition but rather as autonomous voices in formal theological discussions that both shape and transform Christian history and tradition.

However, the challenge to include feminist perspectives in the formal theological discussions of the Christian tradition is not altogether straightforward. While the diversity of feminist theologies does not detract from

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[31]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The Silenced Majority Moves into Speech' in *Discipleship of Equals, 262-266.*

[32]Judith Plaskow & Carol Christ 'Introduction' in *Weaving the Visions* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 2. Plaskow and Christ note the complexity of the feminist critique claiming that 'because of the intertwining of . . . oppressions, and also because women are half of every oppressed group, it is impossible to empower women without addressing and eradicating all forms of oppression.'

[33]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 43-44.

[34]ibid., 44.

their foundational capacity, it does make the exploration of feminist theologies themselves more difficult. Feminist theology is not so much a homogenous project as a diverse and somewhat complex phenomenon.[35]

The Contours of Feminist Theologies

The phrase 'feminist theologies' shelters many different positions, reflects a diversity of experiences and takes on a variety of expressions.[36] That many contemporary feminists prefer to use the term thealogy rather than theology to describe their own exploration of a feminist spirituality attests to this diversity. Consequently, to speak of feminist theologies in the singular or as a homogenous project, is to simplify and universalise a movement that is 'as diverse and as complex as the experiences' of humanity itself.[37] In light of this, it would seem all but impossible not to reduce feminist theologies to vague generalities or personal expressions of individual relativism. So, while acknowledging the diversity of feminist perspectives when critically evaluating feminist theologies, it is possible to recognise the 'usefulness of categorisation if it is carefully applied.'[38] Being mindful, then, of

Who am I to speak of holy wisdom
with my headaches and complacencies?
Yet once,
she dropped a locution on my lap.
Once I glimpsed her
between the back and Zellers
without scarves, nimbus, robes, plain really,
but with such a look.
Before that I thought heaven
something outside,
beyond belief,
to be stepped into or not
depending on contingencies.
Now it is what I build with her or not
span by span
across deep space
on the tracks of her treading.
Susan McCaslin
Appendix A.

[35]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'For Women in Men's World' in *The Power of Naming,* 6.

[36]See 'Feminist Theology: A Review of Literature' Edited by E. Johnson & S. Ross, in *Theological Studies:* 56[1995], 327-352. which gives a good overview of feminist diversity.

[37]Plaskow & Christ, *Weaving the Visions,* 1-3.

[38]ibid., 7. Here Plaskow & Christ note that while categories offer one angle on a particular subject 'any particular set of categories will obscure some differences even

the limitations of categorisation, and the many different allegiances of feminist theologies it is important to situate the critical feminist theology of Schüssler Fiorenza by first offering a brief outline of the broader contours and development of Western feminist theologies.

In her article 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity,' M. Shawn Copeland reviews the main stages or shifts in the development of critical feminist theologies of liberation within contemporary socio-religious culture of Western Christianity.[39] In charting the formal beginnings and development of feminist theological studies Copeland remarks that:

> theology as an intellectual practice from a feminist perspective mainly took its bearings from the concerns of the secular white women's movement and from the cultural and social (i.e. political, economic, technological) critiques levelled at the hegemony of the West by the various theologies emerging in the struggle of marginalised and oppressed peoples.[40]

Copeland considers that the contemporary academic exploration of critical feminist theologies of liberation first took shape in response to the broader social movements of liberation that characterised Western cultures and academic institutions during the mid nineteen sixties.[41] She refers to this first phase as the reformist phase. She goes on to maintain that, at this stage, Western feminist theology either disregarded or artificially collapsed the different racial and class positions that existed among women. This meant that, although Western feminist theologies generally 'sought to include women as full participants in social and ecclesial life and in the practice of theology,' in effect

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as it illuminates others' that might be equally important and fruitful.'

[39]M. Shawn Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity' in *Women and Theology* (eds. Mary Ann Hinsdale & Phyllis H. Kaminski, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), I am using Copeland's discussion here on account of its clarity and brevity. However, a similar trajectory of development can be found, among other places, in Marian Ronan's article 'Reclaiming Women's experience: A reading of selected Christian Feminist Theologies' in *Cross Currents:* Vol. 48, No.2 Summer 1998. 218-229 and also Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 1-49 where Schüssler Fiorenza gives an overview of the general development of Western feminist studies in religion through an exploration of her own developing position.

[40]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity', 6.

[41]ibid.

they still 'lived and thought and moved and grew within [the white feminist] horizon of unquestioned privilege.'[42] Consequently, neither personal prejudices nor public institutional biases were effectively able to be acknowledged or engaged. Copeland considers that one notable indication of this non engagement was reflected in the lack of connection between the rhetoric of feminist inclusivity and the reality of inclusive feminist praxis.[43]

The second stage in this development was marked by a great assortment of academic topics and included a wide diversity of theoretical explorations. However, there was still little or no effective engagement of 'the distinctive voices of red, brown, yellow and black women.'[44] Copeland maintains that, while Western feminist theologians were intellectually rigorous in engaging the roots of patriarchy -- with a view to displacing its ideological foundations -- they still did not include an acknowledgment of the different place of women of colour or the various relations between them. This meant that the experiences of marginalised women -- as well as the related difficulties of the socio-economic conditions of their lives -- were not really brought into critical focus or concretely engaged. Consequently, while feminist theologies did employ the 'rhetoric of liberation,' they still did not critically engage with or reflect on their own internal 'sources, traditions, commitments, and horizon.'[45] This lack of internal critical reflection meant that the concrete relationship between feminist rhetoric and feminist action was still not adequately explored.

In phase three the complex and incommensurable diversity of feminist theologies was acknowledged. Understanding patriarchy -- particularly where patriarchy is defined in terms of 'all men dominate all women equally' -- as the

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[42]ibid., 7.

[43]ibid., 7-8. Copeland notes that even though public mainstream white feminist theologies did not engage in the different concrete problems that faced women of colour, 'red, brown, yellow and black women were never silent.' Women of colour were themselves also engaging in the critique, analysis, discussion, reflection, identification and evaluation of the different expressions of their exploitation in the social, economic, political, domestic, educational realm of life and so were building up their own reflections and literature and experience.

[44]ibid., 9

[45]ibid., 8.

sole foundation of women's oppression and marginalisation was critically engaged. Patriarchy, more rightly defined, reflected a myriad of interlocking and graded relationships of power and privilege.[46] This understanding advanced women's liberation from the 'nexus of white patriarchy and white racist imperialist discourse' and feminist theologies began to take notice of the 'previously overlooked and critical differences in relations among women and among the men who oppress women.'[47] While this still didnot 'compass the cultural complexity and fulsome realities of the lived lives of red, brown, yellow and black women,' this position sought to explore a space where the voices of indigenous communities could be heard.[48] Here, the possibility of developing a real concrete relationship between rhetoric and praxis began to emerge.

The next stage in the development of critical Western feminist theologies requires a commitment to build on the previous stages' 'vision for a critical feminist theology of liberation.' It needs to join with the diverse, practical experiences and critical reflections of marginalised feminist theologians within indigenous communities: womanist and *mujerista* theologians; African and Asian feminists; Asian American and Latin American feminists. Such a project must be 'counter-coherent'[49] so as to stand with and engage:

> the victims of history . . . as necessary partners in mutual liberation . . . situate normative control of meaning and value in the cognitive, moral, and religious authenticity of what previously had been despised, ignored, even hated identities and realities -- the identities and realities of red, brown, yellow, and black women.[50]

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[46]As representative of this stage, Schüssler Fiorenza's definition of patriarchy is useful. Schüssler Fiorenza claims that patriarchy is often 'defined in terms sexism and gender dualism or is used as an undefined label. I have renamed patriarchy as *kyriarchy,* that is "the rule of the father/lord/master/husband"' that engenders 'elite male defined relationships of ruling.' See Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Introduction' in *The Power of Naming,* xi.

[47]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity', 9.

[48]ibid., 9-10.

[49]Mieke Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 4-7. Bal uses 'counter-coherent' readings to legitimate a different foundation -- i.e. a new coherence -- as a basis for interpretation.

[50]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity', 10-11.

In light of this brief overview of the development of Western Feminist theologies, there emerge three particular considerations that direct the understanding and engagement of the feminist perspective that underlines this thesis.

Firstly, while not denying the validity -- or even at times the necessity -- of constructing a 'sacred place' for women outside the traditional religious structures of Western Christianity, this thesis affirms the place and presence of women within the biblical traditions. Western women do in fact 'belong' to the religious tradition of Western Christianity and have played a formative -- albeit unacknowledged -- role in the construction, transmission and transformation of this tradition.[51] Judith Plaskow claims it is neither desirable nor in fact possible to attend to the present or to build a new and transformed future in total discontinuity with the past.[52] This means that acknowledgment of, and access to past and present, are essential for the movement towards a transformed future. In other words, transformation of a people's history and tradition must come from within that history and tradition. To attempt such a transformation from outside necessitates rejecting much of a people's history -- and therefore rejecting much of their identity.[53] If feminist theologies reject their religious tradition as 'totally oppressive and neglect it as a positive source of empowerment and hope in creating a better future' for women then they are ultimately relinquishing their tradition 'to the ownership claims of reactionary, right winged fundamentalism.'[54]

The second consideration concerns the right of women to claim their own historical agency. In order to affirm their belonging and connection to their own religious tradition and for that connection to be a transformative one, this thesis maintains it is necessary to critically engage both *past* and *present* realities of

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[51]Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* (trans. Joel Weinsheimer, 2nd edition, New York: Crossroads, 1992), 293-296.

[52]Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 28-29.

[53]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 27-28.

[54]ibid., 27.

Western Biblical traditions. In so doing, Western feminist theologies claim as their rightful heritage the intellectual and cultural roots of Western philosophy and theology. 'Of course we were present at Sinai, or the Last Supper, how is it that the tradition implies we were not?'[55] This experience of connection and belonging means that feminist theologies claim the right to bring their religious traditions into critical dialogue with the social, political and religious implications of contemporary questions and concerns.[56] For in spite of women's alienation from their tradition, and regardless of their oppression within the history of religious institutions, women have played important roles in the construction, maintenance and transmission of the Western biblical religions.

The third understanding that directs this thesis is that of women's experience. Feminist theologies take as their starting point the concrete historical reality of women's lives and relationships. This accent on the concrete and historical means that critical feminist theologies strive to focus attention on women's experience of oppression as this impacts on their specific historical contexts and affects their particular concrete situations.[57] Feminist studies acknowledges the historically conditioned, pluralistic and ambiguous reality of our contemporary situation and, therefore, requires an engagement that demands both commitment and risk. This acknowledgment gives the feminist focus a particular strength. It reflects what David Tracy refers to as the 'intensification of the particular' where, through the particular, 'some recognition of an essential aspect of our existence' is revealed.[58] This intensification of the

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[55]Plaskow, 'Jewish Memory from a Feminist Perspective' in *Weaving the Visions,* 40

[56]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 28. In spite of their radical critique of Western culture and social institutions, neither critical feminist theology nor the early Frankfurt Theorists 'take the step to a complete rejection' of these socio-cultural institutions.

[57]ibid., 16-17.

[58]Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination:* 125-126. Here Tracy claims that: 'The moment named "intensification" is, in fact, fundamentally a moment of experience and understanding.' So even though you must wager and risk, 'at the end of the process comes the understanding that *is* recognised as a belonging to, a participation in and a distancing from the same essential aspect of the whole, now experienced as disclosure and concealment.' In this moment Tracy claims that a 'person gives oneself over to, is caught up in, the most serious game of all . . . the game of "the truth of existence".' 126.

particular serves to maintain the creative tension which acknowledges the specific historical context of critical feminist theologies while still preserving their foundational status.

To engage the relationships between: *memory* and *history; narrative* and those of *language;* and *solidarity* and *community* this thesis uses the feminist theological hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in conversation with the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. While the struggle to articulate a critical feminist perspective within the development of Western Christianity has been guided by the work of many feminist scholars, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is one of the most influential. Schüssler Fiorenza locates herself within the biblical tradition of Catholic Christianity. She considers that this biblical tradition has been charged with the primary prophetic task of mediating God's promise of radical freedom, justice and wholeness to *all* humanity.[59] As a result of her insightful critical theological engagement with her tradition, Schüssler Fiorenza has developed 'a critical feminist theology of liberation which is indebted to historical-critical, critical-political and liberation-theological analyses.'[60]

The Critical Feminist Theology of Liberation of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

The critical feminist theology of liberation of Schüssler Fiorenza strives to 'make possible a critical mode of thought, a radical democratic politics, and a committed solidarity in the struggles for economic justice and global well-being."[61] With other critical theologies, Schüssler Fiorenza claims that the redemptive promise of God must first be directed towards the victims of history and tradition. Again, with other critical theologies, she insists that the prime activity of a truly emancipatory theology must critique the different socio-

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[59]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'For Women in Men's World' in *The Power of Naming,* 11.

[60]ibid., 6

[61]ibid., 8.

economic and religious-political structures that have disenfranchised and marginalised these victims. However, in committing to a specific focus, Schüssler Fiorenza seeks to be more historically concrete and identifies these victims. In so doing, Schüssler Fiorenza highlights that the oppressive socio-economic, religious-political structures of Western culture are multiple and interconnected and the vast majority of the poor, needy, disenfranchised and despised people who live at the bottom of these structures are, in fact, women and the children dependent on them for survival.[62]

In light of her focus on the historical concrete situations of women Schüssler Fiorenza is committed to a critical public-political engagement between faith, life and culture.[63] As a critical theologian, Schüssler Fiorenza has a fundamental interest in social justice and seeks to critically examine the social and historical contexts in which the Christian narratives of salvation are proclaimed. As a feminist theologian, she has a primary commitment to the well-being of women and strives to systematically explore, articulate and re-member the historical experience and religious agency of women. As a liberation theologian, she has a desire to see the Christian tradition facilitate authentic solidarity by nurturing and sustaining the full freedom and wholeness of all human persons. As a critical feminist theologian of liberation, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that justice will not be done and humanity will not be whole until 'the most dehumanised, exploited, and poorest women on earth are free.'[64] So, until the memories, stories and dignity of these women are affirmed, Schüssler Fiorenza claims the relationships that marginalise and oppress

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[62]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology,*(London: SCM Press, 1994), 14. Because 'not all men dominate and exploit all women without difference . . . a critical feminist theology of liberation must be determined by the interests of women who live at the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid struggling against multiplicative forms of oppression.'

[63]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 1-21.

[64]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Patriarchal Structures and the Discipleship of Equals' in *Discipleship of Equals,* 231. This phrase is adapted from the manifesto of the 'redstockings' which was part of the 'second wave' American feminist-womanist movement and included women like Gloria Steinem in their number. It is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it discloses the presence -- and importance -- of the feminist intellectual heritage of Schüssler Fiorenza's work. Secondly, it works as a critical-rhetorical device in Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist hermeneutics.

people will continue to effect -- and infect -- the reality of the Christian tradition. In other words, until the Christian tradition radically commits itself to the liberation of the most dehumanised, exploited, and poorest women on earth, it fails in its prophetic task of mediating God's promise of freedom, justice and wholeness.[65]

This radical focus on women does not reflect a simple gender dualism. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that to say 'all men dominate all women without difference' is naive and simplistic since it remains blind to the complex reality of contemporary life.[66] She considers that such a perspective runs the risk of reinforcing oppressive dualistic divisions of traditional Western culture. This serves to encourage a dangerous gender essentialism that, in the long run, can be used to deny women's historical agency and moral responsibility.[67]

Gender dualism gives rise to the notion of the 'white lady' -- which is underpinned by gender essentialism. This notion supports a belief in women's 'moral innocence' and serves to promote the idea of women's inherent moral superiority.[68] In turn, all these positions can be used to argue for a 'natural essence' of femininity. Here, various attributes are seen as being essentially feminine. This leads to a re-inscription of the same oppressive attitudes against which the feminist critique struggles. In other words, essentialism deals with difference in the same way patriarchy does, and that is, at the level of binary opposites. Essentialism abstracts women from their social and political context

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[65]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'For Women in Men's World', in *The Power of Naming,* 11. Quoting feminist poet/activist Renny Golden who articulates the interdependent nature of our freedom "Our freedom is your only way out. On the underground railroad you can ride with us or you become the jailer."

[66]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child; Sophia's Prophet,* 13-17.

[67]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 5-6. & 41-49. For further exploration of Schüssler Fiorenza's anti-essentialist stance see: Luce Irigaray 'Equal to Whom?' (trans. R Mazzola, *Critique* 43/480, May 1987); Morny Joy 'Equality or Divinity -- A False Dichotomy?' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* Vol.6 No.1, Spring, 1990. For discussion on the general problem of feminine essentialism see E. Grosz, 'Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism' in *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct* (edited by Sneja Gunew, New York: Routledge, 1990) and Linda Alcoff, 'Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The identity Crisis in Feminist Theory' in *Signs: Journal of Women In Culture and Society,* Vol. 13. No.31 1988.

[68]Kwok Pui-Lan, 'The Image of the "White Lady": Gender and Race in Christian Mission' in *The Power of Naming*, 250-255.

making it a basically a-historical and closed concept. However, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that the complex gendered relationships of Western society are not that simple. Rather than presuming a simply androcentric structure, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that the social construction of Western culture is in fact more rightly understood as *kyriarchal.* She claims that:

> 'Kyriarchy connotes a social-political system of domination and subordination that is based on the power and the rule of the lord/ master/father. . . . Whereas much of white feminist thought still locates the roots of misogyny and patriarchal oppression in gender dualism I . . . argue that it is kyriocentric symbolic gender constructions that shape and legitimate the socio-political kyriarchal system of oppression which *in turn* produce such ideological constructions.'[69]

Kyriarachal power relations are located at the juncture of racial, economic, social and sexual politics and produce a complex pyramid of relationships. The threads of exploitation and privilege that keep this structure together are woven within as well as between various levels and are visible along intersecting lines of class, gender, ethnicity, race, age, sexuality. Schüssler Fiorenza claims this is the reality that supports the socio-historical structures of Western culture and therefore of Western Christianity.[70] Kyriarchy gives rise to a complex hierarchy of relationships of domination and submission that are based not only on gender, but also on race, class, wealth, and education.

To understand the structure of Western culture as kyriarchal illuminates the inter-connectedness of oppressive relationships. It critiques the concept of the 'White Lady' and highlights the fact that women participate in -- and are therefore culpable for -- the oppression of both women and men from different racial, ethnic, and economic classes.[71] Because 'elite Western educated propertied Euro-American' men have 'benefited from women's and other "non-persons'" exploitation' the feminist critique must be 'constituted and determined

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[69]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 190.

[70]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Should Women Aim for Ordination to the Lowest Rung?' in *Discipleship of Equals,* 28.

[71]Anne Pattel-Gray, 'Not Yet Tiddas: An Aboriginal womanist critique of Australian Church feminism' in *Freedom and Entrapment: Women Thinking Theology,* 57. Here, Pattel-Gray explores this kyriarchal structure of relationships from her own experience as a Aboriginal women living in a white Australian colonial Christian society.

by the interests of women who live at the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid' and struggle against multiplicative forms of oppression.[72] Regardless of the movement within and between these levels, at the bottom of every rung of this pyramid you will find a woman; and at the bottom of the pyramid itself lies the woman Schüssler Fiorenza refers to as the poorest most despised woman on earth.[73] It is to this woman that the biblical traditions have been given the task of mediating God's promise of freedom, justice and well-being.

Consequently, Schüssler Fiorenza claims that the theological authenticity of biblical traditions cannot rest on a revealed principle or special canon of texts, but in 'the experience of women struggling for liberation and wholeness.'[74] A critical feminist perspective challenges traditional religious frameworks to operate as a more completely human -- rather than a white male -- expression of our relationship with each other and the Divine.[75] This helps to reclaim and transform traditional biblical myths and symbols and so retrieves women's experience and restores women's religious agency. To acknowledge women's religious experience and to reclaim women's religious agency highlights the reality that women -- as well as men -- have been active historical agents in both the formation and the transmission of their tradition. So while this position acknowledges the alienation and exclusion of women's agency and experience from the 'funding of our sacred stories,' it also claims this tradition as the legitimate heritage of women because 'our heritage is our power.'[76]

The struggle to articulate -- and so make present -- new, liberating and more authentically human ways of being in relationship with each other, our tradition, our world and ultimately our God, is a central aspect of Elisabeth

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[72]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 14

[73]ibid., 4-18.

[74]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* xvi.

[75]Plaskow & Christ, *Weaving the Visions*, 7.

[76]ibid., 17. Here, Plaskow and Christ note that even the question of 'what heritage is actually *ours*' is a difficult one to respond to precisely, for owing to the diversity of women's social, cultural and religious experiences different feminist will view the heritage of the Western tradition quite differently.

Schüssler Fiorenza's theological hermeneutics.[77] She considers that a critical feminist theology of liberation is crucial to this task because the commitment to 'articulating the suffering of others while trying to account for the conditions and the structures that produce that suffering' cannot be realised by a kyriarchal church.[78] Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza considers that the Christian church needs to understand itself in terms of a democratic egalitarian community. This democratic egalitarian community is more properly understood as an *ekklēsia* of women that is called to embody kingdom -- or *basileia* -- of God relationships. These two key symbols serve to break open the complex *kyriarchal* relationships of authority and power that underpin Western history and tradition. This gives contemporary Western women -- and other non-persons -- the chance to be recognised as historical agents in the formation, transmission and transformation of their own religious tradition. Schüssler Fiorenza understands the *ekklēsia* of women as being underpinned by:

> A critical feminist hermeneutic of liberation . . . articulates . . . a different theo-ethical vision and religious imagination which can inspire a new wo/men's movement for liberation. . . . Such a critical feminist theology, I suggest, in the interest of wo/men suffering from multiple oppressions, seeks to restore the world's full spiritual vision, correct the fragmentary circle of Christian vision, and change the narrow and biased perception of the world and of G*d.[79]

In light of the significant influence that the biblical tradition has had on the structure and organisation of Western culture and society, and given the deeply imbedded and complex relationships of oppression that have developed around

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[77]Mary Catherine Hilkert, 'Experience and Tradition - Can the Centre Hold' in *Freeing Theology*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993), 67.

[78]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* xi.

[79]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 26-27. Her use of the words *wo/men* and *G*d* is discussed in her article 'Introduction: Feminist Liberation Theology as Critical Sophialogy' in *The Power of Naming*, xxxv-xxxvi. Here Schüssler Fiorenza notes she spells women '*wo/men* in order to destabilise the essentialist notions of women and indicate that from the perspective and positionality of wo/men who are multiply oppressed, the term is also inclusive of disenfranchised men.' In regards to the spelling of God Schüssler Fiorenza has changed from using the more orthodox Jewish writing of 'G-d' to that of '*G*d*' in order to indicate 'the brokenness and inadequacy of human language to name the Divine.' By using G*d,Schüssler Fiorenza 'seeks to avoid the conservative malestream association which the writing of G-d has for Jewish feminists.'

them, a critical engagement with the Christian tradition -- and the texts and symbols that support it -- is not simple. It involves both the de-construction and the re-construction of the symbols, myths and relationships from a feminist perspective. Schüssler Fiorenza considers that this process is an essential one. It is essential not only for Christian women and men, but also for all contemporary Western women and men. Accordingly, regardless of any particular commitment to the dogmas or doctrines of Western Christianity, no Western community can afford to ignore Christianity's sphere of influence or formative power.

The Categories of Memory and History, Narrative and Language, Solidarity and Community

Having explored the context and contours of feminist theologies, and the main concerns of the theological hermeneutics of Schüssler Fiorenza, it is well to return to the central theme of the categories with which this thesis is concerned and to briefly survey their relationship with political and feminist theologies. While political theology does clearly stress the critical and liberative power of Christian memory, narrative and solidarity, I consider that it has not fully engaged the wider implications of these categories for a critical Western theology. Furthermore, without this full engagement, the liberative potential of memory, narrative and solidarity cannot be completely utilised. When these categories are engaged from a feminist perspective, they reveal a connection to three of the broader and even more radical conceptual frameworks within which human interpretation and understanding occur: *history, language* and *community*.

The relationships between history and memory, language and narrative, community and solidarity are interdependent. They serve to mutually define and limit each other. In other words, the framework in which a tradition's history, language and community is understood will effectively direct and control both the understanding and function of the memory, narrative and solidarity within

that particular tradition. The way a tradition understands and interprets its history regulates and controls the availability and usable content of its memory. The same relationship of interdependence can be seen in the relationship between language and narrative. The particular linguistic symbols chosen to engage and retell the formative stories and myths of a culture or society essentially influence the construction of that culture's identity. Similarly, the structure and value given by a society to the notion and function of community will serve to legitimate or marginalise the solidarity of different social groups.

Hence, in order to explore the transformative potential of the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity, it is necessary to examine the relationships between: history and memory, language and narrative, community and solidarity. The relationship between these triads is a relationship of both critical tension and mutual illumination. When this relationship is acknowledged, the interpretive framework or particular perspective within which each category is understood becomes vitally important. In light of these relationships, a feminist perspective reveals the need to explore three fundamental concerns. First, when critical feminist theologies explore the category of Christian memory, serious questions concerning the accepted interpretation of our history and tradition are raised. If the power of Christian women's memory is to be genuinely retrieved, then any objective and value-free interpretation of history must be systematically examined and then critically assessed. Second, within a feminist discussion of narrative, there emerges the need for a critical assessment of the nature and function of language. This means that if the narratives or stories of Christian women's agency are to be authentically retold, then the formative power of language really needs to be acknowledged and creatively explored. Finally, in the practice of Christian solidarity, the need to examine and understand exactly what constitutes Christian community cannot be ignored. Accordingly, if the need for Christian solidarity is to be truly affirmed, the present understanding of Christian community needs to be broken open and forged anew.

In briefly outlining the context and the contours of Western Feminist theologies, Chapter One has highlighted some key concerns of the feminist theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Chapter two continues this

exploration. It examines the relationship between feminist theologies and political theologies and explores their common heritage. This serves to develop the context of both political and feminist theologies and so provides a foundation for a comparison of their approaches in terms of the two triads of categories. Accordingly, Chapter Two briefly sketches the historical and philosophical background of the Critical Theory that informs these theologies and explores the basic movement of memory, narrative and solidarity from the philosophy of the Frankfurt Theorists to the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz.

CHAPTER TWO

The Emergence of CRITICAL THEOLOGIES

As previously stated, this thesis explores the transformative potential of the categories of *memory, narrative*, and *solidarity* by way of a feminist engagement with the broader concepts of *history*, *language* and *community*. These categories are examined in the theology of Johannes Baptist Metz and then engaged with the critical feminist theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Chapter one briefly outlined the main concerns of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's critical feminist theology of liberation and situated her within the contours of Western feminist theologies. Chapter two continues this exploration by examining the foundations of critical Western feminist theologies from the perspective of their relationship to other theologies of social critique -- notably Western political theology and in particular that of Johannes Baptist Metz.

Accordingly, this chapter traces the common historical background of the critical philosophical thought that informs the critical theologies of Johannes Baptist Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza.[1] From within the socio-historical background of Western philosophy this chapter briefly explores the philosophical foundations of the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity. While the relationship between Metz's political theology and Schüssler

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[1]As a feminist liberation theologian Schüssler Fiorenza asks the liberation question of 'what kind of God?' rather than the Metz' political question 'can we believe in God?' However, a conversation between these theologians is fruitful as in coming from similar socio-cultural and philosophical traditions they bring the common and the different together. See Francis Fiorenza, 'Political Theology and Liberation Theology: an inquiry into their fundamental meaning, in *Liberation, Revolution, Freedom*, 5. Fiorenza notes North American theology needs both Political and Liberation theologies. Political theology to 'overcome the relegation of faith to the private sphere by elaborating a new hermeneutic' of theory and praxis. And Liberation theology to explore the meaning of sacred symbols and the action of the Church in supporting the status quo. Schüssler Fiorenza also draws on feminist sources that political theology does not engage. These sources are part of the socio-religious and philosophical history -- albeit a hidden history -- of Western culture.

Fiorenza's feminist theology is commonly situated, it is by no means one of simple identity. Although feminist theologies share an intellectual and theological heritage with political theologies, they have a radically different focus. This difference can be expressed in terms of the *specific* commitment she makes to explore the 'vulnerability' of women.[2]

In *Making the Difference,* Elaine Graham claims that the emergence of feminist theologies is perhaps 'one of the most significant phenomena that has occurred within the Western church over the last twenty-five years'.[3] Regardless then, of any particular personal response -- either positive or negative -- it would be difficult to deny that the presence of feminist theology has profoundly challenged the traditional Western Christian interpretation of contemporary human life. In turn, this feminist challenge has not only impacted on how we relate to and understand each other and our world, but also significantly influenced how we understand and articulate our relationship with God. This makes engagement with feminist theologies not just a personal enterprise or a marginal activity, but a vital and necessary task for the ongoing life and development of Western Christianity.[4]

In light of the significance of the feminist critique neither the worshipping community nor the academic tradition of the Western church can remain untouched by its challenges or unaffected by its influence. In order to evaluate the contribution that a critical feminist perspective makes to Western theology, it is useful to briefly explore its philosophical, historical and theological heritage. Such an exploration serves to illuminate the main concerns of feminist theologies. It also enables attributes and characteristics that both relate it to,

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[2]Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 87. Lerner claims that the enslavement of women by men is always prior to the enslavement of men by other men. The 'vulnerability of women' crosses class barriers so is a *fundamental* problem within the socio-political reality of Western society. [emphasis mine]

[3]Graham, *Making The Difference,* 2. As noted briefly in Chapter One when referring to a feminist theological perspective, I will use *theologies* rather than theology to indicate the plurality of positions that fall under the feminist umbrella. See Schüssler Fiorenza in the forward address of *Freedom and Entrapment:* x-xi.

[4]Anne E. Carr, 'The New Vision of Feminist Theology' in *Freeing Theology* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), 11-12.

and yet distinguish it from, other Western philosophies and theologies to be more clearly outlined. Accordingly, this chapter positions critical feminist theologies within the broader spectrum of contemporary Western history and culture in general and Western Christian theology in particular.

Broadly speaking, Western feminist theology is considered to be a critical theology. It is called a *critical* theology because it *critically* engages with the social and historical contexts within which the Christian gospel is proclaimed. One way of effectively exploring critical feminist theologies and assessing their philosophical and historical development is to bring them into dialogue with another theology that also critically engages the social and historical context of the Western Christian tradition. The theology best suited to this task is political theology. Part of the reason these two theologies are situated together without including a specific consideration of other critical theologies -- like the liberation theologies of South America -- concerns both their historical/ geographical context and their common focus on meaning.[5] Matthew Lamb claims that, political theology is concerned with 'the dialectical question of relating the meanings and values of faith to personal and social transformation . . . in Western post-Enlightenment cultures.'[6] Feminist theology is likewise concerned with the dialectical questions of Christian faith and social transformation. Accordingly, feminist theologies consider that a critical engagement with this post-Enlightenment culture is a necessary aspect of the feminist project.

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[5]Liberation theology can also be refered to as a theology of social critique for it too is underpinned by the Critical Theory that emerged from the Frankfurt School of Social Criticism. Accordingly, liberation theology clearly employs a methodology of social critique and seeks to explore the particular socio-historical contexts in which the gospel is proclaimed. Although Schüssler Fiorenza's theology is reffered to as a 'liberation theology' it is essentially a European feminist theology of liberation. Therefore, it needs to be noted that in dealing with the contemporary Western interpretation of traditional theology this thesis will not include an examination of the liberation theology that specifically responds to the particular conditions of the social, political, historical and economic context of South America. See Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Political Theology and Liberation Theology' in *Liberation, Revolution, Freedom,* 5-22.

[6]Matthew Lamb, 'Political Theology' in *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), 773.

The historical and philosophical foundations of political and feminist theologies lie within the broader setting of contemporary Western history and culture.[7] Elaine Graham notes this has been a fairly ambiguous relationship.

> Although the elevation of scientific reason in the West has been equated with the subordination and oppression of women, the philosophical and political movements associated with the Enlightenment and the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century also provided an important vocabulary of humanism and civil rights. . . . Thus in both philosophical and material terms, the development of modern society carried the seeds both of women's objectification and of their of emancipation.[8]

In order to engage and interpret these theologies appropriately, it is helpful to review their common roots through a brief history of ideas. Accordingly, this chapter presents an overview of the intellectual roots and historical context of the critical theories and social philosophies that underpin critical theologies. By exploring the ideas and concepts that have provided the foundations for these theologies, it is possible to highlight their main concerns and so reveal their common intellectual heritage. It is also helpful to consider the historical conditions that have served to shape the development of these critical social philosophies. This further defines the main concerns of these critical theologies by locating them within their particular social and cultural contexts. In light of this exploration, it is evident that the methodology and tools of research employed by critical theologies are significantly different to those employed by the traditional scholastic theologies of the Western Christian tradition. Indeed Matthew Lamb maintains that theologies of social critique:

> seek creative and critical collaboration which will, hopefully, succeed in eventually dismantling those dichotomies . . . between fact and value, between intelligence and morality, between reason and faith . . . not by collapsing one into the other, but by indicating how they functionally interact both cognitively and practically. . . . It is a search for an integrating wisdom capable of being practised cooperatively in reversing dehumanising justices.[9]

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[7]Andre Dumas, *Political Theology and the life of the Church* (trans. John Bowden, London: SCM Press, 1978), 2-7.

[8]Graham, *Making the Difference,* 15.

[9]Lamb, 'Political Theology' in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 778.

These differences in focus and methodology are quite foundational.[10] Theologies of social critique seek to be consciously aware of the manner in which the reception and interpretation of divine disclosure are historically conditioned. This 'historical' awareness makes these theologies self-consciously interdisciplinary. As such, political and feminist theologies utilise and apply *secular* tools of research.[11] So, even though traditional theologies reflected on the socio-historical conditions of their time, that reflection was not considered an essential part of their theological process. In other words, biblical religions have always responded to the prophetic call to theologically engage different social conditions. However, they have usually done so under their own terms and within their own intellectual and religious boundaries.[12] To explore the interpretation of traditional 'articles of faith' through the critical light of secular social philosophies is somewhat unusual. Particularly when many of the foundational aims of the critical social philosophies had originally been focused on discrediting the truth claims of the dominant religious systems and debunking the positions of power held by the religious institutions of Western Culture.

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[10]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 2-5. In relation to feminist theologies, Hewitt claims if they are to continue their comprehensive 'social and political critique, they must recognise that specifically *theological* resources are exhausted in terms of the potential they held for the full emancipation of women.'

[11]Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York Seabury Press, 1980), 8-11. Not withstanding the emphasis *Gaudium et Spes* placed on the need to recognise the mutual and essential relationship between the Church and the world, Metz maintains that 'the field in which [this practical fundamental theology] proves its value' lies outside previously conceived theological system. 'It is, as it were, defined by the social and historical situation with all its painful contradictions.'

[12]Alistair Kee, 'Introduction' in *A Reader in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1974), ix. Twentieth century Catholic theology has tended to define itself against the popular historical consciousness. Atheism and the secularisation of Western society eroded the authority of the Church to definitively interpret human life. In spite of the acceptance of Rahner's neo-Kantian categories, the Church was nervous of critical secular methodologies and was not open to a critical assessment by external and often explicitly antagonistic systems. In contemporary times this nervousness was reflected in the official response to the methodologies of South America's Liberation theologies, when the Vatican reminded theologians that the 'atheistic ideology' of Marxism was not a suitable tool with which to explore the tenets of Christian faith. See, '*Instructions on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* (Boston: St Paul Books & Media ,1984.)

It is generally accepted that the philosophical bases that underpin the different theologies of social critique have grown out of the insights of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research.[13] This group of mainly German-Jewish scholars came from a wide range of academic backgrounds and were influenced by a wide range of critical thinkers, particularly Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Freud. However, regardless of their particular academic interests, the members of the Frankfurt school were primarily concerned with exploring a 'true' or a 'pure' Marxism. In line with a truly critical-Marxist understanding of society, their principal aim was not to interpret the world, but to change it.[14] Accordingly, these thinkers were not concerned with an abstract theoretical description of Western culture. Rather, they considered the only constructive way of bringing about authentic social change was to reformulate Marx's social or moral philosophy into a programme of social and political critique. As the historical reality of human life and society is pre-eminently practical, then only a practical political critique would serve to transform it.[15] In other words, these scholars engaged the social reality of Western culture by way of the insights of Marx's social and political theories.

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[13]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 1-4. Hewitt maintains that some of the major thinkers working in the area of feminist theologies are heirs to the development of some of Critical Theory's most important themes. So even though many feminists have accused Marxism as being 'incapable of adequately addressing the specific nature of women's subjugation', and many Western feminist scholars have claimed that Critical Theory tends to reproduce many of the 'sexist moments' of Western thought she maintains that feminist theology can no longer ignore the fact that a 'remarkable degree of political and theoretical affinity exists between them and needs to be brought out.' 1-2. See also Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 32-48.

[14]Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach,' in *Early Writings* (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), 423. Towards the end of this essay, Marx emphasises the essentially practical nature of all social life and concludes the theses with the comment that 'Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.' Here, the insistence on understanding the relationship between theory and praxis as a practical and critical one serves to reflect Marx's conviction that Western philosophy in general was too abstract in its assessment of the historical reality of human life and society and this theoretical abstraction prevented the critical impulse needed for the practical transformation of Western culture. This, now famous phrase, was eventually engraved on Marx's tombstone in Highgate Cemetery.

[15]Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1973), 3-4. This 'searching re-examination of the very foundations of Marxist theory' had the dual hope of explaining past errors and preparing for future action.

They sought to engage the intellectual bases of the social sciences of their time in a dialogue that was essentially *transformative* rather than merely explanatory. To do this effectively, these scholars claimed that it was imperative to systematically analyse the practical-historical relationship between the human person and the history and tradition of Western culture. Basically, the Frankfurt School attempted a critical-historical engagement with the dominant intellectual traditions of Western Europe.

The Philosophical Heritage

Academically, critical Western theologies are heirs to the intellectual tradition of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. This institute developed a critical philosophy generally known as Critical Theory.[16] One of the distinctive hallmarks of this shared intellectual heritage is the prominent place given to the practical engagement with the social reality of contemporary historical existence. The second significant link that can be found between Critical Theory and critical theologies is their shared commitment to nourish a more authentically human life by supporting the practical historical struggle for social transformation. This emphasis on practical critical engagement stands in contrast to the more theoretical or academically speculative methodologies that have been commonly employed by the established institutions of Western culture.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
and the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow

T.S. Eliot
Appendix B.

[16]For further exploration of some of the specific points of contact between critical Western theologies and The Frankfurt Theorists see Hewitt, *A Critical Theory of Religion,* 1-36.

In light of this particular critical and concrete focus, political and feminist theologies are systematically critical in their approach to history and culture. They engage in a critical theological examination of the social and historical context of culture and religion as a means of transformation. The emphasis these theologies place on the need for a critical and systematic examination of the context of Western culture means that the relationship between theory and practice is highly significant. It is a relationship that is understood as a commitment to 'concrete changes' in situations that will 'contribute to emancipation on all levels of experience.'[17] When this is coupled with an insistence on the importance of a practically grounded critique of Western Christianity's history and tradition, it reflects a concern with 'dialectical' relationships that can be traced back to the social philosophy of Karl Marx. There is here a direct link between political-and-feminist theologies and some of the foundational aspects of Critical Theory. These attitudes strive to expose and critique the ways in which the Western Christian tradition has functioned to marginalise, silence and alienate the various 'non-persons' of Western culture and society.

The term 'Critical Theory' is a difficult one to define. It is not an all encompassing intellectual theory, nor does it claim to be a self-contained philosophical system.[18] Indeed, the Frankfurt Theorists came from a variety of intellectual and academic backgrounds. However, through shared Marxist roots they had a commitment towards social emancipation expressed in the desire to 'empower real human beings in their struggle for a better life.'[19] To this end, these scholars maintained that the critical exploration of Europe's changing historical conditions required the use of evolving analytical processes. They

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[17]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 5.

[18]Paul Piccone, 'General Introduction' in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), xiv-xv. Piccone notes that 'to speak of "Critical Theory: as a systematically elaborated account of social reality is possible only at a distance from the subject that tends to blur all significant differences existing among the various members of the Frankfurt School. In fact close examination reveals that there are at best only critical *theorists* confronting a common problematic within more or less the same cultural tradition.'

[19]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 13.

believed that to adequately critique contemporary situations of oppression, the systems and processes that examined them must be flexible, fluid and self-critical. Consequently, the most consistent principle of Critical Theory was its insistence on using analytical processes that were themselves both open to change and self-critical.[20] As Martin Jay notes that at:

> the very heart of Critical Theory was an aversion to closed philosophical systems. To present it as such would distort its essentially open-ended, probing, unfinished quality. . . . Critical Theory, as its name implies, was expressed through a series of critiques of other thinkers and philosophical traditions. Its development was through dialogue, its genesis as dialectical as the method it purported to apply to social phenomena. Only by confronting it in its own terms, as a gadfly of other systems, can it be fully understood.[21]

In an effort to keep their work open to new directions -- and in line with Nietzsche's insistence that 'the will to a system is a lack of integrity' -- Critical Theory refused to codify or systematise its programme.[22] This openness to new directions did not reflect an absence of roots nor did it indicate a lack of commitment. Rather, it was a way whereby these scholars could maintain an effective critical focus by way of rejecting any sort of dominating or hegemonic frameworks.[23] The Frankfurt theorists considered that hegemonic frameworks effectively collapse difference into one simple uniform whole. In this way stories and interests of the marginalised and defeated are silenced. When this happens, dominant interest factors present their voice as the 'master narrative' of their society.[24] In effect they present their own particular story as the only

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[20]Paul Connerton, *Critical Sociology* (ed. Paul Connerton, London: Penguin Books, 1976), 22. See also 11 where Connerton claims that despite the diversity and scope of the intellectual interests of the Frankfurt scholars, much of their work 'retained a degree of cohesion by steering between the two extreme positions of the time [1930's-1940's] which typified the relationship between philosophy and the social sciences' - German Phenomenology on the one hand and American social research on the other.

[21]Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 41.

[22]ibid.

[23]ibid., Jay claims that the genesis of Critical Theory was as open-ended and 'dialectal as the method it claims to apply to social phenomena.'

[24]ibid., 165-167.

universal story. Furthermore, because these dominant voices now control the public domain, they are made legitimate. Generally speaking the more powerful or privileged an interest group is, the more complete their domination and suppression of difference. Critical Theory maintained that effective dismantling or disarming of these frameworks requires systems and processes that are aware of and open to the particular, the specific and the different. As history itself often testifies, these totalising or dominating frameworks eventually tend to produce and support hegemonic discourse, universal theories and oppressive regimes.

In order to avoid universalising human experience and generalising particular situations, the Frankfurt theorists insisted on a philosophical approach rooted in 'negative dialectics.'[25] Essentially, this negative dialectic took the form of a particular and sustained negative focus. It was indebted to the Marxist understanding of negative critique or 'ruthless criticism' and functioned by maintaining a critical negative focus on the distortions within Western culture that have rendered particular historical situations oppressive.[26] In this way situations of oppression remain as their prime focus and are prevented from being easily explained away or dissolved into an abstraction. Accordingly, these scholars believed that only by way of a sustained negative critique of what 'is' can the attempt to 'intimate how things might appear otherwise' actually emerge.[27] Only in and through a critical focus on specific situations of oppression can the possibilities of transformation come to light.

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[25]ibid., 179. Jay notes Adorno claimed immanent criticism does not *resolve* 'objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but . . . expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromising, in its innermost structure.'

[26]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 14-15. Marx defined his social philosophical task as the process of actualising ideals -- such as justice and freedom -- in material reality. In the course of their realisation, these ideas emerge as the "ruthless criticism" of everything existing, because the existent is the alienated negative embodiment of those ideals.'

[27]ibid., 18-20. Quoted from Adorno's *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life,* 247 Hewitt claims that 'Critical Theory understood its task as an attempt to confront and expose the "consummate negativity" that pervades human existence, inspired by the hope that in doing so the "mirror image" of its opposite might be revealed.' 18.

Not withstanding the lack of a self-contained philosophical system, Critical Theory does have identifiable intellectual roots and so can be traced back to a particular philosophical and intellectual heritage. Basically, the Frankfurt theorists were Marxist scholars who drew on Marxist theories of social and political critique.[28] The foundation for Marx's social and political theories were laid by 'French utopian ideals of social equality and justice' on a solid humanist base.[29] More particularly, Marx was both responding to and reformulating many of the ideals of Kant's critical philosophy, Hegel's philosophy of history and German Idealism.[30] In turn, although Critical Theorists were indebted to a number of Marxist theories they did reformulate them -- many in a fairly substantial manner. For example, Critical theory was not a utopian philosophy and so did not subscribe to the traditional Marxist notion that the truth of its position will be 'confirmed in the historical action of the proletariat.'[31] Nor did it profess the Hegelian confidence that human progress will automatically be guaranteed by the logic of history. However, in line with traditional Marxism, Critical Theory did affirm history as the locus of human activity, and it did pronounce humanity as the rational subject of history.[32]

> If critical theorists heeded Marx's and Engels' dictum that the only science is the science of history, they understood it in the sense of what the Enlightenment called "conjectural history," or *histoire raisonnée*, turned into the future. . . . It should not be our only concern to ask whether a hypothesis is true, possible or realistic; we should, perhaps, also ask the other way around: "what sort of earth" would it have to be in which this hypothesis . . . *would be* realistic. Only history could verify such hypotheses -- by realising them.[33]

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[28]Max Horkheimer, 'Introduction' in *The Dialectic Imagination,* xi.

[29]David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His life and Thought* (St Alburns. Herts: Paladin, 1973), 95. See also 6-12

[30]Istvan Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (London: Merlin Press, 1970), 48-50. See also Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 37. Connerton notes a significant reformulation concerned Marx' emphasis on historical materialism and the rejection of the world spirit in favour of the practical dialectic materialism of Marxist history.

[31]Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 21.

[32]ibid.

[33]Eike Gerbhardt, 'A Critique of Methodology' in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* 406.

This show of confidence in human reason should not be confused with an uncritical acceptance of 'scientific' or technological rationality, which was often criticised by the Frankfurt theorists. Rather, it was a way of rehabilitating reason to its true and proper place.[34] Along with Kant, Hegel and Marx, Critical Theory maintained the Enlightenment belief that reason represents the 'human potential for realising justice and freedom in history.'[35] This meant that, for Critical Theory, any culture or society that allowed the oppression of some to be the prerequisite for the freedom of others was actually an irrational society.

