

THE CONCRETE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIANITY: RE-MEMBERING JESUS

Speaking and writing in the context of the CTSA meeting is both an unnerving and an exciting prospect for a feminist interpreter of Christian origins. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to hear and be heard about my own work on Jesus and the Gospels in the context of theological reflection on "Jesus, the Concrete Foundation of Christianity." This very brief essay will attempt to do three things: (1) to sketch out a proposal for rethinking the "historical Jesus" which I have made at greater length elsewhere;¹ (2) to suggest shifts in three emphases in recent interpretation of Jesus that operate widely in white feminist uses of Jesus in theology, and (3) to reexamine the question of "father" as a metaphor for God in the teaching of Jesus in light of the changed picture I am seeking to give. Entering this discussion requires me to position myself by situating my own contexts and questions.

PRELIMINARIES: LOCATING THE PROPOSAL

My reflection begins from two abiding concerns: one of these is concern for recognition of the full humanity of women and for the transformation of social and religious imagination in light of this recognition; the other is concern for interpretation of the Bible, and especially of Jesus, that acknowledges and does not perpetuate anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism.

This proposal was formulated in part as a response to the highly problematic question: "Can a male savior save women?" Asking this question has been of major importance in feminist christological inquiry.² But its value is propaedeutic: it cannot be answered, but only rethought, by Christian feminism. To answer it in the negative requires letting go of the Christian tradition; to answer in the

¹Much of what follows has been drawn from the essay recommended as reading for this session: "Re-membering Jesus: Women, Prophecy, and Resistance in the Memory of the Early Churches," *Horizons* 19 (Fall 1992) 199-218. I wrote this essay out of the experience of teaching summer school at Maryknoll School of Theology in 1989.

²The question was formulated by Rosemary Radford Ruether to articulate the acutely problematic character of Christology for women; see Ruether, "Christology and Feminism: Can a Male Savior Help Women?" *Occasional Papers* 1/13 (December 25, 1976) published by United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry (Nashville); see also her treatment of the question in *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983) 116-38.

affirmative violates the feminist perception that liberation begins with one's own experience.

At the same time, the proposal arises from my own training as a student of Christian origins, a training which is primarily in historical inquiry. It puts forward a picture of Jesus that is seriously imaginable to me as a historical scholar. Approaching the Jesus behind the Gospels requires an imaginative evocation of the context of Jesus. The process of producing such a picture is an act of historical imagination; it is always provisional, subject to revision as new questions and new resources emerge. I like to term this effort "re-membering." This word derives from a feminist context; it conveys together the ideas of bringing what has been hidden out of the shadows of history, of putting together what has been dismembered, and of making someone a member of oneself, of a community or of the tradition in a new way.³ This constellation of meanings is particularly appropriate not only as a description of what feminists must do to recover the history of women from the Gospels and the Christian tradition, but also as a description of any twentieth-century and scholarly approach to the Jesus behind the Gospels. All such investigation attempts both to distinguish the context of Jesus and that of the interpreter and to juxtapose them, to see a first-century Jesus from a twentieth-century vantage point.

"Re-membering" also characterizes the processes that produced the Gospels themselves. With the possible exception of Luke, the Gospel writers do not experience Jesus primarily as a figure in the past; rather they brought him back alive into their midst, re-membering him as the risen Lord living and acting in the communities for which they wrote. They related his deeds and recalled his words to explain and affirm, to change and direct the experience and practice of their own communities.⁴ This sense of the presence of Jesus also informed the traditions that lie behind the Gospels. The stories and sayings of Jesus were re-

³For one feminist definition, see Jane Caputi and Mary Daly, eds., *Websters' First Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (Boston: Beacon, 1987) 92; for examples of interpretation of the Bible as feminist re-membering, see Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* 13 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); note esp. Trible's explanation of her approach, p. 3; "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," *Bible Review* 5 (1989) 14-25, 34; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), note esp. xiii-xiv, 31-32. For an analysis of memory in women's experience and in Christian feminist and political theologies, see Flora Keshgegian, "To Know by Heart: Toward a Theology of Remembering for Salvation," unpublished doctoral dissertation (Boston College, 1992). On memory and Jewish feminist theology, see Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) 25-74.

