

“Who Do You Say That I Am?”
A Feminist Study of Women’s Personal Christologies
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This thesis presents a study of the answers that contemporary women give to the question Jesus asked of the disciples: "Who do you say that I am?". It explores the way in which women, throughout their faith journeys, negotiate and renegotiate their understanding of Christ in their lives. It demonstrates that women from diverse social, cultural and denominational backgrounds contextualise their Christologies within their personal life experiences and their reading of the Bible.

The answers that women revealed through questionnaires and interviews have been used to illustrate the feminist readings of the New Testament in chapters three to six. Each of these readings is presented as a "dialogue of voices" between contemporary male and female theologians, some of whom would identify themselves as feminist; interrupting the dialogue are the voices of the women who contributed to the research.

Chapter three presents a socio-political reading of Mark's Gospel. An analysis of the literary structure of the Gospel reveals the way in which women present examples of true discipleship as required by the Markan Jesus. Chapters four and five draw on Michel Foucault's discourse of power relations, and particularly his theory of pastoral power, to 'reclaim' texts which have been consistently used by the Church to disadvantage women. The reading of John's Gospel in chapter six seeks the female in Christ using in particular Julia Kristeva's theories of psychoanalysis and Grace Jantzen's theory of natality. This reading argues that the signs in the Gospel reveal Sophia as much as the Logos within the human flesh of the incarnate Jesus.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

*I shall speak of nothing of which I have no experience,
either in my own life or in the observations of others
or which the Lord has not taught me in prayer.*

Teresa of Avila

The Bible presents us with varying and sometimes contradictory knowledge of Jesus Christ. We read of the divine nature of Christ and the perfect human Jesus. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus raises the Christological question of his 'identity' with the disciples when he asks them "Who do you say that I am?" (Mk 8:27). Peter is able to answer "You are the Christ", but in John's Gospel (Jn 4:5-26; 11:27) the women are able to recognise Jesus as Christ without prompting. Throughout the history of the Church,¹ Christians have formulated their own answer to Jesus' question. For centuries, the patriarchal dominance in the Church has meant that the responses women might give to this question have not had the same prominence as have those which men give. The women whose voices appear throughout this thesis in the quotes under the chapter headings were clearly theologians, but are categorised as 'seers', or 'religious women', rather than acknowledged in the same terms as men. The influence that Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Sienna had on the Catholic Church in the middle ages was only fully recognised in 1970 when they each received the title Doctor of the Church.² It could be questioned whether the Church is even interested in women's Christological views, so long as they meet their traditional roles of nurturers of the soul through prayer, and nurturers of the hierarchy through the provision of material needs for the clergy and the community.

During the last century attendance in Christian Churches³ world wide declined from 34% of the population to 28%. In the UK, attendance at Christian churches dropped from 33% of the population in 1900 to 12% in 2000. The exception to the trend has been in the Pentecostal churches,

¹ By Church, unless the context is clear, or I state otherwise, I mean the Christian community of believers regardless of denomination.

² Both received this status in October 1970.

³ All statistics are from *Religious Trends 2000/2001* No. 2 ed Peter Brierley.

whose membership has grown world wide from 12 million people in 1960, to 122 million in 2000. Interestingly in the UK there has been a 74% growth in new religions since 1980 with membership of the Pagan Foundation rising from 500 to 5000. The Anglican Church talks of revival and the number of people who it is claimed have completed an Alpha⁴ course may support this claim, however, parish statistics for the United Kingdom suggest otherwise. The imbalance within the churches becomes further highlighted as the attendance figures drop. The majority of church leaders remain male whilst the majority of worshippers remain female.⁵ Despite their physical presence in the Church, 'the women in the pews' remain invisible and silent when it comes to finding out their theological and Christological views. Although some denominations have made small moves towards women's visibility within church leadership, there are denominations where this is completely rejected and likely to remain so despite challenges from some very vocal women.

The intention of this project is two fold. I am interested in how Christian women 'manage' their personal relationship with Christ within denominations which often view them as 'second class', and within societies or cultures which seem to present the behavioural norm as the reverse of that which is acceptable to the Church. Do women believe, and live, according to their entire denominational rule book, or do they necessarily become selective, only accepting those rules which suit them? Daphne Hampson argues that women who do so are being dishonest by twisting what it means to be Christian since she claims "there is no point in understanding by Christianity something which patently it does not and cannot be stretched to mean."⁶ Julia Kristeva, commenting on the Nicene creed asks "Does anyone in the West believe in all the elements of this admirably logical and unified

⁴ Holy Trinity Brompton who have pioneered this course estimate that around 3,000,000 people world wide have completed this introductory course in the Christian faith.

⁵ Figures for 1990-98 show an increase in the number of men claiming to attend church regularly. Whilst more men than women claim never to go to church, the number of men and women claiming weekly attendance was both around 20% in 1998.

⁶ Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, page 3.

system?”.⁷ This is perhaps doubly difficult for women since the creed defines their faith completely in patriarchal terms.

The second aim of the project is to read selected New Testament texts from a feminist perspective. In doing so I will create a ‘dialogue’ between the dominant male voices of the twentieth century commentators of these texts, the voices of relevant feminist writers,⁸ my own voice and those of the women that I interview. Ursula King urges that we “listen to women’s claim about the nature and power of their own experience as well as about those experiences from which they strive to be liberated”.⁹ Women’s voices therefore need to be heard in the foreground of these male voices.

My choice of texts reflects the variety of material in the New Testament, both in style, Christology, theology and chronology. The Gospels of Mark and John are chosen because they are the first and last to have been written. These Gospels also demonstrate quite different Christologies, with Mark revealing much more of the human Jesus and John, the divine Christ. Paul’s letters are included because today’s Church reflects Pauline theology, and has a structure similar to that outlined in the Pastoral letters. I have chosen letters from both the undisputed and disputed texts of the Pauline corpus. The feminist readings that I present reflect my own interests in theology and my personal relationship with Christ. They are bound to be influenced to some extent by my Catholic upbringing, and my subsequent faith journey. Although I have always maintained a constancy in my relationship with Christ, I am aware that it has been influenced by many factors. My relationship with the Church on the other hand has been very difficult at times and it is, I feel, these difficulties that have given rise to my interest in how other women balance their relationship with God, Christ and their church practices.

My experience of attending mass here in England as a young mother was always to see a disproportionate number of women and children in the

⁷ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*.

⁸ I will include women who write as theologians as well as other writers.

⁹ Ursula King, *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise*, page 11.

congregation. Were we all there as 'good Catholic mothers', just bringing our children up in the tradition, as we promised at our marriages, saving ourselves from adding to the guilt that so many Catholic women of my generation feel? Was it all a ritual? Or did we just ignore the fact that we may be in second relationships/marriages, and use 'artificial means' to manage the size of our families, whilst we maintained a close and needy relationship with Christ? Attending mass in Ireland always seemed different, until one remembered that contraception then was not readily available and abortion still isn't. Sex education for Catholic women of my generation was unheard of, so naturally women *would* seem to meet the Church criteria that marriage should be fruitful. In Northern Ireland in the seventies there was also the joke that the Catholic marriage was the one way of achieving the 'majority' within the population. Catholicism was politicised.

My own experience of Catholicism was one of exclusion on the one hand and politics on the other. Although we lived in England, my mother's Northern Irish influence was very strong. Brought up with the understanding that Catholicism was the only true religion, it was difficult to understand as a young child why only Catholics would have automatic entry into heaven. My English Grandmother was Anglican, but my mother assured me that God would make an exception for her, though I was never quite so sure about the rest of the relatives!



Fig 1.a The Exception

Before Vatican II, Catholics who attended what the Church referred to, in its elitism, as 'non-Catholic' schools were not allowed to sing hymns, join in religious worship or education, or (in the case of my Grammar school) to receive sex education, in case there was talk of contraception. We seemed forever to be excluded from one activity or another. The girls who were

Brethren were also excluded from English Literature and like us Catholics were banished to the hall to lay tables for lunch.



Catholics and groaners unite!

Fig 1.b Catholics and Groaners

The primary school I attended from the age of eight used to ask 'Catholics and Groaners' to go the back when it came to hymn singing, so as, no doubt, to keep the sound unpolluted!

As a young child I was given a series of books which started me questioning injustice and the Church, and, although my questions may have changed and be more far reaching they still remain. These books were about a little boy Toto and his mother, who lived in a mud hut deep within the African jungle. Luckily Toto had been baptised (I suppose a Catholic, paid for no doubt by a little white child who had collected enough pennies)¹⁰ by the priest who drove around his enormous parish on a motorbike and was always called 'Bwana'. *Toto and the Witch Doctor* influenced me the most. The witch doctor and his natural cures were presented as the devil, in stark contrast to the healing prayers relayed to God by the 'Bwana'. Toto was fascinated by the witch doctor but was encouraged to see him as bad and dangerous, and to reflect on the awfulness that would befall him should he venture to even look at the witch doctor. Somehow the answers to my questions never seemed to justify the bad treatment metered out to the witch doctor, nor the privileged life style of the 'Bwana' in his mission station, when Toto and his mother had to walk miles for fresh water.

Maybe in the fifties these books were seen as a useful and interesting way to teach young children about alternative cultures and the work of the

¹⁰Catholic children were encouraged to collect money to baptise 'Black Babies'. When enough money had been collected the child could get to choose the name for the baby. I vaguely remember doing this at the first school I attended.

African Missions. They certainly helped lead me in a direction of speaking out against oppression and injustice. I know that my politics and faith go hand in hand. My concern for justice informs my feminism which in turn informs my view of theology. The socio-political reading of Mark's Gospel, in chapter three will reflect this. I will present a reading drawing on what Rebecca Chopp refers to as 'American Feminist Theology'.¹¹ Injustice in society and the Church is usually linked to individual or institutional power. Power dynamics in the Church have marginalised various groups, but none more so than women. In my reading of the Pauline texts I shall draw on Foucault's theories of power relations and in particular his theory of pastoral power. I will explore the way in which pastoral power can be seen as asymmetrical within the letter to the Philippians, but as hierarchical and patriarchal within the Pastoral letters. I will draw out Foucault's theories within chapter two and chapter four.

Before starting this project, I managed a number of training initiatives for women returning to the workplace. These women often came to the programmes with low self esteem. An holistic approach to training was taken to empower the woman through restoring her self esteem, enabling her to rediscover the 'real' person that she was, as well providing her with practical skills. Although this training was not done within a theological or Christian context, it led me towards the thinking and philosophies of those feminist theologians who draw on the writings of the French feminists. My reading of John's Gospel, presented in chapter six will be influenced by these feminists and will draw particularly on Julia Kristeva's work in language and psychoanalysis.

Some women have rejected Christianity for a post-Christian view of God. Although I have not arrived at such a position myself, I feel it is impossible to ignore the work of theologians such as Daphne Hampson and Mary Daly, who write from a post-Christian perspective, nor theologians like Carol Christ who have reawakened an interest in Goddess religion. In

¹¹Rebecca Chopp, "From Patriarchy to Freedom: A Conversation between American Feminist Theology and French Feminism" in Graham Ward (ed), *The Postmodern God*.

contemporary Western society, the encouragement to openly express our spirituality, has for some women taken the form of discovering the 'inner Goddess'.¹² Naomi Goldenberg uses her background in psychology and religion to analyse how psychology and psychoanalysis can be used to understand the Goddess and how the Goddess movement can inform psychoanalysis. She writes "thus psychoanalysis, like Goddess religion, participates in the myth of the eternal return through its ritual recall of history and by its stress on experiencing the deep past as alive in the seemingly flimsy present".¹³ The significant growth in theology is evidenced by the growing number of resources that are available both as written texts and on the Internet. As we are becoming more interested in eco-feminism it seems natural that some women should look back to early Goddess myths which link spirituality with the earth, either rejecting Christianity in favour of these myths, or by absorbing some of the myth within their Christian lives. Although this thesis will only address Paganism as it influenced early Christianity, in the chapter five I will consider the way in which women draw on Pagan attitudes.

Some feminist theologians argue that it is possible to have a spiritual relationship with God without God having to be revealed through Jesus Christ. These arguments have developed from the debates concerning the historical revelation of God in man, the maleness of God and the patriarchy of the Christian Church. Hampson first published her post-Christian views in *Feminism and Theology*, whilst Daly's most influential texts are *Beyond God the Father*, and *Gyn/ecology*. Daly describes her journey out of Christianity as "The Be-Dazzling journey", in her book *Outercourse*. Hampson debates what it means to be Christian and feminist with five other feminist theologians in *Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity*. She opens the debate with the challenging statement:

¹²One women's project on which I worked was partnered with a Danish project where discovering the inner Goddess was an essential part of their project for restoring women's self esteem. These women chose a Greek, Roman or Norse Goddess who they felt most matched their personality and then prepared either art work, photography or written work in which they saw themselves as central to the Goddess myth.

¹³Naomi Goldenberg, "The Return of the Goddess" in Ursula King (ed), *Religion and GENDER*.

For a feminist to be a Christian is indeed for her to swallow a fishbone. It must stick in her throat. To be a Christian is to placed in a heteronomous position. Feminists believe in autonomy.¹⁴

For Hampson, there is an incompatibility between monotheistic religions requiring obedience to God and autonomy. We cannot be both autonomous as feminist women, and heteronomous as Christians - these must be mutually exclusive. Because Hampson defines Christianity through the unique revelation of the male Jesus at a given moment in history, it is, she argues, necessarily biased against women.¹⁵ Christianity continues to be reinforced with patriarchal attitudes because the Bible itself is a patriarchal text. Women who try to rewrite these texts, Hampson argues, reinforce the sexism contained within them. Past history is heteronomous and has set the precedence for how one should think.

Although a post-Christian theology/theology has meaning for many women, it is not the answer for everyone. This is evidenced by the wealth of material and the diversity of discussion that emerges from feminist theologians who choose to remain within the Christian tradition. I do not agree with Hampson that it is dishonest to seek new ways of reading biblical and other early Christian texts to enable women to remain in a Christian relationship with God, nor do I feel it is dishonest to remain within Christianity and challenge and question the interpretations that have been presented to women since that revealed historical event. Because the current debates within feminist theology are so diverse I will only engage with some of the discourse around socio-political theology and the theology of subjectivity and becoming.

Socio-political readings of the Bible have emerged through feminist theologies which challenge the oppression of women and other marginalised

¹⁴Daphne Hampson, "On Autonomy and Heteronomy" in *Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity*.

¹⁵For details of this argument see Daphne Hampson, *Feminism and Theology* .

groups. Originally developing out of American public theology,¹⁶ this form of feminist theology strives for freedom from patriarchal oppression in both the political and personal spheres. Focusing on sociological issues such as economics, social equality, violence against women, ordination of women, eco-feminism and global issues, the debate is constantly being enriched and extended as women throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America join with Western women in subverting the theological issues which limit their personal growth, exploit their economies and communities, and at the same time bolster the patriarchal systems which oppress them.

Arguably, one of the most influential texts in feminist theology remains Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her*, first published in 1983. This text challenges the established views of theology as a male domain and suggests new ways of reading New Testament texts by looking for the silences, as well as at the women who, for Schüssler Fiorenza, are central to the Gospel. Preferring to locate Jesus within the Jewish movement rather than within the patriarchal society of the Greco-Roman tradition, Schüssler Fiorenza explores God as Sophia/Wisdom to posit a non-patriarchal vision of God. Developing this idea in *Jesus. Miriam's Child Sophia's Prophet*, she draws out critical issues in feminist Christology. Organising this text into three sections - the invitation of Wisdom, the children of Wisdom and the power of Wisdom, Schüssler Fiorenza reflects on the Christology of the Bible from a feminist liberationist stand point, and as a result challenges the masculinist structures of Christianity which are so excluding of women.

Schüssler Fiorenza's was not the first voice to challenge patriarchal theology. It could be argued that in recent history the Quaker women of the 17th century were among the first to challenge the notion that women were to be silent in Church. Whilst in prison in 1666 Margaret Fell wrote a book *Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures, all such as speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus*.¹⁷ Margaret Hope

¹⁶Rebecca Chopp page 235.

¹⁷Margaret Fell was in Leeds Prison at the time serving a four year sentence for her campaigning. Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America*, page 14. See also Margaret Thickett's paper on Margaret Fell's writing.

Bacon's text, *Mothers of Feminism*, highlights the pioneering work of Quaker women missionaries who travelled around New England in the 17th and 18th centuries, and who she claims are the foremothers of the feminist movement. Quaker women not only pioneered women's rights within the Church, they were also powerful voices within the antislavery movement of the 19th century.

A criticism of the women who formed the committee led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton that produced *The Women's Bible*¹⁸ in 1898 was that they did not challenge issues of race and class. Their project was to produce a commentary on the Bible written by women, to highlight the way in which women were hidden within the text and the consequence of this invisibility on a society whose essence was based on Christianity. But as white, influential, middle class women they stand accused of considering the Bible from a somewhat limited perspective. The project was nevertheless seen as controversial, with the result that no Greek or Hebrew scholars were willing to risk their reputations by joining it.¹⁹

Schüssler Fiorenza argues²⁰ that a critical feminist interpretation for liberation must be reconceptualized as a site of struggle. Almost in direct contrast to Hampson she writes:

Feminists in religion may neither abandon nor defend kyriarchal religions. Rather they must articulate the religious theological agency of wo/men and their authority to participate in the critical construction and assessment of religious, biblical and theo-ethical meanings.²¹

To reclaim the authority of women then, feminist biblical interpretations must first deconstruct the text then reconstruct it using feminist hermeneutics. To

¹⁸Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*.

¹⁹Cady Stanton, page 9.

²⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*.

²¹Schüssler Fiorenza, page 76.

this end, Schüssler Fiorenza in *Sharing Her Word*, outlines a hermeneutical model which uses seven rather than four hermeneutical strategies. As well as a hermeneutics of socially located experience and a hermeneutics of reimagination, she includes a hermeneutics of suspicion, recognising that as the Bible was written using androcentric language which by its nature submerges and silences the voices of women, it does not in reality exclude them. Rather, it is the way the texts are interpreted and used that silence and draw a veil over women. Feminist liberation theologies therefore take the experiences and voices of women and other oppressed and marginalised groups as the starting point of hermeneutical reflection.

Jane Shaw²² challenges Hampson's view that Christianity is not viable for feminists by questioning whether "Christianity is viable without feminists and the multiple voices, work and perspectives of other marginalised groups, whether the Church can, in good conscience, fail to acknowledge that such work is indeed theology".²³ It is this multiplicity of women's voices throughout the world expressing experiences of Christ in their lives that allow new Christologies to emerge. Women's experience of slavery, extreme poverty, racism and oppression in its variety of guises, are being voiced by women theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Elsa Tamez and others in ways which are no longer easy to dismiss.²⁴ Black women's experiences of Christ²⁵ are different from poor white women's experience which are different again from middle class white Western women. Issues of exploitation of sex workers in the far east have been addressed by Rita Nakashima Brock²⁶ and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite. Chung Hyun Kyung²⁷ addresses issues which particularly affect Korean Asian women. Images of Christ as a woman help some

²²Jane Shaw, "Women, Rationality and Theology" in *Swallowing a Fishbone?*.

²³ Shaw, page 65.

²⁴ See arguments presented by women theologians from diverse backgrounds in *With Passion and Compassion* ed Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye.

²⁵ See Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*.

²⁶Rita Nakashima Brock & Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Casting Stones: Prostitution and Liberation in Asia & USA*.

²⁷Chung, Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*.

women relate Jesus' suffering to their own and by so doing help them come to terms with their own pain.²⁸

The collection of essays in *Christianity Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*,²⁹ draws attention to the voices of women whose abuse has in the main been suppressed by the Church. These essays address issues such as atonement, suffering and the ethics of a religion which by its patriarchal structure allows men to "act out their power violently".³⁰ Referring to the inevitable questions that the "can feminism and Christianity be compatible?" debate throws up, Carlson and Bohn suggest "we cannot begin to answer them until we complete the exorcism of this powerful evil that makes Christianity and violent abuse of women and children synonymous".³¹ The women who contribute to this book do so from within the Christian tradition. A powerful documentary, *Sex in a Cold Climate*³² documents, through the voices of four women, stories of physical, verbal and sexual abuse whilst in the care of the nuns in Ireland. I will use their voices in chapter five. Although making some moves towards recognising the abuse that women, children and men have suffered, the Church³³ still shies away from recognising completely its responsibility to the people it has harmed. A growing number of feminist theologians are contributing to the discourse of the theology of the body, from the experience of the body as a site of brokenness, vulnerability, pain as well as from the experience of pleasure.

²⁸ The anonymous poem posted close to the "Christa" statue in the Cathedral of St John the Divine, New York City as printed in *Sex, Race and God* by Susan Thistlethwaite, is a clear example of this. See also the discussion that Elaine Storkey and Margaret Hebblethwaite have on these images in *Conversations in Christian Feminism*.

²⁹ Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn (ed) *Christianity Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*.

³⁰ Carlson and Brown page xiv.

³¹ Carlson and Brown page xv.

³² Screened on channel 4 around 1997 this documentary tells the story of the women who were sent to the Magdalene Asylums in Ireland for 'sins' associated with their sexuality. The last of these institutions only closed in 1996.

³³ The Catholic Church has very recently recognised that priests who abuse children cannot any longer be 'removed to other duties'. It has, however, managed to conceal the whereabouts of priests accused of genocide in Rwanda. The Protestant churches are now more willing to publicly acknowledge violence as recent research among wives of Anglican priests and the treatment of sexually abused women within Methodism has shown.

The debate on women's ordination is becoming more vocal. Quaker women have theoretically always had an equal place with men in ministry within their movement. In some Protestant denominations, women are now able to be ordained, but the ceiling has been placed very low down the hierarchy and can hardly be called glass. Within Catholicism, the fight for women's ordination continues with painful consequences for some women. In her book *Women before God*, Lavinia Byrne writes:

I entered a convent at the age of seventeen. Only over the last five years has the search for God had political overtones; only over the last five years have I allowed myself to feel the pain of being a woman in the Roman Catholic communion; only over the past five years have I begun to search for God within this experience.³⁴

Was this a prophetic statement? The 'political overtones' of women's ordination has seen her subsequent book *Woman at the Altar* banned by the Vatican and the demand for her silence on the issue handled in such an unjust way, she has chosen to leave the order that she had belonged to for almost her entire adult life, so that at least now her voice can ring out loud and clear. Neither will Joan Chittester, a Benedictine nun and feminist theologian, let her voice be silenced by the Vatican. Addressing the first international conference on Catholic women's ordination, she said

These Benedictines are the order that went through the dark ages, feudalism, the bubonic plague, the rise of national states and two world wars and we're not going to let a little letter from Rome get us down.³⁵

Although this thesis will not address the issue of women priests specifically, I will discuss the issue of women's silence in the Church in chapter five, and

³⁴Lavinia Byrne, *Women before God*.

³⁵Taken from *Sunday* broadcast on BBC Radio 4, 1st July 2001. The conference was held in Dublin earlier that week.

present the conflicts that this has for women, especially those who live what might be termed 'Bible-based' lives.

Postmodern discourse has not been ignored by feminist theologians. Whether reflecting on a postmodern world in which God is absent,³⁶ exploring what spirituality means in a postmodern age³⁷ or analysing the relationship that deconstruction theories and theories of difference³⁸ have to theology, women's voices are being heard amongst the men's. What I feel is exciting for women in the new millennium, is that even if they do not engage in the academic discourse surrounding postmodernism, the freedom to investigate alternative theologies and new ways of understanding 'self' is within their domain and not just within that of male philosophers and theologians.

Although for many men and women it is still difficult to be openly gay or lesbian as Christians, there is an increasing literature which brings the issues of homosexuality and the Christian Church into the public space. Elizabeth Stuart has been a leading feminist theologian³⁹ in this field, allowing the voices of Christian gay men and lesbian women to be heard. She has also helped to shape prayer and worship material to be inclusive for homosexual men and women. I will include within this thesis the voices of two women that I interviewed who have had to address the relationship of the Church and their faith, to homosexuality. In *Just Good Friends*, Elizabeth Stuart presents a theology of friendship which in its inclusiveness embraces all kinds of relationships. She writes "we can all have friends, and all friendships are embodied and expressions of our passion". A theology of friendship:

demands that people take responsibility for all their friendships,
that they learn to balance them and that emotional and physical

³⁶See for example the work of Ursula King, Anne Primavesi and Rosemary Radford Ruether especially in Ursula King (ed) *faith and praxis in a postmodern age*.

³⁷See Linda Woodhead "Post-Christian Spiritualities" in *Religion* (1993) 23 pp 167 - 181

³⁸ Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Grace Jantzen, Alison Jasper, Pamela Sue Anderson and others.

³⁹See also the works of Mary Hun (1991) and Carter Heyward (1984, 1989, 1993).

intimacy is negotiated between friends in the context of the web of friendships that surrounds and sustains them, and in the context of structural sin.⁴⁰

Those feminist theologians who are more interested in divine becoming and subjectivity, choose a different approach to the movement from patriarchy to freedom than do the socio-political feminists, locating their debate within sexuality, psychoanalysis, language and philosophy. Drawing on the works of the French feminists and philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, a whole new way of looking for the maternal within God, and what this means for woman's divine becoming has emerged within feminist theology in recent years.

In her essay *Equal to Whom?*, Luce Irigaray questions Schüssler Fiorenza's location of Jesus within the Jewish movement rather than within the



Fig 1.c Good Friday 1998

Greco-Roman period, since there is “no one Judaism and certainly not one Judeo-Christian tradition”.⁴¹ If feminists are reconstructing history as a critical method, she argues, they must also investigate earlier periods when women were dominant and question why these were censored by the phallographic patriarchy.⁴² She reminds the reader that the Church often disregards the possibility that Jesus is a bridge, preferring to lock him into a phallographic

system which often forgets the fact that Jesus' ministry was a celebration, an “invitation to share with him in the fruits of the earth and continue with this celebration after he had gone”.⁴³

⁴⁰Elizabeth Stuart, *Just Good Friends*, page xvi.

⁴¹Luce Irigaray “Equal to Whom?” In Graham Ward (ed), *The Postmodern God*.

⁴²Irigaray, “Equal to Whom?” page 212.

⁴³Irigaray, “Equal to Whom?” page 201.

Through the representation of his body and blood with the fruits of the earth, Irigaray suggests that the bridge is through Jesus' body back to older religions who offer women better examples of "the divinity of woman in her own sexual body". She concludes Christianity "cannot separate Jesus from nature, the divine from the corporeal or the Eucharist from a respect for the earth".⁴⁴ Maggi Hambling's Good Friday sculptures, seem particularly appropriate to illustrate Irigaray's concept of Jesus as a bridge to earlier earth centred religions; her 1998 sculpture (fig 1.c) uses a stone for the face of Jesus, with the features added in bronze.

In *Divine Women*, Irigaray insists that as humans we require divinity to become free and autonomous so as to achieve subjectivity. For this to happen we need God, but woman has no female trinity and therefore no divine in her own image. Here lies the dilemma:

God forces us to do nothing but *become*. The only task, the only obligation laid upon us is to become divine men and women. To become perfectly, to refuse to allow parts of ourselves to shrivel and die that have the potential for growth and fulfilment.⁴⁵

Irigaray encourages women to create a gendered divine symbolic which not only challenges the masculinist symbolic of the divine, but which enables women to reclaim the roles that men have created for them in relation to that divine: "to achieve a new social order, women need a religion, a language and a currency of exchange".⁴⁶ Grace Jantzen's work and particularly her work on natality,⁴⁷ offers a way for women to achieve such a new social order and subjectivity.

Drawing on Derrida's work with binary oppositions, Jantzen proposes her own binary pair theism/atheism⁴⁸ as a starting point to explore alternative

⁴⁴Irigaray, "Equal to Whom?", page 213.

⁴⁵Luce Irigaray, "Divine Women" in *Sexes and Genealogies*, page 69.

⁴⁶Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, page 79.

⁴⁷Jantzen expounds this theory in *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*.

⁴⁸Jantzen, *Becoming Divine* page 64.

divinities. This opposition recognises a shared notion of a God, in which one half of the binary pair believe and the other half disbelieve. This is a God of the masculinist Western ideal so by deconstructing the binary, a space can be opened up from which new ideas can emerge; ideas, Jantzen suggests of desire and imagination, female rather than male and the vulnerable rather than the powerful - ideas which have previously been repressed. The question is, how can we use the language and cultural symbolic that surrounds us to create a feminist symbolic out of these ideas? Within the masculinist symbolic, belief is seen as vital for life on earth and more importantly for life after death. Salvation in the Judeo-Christian tradition is necessary for entry into an afterlife in the presence of God.

Jantzen questions what happens if, instead of locating projection theories in the context of belief, we consider the adequacy of projecting human characteristics onto the divine. Will such projections “best facilitate human becoming and constitute a worthy divine horizon”?⁴⁹ The source of these characteristics, she argues, must be women’s experience which should be seen as “a development of transformative suggestions for a new symbolic”,⁵⁰ which will then be able to draw positively on the diversity of women’s lives.

This new symbolic emerges for Jantzen by rejecting the dependence that the western religious symbolic has on death accepting instead a symbolic based on natality. Natality has a gendered basis and is more basic than death since to die it is essential to have been born. Moreover everyone must be born of a woman. There can be no disembodied natality so therefore, an imaginary of natality recognises the physical and material and so provides a foundation of a freedom which “emerges from and takes place within bodily existence”.⁵¹ Such an imaginary would not promote the position of woman as mother, since not all women aspire to be mothers but rather would emphasise that as sexuate beings we are all born of woman, and so there is a connectedness to all humanity. By focusing on natality it is possible to broaden relationships to embrace not only human relationships but our

⁴⁹Jantzen, page 89.

⁵⁰Jantzen, page 120.

⁵¹Jantzen, page 145.

relationship to the planet. The obligation to become divine does not imply that we become infinite since that would be to reject our embodied selves. Instead, a rejection of the notion that only the infinite can be divine releases us from the dependence on a necrophilic imaginary which assumes that it is only in death that we have any hope of becoming like God and therefore divine.⁵²

It is now recognised that the Bible can be read from many perspectives.⁵³ There are rhetorical readings, historical readings, structural readings, psychoanalytical readings - the list goes on. In fact one can argue that the reader themselves determines the method of reading, so it is possible to have an infinite number of variations within the main broad categories of readings. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger's work on intertextuality, I have found particularly useful. Her reader oriented approach to the female characters in John's Gospel⁵⁴ considers how informed first readers react to texts from what they read as well as from the knowledge that they bring with them to the text. Kitzberger acknowledges the elements of her personality that are vital to her readings. Julia Kristeva⁵⁵ also regards the reader as crucial to intertextuality, arguing that the reader themselves is a text.

Using the analogy of *The Emperor's New Clothes*, Alison Jasper argues that once nakedness is observed it is instantly "clothed again in a rich variety of significances".⁵⁶ In applying this to reading the Bible, she writes:

Texts are interpreted or 'put on', by every new reader, according to her desires or anxieties But text, like the material of the Emperor's new clothes, is an intangible substance. What the story reveals is always ambivalent. And in particular, readers of texts,

⁵²Jantzen, page 155.

⁵³See John Court's *Reading the New Testament* in which he presents examples of ten ways to read the text.

⁵⁴Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, *Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala - Two Female Characters in the Johannine Passion Narrative. A Feminist, Narrative-Critical-Reader-Response*.

⁵⁵Julia Kristeva "Revolution in Poetic Language", in Toril Moi (ed), *The Kristeva Reader*.

⁵⁶Alison Jasper, *The Shining Garment of the Text: Gendered Readings of John's Prologue*, page 18.

like the Emperor of the story, must reckon with the danger of any attempt to make use of the texts either to clothe themselves with authority or to cloak their most profound intentions from view.⁵⁷

What follows in my thesis then is not given 'with authority', but as my analysis of Biblical texts, informed by the many voices of those whom I have read, and illustrated with the voices of the women I have interviewed.

⁵⁷Jasper, page 31.

Chapter 2 Mixed Methods Within Feminist Research.

*The beauty and goodness and joy of created things
Are means of knowing and enjoying things divine
Catherine of Genoa*

The interdisciplinary nature of my research project raises two issues: should it be seen as a project within social science because it researches women's lives or should it be seen as a theological project because it raises theological issues which influence the personal relationship that women have with Christ? By adopting a feminist framework I have been able to use a mixture of methods to best complete the project. I use feminist research practices to carry out my primary research and feminist literary techniques to explore the New Testament texts.

In my primary research I use quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain data relating to women's personal Christologies. Feminists have tended to adopt qualitative approaches to research rather than quantitative, arguing that the latter compound the patriarchal structures which generally oppress women's lives. Some feminist researchers, however, do use quantitative or mixed methods¹ within their research practices, as I have done in this project. My methods for the primary research include both a questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Feminist approaches to research practice consider the broad question of the role of gender in research, so the project addresses the important theoretical issues that surround research methodologies and practices which have gender as their key focus. Some may suggest that the mixed methods I have used are not the 'right' way to conduct research but as Maynard and Purvis argue in *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective* there is no longer a 'right' way to do research.²

¹ For a critique of using mixed methods see Julia Brannen *Mixing Methods: qualitative and quantitative research* (chapter 1).

² Maynard and Purvis (ed) *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, page 2.

Like any other feminist project my frame work embraces the question of epistemology, methodology and methods. The epistemological questions of 'who are the knowers in this project?', and 'what do they know?', themselves produces a range of further questions. From the theological perspective, must the knowers include the Evangelists who present us with the initial knowledge of Christ, with which all Christians engage, along with those male commentators whose voices dominate subsequent readings of the New Testament texts? Or should the knowers only be those feminist theologians who have commented on the text since the emergence of feminist theology along with the historical women theologians? From the social science perspective who are the women that make up my population? Should the knowers only include women who are baptised into the Christian faith and are, or have been, worshippers within that tradition? Or should they be women who claim to live 'Christian lives' in the broadest understanding of the phrase? Should they include women who embrace a Pagan or Goddess religion having rejected the Christian faith of their childhood, or women who have just rejected Christianity outright? Should they include women who claim to be post-Christian? And what knowledge do I myself bring to the project? To what extent do I influence the knowledge that emerges at the end of the project? I will address each of these questions throughout the chapter.

Sandra Harding³ identifies three epistemological positions - feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint and feminist postmodernism. A post-modern epistemology, she argues, is one which embraces "fractured identities" which might negate the standpoint assumption of common experiences of oppression.⁴ Although it could be argued that my primary research sample would be women who may all have the common experience of oppression by the patriarchal institution of the Church, it is important to recognise that these women may in fact have different standpoints within their collective standpoint of Christian women. In this context it is then important to identify what these 'fractures' are, and how they might inter-link or stand as mutually

³ Sandra Harding, *The Science Question In Feminism*.

⁴ Harding, page 163.

exclusive influences on how women negotiate their personal relationship with Christ. Aino Saarinen⁵ uses the term gyno/gender-centric rather than standpoint to describe projects focussing on women's experience. Since gyno-centric allows for the diversities of standpoints that women take whilst still allowing for the women who form the subjects to be at the centre of the project, I would describe my primary research as such a gyno-centric project.⁶

Many feminist critiques⁷ of Christianity have focused on the patriarchal oppression of women and the incompatibility that Christianity has with feminism. Angela Pears suggests that the reason for the absence of critical evaluation in feminist theological discourse comes from the fact that "critical energy has often been taken up with the multifaceted and demanding issue of the compatibility of feminism and Christianity".⁸ She argues that feminist theological discourse needs to ask "probing deconstructive questions of the methodological identity on feminist theology",⁹ so that it is possible to focus on "the specific and multifarious nature of feminist theological discourse".¹⁰ As well as considering the way in which women's experiences inform feminist theology, I have outlined in the introduction some of the discourse around the compatibility or otherwise of feminism and theology. I do not want to engage further in this debate, as although I have often questioned my own position I have always come down on the side of compatibility. I respect the standpoint of those women such as Mary Daly, Daphne Hampson and Carol Christ but have only drawn on their work in this project to support *my* arguments not theirs.

French feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva have written widely on Christian theology from a focus of feminist psychoanalytic theory.

⁵ Aino Saarinen, *Feminist Research - An Intellectual Adventure?* page 49.

⁶ Maynard identifies three critical concerns which face feminists involved in empirical social research. These relate to experience, the importance attached to diversity and the question of objectivity (page 23).

⁷ These could be considered to come from the Anglo/American feminist debate discussed in the introduction.

⁸ Angela Pears, "Mechanisms of Disclosure: Reconfiguring Critical Analysis of Christian Feminist Theological Discourse" in *Feminist Theology* no 26, 2001 pp 8 - 20.

⁹ Pears, page 9.

¹⁰ Pears, page 11.

Although these women may themselves have rejected Christianity, they provide us with analytical tools for deconstructing then reconstructing Christian texts in quite novel ways. I have used their work throughout this project and have used Kristeva's work extensively in my reading of John's Gospel. In particular I have drawn on Kristeva's theory of semiotics, abjection and maternal embodiment to explore ways in which the Gospel can be open to feminist interpretations.

Mieke Bal suggests that biblical narrative need not be read as "realist fiction", but that dominant readings can be challenged to expose the "gaps and failures of realism".¹¹ Bal argues that hermeneutic models should "provide analytic and descriptive tools that allow the interpretation to be plausible, adequate and relevant to explain textual problems and to give surplus information".¹² Of the three models that she outlines, I shall draw on semiotics of form, and narratology in reading my preferred texts. I will borrow from Bal's narratological analysis of certain biblical stories to enhance my own readings of part of John's Gospel and the Pauline letters.

Kerry Craig and Margaret Kristjansson¹³ warn against any exegeses which only deals with the surface level of the text and ignores the fact that the Bible has been written within the context of a patriarchal society. They suggest

An adequate feminist exegetical methodology, then, must seek to be aware of and to limit, as far as possible, the influence of patriarchal ideology in its own thought. It must broaden its scope of analysis to include texts which appear to be anti-woman or completely uninterested in women, as well as those which appear to be pro-woman. It must approach apparently pro-woman texts with considerable suspicion, and finally it must be prepared to work at

¹¹Bal, *Lethal Love* page 4.

¹²Bal page 14.

¹³Kerry M Craig and Margaret A Kristjansson, "Men Reading as Men/Women Reading as Women: A Structural Analysis For The Historical Project" in *Semeia* vol 51 1990 pp 119 - 135.

discerning the underlying structures of particular texts in order to challenge the logic of patriarchy.¹⁴

In the introduction I discussed the school of feminist theology which acknowledges women's experience as knowledge with which to reread biblical texts. Reading from the perspective of oppression, the texts can be opened up to reveal liberating and positive examples with which contemporary women can engage. Although I would dispute the claim that Jesus was a feminist, I would support readings which show Jesus' challenge to the existing social and political climate of first century Palestine. These readings are often able to be used by women and men engaged in current struggles against oppressive and patriarchal governments or institutions, including that of the Christian Church. My reading of Mark's Gospel draws on the work of a number of feminist theologians who are engaged in the socio-political discourse of liberating women from hegemonies which render them silent or invisible. In producing my reading of Mark, I have also drawn on the Bal's model of semiotics of form. This model allows the reader to unpack the text and so be able to look at how structure is used to inform the analysis. Thus the chiasmic structure in Mark's Gospel and the Evangelist's use of spatial oppositions (in/out of the house; in front of/away from the crowd) will be explored from a feminist perspective.

Alessandra Tanesini's¹⁵ critique of post-modern feminist epistemologies draws attention to the way they shift the focus away from the relations between knowledge and truth and focus more on those relations between knowledge and power. Her exploration of how Foucault's claims that "power is constitutive of knowledge" lends itself to the constitution of scientific knowledge can, I think, be usefully employed here in analysing the constitution of theological knowledge. In particular Tanesini's discussion of Foucault's theory of power in relation to Joseph Rouse's work on science laboratories offers many parallels to the power that operates within church buildings of all denominations.

¹⁴Craig and Kristjansson page 120.

¹⁵Alessandra Tanesini, *Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies*.

Disciplinary power, partly illustrated by Foucault through its embodiment in the architecture of the ideal prison,¹⁶ relies on its continual presence to produce changes in those subjected to it. Tanesini¹⁷ observes that the operations of laboratory science are remarkably similar to those of disciplinary power. She proposes thinking about science in the laboratory as involving “complex practices” rather than a collection of theory, to support her theory of knowledge as practice. Could the same also apply to practices in the church? Here the complexities of worship, prayer and sacramental procedures combine together to produce or inform theological knowledge as practice. The hierarchical observation and normalising practices which are instrumental to disciplinary power can be seen to be operating in the church as well as in the laboratory. Tanesini writes:

Hierarchical observation is practised in the laboratory by means of spatial enclosures and partitioning The laboratory itself is spatially partitioned to avoid contamination thus the ‘architecture’ of the laboratory is designed to make surveillance possible.¹⁸

The spatial partitioning in churches can be interpreted as serving much the same purpose. The separation here comes between the ministers and those being ministered to. The position of the minister is always ‘stage centre’ and usually raised (no matter how slightly) above the ministered, allowing the minister to ‘survey’ those to whom she or he ministers. Although the physical barriers of rood screens, altar rails and pulpits have mostly been relegated to historical items, there still remains an invisible separation between the hierarchy and the subjects over whom disciplinary power is exercised. Even modern churches and ‘Free’ churches tend to have a raised platform for the speaker or leader of the worship. In the same way that this separation in the laboratory forces experiments to be conducted free from interference from

¹⁶Foucault describes the ideal prison, the panopticon where the guards are invisible to the prisoners through its architectural design but the prisoners are in constant view of the guards.

¹⁷Tanesini, page 199.

¹⁸Tanesini page 200.

'contaminatory' sources, so the church leadership remains 'uncontaminated' by the knowledge of the ministered.

Foucault's definition of disciplinary power also relies on techniques of normalisation, so that those who deviate from the norm are made to conform. Disciplinary power works through a continuous presence which ensures that those over whom the power is exercised are responsible for its supervision. In the Church, 'sinners' are called to renounce their deviance in the collective voice of public confession. Catholicism in particular highlights Tanesini's observation that disciplinary power is exercised by the visibility of those who are coerced by this power, whilst those who exercise the power remain invisible.¹⁹ The pinnacle of hierarchy in the Catholic Church is the Pope, but the real power of Catholicism remains within the grasp of the Papacy. The immense power wielded by these invisible men over all Catholics ensures that the visible members of the church remain moulded into the homogenous congregation who "willingly supervise their own disciplinary behaviour".²⁰

Deviating from the norm of Catholicism can have quite different repercussions for the 'deviants'. Catholic women may ignore the Church's ruling on abortion and contraception and negotiate this deviance within their own consciences. Excommunication need no longer be the penalty they pay. Women and men who have taken holy orders and become ordained priests or nuns on the other hand, can still be forced to leave the Church if they follow their consciences and speak out for justice in contradiction to the Church's teaching.²¹ I hope to show in my readings of the Pauline Letters, supported by the findings from my primary research, that women manage to deal with their 'deviations from the norm' in their own ways and in some cases are able to minimise the oppressive consequences of disciplinary power. I apply a Foucauldian analysis to the Pauline texts in particular Paul's letter to the Philippians and The Pastoral Letters as a study of power

¹⁹Tanesini page 199.

²⁰ Tanesini page 198.

²¹Lavinia Byrne and Tissa Balasuriya are examples of a nun and a priest whom the Catholic Church has recently tried to silence for 'deviating from the norm' of Church teaching.

relations within the early Church and the consequences that this has for today's Christian Church.

For the textual analysis I have chosen to include both men and women as the knowers in this project. It is not possible to produce a project such as this without including the authors of the New Testament texts among the knowers. If the Bible is taken to be an authoritative text, then their knowledge of God is clearly stated. The Revelation to John opens with a declaration of the authority given to John through Jesus:

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. (Rev 1:1)

The authority given to Paul is revealed first in Acts, when the author relates Paul's journey to Damascus:

The Lord answered "... I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen in me and to those things in which I will appear to you...." (Acts 26: 15 -16)

Paul reiterates this purpose in the openings of all his letters to the early Christian churches. The author(s) of the Pastoral letters assumes this knowledge and authority on behalf of Paul. Each author of the texts I have chosen, brings knowledge of God and Jesus Christ to their readers. This knowledge may be first or second hand, but since it is the starting point for Christians, it needs to be acknowledged as such.

As well as the author of the texts, I have taken the male knowers to be those theologians from the start of the twentieth century who have written commentaries on the text and are considered dominant voices. I make it

clear who these are in each of the relevant chapters. Where appropriate within these chapters I have also made passing reference to other historical male theologians. As a balance to these male voices, I have taken as the female knowers those women who have written on the texts either as theologians or in other capacities. Again I have focused on women from the start of the twentieth century with passing reference to historical women. I have also woven into my textual analysis where appropriate, the voices of the women I interviewed. This is a departure perhaps from the traditional method of recording research results, but I feel that it is important to use women's experiences to inform my reinterpretation of the text where it is appropriate. Women's voices within the Church are gradually being heard among the louder voices of the men,²² and occasionally above them. The World Council of Churches publication *Echoes* now has a section "Sisters", albeit at the back of the publication, and a recent edition of *JSNT*²³ devoted an entire issue to the voices of German feminist theologians. Women's voices need to be heard in the context of scripture as a challenge to the interpretations of text which confirm women's poor image and legitimise their subordination. As I said in the introduction, women's voices need to be heard in the foreground and not as background whispers. Throughout my thesis I have deliberately recorded the women's stories in anonymous voices. This may seem to contradict my previous comment, but I will justify this in the wider comment of anonymity in the conclusion. Throughout this text a woman's voice will be represented in an indented italicised paragraph. Where more than one of these paragraphs appear contiguously, each represents the voice of a different woman.

In thinking about how I myself would answer Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?", I realised my answers were influenced by a number of issues mostly to do with my Catholic upbringing. If this was true for me, then I suspected that other women's Christological answers may also be influenced by their cultural and denominational experiences. Since women

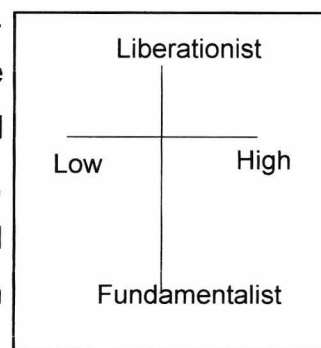
²²At an international conference on the Future of Christianity held at York university in 1999, only one of the keynote speakers was a woman. Very few women were included in the short papers and those were mostly within the experiential theology section.

²³*Journal for the Study of The New Testament* Issue 79/2000

from some ethnicities may have experienced Christianity in a climate of colonialism or post-colonialism I thought that ethnicity too might have an influence on their responses. As Christians we are taught that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine, a perfect man and God. The fact that we are taught this to be a fundamental truth of our faith, does not stop some of us being more drawn to the divine Christ whilst others of us are drawn to the human Jesus.²⁴ As the Bible is the starting point for almost all that we know about the life and mission of Jesus, our reading of it might well influence our personal Christology. This can happen either from our preferred New Testament text, or from the way in which we interact with the text, or have it interpreted for us. A reader who interprets the text in a fundamentalist way - as the absolute word of God - may well have a different set of Christological answers to someone who takes a more liberationist reading of the Bible. Some books of the New Testament reveal a Low Christology whilst others present a High Christology and so we may be drawn more to one text than to another.

I felt that the strongest influences may come from the binary oppositions of High/Low Christology ie the divine/human nature of Christ and from fundamentalist/liberationist interpretations of the Bible. Binary oppositions are formed between two mutually exclusive states in which one is defined as lacking something of the dominant opposing other.

This pair of oppositions can be represented in the form of the cross, a powerful symbol for all Christians. I was interested to see how ethnicity, culture, denomination, life experiences and preferred reading would influence where women might stand in relation to these binary oppositions.



It could be argued here that these binary oppositions exhibit an ability to swap dominance and therefore they are not really in opposition, merely different. I would challenge this since, to a woman who takes a liberationist stand, a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible lacks freedom from

²⁴Jacquelyn Grant explores this in her book *White Woman's Christ and Black Woman's Jesus* implying that there is an issue of race bound up with this.

oppressive restrictive practices, whilst a woman who takes a fundamentalist stand views a liberationist interpretation as lacking strict guidelines to living the message of Christ. Each therefore can be seen as dominant positives depending on the standpoint of the woman.

The population from which I might draw my sample could be described as all Christian women - that is all women who have been baptised into a Christian tradition or who profess a Christian faith. From this population I needed to take a sample that reflected the main influences I have highlighted above. Thus I wanted women from a range of denominations, from diverse ethnic and cultural groups, from those drawn to either the divine or human nature of Christ, from those who interpreted the Bible in a liberationist way and those who treated it as the actual word of God, and from women who chose a variety of New Testament texts as their preferred reading. I did not want to focus my research in just one denomination or one ethnic group.

Choosing a method to carry out my primary research among the women itself raised a number of issues for me. My mathematical background and statistical training pointed towards forming an hypothesis, defining the population and selecting a sample from the population in such a way that the hypothesis could be rejected or accepted with a known probability. This in turn would enable me to make inferences about the population. Since my population was so large I knew my sample would be statistically biased. I could be criticised for not defining my population more narrowly, or in such a way that the stratification within the population could be easily identified. I recognise this as a weakness in any probability based research, but I question the possibility of attempting to use a random or stratified sampling process without adequate financial resources with which to carry it out. However, I was not so much interested in proving hypotheses concerning the population of Christian women as I was in providing a space for some Christian women's experiences to be voiced. From these experiences I was aiming to draw together commonalties, and to see if there was any consensus of agreement as to what a woman centred Christology might be.

Quantitative methods have been criticised by some feminists for their masculinist approaches to research. Being associated with enumerative induction and mathematical methods of processing the data, quantitative methods are seen as scientific and therefore likely to produce more 'reliable' results. Qualitative methods which use analytic induction can be seen as less scientific and therefore more problematic.²⁵ Whilst acknowledging the male domination which has been observed as typical of traditional sociological research, I feel that to reject quantitative methods of analysis per se is to claim mathematics as patriarchal. I take issue with this theory, since mathematics itself is no more patriarchal than nurturing say, is matriarchal. It is the way in which women have been marginalised from mathematics to keep its study within the male domain, which has led to this perception. Although I was able to identify possible variables which might influence women's Christological answers, I felt that these were not sufficiently definable to generate data which could be analysed using rigorous statistical techniques. I chose therefore to use a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, preferring to concentrate on the qualitative methods of in-depth interviews to observe how these variables might interrelate with the women's experiences.

To try to include women whose experiences might encompass the main features I have identified, I drew up a questionnaire which required mostly tick-box Yes/No answers (see appendix 1). Two of the questions required a mark to be placed on a line between the binary oppositions of high/low Christology and fundamentalist/liberationist interpretation of the Bible. I used the responses to the questionnaire as a guide for my sampling frame to ensure that as far as possible I would not have just 'white Anglicans from a fundamentalist tradition' for example, but would have women from as wide an experience as possible. The final question invited women to indicate if they would like to take part in a follow up in-depth interview, and it was from this pool of women that I mostly took my sample.

²⁵ Julia Brannen page 4.

These interviews took place intermittently over a three year period. Beverley Skeggs, describes her research amongst young female Further Education students as ethnographic for the reason that it took place over a similar period of time. She quotes Paul Willis' definition of ethnography as a means of discovering how "structures are lived, reproduced and challenged on a daily basis".²⁶ Such a definition could easily apply to my research practices as I was trying to reveal how women negotiate their Christology when daily they are faced with experiences that attempt to disrupt it.

I distributed my questionnaire in a number of ways. I 'posted' a notice on a feminist theology mailbase on the Internet inviting women to e-mail me for a copy of the questionnaire. This brought replies from 15 women of whom 11 returned the questionnaire. Some replies 'collapsed' into unreadable responses due to incompatible software. As well as returning the questionnaire, some of these women also included comments to explain their responses. Most of the Internet responses came from white Western women predominantly from America. These women did, however, come from a variety of denominations and had differing involvement in their churches. One woman for example explained at length why, and how, she had left Christianity to embrace Paganism. Some questionnaires I gave to Black Christian women whom I met through my job as a lecturer in Further Education and asked if they would distribute them at their churches to any women who would like to contribute to my research. I approached the Evangelical Alliance in Northern Ireland to help me reach women in the Province who came from Protestant traditions. I contacted a women's group in Northern Ireland which included women from both Catholic and Protestant traditions and whose published writings revealed different perspectives on Christ. I approached churches where I knew the congregation was drawn from a particular ethnic group, and churches from a number of denominations asking if women might like to contribute to my research. I had mixed responses from these churches. Some expressed a keen interest but provided no responses to the questionnaires.²⁷ Others were really helpful

²⁶Beverley Skeggs "Situating the Production of Feminist Ethnography" in *Researching Women's Lives*, page 74.

²⁷I had no response from the Salvation Army, nor from a Pentecostal Church with a

with a number of women coming forward to be interviewed. I also invited some women to consider being part of my research if they had disclosed a Christological understanding to me, that I felt they might like to share with other women. As women came to hear of my research they approached me offering to be subjects within it.

In all I sent out over 100 questionnaires in addition to the ones that I sent over the Internet. I had 52 responses, 34 of which I followed up with in-depth interviews. The interviews were a mixture of either one-to-one or group sessions. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face. I only followed up one of the Internet responses with an interview as this was with a woman who lived within a reasonable travelling distance. I was able to interview women from Catholic, Anglican (in the broad tradition of Anglicanism), Methodist, Pentecostal, Brethren, Evangelical (in its broadest sense) and Baptist denominations. I also interviewed one Mormon woman, and one woman who practises within Wicca.²⁸ The ethnic and cultural groupings were limited to Black and Asian African women; Afro-Caribbean women and white European women. Two women disclosed that they had spent some years as nuns before returning to secular life, and one was a nun living as a consecrated hermit after many years in a closed community.

The actual interview process raises important issues which feminist researchers need to consider. Glucksmann suggests that these issues arise from the different and unequal relationship between the researcher and the researched.²⁹ Although, she argues, the task of the researcher is clearly defined as that of producing knowledge, the task of the researched is not necessarily known. The range of knowledge that the researcher and the researched bring to the interview is possibly quite different and raises questions of how the researcher deals with this difference. Ann Oakley, in her critique of traditional social science approaches to interviewing suggests that such methods leave both the researcher and researched as

predominantly Caribbean congregation who initially were very keen to participate.

²⁸This was a very short interview with a woman I know, at the end of my research to explore why she rejected Christianity in favour of Wicca.

²⁹Miriam Glucksmann, "The Work of Knowledge and the Knowledge of Women's Work", in *Researching Women's Lives*, page 150.

“depersonalised participants in the research process”.³⁰ Even research projects where the researcher may be seen as psychoanalyst, she argues, create a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched with the knowledge that the researcher brings to the process to ensure the smooth handling of the interview. Oakley concludes that:

the goal of finding out more about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the researcher is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship.³¹

Feminist research practices attempt to manage this relationship by egalitarian means so that the power inequality between researcher and researched is acknowledged and dissipated. By using approaches which attempt to equalise the power they aim to allow the researched women to become subjects within the research rather than objects of the research. But does this dissipation of power necessarily happen in reality? Are the researched able to recognise at the end of the interview that they have become subjects within the project or do they still feel objects of it? The researcher appears to manage the research process by defining the constraints within which the interview will take place; the format that the interview will take; whether it is structured, semi-structured or informal; the decisions concerning how the data will be processed. The researcher therefore becomes selective in the use of the data. The researched on the other hand may have no involvement in choosing what, of the material that she has provided, will be chosen for the analysis of the data. She will probably only interact with the researcher for a very short space of time. That part of the woman’s story which is of most significance to herself, may be of least significance to the researcher and the woman may not be able to convey to the researcher just how self-important that part of her story is.

³⁰Ann Oakley “Interviewing women: A Contradiction in Terms”, in Helen Roberts (ed) *Doing Feminist Research*, page 37.

³¹Oakley page 41.

Glucksmann summarises this by commenting “what is in it for them is never what is in it for you”.³²

Two of the interviews I conducted tended to support Glucksmann’s comment. The first involved an interview in Ireland which I will refer to later. The second involved a woman that I had come to meet through a multi-faith project she was setting up at the College where I worked. I had met her on a number of occasions during her project and we had talked about her work and a little about mine. At our final meeting at College, she expressed an interest in giving me an interview. I did nothing about this at the time as I was busy with other aspects of this project. Over a year later she rang me at work to have a chat. During the conversation she repeated her interest in contributing to my work and invited me to lunch. I went, had a wonderful lunch, and interviewed her in a very informal unstructured way. We probably, however, talked longer about her project and the subsequent shelving of it by the people who had commissioned it in the first place. We talked at length about the feelings of rejection that such a situation can produce, and how she could go forward with all the knowledge and ideas that she had generated. Clearly there was ‘something in it’ for both of us and I left not feeling that I had ‘taken’ from her and given nothing in return as I had felt in some of my other interviews.

My interviews generally did not follow a predicted pattern. They were unstructured in that I did not have any fixed questions that I wanted to ask. Most women, though not all, had completed a questionnaire which I used loosely in later interviews. Group interviews took on quite a different format depending on where the interview took place. The various settings for the interviews possibly influenced the dynamics of the interview. Some took place in my home; some in the home of the women; some in church halls; others in quiet corners of restaurants; other neutral places and one in a pub over a very long lunch where again I learned a lot from the researcher - this time about Mormonism and anthropological research as well as what I wanted for my research.

³²Glucksmann, page 154.

I question therefore, how significant the choice of setting is in the power relationship between the researcher and the researched. If the interview takes place in a setting which could be described as being the woman's own space, does this always put the researched in a more dominant position than if the setting was a neutral place or could be described as the researcher's space? If so, does this lead to a greater revelation of knowledge because the researched feels more comfortable and in control? In my research this was not a variable that I could measure in any way. If I had conducted my research using traditional statistical methods³³ then I perhaps would have always chosen a neutral place to have conducted the interview, however, this would not have been practical for most of the interviews and on some occasions when I suggested this, the woman insisted that I came to her house for coffee, lunch, tea or just the interview. In return I felt that if I was taking up a woman's valuable time and I could provide lunch for her, then this was the least I could do in return for some very personal insights into her private relationship with Christ.

A further issue that I had to address was that of any prior relationship I had with the researched. If I knew the woman really well prior to the interview could I be sure that I was dealing only with data revealed during the interview, or might I also be inadvertently using data that came from my previous knowledge of her? Was I entitled to use any prior knowledge that I had of the woman just because they had agreed to an interview? To whom did that knowledge belong? Although I would have liked to include the personal Christological knowledge from a variety of women that I know, I decided that I would not interview formally any of my close friends. I felt that to do so would possibly compromise our friendship. I have, however, included 'passing anecdotes' from friends which I know they have spoken of

³³Fisher's experimental design methods insist on being able to analyse for the effect of 'place' on the data obtained. His analysis of variance experimental designs are structured in such a way that all effects can be measured through replication and orthogonality. This may well be appropriate for certain measurable factors such as crop yield, cooking times in ovens etc, but would not lend itself very well to this form of research. It was not possible to select a number of neutral environments and then randomise the interviews across the venues since they took place so far apart.

publicly themselves, and where they might illustrate a comment, interpretation or deduction that I want to make from my readings of the New Testament texts. I have interviewed some women that I knew prior to the interview but did not consider to be personal friends, rather acquaintances. I have also subsequently come to value the friendship of some women who were part of the project but were not known to me before the interview.