It is within this rather broad Marxist heritage, that two of Critical Theory's most influential intellectual foundations can be found.[36] The first emerges from the Kantian tradition of critical philosophy. Here, the concept of critique is understood as an 'analysis of the conditions' that seeks to explore both the possibility *and* the limits of rational faculties undertaken by reason itself.'[37] The second fundamental influence can be traced to the Hegelian analysis of constraints or liberation from 'coercive illusions.'[38] Here, the emphasis is on the mutually defining relationship between the practical restrictions of different situations and their understanding. Accordingly, Critical Theory affirms critique as a process. In reflecting the dynamic and partial nature of human knowledge itself, Critical Theory understands critique as a dynamic, ongoing activity that functions to both reveal and conceal. This understanding insists on a specifically dialectic relationship between theory and practice which, in turn, serves to emphasise the ability of critique to both generate and foster authentic social and political transformation.

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[34]ibid., 372. Here, Gebhardt notes that Horkheimer and Marcuse both challenged: the universal claims; self-images; supposed social functions; political claims; and most specifically 'the identification of scientific and technological rationality with reason in general' because 'scientific procedure in itself is no guarantee of truth'

[35]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 20.

[36]The following section traces some aspects of Kantian-Hegelian philosophy in order to establish the influence that particular aspects of this philosophy has had on Marx and Critical Theory. Accordingly, this section reflects a 'critical-Marxist' rather than a 'traditional classical' reading of Kant, Hegel and Marx and obviously does not deal with them in great depth.

[37]Piccone, 'General Introduction' *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* xi.

[38]Connerton, *Critical Sociology* 18.

From the Kantian tradition of critical philosophy comes the affirmation of the critical power of the human ability to reason. Basically, Kant maintained that the whole process of coming to know something occurred in and through the faculty of reason. He claimed that the activity of reason encompassed two distinct but inseparable movements: that of judging - which Kant referred to as pure reason; and that of acting - which he called practical reason. So for Kant, reason had both a critical ability and a practical application. These two movements were involved in both the structure and the content of reason. They ordered human experience and concepts so that they could be recognised or understood (*Verstand),* and they also provided the content or the source of these concepts and ideas through the critical grasp of reason (*Vernunft).*[39] By understanding, Kant meant the process whereby the mind 'structured the phenomenal world according to common sense.'[40] Kant considered this was a secondary or lesser faculty because it was primarily concerned with the phenomena - or the reflections - of experience. It was, in other words, engaged in the immediate - and often somewhat mundane - task of ordering and classifying objects and information.[41] These objects may, or may not, have any relationship with each other, and they may or may not have any connection to the broader more significant reality of human existence.

On the other hand, Kant also considered that reason or thinking was concerned with the noumenal which was connected to the essence or source of things.[42] This made reason part of the higher transcendental faculty of the mind. By participating in the transcendental, reason was less immediate but significantly more critical than understanding. Reason was able to focus on the source of objects or ideas and able to discern the various relationships between

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[39]Gebhardt, 'A Critique of Methodology' in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* 391. Here Gebhardt notes that 'in the English language . . . the common Kantian distinction between *vernunft* and *verstand* is rarely made' and so remarks like 'reason has been reduced to understanding make little sense to an English-speaking audience.'

[40]Jay, *The Dialectic Imagination,* 60.

[41]ibid.

[42]Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason,* (trans. J.M.D. Meiklrjohn, 2nd edition, London: The MacMillian Press, 1933), 23-24.

them. It was also able to 'grasp the dialectical relations beneath the surface' and thus reveal connections they had to the deeper reality of human experience.[43] These two movements are both necessary and irreducible aspects of the faculty of reason since they work together as a whole activity that actually makes it possible to 'know'. For Kant the conditions of knowing were part of the structure of truth. Reason gives us access to truth because it allows us to explore the conditions of truth.

Kant maintained that while 'it does not follow that all our knowledge arises out of experience . . . there can be no doubt all our knowledge does begin with experience.'[44] For Kant then, human knowledge can never be purely objective because it can never be completely separated from the actual experience of the object or truth that we seek to know. However, neither is knowledge purely instinctual, since it is not always a direct product of a particular subjective experience. Our need to order and make sense of our experience, an object or a truth, makes it impossible to come to a self-contained truth or 'pure' knowledge. This means Kant critiqued the notion that there is one single faculty of reason that has unrestricted access to an unmediated truth. Rather, he maintained that we cannot arrive at any truth about reality that is either independent of our experience or unconditioned by our attempts to make sense of our experience. Since human beings are both sensate and experiential creatures then Kant reasoned that human knowledge must also be both *sensible* and experiential.[45] Put another way, both the conditions and the possibilities of the activity of knowing are important, for they serve simultaneously to create - and limit - the possibilities and the scope of knowledge.

Basically, Kant considered that knowledge relies on the faculty of perception. The faculty of perception orders and sorts formal judgements and rational reconstructions of material impressions received by the senses. Kant maintained that this makes understanding possible insofar as we can only come

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[43]Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* 60.

[44]Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason,* 14.

[45]ibid., 22.

to know through the experience -- and the activity -- of ordering material. While 'perception does not produce reality, it does produce the mode in which reality appears to us.'[46] Within this understanding, both human knowledge and human experience are inescapably linked together as essentially related processes or activities.[47] For Kant, analytical truths -- those statements whose truth is predicated within their definition -- were generally objective or apriori truths. This means that even Kant's three great metaphysical 'truths' of God, freedom and immortality are really only able to be known because they are implied by the human experience of moral duty or moral obligation.[48] Consequently, Kant insisted that human knowledge was essentially a dynamic and ongoing process that was the result of the whole activity of grasping concepts and making judgments.

> Our knowledge springs from two main sources in the mind, the first of which is the faculty or power of receiving representations; the second is the power of cognising by means of these representations. Intuition and conceptions constitute therefore, the elements of all our knowledge . . . so that [alone] neither . . . can afford us cognition.[49]

Accordingly, Kant maintained that knowledge can not be separated from the process in which it is assessed or the activity through which it is sorted. This meant that, for Kant, human knowledge is a conditional process closely concerned with coming to understand. Kant also claimed that in the grasping concepts and making judgments the activity of knowing reveals itself as both a practical and a critical activity. In light of these understandings human knowledge is, by virtue of both its nature and its function, conditional. This means that humanity can never completely possess definitive truth since

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[46]Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 16-19.

[47]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 22. 'There are two sources of human knowledge namely, sense and understanding. By the former objects are *given* to us, by the latter *thought* . . . the conditions under which alone the objects of human knowledge are given must precede those under which they are thought.'

[48]ibid., 10. 'I cannot even make the assumption - as the practical interests of morality require - of God, freedom and immortality, if I do not deprive speculative reason of its pretensions to transcendent insight. For to arrive at these, it must make use of principles which, in fact, extend only to the objects of possible experience.'

[49]ibid., 39.

knowledge itself contains both the possibilities and the limits of truth - both the truth and a distortion of the truth. For Kant, knowledge is indeed an essentially critical and practical activity.

The second foundational influence on the development of Critical Theory comes primarily from Hegel and is influenced by the philosophical tradition of German Idealism. This influence underpins Critical Theory's 'praxis philosophy' and it was developed from Hegel's perception of the practical and dialectic conditions of human beings historical life.[50] The practical and dialectical influence of Hegel's thought can also be found in Marx's social theory and is clearly reflected through his understanding of historical emancipatory praxis.[51] Hegel maintained that there is an indissoluble relationship between human thought and human activity. Furthermore, Hegel claimed that it is really only from within this relationship between thought and activity that the possibilities for transformation can emerge. Thus, Hegel saw history as the 'temple of self-conscious reason'.[52]

Hegel believed that humanity progressed teleologically towards greater understanding and truth as part of the great rational movement of history.[53] As rational historical agents, humanity are able to transform or change aspects of both their social and individual realities. Hegel claimed that this ability to change or transform situations is possible because every practical and historical reality carries with it the 'inner articulation necessary for contradiction' and change.[54] He considered that by virtue of this inner contradiction it is possible to recognise that there is a difference between what something *actually is* and what it *aims*

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[50]Andrew Arato, 'Political Sociology and Critique of Politics', in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, 5.*

[51]Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 17-21.

[52]George Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (trans. R. Brown, J. Stewart, & H Harris, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), xvii.

[53]George Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 13.

[54]Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 55-57. Taylor claims that in ascribing this transformative 'power' to history rather than the human person, Hegel maintains that history, rather than humanity, will be the true driving force behind the transformation of society.

to be. In light of this recognition there is a shift in understanding a situation and the possibility of difference or change emerges. In other words, a change in the conscious understanding of a situation will necessarily change the reality or the actions that take place within that particular situation. Theory shapes practice; practice shapes theory.

For Hegel, knowledge has an essentially practical component and practice an essentially reflective element. These elements of theory and practice form a dialectical relationship that is both dynamic and mutually defining. An irreducible aspect of this whole relationship includes an awareness of the function and the limits of human truth and knowledge. Hegel considered that 'just as every individual is a child of his (sic) time; so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts.'[55] Thus, human reason is an historical function and so human knowledge and activity must be subject to historical development. Consequently, since knowledge and activity - or theory and practice - are ongoing and open to change so they must be incomplete.[56] This means that the relationship between theory and practice cannot be understood as a 'meta-system.' This relationship must acknowledge that its own particular historical form 'is *one* rather than *the* mode of conceptualising' human knowledge and experience.[57] To insist on the necessity of understanding human knowledge and experience as an ongoing critical engagement meant that Hegel maintained that 'the task of philosophy is to comprehend what is, because what is, is reason.'[58] Consequently, reason itself is 'not a timeless faculty hovering over the objective world, but rather an historical function, the dawning stage of awareness.'[59]

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[55]Hegel, *Philosophy of Right,* 12.

[56]Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society,* 58-61.

[57]Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Vol. VII.* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979), 244. Copleston notes even though Hegel saw 'his own system as the highest stage yet reached in the development of philosophy' most of his philosophy maintains a very historical basis. Since Hegel thought it 'just as foolish to suppose that a philosophy can transcend its contemporary world, as it is to suppose that an individual can leap over their own time' he would not seriously have thought philosophy came to its end with himself.

[58]Hegel, *Philosophy of Right,* 11.

[59]Gebhardt, 'A Critique of Methodology' in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* 381.

However, Hegel's understanding of the complex and dialectical relationship between human reason, human life and human history was itself subject to further scrutiny and change. The followers of Hegelian philosophy eventually split into two groups: the right-wing, or 'Old Hegelian' scholars; and the Berlin left-wing thinkers who were referred to as the 'Young Hegelians'.[60] The right-wing Hegelians worked to conserve the intention and compatibility between Hegelian philosophy and the traditional church. They were also concerned to affirm the legitimate, autocratic authority of the rule of the state. However, the more radical left-wing scholars, or the Young Hegelians, maintained that there was a contradiction between the revolutionary impulse of Hegel's dialectic and the conservative conclusions he -- and the right-Hegelians -- consistently arrived at. They believed Hegel had compromised the revolutionary principles that were inherent in his philosophy with an uncritical loyalty to the state and a non-critical attitude to religion. Both Hegel and the older or right-wing Hegelian scholars maintained that the authority of the state was fundamentally willed by God. They also used Hegelian philosophy to support the existence and authority of the German Lutheran Church as an institution similarly willed by God.[61] The Young Hegelians, however, rejected this separation of state from history and society. They also rejected a personal Christian God and discarded the notion of personal immortality. Finally, they moved into an 'atheistic humanism' and insisted that the so called 'divine sanction' of constitutional monarchy was all about legitimising private interests within the general political structure.[62]

The Young Hegelians emerged against the background of Germany's growing capitalist modernisation and rapid social change. This group of young radical scholars counted both Marx and Engels in their number. Among other things, this group was interested in exploring how philosophy could be used as a critical tool for social analysis. They saw in Hegel's dialectic a framework that

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[60]Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Vol. VII*, 246-247.

[61]Lucio Colletti, 'Introduction' in *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (London: Penguin Classics, 1992.) 10-14.

[62]George Lichtheim, *Marxism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 14-20.

would facilitate exploration of such an analysis. Even though they rejected Hegel's loyalty to state and church authority, they still considered his philosophy had an inherently 'revolutionary' impulse. Consequently, the Young Hegelians believed that if this dialectic was developed from 'outside' Hegel's loyalty to the authority of the state its obvious revolutionary impulses could be released and the transformation of society would then be possible.[63] In that sense, Martin Jay claims that the Young Hegelians were in fact the first critical theorists for they were committed to the 'possibilities of transforming the social order through human praxis.'[64]

Marx eventually broke with the young Hegelians. One of the main reasons for this was that Marx considered that the critical edge of their philosophy was not dialectical or material enough. In practical terms, Marx began to develop his historical materialism through the exploration of a more historical understanding of both the material nature and the practical function of human knowledge. In his 'Theses on Feuerbach,' Marx critiqued Feuerbach for regarding the 'theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude.'[65] Marx went on to claim that the predilection these thinkers had for theory meant that it became impossible for them to engage with the truth or 'significance of "revolutionary" or "practical-critical" activity.'[66]

> The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations. . . . Social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the contemplation of this practice.[67]

Basically, Marx considered that human persons cannot be 'abstracted from the historical processes' of their social development for they reflect the complex totality of social relations.[68] In light of this inter-dependent relationship he

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[63]Colletti, *Karl Marx: Early Writings,* 12.

[64]Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* 42-43.

[65]Marx, 'These on Feuerbach' in *Early Writings,* 421.

[66]ibid. 421-422.

[67]ibid., 423.

[68]ibid.

considered that it is not possible to separate the activity of 'knowing' from its historical situation. Social development is a 'practical, human sense activity' that both reflects and directs human life and human history.[69] In other words, human reason, the human person and society as a whole are not determined by theory. Rather, they are determined by real concrete historical relations. Consequently, Marx maintained that right thinking -- or 'critical' theory -- must be a practical political activity because it is deeply rooted in the material conditions of human history.[70] As a practical activity, human knowledge and human reason serve to inform and condition the consciousness of humanity. This means knowledge and reason are best understood as being social and dialectical by nature. And because right thinking is a social and dialectical activity, it reflects practical, material, historical interests.

The dialectical element here is absolutely essential: any attempt to reduce theory and praxis into a more harmonious unity will lead to an idolisation of the truth. In turn, this will ultimately result in a depreciation of praxis. Harmonious synthesising of the theory-praxis relationship allows for the re-assertion of 'theory as a primary abstract category that exercises a coercive, regulative force on praxis.'[71] This underscores the fact that thinking is not really a question of theory, rather it is an essentially practical question. For as Marx himself maintained, humanity must constantly strive to 'prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, of its thinking in practice.'[72] This means that to separate or collapse the all important dialectical relationship between theory and praxis only serves to fossilise or codify human thought and knowledge. When this happens, the possibilities for change are inhibited and so the potential for

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[69]ibid. 'The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. . . . The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question.'

[70]Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 21-23.

[71]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion*, 6-7. Here, Hewitt stresses that the mediated and dialectical relationship between theory and praxis is absolutely essential to Marx's social theory and any theory that seeks to 'harmonise' or collapse theory and praxis together will inevitable result in a situation of "scientific socialism."

[72]Marx, 'These on Feuerbach' in *Early Writings,* 422.

transformative action is all but eliminated.[73] In line with Hegel then, Marx considered that the seeds or potential for developing a new and more liberating reality cannot come from outside.[74] Rather, they are inevitably a part of, and are therefore connected to, the historical reality of the present situation. In the light of this understanding, Critical Theory eventually came to understand the whole practical activity of critique as being both 'a reflection on the possible conditions of knowledge as well as the analysis of the constraints to which people or whole groups of people are subject.'[75] This makes critique both the theory and practice of emancipation.[76]

In keeping with the Marxist understanding of history, German philosophy in general -- and Critical Theory in particular -- turned the critical gaze of the Enlightenment upon many of the 'givens' of the Enlightenment itself. This critical re-evaluation seriously questioned the Enlightenment project of separating the public arena from the private sphere and the split between science and religion, knowledge and values, politics and morals could no longer be so confidently maintained.

In turn, this meant that the powerful claim of human reason and the science of human rationality as the unquestionable judges and dispensers of the 'objective' truth were openly challenged. Reality and truth could no longer be separated from their material or historical bases and so could no longer sustain their claim to be immutable, a-historical or interest free. They would then risk becoming ideologies. And the problem with ideologies, claimed Adorno, was not so much that they were false, but that they falsely represented reality.[77] The categories of nature and science as the prime interpreters of human life were

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[73]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 12-13.

[74]ibid.

[75]Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 20.

[76]Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* 41-44.

[77]ibid., 179. Jay notes although Adorno claimed a redeemed future society would be a 'harmonious reconciliation of form and content, function and expression, subjective and objective elements' this harmony was expressed negatively with 'an element of protest.'

now replaced with those of culture and history.[78] Seeing history as the new interpreter of human reality was, of course, one of the major insights and convictions of the work done by Marx and Engels. Accordingly, Marx maintained that although:

> human beings make their own history, they can do so intelligently only if they know the laws of social development and therefore the laws of history. . . . We cannot create the sort of society we desire if we disregard or try to flout the laws of social development.[79]

Within this critical re-evaluation of Enlightenment philosophy a new historical consciousness began to emerge. It changed the relationship between individuals and society and opened up the political and religious forum to public scrutiny. Hegemonic ideologies were no longer able to so easily halt the call for social change. Nor were they able to privatise -- and so separate -- the concerns of various groups from their social, political, economic or religious contexts.[80] The next step in this contextualisation of human knowing was the admission that as well as being public and political, knowledge is also interested and biased. In other words, there is no text without a context and there can be 'no such thing as value neutrality or pure disinterested knowledge.'[81] Indeed, as Kant claimed in the preface to his *Critique of Pure Reason,* nothing can be exempt from the incisive critique of human reason: 'what reason produces from itself cannot lie concealed, but must be brought to the light by reason itself.'[82] Added to the general cultural and intellectual impact of the Enlightenment, understanding knowledge as an activity and truth as a process, had wider implications than a revamping of philosophical epistemology. As the prime interpretive framework within which human life is both understood and evaluated, history and culture

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[78]Copleston, *On the History of Philosophy,* 133-138. Copleston claims that like Hegel, Marx claimed history, not nature, offered the best interpretation of human reality.

[79]Marx, 'Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy' in *Early Writings,* 386.

[80]Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation,* 66-68.

[81]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 7.

[82]Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 4.

can no longer be considered an imposed or value-free framework. Rather they have become an important and influential consideration for both the development and the interpretation of any philosophical understanding.

The Historical Context

In *Critical Sociology,* Paul Connerton remarks that if 'Critical Theory was a creation of the early thirties, then it was also a discovery of the late sixties'.[83] Within these two dates the historical circumstances of Critical Theory were both varied and diverse. During this time there was a geographical shift over two continents, an intellectual and philosophical engagement with Russian communism, German Nazism and American capitalism. Finally, there was the upheaval of the Second World War. These historical events took place within three rather broad, but distinct, periods that all served to significantly mark the development of Critical Theory.[84] Eventually, in the nineteen sixties, a whole new generation of post-war Socialist-Marxist students in Germany 're-discovered' Critical Theory and took it into a variety of disciplines within the formal arena of the academic university.

The first historical stage of the development of Critical Theory was located in the radical social and political changes that the Bolshevik revolution and the First World War brought to Europe, especially Germany. The second period covers the engagement of scholars like Horkheimer, Benjamin, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm and Neumann from a depressed and economically marginalised Weimar Republic to the critique of American individualism and Roosevelt's New Deal capitalism. The third period can be found in the Western re-appropriation of various Marxist social and political theories by the radical leftist university students of a post Second World War Germany.[85]

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[83]Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 12-13.

[84]Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* 4-40. See also Paul Piccone 'General Introduction' in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* xiv-xxii.

[85]Piccone, 'Political Sociology and Critique of Politics' in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* 5-21.

Historically, it could be claimed that the early intellectual work of scholars like Lukács, Fromm, Neumann, Löwenthal, Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin and Marcuse emerged against the background of revolution and war. Indeed, after the First World War, and in light of the Bolshevik revolution, Western European life and culture underwent a radical and foundational shift.[86] The First World War effectively finalised the erosion of Europe's traditional strongholds of privilege and changed the structure of relationships both within and between nations. Traditional strongholds of social and political privilege that had been slowly wearing away finally collapsed. What the French revolution started just before the turn of the nineteenth century, the Bolshevik revolution virtually completed a hundred years later and, with the assassination of the Austrian Crown Prince, Europe itself was brought to War. This erosion of privilege and redefinition of power meant that the social and political reality of post war Europe in the nineteen twenties was radically different from the social and political reality of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[87] In the wake of the critique of the older 'pre-revolutionary' interpretations of the social and political order, these emerging -- and more radical -- philosophies of social critique became increasingly prominent.

Within all this social and political change, and in the absence of an established or traditional power base, newer and more radical visions of human life took form. Alternative visions of social and political transformation emerged. One such group interested in working towards a new and transformed reality of human life was the loose association of German Marxist intellectuals.[88] These scholars came together in the early nineteen twenties at a time when the

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[86]Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* 4-5. & 30-32. Where Jay notes that the practical and transformative focus of the Frankfurt Theorists can be seen reflected in the 'intent of the founding members to create a community of scholars whose solidarity would serve as a microcosmic foretaste of the brotherly society of the future.'

[87]Piccone 'General Introduction' *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* xx-xxi.

[88]Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* 4-5. & Paul Piccone 'General Introduction' *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* xx. Piccone makes the comment that this time was not only 'marked by a blossoming of a variety of Marxist theories [but also] by the prefiguration of various successful and unsuccessful institutions of the coming welfare state.'

possibilities for social transformation seemed like a realistic and realisable goal. Together they formed the 'The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research.' The original idea of Felix Weil was that various scholars in the 'Institute' would offer a European 'school' or academic place of learning where it would be possible to pursue the development of 'a 'true' or 'pure' Marxism.[89] Thus, within 'an atmosphere of economic and intellectual autonomy,' and under the broad but common goal of pursuing 'theoretical innovation and unrestrained social research,' the early work of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research began.[90] However, by the nineteen thirties, Europe, England and, even America, were deep in a post-war depression. This depression was made even more severe in Germany by the political and economic restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles. The subsequent crippling of the German economy laid the foundations for the political rise of National socialism that eventually lead to the Second World War. This, and the subsequent rise of a strongly anti-Semitic Nazism, succeeded in exiling many of Germany's most critical thinkers.[91]

Many of the Jewish-German intellectuals forced into exile during the Second World War emigrated to America. Generally speaking the American experience was an ambiguous one for the Frankfurt Theorists. In spite of living within one of the most influential English speaking societies, their work and concerns remained only partially assimilated. Although their 'critique of mass culture and the potential for authoritarianism in American society had a substantial impact on intellectual life in the United States,' their work still failed to really break into the English speaking academy.[92] The main reasons for this

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[89]Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 12-16. Connerton notes many Marxist scholars interpreted the political ferment of the time as leading into a true Marxist socialism. Hence the advent of Stalinism - despite its shortcomings - was seen by many of the Frankfurt school as a transitory stage to authentic socialism, the rise of Fascism was the infamous last stage of the decline of the capitalist regime, which meant that for some American capitalism had to move through fascism before it could progress into authentic socialism. See also Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* 5-8.

[90]Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* 4-5.

[91]ibid., 28-30. The Frankfurt School was finally closed in 1932 for 'tendencies hostile to the state.' The rise of Hitler's Nazism - with its rigorous anti Semitic policy - meant that most of the educated thinking elite were either in exile or killed.

[92]Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 12-13.

were that Frankfurt theorists wrote like German nationals. These scholars essentially still thought in terms of German culture and still pursued the transformation of German society through a critique of German history and culture. Consequently, both the content and style of their work were Teutonic. The Frankfurt theorists also had an aversion to using all-encompassing systems or 'meta-theories.' The effect was to make their language and technique academically dense. Broader English-speaking audiences showed little comprehension and even less interest.[93] In addition, the individualist understandings of American capitalism meant that these scholars tended to play down the socialist-Marxist foundations of their work.

Eventually, the German content and Teutonic style of Critical Theory was finally responsible for its 'rediscovery.' Germany's radical student movement of the nineteen sixties took many of the concepts and critiques of the Frankfurt School into the academic forum and so into the university's intellectual life.[94] However, even as the student movements of the time were essential, Connerton claims that it would be simplistic to credit the resurgence of Critical Theory 'solely to the rising temperature of the late sixties' with its radical student movement and revival of Marxism.[95] The Frankfurt School was broader than this, and it is perhaps best described as a 'phenomenon of German intellectual history.'[96] In this sense the Frankfurt school was 'representative of the Weimar Republic' and so was an important part of Germany's national culture and intellectual tradition.[97] Consequently, it spoke to a whole generation of Germans who, in light of the failure of German Liberalism, the rise of totalitarianism and

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[93]ibid. Connerton considers the inaccessibility of these scholars was 'not a matter of historical circumstances alone' but was bound up in a denseness of language and the subtlety of irony and satire - things the American audience were not really able to understand. It was also partly due to the aversion of the Frankfurt School to simplify things with an all-encompassing 'system' or meta-theory.

[94]Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* 4-5.

[95]Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 12-13.

[96]ibid., 13-15.

[97]Jay, *Dialectical Imagination,* 43. 'In picking up the critical themes of the young Hegelians, Critical Theory filled an historical vacuum that had been left by their dissolution.'

the devastation of the Second World War had all but lost contact with this heritage. Accordingly, Connerton maintains that, in its later resurgence, Critical Theory was able to offer to 'a devastated post-war Germany a connection to history of their past in the form of a thread of spiritual continuity.'[98]

With the admission of Critical Theory into the German universities, Critical Theory effectively moved into the formal academic institutions of Europe and America. Owing to its diverse interests Critical Theory found expression in a number of different intellectual disciplines. Even though it had been formulated a generation earlier, Critical Theory's identification of fundamental issues and concerns seemed almost prophetic.[99] Still, the prime objective of Critical Theory was the critique and transformation of Western culture. To do this effectively, these thinkers claimed it was not sufficent to analyse present social and historical conditions. What was needed was a systematic critique of practical-historical relationships between person and society.[100] Consequently, the Frankfurt theorists maintained that only a radical examination and a systematic critique of dominant interest factors and ideologies that shaped and defined these relationships would make transformation possible.[101]

As part of the movement to counter the apathy and transform the 'false consciousness' of twentieth century Western culture Benjamin, Marcuse and Adorno explored the philosophical categories of memory, narrative and solidarity. They sought to retrieve the critical impulse of these categories from the impoverished and one-dimensional understanding given them by both the

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[98]Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 13-15.

[99]Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* xv.

[100]Connerton, *Critical Sociology,* 23-32. Connerton briefly outlines four basic stages of the development of Critical Theory. Stage one recognises that the 'power of ideology extended beyond the range of discursive propositions.' 23; Stage two these scholars 'turned to consider the self-reinforcing qualities of the infra-structure' and explored this through the dialectic of the Enlightenment. 27; Third stage saw a renewal of its 'search for the "negative" and critically engages technical rationality and explores metapsychology; Stage four -- with Habermas -- refocused a 'critical engagement of technology as 'both an instrument and a competitor of politics as a means of 'distinguishing between instrumental and communicative action.' 30.

[101]Piccone, 'General Introduction' in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader,* xi-xvi.

Enlightenment and the technological progress of modern society. They aimed to give memory, narrative and solidarity a new lease of life by bringing them out into the light of the public arena. They saw in these categories potential for realising two of the Frankfurt School's prime concerns; critical analysis and transformative action.

Memory

In his article, *A Study of the Category of Memory*, Gerard Hall claims 'one can view the entire work of the Frankfurt School as essentially a remembrance of the notion of critical reason within history.'[102] Although Benjamin, Marcuse and Adorno stressed different aspects of the category of memory it is clear memory played a key role in their 'understanding of the crisis in modern civilisation.'[103]

For Walter Benjamin the transformative potential of memory was engaged through the critical concept of dangerous memories. He claimed that memory protected tradition from 'becoming a tool of the ruling classes' by flashing up in moments of danger.[104] Benjamin understood memory as that which creates the 'chain of tradition' that passed the stories or epics of history from generation to generation and kept them connected.[105] By holding onto the stories and hopes of the victims of history, Benjamin maintained that memory is able to stand against the will of those who would dominate history. Here the acknowledgment and appreciation of the history of suffering is not only necessary; it actually becomes a vital consideration for the life and future of Western society.

To preserve the liberative promises of life and reality Marcuse focused on the development of a critical -- even revolutionary -- category of

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[102]Gerard Hall, *The Study of the Category of Memory in the Political Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz,* Thesis (MTh) Catholic University of America: Washington, 1983), 1.

[103]Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination,* 267.

[104]Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Harper Collins, 1973), 247.

[105]ibid., 97.

remembrance.[106] Following Nietzsche's insight that oppressive societies require forgetfulness in order to function, Marcuse pursued the use of memory as a subversive tool that facilitates social action. He claimed that Western society has been pushed into forgetfulness and apathy. This forgetfulness blocks and represses the critical and liberating truths that would counter apathy and shatter false consciousness. However through memory these truths can be retrieved and forgetfulness broken. Marcuse considered that, it is only in the truths of these repressed memories -- a truth which reason often denies -- that society is able to access the hidden existence of its past freedoms.

Theodore Adorno explored the critical function of memory through the concrete possibilities and dialectical tension of the memory of guilt, pain and negativity.[107] Because no value-free objectivity is possible, Adorno insists on paying attention to the concrete historical context of human situations. More often than not, these contexts reveal themselves as negative, dialectical and ambiguous memories. Liberative praxis will emerge only when we attend to their true historical implications. Adorno considers that this is necessary to engage and interpret memory as a 'dialectical mediation with the negativity of human life.'[108] By holding onto the history of the oppressed, memory makes it possible to go beyond the history of the oppressors. This work on memory as a resource to counter apathy and a tool to transform false consciousness clearly highlights the 'intrinsic connection between memory and emancipation on the one hand and forgetting and enslavement on the other.'[109]

Narrative

Like the other categories of memory and solidarity, narrative is basically orientated towards practical interests. The critical and transformative potential

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[106]Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 33.

[107]Jay, *The Dialectic Imagination,* 267.

[108]Hall, *The Study of the Category of Memory in the Political Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz*, 10

[109]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 147.

of the category of narrative was revitalised through conscious retrieval of both the lost art of story-telling and the art of telling lost stories.

Benjamin claimed that as technique and symbol the power of narrative cannot be underestimated; it affects both the personal and collective consciousness.[110] History can never be told 'the way it really was' or abstracted from its historical context. What actually happened really depended on your own particular historical perspective.[111] This meant Benjamin rejected the idea that narrative merely carried factual data or technological information. Rather, authentic narrative makes it possible to hold onto subversive stories and so change the outlook of both the story and the listeners. Benjamin maintained that in order to acknowledge the 'anonymous toil' of history's victims we must brush the stories of the victors 'against the grain' for there is no story of heroism and valour that is not at the same time a record of victimisation and 'barbarism.'[112]

With his radical commitment to challenging the practical, political reality of Western culture, Marcuse called for a return to the confrontative medium and dialectical language of the street theatre. He believed that in Western cultures art in general has been co-opted by the status quo. This means that the ability of natural art to function as a challenge to and a critique of society has all but been eradicated. Consequently, not only has the critical, public sting of true street theatre been diminished, but whatever audience is left has been reduced to apathy. In order for the 'complacent consciousness' of Western civilisation to be effectively engaged, Marcuse maintained that there was an urgent need to revitalise the 'eternal myths and primitive magic' of street theatre.[113]

Theodore Adorno claimed that the category of narrative could be used to acknowledge the negative and dialectical reality of human life and human

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[110]Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 86-88. Benjamin distinguishes between 'story-tellers' and 'novelists' as individualism versus community. A story-teller takes and creates experience involving past stories, the teller and the listeners. In contrast, a novelist is solitary and isolated 'uncounselled and unable to counsel others.' 87.

[111]ibid., 247.

[112]ibid., 248.

[113]Metz, 'Future in the Memory of Suffering' in *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, amd Modernity,* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 6.

history. In response to the horrors and catastrophes that marked contemporary Western society Adorno maintained that 'we cannot write poetry after Auschwitz' because the guilt of these events is 'irreconcilable with living.'[114] Accordingly, Adorno considered that the reality of Auschwitz -- and other such outrageous and immoral events -- impose a new categorical imperative on Western society. From now on 'thoughts and actions must be arranged so that this hell and human evil will never be repeated.'[115] In this sense, Adorno saw the story of truth as a story of silence and negativity -- a story that is only really present within the absence or the 'unwhole.'[116]

Solidarity

The transformative power of solidarity lies in the commitment to stand alongside -- rather than above -- a people and their history. Accordingly, Critical Theory understands solidarity as a communal activity underpinned by a sense of 'co-responsibility among human beings which takes into account the totality of human history as it searches for future liberation.'[117]

For Benjamin, this transformative power is expressed in anamnesis. Benjamin linked past and present in a movement of critical transformative appropriation through an anamnestic solidarity with the victims of history. In this way he provides those who have suffered and died at the hands of an oppressive history the consolation that they did not suffer for nothing. Without this solidarity 'even the dead will not be safe from the enemy.'[118] Benjamin maintained that the history of suffering is the medium that breaks open future possibilities of freedom. Thus anamnestic solidarity is necessary to truly redeem or liberate the past, the present and, therefore, the future. A future that is not

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[114]Theodore Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 364.

[115]Hall, *A Study of the Category of Memory in the Political Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz,* 9.

[116]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 144.

[117]Hall, *A Study of the Category of Memory in the Political Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz,* 25.

[118]Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 247.

built with generations of the down-trodden in mind is ahistorical and impotent.

Marcuse claimed that in being so closely linked to justice and freedom, solidarity with those who suffer is the essential motivation that will lead us into liberating historical praxis. He considered that to 'forget past suffering is to forgive the forces that cause it - without defeating those causes.'[119] The critical action needed to defeat historical forces that cause and perpetrate suffering can only really take place in and through a radical solidarity with those who suffer its consequences. Accordingly, solidarity is the critical historical force that makes it possible to access freedom and justice within history.

In light of his focus on the negativity of human life and the memory of guilt Adorno considered solidarity with those who suffer an essential aspect of the movement towards full or whole humanness. Without solidarity there can be no redemption from the human evil and outrageous immorality that has marked Western history and tradition. Consequently, Adorno maintained that it is our duty as well as our moral obligation to both acknowledge the guilt and share the responsibility for this suffering.[120]

Accordingly, Benjamin, Marcuse and Adorno are concerned to critically engage the forgetfulness that plagues contemporary Western culture and the apathy that has allowed so much suffering to occur. Much of the work of this critical engagement is done through the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity. These scholars claimed that only when we remember the repressed and forgotten stories of human life can our connection to history be authentically secured and our culture be truly transformed.

Because of Critical Theory's commitment to the social and historical transformation of Western culture, their categories and methods offered new hope to post war Europe. Among the different disciplines that engaged the possibilities of this renewed critical interpretation of contemporary Western life was political theology. Political theology was struggling to engage the issues of a secularised, post-holocaust, post-war society with a defensible understanding of Christian faith. Echoing Critical Theory's commitment to 'forging a practical

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[119]Marcuse, *One Dimensional Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 212.

[120]Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 364.

theory and an immanent critique of oppression and injustice' and coupled with the aspiration to 'abolish the conditions that produce and sustain them,' political theology can claim a shared interest in the intellectual and philosophical heritage of Critical Theory.[121]

The Contours of Critical Theologies

In view of the above discussion it is clear that both political and feminist theologies draw broadly from the intellectual tradition of the Frankfurt School of Social Criticism.[122] This shared commitment to transformation is reflected in political and feminist theologies rejection of the more speculative frameworks employed by many traditional Western theologies. In other words, political and feminist theologies seek to engage and interpret Western culture and society within a perspective that is essentially practical and radically critical. Consequently, many of the central concerns of political theologies are reflected in feminist theologies. They also share many methodological similarities. This makes them both theologies of social critique which seek to foster historical transformation through a systematic exploration of the socio-political context with which the gospel is proclaimed. As part of this critical examination, these theologies use the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity. They consider that these categories provide a fruitful resource for actively engaging the liberative and transformative possibilities of the gospel message within contemporary Western society.

Accordingly, Marsh Hewitt maintains that the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity are important concepts for any philosophy or theology

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[121]Horkheimer, 'Preface' in *The Dialectical Imagination,* xi. What united 'these men from different scholarly backgrounds was [their commitment in] formulating the negative in the epoch of transition . . . [and the] critical approach to existing society.'

[122]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 1-36. Hewitt explores the connections between Western theologies and Critical theory. With their links to social feminism, feminist theologies are also heir to the emancipatory tradition of the early feminist/womanist writers. See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 14-25. Here Schüssler Fiorenza notes the influence of feminist scholars as well as 'Critical Theory and liberation theology' in her work.

of social critique. She claims that these categories contain 'the hope, however tentative and fragile, that present conditions may harbour the seeds of a transformed world.'[123] For Critical Theory, the possibility of transformation, however tentative, is a vital part of Western culture's future redemption. The Frankfurt scholars consider that although 'the multiple forms of domination are becoming more sophisticated, more remote, more invisible,' they are by no means less present or less dominating.[124]

As mentioned above, the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity have their roots in the early work of the Frankfurt School of Social Criticism. The Frankfurt Theorists believed the only possible way of transforming and redeeming Western culture was to expose the systematic assumptions of the Enlightenment. These scholars then, worked to critique the 'false consciousness' that these assumptions supported through a critical systematic examination of Western history and tradition. Consequently, the Frankfurt scholars sought to disclose and examine the extent to which history and tradition 'participate in repression and domination . . . [as this is] . . . experienced as alienation.'[125] In effect, these critical theorists employed a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' to identify interest factors that served to support this domination and analyse the associated praxis that validated the power structures of Western society.[126] This hermeneutic of suspicion has become a useful tool for theologies of social critique.

A hermeneutic of suspicion takes a particular and sustained critical attitude. It is a conscious, practical, political activity of critical assessment. It was

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[123]ibid., 147-150.

[124]ibid., 4.

[125]Schüssler Fiorenza 'Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation' in *Discipleship of Equals*, 62-63.

[126]The term 'hermeneutic of suspicion' was coined by Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 33. It refers to the critical systematic unmasking of the 'false consciousness' of the Enlightenment. This false consciousness insists that as autonomous, conscious and rational beings, humanity needs fear no further illusions. However, as many social critics claim, this can blind us to the way history and tradition can be distorted by hegemonic relations of power and control. See T. Veling, *Living in the Margins* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 80-86.

part of the emphasis on negative dialectic that Critical Theory employed as a commitment to 'articulating the suffering of others while accounting for the conditions and the structures that produce that suffering.'[127] In direct contrast to the Enlightenment's objective neutrality, the Frankfurt Theorists took an explicit and partisan interest in those who had 'long been relegated to the refuse heap of civilization by their conquerors.'[128] This interest in the victims of history was motivated by secular emancipatory interests rather than any overtly religious sentiment. So, while acknowledging their secular incentives, Metz maintained that the insights that have emerged from their systematic critique have provided useful interpretative tools for a critical theological methodology.[129]

Like the Frankfurt theorists, the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz concerns itself with a systematic critique of the dominant social structures of Western society. Metz is also interested in the victims of Western history. This means that his political theology is concerned with an examination of the concealed interest factors that operate in contemporary Western culture. Indeed, Metz' interpretation of modern society through the elaboration of a Critical Theory, is 'integral to his interpretation of the current situation of Christian faith and theology today.'[130] This concern is theologically expressed through an exploration of Christianity's response to questions of suffering and justice or 'sensitivity to theodicy.'[131] An essential aspect of this sensitivity to theodicy is the particular attention Metz places on the practical application of Christian faith in society.

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[127]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* xi.

[128]ibid.

[129]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 105-122. Metz acknowledges 'the distinctions developed in Critical Theory's dialectics of emancipation are not theological distinctions 'but conceptual tools for a dialectical analysis of social contradictions in the interest of total emancipation.' However, they can signify a 'new association of politics and morals. From it there ultimately emerges a conception of political life and political responsibility for which the great moral and religious traditions of humanity could also, possibly, be mobilized, once they have been comprehended at their deepest level of meaning.'

[130]Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Introduction' in *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity* (New York Orbis Books, 1995), xiii,

[131]Metz. 'Introduction' in *Faith and the Future,* viii.

This makes political theology a praxis oriented theology. It seeks to integrate Christian faith and contemporary society in order to be both socially and religiously transformative. By using a similar hermeneutic of suspicion to the Frankfurt Theorists, Metz expanded his theological methodology. This expansion of methodology was aimed at challenging the individualistic and socially oppressive tendencies that are operative within contemporary Western Christianity.[132] Through the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity, Metz has endeavoured to break open the redemptive and liberative message of the Christian gospel.[133] With their orientation towards transformation, and through their incisive powers of social and political critique, memory, narrative and solidarity have, in turn, become useful categories for feminist theologies.

Along with Metz, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza believes that theology cannot be separated from the social and historical realities of human life. She also considers that it is necessary to engage in a critical analysis of the traditional social, political and religious contexts within which the Christian gospel is proclaimed. Like Metz, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that critical theologies must strive to understand and change our knowledge of the world in order to transform the 'kyriarchal institutions which produce' and are legitimated by this knowledge.[134] Furthermore, she also recognises the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity as important tools that can help make present again the redemptive, transformative and liberative message of the Christian gospel.[135]

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[132]ibid., 17-19. 'In "bourgeois" religion, the messianic future [of Christianity] is in the gravest danger . . . of turning into an endorsement and encouragement for those who already have plenty' of power, property and prospects.

[133]Metz, *Faith and the Future,* 183. Metz first engaged Critical Theory in 1972. *Faith in History and Society* -- which was published in 1977 -- was his first systematic elaboration of the categories memory, narrative and solidarity. He weaves the categories throughout the book but saves the explicit exploration of them until the end in an effort to 'deal with these three major categories in an as yet not fully elaborated attempt to systematise them.' Thus, he does not really treat these categories separately since he considers them the 'basic categories of a practical, fundamental theology' and so claims they must be taken together.

[134]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 34.

[135]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 115. Schüssler Fiorenza notes 'To recover biblical history as memory, and remembrance as history for women . . means

However, within all this common heritage and shared focus, feminist theologies have a radical and central commitment towards fostering the liberation and well-being of women that political theologies do not overtly share. This is not to imply that political theologies are unconcerned with the liberation of women. Nor do I wish to suggest that feminist theologies do not seek the well-being of men. Both these theologies are clearly committed to a critical and systematic examination of the structures that serve to marginalise and silence different social and cultural groups within our tradition. Both theologies are likewise concerned with using insights that emerge from this critical examination to direct and regulate emancipatory action.[136] However, in light of its commitment to, and concern for the liberation and well-being of women, feminist theologies take as their starting point the concrete historical reality of women's lives and relationships. Furthermore, this starting point serves to ground both the focus and the direction of its theological perspective.

While Schüssler Fiorenza pursues the transformation of Western culture and religion, she does so from a different direction. She employs the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity to facilitate this transformation, but she engages them from a different perspective. Basically, Schüssler Fiorenza identifies the feminist perspective as the foundational horizon from within which her critical analysis takes place.[137] She concretely directs and grounds her

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to continue our struggle in solidarity with [our biblical foremothers]. Their memory and remembrance -- rediscovered and kept alive in historical reconstruction . . . encourages us in historical solidarity with them to commit ourselves to the continuing struggle against patriarchy in society and church.' See also footnote 9, 163, where Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that Metz makes more of a critical use of these interpretative categories than other political theologians.

[136]David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 80. Tracy refers to Critical Theory as that which 'renders explicit how cognitive reflection can throw light on systematic distortions' and through this illumination encourages a programme of 'emancipatory and transformative action.' He then goes on to acknowledge that 'any illumination that Critical Theory can provide is necessarily partial -- as the best critical theorists, like Adorno, insisted. And any emancipation is inevitably limited -- as feminist theorists make clear.'

[137]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* xv & 44. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that the feminist perspective is vital to the transformation of contemporary Western culture and theology because women and the children dependent on them for survival are always the ones to found at the bottom of the socio-religious ladder of Western Christianity.

engagement with the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity in the specific focus of the social, political and religious situation of women.[138]

In brief, the thesis so far has outlined the theological perspective within which Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza grounds her specific focus; explored the foundations of critical Western feminist theologies from the perspective of their relationship to political theologies; and broadly engaged the basic contours of the categories memory, narrative and solidarity. This has highlighted some of the common roots of political and feminist theologies and provided a basis for a critical demonstration of how feminist theologies go beyond political theologies through their engagement with the broader concepts of history, language and community.

Chapter three begins the process of exploring the categories themselves by situating memory within contemporary scholarship and, then, examines the use of memory in the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. Using the feminist theological hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, this chapter will critically engage the relationship between memory and history and, in so doing, highlight feminist theologies' dependence on -- and extension of -- political theologies. Chapter three demonstrates that a critical feminist engagement of history offers the Western Christian tradition a more radical and inclusive framework within which to access its own ecclesial memory.

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[138]Ibid., 67. & 163. Here Schüssler Fiorenza acknowledges the common 'theoretical insights and moral impetus' between political, liberation and feminist theologies -- an impulse that seeks to 'rescue the biblical vision of liberation from the ideological distortions of those who have formulated, interpreted and used the bible against the cultural and ecclesial victims.' She further notes that in relation to Hauerwas, the focus Metz directs to the memory of the innocent victims of history means that Metz' theological methodology has a far more critical hermeneutic of liberation than someone like Hauerwas. Consequently, Metz spells out the critical -- and therefore liberative -- implications of the categories memory and narrative more clearly than other political theologians.

CHAPTER THREE

The Place of HISTORY in the Category of MEMORY

By virtue of a critical comparison between the political theology of J. B. Metz and the feminist theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza this thesis maintains that it is possible to explore the triads of history and memory, language and narrative, and community and solidarity as interpretative relationships of critical tension and mutual illumination. This exploration began by locating the critical theological hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. It then outlined the historical and philosophical background of critical theologies and charted the movement of memory, narrative and solidarity from the Frankfurt Theorists to the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz.

Chapter Three continues with an examination of the relationship between history and memory. It explores the category of history by way of a critical engagement with the philosophical presuppositions of the Enlightenment and the concerns of feminist historical scholarship. Chapter Three then engages the category of memory looking specifically at the place of memory in the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. It finally highlights the relationship between memory and history through the feminist theological hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. The analysis of memory and history from a critical feminist perspective serves to highlight the problems that arise with the more traditionally accepted objective interpretation of history and tradition.