⁴Nils Dahl, "Anamnesis: Memory and Commemoration in Early Christianity," in *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) 11-29, describes the function and the liturgical setting of memories of Jesus.

membered not primarily to record the past but to inform and direct the community's present; the miracles of Jesus spoke of the transformation of the believers' lives, the sayings spoke to the communities' needs. And Jesus continued to speak new words in these communities; the early Christian movement consisted of charismatic, Spirit-oriented communities, and the Lord who spoke in the early Christian prophets was the Lord Jesus. It cannot be shown with any certainty that these early communities distinguished between the words of the risen Jesus in the prophets and the words of Jesus before his death.⁵

The traumatic events of Jesus' death as Messiah and of the destruction of the temple radically transformed the memories of Jesus, and of the Judaism to which he belonged. Everything that is remembered of Jesus and his contemporaries in the canonical Gospels is re-membered not merely across these events but through them, in order to explain them. Traditions were either formulated or revised in light of the need to understand the death of Jesus, the title "Messiah" (the title under which Jesus appears to have been crucified) and the disaster of 70 as manifestations of divine will.⁶ These observations are intended to underline the problematic aspects of attempting to do what I shall attempt to do below: to look at the Jesus behind the Gospels, to attempt to imagine Jesus before his death and beneath the early communities' reflection on it and on his living word to them.⁷

A PROPOSAL:

JESUS AS A PROPHET WITHIN A PROPHETIC MOVEMENT

My proposal is that Jesus is best understood by combining two Christologies which are featured in Rosemary Radford Ruether's review of Christologies with potential for feminist use, and which play a significant role in the interpretation

⁵See on this Mary R. D'Angelo, "Remarriage and the Divorce Sayings Attributed to Jesus," in *Divorce and Remarriage: Religious and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. William P. Roberts (Kansas City MO: Sheed & Ward, 1990) 86-94; for an attempt to distinguish prophetic sayings, see Eugene M. Boring, *Sayings of the Risen Jesus: Christian Prophecy in the Synoptic Tradition*, SNTS Monograph Series 46 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁶On the death of Jesus and the title "Messiah," see Nils A. Dahl, *Jesus the Christ: The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine*, ed. Donald H. Juel (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 2-47, first published in *The Crucified Messiah and Other Essays* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974) 10-36.

⁷To some extent, Q and *Thomas* differ from the canonical Gospels in this regard. Explicit references to the fall of the temple and the death of Jesus are lacking in both, and neither uses the title "Messiah." But the death of Jesus and the conviction of his continuing life are the precondition of Q and *Thomas* alike, and it is possible to argue that the form of Q used by Matthew and Luke was also formed by the disaster of 70 or at least by its near approach; see Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) for one description of postwar concerns in Q; Mack believes that it is possible to retrieve earlier forms of Q; see below.

of Christian origins; they are the explanation of Jesus as a prophet, and Spirit Christology.⁸ The first of these is usually a way of understanding Jesus before his death. For some time most historical scholarship on Jesus has stressed the probability that Jesus was seen by his contemporaries and saw himself as a prophet. Christological uses of "prophet" tend to cast Jesus as a heroic and pioneering figure ahead of his time in his proclamation of justice for all, including for women.⁹ Usually a prophet Christology is or is taken to be a "low Christology."

Spirit Christology is a postresurrection Christology that understands Jesus as spirit who is continually present and accessible in the community. In this context, Jesus can be envisaged in either male or female terms. The Shakers and the New Prophecy (Montanists) offer the most conspicuous examples of this aspect of Spirit Christologies.¹⁰ Early Spirit Christologies are the product of prophecy in the early Christian communities; they envisage Jesus as the spirit who speaks in the prophets. This experience of Jesus actually precedes and underlies both the New Testament writings and the process by which they came to be. Spirit Christologies are usually some form of Wisdom Christology; they draw upon wisdom tradition and reflection. Like Wisdom Christologies, they generally belong to the category of "high" Christologies.

