

Features

Women and their Religions

A woman's religious experience and what she holds religiously most important are qualitatively different from men's religious experience and focus. A woman may focus on those aspects of a group's world view that speak to her social situation. Official religious institutions have historically epitomised the structural and ideological suppression of women. Women's religion is nevertheless shaped heavily by the larger religious group because it is not a separate religion.

In this feature we have gathered articles from men and women who have looked at the status and function of women within different religious traditions and some of the problems faced by women who attempt to transcend the constraints of official religion. Contributions

on the role of women in Aboriginal religion and Islam, although requested, have unfortunately not been received. As well we include some reviews of recently published books in the area of women and religion.

Women-Church: What's in the Name?

Erin White

Women-Church is ten years old. In another sense it is two thousand years old and older. The term women-church arose in the United States, probably coined by the Scripture scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in the context of the Women Moving Church conference in 1981. Here Schüssler Fiorenza spoke of the 'ekklesia of women' which soon became known as women-church.¹

In 1983 her influential work, *In Memory of Her*, was published.²

Devoted to 'a feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins', the work articulates the foundation of women-church as Fiorenza understands them.

In 1985 another key text, Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Women Church: Theology and Practice*, appeared in the United States.³ Tracing the history of women-church, its tensions and relations with institutional church, and including several rituals of today's women, this work complements Schüssler Fiorenza's. Both ar-

ticulate a fresh understanding of women in the United States, one that can also be identified in Canada, Europe, parts of Asia, and Australia. How do Schüssler Fiorenza, Ruether and other theologians understand the widespread phenomenon of women-church?

For Schüssler Fiorenza the expression 'ekklesia of women' is a hermeneutical, re-constructive and political term.⁴

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

A. A Hermeneutical Term

First it is hermeneutical in that it is an interpretative linguistic strategy. As Schüssler Fiorenza realises, the term women-church offends on account of its implicit reductionism. Fair-minded women and men object that it excludes men, and spiritual seekers, tired of institutional limitations and abuses, object that church is an outmoded term. The terms 'women' and 'church' irritate different groups for a variety of reasons. In Schüssler Fiorenza's understanding, however, women-church is not about the exclusion of men. It is about the inclusion of women. The term unambiguously signifies that women are and always have been church.⁵ Whereas the non-gender term 'church' in practice excludes women from leadership and self-determination and reduces us to passive recipients of ritual and knowledge, the term 'women-church' draws attention to our leadership and participation as women. It makes women visible and signifies our autonomy in the spiritual domain. Similarly, no apology need be made for the term 'church'. Schüssler Fiorenza interprets it as derived from the Greek notion of *ekklesia* being 'the public assembly of free citizens who gather in order to determine

their own and their children's communal, political and spiritual well being'.⁶ So *ekklesia* specifically endorses notions of freedom, choice and self-determination. Although historically the Greek assembly excluded women because they were not admitted to full citizenship of the state, and although the church has, for the most of its two thousand years, excluded women (and most men) from participating fully in decisions concerning their own spiritual needs, there is a need for women today to conform to this restricted and inaccurate meaning of *ekklesia*. Instead women can reclaim the original liberating meaning of 'church'. Women-Church is about this reclamation.

B. A Constructive and Re-constructive Task

One such task is the scholarly work of re-constructing the origins of Christianity so that women are understood as being, from the beginning, at the centre and not on the margins. Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her* is a classic work of re-construction. By examining ancient documents, many non-canonical, Schüssler Fiorenza demonstrates that 'women as the *ekklesia* of God have a continuous history that can claim women in Judaism, as well as in the Jesus and early Christian movements, as its roots and beginnings' (p 350). This work of making ancient women visible as both victims and agents of history empowers today's women. A further task is the practical living out of the implications of this scholarly work. So the construction of modern women-church is partly founded on the reconstruction of the origins of Christianity. It is not as though women-church has sprung up unheralded as a fad of late twentieth-century women. It has an ancient heritage, admittedly in fragments and therefore difficult to retrieve but with

countless traces waiting to be interpreted. And this re-construction of the first three centuries of Christianity is not an isolated venture.⁷ It is part of the massive reclaiming of women's history which is now well under way and has its own momentum. Similarly the practical work of women-church occurs in the context of a variety of movements currently engaged in claiming women's space in all political and cultural domains.