One of the major shifts in contemporary Western philosophy has been the emergence of a new 'historical consciousness.'[1] This new consciousness has effectively rejected nature as the primary interpretative framework for

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[1]Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination,* 104-107.

understanding human life and replaced it with history. Consequently, Western culture now explores meanings and patterns of human existence through the lens of history rather than the world of nature.[2] Alongside this new historical consciousness a critical feminist historiography has developed. Both these philosophical positions have served to stimulate a renewed interest in the nature of history and the concept of memory. This contemporary interest in both history and memory understands history as an ongoing process and acknowledges memory as a radically formative category that both directs and grounds human identity and belonging.[3]

The category of memory is part of a dynamic activity that facilitates the defining -- and re-defining -- of human identity. In being so closely connected to the formation of identity and belonging, the concept of memory has the ability to critically engage both the public and private lives of a community. This makes memory a potentially transformative philosophical category. Consequently, the exploration of memory is not merely an academic exercise. Rather it is an essentially practical activity that is able to create 'possibilities for political action that may lead to liberating social transformation.'[4] Accordingly, this chapter seeks to explore the role memory has in the theology of Johannes Baptist Metz and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. More particularly, this chapter explores the relationship between history and memory in an effort to assess how that relationship might facilitate or inhibit the development of a practical, inclusive and transformative theology.

Metz is primarily concerned with the crisis facing Western Christianity -- in particular the 'crisis of identity'. Furthermore, he believes that this crisis can only be addressed in and through the memory of suffering. Metz considers that the new revelation of the redemptive presence and promise of God can be found in the victims of history. Since the victims of history proclaim the presence of God then the historical promise of redemption is carried in the memory of

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[2]Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of the Risen Lord*, (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 731-734.

[3]S. Jay Kleinberg, 'Introduction' in *Retrieving Women's History*, (ed. S. Jay Kleinberg, Oxford, Berg Publishers Inc. 1988), ix-xii.

[4]Hewitt, *A Critical Theory of Religion,* 150.

their suffering.[5] Consequently, memory is intimately linked to the prophetic call for freedom, justice and well-being. Our ability to acknowledge the memory and history of this suffering is, in fact, the measure of our humanity. Metz believes that, through the category of memory, Christian theology is able to unlock this history of suffering and so redeem both the past and the future. He maintains that engagement with sufferings of the victims of Christian history makes conversion from apathy to awareness and responsibility possible. Without this commitment, Metz considers humanity is powerless to resist future oppression and so is unable to move towards a transformed future.[6]

However, while Metz is so obviously concerned with the victims of history, his focus tends to the overall *rehabilitation* of suffering and the dead. Little attention is given to the acknowledgement of their historical agency or of their particular resistance to oppression. Part of the reason for this lies in the concern Metz has for those who privilege the suffering of one particular group over another group who also suffer.[7] However, in taking a generalised or non-specific approach to oppression there is a danger that particular concrete situations of oppression will be overlooked. Likewise, to simplify or subsume the experiences of victims under the broad category of 'suffering' runs the risk of missing specific root causes of oppression. Unless the systematic character and particular interconnected nature of oppression within Western society are addressed the same injustices will continue to emerge.

Although Schüssler Fiorenza affirms the emphasis Metz gives to the memory and history of suffering within the Christian tradition, and although she acknowledges that the Christian tradition has a prime commitment to speak for the victims of history, she engages a very different perspective. Rather than refusing to privilege the suffering of a particular group, Schüssler Fiorenza actually takes a particular group as her starting point and constantly refers back

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[5]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 197.

[6]ibid., 110.

[7]Metz, 'Future in the Memory of Suffering' in *Faith and the Future,* 13. 'The memory of suffering, in the Christian sense, . . . creates a social and political conscience in the interests of *others* suffering.' [emphasis mine]

to them.[8] She believes the best way to positively engage the injustices and oppression of the Christian tradition is to privilege the history of the women who have suffered and been marginalised within that tradition. When this happens, not only do the interconnected nature of oppressive structures and attitudes become clearer, but the memory of Christianity is revealed as one of not only suffering but also as one of resistance and agency.

This serves to implicate Christian history in a broader sense than that acknowledged by Metz. It also allows for a deeper and more specific appreciation of the complexity of structures that cause and support oppression. Through her critical attention to both the oppressive and liberative tendencies of the Christian tradition, Schüssler Fiorenza aims to systematically examine and deconstruct ideologies and social structures of Western Christianity from a feminist perspective. She believes that only in this way can the memory of Christianity help build a transformed and liberating future.[9] Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that without this critical and systematic challenge the Christian tradition fails in its prophetic task to mediate the full redemptive promise of God. In other words Schüssler Fiorenza claims that justice will not be done and the well-being of humanity will not be accomplished until the concrete historical conditions of the most dehumanised, exploited and poorest women are addressed.[10]

However, regardless of the different foci given to the category of memory, Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza both acknowledge its historical basis. This means that both theologians critique a consciousness that doesn't recognise history's constitutive role in our self-understanding. Rather, they affirm the notion of history as an ongoing process of interpreting and giving meaning to human life. This understanding of history has distinct implications for the way memory is

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[8]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 29-31. 'G*d's power for our salvation must "reveal" itself as active in the struggles for survival and well-being of women living at the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid of power [paying] particular attention to those theological articulations of wo/men that explore situations of multiplicative oppressions.'

[9]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 17.

[10]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Patriarchal Structures and the Discipleship of Equals' in *Discipleship of Equals,* 231.

used both philosophically and theologically. In order to appreciate their particular uses of memory, it is important to explore the philosophical frameworks within which Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza interpret and understand history. The way a tradition understands and interprets its history serves to regulate the availability -- and therefore the usable content -- of its memory.

The Category of History

The notion of history is an important theme or category within both the philosophical and theological understandings of the Christian tradition.[11] History plays a singular and somewhat unitive role in the Western Christian tradition as it weaves and connects the process of 'naming of ourselves, the universe and the sacred powers that sustain us' into the concrete reality of human life.[12] Expressed differently, history can be understood as the connective tissue that directs and informs our questions of ultimate meaning in relation to our present reality. It offers us access to our origins and destiny in light of where we are at the present point in time. In so doing, history plays a significant role in the interpretation and articulation of Christian faith and theology.

However, while the place of history in Christian theology is fairly assured, the question of how the Christian tradition actually understands history is not quite so simple. Subsequently, this means that consideration of how history is to be interpreted is not always agreed upon. If history provides the content of Christian heritage and identity, then the framework within which history is understood plays a vital role in how this heritage and identity are accessed and articulated. Consequently, the critical exploration into how history is understood, and therefore how it is actually interpreted, is an unavoidable task for any theological methodology.

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[11]Plaskow and Christ, 'Theology in a Different Voice' in *Weaving the Visions,* 9.

[12]Schillebeeckx, *Christ,* 746-762. Here Schillebeeckx offers a fairly comprehensive overview of the current theological understanding of the relationship between revelation, salvation and history through an exploration of the work of theologians such as Cullmann, Pannenberg, Rahner, Metz, Kuitert, Gutierrez and Bonino.

Both Johannes Baptist Metz and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza maintain that the biblical God is first and foremost a God of history -- a God who acts within the concrete historical world of humanity.[13] Indeed, they both believe that because salvation is not possible 'outside the world or without the world,'[14] history and society must be *'the* place for Christian theology.'[15] As a critical reflection on the relationship between God and humanity, theology cannot occur outside the historical context of the communities concerned. The articulation of our relationship with the divine is, at any one time, expressed within a particular historical context and from a particular historical perspective.[16] For Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza human history serves to both mediate and reveal the relationship between the human and the divine. Christian theology has always interpreted this revelation within a variety of frameworks. These have given rise to a legitimate diversity of responses which owe much to the various cultural, philosophical and historical situations within which Christianity takes expression.

Prior to the Enlightenment, Western Christian theology reflected the cultural and religious unity of Europe. Not withstanding the breach generated by the Reformation Western Christianity was, basically, a homogeneous project. It reflected a 'natural' understanding of the human person and engaged with a static understanding of humanity's relationship with the divine. This means that there was little awareness of historical or cultural diversity. The Enlightenment radically challenged this unified religious and metaphysical world-view of seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe.[17] Historically, the Enlightenment foreshadowed a breakdown of the traditional understanding of human existence and engendered one of the most far-reaching shifts in intellectual perspective

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[13]Metz, *Theology of the World,* 22 and Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 148-149.

[14]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 27.

[15]Metz, 'Theology in the Struggle for History and Society' in *Faith and the Future,* 51.

[16]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 98-99. Schüssler Fiorenza claims that to maintain that it is possible to uncover the objective truth of the past leads to the belief that: 'historical facticity and theological truth can become identical.' 99

[17]J. Gilles, *The Evolution of Philosophy,* (New York: Alba House, 1987), 140-141.

in the Western world.[18] Philosophically, the Enlightenment aimed at the 'conquest of myths by logos.'[19] With its emphasis on individualism, its fascination with empirical data and its confidence in the power of human reason, the Enlightenment was interested in explanation of facts rather than interpretation of life. Accordingly, it believed that human history should be concerned with scientifically uncovering the facts of past events so they could be clearly ordered and then rationally assessed.[20] With its optimistic confidence in the superiority of the faculty of human reason, the Enlightenment considered history as rooted in a scientific framework of rational objectivity and historical neutrality.[21] Thus, history was assumed to be a scientific value-free enterprise that should be engaged within the unbiased framework of pure reason.

The Philosophical Presuppositions of the Enlightenment

The philosophy of the Enlightenment considered that the main role of history was to provide a value-free framework from which data about the past could be systematically recovered.[22] Basically, the Enlightenment understood human history as a linear or one dimensional ordering of past events. It believed that human history was essentially one-dimensional and therefore undialectical. Accordingly, the function of history was to arrange historical information in order to discover and examine 'what actually happened' so as to objectively chart the evolutionary progress of humanity.[23] This philosophical world-view encouraged a dualism that served to separate human life from history, and belief from

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[18]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 15. Metz claims the Enlightenment: a) nullified the identity of faith and religious consciousness; b) shattered the unity of religion and society.

[19]Josef Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique,* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 11-16.

[20]Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 272.

[21]Flora Angel Keshgegian, *To Know By Heart: Towards a Theology of Remembering For Salvation,* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1992), 149-150.

[22]Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics,* 11-26.

[23]ibid., 97.

knowledge.[24] History was merely a linear organisation of events that occurred at various historical times and in different historical places. Human life was seen in terms of the separate -- and often separated -- points along a time-line of events. This meant that belief, or knowledge that could not be empirically verified, was banished to the realm of the superstitious or irrational. Like all areas of human reality, history was seen as a scientifically measurable object; its claim to truth needed to be critically and objectively assessed by the faculty of reason.[25] The Enlightenment claimed human history not only could -- but also *should* -- be isolated from the cultural and political contexts that gave rise to and later examined it.

> 'In the Enlightenment, tradition lost its power to determine human activity and direct man's (sic) life. It became an object of historical knowledge or storehouse of information to satisfy the needs of reason in the Enlightenment. This technical association between history and tradition was given scientific expression in historicism.'[26]

This view of history seriously denies the importance of the past and so disempowers its influence. If history is only understood as the chronological arrangement of objective facts or value-free events, then, once these events have occurred, they are studied or assessed as peripheral rather than central considerations. They are not really considered to be operative or functional and so are no longer important to the past, the present or the future. This means history cannot really be of any contemporary existential value because it cannot be questioned by 'the texture of modern emancipatory impulses.'[27] When this happens, there is no critical point of entry for those who would tell a different story. Consequently, groups who do not reflect the accepted cultural reality are denied the opportunity of giving voice to their different concerns.

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[24]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 189-194. Here Metz echos Walter Benjamin's critique of separating life from history -- as found in historicism. See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 254-255.

[25]Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics,* 11-26.

[26]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 36.

[27]ibid., 24. Along similar lines, Metz claims: 'It is only possible to be a true hearer of the Word' if you can 'hear the objections raised by the world of one's time and shares the problems of that world.'

The philosophical horizon of the Enlightenment was questioned by the emergence of critical-hermeneutical philosophy. This critical philosophy challenged the Enlightenment's preoccupation with factual certitude which, in turn, served to critique the Enlightenment's a-historical foundations and challenge its emphasis on historical neutrality. Basically, a critical philosophy claimed that the Enlightenment produced a reified and one-dimensional understanding of history that is quite inadequate for the contemporary interpretation of human truth and human reality. In contrast, it emphasised the incomplete and dynamic character of human truth and human reality.[28] A critical philosophy replaces the Enlightenment's understanding of history with an horizon that is essentially intersubjective and inter-relational. In contrast to the Enlightenment, it seeks to highlight the growing historical consciousness of humanity. [29]

A Critical Engagement with History

Critical-hermeneutical philosophy maintains that a commitment towards the redefinition and the subsequent transformation of tradition requires an alternative perspective engaged from within a much broader horizon. To limit history to a 'scientific' understanding, as the Enlightenment had done, excludes the interests of others. It effectively prevents their access to 'unfulfilled historical possibilities for a more human future.'[30] Critical-hermeneutics considers that a usable past must be a retrievable past. To lose access to the unfulfilled possibilities of a culture or a society is to encourage hegemony and domination. This loss effectively closes off the heritage and identity of all but the dominant and powerful groups.[31]

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[28]Letty Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective: A Theology,* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 75 .

[29]ibid. Russel notes the shift from a primary system of static ontological categories of thought to a secondary system of changing, historical categories of thought and action.

[30]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 105.

[31]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* 39.

Accordingly, this critical-hermeneutical shift in philosophy sought to stress the essentially inter-relational and inter-subjective quality of human life and human history. It critiques the Enlightenment's 'anthropological reduction of history and society' claiming that this attitude serves to ignore humanity's growing historical consciousness and reduces human reality to the private individual.[32] A critical philosophy challenges the dualistic interpretation and objective basis of Enlightenment philosophy. It declares that the various claims to be able to engage an objective and a-political view on life and history are themselves, quite unreasonable. Such claims not only hide their own prejudices and interest factors but they also fail to be sustained by the concrete 'historical' experience of contemporary human life.[33] A contemporary understanding of our relationship to history and tradition requires an acknowledgment of 'public consciousness' not value-neutrality.[34]

In light of these critiques, a critical-hermeneutical philosophy rejects the claim that the faculty of reason is the only authentic or legitimate path to truth and knowledge. This 'anthropological turning point' emphasises the essentially contextual, dynamic and inter-subjective nature of life and history. It highlights the historically creative and transformative ability of humanity and the communal and therefore public nature of history.[35] Humanity is no longer the detached subject reflecting on an objective world because it is impossible to isolate people from their historical world.[36] Rather, humanity experiences life as subjects who shape the world and its history and participate in its ongoing creation. History itself both grows and unfolds through the human lives that influence and inform

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[32]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 63.

[33]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 46.

[34]ibid., 104.

[35]Metz, *Theology of the World,* 53- 54. While attributed to post-modern philosophy, Metz notes this conception has its roots in the biblical understanding of the promise of God.

[36]Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 276-277. Gadamer claims our prejudices, not reason, are the fore-structure of understanding. He asks: 'Is not, rather, all human existence, even the freest, limited and qualified in various ways? If this is true, the idea of an absolute reason is not possible for historical humanity. Reason exists only in concrete historical terms.'

it.[37] Within this understanding, history is not an external framework of the world. Rather, as the unfolding story of human reality history is so deeply imbedded *in* the world that the nature of the world itself is historical.[38] In other words, a critical-hermeneutical philosophy underscores and emphasises Gadamer's assertion that 'history does not belong to us, rather we belong to it.' [39]

This view preserves the inter-relationship and internal dynamics of history itself. Past, present and future are not isolated from each other but stand in a relationship of creative tension. Without this creative tension history has no real future, and the past has no real history. This means that humanity has no historical freedom.[40] The present is both appropriated and shaped by the history of the past which, in turn, serves to influence and shape the history of the future. Consequently, the past 'is not dead for it is not even past.'[41] Rather, the past is the formative base and the radical foundation of humanity's present reality and future possibilities. The 'nineteenth-century assumption' that sound historical scholarship should not be influenced by present day concerns is dismissed as 'aggressive apologetic rhetoric.'[42]

Indeed, Schillebeeckx claims that 'our relationship with the past is in itself an option for the future' and so it can never be purely theoretical.[43] This understanding radically challenges the primacy given to the dominant historical voices of Western society. Consequently, it has important ramifications for all groups within our culture, particularly the marginalised. As David Tracy declares,

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[37]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 96-98.

[38]Metz, 'Theology in the Struggle for History and Society' in *Faith and the Future,* 53-54. Unless Christian theology affirms Marx's insight of 'the world as history' faith is in danger of believing secular history operates outside salvation and salvation stands outside history.

[39]Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 261.

[40]Metz, 'The Responsibility of Hope' in *Philosophy Today,* (Vol.10: 4/4, Winter 1966), 282.

[41]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity* 36.

[42]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone,* 95-96.

[43]Edward Schillebeeckx, 'The Crisis in the Language of Faith' in *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology and the Church*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 92.

historical scholarship has now placed history 'at the service of the wider conversation of our common humanity.'[44]

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that critical feminist theory must claim a central place for the category of history.[45] It must acknowledge women's history as an integral -- albeit hidden -- component of Christian tradition. She claims giving primacy of place to history makes it possible for contemporary women to search for their roots, to practice solidarity and to retrieve memory of sufferings and the resistance of generations of Christian women. History is a foundational source of our heritage since it is from within history that we find our identity and it is through history that we access our tradition. Consequently, an authentic exploration of Christian roots, Christian solidarity, Christian memory, and Christian identity must engage in a critical analysis of the content, place and role of women's history.

Feminist Concerns with History

Feminist studies consider that the history and tradition of Western culture has systematically marginalised the stories and agency of women.[46] Within this history and tradition women have been largely forgotten or ignored. The voices, concerns and activities of women have been effectively eliminated from the public record of their cultural and religious traditions rendering women historically 'invisible.'[47] Feminist studies maintain that the historical invisibility of

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[44]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* 39.

[45]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'In Search of Women's Heritage' in *Weaving the Visions,* 35. Here Schüssler Fiorenza states that 'if history in general, and early Christian history in particular, is one way in which androcentric culture and religion have defined women, then it must become a major object for feminist analysis.'

[46]Jay Kleinberg, 'Introduction' in *Retrieving Women's History,* ix. See also Carol Christ, *Womanspirit Rising,* (eds. Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, London: Harper & Row, 1979), 3-4, who notes most feminist critiques originated because women were excluded from traditional socio/religious spheres.

[47]Wallach Scott, 'The Problem of Invisibility' in *Retrieving Women's History*, 5. Here, Wallach Scott claims that recent research shows 'not that women were inactive or absent from events that made history, but that they have been systematically left out of the official record.'

women in Western society does not so much reflect the absence of women from the historical record of their tradition but more precisely testifies to the 'androcentric bias that has shaped the historical writings' of the Western tradition.[48] In other words, the problem of women's historical invisibility has not occurred because women have played no part in the formation and transmission of their cultural or religious history and tradition. It has occurred because predominantly male writers and historians of our culture have considered the contributions of women either unimportant or insignificant.

Many feminist scholars blame the patriarchal bias of Western society on the androcentric interpretation of biblical texts. They claim that Western biblical traditions promote male concerns, project male values and define male interests as the normative framework within which to understand and interpret human truth and reality. Women's concerns, women's values and women's interests have played little part in this interpretation.[49] This androcentric perspective serves to legitimate the exclusion of women their concerns and their interests. Basically, androcentrism reveals a basic defect in an accepted understanding of our ultimate reality. This both diminishes the present and impoverishes the openness of our tradition to future possibilities.

Because of the mutually formative relationship between biblical religions and Western culture, this critique implicates the biblical religions in general and Western Christianity in particular.[50] Following from the contemporary critical feminist engagement of Western culture there is a growing awareness of the need to challenge Christian history and be suspicious of its tradition. Critical feminist scholarship maintains that If Western Christianity truly wishes to explore the human-divine relationship, it must subject the tradition to a systematic feminist evaluation that explores the gaps and distortions of its historical

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[48]Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai,* 37.

[49]Wallach Scott, 'The Problem of Invisibility' in *Retrieving Women's History,* 5-6. 'The answers to [women's historical invisibility] must be tied to an analyses of history itself, and to an understanding of the relationship of the official histories to the politics of any age. . . . We have to figure out how sexual difference . . . (the understanding of the meaning of differences between men and women) figured in politics and the writing of history.' 6.

[50]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 4-5.

memory. This programme of critical examination and systematic evaluation of the Christian tradition specifically brings to light both the unavoidable ambiguity and the androcentric nature of Western history.

Schüssler Fiorenza maintains it is precisely in the loss of historical memory that the roots of oppression can be found.[51] Accordingly, feminist studies start with a specifically feminist position and then read history 'against the grain' of accepted official or traditional understanding.[52] This means feminist studies engage in descriptive rather than a prescriptive methodologies. Feminist studies refuse to read history *about* women. Rather, they read history *with* and *for* women. This commitment entails more than just the recovery of stories. Consequently, critical feminist perspectives do more than complement the existing picture. They engage more fundamental methodological problems. They 'ask *why* and *how* women became invisible to history when, in fact, they were social and political actors in the past.'[53] They argue that only then can our historical understanding be transformed. Because the 'victims of history are also the *makers* of history' feminist studies deconstruct conditions that historically silence and marginalise women in order to re-construct them again with women at the centre.[54] As Walter Benjamin maintains, to go beyond the history of the oppressors we must hold onto the history of the oppressed which entails wresting the 'tradition away from the conformism that is about to overpower it.'[55]

Patriarchal traditions both support and engage in hegemonic discourse.

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[51]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 133.

[52]Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 248. Benjamin 'brushes against the grain' of traditional understanding and so challenges the hegemonic history of the 'rulers' by the 'authentic' history of the oppressed victims. For other writers who read history 'against the grain see: Metz, 'Future in the Memory of Suffering, in *Faith and the Future,* 12. Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 35. Mieke Bal *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges,* 17.

[53]Wallech Scott, 'The Problem of Invisibility' in *Retrieving Women's History,* 13.

[54]Hewitt, *A Critical Theory of Religion,* 150-151.

[55]Benjamin *Illuminations,* 247-248. 'Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. . . . There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another.' 248.

They concern themselves with stories of the most powerful groups and ideologies of the most dominant voices of society. Furthermore, they seek to present those stories as a true understanding and authentic interpretation of the history and reality of that society. In order to do this, patriarchal traditions marginalise and suppress all those accounts that would challenge or contradict them. Critical feminist studies maintain that the reality or truth-claims of these traditions are seriously defective for they carry significant misinterpretations and fundamental distortions. These distortions serve to 'dominate and oppress different groups . . . and so impede and prevent the true pursuit of justice and freedom.'[56]

Consequently, feminist studies have a two-fold task. They begin with an examination of the socio-historical context in which history is interpreted. Then, they evaluate how this either encourages or suppresses the contemporary struggle for the liberation of women. This double-pronged approach affirms women's historical agency and makes it possible to reconstruct stories and memories of their historical participation.[57] This explicitly partisan and contextualised approach acknowledges that as history is contextual and value-laden, the feminist critique of history will make its historical context and value-specific position clear. The feminist critique takes an unequivocally historical, unavoidably social and radically political position.

Historical critique does not originate 'from a point beyond history and society but is deeply embedded and implicated in them.'[58] The advocacy stance of critical feminist theologies localises its analysis and so historically grounds its critique. This helps prevent a generalised or reified understanding of the conditions of women's oppression from emerging.[59] In this way, critical feminist theologies can motivate and assist women in formulating their own goals and

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[56]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone,* 136-140. 'Feminist theology therefore insists that we have to bring to bear a critical evaluation and "hermeneutics of suspicion" both upon the content and the process of biblical interpretation.' 139.

[57]Ibid., 44.

[58]Hewitt, *A Critical Theory of* Religion, 38-41.

[59]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 44-45.

strategies for liberation and so help to re-define history and transform tradition.[60] This hermeneutical shift in understanding brings the past, the present and the future of history together and names them as dynamic and interconnected. Schüssler Fiorenza insists that:

> History is not a collection of facts or meaningless chronicle, but either a means of domination or the heritage of a people that looks to the past for its vision of the future. If oppressed peoples are to have future, freedom, and autonomy, they must recover their historical roots and base their solidarity on a common historical self-understanding.[61]

The stories of those who have been silenced or marginalised by history is vitally important. These hidden stories contain the forgotten possibilities of human existence. When these stories are recovered and retold past, present and future are linked together and the inner tension of history is preserved. This inner tension of history is important. Without it the Christian tradition is in danger of encouraging a dualistic sacred/profane understanding of history or collapsing history into a false consciousness.[62] When this happens the stories that would offer a critique to the dominant position or speak of an alternative vision tend to become more and more marginalised. Eventually, the ethical demands of Christian life are lost, the historical responsibility of Christian faith is diminished, and the political responsibility of the Christian tradition is ignored.

A critical feminist exploration and reconstruction of history re-claims and re-writes women back into their own religious traditions. This serves to make the stories, concerns and agency of women historically visible. Through reclaiming the historical presence and agency of women within their own religious histories, critical Western feminist theologies aim to liberate and thereby transform Western religious traditions.[63] This highlights the fact that the relationship between human life and human history is mutual and dynamic. It points to the reality that as feminist theologies have been shaped by historical events and

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[60]ibid., 137.

[61]ibid., 146.

[62]ibid, 4-12.

[63]Rebecca Chopp, *Saving Work*, 18.

struggles so too have they shaped and inspired them.[64]

Although critical feminist theologies take the marginalisation and silencing of women as their starting point, they do not stop there but actively re-construct stories and memories of women's historical agency. Even when women's presence and activity is real, women have not been treated as historical agents. Rather they have been seen as a 'topical or heuristic category' and therefore reified.[65] In this way, women's concerns have been relegated to the private sphere and systematically excluded from the public historical record. Consequently, what we encounter in our history is not concerned with the reality of women's experiences or what actually happened. Rather, it reflects men's experiences of women and so it actually reflects responses men have *to* women and the ideas they have *about* women.[66] Accordingly, feminist historians must:

> recover instances when women have not only been victims but also agents. . . . Locating times when women challenged and moved beyond their roles enables the historian to move women's history from the periphery of Church history and closer to its centre. Thereby, women's roles in shaping the church are more fully recognised and "women's history" is no longer a special category [within] . . . Christian history.'[67]

History offers feminist studies the hope -- however tentative -- that the consciousness of a culture can be changed.[68] Given the historical nature of truth and the dynamic nature of history, it is no longer possible to claim one truth or one reality; tradition can no longer be a 'clear historical narrative of progressive enlightenment'; truth no longer exists in an exclusive-universalist framework.[69] History can no longer exclude stories of marginalised groups and still make a

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[64]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 113.

[65]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 84.

[66]Wallach Scott, 'The Problem of Invisibility' in *Retrieving Women's History*, 5-11.

[67]Helen Marie Ciernick, 'Women at the Second Vatican Council' in *Women and Theology,* 77.

[68]Catherine Belsey & J Moore, *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism* (London: MacMillan Press, 1989), 3.

[69]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* 69

claim to authenticity for it is clearly marked with plurality and ambiguity.[70] By critically challenging stories of the 'dominant decision makers,' feminist theologies seeks to illuminate the barely visible layer of a history -- or memory -- of the marginalised.

Authentic history includes the stories of all who participated in its formation. It carries the struggles of victims as well as the triumphs of victors. To forget the hidden stories of history is to allow oppression and domination to continue. Critical feminist theologies take seriously the need to reclaim the memory of women's struggles. Consequently, memory has become a most significant theological and philosophical category for feminist theologies as they explore the possibilities of transforming their religious traditions.

The Category of Memory

There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that.
You walked alone,
full of laughter,
you bathed bare-bellied.
You say you have lost all recollection of it,
remember. . .
You say there are not the words to describe it,
you say it does not exist.
But remember.
Make an effort to remember.
Or . . . failing that . . . Invent
Monique Wittig.
Appendix C.

In her article *The Redemptive Power of Memory,* Marsha Hewitt claims there is an 'intrinsic connection between memory and emancipation on the one hand and forgetting and enslavement on the other.'[71] Hewitt goes on to maintain that when a society or a community are denied access to the history or the memories of their past they are in effect rendered 'helpless in the face of domination'.[72] Metz further supports this connection between human freedom and the power of memory when he declares that it is not by chance that 'the destruction of memory is a typical measure of

[70]ibid.

[71]Hewitt, 'The Redemptive Power of Memory' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* Vol 10. (Spring 1994): 73-89.

[72]ibid., 73-75.

totalitarian rule.'[73] As the primary carrier of the events, symbols, rituals and identity of a people, historical memory is vital to human life. Consequently, any loss of those memories is fatal.

In accessing and interpretation of religious tradition, memory acts as both a hermeneutic of retrieval and a hermeneutic of suspicion. As a hermeneutic of retrieval it positively seeks to engage stories and concerns that have formed and shaped the identity of the community as it is now. As a hermeneutic of suspicion it retells and remembers these stories disclosing misrepresentations and interest factors that have acted to distort the tradition. These interest factors have, in effect, suppressed and concealed the stories and histories of the disempowered and marginalised. Memory, then, is a resource for the continuation -- and the transformation -- of tradition. A critical reclamation of memory enables challenges and visions that have been historically suppressed or ignored to emerge. Memory provides a subversive and dynamic wellspring from which stories of human experience can be used to re-imagine and re-vitalise tradition.[74]

Memory connects, informs and grounds history as the context in which human experience is interpreted. As there is no separation between life and history so there is no separation between history and remembering the stories that have shaped, influenced and directed that history. This does not mean that the critical exploration of history ceases. Rather, Schüssler Fiorenza claims:

> To recover biblical history as memory and remembrance as history for women, does not mean abandoning critical historiography but deepening a critical understanding of historical inquiry, conceiving of historiography as memory and tradition *for* people of today and tomorrow.[75]

Memory links past, present and future in a manner that affirms the identity and continuity of a living community. Any community denied the stories and the memories of its history, is denied the power to lay claim to its deepest belonging and its own identity. In effect the community is told that its history,

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[73]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 110.

[74]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 137.

[75]ibid., 115.

culture and perceptions of the world do not really matter for they are not historically significant enough to remember. These people, or groups of people, are unable to participate in their present reality and can therefore no longer envision their own future. Rather, history is interpreted for them and tradition is shaped around them by the dominant and powerful. In operating 'above all as a category by which historical identity is found' memory is vital for the ongoing life of a people or community.[76] For in denying the past the options for a useable present are limited and so access to a transformed future is actually prevented.[77]

In providing this vital link between the present, past and future, the category of memory is considered to be an essential component of the struggle against oppression, domination or exclusion from our 'common stories.' As George Orwell said in his book, *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* 'Who controls the past, controls the future: and who controls the present, controls the past.'[78] This means that a community cut off from, or denied access to the past that has shaped and formed it, can lay no claim to its own deepest belonging. It is a community that is unable to envision any future that truly speaks of who it is or where it wants to go. In effect it has no concrete identity of its own making. Memory sustains and empowers the experiences and the stories of a community by giving it access to an enriching and life-giving tradition. It provides an entry into 'old texts from a new critical direction' and so enables history and tradition to become a demanding heritage.[79] Through memory, the forgotten stories of humanity's past experiences are rediscovered and reclaimed as significant and formative. This grounds the hope of the present as a real

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[76]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 67

[77]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 81.

[78]George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* as quoted by Marsha Hewitt in 'The Redemptive Power of Memory' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 10, 73. Hewitt considers this understanding of memory 'is thematically sustained' through George Orwell's focus on the party's will for 'absolute control in its ruthless and relentless measures to erase even the most private memories of individuals.'

[79]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 113.

possibility and empowers it to transform the future.[80] Basically, memory unlocks the legitimate diversity that constitutes humanity's relationship to God and in its ability to acknowledge diversity and transform the future, memory has become an important critical category in contemporary Western theologies. In the words of T.S. Eliot 'Memory! You have the key'.[81]

The Category of Memory in the Work of JOHANNES BAPTIST METZ

Johannes Baptist Metz is a founding author of what is generally referred to as 'political theology.' Political theologies are essentially critical practical theologies. The roots of Metz' own political theology lie in the critique of the Enlightenment. Consequently, Metz does his theology in an acute awareness of the crisis of modernity: a crisis of tradition; a crisis of authority; a crisis of reason; and ultimately, a crisis of religion.[82] In light of this cultural crisis, Metz believes that the task of Christian theology is to participate in a practical fundamental theology that acknowledges the fragmentation of contemporary life; takes seriously the 'historically mediated totality of the modern world;' and seeks to make the truth known through the concrete engagement of Christian praxis.[83] In other words, while Rahner declares Christians must be 'hearers of the word,' Metz considers Christians must ultimately be 'doers of the word.'

In discussion of memory as a category of critical theology, the name Johannes Baptist Metz will usually spring to mind. And rightly so, for Metz was one of the first contemporary theologians to engage Western Christianity in the

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[80]ibid., 146.

[81]T.S. Eliot, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 27. Note also Eliot's poem the 'Four Quartets.' Here Eliot further explores the creative power of memory through its ability to radically form identity and so transform the future. He explores the important distinction between memory that is nostalgic and memory that is challenging or transformative.

[82]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 34-45. Metz claims that this situation of crisis in Christianity is not 'primarily a crisis of the Christian message, but rather a crisis of its subjects and institutions.'

[83]ibid., 50-60.

critical examination of memory as a vital - and even dangerous - category for the ongoing life of the tradition.

Metz encountered the use of 'dangerous memories' in the works of Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse and Theodore Adorno.[84] These thinkers were part of the Frankfurt School of Social Criticism and, as outlined in the previous chapter, were concerned with developing a Critical Theory that would help counter the growing apathy and transform the 'false consciousness' of twentieth century Western culture. Through the category of memory these scholars found an effective tool for potential transformative action. Benjamin explored how memory acted to resist totalising ideologies by flashing up in moments of danger and domination. Marcuse pursued the necessity for the development of a 'critical remembrance' for a society that had been pushed into forgetfulness. Adorno explored the concrete possibilities and dialectical tensions found within the memory of guilt.[85] In effect, these thinkers used the category of memory to go 'beyond the history of the oppressors' by 'holding onto the history of the oppressed.'[86] This work on memory as a resource to counter apathy and a tool to transform false consciousness highlights the 'intrinsic connection between memory and emancipation on the one hand and forgetting and enslavement on the other.'[87] In being so intrinsically connected to situations of oppression and emancipation, memory has become a formative category in the theology of Metz and, through him, for other contemporary theologies of social critique.

Metz considers memory a radical aspect of human freedom. As part of human freedom, he maintains that the dangerous memories of Christianity act to prevent the development of an apathetic relationship with history and tradition.[88] Without these dangerous memories, Metz believes that the past is

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[84]Hall, *The Study of the Category of Memory in the Political Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz,* 2.

[85]ibid., 2-10.

[86]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion:* 155.

[87]ibid., 147.

[88]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 190. 'The contemporary hermeneutical tendency in philosophy, then, developed as a reaction against a world dominated by

in danger of being dislocated by being reduced to a collection of obsolete historical facts that can make no claim on the present. This prevents access to the critical and liberating strands of our tradition. So for Metz, dangerous memories belong to the ongoing story of human history as an irreducible sign of a free, authentic historical existence. They are the inner voice of history and tradition that dares to remember the stories of the conquered rather than those of the conquerors. This makes memory the voice that challenges the plausibility of existing relationships and disturbs unexamined attitudes that would reduce humanity to objects. In this way, memory secures humanity as subjects in history before God.[89]

In line with contemporary historical consciousness, Metz understands history as the basic framework within which human truth and reality are accessed and interpreted.[90] For Metz, truth and reality are historically mediated values with understanding being the process of interpreting them. Accordingly, Metz maintains that the category of memory is best explored through a practical philosophy of history and a critical hermeneutic since it is through these that the 'restoration of memory to its rightful place as a means of liberation' can actually begin.[91] He goes on to claim that Hegel's work -- particularly the concept of *memoria* -- provides a clear philosophical framework for exploring such a practical philosophy of history. Although Metz considers Hegel's 'world spirit' as having a tendency to be apolitical and somewhat abstract, he concedes that Hegel's *memoria* resists the destruction of the relationship between life and history so that there is less danger of abstracting truth and knowledge from their own historical contexts.[92]

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science and deprived of memory and tradition. . . . This criticism resulted in a plea against memory and for forgetfulness as the factor that made life possible.'

[89]ibid., 184.

[90]Metz, 'Theology in the Struggle for History and Society' in *Faith and the Future,* 52-53.

[91]Metz, *Faith in History and Society* 193. Although it is important to note that Metz considers neither of these approaches are without 'unsolved problems.'

[92]ibid., 189. Metz considers that 'perhaps more fully than that of any other modern thinker' Hegel does not 'recall truth as an abstraction from historical relationships. [But rather] 'compels philosophy to consider truth at the historical level of its

Metz considers that this 'compels philosophy to consider truth at the historical level of its mediation.'[93] Here, memory exercises a critical function that serves to resist the apathy and forgetfulness of suffering and so protects humanity as a subject in history. Accordingly, memory is not an object of the human mind, but 'an inner aspect of all critical consciousness.'[94] It serves as a practical and fundamental philosophical category since it preserves the subversive or hidden thread of history and so is able to save the 'threatened identity' of those who have been marginalised and oppressed.[95] As a fundamental category in which historical identity is formed and protected, memory is the historical process whereby humanity understands and situates itself as subjects within the world and its history. In line with this, Metz regards memory as a systematic 'expression of the relationship between reason and history' that aims to become 'practical as freedom in the medium of history.'[96]

While Metz considers memory to be a fundamental category of a critical philosophy, he also understands it as a foundational category of his practical fundamental theology. Historically, an understanding of memory within Christian history and tradition has its roots in both Greek philosophy and the Jewish tradition. From Greek philosophy, Christianity appropriated the concept of *logos* with its metaphysical conceptual framework. It also took up a somewhat re-worked understanding of Plato's *anamnesis*. From the Jewish tradition, Christianity took over the biblical understanding of memory as the memory of God in the history of the people of Israel.[97] The specific articulation of memory within Christianity also owes much to the thought of St Augustine, on whose

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mediation.' Hence, Hegel's 'concern with memory in which the previously known - or *apriori* - truth of classical metaphysics is mediated with the history of freedom of the human spirit.'

[93]ibid.

[94]ibid., 193. See also 88. Here Metz says 'we live in a period when all ideas and concepts, including those of God, are determined and deciphered . . . in accordance with their social interests and historical contexts . . . . No theological theory can allow any abstraction from such problems as public life, justice and freedom.'

[95]ibid., 66.

[96]ibid., 185-189.

[97]ibid., 184-188.

work many Christian thinkers have subsequently built. Augustine understood memory as the foundation of rational thought. Accordingly, he explored the theological meaning of memory in terms of divine illumination. He considered memory was the pathway of 'knowing' that beckons -- or leads -- us towards God. Metz considers that in following Augustine's line of thought Christian history has managed to appropriate memory as both *anamnesis* and *memoria.* This has provided Christianity with a hermeneutical category that is able to interpret history in the presence -- and therefore under the promise -- of God.[98]

The Christian tradition is also aware that 'its memories are related to a single historical event' in which humanity has been 'redeemed and set free' by God.[99] Thus Metz considers memory a foundational aspect and fundamental activity of Christian faith. Standing as it does under the promise and the responsibility of the Christ event, memory has an element of judgment and an element of danger. It calls humanity to a new definition of self in relation to God and a new understanding of history and tradition.[100] Through the exploration of what he refers to as the 'dangerous' memories of Christian history, Metz strives to overcome the 'forgetfulness' of human suffering and so preserves humanity as a subject in history before God. By doing this Metz seeks to reclaim the 'practical freedom' that lies at the heart of the gospel message.

For Metz, memory is **the** fundamental expression and central action of Christian faith.[101] At the centre of Christian history and tradition lies the *memoria Jesu Christi.* This memory of Jesus Christ is the testament through which the kingdom of God is proclaimed in human history as the 'liberating power of God's unconditional love.'[102] Metz maintains that the proclamation of this memory is a

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[98]ibid., 188. While the notion of memory as the foundation of rational thought in terms of the Platonic idea of divine pre-knowledge or transmigration of the soul was rejected by Christianity, Metz believes that in *Confessions* the influence of Plato's *anamnesis* can be seen in Augustine's *memoria,* where Augustine considers that the soul sees through itself in the light of divine illumination and perceives itself in its own way of life.

[99]ibid.

[100]Keshgegian, *To Know by Heart* 57.

[101]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 90.

[102]ibid.

practical and a critical act of Christian faith in human history. It constantly challenges the plausible structures of a society and calls to account the prevailing consciousness which would encourage uncritical compliance. It is a dangerous memory of freedom because it refuses to allow apathy or forgetfulness in the face of suffering and continually makes clear that God is on the side of the victims of history. Metz considers that in imitation of the *memoria Jesu Christi* Christian memory must disturb the comfort and apathy of the status quo in order to give hope to those who suffer and are in danger of being forgotten.[103]

Consequently, in its 'political and social reality' the Church should be the 'public witness and bearer of the tradition of the dangerous memory' of Christianity.[104] Metz claims that at different historical times throughout the Christian tradition the institutional church has failed to make present the kingdom values of justice and right relationships. When this happens, a new 'bearer' of God's historical promise will emerge. For Metz the new bearers of God's promise of redemption are the victims of history -- those who have suffered oppression. Accordingly, Metz considers that it is those who have had their voice ignored and their subjectivity denied who will carry the dangerous memories of Christianity into the future.[105]

Metz maintains that these new bearers emerge as a constant challenge that demands the Christian tradition move towards a new and transformed future.[106] Theres dangerous memories of the Christian tradition -- revealed in the *memoria resurrectionis Jesu Christi* -- provide the necessary key for transformation. For only in and through these dangerous memories can the Christian tradition hope to authentically engage a transformed consciousness,

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[103]ibid.

[104]ibid., 91.

[105]ibid., 105-108. Metz maintains that 'the essential dynamics of history consist of the memory of suffering as a negative consciousness of future freedom and as a stimulus to overcome suffering in the framework of that freedom.'

[106]ibid., 90-95. Metz claims that the 'witness borne by the Church to liberated freedom can only acquire authority (from religious competence!) if it remains linked to the interest of love that looks for its own way through history in the track of strange suffering.' 95.

a transformative praxis and a transforming future. When this challenge for transformation has been taken up, the potential meaning of our history changes. History is no longer a category that is reserved only for the triumphs and accomplishments of the conquerors since a transformed future rests not with the survivors but with the victims.[107] Accordingly, Metz claims that the dangerous memories of Christianity are essentially both practical -- in the memory of freedom -- and eschatological in the memory of hope.

The Memory of Freedom.

As part of a practical theology, Metz maintains that the memory of freedom has a fundamentally redemptive task. In other words, the memory of freedom is radically oriented towards the liberation and salvation of humanity. This memory of freedom cannot be reduced to - or derived from - any given social or historical concept or institution. To do so would not facilitate true freedom but allow an abstract ideal of emancipation or a teleological illusion to take the place of freedom. Instead, the memory of freedom must subject these contemporary concepts and institutions to a practical and critical examination and so create a 'social and political conscience' in the interests of the sufferings of others.[108] Metz believes that only in the conscious recognition and public validation of suffering can our freedom be assured, for our future freedom is in fact 'nourished from the memory of suffering.'[109] Without such a memory, freedom ceases to be active or effective. This means that, whenever suffering is remembered and the vanquished possibilities brought to light, freedom will flourish.[110] Conversely, Metz considers that if suffering is allowed to go publicly unchallenged, or it is defused by being privatised and internalised, freedom itself

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[107]ibid., 113-114.

[108]Metz, 'Future in the Memory of Suffering' in *Faith and the Future* 13.

[109]ibid., 11.

[110]Metz, 'Freedom in Solidarity' in *Faith and the Future,* 77.

will disintegrate.[111]

Metz understands the memory of freedom as a dangerous memory because it refuses to ignore the forgotten or vanquished and dares to lay claim to the sufferings and injustices of the past. This makes freedom and memory critical-practical or social-political activities insofar as they carry an irreducible demand for ethical responsibility. The memory of freedom critiques the emancipatory impulses or teleological illusions of contemporary institutions and concepts. It exposes them as ideologies because it reveals that these impulses attempt to pre-prescribe our future as a means of controlling our freedom. In effect, we 'remember the future of our freedom in the memory of this suffering.' This means that the memory of freedom -- as it is nourished from the memory of suffering -- secures and preserves Christianity's eschatological memory of hope in the promise of God.[112]

The Memory of Hope.

For Metz, the eschatological memory of Christianity means Christian faith must also be understood as a practical commitment to hope. This means that Christian faith is a decision for the future and remembers 'the promises that have been made and the hopes that have been experienced as a result of those promises.'[113] The memory of hope is eschatological and dangerous. It is eschatological because in light of a comfortable apathetic present, it 'remembers a future that is still outstanding.'[114] It is dangerous because of its subversive features. It brings to light vanquished possibilities of history by breaking 'through the prevailing consciousness to claim the unresolved conflicts

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[111]Metz, 'Future in the Memory of Suffering' in *Faith and the Future,* 11-13. Metz goes on to claim that 'any society that suppresses these and similar dimensions in the history of freedom pays the price of an increasing loss of all visible freedom.'

[112]ibid., 14.

[113]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 113-114.

[114]ibid. 'Hence the Christian *memoria* becomes a memory which shocks us out of our ever becoming prematurely reconciled to the facts and trends of our technological society. It becomes a dangerous and liberating memory over against the controls and mechanisms of the dominant consciousness.'

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and unfulfilled hopes' of suffering.[115]

Metz considers that as freedom is sustained and nourished from the memory of suffering, so too is hope. Without these memories possibilities for a transformed future remain hidden and ineffective. There remains the danger that Christian eschatology -- the hope in the promises of God -- will disintegrate into a secular teleology or become reconciled to an 'abstract ideal of emancipation.'[116] It will not bring us towards freedom and redemption but pacify us and lead us 'astray by the evolutionary idea' which would only promise paradise for the victorious.[117] The task of Christianity, however, is to hold to the future as the time of God's promise and judgement, making Christian faith an active commitment on behalf of a future that necessarily includes the past.[118]

Metz considers that memory is both story and dogma. Memory 'mediates the relationship between revelation and the religious community.'[119] For Metz, the dangerous memories of Christianity are the critical, active, practical, ethical, eschatological commitments of Christian faith. They are critical in their refusal to concede suffering to the forgetfulness of history. They are active in their continued call to listen to neglected possibilities for human existence. They are practical in the concrete link they forge between the meaning of suffering and the meaning of history. They are ethical in the way they demand a response to human hunger and thirst for justice. They are eschatological because the whole of Christian history stands under the redemptive promise of God.