My proposal is that these two versions of Jesus are not and ought not to be discrete; that they should be combined, not treated as sequential, in attempts to understand Jesus before his death. That is, Jesus saw himself, and was seen by his contemporaries as a prophet. But his prophecy should not be explained in terms of the unique role of an "eschatological prophet," nor should it be explained as an anachronistic revival of the roles of the Hebrew prophets before the exile.¹¹ Rather, Jesus should be seen as a prophet within a Spirit-driven prophetic movement. His experience was similar to that of Jewish apocalypticists like the author(s) of *1 Enoch* on the one hand and the prophet Theudas on the other, and early Christian prophets like the John of Revelation, Hermas and Perpetua. In twentieth-century terms, Jesus was an apocalyptic revolutionary engaged in spiritual—literally spiritual, that is Spirit-inspired—resistance.

⁸Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*; see esp. 20-22 and 127-38. For a full analysis of Ruether's Christology, see Mary Hembrow Snyder, *The Christology of Rosemary Radford Ruether: A Critical Introduction* (Mystic CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988).

⁹Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 117-22.

¹⁰See Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 130-32; see esp. the saying attributed to Priscilla: "Appearing as a woman clothed in a shining robe, Christ came to me (in sleep); he put wisdom into me and revealed to me that this place is sacred and that here Jerusalem will come down from heaven" (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 49.1).

¹¹On Jesus as reviving outdated roles, see Helmut Koester, *The History and Literature of Early Christianity*, vol. 2 of *Introduction to the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 78.

In recent years, another major interpretation of Jesus has emerged, one in which Jesus is envisioned in the mode of a wisdom teacher, a peasant sage who operated in much the same way as cynic philosophers.¹² In at least one version of this interpretation, the wisdom which characterized Jesus and his earliest followers is nonapocalyptic, nonpolitical, tied to no particular ethnic loyalties and not involved with miracle or mystery.¹³ This picture proceeds from the redactional analysis of Q into three layers, and the description of the earliest layer (Q1) as "free" of apocalypticism.¹⁴ It is based on the conviction that wisdom of the proverbial type and apocalypticism are mutually exclusive world views.¹⁵

The vision of Jesus as apocalyptic prophet by no means excludes the vision of Jesus as a teacher of wisdom. But any Jesus recognizable to me is Jewish, political, and Spirit-driven. For recent scholarship on apocalypticism, "apocalyptic" does not refer only or even primarily to the expectation of the end of the world or the change of the ages, but rather to literature and movements characterized by a claim of unique and divinely revealed insight into the divine plan for the world, whether the structure of the cosmos or the plan of history with its end. Its cosmological presuppositions involve both a temporal axis (this age/age to come) and a spatial one (above/below).¹⁶ Wisdom forms like proverbs, beatitudes and parables abound in apocalyptic literature.¹⁷ From 300 BCE on, wisdom traditions

¹²See, e.g., John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990); Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, esp. 53-77, and *The Lost Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993); Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians*, Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 96-108.

¹³Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 65-77; *Lost Gospel*, 51-68.

¹⁴The basic analysis was done by John S. Kloppenborg in *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*. Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Mack's *Lost Gospel* incorporates more recent work by Kloppenborg and others in his own reconstruction of the stages of development of Q.

¹⁵See Mack, *Lost Gospel*, 31; Crossan also makes a strong distinction between apocalyptic kingdom and sapiential kingdom (*Historical Jesus*, 292) although he does see Jesus as an exorcist and healer and gives this activity a political anti-imperialist context (313-32).

¹⁶For research in this area, see John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Semeia 14 (1979); Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1987); Collins, "Early Jewish Apocalypticism," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 1:283-84.