In carrying out the primary research, I met with incredible generosity from the women that I interviewed. This was particularly evident in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Evangelical Alliance gave me the name of a woman who had set up a Christian Renewal Centre with her husband some years ago. She invited me to come and stay for a night within their community and arranged four interviews for me, which became five once I was there. The leader of a women's group within the Evangelical Alliance arranged for a group of women who were all involved in some kind of Christian work within their Church communities and across the Alliance to come and talk to me. The group included women from most of the Protestant traditions in Northern Ireland. This meeting at the Alliance offices in Belfast lasted for an entire morning and was helped along with a constant supply of coffee, cakes and fruit.

During this meeting, the wife of the founder of a fairly new Free Evangelical Church just outside Belfast rang to arrange for me to meet a group of women who attended her Church the following Sunday. I was invited to spend the afternoon with her family and have tea with them before joining them for their evening service. Despite knowing my way around Belfast, she insisted on meeting me at a well known landmark so that I would not get lost on the way to her home. This particular Sunday was the day after the Omagh bombing in 1998, in which the mother of one of their congregation was killed. I did not know this of course before I went for tea. The family, however, did know that I came from within the political tradition that, even if they had not planted the bomb, had skirted around the issue of responsibility

for its planting.³⁴ Yet still I was invited into this family gathering and made to feel really welcome.

In London and in Kent I have met with similar generosity from the women I have interviewed. In all the interview situations I was very conscious not only of taking the woman's hospitality but also of 'taking' something very personal to her. For some women this meant recalling some very painful and horrifying experiences and journeys (literal as well as spiritual). For others it was an opportunity to share what was clearly a very strong and joyful relationship with either Jesus the man or Jesus the divine Son of God. Even in the interviews where I was able to offer the hospitality I was still aware of this feeling of taking something personal from those women being interviewed.

At the beginning of all the interviews I stressed the confidentiality of the women's responses. I also assured the women that I would not identify them explicitly within my reporting of their experiences. I was clear about the purpose of the interview from the outset and that I was willing to answer any questions they might have before, during or after the interview. I also told them I was happy for them to contact me again should they wish to do so. All the women had my telephone number, my e-mail and postal addresses. Both Oakley and Skeggs used follow up interviews and discussed the transcripts of their interviews with their research subjects. I did not discuss the transcripts with the women I interviewed once the interview was over, nor did I invite feedback. I did not carry out second interviews as it was not appropriate for my project.

The length of the interview varied according to the time available for the woman, and the intimacy that developed during the interview. I suggested to each woman that an hour would be about the length of time that I would like to talk with them. Some interviews lasted about an hour others three or four hours. Initially I decided to record the interviews as I felt that this might be

³⁴Because of the political divides in Northern Ireland, I felt it had been necessary to be open about my own family background of Catholicism and, by default Nationalism, to all the women that I interviewed.

less intrusive than conspicuously writing down the conversation and would seem as if I was more interested in what they were saying. I also felt that if I recorded the interview I would not 'miss' any of the information the women were giving me. However, I quickly abandoned the recorder as some women were very unhappy about it. The tape recorder is not always a friendly object if you come from difficult political regimes. One woman from the Shankill Road in Belfast was very concerned, as were some Ugandan women. All of the women, however, were happy for me to take written notes during the interview, so this was the practice that I adopted.

I did not have a set list of questions but often built on the issues that some women had raised in their interviews as questions for later interviews.³⁵ One of the women I interviewed at the Christian Renewal Centre, told how she came to reread the letters of Paul when she realised her son was homosexual. She had previously interpreted the Pauline texts literally so "*knew that the practice of homosexuality was wrong*". Her love for her son did not change once she was aware of his sexuality, nor she knew did God's love for him change either. She felt that if God had created her son, then it was to live a full and complete life which included loving relationships with a partner of his choice. Both groups of women that I interviewed in Belfast raised the issue of literal interpretation of the Pauline texts. They were particularly concerned about Paul's order that women should not teach in church, and how unjust this seemed in the light of Paul's teaching on gifting. I asked them for their views on Paul's teaching on homosexuality and how they would deal with this should one of their children realise that they were lesbian or gay. This led to a serious discussion about the actions and behaviour of children generally and how as Mothers they negotiated their love for their children within their relationship with Christ. One woman, who was particularly hurt about the break-up of her son's marriage concluded, "*but he is my son and I love him*".

³⁵Annecka Marshall describes a similar technique in her study of the "Construction of Black Female Sexuality" in *Researching Women's Lives*, page 115.

The first interview I carried out was with a Black South African woman who said that for her, being a Black African Woman so informed her Christianity she could not separate being Black, from being a woman, and from being a Christian. When I asked the women in Belfast if they felt their Irishness informed their Christianity, a really interesting discussion developed on the 'broadness of God.' It was very apparent that we had all grown up with a God who was a fully paid up member of our own denomination. It was interesting for me to see how Protestant Northern Irish women seemed to have deconstructed their 'Protestant God' more successfully than had the Northern Irish Catholic women that I interviewed.

The group interviews seemed to be the ones in which the women 'controlled' the interview. This was rewarding for me in the sense that they raised issues which for them were important and I may not have realised were of particular significance. A group of Ugandan women talked of their painful exodus from Uganda and the effect that their relationship with Jesus had in giving them the courage and faith with which to go. Before meeting these women I was aware that one of them was a refugee and that she was reluctant to talk about her experience, so I was expecting the interview to focus much more on their spirituality, worship, their experiences of being taught by Irish nuns and the White Fathers.³⁶ The women themselves turned the conversation round to the political upheavals of recent years in Uganda and their painful journeys in leaving home. The experience of one woman was quite shocking and I felt very uncomfortable that my research project had in some way been responsible for her having to relive it. I have used her story in my reading of John's Gospel because it informs what I want to say about faith, separation and pain.

However, I have chosen not to include the interview with one young Polish woman because I felt that she spoke to me - not to contribute to my research but almost as a counsellor to deal with grief. After supper at the Christian Renewal Centre, the community gathers for prayer and worship.

³⁶The White Fathers are a group of missionary priests who work predominantly in Africa and Asia as teachers.

As everyone was settling down, this young woman told us that she had just taken a telephone call from a friend telling her that two of her late husband's friends had been killed in a car crash. She asked if we could pray for them. During the worship she was sitting on the floor beside my chair. She became very upset and I put my arm around her to offer some comfort. When the worship was over she asked if I would let her give me an interview too. She talked for two hours about her husband, his family, her terrible grief at his painful death and her deep depression that followed it. She told me of the strength she eventually got from her relationship with Jesus and from living with the community at the Centre. Glucksmann's question of "what's in it for the researched" is again apparent here. The woman had originally chosen not to be interviewed as part of my research. I suspect that she would not have altered that choice had she not received her distressing news, nor if I had not reached out instinctively when she became so upset. Skeggs comments on the 'confessional' aspect of ethnographic research methods in the context of the support the researcher can give to confessional disclosures. She remarks on the way that counselling can almost "jeopardise the research" because of the time it takes up, but concludes "this is an ethical dilemma of feminist research".³⁷ I must admit, I felt drained at the end of this session and although my presence may have been a help to this young woman at the time, I feel her conversation with me was too private to be included within this project as to do so would be exploiting her grief. This may be a wrong decision on my part, but nevertheless is one that I am sticking to.

On a number of occasions I felt almost like a voyeur looking in on a personal love affair, as intimate details of women's spiritual feelings were disclosed. This left quite a strange feeling with me as I am aware of my own desire for privacy in my journey with Christ. On one occasion this strange feeling of 'shared secrets' was particularly apparent. I interviewed a woman with whom I have since become quite friendly. Following the interview, we shared supper before going to a talk and workshop on John's Gospel. There were a large number of people at this gathering and it was not too long before we

³⁷Skeggs, page 81.

were in small discussion groups to share our feelings and reflections on a Gospel passage. Despite both of us having spent more than an hour revealing quite intimate feelings of our personal relationships with Jesus to each other, neither of us felt able to share any of this with the group. We talked about why this was later in the evening but could not really come up with any satisfactory answers, other than “they were strangers”. But what were we to each other at the outset of the interview?

In questioning whether there can ever be an ideal interview, Maynard suggests that friendly woman-to-woman interviews may hide the fact that the researcher and the researched may feel very differently about the interview. It is difficult to assess how the women felt about my interviews after they were over, and I did not ask how they felt. The women’s reactions to the interview itself did not seem problematic in any instance. Some women I have not seen or spoken to since that day. Others I see fairly regularly. I have returned to the Evangelical Church in Northern Ireland and was welcomed as a friend, receiving updates on families, relationships, new babies and so on.

Oakley comments that the women she interviewed did not see her as too far removed from themselves.³⁸ I feel this is probably a comment I too could make concerning the women I interviewed. Like them, I am a Christian woman negotiating my own personal relationship with Christ. I often have similar denominational experiences to them, and I struggle with many of the same questions they are seeking answers to as well. My Christian experiences have also been influenced by my ethnic and cultural situation. Ann O’Hara Gruff argues that experience is always located within our experiences of race, culture, gender and sexuality, but whatever our personal locations, as Christian women we all share the “narrative tradition of scripture and the drama of the sacraments”.³⁹ I never felt that any of the women were reluctantly taking part in my research, or that they felt

³⁸Oakley page 42. Skeggs comments on this in her research noting “We had similar knowledge to trade which restricted the differences to overcome”, page 78.

³⁹Ann O’Hara Gruff “Ecclesial Discernment” in Hinsdale & Kiminski, (ed) *Women and Theology*.

uncomfortable with any part of the interview. At times I felt an intruder and had to ask myself serious questions about how I would use the data that the interviews had generated.

It can be argued that women's experience is at the centre of all feminist research and the production of women's knowledge must emerge from this research in the 'purest' possible way. Should the women's voices be allowed to 'speak' for themselves without interpretation, or does the researcher have the right to analyse the data and to impose upon it her own interpretation? In contributing to the research, the subject herself has reconstructed and interpreted experiences which themselves are culturally embedded.⁴⁰ In re-presenting the experience within the recording of the research, the researcher makes decisions which in themselves amount to interpretation. Even if the researcher records the subjects' experience verbatim, the place within the research report at which it is located may itself be a comment on the data.

Maynard argues that "feminism has an obligation to go beyond citing the experience in order to make connections which may not be visible from the purely experiential level alone".⁴¹ This is particularly important when the research is exploring questions to do with difference. The effects of 'cultural' differences impact on all our lives and to focus on these differences in terms of 'experience' alone is, Maynard suggests, to miss the point. Analysis allows inter-relationships between a variety of forms of women's oppression to emerge in a way that presenting experience as knowledge may miss. Linda Moody answers her own question "can a white woman speak for women of other cultures?" with two observations of Una Narayan: that in speaking for women as an outsider, the outsider should exhibit both methodological humility and methodological caution.⁴² By this Narayan means that the outsider should recognise that she may be missing something of the insider, and in speaking for the other woman she must take

⁴⁰Maynard page 23.

⁴¹Maynard page 24.

⁴²Linda Moody "Theology Across the Boundaries of Difference" in *Women and Theology*,

care not to “dismiss or denigrate the validity of the insiders point of view”.⁴³ I trust that I have heeded both of these observations in this project.

Initially I intended to use my questionnaires just to inform my sampling strategy. I therefore analysed the responses quantitatively to ensure a balance in selecting women from the main standpoints that I have already outlined (see Appendix 2). The quantitative part of my research methods can be described, using Brannen’s phrase, as a “facilitator for the qualitative work”.⁴⁴ She also addresses the issue of using mixed methods to reveal inconsistencies within the data. In looking at the results of my analysis I noticed that this was the case for one woman⁴⁵ who on paper indicated that she was a regular worshipper in her church, whilst within the interview she claimed that she could no longer worship within her church because of her new relationship. I got the impression that the relationship with this partner had been in existence for some time longer than the interval between completing the questionnaire and taking part in the interview. This then raises two questions for me:

1. Is it really important that on paper, one is seen to be in communion with one’s faith as a political statement if one comes from a community in which religion is practised within a culture of ‘perceived, or actual oppression’, when the reality is that one no longer practises that faith?
2. Was the question in my questionnaire ‘Are you a regular worshipper within a Christian tradition?’ confusing, in that could be interpreted in a variety of ways?

The problem of how the respondents interpret the questions will always be present. I tried my questionnaire out on a number of women before finalising the format of the questionnaires taking into account their comments. The

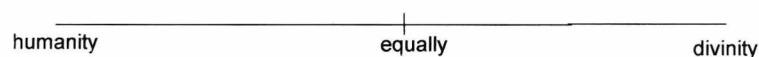
⁴³Moody page 192.

⁴⁴Julia Brannen sets out three categories for using mixed methods. This fits into her third category. Page 23.

⁴⁵I discuss this further in chapter 3.

question which asked about the respondent's preferred New Testament text produced some very detailed answers quoting chapter and verse when all that was required was a tick in a box. I noticed that these responses came mostly from women who came from denominations which could be described as "Bible-based" such as Brethren and Evangelical churches. Their responses may just have been a reflection of their more detailed biblical knowledge than other women who read the Bible with less detail to actual verses. In quantifying these responses I counted each text as a preference.

Asking for a mark to be placed on a line seemed also to confuse some women. With hindsight I perhaps should have included a middle point on the humanity/divinity binary pair.



Although this question clearly asked what of the natures of Christ you felt more drawn towards, I think this question may have been viewed by some women as a test of faith, since they marked both ends of the line, when I thought the middle would have been the point for "drawn equally to both". Unless a substantial pilot is carried out with a feedback interview of the questionnaire itself, I ask myself how useful the questionnaire is as a measure of validity. Perhaps the interview should be seen as a measure of elaboration, clarification and expansion, since none of the issues that have become apparent within my questionnaire responses were revealed from the trials. Annecka Marshall notes the need for a range of techniques when the subject of the research is sensitive in nature, since she maintains that people respond differently to questionnaires and interviews.⁴⁶

The question of ethnicity I left open for women to describe their own ethnic background. This too revealed a number of unexpected results. In London, and probably the wider UK, we are very used to ethnic classifications of

⁴⁶Marshall, in *Researching Women's Lives* page 112.

White, Irish, Black African sub Sahara, Bangladeshi and so on. In Northern Ireland, ethnicity is rarely asked for but religion is the indicator for equal opportunities. I found responses such as “working class Protestant”, “conservative Evangelical”, which are probably better descriptions of culture than ethnicity. Within another project it may be useful to define the categories of ethnicity, but as this usually renders someone into the category “other”, I wanted to avoid this marginalisation here.

The analysis of the questionnaire was not intended for any purposes of prediction or hypothesis testing. I subsequently however, did look for any significance which might be apparent between denomination and involvement in the Church. I tested whether the woman’s belief that they had opportunities for involvement in active participation within their church was independent of their denomination as well as whether their desire for more involvement was also independent of denomination. I discuss the results in the conclusion, along with the further issues which arise from such a test.

This chapter details the methods that I used in my research and how they fit within a framework of feminist methodology. As I have demonstrated, feminist research embraces a wide variety of methodologies and epistemologies. I have drawn on this diversity in the approaches that I have taken to both the primary research and the textual analysis of the New Testament texts. I open that analysis with a feminist socio-political reading of Mark’s Gospel.

Chapter 3 And She Began To Serve: A Feminist Interpretation of Discipleship in Mark's Gospel.

*Divinity breathes into compassion without chains of sin
And so removes heart-breaking pain from that very garment humanity wears*

Hildegard of Bingen

Mark's Gospel can be regarded as a 'manual' of discipleship. It details the role of the disciple, outlines the qualities required for discipleship and gives instructions on the way in which a disciple must behave within a Christian community. The Gospel was written for an early post-resurrection group of Christians who, like the communities Paul was writing to, were awaiting the imminent return of Jesus. The role of the disciple was of great importance in preaching the Gospel and in preparing the new converts for the coming Kingdom. Early Christian communities would have depended on the message of these texts, either through an oral telling of the stories, written sources in the form of letters or from experience of living among people who shared a common belief.¹

The structure of these early Church communities would depend on the group who was receiving the Gospel.² If, as Stuart Hall suggests, entire congregations converted to this new Christian philosophy³ they may well have maintained the structure of their previous religious group. Some communities would probably retain the structure of the synagogues whilst others would reflect the structure of the household, as disciples travelled along major trade routes and into rural communities.⁴ Where there was more than one house church in a community it is possible that they were viewed in some way as a shared community, with one person managing the communication between the houses. This need for organisation is what

¹ Knut Schäferdiek "Christian Mission and Expansion", in *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600* ed Ian Hazlett, page 67.

² Stuart G. Hall "Ministry, Worship and Christian Life", in *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600*.

³ Knut Schäferdiek suggests that Christianity was promoted as a philosophy well into the 3rd century.

⁴ Abraham Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*.

possibly led to the role of the presbyter or bishop.⁵ Despite women being identified as taking important roles in these early Christian communities, the influence of the patriarchal structures of the synagogue and household were sufficient to ensure that the roles of bishop and deacon were seen very definitely to be roles for the men - Phoebe seems to have been the one named exception (Rom 16:1). By the end of the second century the Church had become a catholic group marked by “common features: the rule of faith, which means an elementary consensus of doctrinal tradition, an established order of ministry based on the episcopate, and the scriptural canon of the New Testament”.⁶

The urgency surrounding the perousia was beginning to diminish and so the role of the travelling disciple was absorbed into the structure of the emerging Church. Thus the role became associated the men named as apostles, and with their successors the leaders and teachers, and ultimately the ‘priest’. Mark’s Gospel, however, makes it very clear that the discipleship role does not lie solely within the male domain. As contemporary readers of this Gospel, we can appreciate, and use, the structural and literary techniques that are apparent in the Gospel to aid our interpretation of it. These become an analytical tool with which to examine the discipleship theme as it applied to the early Christian communities as well as to our own. The Gospel of Mark can be read as a text which reveals a man who was subverting the existing social order determined in part by Judaism, to challenge the practices which led to exclusion and oppression. The feminist reading that I wish to take will explore the way in which the structure and the language of the Gospel reveals this subverting message, and its relevance to the discourse of modern discipleship for women.

Discipleship for contemporary Christian women has many meanings. Denominational structures have left some of the women that I interviewed feeling this very keenly. Women who practised their faith in denominations which take a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, questioned the texts

⁵ Malherbe, page 70.

⁶ Schäferdiek page 68.

which excluded them from certain roles. But women who are excluded on the basis of Church dogma feel unfulfilled, angry and let down by their churches when they are prevented from taking on the discipleship roles to which they believe God has called them simply because of their gender:

I have just finished my M Div., in response to a perceived call to ordained ministry. While that call was affirmed by various people in the church and seminary, there is now some uncertainty over whether I will in fact be ordained - which appears to be influenced by my gender (the only woman in my graduating class to have been employed and ordained, 'invented' her own part-time position. Meanwhile, the men have either received positions, or at least interviews - something none of the women have ...)

I know I was called to priesthood. Christ values women highly; he was born of woman, ministered by women and kept women in ministry. The call was so strong that I spent the whole of one summer praying about it. In Israel for a few days at the end of the summer, I saw an old man putting some rubbish out. I could see that it contained fabric so I went scavenging. He said to me "take it, it is your gift from Jerusalem". When I saw that here were some priestly vestments I knew it was sign that I should leave Catholicism and pursue the opportunity for priesthood as an Anglican. It was a hideous process. Such a dark night. I gave up the community, my Christian involvement died. The process for ordination was unspeakable. The treatment of people was appalling. I was given to understand all along that my application was being supported, only to discover in the end that a decision had been made very early on that I should be rejected because the woman in charge of ordinands felt "threatened by me". When I contacted the Bishop, I was told that "he had no recollection of me". There was such hostility to women in ordained ministry, that I felt it was having a damaging effect on my spiritual life and therefore I withdrew.

I was once asked to give the homily but I've never been allowed to read the Gospel. I would welcome a priest's ministry. I would love

the chance to minister sacramentally - to have a counselling sacramental ministry.

But is it just gender that determines the discipleship model for women, or do socio-cultural influences have an affect too? It is answers to these questions that I wish to explore through this reading of the Marcan text. Women are no longer comfortable with the patriarchal images and message still presented by dominant interpretations of the text. This discomfort is not just confined to feminist women who are seeking new ways to interpret the texts so that patriarchy can be challenged, but to many other women who would not classify themselves as feminist at all. Throughout this reading, I will draw on the dominant male voices of Ernest Best, Vincent Taylor, Robert Tannehill, William Telford and Ched Myers. I will also refer to Morna Hooker's commentary of the Gospel and the works of other appropriate women theologians.⁷

Mark's Gospel is relatively short and can be read comfortably in one sitting. The reader who does so may be left with the impression that the Gospel is just a chronological record of Jesus' ministry. It starts with his baptism; details his journey throughout Galilee and the surrounding regions, preaching, teaching and healing on the way; and ends with his death in Jerusalem. But the Gospel is much more complex than this. A closer reading of the Gospel reveals it to be carefully structured with recurring themes, repeated telling of similar events and stories broken up by other stories. There is no confirmation of time or order of the events between Jesus' baptism and his death. Rather, it is the language that the author uses to link these events that suggests the journey.⁸ One might expect a chronological record to start with a birth story, but like the fourth Gospel there is no mention of a virgin birth or of Jesus' genealogy. Instead, the Gospel opens with a quotation from Isaiah: "See I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

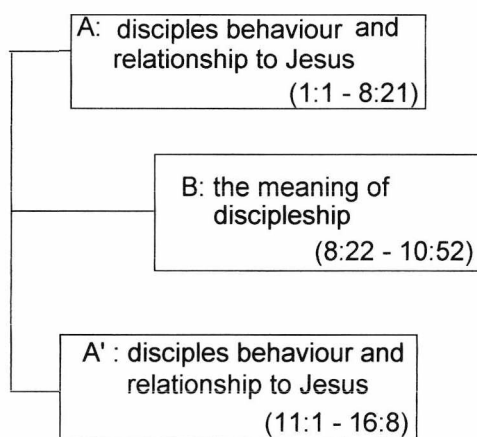
⁷ Amy-Jill Levine (ed) *A Feminist Companion to Mark* was published too late for inclusion in this project (Sheffield Academic Press 2001).

⁸ Ernest Best, discusses the journey in terms of the places visited and suggests that Jesus may well have been in Jerusalem at other times than in his last week. The journey he concludes must be one of the authors own making. *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, page 15.

'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'" (1:2-3) establishing from the outset the dual meaning that 'the way' (τὴν ὁδόν) will have throughout the Gospel. The way will be the literal journey of Jesus to Jerusalem and death, but it will also be the spiritual journey of the reader as they react to, and interact with, the text of the Gospel. The language that Mark uses to present the discipleship message creates the visual images of a movement from one's existing life, into that of a disciple, but there is no indication that discipleship is only for men. It will become apparent as the Gospel unfolds that it is the women who repeatedly demonstrate the required characteristics of discipleship behaviour. Along the route, Mark uses place and people as significant markers for revealing the message. The crowd represents the wider community and those outsiders yet to commit themselves to following Jesus. The teaching given in the open space to the crowd is indicative of life changes that must be made to become part of the community of disciples. The twelve, and subsets of them, represent the committed followers who need to be taught how to behave once they have chosen to follow the Christian way. This teaching is often given in the enclosed space of the house.

In the first part of the Gospel, Mark presents the reader with a clear picture of Jesus' ministry. Jesus attracts a wide following from whom he selects the twelve apostles (3:14-19) who are to work with him in proclaiming the message of the Gospel (3:14-15). Despite favoured teaching, these men do not appear to grasp exactly who Jesus is, nor what is required of a disciple, which necessitates the middle section of the Gospel. Here the Marcan Jesus explains exactly what discipleship entails, but the twelve still do not seem to understand the full significance of his message and Jesus goes to his death in the final section of the Gospel with the twelve scattered. Throughout the narrative the author balances this increasingly negative attitude of the disciples - assumed to be the twelve - towards Jesus with examples of positive discipleship behaviour displayed by other characters, especially the women.

Recent studies⁹ of the Gospel have highlighted the significance of the structures that Mark uses to reveal the discipleship message. Joanne Dewey¹⁰ critiques research into the main structures: chiasm, intercalation, insertions, ring and other concentric structures, arguing that these structures need to be analysed for their dramatic and literary effect as well as for the manner in which they help understand the theology of the text. These structures appear throughout the Gospel, in what J. R. Edwards¹¹ refers to as ‘Marcan Sandwiches’. At times they are strictly chiasmic of the type A-B-A’, A-B-B’-A’, A-B-C-B’-A’. At others they are intercalations in which a continuous narrative is interrupted with another text. The central text in any of these structures can provide the theme or message which is the key to understanding the entire structure, echoed in the frame by related references. Some commentators argue that an intercalation is a method of inserting a time delay to increase the dramatic effect of the teaching, but as Edwards points out would someone who “uses the word immediately some 40 times”, need to “create the illusion of a passage of time at these particular points?”.¹² The purpose of the structures is theological which Mark uses to emphasise “the major motifs of the Gospel, especially the meaning of faith, discipleship, bearing witness and the dangers of apostasy”.¹³



The entire Gospel can be viewed as a chiasmic structure of the type A-B-A’. By framing the middle section in this manner the emphasis of the Gospel is on the way in which a disciple of the Marcan Jesus should behave if they are to be a true follower and enter the Kingdom of God.

⁹ William R Telford, *Mark*.

¹⁰ Joanne Dewey *Marcan Public Debate. Literary Technique, Concentric Structure and Theology in Mark 2:1-3:6*, page 21.

¹¹ James R Edwards “Marcan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Marcan Narratives” *NovT* page 197.

¹² Edwards, page 195.

¹³ Edwards, page 196.

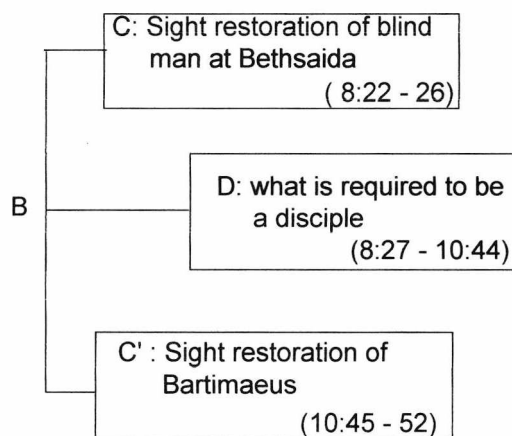
Throughout my reading of the Gospel, examples of the Marcan 'sandwich' will be used to interpret the text so that parallels can be drawn between the message to the first readers of the text and today's reader. I propose to consider those outlined in table 1 as relevant to an interpretation which may be compatible with a feminist understanding of discipleship.

| <i>Section</i> | <i>Structure Type</i> | <i>Verses</i> | <i>Theme</i> |
|----------------|--|---|---|
| Whole Gospel | chiastic A-B-A' | A 1:1 - 8:21 B 8:22 -10:52 A'11:1 - 16:8 | Disciples behaviour and relationship with Jesus. Meaning of discipleship Disciples behaviour and relationship with Jesus. |
| B section | chiastic C-D-C' | C 8:22-8:26 D 8:27-10:45 C'10:46-10:52 | Sight restoration Requirements of discipleship Sight restoration |
| D section | chiastic E-F-E' | E 8:27 - 9:13 F 9:14 - 9:29 E' 9:30 -10:45 | Suffering and service Faith as a disciple Suffering and service |
| E' section | chiastic G-H-I-H'-G' | G 9:30 - 9:32 H 9:33 - 9:49 I 10:1 - 10:13 H' 10:13-10:31 G' 10:32-10:34 | Pronouncement Place in the community using images of child Unity and equal status in the community: a challenge to patriarch/hierarchy Place in the community using images of child Pronouncement |
| A section | loose trio A ₁ -A ₂ -A ₃ intercalation J-K-J' intercalation L-M-L' | A ₁ 1:23 -1:26 A ₂ 1:29 -1:31 A ₃ 1:40 -1:45 J 3:20 - 3:21 K 3:22 - 3:30 J' 3:31 - 3:35 L 5:21 - 5:24 M 5:25 - 5:34 L' 5:35 - 5:43 | Healing of man possessed Healing of Peter's mother-in-law Healing of leper Concern of family Divided community Community as family Jairus pleads for healing Woman with haemorrhage Jairus' daughter healed |
| A' section | intercalation N-O-N' | N 11:12 - 11:14 O 11:15 - 11:19 N' 11:20 - 11:25 | Curse of the fig tree Cleansing of the temple Withered fig tree |

Table 1

Since, as I have already argued, the key in such structures is to found in the central section, I will start with an analysis of the discipleship message section B (8:22 - 10:52), before interpreting this message in the light of the teaching contained within the frame A (1:1 - 8:21) and A' (11:1 - 16:8). The

analysis of the frame will present a non-patriarchal reading of the text which will offer opportunities for the reader to identify with the alternative discipleship role models that Mark provides. The Evangelist presents the teaching on discipleship to instruct followers in the meaning of the way, as well as to highlight the socio-cultural changes that must be made in the Christian community as it grows. Contemporary Christian groups can draw on this message as the Church develops and changes to meet current societal needs.



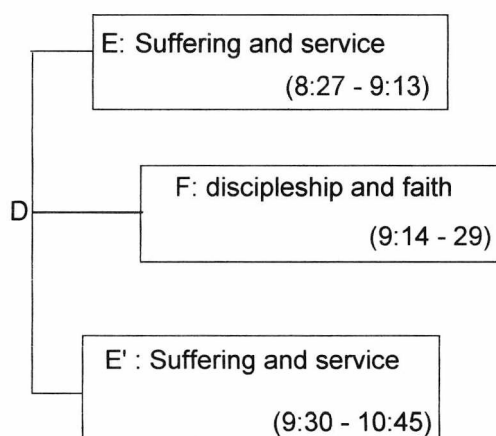
The middle section of the Gospel is a chiasmic structure of the form C-D-C'. Details of the behaviour that a disciple must adopt to become a follower are enclosed within the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida and the healing of the blind beggar Bartimaeus. Mark has chosen these two sight restorations as metaphors for the journey from darkness into enlightenment that is necessary for all Christians.¹⁴

Mark indicates that this journey will not necessarily be straightforward through the two stage healing of the first blind man (8:22-26). Jesus leads the man by the hand, out of the village where he begins the healing process. This results in the man seeing only unclear images (8:24), indicating that the journey begins through being helped along and may include a time of poor understanding. At the second attempt the man is given perfect sight (8:25). Similarly through understanding the teaching that is about to unfold, the reader can be led out of their existing level of understanding into a new realisation of the meaning of discipleship.

¹⁴Mary Beavis interprets this story in the context of disabilities. See "From The Margin To The Way" *JSFR* vol 14, 1 pp 19 - 39

The closing section of this frame links sight to faith. Despite the crowds attempt to silence him, Bartimaeus repeatedly implores “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me”. Calling Bartimaeus to him, Jesus asks “What do you want me to do for you?” (10:51). Through Bartimaeus’ response: “My teacher, let me see again” (10:51), Mark confirms to the reader that the section between the two healings has been important teaching. Once healed, Bartimaeus followed him on the way” (10:52), leaving the reader to decide exactly what this means. Is Bartimaeus just part of the crowd walking with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, or has he become a follower of Jesus’ philosophy? The implication for the reader is clear - if they have gained insight from the text, they too can be a disciple. By structuring the sight restorations as a frame to the central section, Mark emphasises the importance of the middle section of the Gospel for determining just what behaviour is required of a disciple: “the rule of discipleship is: Jesus. As Jesus was, so the disciple must be”.¹⁵

The embedded chiasms, lead the reader into the main teaching on faith and



belief (F) which is contained between two longer passages on the meaning of service and the need to suffer, if a follower of Jesus is to become a true disciple (E, E’). Following in the way of the Marcan Jesus by necessity involves faith, belief and suffering. More importantly, each must be understood with new meaning if a disciple is to

gain the clear sight identified in the C-C’ frame. Full sight can only come through faith in Jesus as the revealer of the Kingdom of God.

This first teaching on suffering and service (E) opens at Caesarea Philippi with Jesus posing the Christological question to his disciples - “Who do

¹⁵Ernest Best, *Disciples and Discipleship*, page 3.

people say that I am ?” (8:27). The response demonstrates that despite the evidence of the healings, the miracles and the teaching that they have witnessed on the way, the disciples really do not know who Jesus is; only Peter suggests that he is the Messiah (8:29). It soon becomes evident, however, that Peter does not understand Messiahship in the same context as Jesus. Ernest Best¹⁶ links Peter’s response to Jesus’ question and the two stage healing at Bethsaida:

Peter confesses Jesus is the Christ; that is half sight. It is only half sight because he does not understand the destiny of the Messiah - to suffer Full sight will only follow on full understanding of the purpose of Jesus.¹⁷

The reference to partial sight is a mechanism Mark uses to emphasise the importance of Jesus’ death and resurrection.¹⁸ Full sight and understanding will only be possible once the disciple has understood why Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection are necessary. Following the Marcan Jesus is bound up with the cross. To be a disciple means accepting Jesus’ qualifying conditions given to the crowd “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me” (8:34). This is a condition for everyone, hence the crowd, which includes women as much as it does men.

Denial in the context of following, is not to mean self denial but the denial of self so that the emphasis shifts from not doing without, to ceasing to place one’s own needs at the core of one’s existence. Ernest Best suggests that the interpretation one gives to the verse “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it” (8:35), depends on the meaning given to the word life (ψυχή). By taking the translation to mean ‘real self’ rather than ‘physical life’, Best argues that it is possible to attach deeper meaning of the following verse “for what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?”

¹⁶ Best, page 4.

¹⁷ Best, page 4.

¹⁸ Morna D Hooker, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, page 198.

Indeed what can they give in return for their life" (8:36). By linking this verse to the parables of the sower (4:3:26) and the rich man (10:17 - 22), it is possible to see the wider implications of discipleship:

The man who denies himself is the equivalent of the man who loses, or destroys, himself; the man who affirms himself is the equivalent of the man who saves, or gains, himself.¹⁹

It could be argued that in today's society women's suffering is so widespread that they may have a greater claim on cross bearing than men and therefore a stronger claim on discipleship. However, to interpret women's suffering in this way can lead to victimology, through ultimately greater oppression and exclusion. Cross bearing can be interpreted quite differently. Some see the cross as enriching love:



Fig 3.a The Yellow Christ

I started to do things that I wouldn't have dreamt of doing before, like reading his diary and things like that ... Although it [homosexual practice] goes against religious teaching, I had to go and ask myself what Jesus would have done in the same circumstances. I believe Jesus would continue to love him and I thank God that my son was able to find love even with one of his own kind, than not love at all. I don't think everybody would agree with me but I know the great love of God for me and I want to show the same kind of love, because I felt Jesus was waiting for me with open arms, the arms of the cross and waiting for him as well. And who am I to judge?

¹⁹Best, page 9.

Yet to others it is a major difficulty for some time:

I went through a period of hell. I was very angry with God. The injustice got to me; being talked about behind my back, no pastoral care, people being free to talk about me anyway. But I realised that this is what Christ went through. It was crucifixion without the nails.

And to some it is coping everyday with little things:

I suppose I've never had a cross that I've had to carry for years. My mother died suddenly therefore I had no cross of looking after a parent. Even my darling governess, my sister looked after as I was in Belgium. I look upon the cross for me as tiny irritations that come every day and you have to deal with all those little obediences that one must learn to do cheerfully without arguing. That is more to me my personal cross.

Ched Myers²⁰ interprets 'taking up one's cross' in a political context, arguing that the self denial associated with taking up one's cross is one of literally losing one's life. He extends this political interpretation to the verses which follow: namely by saving one's life by not dissenting, it is destroyed for God, but by losing one's life through actual death for the sake of the Gospel, it will be saved for God.²¹

Jesus has revealed that his Messiahship means political confrontation with, not rehabilitation of, the imperial state. Those who wish to 'come after him' will have to identify themselves with his subversive program. The stated risk is that the disciple will face the test of loyalty under interrogation by state authorities. If 'self' is denied, the cross will be taken up, a metaphor for capital punishment on grounds of insurgency. Through *these* definitive choices the disciple will 'follow Jesus'.²²

²⁰ Ched Myers, *Binding The Strong Man*.

²¹ Myers, page 245.

²² Myers, page 247.

Confrontation of the political state continues to be a way of life for many communities today. Liberation and feminist theologies have encouraged many Christians in Latin America, Africa and Asia to challenge the dictatorships that create social injustices and oppression. Women, as well as men have looked to Jesus' challenge to authority, to empower them in their own struggles against tyranny. Nicaraguan women in the 1970's saw Jesus' face "present in all the men and women who endure weariness and give their life for others ... a God who is in pilgrimage with the people".²³ Throughout their fight for political freedom these women found in Jesus the example of freedom of giving one's life for others.

Patriarchal interpretations of self denial have given legitimacy to women's oppression both in society and the Church. Women's self denial often provides sustenance and growth for others, bolstering patriarchal power structures to the detriment of themselves. Women are acculturated to be servants in almost all of their experiences. They will survive with less food to provide a larger share for their men and children; they will remain in abusive relationships because their self-esteem is too low to break free; they remain exploited in low paid work because of the need to provide for their families and they remain on the fringes of the Church. Vulnerability in women is often seen as weakness, especially in a society where there are marked divisions between the vulnerable and the strong. Jesus' vulnerability through suffering becomes his strength and it is through this experience that women too can gain strength. By interpreting ψυχή as 'real self' as Best suggests, a liberating reading of denial and service is possible.

Discipleship *is* about serving, but not through servile behaviour from one section of the community to another. Rather it is about denying the outward self in favour of a recognition of the inner self in relation to God. Becoming aware of the divine within empowers women to acknowledge self worth in all their relationships. Chung Hyun Kyung²⁴ tells how women's groups

²³ Luz Beatrice Arellano, "Women's Experience of God in Emerging Spirituality" in Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (ed) *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, page 137.

²⁴ Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle To Be The Sun Again*.

throughout Asia, like sister groups in other parts of the world, have used the power in self awakening/self affirmation of critical reflection and creativity, to develop strategies to resist oppression. Denial of the self empowers these women through the interpretation of servanthood not as "mere submission or obedience", but as "a powerful witness to evil and a challenge to the powers and the principalities of the world, especially male domination over women."²⁵

Knowledge that, no matter what oppression is in their lives, the power of God is within them, has enabled women to unite in the struggle for political and personal liberation. For some communities of women this struggle has been greater than for others, but the emergence of women into the political arena has fuelled and strengthened that determination. God no longer needs to be seen as the 'patriarchal master that has to be obeyed' but as the humane Jesus who shares in the every day suffering of all oppressed groups. Since the Marcan Jesus gives this teaching to the crowd, the intention is that the whole community should benefit from its message.

A feminist analysis of this text should be looking for a liberating message for all marginalised groups. It is not just women who are oppressed by patriarchal power. Many men, particularly in developing countries, suffer as a result of the practices of powerful businesses and globalisation. In her analysis of the balance between power and powerlessness in the Gospel, Dorothy Lee-Pollard argues that:

Mark demonstrates that God's power is the power to *renounce* power it is only through God's power that Jesus is able to become power-*less* and face the necessity of the cross the function of power in the Gospel is therefore to liberate human beings from those harmful and life denying forces that oppress them.²⁶

²⁵ Hyun Kyung, page 57.

²⁶ Dorothy A. Lee-Pollard, "Powerlessness as Power: A key Emphasis in the Gospel of Mark" *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol 40 pp 173-188.

In the context of the Gospel, Jesus' power is to counteract the evil spirits and personal demons that disrupt the lives of those he encounters. In the wider society of today's world Jesus' healing power can be channelled to counteract the 'personal demons' of lives consumed by poverty, exploitation, slavery,²⁷ and living without the basic necessities that most of us in the developed world take for granted. The role of the modern Church must be to take the message of power as expressed in Mark's Gospel and use it to influence governments and financial decision makers, throughout the developed world as they impose strictures on countries with developing economies. Fulfilled lives for any oppressed group cannot come through patriarchal power, but through an understanding that God's power is all embracing, not selective. This power is revealed to the smaller group of disciples at the transfiguration (9: 2-8).

Jesus takes Peter, James and John away from the rest of the disciples up the mountain where they are terrified (9:6) and confused (9:10) by the changes that overcome Jesus (9:4). A cloud overshadows the three disciples from which God's voice can be heard saying: "This is my Son the Beloved; listen to him" (9:7). The contrasting visual images - the cloud over the disciples and the dazzling whiteness of Jesus' clothes (9:3) indicate that sight and light are synonymous with understanding. The cloud represents the disciples' hazy and muddled understanding of Jesus; they still only have partial sight; whereas there can be no light on earth brighter than that surrounding Jesus. God instructs the disciples to listen to Jesus (ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ) so that they can gain this same light/sight then they will fully understand Peter's answer "You are the Messiah", to Jesus' question (8:29). There need be no further doubt, since God reiterates the filial relationship of father and son (ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός) that has been given at Jesus' baptism (1:11).

Mark structures this key teaching to link back to the frame through the voice of God insisting that Jesus' words be listened to, and the deaf and

²⁷Recently the trafficking of child 'slaves' in the cocoa plantations of West Africa; tied workers in the sugar companies of the Dominican Republic are a modern form of slave labour.

speechless boy being brought for healing. Mark contrasts those who do not listen and therefore cannot speak with knowledge, to the boy who cannot hear and therefore does not speak. The disciples fall into the first group, as they argue with the scribes over their unsuccessful attempts to heal the boy (9:16 - 18). This is not just a story of healing. For Mark, it is a metaphor for the continuing struggle there will be between belief and unbelief even after the new disciple has made his or her commitment to Jesus. The crowd are the faithless ones who need to learn that "all things can be done for the one who believes" (9:23). The father's plea "I believe, help my unbelief" mirrors the disciples' confusion between believing in Jesus yet at the same time having no faith in their own ability to heal the boy in Jesus' name.

This short interlude in the teaching on suffering and service is needed for the reader to take stock, and realise the importance of faith in understanding how to serve and the relevance of suffering. Maintaining faith was no easier for early Christians living in the political uncertainty of the first century than it is with today's diversions, so Mark uses the metaphor of deafness to emphasise a disciple's need to listen to Jesus, as God has just commanded (9:7b) and that through hearing this word belief *can* overcome unbelief. Myers questions whether Mark might introduce this passage here to link prayer with "critical reflection upon the demon's within":

Is not prayer the intensely personal struggle within each disciple, and among us collectively to resist the despair and distractions that cause us to practice unbelief, to abandon or avoid the way of Jesus?²⁸

Myers' interpretation confirms the personal struggle that will always be present for each new generation of disciple, demonstrating that the Marcan Jesus' message is as relevant today as it was to the Marcan community. Following Jesus is not meant to be easy, but how much more difficult is it for women when the Church places so many barriers to full inclusion, and maintains those barriers by persistent deafness to women's collective voice?

²⁸ Myers, page 256.

The Marcan Jesus acknowledges the patriarchal structures in the old order, and offers new possibilities for all by belief in the new order that he presents.

Vulnerable people who suffer from low self esteem constantly struggle with accepting that they do have worth. It is often easier to remain cocooned within the familiarity of fear, than it is to accept the challenges brought about through accepting the value of self. Sometimes these fears are so great they entrap the person, effectively making them a victim, so that escape seems an impossibility. The possessive spirit in this passage, represents the control over negativity that causes deafness to the voice that belief can, and will, bring freedom through personal awareness of the divine within. The violent manner in which the spirit causes the boy to behave can be seen paralleled in the self-mutilation and self-destructive behaviour that often accompanies low self esteem. The reluctance with which the spirit leaves the boy mirrors the struggle that vulnerable people have in facing and shedding patriarchal fears. To do so, it is necessary to let the old self die, as the boy appears to do, so that the true self can live. Mark is able to use this healing to show how transformation is possible through listening rather than hearing. The popular phrase "I hear what you say", rarely means that "I am listening to what you are saying, to understand your point of view".

This healing, provides a liberating message if taken metaphorically, but can be very damaging if taken literally. The evidence given in a recent death of a seriously abused child described how the child had been taken by her carers to a number of Christian churches to be exorcised of the demons which supposedly possessed her. The child herself is reported to have told a Pastor of a dream in which the devil told her to injure herself. The Pastor arranged for her to be brought to a 'deliverance service', which this church regularly holds to cast out the demons 'possessing' members of the congregation. The day before she died, the child was taken for her exorcism in a very poor state of health. Too late to save her, the Pastor at least persuaded the carers to take the child to hospital. A child may have many things wrong with them to make them behave in the manner of the boy in the Gospel, but looking for 'demon possession' when there is now so much

knowledge about illness, is perhaps no longer appropriate. One must also question the responsibility that churches such as this one, invest in young pastors²⁹ to make decisions which could harm children and vulnerable adults rather than heal them.

Prayer is a powerful form of healing, but we should use this prayer to seek wholeness in the form of accepting who we are as the people that God has made us, rather than miracle cures for physical or mental illness.³⁰ We should recognise the dangers that equating 'demon possession' with illness³¹ literally rather than metaphorically, can do to those who are persuaded by the argument. For Christians the dangers are really twofold. First there is the belief that a person can become alienated from a loving God by somehow being possessed by a devil of illness, and secondly there is the question of 'greatness'. By setting oneself up as a 'miracle healer' or an 'exorcist' in the manner of some of these claimants, there is a sense of elitism and separateness, that makes this one person almost a 'better' disciple/Christian than others in the church community. They present themselves as having been favoured in a way that others have not. But this is very much against the message of inclusivity that comes so strongly out of Marks' Gospel.

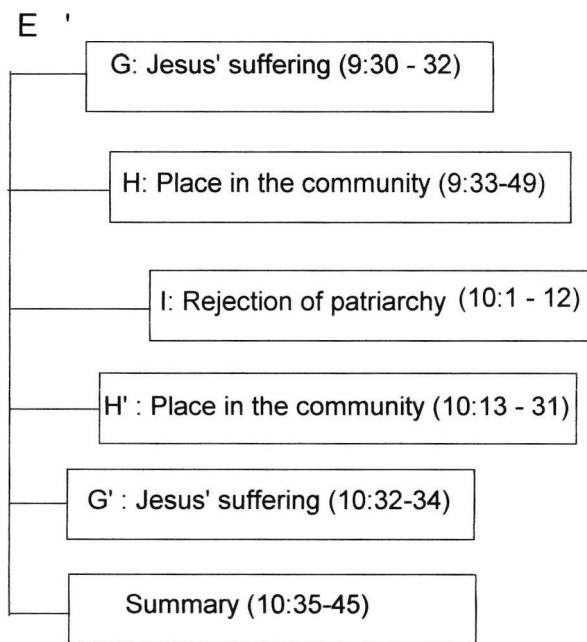
Charismatic healers who tour the world making money for their extravagant public healing services, should have a responsibility to investigate very carefully the effect that they have on the lives of those who come forward for healing but are not healed. Led to believe that if they have enough faith (translated one suspects into thanksgiving money for the church) then they will be healed, only serves to further the lack of faith in themselves as worthy people if, or when, the healing does not materialise. This is against the message of the Gospel. All God asks for is that, as Christian disciples, we believe. The Gospel does not imply that God recognises and rewards a

²⁹The Assistant Pastor in this case was reported at the trial to be 21 years old.

³⁰The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God was asked to remove the claim that common illnesses such as migraine could be cured by exorcising the demons that caused it.

³¹ There seems to be a growth in some Pentecostal churches to attaching illness to demon possession. An Internet search of 'spirit possession and evangelical movement', generated over 300 web sites dedicated to healing possession such as this.

graded scale of belief.³² This is not to deny that God has given a gift of healing to many people. However, the recognition of the healing should rest with the healed, rather than with the healer for true discipleship.



Mark returns to the interlinked themes of suffering and serving with the second part of the frame (E'), where he details the requirements for discipleship. This section itself contains a chiasmic structure. Mark leads the reader through to the key at the centre of this teaching with teaching on how to behave once a member of the community, and what is required of a follower to be able to join the community.

The disciples remain mystified by Jesus' second pronouncement of his impending suffering, death and resurrection but are afraid to ask for clarification (9:32). As if anticipating that his readers may also be confused, Mark places the disciples in the enclosed space of the house (ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ) (9:33), to hear Jesus reveal what he expects of intra-community relationships if discriminatory practices are to be subverted. The twelve are reluctant to admit that on the way they have been arguing about who is the greatest (9:34), so the Marcan Jesus draws out the meaning of denying self - "whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (8:35). A disciple should be concerned with the least important in the community

³²A recent television program "Miracles: Hope and Damnation" (ITV Sun 28th April 2001) illustrated this clearly. Highlighting the work of two well known tele-evangelists, the documentary contrasted the vulnerability of people desperate for cures, with the needs of what seems to be the financial and ego-massaging of these charismatic healers. The plight of one family in particular was very revealing. An Asian couple converted to Christianity because they had heard one of these healers promise that he could cure the terminally ill. They took their child who was close to death from a brain tumour for healing. The 'healer' "laid his hands" on the child and told the parents to believe in a miracle. Despite contributing large sums of money to the work of this man, the child died, leaving the parents to question the strength of their faith but not the healing powers of the Evangelist.

rather than concentrating on their own importance.³³ Using the example of the child - a metaphor for the newly converted - Jesus indicates that the sign of a true disciple, and servant (διδάκονος)³⁴ will be the one who welcomes the child in his name. To do so is an acceptance of Jesus and therefore of God (9: 36-37).

Mark illustrates the dangers that can occur when trying to be the 'greatest' in God's standards lead to an inverted hierarchy of greatness in human standards - the 'greatest' being the one who shows the most humility. Mark intercalates this teaching with the pericope of the exorcist which emphasises the dangers to the community of internal and external elitism. The disciples tell Jesus that they have stopped an exorcist from claiming cures in Jesus' name because he is not one of their group (9:38). Jesus admonishes³⁵ the disciples for paying more attention to the fact that this man is an outsider than that he is aware of who Jesus is, "whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward" (9:40-41). The message to the community is clear, they must not draw boundaries and become insular but must embrace all those who recognise Jesus as Christ, to be true disciples.³⁶ This can only be achieved if there is no hierarchy, no one person is to be more important than another, but everyone is to be a servant in the new meaning that self denial has for discipleship. To be truly great within the parameters set by God, one must welcome the new Christians (children), the outsiders (the exorcist) and all those that might be potential enemies (9:40) by accepting them as having equal worth as people.

I have realised since I came here how appallingly English I am; how harmful and hurtful my accent is here - superior. I do feel superior but I have been struggling with it for the last three years. The superiority of the English here really is a problem, quite unknowingly we put them [the Northern Irish] down. I was quite

³³ Hooker, page 228.

³⁴ Best *Disciples and Discipleship*, page 10.

³⁵ Hooker suggests this rebuke may be a comment on leaders who "tried to exercise a monopoly in certain gifts" page 229.

³⁶ Best *Following Jesus*, page 83.

struck the other day when a Catholic who lives up the hill, talked about his childhood - how he dreaded hearing English voices because they gave him a feeling of inferiority. My Oxford accent must be quite off-putting. I was on telephone duty a few months ago when someone rang up and identified themselves as Rev. More. I asked him to repeat it a few times and then to spell it "Oh", I said "you mean Moo-ore", it just shot out of me - as if the man couldn't pronounce his own name. I felt really ashamed.

Mark completes this first section on intra-community behaviour, with a collection of sayings contrasting the dangers of worldliness to the benefits that can be gained through having knowledge of the kingdom of God. The first of these builds on Jesus' warning on right community relationships by once again referring to 'little ones' (9:42) as those new to the Christian faith, but not yet perhaps members of the community of followers. The consequences of denying these fledgling Christians the opportunity to voice their faith must be great if certain drowning from having a millstone tied around one's neck is to be considered better (9:42). Using images of amputation and gouged out eyes,³⁷ Jesus suggests that it is better to live without a hand, a foot or an eye in the kingdom of heaven than to be cut off from God permanently in hell (γέεννα)³⁸ with all limbs intact and being able to see with both eyes. It is better to have a right relationship with God than it is to have full but imperfect sight.

Myer's political interpretation of these sayings considers the possibility that Mark, in keeping with the Pauline metaphor of the body (1 Cor 12), was suggesting how to deal with those members of the community who were dissenters and informers, and that it was better to expel rather than execute such members for the sake of the "whole body".³⁹ He argues that to "have

³⁷ Hooker (page 232) provides a discussion on Derrett's analysis of punishment practice, in which he argues that to lose an eye, hand or leg was a common form of punishment at this time.

³⁸ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, argues that Mark uses Gehenna rather than Hades as an indication of punishment, since it is used as a symbolic name for a place of future punishment, page 411.

³⁹ Myers, page 263.

salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another" (9:50b) points to Mark's use of these sayings of Jesus to comment on:

the dialectic between the community solidarity (strong group boundaries) and nonexclusivity (weak group boundaries). The good from "outside" must be affirmed, and the bad from "inside" cut out.⁴⁰

This rather harsh political stand can be appropriated for a feminist interpretation. Community solidarity is best maintained with boundaries which preclude hierarchy and embrace equality. Thus permission is given to challenge and remove those structures within the community that preclude some members from a full and equal relationship with God and with each other. "Everyone will be salted with fire" (9:49) implies an equality of opportunity for everyone to be disciples. Salt which loses its taste represents those who would assume positions of power within the community in opposition to Jesus' teaching on serving. Power is to come through doing deeds in Jesus' name (9:39), not in being first in the eyes of others (9:35).

This interpretation accords with Hooker's analysis that the reference to salt losing its taste is a warning on the uselessness of disciples "who do not show the characteristics of discipleship".⁴¹ She suggests that Mark uses the analogy of sharing salt, to meal time fellowship, in the final verse as a reminder of the importance of living in "fellowship and peace together", and how inappropriate their earlier dispute on greatness (9:33-37) has been. Best argues that Mark uses salt to mean something different to Luke's (14:34) and Matthew's (5:13) subsequent use of it. The reference is to the disciples themselves but, since salt preserves, Mark could be using it as a metaphor for the preservation of discipleship through persecution when "the persecuted gives himself and thereby saves or preserves himself (8:35)".⁴²

⁴⁰ Myers, page 264.

⁴¹ Hooker, page 233.

⁴² Best *Following Jesus*, page 87. Taylor notes how this section appears to be a series of catchwords "intended to assist the memory", behind which it is possible to "see signs of poetic forms used by Jesus himself" page 409.

As Jesus' journey progresses beyond the Jordan, and the reader's journey reaches that section of the text which explains the meaning of correct discipleship behaviour, Mark places Jesus in dialogue with the crowd. The central (I) section of the structure emphasises and links the teaching which has gone before with that which will follow. No longer referring to relationships between community members, the teaching returns to the personal conduct a member must have to follow in the way. The teaching is introduced through a challenge by the Pharisees as a test for Jesus, Mark's way of reminding the reader that Jesus' journey is to the cross and how closely discipleship is bound up with the cross. The test comes in the form of a question "is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" (10:2), to which Jesus responds by questioning the Pharisees' own knowledge of Mosaic law (10:3).

Best interprets this passage in the context of sexual propriety. Noting the sexual permissiveness of first century Roman society, he suggests that it is entirely necessary and proper that Jesus should address the issue of marriage. The crowd are the uncommitted, those who have still to decide on joining the community of the church so it is important, he argues, that they know and understand the Christian concept of marriage before they commit themselves fully to becoming a follower of Jesus. This will mean abandoning their "present sexual ethic"⁴³ as they take up their cross - "Mark's sexual teaching is as absolute as the cross itself".⁴⁴ By referring back to the Genesis teaching that husband and wife are joined by God as one flesh and cannot therefore be separated, Best argues that the Marcan Jesus clarifies the Christian understanding that divorce is forbidden to both the husband and the wife.⁴⁵ The subsequent teaching to the disciples within the house, reinforces the code of divorce and remarriage.

Ben Witherington III suggests that Mark here is actually teaching a policy of no divorce⁴⁶ which provides increased security for women within a Christian

⁴³ Best, page 101.

⁴⁴ Best, page 101.

⁴⁵ Best, page 101.

⁴⁶ Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, page 159.

marriage. There are parallels here with the language that Paul uses when writing to the church at Corinth on a similar topic (1 Cor 7:1-17) and it is possible that both the Corinthian church and the Marcan Christian communities were facing similar problems, including the ascetic practice of celibacy. However, both these early communities were expecting the perousia at any time and there was an urgency about being prepared for the event. Paul interprets this as retaining one's existing marital status so that energies could be spent on leading "the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God has called you" (1 Cor 7:17). Morna Hooker supports this view, arguing that both Mark and Paul use this teaching as "an eschatological challenge which calls for perfection by pointing to the ideal for mankind set out at creation".⁴⁷

Antoinette Wire⁴⁸ discusses the dilemma that faces Paul when communicating with the Corinthians, and her analysis may well be appropriate here. On the one hand Paul wants to promote his own preferred state of celibacy as the ideal state for the second coming but, on the other, he needs to discourage women out of celibacy and back into the state of marriage primarily as a means of preventing men from living sexually immoral lives. The ascetic ideal of celibacy gave women freedom from the sexual pressures of marriage at an early age, and the pressures that arose from the shortages of women due to the practice of female infanticide.⁴⁹ By moving out of the oppressive practices of the patriarchal household, women were able to take more prominent roles within the public sphere of worship and prayer.⁵⁰ Paul takes care not to rebuke women for these practices because they are intrinsically wrong, merely because the more women choose celibacy, the more it entraps men within a life of sexual behaviour which is displeasing to God. It seems that little has changed - women have always been encouraged to act so that their needs come second to men!

⁴⁷Hooker page 237.

⁴⁸Antoinette Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*, page 80 ff.

⁴⁹Wire, page 91.

⁵⁰Wire, page 92-3.

My upbringing was typical of Catholic women my age, dominated by the nun's interpretation of sin, morality and obedience. I was brought up with the understanding that a woman's body was a haven for sin; to touch your body, to look at it, to use it for pleasure were all sinful; worse if a man should molest or abuse you then you must in some way have caused him to commit this offence and so you were not only guilty of your own sin but must bear the responsibility for his as well.

James Dunn's⁵¹ comment of Paul's letter: "we are confronted at every turn with relationships in transition as new relationships of the church were cutting across the more established relationships of wider society..." could be addressed to today's church which is still confronted with 'relationships' in transition as society's attitudes to marriage (especially within the Western tradition) change. As both the Marcan and the Pauline texts are read by Church communities who view the perousia with considerably less urgency than the first readers of the texts, it is possible to look for alternative, more flexible, interpretations of this teaching.⁵² I would like to interpret the Marcan Jesus' teaching on divorce and adultery as two linked stages, the first involving that given to the crowd and the second to the smaller group in the house. Together the teaching will build to provide a challenge to the patriarchal attitude prevailing in society at the time and a reminder that there is no place for hierarchy within the Christian community, then or now. I propose then to interpret this teaching as a metaphor for loyalty.

Jesus reminds the crowd that from the beginning "God made them male and female" (10:6) and in marriage "they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate" (10:8-9). Since God has made both men and women, and each can commit themselves equally to God there need be no difference in the commitment men and women make to God through discipleship. By joining the community of followers both men and women are entering into a oneness with God

⁵¹ James D.G. Dunn, *1 Corinthians*,.