This intimately links memory to the prophetic call for freedom, justice and well-being and makes it useful category for Schüssler Fiorenza's critical feminist theology of liberation. For until the memories of the most marginalised, insignificant and most faceless victims of Christian history are properly

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[115]ibid. This echoes Benjamin's belief that the dangerous or 'hopeful' memories of the suffering in history will protect us from the domination of progress and forgetfulness. See Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 247-248.

[116]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 113. See also 'The Confession of Jesus Christ' in *Faith and the Future,* 117.

[117]Metz, 'The Confession of Jesus Christ' in *Faith and the Future,* 117.

[118]Ibid., 118.

[119]Keshgegian, *To Know By Heart,* 183-184.

acknowledged, the Christian tradition fails in its prophetic task of mediating God's promise of freedom, justice and well-being.[120]

The Work of Memory in the Theology of ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA.

Schüssler Fiorenza situates her feminist critique and reconstruction of early Christianity in history. She claims that 'if history in general, and early Christian history in particular, is one way in which androcentric culture and religion have defined women, then it must become a major object for feminist analysis.'[121] As a biblical scholar, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza explores biblical texts within the analytical framework of historical-criticism. As a feminist theologian, she interprets these texts from the perspective of a feminist theology of liberation. She believes the task of Christian feminist scholarship is to critically analyse both the historical silences and the historical evidence of women's religious agency in early Christian sources.[122] Like the traditional texts within which Christian history is recorded, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza claims that the Christian tradition is at once both liberative and oppressive.[123]

In her critical engagement with the Christian tradition, Schüssler Fiorenza resists understanding memory as merely the recollection of past facts. Rather, she claims, memory facilitates our participation in the ongoing interpretation of our religious tradition. Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist reconstruction of the Christian tradition understands history as being both 'remembrance and memory.'[124] Remembrance encompasses the notion of solidarity in suffering. It seeks the transformation of Christianity's patriarchal tradition through reclaiming

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[120]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 29-33.

[121]ibid., xx.

[122]ibid., 29.

[123]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* x. 'In our struggle for self-identity, survival, and liberation in a patriarchal society and church, Christian women have found that the Bible has been used as a weapon against us but at the same time it has been a resource for courage, hope and commitment in this struggle.'

[124]ibid., 114-115.

the visions and stories of those who suffered under its domination. Memory serves to recover women's legitimate Christian heritage through retrieving the stories of women's positive, historical religious agency. By searching through and evaluating both the presence and the absence of women within Christian history Schüssler Fiorenza aims not only to uncover the injustices that have marginalised women, but also to make visible again the role women have played in the ongoing formation of their tradition. In effect, Schüssler Fiorenza seeks to 'imaginatively reconstruct Christian history' and so re-member women back into their religious tradition.[125]

This imaginative reconstruction of Christian history is vitally important for the transformation of the Christian tradition. It serves to shatter the false memory or false consciousness that expels women to the margins of history, and so restores women's concrete, historical agency to the Christian tradition. Schüssler Fiorenza claims this imaginative reconstruction redeems the past in and through an *anamnestic* solidarity with the marginalised and silenced victims of Christian history.[126] In so doing, this shapes present realities and future possibilities of the Christian tradition. She claims that through an anamnestic solidarity in the visions of those who suffered under the domination of the Christian tradition, we 'participate in the same struggle . . . for survival and freedom.'[127] Consequently, anamnestic solidarity not only redeems the past but actually encourages the political motivation to transform the future. It enables feminist scholars to reclaim the struggles and the visions of women in stories that emphasise women's concrete historical agency.[128] In other words, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that the key to any authentic interpretation of Christianity's social history lies in the reappropriation of the memory of those who not only 'suffered its pain of oppression, but also participated in its

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[125]ibid., 112.

[126]ibid., 115.

[127]ibid. This sense of anamnesis is also found in Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations* 245-246 where Benjamin maintains: 'Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply.'

[128]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 162-163.

transformation and development.'[129] Through this critical reclaiming of Christianity's historical memory a two-fold challenge of critical disclosure and liberative empowerment emerges.

The historical memory of a tradition is concerned primarily with interpretation and the bestowal of meaning. If traditional Western Christianity is to be a more authentic articulation of what it means to be human in relation to the divine; if it is to facilitate God's promise of freedom, justice and well-being; then, it must be subjected to a critical systematic feminist evaluation.[130] This feminist evaluation must explore the gaps and examine the distortions of the Christian tradition. It is clear that women did participate in both the formation and transformation of the Christian tradition. This means that Christian women must be able to claim a history and a memory of active religious agency.

'Of course we were present at the Last Supper' [131]

However, the public record and canonical texts of the Western Christian tradition reflect very little evidence of the historical presence or the religious agency of women. Accordingly, women are forced to ask:

'So how is it the texts imply we were not?'[132]

In answer, Schüssler Fiorenza claims traditional texts imply women were not present in the way all hegemonic discourse maintains its own privilege: by hiding the presence; marginalising the agency; and silencing the voices of those who

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[129]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 111.

[130]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The Silenced Majority Moves into Speech' in *Discipleship of Equals,* 257-266. 'Insofar as religious language and symbol systems' legitimate the social oppression and cultural marginality of women, 'the struggle against ecclessial silencing and invisibility is at the heart of women's struggles for justice, liberation and wholeness.'

[131]This phrase is my adaptation of Judith Plaskow's phrase from 'Jewish Memory from a Feminist Perspective' in *Weaving the Visions,* 240. Here Plaskow critiques the way androcentric attitudes have effectively silenced -- and therefore excluded -- women from the Jewish tradition during moments of Israel's high cultic significance. It is useful here to draw attention to the way Schüssler Fiorenza uses the silences of traditional biblical texts: 'It is crucial , therefore, that we challenge the androcentric model of early Christian history by assuming instead a feminist pattern for the historical mosaic, one that allows us to place women as well as men at the centre of early Christian history.' See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 112.

[132]ibid.

would tell a different story. This has left Christian women with a hidden religious history and a subversive historical memory. Consequently Schüssler Fiorenza endeavours to open and include into the historical memory that which has been distorted, forgotten or suppressed.[133] The task then, of feminist memory is to critically reclaim the forgotten stories of both the oppression and the liberation of women and then write them back into the memory of the Christian tradition.

Memory serves to retrieve as well as to interrogate the tradition and so it brings to the surface both the suffering and fidelity of Christians. Because the Christian tradition carries both the memory of suffering and the memory of liberation Schüssler Fiorenza uses both a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of remembrance.[134] Acting as a hermeneutic of suspicion, memory uncovers the forces that have suppressed and concealed the stories of those who have been abandoned by history. In this way it discloses interest factors that have acted to distort and corrupt the tradition. However, Schüssler Fiorenza affirms that memory also re-claims the history of women's positive religious agency. Here, a hermeneutic of remembrance reclaims stories of resistance to domination and hegemony and then retells these stories of liberative struggle of positive religious agency. In this way the historical memory of those who have been marginalised is affirmed. In this sense, memory is able to be a resource

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[133]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'In Search of Women's Heritage' in *Weaving the Visions,* 30.

[134]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 77-80. Schüssler Fiorenza notes that she did use four but now uses seven different hermeneutical movements to critically engage the Christian tradition from a feminist liberationist position. She uses a hermeneutics of experience to explore and name socio-political religious locations; a hermeneutics of domination which engages kyriarchal systems of domination; hermeneutic of suspicion which questions and examines to disentangle the ideological workings of andro-kyriocentric language; a hermeneutic of assessment and evaluation which critically engages interpretations as to whether they advocate kyriarchal or liberationist values; a hermeneutics of reimagination; a hermeneutics of reconstruction which critically reconstructs the text with an eye to excluding kyriocentric attitudes and constructs; and a hermeneutics of change and transformation which seeks to embody the egalitarian and democratic ethos of liberation uncovered in the critical feminist engagement. These movements operate concurrently rather than sequentially, and serve to interrogate and reconstruct the space between both the evidence and the silences of early Christian texts and sources. Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza adds 'world' as a fourth hermeneutical pole to the 'interpreter, text, ideology' usually used. These seven hermeneutical strategies seek 'to *displace* positivist and depoliticised academic practises of reading.' 77.

for the continuation -- and a tool for the transformation -- of the Christian tradition.

The Memory of Suffering.

The stories and memories of a people affirm their identity and secure their belonging. Without these memories oppression and eventual destruction of self-identity occurs. When this happens, 'enslavement becomes total and solidarity with the dead becomes impossible.'[135] The recovered stories and concerns of women become dangerous memories not on account of what they describe but because they dare to speak of what *could* or *should* be. Such memories are dangerous memories because they radically challenge the truth-claims of traditional Christian theology. They break the hold of the unchanging present and bring to light the reality that the 'perspective of the defeated in history' tells a very different story.[136] Dangerous memories provide the religious and the political motivation for women to hope that these remembered possibilities can now, at last, be realised. Disclosure of these stories opens up Christianity's historical memory to the possibility of transformation. As long as the self-understanding and religious vision of the forgotten 'victims' of Christianity's patriarchal history are denied or marginalised, the challenge for the transformation of history can not be taken up.[137]

Schüssler Fiorenza uses a hermeneutic of suspicion to uncover these dangerous memories of Christian history. In so doing, she challenges the 'visible' or accepted interpretation of Christian history and seeks to disentangle 'the ideological workings of andro-kyriocentric language . . . [which] is socially and historically constructed.'[138] She maintains that the kyriocentric structures

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[135]ibid., 19

[136]ibid., 57.

[137]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her, xvi-xvii.*

[138]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 90. It must be noted that the refinement and development of Schüssler Fiorenza's critical methodology is reflected in the refinement and development of her hermeneutic methodology. Accordingly, her hermeneutics of suspicion in *In Memory of Her* -- which much of this section draws

and attitudes of Western culture have given rise to the historical privilege of the powerful. These structures serve to legitimate and perpetuate structures which operate to marginalise, oppress and dominate women and other non-persons.[139] However, dangerous memories break through the historical privilege of the dominant and powerful. In so doing, they dispute the notion that history 'stands on the shoulders of giants'.[140] Schüssler Fiorenza considers that such a remembrance of women's suffering within their own religious history is critically important since this constitutes the dynamic inner movement of feminist Christian history.[141] When the stories of the dead are reclaimed there emerges the possibility of transforming Christian history and tradition.

Critical feminist theologies take seriously the fact that history is written by the dominant groups of a community. This means history can never be understood as 'impartial, objective, or value-free.'[142] History is not the story 'of' something but actually a story 'for' some people. Furthermore, because history is a history for people it cannot become objective or value-free by merely hiding or disguising its contemporary interest factors -- either from itself or from others.[143] Rather, the historical memory of a people will reflect the social values and protect the political interests of history's winners. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that Christian history is no exception. It also reflects the values and

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from -- is obviously not as engaged with a critique of kyriarchy -- which she has used since 1990 and subsequently developed in her later works . See *Sharing Her Word. 77-78.* & 190.

[139]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* xvii-xix This is particularly evident within the academic institutions where the feminist perspective 'encounters resistance' from the traditional academy. Feminist scholars are only considered 'competent when they adopt the investigative methods and theoretical frameworks of their male mentors.'

[140]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion*, 164. Here, Hewitt is reflecting Walter Benjamin's concern that this preserves and legitimates the historical hegemony of the rulers at the expense of the victims.

[141]Schüssler Fiorenza *In Memory of Her,* 32. Here, Schüssler Fiorenza points out that: 'such a feminist memoria of the sufferings of Christ and of the innocent victims of patriarchal oppression must be careful not to assign this suffering to the will of God'.

[142]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 107. See also 98

[143]ibid.

protects the interests of a patriarchal tradition.[144] The voices, values, experiences and the interests of women have all fallen victim to this patriarchal traditioning of Christian history.[145] They have been systematically silenced as unimportant or marginalised as insignificant. Feminist theology seeks to reclaim these forgotten voices and bring them back to their historical centre.

Consequently, Christian feminist theologies adopt a systematically critical attitude to traditional texts and sources. They use a hermeneutic of suspicion to search through the dominant readings of history not just to 'uncover the "lie" of dominant readings' but to reclaim the hidden stories of history's victims.[146] In so doing, it uncovers the presuppositions and root causes of oppression and injustice, which, if they are left unexamined, will continue to enslave and oppress.[147] Schüssler Fiorenza uses a hermeneutic of suspicion to carefully analyse 'Christianity's androcentric tendencies and patriarchal functions' in order to break the silences and bridge the gaps of its history and tradition.[148] Here, their specific commitment to oppressed women serves to focus and concretise this critical historical analysis. For within any social, cultural or economic group women, and the children dependent on them for survival, are usually the most marginalised, the most exploited, and the most vulnerable. Therefore, engagement in a critical feminist theology is a profoundly political as well as a deeply religious task. For contemporary Christian women, entering into an accepted interpretation of history from a new critical direction is not 'just another chapter in cultural history' rather, it is 'an "act of survival."'[149]

Accordingly, the stories of women's religious agency are remembered and reclaimed by women and for women. They can no longer be filtered through the dominant ideology of traditional theology as this does not reflect women's

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[144]ibid., 5-7.

[145]ibid., 77-79.

[146]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 90.

[147]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 30-31. Feminist theologies must analyse the historical oppression of biblical women in order to change the social reality of the churches in which this oppression 'takes its specific historical patriarchal forms.'

[148]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 108.

[149]ibid., 113.

concrete historical reality and so is a prescriptive not a descriptive activity. Traditional theology continues to allow dominant voices to interpret women's connection to Christianity. Instead, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that women's stories and visions need to be 'dislodged from their patriarchal frame' and read 'against the kyriocentric grain' of their traditional understanding.[150]

Remembrance of women's suffering is the central dynamic that informs and motivates critical feminist theologies. These theologies do not identify women as passive victims of patriarchal oppression. Rather, they see them as historical agents in the formation of their tradition. This enables contemporary women to take up the vision of their fore-sisters. It makes redemption of the past possible and opens up hope for the future.[151] The liberation of women from the kyriarchal structures of the Christian tradition is necessary not only for women, but for the whole Christian tradition. Only through this remembrance are the transformative possibilities of Christian history able to survive.[152] For without these stories, the dominant, oppressive and unjust conditions of the Christian tradition can not be called to account for - or repent of - the systematic marginalisation of women and other oppressed people.

However, just as history marginalises it can also be the source of belonging. As the heritage of a people, history affirms identity and secures belonging. It grounds who we are and where we are going.[153] History provides access to the past in a way that makes an authentic future possible. While the suppression of women's voices hides their historical presence and agency it cannot erase them. The task of feminist theologies is to read into the silences of the tradition the stories of women's religious agency and historical participation in the building, the maintenance and transmission of their religious traditions. In this way feminist theologies are able to re-claim the religious heritage of women and re-store their religious agency.

Although there is an urgent need to break through the biases and

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[150]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* (Boston: Beacon press, 1992), 35.

[151]ibid., 101.

[152]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 31.

[153]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone,* 146.

silences of Christian history, Schüssler Fiorenza insists that Christian feminist theology has the more primary task of keeping alive the *memoria passionis* of Christian women.The theological heritage of Christian women is not only a history of oppression, it is also a history of religious agency and liberation.[154] Scant historical traces of women's co-equal discipleship and religious agency affirms that women were -- and largely remain -- responsible for maintaining and preserving the egalitarian currents of early Christianity.[155] Consequently, Schüssler Fiorenza believes that Christian feminist theologies must also reclaim and reappropriate the memory of liberation and resistance.

The Memory of Resistance.

As memory has the power to dis-member people from their history and tradition, so too it has the power to re-member them. In the subversive power of the 'remembered past' the present hope of contemporary reality is opened up making future transformation possible.[156] Schüssler Fiorenza claims that re-telling the stories of women's religious agency and their resistance to domination demythologise the texts and traditions which perpetuate the forgetfulness of women's suffering. This enables feminist theology to participate in re-storing Christianity to its original liberative intent. Remembered stories can then be used to imaginatively reconstruct Christian history. This historical reconstruction of religious agency is motivated by a hermeneutics of remembrance and accompanied by a hermeneutics of creative actualisation.[157] It takes its authority from, and makes its commitment to, the women who are -- and have been -- engaged in the struggle for liberation and well-being. Schüssler Fiorenza considers that critical feminist theologies must remember the fragmented evidence and marginalised history of women's religious

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[154]ibid., 36.

[155]Hewitt, 'The Redemptive Power of Memory,' 87.

[156]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 31.

[157]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 19-22.

experience and claim these as legitimate heritage: 'our heritage is our power.'[158]

Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that the contemporary struggle for women's liberation finds its historical roots and its political motivation in acts of anamnestic solidarity with the generations of women who have also participated in the struggle for freedom and emancipation.[159] This solidarity is made possible by remembering the stories and the visions of women's concrete historical agency. The presence of women as active members and co-equal disciples in the early Christian tradition attests to the 'egalitarian ethos' that informs the basis of Christian belief and practice.[160] In the scant historical traces of women's co-equal discipleship and in the marginal stories of agency and resistance, there is an affirmation that women participated in the development and transformation of the Christian tradition. Acts of anamnestic solidarity preserve and restore to Christianity's historical memory the liberative traces and redemptive promises of the biblical tradition. Rather than seek identification with the dead, feminist theologies strive to reappropriate -- and so re-ignite -- the visions and hopes of all who have struggled through history for change and transformation. The memory of women's resistance and agency motivates and empowers contemporary women to 'survive with dignity and to continue the struggle when there seems to be no hope for success.'[161]

As mentioned above, history can never be value free. It operates as a public, political and cultural discourse and reflects the social values and political interests of those who write it.[162] Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that biblical texts are not exempt from this historical situatedness. Rather than accurately reflecting the historical reality of women's religious agency Christian Scriptures are conditioned -- or perhaps contaminated -- by the androcentric and kyriarchal

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[158]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'In Search of Women's Heritage' in *Weaving the Visions,* 35.

[159]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 30-32.

[160]Marsha Hewitt, 'The Redemptive Power of Memory', 87.

[161]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xiii.

[162]Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 81-84.

world-view of their time.[163] They cannot be considered as trustworthy reports because they are not reliable accounts of women's historical activities.[164] Schüssler Fiorenza challenges the emphasis on 'objective' textual interpretations and rejects the possibility of value-free historical reconstructions.[165]

This brings the authority of biblical texts and sources as the 'revealed word of God' into focus.[166] If biblical texts are used to exclude women's experience, or to legitimate the suppression of women's religious agency, they become tools of oppression and injustice. Schüssler Fiorenza believes that as a 'mythical archetype' the bible has been able to exclude and marginalise women. A 'mythical archetype' is a text or tradition that places itself outside the social and historical context of a culture. Its ideas and interpretations are considered to be definitive and so are not open to critical or historical evaluation.[167] Schüssler Fiorenza maintains theologies that understand biblical texts as mythical archetypes assume an authority that seeks to be independent rather than communal. Such theologies claim an a-historical perspective when in reality they merely universalise historically limited experiences and historically situated texts. In claiming their own world-view as the divinely ordained order of relationships, these theologies place their own interest factors and presuppositions beyond appraisal or critique.[168] In effect, they claim a sovereign power to interpret and articulate the human story 'the way it really was.'[169]

However, history can never be told 'the way it really was.' Instead of understanding the bible as mythical archetype, Schüssler Fiorenza considers it is more valuable to consider the bible as an 'historical prototype.' This paradigm shift from mythical archetype to historical prototype is intended to

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[163]ibid., 111.

[164]ibid., 92-96.

[165]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 30.

[166]ibid., 25-28.

[167]ibid., 9-10.

[168]ibid., 8-12.

[169]Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 255.

prevent any one particular historical view from claiming a timeless or definitive *gnosis.* Consequently, it acts to demythologise the use of biblical texts and tradition. When the bible is understood as an historical prototype it is acknowledged as an historically conditioned and mediated tradition. This makes it much harder to use as a tool of oppression because its authority cannot be so easily abstracted from its own particular context or interest factors. Schüssler Fiorenza claims as an historical prototype, the bible is able to function as a resource for liberation. Here the diversity of humanity's religious experiences is not reduced to a normative authority of abstract principles. Consequently, divine revelation is not isolated from the community of its historical reception. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that feminist theology is *informed* by biblical texts *under* the authority of feminist experience.[170] If biblical revelation is ongoing and takes place 'for the sake of our salvation' then the vision of liberation and salvation begins with the experience of the most marginalised and exploited women in their struggle for liberation.[171]

As the *ekklesia* of women Schüssler Fiorenza maintains we are invited to remember our biblical heritage and so transform our religious history. She claims only when our tradition is able to re-claim and re-store the liberative and powerful stories of women's religious agency, will it become open to its own transformation.[172] This discloses the notion that both the bible and the tradition have been a source of liberation for women. In so doing, contemporary women are empowered to continue their own struggle for liberation.[173] The prophetic call for freedom justice and well-being is made accessible through the stories of women who have 'rejected slavery, racism, anti-Semitism, colonial exploitation, and misogyny as being unbiblical' and against God's will.

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[170]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 61-63.

[171]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 43-49.

[172]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 30-34.

[173]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 114-115. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that the movement to reclaim the 'bible as a feminist heritage and resource' is only possible because the bible 'has not functioned only to legitimate the oppression of all women.'

CONCLUSION.

It is quite evident that there are many points of contact and agreement between the theological methodology of Johannes Baptist Metz and that of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. It would also be fair to say that Schüssler Fiorenza is indebted to Metz for his critical insistence on -- and his systematic appropriation of -- the importance of the category of memory within the history and the tradition of Western Christianity.[174] In a time of powerful and ever competing ideologies, Metz brings the focus of Christian faith sharply back to its radical biblical roots -- the promise of God for the redemption and salvation of humanity.

For both Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza, our primary task as Christians, and therefore an indispensable part of our responsibility of faith, is the practical solidarity with those who suffer. The central action of this solidarity is memory. Accordingly, every claim for freedom and liberation is examined in light of God's historical promise of redemption. And the truth of this promise is judged according to its liberative and practical action.

This makes liberative praxis both the method and the goal of the practical theological methodology of Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza.[175] Accordingly, Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza consider that praxis serves to manifest truth. Praxis grounds the biblical promise of freedom and hope in the history of human life. In being motivated by the hunger and thirst for justice praxis has an irreducible ethical, social and, political dimension. By giving privilege to the moments of suffering in human history, and grounding them in Christian praxis, memory rejects the claim that the history of the victors is the only history that matters. The emphasis on the memory of Christian history brings to light the conviction of Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza that if Christianity is to have any possibility of a free and redemptive future, then the stories of the forgotten and the vanquished must be remembered and so kept alive.

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[174]ibid., 67.

[175]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 8-9. and Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* xii-xv.

In all this, the central focus of Metz' work remains fixed on the suffering of the forgotten victims of Christianity. So for Metz, the entry point into the redemptive promise of God, the concrete manifestation of our responsibility to Christian faith, and even the indication of the depth of our humanity, rests on our ability to remember the suffering of those who have been marginalised and forgotten. And Schüssler Fiorenza would agree this is a necessary starting point and an indispensable facet of any Western theology. Without this commitment to the memory of suffering in Christian history there is no remorse, no guilt and therefore no conversion. And if there is no conversion, there is no redemption.[176]

However, while this is where we must start, Schüssler Fiorenza claims this is not enough and therefore not truly liberative for all Christians -- particularly women. She maintains that, while naming the forces within the Christian tradition that excluded and marginalised women is important, it is not the whole story. It is equally as necessary for liberation to name the historical agency of women and to recover their free and active agency for change and transformation. In the naming of the resistance of generations of Christian women to the 'vanquishing powers of a patriarchal tradition,' the historical agency of women is claimed and women are rightfully seen not as passive victims but as pro-active -- and therefore transformative -- agents in history.

This accent on the concrete and historically particular struggle of women is part of Schüssler Fiorenza's concern to name women's religious experience and therefore historically ground the reclaiming of women's religious agency. In this way she considers that women's suffering is less easily abstracted from its historical context and so it is less prone to being understood as a generalised category.[177] In turn, the power of women's historical agency is given more force. Thus Schüssler Fiorenza's work holds more promise for the real liberation of women because it stresses the particular and historical nature of women's religious agency. Accordingly, 'women' or 'women's stories' are prevented from being generalised and reified. This enables the revisioning of new myths,

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[176]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 163 note 9.

[177]Hewitt, *A Critical Theory of Religion,* 165.

authentic symbols and transformed life-styles to occur.[178] Schüssler Fiorenza's work also holds more promise for the emancipation of society in general because it draws sharp attention to the reality, that whatever aspect of society is examined, it is the women, and the children dependant on them for survival, who are the most dominated, exploited and marginalised.[179]

Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza believes that to understand the Christian tradition only as oppressive acts to seriously misrepresent women's theological heritage. Christian history is not only the story of women's domination and suppression, it is also a story of their religious agency and liberation.[180] Women have -- and so they must rightly claim -- a legitimate prophetic role and critical mission within the structures and the function of organised Christianity. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that as she and generations of Christian women have been shaped by their tradition, so too have they acted to shape it. While the past has operated to marginalise and silence victims, it has also been able to empower and liberate women in their fight for freedom, justice and dignity. The biblical past is, in effect, still a 'usable past.'

Consequently, it is not freedom from the past that will facilitate an authentic feminist spirituality. Rather, the critical point for a feminist theology of liberation is what is done with this past: how it is interpreted; how it is challenged; how it is evaluated. A truly authentic critical feminist theology seeks to liberate and redeem the past so that new possibilities of what it means to be human in relation to the divine can emerge. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is profoundly concerned with the history - in both its oppressive and liberative articulations - of the Christian tradition.[181] She is critically aware of the need to offer contemporary women new ways to be re-membered within their religious traditions and new ways in which they can re-store their religious agency. She believes that in reclaiming the histories, stories and rituals of our fore-mothers and fore-sisters, the original liberative impulse of Christianity can be recovered.

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[178]ibid.

[179]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 44.

[180]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 36.

[181]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 141.

In this way, a more inclusive, just and authentic understanding of humanity's relationship with the divine can be explored.

Another area of difference between Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza is their approach to the naming and therefore the concrete identification of those who actually suffer. Whose experience of suffering is named? Whose experience of suffering is claimed as the new locus of God's redemptive promise? In his own work, Metz stresses the urgent need to critique and expose the structures that support the oppression of people within Western Christianity's history. He also rightly calls attention to how the social and ecclesial structures of Christianity have been implicated in contemporary Western society's forgetfulness of suffering.[182] However, it would seem that Metz does not completely acknowledge the extent to which the biblical tradition -- and by association biblical texts -- participate in this oppression and marginalisation. Hence the private Western 'bourgeois' citizen remains the prime focus of his critique.[183] Metz' examples of the movement towards liberative Christian discipleship include resistance to nationalism, racism, and classism -- but not sexism.[184]

In general, Metz is very concerned with the hazards involved in privileging a particular group who suffer over and above others who also suffer.[185] He considers that, in privileging the suffering of a specific group, there is a very real danger of abstracting suffering from its particular historical context. When this happens there is a danger of creating a class of 'innocent victims.'[186] Metz maintains that, the social and political power of the rich and the rulers must 'continually justify themselves in view of actual suffering.'[187] He also considers that those with power must 'be open to the question of the extent to which they

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[182]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 28-29.

[183]Metz, 'Messianic or "Bourgeois" Religion?' in *Faith and the Future,* 18.

[184]ibid., 21-29.

[185]Metz, 'Future in the Memory of Suffering' in *Faith and the Future,* 13. Metz does categorically reject the notion of placing the suffering of the rich and powerful in a position of primacy in understanding of suffering, claiming that he has instead 'the primary duty of opposing them and confronting them with the claim of Christian consolation and Christian redemption.'

[186]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 156-157.

[187]ibid.

cause suffering'[188] However, Metz remains vague as to the exact nature of the authority to which the rich and powerful justify themselves. And feminist scholars consider that, to claim the authority of 'the biblical promise of God's justice' without critically assessing how that promise is interpreted is too ambiguous. Accordingly, when faced with the full 'death dealing power of patriarchy'[189] Schüssler Fiorenza considers it is imperative to explore the myriad relationships of domination in a more radical way. Christianity must take seriously the fact that the bible 'still functions today as a religious justification and ideological legitimisation' of kyriarchal relationships.[190]

Although Schüssler Fiorenza takes the kyriarchal horizon of traditional theology as the basis of her critique, she insists that the process of critique cannot be left there. Consequently, she also turns her attention towards examining how this perspective connects and supports a myriad of oppressive attitudes and situations.[191] She believes that a critical feminist theology must constantly refuse to be diverted from its task of struggling for liberation until 'the poorest, most dehumanised and most despised women on earth' are free.[192] Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza insists on implicating the wider social, cultural and political structures of contemporary Western Civilisation. She is convinced that a critical feminist theology of liberation must also engage in systematically uncovering and critically evaluating the broader connections of Western society's religious history and tradition. The established understanding and interpretation of traditional religious structures must be suspiciously examined for its partial and biased formulation of humanity's religious experience.[193]

Although both Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza consider the categories of history and memory are foundational theological categories they use them

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[188]ibid.

[189]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* xv.

[190]ibid., xi.

[191]ibid., 2-4.

[192]ibid., 7

[193]ibid., 107.

differently. This essential difference in usage can be best examined against the particular feminist perspective adopted by Schüssler Fiorenza. In exploring the sexist attitudes and structures of the Christian tradition from a feminist perspective Schüssler Fiorenza illuminates a pivotal -- and somewhat major -- axes along which oppressive relationships operate. Thus she understands and interprets history in a more concrete and, therefore, more critical fashion than Metz. For in ignoring the historical connections between sexism and relationships of oppression and coercion Metz remains blind to the root cause of the subjugation of over half the human race.

Without a specific concrete engagement with the marginalisation of women, Metz misses the opportunity to recover the memories of resistance hidden within the memory of suffering. Consequently, women remain the victims of history for when the memories of women's opposition to injustice remain unclaimed the possibility of true rehabilitation is lost. The task to re-cover and re-store wholeness and justice to women cannot be done unless their agency is acknowledged. This means both the suffering and the resistance of women must be identified and affirmed. Until this happens, the theological potential of the category of memory remains unfulfilled.

In exploring the relationship between the categories of memory and history Chapter Three situated history within contemporary philosophical and feminist scholarship. It then examined the theological potential of the category of memory and assessed its use in the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. This chapter then critically engaged the relationship between memory and history through the feminist theological hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. This engagement revealed that when the historical silences and distortions are read carefully history discloses both the oppressive and liberative memories of women's religious agency. And in the recovery of the memories of resistance the historical agency of women is affirmed and they are no longer just the victims of history. Consequently, a critical feminist engagement of history offers the Western Christian tradition a more radical and inclusive framework within which to access its' own ecclesial memory.

Chapter Four continues the exploration of these categories by examining the use of narrative within current Christian theology with a particular emphasis on the narrative component in the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. Through the critical theological scholarship of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza this chapter demonstrates the inextricable link between language and the transformative potential of the category of narrative. In so doing, it illuminates the urgent need for a critical feminist assessment of the nature and function of the language that shapes our sacred myths and narratives.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Influence of LANGUAGE in the Category of NARRATIVE

As previously stated, this thesis explores the relationships between the categories of memory, narrative, and solidarity and the broader categories of history, language, and community by way of a conversation between the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz and the feminist theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Chapter One situated the feminist theology of Elisabeth Shüssler Fiorenza. Chapter Two outlined the common heritage of political and feminist theologies. Chapter Three then examined the relationship between memory and history.

Chapter Four now further develops the critical exploration of Western theology's transformative categories by examining the use of narrative within current Western Christian thought. This chapter explores the place of narrative in the political theology of Johannes Metz and then examines the feminist critique of the androcentric and patriarchal language that has shaped our narratives. It proceeds to demonstrate the inextricable link between our sacred language and the transformative theological potential of the category of narrative. By way of the feminist hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza Chapter Four outlines the need for a critical awareness and a systematic assessment of the nature and function of language as it shapes our foundational religious stories and experiences.

Hauerwas claims there is no better category for understanding 'the grammar of religious conviction' than narrative.[1] Indeed, the exploration of a narrative theology has become something of a contemporary passion in

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[1]Stanley Hauerwas, David Burrell & D. Bondi, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 8.

Western Christianity. While this chapter does not attempt a detailed study of narrative, it does seek to trace its broader contours. More particularly, this chapter will explore the relationship between narrative and language in order to assess how that relationship might facilitate or inhibit the development of a practical, inclusive and transformative theology.

Stories radically shape our identity and reality; people actually 'live' in stories. This makes narrative an essential category in defining what it means to be a human person living in a particular community.[2] Consequently, our common stories are dynamic and mutually defining. They shape our identity and reality and are shaped by them. Since stories are part of the culture and history of the people who tell them stories express and embody a sense of self and world. This makes narrative an essentially 'public' activity. Sacred stories are even more expressive of self and world for they serve to carry truths by which communal identity is measured. These stories do not really belong to individuals; they belong to the whole community. Accordingly, narrative serves to construct a 'canon' that guides and governs our sense of who we are and what we wish to become.[3] In the work of both Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza the practical, formative and public nature of theological narrative provides an effective framework for engaging tenets of the Christian faith with the reality of contemporary human life.

For Metz the category of narrative advances a practical and public theology. He claims that only a practical, public, narrative theology is able to bridge the contemporary gap between faith and life, belief and practice. Metz considers that if Christianity is to be relevant and distinctive it must retell the 'dangerous' stories of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.[4] He maintains that, because the truth of Christian salvation is not a propositional truth but rather a practical, narrative one then the narratives of Christian faith must be made true in liberative practice of social action. Yet, for all the emphasis Metz gives to the

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[2]Stephen Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience' in *Why Narrative?* (eds. Stanley Hauerwas & L. Gregory Jones, Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmanns Pub., 1989), 70.

[3]Chopp, *Saving Work* 22-23.

[4]Metz, 'Future in the Memory of Suffering' in *Faith and the Future*, 7-9.

radically narrative structure of Christian theology, and for all the stress he places on re--telling dangerous stories of suffering, he ignores the significance of language.

The connection between language and narrative is crucial. Since narrative is concerned with meaning-making, it serves to interpret the contours of human reality. However, language is not only concerned with meaning-making; it is more fundamental in nature since it shapes and gives access to the human experience of narrative itself.[5] Consequently, in order to facilitate the development of a practical, inclusive and transformative theology, it is necessary to examine the sort of language that is used to express and articulate theology. In this way, the particular prejudices and interest factors that build and support our sacred stories -- and shape and direct our reality -- can be more readily uncovered and more adequately assessed.

Although Schüssler Fiorenza acknowledges that there is a need to develop a practical and public narrative theology, she insists that a more radical attitude must be taken to the language that articulates and shapes this theology. Schüssler Fiorenza claims that the sacred stories of traditional Western Christianity construct, reflect -- and even divinely sanction -- relationships of male privilege and kyriarchal power. Accordingly, the question of 'whose story is this?' becomes a vital one. If the sacred stories of the Christian tradition are to be practical, inclusive and transformative stories for women, then both the narratives **and** the language that shape and form them must critically engage the dominant kyriocentric frame of meaning and reconstruct these stories from 'the context of actual religious experiences of liberation and particular struggle for wo/men's well-being.'[6]

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[5]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* 48-50. Tracy claims that interpreting and naming experience by understanding it through language means 'language is not an instrument that can be picked up and put down at will; it is always already there, surrounding and invading' all we think, experience, understand, judge, decide and act upon.

[6]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 86-87. 'A critical feminist model of reading for liberation engages in biblical interpretation not only as a theological but also as a cultural-religious practice of resistance and transformation.

The Category of
NARRATIVE

Narrative is essentially a practical and communal activity. It is intimately related to story-telling which is considered to be one of the oldest of human activities. Basically, narrative is the process whereby both the aspirations and the practical reality of the lived experiences of a community -- or of groups within a community -- are named and claimed. Consequently, narrative serves to ground the identity of a group within the reality of the different connections and relations that go to make up the life of that group. And so in the activity of narrative we have the opportunity to participate in what Rebecca Chopp calls the 'the practical reality of what we have to face: the ongoing activity of writing our lives.'[7] The human person and the human community are essentially narrative in nature because they are concerned with the 'telling of stories that aspire to truth' and reality.[8] Accordingly, narrative is an essential communal activity. Through narrative, human communities seek to explore and make sense of various patterns of experience and relationships that touch human life. Significant narratives and the sacred stories of a community are in fact 'testifying life-stories.'[9]

Consequently, narrative is intimately linked with the process of cultural boundary setting. Rebecca Chopp maintains that stories are the place where the meanings of our actions and the construction of our agency are brought together to be interpreted, explained and validated. This makes narrative a most

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[7]Chopp, *Saving Work,* 34. Here Chopp is highlighting the fact that while narrative is related to both the individual and his/her society, it is 'neither pure social determination nor autonomous individualism' but rather is inter-relational.

[8]Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Virtues, Unity of a Human Life, Tradition' in *Why Narrative?* (Ed. Stanley Hauerwas & L. Gregory Jones),101.

[9]Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God,* 21. Schillebeeckx underscores the essentially narrative nature of human life and reality when he maintains that: 'With critical reflection, human experiences, as a revelation of reality . . . belongs to what is called experiential competence or the authority of experiences. Experiential competence -- and here the Old and New Testament are models -- therefore has a narrative structure.'

'essential genre of describing human activity.'[10] As such, the art of story-telling has the ability to bring together the event and the meaning of that event, the action and the intentions of those actions. This means that narrative is essentially about defining and then re-defining our position and our identity in relation to our world and people in that world. Chopp goes on to claim that in the practice of narrative we are offered the 'possibility of emancipation' since we are called to engage in 'different lives, different relationships and different worlds.'[11] Accordingly, narrative offers us the possibility of engaging with new insights because the nature of narrative is such that every re-telling is a new encounter between story and situation.[12] This means that narrative offers us the possibility of breaking free from the definitions imposed by others through the opportunity of participating in the ongoing process of actively re-writing our lives, re-shaping our relationships and redefining our world. Put another way, to affirm a narrative reality to human life is not to claim that there is only ***a*** story but that there is in fact ***only*** story.[13]

> The use of the concepts of "narrative" or "narrativity" is also employed in philosophy to name the practice of lived experience. . . . Personal identity is not fixed . . . but is constructed through narrative. . . . Narrative and identity presuppose each other . . . push[ing] beyond actual texts and acts of writing to name historical experience.[14]

Crites considers that narrative has a particular 'musical vitality' which gives the whole process a naturally dramatic tension.[15] He claims narrative is fundamental to securing the continuity of human life because it manages to echo our origins while also calling us into a revolutionised -- and therefore a transformed -- future. In other words, while narrative resonates with something

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[10]Chopp *Saving Work,* 32. Chopp considers that stories construct agency and so are related to -- but not completely determined by-- events beyond our control, people with whom we relate, and traditions we appropriate or resist.

[11]ibid.

[12]Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord,* 32-38. This means that: 'Anyone who has had an experience *ipso facto* becomes a witness.'

[13]Crossan, *The Dark Interval* (Texas: Argus Communications, 1974), 45.

[14]Chopp, *Saving Work*, 32.

[15]Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience' in *Why Narrative?* 68.

that is deeply familiar, it simultaneously, offers us the possibility of engaging a new and transformative vision. Indeed, Crites considers that it is precisely the 'narrative quality of human experience' that creates, provokes and challenges human communities in a way that engages imagination rather than intellect.[16]

Accordingly, it is the passion and the dynamism of narrative that enables story-telling to reshape and reform perspectives. Tilley maintains that narrative performs these functions in a way that re-connects and re-grounds narrative back to experiences of people or communities out of which they arose.[17] This has the effect of countering Western modernity's tendency to abstract human experience from the broad stream of human history and tradition. In turn, this helps to overcome the mind-body dualism of the Enlightenment. In light of these qualities, it is clear that narrative has a particular talent for dealing concretely with human life -- even within its diversity of experiences and generalities of meaning. So, rather than objectifying human life or abstractly talking about human experiences, narrative engages life and reality at its most foundational level. Crites maintains that, in light of this facility for engaging the raw experiences of human life, narrative can be as potent and as powerful as any revolution since it allows the emergence of new creative stories into a community.[18] This practical -- even revolutionary -- power of narrative is not accessed by violent force which encourages the dissolution of authority. Rather, the revolutionary power of narrative is actually found in the revival of ethical authority.[19]

Consequently, narrative makes it possible to 'recover a living past, to believe again in the future, to perform acts that have significance for the person

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[16]ibid.

[17]Terence Tilley, *Story Theology,* (Delaware: Michael Glazier Ltd., 1985), 45. Tilley claims 'one of the blights of the modern era' is the refusal to recognise we 'live in a world constructed by myth.' He considers that in the tendency to abstract and 'dualistically objectify human experience from the myths and narrative of our tradition' we rejected myth but remained blind to the myth which constructed this rejection and so created a world blind to the power of myth.

[18]Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience' in *Why Narrative,* 87-88.

[19]Crossan, *The Dark Interval,* 36-37. Here Crossan deals with the power of story and language as revolutionary claiming that as 'Plato knew long ago, it is the poets' who are in fact the dangerous ones.

who acts' and so restore a 'human sort of experience.'[20] It is this focus on the transmission of our concrete experiences that makes narrative such an effective vehicle through which different groups can truly begin to engage and articulate -- even critique -- the stories of their personal and communal lives.[21] Indeed, in emphasising the transformative power of narrative Rebecca Chopp notes that when women first claimed their own 'authorial agency' they created different lives, different relationships, even different worlds. Chopp claims that the power to effect this transformation is part of the practical activity of narrative because

> to write, and by extension to live one's life as the act of writing, is to be able to resist oppression and definition by others. The narrativity of one's life, in a sense, is one possibility of emancipation: to free one's self from definition imposed on one and to live one's life in the activity of writing.[22]

Narrative is part of the process that grounds and orders the 'big' questions of life by engaging, arranging and preserving them.[23] So, the questions that are too real to be discarded as 'sophistry and illusion' are practically engaged and those that are too large to be empirically explained away are not lost or dismissed. Consequently, the role of theological narrative -- or stories of our sacred myths -- becomes fundamentally important to the flourishing of humanity; both personally and collectively. These sacred stories are fundamental to human wholeness not only because the 'gods are celebrated in them, but because humanity's sense of self and world is created through

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[20]Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience' in *Why Narrative,* 87.

[21]Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord,* 38-42. Schillebeeckx sees this as a dialectical process referring to this aspect of narrative as the quality of critical experience. He claims that in engaging a new story of reality we revise some of the propositions of our own convictions about life. This opens up a new way of life for both ourselves and others.

[22]Chopp, *Saving Work*, 32.

[23]Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 83-107.Benjamin claims the story-teller is able to reach back into the lives of all who have contributed to the present reality of the story. Consequently, a truly epic story resembles the seeds of grain which has 'lain for centuries in the chambers of the pyramids shut up air-tight and yet have retained their germative power to this day.' 90. 'Seen in this way the story-teller joins the ranks of teachers and sages. He (sic) has counsel not just for a few situations, like the proverbs does-- but for the many like the sage.' 107.

them.'[24] Such stories -- and the different symbolic worlds they create and project -- cannot be understood as monuments. They are more like 'dwelling places': people actually 'live' in them.[25] These stories clearly illuminate how personal human stories grow out of and yet also flow back into collective human stories. Accordingly, sacred myths of a community offer a sense of the mutual, inter-relational connections that exist between the person and the group.[26]

Understood in this way, it is clear theological narrative serves to bridge the gap between dogmas of a community and the reality of its lived faith experience.[27] As mentioned before, narratives are 'lived in' rather than merely 'contemplated.' This makes theological narratives as important as ritual. In effect, they ground theology by providing a way for 'canonical images and metaphors' to move from the 'community or tradition to the individual.'[28] Thus, narrative is one of the most effective ways in which 'the key ideas of Christianity are actually carried into the lives of believers.'[29] In other words, narrative reconciles the split between thought and life, belief and practice. It is through narrative that a community is able to ground its values. Narrative makes it possible to 'believe with our hearts what we confess with our lips.'[30]

Although Christian narrative will often encompass and explain both dogmas and propositions it is not really concerned with formally structured or

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[24]Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience' in *Why Narrative*? 70.

[25]ibid.

[26]ibid. This echoes Gadamer's conviction that 'Being that can be understood is language.' See *Truth and Method*, 474. Crites insists that people 'live in' narratives rather than just use them. Accordingly, the stories of a people -- or groups of people -- serve to 'inform people's sense of the story of which their own lives are a part, [and so somehow chart] the moving course of their own action and experience.'

[27]Tilley, *Story Theology,* 3-6.

[28]ibid., 4-6.

[29]ibid., Tilley claims there is actually nothing wrong with doing propositional -- as opposed to doing narrative -- theology. However, he considers that propositional theology does tend 'rob central Christian concepts of their power to evoke new insights.' This means that propositional theology will more than likely run into difficulty when 'showing how the faith enters into the lives of the believers.' 5-6.

[30]McFague, *Metaphorical Theology,* 30.

strictly systematic explanations.[31] Rather, it endeavours to connect key ideas of the Christian message with the lived faith experience of contemporary communities and proclaim them in a meaningful and accessible way. At a time when it would seem almost impossible to be able to positively maintain the tension between contemporary secular experience of human life and relevance and/or distinctiveness of Christian faith, this is obviously a task of some theological importance -- if not urgency.[32] So, even in the aftermath of the breakdown of the traditional myths that connected life and faith, a narrative theology seeks to hold Christian faith and human life together in a way that grounds our understanding of reality and identity. [33]

In this way, theological narrative serves to reflect the primary and practical structure of human existence. In both its personal and collective dimensions, theological narrative gives meaning to human life and explores how human beings relate to each other, God and the world.[34] Furthermore, it does this in a way that is able to 'make basic claims about the truth of that existence and display the ways in which that existence may be fundamentally affected or transformed.'[35] So, even among theologians who disagree on the exact theological significance of many of our foundational biblical narratives the transformative quality of these narratives -- over and above purely doctrinal or

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[31]Tilley, *Story Theology, 3.*

[32]Paul Lauritzen 'Is "Narrative" Really a Panacea?' in *The Journal of Religion* (Vol.67 No.3 1987, 322-339), 326-327. Lauritzen, however, does not believe all the claims for narrative are justified.

[33]Terence Tilley, *Story Theology,* 3. & 46. Here Tilley claims that the myths of narrative serve to establish worlds & their social order; direct peoples religious awe; and ultimately give a sense of the cosmos. So while some myths are more hidden that others i.e. not all myths 'function equally well' or are obvious or immediately visible, those who seek to live in 'a cosmos not established by a myth will have no sense of who or where they are.'

[34]Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God,* 21.