¹⁷On the beatitudes, see D'Angelo, "Blessed the One Who Reads and They That Hear': The Beatitudes in Their Biblical Contexts," in *The Beatitudes: New Perspectives*, Proceedings of the Villanova Theology Institute, ed. F. A. Eigo (Villanova PA: Villanova University, forthcoming). On the collaboration of apocalyptic and sapiential elements in Q, see Helmut Koester, "Jesus the Victim," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992) 7; also D'Angelo, "The Beatitudes," in *A Dictionary of Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. Judith

and emerging apocalypticism share their contexts and respond to similar pressures.¹⁸

SHIFTING EMPHASES

Filling out this vision of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet within a prophetic movement involves shifts in the ways the context of Jesus' life is imagined, especially in three emphases that have become foci, almost slogans, in recent interpretation of Jesus, especially the white feminist interpretation which is my own context.

The first of these shifts is from depicting Jesus as opposed to and by "religious authorities of his day" to Jesus as opposed to and by the imperial Roman rule. This shift has been proposed before, most notably by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,¹⁹ but is rarely made in the context of interpreting the materials about Jesus. Even where the need to recognize the Roman interest is acknowledged, interpreters, including feminist interpreters, have difficulty focusing upon the Roman interest as a factor in Jesus' career, and tend to turn to the question of how Jesus was different from the oppressive scribes and Pharisees. The Gospels themselves do invite the reader to read Jesus in terms of conflict with the Pharisees, the scribes and the priests. But it is increasingly recognized by scholars that the Gospels are formed by the tensions of a later time. The Pharisees and scribes of the Gospels reflect the opponents of the early Christian communities; they are characters in the Gospels, created to fulfill literary roles as opponents.²⁰ But feminist motivation also plays a role in the misrepresentation of ancient Judaism; women (especially Roman Catholic women) feel the need to present Jesus in opposition to "the religious authorities of his time." This euphemism encourages the assumption that the Pharisees and/or the high priest had the kind of power

Dwyer (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, forthcoming); Richard J. Dillon, "Ravens, Lilies, and the Kingdom of God (Matt 6:25-33/Luke 12:22-31)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53 (1991) 605-27, esp. 606-607n.7. On Matt 6:9-13 || Luke 11:2-4, Matt 7:7-11 || Luke 11:9-13, see Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 203; Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 141, 144.

¹⁸This recognition was first articulated by Jonathan Z. Smith in "Wisdom and Apocalyptic," in *Religious Syncretism of Antiquity*, ed. Birger Pearson (Missoula MT: Scholars Press, 1975) 131-56.

¹⁹See e.g. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 105.

²⁰On the question of the role of the Pharisees, see the survey in E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia; London, 1985) 291-92. Note that the question is most trenchantly put (as is so often the case) by Morton Smith: see *Jesus the Magician* (New York, 1978) 153-57. For a study of the characterization of the Jewish leaders in the Gospels that takes literary concerns fully into account, see Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Marcan Characterization," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989) 259-81.

popes have had, and used it in similar ways. It badly distorts the diverse Judaisms of the period before the year 70.

The second major shift that this essay proposes is one that should make it easier to keep the Romans on the horizon in interpretations of Jesus. I wish to suggest the move from speaking of the "Jesus movement" to speaking of the "reign-of-God movement." This shift combines newer sociological characterizations of the context of Jesus as an itinerant, charismatic movement of women as well as men with the older recognition that Jesus preached not himself, but God's reign.²¹ Rethinking the movement as a reign-of-God movement revises a basic question about participation, especially of women, in the movement; it suggests that the appropriate question is not "why did women follow Jesus?" but "what did women want from God's reign?"²²

Most attempts to interpret the proclamation "God's reign has come near" tend to depict it as announcing a message from God whose implications were revealed in full to Jesus. Some more recent attempts see it as unveiling a "social experiment" he proposed, or rather provoked.²³ But this proclamation had deep resonances in the consciousness of the Jews of Galilee who toiled under the Roman rule, and its meaning must have come largely not from the specific content provided by Jesus, but from the hopes and expectations of its hearers: justice for the poor, an end to hunger, landlessness, and homelessness, freedom from the Romans' taxes and their idolatrous rule. In the first century, the announcement "God reigns" (or shall soon reign) must have implied for nearly every hearer: "God reigns—and not the emperor."²⁴

Resistance in the Spirit was real not only to its practitioners, who by it made God's name holy, invited God's reign, and did God's will (Matt 6:9-10), but also to the Romans. The movement's itinerancy distanced it from two relatively certain means of imperial control: family and possessions. First, the movement's itiner-

²¹Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), first published in German as *Soziologie der Jesus-bewegung* (München: Kaiser-Verlag, 1977); Meeks, *Moral World of the First Christians*, 96-108; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza stresses the participation of women in the movement, *In Memory of Her*, 105-59. For a critique of Theissen, see Richard A. Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

²²On the question of whether or how the movement might have been particularly attractive to women, see Ross S. Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 128-34.