⁵² Hooker suggests that this discussion indicated that divorce would continue but with the recognition that it's necessity was due to human failure and not as an automatic right to be justified as a Mosaic command, page 237.

through a spiritual relationship in much the same way they become "one flesh" in marriage. On entering marriage, each partner will leave their existing family to join a new family with each other. Likewise when a disciple enters a spiritual relationship with God they must leave behind the old 'family' and find support within the new family of the Christian community. Marriage requires commitment and loyalty not "hardness of heart" (10:5), if it is not to dissolve in divorce. Similar commitment and loyalty will be required from a disciple on joining their new Christian family. The difference is that this family will be based upon God's law, which means a disciple can depend on God's loyalty. For God there will be no need to "write a certificate of divorce" (10:4) since nothing spiritual will cause a disciple to become separated from God.⁵³

The Marcan Jesus withdraws with a smaller group inside the house to deliver the second stage of the teaching. Since Jesus responds to the Pharisee with a reference to Mosaic law, the teaching must somehow relate back to the established law of the old order. Although, as Bests points out, Roman law allowed a woman to divorce her husband,⁵⁴ Mosaic law prohibited such an act. Jesus' indication here then, that the same rules apply for women and men in divorce and remarriage, means that changes need to be made within the Church so that men and women should be recognised as the equals that God created them to be. If this is not to be the case what advantage is to be gained by restating the law in favour of women? This is a not just an explanation of the law of Moses but a clear statement that within the Christian community there will be no marginalised groups since there is no patriarchy/hierarchy within God's law. Every Christian can have a unique but equal spiritual relationship with God. Since

⁵³ Julia Kristeva, (*In the Beginning Was Love*), argues that there is a need for a primary identification with a loving agency which she suggests Christians celebrate in the unconditional divine love of God. I will explore this further in the chapter on John's Gospel.

⁵⁴ Both Taylor (page 420) and Hooker (page 237) refer to Burkitt's suggestion that Jesus is here referring to the well known case of Herodias who leaves her husband for another man. Taylor provides an analysis of a number of exegeses on this question, and concludes that although Jesus could have been commenting on Pagan customs he was more likely to have been thinking of the Jesus situation and that his teaching could have been adapted to suit the Roman situation.

God is not differentiating between Christians neither should some members of the community support structures that discriminate against others.

David Dungan⁵⁵ asks the question “Are we to suppose that in Mark’s view marriage, once initiated, was to be maintained regardless of what each of the partner’s did?”. He concludes, using what he calls the flexible approach of Paul when dealing with similar issues facing the church at Corinth,⁵⁶ that this is *not* what the Marcan Jesus meant. What Jesus did mean was that *remarriage* was prohibited, not divorce. If, as Witherington suggests, Mark was making a clear distinction in his teaching between the physical family and the family of faith,⁵⁷ are we now living in an age in which the Church can also make the same distinction? Should the Church be recognising that once a physical relationship is no longer sustainable and a new partnership becomes viable this need not necessarily mean that the individuals concerned have separated from God? At this time, people may need the support of their Church. A number of women in my research provided clear evidence of strong spiritual relationships with God now that they were in new relationships even if they could not retain a relationship with their church community.

My first marriage was very short. My husband left me with two little children. I was very lonely and eventually I found someone. It was a sacrificial thing. I knew he was really a [the tape is unclear here], and I was hoping to be of help in that. We were married for 26 years and he was just totally unfaithful to me (I mean within the 20's). It was the only thing that could give him a lift off - make him feel worth. I hung on through thick and thin. Each time it happened I forgave it and moved on. I ran out of love quite early, but I asked the Lord for his love to forgive him. Finally, I was away one night, when I came back and found he had brought a woman into our bed. I struggled to keep the marriage going, but I went for healing

⁵⁵David Dungan, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul: The use of the Synoptic Tradition in the Regulation of Early Church Life*, page 128.

⁵⁶Hooker notes that Jesus was talking to the disciples whereas Paul was addressing the entire community. There is no suggestion she argues that these rules should extend to others not committed to Christian Discipleship, page 237.

⁵⁷Witherington page 159.

at a place in Kent where I got a lot of support. They helped me to see that I was being abused, and that by staying, I was colluding with him. I was not helping him. What started as service became slavery. Although I left the relationship, I won't reject what happened, it was part of my life. I am thankful for everything that really happened because the Lord won't waste anything. We do have to pass through these actions, through which we are tempted to desert God to come to a truer relationship with Him. All we can do is what we understand at the time.

This woman was able to develop what seems to be a closer relationship with God and to remain within her church community. This was not so for another woman who talked about the way in which she was 'divorced' from her church because she had entered into a sexual relationship with a new partner. So powerful is the idea of sin within Irish Catholic women of her generation, she felt unable even to go to mass in a church where she wasn't known. She had effectively to 'divorce' herself from the Church, even though she still felt a close personal relationship with God.

I spent many years raising a large family in an abusive marriage with no support from my church. In essence I should put up with my suffering, offering it for the "Holy Souls" since any suffering I would endure could be nothing compared to Jesus' suffering on my behalf. Eventually I left my abusive marriage but struggle to reconcile the wholeness I experience from a new relationship, with the shame it brings on the church. I can't go to mass because to enter a church would be a brazen act which would tempt the wrath of God. One day my partner said to me " I gave up my wife and children for you", I replied " But I gave up my God for you."

A lesbian Christian talked of her experience in a similar way. She felt the Catholic Church only recognised lesbian women if they remain in celibate relationships:

I was very active within my church - a Eucharistic Minister, everything. At the time of becoming Catholic I was very happy in a celibate relationship, but eventually that friendship ended and my new relationship was not celibate. My church would not accept me as an active sexual woman. The Church does not know how to deal with us.

Both of these women feel rejected by their church, yet remain in a close relationship with God. Both women had been in 'full communion' with the church and in the case of the lesbian woman this had been an important part of expressing her relationship with God. Are either of these women's stories, examples that the Marcan Jesus would tolerate? It would seem that these women are also examples of "those who are not against us".

Myers presents an interesting analysis of Mark's use of the child in each of the sections enclosing the teaching on marriage and divorce. He explores the connection between the family system and the roots of violence, suggesting that Mark uses the child to represent a class of exploited persons. He questions whether, by linking this passage to the discourse on divorce and remarriage, Mark may be arguing for non-violence as a way of life, using the family as the basic building block of human social existence.

The child is not a mere symbol in Mark, but a *person*. To deal with this person is to deal with our own repressed past, the roots of violence, and the possibility of a transformed future, our own and our children's.⁵⁸

If Myers is correct, and Mark is arguing for non-violence as a way of life, then the message needs to be drawn out in relation to the Church family as well as the nuclear family. It would be possible to justify such a conclusion from the fact that the initial teaching is given to the crowd (the secular family) and the second stage of the teaching is given in the house (the Church family). It is as important today that the Church family should adopt

⁵⁸Myers, page 271.

a policy of non-violence (in all its forms), towards members of its community as it would have been to the Marcan community.

Mark uses the disciples' stern rebuke of the children (10:13) as an indication that Jesus' radical views will be resisted. It *will* be appropriate to include the marginalised, the weak and the vulnerable as able disciples - special qualifications will not be necessary. The Kingdom of God is to be a gift to all who receive it (10:14-15).

Mark contrasts the image of the child who has the least wealth but is the true beneficiary of the Kingdom of God (10:14), with the story of Jesus' encounter with the rich man who has everything. This was not a man who was trying to test Jesus, but was seeking an answer to his genuine⁵⁹ question about eternal life. Despite having followed the commandments and lived a 'good' life, he rejects Jesus' call to "come follow me" (10:21b) because he cannot accept Jesus' other command to "sell what you have and give it to the poor" (10:21). Vincent Taylor points to the debate among commentators that this demand to the rich man is not "a universal renunciation of property",⁶⁰ but is a special instruction to him concerning his call to discipleship. The demand serves to illustrate that although there will be differences in the new order it is still in agreement with the Rabbinical order that wealth is not to be associated with divine favour, but with the need "to love God rather than the body or life or property."⁶¹ Best argues, that by placing the story here, Mark is "widening the challenge of Jesus (v21) beyond wealth and into the family"⁶² since, although not everyone has wealth, they do all have families.

Jesus contrasts the child with the rich man, referring to the disciples as children (10:23) as he indicates how difficult it will be for everyone to enter into the kingdom. Is Peter therefore disappointed that even though the twelve have left everything, including their families, to follow Jesus (10:28) it

⁵⁹Hooker, page 214.

⁶⁰ Taylor, page 429.

⁶¹ Taylor, page 429.

⁶²Best, *Discipleship and Disciples*, page 18.

may not have been enough? For Peter comes the reassurance that *whoever* gives these things for "my sake and the good news" the future reward will be plentiful (10:29-30). By rejecting the patriarchal yoke of the traditional family (10:29), rewards will be a hundred fold now in this age as well as in eternal life (10:30). In the new family there will be no hierarchy since the first will be last and the last will be first (10:31). Morna Hooker regards this pericope as further confirmation of the need for self denial and taking up one's cross to follow Jesus "on the journey he is about to resume".⁶³ The rewards for this come not through riches but through God, for whom all things are possible (10:27). For Hooker, the reference to family, is a reaffirmation that Jesus understands what a follower must give up, since Jesus himself rejected his own family (3:31-35). Rejection therefore will be rewarded one hundred fold by membership in the Christian community.

Myers argues, that rather than just reaffirming Jesus' commitment to the law, this passage is clearly about 'economic exploitation'. The Marcan Jesus is passing judgement on the wealthy classes:

The implied opposition between earth ("give to the poor"), and heaven ("and there you shall have treasure") is yet another expression of apocalyptic status-reversal As far as Mark is concerned the man's wealth has been gained by "defrauding" the poor - he was not "blameless" at all - for which he must make restitution.⁶⁴

Myer's comment that Jesus is directly confronting the exploitation of the poor by the Jerusalem Temple has direct parallels in modern society. Today's reader can interpret this pericope in the context of the contrasting wealth and poverty that divides the world. The demand to "sell what you own" will no longer be taken literally since it is evident that there has never been a society which operates perfectly on the policy of equal ownership. Human greed and enjoyment of power mean that even in the best

⁶³ Hooker, page 242.

⁶⁴ Myers, page 272-3.

intentioned societies some will benefit at the expense of others. What this teaching demands in a modern context is that we assess the disproportionate distribution of resources that exploit so much of the world for the benefit of the rest. This assessment should be undertaken locally within our own experience as well as globally. Behaving as a true disciple entails consideration of the weakest, through recognition that our own needs must not be gained at the expense of others, relinquishing what we can do without if someone else needs it more. But the wider implication can be seen in governments which support global organisations which exploit the poorest of the poor.

I have often questioned my own discomfort with some charitable works, particularly those of organisations such as Comic Relief, and the work of Mother Teresa's community. It is perfectly right that we take the message that Mark was giving here and look at ways of redistributing wealth. If that can be done by giving to charities which help those communities who do not



Fig 3.b Mother of the Streets

have basic needs, that is good. But when it is done by very wealthy celebrities, presenting harrowing images of need, to provoke far less wealthy people than themselves into parting with money, I feel a discomfort which I cannot deal with satisfactorily. Is it just enough that large sums of money are raised to help others to have a better life? Should we not also be taking political action to put pressure on governments and companies who create the poverty in the first place? This has always been

my concern about Mother Teresa. On the one hand I applaud the good work that the woman did in helping the street people of Calcutta, and in the way that she personally went out of her way to thank those who contributed to her work:

He was in the warehouse one morning, baling clothes as usual when this little old lady shuffled in. He was surprised to see her and asked

how he could help. She said "I'm Mother Teresa, I have come to thank you for all the clothes you send to us, God Bless You".⁶⁵

But on the other hand, it seems as if she was just 'putting plasters' on to the wound when people fell over the obstacle, instead of moving the obstacle out of the way. I appreciate that the obstacle of the Indian-underclass is too big for one woman to move, but she clearly had the ear of influential world leaders who could have put pressure on the Indian government to tackle its poverty. I feel almost sacrilegious in criticising a woman who was very definitely a disciple, and will almost certainly be canonised by the Catholic Church before the end of the century, but I do wonder if "service" as a disciple is meant to be "patching up" without, if one has the opportunity, making a political challenge as well.

By considering political domination, patriarchy and the family system, Myers offers an interesting analysis of Mark's critique of power systems. He offers four interpretations,⁶⁶ the fourth of which is of interest here. Myers writes:

in a thoroughly patriarchal socio-cultural order, women alone are fit to act as servant-leaders How else can a portrait that paints men as power-hungry and women as servants function, except to legitimate women as leaders?⁶⁷

If the last are to be first then this is confirmation that within the new order women can take up these newly defined roles of leadership. This argument is valid if one assumes that a 'patriarchal' order even if the gender roles are reversed, is the only one that can function within society. The difficulty I feel

⁶⁵This story was told by a close friend whose husband had the franchise for baling and exporting clothes for 'Help The Aged', in the late '70s. His warehouse was in an out of the way industrial estate in North Woolwich.

⁶⁶ Myers references (1) Kelber's argument that Mark used the social function of service rather than power "as a polemic against the Jerusalem based church led by Peter, James and Jesus' family; (2) that Mark wished to discredit any and all forms of leadership; (3) that the story was to encourage accountability of leaders. The negative portrait of the disciples would then help the community to realise that "leaders can and do fail", Page 281.

⁶⁷ Myers, page 281.

with Myers analysis is that not all women function in a non-patriarchal way when they become leaders.⁶⁸

As a young woman, I went on retreat to a Lutheran convent. I decided to enter the home for life, and from the age of 22 to 31 I lived in the community as a nun. The community had 150 sisters in several houses around the world. Women's sisterhood was a powerful experience. There was a strict hierarchy and we could only read what our leader had written. It was repressive and intended to make us conform. There was a downward spiral of condemnation intended ultimately to lead to repentance and therefore joy. Comments against jealousy and so on stacked up, justification of self was the worst sin. It just led to despair. There was a heavy emphasis on judgement but no big emphasis on forgiveness. It was a crushing experience.

I would suggest that in the Gospel, the Marcan Jesus is saying something more fundamental than that roles can be reversed. I propose that he is arguing to reject the hierarchical order of patriarchy, replacing it with a social structure based on the recognition that gendered difference should be celebrated and recognised as having equal value, worth and place within any society. This is something that women have been striving for, probably since the time the Gospel was written. Contemporary feminisms⁶⁹ seek to clarify the need to recognise difference and respect women's opportunities, not to insist on placing women in roles traditionally assumed to be for men without also recognising the alternative qualities that women can bring to such roles.

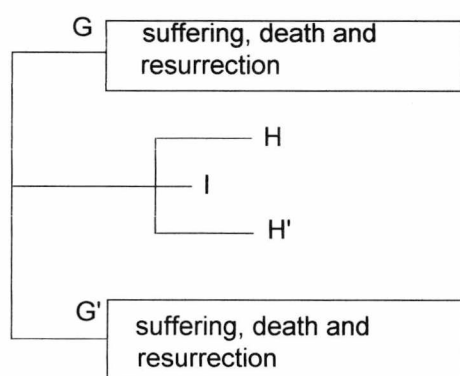
Is this teaching an eschatological pronouncement or indicative of present community relationships?⁷⁰ Although Mark has not placed the disciples in

⁶⁸The government led by Margaret Thatcher is a classic example of a woman maintaining for herself all the privileges of 'male' power, whilst denying opportunity to other women. I am sure that there are also examples in the workplace where some women fit very neatly into the patriarchal model once they are promoted to positions of leadership.

⁶⁹Feminisms here includes all the feminist ideologies that have developed out of what can be called second wave feminism and would include Marxist feminism, radical feminism, liberal feminism and so on.

⁷⁰ Taylor suggests that the Kingdom could be considered eschatologically but is most likely

the house to receive it, Peter is named within the teaching, indicating perhaps that Jesus may be addressing this smaller group on relationships within the present community. By adopting the new code of non-hierarchical behaviour, Jesus is stressing that a disciple will not be suffering from real loss but will be gaining from more rewarding social and spiritual relationships. This message is as relevant today as it was to the Marcan community. The Church will become a richer establishment for the rejection of those structures which enrich the few at the expense of the majority.



This particular chiasmic structure closes with the third pronouncement which details just how powerless Jesus now is in going to the cross (10: 33). Yet it is through this powerlessness that God's true power will be revealed.

Mark summarises all of this teaching on discipleship behaviour by reiterating the meaning of suffering and service, clarifying why Jesus is so powerless: “for the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45). There is more to being a disciple than just imitating a male Jesus. It is not the maleness of Jesus that is important but what his death reveals to both men and women. Normal society conventions must be reversed “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be the servant of all” (10: 43-44). Discipleship is therefore possible for all and is independent of gender since, by his suffering and death, Jesus provides all disciples with a legitimacy to believe.

This middle section of the Gospel draws to a close with the second sight restoration. At Jericho, Jesus and his followers encounter Bartimaeus who, with full understanding, recognises Jesus as the Son of David (10: 47). James and John earlier call Jesus 'Teacher' (10:35) even though, through

to be considered as present, Page 431.

their request to share in Jesus' glory by sitting "one at your right hand and one at your left" (10:37), they demonstrate so clearly that as learners they have failed completely. Bartimaeus, on the other hand, uses the phrase "My Teacher" with full knowledge that his faith in Jesus will be enough to heal him, if that is Jesus' wish. In the opening sight restoration clear sight came to the blind man in two stages, implying that what evidence the followers had at that time was not enough for their full understanding. It needed further teaching in the meaning of following for this sight to be available. Now, reassured by the example of Bartimaeus' faith that his sight would be restored through belief, the reader is able to make an informed and positive choice to follow Jesus.

When reading the Gospel through feminist eyes we must resist the temptation of viewing the male disciples in a wholly negative light and claim only the women as true disciples, which of course they turn out to be. Mark has portrayed the male disciples as he has for a purpose and we must therefore try and analyse this portrayal using a feminist critique, picking up on and expanding some of the more recent commentaries and analyses of the role the disciples play in Marcan theology. Marie Sabin, in her work on the Wisdom tradition and Mark, suggests that by reading Mark as Midrashic homily it is possible to see "that the disciples' weaknesses function as metaphors for folly".⁷¹ What is surprising in this metaphor though is the foolish disciples are all male, whilst the wise disciples are female. I would question Sabin's argument to some extent, because not all the men are foolish. Mark does use them, however, as a tool to reveal his subverting theology.

Robert Tannehill's⁷² narrative analysis of the Gospel explores just how the disciples function in the plot. Tannehill concurs with Theodore Weedon⁷³ that Jesus' relationship with the male disciples passes through three stages: unperceptiveness, misconception before finally rejection. Through an initial

⁷¹ Marie Sabin, *Woman Transformed: The Ending of Mark is the Beginning of Wisdom*, page 1.

⁷² Robert C Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of Narrative Role", in William R Telford (ed), *The Interpretation of Mark*.

⁷³ Theodore J Weedon Sr, *Mark. Traditions In Conflict*.

positive portrayal of the disciples, Tannehill argues that the reader hears the author's indirect voice, and so models their own discipleship on that revealed in the text.⁷⁴ But by structuring the text to then alert the reader to the disciples' failure, Mark has set up a mechanism for the reader to come to repentance.⁷⁵ The disciples' mystification at Jesus' teachings, their conflict with Jesus and finally their desertion of him when he needs them most, all point to behaviour that the reader will probably not want to identify with themselves. The reader is then left with the choice of either following Jesus or following the male disciples.⁷⁶ It is at this point that I feel Tannehill stops short of a proposal that meets the needs of a feminist interpretation. Certainly the reader is left with choices, but these also include that of specifically exploring the relationship of the women to Jesus - women whom Mark shows to possess strong discipleship traits.

At the outset, the male disciples seemingly without the knowledge that the reader has of Jesus' filial relationship to God (1:11), leave everything and follow Jesus when he calls them (1:16-21, 2:14, 3:13-19). This action forms the basis of Tannehill's argument for Mark's initial encouragement of the reader towards the disciples. This positive feeling increases as these men go out as commanded, to cast out demons, cure the sick and proclaim the message of Jesus (6:7-13), which they seem to do with energy and enthusiasm (6:30-31). But already Mark is planting seeds of doubt in the reader's mind. These chosen men need to have the parables explained to them (4:13-14; 34); they do not trust Jesus' decisions (4:38; 6:37; 8:41); they do not understand the wisdom that is within Jesus (6:2) and the nature miracles leave them baffled (4:41; 6:47-52). Clearly they do not realise the nature of who Jesus is, nor what following means for Jesus. At the same time, however, Mark has set up situations through which the reader can relate positively to other models of discipleship as a counterbalance to the growing negative feelings that they might be harbouring towards the twelve.

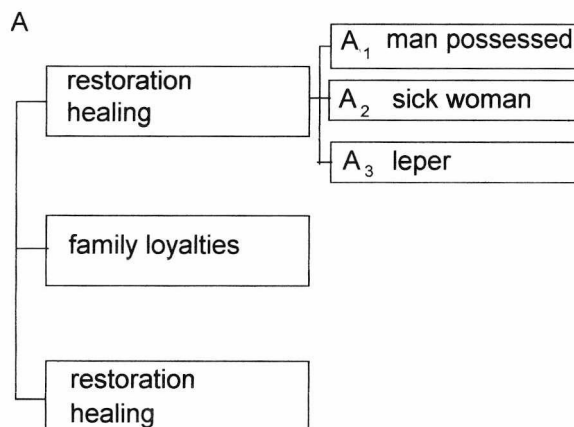
⁷⁴ Tannehill, page 176.

⁷⁵ Tannehill, page 176.

⁷⁶ Tannehill, page 176.

The first such situation concerns the mother-in-law of Simon Peter, one of the first men to be called by Jesus (1:16:20). As Jesus enters the house of Simon and Andrew, he is immediately told of the mother-in-law's illness. We do not know who the messenger is, but the immediacy with which Jesus is informed creates a sense of urgency. The crux of the story is told in just one verse "He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. The fever left her and she began to serve them" (1:31). Why is this such a positive example of discipleship? What can this tell us about the place of women not only in the Marcan community but also in the Church today? Some commentaries suggest that Mark includes this pericope as an illustration of the fact that Mark was writing Peter's remembrances.⁷⁷ If this was just the case it seems unlikely that Matthew and Luke would have felt it's inclusion necessary, it must be more than just a healing story.

The reader is alerted to the theological importance of this pericope because it contains all the techniques that Mark uses for emphasis - structure, manner of identification, language and place. This healing story can be viewed as the middle of three healing miracles dealing with people



marginalised by society. Although not a strict chiasmic structure, nor an example of intercalation, the structure becomes significant because Mark chooses to place the healing of the woman between those of two men. They are only marginalised by society through illness, whereas the

woman is doubly marginalised by her gender too. The central story therefore has a deeper meaning than just one of healing - it is about the exclusion of certain sections of the community but more importantly it is about the ability of women to be disciples. I have already argued that the Marcan Jesus uses the enclosed space of the house to instruct the

⁷⁷ Hooker, page 70; Taylor, page 178, regards the narrative as Petrine.

community on their relationships with one another, so it is within this context that this healing must be interpreted.

The woman is identified in the highly irregular manner through her relationship to her daughter's husband; normally the identification would be through her father or her own husband. Marie Sabin suggests that Mark makes a special point of her social anonymity as evidence of a new attitude to women that was emerging in early Judaism.⁷⁸ This may be true, but I want to suggest that Mark is also making an alternative point about discipleship. One unnamed woman is healed, but another unnamed woman is also on the scene (her daughter) albeit off stage. By linking these women to a chosen named disciple, Mark is allowing the reader to interpret the mother's subsequent action of service in the context of discipleship.

It is the language that Mark uses to tell of the healing that brings out the full importance of this verse. The woman "was in bed with a fever" (1:30). The Greek, κατέκειτο πυρέσσουσα implies that she was lying prone, burning with a fever, so possibly there was little expectation that she would survive for long. Jesus "lifts her up" (ἐγείρω), a word associated with restoration and resurrection (5:41,16:6). This then is not just a story about the restored health of one anonymous woman, it can be interpreted as symbolic of the death of the exclusion of all women from society and their resurrection into a new position within an inclusive society. Both the mother and the daughter are restored.

Throughout the Gospel, Mark uses εὐθύς to express immediacy. In this story, however, he uses the word not to express the immediacy with which the cure takes place as he does in other healings (1:40; 2:12; 5:29; 10:52), but to stress the urgency with which Jesus was told of the illness. Is this just to confirm the close relationship of Peter to Jesus, and as a close friend he maybe could expect Jesus to attend as quickly as possible? Or can it be used to clarify the interpretation of the word used subsequently to describe the healed mother-in law's action? The immediacy with which Jesus comes,

⁷⁸ Sabin, page 1

confirms the seriousness of the illness and the severity of the fever. Although the fever leaves the woman as Jesus raises her up, it would be unreasonable if she had been so ill to expect her to provide hospitality the minute she recovered. I suggest it is more logical to interpret her service as discipleship which is in keeping with Mark's use of διακονέω as a characteristic of discipleship elsewhere in the Gospel.

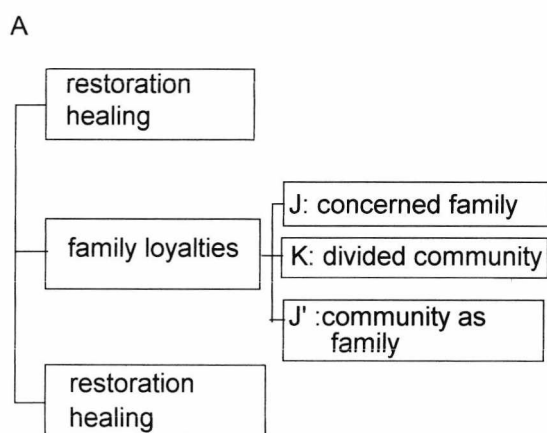
Mark also uses the word when describing the reason for discipleship "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἦλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι) (10:45). Here it is used to describe the woman's first action once her health is restored "and she began to serve them" (καὶ διηκόνει αὐτοῖς) (1:31) strengthened in the Matthean account to "served him" (Mt 8:15). Although διακονέω has dual meaning associated with either domestic service and food preparation, or to minister as in a deacon of the Church, Mark interestingly does not use this word in the feeding miracles when discussing the preparation of food for the thousands (6:37, 8:4), nor after the healing of Jairus' daughter when he demands that she be given food (5:43). He reserves it for discipleship.

The illnesses of the three people in this frame (1:23, 1:29, 1:40) all hold a power over those with whom they come into contact. In the case of the man possessed (1:23), the unclean spirit attempts to have power over Jesus by naming him. However, by commanding the spirits to leave the man, Jesus demonstrates that his power is the greater. Physical contact with the woman and the leper would have led anyone touching them to become unclean (Lev 22:5-7). By touching these two, Morna Hooker suggests that Jesus demonstrates his power of healing is greater than the contaminating power of the illness.⁷⁹ A social restoration parallel can be seen in the touching of the woman's hand. By this physical act, Jesus demonstrates that the inclusive power of the new order, is greater than the power the old order has to exclude.

⁷⁹Hooker, page 149.

In this opening section of the Gospel, Mark indicates the subversive nature of the text through Jesus' actions as well as his words. Jesus ignores the conventions of society by eating with the marginalised (2:15 - 17); by defying the Sabbath laws (2:23 - 27; 3:1 - 5) and generally upsetting the authorities by his actions. Jesus defends these actions with his teaching on the need to move away from the old order whose structure and rules divide (the old cloak, old wine skins (2:21 -22), to embrace the new structure in the kinship of God (the fresh wineskins to hold the new wine). This must be in the context of a new beginning, it is not enough to “patch up”, what exists already (2:21). The Marcan Jesus uses the parable of the divided kingdom, which Mark encloses in a frame concerning kinship and family loyalties, to emphasis how important it is to take this change seriously.

Mark opens the frame by using the metaphor of the extended family (οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ),⁸⁰ to illustrate the break that must be made from tradition, and the struggle that there will be in doing so. The scribes accuse Jesus of being



possessed by Beelzebub, and controlled by “the ruler of the demons” as he heals (3:32). His family are concerned (J) at the controversy his actions are causing and try to restrain him (κρατῆσαι αὐτόν) (3:21). The use of such a strong phrase indicates the strong opposition to change, and the reassurance that safety

can be found within the familiar. But the Marcan Jesus is not comfortable with the familiar, particularly when that familiarity leads to division. For Jesus the challenge of the Scribes must be countered in the language of the challenge with the parable of the inner section (K).

⁸⁰ Vincent Taylor discusses the various meanings of the phrase (οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ) in other early manuscripts such as envoy, ambassador, followers before concluding that here Mark is referring to the family at Nazareth not merely friends and definitely not the disciples. The use of the strong expression (κρατῆσαι αὐτόν) indicates the family's desire to control Jesus' actions, page 236.

Jesus points out that the misunderstanding lies with the accusers. They have mistaken Satan for the Holy Spirit, and so it is the acknowledged leaders who are really guilty of blasphemy.⁸¹ They are the ones who are blind to the truth and so represent the divided family. It is Jesus who will be the one to "tie up the strong man" (3:27), a reference to Satan, and plunder his goods. The word that Mark uses here, (σκεῦος) can mean household possessions which would be in keeping with Mark's metaphor. Vincent Taylor⁸² suggests that here this would mean those people possessed by Satan. However, the phrase can be used to mean a woman as a vessel of her husband, so is it equally plausible that here Mark is also referring to a rejection of patriarchy. Women will no longer be seen as possessions but disciples in their own right.

Mark returns to the apparent rejection by the family because of Jesus' behaviour in the closing section of the frame (J'). Here the close family members are used as illustrations of the dualism of rejection and acceptance. The apparent rejection comes with Jesus reply "Who are my mother and brothers?" (3:33) when told by those inside the house listening to him that his close family (ἡ μήτηρ μου και οἱ ἀδελφοί μου) are outside calling for him. Earlier in the frame the extended family reference was to the wider community.⁸³ The reference now to the immediate family does indeed seem that Jesus is rejecting those closest to him, adopting an attitude which is contrary to his previous behaviour of accepting the most marginalised members of society with whom to eat and associate. What therefore is the message that Mark is suggesting in this apparent contradiction?

Vincent Taylor suggests that the pronouncement on the new kindred of Jesus⁸⁴ was current in the oral tradition long before Mark included it in his

⁸¹ Hooker, page 114.

⁸² Taylor, page 241.

⁸³ Ched Myers stresses the importance of kinship as the "axis of the social world in antiquity" and as such represents everything that Jesus opposes, page 168.

⁸⁴ Taylor, page 245.

Gospel. There are parallels with the Gospel of Thomas which makes references to the family outside and the ones on the inside:

The disciples said to him 'Your brothers and your mother are standing outside.' He said to them 'Those here who do the will of my father are my brother and my mother. It is they who will enter the kingdom of my father' (Logion 99).

This collection of sayings was possibly a source for both Mark and Matthew, but Matthew chooses not to link the close family to the wider kinship (Mt 12:46-50) so has Mark been further influenced by the oral tradition recorded by Thomas in the sayings of Jesus in structuring this telling of the story?

Jesus said "whoever does not hate his [father] and his mother as I do cannot become a [disciple] to me. And whoever does [not] love his [father and] his mother as I do cannot become a [disciple to] me. For my mother [...] but [my] true [mother] gave me life. (Logion 101)

In this saying of Jesus there is the dualism of hate and love, with the paradox that it is impossible to be a disciple if you do not hate your mother and father, yet it is equally impossible to be a disciple if you do not love your mother and father. So which is it to be? Mark, by carefully putting this into a chiasmic structure, translates and separates hate/love of the family into rejection/acceptance of the old and the new.

The final line of the Thomas passage gives a strong endorsement of the importance that Jesus places on his own mother and for the maternal in God. The opportunity for real life, and for discipleship is linked to the mother. This can provide women with opportunities to see the mother in an empowering role. This is particularly so for Catholic women who grew up with the image of the idealised mother that the Catholic Church placed on Mary.

Mary was chosen, she had no choice. She is a wonderful role model - since she was given the role of mother, given the message - she is able to give it to me.

Mary is very significant to me both as a woman and a mother. I had no mother as she died in childbirth. I can see Mary as a real woman, getting older and fatter...

Ched Myers sees within this passage a mutual opposition between Jesus and his family. The family will not accept Jesus' vocation and therefore he must reject their kinship.⁸⁵ The dualism of those outside (ἐξω) the family and the crowd inside ends, for Myers, in a "new definition of 'outsiders' and 'insiders'".⁸⁶ This then enables Mark to "introduce a new kinship model based upon obedience, not to the family or clan patriarch but to God alone (3:35)",⁸⁷ this is a metaphorical replacement of the secular family with the spiritual family of God. This extended family indicates the extent to which the spiritual family can grow when those outside the community accept the will of God. The assurance given that "whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (3:35) indicates that in the spiritual family of God all are accepted without hierarchy in an undivided house.

The use of the close family in the closing section of the frame in contrast to the metaphor of the extended family in the opening section would seem to support such a feminist reading of the text. The linear relationship of the brother-sister together with the non-patriarchal structures which can be developed around relationship with the mother, rather than the patriarchal structure of father-brother indicates that 'non-clan' structure is to be adopted by the new 'insiders'. What we see here is a call to reject divisive structures illustrated through traditional family metaphors, rather than a mutual rejection of physical family bonds.

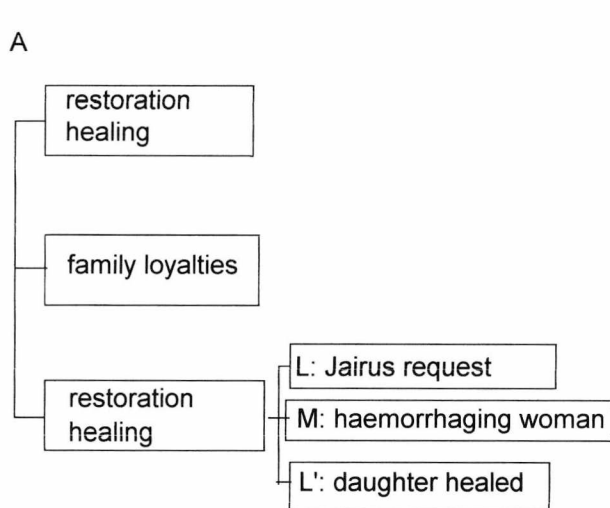
⁸⁵ Myers, page 168.

⁸⁶ Myers, page 168.

⁸⁷ Myers, page 168.

Mark uses the initial frame of chiasmic structures to set up scenarios which will initiate the teaching in the central key section. In the central section of the Gospel structure (B) the Marcan Jesus teaches that faith is essential to understanding discipleship behaviour (9: 14 - 29). In the opening frame (A) Mark provides contrasting examples of faithlessness and faith in the story of Jairus' request for healing for his daughter and the woman who has bled for many years.

The story begins with Jairus begging Jesus to come and heal his sick daughter; on the way to Jairus' house the woman pushes through the crowd



for her own healing which delays Jesus' progress long enough for Jairus' daughter to die, thus requiring Jesus to restore her to life. The insertion of the pericope of the woman serves not as a time delay to heighten the dramatic effect⁸⁸ of the resurrection of the girl, but is the key to the teaching

on faith, discipleship, and the need to remove socially excluding taboos.

Jairus is a well respected member of the community, a leader of the synagogue who should have faith in God. He clearly has expectations that Jesus can help his sick daughter as he falls at Jesus' feet repeatedly pleading for her healing (5:23). The reader gains an image of the distraught father whose little daughter is close to death (5:23) so is heartened that Jesus agrees to go with Jairus. The crowd too is expectant that something will happen so follow Jesus to Jairus' home (5:24). Through the crowd pushes this anonymous woman who has endured much suffering because of her condition. As this is clearly vaginal bleeding she not only suffers the physical weakness that accompanies continuous blood loss but also the

⁸⁸ Edwards, *Marcan Sandwiches*, disagrees with Nineham and Klostermann here who regard the purpose purely for delay, page 205.

permanent exclusion from society through her perpetual state of so called uncleanness (Lev 12:2). To make matters worse this woman has "endured much under many physicians" (5:26) so she has been drained financially as

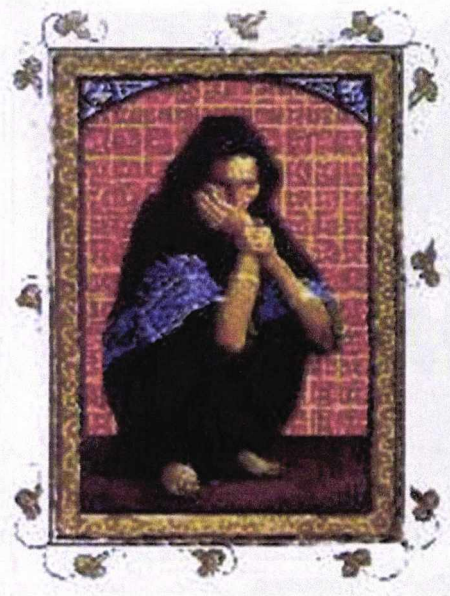


Fig 3.c The Woman with a Hemorrhage

well as physically. Her faith, which is so strong that she knows just by touching Jesus' garments⁸⁹ she will be healed, does not go unrewarded (5:29). Aware that there has been a transference of power Jesus tries, to the disciples' evident surprise to discover who it is that has touched him (5:30-31). Unlike Jairus, who falls at Jesus' feet to plead, the woman does so in awe of Jesus' messianic nature to reveal exactly what she has done and why (5:23).

Her faith ensures her healing as

Jesus commands her: "Daughter your faith has made you well: go in peace and be healed from your disease." (5:34).

As Jesus is still speaking, news reaches Jairus that his daughter is dead; there is no need to detain Jesus any longer. Whoever has brought the news refers to Jesus as 'the Teacher', a technique that Mark uses to remind the reader that what follows is 'teaching' related to discipleship. Jesus encourages Jairus to have faith and believe that "the child is not dead but sleeping" (5:39). However, it is clear from the reaction of the family and the disciples who have come into the house with Jesus, that faith is the one thing they do not have. They are "overcome with amazement" (5:42) as Jesus takes the girl by the hand, as he did the mother-in-law of Simon Peter, and restores her to health (5:41). In presenting the readers with a clear lesson in faith, Mark has once again made a statement on restoration of the marginalised through the use of the verb *εγείρω* to describe the girl's

⁸⁹ Taylor discusses the ancient belief that the garments and the shadow were considered extensions to the healer's personality. The expression "at least his garments" marks the intensity of her desire to touch Jesus, page 291.

awakening from death to life. At the start of the story, Jairus is identified by his status in society and by his name. His theological knowledge should have given him faith in God, but his rapid loss of hope that Jesus can heal his daughter once he hears she is dead, shows that he has no faith in Jesus as God. By contrast, the woman who has no name and no status has complete faith that Jesus will embrace her in his healing power.

Mark uses place, structure and language to make his point about inclusivity. The healing of the woman takes place in front of the crowd. This then, is a message on appropriate attitudes for those who are about to join the community of followers. A disciple needs to have the same faith as the woman, but this is possible for *each* member of the community since none will have special abilities over any other member. This woman demonstrates true discipleship characteristics and therefore will be able to take her place within the community having equal status with all community members. She will not be excluded through her biology.

Mark doubly links the two women through daughter relationships and through time. The older woman has been permanently unclean through her condition for twelve years, yet Jesus embraces her as his 'daughter' as he restores her to health. Jairus' daughter, we learn, is not such a little child after all. She is a young woman aged twelve (5:42) possibly already also periodically unclean. The stoppage of the woman's excessive flow of blood, and the death of Jairus' daughter are symbolic that in the new order there must be a 'death' of the stigma of uncleanness. More than that though, the daughter's resurrection indicates a 'lifting up' of the status of women within the Church community. Like the woman who came from 'behind' into full view of Jesus, so women today can come from obscurity into full discipleship within their churches. Although some Christian societies still practice exclusion on the grounds that menstruation and sexual intercourse pollutes, women are beginning to take it upon themselves to challenge such restrictive practices.

Gabriele Deitrich,⁹⁰ describes the difficulties these practices have for Indian women in the fishing communities of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Women are deemed to pollute the sea because of their menstruation and birthing. Further, they pollute men through intercourse which needs to be cleansed before the man can enter the sea, when his safety in the water depends on the wife's faithfulness. Globalisation has forced the men in the community to seek work further afield which poses a problem for the women. Potentially they have no means of providing for their families. Through necessity women are now organising their resources to challenge traditional beliefs and to demand their economic independence and thus the communities' survival through abolishing these sexual taboos. By recognising and preaching the message of restoration contained in these pericopae of the 'unclean' women, the Church can add an influential voice of support for these fishing community women.

Mark makes the link from this section to the central section through Jairus and the father of the boy possessed by the spirit - two fathers, one named the other anonymous both with the expectation that Jesus can perform miracles. Jairus, who should have known better, loses all faith in Jesus' ability to heal his daughter but the anonymous man acknowledges his struggle between belief and unbelief (9:24) as he waits for the spirit to be cast out of his son. Mark uses the same theme of anonymity of the man, as he did with the woman, to symbolise all believers. The restoration language used to describe the healings of Simon Peter's mother-in-law and Jairus' daughter recurs in the healing of the boy (κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ ἤγειρεν αὐτόν). Neither Matthew nor Luke associate γείρω in connection with this healing of the boy so do not make the link of faith and resurrection that Mark does.

As Jesus restores Jairus' daughter to health he asks that the child be given something to eat. This need for food is usually required as evidence of the cure, but I would like to argue for a more liberal interpretation of the food as

⁹⁰ Gabriele Dietrich "The Word as the Body of God" in Rosemary Radford Ruether(ed), *Women Healing Earth*

metaphor. Through the five main characters in these pericopae, Mark has linked the socio-cultural changes that must be made for inclusion of the marginalised into society to faith and the continuing struggle a Christian will have in maintaining faith, as defined in discipleship terms by the Marcan Jesus. This struggle will need sustenance if faith in the new order is to succeed over the old. I would like to suggest two possible ways of interpreting the demand to provide food⁹¹ for Jairus' daughter.

The first interpretation is that the food is symbolic of the energy needed by the community to ensure that it will become established and grow; the second is linked to vulnerability. As I have previously argued the spirit in the boy can be likened to the inner spirit that tenaciously controls negativity in the mind of the vulnerable. Once awakened, awareness of the true self needs constant reinforcement if this negativity and hence vulnerability is not to return. The food for Jairus' daughter is then symbolic of the energy required for the constant need to reaffirm that having God within, the vulnerable are able to overcome the doubt that they have in their own self worth.

Because Mark makes the link between Jairus' daughter and the epileptic boy, we are able to explore the relationship between the other healing miracles and the exorcisms in more detail, identifying parallels and associations before reconstructing their meaning for the contemporary reader. Altogether there are four exorcisms in the Gospel, the other three taking place in the first section. Each of these exorcism stories reveal details of the disciples' behaviour and as such contributes to the need for Jesus' use of the possessed boy as a means of teaching on the requirements of discipleship. For a feminist reading it is useful to consider these three earlier exorcisms collectively as well as individually.

As we have seen, Mark uses place skilfully throughout the Gospel to deliver the message of discipleship at various levels, and with subtlety of meaning.

⁹¹ Ched Myers identifies the occurrence of food, feeding and hunger as a recurrent theme in the Gospel. I will later discuss this in more detail with an interpretation of the fig tree.

The location therefore of these early exorcisms is perhaps significant. The first takes place in the synagogue (1:21 - 26), a sacred healing and as such can be construed as a message to the early Christian Church in the way it should behave as an institution; the second takes place in front of the crowd (5:1 - 16), so can be interpreted as an instruction to the wider community on the qualities required of a person if joining the community; finally the third takes place in the house (7:24 - 30) - an indication that here is a message on how, once having joined the Christian community, members should behave towards one another.

By recording the first exorcism immediately after Jesus' call for followers, Mark is able to contrast blind faith without understanding Jesus' authority, with the faith of the mother-in-law of Simon Peter whose healing immediately follows this exorcism. The named disciples may have had faith to leave their fishing nets, but their astonishment at the authority that Jesus has over these spirits (1:27) reveals that they really do not understand just who Jesus is. The unnamed woman's confirmation of Jesus' authority comes through her service, so she is able to exhibit true discipleship behaviour. The second exorcism is placed in between the nature miracle (4:35 - 41) which reveals the disciples' failing faith in Jesus as they panic in the storm, and the interlinked pericopae of Jairus' lack of faith in Jesus' ability to restore his daughter to life and the strong faith of the haemorrhaging woman.

These early exorcisms are of men who have been marginalised by their illnesses (1:23 - 29), and in the case of the Gerasene also by the fear (5:1 - 21) of those whom he encounters. As a result, this man has been banished to live away from the community among the dead. Metaphorically he is already dead. Attempts to restrain him have been unsuccessful (5:3) and so great is his torment that he has resorted to self mutilation (5:5). Unlike the disciples, who are amazed at Jesus' actions in healing these two men (1:27; 5:20), the spirits identified as possessing them are in no doubt of Jesus' identity (1:24, 5:7), nor are they in any doubt that Jesus has the power to destroy them. They name him as "Jesus of Nazareth ... the Holy One of

God" (1:24) and "Jesus Son of the Most High" (5:7). We must be clear, however, that this revelation of power over the demons is not that of a supernatural patriarchal power but a restorative power of wholeness. For Rita Nakashima Brock the links between the exorcisms and healings in Mark "symbolise the political, social, physiological and relation nature of sickness, the necessity of power and the heart of interactions of erotic power".⁹² This erotic power she defines as the "feminist Eros", the fundamental power of life able to heal brokenheartedness and give courage to the fainthearted.⁹³ The Gospel of Thomas confirms that for Jesus divine healing comes from within as well as from outside "... rather the kingdom is inside of you and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves then you will become known" (Logion 3)

The crowd who have witnessed the healing of the Gerasene, are afraid at the outcome and beg Jesus to leave the area (5:17). But what is it they are afraid of - Jesus power to heal; the illness itself; the Gerasene, or their own lack of understanding? Whatever answer we give to this question may be relevant to our own discipleship role. The lived experiences of these men are probably no different to those of the modern Gospel reader who is suffering from mental illness. Today's society may not condemn a sufferer to a life among the tombs, but often is no more welcoming of such a person into the neighbourhood. Care in the community replacing institutionalised care often does little to remove the source of the 'spirit', nor rejection by the community. Like the crowd who fear the Gerasene, we too are wary of those whose behaviour may be unpredictable and so cause us discomfort. If we read this passage of the Gospel in the spirit of restoration we might ask the question "how frequently is the non-vulnerable reader being liberated by its message compared to the frequency with which the vulnerable are restored by it?"

Such psychiatric and psychological illnesses as these men experienced have not been considered demonic possession⁹⁴ in Western society since

⁹² Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*, page 71.

⁹³ Brock, page 25.

⁹⁴ For a detailed discussion of exorcism and healing in early scripture see Adela Yarbo

the seventeenth century. However, anyone who has ever suffered from depression or anxiety will be able to describe the experience of feeling that someone, or something, has taken over the mind and spirit. It is in this context that 'unclean spirits' might be interpreted. The roots of many psychological illnesses lie in an inability for the ill person to feel comfortable with their inner self which is often the result of a patriarchal oppressive power over the individual. This is particularly true for women, but is increasingly true for men. In Western society men are struggling to cope with the confusing messages that are presented to them regarding their behaviour in all of their societal and familial relationships.⁹⁵ In developing countries men are having to deal with the changing roles that inevitably accompany economic development, whether for the benefit of their own community or more often perhaps, for that of the developed West. This vulnerability can manifest itself both for men and women in a variety of psychiatric or psychological disorders often linked to low self-esteem and poor self-image.

An example of a modern 'demon' can be seen in eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. These illnesses which mostly affect young white middle class, well educated women who have high standards of personal perfection and achievement, became increasingly common in the late twentieth century.⁹⁶ It has now, however, been recognised that women, particularly holy women, have been affected by such illnesses for centuries. Experts differ as to the causes of these illnesses but many report similar feelings among the sufferers, notably confusion about self worth, low self-esteem, poor understanding of familial relationships and rejection by their families. Unable to control their feelings of inadequacy, these young people attempt to control their body size and image either by starvation in the case of anorexia, or by the classic bulimic behaviour of bingeing and

Collins *The Beginning of The Gospel*, pages 46-58.

⁹⁵There has been a growth in men's movements in recent years. Often based on the misguided assumption that feminism has been the cause of all society's (and in particular their own) ills these movements highlight the increase in vulnerability that men feel when they are faced with difficulties in their lives.

⁹⁶ This has been well documented and much information is available particularly on the Internet, eg BBC News-Online.

purging. Paradoxically they rapidly become victims to the behaviour over which they ultimately have no control. Like the possessed in the Gospel the 'spirits' have very definitely taken over.

Fasting as a means of control is not a twentieth century phenomenon and has long been associated with secular and religious activity. Fasting to increase supernatural power became a precursor for many religious rituals,⁹⁷ (as a child I remember the long walk to church without breakfast so as to be ready to take communion). Holy men and women throughout history have reportedly gained spiritual power through surviving only on the Eucharist for long periods of time. The Ascetics used the self-discipline of fasting and self abuse as a means of reaching personal perfection, a link which is made by many of the women who suffer from eating disorders today. Starvation *is* used as an attempt at reaching perfection and these sufferers often report a feeling of temporary relief from their turmoil after self-injury.⁹⁸ This may well have been the experience of the Gerasene as he went about night and day 'howling and bruising himself with stones' (5:5).⁹⁹

The Christian Church may have unwittingly encouraged self-abuse through the images and imitation of Christ's suffering. By trying to achieve similar degrees of suffering as depicted in these images, holy men and women throughout history have exhibited forms of self abusive behaviour which today might possibly suggest a personality disorder. More worrying, for the affect it has had on women, is the way the Church has been slow to oppose, and in some instances still does not oppose, the mechanisms which promote feelings of guilt and disgust associated with female sexuality.¹⁰⁰ There is evidence that women continue to mutilate themselves as a result of the negative feelings they have of their bodies once they reach puberty. But fasting need not be wholly negative, as many people who use it as a means

⁹⁷ Vandereycken & Van Deth, *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls*, page 16.

⁹⁸ Armando Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege*.

⁹⁹ The NRSV translation of the Greek (κατακόπτω) as bruising does not indicate the strength of violence in the action that an alternative translation such as cut to pieces or gash as given in Thayer's Lexicon might otherwise suggest. In the context of Favazza's research it is probable that the Gerasene did inflict more damage upon himself than just bruising.

¹⁰⁰ Favazza, page 203.

of detoxifying the body will attest. It can also be a means of bringing one closer to God as this woman explained:

I regularly use fasting as a means of prayer. I always fast alone. I just drink water. Sometimes it will be for a whole day, sometimes for part of a day. If I am praying for something really important to me then the fast will be longer. When I fast I always feel very close to God.

The Marcan Jesus commands the unclean spirits to leave these two men, and uses the exorcism of the boy (9:29) to teach of the importance of faith and prayer in maintaining the love of self, through love and knowledge of God's power within.

The Syro-Phoenician woman (7:25:30) already has this inner love and knowledge of God. This woman begs Jesus to release her daughter from the controlling spirit responsible for her illness. At first Jesus seems to respond in a manner which suggests exclusivity. He engages the woman in a theological discussion, indicating through his reference to feeding the children first, rather than throw their food to the dogs, that he is here to enlighten the Jews, not the Gentiles. The woman, by her response "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (7:28), confirms that she recognises Jesus' mission is primarily for the Jews in Israel.¹⁰¹ She shows, however, that her faith also recognises Jesus as God, not

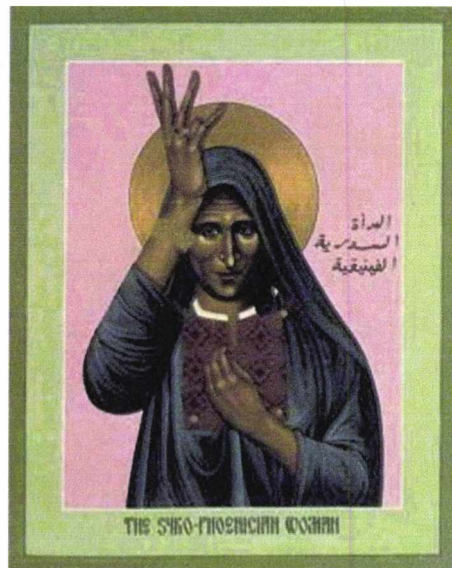


Fig 3.d The Syro-Phoenician Woman

just as a miracle worker. Not content with Jesus' dismissal, she argues with him that even those whom some might see as excluded from society need the crumbs that fall from the table.

¹⁰¹ Hooker, page 182.

By her bold action of arguing, she claims the crumbs not as leftovers but as the fragments that make the whole and with them the same rights of recognition as those who are already the advantaged. Not settling for second best, she is able to articulate the right for all to share in the revelation of God's power. The boldness of the woman's faith and understanding is rewarded by Jesus sending her home to her healed daughter (7:29). How many women throughout the world today identify themselves as being in the same position as this woman, with a voice that is heard but not listened too? They too can benefit from healing, as Julie Hopkins writes:

Each healing in the Gospel is initiated by someone who in need and through faith created a relationship with Jesus in which brokenheartedness and healing were shared. Healing brought wholeness to the afflicted but also openness to the suffering and need of liberation of others.¹⁰²

Once more Mark links the healing of a daughter as a demonstration of the need for faith, and an illustration of women's ability to understand and recognise the significance of Jesus' power. The first two exorcisms are followed by a demonstration of faith from a woman, but here such a woman is herself requesting the healing. Neither does the possessed person need to be in Jesus' presence, since the faith of the woman matches the strength of Jesus' power to heal at a distance (7:30). The influence of this woman as a role model for today's women comes not only through her faith in Jesus as God, but that through persistence it is possible to have a voice which is not only heard but is recognised, listened to and invokes positive response. Matthew's account (Mt 15: 22-28), records how the woman refers to Jesus as "Lord Son of David" (Mt 15: 22) and persists in her request for healing even when the disciples urge Jesus to send her away (Mt 15:23). Mark does not need to include this extra detail since by placing the healing in the house his intention is not to discredit the male disciples but to use the

¹⁰² Julie Hopkins, *Towards A Feminist Christology*, page 43.



incident as a reminder that once an outsider has been drawn into the community they must be respected as equal to all other members.

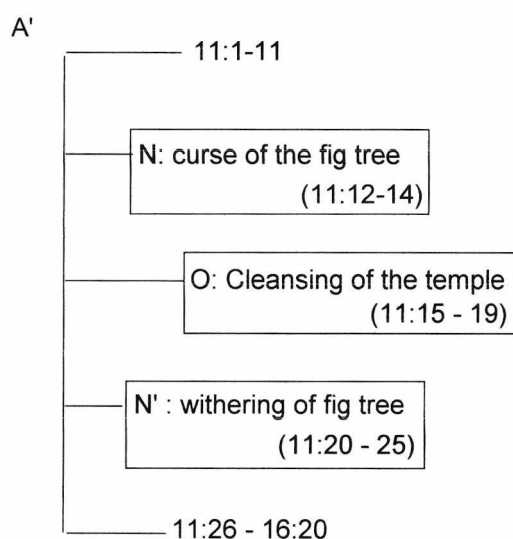
Is it coincidental that the teaching relating to the things that can defile a person immediately precedes this third exorcism? Or is Mark pointing to something more significant? Morna Hooker argues that the significance of placing of the story here can be found in Jesus' suggestion that the distinction between what is clean and unclean depends only on attitudes, which allows the distinction between Jew and Gentile also to fall.¹⁰³ The laws that govern behaviour on cleanness, and therefore exclusion before God for non-observation, are from the old order. The teaching of the new order is that it is only one's inner intentions that can exclude a person from a right relationship with God. The examples Jesus gives as intentions which defile are all associated with the oppressive power which exploits as well as corrupts (7:21 - 23). The disciples still have not understood exactly what Jesus requires of them to be followers, either through the examples they have been given or through the parables. The increasing negativity towards the disciples that Tannehill observes must by now be at its maximum. But this is only so if we make what I believe to be the false assumption that the disciples and the twelve are one and the same. What we do need to consider, however, is why Mark chooses the male disciples to be so obtuse in their understanding and the women to be so perceptive.

If Mark's Gospel was written so that it is to be read in a socio-cultural context then it is necessary to cast women who are the most marginalised of all societies and can therefore represent all excluded and marginalised men and women, in roles which show them to have the greater understanding for the impact of an alternative society to have any value. If the exorcisms for example had been followed by demonstrations of male faith then a restoration reading would not make sense since the illustration would just serve to further promote the idea that in a hierarchical structure some men are better able to understand than others, and so nothing changes. Instead Mark balances the behaviour of the female and male disciples in such a way

¹⁰³Hooker, page 181.

as to necessitate the middle section of the Gospel, not only to allow for an explanation of the meaning of discipleship but to re-enforce the idea that discipleship is open to all.

The Marcan journey draws to a close in the final section as Jesus enters Jerusalem. Mark begins this final stage of the journey with yet another intercalation outlining what is expected as the structure of the new order of



Christian behaviour and society. Mark primes the reader for the importance of the disclosure by the suspense in the recorded action of Jesus on his arrival in the city: "Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple, and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve" (11:11). What had Jesus seen, that could not be dealt with immediately?

Jesus retires with the twelve to Bethany the place where the messianic action of a woman will shortly take place. At the end, as at the beginning of the Gospel there is a need for Mark to separate the twelve from the rest of the disciples.

The following day Jesus, returning to the city with the twelve notices a fig tree which he checks to see if it could provide food to alleviate his hunger (11:12). It is not the season for figs so the tree cannot possibly offer a source of sustenance for Jesus. Jesus, within the disciples' hearing, curses the tree "May no one ever eat fruit from you again" (11:14). When the disciples pass the tree the next morning they discover that it has withered to the roots (11:20). The fig tree is symbolic of Israel¹⁰⁴ who has "failed to produce the fruits when her Messiah looked for them".¹⁰⁵ By inserting the

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, page 458.

¹⁰⁵ Hooker, page 261.

destruction of the temple within the pericope of the fig tree, Mark allows the reader to explore the symbolism of the failed temple-order which can no longer 'produce fruit', with the social changes that are now required. The twelve, who have demonstrated their inability to 'see' and 'hear' the message that Jesus has been giving, are now the ones who are to witness not only the 'withering' of the old society, but the destruction of the order on which it is based.

For Ched Myers, the narrative function of this pericope is to "begin Jesus' ideological project of subverting the temple centred social order", confirmed for him by the parallel between the end of the fig tree and the end of the "world of the temple based state".¹⁰⁶ The metaphorical reference to Jesus' hunger is significant, since Mark links feeding/hunger to change within the social order.¹⁰⁷ This link is particularly important to highlight for a feminist reading of the Gospel, as it supports the notion that change needs to be fed if it is to survive. As with the feeding of Jairus' daughter, a physical need (here symbolised by Jesus' hunger) is linked to the spiritual hunger that needs regular sustenance. This spiritual food cannot be obtained from a source that can only provide intermittent sustenance (seasonal fruit), and is available to only some of the community.