[35]Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 244. In stressing the transformative and connective quality of theological narrative Goldberg emphasises that 'some narratives not only help explain to us what has come before, but also show us how we ought to proceed.'

propositional theology -- is not often questioned.[36] As Rebecca Chopp maintains, theological narrative is basically concerned with possibilities that are available within the ongoing construction of human life and reality in context of the human-divine relationship.

> Christianity is, among other things, a kind of "in-process" narrativity of God and world. The way the Christian story is told at any given time and place is conditioned by the historical location of the tellers . . . Narratives, after all, can be expressed through many different plots and styles. And Christianity is itself a living tradition whose theological symbols point to the openness of its narrativity.[37]

The dynamic and constructive quality of narrative -- with its eminently practical and transformative character -- makes narrative an attractive category for critical or practical theologians like Johannes Baptist Metz. After all, if stories are 'lived before they are told,' then the telling of stories becomes a very practical and self-critical task.[38]

It is clear that there is a reciprocal and inter-dependant relationship between people's lives and the narratives that ground and celebrate those lives. As such, narrative proves to be a most effective tool in the practical process of interpreting what it means to be human in relationship -- with each other and the divine. This is because through narrative it is possible to participate in the articulation and transformation of our personal and collective identity. Rebecca Chopp maintains that although established narratives of Western culture and Western Christianity are not actually gone, it is clear that they 'no longer exist as sure foundations.'[39] This means there is now a vital need to write new stories for Western Christianity; stories that more adequately reflect the reality of being in relationship with God and each other. Furthermore, if these new stories are to act as sure foundations, then they must be built on the 'changing reality' of contemporary Western experience. In response to this need, Johannes Baptist

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[36]ibid., 192. Although, as Goldberg points out, narrative theology is still not immune from the major questions of contemporary theology: truth -- the relationship between faith and experience; meaning -- the hermeneutic of interpreting faith; and rationality -- the charge of moral relativism.

[37]Chopp, *Saving Work,* 21.

[38]MacIntyre, 'Virtues, Unity of a Human Life, Tradition' in *Why Narrative,* 97.

[39]Chopp, *Saving Work,* 21.

Metz claims that, from within the category of narrative, contemporary Christian theology is able to explore the practical, liberative and transformative potential of the Christian story.[40]

The place of NARRATIVE in the Theology of Johannes Baptist METZ

It was through his critical engagement with contemporary Western culture and society that Metz was drawn to narrative as a suitable category for his political theology.[41] Metz considers that in its practical, active and transformative nature, theological narrative is an essential aspect of a practical contemporary theology. Narrative critiques the idea that theory should inform praxis or that process is less important than speculative thought. He claims that a political theology acknowledges narrative and memory as a 'constitutive function of Christian praxis.'[42] Political theology also rejects the notion that the 'universal meaning of history and the historical identity of Christianity' have already been definitively set and are now firmly established.[43] Consequently, the separation of world history from salvation history poses a grave problem for Christian theology. If this happens, Metz considers Christian faith is in danger of 'looking over the heads of those who are bowed down under their own history of suffering.'[44] In order to realise the practical, liberative intent of Christianity, Metz

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[40]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 207. Metz claims that 'what is new and has never yet been can only be introduced in narrative.'

[41]ibid., 193-205. Metz acknowledges Marcuse, Benjamin and Adorno as being three of the most influential thinkers in the work done by the Frankfurt School in the critical exploration of the narrative character of memory as freedom and 'the narrated history of freedom.'

[42]ibid., 161. Here Metz maintains that: 'My criticism is principally directed against the attempt to explain the historical identity of Christianity by means of speculative thought . . . without regard to the constitutive function of Christian praxis, the cognitive equivalent of which is narrative and memory.'

[43]ibid., 163-165. Metz considers that Narrative protects the universal meaning of history and so the salvation of the 'whole of history' is not reduced to a harmless teleology of meaning' in which it is no longer possible to consider history's catastrophes.

[44]ibid., 164.

claims that Christian theology cannot ignore the 'ever changing times of history' but must strive to critically engage them in an effort to foster greater awareness and deeper understanding.[45] To achieve this awareness Metz appeals to the category of narrative as being of central importance for radically engaging with contemporary Christian thought.[46]

Metz considers that contemporary Western Christianity is going through an unprecedented historical crisis of identity. This is not a crisis of the content of Christian faith but a crisis of Christian identity. More simply, it is a crisis of Church and theology.[47] Metz places the root cause of this crisis firmly in the Western philosophical movement of the Enlightenment. He considers this crisis

> is due to the breakthrough at all levels of the new middle-class man (sic) or citizen . . . [who] emerged in the Enlightenment. He (sic) is the subject in the subject . . . the creator of that form of religion that is used, as it were, to decorate and set the scene, freely and in private for middle-class festivals. . . . Religion no longer belongs to the social constitution of the subject, but is rather added to it.'[48]

This situation effectively shattered the relationship between religion and society by dissolving both the position and authority the Christian Church had over the Western world. Metz considers one of the results of this separation between the Church and the world was the emergence of Western society's private *bourgeois* citizen.

The problem that now arises for Metz -- and indeed for all contemporary Western theologians -- is that of building a new authentic relationship between

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[45]Metz, *Theology of the World,* 13. 'The universal secularity [of the contemporary world] challenges faith to say what its attitude to it is. Faith can try, of course, to ignore the acuteness of the situation and simply hammer away behind locked doors' as though there were no need to 'understand and answer for the ever changing times' but if it does this it 'will lack the urgency and taste of reality and can suddenly descend into mythology.'

[46]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 81, note 24. Here, Metz conducts a lengthy discussion on the 'indispensability' of the category of narrative as a means whereby not 'only certain groups of persons but all persons may emerge as subjects of history.'

[47]Metz, 'Theology in the Modern Age, and before Its End' in *Faith and the Future,* 31-35. Here Metz 'lists some crises whose solutions radically affect the shape of doing theology.'

[48]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 33.

Christian faith and secular Western society. Basically, Metz seeks to positively engage the inevitable secularisation of our world. He explores ways whereby relevance of Christian faith and distinctiveness of Christian salvation are able to be confirmed and validated within the world view of our contemporary rational, private, and 'enlightened' lives. More specifically, Metz insists that contemporary Christian theology must find a way to respond to a world that has privatised and domesticated the real power of Christianity to such an extent that the practical implications of Christian faith are now all but non-existent. He considers that this separation of faith and life, belief and action, has reduced the ethical directives of Christianity to theoretical dogma. Consequently, Metz considers that contemporary Western society has effectively redefined Christian salvation and reduced it to a personal moment of private assent.[49] For Metz, the answer to this challenge to Christianity lies in construction of a new -- and specifically -- *practical* theology whose fundamental structure must be thoroughly *narrative* in both nature and function.

Metz considers that the basic structure and prime function of human consciousness is fundamentally narrative. This means that as our lives grow and change so too do the stories that express our lives. These narratives -- or life stories -- cannot be understood as pre-determined frameworks that are imposed on an already formed reality. Rather, they shape our consciousness, identity and reality. This occurs in continuous and dynamic process that Rebecca Chopp refers to as the 'ongoing activity of writing our lives.'[50] This process is accomplished in and through the primal stories or sacred narratives of the community. Consequently, Metz maintains, that because narrative is foundational to human life, then narrative is the practical and primal activity of any human community.

Human communities are fundamentally story-telling communities. Religion, or engagement with the sacred, is a primary human need. This means that it is stories or narratives of Christian faith that form the basic structure of our

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[49]ibid., 65. Privatisation serves to separate Christian faith from its ethical imperative which does a violence to the salvific and eschatological content of Christian faith.

[50]Chopp, *Saving Work,* 34.

theologies.[51] By claiming a radically narrative structure for Christian theology, Metz seeks to dispel the idea that religion can be understood as either an optional extra or private choice of the individual. Instead, he insists that because religion is actually an expression of a primary and fundamental human need, then Christian faith is fundamentally a communal and practical activity. In other words, rather than concentrating on the process of theoretical reasoning about our faith, Metz privileges the practical activity of living our faith. Within this understanding, Metz is then able to insist that religion is crucial to the social construction of the person and so must be essentially *public* -- and therefore *political* -- in nature.[52]

Metz believes that the narrative structure of Christianity prevents faith being reduced to a doctrine for private consideration or a relative belief within a sea of equally possible alternatives.[53] Metz blames the Enlightenment for this tendency to reduce and relativise religion. He maintains that it reflects Western society's inclination to divorce notions of truth and reality from the 'particularities of humanity's historical existence.'[54] Rather than isolating human life from the particularities of humanity's historical existence Metz claims we need to recognise that it is the particular historical situations of human life that give rise to the stories of our lives. Faith stories are not merely dramatic embellishments of a rational and argumentative theology. Rather, they form the foundational structure of theology. Metz defines the Christian community as a 'community remembering and narrating with a practical intent.'[55] Consequently, he considers that Christianity must acknowledge narrative as the primary structure of theology. With this acknowledgment, Metz believes Christian faith can break out of the private and theoretical grasp of Western society's bourgeois individual.

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[51]Metz, 'Theology in the Struggle for History and Society' in *Faith and the Future*, 52.

[52]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 35-36.

[53]Lauritzen 'Is "Narrative" Really a Panacea?' 328-329. Lauritzen considers that Metz does not provide an adequate account of: 'narrative, the narrative structure of theology, or a narrating faith.' 328.

[54]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 36-38.

[55]ibid., 51 & 212.

Therefore, Metz rejects a purely argumentative or speculative theology. He considers that speculative theology is too easily abstracted from its concrete historical context. Any theology which is too abstracted or too speculative will have a difficult relationship with the practice of Christian faith. In turn, this undermines primacy of praxis and identifiable content or 'truths' of Christianity are in danger of being lost or relativised.[56] Metz considers that, because truth is a dynamic activity rather than a static concept, Christian truths are not theoretical or speculative truths. Rather, they are eminently practical truths that are made true in action -- particularly the liberative praxis of social action. This means that the central Christological knowledge of Christian faith is not primarily 'handed down as concepts' dogmas or doctrines. Rather it is made true in and through stories and actions of Christ.[57]

This is possible because Christianity has a 'practical character with a practical and liberating intention.'[58] By this, Metz means that the universality of Christianity -- its ability to mediate 'salvation' for all humanity -- does not become real -- or even true -- theoretically. Rather, it becomes real in and through the 'power of praxis.'[59] Consequently, to preserve the identifiable content of Christian salvation we need to reclaim the dynamic and dangerous memories of Jesus' life death and resurrection as our dogmas of faith. Christian praxis is directly shaped by the memory of the life and death of Jesus made present through the narratives of Christian faith.

Within these dangerous memories, Metz maintains that the life-transforming potential of our faith-stories are able to be reclaimed and remembered. This recalls the liberative origins of Christianity which, in turn, acts to protect the public and practical nature of Christian faith. Through narrative,

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[56]Metz, 'Facing the Jews' in *Faith and the Future,* 40-41. The concept of truth in action gives narrative its critical and practical edge. If the stories of liberation are told through the memory of suffering then these memories prevent narratives from being mere 'historical reconstruction' and make them stories of God's promise that can be 'remembered practically.' 40.

[57]Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 52.

[58]ibid., 165.

[59]ibid.

Christian theology claims that memories and stories of God acting in our history still shape our lives. They are still relevant and distinctive stories. These stories are still relevant because they are intimately connected to practical social action. They are still distinctive because they are not just any old stories, but 'stories about the Christian God and so they cannot be reduced to any universal message without loss of content.'[60] Metz considers that this makes Christian redemption a radically memorative and narrative act. Accordingly, Christian theology must strive to keep this memory of redemption alive in 'narrative form as a dangerous, and liberating memory of redeemed freedom.'[61] This narrative must then defend that memory from the 'systems of our so-called emancipative world'.[62]

There is here a clear connection between narrative and sacrament, narrative and liturgy, narrative and ritual. If, as Sally McFague maintains, narrative makes it possible to 'believe with our hearts what we confess with our lips,' then it is clear that narrative provides the bridge that connects these proclamations of the church with the faith -- and therefore the lives -- of the worshipping community. Within the very practical nature of the process of narrative that the Christian promise of salvation is re-affirmed and it is through narrative that the community response to that promise is re-grounded.[63] In and through the community re-telling the stories of the redemptive action of God in history the Christian community is able to make that redemptive activity concretely and continually present. This connects narrative to the sacramental life of Christian communities since it is in and through the sacramental life of our faith community that the stories and commitment of our faith become active in the world. As such, the sacramental life of the Church presents itself as the stories of life and suffering and in so doing reveals itself as saving narratives.

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[60]Lauritzen, 'Is "Narrative" really a Panacea?', 337.

[61]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 133.

[62]ibid.

[63]McFague, *Metaphorical Theology,* 30.

Indeed Metz maintains that:

> Christianity as a community of those who believe in Jesus Christ has, from the very beginning, not been primarily a community interpreting and arguing, but a community remembering and narrating with a practical intent -- a narrative and evocative memory of the passion death and resurrection of Jesus. . . translated into dangerously liberating stories.[64]

Metz is very aware that the stories of Christian identity have changed. He is also aware that there is an urgent need for a new, practical and fundamental theology that can reclaim the relevance and distinctiveness of Christian faith. The most suitable category for this task is narrative.[65] With narrative, Metz is able to articulate a radically Christian understanding of human identity within the changing reality of contemporary secular life. In the stories of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, Metz grounds the practical and liberative possibilities of Christian faith. This saves faith from becoming the private, theoretical concern of the autonomous, middle-class individual. Theological narrative reflects the practical structure of human existence as it relates to God. In this way it is able to 'make basic claims about the truth of that existence and display the ways in which that existence may be fundamentally affected or transformed.'[66]

However, narrative does not exist in isolation because every story is supported and maintained by particular linguistic influences[67] During times of social change and cultural upheaval, the influence and function of a community's stories becomes more urgent and more important. And although the stories of a society are radically formative of its reality, they are not the most radical foundation of the community's identity. Ultimately, communal stories are constructed and supported by a particular meaning-system or language. This means that as well as examining the way the dominant and subversive narratives of a society function, it is necessary to explore the different interest

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[64]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 212.

[65]ibid., 212-213.

[66]Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative,* 244.

[67]Susan K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key,* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), 103.

factors of the language that shape and direct these narratives. In this way, the subtle and often hidden implications and values of the language that builds these stories can be more clearly uncovered and more adequately assessed.

Metz clearly stresses the importance of narrative in Christian theology. He considers that narrative theology is involved in the authentic retelling of the human-divine story. However, his concern with language at the practical transformative level is minimal. Metz pays little attention to the way language is able to radically shape and re-shape the sacred stories of the Christian tradition and so runs the risk of remaining blind to many of its ideological distortions.[68] The best example of this is Metz' treatment of women.

Even as Metz critiques the hegemony of Christianity's 'dominant' discourse, he does little to acknowledge that, while this discourse marginalises many groups, it has particularly excluded women. Because women have been the most historically marginalised and victimised by this hegemony over half the stories of suffering in Christian history are women's stories of women's suffering. Yet, even with his explicit concern for the stories of suffering, Metz pays no attention to the largest collection of stories of victimisation and oppression.

Being oblivious to the stories of the victimisation of women Metz neglects to engage the root cause of one of the principal sources of oppression within Christian history. Even as he engages historical and ideological forces that have silenced the victims of history he fails to note that Christianity's androcentric language and patriarchal narratives have been complicitious in the neglect and silencing of women.[69] Consequently, Metz' theological methodology is not self-critical enough. In failing to identify the basic ideology that supports Western Christianity, and so neglecting the root cause of the marginalisation of the majority of the victims of Christian history, Metz risks re-inscribing this ideology into his own theology. In effect, Metz runs the risk of not de-constructing the hegemony of traditional theology but rather of supporting it.

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[68]Although it must be noted Metz does implicity note that the legal nature of 'apologetic' theology has shaped the concept. See *Faith in History and Society,* 8-9.

[69]Keshgegian, *To Know By Heart,* 353.

Regardless of the attention Metz gives to constructing a practical and transformative narrative, his methodology is insufficiently critical enough to facilitate a truly transformative narrative. It is unable to respond adequately to the reality that the root ideologies of the Christian tradition are primarily articulated along the lines of gender. Even if Metz did acknowledge the marginalisation of women, by failing to redress this with positive stories of women's agency and hope, Metz misses the chance to rebuild new transformed relationships for contemporary theology. Any theology that leaves the most systematically marginalised group of Christianity's victims un-named and unheard is not responding to contemporary experience.

The Category of LANGUAGE

'Language', claims Heidegger, 'is the house of being.'[70] This well-known saying reflects the hermeneutical perception that language cannot be understood as a tool of human reason or an objective function of human expression. Rather, Heidegger considers that the language used to express human life and reality becomes an intrinsic part of the experience of life itself. In other words, the whole process of becoming human is radically

Metaphor bore me.
But for you I stripped all adornment.
I am dancing in the play of language.
I am dancing the world alone.
You help create me,
but I precede you.
You precede yourself to me.
Why do you not know me?
I am not morality, not a crackable code.
You cannot break me,
or measure up to me
I am not law, though my feet obey.
I transcend ethics, but you
must comprise the ethical to get me.
The main thing for you to remember is:
teeth full of money and
pockets of power.
Susan McCaslin
Appendix D.

[70]Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 213. Here Weinsheimer notes that Heidegger's understanding of language as the 'house of Being' is a foundational aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutical theory. Consequently, the almost ontological status that Heidegger gives to language forms an essential aspect of how Gadamer approaches the basic interpretative -- and linguistic -- experience of 'Being' human.

linked to language. It is, in effect, a linguistic process. This makes language a distinctive hallmark of human societies.[71] In other words, the process of becoming human is an ongoing linguistic process that is, in effect, immersed in and so grows out of experiences of language.[72] So, for Heidegger, language can never be merely an instrument of the human will or an object of human reason. Humanity does not actually 'speak' language: language 'speaks' humanity. Within this, there must be the acknowledgment that genuine understanding and genuine conversation are both willing and reasonable. This means that understanding cannot be 'willed' into existence nor can it be 'reasoned' into being. Rather, understanding emerges out of linguistic encounters. This relationship is perhaps most clearly expressed through Gadamer's assertion: 'Being that can be understood is language.'[73]

Gadamer's understanding of the role of language within the pattern of human life has obvious connections with Heidegger's linguistic philosophy.[74] Gadamer maintains that the activity of language is intrinsic to the experience of being human and so is radically formative of the experience of life itself.[75] This hermeneutical approach to language opposed the notion of language as an objective transmitter of meaning that merely transfers knowledge and reality. Rather, Gadamer stresses that movement towards understanding and dialogue

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[71]Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key,* 103-127. Langer considers that language is *the* constitutive hallmark of human societies. To this end she maintains that language is 'possessed by every primitive family, from darkest Africa to the loneliness of the polar ice. Even [if] the simplest of practical arts, such as clothing, cooking, or pottery, is found wanting in one human group or another, or at least found to be very rudimentary, language is neither absent nor archaic in any of them.' 109.

[72]Charles B. Guignon, 'The Philosophy of Language - Martin Heidegger' in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy,* ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 319. Guignon claims Heidegger saw language as 'the source of all intelligibility. . . . [The idea that] humans do not speak [language] but rather language speaks us' is an insight of Heidegger's that became central to modern post--structuralist theories.

[73]Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 474. See also 417. 'Language and thinking about things are so bound together that it is an abstraction to conceive of the system of truths as a pre-given system of possibilities of being for which the signifying subject selects corresponding signs.'

[74]Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics,* 213.

[75]Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 417

is an essentially linguistic engagement. Consequently, he rejects the belief that language was simply a tool that 'signed' an event. Instead, Gadamer claimed there is a radical and formative connection between human life and the language used to describe, interpret and understand that life.[76]

In *Plurality and Ambiguity,* David Tracy explores a hermeneutical understanding of language.[77] Tracy maintains that modernity's confidence in philosophical positivism -- in the presence of an objective realm of facts -- has collapsed. Accordingly, Tracy considers that to maintain that the basic 'facts' of human knowledge, be they scientific data or personal insights, are pre-linguistic is no longer a serious option.[78] As mentioned aboved, modernity tended to abstract the content of a subject from its context. Philosophical positivism saw language as a carrier for the content of the experience it described. So, language that interpreted scientific activities was objective and clear-cut because it described objective, clear-cut matters. Language used to interpret the arts, religion, or morality was much less controlled since it engaged subjective ideas or personal opinions. The nature of the activity determined the nature of the language; and the significance of language is reduced to the ability to signify its pre-determined subject matter.[79]

Both Gadamer and Tracy reject this functional understanding of language. Instead, they engage a hermeneutical approach that stresses the essential relationship between language and life.[80] In the work of both Wittgenstein and Heidegger, Tracy uncovers two important contributions in the

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[76]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 547-548. Gadamer tells his students 'you must realise that when you take a word into your mouth you have not taken up some arbitrary tool which can be thrown in a corner if it doesn't do the job.'

[77]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* ix Throughout this book Tracy is relating the place and the power of language and history in the exploration of truth and meaning, with Chapter 3 directly examining his own approach to language and 'its relationship to hermeneutics, religion and hope.' As an aside, the title of this book appears as a subtle play on the contributions of the great linguistic philosophers Wittgenstein and Heidegger to whom Tracy attributes the insight that language is infused with both plurality -- Wittgenstein -- and ambiguity -- Heidegger.

[78]ibid., 49-50.

[79]Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 226-228.

[80]Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 548-549. & Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* ix.

relationship between language and life.[81] In Wittgenstein, the connection between language and life is reflected in the resemblance between the plurality of languages and the plurality of life-forms. Similarly, Heidegger's insistence on the ability of language to simultaneously disclose and conceal meaning reveals the *Dasein* of being human in a way that language can indeed be called the house of being.[82] Accordingly, language actually produces meaning.[83] So, given that our contemporary experience of understanding truth and meaning are thoroughly linguistic, language can no longer be understood as a passive vehicle that merely conveys human meaning. There are, claims Tracy, no 'pure' messages or ideas that are free from the web of language.'[84]

The process of language is the process of life itself. David Tracy claims that humanity belongs to its language far more than language belongs to humanity. Through language, we are able to participate in and therefore belong to our history and society. In this sense, language actually precedes us; we are born into a language the way we are born into a family. Language is always 'already there surrounding and invading all we experience, understand, judge, decide, and act upon.'[85] This relationship between language and life means that

> when we really master a language, no translation is necessary . . . [since] where there is understanding there is not translation but speech. . . . Understanding how to speak . . . is both an accomplishment of life itself and a life time accomplishment.[86]

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[81]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity, ix.* In Chapter 3, Tracy directly examines his own approach to language and 'its relationship to hermeneutics, religion and hope' As an aside, the title of this book appears as a subtle play on the contributions of the great linguistic philosophers Wittgenstein and Heidegger to whom Tracy attributes the insight that language is both plurality -- Wittgenstein -- and ambiguity -- Heidegger.

[82]ibid., 50-51. *Dasein* is Heidegger's phrase to indicate the 'throwness' of human beings -- and of being human. *Dasein* carries an implicit ambiguity in that it conceals as it reveals and so it discloses as it hides.

[83]ibid., 44-45.

[84]ibid., 43.

[85]ibid., 50. Tracy states trying to 'escape this reality . . . is to find oneself not freed from language, but trapped in . . . romantic expressivism or positivist scientism.'

[86]Gadamer in *Truth and Method,* 384-385.

The relationships among language, understanding, and reality are complex and ambiguous. Language does not merely uncover truth or realities that are already present. Rather, truth and reality actually come to be in and through the linguistic encounter that gives them expression.[87] Accordingly, truth is 'the reality we know through our best interpretations' to be true and reality is 'constituted through the interpretations that have earned the right' to be called truly real.[88] Since language and understanding are inter connected and mutually formative human beings must interpret their reality and live their lives in and through language.[89]

Like truth and reality then, language and understanding are radically formative and radically relational human life processes.[90] They are radically relational because as they take their shape in relationship to the people, culture, and history they interpret so they shape those people, cultures and histories. This makes language and understanding a necessary and irreducible aspect of the conditions of historical existence.[91] They can never be claimed as private or individual activities because they belong to the whole community. They are communal because the experiences and ideas of a people are always expressed in and interpreted through the public, communal, social and historical languages available to them. Accordingly, we do not understand an idea or experience an event and, then, search for the most appropriate words that will name it for us. Rather, we come to understand an experience in and through the language that expresses that experience.

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[87]Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God,* 16-17. 'There can be no affirmation of truth -- or indeed of lies -- without any articulation in language.'

[88]ibid., 48-49.

[89]Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key,* 107-110. Here Langer explores the notion that the roots of language lie in 'the tendency to see reality symbolically' This means that while language naturally lends itself to communication, it is not its prime purpose or orientation.

[90]Andrea Nye, 'Semantics in a New Key' in *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 288-289.

[91]Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience' in *Why Narrative,* 65

Consequently, it is clear that any attempt to abstract language from its context as if it were a tool that could be mastered must be rejected. It is in articulating an idea or event that the experience itself takes shape. In other words, the language that interprets an event directs how that event is understood. This means we grow to understand our values and truths more clearly as we learn to interpret them more authentically.[92] Consequently, the event and the language used to express it are irreducible aspects the whole experience. Neither can be collapsed into or replaced with the other. It is this linguistic process that enables humans to have common understandings and so communicate and share their experiences with others.[93] In other words, 'Being that can be understood is language.' This makes the critical consideration of language and its contexts has become a primary task for our contemporary Western society. In light of this academic disciplines and public discourse must acknowledge both the formative power that language extends over human life and the context from which it arises.[94] This means contemporary discourse must also be prepared to critically examine the language within which a community shapes and embodies its reality.[95]

Within the recent history of Western culture and society the stories of what it means to be a woman -- particularly a Christian woman -- have undergone dramatic changes. Consequently, there is an urgent need to reclaim stories that can do justice to contemporary Christian women's lives and re-write stories that can offer contemporary Christian women a place in their own future. This task, however, cannot succeed unless careful attention is paid to the language -- and the speakers -- that seek to direct and shape these stories.[96]

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[92]Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 16. Rorty claims we must drop the 'picture of the human mind or human languages becoming better and better suited' to describe more of the real meaning or to 'represent more and more facts.'

[93]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* 48-49.

[94]Sheila Briggs, 'A History of Our Own: What would a Feminist History of Theology Look Like' in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 169.

[95]Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 20-21.

[96]Briggs, 'A History of Our Own' in *Horizons in Feminist Theology,* 169.

Accordingly, any attempt to build radically new and more inclusive stories about human life and relationships must be critically aware of the significance and the power of language. Otherwise, there is a real risk of reinscribing the same -- or even more marginalising -- attitudes back into these stories.[97] Given the formative power of language in creating human identity and reality, critical attention to language is an essential task for all contemporary discourses and disciplines.

FEMINIST CONCERNS WITH LANGUAGE

Contemporary feminist studies acknowledge that language is a powerful and complex phenomenon.[98] They critique any notion that claims language 'imprisons' the true human essence, claiming this reflects an unhealthy 'suspicion of the corporality and historicity of humanity.'[99] Feminist studies claim that language is so deeply contextual it reflects and embodies human experience: language and life are inseparable. As the entry point into our 'social-symbolic order' language allows for the participation in the practices, principles and values of a society.[100] Kristeva claims that it is the 'fundamental social bond' of our cultural history and tradition.[101] The transformation of Western history and tradition requires at the same time the transformation of language.

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[97]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 90-92. Schüssler Fiorenza claims that: Kyriocentric language operates simultaneously on four discursive levels: the linguistic-grammatical, the biological-natural, the social political, and the ethical-symbolic levels. The categories "man" and "women" do not signify dualistic opposites or fixed linguistic gender slots but socio-political-cultural-religious discursive practices. . . . [They] are discursively constructed and socially maintained as cultural sex differences. 91.

[98]Belsey & Moore, 'The Story So Far' in *The Feminist Reader,* 3-5.

[99]Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Experience,* trans. P. Madigan sj & M. Beaumont, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 34.

[100]Rebecca Chopp, *The Power to Speak,* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1992), 14.

[101]Kristeva, 'Women's Time' in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism,* 203.

The notion that language is the fundamental social bond of our cultural history and tradition gives truth and reality a linguistic nature. Andrea Nye expresses the importance of language in the creation of our reality by claiming:

> Questions of reference, meaning and truth are . . . of vital interest to feminists. . . . If we continue to leave philosophy of language to male dominated logical semantics, feminists will lack a theory of truth. . . A possible feminist philosophy of language . . . would take as its subject matter elements that are essential to the achievement of reference and truth between diverse peoples with diverse interests.[102]

Any culture that acknowledges its prime language as its 'mother tongue' recognises the foundational influence of language on our personal and social realities.[103] As language is individual and personal; it is also communal and political. In acknowledging the relationship between the public and the private function of language, feminist studies seeks to expose and critically engage the ideological use of language -- particularly sexist language.[104] David Lee maintains that the 'pervasive ideologies' of sexist discourses are reflected through negative, sexist and stereotypical language about women. Conversely, negative, sexist and stereotypical language about women support a public consciousness that keeps women marginalised and oppressed.

Language interprets, shapes, and facilitates our relationship with our social-symbolic order.[105] This means as our world transforms our language so our language transforms our world. In having the ability to transform socio-symbolic public realities, language is both 'prior to the individual' and the 'site of politics.'[106] Consequently, it is no longer possible to ignore the political

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[102]Nye, 'Semantics in a New Key' in *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice,* 288-289.

[103]Gilbert & Gubar 'Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality.' in *The Feminist Reader:* 98-99.

[104]David Lee, *Competing Discourses: Perspectives and Ideology in Language* (London: Longman, 1992), 110-114. Lee claims 'sexist discourse both reflects the 'underlying conceptual orientation' of a society and actively participates in the crucial role of the creation and perpetuation of perspective.' 112.

[105]Chopp, *The Power to Speak,* 14

[106]ibid., 2-13. Chopp claims the formative nature of language it involves a creativity, and a fluidity, 'that can birth new meanings, new discourses and new signifying practices.'

implications of language. Nor is it possible to insist that male generic language is gender-neutral and so free of the influence of male power.[107] Schüssler Fiorenza reinforces this point by insisting that hiding the political nature of the patriarchal interest factors in the androcentric language of Western culture society does not simply eradicate them. The power of these factors to shape the public-political understanding of reality is not defused by denying their influence.[108]

The acknowledgment of the transformative power of language gives women -- and other marginalised groups -- the opportunity to re-engage the attitudes and structures that have kept them disenfranchised.[109] Through the critical attention to language many of the 'figures, terms, principles and values of that time and culture' are able to be criticised and transformed.[110] This suggests two important factors govern the relationship between language and the lived reality of a community. Firstly, there is the understanding that language has the power to examine and critique the principal figures, terms and values of a community. Secondly, language has the ability to reconstruct the dominant values and concerns of a culture. In other words, language is able to assess and re-interpret a culture's reality. This obviously impacts upon the areas of human life that deal with questions of ultimate significance. So, when it comes to the critical examination of life's 'ultimate questions' then the exploration of the language that constructs these must take a high priority. As a public discipline that engages Western culture's ultimate questions theology is surely a place

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[107]Belsey & Moore, *The Feminist Reader: Essays in the Politics of Literary Criticism,* 13. See also Jacques Derrida, 'Women in the Beehive' in *Men In Feminism,* eds. A. Jardine & Paul Smith (London: Methuen, 1987), 194. Here Derrida maintains that: 'It is the classical ruse of man to neutralise the sexual mark. In philosophy we have such signs all the time; when we say that the ego, the "I think", is neither man nor woman, we can in fact verify that it's already a man and not a woman.'

[108]Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 25-26.

[109]Wainwright, 'What's in a Name? The word that binds/ The word that frees,' in *Freedom and Entrapment,* 101.

[110]Chopp, *The Power to Speak,* 12. Chopp claims that: 'Around this social-symbolic order are margins and fissure that allow language -- and thus the social-symbolic order itself -- to be corrected, changed, subverted, interrupted and transformed.'

where the critique of language is essential.[111]

Western Christianity's particular -- Radford Ruether would add *peculiar* -- habit of imaging God in exclusive, hierarchical terms of male power is coming under sharp critique from virtually all Western feminist theological perspectives. Feminist theologies claim that the use of male language to talk about humanity's relationship with the divine is not a value-free exercise, nor is it a neutral undertaking. Generic male language does not serve -- as traditional Christianity claims it does -- to include women as well as men. Rather, the continual and exclusive use of male language supports the structures and reinforces the ideologies that exclude and marginalise women. Furthermore, to insist that it does not is more than naive; it is clearly deceptive. This use of male language, male imagery and male metaphors for God is a formative aspect of the construction and maintenance of positions of power and influence within Western Christianity. Phyllis Kaminski claims that if:

> Theological inquiry is truly to be a conversation . . . there is more to learn from women's voices . . . [and] more to discern about the ways in which Christian language and doctrine conceal fundamental distortions regarding the reality of women's lives and the value of women's experiences. If theological conversation is to thrive then it must be fully open to women and it must be cured of its systematic biases.[112]

Accordingly, the feminist critique of Christianity's continued -- and uncritical -- use of these male relational frameworks has become a vital and necessary task for all contemporary theologies.[113]

Sandra Schneiders claims that, as women began to study the scriptures, two broad areas of difficulty emerged. The first concerned the realisation that biblical texts privilege male language and male images as normative. In traditional biblical discourse the word 'man' could either specifically refer to a

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[111]Wainwright, 'What's in a Name?'in *Freedom and Entrapment,* 118. 'A liberation of the naming of the divine may then have its impact on the naming of the human community. . . . The power released in such a transformation of human structuring would be enormous (within Church and society). With it we could indeed transform the world.'

[112]Kaminski, 'Theology as Conversation' in *Women and Theology*, x.

[113]Belsey & Moore, *The Feminist Reader: Essays in the Politics of Literary Criticism,* 13. See also Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 13.

male person or could generically cover any person -- either male or female. The word 'woman', however, was quite particular. It could never mean anything other than a female person. In other words, the biblical tradition maintained that while 'men' could refect the full humannes of a community, 'women' could only adequately reflect a partial humanness or a particular aspect of a community. Indeed, in the words of one of Christianity's influential church 'Fathers,' women were 'misbegotten males.'[114] This understanding -- or rather misunderstanding -- of women served to both create and sustain androcentric frameworks through which Western Christianity's social, political and ecclesial relationships were interpreted. So, even where women were featured at all, they were inevitably presented as 'inferior in themselves, marginal to salvation history and far more marked by and responsible for sin and evil in the world than men.'[115]

The second area of difficulty follows on from this androcentric understanding. It concerns the impact that the overwhelmingly male language and images of God has had, not only on women's religious experience but also on their relationship to God. [116] Within that Western tradition, Christian theology has clearly privileged male images of God. This has served to support the idea that women were only 'truly' human when related to a man. Both women's humanity and their relationship with God had to be mediated by men. Women could not directly access God and so they could not develop an independent relationship with the divine. This understanding has been so deeply woven into the fabric of Western Christian culture that it was believed to have the divine seal of approval. Women were understood to be not only inferior in themselves

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[114]This famous phrase is originally from Aristotelian philosophy but owes this particular articulation to St Thomas Aquinas. The whole notion that women were 'essentially' physical and spiritual inferiority was supported by various arguments from nature. For example these scholars believed that all human fetuses started life as males but if something unpleasant happened in the early months of pregnancy it would hinder the 'true' and proper development of the baby -- the unwelcome presence of the north wind for example -- When the growth and development of the fetus was distorted the fetus would develop into a female. See Elizabeth Johnson in *Consider Jesus,* 100-102 for similar quotes on women by other influential church scholars such as St Augustine, Tertullian and others.

[115]Schneiders, 'The Bible and Feminism' in *Freeing Theology,* 34.

[116]ibid., 35.

and deficient as full human beings, but also subordinate to men by divine design.[117] This meant that women could only reflect or image God in or through their relationships with men. They needed male support, male assistance and male authority to be able to properly maintain their relationship with God. These presuppositions affirmed that men were not only more human than women, they were probably more divine as well. In other words, if to be God-like was to be male, then it was but a small step to claim that being male was to be God-like.[118]

Although traditional western theology systematically claims a gender neutral understanding of God, when it comes to talking about God, it does not employ gender neutral language.[119] The Christian tradition has become so used to this privileging of male language and images that, even as it insists intellectually that God is beyond gender it still refuses to speak to God, about God, or actually engage in any sort of God-talk in language or images other than the obviously male.[120] This point is reinforced by the fact that the attempt to speak of God without using male language, or symbolise God outside particular male images, is an unfamiliar -- often uncomfortable -- experience. More tellingly, the mention of God in terms of specifically female imaginary and language often results in a 'shock.' Consequently, we then immediately and unconsciously realise that the proper or more 'correct' language for God is definitely male.[121]

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[117]Wainwright, 'What's in a Name?' in *Freedom and Entrapment,* 106-107. This meant that 'both [men and women] were trapped within the confines of divinely sanctioned patriarchal power.'

[118]Daly, *Beyond God the Father,* 19.

[119]Radford Ruether 'Sexism and God-Language' in *Weaving The Visions,* 152. The use of stereotypical images of women in traditional theology reflect a sexual fear of female metaphors and language. Thus 'gender becomes a primary symbol for transcendence/immanence dualism.' This controls the *possibility* of women reflecting the divine: i.e. men operate publicly/women in private; men reflect the mind/women the human body; men are rational/women emotional; and so on.

[120]Elizabeth Johnson, *Consider Jesus* (London: Crossroad, 1990), 106 This happens at all levels of our communities even from the 'sophisticated theologians' who claims that 'God is not male, **He** is a spirit.'

[121]McFague, 'God as Mother' in *Weaving the Visions,* 140.

As the centrality of the incarnation testifies, the fostering of a personal relationship with God is a distinctive hallmark of Christianity. Because we ourselves are gendered, then the way we understand and express ourselves and our relationships -- particularly our most intimate relationships -- reflects the gendered reality of human life. This is reflected in the way we order reality and give meaning to life experiences.[122] However, the gendered reality of human life does not provide traditional theology with the necessary justification to continually endorse the exclusive use of male language and images. Nor does it justify the use of exclusively female language and images. So, while there is no escaping the fact that the reality we live in is a gendered reality, the 'divinisation' of one gender over the other will eventually lead to the sanctioning of relationships of domination and elitism. This emphasis on more inclusive language and images is not, as many would claim, the 'pronoun envy of a few fringe women' but an attempt to engage in a 'serious, well researched, political action to change the sexist language and social structures.'[123] It stems from the fundamental belief that the *imago dei* -- just like the incarnation -- is not about being male but rather about being human.[124]

When God is imaged in overwhelmingly male terms the metaphor is in danger of being mistaken for the message.[125] The problem here, is not so much that God is imaged as male, but that maleness becomes the root metaphor for God. Radford Reuther calls this 'male monotheism' and considers it reinforces 'the social hierarchy of patriarchal rule' where only men are able to become responsible partners in the covenant with God.[126] This gives men a primary

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[122]Radford Reuther, 'Sexism and God-Language' in *Weaving the Visions,* 154.

[123]Letty Russell, 'Inclusive Language and Power' in *Religious Education,* Vol.80: No.4, (Fall 1985, 582-602), 583-585.

[124]McFague, 'God as Mother' in *Weaving the Visions,* 140.

[125]Radford Reuther, 'Sexism and God-Language' in *Weaving the Visions,* 158. Radford Reuther claims that the habit of representing God in exclusively male terms allows our image of the divine to be co-opted by 'the patriarchal leadership of Monarch and Pope' and should be 'judged for what it is -- idolatry: setting up certain human figures as the privileged representations of God.'

[126]ibid., 151-154. Radford Ruether claims that 'predominantly male images of God' in the Biblical traditions make monotheism an 'agent in the sacralisation of patriarchy.' 151.

connection to God where women have a secondary connection. Women need the mediation of a male to relate to God. This hierarchy of relationships articulates the correct order of reality -- and therefore the proper line of power and authority -- as God-Male-Female.[127] Men point *to* God but women point *away from* God. Thus, gender dualism becomes a primary symbol for the separation of: women from men; humanity from the divine; the sacred from the profane. Women are not just secondary in relation to men but they are actually imaged negatively in terms of both their humanity and their relationship to the divine.[128]

Accordingly, the question of what narratives direct our reality -- and in whose interest these narratives are told -- is an important one for Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In being concerned with narratives that tell of the liberative promise of God, Schüssler Fiorenza claims critical feminist theologies must seek to 'articulate theology in such a way that does not continue to foster wo/men's exploitation.'[129] They must continue to 'critically explore wo/men's dehumanisation in and through theological traditions and kyriocentric sacred language.'[130] If Christianity is to speak a truly liberative word into the lives of all humanity then the language that facilitates and directs theses narratives must be 'subjected to a serious feminist analysis.'[131] This task is not just orientated to the de-construction of 'hegemonic' academic and theological discourse but must also participate in the construction of a 'different feminist discursive space.'[132] This makes the critical exploration of the language that constructs the sacred stories of Western Christianity a vital and necessary task.

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[127]ibid., 151. This notion of women 'needing' men to access the sacred is found in Scriptures, e.g. 1. Cor. 11:7 'since he [the man] is the image of God, but the women is the glory of man.'

[128]ibid., 152.

[129]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 41.

[130]ibid.

[131]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 78.

[132]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 42.

LANGUAGE and NARRATIVE in the Work of ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza broadly defines her work as a commitment to the ongoing feminist struggle of Christian women who wish to claim the stories and wisdom of their religious heritage. In light of this, Schüssler Fiorenza seeks to 'intervene in the contest over who has the right and authority to define and claim biblical religions.'[133] She maintains that the various women's movements in Western society need 'a critical feminist analysis of patriarchal religious structures' as well as a 'critical feminist theological articulation of liberation.'[134] Thus feminism is both a theoretical and an historical movement that must constantly seek to engage the 'socio-cultural and religious institutions and structures' of Western culture in an effort not just to understand them, but to change them.[135] Accordingly, feminist theologies 'have the dual goal of not only fundamentally altering the nature of malestream knowledge about the Divine and the world but also of changing institutional religions' which exclude wo/men from roles of leadership and authority.[136] Schüssler Fiorenza goes on to say that Christian feminism attempts to do this by 'seeking full citizenship for wo/men in church and society, and by reformulating the study of scripture, tradition, theology, and community in feminist terms.'[137] She considers this task vital, necessary and urgent for the ongoing life of the Christian tradition.

The systematic marginalisation and silencing of women's stories from the socio-religious tradition of Western society controlled and then restricted women's power to contribute to the shaping of their community. This has considerably impoverished the Christian tradition. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that in order to 'restore the world's full spiritual vision, correct the fragmentary

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[133]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals,* 2-3.

[134]ibid.

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

[136]ibid.

[137]ibid.

circle of Christian vision, and change the narrow and biased perception of the world and of G*d,' the world needs to hear the voices and the stories of women.[138] To assist Christian women to articulate a new theo-ethical vision, feminist theology must search for the hidden stories -- or narratives -- of women and bring them back into focus.[139] Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that a specifically feminist perspective does not reduce feminist theology to making 'marginal, anomalous, or ideological claims.'[140] Rather, it emphasises the fact that biblical interpretation is located within a complex network of social, political, historical and religious interest factors. Any theological discourse -- or narrative -- that remains unconscious of or abstracted from its social, political, historical or religious context does not offer humanity a more 'objective truth' but, instead, 'hides and denies the social constructedness and relativity of its claim to divine revelation.'[141]

Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that one way to bring the stories of women back to the centre of our communal narratives is to shift the 'onus of proof' from the 'feminist' margin to its malestream centre.[142] Rather than accepting the presuppositions of traditional theology as the basis for all 'legitimate' theologising, Schüssler Fiorenza challenges traditional theology to prove it can tell an inclusive story of humanity's relationship with the divine. She maintains that the evidence so far is that it cannot. However, in shifting the stories of women from the margin to the centre, it is possible to challenge and destabilise the ideologies that underpin oppressive political, social and religious structures and relationships of Western Christianity. This challenges 'the blueprints of androcentric design, assuming instead a feminist pattern for the historical mosaic that allows women as well as men into the centre of early Christian

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[138]ibid., 26.

[139]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 151. 'Only when we place the Jesus stories about women into the overall story of the Jesus movement' can we recognise their subversive character and realise women were at the centre of Christian praxis and solidarity.

[140]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 45.

[141]ibid., 86.

[142]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 41. In being so implicated in structures of oppression and injustice traditional theology is "guilty until proven innocent."

history.'[143] In so doing, a critical feminist theology creates a new space for Christian women to be responsible and self-determining in creating new inclusive stories of humanity's relationship with the divine.

With her emphasis on the creative reconstruction of Christian history from a feminist perspective, it is little surprise that Schüssler Fiorenza is interested in the narratives that have directed the boundaries of Christian identity.[144] Part of this exploration includes an examination of the language that constructs and interprets our understanding of individual and communal identity. Indeed, in claiming that 'language determines the limits of our world', the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza clearly reflects an understanding of the power of language in the formation and interpretation of our social, political and religious reality.[145] Through her critical exploration of Christian history from a feminist perspective, Schüssler Fiorenza aims to 'deconstruct hegemonic academic discourses' in order to 'construct a different feminist discursive space.'[146] This creative -- and imaginative -- reconstruction of women's lives and women's concerns serves to critically engage Christianity's 'unarticulated patriarchal' horizon and so 'relativise the impact of androcentric texts and language.'[147]

Schüssler Fiorenza claims the androcentric and grammatically masculine

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[143]ibid.

[144]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 9.

[145]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 25. Schüssler Fiorenza claims Rosemary Hennessey's work on language and ideology extends post-modern and feminist critiques of the centred subject without giving up a commitment to the possibility of transformative social change.' Language implicates ideology in the formation of 'reality' by naming it an 'ideological-rhetorical construct' shaped by languages and theory's of particular historical moments.' Similarly, she critiques Irigaray's position as being in danger of falling into 'a-historical readings' that cannot conceive of a '"reality" outside of language that language may correctly or incorrectly represent' which -- in quoting Andrea Nye, -- Schüssler Fiorenza claims acts to dissolve the difference between the material/historical reality and the terms we use to interpret, represent or criticise that reality.' This makes deconstruction simple but reconstruction -- and therefore transformation -- almost impossible. See Schüssler Fiorenza *Sharing Her Word,* 101-103.

[146]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 42. & 102-103. To restrict the feminist critique to deconstruction fails to affirm the women as a positive presence.