²³Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 76-77.

²⁴Josephus describes a "fourth school of Jewish philosophy" whose major tenet was a rejection of human (esp. foreign, Roman) rule, God being their only ruler and lord: *Jewish War* 2.8.1 #118; *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.1.6 #23-26. On the sentence "God reigns" as a transposition of "the reign of God has come near," see C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961) 21.

acy was a threat both to the patriarchal household idealized in the Roman myth of *patria potestas* and in the imperial settlement legitimized by *patria potestas*.²⁵ Secondly, the itineracy of the movement was accompanied by a renunciation of possessions and money. This renunciation was also a rejection of the imperial coinage marked with a graven image and of the impoverishing imperial taxation that accompanied it. Itineracy and its practices have a special relation to the meaning of God's reign for Jesus and his companions. For the reign-of-God movement, the movement itself is God's reign. God's reign is, i.e., is composed of, people. This aspect appears in some very ancient sayings: "Blessed the poor . . . of them is God's reign" (Matt 5:3); "let the little children come to me; of such is God's reign" (Mark 10:15). The expressions "of them" and "of such" should probably not be read as a possessive but as a kind of partitive, expressing the *composition* of the reign. The proclamation "God's reign has come near" was a threat to imperial rule but empowerment to impoverished and marginalized women and men whose needs and hopes had been ignored and destroyed in the pursuit of the imperial interest. For women whose lives were defined and deferred in the interests of the patriarchal family and the imperial rule, the movement was an exodus of hope and resistance, the harvest to which they had grown with attention from no one. In it such women found the voice to speak of God's reign as the Spirit gave them. God's great future was "of them"; they were, they announced, and they enacted the once-future reign.

Envisioning the context of Jesus as a prophetic reign-of-God movement suggests a third shift, that of replacing or supplementing E. Schüssler Fiorenza's influential description of the movement as a "discipleship of equals" with a perception of it as "shared prophecy."²⁶ These two phrases imply subtly differing visions. "Discipleship of equals" sees women and men as equal to each other, but implies that both remain disciples of and followers of Jesus. While Schüssler Fiorenza herself generally speaks of the praxis of the movement, the expression makes it difficult to move beyond a focus on Jesus' intentions and attitude toward women, and invites anachronistic attribution of feminist ideals to Jesus and or the movement. The expression "shared prophecy" expresses the insight that Jesus is not the only prophet in the movement; the Spirit moves and acts in Jesus, but also in others, women as well as men, and not always as they are commissioned by Jesus.²⁷ There are in fact some remnants of this experience in

²⁵See W. K. Lacey, "Patria Potestas," in *The Family in Ancient Rome*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1986) 129-44, esp. 133-40; also D'Angelo, "Abba and 'Father': Imperial Theology and the Traditions about Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111/4 (1992) 611-30, at 623-26.

²⁶See esp. *In Memory of Her*, 97-159.