C. A Political Strategy

It operates, not on the boundaries of patriarchal church, but at its centre. It draws together the various feminist strategies for opposing patriarchy and it lives out the vision of these strategies right at the centre of the institution. Schüssler Fiorenza compares women-church to an ivy that seeks 'to envelop the patriarchal ecclesial weeds and to replace them one by one with a different praxis'.⁸ Women-Church signifies, not an exodus, but a struggle with patriarchal church. 'Struggle', not exodus, 'is a name for Hope'.⁹

Rosemary Radford Ruether

Rosemary Radford Ruether's concept of women-church, while complementing Schüssler Fiorenza, articulates a different basis. It rests, not so much on a reconstruction of origins, as on the image of an exodus community linked with other historical exodus communities whose course can be plotted over the last two thousand years. Via the biblical image of exodus, Ruether traces the history of these groups and links them with modern women-church. 'To be Church', she says, 'means an exodus from patriarchy'.¹⁰ The image of exodus does not, however, signify a breaking with in-

stitutional church. It means rather remaining in dialectical relation with it. 'Women-Church means neither leaving the church as a sectarian group, nor continuing to fit into it on its terms. It means establishing bases for a feminist critical culture and celebrational community that have some autonomy from the established institutions'.¹¹ Both aspects of these 'autonomous bases' are significant in Ruether's understanding: 'the feminist critical culture' that analyses and struggles against patriarchy in all its forms, and the 'celebrational community' that can ritually grieve and rejoice about the experience of women. These elements cannot be separated. 'Women in contemporary church', she says 'are suffering from linguistic deprivation and eucharistic famine'.¹²

Unless this need for word and symbol is met women will not be sufficiently nourished to fight against patriarchy. Women-Church is a place of both nourishment and struggle.

The difference in emphases between Schüssler Fiorenza and Ruether's understandings of women-church are obvious. In fact Schüssler Fiorenza believes that in the United States there are two movements both calling themselves women-church, one concerned with struggling with patriarchy at the centre of institutional church and the other concerned with providing ritual consolation to its members.¹³ She supports the first and warns that the second is in danger of further entrenching the marginalising of women. It seems to me, however, that the two understandings are closely related rather than oppositional.

Mary Hunt

Mary Hunt's work is helpful in exploring this relationship. Hunt defines women-church as 'a global, ecumenical movement made up of local feminist base communities of justice-seeking friends who engage in sacrament and solidarity'.¹⁴ Her discussion of the relation between sacrament and solidarity puts into some perspective the tensions between the above two concepts of women-church.

Hunt defines sacrament as 'an act of lifting to public expression the everyday life of people because it is holy'. She says 'prayer is momentary attention to the presence of the divine' and that 'attention does not make the divine present, it simply recognises what is so'.¹⁵ This understanding of sacrament and prayer means that anyone can lead and participate in naming and attending to the divine, a right and freedom fully claimed by women-church. Closely related to this view of sacrament is the political work of solidarity. Consider Hunt's examples of this work: 'it ... includes hugs as well as legislation, watching one another's children grow as well as stopping nuclear war, attending to the environment as well as ending global conflict'.¹⁶ Here is the dailyness that is lifted 'to public expression' in sacrament. A break between solidarity and sacrament is artificial: 'solidarity is just as spiritual as sacrament is political in women-church'.¹⁷ This key insight renders unnecessary any break between women-church groups devoted to struggle and those devoted to exodus activities.