[147]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 61.

texts of Western culture are not simply descriptive reflections of reality. Rather, they 'produce women's marginality and absence from public consciousness by subsuming them under masculine terms.'[148] In line with the critical feminist scholars discussed above Schüssler Fiorenza claims the use of male-gendered language and terms to refer to all humans is underpinned by an androcentric prejudice. Male-gendered generic language identifies women as women only when they are unusual, difficult or unmanageable. Consequently, the specific mentioning of women serves to portray women as ones who stand out from the norm; they are only explicitly mentioned as special cases.[149] Because all early Christian writings, whether written by women or by men, 'more or less share the androcentric mind-set' of Western culture our religious texts must be 'carefully analysed and critically tested' to assess how they either facilitate or inhibit the freedom and agency of women.[150] Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that, as a marginalised people, women have an ambivalent relationship to the scriptures.[151]

> The systemic androcentrism of Western culture is evident in the fact that nobody questions whether men have been historical subjects and revelatory agents in the church. The historical role of women, and not that of men, is problematic because maleness is the norm while femaleness constitutes a deviation from this norm.[152]

This highlights two important issues contemporary feminist theology must address. The first concerns the 'normal' or traditional interpretation of stories that direct and support our religious identity. Schüssler Fiorenza believes that the gaps and the silences of women's religious agency are more reflective of Christianity's andro-kyricentric traditioning than women's historical absence from

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[148]Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 25-26.

[149]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 91. 'This Western Linguistic sex/gender system functions to reify and naturalise socio-political cultural gender constructs . . . [and] explicitly[s] mentions wo/men only as the exception to the rule, as problematic. . . . The social world is determined by relations of domination; gender is an intergral part of the relations of ruling that also ground other divisions such as race and class.'

[150]Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 25.

[151]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Preface' in *Searching The Scriptures. Volume One: A Feminist Introduction,* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, New York: Crossroad, 1993), x.

[152]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 42.

the tradition. To uncover women's historical presence and religious agency, our sacred stories must be read 'against the grain' of their cultural construction and, imaginatively retold with women at the centre. She maintains that, without this emphasis on the centrality of women in these imaginative reconstructions, the feminist critique will be in danger of degenerating into various discussions and debates *on* women, or *around* women, or *about* women. However, they will not tell liberating stories *for* women.[153]

The second issue engages the reimagination and reconstruction of our sacred stories.[154] Given that language shapes and directs our reality Schüssler Fiorenza claims that it is important to not only to examine the biblical texts for androcentric language and assumptions but also to subject the subsequent reconstructions of these texts to serious feminist analysis.[155]

In this way, Schüssler Fiorenza likens the task of a critical feminist theology to that of both a detective and a quilt-maker. She believes feminist theologies must first search through the gaps and silences in Christian history and tradition for stories of women's religious agency and empowerment. [156]After

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[153]Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 42-43. A feminist analysis of biblical texts **on** women will not do. 'The topical, thematic approach to analysing women in the bible has adopted a theoretical approach and an analytical perspective that marginalises women, since only women -- but not men -- become the object of historical-critical inquiry and theological discussion.' This relegates the "women's question" to 'the periphery of scholarly concerns . . . not worthy of serious attention.'

[154]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 20-21. Schüssler Fiorenza's maintains we must remain alert to the fact that a 'real danger exists today that feminist critical work may again be swallowed up by forgetfulness. . . . In this fear I am not alone . . . During the 1920's and 1930's, a younger generation of wo/men began to [consciously] adopt male scientific and literary language . . . in their attempt to give a feminist or female interpretation to male theories.' However, in the end these 'elite, well-educated women were co-opted and silenced by these malestream theories.'

[155]Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 43, & *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 78. Schüssler Fiorenza notes that applying a critical analysis only to the retrieval of women's stories does not always prevent the 'sex/gender framework' or the gender essentialism that is being critiqued from being reinscribed back into the work being undertaken.

[156]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 102-103. In discussing Andrea Nye's article 'The Hidden Host: Irigaray and Diotima at Plato's Symposium" (*Hypatia* 3, no.3, 1989:45-61.) Schüssler Fiorenza claims the feminist task is not to uncover a hidden women's truth but to **reinscrib** the truth that women 'are not and have not been an absence but a presence in all human affairs.'

the small scraps and snippets of women's presence, agency and empowerment have been retrieved from the Christian tradition, a critical feminist theology of liberation must then engage in a reinscription of women's power, authority and agency and stitch them together to create a new -- and more liberating -- story of what it means to be human in relation to the divine.[157]

THE DETECTIVE

Schüssler Fiorenza considers that it is necessary to distinguish between the life and ministry of Jesus and subsequent reflections which sought to record, organise and give meaning to his life and ministry. Contemporary biblical scholarship must acknowledge that the locus of Christian revelation lies not in 'androcentric text but rather in the life and ministry of Jesus and the movement of women and men called forth by him.'[158] Biblical texts order and reflect this revelation but, in the activity of this ordering and codifying the biblical text selects and interprets material according to its own -- conscious or unconscious -- presuppositions and interests. Christian faith and revelation are always 'intertwined with the cultural, political, and social contexts' so that it is not possible to 'neatly separate biblical revelation from its cultural expression.'[159] Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza claims that these texts cannot be considered as informative 'factual' data. They cannot be considered objective and accurate reports of 'what actually happened.' The biblical texts should not even be understood as the literal 'word' of God especially if that word is perceived to be an unambiguous and even unmediated articulation of the divine mind. Rather, the Christian scriptures are the words of the first century men who wrote them.[160]

Scriptures reflect the particular historical location and specific theological

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[157]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 42-44.

[158]ibid., 41.

[159]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 34.

[160]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'You Are Not to be Called Father: Early Christian History in a Feminist Perspective' in *Discipleship of Equals,* 152-153.

concerns of the different communities for whom they were written.[161] Biblical texts are not really concerned with a systematic and unreflected account of what actually happened. What they are concerned with are the implications and significance of what happened and the new understanding of truth and reality that these happenings brought to light. Consequently, textual silences in early Christian writings cannot automatically be assumed to be an authentic account of 'women's historical and theological experience and contribution.'[162] Nor can they be assumed to be an accurate reflection of the absence of women in early Christianity. Instead, Schüssler Fiorenza claims these silences must be considered to be evidence of the 'androcentric historiography and theology' of the early Christian tradition.[163] So, in order to positively enter into the truth and reality of 'which these texts speak', Schüssler Fiorenza maintains we must read these silences 'as evidence and indication of that reality about which they do not speak.'[164]

To read the silences of biblical texts from a feminist perspective means to engage in a 'counter-coherent reading.'[165] It means to read the text 'against the grain' or the coherence of their andro-kyriocentric framework. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that this hermeneutic of suspicion is a valid and necessary interpretative tool. Accordingly, a critical feminist

> hermeneutics is not only conscious that the process of canonisation has selected those texts that were acceptable to the hegemonic communities and leadership in biblical religions; it also must consider that canonical authority has been established in and through the silencing and exclusion of writings by women and other marginalised people.[166]

For the Western tradition the accepted 'linguistic expression of reality'

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[161]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 53.

[162]Ibid., 41.

[163]ibid., 52. 'It is important to note that the redaction of the Gospels and of Acts happened at a time when the patriarchalisation process of the early Christian movement was well under way.'

[164]ibid., 41.

[165]Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry,* 162-163.

[166]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Preface' in *Searching The Scriptures. Volume One,* x.

tells us that male existence is the rule and the measure of human existence.[167] The texts and stories of the Western tradition carry an unmistakable male bias. Consequently, we are faced with a misleading picture of women's involvement and influence within Western history and tradition. As a critical tool for exploring and interpreting biblical texts, the strategy of reading the gaps and silences provides a new and fruitful perspective within which we can engage and interpret our sacred stories. This enables contemporary women to explore the rather patchy and conflicting picture of the religious activity of women reflected in biblical texts. It is then possible to recover the activities of women as members, prophets, missionaries and leaders of the early Jesus movement.

The androcentric bias of the biblical traditions makes it difficult to recover the stories of women's religious agency from the 'funding of our sacred stories.' Generally speaking, women's activities and concerns were not dealt with directly but were subsumed under the general or generic activities and concerns of the community. So, while particular women or specific incidents involving women are mentioned, their significance is often unclear and their authority is usually overlaid with obvious levels of political or ecclesial polemic.[168] Therefore, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains it is reasonable to assume that the women who are mentioned have been singled out because they had become a problem or they presented some sort of an anomaly. In other words, the specific mention of a woman - or groups of women - would only occur when they stepped outside the boundaries or the norms of the male defined community. This means that the exhortation for women to refrain from various ministries within a community does not reflect the reality that women did not actively minister. Rather, it attests to the fact that they *were* active community ministers. Otherwise, how can the criticism and curtailment of women's ministerial activities be explained?

Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that Paul's exhortation to

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[167]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 42.

[168]ibid., 47. For example in Rom 16:1-3, Phoebe like Paul and other leaders is called both *prostatis* and *diakonos.* However, exegetes translate *prostatis* as patroness - a rich woman who financially supports Paul and *diakonos* as *deaconess,* which was not an office or ministry in the early Pauline communities but a later -- and more limited -- ecclesial development.

Corinthian women to stay silent at community worship does not reveal that women were silent. On the contrary, it reveals that they were quite vocal. In effect, Paul presupposes Corinthian women do in fact regularly speak in public, as prophets, and is asking them not to.[169] In contemporary biblical studies, when translators come across clear examples of leadership titles and positions of authority attributed to women, they assume there has been a mistake. They ignore the obvious acknowledgement of women's position and authority and edit them out to produce a safer and more 'acceptable' translation.[170]

As the 'master narrative' of Western Culture, the bible is 'implicated in and colludes with the production and maintenance' of what counts as reality.[171] Consequently, Schüssler Fiorenza believes the imaginative reconstruction of the stories of women's religious agency is necessary -- not only for Biblical women or religious communities but for Western culture as a whole. As such, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains women cannot afford to dismiss the bible, for regardless of any 'personal loyalty' no Western woman is completely free from the 'world of vision' the bible projects.[172]

THE QUILT-MAKER

One of the problems encountered in the reconstruction of women's history is the difficulty in moving between a critical analysis of these ancient texts and the contemporary process of writing women back into the stories of their cultural and religious traditions.[173] Given that language not only expresses a particular reality but also serves to shape 'the way things are,' the process of

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[169]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 52.

[170]ibid. One scholar did translate *diakonos* in relation to Phoebe as deacon but adds that as she works in the service of the community she was obviously 'one of the first pastoral assistants.'

[171]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 5.

[172]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 34. Schüssler Fiorenza continually emphasises the formative influence and power that the bible -- as a root model -- and the stories within the bible have on Western culture.

[173]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 9

both retrieving and re-writing these stories is somewhat complex. If the story is to have any relevance for the community for whom it is being told, then the relationship between the two stories - the old and the new - is of vital concern.[174] The story cannot be merely 'translated' word for word because this is unlikely to do justice to either the content or the context of the overall story. Words do not only *signify* meaning or reality. Rather, they serve to create, direct and even embody meanings and realities. This means that any approach that is content with a literal interpretation is likely to miss the 'spirit' of the original story and so render the new story somewhat wooden and even lifeless.[175] Accordingly, the contemporary narrative will fail to preserve the original impulse and even distort the central insight of the story. In effect, it will re-inscribe the same biases that corrupted the story in the first place. This does little to enrich or expand our present understanding of reality. Nor does it advance the cause of women's concerns or affirm the place and the presence of women as historical agents.[176] Consequently, critical feminist biblical interpretation

> must adopt a theory of language that allows for wo/men's voices, creativity, and agency in interpretation. . . . This does not mean that feminist interpretation cannot utilise malestream methods and theories. It only means that it must do so critically and eclectically, and integrate them into a feminist theory and method . . . based on wo/men's agency. Feminist historical readings have the task of elaborating the assumption of wo/men's presence in ever-new historical situations . . . [and of] elaborating their presence and power in political-historical terms.[177]

In order to move from a true understanding of our stories about God to a new and more liberating story of relationship with God, it is necessary to be

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[174]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 77-79.

[175]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 44.

[176]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 102-104. Here Schüssler Fiorenza discusses the problems inherent in feminist deconstruction of language -- specifically Andra Nye's discussion of Luce Irigaray's work on the symbolic structure of language -- and claims 'a deconstructive reading `a la Derrida, Lacan, or Irigaray [with its] method of textual practice and its underlying theory of language is very useful for deconstructive ends but cannot engage in reconstruction because it cannot speak from the alternative place of wo/men's presence, authority, and power.'

[177]ibid., 103-104.

aware of this tension. Accordingly, we must strive to not only preserve our heritage but also remain alert to the danger of reproducing similar -- or even new sets of -- oppressive patterns or kyriarchal structures of marginalisation and reinscribing them back into our contemporary understanding.[178]

Consequently, when critically examining a classic text or story Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that it is necessary to explore both the content and context of the original world-view and how contemporary questions can be most authentically maintained. She claims that such an activity can never be seen as 'just' a translation, but rather is already a hermeneutical task that is actively involved in 'meaning-making.'[179] Language is as historically situated as the lives it engages. So, just as biblical stories of Christianity 'utilise the language world of their own times,' contemporary feminist theologies must also utilise discourse that 'operates within the problematics of modernity.'[180] This does not entail setting up two separate worlds that have no ground for dialogue. Nor does it require a movement into the empiricist-positivist philosophy of value-free neutrality. Rather, it requires the acknowledgement that these respective 'language worlds are not simply a form of expression' but actually serve to construct and constitute meaning.[181]

Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that, for disclosure of meaning to be authentic, it is vitally important to acknowledge that any translation is

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[178]ibid., 84. See also *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 78. Here, Schüssler Fiorenza is concerned with paying particular and critical attention to every step of the examination and the (re-)construction of the stories from the early Christian tradition so that the particular cultural sex/gender system is not unwittingly 'reinscribed back into the analysis'. She claims that even if the original critique is methodologically sound, unless attention is given to the language and format that reconstructs these stories there is a risk that the original distortions will be written back into the text.

[179]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 120.

[180]ibid.,

[181]ibid., see also 25. Here Schüssler Fiorenza discusses the need for language to be understood as formative and constitutive of reality. In this way language is seen as containing or carrying the possibilities of 'transformative social action.' In contrast the 'empiricist-positivist' approach to language would understand reality as being 'outside discourse' and so is blind to the role language plays in the transformation of reality.

already and unavoidably an interpretation. This means that the whole process of studying ancient languages and texts automatically involves more than just replacing words. It involves engaging old familiar texts with a new -- and often radical -- point of entry. In other words, when exploring ancient texts and making them available for contemporary usage, the whole engagement is already unfailingly hermeneutical and radically interpretative.[182]

Schüssler Fiorenza is deeply concerned with the way the sacred stories of Christianity can be interpreted in such a way that women -- as well as men -- have access to God's liberating and salvific promise of freedom, justice and well-being for all.[183] Using the Bible as an historical prototype rather than a mythical archetype, Schüssler Fiorenza strives to open up the narratives and the language that have directed Christianity's reality to the possibility of a radical, corrective and even creative critique. In the practical exploration of Christianity's sacred texts, Schüssler Fiorenza highlights her concern to make the biblical promise of redemption present by paying particular critical attention to the biblical texts not as texts *of* or *about* women but, rather, as texts *for* contemporary Christian women. She does this in an effort to allow contemporary Christian women to re-claim their religious heritage and agency not only for their own generation but also for the generations of women who have gone before them.

This activity of retrieval, translation and reconstruction is necessary because the institution that has been responsible for creating and nurturing the humanity of women has, instead, systematically marginalised their insights, ridiculed their contributions, dismissed their commitments and even negated

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[182]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 75. Even the earliest witness about Jesus the Christ is 'not a metaphysical "given" but a scientific-historical (re-) construction that tacitly presupposes certain theological assumptions and frameworks.'

[183]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 53. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that to understand antifeminist biblical quotations as a 'misreading' or misuse of scripture 'misses the central problem of feminist biblical interpretation.' Rather, she asserts that '[t]he bible as sacred scripture has sanctioned oppression throughout the centuries not just because it was falsely interpreted but because in many ways it preaches oppressive relationships of domination and it has helped to form Christian identity decisively along those lines.'

their humanity. Consequently, feminist scholars and feminist scholarship must continue to ask deeper more critical questions of whether religious institutions and theological disciplines can be changed, redefined, and transformed. Schüssler Fiorenza considers that:

> Only if feminist scholars in religion continue to critically explore wo/men's dehumanisation in and through theological traditions and kyriocentric sacred language, as well as through the theological politics of wo/men's exclusion from church leadership, will they be able to transform wo/men's lives on the grassroots level in and through the practice of feminist ministry.[184]

CONCLUSION.

Many contemporary theologies use the category of narrative in an effort to explore the relevance of Christian faith in a more practical communal way.[185] With its essentially communal and pre-eminently practical nature, narrative serves to ground identity within the reality of the different connections that make up human life. The activity of narrative is an activity that communities engage as a way of making sense and giving meaning to different experiences that touch human life.[186] In narrative, communities can define and re-define their identity and reality in relation to the changing world and the people in that world.

As such, the category of narrative offers people the opportunity to transform their reality. Within the 'creative genre' of narrative there is the 'possibility of emancipation' in that we are called to engage in 'different lives, different relationships and different worlds.'[187] Through the possibility of participating in the ongoing process of actively re-writing our lives, we have the chance of re-shaping our relationships and our world.

Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza both claim a fundamentally narrative

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[184]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 25.

[185]Chopp, *Saving Work,* 31-34.

[186]ibid., 32.

[187]ibid.

structure for human consciousness. This makes narrative -- with its practical, transformative character -- a useful category in their theologies. If narrative is primarily concerned with the 'telling of stories that aspire to truth,'[188] then a renewed commitment to a narrative structure for Christian faith and theology is not only important but, actually, necessary. Metz also claims a privileged place for the marginalised narratives of Western history and tradition. However, within all this talk of redemptive and liberating stories, and with all his acknowledgment on the ability of narrative to shape and direct a community, Metz does not really explore the formative role of language. Nor does he sufficiently acknowledge the power language has to shape and direct the narratives of our tradition. Consequently, Metz does not critically engage specific language that builds and shapes these stories; nor does he seek to uncover the interests of power and domination that language itself can carry. Rather, Metz maintains that a 'linguistic analysis' of theological narrative is beyond the scope of his inquiry.[189]

However, to affirm that narrative functions to preserve the public and political truths of Christianity demands a critical engagement with the basic process of how these truths come to be articulated. To neglect this is to tell half a story. This lack of engagement means that Metz fails to critically evaluate many foundational ideologies that language transmits. To privilege Christian faith in this way can serve to place it beyond critique. This may, in fact, act to suppress rather than uncover the very hidden voices and marginalised stories of suffering that Metz actually seeks to privilege. Unless there is a recognition that *all* human knowledge carries ideological perspectives -- of one sort or another -- the possibilities for relationships of mutuality and respect are diminished. This recognition must be extended to include the doctrines and dogmas of Christian faith or there cannot be an adequate assessment of whether or not a commitment to Christianity is indeed a commitment to justice and right relationships.[190] Without this acknowledgment the liberative

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[188]MacIntyre, 'Virtues, Unity of a Human Life, Tradition' in *Why Narrative?* 101.

[189]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 205

[190]Metz begins this engagement with the notion that the dangerous memories of Christian faith must form the 'dogmas' of Christian tradition. However, he still fails to engage the dangerous memories critically enough to uncover the gender bias that is

possibilities of theological narrative lose some of their practical and transformative character. Accordingly, their ability to engage in different lives, different relationships and different worlds is somewhat diminished.

If Christian faith or the Christian tradition are accorded uncritical status of universal givens, then they are ultimately ahistorical. The contemporary acknowledgment of the deeply contextual nature of human life, human history and human stories rejects the possibility of universally determined root-truths that are free of ideology. To believe in ideologically free and universally determined root-truths means that the truth of dogma and tradition is understood as an ideal truth rather than a practical and historical truth. This concept of 'idealism' over and above the practical and historical as a framework for Christian faith is open to interests which use doctrine and tradition as a way of restricting agency and negating suffering.

Consequently, women -- and other non-persons -- are able to be continually marginalised and silenced. When the voice of theology fails to make present particular historical stories of suffering and marginalisation, then the prophetic notion that the cries of the victims are in fact 'the voice of God'[191] is surely in jeopardy. When this happens how is either Christian dogma or the Christian tradition able to transcend ideological usage and ask 'who is the subject of this story and what is their interest in it?' Our endangered stories -- those that must be preserved and honoured -- and our dangerous stories -- those that can motivate for change and transformation -- are different. But they must both be remembered and retold since both are necessary vehicles for the transformation of the Christian tradition.[192]

So, although Metz is particularly concerned with recovering the stories of suffering and victimisation, he does not adequately acknowledge the need to pay particular attention to the stories of women. Nor does he examine the androcentric language or name the patriarchal structure of the sacred stories of Christianity itself as being extensively complicitous in the neglect and silencing

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present in all Christian history and tradition.

[191]Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims,* 1

[192]Keshgegian, *To Know By Heart,* 195-200

of women. This means that the theological narrative in Metz' work is unable to respond adequately to the relationship of knowledge and power -- especially as it is articulated along the lines of gender. Consequently, he is unable to fully develop a truly practical and transformative theology. Even if the neglect and marginalisation of women were acknowledged, by failing to redress the silence with positive stories of women's agency and hope Metz misses the chance to rebuild and re-configure new transformed relationships. A theology that responds to the contemporary experience of suffering cannot leave victims un-named and therefore unacknowledged and so still unheard and powerless.

In contrast, Schüssler Fiorenza claims that a critical examination and a feminist analysis of the androcentric language that is used to construct our sacred stories - and therefore our truth and reality - is vitally important. Without this critical engagement with the biases and the interest factors of language, there is no real possibility of participating in the transformation of our truth and reality. Without this critical engagement there is no opportunity or place from which to acknowledge the legitimate diversity that actually comprises our contemporary reality. Consequently, the suppression of difference will continue to occur. When this is the case, there is no place to legitimately ground a different perspective or counter-cultural reading of the dominant stories for our contemporary situation.[193] Accordingly, whole groups of people will continue to have their voices silenced and marginalised. This has implications not just for the groups that are excluded, but for the life of the tradition as a whole. Because language so obviously serves to create, sustain and reflect a community's truth and reality, this critical consideration of language is not just an important task but, actually, a vital and unavoidable requirement.

One of the main reasons for this lies in the fact that language constructs our sacred stories and so serves to give access to a society's socio-symbolic order.[194] This means that language and ways of knowing are not only personal

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[193]Chopp, *The Power to Speak.* 12

[194]ibid, 14. See also Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The Silenced Majority Move into Speech, in *Discipleship of Equals,* 263.

but are also deeply embedded in the community.[195] They both form and inform the people and community within which they are practised. Accordingly, as language serves to direct and inform our conscious - and even our unconscious - ways of understanding and relating to our world and the people in it, so too does it direct and inform the contours of the ways in which the community will relate to us. This mutually formative relationship means that, as our language constructs us as people open to other people, other visions, and other realities, then the communities within which we live will follow suit. As these communities become communities of openness and expanding horizons they will be encouraged to extend and facilitates this openness to others -- both within and outside their own communal boundaries. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that, given the sacred stories of a community actually *define* the socio-symbolic boundries of that community, they serve to actually *intensify* belonging or non-belonging of members. This means that the critical attention to the language that constructs those stories is a vital and necessary task for the ongoing life of the Christian story.[196]

So while Metz does stress the fundamentally narrative quality of Christian theology he does not clearly engage either a narrative theology or the foundations of Western theological narrative. The more radical critique of Western theological narrative is found in the critical feminist perspective that Schüssler Fiorenza brings to bear on the formation and maintenance of the biblical narratives that underpin our religious identity.[197] Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that, critical feminist theologies must claim the right and the authority to interpret for themselves the biblical texts -- or scared narratives -- that have so decisively shaped their socio-cultural-political-religious reality. This makes the critical engagement in the language that constructs the stories of this tradition unavoidable.[198] Furthermore, given that the exclusion and marginalisation of

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[195]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The Silenced Majority move into Speech' *in discipleship of Equals*, 258-261.

[196]ibid., 263.

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

[198]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals,* 2-3.

women and other non-persons is embodied in exclusive and marginalising language then the critical engagement with language becomes more than unavoidable; it becomes absolutely vital. Without the critical attention to how and why groups are excluded, the restoration of basic human dignity of these groups is not possible.

This clearly acknowledges the contemporary philosophical understanding that language is deeply implicated in the formation of being human -- at both a personal and a communal level. However, while the concern Schüssler Fiorenza has with language has a specifically feminist base and takes a specifically feminist perspective, her project is not an exclusively feminist project. Here, it is helpful to remember David Tracy's 'intensification of the particular.' Within this understanding, the feminist project can be named as a foundational rather than representative one.[199] So, while different groups that lie within the feminist perspective will always offer local or regional positions, the larger feminist project remains foundational. It remains a systematic and critical perspective that, while recognising difference, ambiguity and fragility, will continue to engage and critique relationships of elitism and domination. Accordingly, to be concerned with androcentric language and patriarchal structure within our sacred stories should not be the exclusive concern of women. Rather, it must be the concern of the whole worshipping community. This feminist focus on language uncovers not only attitudes and ideologies that marginalise and silence women; it also illuminates the broader contours of oppressive structures that maintain and perpetuate the marginalisation of other 'non-persons.'[200]

Chapter Four has examined the use of narrative within current Christian theology with a particular emphasis on the narrative component in the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. It explored the broader category of language and outlined some of the feminist concerns with language. This chapter then critically engaged the categories of narrative and language through the feminist hermeneutics of Schüssler Fiorenza in order to more clearly assess the relationship between narrative and language. In so doing, it demonstrated the

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[199]Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination,* 125-126.

[200]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 44.

inextricable link between language and the transformative potential of the category of narrative. Further, it illuminated the urgent need for a critical feminist assessment of the nature and function of the language that shapes our sacred myths and narratives.

This exploration continues with Chapter Five examining the last of these three relationships. Accordingly, our attention now turns to the relationship between community and solidarity. Chapter Five begins with an outline of the category of solidarity and examines the place of solidarity in the work of Johannes Baptist Metz. It then critically engages the understanding of Christian community by exploring the diversity of community through a contemporary feminist rather than a traditional hierarchical perspective. These feminist insight are then explicated within the feminist thought of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In light of this engagement vital questions concerning the praxis of Christian solidarity emerge and it becomes clear that for Christian solidarity to be truly effective the understanding of Christian community must be broken open and forged anew.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Relationship between SOLIDARITY and COMMUNITY

The final triad this paper engages is the relationship between solidarity and community. Accordingly, this chapter examines the influence a community has on the formation of human identity. In being able to encourage or restrict belonging this thesis claims that community affects the transformative potential of the category of solidarity. Chapter five begins with an exploration of solidarity and examines the place of solidarity in the political theology of Metz. It then engages the broader category of community finally exploring the relationship between community and solidarity in the feminist thought of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In light of this engagement it becomes clear that if Christian solidarity is to be truly effective then the understanding of Christian community needs to be broken open and forged anew.

As with memory and narrative, the action of solidarity is not an isolated activity but takes place within a particular historical context. Solidarity is a response to a particular situation and frames the struggles of a particular people as they strive for transformation. This means that the exploration of the category of solidarity must engage with questions of 'solidarity with whom?' and 'solidarity for what?' To keep this engagement focused, it is necessary to ground solidarity in the concrete lives of people and particular historical context of their community. In other words, commitment for authentic, transformative solidarity must be grounded in the historical, existential reality of particular groups or communities of people. Without this historical grounding, solidarity not only becomes difficult it is in danger of remaining an academic concept, or worse, deteriorating into an ideological tool.[1] Consequently, I consider that an examination of the function of community is essential for assessing the

[1]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion: A Feminist* Analysis, 212--219.

transformative possibilities of authentic solidarity. If an oppressive situation is to be successfully transformed it is essential there is an understanding of what people are being freed *for* as well as what they are being freed *from*.[2] Therefore, in this chapter, I propose to explore the category of solidarity within the broader framework of community.

The word 'solidarity' has become quite fashionable in recent Western culture.[3] It was used to describe the collective front with which Marxist workers challenged exploitation of their labour. It served to acknowledge the resistance movement that sought to disable Nazi destruction of European Jews and Gypsies. It epitomised the Polish struggle for liberation from political control of the Eastern Soviet Bloc. It called for the restoration of justice and an acknowledgment of the dignity and equality of the poor and marginalised peoples of Latin America. More recently, feminist solidarity has ventured to challenge patriarchal control and domination of the social, political and religious status of women. However, within all this diversity of time, place, culture and even ideology that solidarity has encompassed, there exists one common and unifying thread that weaves these situations together. At its most fundamental level, the concept of solidarity refers to the process of critically responding to a situation of human coercion or suffering. This response is made in light of the common dignity of the human person and is critical in its vision for resistance and transformation.

> Solidarity is crucial to . . . the future of humanity. . . . [It] opens us to new and creative possibilities in human relations. While much less intimate than friendship, solidarity insinuates cohesion, bonding and interdependence. . . . [It] is a practice. It extends the ground on which we may stand with other women (and children and men) who may be different in culture, history, religion, race, social class, sexual orientation, but without whom we have no future.[4]

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[2]Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord,* 512-514.

[3]Gutierrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells,* 21. See also Chapter 1 for a brief overview of the category of 'solidarity' as used by the Frankfurt School -- to whom Metz is quite indebted for his own understanding of this category.

[4]Copeland, "Difference as a Category in Critical Theologies for the Liberation of Women,' in *Concilium: Feminist Theologies in Different Contexts,* 140.

Solidarity with others is made possible from within different situations that frame people's experience of resistance and struggle. In entering into relationships of solidarity we are, as Copeland reminds us, extending the ground upon which our humanity is affirmed. Solidarity offers us opportunities to enter into relationships where we can *be* human *for* others. As such, it is an important and a necessary dimension of our humanity. It is through solidarity that questions of where we have come from, where we might be going and so who we can become, are more concretely grounded and more fully realised.[5] Accordingly, this chapter explores the broader contours of the category of solidarity. In particular, it explores how Christian solidarity is used by Metz and, then, how it is taken up by Schüssler Fiorenza. In order to assess its use and importance in relation to Schüssler Fiorenza's own theological work this chapter explores the relationship between solidarity and the community within which it is practised. It does this in an effort to ascertain how the relationship between solidarity and community might serve to either facilitate or inhibit development of a practical, inclusive and transformative theology.

The category of solidarity has an important place in the theology of Johannes Baptist Metz. He uses it to integrate the practical and liberating character of Christian memory and Christian narrative.[6] Metz considers that without solidarity, memories and stories of those who have suffered in the past are not able to connect with the present. If they do not connect with the present they are not able to become a part of the present. When this happens a situation Metz refers to as an historical 'forgetfulness' occurs. This historical forgetfulness effectively dislocates history by preventing those who have gone before us from becoming part of our present reality.[7] Consequently, Metz

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[5]Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God,* xiv-xv. 'To seek what [the promises of] God can mean to men and women . . . one has to go and stand alongside and in their lives for they are the story of God in our midst. These stories . . . resound in the lives of men and women today. That happens again and again, down through the centuries. In this way we are listening to the gospel [or God's promise] of yesterday, today and tomorrow.'

[6]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 229.

[7]ibid., 183. 'If the theological concept of solidarity is indissolubly connected with the concepts of memory and narrative' and these concepts prevent us from defining history as the history of conquest 'then this connection compels us to look for a

maintains that Western Christianity has grown to honour stories and memories of the victorious at the cost of forgetting memories and stories of the vanquished. In effect, Western Christianity has become all but the controllable and personal expression of bourgeois, middle-class individuals. This historical forgetfulness has committed voices of difference and stories of failure to the underside of history and, in so doing, has impoverished the human story. It has effectively robbed generations of victims of identity and meaning.

In light of this forgetfulness, Metz claims Western Christianity has lost the ability to respond positively to suffering -- especially the suffering of innocents. He maintains that if God is indeed revealed and made incarnate within the suffering and redemption of innocent victims, then these innocent victims must be the new bearers of the promise of Christian redemption. Metz believes that the repressed and forgotten sufferings of those who have been discarded can only really be safeguarded through the category of solidarity.[8] It is through solidarity with the dead and those who suffer that Western Christianity is able to reclaim its ability to reveal and access the salvific content of Christian faith. Metz maintains that solidarity with the victims of history prevents faith from being reduced to an empty ideology. Consequently, for Metz, solidarity is an essential and irreducible category for any credible contemporary Christian theology.

However, the category of solidarity does not stand alone; nor can it be isolated from its historical or social context. Rather, solidarity takes its identity from the community within which it is historically grounded and lived out. This means that, when exploring the category of solidarity, the question of how the broader concept of community is understood, structured and nourished becomes of the utmost importance. Because the way a community is organised plays a determinative role in who actually 'belongs' to that community, then the structures of that community will have a radical effect on ordering the boundaries and patterns of relationships within that community. Community

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theological form of hermeneutics which would attempt to save the forgotten subject.' 236-237.

[8]ibid., 233.

functions to create and sustain the identity and reality of a culture or society.[9] This means that the experience of community shapes members' understanding of human relationships; and the experience of human relationships shapes members understanding of community. Indeed, Rebecca Chopp claims that 'one of the most genuine social, personal, and religious desires today' is the desire for community.[10]

Consequently, critical attention must be paid to the particular communal framework within which the movement towards solidarity occurs. It becomes apparent that the structure and function of community demands an even more radical exploration than that of solidarity since, without community there is no access to the activity of solidarity.[11] In order then, for the category of solidarity to be able to facilitate development of a practical, inclusive and transformative theology, it is necessary to examine the sort of community that is constructed through the experience of solidarity. In this way the use and the interest factors that shape and direct our most basic sense of identity and belonging can be more readily uncovered and critically assessed.

Schüssler Fiorenza agrees with Metz' critical focus on solidarity with the marginalised of Christian history. However, she insists that a more radical attitude must be taken towards the understanding of both the community *for* whom this solidarity is undertaken and the community *within* which it is practised. She claims that many of the social and religious communities of Western society construct, reflect, sustain -- even divinely sanction -- relationships of male privilege and positions of hierarchial power. In light of this, Schüssler Fiorenza claims the practice of solidarity cannot be undertaken superficially. Rather, it must begin with a commitment to a critical examination of the community itself. This means that the question of 'solidarity with whom?'

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[9]Veling, *Living in the Margins: Intentional Communities and the Art of Interpretation*, 65. 'Our identities do not exist independently prior to our relationships but continuously emerge from them.'

[10]Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education*, 64.

[11]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, xxii-xxiii. Schüssler Fiorenza considers that, 'dialogical communities that can foster solidarity, freedom and public discourse presuppose incipient forms of such communal life.'

becomes a vital one. Without a critical examination of Christianity's hierarchial relationships and history of suppressed freedom then the struggle for solidarity will not engender new community. Nor will the struggle for solidarity be able to sustain empowering relationships of mutuality and liberation.[12] So, if the Christian story is to be a practical, inclusive and transformative story for humanity, then both the systems **and** the structure of its communities must be critically engaged from a feminist perspective. For 'the continuing challenge of the victims of religious patriarchy' is only met 'through solidarity and committed remembrance of the hopes and despairs' of women.[13]

The Category of SOLIDARITY

. . . arms over your breast folding
your sorrow in to hold it,
you brought me to you
some of the way
and came the rest to meet me;

over the desert of red sand
came from your lost country
to where I stand with all my fathers,
their guilt and righteousness. . .

My shadow-sister, I sing to you
from my place with my righteous kin,
to where you stand with the Koori
dead "Trust none -- not even poets"
Judith Wright
Appendix D.

At its most fundamental level, the concept of solidarity refers to the process of critically responding to a situation of human coercion or suffering with a view to resistance and transformation. Solidarity is an activity that seeks to acknowledge, assess, resist and transform the human suffering of a particular group of people within a particular social context that is comprised of particular historical relationships.[14] Solidarity moved into the field of theology from the intellectual movement of ideas within catholic social teachings surrounding the

[12]ibid., 71-73.

[13]ibid., 19-20.

[14]ibid.

labour movement.[15] It also takes up contemporary philosophical concerns to reject the widespread 'alienation of modern individualism.'[16] Here, contemporary philosophy sought to stress the irreducible social, political, and historical matrix of human life and relationships.[17] In other words, solidarity seeks to engage the whole person within the context of real historical relationships. It is 'rooted in experiential, intellectual, rational, and responsible agreements and commitments to live out of certain meanings.'[18] Firstly, solidarity requires an acknowledgment of oppressive conditions. Then it assesses how these situations have been culturally sanctioned as a systematic part of the social structure. Armed with this knowledge, solidarity resists the destructive power of the injustices that have lead so relentlessly to human suffering. Finally, it seeks to offer a new transformative vision for the future.[19] This marks solidarity as a serious commitment of people to an engagement with critical praxis that will lead to transformative and liberative action.

Jose Maria Arguedas describes the activity of solidarity as a 'fellowship of the wretched.'[20] Matthew Lamb calls it a narrative of the human heart. [21] M. Shawn Copeland refers to it as a radical form of Christian social praxis.[22] In light of these understandings, solidarity can be understood as a movement of the human heart that -- at a very fundamental level -- serves to connect us to the

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[15]Copeland, 'The New Anthropological Subject at the Heart of the Mystical Body of Christ' in *The Catholic Theological Society of America: Proceedings of the Fifty-third Annual Convention,* (ed Michael Downy Vol 53, 1998), 36.

[16]Lamb, 'Political Theology', 776-777.

[17]ibid., 776.

[18]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity,' 15. Copeland claims 'if solidarity is to mediate the struggle for liberation, it must also be recognised as it's end.' She maintains that as 'an integral part of theology' the theological implications of solidarity for a critical feminist theology of liberation concern questions of: methodology; anthropology; community; and eucharist. 28-29.

[19]Lamb, *Solidarity With Victims,* ix. Lamb understands self-critical solidarity as working **with** communities **of** victims in common reflection and action "against the degradation of human beings preventing them from becoming the rightful subjects or agents of their own labour and history."

[20]Gutierrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells,* 21.

[21]Lamb, *Solidarity With Victims,* 1.

[22]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity' 32.

most wretched of humans and ground us in common action. Authentic solidarity engages the whole human person at the level of heart, mind, and body. Thus cognitive and affective dimensions of the human person are essential elements of authentic solidarity. As human beings, solidarity calls us into a more radical acknowledgment of our humanity. Furthermore, it serves to remind us that this engagement is really only possible *because* we share a common humanity.

In being so closely bound to fellowship, commitment and social action the call for solidarity is a prophetic call that has strong biblical foundations.[23] The biblical notion of solidarity is grounded in the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures. Here, Israel is constantly reminded that Yahweh's presence -- and favour -- will always 'hover over' the afflicted and the dispossessed. This reminder continually calls Israel towards holiness that is made present in and through the practice of 'right relations.' In other words, biblical solidarity calls Israel towards a conversion of heart and mind that is grounded and renewed in a social praxis of covenant.

Biblical solidarity is further reinforced through the radical call to discipleship that can be found in the Christian gospels. Here, believers are commanded to take up service to 'the least' of humanity for that is where God is to be found. In other words, the concept of solidarity takes seriously the notion that 'the cries of victims are the voice of God' and, in so doing, seeks to continually respond to this voice as it is heard in its particular concrete historical location.[24] Peukert maintains that, because Christian solidarity is essentially anamnestic and an act of universal trust, it anticipates 'the completion of salvation for all.'[25] Consequently, genuine solidarity really requires a commitment to a discipleship that takes as its fundamental expression a radical

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[23]Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology* (trans. James Bohman, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1984), 218-227.

[24]Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God,* 127-129. Christian discipleship means the imitation of a life lived in solidarity with the poor and oppressed. This solidarity anticipates and confirms the redemptive act of the resurrection. Jesus' dying is given 'redemptive or liberating force' through its connection to Jesus' faith in the promise of God which he gave 'form in his message and above all in his way of life' as the 'historical anticipation of the significance of the resurrection and thus of God's overwhelming power over evil.'

[25]Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology,* 227.

social praxis. This is given life through a 'concrete *answerability* to oppressed people, not just subjective identification with them.'[26] This means that solidarity is fundamentally social in function and, therefore, radically ethical in nature. As such, it is an action of Christian commitment and responsibility taking place both within and on behalf of Christian community.

The communal context of solidarity makes it a concrete historical activity of personal trust and public response that can be understood as a 'concrete form of faith in God.'[27] Accordingly, the movement into solidarity has concrete historical implications in both a personal and social sense. As imitation of the life of Jesus, Christian discipleship includes the command for a particular solidarity with those who are oppressed and marginalised.[28] However, that command is not only personal, it is also radically public and deeply communal. For discipleship also carries the responsibility to help the church as a whole bear witness to the kingdom values of justice and mercy that mark the presence of the reign of God.[29] Accordingly, discipleship involves a change of heart that leads to a new way of seeing things. This means there needs to be both a 'break with the life lived up to that point' as well as a serious commitment to 'set out on a new path.'[30] Bernard Lonergan claims, authentic solidarity challenges us to 'be attentive, to be intelligent, to be responsible, to be loving, and, if

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[26]Pamela K. Brubaker, 'Sisterhood, Solidarity and Feminist Ethics', in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* Vol. 9, (Spring/Fall 1993, 53-65), 53. [emphasis mine]

[27]Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God,* 143.

[28]Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology,* 224-225. 'The determination of the reality of God is bound to a specific mode of communicative practice and action and occurs in action directed towards others. With his existence and in his actions Jesus asserts God as the saving reality for others . . . the poor, the outcast, the lost.'

[29]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity', 30. 'A broken body and a broken bread is a powerful mediating symbol of the [solidarity] of Eucharist. . . [However] if we have not: confessed our sins; repented of our participation and/or collusion in the marginalisation of others; . . . begged forgiveness from those whom we have offended; . . . pledged firm purpose of amendment; . . . moved to healing and creative Christian praxis. . . . [then even eucharist] is an empty symbol. . . .[For it] involves something much deeper and more extensive than consuming the elements of this ritual meal. *Women and men must do what they are being made*: there are social as well as sacramental consequences to the Eucharist.'

[30]Gutierrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells,* 95.

necessary, to change.'[31] Put another way, the first step -- and therefore an indispensable requirement -- towards solidarity is conversion.

> Conversion is always a withdrawal from bias and sin; it is always a continuing transformation "not yet" fully achieved. Religious solidarity with the victims of history is never an easy, comfortable, automatic or cheap grace. Conversion can shatter; religious symbols and language can become the property of [those] who pay only lip service to the revelation of values.[32]

Basically, then, conversion is fundamentally understood as a *metanoia* or a radical change of heart. The initial movement or awareness of conversion can often be a dramatic -- and sometimes even a traumatic -- experience. However, conversion itself is not a single event nor is it a particular achievement. Conversion is more of a process. This means that conversion is never really completed as a 'once and for all' realisation since it does not occur as a separate or isolated incident. Rather, it is a dynamic activity that is part of the broadening and stretching of personal horizons. Because a conversion experience is concerned with the human heart, it not only changes the way we see others, it changes the way we see our deepest selves. This has an impact on where we consider we stand in relation to attitudes, situations, and people in our world. Conversion is perhaps best described as ongoing and relational because it is fundamentally concerned with human relationships.[33] Understood like this, conversion becomes an essential aspect of the ongoing maturation and developmental process of life itself.

Like solidarity, authentic conversion is a process that is both personal and social. It is intimately connected to the engagement and extension of personal horizons. Yet, authentic conversion can not stop at the personal level. Rather it must flow from the individual into the wider public/political community.[34]

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[31]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* 19. See also M. Shawn Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity', 22-23.

[32]Lamb, *Solidarity With Victims,* 10. The 'co-suffering' of solidarity in transcending victimhood can transform sin, death, and folly into grace, life and wisdom.

[33]Gutierrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells,* 96.

[34]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity', 20-25.

Conversion has an undeniable impact on communities because it effects the development of broader horizons of human relationships. In the commitment of a people within their own particular history of oppression and suffering, there is a corresponding call for effective action within that history. Solidarity cannot simply be understood as a purely interior call. Rather, it must involve the entire person in their personal and social dimensions. This means that solidarity also has consequences for the entire 'web of social relationships of which the individual is a part.'[35] To effectively engage in the practice of solidarity, there is an urgent need to critically 'analyse and understand the conditions that give rise to suffering.'[36] Without this critical analysis the mediation of the transformative significance of our religious traditions to contemporary social and political issues is made even more difficult. This makes solidarity a self-critical movement that must always be 'open to dialogue and collaboration with others.'[37]

A foundational feature of any authentic self-critical awareness lies not only in the ability to acknowledge one's own socio-historical location, but also in the willingness to respond to that knowledge. Only then is it possible to listen carefully to the implications of the different connections that are inevitably embedded within any socio-historical location.[38] Being a child of the Enlightenment, Western science is concerned with value-free understandings. Consequently, it is suspicious of any strategy that is overtly partisan or clearly articulates its foundational biases. Western science has always considered that partiality rendered a work or insight 'hopelessly subjective' and therefore not a serious reflection of reality. However, a contemporary critical hermeneutics actually seeks to acknowledge a person's socio-historical location and biases.[39] So, far from rendering such conversations worthless a critical hermeneutics

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[35]Gutierrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells,* 98. The call to conversion 'is not limited to interior life but must also be translated into attitudes and commitments that regard changes in reality as a requirement of Christian love.' *Evangelizacion: Algunas lineas pastorales",* The Episcopal Conference of Peru, 1968-1977.

[36]ibid., 21.

[37]Lamb, *Solidarity With Victims,* ix.

[38]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity', 23-25.

[39]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* xvi-xix.

considers that an understanding of the different and particular vantage points from which we speak actually opens up the conversation to the possibilities of discussing difference. Without this acknowledgement of difference there can be no real discussion or conversation. As Johnetta B. Cole remarks, 'to address our commonalities without dealing with our differences is to misunderstand and distort that which separates as well as that which binds us.'[40] In turn, this acknowledgment of difference offers the group or community involved in the conversation the potential of seeking unity and solidarity not by collapsing difference but by acknowledging diversity.[41]

Effective social action necessarily requires a self-critical social analysis.[42] Schillebeeckx claims that any social analysis without self-critical awareness or intellectual analysis of systemic injustices is impotent because it is unable to promote effective critical praxis.[43] This means that self-criticism 'is an important prelude to practical, theoretical, and theological self-determination' and, so, is an essential ingredient of all effective -- or transformative -- social praxis.[44] In other words, any movement or impulse towards change and transformation needs to be critically aware not only of the situation it wishes to critique, but also of the socio-historical context and implication of its own particular situation. Any attempt of social analysis that does not include a critical self-awareness places the effectiveness of its social action at risk and authentic solidarity is jeopardised. In the final analysis, true critical praxis is in danger of degenerating into either superficial optimism or false pessimism.[45]

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[40]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity', 16. Here Copeland is quoting Johnetta B. Cole *All American Women: Lives that Divide, Ties that Bind* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 1.