Mark now reveals what was in Jesus' mind the previous evening. The fruitlessness of the fig tree is mirrored in the temple which provides, through the traders, the means for perpetuating the marginalisation of over half the community. Jesus forcibly drives out (ἐκβαλεῖν) the traders and in particular 'over turns' the seats of the dove sellers. These doves were required by Levitical law for the ritualistic cleansing of women (Lev 12:6) and lepers (Lev 14:22). After childbirth all women were required to bring a dove as a 'sin-offering' for the priest to offer as atonement on her behalf. Poor women

¹⁰⁶ Myers, page 299.

¹⁰⁷ Throughout the early part of the Gospel Mark has used food/feeding/hunger in connection with restorative miracles and challenges to normal societal behaviour ie Jairus' daughter and the Syro-Phoenician woman; table fellowship with tax collectors and other marginalised people; eating on the Sabbath and the swine feeding in the healing of the Gerasene. Myers comments on the 'feedings' in Mark as indicative of a society where hunger and disenfranchisement are widespread and suggests that Mark links this deprivation with the economic order dictated by the temple system, page 432.

were allowed to replace the lamb required for a burnt offering as part of the purification ritual, with another dove. These same rules applied to lepers who also had to bring a dove and lambs as part of their cleansing ritual. This action of Jesus was more than the rejection of the misuse of the sacrificial system,¹⁰⁸ or of abuse of the temple system,¹⁰⁹ it was a call to reject the discriminatory system itself. Not only does the system discriminate against those who were sick, it also discriminates against those who bear the next generation, and thus perpetuates the cycle.

If such an interpretation is to be made of this cleansing of the temple, one might question why Mark did not introduce the story earlier when Jesus demands the healed leper to present himself to the priest "and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded" (1:44). To include the teaching so close to the end of the journey¹¹⁰ and the death of Jesus as Mark does serves to emphasise, as if in summation, one of the important reasons of the journey. The healing of the leper at the outset of the journey establishes the need for societal change and a return to belief in God's inclusive domain. The overturning of the seats of the dove sellers confirms that along with the 'death' of the temple order will go the need for sacrificial atonement for the marginalised, and for women; their sexuality will no longer be associated with impurity and sin.

The inclusive nature of the new order is strengthened with Jesus' teaching that the house of prayer is for all nations. Through the insistence of the Syro-Phoenician woman, God's word and healing power became available to Gentiles as well as to Jews. Here now is further emphasis that the house of God is available to everyone and not just to the Jews. The reference to the temple as a 'den of robbers', is not to the cheating of society by the traders but to the way that the temple has metaphorically 'robbed' over half society of equal respect within society and an equal relationship with God. The withering fig tree in the closing frame of this intercalation, equates with

¹⁰⁸ Hooker, page 263.

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, page 463.

¹¹⁰ Morna Hooker suggests this is indicative that Mark is using the story as symbolic of the death of Judaism and the rise of Christianity, page 263.

the destruction of the divisive temple society laws as once again Mark links faith with paradigms of socio-cultural change (5:34, 5:36, 9:19). By having faith in God the ability to maintain the seemingly impossible¹¹¹ (11:23) will be granted to all who ask (11:24).

In the closing section of the Gospel (A') Mark returns to the theme of the clan system as a criticism of patriarchal structures. The Sadducees raise the issue of the 'levirate'¹¹² marriage and the theological problem raised through a belief in the resurrection. They use the example of a woman who is married successively to seven brothers, as each time she is left widowed and childless. Such marriage laws served to preserve the patriarchal family by determining inheritance, an important issue to the wealthy Sadducees.¹¹³ They need to know whose wife she will be in the resurrection (12:23). Jesus insists they are quite wrong in their reasoning since they have not understood "scriptures or the power of God" (12:24). The Marcan Jesus has already taught that God does not recognise patriarchal laws of marriage and divorce (10:2 - 12), now he stresses this point with the teaching that God is for the living not the dead (12:27) and in this world of God, patriarchal marriage laws do not exist. In the resurrection "they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels in heaven" (12:25). The reference to the angels does not imply asexuality, as Schüssler Fiorenza argues:

The eschatological being of men and women "like the angels or heavenly messengers" must be understood with reference to the first part of the sentence. It is not that sexual differentiation and asexuality do not exist in the "world" of God but that patriarchal marriage is no more, "because its function in maintaining and continuing patriarchal and economic structures is no longer necessary".¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Taylor, page 467.

¹¹² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, page 144.

¹¹³ Schüssler Fiorenza, page 144.

¹¹⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, page 145.

Within God's world men and women do not relate within a system of hierarchy but as individuals free from domination in the presence of God. The Sadducees are quite wrong (14:27) to assume anything else.

This discourse links back to Jesus teaching on 'place' within the kingdom of God. Mark continues the theme of place reversal between the first and the last, as he describes Jesus' reaction to the Scribes and the treasury collectors. He criticises the Scribes for their show and need for respect from the people (12:38-39), yet who "devour the widows houses" by controlling their economic affairs.¹¹⁵ The poor widow who donates two small coins, does so because the system is one of exploitation in which everyone must contribute. The contrast is made between the rich who could put in large sums (12:41) and the poor woman who put in so little, but Mark draws attention to it as a reminder of Jesus' earlier teaching. Unlike the rich man who rejected Jesus call to follow him as he had too much to lose (10:17), the woman has given her all. This woman 'robbed' by the temple has nevertheless shown the characteristic of true discipleship.

We might question whether this form of exploitation exists in some churches today. During the course of this research I visited two churches in London where the worshippers were urged to give according to how much they have been blessed (judging by the size of the containers used to collect the offerings they were expecting that everyone had been well-blessed). In both of these churches, the call for money came after a long (in one case an hour) sermon in which the preacher constantly asked "have you been blessed?", evoking louder and louder responses of "Amen" from the congregation. At the end of one of these sermons, an influential member of the church hierarchy said "I want 20 people who have been blessed £50", twenty hands rapidly went up; then he invited all those to come forward "who have been blessed £20", this continued, going down in monetary value until finally all those who had yet to give were invited to come forward. Needless

¹¹⁵ Myers provides an analysis of the commentaries which contrast the scribal attitude with the piety of the woman but concludes that this is not the contrast which should be made. The scribal system allowed abuse of the temple practice to protect the vulnerable and it is to this that the pericope refers.

to say there were not many of them. This could be seen as a good way of raising money for the church and perhaps something which all churches should do, but it can also be called exploitation. Poor people can be shamed into giving what they cannot really afford. And how do the poor feel - that God hasn't blessed them that much, otherwise they too would be wealthy?

Jesus returns to the theme of the temple destruction, and the preparation needed to be ready for the new order which will replace it (13:21-37). This teaching, given in private to the small inner circle of male disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew follows on from the widow's example of discipleship.¹¹⁶ But even with this favoured treatment, these disciples still do not demonstrate 'perfect sight' and will continue to be discredited as Jesus' journey ends. Mark uses the woman on the other hand to confirm Jesus' messianic nature and the constancy required in following.

At Bethany, Jesus is having a meal at the house of Simon the leper (14:3-9) when an unnamed woman comes to the table and anoints him with nard.¹¹⁷ In contrast to the poor widow, this woman has access to wealth as Mark records that the alabaster jar contains nard worth more than three hundred denarii (14:5). The woman breaks open the jar (συντρίψασα τὴν ἀλάβαστρον) and pours the ointment over Jesus' head in a messianic action. This care of Jesus body, Myers argues, "prepares us for the emergence of this body as the new symbolic order of the community".¹¹⁸

The verb (συντρίβω) means not only 'to break open' but 'to shatter' which here suggests a completeness of action,¹¹⁹ all the ointment will be released not just a few drops. Here is yet another woman able to let go of all she has in a gesture of prophetic recognition. Some of those present criticise the woman for wasting such wealth when it could have been given to the poor (12: 4 - 5) but Jesus rebukes them saying she has performed "a good

¹¹⁶Further evidence perhaps for the Church to reinforce the maleness of discipleship.

¹¹⁷This incident is recorded differently in John (12:1 - 8) where the woman is named as Mary with the implication that the house is possibly that of Lazarus.

¹¹⁸ Myers, page 359.

¹¹⁹ Hooker, page 327.

service for me" (12:6). This pre-burial anointing of Jesus as Messiah, is recognised by Jesus to be such an important action of true discipleship that he proclaims: "Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her" (14:9).

This story contains many of the themes that Mark associates with challenge and change to the temple laws. Reference is once again made to eating and table fellowship with the marginalised and unclean. The woman 'breaks' the protocol of eating, by intruding at the table, and when she is criticised for her actions (14:5b), Jesus sides with the one who has broken the rules, as he did earlier when the disciples broke the rules of eating on the Sabbath (2:23-27). This incident summarises the three requirements for discipleship set out by the Marcan Jesus - to serve, to follow and to have faith. The last - the woman and the leper - have become the first; through her anointing action this woman shows faith in Jesus as God. In contrast to the rich man, she is prepared to let go of all she has, to follow as a believer.

The journey is now in its final stages. Jesus predicts that he will be betrayed (14:18), deserted (14:27) and denied (14:30) before the morning. During his last hours in Gethsemane, Jesus' suffering becomes immense (14:32). Let down by Peter, James and John¹²⁰ who could not stay awake while he prayed (14:32:41) Jesus calls on God "remove this cup from me; yet not what I want but what you want" (14:36). At the last supper Jesus has shared bread as a symbol of his anointed body, and the cup as his "blood of the covenant that will be poured out for many". This cup contained the drink that Jesus has already linked to baptism (10: 39) when teaching James and John the importance of rejecting hierarchy in the new structure. Now, in his powerlessness, the cup takes on a new significance.

¹²⁰ Raymond Brown, *Death of The Messiah* (Vol 1) stresses that the three times that Mark groups Peter, James and John together he does so to highlight witness rather than revelation. In the case of the healing of Jairus' daughter they were witness to Jesus' miraculous power over death, at the transfiguration they were witness to God's revelation about Jesus' filial relation to God and here in Gethsemane they are witness to Jesus' suffering.

Jesus reveals himself to be fully human sharing in the suffering experienced by the Gerasene, the sick and the truly vulnerable, powerless to do anything but obey God's will that he will go to the cross and his death. By offering to share the cup of baptism with James and John (10:38) Jesus has linked baptism, hence new life with the cup of suffering¹²¹ which is now used as an image in the plea by Jesus to God's all powerfulness.¹²² The Marcan Jesus uses the ultimate symbol of uncleanness - blood, as the means for all to enter into the new covenant. This is the most powerful statement that Mark has made for revolutionary change.

The Lord meets us at our need and he gives us what we need. He has given me lots. I was lying in bed tossing and turning. I felt I was being raked out with the torture of worrying. A thought came to me. I said, "I shouldn't be doing this Lord, I should be praising You". At that moment, I saw Jesus at the bottom of the bed. He came towards me up the side of the bed. I was just lying there. And he had something big in his hands like a bowl and he was walking towards me. He offered it to me - stuck it under my nose and when I peered over the edge of this bowl it was full of blood. I was very shocked. I could smell it, it was earthy like blood, very thick and dark red and I shrunk from it. And he said "unless you drink it you can't be sanctified". I always have a terrible problem with guilt and I took it and he was gone. I know that he was telling me something about forgiveness and justification, so for me the key is that it is the presence of God in whatever form he uses. Christ is there absolutely sanctified and important.

Jesus is taken and crucified and Jesus' journey, as told by Mark, is at an end. The Gospel journey begins with the "heavens torn apart" and God's voice declaring Jesus to be "My Son the Beloved" (1:10-11) and now closes

¹²¹ Raymond Brown's analysis of the cup discusses various theological arguments linking the cup with sin and God's wrath over sin. He concludes, however, that the link should be made to the cup/baptism that the disciples are challenged to drink (10:38-39) which is the cup of suffering Jesus has already begun to drink and here will end with his painful death. "By having Jesus in his own words ask to be delivered from the cup of that he had challenged James and John to drink with him, Mark is confirming the wrenching crisis that Jesus is undergoing and adding to the picture of him as greatly distraught, sorrowful unto death and prostrate on the earth", pages 169-70.

¹²² Hooker, page 349.

with the curtain of the temple being "torn in two from top to bottom" whilst the centurion declares "truly this man was God's son" (15:39). Looking on are the women.

Now at the end of the journey it is the turn of the women to be named. Peter, James and John are the first to be called, the three who witness key events along the way, but here at the final events they are the ones whose



Fig 3.e The Empty Tomb

desertion of Jesus symbolises the falling away of the old order. The dawning of the new order is secured by three named women - Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome¹²³ (15:40; 16:1). These three witness the

death of Jesus on the cross (15: 40), the empty tomb (16:5), and they are chosen (16:5) to tell Peter and the other disciples that Jesus will "go before them into Galilee" (16:7).

It is clear that Peter, despite his denial of Jesus, has been reinstated since the women have been told to tell him the good news. So why has Mark used women disciples to be the ones to pass on the news of Jesus' resurrection rather than the male disciples and in particular why not Peter? It can be argued that in fact the women did not pass on the news since they "fled from the tomb" in fear and said "nothing to anyone" and so they too have abandoned Jesus. Morna Hooker describes this as Mark's final irony:

¹²³ Schüssler Fiorenza identifies four women here Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, the mother of Joses and Salome. Whether there are four women or three they still serve to complement the smaller seemingly inner circle of male disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew.

In the rest of the story Jesus has commanded men and women to say nothing about the truth they have glimpsed, and they have frequently disobeyed. Now that the time has come to report what has happened the women are silent.¹²⁴

It is, however, possible to have a much more positive reading of the ending of the Gospel. Mark describes the women at the cross as having followed Jesus and served him whilst in Galilee (15: 41), both requirements of discipleship (ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ ἠκολούθουν αὐτῷ καὶ διεκόνουν αὐτῷ). They were among "many other women" who had come up with Jesus from Jerusalem (15:41), evidence of just how large the female disciple group was. Mark uses the women as a paradigm of discipleship when the men have fled, to emphasise the position woman should have in the new order. For Myers "the women now become the 'lifeline' of the discipleship narrative".¹²⁵

The disciples, both male and female, have therefore been used by Mark to draw out the significance of Jesus' journey and the requirements of those who are to follow after Jesus. The disciples themselves have been used to 'frame' Mark's theological disclosures. The named male disciples are initially called to "fish for people" (1:16; 19) as an opening frame, and as a closing frame the named women are charged with telling the news of the resurrection (15:40). A feminist reading of Mark will recognise the weaknesses of the male disciples. Their partial sight, depicted even at the end by the heavy eyes and inability to stay awake of Peter, James and John, and their failure to hear and understand the teaching of Jesus. But rather than view this as negativity, as Tannehill describes, it is possible to recognise how Mark needs this behaviour to provide the counterbalance with that of the women as he reveals the injustice of a temple structure that marginalises not only women but the poor, the sick and the vulnerable. It would not have been possible to reveal the strength of the socio-cultural

¹²⁴ Hooker, page 387.

¹²⁵ Myers, page 396.

challenge to the temple structure if only the male followers were the ones to exhibit true discipleship qualities.

It can be argued of course that this challenge to the system has gone unheeded for most of the time since the early Christian community, and that by naming the men, and the occasions on which Peter, James and John seem to have been favoured has helped to exclude women from active discipleship roles within the Church. The richness of Mark's Gospel has been lost to many Christians throughout history who have been unable to benefit from the message of equality that it contains. Socio-cultural and feminist readings enable an alternative status for the marginalised, the vulnerable and the weak to emerge and to be supported through new interpretations of the complementary actions of the male and female disciples. Such readings offer new opportunities to all Christians in all denominations, not only for participatory roles within the church but for healing brokenheartedness and suffering; for the removal of victim ideology and for recognition that difference can mean equal status for all. The Marcan Jesus will "go ahead" (16:7) enabling all to take up their cross and to follow with a true sense of freedom and liberation and with full sight (8:34).

Through Mark's Gospel we are able, as women, to know a Jesus who is inclusive in his relationships, who confronts unjust social and political hierarchy and whose powerlessness in suffering enables a greater power than that of patriarchy to emerge. Women today can be equally empowered by the message of this Gospel, to experience wholeness in the same way as the women of the Marcan community in the first century did.

Chapter 4 Paul's Letter To The Philippians: A Model of Patriarchal or Pastoral Power?

*But in this it appears she is Love and lady
That she is the Mother of virtues
She is fertile and she alone bears the fidelity
From which all of you who love are endowed with power
Hadewijch of Brabant*

Paul's letters are possibly the most difficult New Testament texts for women to engage with since they contain so many references which demand behaviour of them which has been used to exclude them from full and active roles in many denominations of today's Church. Paul's letter to the Philippians contains neither explicit instructions which directly exclude women, nor references which can be directly used to women's disadvantage. On the surface the letter is full of joy and friendship and acknowledges the active role of women in the early Church. Closer reading reveals a number of themes which can be explored to find positive support for women's discipleship and by providing an alternative reading can be used to challenge the interpretations of Pauline ideology which is regularly used to women's disadvantage.

My reading of the letter to the Philippians will consider the way that the major themes of the letter are subsumed within power relations, and how these may have been interpreted to disadvantage women, before interpreting the letter in the context of today's communities of Christian women. The intention of such an exegesis is to redeem the Pauline message from being a tool which has been used to exclude and silence, and to promote it as an empowering message for women's discipleship in the modern Church. To do this it is important to differentiate how women's interpretation of the text may vary from the orthodox interpretations, since it is probably the latter which have prompted the challenges to the Church's stance on women's leadership and priestly role, rather than the Pauline texts themselves. Women have persistently struggled against the traditional interpretations of Pauline texts which have prevented them gaining access to fulfilling and

equal roles within the Church. Foucault¹ identifies three sites of struggle in power relations - domination, exploitation and subjectivity and submission. Women have experiences of all of these, as they challenge the interpretations of the Pauline texts which, not only dictate what may seem the triviality of their dress code² and their behaviour in Church, but which have much wider implications in determining societal attitudes to women generally.

Julie Hopkins argues that seeking dialogue with the early Christian communities enables a fresh insight to be brought to the texts of those communities.³ It will be useful therefore to briefly review the biblical evidence for Paul's visit to Philippi and to establish the possible role and status of the women living in this community. It would seem that Paul arrived in Philippi following a vision (Acts 16:9). Philippi⁴ was a major Macedonian city described by Luke as a colony⁵ (κολωνία) of Rome (Acts 16:12). Despite the patriarchal structure of the society, Macedonian women had greater status and influence than Hellenistic or Jewish women; for women to have leadership roles within the Philippian community therefore would not have been unusual.⁶ Valerie Abrahamsen attributes the involvement of the women at Philippi to their prominence within pagan groups in the city.⁷ She suggests⁸ that the presence of Diana and Isis cults continuing so long after the arrival of Christianity was evidence that women were encouraged into prominent positions of religious practice and leadership within the community.

¹Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power" in *Power the Essential Works* 3, page 331

²See the chapter on the Pastoral letters for a further comment on this.

³Julie Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology*, page 41.

⁴For a geographical/ historical background to Philippi see Markus B. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 4th ed, page 3. For useful Internet sites see page x of Bockmuehl's introduction.

⁵Florence Gilman, in her paper "Early Christian Women at Philippi", *JGWR* 1 1990 (p 59 - 79) provides a background to the privileged status accorded to the colony.

⁶Gilman, page 63.

⁷Valerie Abrahamsen, "Women at Philippi: The Pagan and Christian Evidence" in *JFSR* 1987 vol 3, 2 page 17.

⁸Abrahamsen, page 22.

The long established Mystery cults, particularly of Cybele the earth Goddess and her son/lover Attis, continued to attract many men and women to their philosophical teachings at the beginning of the Christian era, possibly because they offered a deeper meaning to existence than that offered by the official state religions.⁹ The idea of sacrifice for the initiates of the Mysteries changed from bloody public slaughter ceremonies to secret rituals of symbolic death and rebirth. The idea of a divine and human duality was familiar to these initiates:

The inner and symbolic 'sacrifice' of the fear of death released the initiate from the conception of life and death as irreconcilable opposites and opened his or her consciousness to the wonder of being The initiates of the Mysteries of Cybele and Attis would have known themselves to be both human and divine, but have seen no essential separateness in that duality, Immortality was certain because humanity, like all creation was divine.¹⁰

The religious experience of the Philippian community was therefore likely to include the traditional Greco-Roman religions, the Mysteries and possibly Judaism. The latter may only have been a small presence as Luke's account of Paul's first visit makes no mention of the existence of a synagogue. Paul would have been familiar with the ideologies of all these religions from his own personal involvement and from the experiences of his travels.

During his first visit, Paul encounters a group of women gathered for prayer (Acts 16:13) who become his first converts. Amongst these women is Lydia, described as a dealer in purple cloth (Acts 16:14), an indication of her likely wealth. Lydia provides Paul with the patronage needed for his evangelising. If the Acts account is historically reliable, Lydia, whom Paul describes as "faithful to the Lord" (16:15) is influential in establishing the Church in

⁹Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*, page 413.

¹⁰Baring and Cashford, page 414.

Philippi, even if she is not named as a leader. Although it is important to seek dialogue with the women in the early Christian community we must take care not to use assumptions about women whose historicity,¹¹ is doubtful as the basis of a claim for women's roles within the modern Church. Paul does not refer to Lydia in his letter to the Philippians although he specifically mentions two other women Euodia and Syntyche; possibly she is included in the bishops and deacons (Phil 1:1), or possibly she never existed. Abrahamsen seems to be of this opinion, suggesting that the author of Acts, knowing of the number of Philippian women who converted to Christianity, used this as a contrast to men's hostility to Paul's message.

It is not clear how long Paul's visit lasted, but Luke's comment "one day as we were going to the place of prayer..." (Acts 16:16) suggests that the visit lasted for some time.¹² Paul was clearly there long enough to establish a strong bond of friendship with the Philippian community. Paul then writes from prison to this early Christian community with the joy and love of reciprocated friendship; with details of his current imprisonment; with his fears and hopes for the community as he urges them to be firm in defence of the Gospel in the face of opposition.

Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Elizabeth Castelli¹³ and Sandra Polaski,¹⁴ I will explore the themes of the letter in the context of the power relations that are apparent between Paul and the community, Paul and God (both in human and divine form), and Paul and the early Church. Within the parameters of Foucault's ideas on power relations, it is possible to analyse

¹¹Valerie Abrahamson footnotes commentaries on the historicity of Acts in her paper See also Ross Shepherd Kraemer *Her Share of The Blessings: Women's Religions amongst the Pagans, Jews and Christians of the Greco-Roman World*, in which she comments on Luke's stories of women (page 129).

¹²Jerome Murphy O'Connor, in *Paul a Critical Life*, presents a chronological review which suggests that Paul spent at least the winter of 48-49 in Philippi.

¹³Elizabeth Castelli presents a Foucauldian critique of the discourse of power within Paul's exhortation for the early Christians to be his imitators. See chapter 2 of *Imitating Paul*.

¹⁴Castelli and Sandra Polaski (*Paul: A Discourse of Power*) both provide post-structural analyses of the Pauline texts based on Foucault's ideas of power.

the roles of the dominant and subordinate players within the relationships, and to examine the inter-changeability of dominance and subordination. Power relations function in the Philippian text on a variety of levels, and with varying complexities. Foucault¹⁵ argues that the exercise of power is manifested through the way in which certain actions of the partners within a power relationship modify other actions. The power relationships which Paul, consciously or otherwise, establishes with God/Christ and the Philippians, can be explored in the context of a relationship in which both parties are actors, and both of whom maintain the ability to act throughout the relationship. Foucault's suggestion that power in this case can be "exercised only over free subjects, and only in so far as they are free"¹⁶ will be examined later in this chapter.

Foucault proposes that an analysis of power relations should establish five points:

The system of differentiation which permits one to act upon the actions of others. Such differentiation can be determined by law, economic differences, shifts in the process of production, linguistics or culture.

The types of objectives pursued by those who act upon the actions of others. These objectives include the maintenance of privileges and the bringing into operation of statutory authority.

The means of bringing the power relations into being. This can include threats and violence, the effects of the word or maintenance of economic disparities.

¹⁵Foucault, *The Subject and Power* page 340.

¹⁶Foucault, page 342.

Forms of institutionalisation. These include customs that can be seen in organisational structures such as the family, can take forms in which hierarchical structures are defined, or can form complex systems such as government.

The degrees of rationalisation. This concerns the possibilities within which action within the power relation can function and how these actions may be transformed.¹⁷

Foucault is concerned not only with the “other” and how this identification privileges the “same”,¹⁸ but with the way in which hierarchical and asymmetrical power relations in societies are connected to dominant forms of knowledge. Paul’s relationship with the Philippians can clearly be interpreted in a Foucauldian context and while these power relations can be shown to be asymmetrical they are not necessarily always hierarchical.

In reflecting on Foucault’s argument that “something called power does not exist”,¹⁹ Castelli suggests that

power relations are ultimately coterminous with social relations. Power is not something one person or class holds over and against another person or class; rather power constructs the contours of the relations between these, affecting both the dominator and the dominated.²⁰

Such a power relation indicates that although the relationship may be asymmetrical, all partners have the freedom and the ability to act within the relationship. Although much feminist debate has centred around marginalised women’s inability to act with this freedom, it is clear that in

¹⁷Foucault, page 344. Sandra Polaski applies each of Foucault’s points in her analysis of Philemon developed in *Paul and the Discourse of Power*.

¹⁸Elisabeth Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power*, page 41.

¹⁹Foucault, page 340.

²⁰Castelli, page 43.

Paul's social relationships with the Philippians no such inability exists. Throughout the letter Paul consistently uses language which, whilst reiterating the sameness of the community in their sharing the Gospel, also illustrates the difference both actors bring to the relationship. It is within the context of these differences that I would like to locate my analysis of the power relations that operate within the letter to the Philippians.

Within the letter, it is possible to identify four systems of differentiation in operation: between those who share in the Gospel and those who do not; within the economic superiority of the Philippians over Paul; within the authority that Paul is assumed to have and finally within the possible privileges this superiority gives him over the Philippian community. It is almost certain that when Paul arrived in Philippi he would have been the dominant actor in terms of his knowledge of the Gospel, but equally the Philippians were the dominant actors in terms of providing the financial and material support necessary to sustain Paul's mission. This was true not only within Philippi, but also on his subsequent journeys (4:16). The fluidity within the power relations can be seen in the language that Paul uses to express the reciprocity of the relationship as the letter unfolds.

There is considerable discussion concerning the integrity of the letter as a single document.²¹ For this reading I will accept the integrity of the letter as it appears in the canon since it is in this form that contemporary Christian women encounter its message. The letter as presented conforms to the structure of the other Pauline letters which themselves exhibit many of the characteristics of Hellenistic letters of the time. Roetzel,²² in his analysis of the Pauline letters demonstrates how Paul's Jewish roots and Hellenistic influence clearly emerge from the message of the letters. He suggests that though the presentation and the structure of the letters closely mirror the typical Greek format, Paul's adaptation of the standard form enables the

²¹ Murphy O'Connor summarises the debate (page 215); Gordon D. Fee in *Paul's Letter To The Philippians* refers his readers to David Garland's "The Composition and Unity of Philippians Some Neglected Literary Factors" in *NovT* 27 (1985) pp 141 - 173.

²² For a detailed discussion on the format of the Pauline letter see Calvin J Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*.

reader to explore “Paul’s self understanding, his intentions and his theology”.²³

The Greek letter²⁴ has a salutation, a prayer, a body and a conclusion. The salutation names the sender and the recipient, and contains a general greeting, which in all his letters Paul adapts into an offering of grace and a statement of the peace of God. In the Hellenistic letter the prayer is usually given in thanks for the health and well being of the recipient. Paul adapts this to acknowledge God and Christ as being central to his thoughts and motivation, either as a direct thanks - “First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you” (Rom 1:8) - as in the undisputed letters, or as a longer outpouring of praise such as in Ephesians (Eph 1:3-23). The prayer points forward to the body of the letter indicating theological and Christological motifs. The body of the Pauline letter contains details of Paul’s concerns, his encouragement for his friends, instructions for their well being and his travel plans. This content is typical of the standard Greek letter, only in Paul’s case these communications are all developed in the context of Pauline theology. The body of the Pauline letter often closes with some final instructions of behaviour (2 Cor 13:5; Eph 6:10) concluding with a peace wish, greetings, a kiss and the goodbye, all typical of the Greek letter. As Paul’s goodbye always makes reference to God he firmly places the recipient in the presence of God from the opening to the conclusion of the letter. Paul makes it quite clear that though the letter may come from him, he feels enabled to write through the grace of God and acknowledges that the recipients also share in this grace. The letter to the Philippians, as it appears in the canon follows a typically Pauline structure:

| | |
|--|---|
| Salutation | 1:1-2 |
| Prayer | 1:3-11 |
| Body: main ethical instructions | 1:12 - 2:11; 3:1 - 4:1; 4:10 - 20 2:12 - 29; 4:2 - 6 |
| Conclusion: peace wish greetings grace | 4:7 - 9 4:21 - 22 4:23 |

²³Roetzel, page 59.

²⁴For a fuller discussion on the format of the Greek letter and the psuedepigraphical letter see chapter 5 of this thesis.

The letter opens with a greeting “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi” (1:1). Paul recognises all those in the community who share in the love of Jesus as Christ to be holy people - he is not using saint in the hierarchical sense of special people set apart from other believers for their holiness and elevated status, as the Church was later to do. Each of Paul’s friends is special because of their relationship with Christ and with each other. This establishes a mutuality within the relationship and a degree of sameness in that they all are in relationship with Christ. What Paul means by the phrase “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ)(1:1) has been much debated.²⁵ Jean Francois Collange²⁶ concludes that ‘in’ has temporal and historical meaning, not spatial with the state of being ‘in Christ’ arising out of the death and resurrection of Jesus, since this is the one event which has marked all Christians out as holy. Bockmuehl on the other hand argues that “to be ‘in Christ’ means to be incorporated into his body, to live in relation to him and through him”.²⁷ Whether we interpret this as temporal or spatial, Paul is also ‘in Christ’ which in this context places both Paul and the Philippians on an equal footing in their relationship with Christ. Paul and the community are therefore in partnership, a partnership which Gordon Fee concludes is defined by the fact that in this letter Paul studiously avoids any indication of a ‘patron-client’ (or ‘patron protégé’) relationship.²⁸

But almost as soon as the reader has identified this friendship as a partnership, they become aware that a hierarchy seems to have emerged within the community. Who are these bishops and deacons that Paul selects for special greetings (1:1)? Are they part of a privileged leadership group, or is this an early example of the hierarchy that was evident in the Church of Clement? Here is a clear example of the androcentric language which Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues should be interpreted with a

²⁵For a detailed summary of the discussion see Bockmuehl, pages 52-3

²⁶Jean Francois Collange, *Epistle of St Paul to the Philippians*, page 37

²⁷Bockmuehl, page 56

²⁸Fee, page 6, draws this conclusion since Paul does not establish himself in a father role as he does in other letters, nor does he claim for himself the role of apostle.

“hermeneutics of suspicion”.²⁹ The gendered language of the letter may well appear to exclude and has been interpreted to privilege men’s position within the Church, but Paul clearly embraces the whole community with his inclusive salutation. Is it possible that Foucault’s fourth point for determining a power relation can be seen in embryonic form here? To answer these questions it is useful to consider how soon after leaving Philippi the letter was written.

Three possible places have been offered for the prison (1:7) from which Paul is writing this letter - Ephesus, Rome and Caesarea. If Ephesus was the place, as seems very plausible from the available evidence³⁰ the letter would have been written around 52-54 CE, at most six years after the first converts were made at Philippi. Although this may have been long enough for the Church to have developed a hierarchical structure of bishops and deacons it would probably not have been on the lines of that which emerged in the second century.³¹ This is even more unlikely if these earliest converts were women of influence and wealth who were able to offer their homes for the early meetings. If, however, Rome is taken as the likely place of imprisonment, then Paul is writing to the Philippian community some fourteen years after his first visit,³² which certainly gives more opportunity for such a formal structure³³ to have developed. It is worth noting, however, that in Polycarp’s letter to a later Philippian Church no mention is made of bishops.³⁴

This greeting has been used to men’s advantage by preserving the role of bishop in the male domain, but it is questionable that even if Paul did see

²⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*.

³⁰ For a note of the literature and the arguments for and against each place of imprisonment see Bockmuehl, page 26ff.

³¹ Ross Kraemer notes in *Her Share of the Blessings*, the possibility that the little known prophet Quintilla, possibly of the 2nd century CE had women bishops and presbyters, page 178.

³² Bockmuehl, page 32.

³³ See chapter 3 in this thesis for further details of the developing ministry of the early Christian Church.

³⁴ *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians*.

the bishops and deacons as part of a hierarchical church organisation that he would have excluded women from these roles. A power relation of dominant women would have indicated a radical departure from the structure of the established Jewish Church, but given the influence of pagan Goddess worship in Philippi at the time, this may not have been so unusual. Given the involvement of women in the early Church and their position of wealth, one must consider the possibility that if this was an early example of the structure that was to become established in the Church within the next hundred years, the earliest bishops and deacons would almost certainly have been women. Kraemer notes that the issue of women's leadership is only problematic within Christianity, pointing out that "within pagan worship it has never been in dispute and within Judaism has never been a possibility".³⁵ However, Bernadette Brooten³⁶ and others cite examples where women did lead in some synagogues.

The Philippian Church provided Paul with financial support, it would seem, on a regular basis. It is the people who organised the collection and transmission of these finances that are the ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις, suggests Jerome Murphy O'Connor,³⁷ titles which he translates as "supervisors and assistants".³⁸ Is it out of the question, that Lydia as a wealthy supporter of the early community may have taken on this role herself?

David Black³⁹ draws attention to Paul's use of σὺν (with) rather than ὑπὸ (under) when addressing these organisers, which indicates the role to be integral to the Church, not over it.⁴⁰ The opening and closing sections of the

³⁵Kraemer, page 174.

³⁶See for example *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*.

³⁷Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*.

³⁸Murphy O'Connor page 217.

³⁹David Alan Black, "The Discourse Structure of Philippians A Study in Text Linguistics" in *NovT* 38,1 1995 pp 16 - 49.

⁴⁰Black, page 23 n 22.

Greek letter carry, according to Black, "the strongest pragmatic force",⁴¹ which emphasises the equal position these workers had within the Church.

I argued in chapter 3, that the Marcan Jesus uses διακονεω as a clear recognition of discipleship, particularly in association with women's discipleship (Mk 1:31). Is it possible that in the opening of this letter Paul is also using διακόνοις in the context of discipleship, rather than organisation, and by so doing is confirming that he, too, sees women in a discipleship role? If, as Murphy O'Connor argues, the leadership structure in the Philippian Church was similar to any other Pauline churches with the leaders emerging from the community rather than being appointed by Paul,⁴² why should those leaders not have emerged from the women disciples who "struggled" beside Paul "in the work of the Gospel" (4:3)? Here after all, through their active service within the Philippian community and beyond, are women exhibiting the same characteristics of discipleship that were recognised by the Marcan Jesus.

In the salutation, Paul places himself and Timothy (his fellow servant of Christ), and the Philippian community in equal relationship to God. Grace and peace is to come to his friends from "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2). By using the plural form of the possessive adjective, Paul does not declare God to be solely *his* father but embraces the entire community within the relationship. The peace⁴³ that Paul offers, is the gift from God, given to all those whom God considers to be saints. The power is with God, as Paul establishes the hierarchy God/Christ - believer, rather than God/Christ - Paul - believer. The structure that Paul uses for the peace, confirms the unity of God and Christ, establishing at the same time the high Christological theme which will be developed throughout the body of the

⁴¹Black, page 23 n 23.

⁴²Murphy O'Connor, page 217.

⁴³Fee, page 70, footnotes the possible references that "peace" has for Paul - either peace with God; peace with the believing community; inner peace in place of turmoil and rest or order within a context of worship, concluding here that Paul could possibly intend any or all of the first three meanings.

letter. God is not only 'Father', but also 'Lord Jesus Christ' (1:2).⁴⁴ It could be argued that Paul's use of patriarchal, filial language will fulfil most of Foucault's requirements for establishing a power relation which not only confirms God's maleness but stresses women's subordination, through social structures based upon the family. To dismiss the Pauline message on this premise, however, would be to miss the opportunity of reading the text as a source of female enrichment and empowerment.

Paul continues to pour out his feelings of love and friendship for this whole community by acknowledging his thanks to God for their friendship (1:3) and praying with joy (μετά χαρᾶς) in all his prayers for them (1:4). Paul knows how this community hold him in their hearts (1:7) and shares God's grace with him now that he is in prison. So deep is Paul's love for his friends that he is moved to calling on God's love to express his feelings; the source of his love being the "passionate and compassionate love of Christ".⁴⁵ Although David Black urges caution against taking joy as the main theme of the letter because of Paul's frequent use of joy language,⁴⁶ it is through this language of joy that the interchange of the dominant and subordinate becomes apparent.

Friendship in Greco-Roman society was based on goodwill and loyalty, pleasure or need.⁴⁷ In this context Paul's friendship with the community in Philippi is evidenced through reciprocity. The economic differentiation indicative of Foucault's first point can be seen here to place the Philippians in the dominant position within the power relation, since it is they who have the wealth to finance the Pauline mission at home and abroad. But here is clearly a partnership - the Philippians provide shelter, hospitality and

⁴⁴Fee argues that "in Paul's mind the Son is truly God and works in co-operation with the Father and the Spirit for the redemption of the people of God", page 71.

⁴⁵Bockmuehl, page 65

⁴⁶Black notes that Paul uses this language more frequently in this letter than in any of his others, citing fourteen references to χαίρωχαρά in Philippians compared to thirty six references in all the other letters.

⁴⁷Fee page 5. See also Elizabeth Stuart, *Just Good Friends*, for a synopsis of 'friendship' through history .

financial support; Paul responds with thanksgiving, joy, prayer, and spiritual support as together they share in the Gospel and await salvation. The economic imbalance between Paul and the Philippian community sets Paul apart as *other*, but within the friendship there is no hierarchy, since each can contribute what they are able.

The letter moves from the salutation into the prayer which here can be considered as part thanksgiving (1:3-8) and part petition (1:9-11) the first part building to disclose the spiritual themes of the second. In contrast to greeting the Philippians with the Grace and peace of “our God” (1:2), Paul now offers his thanksgiving to “my God” (1:3). Is this change in the use of the possessive, a means by which Paul can realise the objective of a power relationship in which he is the dominant actor? By claiming God as *his* personal God, Paul is able to create a hierarchy in which he places himself below God but above the Philippians - but is this Paul’s objective? Polaski might well argue yes⁴⁸ but I would prefer to unpick the more traditional interpretation of other commentators since they are not necessarily incompatible with a feminist reading.

Paul reverses this sequence of ‘our God’/‘my God’ when he concludes the letter with ‘my God’/‘our God’ in his confidence of God’s gifts and praise to God’s glory (4:19-20). It is this confidence that Paul has in God, which enables him to use the phrase ‘my God’ as an echo of Old Testament prayers rather than as a statement of the uniqueness of his relationship with God.⁴⁹ Paul immediately dispels any suggestion of differentiation and imbalance between his relationship with God and the Philippians, as he continues to declare his thanks to God for *all* the community without exception. Paul makes this thanks every time he remembers his friends (1:3) because of the way the Philippians have shared in the Gospel “from the first day until now” (1:5). If Paul was aiming at establishing a hierarchical power relation would he describe the missionary work of this community as a

⁴⁸See the later argument of Polaski in relation to chapter 2 of Paul’s letter.

⁴⁹Bockmuehl, page 57.

partnership, might he not have chosen to describe the work in a way which confirmed his elevated position within a community structure? Rather, Paul chooses to describe their partnership (κοινωνία) in such a way as to emphasise the active level of shared involvement not only in advancing the spiritual message of the Gospel but in generating the financial support for continuing its advance. It is a joint participation for Paul and the Philippians, made possible by the power of God and, it is the bond which ties the community (of which Paul is a part) to God, that Paul gives thanks for. God has begun the good work among this community and Paul is confident (1:6) that this work will be finished by the God he knows so well so that their future will be certain (1:7) and their salvation ensured.

That Paul's thanks are primarily for his friends and their relationship to him and to God, rather than for material gifts, is evidence of his spirituality. He knows they all share with him in God's grace (1:7) and so he longs for them "with the compassion of Christ Jesus" knowing that this longing is witnessed by God (1:8). Is this really the prayer of one who sets himself up above the rest of the community? My understanding of the passage contrasts to that of Black (if I read him correctly), since he stresses that the primary reference of κοινωνία is the financial support given to Paul by the Philippians. Although Black suggests that "Paul sees his relationship with the Philippians as one of contractual reciprocity in their common goal in spreading the Gospel",⁵⁰ it is the reference to the sharing of material goods at the beginning and at the end of the letter which, he argues emphasises how important this is to Paul.

Paul moves into the second part of the prayer, petitioning God that the Philippians' "love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight" (1:9). He is concerned that his friends should have the maximum opportunity to be prepared for the parousia, the event which at this stage Paul still believes will hold the "solution to all practical theological human difficulties".⁵¹ This full insight will help the Philippians "to determine what is

⁵⁰Black, page 27.

⁵¹RT Fortna "Philippians: Paul's Most Egocentric Letter" in Robert T Fortna and Beverly R Gaventa(ed), *The Conversation Continues: Studies of Paul and John in Honor of J Louis*

best” (1:10) thus being “pure and blameless” (1:10b) and having “produced the harvest of righteousness” (1:11) on the day of Christ. As Black notes, the prayer has petition (1:9), purpose (1:10) and provision (1:11) bordering on exhortation as it “encourages the Philippians to greater unity and amity”,⁵² the central theme of the letter as far as he is concerned. This petition is for God to provide the Philippians with the means to be able to prepare themselves to deal with the issues that will be raised in the body of the letter.

Black⁵³ suggests five such issues, namely the proper mind set of a Christian,⁵⁴ suffering within Christian mission; the Gospel message which must be shared and defended; the concerns of partnership⁵⁵ and finally the theme of joy and in particular joy in adversity. Fee separates out seven key phrases within these two verses and uses them to explore the ethical and moral message that the body of the letter will reveal, combining these phrases to the *what*, the *why*, the *means* and the *end*. The *what*, he suggests, comes in Paul’s desire for the Philippians’ love to continuously overflow (1:9-10a) and for them to be filled with the harvest (fruits) of righteousness (1:11a); the *why* is so they may be ready and pure for the return of Christ (1:10b). The *means* by which this will be effected is through the gift of righteousness from Jesus Christ (1:11) which will *end* with the Philippians being able to praise and glorify God (1:11).⁵⁶ Each of these items points forward to the main body of the letter, and to equity.

The love Paul prays for is Christian love, ἀγάπη, a love in Christ which will strengthen the love that they have in community with each other. This love must continue to nurture and develop, thus drawing together as community the essential abilities for sustaining growth in one another, as well as in God. Through this love the Philippians will be able to have a true

Martyn, page 221.

⁵²Black, page 29.

⁵³Black, page 29.

⁵⁴This, Black argues, is introduced by the word φρονέω, used by Paul 10 times in this letter, page 29.

⁵⁵Black notes 8 points here, page 29-30.

⁵⁶Fee, page 96.

understanding of God as revealed in Christ. Linking love with full insight Bockmuehl argues, is because they are “not merely compatible but mutually necessary, the measure of one is the measure of the other; genuine growth in love goes hand in hand with genuine understanding and the knowledge of God”.⁵⁷ The continuing development of this love is a necessary preparation for understanding the appropriate state of readiness for the return of Christ. In the short term this knowledge will enable the Philippians to know what really matters to God, so they can determine what is best (1:10a) “not merely right from wrong but also the best from what is merely second best”.⁵⁸ In the long term this knowledge will enable them to become pure and blameless (1:10b) in time for the parousia. Although Paul does not directly link this knowledge with spiritual wisdom, there is an echo here of the prayer in the letter to the Colossians that “you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col 1:9) which suggests that Pauline thought was bound up with Sophia/Wisdom.⁵⁹ The introduction of the metaphorical harvest of righteousness, confirms Paul’s understanding of the spiritual nature of God.

This harvest of righteousness, which is to be understood in relation to the character of God, will come from God through Christ and points forward to the character adopted by Christ as a humble servant in the body of the letter (2:6-11). In his letter to the Romans, Paul links righteousness to the character of God (Rom 1:17; 8:21-22) and in writing to the Galatians, he confirms the benefits to be gained from the fruits of the Spirit, (Gal 5:22 -23) if one lives by the Spirit (Gal 5:25). Thus it follows, that if the Philippians are filled with this harvest they will necessarily overflow with love⁶⁰ which reflects God’s love and which in turn will lead to the behaviour required of a Christian. Most commentators suggest that this message points either directly, or obliquely, to the supposed disunity within the community, a theme

⁵⁷Bockmuehl, page 67.

⁵⁸Bockmuehl, page 68.

⁵⁹If Colossians was not written by Paul, it is unlikely that someone writing in the Pauline form would have introduced a Sophia/Wisdom theme if it was not part of a Pauline theology.

⁶⁰Bockmuehl, page 70.

to which I will return, later in this chapter. This disunity may indicate less of a split or polarisation of views within the community, more that not all of the community have a complete understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the Pauline sense. Paul is concerned that as many as possible of his friends will be able to share in the benefits of the truth as he sees it, when the time is right.

Paul concludes the prayer and moves to the body of the letter to expand the themes already hinted at. The body provides encouragement and inspiration in how to live within the Pauline understanding of Christian ethics and morality. This could be the opportunity for Paul to develop or sustain⁶¹ any hierarchical advantage that he may desire in a power relation with the Philippians, yet he chooses a style that seems to avoid this.

The body is an example of an adaptation of the classic Greek letter intended to nurture friendship.⁶² A letter in the paraenetic style was not intended to teach anything new, rather it served to influence conduct and encourage the recipient to continue with their actions (1:5; 1:9; 1:25; 1:27; 2:16; 4:4; 4:9). Such a letter may be written with a sense of bodily absence but spiritual presence highlighting the loneliness and isolation of the writer through enforced separation (1:3; 1:8; 2:16). Through constant reference to shared experiences (1:5, 1:7; 1:26) the writer seeks to maintain the friendship, and overcome the distance which separates.

In the salutation Paul has already described himself and Timothy as slaves, δούλοι,⁶³ of Christ Jesus (1:1) suggesting that their role in relationship to the community is not one of patriarchal power, but of service willingly given by himself and Timothy for the Philippians to use as they desired. Polycarp,

⁶¹Foucault's third point for determining a power relation.

⁶²This interpretation will draw on Abraham Malherbe and his references to early Greek letter writing styles, in *Paul and The Thessalonians*.

⁶³In the English translation of the text the word servant is used rather than slave. Fee offers a discussion of the weakening of the idea of slave through this use of servant. Fee also notes the use of δούλος as an honorific title for those in special service to God. He footnotes OT references to servants of the Lord and argues that Paul may have substituted Christ Jesus for Lord (Yahweh). Page 63

writing to a much later Philippian Church, reminds them that when Paul was absent from the first community in Philippi he wrote to them “as the mother of us all”.⁶⁴ Rather than writing as apostle making demands on this community, Paul is mother, father and nurturer, caring and supporting his friends in the necessary preparation for their salvation. Abraham Malherbe draws out Paul’s “sensitivity to the psychological and social conditions of his converts”⁶⁵ in his study of Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians. In this letter Paul is concerned that his enforced separation from the Thessalonian Church exaggerates their feelings of isolation, so he writes in attempt to diminish this feeling and to offer his support. Paul has himself experienced isolation due to separation so no doubt can empathise with the emotions of this community.

Malherbe argues that Paul responds to the Thessalonians’ needs “by sending Timothy, , by writing the letter and by directing them to continue among themselves the nurture he had begun”.⁶⁶ We can see that Paul responds to the Philippians’ needs in much the same way - he writes to them to nurture them in their faith; to encourage them to support one another, particularly Euodia and Syntyche (4:2) and he intends to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to minimise their feelings of separation and distress (2:19-28). Epaphroditus will be sent so they need no longer be worried about his health but can see for themselves that he has recovered (2:25). Epaphroditus will be able to bring support from all the other Christian communities to help the Philippians stand firm in the Gospel as well as maintaining the link with Paul, which is necessary for Paul’s own peace of mind (2:28). Paul needs to draw strength from the Philippians’ friendship to minimise his own feelings of isolation and abandonment. Paul’s enforced departure from Philippi after being “shamefully maltreated” (Thess 2:2), has not led to him being abandoned by his friends as the warmth of this letter indicates. Paul’s description of himself as an orphan through enforced

⁶⁴ Polycarp’s *Epistle to the Philippians*.

⁶⁵ Abraham Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care*, page 61.

⁶⁶ Malherbe, page 61.

distance (Thess 2:17) implies that he too has a need to be nurtured by his friends. Paul's ability to empathise with the communities from whom he is forcibly separated shows in his concern for the community to whom he is writing. Malherbe's observation that "Paul was not arrogant but diplomatic and pastorally sensitive", when writing to the Thessalonians can equally apply to the manner in which he writes to the Philippians. Paul acts as the carer to the community as one who knows and understands the need for care, not as a self-important leader. But more than this, Paul displays his own weaknesses and vulnerabilities as he longs for his friends during his absence from them (1:8).

Foucault identifies the form of power which is in operation here as pastoral power.⁶⁷ Such a power relation enables one (or more) of the actors within the relationship to act as pastor(s) to the others and it is clear that Paul has such a relationship with the Philippian community which he manages through his letter to them. This special form of power Foucault suggests, has as its ultimate aim individual salvation, therefore the individual rather than the community becomes the focus of the power relationship. Paul's main objective is that the entire community who have worked with him in sharing the Gospel should be prepared for the day of Christ, thus ensuring their individual salvation. The frequent references to "all of you" (1:3; 7; 8) suggests that Paul's concern is for the salvation of each individual within the community rather than for the salvation of the community as Church. Despite constant brushes with authority and repeated imprisonment, Paul does not waver from spreading the Gospel and so entering into pastoral relationship with ever increasing numbers of individuals.

Paul encourages the Philippians by writing of the advancement of the Gospel during, and because of, his imprisonment (1:15-17). Knowing that this advance is because he is imprisoned for Christ (1:13), Paul relates how the message of the Gospel can be boldly proclaimed without fear (1:14). Paul rejoices in the fact that knowledge of God is spreading, though whether

⁶⁷ Foucault, *The Subject and Power*, page 332.

this comes by proclaiming Christ through goodwill, envy, rivalry or selfish ambition seems of little concern to him (1:15-18). Paul ponders on the possibility that his imprisonment may result in his death (1:20), so he encourages the Philippians to become 'pastors' to him, through their prayers for his spiritual salvation and for his salvation from death at the hands of his captors (1:19). The Philippians hold the power through prayer to support Paul through this vulnerable time.

Foucault's criteria that a power relation only exists because both parties are able to be actors within it is confirmed here, and once again exposes the shifting dominance of each party. Since imprisonment could always result in Paul's death Foucault's second criteria for pastoral power,⁶⁸ namely the preparedness to sacrifice the relation for the life and salvation of the flock is also met. Foucault's third definition point for pastoral power is the requirement to nurture the individual throughout their entire life but, Foucault concludes, pastoral power can only come about through "knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it".⁶⁹ Paul's need to know that the Philippians "are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the Gospel" (1:27) is so that he can be sure that they are aware of, and able to understand, what is required of them to be ready for the day of Christ (1:6).

R.T. Fortna offers a quite different view of Paul's personality in his paper "Philippians: Paul's most egocentric letter". To Fortna, Paul is concerned with self and is mostly occupied with his own situation when he writes to "his mostly lower followers in Philippi".⁷⁰ By thus describing the community, Fortna appears to demolish the idea of a friendship based on equality rather suggesting a power relation of patriarchal dependence - Paul is the leader and has needs which the 'followers' can provide. Paul, rather than paying attention to the needs of the Philippians is concerned solely with the theological problem his imprisonment, and possible imminent death

⁶⁸Foucault, page 333.

⁶⁹Foucault, page 333.

⁷⁰Fortna, page 221.

(1:21-24) poses for himself.⁷¹ Paul's objective, if Fortna's argument is to be accepted, is to maintain his privileged position as leader of the community and thus preserve his sense of self importance. But to maintain this position, Paul is dependent on the continued economic advantage of the Philippians. In Foucault's terms, Paul must employ some means of retaining authority over the community, either through force, manipulation or through language which convinces the Philippians of the necessity for the continuance of the Pauline mission. Even if one does accept Fortna's argument, the shift from who is dominant to who is subordinate within the power relation continues to oscillate between Paul and the Philippians.

Paul is aware of his vulnerability in prison and although he claims confidence that the prayers of the community will result in his deliverance (1:25), this may well be more to encourage the community in their faith than to increase his status as sole provider of the knowledge of God. Fortna suggests that Paul's concentration on his own suffering in prison compared to the brief mention of the Philippians suffering, serves to highlight his self importance. It is due to this importance, Fortna argues, that Paul is convinced he will remain to "meet his obligation to his Christian followers",⁷² rather than depart and be with Christ which would be preferable (1:23). But although it is tempting to consider, as Fortna does, that it is Paul's egocentricity that drives his ability to reveal his feelings, as women we can also recognise Paul's ability to describe and discuss emotions as being a natural element of friendship. Of course Paul is concerned with his predicament, he is only too human and why should he not ponder this in theological terms? But is this indicative of an ego which seeks self promotion? It could be that Paul needs to remain "in the flesh" (1:24) in order that he can respond to their material generosity as an equal, by providing a presence when his friends need him, rather than to continue in a hegemonic relationship with the community. The balance of objectives within the power relation is maintained since Paul requires the Philippians to be actors in praying for his deliverance so that he can be an actor in furthering

⁷¹Fortna, page 221.

⁷²Fortna, page 223.

their joy and progress in faith (1:25). This does not seem to be a person whose ego is necessarily controlling his existence.

Depending on how one interprets Paul's exhortation, it is possible to identify two sets of power relations operating here. If Paul is acting solely in the role of pastor then it is important for Paul to know that the Philippians' main purpose is to stand firm in their knowledge for what is needed for the parousia. He directs their conscience with the intention of making them aware of the need to maintain a life in Christ since he believes that individual salvation is only possible if one has a clear knowledge of the Gospel. The word Paul uses here $\mu\iota\grave{\alpha}\ \psi\upsilon\chi\eta\grave{\iota}$ which NRSV translates as 'one mind', comes from the verb $\psi\acute{\upsilon}\chi\omega$, to breathe or to blow and translates literally as 'with one soul'⁷³. An alternative translation⁷⁴ is 'the breath of life, the vital force which animates the body'. For Paul this vital force is necessary for a life with Christ since salvation is the ultimate goal of every Christian. Paul's concern therefore need not be that the Philippians are in 'agreed collective thought', showing unity as a community, but that each individual is aware that the breath of life which feeds their soul comes from knowing God and what is vital for individual salvation. Paul's desire is to know that the community is focussed in their preparation for salvation, so that then his own joy will be complete (2:2).

This section of the letter is often interpreted as an indication of the squabbling Philippians⁷⁵ who are being intimidated by their opponents. Internal differences could lead to disunity and the collapse of the Church. However, if instead of viewing Paul's relationship with the Philippians as an equitable one we are to view it as hierarchical and egotistical, then such a collapse would remove Paul from a leadership role, in which case it is vital for Paul's ego that he persuade the Church to remain in union. Bockmuehl points out, however, that there is no actual reference to disunity amongst the

⁷³J H Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 4th ed.

⁷⁴Thayer, *Lexicon*.

⁷⁵Fee page 184 and others.

Philippians in this letter, it is only through association to other letters⁷⁶ that such inference can be drawn from this passage. Even the instruction to the Church to support Euodia and Syntyche (4:2-3) need not be interpreted as a likelihood of impending schism. If Paul is concerned with his ego when he urges the Philippians to be of one mind then it would seem that the language of mutuality used in chapter one has given way in chapter two to the language of coercion, with the need to please Paul coming through obedience (2:2; 12-17). Paul's language can be considered manipulative, insisting his joy will only be complete when they are "of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (2:2). Paul, who uses egalitarian language in the joy and friendship that he expresses throughout Philippians seems suddenly to be assuming the right to judge the Philippian community⁷⁷ on what he has deemed to be their disunity, and uses language of manipulation to persuade them to alter their behaviour. If this is the case, the balance of power has clearly shifted. Manipulative behaviour achieves results through generating feelings of guilt within those being manipulated. Such manipulative behaviour is a means by which oppression can be perpetuated but with the oppressed taking on the responsibility of their own oppression.

The alternative is to interpret this passage in the context of pastoral power when Paul's language becomes a statement of fulfilment. His joy will be complete *because* he knows that each and every one of his friends will be saved at the coming of Christ. I suggest that Paul may well have recognised and even celebrated difference of thought within the individual members of the community but was encouraging them because of the strength of his friendship, to use this multiplicity of thought to achieve the same end - eternal life with Christ. The power of the Pauline discourse emerges from the rhetoric of salvation - without salvation there can be no relationship with God, but within this there is room for individual difference of thought and understanding of salvation. Paul is not promoting a power relation in which

⁷⁶Bockmuehl hints at this page 108.

⁷⁷Polaski makes the same comment on Paul's judgement of Philemon.

he is assuming a hierarchical position of leadership but is continuing to administer pastoral power; as Fee writes “while on the surface this may sound self-serving, in reality it speaks volumes about Paul’s pastoral heart”.⁷⁸ Fortna argues that this is in fact an incorrect interpretation, and that Paul is really concerned with the additional support that will come his way if there is harmony and love amongst the Philippians.⁷⁹ It is for this reason, Fortna suggests, that the Christological hymn⁸⁰ is introduced into the letter at this point - it is for Paul’s needs not the Philippians “since it pertains to the hidden agenda not the overt one”;⁸¹ this hidden agenda being Paul’s need for nurture not the Philippians.

The Pauline Church was concerned not only with creating the boundaries of these new Christian communities but with nurturing the community from within. Paul begins in chapter two to encourage the community in their vigilance of each others’ needs and how they should behave to ensure those needs are met; their own interests must be secondary to those of others (2:4). Selfish ambition and conceit are to be exchanged for humility, regarding others as better than oneself (2:3), clear parallels with the Marcan Jesus’ conditions for discipleship. Paul is so convinced of Christ’s imminent return that by encouraging the Philippians to behave as closely as possible to the human Christ - “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (2:5), then their salvation would be ensured. Fee argues that this exhortation points forward to the hymn that follows both linguistically and conceptually.⁸² Firstly Paul appeals to the Philippians to be of one mind (2:2), to have the same attitude⁸³ as Christ (2:5). By so being, the contrast is made between Christ’s behaviour in both divine and human form (2:6-8) and the selfish ambition and conceit that Paul has warned against. Although this is an

⁷⁸Fee, page 183.

⁷⁹Fortna, page 224.

⁸⁰The general consensus of opinion amongst the commentators is that the hymn here comes from a pre-existent hymn that Paul has adapted to suit his own purpose.

⁸¹Fortna, page 224.

⁸²Fee, page 175.