Women-Church in Australia

None of this is to deny that there are tensions within women-church. It is simply to affirm that these tensions, far from being divisive, can be creative. Here is an Australian example that makes the tensions concrete.¹⁸ In 1989 I attended a conference entitled 'Towards a Feminist Theology'. Four hundred participants, mostly women and a few men, met in a secluded coastal spot on the outskirts of Sydney. All liturgies, lectures, workshops, meals, entertainment affirmed women. We were all believers there and no voice dissented, publicly at least. It was idyllic. There were struggles, of course, some destructive because patriarchal attitudes went with us, and some creative because they were necessitated by the articulation of the differences between feminisms. But despite the struggles and sometimes because of them, we did experience an unusual degree of freedom. At the end of the conference several participants went from the secluded seaside place to the city centre for a procession through the streets to the Anglican cathedral. Here, immediately before the opening ceremony for a General Synod due to debate the ordination of women, we participated in a televised ritual affirming women and lamenting our exclusion from ordination in the Anglican Church and from full participation in Christian churches in all denominations. It is easy to detect in this example that the first of these events more readily evokes the 'spiritual' images of exodus and sacrament and the second the 'political' ones of struggle and solidarity. But a closer look reveals that the holding of a feminist conference, no matter how secluded the spot and how exclusively attended by believers, is indeed

a political act, and the celebration of a liturgy, no matter how publicly provocative its place and timing, is a sacramental event. A similar analysis can be made of many women-church activities. In general, the experiences suggested by exodus and struggle, by sacrament and solidarity are entwined in women-church in a way that refuses to conform to the absoluteness of the public/private split of patriarchal institutions. As Hunt said, in women-church 'solidarity is just as spiritual as sacrament is political'.

In conclusion a few clarifying points need to be made about women-church in Australia. As far as I know, there are only a couple of groups here that call themselves women-church and these are based in Sydney.¹⁹ There are, however, many groups whose activities and self-understanding can be readily identified with the concept of women-church as articulated in the works of Schüssler Fiorenza, Ruether and Hunt.²⁰ There is an unmistakable 'family resemblance' amongst groups that links them within Australia and with similar groups overseas. In broad terms, all groups reject the injustice of patriarchal religion and challenge androcentric ecclesial structures, all recognise themselves as having divine spiritual needs, and all affirm the revelation of the divine in womanhood. A collective energy arises from these likenesses giving rise to a proliferation of groups with publications, conferences and all kinds of public activities.

It is important, though, not to overstate likenesses and especially not to impose a name.²¹ Many differences are evident. One of the most obvious is the degree of affiliation with denominational churches with groups seeing themselves variously as 'disassociated insiders', 'associated outsiders' or 'disassociated outsiders'.²²

This difference is often related to the varying emphases given to political and spiritual activities. Groups vary too in the symbols used with some groups restricting themselves to Christian symbols, some to neo-pagan (Goddess) symbols, and others adopting whatever symbols present themselves. Other significant differences occur in attitudes to feminist scholarship, and to feminist struggles in the 'secular' domain. In sum, symbols and strategies differ in accordance with nuances in self-understanding in different groups.

Schüssler Fiorenza sees the various feminist strategies and visions as 'strands of a rope which only when intertwined and twisted together have the strength to bind the evil power of patriarchy'.²³ The intertwining is both the strength and the difficulty as was demonstrated at a recent national conference 'Women Authoring Theology' attended by 400 women and a few men.²⁴ Organised by four groups, the Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW), Women and the Australian Church (WATAC), Feminist Uniting Network (FUN), and Sydney Women-Church, this was a diverse, ecumenical conference. With all the differences and likenesses outlined above featuring within the four organising groups as well as between them, the conference itself reflected a multi-faceted structure. As a result, participants benefited from the acquired administrative, academic, liturgical, experiential and political skills of these groups and the individuals within them, but none of the areas could be explored in depth. This can be frustrating for those with a highly developed taste for one area, but it has advantages. To change from the rope image, a smorgasbord lets people know what is on offer, lets them see even if they choose not to taste, and

can develop new tastes. The very diversity can be nourishing and so can fortify for the struggle.

