

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Empowering Memory and Movement: Thinking and Working across Borders*, Fortress, Minneapolis, MN, 2014. 535 pp. \$49.00. ISBN: 9781451481815.

Empowering Memory and Movement: Thinking and Working across Borders is a collection of writings by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and is the third volume in a series of collected works by Schüssler Fiorenza. This edited collection includes articles, speeches, interviews, and sermons; it distinguishes itself from the first two volumes by incorporating writings that specifically explore “the intersections between memory, history, rhetoric, and movement from the perspective of a critical feminist the*logy of liberation” (1). *Empowering Memory and Movement* covers much theoretical ground, but certain key concepts weave themselves through each of the different pieces. Because the scope of the collection is so broad, this review will focus on just a few of these key concepts.

One of the concepts that Schüssler Fiorenza returns to the most frequently is her distinct theological approach, which she names a “critical feminist the*logy of liberation” (1). While at first glance this might seem like an unnecessary amalgamation of scholarly jargon, Schüssler Fiorenza is clear throughout the book about how each of these pieces informs her work (see especially 274–75). By outlining her own personal history early on in the book, she establishes how her experiences as a “resident alien” in many different contexts have helped her to see the necessity of crossing boundaries and remaining critical of theoretical approaches that are rooted in essentialist notions of identity (62–64). Thus, while Schüssler Fiorenza situates herself within a feminist framework, she also remains committed to a critical approach to feminist theology as a way of being accountable to the many different expressions of feminism throughout history and geographic location. She writes, “Only if the term ‘feminist/feminism’ is not reified as a fixed essentialist classification but is understood in rhetorical-political terms can it function as an ‘open-ended’ category that is to be questioned, destabilized, and redefined in ever-shifting historical-political situations of domination” (205). Schüssler Fiorenza’s critical feminist theology attempts to ground itself in movements of liberation and not remain tied to one particular social location.

Closely related to this first concept is Schüssler Fiorenza’s use of the term “kyriarchy” to describe the system of domination that crosses boundaries beyond gender. She developed this concept, in part, as a response to the critique of the notion that patriarchy affects all women equally. Through the concept, she sought to “develop a feminist analysis that could uncover the interstructuring of sexism, racism, colonialism, and class exploitation in wo/men’s lives” (108). Instead of using patriarchy as a key analytical concept, Schüssler Fiorenza utilizes kyriarchy to think beyond the limiting notion of men versus women and see, instead, the way struggles for liberation are marked by the deeper tension between the notion that some are

more fit to rule over others and the realization of a radical democratic existence (108). In this way, she attempts to depart from intersectional theorists who think primarily in terms of hierarchy of identities, and she posits, instead, kyriarchy as a pyramidal structuring of multi-layered oppressions (524–25). Kyriarchy is closely tied to Schüssler Fiorenza’s critical feminist theological approach in that both work together to allow her to engage her work across many different identity boundaries.

Schüssler Fiorenza dedicates a good portion of the beginning of *Empowering Memory and Movement* to laying out these theoretical foundations, but the final two sections of the book are where her specialty in biblical studies really starts to come to the forefront. The later chapters in the book are largely dedicated to applying Schüssler Fiorenza’s critical feminist approach to the historiography of biblical texts. A favorite image that she employs to help readers understand her approach to this topic is that of quilt making. In contrast to a positivistic approach to history as a search for objective origins, which she likens to the image of archeology, Schüssler Fiorenza uses quilt making as “a metaphor that understands historiography as history making, as integrating the surviving scraps of source information like pieces of cloth into a new and different design” (327). More than simply encouraging readers to rearrange the pieces in whatever way they see fit, however, this approach insists that the process of interpretation must use rhetorical analysis to account for “sociopolitical and the*-ethical questions of power” and not become bogged down by demands for objectivity (396).

In a few of the chapters in *Empowering Memory and Movement*, Schüssler Fiorenza uses this methodology to interrogate Paul’s writings, especially those that pertain to the subordination of women and slaves. In doing so, she shows no intention of “defending the teaching of Paul,” but rather, she attempts to bring to the forefront the hidden voices within the text by giving an account of how Paul’s rhetoric would have been received and/or resisted by these subordinated subjects (458). While some might see this as hermeneutical overreach, Schüssler Fiorenza insists that the reconstruction of these perspectives must be central to the task of interpretation if biblical studies are going to fulfill a liberative function.

Overall, *Empowering Memory and Movement* contains many interesting, challenging, and helpful ideas for engaging the relationship between women and theology. Most helpful is Schüssler Fiorenza’s commitment to holding together biblical studies and theo-ethical responsibility. Her critical feminist theology of liberation calls readers to abandon attempts at disinterested theology and commit to uncovering and empowering movements of liberation wherever they can be found. Perhaps the entire thrust of Schüssler Fiorenza’s work is summed up by a comment she makes in one of the interviews in the book: “The divine can be experienced today not by stepping outside kyriarchal structures—we can’t do this because we are deeply implicated in them—but by trying to change them” (408). This invitation

to experience the divine through the resistance of oppression is an inspiring call to a renewed and engaged theology.

My critiques of *Empowering Memory and Movement* are mostly editorial rather than substantive. Not only do most of the chapters engage similar themes and topics, many of them also contain the same anecdotes and examples. My recommendation is that readers should not feel constrained to any specific progression of chapters. Furthermore, I would recommend this collection mostly for those who are familiar with Schüssler Fiorenza's more substantive works. While each chapter is able to stand on its own, many of them allude so heavily to her full-length books that I found myself wanting to read those instead. *Empowering Memory and Movement* would probably function best for those seeking to gain a deeper appreciation for how Schüssler Fiorenza's work exists in various contexts.

MARK RUPP lives in Columbus, Ohio, and is Pastor of Christian Formation at Columbus Mennonite Church.