²⁷On prophecy as a role for women that was recognized both in Judaism and the Greek-speaking imperial world, see D'Angelo, "Re-membering Jesus," 207-208, and "Women in Luke-Acts, A Redactional View," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990) 448-60.

the Gospels: the most striking is the woman prophet who anoints Jesus—that is, designates him as Messiah (Mark 14:1-11 || John 12:1-8) as Samuel anointed Saul and David, as Nathan anointed Solomon. In the Gospel of John, the mother of Jesus displays a knowledge of his real intentions that seems to override his spoken word (2:4-5), and the Samaritan woman “harvests” her co-citizens without any commission from Jesus (4:27-42). There are also other traces of prophetic activity—disciples and nondisciples are remembered as performing miracles and exorcisms and preaching (Mark 9:14-23, 9:38-39). In Mark’s narrative, Jesus gets messages from others as well as from God (1:9-11, 1:24, 1:38, 1:40, 7:28-29), and cures “happen in” Jesus. Most notably, the hemorrhaging woman cures herself by touching the power that goes out from Jesus (5:20-43).²⁸ The point of these references is not that the individual texts describe historical events, but that even Mark and John, whose foci are so strongly christological, reflect an understanding of the prophetic Spirit which does not restrict it to Jesus.

If the context of Jesus is envisaged as a prophetic and charismatic movement whose focus was God’s reign, then leadership of the reign-of-God movement might be envisaged as a shared leadership in which prophetic words and deeds emerged and receded continually among the charismatics of the movement.²⁹ If the movement’s vision of God’s reign was articulated out of forms and traditions of wisdom, then his women and men companions ought to be seen not only as disciples but also as teachers. This is reflected not only by the character of wisdom and of teaching and learning but also by the tradition; the Q saying in Matt 10:24 and Luke 6:49 preserves the goal of wisdom: that every disciple becomes like the teacher: i.e. also a teacher. Jesus too must be seen as disciple, learning wisdom with and from his companions. As disciples of wisdom and of each other, the women and men of the movement, including Jesus, would have learned the meaning of God’s wisdom from their own expectations and practice.

Why then were the memories preserved in tradition and the Gospels centered so exclusively around Jesus? To a large degree, this focus results from the effort of re-membering Jesus to explain his death. It was the events of the last week of Jesus’ life, in particular his death as Messiah at the hands of the Romans, which affirmed his messiahship in the eyes of his companions. An analogy can be drawn between the postmortem fates of Jesus and that of Martin Luther King, Jr.: during his lifetime, King was one among a number of men and women leaders and theorists in the civil rights movement; after his death as its martyr he became its symbol. This is of course an imperfect analogy; the two movements differ in many aspects. The preeminent factor in their difference lies in precisely the character of the reign-of-God movement that this essay seeks to emphasize: the ex-

²⁸A number of these points have been noted in Rita Nakashima Brock’s christological reading of Mark, in *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 71-88.

²⁹Note that Trible likewise sees Miriam in the context of a communal prophecy: “Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows,” 20-22.

perience of Spirit and prophecy. The prophecy of the reign-of-God movement was transformed after the death of Jesus because his prophetic companions met him alive after his death. Their dead companion spoke in their midst; when they spoke in the Spirit, they spoke in the Spirit of Jesus. They found him present, then and forever.

THE CONTEXT OF JESUS AND "FATHER" AS A DIVINE TITLE

The vision that I have proposed opens a very different approach to reflecting upon the teaching of Jesus. It demands that this material be examined in the light of the imperial interests. It also raises the question of whether what has been designated as "the teaching of Jesus" must not be considered as resulting from the activity of the Spirit in women and men prophets both during the career of Jesus and after his death. Here I wish to summarize my own rethinking of one set of conclusions about "the teaching of Jesus" that is widely assumed by theologians, but that has proven problematic for feminists and is based upon the misrepresentation of ancient Judaism. This area is the question of the use of "father" as a divine title—the supposed "abba-experience" of Jesus.³⁰

The claim that the Aramaic word *abba* was a unique feature of Jesus' teaching and constitutes a special revelation that is central to his message was based on extremely slender evidence.³¹ *Abba* is attributed only once to Jesus in the Gospels, in a context that is almost certainly redactional (Mark 14:36). Attempts to extend its use to other sayings attributed to Jesus (or to all of them) are based on extremely dubious linguistic arguments.³² *Abba* is explicitly attributed to the Holy Spirit in Paul (Gal 4:6, Rom 8:15). I have suggested elsewhere that the single use of *abba* in Mark reflects that Gospel's concern with the power of the Spirit.³³ The title "father" is also much less important in the earliest

³⁰For a more detailed presentation, see D'Angelo, "Abba and 'Father,'" 611-30 (n. 25, above). Elsewhere I have also considered the sayings about divorce and the beatitudes in light of the picture of the reign-of-God movement and the early Christian communities: see D'Angelo, "Remarriage and the Divorce Sayings Attributed to Jesus," in *Divorce and Remarriage*, ed. William G. Roberts (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1990) 78-106; on the beatitudes, see "Blessed the One Who Reads" (n. 17, above).