⁸³Fee, page 201.

appeal to the individual Philippian, if they each have this attitude *within*, then the same attitude will prevail *among* the community.⁸⁴ The fact that Christ humbled himself in taking the human form of a slave links back to the humility required to escape elitist behaviour, as required by Jesus of the Marcan community. The emphasis is therefore not on Paul, but on the Philippians remaining in Christ, through the Spirit.⁸⁵

The hymn is in praise of the humility of Christ and the fact that rather than exploiting his equality with God he took on the form of a slave and became obedient even accepting death on the cross (2:6-8). The hymn proclaims the pre-existence of Christ, his birth, death and return to the divine state. Paul has also established that God and Christ are one and the same (1:2) and has already introduced the idea that the truth can be sustained through a pastoral/slave relationship. The message of the hymn shows parallels with the thinking of the Mystery cults, especially with its reference to the human/divine dualism. The idea of the human form of the divine being, which at death will return to the eternal divine can be seen in the beliefs of the Greek and Roman Mysteries:

The primary revelation of the Egyptian, Greek and Roman mysteries was that the eternal body was the 'Ground', 'Mother', 'Father' of the consciousness temporarily focused in the physical body. The initiate knew that at death he or she would be revisited with this ground this greater self to which he or she belonged as child to parent.⁸⁶

Paul uses the words of the hymn to link his attitude as slave to the community, with that of Christ, as Christ empties himself (ἐκένωσε) into the fully human form of slave (μορφήν δούλου) to the world. Is Paul equating himself with the humbled slave of Christ when he uses slave language to describe his relationship with the Philippians and so replacing the hierarchy

⁸⁴Fee, page 201.

⁸⁵Fee, page 179.

⁸⁶Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess* page 630.

established in the opening with one based on God/Christ/Paul-Philippians, or is he claiming the role for himself of enabler, having authority from God to bring awareness of salvation to the community?

Polaski suggests that the argument is more complex. The slave position willingly adopted by Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus which Paul encourages the Philippians to imitate, serves to reinforce Paul's position of authority. Because the hymn concludes with God exalting Christ above all others (2:9), by association Paul's position is also elevated.⁸⁷ Polaski raises an interesting point. However, Paul has established the non-hierarchical relationship with Timothy at the outset of the letter (1:1) and hints at a similar relationship of equality with Epaphroditus, calling him brother, co-worker, fellow soldier (2:25). Does this self-lowering serve then to enhance only Paul's position of authority? What about Timothy and Epaphroditus? How have their power relations with the Philippians and with Paul progressed? Polaski's argument would be stronger, I feel, if Paul had addressed the community as apostle and not as slave.

By using this language to describe himself and Timothy, Paul stresses the power relationship that there must be between a believer and Christ, and suggests that this submission to God is willingly given by himself and Timothy which can serve as an encouragement to the Philippian community. Paul has included Timothy as an equal slave indicating a negation of the hierarchical power relationship that has been suggested existed between Paul and the early Church community. By not identifying himself as an authority of Christ in the form of a self-appointed apostle, with Timothy as subordinate, as he does in his other letters (Rom 1:1; 1Cor 1:1; 2Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1), Paul has weakened the notion that the Church in Philippi began with the strict hierarchy of God/Christ-Paul-bishops-deacons-brothers that was to emerge as the model for the later Church, with sisters nowhere to be seen. Rather it is because Paul *does* consider Timothy and Epaphroditus as brothers and co-workers, and recognises the equality of

⁸⁷Polaski, page 119.

at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:12-13). But to whom is Paul expecting obedience? It is crucial to establish this when discussing Paul in the context of power and domination.

The NRSV translation, unlike other translations suggests that the obedience should be to Paul himself - “therefore my beloved just as you have always obeyed me ...” (2:12), however, other translations leave out the ‘me’ since the Greek (καθὼς πάντοτε ὑπηκούσατε) does not suggest that it should be included. Bockmuehl points out the verbal link between obedience here and Christ’s obedience in verse 8.⁹³ Fee makes a similar link between the two occurrences of obedience arguing:

... For Paul *faith in Christ* is ultimately expressed as *obedience to Christ*, not in the sense of following the rules, but of coming totally under his lordship, of being completely devoted to him. This is the only “obedience” to his own words that Paul cares anything about Thus Paul starts on this note of reminder, that they have always given evidence of their faith by their obedience to Christ.⁹⁴

If Paul was reinforcing a hierarchy of obedience he may well have used a phrase to indicate the community as his children (1 Cor 4:14) instead he refers to the Philippians as ἀγαπητοί μου, my beloved, and as τέκνα θεοῦ, children of God (2:15). Paul reminds them with confidence of their obedience to the Gospel⁹⁵ and encourages them by linking this with Christ’s obedience. The emphasis for Paul is that faith in Christ is expressed as obedience to Christ, not in a legalistic sense but by total devotion.⁹⁶ The result of such obedience will be personal salvation for each Philippian not patriarchal power for Paul, since it can be achieved whether Paul is present

⁹³Bockmuehl, page 149.

⁹⁴Fee, page 233, especially footnote 15.

⁹⁵Bockmuehl (page 149), Fee(page 233 ft 15) and Collange (page 109) all dismiss the reference as obedience to Paul himself.

⁹⁶Fee, page 233.

actions of the Philippians in sharing the Gospel, that these power relations can be seen as asymmetrical but not hierarchical.

The Christological message of the hymn may at first reading appear to offer little for women's empowerment since it can serve to reinforce the maleness of God. Paul uses the word 'form' twice: to indicate that Christ was in the form of God (μορφῆ Θεοῦ) then in the form of a slave (μορφὴν δούλου) being born in human likeness (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος). Fee⁸⁸ points to the difficulty posed by Paul's use of μορφῆ because of the limitations posed in translation. He concludes that Paul chooses μορφῆ because of its dual use as metaphor:

His urgency is to say something about Christ's "mindset" first as God and second as man. But in the transition from Christ's "being God" to his "becoming human", Paul expresses by way of *metaphor* the essential quality of that humanity: he "took on the 'form' of a slave." *Morphe* was precisely the right word for this dual usage to characterise both the reality (his being God) and the metaphor (his taking on the role of a slave), since it denotes "form" or "shape" not in terms of external features by which something is recognised, but of those characteristics and qualities that are essential to it. Hence it means *that which truly characterises a given reality*.⁸⁹

The essential quality then is not maleness but what it means to be a slave. Slavery is not to be seen as subordination in a menial sense but is to be celebrated as being spiritually supportive. Bockmuehl argues that for Paul the only freedom "is in being a slave to God".⁹⁰ As a slave God took on a

⁸⁸Fee presents a summary of these difficulties as discussed by other commentators page 204.

⁸⁹Fee, page 204.

⁹⁰Bockmuehl, page 50.

human (ἄνθρωπων),⁹¹ not a male form and therefore took on the likeness of each of us. Jesus existed in the body of a man but in essence he was human not male. Christ took on this form instead of exploiting his equality with God. Christ did not 'snatch at the prize' (οὐχ ἄρπαγμὸν) of divinity, rather it was as a human being that he made himself humble (ἑταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν), a quality which enabled him to be obedient even to death on a cross.

I get tremendously excited by the second chapter of Philippians. It was a tremendously humbling experience and it hits me every time. It reverses Adams's sin, doesn't it; Adam and Eve grasping at something they had no right to - He had the right to everything and gave it all up. It is beautiful, but that is so typical of God, reversing things. The concept of divinity and humanity together is quite beyond my grasp but very real, anyone who tries to take one away from the other diminishes their believe tremendously.

That Christ's obedience is spelled out in his death on the cross is for Fee, the essence of the Pauline theology; that God is love and that this love expresses itself in self sacrifice.⁹² Self-sacrifice is a common experience for women. Often as an act originating out of love, this sacrifice becomes for many women a means of survival within an oppressive relationship. Paul's metaphorical use of Christ becoming poor so that others can become rich (2 Cor 8:9) becomes a reality for many women. But because God's love is expressed in this way women can be encouraged as they struggle to find wholeness and healing.

Paul continues in paraenetic style as he reminds the Philippians that obedience is connected with personal salvation rather than patriarchal power, and even though he is not with them in person, he exhorts them to continue in their obedience "not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is

⁹¹The choice of the plural here, Fee suggests, is indicative of the whole human race

⁹² Fee, page 217.

or not. Paul is again encouraging the Philippians to nurture each other from within the community. Paul reaffirms that this is only possible through God, “for it is God who is at work in you” (2:13) not through Paul himself.

That Paul should urge the community to work out this salvation without “murmuring and arguing” (2:14), is interpreted as further evidence of a community in conflict. Although the phrase could equally well suggest that the Philippians were able to enter into lively debate in much the same way that feminist Christians do today, it is possible that Paul was warning of the dangers of elitism that can emerge when individuals pursue the selfish ambition (2:3) that prompted Paul’s discussion of humility in the first place. Is Paul worried that this selfish ambition may lead either to a split in the Church with some Philippians moving away from the route that Paul sees is required for personal salvation? Or is Paul concerned that a leader might emerge to challenge his personal leadership role? Maybe each of these is possible.

We have already seen that Paul is acting in a pastoral power relationship, working and praying for the individual salvation of those members of this community whom he regards as his friends, and he is concerned that they do not waver before the return of Christ. But there is little evidence to suggest that Paul is determined to be the sole leader of all the early churches. He recognises many others who “share with him” in spreading the Gospel, not many “who work under him” in this activity. Fee presents this passage as Paul’s explanation of individual empowerment. The empowerment comes from God since God supplies the power of obedience to God. God is at work both within each Philippian and amongst them as community by empowering their “doing and also the willing that lies behind the doing”.⁹⁷ Why God should do this, Fee suggests, is ambiguous,⁹⁸ since it could mean either that God is at work to promote harmony in the community, or more likely he argues, is that their obedience is empowered for God’s own pleasure - “God’s pleasure is pure love” - and is therefore an act for those God loves.

⁹⁷Fee, page 238

⁹⁸Fee, see page 239, footnote 39

In the next verses we again see an echo of Paul's language which could possibly be manipulative. Paul urges the Philippians to be "blameless and innocent children of God" (2:15a) so that they may "shine like the stars in the world" (2:15b). If they do this then Paul will be able to "boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour in vain" (2:16); Paul will be judged as having succeeded in his apostolic mission. Paul is speaking eschatologically and, on balance, though he is so concerned that his friends will be prepared for the parousia, his language is more to be construed as indicating joy that his friends were ready, than recognition for his own part in their readiness. It is through Paul that Christ has been able to work, and it is for this reason Paul is able to boast that his work has not been in vain (2:16). Knowing that he is the vessel for this knowledge of Christ being spread throughout the area could increase Paul's enjoyment of a position of power. However, this need not be a personal ability for which Paul is claiming credit, rather it could be recognition of the power of the Spirit to work within those who recognise Christ and the Gospel.

Paul completes this section of the letter with sacrificial language reminiscent of Old Testament or Pagan offering.⁹⁹ Whether Paul is referring to his own death or speaking metaphorically is unclear; it is more likely Paul is referring to his missionary activities than to his death since he anticipates being with the Philippians some time soon (2:24). The whole of this section of the letter draws on the Old Testament imagery¹⁰⁰ with which Paul is very familiar, but here it is used to encourage the Philippians to remain firm in their belief in the "word of life" (2:16) when they are surrounded by the pagan influences of "a crooked and perverse generation" (2:15). These influences are the possible cause of the Philippians' suffering that Paul refers to earlier in the letter (1:29) but from this suffering will come the joy of becoming children of God (2:15). Paul is able to rejoice with the Philippians that their partnership in the Gospel has been, and will continue to be fruitful, and urges them to reciprocate by rejoicing with him. This is a partnership based on mutuality.

⁹⁹Bockmuehl, page 160.

¹⁰⁰Fee, page 258.

If Foucault's model for power relations is to apply then Paul must have some means not only to bring the power relation into existence but to maintain it once in place. If that power relation is to be described in terms of pastoral power then Paul as well as having knowledge of the Philippians conscience, must also have the ability to direct it. Does this explain Paul's apparent dramatic change of style as he moves into the next phase of the letter body? Is this strong language repeatedly urging the Philippians to "beware" (3:2) of influences which might harm them, a means of directing the Philippians so that Paul is placed in a superior position? Paul's use of metaphor in claiming that true Christians are the "circumcised" (3:3), provides him with an opportunity of using his own conversion to draw attention to himself as role model, and thus to urge the Philippians to be his imitators. Paul has no legal or political means of bringing about power relations¹⁰¹ but must rely instead on "the charismatic's extra ordinariness"¹⁰² in his persuasion of the Philippians to stand firm in their faith. In Sandra Polaski's words "Paul has the force of his own rhetoric, the power of his personality and the respect that others choose to grant him, to promote his agenda."¹⁰³

Elizabeth Castelli¹⁰⁴ is concerned as much with the authority with which Paul claims to promote this agenda as she is with the truth as Paul sees it. This respect for Paul's authority comes through the manner in which Paul is able to establish the authority of the Gospel in the minds of those whom he meets. For Castelli,¹⁰⁵ the establishment of truth in early Christianity is tied to the way in which that truth is revealed, in other words to who speaks and who does not.¹⁰⁶ The influence of the Pauline letters in what is accepted as

¹⁰¹See Foucault's five points earlier in this chapter.

¹⁰²Sandra Polaski, *Paul and The Discourse of Power*, page 68.

¹⁰³Polaski, page 68.

¹⁰⁴Elizabeth Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power*, page 36.

¹⁰⁵By suggesting that 'societies are organised and power relations emerge in response to very particular historical circumstances', Castelli explores the social effect of the rhetoric of power in the Pauline texts, since Paul's claims for himself as the privileged speaker for the early Christian communities has had such profound social implications, page 37.

¹⁰⁶Castelli, page 49. Incorporation of texts in the canon debased what is left out.

the authoritative text of the New Testament is evidence of this. The writers of early Christian texts are concerned with the truth as they perceive it and are keen to establish their version with authority. The dominance of Pauline ideology in the Church is clear, though whether Paul intended the consequences of the interpretation of his text on power relationships in subsequent societies is questionable. It can be argued that much of the poor relationship the modern Church has with marginalised groups comes from a similar determination to establish its version of truth with authority. However, Castelli stresses that the Pauline discourse should be seen as “a claim to truth not truth itself”.¹⁰⁷ It is the discourse of the privileged speaker, Castelli argues, that “creates the contours of the social experience of Early Christian communities” leading towards a singular truth and a universal organisation. It is in this context that she poses the question concerning Paul’s call for imitation (3:17):

Is “imitation” then, “power’s discourse,” the very articulation of power? Or perhaps it could be read as a genitive of respect: “imitation” as a way of articulating power relations and claiming for them a grounding in truth.¹⁰⁸

Castelli suggests that it is both. Paul’s call on the Philippians to “join in imitating me and observe those who live according to the example you have in us” (3:17) in contrast to those who “live as enemies of the cross” (3:18), she argues, is part of a larger call to unity within the community. For those whom Paul clearly identifies as *other* (3:2) will be destruction, and their glory shame (3:19), whilst for the Philippian believers, imitating Paul will lead to “citizenship in heaven” (3:20), sure in the knowledge that Christ will “transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory” (3:21). This passage for Castelli is clear evidence of a hierarchy of power. At the head is Christ who has the power to perfect the transformation from humility to glory (3:21), then comes Paul who acts as

¹⁰⁷Castelli, page 56.

¹⁰⁸Castelli, page 56.

the mediator through whom this salvation becomes possible, thus placing him in a privileged position.¹⁰⁹ This Christ-Paul hierarchy she argues functions in a double sense:

First, it constructs the power relations that will give the community its identity as a monolithic social formation constituted by the unity it must maintain. Second, it reinscribes Paul's privileged position within the hierarchy as the mediating figure through whom the community might gain access to salvation.¹¹⁰

This, she suggests, is bound up with the hymn in chapter two as Paul repeats the call to the Philippians to be of the same mind (2:2; 3:15). The behaviour required of a Christian is firmly linked to Christ's humility on the cross and to imitating Paul which provides a unifying bond against those outsiders.¹¹¹

I would question Castelli's interpretation of Paul's power of privilege as one that necessarily establishes hierarchy within the systems of differentiation that Paul identifies. There is no doubt that Paul has recognised the differences in reward between those who follow Christ and those who do not, however, Paul seems to me to be exploring the idea that unity is the key to liberation. To be "of the same mind" can be interpreted on a personal level as well as a corporate one, indicating the continuation of what is needed for individual salvation. It need not necessarily imply disunity among believers, nor that their understanding must be 'identical'. In this context then, Paul uses his own example (3:7-11) to encourage the Philippians to stay in a personal relationship with Christ so that they too might reap the rewards that Christ has in store for them. Paul clearly acknowledges that for him this is only possible because "Christ Jesus has made me his own" (3:12). Is this then another example of pastoral power, rather than one of

¹⁰⁹Castelli, page 96

¹¹⁰Castelli, page 96

¹¹¹Castelli, page 97

hegemonic power, with Paul indicating that Christ will also make the Philippians his own?

Paul again addresses the Philippians using inclusive language as he did when calling for their obedience (2:12), calling them brothers and sisters, ἀδελφοί, rather than beloved, ἀγαπτοί, as he uses the example of his own experiences to draw them more closely into the way of Christ. This can of course be read as evidence of Paul's egocentricity, promoting his own superiority in his relationship with Christ, as he boasts about the losses he has suffered in order to gain Christ (3: 7-9). I feel, however, that this can also be read as a "sharing", as one friend uses their own experiences to encourage others to realise the same benefits for themselves. Paul is quite clear that he is still on his journey, and rejects any suggestion that he might have had a hand in his own salvation, "I do not consider that I have made it my own" (3:13), as he presses on "towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (3:14). That Paul writes using this language immediately prior to his call for the Philippians to be his imitators, I feel, weakens the idea of a Christ-Paul-Christian hierarchy, but strengthens instead Paul's realisation of the power of God. Polaski acknowledges that here Paul realises his subordination to Christ (3:7) but "also expects his fellow workers in Philippi to acknowledge Paul's special standing, his role as model for their imitation".¹¹²

For Polaski it is Paul's use of grace language which "establishes a place for everyone - attributing Paul a place in the top"¹¹³ which gives Paul, she argues, the authority to describe not only the structure of the community but to assign others their place within it.¹¹⁴ Although grace is a gift from God to all members of the community, Polaski suggests that it is the varying gifts of grace that Paul identifies in his letter to the Romans (Rom 12:6) which reveal his presumption of a spiritual hierarchy - a hierarchy which exists hidden by the language which stress the mutuality of grace such as in his

¹¹²Polaski, page 119

¹¹³Polaski, page 119

¹¹⁴Polaski, page 118

letter to the Philippians.¹¹⁵ There is an ambiguity, she argues, in Paul's use of grace to open and close his letters:

Paul both *mediates* grace, by these pronouncements, and *acknowledges* that his correspondents are recipients of a divine power over which he has no direct control. Grace empowers the community, it makes service to God and to one's neighbour possible, it endows *charismata* Yet Paul also claims the task of defining 'grace' for his readers, of bringing them into a discourse in which Paul's authority is an unquestioned part of the will of God, a set of power relations which Paul himself defines and no one else would dream of challenging.¹¹⁶

Is it possible therefore, she asks, to read the word grace in the Pauline text without questioning its implication for a discourse of power? It is precisely because the gift of grace *is* given by God and completely outside Paul's control that sets Paul apart as privileged. Polaski concludes: "Paul claims an unassailable power, an authority over his correspondents which is his alone precisely *because* he is the subject of an undeserved favour of a powerful God".¹¹⁷

Polaski's argument relies on the fact that Paul, in asking the Philippians to be his imitators, does so because *he* sees *himself* in a position of privilege. But what if Paul realises the grace that God has given to him is not in any way special to him, but is available in exactly the same form to everyone else. Would this still mean that Paul claims "an unassailable power" over the Philippians? In this case, Paul's call to be imitators might be done in paraenetic style because he is saying to the Philippians "you too can share in this knowledge, if you are able to come to an understanding of the call of God as I have been able to do".

¹¹⁵Polaski, page 119

¹¹⁶Polaski, page 123.

¹¹⁷Polaski, page 122.

The case for Paul's assumed power of privilege is much stronger in his letter to the Corinthians, where he provides a detailed list of the Corinthians failings before appealing to them to be his imitators (1 Cor 4:16), since Paul himself can be considered a trustworthy steward of God's mysteries (1 Cor 4:1-2). Here in his letter to the Philippians, there is no indication that the Philippians have been distracted from God in the same way that the Christians in Corinth have, nor that Paul is anyway more advantaged than they are. These communities accessed the truth through the recorded word of Jesus interpreted for their own needs. Paul claims his apostolic authority as instruction from God given to him through visions and revelations of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:12) but he does not make reference to this apostolic role directly when writing to the Philippians. Paul's request to be the one who is imitated therefore I feel is couched less in a desire for authoritative power, than it is a gift of pastoral power. Paul's continuing reference to the Philippians as beloved, now as he declares how much he longs for and loves them "my joy and crown" (4:1) reaffirms the mutuality of the relationship. If Paul was wanting to assert patriarchal authority he may well have stressed his apostolic role (Col 1:1; Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1) and referred to the Philippians as his children (1 Cor 4:14; 1 Thess 2:11; 5:5; Gal 4:6-7).

It has been argued that this section of the letter clearly indicates Paul's political opposition to imperialism.¹¹⁸ Rather than assuming that Paul places himself within the Church hierarchy below Christ but well above the others, his invitation to "imitate me", is possibly a call to the Philippians to align themselves with Paul in opposition to the imperialism of Rome. Paul advises the Philippians "our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (3:20). This passage uses saviour, Richard Horsley argues, "in an unmistakably political context", since, Jesus as Lord "sharply opposes" the imperial saviour.¹¹⁹ This is because, he suggests, the Philippians would have been very aware that they had a saviour in the form of the government in Rome. If this is so, then again

¹¹⁸Richard A Horsley (ed) *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*.

¹¹⁹Horsley page 141.

it indicates imitation to be for mutual moral support rather than for hierarchical power.

Paul concludes the body of the letter by singling out two of his co-workers Euodia and Syntyche for what most commentators argue is rebuke for some quarrel they are having. This interpretation may well have suited male commentators for a number of reasons. Firstly, it adds strength to the theme of disunity among this community. Not only does Paul have to remind the Philippians as a Church to be of the same mind and to stand firm in the Gospel, he now needs to call on a mediator to settle an apparent squabble¹²⁰ between two women. Secondly, these co-worker *are* women. By highlighting women's inability to agree, added weight can be given to their exclusion from leadership roles within the Church.¹²¹ Nils Dahl chauvinistically suggests that "Euodia and Syntyche were most likely rivals who wanted to get as much recognition for their work in the Gospel as possible. Questions about who had contributed the most to the gift to Paul may perhaps have been part of their conflict".¹²² But none of these interpretations is sufficient to claim that these women are in disagreement with each other nor, as Mary Rose D'Angelo¹²³ suggests, with Paul himself. If Paul can be seen to be operating within the premise of pastoral power, then probably he recognises the importance of the role of these women as co-workers who have struggled beside him in the Gospel (4:2). As he has encouraged all the Philippians to be of the right mind for individual salvation so Paul asks specifically for support for these women as they undertake whatever needs to be done within the community and within the Church mission. It does not necessarily follow that because Paul urges each individually to remain united with Christ that he doubts either is faltering or in

¹²⁰Brockmuehl refers to Euodia and Syntyche as having a feud, Nils Dahl describes their conflict as 'scandalous' whilst Black suggests they have played a major role in the Philippians' disunity, page 31.

¹²¹Fee agrees that such interpretations are chauvinistic and are no longer sustainable.

¹²²Nils Dahl, "Euodia and Syntyche and Paul's Letter to the Philippians" in White and Yarborough (ed), *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne Meeks*, page 14.

¹²³Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women Partner's in the New Testament" *JFSR* vol 6, 1 1990, page 76.

dispute with each other, with him, or with God. Rather it highlights the respect that Paul has for each woman as equal friends, and as women who can promote the message of the Gospel to the wider community. D'Angelo suggests that we view these women as "partners in mission rather than individual members of Paul's missionary team" who as a partnership she suggests, are in dispute with Paul. Whether we accept D'Angelo's proposition, or view these women as working independently of each other,¹²⁴ we do not need to interpret Paul's entreaty as indicative of disunity.

Paul's request for help for Euodia and Syntyche comes after his encouragement in a new sentence: "Yes and I ask you also, my loyal companion help (συλλαμβάνου) these women" (4:3). It is possible therefore that Paul is urging another co-worker to arrange for material or practical support for these two women to enable their mission work to progress. The language that Paul uses to describe this work suggests struggle (συναθλέω)¹²⁵ which may have required financial support especially if these women were to be travelling to spread the news of Christ into hostile regions. Paul after all was writing from a situation where his imprisonment was recognised as being for Christ, and he too had been grateful for financial support from this community (4:14). We have no further evidence of the role of these women but it is as plausible to look for evidence of missionary support required for these women, whom Paul respects as equal co-workers, as it is to look for evidence of disunity. If there was a real likelihood of split, perhaps because these women were possibly in positions of starting up their own house churches away from the main church in Philippi, would Paul not have used a stronger rebuke as he does when writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:10ff), and be less oblique in his comments?

The letter moves to the conclusion with Paul reminding the Philippians that all will be well through prayer and supplication to God through Christ (4:6),

¹²⁴Dahl suggests that they were independent workers as their conflict "was conflict between two rivals".

¹²⁵Thayer references the other use of this form of the verb συναθλέω in Lk 5:1. In this case, the disciples are requiring practical assistance because the weight of the catch is too much for one boat to handle.

who will provide them with the peace “which surpasses all understanding” (4:7). Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians to reflect on those things which are most important to God - truth, honour, justice, purity - things which will please God, and to keep following the truth and example they have seen in Paul, may well have been as Dahl proposes because the presumed conflict between Euodia and Syntyche goes against the generally accepted rules and standards of Christian love and behaviour. It is this, he suggests, that prompted Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians to reflect on those things which are “true honorable and just”.¹²⁶ Is this further evidence of Paul’s desire to be in hierarchical power, basking in his own self-glory, or a means of encouraging a fledging community with an example of what is possible from one who has experienced the grace of God and who knows that they too can have a similar experience with the same rewards (4:9)? Paul’s conclusion recognises the Philippians’ economic dominance as he thanks them for supplying resources to meet his needs especially whilst in prison (4:14) and he makes it clear that this gift to him will be richly rewarded by God (4:18). Is this still further evidence of Paul’s privileged insight into God’s desires? Or perhaps Paul’s words support a manipulation of the relationship in a Foucauldian sense - knowledge that the certain rewards which will come to them from the insight in Christ given to them by Paul, will result in financial support for Paul as grateful thanks.

Although I accept that it is possible to read the letter in this way, Paul makes it quite clear that he can exist without the financial support of his friends and that he does not seek it. For Paul, sustenance comes from Christ alone “in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well fed and being hungry I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (4: 12-13). The real gift for Paul is knowing Christ, and being able to share this knowledge with those for whom he cares and nurtures. The God whom Paul recognises as “my God” (4:19) is also the universal God, and it is to “our God” (4:20) that Paul offers glory as he ends his letter in the grace of Christ.

¹²⁶Dahl, page 9

Is this letter still perceived as one which reveals power structures set in place by Paul and supported through centuries of Church patriarchy? Do women view Paul himself in a different light? From a feminist perspective it may seem easy to blame Paul's ego for a Church which has developed not just in line with Pauline theology but on structures supported through patriarchal interpretations of the Pauline letters. The non-patriarchal community structure proposed by the Jesus of the Gospels seems far from the rigid hierarchy that has emerged from the early Pauline churches. If we are to reclaim the Pauline letters, and in particular Philippians, through a feminist rereading of the text, then it is necessary to acknowledge that 'self' may not have been the only concern of Paul when writing to this community. Paul was almost certainly occupied with thoughts on his own situation - he was after all writing from an oppressive situation - but the letter continues to be read by many women today who are able to see beyond Paul's ego and interpret his message for their own empowerment and spiritual progression. As women we have all been disadvantaged by male ego and supremacy of power. Within the Church this has often been because privileged men have turned to the authority of Paul to consolidate their own positions. This does not mean, however, that we have to accept that Paul's concern with self was for self-promotion. Rather we can look for characteristics within Paul and his ministry which we can recognise within ourselves and our relations with other women.

I will explore a number of the themes exposed in the letter, in the context of contemporary Christian women's lives. Firstly, the theme of friendship: Women can identify with the expression of friendship that Paul has for the Philippians since it is reminiscent of the friendships that they have for each other. Studies on gendered friendships carried out in the last twenty years describe women's same-sex friendships as focussing on the relationship, communicating and disclosing information about themselves whilst male friendships, focusing as they do on sociable relationships with others, "restrict the extent to which self is revealed within them".¹²⁷ Recent

¹²⁷Graham Allan in *Friendship: Developing a Sociological Perspective*, quotes research studies by Pleck(1976), Hess (1979) , Bell (1981), Wright (1982), Crawford (1977) to

sociological studies have confirmed the cultural assumption that such friendships for men and women are different, with women's friendships being described as 'face-to-face' whilst men's are described as 'side-by-side'. Pat O'Connor, reviewing the studies which have dismissed women's friendship as inferior to men's and which cite the lack of historical recordings of women's friendships as a further indication of this weakness, writes: "it is hard to escape the idea that it was systematically ignored, derogated and trivialised within a wide variety of traditions".¹²⁸ O'Connor cites Solano's¹²⁹ study which identifies three functions of friendship present in women's friendships: material needs, cognitive needs and socio-emotional needs. All three of these functions can clearly be seen to operate within Paul's friendship with the Philippian community.

Women in modern Christian communities can see the friendship that Paul had with the Philippian community reflected in their own same-sex friendships. They are able to recognise equality in the reciprocity of Paul's friendship as they themselves form asymmetrical support friendships in which one woman may provide material needs whilst another reciprocates by being there when needed.¹³⁰ Whilst men choose others in their friendships for their company and socialising, women look for the trust in their same-sex friendships that Paul had with this community. Paul's friendship with the Philippians appears to be one where friendships are without patriarchal constraints and follow the pattern of modern women-women friendships. Paul is clearly able to express his understanding of the relationship in terms of joy, love and concern - his is a 'face-to-face' friendship where he has established a greater intimacy than just a need for socialisation. In the same way that Paul links love of his friends to the compassionate love of Christ, women in Christian friendship today can

support this conclusion, page 86.

¹²⁸Pat O'Connor, *Friendship Between Women: A Critical Review*, provides a summary of research in this field, page 10.

¹²⁹O'Connor, page 6 quoting CH Solano (1986).

¹³⁰Salano differentiates "material needs" as being both actual provision of concrete help and the feeling of inner security created by the presence of those willing to help out", O'Connor page 6.

reaffirm their love for each other as also being linked to the love of Christ. Christ for them becomes as another woman in the friendship. Women are able to vision Christ in a variety of roles to meet the cognitive and emotional needs of friendship, particularly when they feel isolated within their social setting.

No matter how these roles are named, they often exhibit the characteristics of women-women friendship as a piece published in an anthology of Craigavon Women's Writing¹³¹ demonstrates. One woman writes of her journey from a childhood where she was expected to be a perfect little girl like her older sister, through twenty one years of a violent marriage to her discovery of her inner strength to be a woman worthy of recognition as an equal. She rejected the formal picture of Christ that her Catholic education had presented to her instead visioning Christ throughout this journey as the brother she never had - a brother whom she believed would have rebelled and in so doing have reduced her parent's expectation of perfection in herself. She writes:

When I was smoking the sixth fag and drinking that seventh mug of tea, I was sitting at the kitchen table across from him. I always pictured him in a loose white shirt and jeans. And in all honesty he became what I wanted him to be, my brother. Over the years no one could have shielded me from all the horrors and stress and still keep me warm and loving and healthy against all odds.¹³²

Although this woman names her vision of Christ as 'brother', I suggest that the way in which she used Christ as her confidante and friend, sharing her emotions and in return gaining her self-esteem and wholeness as a woman, is reminiscent of women's same-sex friendship as much as it is brotherly

¹³¹This group of women from Craigavon in Northern Ireland have been writing as a means of 'healing' cross community divides throughout the '90s. They have published a number of collections of their writings under the name of Dolly Mixtures.

¹³²Brigid Murphy, "Journey", in *Dolly Mixtures* 1991

concern. Trapped in her 'prison', like Paul was in his, she looks to her 'friend' for spiritual and moral support.

God is so important to me and is the only person I can really talk to. Jesus is there when I need him; I cry and talk to him as if he is a human being.

Secondly, the theme of self-emptying: Daphne Hampson suggests that kenosis is a "critique of patriarchy", and that "the theme of self-emptying is not a helpful example of feminist empowerment".¹³³ Sarah Coakley¹³⁴ responds to Hampson's analysis by proposing a case for kenosis which is, she claims, not only "compatible with feminism but vital to a distinctly Christian manifestation of it...", which "...embraces the spiritual paradoxes of 'losing one's life in order to save it'".¹³⁵ She argues that as women we need to dispense with the outmoded gender assumptions associated with self-emptying and instead look for a "more creative theological way of reformulating the notion of divine power and its relation to the human".¹³⁶ John Macquarrie suggests that "it is at the human level and out of our own experience of human life that we can first begin to have some understanding of what self-emptying might mean".¹³⁷ This new form of kenoticism, he argues, allows Christ to become more accessible by stressing the human self-emptying of Jesus. Kenosis acquires a fuller meaning if we begin with "the humiliation of Christ in his earthly and human life with the self abasement of the human Jesus as he goes obediently to the cross".¹³⁸ Any Christology that is compatible with feminism should perhaps be born out of the experiences of women, and this new form of kenosis suggested by Macquarrie offers such a possibility. A Christology centred on the cross and

¹³³ Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, page 155.

¹³⁴ Coakley lays out her response to Hampson's critique in her essay "Kenosis and Subversion" in Daphne Hampson (ed) *Swallowing A Fishbone?* .

¹³⁵ Coakley, page 83.

¹³⁶ Coakley, page 99.

¹³⁷ John Macquarrie, "Kenoticism Reconsidered" in *Theology* 77 1974 page 124

¹³⁸ Macquarrie, page 123

the powerless obedience of Christ can have both positive and negative implications for women and other oppressed groups.

Graham Ward's¹³⁹ analysis of the association between kenosis and naming, offers some useful insights into a feminist understanding of kenosis. As the "account of the act of divine representation", Ward argues that kenosis "calls into question the narrative and status of human representations before and following the incarnation".¹⁴⁰ He notes, that in the Philippian hymn (2:5-11), the outcome of the kenotic act is that God gives Jesus the "name that is above every name" (2:9) so that everyone can confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord" (2:11). As such, Ward argues that "humiliation or submission (not Christ's this time, but ours) leads directly to acts of representation, to speaking out publicly".¹⁴¹ Ward reminds us that "what is poured out is love, a love that in giving itself suffers and through that suffering is able to name".¹⁴²

Lucien Richard also relates kenosis to love, suggesting that:

The strength of kenotic Christology is both intellectual and symbolic; its imagery of the self-emptying God revealed in the person of Jesus is one that resonates with the deepest elements of our human nature. This Christology addresses the issue of human suffering in stark and challenging terms, and it provides Christians today with a fundamental understanding of the transformative power of love that always entails vulnerability.¹⁴³

Richard considers the parable form of the narrative of Mark's Gospel as an expression of kenotic vision, since the Gospel is a parable about God's

¹³⁹Graham Ward, "Kenosis and Naming: Beyond Analogy and Towards Allegoria Amoris" in Paul Heelas (ed) *Religion Modernity and Posternity*.

¹⁴⁰ Ward, page 236

¹⁴¹Ward, page 237

¹⁴²Ward, page 237

¹⁴³Lucien Richard, *Christ the Self-Emptying of God*, page 2

kenotic love for us shown through the person of Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁴ Paul echoes the message of the Marcan Jesus with his images of slave, self-emptying and obedience since the way of discipleship in the Marcan Gospel is through service, powerlessness and suffering. But the powerless acceptance of suffering has allowed patriarchal oppression to flourish.

Women's experience, whether through poverty, violence, injustice in the family, workplace or Church are usually experiences of powerlessness. For many women 'self-emptying' is an everyday occurrence. Women divest themselves of the human 'being' that they truly are, as they are acculturated to be servants in almost all of their experiences: they will survive with less food to provide a larger share for their men and children; they will remain in abusive relationships because their self-esteem is too low to break free; they remain exploited in low paid work because of the need to provide for their families and so on. Women are sold, and owned as slaves within the sex industry; they become 'slaves' to provide tea, sugar, flowers and other products for a privileged western society.

Vulnerability in women is often seen as weakness especially in a society where there are marked divisions between the vulnerable and the strong. Women in such situations are vulnerable not only to the treatment of others but to their own inner emotions and understandings. It is the acceptance of this powerlessness as an essential part of everyday life and becoming a 'victim' of it which is the negative aspect of kenosis. If women have to accept such servile victimisation willingly because of the suffering of the self-emptied human Jesus, then patriarchal oppression has not been removed and I would have to agree with Hampson that self-emptying is not conducive to feminist empowerment. But because a kenotic Christology is itself a dualism of liberation and oppression, as vulnerable humans, by revisioning this vulnerability, we can be empowered through a kenotic Christology. Jesus' vulnerability became his strength and it is through this experience that women too can be released from being 'victim'.

¹⁴⁴ Richard, page 63

Foucault differentiates between a power relation and oppression by insisting that the former only exists when all the actors within the relation have the freedom to exercise power. For many women and men, power relations become oppression because their individual power is limited by circumstance. In the global sphere the powerlessness of these people is almost always increased. I recognise that some women (particularly in the West) have advantages of power denied to some groups of men but it is women's lives that I wish to focus on. However, the analysis that I will present does not just embrace women but can equally apply to vulnerable men.

Dorothy Lee Pollard argues that power functions in the Gospels to 'liberate human beings from these harmful and life denying forces that oppress them'. Some might argue that power functions in the Pauline literature in exactly the opposite way - to oppress people using the forces which should liberate them.

I do not like Paul, I dislike his attitude towards women. He is "interpreting" the Gospel for himself.

Most of the women I interviewed found Paul's texts challenging, restricting and contradicting, but not overtly oppressive, and although they didn't specifically make the identification, it is evident that some of the women I interviewed found Sarah Coakley's interpretation of kenosis particularly empowering. Coakley presents a critique of the various historical approaches to kenosis as she unpicks Daphne Hampson's anti-kenotic analysis. In summing up her critique she challenges both the "'new' (theological) kenoticism" and the "'analytic' (philosophical) anti-kenoticism"¹⁴⁵ as both being problematic for feminists.

Whereas the 'new kenoticism' appears to make 'God' both limited and weak (by a process of direct transference from Jesus' human life to the divine), and so endanger the very

¹⁴⁵Coakley, page 104.

capacity for divine transformative 'power', the analytic 'orthodoxy' clings ferociously to a vision of divine 'omnipotence' and 'control' which is merely the counterpart of the sexist 'man' made in his (libertarian) image. One model seems propelled by masculinist guilt, the other by unexamined masculinist assumptions.¹⁴⁶

What neither of these consider, she argues, is the text of Paul to the Corinthians "for power is made perfect in weakness.' (2 Cor 12:9), that within Christ there is "the normative concurrence - of non-bullying divine 'power' with 'self-effaced' humanity."¹⁴⁷ Coakley then poses the question:

What if true divine 'empowerment' occurs most unimpededly in the context of a special form of human 'vulnerability'?¹⁴⁸

The difficulty, she argues, is to define vulnerability in such a way so as not to condone the damage done to women through various forms of abuse. What is needed is to search for alternative understandings of vulnerability so that self-emptying can be seen in an alternative light to victimology.¹⁴⁹

Coakley proposes that this can be done through silent contemplative prayer, so as to be able to respond to the divine, through an opening of the 'self' to be transformed by "non-abusive divine power."¹⁵⁰

I have always been drawn to Carmel. The attraction of living in the presence of God with little in the way of formal prayer but living through contemplative prayer keeps me going.

¹⁴⁶Coakley, page 104.

¹⁴⁷Coakley, page 105.

¹⁴⁸Coakley, page 106.

¹⁴⁹Coakley, page 106.

¹⁵⁰Coakley, page 106.

When I first read Sarah Coakley's essay, I felt that contemplative prayer was a luxury which needed time that many women could not afford. However, the more I think about her proposals and relate it to the work that I have done in assertiveness training and personal development courses, the more I engage with her thinking. Other women also make the connections between prayer, personal development and freedom:

To develop as a woman I needed more freedom to study and pray. Being attached to a community has given me more freedom to become closer to Christ and has been more freeing for my own personal development, growth and change.

Coming here provides times for contemplative prayer. Carmelite spirituality brings it all together for me. I have no difficulty saying anything to Jesus, he is not an untouchable divine. Divinity is not "up there".

Graham Ward draws on the work of Julia Kristeva in progressing towards what he describes as a kenotic economy which is "an allegory of love empowered by God-inspired desire". In summarising her theories he concludes:

... if Kristeva is right, then on the basis of the theological account of kenosis, we can understand each act of signification (speaking or writing) and each act of performing that act (reading, liturgical practice) as a move in love, a kenotic giving towards an ineffable Word, a name above all names, a name which gathers up all our naming and within which we too are named.¹⁵¹

Julia Kristeva's work is particularly useful in exploring the maternal within the Word,¹⁵² which as Christian women may enable us to see the divine

¹⁵¹Ward, page 249

¹⁵²I have drawn on Kristeva's work in chapter 6 of this thesis.

reflected in the person who we 'declare publicly' - 'name' to be ourselves. To be able to do this, to rebuild, or progress from a vulnerable person to a strong person, the more we need to be able to self-empty and totally expose the vulnerabilities which impede empowerment. For vulnerable Christian people this may well be achieved, as Coakley suggests, through "making space for God to be God".¹⁵³ This, however, necessitates engaging with a new kind of vulnerability, since it almost always easier to remain in the 'secure' suffering state, than to enter the unknown. As Coakley writes:

Thus the 'vulnerability that is its human condition is not about asking for unnecessary and unjust suffering (though increased self-knowledge can indeed be painful); nor is it (in Hampson's words) a 'self abnegation'. On the contrary, this special 'self-emptying' is not a negation of self but the place of self' transformation and expansion into God.¹⁵⁴

For this self' transformation to be complete it is also necessary to be accept self 'forgiveness'. For Paula Cooley¹⁵⁵ this transformation in women can come about through a transformation of power. She considers the same principles at work in women's experience of 'consciousness-raising'¹⁵⁶ as are present in religious conversions since both are about development of personality, and a 're-centering of identity'.¹⁵⁷ She writes:

"Full related selfhood" suggests that "conversion" in this context makes a turning toward a sense of balance in which

¹⁵³Coakley, page 107.

¹⁵⁴Coakley, page 108

¹⁵⁵Paula Cooley, "The Power of Transformation and The Transformation of Power" in *JFST* vol 1/1 1985 pp 23 - 35.

¹⁵⁶This phrase, which is linked to second wave feminism of the 70's is still useful here when considering women's empowerment. Although in Western society we may argue that feminism has moved on from, there are still many women who are seeking transformation in their lives as a result of patriarchy and oppression.

¹⁵⁷Cooley, page 27.

relationships to others no longer stand in opposition to individual identity.¹⁵⁸

Such conversion, she argues, require a shift in power which is both “conceptual and actual”.¹⁵⁹ Power needs to be understood “in a broad sense as vitalizing energy rather than in a narrow sense as internal and external control exerted by a person or group.”¹⁶⁰ Such an understanding of kenosis can therefore provide personal empowerment and healing.

Lucien Richard argues for healing on a wider level to come through a movement towards a ‘kenotic church’.¹⁶¹ He proposes that evil and suffering in the world can be transformed through a kenotic church built on the understanding of a humble Jesus calling ‘the dispossessed to full person hood in the kingdom of God. Here they are no longer ‘non persons’, but God’s beloved and privileged people. Richard’s vision of a kenotic church is a unifying church, in which there may well be “structure, order, authority, and ecclesiastical office”,¹⁶² but these should not involve destructive power. Power within a kenotic church must enable its members to change reality.¹⁶³ Power for Richard, as it does for Cooley, becomes relational whose goal is the “enlargement of freedom”.¹⁶⁴ Unlike hierarchical power which is unilateral and dominating,

a kenotic church on the other hand, manifests a transformation of hierarchical into relational power; mission and ministry call for such transformation. Self-limitation on the

¹⁵⁸Cooley, page 29.

¹⁵⁹Cooley, page 30.

¹⁶⁰Cooley, page 30.

¹⁶¹ Richard, page 179.

¹⁶²Richard, page 184.

¹⁶³Richard, page 185.

¹⁶⁴Richard, page 187.

part of the church as institution is the one sure way by which space can be created for authentic discipleship.¹⁶⁵

One woman seems to have found just such a church:

I have now been able to find my priestly role within the Metropolitan Community Church. All people feel included here, it is as universal as possible. Here I can preach, celebrate the Eucharist, or 'lead' the liturgy. There is no hierarchy, no star of the show. The 'leader', the preacher and the celebrant exchange the stole as it comes to the part of the service for which they are needed. No-one is an outsider.

Was this kenotic Church the vision of the Church that Paul had? Or did Paul have in mind the model of Church which elevates some, at the expense of many? Was Paul trying to nurture a Church in Philippi that would be the foundation of an institution which for the next two millennia would nurture patriarchy, exclusion and abuse? Paul has been looked to by many women as being responsible for the hierarchy which exists within today's Church, and by many men for the authority to uphold their positions of authority and power. But should Paul be read in this way?

I would like to argue that, although, it is possible to interpret Paul's power relations as patriarchal and hierarchical, it is also possible to recognise that Paul was writing to a set of friends whom he loved so much he was anxious for the best for them. That he proposed himself as a model of the benefits and grace that could be theirs if they remained firm in the Gospel, was not by necessity an indication of his desire for privilege and apostolic recognition. The wider Church must openly acknowledge that Paul was writing within the social formations of the time, and should no longer be used to subordinate women in such different social situations. Women have been disadvantaged by men's interpretations of the Pauline letters, of that there is no doubt. Now is the time to look deep beneath the surface and to

¹⁶⁵Richard, page 187.

reclaim the Pauline message as one that can liberate as much as it can imprison.

Chapter 5 The Pastoral Letters: Would a Feminist Canon Include These Texts?

*Lord you are my lover
My Longing,
My flowing stream,
My sun,
And I am your reflection
Mechtild of Magdeburg*

The Pastoral letters, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, are letters with very clear instructions on how women are to behave within the early Christian communities to whom they were written. These instructions, particularly those which demand women's submission and silence in worship (1 Tim 2: 11-12) are still being quoted in some Christian church communities today as if they were a decree for all time, thus preventing women not only from roles in the priesthood but also from reading or teaching publicly within the church. The ultimate effect of these letters in many Christian denominations is to ensure that women's visibility within the ministry of the church remains in the traditional roles of cleaning, flower arranging, making the tea and visiting the sick.

I have chosen to read these letters from a feminist standpoint for two reasons. Firstly they appear to offer little in the way of encouragement for women in contemporary church society and I would like to explore the possibility of challenging this lack by exposing some positive reward for women. These letters stand in direct contrast to the earlier Pauline letters where women can be clearly seen in prominent positions within Paul's circle of co-workers, taking active leadership roles within the early Christian churches. My second reason is that they have been written probably around the turn of the first century c.e., at a time when the early Christian Church seemed to be developing a more formal structure than that of the house churches detailed in the earlier Pauline texts, and the unstructured communities of the Gospels. In this chapter I shall seek to answer two questions: "What has prompted Paul to write these three letters in a style

which stresses the exclusive patriarchal order of the household rather than the inclusive message that Jesus was promoting in the Gospel, and that he was apparently following in his own churches?”, and “How may the message of these letters be interpreted to enable women to become visible in those denominations which take a literal interpretation of the text?”.

There is much academic debate surrounding the purpose and origin of these letters. It is possible, as some academics argue, that Paul wrote them late in life which accounts for the quite different style of these letters compared to the rest of the Pauline corpus. Others argue that Paul was not the author of these letters, but that they were written in a Pauline style either by a secretary of Paul or even later by an admirer of Paul.¹ There is further debate concerning the authenticity of 2 Timothy since as Jerome Murphy O'Connor² points out this letter has a significant number of differences to 1 Timothy and Titus, but has a number of similarities with the undisputed Pauline letters. There is also a question surrounding the recipients of the letters. Are the letters genuinely written to Timothy and Titus who were co-workers of Paul or might the letters be doubly pseudepigraphical?³ Donelson's⁴ in depth study of the structure of the pseudepigraphical letter suggests that both author and recipients could be pseudonymous. He writes: “doctrinally the historical Paul has little influence. He is used more for his authority than his idiosyncratic view of Christian theology”.⁵

Although this debate is interesting and will have a bearing on the conclusions that can be drawn from a feminist reading of these texts, I do not propose contributing further to the authorship debate since at an experiential level for women in modern Christian communities the authorship

¹ The debate is detailed in Raymond F Collins, *Letters that Paul did not write. The Epistle to The Hebrews and the Pauline Pseudepigrapha*, and for a discussion of the possible authors and recipients see Jerome D. Quinn & William C. Wacker, *The First Letter to Timothy and The Second Letter to Timothy*.

² Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *Paul A Critical Life*.

³ Collins, page 93.

⁴ Lewis R Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles*.

⁵ Donelson, page 62.

is usually assumed to be Paul. With that assumption comes the added weight of apostolic authority.

I always got very angry with Paul until I realised that he wasn't always the author of all the letters.

Like this woman, I too am personally more persuaded by those arguments that assume the letters to be pseudepigraphical, and accept the observations of Murphy O'Connor of the differences between 1 Timothy and Titus and that of 2 Timothy. For the purposes of this reading I shall refer to the author(s) as P*ul. I will not assume that P*ul and Paul are necessarily one and the same, nor that there is only one author of the letters. I will make no assumptions concerning the recipients of the letters but will refer to them as Timothy and Titus and will assume that they were in Ephesus and Crete as the letters indicate.

The letters tend to follow the construction of the undisputed Pauline letter but with some amendments. The Pauline letters, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, are themselves adaptations of the standard Hellenistic letter and in some cases, written in the paraenetic style. Paul personalises this style to locate his readers firmly in the presence of God/Christ through the salutation and conclusion. Although P*ul uses the same technique as Paul for the opening and conclusion, the body of the letters differs in tone, content, theology and ethics. The letters are written to single recipients with whom Paul enjoyed close relationships. P*ul assumes the same closeness as he writes in paternalistic, rather than partnership terms to Timothy and Titus (1 Tim 1:2, Titus 1:4, 2 Tim 1:2). This use of biography in the pseudepigraphical letter, Donelson argues, can add strength to the message the real author is trying to convey:

... a combination of Paul as author and Timothy and Titus as recipients creates a volatile situation resplendent with opportunities The Pastorals pretend to be private communications from Paul to two of his most trusted

confidants. If anything secret was ever handed down from Paul it would certainly be here in private communication of this sort. Therefore we can believe that these letters contain the complete, unaltered, wholly reliable teachings of Paul.⁶

Timothy has been urged to remain in Ephesus to confront the heretics among the church community with Titus being left in Crete for much the same purpose. There is no mention, however, in any of the undisputed Pauline letters, or in Luke Acts, to suggest that Paul had indeed visited Crete. The suggestion that Titus is to maintain such a mission may just be a technique used to emphasise that the letters were in fact written by Paul. It appears from the letters that these early Christian communities are facing heresies and false teaching which need to be addressed through examples of behaviour appropriate for Christians, and through sound teaching of the Gospels. By choosing Paul as the pseudo-author, and Timothy and Titus as pseudo-recipients, P*ul is able to draw on the authority which would have been associated with them and to use them as models of correct behaviour who should be imitated. In true paraenetic style Paul has urged other early Christian communities to imitate him (Phil 3:17; Cor 4:16) so the precedent has been set for P*ul to do the same. Letters such as the Pastorals expect “not answers but action”.⁷

A Foucauldian analysis of pastoral power as it applies to Paul's letter to the Philippian Church enabled an empowering message for contemporary women to emerge. A first reading of the Pastoral letters suggests that such a Foucauldian analysis of the power relationships operating here will only serve to reinforce the subordination of women within a Christian context. However, it may be possible to identify points of opposition which, if explored, could open up a space into which women in contemporary Church communities can stand as equal participants in church worship and occupy all positions in the modern Church 'management' structure. It is possible to identify similar power relations functioning in the Pastorals as in the letter to

⁶ Donelson, page 61.

⁷ Quinn, page 9.

the Philippians, but unlike those in Philippians which I have argued are asymmetrical, the power relations which operate within the Pastorals can be seen to be hierarchical, and are managed in such a way that the hierarchy is preserved.

The instructions to Timothy and Titus fit neatly into Foucault's model for constructing and managing power relations,⁸ and in particular his model for pastoral power. In writing the letters in the style that he does, P*ul appears to exercise pastoral power through an implied knowledge of Timothy's and Titus' minds.⁹ He works on their consciences to direct their thinking so that they in turn might engage in similar power relations with the wider community. In reality, P*ul himself is attempting to control the individual consciences of the Christian communities in Ephesus and Crete, since the likely intention of each letter is that it reaches a wider audience than its supposed recipient. P*ul appears as a pastor to Timothy and Titus and through the letters legitimises their role as pastors to the church in Ephesus and Crete. The power relations between P*ul and the community, P*ul and God/Christ, God and the community, can be identified and explored within the broad themes of the letters. It may also be fruitful to explore any power relation that the letters reveal between P*ul and Paul.

All three letters open by reminding the recipients and thus the wider Church, that Paul is an apostle of Christ Jesus (in Titus the order is transposed to Jesus Christ) appointed either by the command (1 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:3) or by the will of God (2 Tim 1:1). It is only in 1 Timothy and Titus, out of all the material attributed to Paul that his apostleship is declared in such strong terms as by 'God's command'. The significance of such strong language and style indicates that P*ul clearly wishes to establish what he sees as Pauline authority and with that, give authority to the letters themselves. At first sight, P*ul appears to have no desire to place himself within the hierarchy that he upholds by the exhortations which follow, since he seeks anonymity through Paul. By default, however, he has knowingly claimed for himself Paul's

⁸ See chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁹ Foucault's 4th criteria for pastoral power; *The Subject and Power*, page 333.

assumed position in the structure, and with it any of the power claims he attaches to Paul. The aim of Paul's apostleship is made clear to Titus: it must further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth (Titus 1:1), so affirms P*ul's authority. At the same time it highlights the importance of the Gospel message (Titus 1:3) which will be revealed through God's promise of future salvation by Paul and his heirs.¹⁰ Having established this authority, P*ul is able to deliver his version of the Gospel truth with a much more certain hope of it being accepted by the audience than if his own identity was revealed. "Timothy and Titus are the paradigmatic persons who furnish the pattern of what the continuing Pauline apostolate is and does".¹¹ The letter to Titus has the longest opening of the three letters, second only in length to the letter of Paul to the Roman Church. This longer introduction points forward to the themes of godliness and salvation which will be developed in the body of the letter, themes which occur in all three letters.

The grace following each salutation implies that P*ul equates God and Christ (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2, Titus 1:4) and so functions in much the same way as does the grace in Paul's salutation to the Philippians (Phil 1: 2). However, in each of the Pastoral salutations, P*ul differentiates between the roles of God and Christ which hints at the formal hierarchical structure that he is about to describe: God is the Saviour (1 Tim 1:1, Titus 1:3), whilst Christ is the hope of eternal salvation in the life that God has promised (Titus 1:2). The salutation affirms Paul's apostolic relationship with God, and Timothy and Titus as his heirs to the leadership role. This then ensures the continuation of the transference of Paul's assumed power to the subsequent leaders of the Church within the Church structure that the letters encourage. The language P*ul uses to address Timothy and Titus reflects the patriarchal structure of the family - no longer an equal co-worker and servant of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:1) Timothy, like Titus, has become a true and beloved child (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4). This language is reminiscent of the familial language that Paul uses to describe his relationship with Timothy when writing to the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:17), a possible

¹⁰ Jouette M Bassler, *1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus*

¹¹Quinn, page 18

source text for P*ul to draw on as he links the patriarchal order of the household to that of the Church.

P*ul does not hesitate to indicate the true purpose of his writing as he moves from the salutation into the next section of the letter. In his first letter to Timothy this section prefaces the main body of the letter (1 Tim 1:3-20), laying the theological foundation of what is to follow whilst at the same time linking doctrine to behaviour.¹² The second letter to Timothy includes a short prayer of gratitude (χάριν) before moving into the body, whilst the letter to Titus includes neither a preface nor a prayer. The language that P*ul uses to express his thanks is for benefits or services given, which again hints at a formal response to what is expected from those below him in the hierarchy, whereas Paul in the undisputed letters uses language that firmly places his gratitude (εὐχαριστέω) with Christ. The letters indicate that the early Christian churches at Ephesus and Crete were no different from other early churches in facing what was arguably heretical thinking from within the Church, as well as from the wider community. These letters serve to provide Timothy and Titus with a means of challenging such heresies by outlining the behaviour required of influential groups within the church who will thus have the strength to promote right thinking through example. The urgency to get to the problems that the heretics are causing, seems almost too strong to bother with the niceties of the traditional Greek letter, and is a further indication that although the letters are addressed to a single recipient they are intended to be heard by a much wider audience.

Paul has himself referred to those who teach an alternative Gospel (Rom 3:3, 8; Gal 1:7; 2:12), particularly when he reminded the church at Corinth why he had sent Timothy to them (1 Cor 4:17). Here P*ul seems to see the heretics as a group mostly inside the Church whose presence, and influence, may cause division and dissent. The heretics themselves are not clearly identified in any of the letters. They function as a group who teach an alternative doctrine (ἑτεροδιδασκαλέω) concerned with myths and genealogies (1 Tim 1:4), whose message will "ruin those who are listening"

¹² Bassler, page 37.

(2 Tim 2:14) and who must be silenced (1 Tim 1:3; Titus 1:11). Quite what this alternative doctrine teaches is also not made clear,¹³ rather it is introduced as a contrast to the correct teaching¹⁴ whose aim is to create "love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Tim 1:5). Little clarification comes from P*ul as he names certain members of the community whose faith has been compromised by rejecting this good conscience (1 Tim 1:19-20). Hymenaeus and Alexander have been delivered by P*ul to Satan, probably a metaphor for excluding them from the Church community, because they have "suffered shipwreck of their faith" (1 Tim 1:19). If this is the same Hymenaeus linked with Philetus in the second letter to Timothy, he is part of a group whose "profane chatter" (2 Tim 2:16) includes a belief that "the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Tim 2:18), a possible reference to gnosticism. Phygelus and Hermogenes are part of the group who turned away from P*ul in Asia, whilst the Alexander named in the same letter has done "great harm" by strongly opposing the true message (2 Tim 4:14). Demas, too, has turned to the "present world" (2 Tim 4:9) and deserted the true Gospel.

The reasons for naming these specific opponents may have more to do with establishing the authority of the letters, if they are pseudepigraphical, than in identifying the source of the heresy. All of these opponents have been linked with Paul in other New Testament texts as well as in other early Christian writings such as the *Acts of Paul*¹⁵. In *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* Demas and Hermogenes are identified as companions of Paul "who were full of hypocrisy" but whom Paul "loved greatly" despite their plotting to have him tried and executed.¹⁶ In the same text Alexander, a magistrate, is

¹³ The debate on the teaching of the heretics includes the possibility that it was influenced by gnosticism; that it was influenced by Marcion (not accepted as a theory by Dibelius); there was a link to Judaizing Gnosticism (Dibelius); Judaizing heterodoxies in applying the law to Pagan converts (Donelson; Quinn); women and those concerned with their status (MacDonald).