[41]It is this ability -- albeit through need -- to work within diversity that makes critical feminist theologies such a necessary part of the contemporary theological debate.

[42]Lamb, *Solidarity With Victims*, 20-21.

[43]Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God,* 179. Schillebeeckx claims that Christian story and Christian praxis have a primacy over theological theory because 'liberating action in faith does not call for less but rather for more critical-theoretical analysis.'

[44]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity', 23.

[45]Lamb, *Solidarity With Victims,* 16. Lamb claims that the lack of a self-critical component in social analysis renders social action as effective as 'a bandaid on a

Self-critical awareness is a fundamental dimension of effective social action. It challenges the temptation to disguise or conceal evil and sin by privatising them. The privatisation of sin and evil effectively removes its public/ political face and allows for the subversion of accountability -- both personal and communal. Self-critical awareness keeps the challenge for personal conversion open. In so doing, it protects the necessary political public dimension of this conversion. It teaches us to be aware of where we stand in the extensive web of the social, political and religious relations that comprises our reality. It also teaches us to acknowledge the inter-connections of this web and to accept that we cannot avoid an historical response to our location.[46]

If we allow the challenge to self-critical conversion, then our response is more likely to be positive. While individuals may have the best will in the world, without a self-critical awareness they will 'contribute to the social structures and the historical process which dehumanise and oppress'.[47] Solidarity helps to rehabilitate human freedom and emphasise its transformative character. As David Tracy claims: 'Not all are guilty, but all are responsible.'[48] The call to take our responsibility seriously -- and so to acknowledge the associated sense of guilt that this brings -- is an important aspect of Metz' treatment of solidarity. Accordingly, Metz considers that Christianity is compelled to respond to the practical challenge of the history of oppression and suffering.

SOLIDARITY in METZ

The category of solidarity serves as the practical and humanising feature of Metz' political theology. In fact, Metz goes so far as to claim that the measure

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leper.'

[46]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity' 14. 'Complex social relations and interactions simultaneously promote coalitions and conflicts that can not always be easily anticipated. Neither race nor class nor gender can ever serve as "*automatic* [emphasis Copeland] concepts of connection or of community"'.

[47]Lamb, *Solidarity With Victims,* 3.

[48]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* 69.

of our freedom and humanity actually depends on our ability to respond to the history of the suffering and the dead.[49] Metz considers that solidarity with the dead and the vanquished prevents the demands of Christian faith and discipleship from becoming the privatised concern of the autonomous person. Solidarity with the dead helps us to become 'subjects before God in history.'[50] For Metz, becoming a subject before God in history is both the process and the goal of whole human divine relationship. Consequently, Metz considers that solidarity is the activity that grounds political theology in concrete reality of human life. In so doing, solidarity offers the Christian community the possibility of a truly free and authentic future. Accordingly, solidarity seeks to make the liberative -- and challenging -- word of God concretely present and effectively operative within human history.

This makes solidarity a primary operative category of Metz' practical fundamental theology. Metz maintains that it is only through solidarity with the suffering of others that stories of the forgotten and vanquished are acknowledged and remembered. This allows the identity of those who have suffered and died to be 'raised up' and given meaning.[51] The practice of true solidarity, with and on behalf of the memory of the dead serves to protect authentic Christian praxis. Without this solidarity, Metz maintains that praxis is in danger of being reduced to an 'alliance between equal partners.'[52] The prime motivation for and goal of this alliance is the mutual protection of fundamental interests. Instead of encouraging a relationship of radical support *for* others it results in individual protectionism. This conceals the redeeming and liberating force of Christian memory and Christian narrative.

This makes solidarity with the victims of Christian history a vitally

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[49]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 128-129.

[50]ibid., 60-62. Metz considers that to be a 'subject before God in history' is a dynamic and radical activity that is marked by growing into an authentically human identity in and through a free and responsible relationship with God. This relationship calls people to be subjects -- to be more fully alive, more fully responsive, more fully responsible and so more fully human.

[51]ibid., 229.

[52]ibid., 229-230.

important aspect of Metz' understanding of both human freedom and Christian salvation. At its most fundamental level, Metz claims that the category of solidarity is a category of commitment to humanity. The radical foundation of which is a deep and serious concern 'with the history of human suffering.'[53] Metz considers that it is this serious concern for the history of suffering that safeguards human freedom. In turn, this makes redemption possible and prevents salvation from falling into a pre-prescribed evolutionary logic.[54] For Metz, freedom and redemption are intimately linked to solidarity with those who suffer since it is their identity as subjects before God in history that is most threatened.[55] This gives the history of suffering a certain redemptive authority that applies not only for the victims of history but also for our own redemption.

> 'It is deeply inhuman to forget or suppress the question of the life of the dead, because it implies a forgetfulness and a suppression of past sufferings and an acceptance of the meaninglessness of that suffering. Finally, the happiness of the descendants cannot compensate for the suffering of the ancestors and social progress cannot make up for the injustice done to the dead. If we accept for too long that death is meaningless and are indifferent towards the dead, then we shall in the end only be able to offer trivial promises to the living.'[56]

When solidarity with the suffering of the victims of history is properly acknowledged, then Metz considers that the dead come to be more important to us than we are to them.[57] Solidarity with those who have suffered and died prevents Christianity from being privatised and internalised; its social and political dimensions are safeguarded; its claim for redemption is properly

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[53]ibid., 231-232.

[54]Metz 'Future in the Memory of Suffering' 11-13.

[55]ibid., 12. When we truly enter into solidarity with the suffering and the dead then 'the vanquished and forgotten possibilities of human existence that we call "death" are allowed a meaning that is not recalled or canceled by the future course of history.'

[56]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 75. This quotation is from *Usere Hoffnung* -- published by the Synod of German Bishops (I, 3.)

[57]Metz, 'Future in the Memory of Suffering' in *Faith and the Future,* 12-15.

actualised.[58] Consequently, Metz believes that a practical, liberative theology takes the stories of those who have been defeated and lost seriously. Only then can the memory and the narrative of Christian salvation access its particular mystical and political dimensions.[59]

Metz maintains that our humanity is deeply implicated in our response to suffering. Consequently, the whole process of becoming a free human subject before God in history actually occurs in and through the human response to the sufferings of others. This means that, the activity of solidarity becomes the place where the proper exercise and effective actualisation of human freedom actually occurs. In support of this, Metz takes the *memoria passionis* of Jesus as both the ground and justification of true human freedom. He maintains that it is in and through this passion or suffering that God's promise of future freedom for all has been given.[60] This also serves to highlight the liturgical relationship between freedom and solidarity: our response to the command to 'do this in memory of me' both celebrates and grounds our humanity. [61] In other words, in the active remembrance of the suffering of Jesus -- which encompasses the suffering and death of all humanity through anamnestic reason -- our humanity as subjects seeking freedom in solidarity is safeguarded. Within this framework, it is clear

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[58]ibid., 15. Metz claims 'the memory of suffering brings a new moral imagination into political life . . that should mature into a generous, un-calculated partisanship on behalf of those who are weak and unrepresented.'

[59]ibid., 13.'Social power and political domination must continually justify themselves . . . [to] the extent to which [they] cause suffering. They cannot escape this reckoning by invoking the specific suffering of the rich and powerful. . . . I have a primary duty of opposing the suffering and oppression brought about by power and riches. And this is a resistance that means that I confront them with the claim of Christian consolation and Christian redemption. The memory of suffering, in the Christian sense, creates a social and political conscience in the interests of others suffering.'

[60]ibid., 10. On 112-113 Metz takes care to note the essential relationship between *memoria passionis* and *memoria resurrectionis* pointing out that 'it is impossible to make a simple distinction between the *memoria passionis* and the *memoria resurrectionis.* There is no understanding of the glory of resurrection that is free of the shadows and threats of the human history of suffering.'

[61]Metz, 'Freedom in Solidarity' in *Faith in the Future,* 77-79. Metz cautions that while Christianity has indeed 'preserved the anamnestic character of its identity in worship - "Do this in Remembrance of me" - it has largely neglected to develop this anamnestic constitution culturally.'

that Metz considers the depth of peoples response to suffering and injustice is the measure of their humanity. The activity of solidarity and the exercise of human freedom are, for Metz, inextricably bound together.

Metz considers that the category of solidarity serves to acknowledge human history as the locus where the redeeming and liberating force of God's promise actually occurs. More particularly, Metz understands solidarity as the practical component of a Christian church or theology that seeks to express and secure God's redemptive liberating power within the history of suffering.[62] This emphasis on the history of suffering maintains the existential connections within human history. It prevents the abstraction of suffering from its historical context. Without this movement towards engaging suffering and forgetfulness, Metz believes that 'the problem of painful non-identity' is side-stepped or ignored.[63] Put another way, authentic solidarity acts to prevent history from being defined or understood as the history of heroes and conquests. Instead, it demands an engagement with those whom history has left behind, discarded and forgotten.

Accordingly, Metz insists that Christian theology must pay particular attention to the activity of remembering the dead and acknowledging the suffering of those whom history has sought to forget and discard. He considers that any theology that does not focus on situations of injustice and human suffering cannot really allow the dangerous memory of human freedom to be acknowledged. For without such acknowledgment, authentic relationships of solidarity cannot be supported.[64] Such a neglect serves to further privatise the responsibility of Christian relationships. This privatisation of responsibility allows the demands of Christian discipleship to be further depoliticise and eventually neutralise. This erosion of the responsibilities and the demands of Christian faith

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[62]Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 22.

[63]ibid., 231. 'The Church will only become a Church in solidarity when it ceases to be a protectionist "Church for the people" and becomes a real "Church of the people.'

[64]ibid., 71. Here Metz stresses that, regardless of its protests otherwise, institutional religion has not been made guilty by its participation in the 'historical struggles for all humanity and their status as subjects' but rather by 'its attempt to purchase its political innocence by not participating!' In reality however, the possibility of 'political innocence' for any historical public institution is a myth.

encourages the development of what Metz refers to as rational or ideal partnerships.[65] They are basically relationships where the key factors are of alliance, exchange and mutually self-serving interests. These partnerships obscure the values of Christian praxis and make authentic solidarity almost impossible.

Relationships of alliance and exchange are essentially contracts between two equal and proficient 'subjects.' They are rational relationships based on the mutually defined interest factors of success and progress; they rely, to a large extent, on a series of reciprocal associations or complementary exchanges. Within these relationships, Metz maintains that commitment takes the form of a mutually protected obligation. Like the relationship itself, this commitment is also ultimately self-interested. So, while these relationships of exchange may be attentive and possibly even sympathetic relationships, Metz considers that they are still fundamentally self-interested or rational relationships.[66] Accordingly, they are primarily concerned and identify with the victors rather than the victims of history. Here, there is little real incentive to overcome the 'suffering caused by oppression and injustice.'[67]

Metz considers this lack of engagement with injustice and the suffering of others -- except as it affects mutual concerns -- impedes the radical Christian impulse of liberation and redemption. In these circumstances, relationships are not truly redemptive: they fail to either liberate those who suffer or transform situations that marginalise the victims.[68] In other words, relationships of alliance

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[65]ibid., 232-233.

[66]ibid., 232-234. Here Metz critiques the contemporary philosophy of both Habermas 'universal solidarity' and Apel's 'community of communication' claiming that 'all relationships developed in these and other similar theories of communicative action . . . have, at least tendentiously, the character of a relationship based on exchange.'

[67]ibid., 230-231

[68]Metz, 'Messianic or "Bourgeois" Religion?' 21-23 Here Metz explores the cult of exchange in relationship to the 'substitution' of Christian virtues for commodities - particularly money - and notes that when money 'becomes a substitute for compassion with the suffering of others; it serves to express solidarity and sympathy, as compensation for the neglect of a wider justice imposed by a society determined at a fundamental level by exchange.'

cannot foster solidarity because they are unable to seriously engage with the loss of identity, freedom and hope by those discarded as subjects before God.[69] Metz claims that unless Christianity engages in solidarity with human suffering, it cannot really bear witness to God's radical offer of redemption. Solidarity -- in the form of remembering and retelling the stories of suffering and oppression -- engages the whole social spectrum of the community from universal to particular and from mystical to political.

Metz claims that a tensive relationship between the mystical-universal and the political particular dimensions of the expression of Christian faith is the hallmark of solidarity. Christian solidarity is mystical because it is supported and effected by prayer;[70] it is universal because 'the God of the living and the dead is a God of universal justice.'[71] In prayer the demand for Christian faith to be truly responsible is acknowledged and the promise given to those who 'suffer unjustly and die' is kept alive. Through prayer the vulnerability of being a subject before God in history is protected. Because Christian solidarity has a particular-political dimension, Metz maintains that it must also relate with humanity's historical existence, particularly that of suffering and loss. Through engagement with the experiences of suffering and loss, the biggest threat to the practice of solidarity -- the erosion of the human subject through apathy -- is able to be resisted. [72]

To be existentially effective, the call to commitment must be historically grounded. The biblical promise -- articulated through prayer and given shape by solidarity -- does not occur in a vacuum. Rather it must be given eschatological meaning in a particular historical place and a specific historical way. The

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[69]Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 71-72. 'A society which has lost its interest in the continuing state of its people as subjects and which has abandoned its community of interest with the dead will inevitably become weaker and weaker in the historical struggle for the state of the living as subjects and fall victim to evolutionary apathy.'

[70]ibid., 61. 'Prayer impels the one who prays to remain a subject and not avoid their responsibility in view of their own guilt. It makes them subjects in the presence of their enemies, in the midst of fear of loosing their name, their face, their selves.'

[71]ibid., 72.

[72]ibid.

historical location for this must surely be found in ecclesial Christian communities. Metz acknowledges that authentic praxis demands that, as an essentially 'eucharist community', the church support the struggle of all humanity to become subjects in history before God.[73] He also acknowledges that small 'politically active base communities in various countries' strive to do this.[74] However, his basic metaphor for the Western Christian community and authentic praxis remains 'the community of the dead.'[75]

Metz identifies the community of the dead as the locus where the most radical vulnerability of human persons as subjects in history is found. Solidarity with the dead ensures that Christian hope is not just personal and private; it is also universal because, only by hoping for others, can Christians truly hope for themselves. To hope for the dead who, after all, can no longer hope for themselves, is truly an action of solidarity with the *memoria passionis et resurrectionis* of Jesus. This sense of safeguarding the 'stories and the memories' of the generations who have struggled before us is also a central aspect of Schüssler Fiorenza's theology.[76] However, Schüssler Fiorenza does position her prime focus in the more abstract struggle of redeeming the community of the dead.

Although critical feminist theologies affirm the notion that commitment to the dead is an essential aspect of Christian faith, they consider that the concrete historical praxis of liberation still needs a concrete historical focus. Critical feminist theologies maintain that the key to redeem the community of the dead is found in the struggle to affirm the most vulnerable community of the living. A theology that refuses to name the victims of the present will find it difficult to redeem the victims of the past. This means that the action to establish the identity of the dead is accomplished in the vindication of the struggle against victimisation in the present. If solidarity is fundamentally an action of Christian responsibility and a reflection of Christian discipleship, then an understanding

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[73]ibid., 70-71.

[74]ibid., 81-82.

[75]ibid., 74-77.

[76]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 30-32.

of the historical community it takes place within is essential. As M. Shawn Copeland notes: 'Solidarity is not a novel or topical addendum to the theological agenda; it is an integral part of theology . . . [and an] achievement of community.'[77]

The Category of COMMUNITY

In her book *God For Us*, Catherine Mowry LaCugna explores the human-divine relationship through an exploration of the Christian Trinity. The interpretative framework she uses is the trinity as a community of persons. Indeed, LaCugna claims that the doctrine of the trinity affirms that the 'essence' of God is radically relational for 'God exists as diverse persons united in a communion of freedom, love and knowledge.'[78] In light of this exploration, LaCugna maintains that key for understanding the human person -- as it relates to both the divine and each other -- is relationality. Accordingly, LaCugna maintains that 'persons are imperfect if self-centred or solitary individuals.'[79] Generally speaking, anyone involved in the human sciences would agree that the proper and healthy development of a human person occurs within a particular primary group or a significant socio-cultural community of other people.[80] As a species, human beings are essential inter-relational - and therefore communal - beings. This means that authentic human life is intimately connected to the desire to belong to a particular group. In other words, the well-being -- and even the survival -- of people is connected to the ability to identify with a community of others. When the human person is perceived within this framework, there is an obvious acknowledgment that in order to ground their sense of belonging people have both the need and ability for relationship with

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[77]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity' 29.

[78]Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us,* 243.

[79]Mowry LaCugna 'God In Communion With Us' in *Freeing Theology,* 106

[80]Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism,* x-xi. Grosz maintains that there is an 'organic ontological "incompleteness" without this social completion, social ordering and organisation.'

and commitment to others.

Like solidarity, community has been widely used to define different economic, political, social, religious, racial, sexual, and eccesial groups within the Western tradition. We generally claim that the history of Christianity began with small house churches of the first century which we remember as being the 'early Christian communities.' We speak of the emergence and development of liberation theologies as being rooted in particular 'base communities' in South America. We refer to the Western mainstream experience of Church as our 'parish communities.' We call the groups with whom we come together for ritual as our 'liturgical communities.' Those who take contemplative religious vows are said to belong to 'monastic' or 'religious communities.' Indeed, Rebecca Chopp maintains that:

> One of the most genuine social, personal and religious desires today is for community. In a highly individualised and rapidly transient culture, many women and men feel the loss of belonging to and being formed by a community. Certainly a consistent theme in Christian theologies is the importance, often the priority, of Christian community.[81]

Within this acknowledgment of the need for community it would appear that the prime factor that links these explorations of community is that of diversity. Consequently, it seems an almost impossible task to systematically define what a community is or to definitively discern exactly what makes a *community* different from a small group or *life-style enclave*. However, within all the diversity of belonging that so clearly exists within small groups or communities there is one broad but key element: a common desire or conscious commitment to belong.[82] In his book *Living in The Margins,* Terry Veling explores the dynamic, pluralistic, and committed nature of small Christian communities.[83] Veling notes that by their nature these communities entail a

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[81]Chopp, *Saving Work,* 64.

[82]ibid., 65. Chopp calls these communities *substantive* communities claiming they are 'characterised by identity conceived of by its members' and have 'substance in the sense that they have a fullness of relations determined . . . by a communicative sense of justice . . . and the fullness of relations.'

[83]Veling, *Living In The Margins,* 4-8.

commitment to the group through an intentionality of membership. This intentionality of membership means that the community is fuelled by an internal rather than an external dynamism. They are groups that grow into life rather than ones that are able to be systematically controlled by an externally imposed plan or a prescribed vision.[84]

Belonging to a particular identifiable group or community serves to shape us as people. It provides the opportunities and challenges that effectively shape and direct our own formation as persons, our ongoing relationships with others, and our understanding of the world we live in. In this sense, Rebecca Chopp maintains that a community -- as a place where the 'truth' of our lives can be affirmed -- can provide the 'space for the creation of new possibilities' of being and relating.[85] It is able to do this because community provides us with the tools and ability to become responsible -- and therefore moral -- human beings. We are then able to both contribute and respond to our environment and the people in it. This means that just as the community shapes and directs its members, the members of that community, in turn, shape and direct the community. Accordingly, the place of community is the place of commitment. It is the place where people are offered the opportunity to commit to other people, other visions, other goods and other needs outside their own individual or personal selves. True community 'allows us to speak the truth of our lives, gives us the moral imagination to create visions of what ought to happen, and allows the flourishing that ought to exist.'[86]

It is in this creative ability to respond that a community expresses its dynamic and transformative potential. In responding, there is already a first level engagement in the creation of new possibilities. When it comes to Christian communities, the creative and transformative potential of human agency takes on an indispensable and particular focus: the endeavour to make present the attributes and the mind of God. The framework within which this is made

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[84]ibid.

[85]Chopp, *Saving Work*, 66.

[86]ibid. 'The feminist stress on friendship is an apt characterisation of the substantive nature of the community.'

possible must be built in and through the fostering and nurturing of right relationships.[87] The focus of Christian community is to organise and live life in a way that makes present the attributes and mind of God. Here, the critical assessment of various anthropological assumptions is essential. Given that the way we image -- and imagine -- God reflects our own gendered human reality then the attributes we assign to the mind of God must be carefully examined. For these attributes are often concretely expressed in the structuring and ordering of the community.[88]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the feminist critique of language outlines the dangers of forgetting that images for God are always metaphorical. When the boundaries between the metaphor and message are blurred then the metaphor is in danger of being mistaken for the message. When this happens, the essence of the message is often reduced to the metaphorical. So while anthropological assumptions about God are unavoidable they are still always metaphorical. They must be critically examined to reveal how much they participate in the oppression or liberation of persons. In order, then, to engage the question of who we really are, it is necessary to understand human persons in the context of the particular, historical, communal and interpersonal relationships that have formed them.[89]

When looking for a sound Christian framework within which to understand community, many feminist theologians begin with the radically relational nature of the trinity. Catherine Mowry LaCugna deals with an understanding of community by exploring traditional Trinitarian doctrines through a feminist perspective. She focuses on the trinity as 'a circle of relationships that

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[87]Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us*, 402. 'The principle of communion leaves open the questions of *community* and *institution*, how persons actually gather, configure, and structure their common life. . . . Clearly some form of leadership is required, but ecclesial leadership is to be rooted in the ministry of service not lordship.'

[88]Wainwright, 'What's in a Name? The Word that binds/The Word that frees, 101. 'New names may, in fact, break open the prison bonds and enable an expansion of Christian imaging of God in ways which can profoundly liberate both the experience of the divine and the imaging of the human community.' Once 'predicated of the divine' these images are 'not readily critiqued.' 106.

[89]Robert Gascoigne, *The Communication of Christian Ethics in Liberal Societies*, MTh. (Melbourne College of Divinity 1995), 140.

invites participation by presupposing belonging.'[90] According to LaCugna, when the traditional scholastic emphasis of the substance of God is replaced by the relational personhood of God, then a different ordering of relationality can occur and a non-hierarchical understanding of relationships is possible. This amounts to a considerable change in perspective. Divine unity and divine life are not automatically located in a primacy or hierarchy of persons. Rather, the unity of divine life occurs in a communion of equal -- though unique -- persons. When this understanding is used as the guiding principle of Christian communities, diversity is grounded in the radical relationality of human persons called to live 'in authentic communion with God, other persons and God's creation.'[91] When relatedness or relationality is understood as the supreme characteristic of God, then being human -- in the image and likeness of God -- is all about being in relationships. For the Christian tradition, this concept finds it most foundational historical illustration in the incarnation where the human and the divine are held together in the expression of radical relationality. This has important political implications because it has a 'profound bearing on how we envision the nature of the human person and the shape of human society.'[92]

Authentic and life-giving communities -- like the solidarity that arises from them -- must be places of radical relationality. When community is understood relationally rather than hierarchically, two insights emerge. The first concerns the traditional preoccupation of the Western Church for 'unity through conformity' at both a theological and ecclessial level. The second engages the superficial dissolution of difference to avoid the challenge of self-critical engagement.

When the only legitimate understanding of unity and belonging is through conformity difference is always problematic. This approach gives rise to 'what social theorist Theodor Adorno called the relentless "logic of identity."'[93] Here, difference is not seen as an opening for true conversation. Nor is it considered

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[90]Mowry LaCugna, 'God In Communion With Us' in *Freeing Theology,* 84.

[91]ibid., 86-106.

[92]ibid., 91.

[93]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity' 15.

as an invitation to participate in a reality beyond the immediate and personal. Rather, difference is always understood as something negative. When difference is understood negatively it becomes a threat to unity, a barrier to true communion and, eventually, an impediment to authentic belonging. When this happens, difference can be used as a tool that divides and marginalises groups or people within groups: minimising difference means maximising belonging.

This particular view of difference tends not only to polarise difference from the standard norm; it also stratifies differences according to an hierarchical chain. To polarise and stratify difference serves to eradicate uniqueness. It encourages the marginalisation and suppression of diversity. Consequently, only the dominant or most powerful voice is heard. Furthermore, it is this voice which is considered to be a true reflection of the identity of a specific group or community.[94] This understanding of difference clearly promotes a situation that eventually legitimises hegemonic or monological discourse. When this happens the possibility and risk of true conversation is unable to occur.[95] For only in a radically relational community can dialogical conversation take place.[96]

Given this tendency to dissolve difference, it is not surprising to hear the assertion that 'difference doesn't really matter.' Eventually, this leads to the pretension that difference doesn't exist.[97] The result is not polarisation of difference but the collapse of difference. In an effort to avoid conflict, confusion, and even conversation difference is collapsed into one large bland amorphous 'sameness.' This position takes no account of the ever changing social, political, historical or religious context of a community. It is deaf to the voices of

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[94]ibid., 15-17 Here Copeland notes the comment by political philosopher Iris Marion Young who claims: 'The ideal of liberation' has been the 'elimination of group difference.' Young goes on to say that 'the irony of the logic of identity is that by seeking to reduce the differently similar to the same, it turns the merely different into the "absolute other."'

[95]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* 20 'Conversation in its primary form is an exploration of possibilities in the search for truth. In following the track of any question, we must allow for difference and otherness. At the same time . . . we notice that to attend to the other as other , the different as different, is also to understand the different as possible.'

[96]ibid., 25.

[97]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity' 16-18.

experience -- which are often voices of anguish and affliction. Here, there is a lack of the necessary self-critical attitude that is so essential for the effectively engagement of the social, political, and religious realities of a community.[98] Consequently, this position is blind to the truth claims and challenges of any other group because it is only aware of its own unexamined reality. It also ignores the -- often hard won -- identity of smaller marginal groups who are divested of historical particularity and personal individuality. In naming the identity of others as insignificant this position serves to render their experience invisible.[99] Such a lack of self-critical awareness also means that it is all but impossible to make an informed judgment because the whole procedure of judging is based on material that is incomplete and even erroneous.[100]

There is here an obvious connection between both the conditions that facilitate authentic solidarity and the structure of the community from which these arise. This connection is clearly marked by the need for communities to be radically dialogical and relational. Openness to relationality and dialogue requires a critical openness to the particular historical context and specific experiences of the community in all their expressions of difference and diversity. Without this critical openness to context and diversity, the prejudices and biases that underpin the different social, political, and religious structures of a culture cannot be adequately acknowledged, let alone engaged. Put another way, without open and honest self-criticism, authentic solidarity cannot emerge. The insistence on a radical critique and self-critical engagement with the social, political and religious conditions and attitudes that structure our reality is particularly developed in the feminist hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.

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[98]Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 79-81.

[99]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity' 29. 'To substitute gender or race or social class or group or ethnic-cultural heritage for what is substantive of human being is to surrender reason's power; but to dismiss or dissolve or ignore gender or race or social class or ethnic-cultural heritage as irrelevant is to disregard concrete differentiated human persons, to render them invisible.'

[100]ibid., 17.

COMMUNITY and SOLIDARITY
in
SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA

For Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza the engagement with supportive dialogical communities and the experience of solidarity with groups of women 'doing theology' has been the source of her theologising. In the introduction to her book, *Discipleship of Equals*, Schüssler Fiorenza remarks that when her career as a professional theologian began there was very little community support for non-clerical theologians. There was even less support for women doing theology. In turn, this meant there was an absence of academic solidarity from traditional Catholic theological circles.[101] So, for Schüssler Fiorenza, her own personal experience and theological perspective were not validated or supported by the religious or scholarly 'authorities' of her traditional religious community. Rather, they were validated and supported by her experience of the women's movement.[102]

In regard to the establishment of feminist community and the practice of solidarity among women, Schüssler Fiorenza considers that the women's movement in society and church has served two critical functions. Firstly, it recognised the importance of exploring and articulating women's experiences and concerns. Secondly, it provided the forum within which to do this.[103] Consequently, the early feminist theologians were -- by the very definition of their function and objectives -- forced into a self-critical engagement with the attitudes and conditions of the community that served to structure and define the religious and academic reality of Western society. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that among other formative encounters this engagement with the women's movement enabled her to understand herself as an 'intellectual "doing theology"

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[101]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The Forgotten Partner: The Professional Ministry of Women in the Church' in *Discipleship of Equals*, 1-15.

[102]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 5-7. Schüssler Fiorenza notes that the existence of the women's movement -- as a concrete historical public entity -- was extremely important for the development of her own academic work.

[103]ibid.

with a focus on and in the interests of wo/men as my very own people.'[104] Even though Schüssler Fiorenza did not share the same experiences as many of these women, she claims they were still very important.

Firstly, from the women's movement came the impetus for women to claim the right to 'do theology as their birthright.'[105] This both supported and reflected the raised consciousness that is necessary for a more critical awareness and a new way of understanding the realities, structures and attitudes of one's world. A raised consciousness is, in other words, the first step towards authentic solidarity since it is a precursor to a change in attitudes that leads to conversion. Secondly, the women's movement set about changing the conditions that produced such 'negative experiences of feminine socialization and role determination.'[106] So, supported by the critical awareness of how the structures and attitudes support marginalisation and injustice, there emerges a common commitment to work towards transforming those experiences. Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that it was in her engagement with the women's movement in society and church -- and the subsequent support and solidarity for her work -- that she was able to define herself as a critical feminist theologian. Accordingly, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that the experience and commitment to feminist sisterhood[107] and solidarity form essential aspects of the 'rationale and the argument for a wo/men's movement for change and transformation.'[108]

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[104]ibid. 6-7.

[105]ibid., 4-6.

[106]ibid., 4-7 Along with 'the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas, Jean L. Cohen . . . [argues] because of the dualistic character of the public and private spheres of modern capitalist-democratic societies, emancipatory social movements have to engage in a two pronged strategy if they are to bring about change . . .The feminist movement in the United States . . . has indeed adopted such dual politics, [targeting] not only the state, the law, and the economy but also the institutions and normative presuppositions of civil society.'

[107]It is important to note that the term sisterhood can be a somewhat ambiguous one for many women, being used socially, racially, and religiously to both unite *and* divide them. See M. Shawn Copeland 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity' 12-13.

[108]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 25.

In response to the changing historical realities of Western culture, particular questions of Western feminist theologies and feminist studies in religion have also changed. However, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that if the movement for change and transformation is to be successful, then there is still a need for an ongoing critical engagement of the structures and functions of our socio-religious communities.

> Feminist theologies and studies in religion have the dual goal of not only fundamentally altering the nature of malestream knowledge about the Divine and the world but also of changing institutional religions, which have tended to exclude wo/men from religious authority and leadership positions. . . . Christian feminism attempts to do both by seeking full citizenship for wo/men in church and society, and by reformulating the study of scripture, tradition, theology and community in feminist terms.[109]

Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza grounds the action towards authentic Christian solidarity in the commitment to 'the hermeneutical centre created by the biblical-political vision of the *ekklēsia* of women and the associated theological notion of the discipleship of equals.'[110] She maintains that if this commitment to a community is to 'articulate a sociopolitical religious horizon for biblical interpretation -- and she believes it should, -- then it must be 'spelled out in sociopolitical and cultural-religious terms.'[111] The radically democratic and egalitarian vision of the *ekklēsia* of women has never been 'fully realised in history since, in Western traditions, wo/men have not been accorded full citizenship and self-determination.'[112] However, traces of this vision can be found in the biblical vision of the *basileia*. Within Schüssler Fiorenza's theology, the notions of the *ekklēsia* and the *basileia* of God does two things. Firstly, it offers suitable means to engage Schüssler Fiorenza's understanding of solidarity. Secondly, it also informs her interpretation of the function and structure of life-giving Christian community.

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[109]ibid., 25.

[110]ibid., 112.

[111]ibid.

[112]ibid.

Even though the word *ekklēsia* is a common one within the Christian tradition, it carries a certain amount of ambiguity. Schüssler Fiorenza claims a considerable amount of this ambiguity results from the different ways the tradition has interpreted and used *ekklēsia.* In its classical Greek formulation Schüssler Fiorenza claims the *ekklēsia* is best translated as a decision-making congress/assembly of fully fledged citizens. The *ekklēsia* then, is about groups of people where the members are of equal standing. When understood in this way, *ekklēsia* is a socio-political and a cultural-religious term that designates an assembly of full citizens gathered to engage in the practice of radical democracy.[113] This particular definition encourages the understanding of *ekklēsia* in terms of a participative and democratic congress that is operated by a discipleship of equals.[114]

However, the word *ekklēsia* has also been used as the source of the English word 'ecclesial' meaning 'of the church'. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that although the word 'church', strictly speaking, derives from the Greek word *kyriakē* -- meaning belonging to the lord/ father/ master -- over the years it has developed a connection to the word *ekklēsia*. This means, within understanding the word Church, an automatic tension arises between the notion of the Church as a participative community marked by a discipleship of equals and the Curch as a community marked by hierarchically ordered relationships. Consequently, in English the *ekklēsia* of the Christian church carries two contradictory meanings. On the one hand it tells of the full equality in assembly and the full

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[113]ibid.

[114]Both the ancient Greeks and Romans structured their communities along kryiarchal lines. The lack of civil rights afforded to male and female foreigners and slaves as well as most women and children testifies to this. However, *if* you were a full citizen -- however that citizenship was actually defined and even if it was defined in gender terms -- you had full and equal standing rights within the *ekklēsia* and were accorded full participation in the decision making process. I understand Schüssler Fiorenza to interpret and apply the notion of the *ekklēsia* here as a claim for full democratic participation for all those who rightfully belong to the church. For *if* you are a fully baptised member of the church then you are a 'full citizen' and should be accorded all the rights and responsibilities that belong to full citizenship.

participation by all members. However, on the other hand it maintains a connection to the subordination of freeborn women, children, and slaves to the *kyriakē* or the kyriarchal head.

Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza considers that the traditionally accepted translation of *ekklēsia* as "church" is actually misleading. The word '*ekklēsia* is best rendered as "democratic assembly/congress of full citizens."'[115] When the *ekklēsia* as the democratic assembly/congress of full citizens is supported by a critical feminist reading of scripture, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that it makes it possible to keep the "dangerous memory" of Christian history present and active in the struggle for radical democratic vision. She considers that only a

> theoretical model that comprehends the ongoing conflicts and struggles between the vision and emancipatory practices of radical democracy on the one hand and those of kyriarchal social systems on the other . . . is able to . . . provide for a fragile historical continuity of emancipatory struggles. Indeed, feminist, emancipatory biblical studies must be positioned within both this history of conflict and struggle for human freedom, dignity and well-being (the *ekklēsia*) and the biblical vision of the *basileia,* G*d's different society and world without poverty, hunger, suffering, homelessness, murder, and injustice.[116]

All of this is not to presuppose that Schüssler Fiorenza understands the *ekklēsia* of women as an exclusive community of believers. Even though her use of the *ekklēsia* has an explicit commitment to the struggle and agency of women in Western Christianity, Schüssler Fiorenza does not seek to limit this community to the concerns or the membership of only women.[117] Rather, she uses the term *ekklēsia* eschatologically to create a radically open, dialogical and democratic community that includes all humanity. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that when Christian community is understood as an *ekklēsia* then there is

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[115]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 112-113. Schüssler Fiorenza, maintains that 'the translation process which transformed *ekklēsia*/democratic assembly into *kyriakē*/church, indicates a history that has privileged the kyriarchal/hierarchical form of church over that of a democratic congress or discipleship of equals.'

[116]ibid., 114.

[117]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 191.

renewed hope for the emergence of a 'political-oppositional' community. She considers that only a truly political-oppositional community can challenge the systematic power relations that support the construction and the maintenance of kyriarchal structures and relationships.[118]

Consequently, Schüssler Fiorenza sees this *ekklēsia* of women as a dialogical community of equals. It is a term that seeks to make present and make real a community of 'critical practice and a radical vision of democracy in society and religion.'[119] Understood like this, the *ekklēsia* of women is able to provide for a community that can truly be a 'motivating resource and an empowering authority in women's struggle for justice, liberation, and solidarity.'[120] The presence of an *ekklēsia* serves to challenge the accepted hegemonic "common sense" theological discourses by naming 'an alternative reality of justice and well-being for all.'[121]

The structure of the *ekklēsia* of women within Schüssler Fiorenza's critical feminist hermeneutics can be found by exploring what she describes as 'dialogical communities.' Dialogical communities work to foster 'solidarity, freedom, and public discourse.'[122] Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that, in their commitment to open and democratic dialogue, authentic dialogical communities are committed to being critically inclusive communities. When understood within the framework of the *ekklēsia* of women, this dialogical inclusivity is able to focus specifically on women's historical exclusion from the Christian tradition and the struggle for full community participation. As a reflection of their basic impulse and vision to be inclusive, historical and practical, dialogical communities reject three particular pre-suppositions that inhibit or prevent

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[118]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* xiv-xv.

[119]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 24.

[120]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not* Stone, xxii.

[121]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 43, Western 'feminist studies have shown that despite such rhetorical claims to value neutral objectivity, virtually every academic discipline operates on the unreflected "commonsense" assumption that equates male reality with human reality.' Thus "common sense" notions can be dangerous because their negative and oppressive presuppositions covertly inform and distort.

[122]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* xxii.

solidarity.

Firstly, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that dialogical communities work to resist a certain 'Cartesian anxiety' at the very practical, historical level of community. Cartesian anxiety is reflected in a dualistic approach to human life, knowledge, and reality that can only affirm an either/or stance. Consequently, it claims that either there are objective truths, or all truth is essentially subjectively relative. However, rather than seeking a 'revealed Archimedean point . . . be it a liberating tradition, text, or principle,' Schüssler Fiorenza maintains a critical feminist hermeneutics explores and assesses how these texts and traditions are used to facilitate liberation. Therefore, it critically assesses 'whether and how scripture' and tradition are able to become a resource and authority in 'wo/men's struggle for justice, liberation and solidarity.'[123]

Secondly, dialogical communities must withstand the pressure of allowing the most powerful voices to become the most authoritative or the most frequently heard. Accordingly, dialogical communities must pay particular attention to the silent or invisible members. Schüssler Fiorenza claims that this requires a commitment to taking the experience of their 'exclusion and invisibility as its critical point of departure.'[124] In effect, the commitment to the *ekklēsia* of women, is a commitment to listen to the voices of exclusion and invisibility. This means listening to the voices of women. To be truly inclusive these communities must facilitate and foster an environment where all members are legitimate members of equal belonging and so are encouraged to active participation. Schüssler Fiorenza claims that to attempt to uphold the full 'spiritual' equality of women -- through the affirmation of their salvation, hope and charity -- while continuing to engage in ecclesial discrimination at the practical everyday level is just not compatible.[125] If a community is to engage in transformative action,

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[123]ibid.,

[124]ibid., xxiv.

[125]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The First Women's Ordination Conference' in *Discipleship of Equals,* 88-89. Schüssler Fiorenza notes while equal access to 'ordained' public leadership 'is the test case' for a renewed community where all are 'entitled to active participation and leadership,' the transformation of 'a celibate priesthood, hierarchical

then it is essential that all members have a very real sense of agency and belonging.

Thirdly, authentic dialogical communities need to grow out of their own reality and concerns. Only in this way can members truly gain access to their own historical identification and identity.[126] This means dialogical communities must reject an external or pre-figured *teleos* which is not part of the vision of the group. Authentic dialogue requires the rejection of totalising discourses. The historical movement of these communities must be acknowledged as: essentially unfinished; still in process; awaiting completion. In other words, the goals and achievements of dialogical communities are eschatological. They are concretely present while yet to be fully 'realised in feminist conversion and historical struggle for liberation from patriarchal oppression.'[127]

Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza claims the challenge for Western Christian communities to become authentic dialogical communities is an urgent one. She maintains that, only when proper attention is paid to the nurturing of dialogical -- rather than monological -- practices and structures, can the church begin to bring forth the *ekklēsia's* vision of inclusivity. Only when the church claims this inclusive *ekklēsia* vision as its own, will Christian communities again emerge as true discipleship of equals. In other words, Schüssler Fiorenza considers that until the church community is once again a true discipleship of equals, its 'full apostolicity and catholicity' must remain in question.[128]

Schüssler Fiorenza acknowledges that the task of sustaining a resolute and authentic commitment to the 'radical democratic religious vision' structured around the concept of the discipleship of equals is not an easy one.[129] The difficulty of this task is not just a contemporary difficulty of interpretation since there are also ambiguous passages within the scriptures themselves. These

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church, and male-clerical theology is its unconditional prerequisite and consequence.'

[126]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not* Stone, xxiii-xxiv.

[127]ibid.

[128]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The First Women's Ordination Conference' in *Discipleship of Equals* 87.

[129]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 119.

passages clearly reflect a 'contradiction and conflict between egalitarian practices of community and the dominant reality of patriarchal kyriarchy.'[130] Scriptural passages contain reflections of different models of community. This means they reflect community in terms of both a discipleship of equals and as a hierarchy of relationships.[131] However, within these reflections, Schüssler Fiorenza claims that the commitment to fostering the radical, democratic, community ethos of the early Jesus-movements was a very early and deep historical reality.[132] Consequently, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that the ambiguity surrounding the historical materiality of a radically democratic and egalitarian community does not render the interpretation of early Christian community life as a discipleship of equals invalid. It is abundantly clear that the early Jesus communities engaged in a social, political, religious and cultural struggle to build egalitarian communities and foster democratic relationships. They were, in other words engaged in the activity of building up the *basileia*, or the kingdom of God.

The *Basileia*

Schüssler Fiorenza claims that the historical evidence for the discipleship of equals can be found at the heart of the stories, parables and miracles of the gospels in which Jesus outlines the shape and values of the *basileia*-kingdom, or, the reign of God. Accordingly, she believes that the scriptural paradigm of true discipleship -- and therefore the blueprint for new community relationships -- can be found woven in and through the call to the gospel practice of radical inclusivity and the affirmation of the healing activity that is the hallmark of the

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[130]ibid., 113-114

[131]ibid., 120. Biblical interpreters who favour a "discipleship of equals" model of church will emphasise the radical democratic elements inscribed in biblical text and those who favour a "hierarchial" one will stress the kyriarchal aspects. . . . Interpreters can do so because variations of both models of church are inscribed in biblical traditions and available as models of reality for today.'

[132]ibid., 169.

basileia of God.[133] In light of this, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that the discipleship of equals can be legitimately re-imagined and re-constructured from the *basileia* stories and parables. In other words, the communal reality of the discipleship of equals can be found in 'the eschatological project of the *basileia,* the intended society and worlds of G*d.'[134]

The *basileia* of God is a very old and very rich scriptural term. It is linked to both the prophetic and wisdom literature of Israel's history and so is both a political and a religious concept. The *basileia* is deeply embedded in the challenge of the covenant continuously calling the people of God to the responsibilities of right-relationships. It is also a cosmic-apocalyptic symbol operating to 'invoke . . . the eschatological "new creation"' of Jesus life and mission.[135] Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that this eschatological vision of the *basileia* of God definitively marked the early Jesus movement.[136] Because the *basileia* of God was the foundational vision that drove the life, ministry and mission of Jesus, then the *basileia* of God must surely be the eschatological vision that drives Christianity. This means that all subsequent Christian communities are continually challenged to re-present the *basileia* in their own particular historical lives. In other words, the vision of the *basileia* of God continually challenges Christian communities to understand themselves and their relationships in light of the biblical-prophetic-wisdom vision that engenders the alternative world of freedom, justice and well-being.

Schüssler Fiorenza claims that this understanding of community and community relations is the forum for the discipleship of equals. As such, it is also the foundation from which the praxis of authentic solidarity can emerge and

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[133]ibid., 114-115. In having no "fathers" the new community 'implicitly rejects patriarchal socio-religious power and status' and breaks with kyriarchal relationships. Those at the bottom of the 'kyriarchal structures, become the primary paradigm for true discipleship.' Jesus' 'paradoxical' saying "whoever does not receive the basileia of God like a child/slave shall not enter it" is not an 'invitation to childlike innocence and naivete but a challenge to relinquish all claims to the power of domination over others.' 115.

[134]ibid., 120.

[135]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 110-111.

[136]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 119-120.

be nourished.[137] The testament of the early Christian communities concerning their experiences of the *basileia* are hidden -- but not completely erased -- by later editorial amendments. These testaments clearly link an understanding of the *basileia to* Jesus by identifying him as its inaugurator.[138] They understood Jesus as both the proclaimer and the proclaimed: not only did Jesus proclaim the kingdom of God; Jesus also became the kingdom proclaimed. In other words, an encounter with the person of Jesus both mediated the promise of God's freedom, justice and well-being and engaged the person in the experience of the actual presence of God's freedom, justice and well-being.[139] Through an encounter with Jesus -- and the communities that claimed him, -- the poor, the marginalised and the sinners experienced the presence of God in a very tangible and existential way.[140] It was a here-and-now experience.

> 'The *basileia* vision of Jesus makes people whole, healthy, cleansed, and strong. It restores people's humanity and life. The salvation of the *basileia*
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> is not confined to the soul but spells wholeness for the total person in his/her social relations. The exorcisms of Jesus . . . [are] not so much concerned with polluting power as with debilitating dehumanising power. . . . If Jesus in the power of God . . . overcomes the evil powers that keep people in bondage, then the liberating power of God, "the *basileia* (,) has come (*ephthasen*) upon you." (Luke 11:20.)'[141]

The biblical understanding of parables, miracles, kingdom-stories and kingdom-

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[137]ibid., 151-154. Schüssler Fiorenza notes that while some stories of the community's recognition of women's public-prophetic praxis of women have remained (Mk. 14:3-11), later communities transmute the *basileia* and 'no longer understand the "solidarity from below" that inspired Jesus and his first followers.' Consequently, in Lk. 7:36-50 'prophet' becomes 'repentant sinner' and 'women' and 'the poor' are no longer the central figures of the *basileia* but 'have become the object of almsgiving and charity.' She goes on to claim that 'If solidarity from below is to become a reality for the whole community of Jesus again then the *basileia* -- as the "church of the poor" and the "church of women" -- must be recovered.'

[138]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 110-111.

[139]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 166. This section explores Schüssler Fiorenza's sophiaological designation of Jesus' salvific ministry. 'As Sophia's messenger and prophet, Jesus not only proclaimed the basileia of G*d to the poor, the hungry, and the excluded in Israel, he also made it experientially available through his miracles and healing activities.'

[140]Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 152-153

[141]ibid., 123.

sayings is focused on restoring Israel to covenantal wholeness. Accordingly, the *basileia* is primarily concerned with covenantal relationships; its central impulses are restoration and freedom. Through his parables and miracles, Jesus sought to liberate people from the behaviours and attitudes that kept them bound to half-lives and half-truths. In other words, Jesus gave people the freedom to be fully human and therefore fully alive. This freedom *for* life is embodied in the freedom *for* participation and, therefore, *for* community. In particular, then, the *basileia* seeks to re-store people to the fullness of life within their own particular socio-religious communities. The *basileia* seeks to establish a radical solidarity that not only allows people back into community but actively invites those who have been ignored and marginalised, impoverished and maimed into the fullness of life.