³¹The most influential presentation of this idea was Joachim Jeremias' *The Prayers of Jesus*, Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd series, 6 (Naperville IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc, 1967) 11-65; it was translated from *Abba: Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologies und Zeitgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1966) 15-67. Jeremias' study was the basis for Schillebeeckx's treatment in *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskyns (New York: Seabury, 1974) 256-61.

³²See James Barr, "Abba Isn't Daddy," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 39 (1988) 28-47.

³³"Theology in Mark and Q: *Abba* and 'Father' in Context," *Harvard Theological Review* 85 (1992) 149-74.

layers of the tradition than has been portrayed.³⁴ Further, Eileen Schuller's publication of a prayer from Qumran in which Joseph addresses God as "my father" requires a reassessment of Jeremias' claim that Jesus' use of the address was unique.³⁵ It invites more attention to other early Jewish addresses to God as father and references to God as father in prayer, and a careful study of the theological functions of "father" in the Gospels.³⁶

The question of whether Jesus used the address, and what it might have meant to him, must be rethought in light of how the reign-of-God movement might have adapted early Jewish use of this address, and how it would have reacted to Roman use of "father" as an imperial title. If this title was important to the reign-of-God movement, it is likely to have been not because it embodied a revelation unique to Jesus, but because it resonated deeply with the hearers' experience. It made the claim that God (not the emperor) was their father, and his reign (not the emperor's) was at hand. It gave them confidence to pray for the hungry to be fed, for debts to be forgiven, for the idolatrous and oppressive Roman rule to be lifted: "our father, bring your reign." This reading of the use of "father" in the reign-of-God movement does not claim that Jesus or his companions used this title in a special nonpatriarchal sense; rather it suggests that they used this patriarchal metaphor to challenge the imperialist patriarchy of Rome.

CONCLUSIONS

This essay has been a summary of one attempt to re-member Jesus. Like Elizabeth Johnson's rethinking of the Trinity, a vision of Jesus as a prophet among the women and men prophets of God's reign begins with the Spirit.³⁷ This vision depicts experience of Jesus and the reign-of-God movement as continuous with that of most streams of the early Christian movement, which were also Spirit-oriented. Whether this vision is seen as a "high" or "low" Christology depends on how highly the activity of the spirit in the movement is esteemed.³⁸ In such a vision "the concrete foundation" or perhaps the dynamic foundation of Christianity extends beyond and after Jesus, to the women and men of Spirit who

³⁴D'Angelo, "Abba and 'Father,'" 617; "Theology in Mark and Q," 157, 172-74.

³⁵4Q372 1: A Text about Joseph," *Revue de Qumran* 14/55 (1990) 343-70. See also Schuller, "The Psalm of 4Q372 1 within the Context of Second Temple Prayer," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992) 67-79.

³⁶D'Angelo, "Abba and 'Father,'" 630; "Theology in Mark and Q," 174.

³⁷Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in a Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

³⁸I do not understand this proposal to imply a denial of the divinity of Christ. In fifth-century terms, I understand it to take a more restrictive view of the *communicatio idiomatum* and a more inclusive view of *entheosis* as the destiny of the believer than is usual today.

were his companions and successors in prophecy and wisdom—and perhaps before him, to his predecessors as well. The practice and proclamation of the reign-of-God movement can and must be continually re-membered to inspire the practice of later communities, but “normative” reconstructions of the “teaching of Jesus” are replaced by the continuing search to discern the guidance of the Spirit. To begin with the Spirit re-members Jesus in the company of all who speak and see in the recognition that it is She Who Is.

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