¹⁴ Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (in English Translation), page 2.

¹⁵ *Acts of Paul* as contained in E. Henneke, *New Testament Apocrypha* Vol II (in translation) page 353. *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* is a 2nd century text composed possibly from oral tradition.

¹⁶ *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, page 353, paragraph 1.

instrumental in having Thecla thrown to the beasts after failing to coerce Paul into procuring her for his own sexual desires. Surviving the beasts because of her faith in God which she has acquired through Paul's teaching, Thecla becomes a follower of Paul who sends her out to "Go and teach the word of God".¹⁷ If these are the same people that P*ul refers to in his letter, then he has firmly grounded his arguments in the life, and thus by association the authority, of Paul.

The fact that P*ul does not specify the false teaching in detail but attempts to correct it by proposing the church to be the 'household of God' within the constraints of the secular patriarchal household, suggests that it is the challenge to order that preoccupies him most. Indeed Donelson proposes that "it is the author and not his opponents who constitutes the minority and thus in some sense the heterodox group",¹⁸ since the opponents would in the main have considered themselves good "Paulinists":

The author's portrait suggests that his opponents were speculative, creative theologians. They appear to have searched scripture, struggled to understand the stumbling block of the resurrection, and been willing to subject themselves to the rigors of public debate. They were also having enormous success.¹⁹

Donelson argues that P*ul needs to show these people as undermining the true Pauline message by promoting his own message as the truth:

The Pauline tradition (παρρασήκη), as the author manufactures it, did not exist in this exact form until the letters were written ... the idiosyncratic reading given this traditional material in the Pastorals is the result of the author's own creative act. Thus he is opposing his creative reading to theirs.²⁰

¹⁷ *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, page 364, paragraph 41

¹⁸ Donelson, page 125.

¹⁹ Donelson, page 124.

²⁰ Donelson, page 125.

The problem for P*ul, Donelson suggests, is that in both their spirituality and theology, these opponents produce patterns of behaviour which is contrary to that which P*ul sees as being fit for his Church.

The correct teaching that is to oppose the 'heresies' is presented as a series of contrasting examples of good and bad behaviour. The heretics behaviour is firmly placed within the bad examples, whilst the good examples bolster the hierarchical order that P*ul sees embodied within God's plan. Thus the strict order of bishops, deacons and elders is defined and blessed with the absolute authority of P*ul, whilst the women are firmly placed back within the subordinate roles determined by patriarchy. The inclusive, embracing Jesus of the Gospels seems somehow lost in the neat pigeonholing of powerful men and powerless women and slaves within the structure determined by the message of P*ul - a message which he ensures is not challenged by exhorting the church communities to lead a "quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim 2:2).

The manner in which P*ul deals with the problem of the heretics reveals much about the way power relationships between P*ul and the apostle, and P*ul and the community function. P*ul has an agenda and a theology of his own²¹ which he wishes to promote. Possibly he does not have the authoritative voice necessary for his personal views on the correct behaviour for godliness to be widely accepted by the early Church, so by hiding behind the identity of Paul and by referring to people with whom it was known Paul had either close or problematic relationships, he is able to assume an authority which he can use to his own advantage. P*ul therefore enters into an interesting relationship with the real Paul - a relationship which he then uses to exert pastoral power over the church communities in Ephesus and Crete. In this relationship P*ul must recognise that the power balance favours Paul. P*ul might desire that position of power himself but can only acquire it through adopting the persona of Paul. He becomes the 'Pastor'

²¹Both Collins (pp 102 - 106) and Donelson (pp 129 - 154) present detailed reviews of P*uline theology.

who can command the communities to which he is writing through his own variation of the salvation message. However, the manner in which he uses this pastoral power²² is in direct contrast to that which Paul exerts in Philippi.

At Philippi, Paul was exercising pastoral power through relationships of reciprocated friendship, showing himself to be an equal servant of Christ whilst here P*ul is placing himself in a superior position to the rest of the community. P*ul meets all the principles Foucault has identified for pastoral power but by assuming the mantle of Paul, he reveals his own desire for the privilege that has been, in his opinion, accorded to Paul. By equating himself with Paul through claiming his identity, P*ul has knowingly placed himself very near the top of the hierarchy he is determined will form the structure of the early Church. P*ul's theology with its shift from the inclusiveness of the message of both Jesus and Paul, is more important than even the Gospel message itself. P*ul manages to provide the authority for the structure of power relations which are still functioning today to disadvantage members of the Christian Church community, without ever revealing his own identity. P*ul is not nurturing a community with whom he has a reciprocal friendship, instead he seems to be seeking to create his own legacy of power and order.

P*ul seems particularly challenged by the women within the community and their presence outside the family domain. He provides detailed instructions on behaviour for no less than four identified groups of women as well as women in general. The androcentric language of the text could mask the fact that other groups such as the bishops and deacons²³ might also include women although for how much longer women could remain in such roles after hearing this letter is debatable. The women's activities are always on the 'bad' side of P*ul's balance of 'good behaviour/bad behaviour', with salvation only possible if they change their ways to exhibit the 'good' behaviour which he defines. Thus Foucault's principle that pastoral power

²²See chapter 4 of this thesis.

²³Margaret MacDonald *Early Christian women and Pagan Opinion*, cites Pliny's order to have two women slaves "who were called deacons", tortured to find out the truth of Christianity, page 51.

exists to assure individual salvation in the next world becomes doubly conditional for women.

In both Ephesus and Crete, women would have enjoyed prominence within the Goddess cults. As well as being active participants in worship, women would have been involved in healing, teaching and in priestly roles. Although Jewish women in first century Ephesian society would be bound by the Mosaic law, Pagan and Gentile women were experiencing improved status.²⁴ Goddess cults with their female deities were prominent throughout the known world. The Mother Goddess appeared in different guises and was known by a variety of names. The Ephesian Goddess Artemis was "honoured as the power of fertility in nature, the mother of life and the nourisher of all creatures of the earth, air and sea".²⁵ Women would have been particularly attracted to these mystery religions which reflected the rhythms of the seasons and their own natural reproductive cycles. These cults stressed the role of women in the worship practices with high status being given to the priestesses. Worship practice celebrated women's sensuality which was often enhanced by the asceticism the religions advocated such as fasting, abstinence and bodily mutilation²⁶. The women who were joining the early Christian Church would have been drawn from quite diverse cultural and religious backgrounds²⁷ and some of them no doubt would have been prominent in worship rituals. The domination of the Mother Goddess would have been so great in Ephesus and Crete that most women would have been influenced by her to a greater or lesser extent.

It is possible to see why P*ul is so keen to silence the women and promote their return to the submissive confines of the familial role. If the temple was used to seeing women in roles which exceeded the 'quiet image' of the submissive wife, then by distancing women in the early Christian Church

²⁴ For a detailed analysis of the context of 1 Timothy with respect to women in Ephesian society see Sharon Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus*.

²⁵ Gritz, page 39.

²⁶ Gritz, page 33.

²⁷ Gritz, page 23.

from the roles they would have enjoyed in the mystery cults, P*ul would be able to mark out a different set of worship practices that distinguished Christianity from any other cultic movement. P*ul had his own theology of salvation to promote and it did not include any of the cultic activities such as ascetic denial, or sacred intercourse that was associated with the Artemisian view of divine salvation. It was more closely linked to the rites of the Old Testament.

For P*ul, God is the 'saviour', as God is in the old Testament. The concept of saviour would already have been familiar to the Pagan cults, as the gods would have been relied on to save believers from catastrophe and natural disasters. In the Mystery cults, salvation would have been seen in the context of the realisation of immortality, but for P*ul salvation from sin was an essential requirement of God's plan for saving humanity. Paul describes both God and Christ as saviour. God is the saviour (1 Tim 1:1, 2:3; 4:10 Titus 1:3, 2:10, 3:4), and salvation is to be primarily through God's will (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 1:9), although Christ will be a mediator of that salvation both in the present (2 Tim 1:9 -10; Titus 1:4, 2:11-14, 3:6), and in the future (Titus 2:13). God will be saviour (σωτήρ) to the Christian Church, as God was to the Israelites in Egypt (Ex 13, 14), releasing them from bondage.²⁸ 'Bondage' for the P*uline church will be 'sin' through participating in the evil deeds of the good/evil dualism that P*ul details so explicitly. Participation in good deeds comes through knowing how to behave in the manner P*ul declares appropriate. Women's place is carefully defined by P*ul through reference to Genesis. Women are not to be allowed a voice because they are to be submissive to men: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and becomes a transgressor" (1 Tim 2:11-14) (Gen 2:22-23; 3:4-6). P*ul adapts the suffering that Eve would experience to suit his own notion of right behaviour for women (1 Tim 2:15), a point I will return to later in this chapter. Good community, for P*ul, is therefore rooted in the order of creation and the correct teaching that follows from this.²⁹

²⁸Philip H Towner, *The Goal of Our Instruction*.

²⁹Dibelius and Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, page 8.

The body of the first letter that P*ul writes to Timothy, opens with explicit instructions to the church community to pray, petition and give thanks for everyone to be able to lead a quiet and peaceful life in the dignity that will please God. The universality of P*ul's statement is without question. It embraces the whole congregation (πάντων ἀνθρώπων), kings (βασιλέων) and all who are in high positions (ἐν ὑπεροχῇ ὄντων) (1 Tim :2 1-2) but it also serves to place the congregation in the eyes of God in a parallel position to that of the household in secular society. This is good behaviour and will result in pleasing "God our Saviour" who wants everyone to be saved through "knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:3). Thus P*ul manages to link the truth with hierarchy. There is one God, then there is Jesus who will act as mediator between those below him and God above, (1 Tim 2:5), then there is Paul (1 Tim 2:7) - and by association P*ul - and finally there is everyone else who must behave in the manner which P*ul is about to reveal. The community would know that this is the true order because P*ul assures them "I am telling the truth, I am not lying" (1 Tim 2:7).

P*ul's pastoral power can only be exercised over this community if he uses language which suggests that the apostle Paul is the speaker, and persuades the listener that the instructions that are to follow are Paul's, and by implication, God's wish. He does this by prefacing his instructions for appropriate behaviour in worship, with the words "I desire" (βούλομαι) (1 Tim 2:8). Paul did not use this language in the undisputed letters but P*ul uses it whenever he needs to link his notion of what is right behaviour to what is pleasing to God (1 Tim 5:14; Titus 3:8). P*ul's desire is that in every place (ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ) men should be seen "lifting up holy hands" in prayer (1 Tim 2:8) whilst the women are to blend into the background in the modest attire that is "proper for women who profess reverence for God" (1 Tim 2:9). Women are not to braid their hair or wear bright expensive clothes, but must instead 'adorn' themselves with good deeds. (1 Tim 2:9).

Jouette Bassler argues that this contrast between outer appearance and inner virtue is typical of the ethical writings of the day³⁰ and therefore one should not draw firm conclusions concerning specific Church behaviour from this passage. However, the authority which Church leaders assume from these passages has continued to dictate women's behaviour in Church to the present day. It has also been used to suppress women's pleasure in their own appearance which can create a general lack of self-confidence. Although in most contemporary Christian churches women have equal status with men in their manner of prayer, that is not always the case in the dress code that is expected of them. The Salvation Army is a case in point, where although men and women have equal opportunities to reach any rank, most members are required to wear uniform, but the women have no free choice in wearing dress such as trousers, they have to wear skirts retaining the traditional acceptance of what constitutes 'femininity'.

In 1998 I was invited to a youth rally organised by an Evangelical Church³¹ in South East London. This church had a large active community of worshippers with many young people participating in worship. Young women, however, did not appear to be leading prayers or teaching, in contrast to the young men who were very vocal. The women's vocalising came through their involvement in the Gospel choirs. Towards the end of the morning the discussion moved to the question of what was appropriate dress for young women within the church community and at the worship services. The (male) Pastor, commenting on the 'incorrect' manner in which the young women were appearing at church by exposing their arms and wearing makeup, used these P*uline texts to remind them of how they should be dressed. Their dress choice was immodest and not suitable for Christian women. The argument became very heated and personal. This was obviously a problem that had been festering for some time. An older woman intervened to ask the young women to show respect for the Pastor, which cooled the argument but left the problem unresolved. The older

³⁰ Bassler quotes Plutarch's *Advice to Bride and Groom* for examples of early societal standards of behaviour for women, page 58.

³¹ This church served a largely Jamaican community.

woman asked that they respect the Pastor for his age and standing in the community - she neither condoned his argument nor condemned the younger women for their challenge to what he was saying.

What I found interesting as an onlooker to this exchange, was that no criticism was made of the older women in the congregation who were wearing very expensive, elaborate clothes - disallowed by the same P*uline texts - nor of the men in slick suits and gold jewellery. Was this because these older women were generally in family situations and were therefore seen as subordinate? Or was it because young women, in their chosen style of dress, are seen as openly displaying their sexuality in a sensual way and are therefore perceived as a threat to the patriarchal order of the family?

This disagreement came back to me when I was at mass on Easter Sunday a couple of years later. At the mass were a number of young women whose dress would not have been out of place at a night club (tight low cut dresses, split skirts, lots of jewellery) but was clearly seen as inappropriate for church, judging by the many raised eyebrows among those in the congregation. Later I was having coffee with a group of people, which included the priest who had said mass, when these young women walked past the window to come in for coffee themselves. On seeing them pass, the priest remarked "it is good to see so many travellers at mass this morning and I noticed there were some French visitors too". No raised eyebrow, no quoting P*ul, no condemnation of dress nor any mention of modesty. For this priest dress was a choice of the individual and not a means of subordinating women. It is true, one might argue, that as a Catholic priest he represents a system which legitimises women's oppression, however, I know that as a person he is in favour of equality for all. It is very refreshing to know that there are some religious leaders for whom the true Gospel message of inclusivity is alive and flourishing.

In giving his instructions P*ul uses language that suggests self control and moderation (αἰδώς, σωφρονέω) which fits with his ideal of the quiet life for Christians. The prayers must be said without anger and quarrelling (1 Tim

2:8), an echo of Paul's instruction to the Philippians (Phil 2:14), but here determines that the activities of the opponents are removed from the worship.³² However, by using these words in connection with women's behaviour, it would seem that P*ul is promoting actions which ensure the visibility of men within worship in direct contrast to the visibility of women in the Mystery cults. P*ul's use of κοσμίως (modesty) with σωφρονέω implies more than just modesty, it suggests that the 'suitable clothing' that women should adopt is not just 'good works' but also 'chastity'. To make his point stronger P*ul supports his arguments with a doctrinal reference to the Genesis story and the authority of Paul as he permits (οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω) "no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent" (1 Tim 2:12). But in contrast to Eve who was punished by having to suffer in childbirth (Gen 3:16), P*ul now declares that women will be saved through childbirth (1 Tim 2:15).

P*ul ensures the retreat of women into the family role with this extra condition for their route to eternal salvation. If eternal salvation can only be assured through the family and childbirth then the status given to virgins in the Gnostic movement and in the Goddess cults is reversed in Christianity. This regression of women back into the family may have suited P*ul's ideal of the order to be reflected in God's house but is a departure not only from the prominence given to women by Jesus, but also by Paul himself. Women were very visible among the followers of Jesus and accompanied Paul in his ministry. In the undisputed letters Paul includes greetings to women, and Luke Acts indicates that Paul had appointed women as leaders in the early house churches, but now P*ul is insisting that this is not a role to which women are suited. In these texts pastoral power is indeed patriarchal power.

Paul expresses his ideas on dress and salvation in his sermon to the Ephesians. This sermon probably handed down in oral form, is recorded in *The Acts of Paul*. Preaching in the house church of Priscilla and Aquila, Paul

³² Bassler, page 57.

tells of his visit in prison by Artemilla and Eubula. When he sees Artemilla, Paul groans:

Woman, ruler of this world, mistress of much gold, citizen of great luxury, sit down on the floor and forget thy riches and beauty and thy finery. For these will profit thee nothing if thou pray not to God who regards as dross all that here is imposing, but graciously bestows what there is wonderful. Gold perishes, riches are consumed, clothes become worn out. Beauty grows old, God alone abides, and the sonship that is given through him in whom men must be saved.³³

Paul does not ask Artemilla to reject her possessions for any other reason than that they are transient. God is eternal and salvation will come through hope, not childbirth:

Now Artemilla, hope in God and he will deliver thee, hope in Christ and he will give thee forgiveness for sins and will bestow upon thee a crown of freedom that though may serve the living God and Father of Christ, whose glory is forever Amen.

Paul's desired attire for women has had repercussions throughout history as women's sexuality has been suppressed through requirements of chastity and modesty. There is increasing evidence that 'charitable good works, modesty and chastity' have psychologically damaged women who have been cared for in institutions run as charitable organisations of the church. Women are slowly finding voices to speak out against the abuse that they suffered at the hands of nuns and priests in children's homes and convents during the last few decades. As well as physical and mental torture, nuns' distorted views of modesty have left some women with an image of their bodies as problematic.

³³*Acts of Paul and Thecla (Paul in Ephesus) page 370.*

*Sex in a Cold Climate*³⁴ was a powerful documentary which told the stories of four women who had associations with the notorious Magdalene Asylums in Ireland during the latter half of the 20th century. Known as penitents after the repentant Mary Magdalene, these women suffered systematic physical, sexual and verbal abuse. They were punished because they were perceived to be sinners, their sin associated with their sexuality. Their penance was symbolic, they were made to work six days a week, silently purging their sin through washing the clothes and linen of the priests, the Church and the nuns. Brigid³⁵ speaks of her childhood in the orphanage attached to the laundry in Limerick:

When we started to develop we were told quite clear from the nuns that there was no way we could show our breasts, even through our clothes we couldn't show breasts. We had to make ourselves flat as pancakes.

Phyllis, brought up in another orphanage echoes Brigid's story:

When you started to develop they put you in a sort of bodice, it was calico - just two straps on it - and it was tightened really tight around you. It was very uncomfortable. If a girl was nice looking, or she had nice hair, the hair was cut, you know, and when you started developing - well girls, you know how they look down at their bodies when they're young - the nuns would notice, or one of the monitors would notice and they would tell. You'd be brought into the big office and you'd be sat down and you'd be told it was a sin to be vain, it was a sin to go round swinging your hair, it was a sin to be looking at your body.

Phyllis was sent to a Magdalene asylum when she was fourteen years old to save her from danger:

The nuns told me I was 'pretty as a picture', which meant they thought I would fall away and get pregnant. So I was put in the asylum for my own protection, for no other reason.

³⁴See footnote 31, page 12 of this thesis

³⁵I have named the women in this documentary as they were not part of my sample.

Other women were sent because they had shamed their families by having illegitimate children, in a society where the Catholic church made sure that women had no sex education and contraception was not allowed. Martha was also sent at fourteen because she was sexually assaulted by her cousin, and told a friend:

The biggest sin in Ireland in them days - well apart from having a child outside marriage - was to talk, so I was hurried away.

The women in the asylums were not allowed to have any contact with the children in the orphanages, often their own children. Crying, Brigid tells of her punishment for talking to an inmate when delivering the dirty linen to the laundry.

She [the nun] took us into a back shed and she came in with a great big long black rubber thing she had specially made to beat the children with, scissors and an open razor and she shaved both our heads and gave us a severe beating. And after she did that she grabbed the two of us again and made us look in the mirror to see what we looked like after she had finished with us I'll never forget what looked back at me, totally devastating, your forehead all swelled up, under my chin all bleeding where she had stuck the scissors in wide open, the blood running into my eyes, my eyes totally closed, she was making us open our eyes and look in that mirror 'and you're not so pretty now are yous '. I'll never forget that day.

A friend of mine who was at a Hertfordshire boarding school run by nuns in the early sixties does not recall brutality, but tells of the special gowns they wore to have baths. The girls would put on these gowns, which the nuns would spread over the bath so that the girls should not see their bodies. A social worker told me a similar story when she spoke of her time working in a Scottish institution for young boys run by nuns at about the same time. Like the girls, the young boys were discouraged from seeing their genitalia at bathing time and were made to wear two pairs of trunks when they showered.

But why should P*ul be so threatened by the active involvement of women in the churches? What aspect of their involvement concerns P*ul most? It is probably not women's involvement in praying that is his concern since the text suggests that women could be included in the instruction to pray with upheld hands as well as the men.³⁶ Maybe P*ul thinks that the women will teach a false message because they encourage the heretics into their homes (2 Tim 3:6)? P*ul uses a chiasmic structure to make his point that it is the women's *teaching* that is the problem for him. He encloses the teaching instruction between two statements demanding women's silence, stressing that the teaching is the most important part of the message (1 Tim 2:11-12). The outer arms of this structure link submission with lack of authority - with silence comes full submission (1 Tim 2:11) and with no authority there can only be silence (1 Tim 2:13). This is not just P*ul's desire it is actually his command (1 Tim 2:12).

P*ul's prohibition of women teaching in the early church still prevents women from teaching in some Christian denominations today and is being debated in the context of gifting. Paul encourages all to use the gifts God has given them, gifts which many women recognise includes the gift of teaching. Why then is there such a contradiction in implementing Pauline thought, since the churches who impose such restrictions accept the Pastoral letters as genuinely written by Paul. Why should women be restricted to using their teaching ability to teach only other women or children? If the Pauline texts which clearly recognise women as teachers and urge people to use their God given gifts are being ignored in favour of these texts, it can only be to preserve the dominant position and therefore the authority within the church of men.

This question came out in the discussion I had with a group of women in Belfast³⁷ as part of this research. It was also raised by a Mormon woman I

³⁶ Dibelius argues: "Likewise the women" (ὡσαύτως) should be supplemented with "I wish to them to pray" (προσιύχεσθαι βουλομαι) since the rhetorical exchange of prepositions of in and with (ἐν-μετά, ἐν-διὰ makes it difficult to decide, page 45.

³⁷ The Belfast women were from churches associated with the Evangelic Alliance in Northern Ireland.

interviewed. The Belfast women were looking for ways in which they could teach in church within the boundaries set by the strict biblical base of their faith. To them this was a real challenge and was an issue they knew would arise again and again as their teaching gifts were recognised in secular society. The conversation went backwards and forwards with most women having an opinion:

The ordination of women doesn't fit comfortably here, [Northern Ireland] there are biblical reasons given by Paul. Biblical teaching informs our opinion

Scripture is very important, none of us would want to compromise that, we really have to grapple with this.

It is difficult, now we're looking at different boundaries. Sometimes we want to run back behind the boundaries we had as children and not challenge them.

The biggest problem I find is that a lot of people don't know why they believe what they believe, they just say it because they've heard others say it. The church where I belong has the Pastor's wife as an elder. She preaches. I know some people will find that difficult. I personally believe she is very gifted and the thing that thrills my heart is to see the use of women in that way. We've got some very talented women and I believe there are certain things that only a woman can talk about - things that a man cannot do. I really do believe that there is a role for women's leadership within the church.

Not everyone was able to accept this woman's belief, as one older Brethren woman gave her opinion:

There is a very definite role for women to teach women, older women should teach the younger, but I would have grave difficulties with women teaching men. I wouldn't have difficulty with women praying in mixed assembly rooms, or with women taking part in a Bible class, but

I really think it is a sign of weakness if there isn't a man able to do it. Also I think it is all right in the mission field where it is probably very feasible for women to teach men because there is not a man there to do it.

Both the Belfast women and the Morman woman talked of the compromises that women in their respective church communities make by teaching women's groups and children away from the sacred space of the church building but want to have their gifts recognised within that space. Worse than precluding women from teaching in church, P*ul endorses the role of women as teachers of other women and children. He urges Titus to bid the older women to train young women to be submissive to their husbands "so that the word of God may not be discredited" (Titus 2:5). Like Titus, women have the authority to "teach what is consistent with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1) but only so that patriarchal order is preserved both in God's and the husband's house.

Two young African women who worshipped in Deptford were also concerned with these passages on women's silence. One of the women taught in Bible class for the teenage members and they both sang in the Gospel choir. They both were really insistent wanting real answers to why women should be silent in church and not to take leadership roles in worship. However, neither of them felt they would want the role of leading their Church community. This was a large community of mostly West Africans and for these two young women the responsibility of leading the spiritual development of the community members was too great a personal responsibility for them:

A man should be the head of a relationship or union therefore a man has better qualities to be the overall leader of the church. The leader should have a stabilising influence. Although leadership should be a team, the final word should come from a man through agreement.

P*ul leaves his interpretation of what is correct worship behaviour as he turns to the required characteristics of various other groups within the church

community. The hierarchical structure of most modern Christian churches is founded on the order that P*ul promotes though this correspondence. The relationship between the bishops (ἐπισκοποις) and the community to whom Paul sends greetings in his letter to the Philippians, appears to function on a different level to that between the bishop (ἐπισκοπῆς) and the Ephesian community. P*ul no longer views the bishop as an overseer (probably of the finances) but much more as a person with formal duties and placed high up in the hierarchy of the church structure. However, he does not provide a job description for the position, instead he offers what would more appropriately fit the model of 'person description' that accompanies most job application forms today. P*ul sets out his desired qualities for the bishop by once again contrasting what is good and therefore desirable, with what is not good. He carefully presents these qualities in such a way that women and slaves, by default always possess some of the undesirable qualities. This is to be 'a job for the boys'.

By the time that Ignatius is writing to the Ephesian church, the role of bishop is clearly defined and is occupied by Onesimus. This man is to be a role model for the church because, as Ignatius writes, he has fulfilled the qualities that P*ul requires:

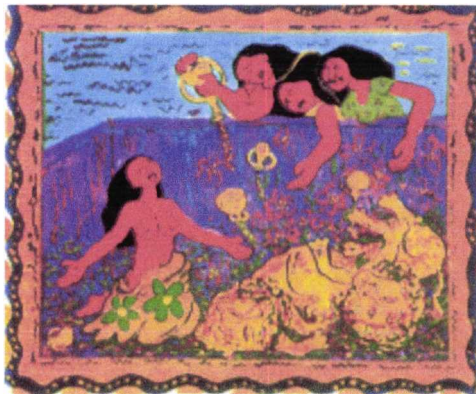
I have therefore received your whole multitude in the name of God ... through Onesimus, a man of inexpressible love, and who is your bishop, whom I pray you by Jesus Christ to love, and that you would all seek to be like him. Blessed be God, who has granted unto you, who are yourselves so excellent, to obtain such an excellent bishop.³⁸

The bishop must be above reproach, have only one wife and must be an apt teacher (1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:8-9). He must not be quarrelsome, a drunkard, violent, nor love money (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7). P*ul has already barred women from teaching and made reference to their elaborate clothing but he determines their exclusion from this hierarchy through his desire for the

³⁸From the *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (Ch 1: 1-3).

bishop to have only one *wife*. Dibelius³⁹ considers whether this desire is a statement against polygamy or a widower remarrying but concludes that what P*ul is probably recommending is the institution of marriage. This allows P*ul to compare the bishop's role of managing the church with that of managing the family (1 Tim 3:4). If the bishop cannot manage his own family and assure the submission of those beneath him in the family structure how P*ul asks, can he "take care of God's church"? (1 Tim 3:5). The power relations are clearly set and with them the authority to demand submission. The bishop must be chosen from among those with a long standing reputation not just within the church but from within the wider community (1 Tim 3:6-7) so that he is able to refute the heretical teachers (Titus 1:9). This precludes recent converts (1 Tim 3:6) who may be "puffed up with conceit" (1 Tim 3:6) - a veiled reference to the women perhaps, who may have been among the most recent converts and may bring unorthodox practices with them.

Again this is a departure from the Pauline practice of the early church and from the reported practices of the Gospel communities. The newly baptised would have been welcome in setting up communities and in evangelising others. Paul respected Lydia, Eunice and Lois (Timothy's mother and Grandmother), Euodia and Syntyche and many other women, recognising, and encouraging them to use, their leadership qualities.



Paul's recognition of women as baptisers is recorded in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* when, faced with the lions, Thecla baptises herself in the pit of seals:

Fig 5.a Thecla of Greece

³⁹ Dibelius, page 52.

And when she had finished her prayer, she turned and saw a great pit full of water, and said: "Now is the time for me to wash". And she threw herself in, saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ I baptize myself on the last day!" But the seals seeing the light of a lightening-flash, floated dead on the surface. And there was about her a cloud of fire, so that neither could the beasts touch her nor could she be seen naked.⁴⁰

P*ul proceeds to set out the qualities for the role of deacon. They, too, should be serious, quiet and of good standing but must prove their faithfulness to the true teaching (1 Tim 3:8-10). This proof may have required an official test but it is more probably a means by which P*ul can draw attention to the faithlessness of those whom he considers to be false teachers. Like the bishops, they too must have been married only once and show good management of their families (1 Tim 3:12). The patriarchal structure is once more enforced. Interspersed, however, with the desirable qualities of the deacons, is an instruction which hints at a possible role for some women within the hierarchy. "Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things" (1 Tim 3:11). Who are these women? Commentators variously describe them as the wives of the deacons, or as deaconesses⁴¹ or even as a group of widows,⁴² but no further explanation is given in the letter itself.

P*ul now reveals his theology, slipping back into the role of Paul to introduce his theological concept of the household of God. If "I am delayed" (1 Tim 3:14 -15) P*ul tells Timothy, these instructions will help the community know how to behave in Church. The household of God is more than just the sacred space of the building, it is, as Bassler suggests, a "metaphor of signal importance"⁴³ since it refers to the essence of the community. It is the

⁴⁰ *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, page 362.

⁴¹ Dibelius, page 58.

⁴² Bassler references the debate, page 71.

⁴³ Bassler, page 73

church of the living God (1 Tim 3:15). The “pillar of truth” that is this church parallels that which forms the pillar of society and so the church becomes a “divinely ordered social structure”.⁴⁴ P*ul’s metaphor of the Church as the household of God compares to Paul’s use of the same phrase in his letter to the Ephesians. Paul’s household is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone” (Eph 2:20), and it is through Jesus that the “structure is joined and will grow into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:22).

Paul implies that the church is a broad community in which no one will be a stranger or alien. But for P*ul the most important thing in the household he envisages, is that correct behaviour will be observed within the structure that he decrees. The imagery points beyond that of the physical building, although P*ul uses structural images to reinforce his message, and refers to the community and the code of practice that is desired by P*ul for within the community. Quinn⁴⁵ and Dibelius/Conzelmann⁴⁶ point out the Jewish and septuagintal influence in P*ul’s use of these structure images, both quoting references from the Essenes’ writings in which they claimed that God had built them a house in Israel, and from Qumran texts which refer to the “volunteers for the holiness of Aaron and for the House of the truth in Israel”.⁴⁷ Quinn draws parallels between the household of God in the Pastorals and God’s kingdom

Both have a visible existence and manifestation in the assembly of actual human believers. Their origin as a family depends totally upon the free and antecedent choice and love of the Father. Their reign and goal are not of this world either God is the Father who gives life to his family, the church, the congregation of believers, in which he is truly known by faith and which he has called into existence and sustains.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Bassler, page 73.

⁴⁵ Quinn, page 310.

⁴⁶ Dibelius and Conzelmann, page 60.

⁴⁷ Quinn, page 310; Dibelius and Conzelmann, page 61

⁴⁸ Quinn, page 311. Quinn questions whether the structural images of the pillar and bulwark

Thus the ecclesiastical household mirrors the patriarchal secular household of the first and second century, with the (male) bishop at the head leading the church in the same way that the father leads the secular family. The women, children and slaves all know their positions of subordination in both the church and the home.⁴⁹ The stability of the church is assured with the proper respect being shown to those in authority (1 Tim 2:11; 3:4,12; 6:1, Titus 2:5,9; 3:1). Instability comes from the "rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers" (Titus 1:10) who upset "whole families" (Titus 1:10) as they insinuate themselves into the household (2 Tim 3:6) and, by implication, the church. Their actions deny God (Titus 1:16) even though their teaching professes knowledge of God (Titus 1:16). P*ul manipulates the consciences of his audience into accepting his idea that order is divinely sanctioned by suggesting that these deceivers are corrupting the minds and consciences of the community who may listen to them as their own have already been (Titus 1:15). By association, women are lumped into this group as P*ul warns Timothy against the "silly women, overwhelmed by their sins and swayed by all kinds of desires" (2 Tim 3:6), who welcome such people into their homes.

Instead of using a "saying is sure" phrase,⁵⁰ P*ul supports his declaration that the church of the living God is the "bulwark of truth" (1 Tim 3:15) by quoting a mystery hymn (1 Tim 3:16). Thus he uses the liturgical fragment of an early Christian hymn to locate the power relations he exercises over the community in theology:

The image of the church as the household of God ...introduces a metaphor that would have had significant psychological and social power.... To use that image for the church was to harness that power for the church. The hymn

of the truth, are referring to the household of God or to Timothy himself. "...Timothy is like a free standing, honorary, victory column, erected in the sanctuary area but not necessarily as part of the building itself", page 314.

⁴⁹P*ul reiterates the household code of the letters to the Ephesian and Colossian churches that wives should be subject to their husbands (Eph 5:22, Col 3:18) and extends to all women.

⁵⁰P*ul uses such phrases throughout the Pastorals.

reinforces the magnitude of the truth that the church is called both to preserve and to reflect through its obedience to the instructions in the letter.⁵¹

Sharon Gritz' feminist exegesis on 1 Timothy 2:19 -15,⁵² places the Pastoral letters, and in particular P*ul's demand for women's' silence, in the historical and religious contexts of the first century. Her thesis proposes:

That the prohibition of women in regards to teaching and exercising authority over men ... resulted from the particular situation in the primitive Ephesian church, a situation complicated by pagan influences from the beliefs and practices of the cult of the Mother Goddess Artemis ... which has infiltrated the church through false teachers.⁵³

She suggests that some women must have already been teaching in the Ephesian church for P*ul to have forbidden it.⁵⁴ Ross Kraemer⁵⁵ and Deborah Sawyer⁵⁶ come to the same conclusion. As Sawyer writes: "Paul's own prohibitions confirm that the practices must have been in existence".⁵⁷ One of the problems for Christianity at this time, she suggests was the "high profile leadership"⁵⁸ of the Montanist movement.

Quinn argues that these extra instructions to the women on the manner of worship were required because the men would have mostly been converting from Judaism so would already be familiar with the protocol of public prayer. Women, on the other hand, would not have been used to such an experience so would need guidance on such matters. However, Gritz notes

⁵¹ Bassler, page 77.

⁵²Gritz accepts that the letters are part of the Pauline corpus and need to be interpreted in the context of the biblical text being authoritative and not contradictory.

⁵³Gritz, page 2.

⁵⁴Gritz, page 123.

⁵⁵Ross Shepherd Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World*, page 151.

⁵⁶Deborah F. Sawyer, *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries*.

⁵⁷Sawyer, page 108.

⁵⁸Sawyer, page 108.

that although women were to be encouraged to pray as the men (1 Tim 2:1), P*ul's need to remind the audience of the "oneness of God and the existence of only one mediator between God and humanity"⁵⁹ indicates that Gnostic and Artemisian ideas had infiltrated the church.⁶⁰ Women who had converted from the Artemis cult "brought to the worship setting a boisterousness that did not conduce to learning",⁶¹ so P*ul needs to provide further details of how women were to worship.



Fig 5.b Artemis of Ephesos

The Artemis cult was particularly strong in Ephesus and is thought to have links with the Minoan Goddess of Crete through the Mycenaeans.⁶² Artemis was synonymous with Cybele, the great Mother Goddess whose influence was strong throughout the Roman Empire. The main temple to Artemis had been built in Ephesus and worship to her continued until 380 c.e.⁶³ The many breasted Goddess was a symbol of fertility and rebirth. The Romans knew Artemis as Diana, and temples to Diana were common throughout the empire.

In Crete the Goddess cult was centred on the great Mother Goddess who was almost always depicted with snakes around her. These serpents are transformed through the Genesis creation to become a symbol of deception and therefore the Goddess herself becomes denigrated. The temples to this Goddess were mostly destroyed by earthquakes in 1500 BCE, but coins have been found from the Greco-Roman period with the heads of Artemis, Athena and Hera indicating that Goddess cults were still prominent. A

⁵⁹Gritz, page 124.

⁶⁰Gritz, page 125.

⁶¹Gritz, page 129.

⁶²For a detailed tracing of the Goddess, see Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of The Goddess* page 323.

⁶³Baring and Cashford, page 551.

temple to Isis has been excavated⁶⁴ dating from around the time of the Roman invasion.

Worship to these Goddesses included women in priestly roles and was often lively. Sawyer emphasises the diversity of women's experiences in the early Christian period. She writes:



Fig 5.c The Mother Goddess of Crete

When we examine some key examples from Greco-Roman cults we can imagine the excitement ... generated by the importation of exotic cults such as Cybele and Attis, or Isis All these cults invited initiates to explore and identify with ancient myths of sex and sexuality of life and death.⁶⁵

Within the Isis cult women were given precedence over men within ceremonies, because the central characters were female.⁶⁶ Sawyer suggests that the Isis cult influenced the Jewish practice of allowing “women of priestly families to function as priests”,⁶⁷ citing the influential work of Bernadette Brooten on women in Judaism as her source. Although for Jewish women there were still many restrictions on their visibility within synagogues, Brooten suggests that this was not always the case.

Gritz argues that P*ul does not require complete silence of the women since, if he had done so, he would have used *σιγάω* or *σιγή* which implies attitude

⁶⁴J.D.S Pendlebury, *Archaeology of Crete: An Introduction*.

⁶⁵Sawyer, page 47.

⁶⁶Sawyer, page 67.

⁶⁷Sawyer, page 74.

rather than ἡσυχία which implies action. Because P*ul has used such a word she concludes that women are not being called to be submissive to their husbands but to what they are being taught - ie how to deal with heresy. She interprets γυναῖκες as wives rather than women so places this entire passage in that context:

... Women had become involved in unorthodox teachings. Some had failed to grasp the Christian truth and maintain sound doctrinal balance. With their new found freedom these women had gone too far. They acquired the arrogant attitude of the false teachers. They were creating confusion. Marriage represented one area of attack by the heretical elders. Paul reminds women of the importance of the marital bond between wife and husband. Being a Christian or Spirit-endowed teacher does not negate marriage responsibilities. Wives were still to recognise their husbands κεφαλή and submit themselves. Thus, married women should not teach in public worship when the exercise of that ministry compromises their relation to their husbands.⁶⁸

Gritz concludes that these problems relate to the heresy in the church at Ephesus and P*ul's need to locate the teaching within a correct reading of Scripture. But how does this interpretation provide an answer for the Belfast women in my research sample and others like them? Gritz' concluding paragraph provides little support I feel for those women who practice in denominations based on literal translations of the text. The growth of Evangelical Churches that are founded on such literal interpretations will do little to promote the acceptance of women as teachers in the public space of the Church. Gritz writes:

Therefore, a better translation of 1 Tim 2:12 is "I do not allow a wife to teach or exercise authority over her husband but to remain quiet" It restates the teaching of 1 Cor 14:34 - 36. It

⁶⁸Gritz, page 133.

also permits the exercise of spiritual gifts by all women, both married and single The normative principle underlying 1 Tim 2:9 -15 is that marriage qualifies a married woman's ministry. A wife's commitment and obligation to her husband should shape her public ministry.⁶⁹

If Gritz is correct, and P*ul's intended meaning was 'wife' this may possibly have been because he knew of the focus on wives within the Isis cult. Kraemer argues that in the Greco-Roman worship of Isis the focus moves from mother to wife, "It is Isis, after all, who commands women to be loved by man, marriage contracts to be written, children to love their parents",⁷⁰ however, in Hellenistic society the increased independence of women meant that these traditional roles for women were given a different emphasis within the Isis cult. Women had greater personal autonomy and therefore greater freedom.⁷¹ For P*ul it was necessary to harness this freedom by drawing the women's role back into silent subordination of the patriarchal household of God. P*ul's concern about the women's hair may also have been because women known to worship within the Isis cult did so with their hair flowing loosely.⁷² If he could do this by redefining the role of the wife, he may have appealed to the women converting from the Isis cults. By further restricting their style of worship, he had ensured behaviour which he saw as fit.

Quinn would appear to support Gritz' translation with his own: "Let a married woman quietly learn in the assemblies for worship ... moreover I do not allow a wife to teach in the public worship and to boss her husband".⁷³ At one level we can argue that translations such as these which use modern language release unmarried women from the restrictions of silence and so we may

⁶⁹Gritz, page 158.

⁷⁰Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, page 75.

⁷¹Kraemer, page 77.

⁷²Sawyer references the poet Tibullus, who recalls a woman untying her hair twice a day to praise Isis (page 105).

⁷³Quinn, page 191. Quinn cites Titus 1:6, 11 as precedents for this translation as *γυνή* is given here in the singular. However, the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (vol 1) argues that *γυνή* is usually translated as woman (female as distinct from male) even though it does cite biblical references for a translation as 'wife' or 'bride'. The Pastorals are not included amongst these references.

possibly have a way forward for women's ability to teach in the Church. But I feel, all that happens here is that the context of the debate subtly changes further marginalising married women without actually advancing the position of unmarried women. Young unmarried women may choose to marry, forcing them to give up teaching - a good enough reason in some eyes to prevent them teaching in the first place. Widows, too, may remarry. P*ul himself encourages this for young widows and only declares a woman to be a real widow if she is over sixty (1 Tim 5:9) when she is probably too old to start teaching. By locating the discussion in the language of 'husband and wife', Quinn moves the argument further into the family stressing the subordination of the wife (for which we can read female) which at the same time attaches the woman as a possession of a man. The power relation between male and female not only becomes firmly grounded in the patriarchal order of superiority and thus control, of the man, it becomes divinely sanctioned. Men have, it seems, been given powerful arguments to discourage women from ever joining 'the preachers club'.

So to return to my second question in opening this chapter. Gritz is right to place these letters in the context of the societies to which they were written but I feel does not go far enough to offer contemporary women the liberation from P*ul's ruling on teaching, by locating his instructions in the realm of the wife. These are letters written, for whatever secondary reason, to address issues facing the Christian communities at the end of the first, beginning of the second century. It can be argued that the decline in numbers attending Christian churches today is indicative of similar issues facing our churches as faced the early Church. But do we need to cope with them in the way P*ul suggests these early churches should, and are we further marginalising women by not reinterpreting the Pastoral letters in the context of our own societies? We might even question whether P*ul understood the Pauline message that well himself.

P*ul was probably anxious to create a stable structure which would bring order and cohesion to an expanding Church. Large numbers of small house churches could lead to fragmentation of the truth of the Gospel and were

vulnerable to the critics of the day. He therefore used the successful model of the secular household as the paradigm for God's Church. His vision for the Church may not have extended into the third century never mind the third millennium, nor may he have envisioned the powerful dynasties that form the modern denominations of the Church today. P*ul may not even have intended excluding women from ever teaching and leading the Church. If, as Collins suggests, P*ul "considers Paul as a model for all Christians, especially those called to a teaching ministry within the church",⁷⁴ perhaps P*ul's insistence on women's silence was intended as a temporary situation to meet the immediate issues confronting the churches in Ephesus and Crete. These may just have been letters to deal with 'local difficulties'. Whatever P*ul's purpose, the content of these letters have been used to disadvantage women from the time that they were written, and we need to look for ways in which they can be redeemed before rejecting them from a 'feminist approved' canon.

I feel we cannot do this through Gritz' analysis of the women γυναικες as wives who should submit themselves to their husbands headship (κεφαλή). To do so fails to remove the link between women and subordination. All women become subordinate because women, if not wives already, are potential wives and therefore can be treated as wives. However, this passage, like the rest of the text, also needs to be seen in the context of P*ul's desire for order, which for him came through the experience of managing a family. If we recognise that these letters are addressed to a particular community at a particular moment in history, with particular needs then we must adapt them to meet the needs and reflect the society to which they are read today.

The management of the family can still be a model for Church management. The 'head' of the Church can, as P*ul requires, still lead the household of God in the same manner that they 'lead' their secular family. What the church must embrace, is the fact that the 'family' has changed. The head of a secular household is now often a woman, and increasingly a woman

⁷⁴Raymond F. Collins, *Letters that Paul Did Not Write*.

managing to raise a family. In Western society this may be through choice⁷⁵, or necessity after a divorce or bereavement. In the developing world, this may be because of enforced separation whilst men seek employment; the men maybe away fighting or have been killed through war. Increasingly families are being redefined through patterns of illness such as AIDS which is reaching epidemic proportions in Africa, the former Soviet Republic and China. The 'head' may also be a gay man or a lesbian woman who may bring quite different qualities to the role of family management. Collectively, or individually, they may, however, meet all the 'good' qualities that P*ul desires of the 'male head' in the Ephesian and Cretan communities to whom he writes, including that of the spirit filled teacher. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus indicates the changing structure of the family. Jesus' relationships are broad and embracing, in the way that many modern family structures are. To change the format of contemporary Church leadership will therefore be more in tune with that recommended by Jesus in the Gospel.

Like the women of the first/second century, modern Christian women may bring to worship the holistic influences of alternative faiths. Christian women may use alternative healing such as Reiki which focuses on the transference of energy to heal the site of pain whether in her own body or in that of others. This does not mean that she will be a false teacher, anymore than does a man who interprets the inclusive message of the Gospel to further the cause of one group at the expense of another. The world bears witness to many instances of this still happening as it always has, where scripture is used to bolster racist, homophobic, white supremacist, sexist and other discriminatory standpoints.

Quinn's modern translation does, however, remove the double condition of salvation from women alone. He prefers to translate women's salvation through childbirth as "a person will be saved rearing children provided they persevere in faithfulness and charity and sensible holiness".⁷⁶ In theory this

⁷⁵See Elizabeth Stuart's comment in *Just Good Friends* on Mollenkott's work on identifications of 'family' in the Bible, page 166.

⁷⁶Quinn, page 230

includes men and all carers of children but as in practice it is women who experience the pain of childbirth and who usually take on the 'rearing' role, not much comfort is gained with this shift in the salvific condition. And what of men and women who are not parents either through choice or circumstance, how are they to be saved? Dibelius⁷⁷ draws out the similarities between this passage and that in Sirach "from a woman sin had its beginnings and because of her we all die" (Sir 25:24) which suggests that P*ul's reference to Eve's deception was because he had in mind sexual seduction. Seduction and sin require 'salvation' and so P*ul is able to maintain the distinction between male superiority (not deceived, therefore blameless) and women's inferiority (deceived and therefore to be punished) by offering salvation through the act which only women can perform - childbirth. However, to some extent, Dibelius and Quinn agree, as Dibelius also suggests that P*ul may be referring to child rearing since he raises the point when writing to Titus (Titus 2:4). If it is the physical act of birth that is being emphasised, Dibelius argues, this may be indicative of P*ul's desire to Christianise the natural order, since the reference will only be to Christian women.⁷⁸

Although many feminist women might disagree with me, I do feel that women can actually gain encouragement by identifying with these second century women in Ephesus and Crete. For P*ul to have been so threatened by their visibility that he demanded their silence, was proof that notice had been taken of their prominence within society and the Church. The oral tradition would have meant that women here were aware of the prominence that Jesus and Paul had given to women in roles as baptisers, leaders, teachers and missionaries. The problem lay not with the women, but with P*ul himself and he relied on the authority of Paul to imply that his conservative misogynist views, were actually the teachings of Paul himself. How would the Ephesian and Cretan women have received these letters? Probably in the same way that women receive them today - they know that this is not the true message of the Gospel so find ways around the altered

⁷⁷Dibelius, page 48

⁷⁸Dibelius, page 48

message to meet their own needs wherever possible. Contemporary women continue to mix the influences of the pagan Goddess with the comforts of the Christian rituals as these second century women no doubt also did.

An example of this in Ireland is the figure of Brigid, who is a strong influence in many Catholic women's lives. She is the joint patron saint of Ireland along with St Patrick. Brigid crosses hand over the front doors of many houses, or in the kitchen, to bring health and well being to the family. The cross, usually woven from the ripened corn is in the form of a swastika, symbolising that the healing will spread to all corners of the home. The cross is seen as a Christian symbol, but is also a powerful symbol within Paganism. At the feast

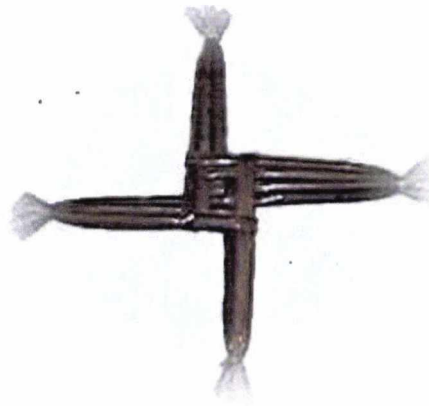


Fig 5.d A Typical Brigid Cross

of Imbolc in early spring (which coincides with the feast of St Brigid on February 1st) a cross is ceremoniously placed in each room of the house with a recitation to new life and blessings to the home.

Stories of Brigid are bound up in the imagery, myth and legends of both Paganism and the early period of Christianity in Ireland. Symbols associated with her as Goddess are reproduced in the Christian images of her as saint. Brigid is both Goddess and Saint, revered in ancient times for her resistance to patriarchy and recognised in modern Ireland⁷⁹ for being as strong an influence in Christianising Ireland as was St Patrick. Her healing powers, whether as saint or Goddess, are invoked by contemporary women either through prayers, or by offerings made at Brigid Wells.⁸⁰

⁷⁹Each spring there is a Brigid festival in Belfast where women take part in workshops for story telling, drama, making crosses and so on.

⁸⁰ There are Brigid Wells throughout Ireland, maybe the most famous is reputed to be at Brigid's birthplace. The one in the photo is at Cranfield.



Fig 5.e A Brigid Well

One such well can be found close to the shore of Lough Neagh. This well is a natural 'puddle' in a hollow surrounded by trees. The offerings take the form of bits of everyday household objects which are tied to the trees. When this photo (fig 5.e) was taken, in the summer of 2000, the offerings included pieces of yellow duster, ripped tea towels, dish cloths, carrier bags, plastic 'ice-pole' wrappers, handkerchiefs and socks.

Belief in alternative healing, even involving what might be seen as witchcraft, or Goddess practice is no doubt strong in all parts of the Christianised world. This story was told to me very recently by a Catholic woman I know as a contribution to this research. She comes from Galway and the story concerns her mother who has been suffering from lung cancer:

I went home to see mother after her treatment was completed. Now she's an educated business woman, she has a degree and all. She took me aside when I got home and opened her blouse to show me her breast. I thought 'Oh God the cancer has spread to her breast', but no it was ringworm. 'I'll get you some cream from the chemist to clear it up', I said but mother wouldn't hear of it. 'I've got a 7th son coming to heal it' she said. A while later this strapping young man arrived at the house still in his rugby kit to lay his palm on my mother's fully clothed chest. 'The healing is in the palm of his hand', she told me, 'that is where the worm curled up and died when it was put on him as a baby, so that is where the healing is'.

Well, the woman told me, it was bound to work because even if it was left untreated ringworm will clear up in about three weeks.

The *Sheelagh-na-gig* image above the door of a church ruin in Killananboy is reputed to be of Brigid.⁸¹ Mary Condren argues that the Sheelagh holds open her genitals as if the congregation must pass back through the womb to enter into relation with Christ during worship. As these images are almost always found on churches from the Norman period, I question Condren's suggestion that the Killananboy Sheelagh is in fact Brigid.



Fig 5.f Kilpeck Sheelagh

These ancient female images can be found on many churches throughout Britain and Ireland⁸². The clearest of these images⁸³ can be seen on the



church of St Mary and St David, Kilpeck in Herefordshire (fig 5.f). This image is not over the door but high up on the wall. The Sheelagh carving to the left above the main door of Rochester Cathedral has had the genitals removed possibly during the occupation of the cathedral by Cromwell's soldiers.⁸⁴

Fig5.g Rochester Cathedral Sheelagh

A young woman I know sends her children to Sunday School each week, whilst she herself practices Wicca rituals. She makes and uses spells in the way that Christian women might use prayer, as she told me:

Getting to heaven is like going round Echo Square⁸⁵, there is more than one way in and one way out.

⁸¹Mary Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess* page 65.

⁸²J Schubert's web site identifies 140 images.

⁸³Photo taken from the web site jlschubert.tripod.com/kilpeck.htm

⁸⁴Image taken from www.jharding.demon.co.uk

⁸⁵Echo Square is a roundabout in Gravesend with six entrances and exits.

So I return to the question that I pose in the title: *Would the Pastoral letters be included within a feminist canon?* Whether we assume Pauline authorship, or the letters to be psuedepigraphical, Pauline authority is used to promote the message of the letter whenever it is used to enforce women's continued invisibility and silence. If we are to retain these texts as feminists, then we need to recognise that they were written to support the agenda of one person who saw, what *he* thought was a specific need of the early Church. We must reinterpret the texts in the context of the needs of today's Church. We too must refer to Pauline authority as we point to the many examples of the roles of women in the early churches for which Paul thanked God, and to the oral tradition that confirmed his acceptance of God's intervention in women's right to baptise. Paul did not indicate in any of the undisputed letters that women had become problematic⁸⁶ as church leaders, or teachers, and we need to remind those who wish to use the Pastoral letters as Paul's desire for women's silence, of this fact. Unless as feminists we are able to persuade the leaders of those denominations who use the texts to women's disadvantage that in his earlier writings Paul insisted that we should use our God given gifts appropriately, then Foucault's observation that "the ecclesiastical institutionalisation of pastoral power has ceased or at least lost its vitality since the 18th century", may need to be revised. The current growth in Christianity within the more fundamentalist Evangelic and Pentecostal churches, may mean that more women will be subordinated rather than liberated by God's message.

It is not enough to hope that circumstance will bring changes to the power structures of the Christian churches. Changes in society will gradually force changes in the church structure and leadership. The decline in the numbers of men coming forward for training as priests in the Catholic church will only lead to women being ordained as priests if the Catholic hierarchy can find no alternatives to the current organisational structures which preserve the role for men.⁸⁷ The growth in numbers of women priests in the Anglican churches

⁸⁶See previous chapter for a response to the argument that Euodia and Syntyche were causing divisions.

⁸⁷In parts of France, I understand that parishes have become very large and are served by only one priest because of the shortage.

will lead to women being accepted into the role of bishop, when women become more widely seen in senior management within secular society. The different leadership styles of women will gradually break down the patriarchal structure of the rigid hierarchy that has developed as a result of P*ul's letters opening the doors to alternative hegemonies. If we must have one 'head' of the Church it need not matter if that person is always a man, if women have an equal voice in who that head should be and an equal opportunity to be in that position herself if she so wishes. It matters enormously all the while women are denied such an opportunity through readings of these letters which assume their validity for contemporary society - a society which has different desires, different needs and alternative understandings than that of the society to which they were originally addressed.

Chapter 6 The Gospel of John: The Woman's Gospel?

*When we were made, God Almighty was the Father
Of our human nature, God all-wisdom our Mother,
and with them was the love and goodness of
the Holy Spirit and this is all one God, one Lord.*

Julian of Norwich

John's Gospel is the final New Testament text that I have chosen to read with a feminist eye. At the outset of this project I chose to include the fourth Gospel because of the way it presents a high Christological message. I felt that women who were more drawn to the divinity of Christ might choose this as their preferred text when searching for answers to the Christological question "Who do you say that I am?" I found, however, that John's Gospel was the preferred choice of 44% of the women who completed my questionnaire, and/or contributed to my research through an interview. This high percentage leads me then to pose the question that appears in the title of this chapter: Is John's Gospel the Women's Gospel? Based on my sample the answer would seem to be yes, but why is this the case? What is it about the Gospel that draws women to it? And if this question was asked to a wider group, would men also be drawn to it, and would their reasons be the same as those of the women? I do not intend to seek answers to the last question, but I will address the other questions throughout this reading of the Gospel.

John's Gospel is my own preferred text firstly for its high Christology as I find myself more drawn to the divinity of Christ than to the human person. Secondly, the poetic language of the text and the imagery the Johannine Jesus uses to reveal the glory of God appeal to me. The manner in which the Johannine Jesus uses the marginalised and particularly women, as those who enable the revelation of God's glory is particularly empowering for me. However, I did not disclose this to the participants in my research at the outset, so do not feel that this has influenced the number of women who have chosen the text themselves. Women who were drawn to the humanity

of Christ more than the divinity also chose this text so it is clear that the Evangelist speaks to women on many levels.

Reading John's Gospel has enabled me to develop my mystical side. The teaching from Jesus' mouth is a high priestly prayer. I am drawn to its intimacy.

John's Gospel is so much more spiritual than narrative. It is much deeper than it appears to be on the surface. The deep meanings of Christ and the prayers of Jesus are so inspiring. The Gospel feels like a personal account of someone close to Jesus and therefore reveals a story of a friend.

Although there have been many influential readings of this text since it was written at the end of the first century, I will use only commentaries from the twentieth century as the preferred or dominant readings. These readings present the 'white male view' of the text and have been chosen to reflect the spectrum of denominational influences. I have limited the number of male voices to five as to include more from the plethora of commentaries may extend the horizon too far and so weaken the focus that I wish to take. The five, represent probably the most influential readings of recent years. Therefore I will draw on Rudolf Schnackenburg, Raymond Brown, C.K Barrett, Rudolf Bultmann and Barnabas Lindars. To counter the male influence I will refer to the works of those female theologians who have explored the Gospel from a woman's perspective, and from women who have been influential in feminist theory. My reading will be influenced in particular by the work of Sandra Schneiders, and that of Julia Kristeva whose theories on text analysis and psychoanalysis have enabled women to explore the Gospel in ways which speak quite differently from the masculine mainstream.

In analysing the relationship between literary theory and reading biblical texts, Mieke Bal argues that "what should be retained from the notion of 'literary readings of the Bible' is not the question of literature but the question

of reading".¹ Alternative readings of Biblical texts, she suggests, should challenge the dominant, and therefore mostly male, readings in such a way as to reveal the 'gaps and failures of realism' through their own consistency.² Thus she seeks to promote readings which do not attempt to overturn the male dominance and replace it with a female one, but to explore the way in which the text reveals and exposes the alternative perspectives on what are considered dominant interpretations of the myth.

Julia Kristeva's work on literature and psychoanalysis has enabled feminist readings to reconstruct the text in quite challenging ways. Although she herself has rejected Christianity, it is quite evident that the influence of Catholicism in her early years has informed her thinking on psychoanalysis. She makes links between faith and psychoanalysis in such a way that her readers are able to question their own understanding of what faith is and how influential it might be in other dimensions of their life. Kristeva's work on intertextuality provides a mechanism for not only analysing the relationship that particular Biblical texts have to others in the canon and other sacred texts, but also the way in which the subject herself becomes a 'text' which interacts with the written word. Whether as first readers³ of a text or as subsequent readers, we see ourselves reflected in, or challenged by it. As Sandra Schneiders notes of this Gospel:

The Evangelist presumes that we will read and reread the Gospel ... every time we reread a text we change our relationship with it, precisely because we have been formed by our previous reading.⁴

Within her work on intertextuality, Kristeva examines the relationship between the symbolic and the semiotic. This is especially useful when analysing the Johannine text as it is rich in poetry and metaphor, and we

¹ Mieke Bal (ed), *Anti-Covenant: Counter Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*.

² Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literal Readings of Biblical Love Stories*, page 4.

³ Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger takes this approach in her study of intertextuality in the women characters of John's Gospel.

⁴ Sandra M Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering John in the Fourth Gospel*, page 11.

constantly change our understanding of the revelation as the signs are presented to us. Kristeva proposes that chapter six of the Gospel could be read as 'a semiological debate'.⁵ Her argument centres around the discussion in which Jesus' conception of signs contrasts to that of the opponents of the Johannine community. But since the Gospel as a whole can be viewed in terms of this debate and the reader's response to the signs, I feel her proposition for chapter six extends to much of the Gospel. I shall draw extensively on Kristeva's argument later in the chapter, and will comment on her work generally throughout my reading of the Gospel.

The Gospel opens with the Prologue (John 1:1-18), the purpose of which is widely debated. Most of my dominant voices support the theory that the Prologue may be based on an early hymn, but differ on the purpose to which the Evangelist puts the hymn. Brown for example suggests it is:

An early Christian hymn, probably stemming from Johannine circles which has been adapted to serve as an overture to the Gospel narrative of the career of the incarnate Word.⁶

Barrett argues that:

[it] stands before us as a prose introduction which has not been submitted to interpolation, and was specially written (it must be supposed) to introduce the Gospel - and, it may be added, to sum it up.⁷

Both Barrett⁸ and Bultmann⁹ note the linguistic and theological parallels between the Prologue and the *Odes of Solomon*, the structure of which can be seen, Bultmann¹⁰ argues, throughout the Gospel. He comments that the

⁵ Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, page 127.

⁶ Raymond E Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John (i - xii)* page cxxxviii.

⁷ *The Gospel According to St John*, Barrett, page 151.

⁸ Barrett page 112.

⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A commentary*, page 30f.

¹⁰ Bultmann (page 15) cites as evidence the repeated emphasis of Logos in v1; life, light and darkness in vs 4 & 5; the use of *κοσμος* as a link between v9 and v10; the linking idea of *ιδιος* in 11a and b; *λαμβανειν* in v11 and 12; *δοξα* in 14a and b and *πληργς* in v14b and 16.

Prologue, “forms a whole, and is complete in itself; it is not necessary for anything to follow”.¹¹ Because the reader brings with them a personal understanding of the life, light, glory and truth motifs, it is only through a complete reading of the Gospel, Bultmann suggests, that they are able to renegotiate these meanings to “understand them authentically”.¹²

It is only when the circle is complete that the ‘Son’ has returned to the glory which the love of the ‘Father’ has prepared for him πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου (17:24), only when the reader has been led back out of the temporal sphere into the eternal, that he can judge conclusively in what sense the Prologue leads out of the eternal into the temporal.¹³

It is perhaps this circularity that leads Lindars to suggest that the Prologue could well be an addition to the Gospel written after its completion so that Jesus could be placed in a cosmic setting.¹⁴ There is no need therefore to conform to strict poetic structures, he proposes, since the Evangelist is not writing a poem but a theological basis and an historical starting point for the Gospel.¹⁵ This theological basis could lie within Wisdom theology and the poetic nature of the Prologue could be that the Evangelist “was consciously modelling his opening statement on Prov 8:22-36 and similar passages”.¹⁶

The Prologue opens with profound statements about God, the word and time:

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| In the beginning was the Word | Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, |
| and the Word was with God | καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν |
| and the Word was God | Καὶ Θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος |

These words reinforce the notion of the maleness of the Word/God - the Word is the divine law and therefore the ultimate patriarchal symbolic. The

¹¹Bultmann, page 13.

¹²Bultmann, page 13.

¹³Bultmann, page 13.

¹⁴Barnaby Lindars, *New Century Bible: The Gospel of John*, page 81.

¹⁵Lindars, page 81.

¹⁶Lindars offers Prov 8:22-36; Sir 24:1-22 and Wis 7:22-8:1 as such texts, page 81.

Word is pre-existent - infinitely far before creation as it will be into eternity - and it is male. Bultmann writes "that for us, of course, the identity of Logos will become clear only in the light of what is said about *him* (my italics). And the first thing we see is that he is a divine figure, at once Creator and Revealer".¹⁷ The maleness of God as both Creator and Revealer, is then encapsulated in the use of the male word Logos.

Although it deals with creation and incarnation, the Prologue, has no direct reference to the role of women in either. It was the pre-existent God/Word who enabled the creation of the world (John 1:10) into which the Word became flesh (1:14) and lived. How as women are we to react to a creation story in which there seems no need or place for a woman? We may argue that the absence of a virgin mother is quite liberating for women since it is a role to which none of us can aspire but whose 'perfection' has for many of us, been held up as an ideal for which we ought to aim. But the absence of an obvious female role in the Word becoming flesh has helped to perpetuate the myth of the male God and male Godhead. As a child, the Prologue was read at the end of every mass,¹⁸ shortly before the prayers for the 'Conversion of Russia' - three Hail Marys and the Hail Holy Queen. So although the opening of the Prologue might seem to reinforce the maleness of God, it is somehow coupled in my mind with the "fruit of the womb" of Mary.

Brown contrasts the Prologue with the openings of the Gospels of Luke and Matthew which, he argues, move "the story of Jesus back to his conception".¹⁹ Problematic though this conception has been for some women, Jesus' birth in these Gospels is at least located in the norm for birth of the rest of humanity. Lindars suggests that the Evangelist's motive in the Prologue, however, was to stress that the "incarnation was an act of divine initiative"²⁰ rather than a miraculous birth. A feminist analysis of this intention

¹⁷Bultmann, page 19.

¹⁸The Prologue was read at the end of mass until the introduction of the new liturgy in English during the 1960's. It was about this time that the prayers for Russia ceased as well.

¹⁹Brown, page 18.

²⁰Lindars, page 93.

allows the possibility for seeing the maternal *within* the Word, rather than as a childlike link *to* the Word.

If the significance of the Prologue is not to present the genealogy of the man Jesus, but to create the link between the earthly existence of the Incarnate Jesus and the timeless existence of God, it is necessary to establish the divine pre-existence of the Word to

enable the creation of the world. To this extent it is possible to view the Prologue as a reworking of the creation myth of the Old Testament but with the Word (λογός), replacing Wisdom (σοφία). Wisdom was with God at the beginning (Prov 8:22), before creation (Prov 8:27). She was the source of life (Prov 8:35), knowledge (Wis 9:11) and the truth



Fig 6.a Creaata God Most Beautiful

(Prov 8:7); was superior to the light (Wis 7:29); made possible the founding of the earth and the heaven's (Prov 3:19) and was the spirit which filled the world (Wis 1:7).

Apart from Bultmann, my chosen commentators all examine the possibility that the Logos roots can be found within this Old Testament Wisdom source. But why should the Evangelist choose to replace Wisdom as she appears in the Old Testament with the Word in the Prologue? Lindars²¹ offers two possibilities: firstly because a masculine noun is needed to associate the divine with the incarnate Jesus, and secondly because not only will this "Incarnate Son" be the Revealer of divine truth, he is the subject of the "apostolic preaching" of the Gospel. It is therefore possible, Lindars argues, to link the Word that was in the beginning with God, and the word which is the message of the Gospel.

²¹Lindars, page 83f.

Schnackenburg argues that the Wisdom theology is rejected in favour of the Word theology as a means of challenging Gnostic teaching, by emphasising the entry of the Logos into “the realm of earth and matter”,²² rather than as a contrast between the earthly being and the spiritual one. He presents an image of Wisdom as a partnership with God at the creation, whereas the Logos is there before creation “in personal fellowship with God”²³ as an active partnership. The repetition of the Word in the opening verses leads Schnackenburg to conclude that the three phrases lead to a fusion of Logos with God, and not in partnership but in nature. Logos and God are one and the same. However, the same cannot be said of the partnership of Wisdom and God. The divine attributes of Wisdom remain, he argues, as metaphors whereas the Johannine statement “The Word was with God” is a statement about the godhead.²⁴

Brown’s detailed tracing of the Word in the Old Testament expands on Schnackenburg’s idea that Wisdom and God are in partnership, whilst the Word and God are one:

Thus while Hebrew thought would not say that Wisdom was God ... nevertheless Wisdom is divine. The Prologue does not speculate on how the Word proceeds from the Father, other than to identify the Word as God’s only son (monogenès). It is interesting that Wis vii 22 applies the adjective monogenès to Wisdom in the sense of unique.²⁵

But the patriarchal image of Father/God needs to be upheld to preserve many of the denominational structures of the Christian Church and I think that Brown is possibly leaving the door open here for others to make more definitive statements about the oneness of Wisdom and God than perhaps

²²Schnackenburg page 231. Schnackenburg does however note the theological background of the hymn to have been influenced by Wisdom speculation of Hellenistic Judaism and by the Wisdom texts.

²³Schnackenburg, page 234.

²⁴Schnackenburg, page 235.

²⁵Brown, page 522.

his denomination would allow for him to make.²⁶ Sandra Schneiders certainly makes such statements throughout her reading of the Gospel.

The opening of Genesis “In the beginning God created .. “ (Gen 1:1) provides a backdrop to the opening of the Prologue, to the extent that the unfolding revelation of the role of the Word in the world can be interpreted in the context of the creation story.²⁷ The opening of the Prologue confirms the relationship of God to the Word, which Schnackenburg describes as “the nature proper to God and the logos in common. It is only the fullness of divine being with which the son receives from the Father’s love which guarantees his absolute power as revealer and redeemer”.²⁸ This is God’s self-revelation Schneiders argues, since God’s very nature is “self-communication, self-opening, self-gift that is creative of the other”.²⁹ It is Divine Wisdom, she concludes, that goes to “the very limit in entering human history in the person of Jesus ... so that the Word/Holy Wisdom can be spoken to the world in a language we could understand”.³⁰ Revelation in John’s Gospel, she suggests, should be seen as a relationship, as: “an invitation to another to enter intimately into one’s life, to participate in one’s self-hood”.³¹

This self-revelation is explored in the discourse on light and darkness which continues throughout the Gospel. Light is given to the blind to enable them to have physical sight, whilst those who have sight are in the darkness if they are unenlightened by the Word. Light, the first of God’s creations in Genesis, became separated from the darkness that covered the earth (Gen 1:3). The light, which God sees as good (Gen 1:4), is not just the natural medium but is also the light of understanding which comes from having God

²⁶In Appendix II of his commentary on the Gospel, Brown makes stronger associations between God and Wisdom and refers to Jesus as Wisdom personified, page 522ff.

²⁷Bultmann compares the opening two verses with the revelation in 2 Esdras “At the beginning of the circle of the earth before the portals of the world were in place...” (2 Esdras 6:1) as evidence of an infinite existence of the Logos. Bultmann is then able to pose the circular argument that to speak of God is to speak of God’s revelation which in turn is to speak of God. This revelation is that God is beyond all time and creation, page 31.

²⁸Schnackenburg, 234.

²⁹Schneiders, page 49.

³⁰Schneiders page 49

³¹Schneiders page 49

within. The life that is in God is the light of humanity. In the Gospel this separates those who understand the purpose of the Revealer and the revelation, from those who remain unenlightened either through lack of understanding, through ignorance or through choice. Collectively those who remain in the darkness are 'other', separated from God and eternal life.

On the third day of creation, God separated the water from the land and the earth was covered in every sort of vegetation, (Gen 1:4-13), including the tree of life - relevant to the Johannine theme of the food of life (John 6:31, 51) - and the tree from which Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Water and food are symbols repeatedly used by the Evangelist as a means through which Jesus is able to reveal the eternal life that is possible through belief in God. The bread of life and the living water are both sufficient for eternal life but to share in either of these it is essential to know the role of the Revealer as well as the revelation. Brown argues that had Adam and Eve survived "the test", then eternal life and enlightenment would have been available for all humanity.³² Brown therefore implies that there is a link between the darkness that attempts to overcome the light (John 1:5) and the "fall of man",³³ which is the necessary reason for Jesus to come and "triumph over sin".³⁴ But since it is Eve who gives the apple to Adam, it is woman that has become associated with darkness. More than this, woman is *responsible* for the darkness which overtakes men.³⁵ Woman and sin become firmly cemented together in the minds of man. There is no guarantee, however, that Adam and Eve would have eaten fruit from the tree of life had they not eaten from the tree of knowledge, so eating the forbidden fruit becomes a metaphor for separation from God into otherness, a separation caused by women.

Brown may not have intended to expose the negative role of women in such a way. He is really focussing on the "ray of hope"³⁶ that is the light

³²Brown is the only one of my dominant voices who makes the connection between the darkness and sin at this point (page 27). Schnackenburg later connects the rejection of the Word in the world to sin and darkness.

³³Brown, page 27.

³⁴Brown, page 27.

³⁵See the woman's voice in chapter 3, page 25.

³⁶Brown, page 27.

shining in the darkness in the form of Jesus who “as the seed of the woman ... would be victorious over Satan”.³⁷ This conclusion is possible, Brown argues, if the relevant verses of Genesis (3:15) are read with the interpretation that would have been placed upon them by the Johannine community, and further with the way the community developed this motif in Revelation (Rev:12), an intertextual reference to which I will return later in this chapter.

Bultmann, Lindars and Schnackenburg consider ‘light and darkness’ in the context not only of God’s self-revelation but also in terms of human self understanding. The symbolic order is firmly grounded in the fusion of the Word and God, out of which comes the revelation that the Word is the life which enables creation and the light which provides humanity with the opportunity to see and understand its place within that creation. Life and light together provide the freedom of self-understanding, and, when viewed eschatologically, with freedom from death.³⁸ This leads Bultmann to conclude that enlightenment must be a divine gift, because light “has its basis in the life (ζωή) of the Creator”.³⁹ The darkness which leads to the self-misunderstanding is intimately linked with the light, unable to exist without it and leads to humanity making choices of believing in God or rejecting God.⁴⁰ This interpretation of darkness as a revolt against God leads, Bultmann argues, to the mythological figure of the devil rather than to the sin of Eve.

But the darkness is not able to overcome (καταλαμβάνειν) the light, in either sense of it’s meaning. When translated in the sense of understanding, the darkness suggests fallible people who can be restored by the light which cannot be totally diminished. However, if καταλαμβάνειν is translated as the

³⁷Brown, page 27.

³⁸Lindars argues that the Evangelist develops these themes within the accepted religious language of the time. Thus the monotheistic Judaism which accepted the darkness as a symbol of death had been modified by Gnostic and other influences into a moral dualism of inner personal struggle between light and darkness - good and evil. If this modification is the accepted thought of the author it would explain the limited references to the darkness in the rest of the Gospel.

³⁹Bultmann, page 47.

⁴⁰Bultmann, page 47.

darkness overtaking the light as in nightfall, the links with Wisdom who is superior to the light are strengthened. The light is “succeeded by the night but against Wisdom, evil does not prevail (Wis 7:38)”⁴¹ and though light may have been diminished it will still be able to shine forever. This perpetual light is the reason why, although the world rejected Wisdom/Word/Jesus⁴² (Enoch 42:2; John 1:10), the rejection of God was not total. Wisdom, like Jesus was misunderstood (Bar 3:9-27), and was unable to find a place to ‘dwell’⁴³ on earth (Enoch 42)⁴⁴. It is Wisdom who knows and understands all things (Wis 9:11), who as the pre-existent Word comes again to earth in the human form of Jesus and as the Holy Spirit is sent to teach the world what pleased God and will save the world from the darkness of unenlightenment (Wis 9:17-18). The historical event of the Incarnation provides humanity with the opportunity to share in the divine life.⁴⁵

The incarnation is very important to me, other Gods were not human. Divinity is no longer ‘up there’ as an untouchable divine, but here in the human Jesus.

For Bultmann this is the moment when the Word becomes the Revealer⁴⁶ so it is no longer necessary to refer the Word again in the Gospel since those who will now encounter the Revealer will interact with him as the “man from Nazareth It is in his sheer humanity that he is the Revealer”.⁴⁷ The Revealer may well take the human form of a man, but the Prologue uses the word *σάρξ*, rather than *άνήρ*, or *άνθρωπος*, to talk about the Incarnation. This suggests that the Evangelist was focussing more on the revealed glory of God than that the Revealer happened to be in the form of a man. In

⁴¹Lindars, page 87.

⁴²Brown suggests the world rejecting Wisdom is a “reflection of the Johannine theology that Jesus is personified Wisdom” (page 30). Lindars argues that the references to Wisdom strengthen the links to the Old Testament and to Israel as the chosen people. The Johannine use of the word here then means “the human response to the light” and the lack of positive response both to the revelation and to its source comes from humanity’s inability to understand. (page 90).

⁴³The same word is used here for Wisdom’s dwelling as is used in the Prologue for the flesh dwelling on earth. The word *σκηνόν* is used both to fix a tent or tabernacle and to dwell.

⁴⁴Brown, page 522ff, and Schnackenburg page 257.

⁴⁵Schnackenburg, page 267.

⁴⁶Bultmann, page 62 in particular footnote 4.

⁴⁷Bultmann, page 63.

Johannine terms, Schnackenburg argues that σάρξ is “in contrast to all that is divine and spiritual”.⁴⁸ There should be no link here, he insists, between flesh and sin since:

For John, Christ in the flesh is not representative of Adamite man, as in Paul (Rom 8:3) but the leader who brings earth-bound man home to the heavenly world of life and glory ... Σάρξ indicates full human reality.⁴⁹

Though the Evangelist may have been contrasting the spiritual Word with the word as the message proclaimed by the earthly form of the Word, the fact that λόγος is masculine, and the Revealer was a man has enabled the Church at its most functional level, to reinforce the maleness of the Godhead. Women have probably always resisted this vision of the totally male Godhead and continue to explore the wider understanding of the ‘Word made flesh’.

In their book *Conversations on Christian Feminism*,⁵⁰ Elaine Storkey and Margaret Hebblethwaite discuss the question “Is God male, female or neuter?” considering not only how women view God, but how they speak about God. Elaine Storkey speaks:

Our language so easily shrinks God It is difficult not to speak about God in ways that are limiting and restricting I always worried when people protested “of course we don’t believe in a male God”, but then almost in the next breath signified that, even if not male, this God was still patriarchal.⁵¹

And later:

⁴⁸Schnackenburg, page 267.

⁴⁹Schnackenburg, page 268.

⁵⁰Elaine Storkey and Margaret Hebblethwaite, *Conversations on Christian Feminism: Speaking Heart to Heart*,

⁵¹Storkey, page 28.

It is being in relationship with the Father that gives us everything. So, culturally, 'mother' could offer little of this. But we have to be careful when we translate what this means in our time. If we fix on the wrong understanding of 'father' - as a remote authoritarian, rather than the one who gives us access - we make God simply into some forbidding deity who is exacting and disciplining.⁵²

To which Margaret Hebblethwaite responds:

Jesus was making an inclusive point. An embracing and inclusive and welcoming point and it has turned into an exclusive limiting point.⁵³

As family structures change and fathers become more frequently absent, rather than authoritarian figures, we need to be even more careful about how we interpret God as father. In today's society, it may well be 'mother' who is the only one able to offer us anything of what might have once been offered as 'fathering'. Discussing the identity of God with the women I interviewed, it became clear that God was envisaged in a variety of ways:

I have always seen God as being like me - a Black, African child and now a Black African woman.

Do you mean, do I see God as a bowler hatted Englishman? Well the answer is no. But God as father/mother is all nonsense. God is male whose great strength is to be as tender as a mother bending over her cradle. It is wholly stupid to talk of God as anything else. Such talk is the devil's great ploy to take our eyes off the main aim.

I am beginning to realise that God is a very broad God, that he is not even a Protestant never mind Brethren.

⁵²Storkey, page 40.

⁵³Storkey, page 40.

Margaret Davies in her exploration of the theological perspectives of 'God and λόγος',⁵⁴ suggests that "an eternal distinction is posited between the mysteriousness of God in herself⁵⁵ and Logos as God".⁵⁶ She argues that 'Word' is an inappropriate translation of λόγος which would be better translated as meaning God's plan in creation,⁵⁷ which culminates in the incarnate flesh of Jesus the person. Like Bultmann, Davies argues that this event means there is no need to refer to the λόγος again since:

from the readers perspective, God has finally and fully communicated her purpose in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and that the reader has no need to look for it elsewhere.⁵⁸

Although Davies attempts to draw out the feminine in God with her use of personal pronouns, Alison Jasper argues that Davies' view of God is still essentially phallogocentric and at odds with the "multiplicity to which gender bears witness".⁵⁹ Davies fails to explore the *otherness* which Jasper sees present in the Prologue:

a more fundamental change of perspective is needed in which the Prologue has to be seen as more than a theoretical introduction if theology is only to be related to the absolute presence of the transcendent being.⁶⁰

The work of the French feminists has been influential in the development of feminist theories which explore human becoming, divinity and subjectivity.⁶¹

⁵⁴Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*

⁵⁵In her discussion Davies alternates her use of the male and female pronouns, sometimes referring to God as 'he' and at other times as 'she'. Although this is an attempt to diffuse the gender of God I feel that it confuses the issue somewhat and detracts from Davies arguments. See also the comment that Alison Jasper makes on this point.

⁵⁶Davies, page 121.

⁵⁷Davies, page 121.

⁵⁸Davies, page 122.

⁵⁹Alison Jasper, *Shining Garment of the Text*, page 211.

⁶⁰Jasper, page 213.

⁶¹Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva in particular have been influential in this area and Grace Jantzen has developed these theories in formulating her work on natality and what this

Jasper suggests that if one reads the Prologue alongside Kristeva's understanding of subjects as "interpreters of their own lives as of a text they read", then it is possible to read the narrative of the Prologue as a reflection of one's own journey "filling out the notion of divine 'Incarnation'".⁶²

Kristeva identifies the need for separation from the mother in order to become a subject, and thus to enter into language. But to overcome irremediable separation from the maternal, she argues that we use semiotic means which "re-establishes a continuity or fusion with an Other"⁶³ which is symbolic and paternal. It is this separation and return to the source that Jasper suggests is paralleled in the Prologue.⁶⁴ The Word emerges from the Prologue as 'divided speaking subject' closely paralleled in Kristeva's psychoanalysis of human subjectivity.⁶⁵

A Kristevan understanding of separation can be seen in terms of the light and darkness of the Prologue. In a quest for understanding self, Kristeva argues that there is a need for a primary identification with a loving agency which she suggests Christians celebrate in divine love: "God was the first to love us, is love and demands nothing in return".⁶⁶ The light of self understanding comes through accepting this unconditional gift of God's love. For those who, for whatever reason, are not able to accept this gift, the light to understand self can come through psychoanalysis, in which the analysand transfers identification with God to identification to the analyst.⁶⁷ The believer is assured of God's abundant grace (John 1:16) and thus a fusion with God, which Kristeva argues is more semiotic than symbolic.⁶⁸ But for faith to be possible she claims:

this semiotic leap towards the other, this primary identification
with the primitive parental poles close to the maternal

means for a feminist philosophy of religion.

⁶² Jasper, page 214.

⁶³ Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning Was Love*, page 24.

⁶⁴ Jasper, page 214.

⁶⁵ Jasper, page 221.

⁶⁶ Kristeva, page 25.

⁶⁷ Kristeva, page 2.

⁶⁸ Kristeva, page 25.

container, must not be repressed or displaced in the construction of a knowledge which, by understanding of the mechanism of faith, would bury it. Repression can be atheist; atheism is repressive, whereas the experience of psychoanalysis can lead to renunciation of faith with clear understanding.⁶⁹

Kristeva defines abjection as a necessary stage in the managing of the split from the maternal into identification with the paternal. Thus through this process the child is able to identify with the father of individual prehistory to encounter a discourse of love as agape and consequently to become a speaking subject.⁷⁰ Abjection, however, stays with us as an 'exteriority' which Jasper understands as 'abominable and a reversal of desire'⁷¹ so parallels the darkness in the Prologue:

[abjection] ... is a darkness in the sense that it shades or blinds, covering over the prehistory of a fusion with the gratifying mother with a series of more or less repetitive and repulsing associations or symptoms that help to prevent subjects imploding or reverting and yet porous enough to allow some sense of that drive energy to find expression in a creative zest for life.⁷²

Kristeva herself describes abjection as "immoral, sinister, scheming, a terror that disassembles".⁷³ But the darkness is overtaken by the light of a primary identification with God and the ability to become Children of God (John 1:12); the significance of which, Jasper suggests is "transferred into the realm of the speaking subject which is *always* and *necessarily* at the intersection of conscious and unconscious motivations."⁷⁴ By such a

⁶⁹Kristeva, page 26.

⁷⁰Julia Kristeva (b 1941): Introduction', Pamela Sue Anderson in *Post Modern God. A Theological Reader*, page 216.

⁷¹Jasper, page 225.

⁷²Jasper, page 226.

⁷³Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, page 4.

⁷⁴Jasper, page 228.

Kristevan analysis of subjectivity, Jasper is able to link the divine Word which is associated with patriarchal symbolism with the maternal body via abjection.

In Christian understanding the Logos is fused with God and temporarily separated from God as it becomes flesh. By creating heaven and earth in the beginning, Kristeva argues that God creates the division which is also the mark of God's presence.⁷⁵ It is then possible Jasper suggests, to read the rest of the Prologue as celebration of the achievement of living as "heterogeneous subjectivity, revealing the father".⁷⁶ Flesh is a heterogeneous concept for Kristeva, pointing both to a body as drive and a sublimated spiritual body "completely submersed into (divine) speech in order to become beauty and love".⁷⁷

Grace Jantzen,⁷⁸ prefers to engage with Kristeva's argument to explore the philosophy of natality. The Word in its separation from God ensures that the Word becomes flesh. Language is not separated from the body, "word, and 'flesh' can be met at any moment, for better or for worse",⁷⁹ which Jantzen argues opens up the possibility for divine be/coming.⁸⁰ The text she argues "enacts a deeper metaphor: the embodiment of the word, the articulation of the flesh: incarnation, becoming human/divine in a context and process of natality".⁸¹ As natals, she argues, we can freely adapt and reshape the cultural symbolic, by entering into language through healing the rift between the semiotic and the symbolic: "Such bringing together by natals of symbolic and semiotic, word and flesh in speech and action for love of the world is incarnation, becoming human/divine."⁸²

The incarnation of the Word in the Prologue, does not therefore need to become flesh through the medium of this unique 'other' - whose

⁷⁵Kristeva, *In The Beginning Was Love*, page 31.

⁷⁶Jasper, page 232.

⁷⁷Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, page 125.

⁷⁸Grace M Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*

⁷⁹Kristeva, *In The Beginning Was Love*, page 6.

⁸⁰Jantzen, page 202.

⁸¹Jantzen, page 203.

⁸²Jantzen, page 203.

impregnation comes from sources outside the norm for human creation. The 'word of life' that emerges as the message of the Gospel in the human form of Jesus, has no need to emerge from the womb of a virgin mother, instead it emerges from Wisdom, a parallel perhaps for the Kristevan chora⁸³ - providing the space in which the speaking subject is formed. Wisdom is eternal, in existence before and after historical time enclosing the temporal in the same way as the womb encloses the developing child. By replacing σοφία with λόγος, to meet the cultural norms of the time, the Evangelist has ensured that the attributes of Wisdom are all attached to the incarnate Jesus through the Word. The mother of Jesus is then freed to be seen as woman/mother with a clear role in enabling the revelation of God's glory through her son.

The first encounter with the mother of Jesus in the fourth Gospel is at Cana where the first sign of the revelation takes place (John 2:11). Jesus' mother is at a wedding with Jesus and his followers. When the wine runs out before the end of the festivities Jesus appears to dismiss his mother's concern with his comment "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). Unperturbed, she advises the servants "Do whatever he tells you". It is not my intention here to explore the sign itself but to consider the maternal role in the sign and the effect on Jesus' followers. Within the Johannine Gospel, Jesus refers to his ministry as completing the work of the one who sent him (John 4:34; 5:17, 20, 36; 10:25, 17:4). As this ministry is to reveal God through the signs and through the word of the Gospel, the signs (σημείων) become incorporated into the works (ἔργον).⁸⁴ The signs exist alongside the word to immediately enlighten those with whom Jesus interacts and subsequently those who read the Gospel. They both serve as means by which humanity is able to share in the light and life of God.

In this first sign, we can argue that in fact it is the mother of Jesus who enables this enlightenment since she ignores Jesus' comment about his time

⁸³Toril Moi (ed) "Revolution in Poetic Language" in *The Kristeva Reader* page 94ff.

⁸⁴Brown suggests that the Old Testament provides the background for the Johannine use of both signs and work. See Appendix III of vol 1 for a detailed discussion.

and instructs the servants anyway.⁸⁵ As a result of her intervention the disciples are enlightened by Jesus' self-revelation. Clearly Jesus' mother knows that her son's purpose is to provide for the spiritual, not the material needs of the community. The dialogue can be seen therefore not as one of

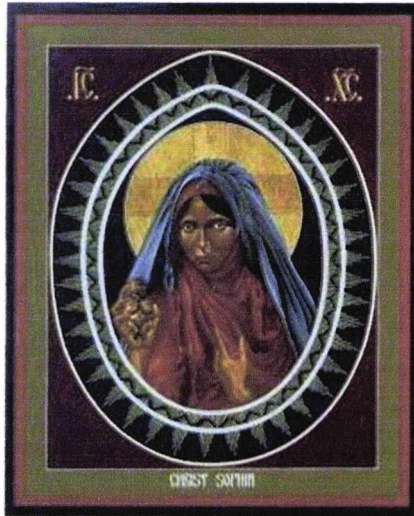


Fig 6.b Christ Sophia

'request - rebuttal- ignore' but as one of 'inform - listen - enable'. Jesus' mother is aware that those who do not already believe, need this sign to understand Jesus' ministry. Martin Scott suggests that an understanding of Jesus' mother's role can be found in the "light of Jesus as Sophia incarnate". As one of Sophia's disciples, he argues, Jesus' mother knows that she needs to ask Sophia for wine since Sophia is the source of spiritual food and drink (Sir 24:21,

Prov 9:5). By instructing the servants, Jesus' mother "assumes a position of responsibility/leadership"⁸⁶ in preparing the way for the miracle.

Brown's suggestion that the text should be interpreted alongside the Old Testament within the understanding with which the Johannine community would have understood them, is particularly appropriate in exploring the relationship between Jesus and his mother here, and as it develops through the rest of the Gospel. A consideration of the intertextuality between Wisdom theology, the creation story in Genesis (3:4-15), and the woman in Revelation (12:1-17), will enable a stronger conclusion to be drawn concerning the maternal in the sign. In Revelation a woman appears in heaven "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev 12:1). Margaret Barker⁸⁷ offers a range of possible identifications for this woman of which the Queen of Heaven, the Daughter of Zion, the Lady Wisdom and the Holy Spirit are of interest to my

⁸⁵Brown notes the similarity here between the instructions Jesus' mother gives to the servants and those of Pharaoh in Gen 51:55, page 100.

⁸⁶ Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus*, page 181.

⁸⁷Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*.

argument. As the Queen of Heaven, Barker presents her as the woman who would give birth to Immanuel (Isa 7:14) and as the woman who “would give birth to the mighty shepherd of Israel (Mic 5:2-4).⁸⁸ In her guise as the Daughter of Zion, awoken from her abandonment (Isa 49:14) and re-clothed as the Queen (Isa 52:1-2), the woman is the city:

The city becomes the mother of many more children and enjoys renewed prosperity.... [The exiled woman] became a symbol or personification of the restored city As Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he fulfilled the prophecy that the King would return to the Daughter of Zion (Zech 9:9; Matt 21:5; John 12:15).⁸⁹

But it is as Wisdom that the strongest links between the Johannine maternal and the Old Testament are forged, enabling woman to be reclaimed as light rather than darkness. Barker provides evidence from Proverbs (8:22; 30) as well as the Psalms (Ps 104:24) to support her identification of the woman as co-creator of the world.⁹⁰ She is the “Tree in Eden” (which Barker argues was originally one tree) and as such is the gift of eternal life through which comes the ability to “make humans like God”.⁹¹ Barker notes the references to Wisdom in Sirach, especially those to “taking root as a tree among time honoured people” (Sir 24:12 -17), and as the abundant water that become rivers of instruction (Sir:24 31-33). However, I feel, the strongest Wisdom references in relation to Cana are those of Wisdom as the vine:

I bud forth delight and my blossoms become glorious and abundant fruit. Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits Those who eat of me will hunger for more, and those who drink of me will thirst for more (Sir 24:18 - 22).

⁸⁸Barker, page 202.

⁸⁹Barker, page 202/3.

⁹⁰Barker, page 203.

⁹¹Barker, page 203.

The image of the vine is so poetic and so powerful. The imagery allows me to unwrap the message and helps to make it stick.

The Evangelist relates that the Cana sign happened on the third day (John 2:1). Is this the third day of Jesus' ministry, or the third day after the baptism of Jesus when the Holy Spirit descended and remained with him (John 1:32),⁹² or a reference to the resurrection,⁹³ symbolic of the new era,⁹⁴ or is it a reference to creation? The third day of creation was the day when the water in the seas and the rivers became separated from the dry land, and so along with the vegetation became a material source of life. The abundance of water in creation which will be the source to sustain life on the land is reflected in the abundance of water that is transformed into the best wine in this sign - the wine which will eventually be the blood of life, which will also be in abundance for those who believe, and will be the source of eternal life.

The reference to the third day is not just as a reminder of the source of life in the form of water and wine. It also has an importance in the way in which Jesus' mother is seen as an enabler of enlightenment. If as Margaret Barker suggests, Wisdom is the 'Tree in Eden' and Wisdom can be seen as integral to Jesus' mother, then Wisdom becomes the key to understanding the sign and the revelation. Woman, in the representation of Eve, ceases to be the source of darkness/otherness but becomes the source of spiritual enlightenment through Jesus' mother. Her awareness of her son as the incarnate God/λόγος/σοφία comes through her own identity with Wisdom. With this sign Jesus splits from his life as a man to enter his life as Revealer. The split has been managed and enabled by the mother and so can be seen paralleled in the Kristevan analysis of the child separating from the maternal semiotic to enter into the realm of the paternal symbolic.

⁹²Barrett suggests a possible 6 days from the day that is last mentioned in 1:43-5'; Lindars suggests the 8th day of Jesus ministry as possible, Schnackenburg rejects any symbolic meaning in the phrase.

⁹³Lindars, Brown, Barrett and Schnackenburg all discuss this possibility.

⁹⁴Lindars considers this as an option.

The image of woman as Wisdom and light, provider of spiritual food somehow became replaced with the image of woman as Eve and darkness, through tempting the man to eat the forbidden fruit. If the woman in Revelation can be interpreted as 'Wisdom', and as 'the mother whose child is Jesus',⁹⁵ then is it not possible to argue that Wisdom is personified not only in Jesus but also in his mother? The mother is not just a 'follower who can take a responsible leadership role' but at the separation of the child from the mother, she too has had a role in imparting Wisdom to her son. Wisdom is the source of life and knowledge and therefore a source of enlightenment, which comes to the disciples and the reader, not just through the signs of the son but through actions of the mother.

The Evangelist carefully structures the Gospel with the signs linked by discourses attributed to Jesus helping to build the sense of intense wonder as the signs reveal more and more of the dualism of Jesus and God. The reader is carefully led from the darkness into the light through the people that Jesus encounters and the actions that he takes. Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus (3:1 -21) lets the reader know that Jesus' mission is also to teach (3:2) the importance of coming to a new understanding of the meaning of baptism and birth, as a means of entry into the kingdom of God. Nicodemus' confusion over "heavenly things" enables the reader to become clear in their own understanding. By then introducing almost as an aside the fact that Jesus and John were both baptising at a place where water was in abundance (3: 22-23), the Evangelist reaffirms in the reader's understanding, the significance of baptism in the Holy Spirit and at the same time prepares the reader for the significance of the 'living water' discourse that Jesus is about to have with the Samaritan woman. There was an abundance of water at Cana, an abundance of water for baptism and now the 'living water' will be a source of eternal life.

⁹⁵John Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation*, explores the possibility of identifying the figure of the woman with Jesus' mother, but argues that "the evidence falls short of proof either that the theme of the representative woman has been developed in this way, or that the early church saw Mary in this light" .

Nicodemus questions the symbolism of rebirth by attempting to imagine a second entry into the womb (3:4), the Samaritan woman by contrast enters immediately into the symbolic as she asks for the living water (4:15) that Jesus offers her. Schneiders suggests that this is because although the woman did not have a greater capacity for knowledge than Nicodemus, she had a greater “capacity for involvement and commitment”,⁹⁶ than he did. This difference in the level of knowledge between Nicodemus and the woman is debatable, but what the woman demonstrates, I feel, is the ability that we all have to come through abjection as a means of entry into subjectivity.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva studies abjection through the Levitical code of food taboos. Such an analysis leads her to conclude “that the object excluded by these rules, whatever form it may take in biblical narrative, is ultimately the mother”.⁹⁷ To become subjects it is necessary to separate from the mother, by rejecting the object of initial desire. Kristeva argues it is “not the lack of cleanliness ... that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules”.⁹⁸ The Samaritan woman is classically unclean. She is a menstruant from the cradle,⁹⁹ in the Levitical code (Lev 15:27), and here represents the absolute opposite of the purity of the virgin mother. Throughout the discourse, the Evangelist has Jesus return to the Levitical code, - the woman questions why Jesus should request a drink from her when they both know that her uncleanness will contaminate him (John 4:9); both she and Jesus refer to Samaritan theology as they discuss the physical properties of the material water in comparison to the eternal properties of the living water (John 4:10-15). Clearly Jesus’ interaction with the woman does not respect the societal rules and is meant to disturb the reader from the complacency of the

⁹⁶Schneiders (page 68) argues that although Nicodemus clearly had the greater knowledge, he was refusing the involvement demanded by the symbolic discourse. She later however presents a feminist reading of the pericope of the Samaritan woman which to my mind indicates that the woman has a greater knowledge than Nicodemus of Levitical theology and who the messiah was (see pages 137-144).

⁹⁷Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, page 118.

⁹⁸Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, page 4.

⁹⁹ Leviticus 15:27 declared that anyone touching things belonging to a woman menstruating would be unclean. Since Samaritan women were considered to be constant menstruants it was to be assumed that they were permanently unclean.

patriarchal message and challenge its relevance to contemporary society. In effect, it is the inverse of abjection.

Brown questions the likelihood of a Samaritan woman having “been expected to understand even the most basic ideas of the discourse”¹⁰⁰ yet she knows of the importance to the Samaritans of Jacob’s well; of the coming of a Messiah; of the place of worship of her ancestors on the mountain and seems very confident to discuss them with a complete stranger. Brown does concede, however, that if the Samaritan use of the phrases “gift of God” and “living water” were the same as in Judaism then the woman “could have understood that Jesus was presenting himself and his doctrine as the replacement of the Torah in which the Samaritans believed”.¹⁰¹ But Samaritan theology of creation and the waters of life itself parallels Johannine theology, in part. John Macdonald¹⁰² references the importance of the Law to Samaritan theology which is seen not only as the tree of life which provides eternal life to those who eat it, but also in the light of understanding and in the waters of life. He quotes the references:

The life of the world is in deep waters of a pleasant water-spring. Let us stand in perception to drink of its waters.
We are thirsty for the waters of life (Mimar II)¹⁰³

and

This is a well of living water dug by a prophet whose like has not arisen from mankind (Mimar VI.3)¹⁰⁴

This prophet is subsequently described as having a mouth

like Euphrates, rolling with living waters which quench the thirst of all who drink of them (Mimar VI:3)¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Brown, page 176.

¹⁰¹ Brown, page 176.

¹⁰² John Macdonald, *The Theology of The Samaritans*

¹⁰³ Macdonald, page 298.

¹⁰⁴ Macdonald, page 435.

¹⁰⁵ MacDonald, page 435.

It is this reference to living water that Macdonald sees paralleled in the Johannine encounter with the woman at the well, and in Revelation (22:1). For my quest of seeking the maternal in the revelation, the language of the Samaritan philosopher Markah closely resembles that of Sirach when he describes the law of Moses as running over “like the Euphrates, with understanding” (Sir 24:26). The law is therefore linked with creation and with Wisdom.

The woman's intellect seems to be overshadowed in the opinions of my dominant male voices by her morality. She is a notorious sinner,¹⁰⁶ living a markedly immoral life,¹⁰⁷ who appears at the well at midday to avoid the other women.¹⁰⁸ This is conveniently though the time that a traveller would seek to rest¹⁰⁹ and so the woman acts as a foil for the discourse that is to follow.¹¹⁰ Margaret Davies calls the woman “a half hearted missionary”¹¹¹ who is judged purely on her marital status. It is interesting that this Samaritan woman has been immortalised for her so called immorality, whilst the same cannot be said of the woman used as an example to test Jesus, by the Sadducees in Mark's Gospel (Mk 12: 19-24). Although this woman's marriages to each of seven brothers, as one after the other they die, would be as unlikely as the Samaritan woman's five marriages, there is no understanding of the woman in Mark's Gospel being immoral. This is no ‘real woman’, rather a metaphorical woman used as an illustration of divine law. Is it possible then that the Samaritan woman's five marriages are a metaphorical device used to enable a discourse to develop between Jesus and the woman on Wisdom theology - a discourse through which subjectivity is possible? Might the reference to this woman's five husbands be a reference to the five cities from whose flames Wisdom rescued the righteous man (Wis 10:6)? Jesus as the embodied Sophia, is able to liberate

¹⁰⁶Schnackenburg, page 424.

¹⁰⁷Brown, page 171.

¹⁰⁸Schnackenburg claims the woman is held in low esteem by her fellows, page 433.

¹⁰⁹Bultmann, page 178.

¹¹⁰Brown includes the woman along with Nicodemus, the paralytic (ch 5), and blind man (ch 9) as foils to enable Jesus to unfold his self revelation, page 176.

¹¹¹Davies, page 227.

this woman, and therefore all women from the taboos which separate them from subjectivity.

Kristeva argues that the book of Leviticus in delineating the precise limits of abjection has “developed a true archaeology of the advent of the subject”.¹¹² It is a text which allows the subject to voice disappointments, acknowledging “bodily discomforts”:

It shapes the very borders of my defeats, *for it has probed into the ambivalent desire for the other*, for the mother is the first other *which is at the base, that is, on the other side of that which makes me into a speaking being (a separating, dividing, joining being)*.¹¹³

Throughout Jesus’ discourse with the woman, we are able to re-examine those personal disappointments and frailties of our own which prevent us from becoming fully subject. Jesus allows this woman the space to acknowledge her subjectivity, by not rejecting her as unclean ‘other’, so that she can become separate and autonomous. Rereading this text as contemporary women, we are able to draw on the disrupting behaviour of Jesus and the woman to find our own space as complete women:

A place that gives meaning to the crises of subjectivity, during which meaning, disturbed as it is by object - abject of desire, eludes me and “I” run the risk of falling into the indifference of a narcissistic, lethal fusion.¹¹⁴

The woman leaves behind her water jar (4:28) as she begins her role as missionary to the people of her city. This act may be of no consequence, as suggested by the male voices,¹¹⁵ but it is a useful metaphorical receptacle

¹¹²Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, page 119.

¹¹³Kristeva, page 119.

¹¹⁴Kristeva, page 119.

¹¹⁵See Linda McKinnish Bridges “John 4:5 - 42 ‘So the woman left her waterpot...’ (v 28)” *Interpretations* April 1994.

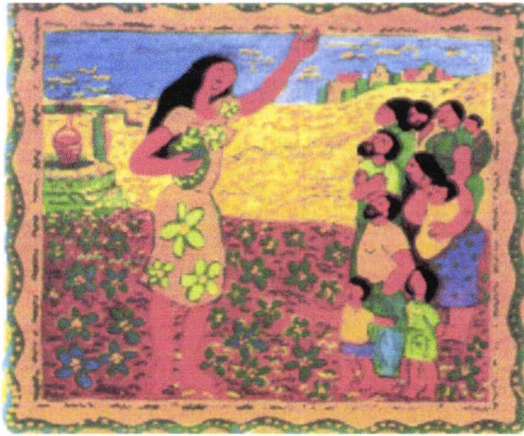


Fig 6.c Mehetabel of Samaria

into which the abject which persists as a “threatening otherness”¹¹⁶ can be placed to allow a rebirth of self as a whole and complete subject. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel considers the jar as historically being a powerful symbol of femaleness; whilst the woman passively waits for the active male to fill: “she remains related to him, open like her jar”.¹¹⁷ Through leaving this jar behind Moltmann-Wendel also suggests that women can leave behind old female symbols to become “something different: a source from which new, independent and living things can proceed”.¹¹⁸

I was living in the city away from my family when I had a real sense that I should go home at once as something was wrong. I started to walk to my family's village. I walked for 30 miles, through country side littered with dead bodies. I found my family hiding in a barn and the village destroyed. They pleaded with me to return to the town as to stay would put their lives in danger. The next day I started back on my journey but was stopped by a lorry full of soldiers. They made me get in and demanded to know if I had seen anyone on my travels. I was very frightened, but God helped me to convince them that the village was destroyed and no one was alive.

As a picture of a real woman with whom contemporary women might identify, the Samaritan woman presents a picture of intelligence, knowledgeable but also possibly suffering. If her visit to the well is interpreted in relation to ‘moral exclusion’ then the inclusive nature of Jesus is heightened. It is possible that this woman’s abjection comes in the form of seeking ‘love’ but not finding it in any permanency within her sexual relationships. It is possible that she has suffered from the abuses that many women experience under a

¹¹⁶Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, page 19.

¹¹⁷Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *I Am My Body*, page 81.

¹¹⁸Moltmann-Wendel, page 83.

harsh patriarchal code and may have been an innocent victim of divorce. Many contemporary women are suffering the effects of abuse in patriarchal relationships; they struggle to survive in second and third relationships and can identify with the emotions that this woman may have experienced whatever her reasons for so many husbands. Possibly the woman did suffer from low self esteem as so many women in today's society do, so that women readers of the Gospel can see this woman in themselves and are able to also identify with the loving agency of divine love,¹¹⁹ as she did.

The pericope of the Samaritan woman is placed in a chiasmic structure between the first and second signs which both take place at Cana. The first sign is enabled by a woman and leads to the disciples' enlightenment. This sign is followed by a lengthy discourse in which the darkness seems to come more to the fore with Nicodemus' apparent confusion about Jesus' self revelation. In contrast the second theological discourse brings the reader back into the light through the Samaritan woman who literally encounters Jesus at the height of the natural light - noon,¹²⁰ and enables the people of Samaria to share in the understanding that Jesus is the Messiah. The reader is enlightened by the word of the dialogue and has this confirmed by the action of the Word in the second sign at Cana in which the son of the royal official is healed (4:46-54).

As the text progresses the signs continue to reaffirm in the readers' mind the divinity of Christ. Kristeva suggests that this is achieved through the semiological debate which comes to a head in chapter six of the Gospel. The Evangelist, she argues, presents this debate through contrasting Jesus' "concepts of the signs with those of the 'people'".¹²¹ These 'people' are the Jews who appear to be in disharmony (6 - 8) with the Johannine community. It is this discourse containing the charges by the Jews and Jesus' responses to them that has led John's Gospel to be considered as possibly anti-Semitic. Kristeva asserts, however, that it is necessary for the Evangelist

¹¹⁹See page 11 of this chapter.

¹²⁰Schneiders also makes the comparison here between night and day but considers this in the context of Jewish conversion.

¹²¹Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, page 127.

to engage in this semiological debate in order “to found his high Christology”.¹²² At first Jesus is presented as a magician drawing the crowds to follow him through his healings (6:2); his transformation of the loaves and fishes to feed the multitude (6:5-14) and finally by walking on the water (John 6:16-21).¹²³ But it is from this point onwards she argues, that the Evangelist begins to attach new meaning to the signs:

... are Jesus’ signs a renewal of biblical signs? If so how might we recognise them? It is at this point that John has Jesus create a new semiology.¹²⁴

For a sign to have value for the receiver, Kristeva argues, it must respond to the sensory needs of the receiver. Her argument indicates the necessity for the receiver to recognise the corporeal needs of hunger and thirst so that the response to them allows the signs “to attain the power that grants them their status as signs”.¹²⁵ By adding what Kristeva describes as “a sensory layer to the signs”, the Evangelist is able to use the words of Jesus as a means of interpreting the signs as “a satisfaction of the primordial need to survive”.¹²⁶ The Evangelist’s narrative then encourages the reader to cease to be satisfied by the sight of the sign alone, but to be transformed by it rather than subjugated by it, into the person the reader truly is.¹²⁷

By acknowledging that a need for hunger and thirst must be satisfied it is possible Kristeva argues, for the reader to make what she sees as the “second shift” into meeting the needs of “I”. For Jesus the “I am “ statements clarify not only his filial relationship to God but also offer the believer the opportunity to determine their own subjectivity. By accepting that Jesus *is* the ‘bread of life’ the believer not only acknowledges the pre-existent divinity

¹²²Kristeva, page 127.

¹²³Kristeva, page 128. The biblical signs in particular refer to the manna given by Moses to his people.

¹²⁴ Kristeva, page 128.

¹²⁵ Kristeva, page 128.

¹²⁶ Kristeva, page 128.

¹²⁷Kristeva, page 129.

of Jesus (8:58), but is also able themselves to enter the eternal life through the Eucharistic bread/wine, body/blood of Jesus as Christ (6:41 - 58).

To participate in this signification Kristeva argues, it is not enough just to recognise the sign as a revelation of the 'giver', but to open up the "interior, invisible space",¹²⁸ so that the Evangelist's semiology is transformed into "an intensely symbolic dimension":

It is not a matter of 'seeing' the Father or of 'knowing' that the Son is the 'bread which came down from heaven' - in the same way that one 'knows' one's own mother and father (6:41-66). Only he who 'comes' from the God has 'seen' the Father visual *representation* is replaced by a *provenance* that is at once physical (traveling, filiation) and symbolic (giving meaning), for it is because the Son *believes* He is signified and generated by the Third Party (the Father) that He ensures His trust and incites the trust of other people. When meaning is subjective, it is derived from this trust.¹²⁹

When, as believers, we eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ, Kristeva argues that we have an "intense identification with the absolute subject-Christ".¹³⁰ The Eucharist identification enables the believer to enter into "diverse realms of subjective experience - from affects to sublimated love, from all-consuming violence to an assimilating trust and vice-versa",¹³¹ as God abides in the believer and the believer in God (6:56). The advantage of such 'subjectivation' Kristeva proposes, is the effect that the body becomes revitalised through the unification with the absolute Subject through speech:

This experience of sensory and corporeal regeneration through the effect of transport - of transference - onto the

¹²⁸Kristeva, page 130.

¹²⁹Kristeva, page 130.

¹³⁰Kristeva, page 131.

¹³¹Kristeva, page 131.

love of the other is imagined to be a guarantee of immortality and resurrection.¹³²

Kristeva's analysis would suggest that the semiological discourse of signs exists only in chapter six and concludes with the knowledge that eternal life is available through eating the bread which came down from heaven (6:58). Yet it is through this revelation that many turned away from Jesus because they did not understand (6:66; 64), suggesting that the semiological discourse continues to the end of the Gospel.

From this point the signs intensify in their complexity as they build towards the final sign of the return of Jesus to God/Wisdom. The Evangelist, however, needs to precede these final signs with a lengthy theological discourse in which Jesus reaffirms to the Jewish people that he has come from God (8:28), and that he will be with them for only a little while longer until he returns to the one who sent him (7:33). This narrative draws the readers' attention to the division that is developing within the temple hierarchy (7:44) regarding Jesus' testament (8:13-18). The darkness builds as the Jews challenge Jesus' statements about the Father (8:19-20), his divinity (8:23) and the opportunity for eternal life that is possible through him (8:51).

Alan Culpepper's¹³³ critique of the characters in the Gospel, presents the Jews as essential to the Evangelist's exploration of belief and unbelief. They function, he suggests, to represent all that is connected with "the wrong side of John's dualism",¹³⁴ the negativity associated with coming "from below", whilst Jesus comes "from above" (8:23). This does not mean that the Evangelist views the Jews *per se* in a negative light, but because, as religious people they "have had the advantage of the heritage of Israel",¹³⁵ in their misunderstanding of Jesus they become representative of the contrasting belief of the old order and the advantages to be gained by belief

¹³²Kristeva, page 132.

¹³³R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, page 129.

¹³⁴Culpepper, page 129.

¹³⁵Culpepper page 129.

sign physically provides new sight for one who has never seen, but in doing so it deprives those who can see but do not understand the sign of sight in the form of the light of enlightenment, thus rendering them blind to the relationship between Jesus and God (John 9:35-41). Kristeva's comment regarding visual representations being replaced by a physical and symbolic provenance is as valid here as it is regarding the "I am" discourse of chapter six. As the believer gains ever increasing insight, the light can be seen to constantly 'rupture' the darkness of blindness but does not necessarily remove it completely. This can be paralleled in Kristeva's discourse on the paternal symbolic as "the site of semiological ruptures and upheavals"¹⁴¹ which Kristeva sees as maternal.

This sign is not just another healing magic act. The man's blindness is a crucial aspect of God's plan¹⁴² for the revelation that Jesus and God are one and the same:

he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world (John 9:3-5).

Like the others, this sign points back to creation whilst at the same time pointing forward to the death of Jesus when he will no longer be in the world in human form.

A long time ago I was very depressed. I had almost given up my belief. A friend, who was a priest, talked to me about blindness. By meditating and contemplating alongside the blind man [in John], it is possible to see who Jesus is, and the way in which he responds to personal blindness leads us to other journeys. I am conscious that from blindness I ask for signs, but have been following the path very much of the human Jesus. I am only now beginning to think about the divinity, about Jesus as God.

¹⁴¹Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, page 70.

¹⁴²See earlier in the chapter for the comment on Margaret Davies interpretation of λόγος.

in the new order. The Jews claim that Jesus is a Samaritan and possessed by a demon (8:48). Schnackenburg notes that this charge is unique in the Gospel, and although it must be connected to the discourse with the Jews, its precise meaning is not obvious.¹³⁶ His analysis suggests three possible meanings - that it is a term suggesting Jesus as heretic, an alignment of Jesus' philosophy with that of the Gnostics who claim divinity, or, a suggestion that Jesus' actions are linked to idolatry and magic.¹³⁷ This claim need not be seen as a term of abuse then, but as an indication that the Evangelist wants to emphasize the unifying role of Jesus for all communities.

The Evangelist has already used the Samaritan woman as being the first to recognise that Jesus is the fulfilment not only of the Samaritan messianic hope,¹³⁸ but also that of the Jews. He has used Jesus' discourse with the woman to reveal the closeness of the Johannine theology with that of the Samaritans and although the Johannine theology of Jesus as the light of the world contrasts with the Samaritan understanding of God's light in creation, there is a common identification among the Samaritans and Jesus of the Spirit and the light.¹³⁹ John Bowman poses the question then, has the Evangelist "attempted to build a bridge in Christ between the Samaritans and the Jews?"¹⁴⁰ Jesus' teaching may have been more closely allied to Samaritan understanding than to Jewish understanding, but the essential message of the Gospel is that through Christ, eternal life is possible for everyone. The accusation of the Jews (8:48) need not be seen as part of an anti-Semitic discourse by the Evangelist, but as a means of heightening the significance to the next sign in which physical sight is given to a man who has been permanently blind (9:1-41).

Metaphorically this blind man represents those who have not yet come into the light, but who can be drawn into the light through the sense of sight. The

¹³⁶Schnackenburg (Vol 2), page 218.

¹³⁷Schnackenburg refers to the examples of the Samaritans Dositheus and Simon Magus and to the later period in which the Samaritan Gnostics are referred to as Χριστινοί (page 492 ft 119,120) Brown also makes reference to how these powers were "greatly esteemed" in Samaria, (vol 1 page 358).

¹³⁸John Bowman, *The Samaritan Problem*, page 61

¹³⁹Bowman, page 66.

¹⁴⁰Bowman, page 63.

Once again, the Evangelist separates the signs with a discourse. The “I am” sayings now describe Jesus’ earthly mission in the context of his divine persona. “I am the gate” (10:6), refers to the entry of the Word into the world through which entry into the eternal life is possible. As the “good shepherd” (10:11), Jesus refers to the final sign - the death and return to God (10:15). And like a good shepherd the Word will provide whatever is necessary to reform the thoughts of the unbelievers who remain in the darkness (10:16), through the word. Some of the people are still not convinced by the discourse and so the way is prepared for the build up to the final sign.

This build up starts with the death and resurrection of Lazarus (11:1-45). Lazarus’ death, like the blind man’s disability, is an integral part of God’s plan¹⁴³ (11:4). It is a turning point in Jesus’ journey to the cross.¹⁴⁴ The role of the women in the sign is once again crucial to the revelation of the nature of Jesus. Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, send a message to Jesus telling him of their brother’s illness. The women both hope for a cure for their brother, but by the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been in his tomb for four days. The story which emerges as Jesus’ response to the women’s message is the prototype of Jesus own death and resurrection. Its significance comes in the messages and symbolism of death, light and life that the Evangelist uses in telling the story.¹⁴⁵ When Martha hears that Jesus is nearby she goes out to meet him. She appears dejected that he has arrived too late, but knows that God will do whatever Jesus asks (11:22). The reader is reminded of the words of Jesus’ mother at Cana¹⁴⁶ and so is aware that a sign may be given.¹⁴⁷ Martha, too, at first seems to assume that Jesus’ reference to her brother rising again (11:23) is the Jewish eschatological understanding of resurrection not recognising immediately

¹⁴³Brown., page 431.

¹⁴⁴Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John (Vol 2)*, page 344.

¹⁴⁵ The role of the women in the story is discussed in the commentaries and differs according to the sources cited for the evangelist’s source. For the relevance of the two women in the story see Schnackenburg (*Vol 2*, page 319), Brown (page 431).

¹⁴⁶Brown links the first part of Martha’s statement to Jesus’ mother’s request at Cana as a “half expressed hope that Jesus will redeem an impossible situation”, (page 434).

¹⁴⁷Schnackenburg argues that the miracle is suggested to the reader without the petitioner herself thinking it. (*Vol 2* page 329). Barrett notes Martha’s faith in Jesus and her confidence that he will help her (page 394).

that the light and life are standing before her in the Incarnate Word.¹⁴⁸ But when Jesus asks her if she believes that “those who live in me even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26), Martha has no hesitation in recognising the oneness of Jesus and God.¹⁴⁹

The symbolism is twofold: the restoration of Lazarus to life reaffirms for the reader that this is a further sign of the divine nature of the Word made flesh, but Lazarus’ movement from death to life is also symbolic of the life for all Christians - namely that they have immediate salvation in Christ.¹⁵⁰ The miraculous raising of Lazarus points forward to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and therefore the ultimate glorification of God, which for Bultmann is the importance of the sign.¹⁵¹ Martha and Mary, like the woman at the well are seen purely as foils for the revelation, and are portrayed in a poor light by the commentators.¹⁵² This may be because the male commentators are themselves more interested in the actual revelation than the surrounding context in which it takes place. Men are used to being at the forefront of discovery so to them it is sufficient to see only the role of the Evangelist who by writing the Gospel has enabled us as readers to believe in the Revelation.