This then is both the purpose and the task of Christian *basileia* communities -- to give wholeness to those who have been injured and oppressed and so to return to all of God's people a full and equal share in community membership.[142] The vision of the *basileia* of God serves to remind Christian communities that everyone has a right to engage in the active and proper participation within their own social/political/religious communities.

Hence, in the early Christian movement Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that the Christian *basileia* clearly stood as an alternative vision that imagined a new community and a new creation. The realisation of this vision in the early church was not a foregone conclusion but an ongoing and continuous struggle that was grounded in the liturgical promise of the *maranatha* prayer. Schüssler Fiorenza considers that neither of these conditions has changed and so she maintains that the *basileia* 'must be realised again and again in and through the continuing struggle against the dehumanising kyriarchal powers of oppression which are theologically named as structural sin.'[143] Accordingly, Schüssler

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[142]ibid., 153.

[143]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 120.Schüssler Fiorenza maintains 'it is not possible to "prove" methodologically the bible advocates egalitarian democracy rather than kyriarchal monarchy since both forms of social organisation are inscribed in the socio-symbolic universe of biblical writings.' This means the hermeneutics of desire used by a critical feminist reading is a 'reconstruction.' It is not understood as a 'factual transcript' or 'theological legitimisation' of egalitarian Christian beginnings.

Fiorenza maintains that both the *basileia* and the 'democratic construction of the Christian *ekklēsia* constitute a partial reality and so provide an enduring vision.'[144] This partial reality is eschatological in nature insofar as it is an active and ongoing process in which we live and work towards the building -- rather than the completion -- of the kingdom. Accordingly, all who throughout history have struggled to manifest and realise this vision are historically linked together in a community of Christian solidarity. This commitment means moving towards greater equality, freedom and responsibility.

CONCLUSION

It is clear, then, that the category of solidarity is a vitally important one for both political and critical feminist theologies. Solidarity provides a focal point for our own -- and others -- identity as well as the opportunity for a dialogue and discussion on belonging. This category also offers both the space and the opportunity for an ongoing, self-critical focus on the primary importance of the praxis of Christian faith. Given that praxis forms both the method and goal of these theologies then solidarity forms the basis and source of this praxis. Marked as it is by radically relational structures and attitudes, solidarity is a primary category for authentic Christian faith understood as transformative action. Accordingly both Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza show a deep and critical concern in regard to the place and the importance of solidarity as a category that gives rise to transformative Christian praxis.

For Metz, this concern is directly linked to the need for a critical engagement with the suffering of others -- particularly the dead. He considers that our ability to respond and give meaning to this suffering is so radically important that it is not so much a reflection of the different socio-cultural aspects of human life as it is the measure of our humanity. Without a proper response to the sufferings of the dead and forgotten victims of history Metz maintains that Christian praxis and discipleship are reduced to an alliance of equal self-

[144]ibid., 119

interested partners. When this happens, our ability to become 'subjects before God in history' is at risk. In turn, this seriously diminishes the concrete ad historical possibilities of God's promise of liberation and redemption. In short, the reality of salvation is endangered.

Metz' concern to make God's promise of redemption historically present and available to humanity means that his understanding of solidarity contains a very political element. However, even with this undeniably political-historical emphasis, Metz does not really explore many of the contemporary implications of solidarity for Christian community at the political-historical level.

While solidarity and community are irreducibly connected, they are not identical. Accordingly, the particular historical community within which solidarity is engaged becomes a prime consideration of authentically self-critical solidarity. Furthermore, an awareness of the structures and interest factors that mark the relationships between the group with whom solidarity is being practised and the larger community is important. There is here the possibility of simplifying the very complex inter-structural network of relations of domination and oppression. When this occurs, solidarity is reduced to a superficial level thereby restricting its ability to engage in concrete transformation. Without a specific engagement with the social and political implications of the operational structure and guiding visions of particular communities, the category of solidarity actually begins to lose its historical ground and runs the risk of being co-opted by an a-historical 'teleos' or a non-critical ideology.

In contrast, Schüssler Fiorenza uses the tensive space created by the *ekklēsia* of women and the *basileia* of G*d to concretely ground her focus on solidarity. She considers that without a radical commitment to the *ekklēsia* of women, Western Christian theology will not be able to effectively nourish and sustain authentic solidarity. This *ekklēsia* is a community of 'radical democratic religious vision' consciously constructed around the concept of the discipleship of equals.[145] Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza's understanding of Christian solidarity is both grounded in and reflective of democratic, dialogical

[145]ibid.

communities. She maintains that these communities must strive to operate as an assembly of full and equal citizens. This means that they gather together in order to engage in the practice of a radical democratic religious vision.[146] To be authentically democratic and egalitarian, she maintains that these communities must be committed to 'the formation of a critical consciousness' and the development of 'radically democratic discourses.'[147] If these Christian communities wish to be places of inclusivity and full participation then, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, they must continually explore and critically examine the conditions and attitudes that order and structure their reality. Expressed differently, Christian communities must be *basileia* communities inspired by the biblical vision 'of G*d's alternative society and world that is free of domination and does not exclude anyone.'[148]

Schüssler Fiorenza maintains her own status as a 'resident alien' has enabled her to deal with identity and belonging through difference.[149] She considers that the experience of being a resident alien -- to never fully belong or be unable to fully identify with a particular community -- acts to sharpen an awareness of questions of identity and potential. This can serve to make people more critically aware of presence and absence, acceptance and rejection. Due to the monological culture of traditional theological enquiry, the very *difference* of the theological concerns and the academic approach of feminist theologians automatically pushed these scholars to the margins of their religious and academic communities. In being deprived of the support of and solidarity with

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[146]ibid., 112. Schüssler Fiorenza's ongoing insistence on equality is a radical equality of belonging and is always situated within the diversity of human persons and communities.

[147]ibid., 42

[148]ibid., 115.

[149] Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Theorising the *Ekklēsia* of Women', in *Discipleship of Equals,* 335. 'Although I write from within the US feminist movements of theology and Church, I do so from the socio-political location of a *resident alien.* The classification resident alien positions one as an insider/outsider in a double fashion. In the United States I am an "insider" by virtue of my years of residence and professional position, and at the same time I am an "outsider" in terms of language, experience and history. When visiting Germany I am an "insider" in terms of citizenship, culture and language, but an "outsider" in terms of professional status and reputation as an "American" feminist theologian.'

traditional academic and religious institutions, early feminist theologians were unavoidably thrust into self-critical engagement with the attitudes of the community that defined their religious and academic reality. Even though Schüssler Fiorenza did not share the same experiences as these early feminist theologians, these women were important for two reasons: they claimed the right to 'do theology as their birthright'; and they set about to change the conditions that produced such 'negative experiences of feminine socialization and role determination.'[150]

A major contribution of a feminist perspective to traditional theological interpretations is the notion of communities living and working with difference. In many ways, the *problem* of traditional theologies is the *heart* of feminist theologies: the commitment to work authentically and creatively with difference. Even though Schüssler Fiorenza does claim a primacy of focus on women, she does not universalise women as subjects or reduce them to a category of sameness. Rather, the focus on the restoration of women to their full dignity and citizenship within the Christian tradition stands as witness to the presence of the *ekklēsia* of women and the in-breaking of the *basileia* of G*d.

As a Christian theologian, Schüssler Fiorenza takes the eschatological dimension of redemption evidenced by the real presence of sin as a serious reality of our historical lives. So, while she does stand within the critical Post-Marxist tradition, she does not claim that the emancipation of her particular group is *ipso facto* the emancipation of humanity from sin. Rather, she claims that there is a constant need to commit and recommit to the struggle to bring the alternative vision of God's justice, freedom and well-being into the reality of our religious communities. Unless the stories and memories of the most marginalised, insignificant and faceless victims of Christian history are acknowledged, Schüssler Fiorenza considers that the Christian tradition fails in its prophetic task of mediating God's promise of freedom, justice and well-being. As a critical feminist theologian of liberation, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains: humanity will not be free, justice will not be done; and so the 'church' will not be whole until 'the poorest most despised women on earth are free.'

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[150]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 6-7

Through the above exploration of – and comparison between – many of the key elements of political and feminist theologies this thesis has revealed that to engage the categories of Western theology from a feminist perspective *extends* the transformative potential of these categories. While political theologies took the necessary first step to open up the traditional Western theological forum to the critical engagement of its own historical and social context the 'political' critique is now insufficiently radical. The 'feminist' critique, which owes much to this first political step, has managed to take this critical engagement between Christian faith and Western society further. In their claiming of women's memories and stories, their naming of women's exclusion and victimisation and their refiguring of ecclesial communities Western feminist theologies offer a more radical foundation from which to build new and inclusive *basileia* relationships. Accordingly, it is possible to claim that feminist theologies offer the Western Christianity new insight into its tradition and in so doing, provides the opportunity to access a new and transformed future.

The thesis will now conclude with a critical-rhetorical reading of the main concerns of theology of Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza. It briefly re-engages the contributions made by both Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza to the categories of memory, narrative and solidarity and acknowledges two broader critiques of Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist theology that have emerged from this engagement.

CHAPTER SIX

The Rhetoric of TRANSFORMATION

This thesis has examined the theological potential of the categories of *memory, narrative*, and *solidarity* by critically engaging them with a feminist reading of the broader categories of *history*, *language* and *community*. The original categories of memory, narrative and solidarity were explored through the political theology of Johannes Baptist Metz and then expanded by way of a feminist reading of the concepts of history, language, and community. These two triads were examined in light of the feminist hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In exploring the relationship between *memory* and *history, narrative* and *language,* and *solidarity* and *community* from within the feminist hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza it has become clear that her theological methodology extends the horizons within which the original categories of memory, narrative and solidarity are interpreted. In so doing, she further develops the transformative theological potential of these categories.

Chapter Six offers a brief overview of the particular contribution Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist scholarship has made to the transformative potential of the categories memory, narrative and solidarity. A critical-rhetorical reading of key motifs in the theology of Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza concludes this thesis and offers some ideas for further exploration and extension.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza situates herself as a catholic woman within the broader biblical tradition of Western Christianity. She acknowledges that her critical feminist theology of liberation is 'indebted to historical-critical, critical-political and liberation-theological analyses.'[1] Schüssler Fiorenza has a foundational concern to legitimise a democratic, egalitarian space where the

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[1]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'For Women in Men's World: A Critical Feminist Theology of Liberation' in *The Power of Naming*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, '6.

historical experience and religious agency of women can be affirmed.[2] She creates this space through the systematic analysis and radical critique of the socio-economic and political-religious structures that silence, oppress and disenfranchise women and other nonpersons. Only then can the attitudes and ideologies that support these structures be effectively transformed.

Consequently, Schüssler Fiorenza is committed to a radical engagement between the social-political-historical context of contemporary human life and the biblical promise of freedom, justice and well-being for all.[3] Her key symbols of the *ekklēsia* of wo/men and the *basileia* of G*d serve to break open the complex *kyriarchal* relationships of authority and power that underpin Western history and tradition. This gives contemporary Western women the chance to be recognised as historical agents in the formation, transmission and transformation of their own religious tradition. Since Western Christianity has been so 'implicated in the continuing exploitation of wo/men' feminist studies must continually challenge its 'willingness to participate in social movements for change.'[4] Consequently, the focus and the task of critical feminist theologies is inescapably public-political.

Schüssler Fiorenza locates the foundational commitment of critical feminist theologies in the experience of women as they struggle for freedom, justice and well-being. This particular focus seeks to engage women wherever they are found. While all women face similar barriers and constraints, Schüssler Fiorenza acknowledges that they experience and process these in light of their own placement within the overall structures of domination.

> Wo/men live in structures that are not simply pluralistic but are traversed by the pervasive axis of inequality along the lines of class, gender, race ethnicity, and age. By insisting in their own discourses on the *theoretical* visibility and difference feminist theory and theology can make it clear that "wo/men" do not have a unitary nature and essence but represent a historical multiplicity, not only as a group but also as individuals.[5]

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[2]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 73.

[3]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Introduction' in *The Power of Naming*, xxx.

[4]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 23.

[5]Ibid., 47.

Consequently, feminist studies must keep their own methodological focus self-conscious and self-critical. Within the broad sweep of the 'multiplicative structures' of the history and tradition of Western Christianity critical feminist theologies engage and support the struggle of women to transform those structures.[6] By asking their questions and shaping their intellectual frameworks within the ongoing historical conditions of women's struggles for survival and liberation feminist studies are better able to participate in the production of radical, democratic, emancipatory ways of knowing.[7] In turn they will be better equipped to rewrite religious scholarship in such a way that they change the discipline rather than become disciplined by it. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that it is not enough to integrate women into the existing framework of academy and church: nothing short of the transformation of all academic disciplines and religious practices is necessary.[8]

One way of facilitating change -- and Schüssler Fiorenza insists feminist theologies are about change -- is to break open the interpretative categories within which human reality is understood. This thesis engaged Metz's understanding of memory, narrative, and solidarity with a critical feminist reading of history, language, and community and read them through the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Through this engagement it is clear that Schüssler Fiorenza's feminist theological hermeneutics has extended their transformative potential. In grounding these categories in her critical feminist analysis, Schüssler Fiorenza has made these categories more responsive to the historical, concrete experience of the alienation of women and other non-persons. In so doing, she has transformed these triads into interpretative relationships of critical tension and mutual illumination.

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[6]ibid., 70. 'A truly feminist biblical interpretation must explore methodologically and hermeneutically how the biblical texts . . . inculcate kyriarchal . . . world views and how they, as gender constructions, mirror and/or mystify kyriarchal relations. . . . One must not overlook that one's own powers of imagination . . . are also kyriarchally damaged.'

[7]ibid., 33-38.

[8]ibid., 48.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's Contribution to the Transformative potential of Memory, Narrative and Solidarity

For Metz, the entry point into the redemptive promise of God, the manifestation of our Christian responsibility, and even the measure of our humanity rests on our ability to remember the suffering of those who have been forgotten and marginalised. Schüssler Fiorenza agrees that this remembrance is a necessary starting point. Without a commitment to the memory of suffering there is no remorse, no guilt and no conversion. And, if there is no conversion then there is no redemption.[9] However, while this is where we must start, Schüssler Fiorenza claims this is not enough to be truly liberative for all Christians -- particularly women.

Schüssler Fiorenza is more specific and more concrete. She is critically aware of the need for contemporary women to be re-membered within their religious history and so re-store their religious agency. However, as well as naming the forces that exclude and marginalise women, she claims we must also name their historical agency. Only in this way can we recover the active participation of women as they struggled for transformation and change. When the historical agency of women is re-claimed, women are rightfully seen not as passive victims but as pro-active and transformative historical subjects.

Metz also calls attention to how the social and ecclesial structures of Christianity have been implicated in this forgetfulness of suffering. However, Metz does not acknowledge the extent to which Christian history and tradition participate in this oppression and marginalisation. Hence the private Western 'bourgeois' citizen remains his prime focus of critique. Resistance to nationalism, racism, and classism -- but not sexism -- are his examples of the movement towards liberative Christian discipleship.[10]

However, Schüssler Fiorenza takes the kyriarchal structures of our history as her starting point to examine how these support a myriad of

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[9]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 63.

[10]Metz, 'Messianic or 'Bourgeois' Religion?' in *Faith and the Future,* 21-29.

oppressive attitudes and situations -- not the least of which is sexism. Thus, a critical feminist theology names women as its prime focus of examination and refuses to be diverted from this task until the poorest most dehumanised women on earth are free.[11] This is because history shows that, in the Western tradition, it is the women who are the most dominated, exploited and marginalised.

Focus on the transformative role played by women -- and other victims of Christian history -- gives their historical agency more force and prevents the abstraction of their suffering from its historical context. In turn, this stops both the victims and their memory from becoming a reified or generalised category.[12] This effort to concretise and ground the victims in their historical context enables Schüssler Fiorenza's work to hold more promise for the real liberation of women and, consequently, for the emancipation of society in general.

To be truly transformative, Schüssler Fiorenza considers the category of memory must engage not only the suffering of the forgotten and marginalised. It must also acknowledge their concrete agency and history of resistance. She claims that a majority of these victims can -- and indeed should -- be named. Through her systematic critique of the complex kyriarchal structures of traditional Christian history Schüssler Fiorenza uncovers a woman at the bottom of the whole human pyramid. This is the woman she refers to as 'the poorest, most despised woman on earth.' It is to this woman that the redemptive narratives of God's freedom justice and well-being must be consciously addressed. This woman is Schüssler Fiorenza's key-symbol of concrete human suffering.

If narrative is primarily concerned with the 'telling of stories that aspire to truth,'[13] a commitment to the narrative structure of Christian theology would surely foster the liberative impulse of Christianity. However, Schüssler Fiorenza claims that the stories of our tradition do not always 'tell the truth.' Rather they

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[11]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 7.

[12]Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion,* 165.

[13]MacIntyre, 'Virtues, Unity of a Human Life, Tradition' in *Why Narrative*? 101.

have also marginalised the religious experience and silenced the voices of women and other non-persons. When Christian history fails to make present the particular stories of suffering and oppression, then the prophetic notion of the cries of victims being 'the voice of God'[14] is surely in jeopardy. To effectively engage stories that aspire to truth Schüssler Fiorenza considers it is essential to critically assess the language that shapes and directs these stories.

Language provides access to a community's socio-symbolic order. It directs and informs how we relate to our communities as well as ways in which the community relates to us. Because sacred stories *define* the socio-symbolic boundaries of a community they serve to *intensify* the belonging or non-belonging within that community.[15] Schüssler Fiorenza considers that without a critical acknowledgment of the power of language to both negate and affirm belonging legitimate diversity is difficult. To ignore this power is to allow the legitimate difference of our historical reality to be ignored or even erased. In turn, only the dominant voices participate in the telling of our sacred stories. When differences are suppressed there is no place to legitimately ground a contemporary counter-cultural reading of our dominant stories; nor is there a place from which to build new ones.[16] Thus, whole groups of people continue to be silenced and marginalised.

This impacts on both the broader tradition and the more specific groups who are excluded. Schüssler Fiorenza claims that both our endangered stories and our dangerous stories must be remembered since they are both necessary for the transformation of the Christian tradition.[17] This makes the issue of androcentric language and patriarchal structures not just the exclusive concern of women, but the concern of the whole worshipping community. As the basic foundations of stories that aspire to the truth of human life language is a

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[14]Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims,* 1

[15]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The Silenced Majority Moves into Speech' in *Discipleship of Equals*, 262-263.

[16]Chopp, *The Power to Speak,* 12

[17]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 4-6.

communal as well as a personal activity.

So although Metz is concerned with uncovering the stories of suffering and victimisation he really does not adequately acknowledge the need to pay attention to the stories of women. He does not recognise the androcentric language nor does he name the patriarchal structure of our sacred stories as being compliciteous in the neglect and silencing of women. This means the theological narrative of Metz is unable to respond adequately to the relationship of knowledge and power as it is articulated along the most basic lines of gender. And even if the neglect and marginalisation of women were acknowledged, by failing to redress the silence with positive stories of women's agency and hope Metz misses the chance to re-build and re-configure new transformed relationships. A critical historical theology that is able to respond in solidarity to the contemporary experience of suffering cannot leave victims un-named and therefore unacknowledged for this means they are still unheard and therefore powerless.

As the locus of identity and belonging solidarity provides the space for a self-critical engagement between faith and praxis. As praxis forms the method and the goal of feminist and political theologies solidarity forms the basis and the source of this praxis.[18] Marked as it is by radically relational structures and attitudes solidarity is a primary category for authentic Christian faith understood as transformative action. Accordingly both Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza show a deep and critical concern in regards to the place and the importance of solidarity as a category that gives rise to transformative Christian praxis.[19]

For Metz, this concern is linked to the need for a critical engagement with the suffering of others -- particularly the dead. For without a proper response to the suffering of the victims and those who have died our ability to become 'subjects before God in history' is at risk and Christian praxis is reduced to an alliance between equal partners.[20] This seriously diminishes the

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[18]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity,' 3.

[19]Metz, *Faith in History and Society,* 230.

[20]ibid., 229-230.

possibilities of God's promise of liberation and redemption being made concretely and historically available and so puts the reality of our salvation at risk.

The concern to make God's promise of redemption historically present and available to humanity does give Metz's understanding of solidarity a very political element. However, even this political-historical emphasis carries a certain abstract quality because Metz does not really engage with the implications this has for Christian community at the political-historical level. An awareness of the structures and interest factors that mark the relationship between groups in particular historical communities must be a major consideration of authentically self-critical solidarity. Furthermore, without a specific engagement with the social and political implications of the androcentric structures and patriarchal vision of particular communities the category of solidarity actually begins to lose its historical ground and runs the risk of being co-opted by an a-historical telos or a non-critical ideology.

To avoid this danger, Schüssler Fiorenza grounds her commitment to solidarity in the tensive space created by the *ekklēsia* of wo/men and the *basileia* of God.[21] As a community of radical democratic religious vision the *ekklēsia* makes it possible for a radically inclusive alternative vision -- the *basileia* -- to emerge. If Christian communities wish to nourish authentic solidarity then they must critically explore and analyse the conditions and attitudes that order and structure their reality. This entails a commitment to the formation of a critical consciousness and the development of radically democratic discourses that will engage the foundational historical structures and visions that direct and support our communities. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that only in this way can authentic and therefore liberative solidarity emerge.[22]

In many ways, the *problem* in many traditional theological perspectives becomes a radical *foundation* of feminist theologies: the commitment to work creatively with difference. So while Schüssler Fiorenza claims women as her prime focus she does not universalise women as subjects or reduce them to a

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[21]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 89.

[22]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 112.

category of sameness. Rather the focus on the restoration of women to their full dignity and citizenship within the Christian tradition stands as witness to the presence of the *ekklēsia* of women and the in breaking of the *basileia* of God.

There is a constant need to commit and recommit to the struggle to make the alternative *basileia* vision -- the biblical promise of freedom, justice and well-being -- a reality within our religious communities. Without this commitment authentic solidarity cannot happen and the potential for transformation is limited. Until the stories of the most marginalised, insignificant and faceless women-victims of history are acknowledged Schüssler Fiorenza claims that the Christian tradition fails in its prophetic task of mediating the *basileia* of God.

It is clear that the theological hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza owes much to the critical steps taken by the political theology of J. B. Metz. However, it is also clear that the feminist theological hermeneutics of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza takes the critical impulse of Metz into a more radical -- and more satisfactory -- engagement with the concrete historical reality of the history and tradition of Western Christianity.

Schüssler Fiorenza is committed to a serious critical dialogue between her own religious tradition and the unquestionable pluralistic reality of our contemporary historical situation. Part of this commitment is revealed through her foundational concern to generate a democratic egalitarian space where the voices of women's historical experience and religious agency can be clearly heard.[23] Schüssler Fiorenza creates this space through the systematic analysis and radical critique of the different socio-economic and political-religious structures that would silence, oppress and disenfranchise women and other nonpersons. This critique is aimed at unmasking the attitudes and ideologies that support these structures not so much to understand them but to fundamentally transform them.

In the creation and the legitimation of a critical, democratic, egalitarian feminist space Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza offers women a place from which to affirm their religious experience and acknowledge their historical agency. In

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[23]ibid., 73.

so doing, women -- and other disenfranchised non-persons -- are able to re-engage their religious history and so transform their belonging to their religious tradition. Schüssler Fiorenza is also very aware of the 'historical situatedness' of people. This awareness of one's own social location is the only place we have from which we can view the world.[24] What we see does depend very much on where we stand.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the critique of different historically situated positions must, themselves, remain open to further critique. So while the vision of the *ekklēsia* obviously resonate with many Western feminists others do not find it as liberating or helpful. When it comes to the so called third world women and those at the very bottom of the kyriarchal structures of Western Christianity it is possible that the commitment to a radically democratic and egalitarian women's space can be problematic.[25]

In her article 'Not Yet Tiddas: An Aboriginal Woman's Critique of Australian Church Feminism' Anne Pattel Gray points out it is a mistake to assume 'that Black and White women's epistemologies are the same.'[26] As an Aboriginal Australian feminist Pattel-Gray goes on to claim that to assume a common epistemology is another form of colonial oppression since it serves to 'deny our identity -- our very being.'[27] Part of this difference in epistemology includes a radically different understanding of both the 'nature' and the 'role' of women and men. The *ekklēsia* is supported by a basically non-essentialist understanding of gender -- which includes a critique of the notion of gender

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[24]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 103.

[25]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 81. I note here, that Schüssler Fiorenza refutes Mary Fulkerson's objection to a critical feminist approach by exploring Paola Freire excellent work on the internalisation of oppression. However, when dealing with the critique of gender relations in different cultures, it is necessary for Western women to exercise some sensitivity. Many non-Western women repudiate, as patronising, the notion that *because* they engage gender relationships Western women critique and reject they are necessarily 'internalising their own oppression.'

[26]Pattel-Gray, 'Not Yet Tiddas: An Aboriginal Woman's Critique of Australian Church Feminism,'168.

[27]ibid.

complementarity[28] -- and carries a critique of deeply imbedded socially constructed gender roles. How welcome therefore, is the struggle and the presence of those who would support rather than critique the notions of essentialism and socially defined gender constructions? Pattel-Gray considers that:

> It is important to note that at some point White women just might be able to learn from Aboriginal women that they have never taken away from their men the role which they play within the community. We have managed to complement each other's strengths and weakness because the concern is for the survival for the whole community and not just the individual. Aboriginal culture could not have survived without the interrelated workings of the men's and women's roles that are clearly defined within an Aboriginal community.'[29]

Pattel-Gray reminds Australian feminism that, because 'our origins are different and our histories incomparable,' Black Australian women take a different focus and commitment. Black women may choose to critique what White feminists support;[30] and, conversely, they may choose to support what White feminists critique.[31] Diversity, then, remains problematic. After struggling for years to move women's concerns from the margins to the centre of the general discourse of Western society White feminist must now ask themselves how willing they are to move back into the margins for women of colour.[32]

Another question that would benefit from exploration is Schüssler Fiorenza's treatment of Trinitarian relationships. Schüssler Fiorenza rightly points out that feminist theologies must critically engage and systematically critique the dominant Christology of traditional Western Christianity. No one

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[28]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 164-167.

[29]Pattel-Gray, 'Not Yet Tiddas: An Aboriginal Woman's Critique of Australian Church Feminism.' 180-181.

[30]ibid., 187.

[31]ibid., 181.

[32]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet,* 10. 'If feminist theologies relinquish the claim that their critiques and insights have universal validity, they are in danger of feeding into postcolonial attempts of crisis management. . . . [If they] relinquish claims that their insight are valid for everyone unwittingly foster such a regionalisation and privatisation of emancipatory political struggles.'

would deny that the traditional, male focused Christology is one of the most effective tools used in the kyriarchal oppression of non-persons -- particularly women. In effect, traditional Western theology has made its Christology inaccessible to the majority of its members. As such it has failed to provide our tradition with an authentic expression of Trinitarian relationships.[33]

However, the tension in the relationship between the person of Jesus from first century Palestine and the Christ proclaimed by the early communities and found in the gospels is multifaceted and complex. This tension is still being explored in many ways by many different feminist theologians. At times the relationship in Schüssler Fiorenza's thought between the Christ as the Sophia-ology of God and Sophia Spirit as the Divine wisdom of God does not sufficiently acknowledge the identity and difference of the second and third persons of the Trinity. This can leave the Trinity with little in the way of incarnational focus -- particularly in its complex historical connection to Jesus of Nazareth. Consequently, the focus given to Mary by women in the so called third world and Latin American countries is perhaps a timely reminder that an accessible incarnation is an irreducible aspect of the Christian tradition. This is possibly what lies behind the movement to 'deify' Mary and retrieve an incarnational focus to the godhead that is sorely missing in traditional Western theology. The temptation to blur the diversity of the Trinity or collapse Christology into a highly charged feminist pneumatology is highly problematic.

Notwithstanding these questions, it is clear that the thought of Schüssler Fiorenza offers the Christian tradition a new critical, practical, contemporary theology. Schüssler Fiorenza's critical engagement with the transformative potential of the categories of Western theology -- particularly with history and memory, language and narrative, and solidarity and community -- and the critical insights that emerge from this have enabled Western women to forge new relationships between their historical reality and their religious traditions. Schüssler Fiorenza's theological hermeneutic is further strengthened by her use of rhetoric. Hayden White identifies the four major tropes that characterise the

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[33]ibid., 8-10.

rhetoric of dialogue: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony.[34] This next section explores the way the prime concerns of Metz and Schüssler Fiorenza can be read though the major tropes of a critical-rhetorical lens. This provides the ground to assess how the theological method of Schüssler Fiorenza does indeed broaden the transformative potential of the categories memory, narrative and solidarity and so contribute to the wider Western theological project.

A Critical-Rhetorical Reading between Johannes Baptist Metz and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

In her essay 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity,' M. Shawn Copeland challenges contemporary feminist theologies to develop a 'real concrete relationship between rhetoric and praxis.'[35] Given that Western feminist theologies place much emphasis on the ability to engage difference -- in particular the differences in relations among women and those who oppress women[36] -- it would appear that this challenge is a timely one. The exploration of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony within the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza offers a useful framework within which to assess the critical-rhetorical strength of her theological hermeneutics.

The contemporary post-enlightenment imagination understands truth as being prior to or independent of language. This has lead to rhetoric being defined in purely technical terms. For many, rhetoric means a technique of debate or argumentation that, ultimately, 'one must reject in favour of unrestrained, rational dialogue.'[37] Gadamer considers that this understanding has stripped rhetoric of its aesthetic connections and reduced it to the activity of describing the process of persuasion through language. This understanding

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[34]Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse,* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 1-5.

[35]Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity', 9.

[36]ibid.

[37]Gadamer, *Truth and Reason*, 568.

assumes that while rhetoric engages in an interesting, colourful, possibly exaggerated oration it does not concern itself with reasonable evaluation. However, this does not do justice to the literary potential of rhetoric because it does nothing to acknowledge the usefulness of rhetoric as a 'central subject of intellectual enquiry.'[38] In his article 'Religious Rhetoric and the Language of Theological Foundations,' Stephen Happel maintains that a renewed understanding of

> rhetoric will redescribe the interaction of speaker and audience as mutual. . . . It will note the transformative character of language for the establishment of the grounds, values, and bases of community. . . . It will recognise the intrinsic relationship between truth-claims and metaphors, between the authenticity of the speaker and the values preached. It will offer a critique of the biases of speaker and audience so that transforming social praxis might be appropriated.'[39]

Authentic rhetoric is not a technical communicative device but a linguistic-symbolic activity. Rhetoric engages texts, conversations, dialogues and discourses in order to explore their presentation as well as to assess the truth-claims of the message itself.[40] This means that rhetoric is fundamentally a hermeneutical task because it is essentially concerned with the understanding and interpretation of truth. Rhetoric possesses what Gadamer refers to as a positive ambiguity: it is not just concerned with the art of 'saying something well'; it is also interested in saying something true.[41] Klemm categorise the movement of the four master tropes of rhetorical dialogue as follows:

> The pattern moves from an initial (metaphorical) perspective on reality, through a reductive(metonymic) analysis of the situation, to a (synecdochic) reconstitution of the elements into a new figure, and

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[38]Gerard Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism,* (Ph.D Thesis, Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1994), 300.

[39]Stephen Happel, 'Religious Rhetoric and the Language of Theological Foundations' in *Religion and Culture: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lonergan*, (eds T. Fallan & P. Riley, Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 195.

[40]Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism,* 301. 'As a "discourse on the margins of truth" rhetoric is concerned with the "space of mutuality" in which the subject-matter is brought to language.'

[41]Gadamer, *Truth and Reason*, 19-20.

finally to a reflexive or dialectical (ironic) comprehension of it.[42]

Most scholars agree that rhetorical dialogue follows this pattern.[43] However, Klemm maintains that the prime metaphor within which Western Christianity understands and interprets theology has shifted. Rather than being concerned with 'historical crisis' Klemm considers that Postmodern Western theology now operates out of an 'openness to the other.' [44] He claims that this change is not merely a shift of style. Rather, it reflects the contemporary hermeneutical consciousness or 'reflexive play of understanding' -- an understanding that engages temporality, historical situatedness and the inevitability of encounter with otherness.[45] Within this Postmodern engagement of otherness Klemm further identifies three typical responses: the confessional type, the deconstructive type and the hermeneutical type.[46] In light of the categorisation Klemm offers concerning the rhetoric of discourse -- and keeping in mind that categorisation conceals as much as it reveals -- it is clear that the theological rhetoric of the work of Metz primarily responds to the metaphor of crisis.[47] In contrast, the rhetoric in the theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza follows a Postmodern hermeneutical response that engages the metaphor of otherness.[48]

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[42]Klemm, 'Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* (55:3 1987), 446-447.

[43]ibid.

[44]ibid., 445.

[45]ibid., 455. 'First, historical consciousness, which initially gave rise to the crisis metaphor, has deepened its reflexive posture, and this, in turn, has unravelled that metaphor. Second, the same reflexive posture that dismantled the crisis metaphor brings otherness out of concealment.'

[46]ibid., 457. Klemm discusses these three types in depth from 457-465.

[47]Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 32-46. Being a political -- post-idealist -- theologian, Metz has made the anthropological turn and is hermeneutically aware of the dangers of a monocultural, hegemonic, Eurocentric theology. However, while Metz does engage 'otherness' crisis is still a prime and recurrent metaphor in his theology.

[48]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 13-21. Here, Schüssler Fiorenza discusses the recent critique of The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) that she is anti-Postmodern in her

The first trope of rhetorical discourse is that of metaphor. Metaphor refers to the process of 'speaking about one thing in terms suggestive of another.'[49] It serves to engage the meaning of discourse in the tension of the mutual space between the speaker and the audience. Accordingly, metaphor provides the prime symbol through which the dialogue of rhetoric is engaged and interpreted. This first movement towards understanding is experienced as a tensive and symbolic moment that is underpinned by either: crisis -- as in the case of Metz; or otherness -- which is found in the work of Schüssler Fiorenza.

Metz does his theology with an acute awareness of the crisis of modernity: a crisis of tradition, a crisis of authority, a crisis of reason and, ultimately, a crisis of religion.[50] He claims that our prime theological task is the struggle to become subjects before God in history. Metz plays out the tension of this crisis of identity through the privatisation of religion. He claims that the privatisation of religion has encouraged an apathy and a forgetfulness -- particularly of suffering. In so doing Western Christianity has effectively turned its back on those who have suffered and died; those who history would forget. In the commitment to Christian discipleship Metz reminds Western Christianity that its most appropriate 'universal interest, is [the] hunger and thirst for justice . . . for the living and the dead'[51] -- the remembrance of which is historically preserved in the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi.*

While Schüssler Fiorenza is also concerned with the history of human suffering her theology is done in response to 'otherness' so her prime metaphor focuses not so much on the crisis of identity, but on the struggles for identity through diversity. Like Metz, Schüssler Fiorenza critiques any attempt to present a grand narrative and she acknowledges that in the effort to collapse otherness

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methodology. While Schüssler Fiorenza is not a *deconstructive* Postmodern thinker it seems clear that her focus on diversity and concentration on otherness marks her work as being *hermeneutically* responsive to the prime Postmodern metaphor of the other. It is problematic to reduce the whole post modern project to any one particular response, be it the deconstructive, the confessional or the hermeneutical response.

[49]Klemm, 'Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology', 447.

[50]Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 32-48.

[51]Metz, 'Theology in the Struggle' *Faith and the Future,* 52.

into a universal theory the truth is often at risk of being lost.[52] However, while Metz critiques grand narratives because they evoke a crisis of human identity and threaten humanity as subjects, Schüssler Fiorenza seeks to decentre the hegemonic structures because they silence the legitimate claim or voice of the other -- particularly women. Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza directs her critical theological gaze towards the complex relational structures of power and domination that support and organise Western Christianity. She maintains that these relationships are kyriarchal: they maintain structures and attitudes that mark difference as inferior in order to marginalise otherness. Schüssler Fiorenza claims that only when the otherness of those who have been relegated to the bottom of this kyriarchal structure is positively affirmed can the truth of Christianity be made concretely present.[53] In other words, the truth of otherness can only be found and retained through its diversity.

The second movement in rhetorical dialogue is that of metonymy. Basically, metonymy takes the leading metaphor of the dialogue and disperses it back into its linked elements. It 'places some intangible state of being in tangible terms and therefore traces the abstract back into real life.'[54] Through the elements of self, other, world and time metonymy seeks to historically situate either the crisis or the diversity of the dialogue. This serves to reduce the more complex original metaphor 'to the less complex realm of specific . . . manifestations of truth.'[55]

Even while Metz speaks of the critical need to develop 'an option for others in their otherness,'[56] it is the crisis of threatened identity that this otherness evokes that remains his dominant theological metaphor. The metonymic movement in Metz' theology can be seen reflected through his emphasis on the crisis of forgetfulness of suffering and of the countless acts of inhumanity that mark Christian history. Metz disperses this forgetfulness of

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[52]Klemm, 'Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology', 456.

[53]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 28-36.

[54]Klemm, 'Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology', 450.

[55]Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism,* 308.

[56]Metz, 'Theology in the Struggle' *Faith and the Future,* 50.

suffering through the specific symbol of Auschwitz. For Metz, Auschwitz becomes the prime symbol for the 'catastrophes' of Western history and the innocent suffering of victims. It is Auschwitz that moves us to ask the big human questions of justice, responsibility, freedom and guilt. He claims that 'if there is no God for us in Auschwitz, how can there be a God anywhere else?'[57] This means that our responsibility to God, our proper response to our faith, and therefore the measure of our humanity, is gauged by our ability to be responsive to -- and consequently remember -- this catastrophic suffering.

The metonymic movement in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza can be found in her insistence on further particularising the situations of oppression and marginalisation. Like Metz, Schüssler Fiorenza disperses her critique of the relationships of Western culture by way of a symbolic focus -- albeit a more abstract one. Schüssler Fiorenza adapts a phrase from the redstocking manifesto to name the most marginal of others -- the 'poorest most despised women on earth.'[58] Given that women are always the 'others' of Christian history, Schüssler Fiorenza claims that those who occupy the lowest position of Western Christianity's kyriarchal structures must be the poorest most despised women. She claims that if the Biblical promise of freedom, justice and well-being is to be made historically present it must first be made present in the lives of these women. This focus serves to remind us that it is not merely the presence of these women that is vital to the life of our tradition, it is the commitment to offer a space to listen to their experiences and so affirm their dignity. While this raises questions of the temporal and relative nature of historical relationships, this metonymic movement basically affirms the possibility of authentic dialogue between the self and other. It does this by actually locating the movement towards a deeper understanding of the self precisely in the engagement with the other.[59]

Synecdoche refers to the movement of re-integration. This integration is

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[57]ibid., 52.

[58]Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Patriarchal Structures and the discipleship of Equals' in *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Ekklēsia-ology of Liberation,* 231.

[59]Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism,* 308-309.

not a synthetic collapse of the dialectic tension. Rather it provides for a re-newed consciousness or re-configuration. After the dispersal of the metonymic movement, synecdoche gathers the diversity of the original metaphor into a new reality. In effect, synecdoche is the site of transformation. It opens the historical moment up to new possibilities and so works to convey a 'redemptive dimension of reality.'[60] Through the previous metonymic encounter this new reality has been marked by a radical shift in understanding.[61] Synecdoche serves to refigure reality so that it remains the same yet changed.

The transformative moment of synecdoche in Metz can be found in the dangerous memories of Christianity. In response to the crisis of forgetfulness the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi* serves to ground the redemptive promises of God. For Metz, there is 'no understanding of the joyousness of resurrection that is free of the shadows and threats of the human history of suffering.'[62] Metz considers that these memories shatter the apathy of forgetfulness and so nourish the imagination of the future. Consequently, the dangerous memories are both redemptive -- for they historically ground God's vindication of Jesus' life and death, and eschatological -- for they provide access to the future of Christianity.

The synecdoche moment within Schüssler Fiorenza theological hermeneutics is the *ekklēsia* of women. The *ekklēsia* is Schüssler Fiorenza's site of transformation structured around the notion of the democratic assembly/ congress of full citizens. Accordingly, it serves to create a 'theoretical space' that operates as a transforming or redemptive space.[63] Schüssler Fiorenza understands the *ekklēsia* as a commitment to a feminist reality, construct and vision that aims to make present a radical democracy. The *ekklēsia* is an eschatological symbol or an alternative vision of Christian community. Schüssler

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[60]Klemm, 'Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology,' 453.

[61]ibid., 312.

[62]Metz, 'Future in the Memory of Suffering' in *Faith and the Future*, 11.

[63]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 132. The continuation of the 'diverse struggles for the radical, democratic, equality, dignity and well-being of all in society and church' means that 'the *ekklēsia* of wo/men will become an ever increasing reality.'

Fiorenza considers it is more properly understood as 'the form of politics that brings people together as citizens' and is 'realised again and again' in the struggle to 'change relations of domination, exploitation and marginalisation.'[64] In the tradition and vision of feminist scholars like nineteenth century African-American suffragist Anna Julia Cooper, Schüssler Fiorenza claims women have the authority and the right to interpret experience, tradition and religion from their own perspective and in their own interests. Accordingly, she insists that the struggle for justice, equality, freedom and democracy cannot be realised if women's voices are silenced or ignored.[65]

Irony is the final trope of the dialogue of rhetoric. The presence of irony serves to prevent the integrative moment of synecdoche from being a return to the original position. This means that irony dialectically reaffirms the tensive experience of the prime metaphor in such a way that the tension that now becomes inherent in the symbol. This movement amounts to the ongoing re-symbolisation of reality itself.[66]

For Metz, the presence of the ironic element can be explored through his understanding of the justice that responds to suffering. Through the question of theodicy Metz strives to prevent the dialectical tension between actual suffering and our response to that suffering from being stripped of its eschatological power. This tension offers Christianity an 'eschatological reminder' that 'God-talk is either the talk of the vision and the promise of a great justice, which also touches on past suffering, or it is empty and without promise.'[67]

The ironic element in the rhetoric of Schüssler Fiorenza's theology can be seen operating within the *ekklēsia* of women. Here Schüssler Fiorenza creates a space in which the rhetoric and praxis of feminist goals and feminist commitments can come together and be concretely realised. Like Metz, Schüssler Fiorenza also uses the ironic elements in her theological method as

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[64]ibid., 112.

[65]ibid., 76-87.

[66]Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism*, 311.

[67]Metz, 'Suffering from God: Theology as Theodicy' in *Pacifica*, Vol.5. No.3 (1992), 275.

eschatological symbols. Accordingly, the *ekklēsia* challenges and evokes the critical feminist readings of scripture. Schüssler Fiorenza holds up the biblical vision of the *ekklēsia* as a critical reminder to keep focused on the struggles of those who strive for the emancipatory practices of radical democracy. The practical redemptive element of this symbol is reflected in the emancipatory movements -- including feminism -- that have emerged again and again because of the disparity between the radical democratic vision of the *ekklēsia* of women and its actual socio-political and cultural-religious realisations. Hence, in the words of Stephen Happel, Schüssler Fiorenza's use of this symbol can be seen to 'offer a critique of the biases of speaker and audience so that transforming social praxis might be appropriated.'[68] In this symbol, Schüssler Fiorenza comes as close as her open-ended contextualised methodology will perhaps allow to defining or outlining a utopia.

CONCLUSION

This brief critical-rhetorical comparison has provided a basic insight into the main metaphors behind many of the key elements in the work of Johannes Baptist Metz and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In so doing, it shows how the feminist theological methodology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza acts to extend the transformative potential of the categories of Western theology. Her methodology critically engages the dominant hegemonic attitudes and structures of the Western Christian tradition; attitudes that have encouraged the suppression and structures that have supported the domination of the 'other' -- particularly women.

Gerard Hall claims that the serious engagement in authentic theological rhetoric -- and the attempt to reconnect this with religious experience -- amounts to nothing less that 'a "paradigm shift" in the way theology is done. It provides strategies for a radically pluralistic theology.'[69] In other words, within a strong

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[68]Happel, 'Religious Rhetoric and the Language of Theological Foundations' in *Religion and Culture*, 195.

[69]Hall, *Raimon Panikkar's Hermeneutics of Religious Pluralism*, 302.

critical-rhetorical engagement contemporary Western theology is able to affirm the universal human experience of diversity in relationship with God the world and each other in a way that authentically engages the 'other' without collapsing difference into familiarity.[70] And one of the key insights that emerges from the feminist theological hermeneutic of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is the place and understanding given to difference.

Accordingly, Schüssler Fiorenza responds to Klemm's challenge of understanding 'what is questionable and what is genuine in self and other while remaining open to self and other and allowing the other to remain other.'[71] As Klemm has demonstrated 'despite our anxiety before a broken tradition, we continue to understand existence theologically.'[72] Accordingly, Klemm considers that contemporary Western theology is in need of a new rhetoric, not so much because it lacks a subject matter but because it needs 'new and persuasive ways of disclosing it.'[73] Klemm's basic conviction also lies at the heart of this thesis. While affirming the subject matter of Western theology, and acknowledging the debt of contemporary theologies to the philosophical and historical tradition of Western Christianity, this thesis claims that the feminist theological methodology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza offers 'new and persuasive ways of disclosing' this subject.

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[70]Marion Ronan, 'Reclaiming Women's Experience: A Reading of Selected Christian Feminist Theologies,' in *Cross Currents* Vol.48, No.2. (Summer 1998. 218-229), 227-229.

[71]Klemm, 'Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology', 456.

[72]ibid., 444.

[73]ibid.

APPENDIXES.
Text Box References.

Appendix A. . . . . 'But Wisdom Was Beyond My Grasp, Deep Down, Deeper Than One Can Fathom'
Wisdom Poems, Susan McCaslin
Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Vol.10 No.2. Fall 1994. p. 150.

Appendix B. . . . . **The Hollow Men**, T.S. Eliot
T. S. Eliot: Selected Poems. London: Faber & Faber 1990, 80.

Appendix C. . . . . **Memory**, Monique Wittig, *Les Guerilleres,* trans.David Levay, New York: Avon Books, 1971, 89.
Also quoted in Carol Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite,* San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987, 121.

Appendix D. . . . . 'You Will Have Plain Speach From Me'
Wisdom Poems, Susan McCaslin
Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Vol.10 No.2. Fall 1994. p. 148.

Appendix E. . . . . 'Two Dreamtimes'
Alive, Judith Wright
A Human Pattern: Selected Poems, Sydney:Angus & Robertson, 1990, p.166.

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