This is, of course, true in one sense, but as women we can see the importance of the Evangelist’s use of the women in the Gospel to be much more empowering than just acting as foils. Mary’s repetition of Martha’s

¹⁴⁸ Brown, page 434/5.

¹⁴⁹ Schnackenburg concedes that the Jewish expectations of the Messiah have been fulfilled and surpassed with Martha’s use of the title “Son of God” since Jesus’ union with God is unique (*Vol 2*, page 332). That Martha’s faith is genuine is accepted by both Barrett and Bultmann.

¹⁵⁰ Barrett, page 395.

¹⁵¹ The roles of the women however are not as important to Bultmann as the opportunity it gives Jesus to speak as the Revealer, “he is the Resurrection and the Life, since for those who believe in him..., life and death... are no longer realities.”

¹⁵² Bultmann portrays Martha simply as a “picture of faith...not the delineation of an individual (Martha) mighty through faith” (page 402). Schnackenburg concludes that Mary “gives the impression of being nothing but a complaining woman, an impression strengthened by the context”. The meeting remains “fairly colourless an interval leading into Jesus meeting with the Jews” (*Vol 2*, page 333/4). Brown agrees the story is not advanced by Mary’s meeting with Jesus (page 435), whilst Barrett sees Mary acting with greater devotion than Martha, no doubt through the act of falling at Jesus’ feet (page 398). Culpepper (page 142) also comments on Mary’s extravagant love.

words, for example, emphasises the confidence both women have in Jesus in stark contrast to the unbelief of the bystanders (John 11:37). Their belief enables our belief. Just why these women are so important, not only to the miracle, but also to contemporary women, can be drawn out through intertextual references in the Gospel and to the intertextual references of the women's own life stories. Mary and Martha are particular role models for some of the women that I interviewed either in a serving role or as models of faith in Jesus.

I waited for hours in the queue to get the exit papers that I needed to leave Uganda. As I waited, I prayed and prayed that I would be successful. When my turn came to go to the counter, the man told me that I must go away and come back the next day. That night I read the story of Martha's faith in Jesus that he would raise her brother, and it inspired me. The next day I went back to the office and was given my papers to leave. I thanked the Lord with all my heart. But Martha? Oh if only the world could trap the faith of Martha all women would be one.

Mary and Martha are mentioned again during Jesus second visit to Bethany before the final journey to Jerusalem. (12:1-8). The sisters are preparing a meal for Jesus which Martha serves (12:2) whilst Mary anoints his feet with costly perfume¹⁵³ before wiping them with her hair (12:3). For Bultmann, the amount and expense of the perfume shows the depth of Mary's devotion and her humility is shown by anointing Jesus' feet rather than his head. The fragrance filling the house is symbolic, Bultmann argues, of the knowledge that will fill the earth.¹⁵⁴ The significance of the entire scene for the Evangelist is, according to Schnackenburg,¹⁵⁵ to emphasise Jesus' dignity, whilst for Brown the anointing of Jesus by Mary "is a culminating expression

¹⁵³Is this the same woman of whom the Marcan Jesus says "what she has done for me will be told in remembrance of her"?

¹⁵⁴ Bultmann, page 415 .

¹⁵⁵ Schnackenburg Vol 2, page 367.

of loving faith".¹⁵⁶ We are able to see Mary in a prophetic role, foreseeing Jesus' death and anointing him before his burial.

Lazarus is identified through his relationship to his sisters, which, for a first century patriarchal society, leads us to conclude that the Evangelist has a need to inform us of the importance of Mary and Martha to Jesus. Martha's meeting with Jesus alone in a public space for a theological discussion on resurrection is reminiscent of the Samaritan woman who was also confident to have a theological discussion when alone with Jesus at the well. Both Mary and Martha confess Jesus to be the Messiah, Martha through her spoken confession (11:27) and Mary through her actions of anointing Jesus. Again there are parallels to the Samaritan woman as both she and Martha are able to declare Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. Of the male disciples, only Peter, had the confidence to do the same (6:69).¹⁵⁷ Like the Samaritan women and Jesus' mother at Cana, Martha did not need a sign to know Jesus was the Christ - his word was sufficient.

As the reader is taken by the Evangelist along the journey to Jerusalem and towards the final sign, the pain and division become all too evident. Following the triumph as Jesus enters Jerusalem to the shouts of the palm waving crowds (12:12-19), the Evangelist prepares the reader for the pain and suffering of the crucifixion through a series of theological discourses and actions intended to convince the reader of the divinity of Christ. This section of the Gospel draws together all the imagery that has been used in the main Christological themes of the Gospel. The language of darkness and light reminds the reader that Jesus *is* the light, and belief that he is sent from God and is God, will prevent the reader from being overcome by darkness. The equality of discipleship which the reader has seen in the way the Evangelist has presented Martha and Mary¹⁵⁸ is confirmed by Jesus washing the feet of

¹⁵⁶ Brown, page 454.

¹⁵⁷Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, "Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala", stresses the importance of the link the reader is able to make here between Martha and the Samaritan woman both for interfigurality and intertextuality.

¹⁵⁸The evangelist highlights the differing qualities of the two women by alternating their importance in the plot, first Mary (11:2), then Martha (11:20 -27), then back to Mary (11:28 - 34) allowing us, as readers, to realise that like Mary and Martha each woman, no matter what her strengths and weaknesses, is equally important to Jesus.

the disciples (13:3-16), and through the new commandment “that you love one another” (13:34-35; 14:12-17). The creator and the creation are seen in the imagery of the vine grower and the vine. In the vine, which cannot fruit by itself, the reader is reminded of the light and water needed for both physical growth and spiritual enlightenment.

Throughout the discourse there are references to Jesus’ impending death and return to God (12:35-36; 13:33; 14:19,25,28; 16:5,7,16,28). This will be a time of darkness and pain, but like the pain of a woman in childbirth (16:21) it will be followed by joy, here the joy of the resurrection (16:22). Betrayed by Judas (18:2-3), disowned by Peter (18:17,25,27) and rejected by the community (18:40), the Johannine Jesus faces the beating and humiliation of his treatment by the authorities. Abject and alone, his hour has finally come to complete God’s work. This work was started at Cana, which I have argued was enabled by Jesus’ mother, so it is fitting that the Evangelist places her once again as a crucial figure in the final revelation of God’s glory (19:25). It is only in the Johannine version of the passion that the figure of Jesus’ mother is placed in such close proximity to the dying Jesus which suggests to the reader the significance of the maternal within the death of the Johannine Jesus. There will be a separation from the maternal, both physical and spiritual, as Jesus returns to the paternal. This separation comes as Jesus looks to his mother and the Beloved Disciple and says “Woman, here is your son” (19:25), and to the disciple “Here is your mother” (19:27), “from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home” (19:27).

Less is made of the symbolism of these two “here is” sayings by my dominant voices from the Protestant traditions than the Catholic voices of Brown and Schnackenburg. For Barrett, the significance comes in the movement of the Beloved Disciple into Jesus’ place in the mother-son relationship but he places no more significance on the event than to stress the important role of the Beloved Disciple in continuing Jesus’ mission. Barrett expresses caution in attaching symbolism to Jesus’ mother claiming “It will be wise not to go beyond the recognition of an allusion to the new

family, the church, and the sovereign power of Jesus".¹⁵⁹ Bultmann's minimalist interpretation of the scene at the foot of the cross centres around the Beloved Disciple and his importance to the Revealer. The women, he argues, are used by the Evangelist as a transition between the dividing up of Jesus' clothes (19:24) and the scene with the Beloved Disciple (19:26).¹⁶⁰ Since this scene is not part of the synoptic tradition Bultmann suggests that its insertion could be for its symbolism. The mother of Jesus therefore represents Jewish Christianity whilst the Beloved Disciple represents Gentile Christianity,¹⁶¹ directed to unite in fellowship of the church by Jesus from the cross.¹⁶² Bultmann rejects any assertion that Mary represents the church arguing for the contrary position that "the church is the Mother of believers and the Bride of Christ".¹⁶³ Lindars suggests that Jesus is not just making sure that his filial duties are transferred to the disciple, rather he is insisting that his mother and the disciple should be seen in a new relationship.¹⁶⁴ Jesus' mother "gains a new son, one who most fully knows the mind of the Son she has lost".¹⁶⁵ Despite rejecting allegorical interpretations concerning the Church,¹⁶⁶ Lindars argues that the incident is concerned with the Church because it is concerned with the future, particularly with the "new life which results from the death of Jesus".¹⁶⁷

Schnackenburg and Brown highlight the links between the first sign at Cana and the action at the cross. Schnackenburg argues that the Evangelist singles out Jesus' mother and the Beloved Disciple for theological purposes, as Jesus' words to them concern the completion of his earthly works.¹⁶⁸ He discusses two possible interpretations for the symbolism of Jesus' mother. The first endorses Schürmann's interpretation, which links the appearance of Jesus' mother at Cana to her appearance at the cross. At Cana she

¹⁵⁹Barrett, page 552.

¹⁶⁰ Bultmann, page 671.

¹⁶¹ Bultmann, page 673.

¹⁶²Bultmann, page 673.

¹⁶³Bultmann, page 673, footnote 4.

¹⁶⁴ Lindars, page 579.

¹⁶⁵Lindars, page 579.

¹⁶⁶Lindars rejects those commentaries which represent Mary as the synagogue and the Beloved Disciple as the Church. He also rejects Bultmann's interpretation of Mary as the Jewish Christian church and the Disciple as the Gentile Christian church.

¹⁶⁷Lindars, page 580.

¹⁶⁸ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John (Vol 3)*, page 278.

represents those who expect salvation from Jesus. She stands for all those who ask for Jesus' gifts and is now to receive lasting fulfilment in the Beloved Disciple. "He will obtain for her what she longs for, unfold that which Jesus leaves behind".¹⁶⁹ The second interpretation suggests that Mary represents that part of Israel "receptive to Messianic salvation", the section open to the 'King of Israel' rather than those Jews who are unbelievers.¹⁷⁰ In either interpretation the fact that Jesus' mother is given to the Blessed Disciple and he to her is a reminder to the Christian community of the mother from whom Jesus and the church originated.¹⁷¹ The act of the Beloved Disciple adopting Jesus' mother into his circle is symbolic of the adoption by the church of all those seeking salvation. By this act, Schnackenburg argues, Jesus completes his work on earth, "the disciple who takes Mary to himself, and with her all those who seek salvation, is the human guarantor of the fact that Jesus' earthly revelation perpetuates itself in the future, that his words are not lost and that his 'signs' are rightly interpreted and understood."¹⁷²

Brown's analysis centres on the revelatory nature of the roles played by Jesus, his mother and the Beloved Disciple. He rejects the 'adoption formula'¹⁷³ of the Beloved Disciple, in favour of the 'revelatory formula'¹⁷⁴ in Jesus' words to his mother (19: 26-27). The adoption formula raises the status of the beloved Disciple beyond that of Jesus' mother, an elevation that Brown rejects. The revelatory formula fits more closely with the revelatory themes found throughout the Gospel:

In this formula the one who speaks is revealing the mystery
of the special salvific mission that the one referred to will

¹⁶⁹Schnackenburg (*Vol 3*), page 278, quoting H Schürmann, 'Jesu letzte Weisung Jo 19:26-27c' *idem Ursprung und Gestalt* (Düsseldorf, 1970), pp13-29.

¹⁷⁰ Schnackenburg (*Vol 3*), page 278.

¹⁷¹Schnackenburg (*Vol 3*), page 279.

¹⁷²Schnackenburg (*Vol 3*), page 279.

¹⁷³Brown references the work of A Dauer 'Das Wort des Gekreuzigten an seine Mutter und den "Jünger den er liebte"' BZ 11 (1967), 222-39; 12 (1968), 80-93 in this respect but rejects the argument because Dauer divorces the scene at the cross with Cana, a connection that Brown considers too important to ignore (page 923). Brown also presents a brief summary of Catholic thought on this symbolism from the early church Fathers, to those who use the scene as a basis for the theology of the spiritual motherhood of Mary (pages 924-5).

¹⁷⁴ *The Gospel According to John (xiii - xxi)*, Brown, page 922/3.

undertake; thus the sonship and motherhood proclaimed from the cross are of value for God's plan and are related to what is being accomplished in the elevation of Jesus on the cross.¹⁷⁵

Thus, Brown argues, the action implies a deeper meaning than just one of filial attention to his mother's well-being confirmed by the Evangelist with Jesus' knowledge that "all was now finished" (19:28). As the action of Jesus' mother in relation to Jesus at Cana begins the work of the Word, now the final action of Jesus in relation to his mother and the Beloved Disciple completes the work of the Word. Brown disagrees that Jesus' mother has had a role in the ministry of Jesus since Cana, citing Old Testament references that her role can only occur at the cross which represents

the birth pangs by which the spirit of salvation is brought forth (Isa 26:17-18) and handed over (29:30) In becoming the mother of the Beloved Disciple (Christian), Mary is symbolically evocative of Lady Zion who, after the birth pangs, brings forth a new people in joy (John 19:21; Isa 44:20-22; 54:1; 66:7-11)¹⁷⁶

For Brown, it is only now that Jesus' mother emerges as the new Eve since at this 'hour' the death of Jesus signifies the time "when the ruler of the world will be driven out", a reference, Brown notes, to the struggle of the offspring of Eve and the serpent in Genesis (Gen 3:15).¹⁷⁷ Brown reinforces this, arguing that Jesus' mother can also be seen as the woman clothed in the sun (Rev 12:1) who gives birth to the male child who is snatched away from the dragon to a place with God (Rev 12:4-5). Brown summarises these intertextual references into a picture of Jesus' mother which also points forward to a future provision of Jesus, namely that of the Christian church. The new relationship of Jesus' mother and the Beloved Disciple represents

¹⁷⁵ Brown (*xiii - xxi*), page 923.

¹⁷⁶ Brown (*xiii - xxi*), page 925.

¹⁷⁷ Brown (*xiii - xxi*) page 926.

the new relationship “which will bind the church and Christian”.¹⁷⁸ I have already argued that through Wisdom links, this image of Jesus’ mother as the new Eve can in fact be made at Cana so on this point I can not agree with Brown.

If we view the death in terms of separation and abjection then we can explore the role of Jesus’ mother from an alternative angle. At Cana Jesus’ mother experiences the separation of her son, not just from the human situation of maturity and a new beginning for Jesus in his ministerial role, but from a Kristevan perspective of separation. As the child separates from the semiotic maternal to enter into the symbolic paternal so Jesus is enabled to enter into the works of the Father/God via separation from his mother. Here again at the cross, through his words “Woman here is your son”, the separation of the Word from the world, signified in the physical separation from the mother through death - a mother who has enabled the Word to exist in the world through birth - Jesus is reabsorbed into God/Wisdom.

The final sign of Jesus’ death comes with the piercing of his side (John 19:34). As the spear enters Jesus’ side blood and water flow out. Blood and water have been symbols of eternal life throughout the Gospel, but are also significant in the way they have been used by the Johannine Jesus as means of crossing boundaries of separation. The Samaritan woman, excluded through the uncleanness of the menstruant becomes incorporated into the living water, there is a mingling of the blood and water. The menstrual blood and the final excrement of the dying body are both seen to have a polluting value, and each come from within.¹⁷⁹ The body of Jesus, that has been defiled externally through the floggings, the crown of thorns and the physical effort of carrying the cross, now releases the inner defilement. The commonality of these two types of defilement, blood and

¹⁷⁸Brown argues that at Cana, Mary was Jesus’ physical mother, now his mother in the hour of God’s plan brings forth Christian children in the image of her son. (*xiii - xxi*), page 926.

¹⁷⁹ Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* discusses the internalisation of the abject and the disruption that comes from the abject within. To achieve proper subjectivity the abject which causes inner uncleanness must be expelled, but which always threatens the unity of the subject.

excrement, Kristeva argues, is that they “stem from the *maternal* and/or feminine of which the maternal is the real support.”¹⁸⁰ She argues:

One could suggest that the rites surrounding defilement, particularly those involving excremental and menstrual variants, shift the border ... that separates the body’s territory from the signifying chain; they illustrate the boundary between semiotic authority and symbolic law.¹⁸¹

Jesus’ dead body is considered by the authorities to have the same polluting effect as the Samaritan woman’s living body, necessitating its removal from the cross so as not to disrupt the Sabbath (19:31). The ritualistic breaking of



Fig 6.d Jesus is taken down from the cross

the legs to speed up the death process is not necessary for Jesus, as he is dead already. Instead, the life giving blood and water spill out as the final signifier for belief (31:35). The body is taken down from the cross and given to Joseph and Nicodemus to purify and prepare for the tomb (19:38-42). The abundance of the oils that Nicodemus brings (19:39) seems

almost to confirm the enormity of the abjection of the defiled body, but conversely, it signifies the abundance of life giving blood and water that will now be the enabler of eternal life.

Alone in the garden before Judas’ betrayal, Jesus prays to God that God will protect the world against ‘the evil one’ (17:15) with the purpose that those who believe in the truth may be united with God:

¹⁸⁰Kristeva, page 71.

¹⁸¹Kristeva, page 73.

As you father, are in me and I am in you, so may they also be in us the glory that you have given me, I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and love them even as you have loved me (17:21-23).

The Johannine crucifixion is the hour of revelation of God's glory (John 17:1). Paradoxically, through the darkness that the physical event gives to all those close to Jesus, it is the final means of providing the light to reveal the truth that Jesus is God. Although Jesus' life is salvific in that it provides the means by which the light is not overtaken by the darkness, the Johannine Jesus himself does not present this act as a sacrifice for the atonement of sins. Brown's detailed analysis of the blood and water includes an exploration of the motif of the paschal lamb in the death of Jesus. In particular Brown notes the words of John the Baptist in the Prologue, who when seeing Jesus declares "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). However, Brown inserts a note of caution in making connections between references to the fact that Jesus' bones were not broken to fulfil scripture, and the paschal lamb. He writes:

Some scholars have further suggested that in picturing Jesus as the paschal lamb John is attributing sacrificial character to Jesus' death. Certainly this is possible But we cannot rule out the possibility that it is also an allusion to Ps 34:21(20) a psalm that deals with the innocent suffering servants of God.¹⁸²

Abjection then in this Gospel need not take the form of sin that has to be remitted through the ultimate sacrifice of the death on the cross. Rather Jesus' death can be seen as the site of the release of abjection, into a glorious new life symbolised through the blood and water that is expelled from the body, in a manner reminiscent of a child expelled from the womb with the birth waters mingled with maternal blood.

¹⁸²Brown (*xiii - xxi*), page 944-956.

A criticism of the feminist search to locate subjectivity within the maternal comes because this in itself appears to marginalise women who are not mothers. Grace Jantzen's work on natality attempts to redeem this by suggesting we should consider ourselves, men and women as natals born of a mother. I believe Jantzen's work is really important in this area because I feel it builds on the work of women such as Kristeva, who seek the maternal within God/Christ in such a way that it enables other women to identify divinity not only within Jesus but within themselves. The Evangelist encourages this exploration through the significance that he placed on women to reveal the word. The first sign is enabled through a woman, and women are again key players in the final revelation; first Jesus' mother and now Mary Magdalene who was also among the woman at the cross (19:25).

It is still dark when Mary Magdalene arrives at the tomb, no doubt to be close to the man she has shared her time with, only to find the tomb empty (20:1). The darkness of the day matches the darkness of Mary's puzzlement and once again alerts the reader to the contrast between the darkness of unbelief and the light of understanding. Shocked, surprised or just misbelieving her word, Peter and the Beloved Disciple rush to the tomb to satisfy themselves of Mary's revelation. But though they too find the tomb empty they do not understand the significance of the resurrection (20: 3:9). Both Brown and Schnackenburg¹⁸³ emphasise Peter and Mary's lack of understanding of the risen Jesus compared to the understanding of the Beloved Disciple (20:8) but Bultmann challenges this theory arguing that Peter is also brought to faith by what he sees since had this not been the Evangelist's intention he would have specifically stated that Peter did not believe.¹⁸⁴ He does not argue the same for Mary Magdalene, however.

I would prefer to support Scott's challenge to the automatic belief of the Beloved Disciple:

¹⁸³Brown (*xiii - xxi*) page 987. Schnackenburg argues that "the point of the story lies in the clear and strong faith of the Beloved Disciple" (*Vol 3*), page 312.

¹⁸⁴ Bultmann, page 684.

if he really did believe that Jesus was risen from the dead with such assurance why was it necessary for Mary Magdalene to go and report her sighting of the Lord as though no-one knew anything about it.¹⁸⁵

I suggest that the most the text actually reveals is that both Peter and the Beloved Disciple came to believe that Mary's account is true. Mary lingers in the garden. Through her tears, she looks into the tomb and sees two angels sitting where the body should have been.¹⁸⁶ Mary turns from the angels to see Jesus, only she mistakes him for the gardener, not recognising Jesus until he call her name.¹⁸⁷ It is possible, Brown argues, that the risen Jesus may have undergone a change and now appears in a spiritual rather than a physical form.¹⁸⁸ This is confirmed by Mary's own account in the *Gospel of Mary* when she tells Peter "I saw the Lord in a vision".¹⁸⁹ The manner in which Jesus calls "Mary" (20:16), reminds the reader of his earlier statement that "the shepherd calls his own by name" (10:3). Mary responds "Rabbouni" (20:16). Brown uses Mary's confusion of Jesus with the gardener and her eventual recognition of Jesus as "Rabbouni", as indicators of her misunderstanding of the resurrection and of someone just starting out in faith and her attempt to touch Jesus as an indicator that she thinks she can follow Jesus with the same relationship as before his death,¹⁹⁰ "trying to hold onto her source of joy".¹⁹¹

This resurrection meeting is better explored in the context of the death and the ascension. The early Christians' understanding of the death, resurrection and ascension was firmly fixed, Brown suggests, that the Evangelist could

¹⁸⁵ Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus*, page 223.

¹⁸⁶ Schnackenburg (Vol 3 page 315). Schnackenburg notes the addition of the angels as that of an editor to the original Easter story, only in the Johannine account they are not given the role of pronouncing the message of the risen Christ.

¹⁸⁷ Brown suggests that Mary's failure to recognise Jesus has links to other resurrection appearances where Jesus is not instantly recognised. This may be, he argues as an apologetic purpose in that "the disciples were not credulously expecting to see the risen Jesus", but may also have had a theological purpose. (*xiii - xxi*), page 1009.

¹⁸⁸ Brown (*xiii - xxi*), page 1009.

¹⁸⁹ James M Robinson (ed), "Gospel of Mary" in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 4th Rev Ed,

¹⁹⁰ Brown (*xiii - xxi*), page 1009.

¹⁹¹ Brown (*xiii - xxi*), page 1012.

not conclude the Gospel with the death on the cross as the final sign of Jesus at one with God.¹⁹² Rather, the Evangelist “had to make the effort to fit the resurrection into the process of Jesus’ passing from this world to the Father”.¹⁹³ The appearance to Mary Magdalene enables the Evangelist to reinterpret the resurrection so that “Jesus is lifted up on the cross; he is raised from the dead; and he goes up to the Father - all as part of one action and one hour”.¹⁹⁴ The Evangelist is not interpreting the resurrection/ascension within temporal space, Brown suggests,¹⁹⁵ so that when Jesus says to Mary “Do not hold me, because I have not yet ascended” (20:17) this is a mechanism for linking the ascension to the resurrection making a “theological statement contrasting the passing nature of Jesus’ presence in his post-resurrectional appearance and the permanent nature of his presence in the Spirit”.¹⁹⁶ The importance here I feel, is that the Evangelist uses Mary to receive an *explanation* of the meaning of the resurrection, rather than a statement of its fact.¹⁹⁷ By so doing the Johannine Jesus indicates that women are just as able to be entrusted to proclaim and explain such a significant event to others as men are.

Sandra Schneiders presents what she calls an integrated reading¹⁹⁸ of the resurrection text in her feminist reading of the Gospel. This means placing Mary Magdalene’s encounter with the risen Jesus not just in the context of the resurrection narrative but the Gospel as a whole. The resurrection is, she suggests, “the communication to Jesus’ disciples of his paschal glory through his return to him in the Spirit”.¹⁹⁹ The darkness and the garden setting are highly symbolic, Schneiders argues, as reminders of the creation in Genesis and the Song of Songs:

¹⁹² Brown (*xiii - xxi*), page 1013.

¹⁹³ Brown (*xiii - xxi*) page 1013.

¹⁹⁴ Brown (*xiii - xxi*), page 1014.

¹⁹⁵ Lindars also suggest this to be the case (page 609); Bultmann indicates that the fellowship between the Risen Jesus and his followers will no longer be in the form of “earthly associations”, (page 687).

¹⁹⁶ Brown (*xiii - xxi*), page 1015.

¹⁹⁷ Brown (*xiii - xxi*), page 1015.

¹⁹⁸ Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*, page 189 ff.

¹⁹⁹ Schneiders, page 190 especially footnote 3.

In this garden of new creation and new covenant, Jesus who is both the promised liberator of the new creation and the spouse of the new Israel, encounters the woman, who is, symbolically, the Johannine community, the church, the new people of God.²⁰⁰

Mary's weeping symbolises "blinding spiritual sadness and hopelessness" which the Evangelist uses as a technique for preparing the reader "to accept a new mode of Jesus' presence".²⁰¹ Mary hears Jesus call her name, which for Schneiders is significant of a 'double turn': Mary turns towards Jesus and in doing so turns her back on the angels. She turns away from the law of Moses and accepts the grace and truth that comes through Jesus.²⁰² When Jesus tells Mary not to touch him, Schneiders suggests that he is :

redirecting Mary's desire for union with him from his physical or earthly body (which in any case no longer exists because it is the glorified Lord who stands before her in appearance which is temporary) to the new locus of his presence in the word, that is, the community of his brothers and sisters, the disciples.²⁰³

What Jesus is doing then is instructing Mary Magdalene to call all disciples to a belief that they too are children of God if they accept the glorification of the Risen Christ (1:12; 20:17).

I have little patience with the "quest for the historical Jesus" -- seems to me that we are likely never to be able to reconstruct adequately the life of Jesus, the man. Of much import to me is the risen Christ -- the divine spirit of Jesus. This is what is accessible to each of us now.

²⁰⁰Schneiders, page 195

²⁰¹Schneiders, page 195.

²⁰²Schneiders, page 196.

²⁰³Schneiders, page 198.

Rather than see the death of Jesus as salvific in terms of removing darkness/sin - a darkness which in the eyes of some is initiated by a woman - the death and resurrection can be seen as a complete and selfless love for the world. John's Gospel is a gospel which emphasises unconditional love and generosity. It is through this love that God gave his only son so that believers may have eternal life (3:16). But salvation comes through belief in the truth of God not as a sacrifice for 'sins'. The ultimate sin for the Johannine Jesus is unbelief, but through the destruction of the "temple of the body" (3:21), belief is made possible for all. The Johannine Jesus commands the disciples: "I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (13:34). As the disciples are comforted by Jesus' assurance that they would not be left orphaned (14:18), so the contemporary reader of the Gospel is assured that if they keep Jesus' commandment they will be "those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them" (14: 21). Is this the reason that John's Gospel appeals to so many women? Used as women are to also frequently giving selfless love, we know that by accepting this revelation and love we are able to experience the selfless love of the Johannine Jesus and achieve complete and fulfilled subjectivity:

Johannine love sketches out the space of a relationship between I and You, Son and Father, an exclusive, absolute one in which They - third parties - are only intermediaries.²⁰⁴

Mary Magdalene is one such intermediary. For Kristeva, Christ's death on the cross is evidence of love rather than sacrifice. Love which is a gift that, by assuming total suffering and loss, enables: "a Meaning, always already there, anterior and coming from above", to become apparent to those who believe. "Passionate love is the experience of becoming *homologous*, a baptism".²⁰⁵ It is a necessity

²⁰⁴Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, page 148

²⁰⁵Kristeva, page 143

she argues, for God to become 'homologous', temporarily mortal so that as mortals we can become analogous with God.

Chapter 7 “Who Do You Say That I Am?”: Is There a Feminist Christology?

*I made the soul after my own image and likeness,
giving her memory, understanding and will
Catherine of Sienna*

Julie Hopkins observes that a universally accepted Christology is neither possible nor desirable.¹ Christologies are contextualised which “relativises our understanding of truth”.² The title of her book in which she argues this point, suggests that although it is possible to move towards it, a definitive feminist Christology will never be attained. Even if we all come from a similar standpoint, as human people we will all have our own personal understanding of and relationship with Jesus Christ. Our Christologies emerge from the many contexts within which we live our lives and although they may touch or seem at points to merge or mesh, they remain distinct and diverse.

The women who contributed to this research may well describe their Christology as feminist, whilst others would have been quite adamant that feminism was nothing to do with their understanding of who Christ is to them. It was clear from the interviews though that women negotiated, and renegotiated, their understanding of Jesus throughout their faith journeys; at times the human Jesus was the most important to them and at others it was the divine Christ. For some women this led to a rejection of the denomination in which they had first formed their Christological understanding and acceptance of another denomination. This became a permanent move for some women but for at least two women it was a temporary move whilst they worked through their disappointment and anger at the patriarchal rules of their denomination which prevented them from realising the role to which they felt God calling them. These women retained a belief in God, but felt divorced from their churches. Two other women found that this rejection led them to a Christology which could no longer be

¹ Julie Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology*, page 10.

² Hopkins, page 11.

experienced and expressed within the Christian church, but which could not be described as post-Christian. Two others rejected a Christian understanding of God preferring instead to look for the divine within the Goddess.

Whatever their Christology at the time of contributing to my research, most women agreed that it was influenced by their life experiences and their experiences of being women.

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----------------------|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Life Experience | 29 | 14 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| Experience as a woman | 12 | 21 | 12 | 1 | 0 |
| Culture | 8 | 20 | 10 | 5 | 1 |
| Social Situation | 9 | 12 | 16 | 5 | 2 |
| Church | 19 | 13 | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| Reading of Bible | 25 | 12 | 3 | 3 | 1 |

The churches within which the women worshipped were also a strong influence in forming their individual Christologies but from the interviews, especially the group interviews, the discussion revealed that all the women questioned the truths they had heard in their churches and negotiated their Christologies within this questioning. For two women, a young African brought up as a Catholic and an elderly Anglican woman, their Christologies only became a real relationship when they experienced the Holy Spirit in what each described independently as a 'rebirth'. The African woman talked of the great joy she got from 'discovering' the bible and the Jesus that emerged from the text to greet her. This woman felt that Catholicism had restricted her knowledge of the 'real' Christ, and she felt that the Pentecostal church allowed her to continue with this discovery in a way that Catholicism did not. Another young African woman explained how she too worshipped in an Evangelical church rather than within Catholicism now that she was living away from home because the way of worship more suited her understanding of Jesus. Some women's journeys have been painful, others have left them with a sense of loss

I am currently worshiping in a Presbyterian church. About ten years ago I left the Catholic Church when I started attending a 'charismatic' independent church. My experience of Pentecostalism was very negative on the whole, and in the midst of my Bible School experience, I came to a greater reconciliation with my Catholic past, also I learned more about the whole Body of Christ. It is more American in a broadly general sense to be Protestant. When people 'evangelised' me in high school it was from a very American version of the Christian Evangelical experience. As an adult evangelised by charismatics, I think it was also a very Americanized Christianity. However I did come to a deeper realisation and a more personally appropriated faith in Christ. I am a bit drawn to the Episcopalian experience of worship. I feel I haven't settled with a denomination and feel some loss and lack of identity.

Had I had a chance to more fully express myself - or be myself, I would probably never have left the Christian church. I tried to take Jesus outside the church with me, but found that too hard a concept to explain to others (especially Christians). I would love to be able to worship God the father, the son and the Mother within the parameters of organized Christianity as I am able to revere the Judaeo-Christian Deity within the Pagan community.

My own experiences led me to question whether or not women felt they had sufficient opportunity to actively participate within their churches, and whether they would welcome more involvement. I did wonder if there would be a significance between the answers these woman gave and the denomination within which they practised. The questionnaire responses indicated that most women felt they had the opportunity to take an active role, and equal numbers of women would welcome more involvement as would not. Statistical tests of significance revealed that the women's responses to each of these questions were independent of their denomination. As I noted in chapter 2,³ the questionnaire itself may indicate a response to a question that is inconsistent with the women's opinion as revealed in the interview. A different sample of women, or differently

³ Page 44

phrased questions may well have produced different results for these tests of significance. As the sample was statistically biased it would therefore be inappropriate to draw any inferences from these results.

It is also difficult to draw any conclusions regarding the acknowledged influence that ethnicity and culture had on these women's personal Christologies. The question which asked women to describe their cultural and ethnic background produced some unexpected results. Women from Northern Ireland almost always defined these in terms of religion and class, whilst women from elsewhere used the more traditional categories of Black African, White European and so on. This may have been because equal opportunity monitoring in Northern Ireland until very recently focussed only on religion. However when asked how strongly women felt their Christology was influenced by their culture or social situation more women agreed that it had rather than were neutral or disagreed. Since cultural identity and life experience are so inter-linked, the fact that most women agreed or strongly agreed that their Christologies were influenced by their life experiences, these must in part include a cultural or ethnic dimension. Perhaps if women lived within communities where their culture and ethnic group predominated, it might be difficult to assess whether their Christologies were contextualised in this way.

My choice of New Testament texts was made at the outset of the project and independently of the questionnaire results; the reasons for this choice I gave in the introduction. As the first Gospel written, Mark's Gospel enables us to experience the recorded recollections of a community closest to Jesus chronologically, and so it is possible that this is the 'truest' picture of Jesus. In this Gospel we are able to see a man who in revealing his divine nature challenges authority and social practices of exclusion and elitism. For marginalised groups in contemporary society this is a powerful Christology, and is particularly so for women. Mark constructs his Gospel, as I have argued in chapter 3, in such a way that Jesus' desire for social inclusion is revealed through the most marginalised people of the time. The chiasmic structures in the Gospel all have as their key a teaching which restores a

group to full inclusion, or uses exclusive practices as an illustration of what is not acceptable in God's Kingdom. From a woman's perspective, the powerfulness of such a Christology comes in the anonymity of the women whom Jesus heals. The woman who is permanently unclean through her bleeding and the woman who seeks 'the crumbs from the table' represent all women, but more so stand as examples that we can all come from obscurity and stand before that which excludes us from equal status within our societies. The unnamed daughters of Jairus and the Syro-Phoenician woman allow us all to be daughters who are healed of the wounds that leave us vulnerable and incomplete. The unnamed mother and wife of the chosen disciple Peter enable us all to be disciples. As Peter's mother-in-law was 'lifted up' to be able to serve as a disciples, so as women we too can all be recognised as disciples with an equal role in delivering the message of the Gospel in the way that God has called us.

Mark's Gospel was chosen as a preferred text by only a small number of women in my sample (12%), compared to Matthew and Luke which was chosen by a much greater proportion (27%). Reflecting why this might be, I question how comfortable the Church is with Mark's message and therefore whether it encourages us to lean towards the more tempered versions of Jesus' actions in Matthew and Luke. Mark's Gospel is uncompromising in its challenge to take a hard look at what is required by Jesus if we are to be followers. We must all take up our cross and be servants, but not servile victims. The cross must be used in a circular argument that assuages the consciences of those who oppress and discriminate because they see those whom they marginalise as clear examples of suffering 'cross bearers'. In a recent sermon on the cross, I heard a priest argue that the cross should be seen as a gateway to healing. It can be seen as a means of standing beside those who need healing in their lives as a support, rather than as the burden they must carry. I thought about the image that gives in the context of Mark's Gospel, and was reminded of the woman in this research who saw the 'open arms of the cross' waiting for her.⁴ Perhaps the message that we should

⁴ Chapter 3, page 57

take from Mark's Gospel is that the cross is a symbol of liberation not one of victimisation; a means by which the whole Church can be liberated.

As a realist, I recognise that woman's voices need to be heard loudly for a long time before active change will come about within the Church. Fear of losing power can be seen as the root of many social and political acts of oppression which divide societies at the expense of majority groups within these societies. The hierarchy of the Christian Church is probably not exempt from this fear, nor from the desire to retain power within the structures it has cloaked with theological 'truth' for centuries. The Church is able to legitimise and preserve these structures through the message of the Pauline material. It is perhaps not surprising that Paul's letters were chosen as the preferred texts for seeking Christological answers by only three women in my sample; Paul's Christological revelations tend to get lost among his message for conservative order which preserves the patriarchal structure of the first century family. In the interviews it became clear though that far more than three women found Paul's letters a source of inspiration in their faith journeys.

Paul's letters help me to see that 'this is what Jesus means'. For me, they provide a fluid response; they are a day to day reference of why I turn to God.

Paul's letter to the Philippian church, as I argued in chapter 4 is written in the Greek paraenetic style of friendship. Paul's recognition of the immense love of Christ is clearly shown in the love that he has for his friends in Philippi whom he embraces as also being "in Christ" (Phil 1:1). The high Christological message of this letter is apparent in the hymn that Paul draws on to describe the pre-existent God emptying into the slave who humbles himself to die on the cross before returning in exaltation to the form of God (2: 5 - 11). Foucault's theories of pastoral power demonstrate how this Pauline letter can be used to support a theology based on friendship. Jesus is revealed as the friend from whom we can draw strength in the same way we draw strength from our secular friendships.

One young South African woman talked of the isolation she felt throughout her childhood as a result of the apartheid classification of her family as 'coloured' and her disability. To her Jesus was the friend she could always rely on; he was there with her whenever she was alone; he never excluded her from a close and loving relationship.

*I always see Jesus as a friend. He is the best friend I always wanted.
He walks beside me as my friend.*

Paul's invitation to the Philippian community to 'imitate' him has often been seen as confirmation of Paul's desire for power and authority within the hierarchy of the early church. I have argued in chapter 4 that this could be a misinterpretation, and that what Paul really wanted was for his friends to be prepared for the imminent return of Jesus. He wanted them to experience what he was experiencing; to live in the joy that he had found in Christ and not as enemies of the cross (Phil 3:18), so that they too would all be transformed to the body of God's glory (Phil 3:21).

The Church has used the Pauline texts to women's disadvantage almost since they were written. It has promoted those parts of the texts which can be used to strengthen the patriarchal structures that it creates and endorses, and to highlight and use divisions within the early Christian communities as a means of discriminating against some members of today's church. The Church rarely promotes the positive inclusion by Paul of women as leaders, baptisers and missionaries who shared with him in spreading the Gospel message as equal co-workers, not as subordinates or deficient in some way. The concerns of some of the women I interviewed in this regard were deeply felt. Some women had been through immense pain and rejection as they had been turned down for priestly ministry. Others were concerned about the way in which the Pauline material was being directly used to limit their behaviour and involvement in worship and to make them blend into the background in their churches; their voices are heard in chapter 5. Some women accepted the Bible message of 'silence' but debated how this was in

conflict with other Pauline teaching, especially that which encourages everyone to use their God given gifts to advance the Gospel. Of all the Biblical texts, the letters of Paul are the hardest to 'defend' from a feminist perspective. However, if I were to construct a feminist canon I would not exclude them, not even the Pastoral letters. As I hope I have shown in chapter 5, the Church must place these in the context of the Greco-Roman societies to whom they were written before starting to interpret their message for the very different societies of the third millennium.

In the feminist reading I have taken of the Pastoral letters I have leaned towards the opinion that these were not written by Paul himself but are pseudepigraphical. Their author, whom I have identified as P*ul, may well have had a personal agenda to promote his own authority in the early church and as such may have been one of the earliest to interpret the Gospel to his advantage. However, his desire for the Church to reflect the structure of the family need not be wholly negative. We all need a secure 'family' environment to develop as healthy and complete people. The Church is no different. For every member to be able to have a complete and comfortable relationship with God/Christ, the Church family needs to be nurturing and able to provide for the spiritual needs of all who believe. The modern Church must incorporate the variety of family structures which now exist throughout the world, including those which P*ul may have seen as threatening the churches in Ephesus and Crete. Feminism and feminist readings of the biblical material open our eyes to the possibility that the Church can overturn those narrow practices which make many Christians feel unaccepted within contemporary Christian society.

P*ul's desire to limit the influence of pagan ideas and practices infiltrating the early churches to whom he addressed his letters seems not to have been entirely successful. Throughout history women have incorporated practices which P*ul may have considered pagan within their own Christian worship and their Christologies using expression of the Goddess and the maternal to voice their understanding of Christ.

.... I saw that the cherished second person, who is our Mother with regard to our essential being, has become our Mother in regard to our physical nature too ... When our essential being was made the second person of the Trinity was our natural Mother, and in him we are rooted and grounded. But he is also our Mother out of mercy because he took our physical nature. So our Mother in whom our two natures are undivided, is a mother to us in different ways. In our Mother, Christ we prosper and develop; in his mercy, he corrects and restores us; and by the power of his Passion, death and resurrection he unites us to our essential being.⁵

There has been a growth in members of new Age religions and Paganism in recent years⁶ but my research has shown that women are happy to incorporate aspects of other spiritualities within their Christian beliefs and worship practices. There is no conflict for the woman who sends her children to Christian Sunday school and Church schools for their education with a spell in their pockets for their safekeeping. Nor is it strange for the woman who places her trust in God and the 'seventh son' at the same time. The *Women Included* prayer book which was produced by The St Hilda Community in 1991 caused controversy at the time, but reflected the way that many women had been praying and worshipping in private for years.

In Uganda there was often a long time between visits from the priest so it was not possible to receive the Eucharist regularly. Instead of the bread and wine we would share banana and water.

John's Gospel was the preferred Christological text of most of the women in my sample (44%). This led me to question in the previous chapter whether it might be considered 'the woman's Gospel', since it speaks to women on many levels. The imagery and language reveal a spirituality and prayer which seems to engage with women's own spiritualities.

⁵ *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian of Norwich, page 121.

⁶ For statistics on this see chapter 1.

John's Gospel endorses femininity; it enables me to feel more deeply as a woman. It provides cameos of discipleship through Jesus' intimate conversations.

These intimate conversations often take place with women or are initiated by women.

The feminist reading I have taken of John's Gospel reveals the extent to which Wisdom theology lies at the centre of John's Christological teaching. The human Jesus can be seen as Sophia/Christ with as much validity as the embodied Word. Luce Irigaray's observation that God obliges us to become divine men and women is more easily achieved for women if we can recognise the female within Christ. This need not necessarily however be a search for the maternal (although for some women experiencing Jesus as mother is very powerful) since not all women are mothers through choice or nature. Rather than replacing a religious symbolic that is masculinist and paternal with one which is feminist and maternal, Grace Jantzen's argument for a feminist philosophy of religion "drawn from the imaginative well-springs of women's lives"⁷ leads her towards a feminist symbolic of natality. Natality acknowledges that we are all born of woman, and as such "it affirms the concreteness and embodied nature of human lives and experiences, the material and discursive conditions within which subjects are formed and out of which a religious symbolic must emerge".⁸

Julia Kristeva's theories of psychoanalysis and language are useful tools in exploring the symbolism and themes of the fourth Gospel. Separation and the inseparable are important themes of the Gospel. Wisdom and God are inseparable; they are pre-existent and together at creation. The emergence of the flesh from the Word in the Prologue and its return to its source at the end of the Gospel is, as Alison Jasper notes, closely paralleled in Kristeva's psychoanalysis of human subjectivity. Kristeva's work on abjection, which

⁷ Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, page 217.

⁸ Jantzen, page 146.

she argues is a necessary stage of separation from the maternal into the realm of the paternal and hence into language and subjectivity parallels the darkness in the Gospel. Abjection constantly disrupts the process of human self understanding in the same way that the darkness pierces the light of understanding the divine revelation.

The signs, which reveal to the reader that the human flesh is inseparable from the divine, remind the reader of the separation at creation. On the third day the water separates from the dry land and the vegetation, including the tree of knowledge, appears. The natural evokes the supernatural, with Jesus as the tree of life, the living water, the vine and the bread of life. At Cana the water becomes an abundance of the best wine as Jesus' mother enables the first sign, which begins the separation of Jesus' earthly existence and his divine mission. Wine will become the symbol of the blood of Christ, which with the bread as the body of Christ will provide the food for eternal life. Jesus' mother is present as the separation from his earthly existence is complete. On the cross, the blood and water that mingle as they emerge from Jesus' side signal his death. This death enables life for all believers and it is perhaps significant that we all come into life as natals through the blood and water mingling in the birth canal.

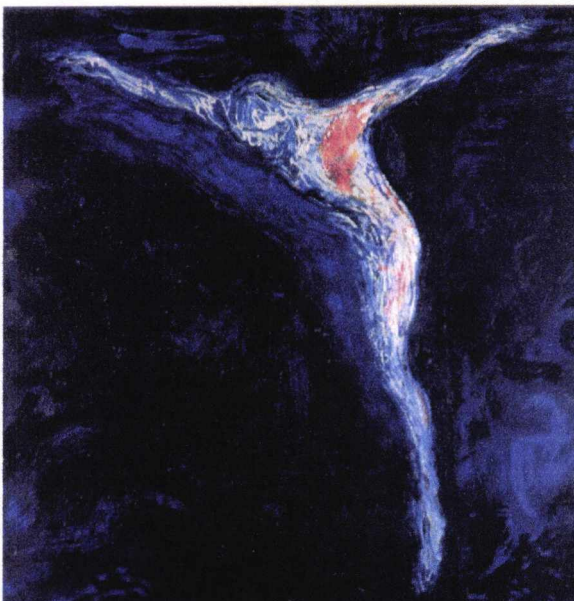


Fig 7.a Good Friday 1990

I have illustrated each chapter of this thesis with images of women or by women which have in some way spoken to me. I am very drawn to Maggi Hambling's *Good Friday* works. Her sculptures incorporate earthly objects which illustrate for me the 'bridge' Irigaray suggests links Christ with earlier female deities (fig 1.c)⁹. Her Christic paintings show quite stark

⁹ Chapter 1, page 15.

images of a suffering Christ yet at the same time he hangs over the world in a protecting embrace.

When I first saw Rosemary Madigan's sculpture *The Yellow Christ*, (fig 3.a)¹⁰, the face of Christ looked as if it was upturned and smiling. A longer look however revealed a down turned suffering image. I particularly like Adam Kossowski's ceramics which capture the abjection of the cross and the fear of the women at the empty tomb. This image (fig 3.e)¹¹ pictures exactly the feeling of fear as "loss". The woman on the left clutches her body as if to stop her muscles relaxing and so defiling her self through the fear that she is experiencing. Her face has an expression "this is too awful to contemplate". The image of Jesus being taken down from the cross (fig 6.d)¹² is a very powerful one for me. The 'handing over' of Jesus' mother to the Beloved Disciple and the Disciples to Jesus' mother is evoked in the out-turned hands of Jesus. The importance of the mother's role in revealing the divine nature of Christ is, for me, captured in the inclined head as Jesus leans on his mother as he is taken down. I like Dina Cormick's works for their vibrancy and colour. I especially like the way that in her illustrations she provides anonymous women in the Bible with names of women close to her (fig 6.c).¹³

Teresa of Avila's voice opens this thesis with the words: "I shall speak of nothing of which I have no experience, either in my own life or in the observations of others or which the Lord has not taught me in prayer". The observations and desires of women that shared their Christological experiences as the basis of this project close it:

¹⁰Chapter 3, page 57

¹¹Chapter 3, page 110

¹²Chapter 6, page 252

¹³Chapter 6, page 236

Opportunities to magnify and glorify his Name more and more, this opportunity would be a privilege

More lay involvement and more freedom in the opportunity of liturgy and sacraments

To preach more and sing; to see women ushers, readers, etc.

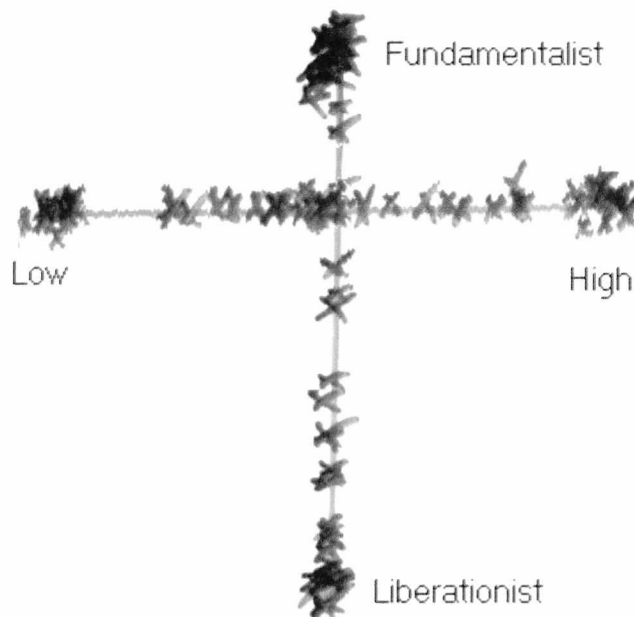
Bible study

To work with children

To see more gender inclusive language in our hymnals

A ministry to people that is sacramental and similar to an ordained priest

More involvement in my lay ministries within reading, the Eucharist and the choir



Singing for God and Jesus; Bible studies; primary teaching

A women's fellowship meeting where we can share our every day experiences with knowing Christ

Mother in Christ in charge of the children

To worship in the prayer ministry

Opportunity for freedom for personal worship within church

To be a teacher and leader of worship

Participate publicly in communion

Decision making power to women

To sing in the choir

To experiment with different styles of church structure - worship would then arise from an ecclesiology that reflected the Gospel values of freedom rather than a hierarchical divine patterning

To worship as a deaconess

Appendix 1 Questionnaire

“WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

This is the question that Jesus asked his followers. For Christians today the question is just as important as it was to those who lived with, and followed Jesus. As part of my post graduate research I am looking at the diversity of answers that we give as women to this question. Who do we say Jesus is for us personally today.

Thank you for the time you will take to complete this questionnaire. Your responses will be treated in strict confidence and there is no need to identify yourself. If however you would be willing to take part in a more explorative study then please complete the final section of the questionnaire before returning it to me.

- 1 To find the answers to Jesus' question “Who do you say that I am?” which of the New Testament texts would you turn to first?

Please tick the appropriate square

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| The Gospel of Matthew | <input type="checkbox"/> | The Gospel of Mark | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The Gospel of Luke | <input type="checkbox"/> | The Gospel of John | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The Letters of Paul | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other Texts | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please specify which other texts

- 2 Would you say that your response to the question emphasises the humanity of Jesus or the divinity of Jesus, or would you consider that it emphasises these qualities equally?

Please mark a cross on the line where you feel your response lies

humanity_____divinity

3 Would you say that the bible is more likely to be the recorded word of God, or the writers' interpretation of God's word?

please mark with a cross on the line where you feel your response lies

God's word _____ interpreted
word of God

4 How strongly do you agree that your response to Jesus' question is influenced by

| | Strongly agree | agree | neutral | disagree | Strongly disagree |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Your life experience | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Your experience as a woman | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Your culture | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Your social situation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Your church | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Your reading of the bible | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5 Are you a regular worshipper within a Christian tradition?

Yes

No

6 Would you describe your church as

Roman Catholic

Anglican

Pentecostal

Episcopalian

Methodist

Baptist

Other: *please specify*

7 Do you feel that your church offers you enough opportunities to take an active role within worship?

Yes

No

8 Would you welcome more opportunities to take an active role within worship?

Yes

No

If you have answered Yes, what opportunities would you like?

9 How would you describe your ethnic and cultural background?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. If you would like to participate in a further study would you please complete your

first name: _____

telephone number: _____

or e-mail address: _____

and return to me at pad4@ukc.ac.uk;
paddydaniel@paddydaniel.screaming.net

Or

Patricia Daniel
11 Bernard Street
Gravesend
Kent DA12 2 EX

Appendix 2 Questionnaire Results and Analysis

Question 1: Which text would you turn to first?

| | |
|----------|----|
| Matthew | 11 |
| Mark | 6 |
| Luke | 3 |
| John | 23 |
| Paul | 3 |
| Other | 1 |
| Multiple | 5 |

Question 4: How strongly do you agree that your response is influenced by:

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----------------------|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Life Experience | 29 | 14 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| Experience as a woman | 12 | 21 | 12 | 1 | 0 |
| Culture | 8 | 20 | 10 | 5 | 1 |
| Social Situation | 9 | 12 | 16 | 5 | 2 |
| Church | 19 | 13 | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| Reading of Bible | 25 | 12 | 3 | 3 | 1 |

Question 5, 7, 8:

| | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| Are you a regular worshipper in a Christian Church | 41 | 6 |
| Do you have enough opportunity to take an active role in worship | 34 | 10 |
| Would you welcome more opportunity to take an active role | 22 | 22 |

Question 6: Would you describe your church as

| | |
|----------------|----|
| Roman Catholic | 7 |
| Pentecostal | 3 |
| Methodist | 3 |
| Anglican | 12 |
| Episcopalian | 2 |
| Baptist | 4 |
| Evangelic | 7 |
| Brethren | 2 |
| Other | 4 |

Hypothesis Tests For Independence of Denomination and Opportunities For Worship Roles

- (a) Test for independence between denomination and opportunity for active involvement in worship.

H₀: Denomination and opportunity for active role in worship are independent
H₁: Denomination and opportunity for active role in worship are independent.

Using the test statistic $\chi^2 = \frac{\sum(O-E)^2}{E}$ with $(n-1)df$

Resulted in $\chi^2 = 5.56$

The critical value $\chi^2_{.05} = 15.51$ with 8 df

Since the calculated value is less than the critical value the null hypothesis is accepted with the conclusion that women's opportunity for active involvement with their church worship is independent of their denomination

- (b) Test for independence between denomination and desire for more opportunity for active involvement within worship

H₀: Denomination and desire for more opportunity for active role in worship are independent

H₁: Denomination and desire for more opportunity for active role in worship are independent.

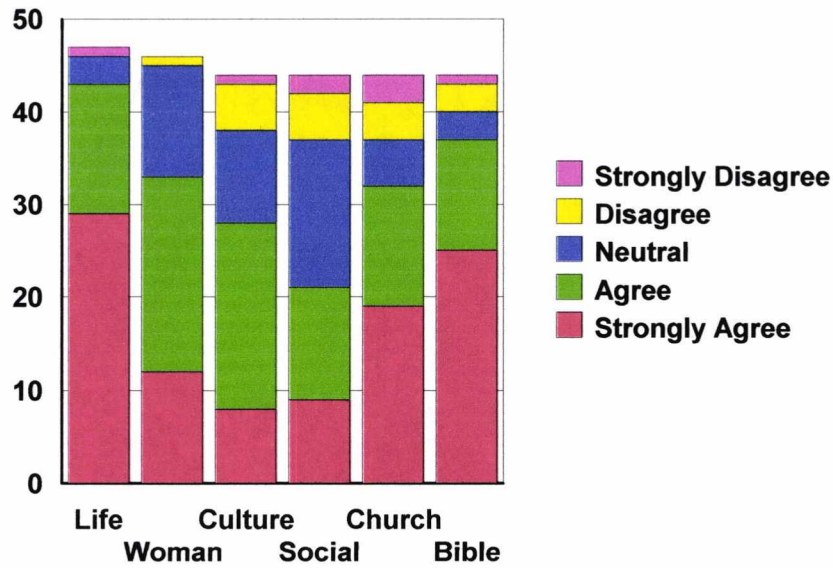
Using the test statistic $\chi^2 = \frac{\sum(O-E)^2}{E}$ with $(n-1)df$

Resulted in $\chi^2 = 9.93$

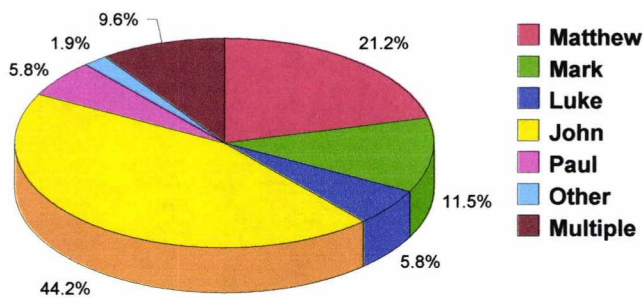
The critical value $\chi^2_{.05} = 15.51$ with 8 df

Again there is no significance here with the conclusion that women's desire for a more active role within worship is independent of denomination.

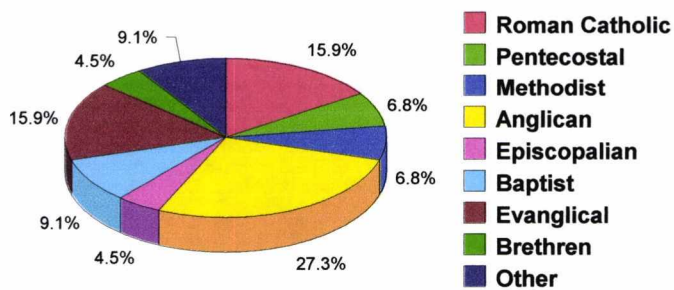
Experiences and Influences



Preferred Text



Denomination of Women



Illustrations

- Fig 1.a Elizabeth Obbard
The Exception
original cartoon 2001
- Fig 1.b Elizabeth Obbard
Catholics and Groaners
original cartoon 2001
- Fig 1.c Maggi Hambling
Good Friday 1998
bronze and stone (unique cast)
24 x 19 x 11.5
- Fig 3.a Rosemary Madigan
The Yellow Christ
1968 Adelaide
Wood (3 sections joined)
230.0 x 155.0 cm
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
South Australian Government Grant 1989
- Fig 3.b Robert Lentz
Mother of The Streets
1986
- Fig 3.c Louis Glanzman
The Woman with a Hemorrhage
1996
- Fig 3.d Robert Lentz
The Syro-Phoenician Woman
1994
- Fig 3.e Adam Kossowski
The Empty Tomb
The Choir Chapel, Aylseford Priory
Personal photograph
- Fig 5.a Dina Cormick
Thecla of Greece
Durban 1995
In Celebration of Women
- Fig 5.b *Artemis of Ephesos*
The Vatican Museums
- Fig 5.c *The Mother Goddess of Crete*
- Fig 5.d *A Typical Brigid Cross*
- Fig 5.e *The Brigid Well*
Cranford, Tyrone, Northern Ireland 2000
Personal photograph

- Fig 5.f J. I. Schubert
Kilpeck Sheelagh
- Fig 5.g J Harding
Rochester Cathedral Sheelagh
- Fig 6.a Dina Cormick
Creata God Most Beautiful
Durban 1995
- Fig 6.b Robert Lenz
Christ Sophia
1987
- Fig 6.c Dina Cormick
Mehetebal of Samaria
Durban 1995
- Fig 6.d Adam Kossowski
Jesus Is Taken Down From The Cross
The Choir Chapel, Aylseford Priory
Personal photograph
- Fig 7.a Maggi Hambling
Good Friday 1990
Oil and aluminium on canvas
91.5 x 82

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Biblical and Early Texts

Ignatius to Ephesians
Polycarp to Philipppians
! Clement to Corinthians
Acts of Paul and Thecla
Illustrations

Fig 1 The Yellow Christ

Fig 2 Mother of the Streets Robert Lentz 1986

Fig 2 Our Lady of Confidence Enrique Miguel de la Vega

Fig 3 The Woman with a Hemorrhage (*sic*) Louis Glanzman 1996

Fig 4 Syro-Phoenician Woman Robert Lentz 1994

Fig 5 The resurrection ceramic from above the altar in the choir chapel at Aylesfrd
Priory