In Conclusion

The women's movement in religion, of which women-church is a part, is engaged in that classic work of exploring the Same, the Other and the Similar, an essential work for feminists. It is redefining women and, by consequence, men. So far the movement has generally avoided the three big temptations: 1) that of making Sameness absolute, thereby creating a false homogeneity via a narrow orthodoxy and orthopraxis; 2) that of ignoring or excluding Otherness or denigrating it as completely alien and hostile in a way that demonises all difference; and 3) that of denying Resemblances and refusing to hold tensions thereby reducing everything to the categories of Same or Other.

Women-Church would certainly fail should it succumb in a major way to any of these temptations.²⁵ Instead, it continues to enlarge and redefine its understanding of the Same, the Other and the Similar by a systematic critique of patriarchy and an unsystematic celebration of women's experience and identity. It is disciplined and spontaneous. While women-church continues like this a revolution in religious thought and praxis is well on the way.

Notes and References

1. The term Women-Church did not take hold immediately in the USA. Instead it found acceptance in The Netherlands from where it spread back to the USA. Lieve Troch details the move towards women-church in The Netherlands in her article, 'The Feminist Movement in and on the Edge of the Churches in the Netherlands; From Consciousness-Raising to Womenchurch' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1989, 113-128.
2. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, Crossroad, New York, 1983.
3. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice*. Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1985.
4. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza 'Daughters of Vision and Struggle' in *Towards a Feminist Theology: Papers and Proceedings from a National Conference*, Elaine Lindsay (ed), The Conference Committee, PO Box 140, Helensburgh NSW 2508 Australia, 1990: 19-20.
5. 'Women are church, we women always have been church, we women will always be church'. These are Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's opening words in a session entitled 'Shaping our Women-Church: Global Perspectives' at the Second National Conference entitled 'Women-Church: Claiming our Power', Cincinnati, Ohio, USA, 9-11 October 1987.
6. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1984: xiv.
7. Many scholars from different disciplines are working on reconstructions of origins that take the gender bias of previous constructions into account. Examples of such works are those of Phyllis Trible, Gerda Lerner, Judith Plaskow, Bernadette Brooten, Carol Christ, Elise Boulding, Marilyn Arthur to name a few.
8. E. Schüssler Fiorenza 'Daughters of Vision and Struggle': 20.
9. *Ibid.*: 19. Schüssler Fiorenza notes that the expression 'Struggle is a Name for Hope' is borrowed from a collection of poetry by Renny Golden and Sheila Collins.
10. Ruether, *Women-Church*: 64.

11. *Ibid*: 62.

12. *Ibid*: 4

13. E. Schüssler Fiorenza 'Daughters of Vision and Struggle': 18-20. Compare the two descriptions of women-church given as the fifth and seventh strategies. Even though this article argues for the linking of various feminist strategies and warns against harmful either/or dichotomies, it is in fact in danger of fostering just such a dichotomy by separating women-church into two groups. See my analysis of this article in *Towards a Feminist Theology*: 36-37 and in Erin White and Marie Tulip *Knowing Otherwise: Feminism, Women and Religion*, David Lovell Publishing, Melbourne, 1991: 141-145.

14. Mary E. Hunt 'Defining "Women-Church"' in *Womanspirit* Vol.4, No.2, Autumn 1990: 5-7, reprinted from *Waterwheel*, Vol.3, No.2, Summer 1990. 'Friends' should not be understood here as a 'privatised... one-to-one relation that makes us feel good without necessarily making change': 6. For Hunt, the call to make friends in all nations is a 'political' and 'theopolitical' imperative. See her recent work *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*, Crossroad, New York, 1991.

15. *Ibid*: 6.

16. *Ibid*.

17. *Ibid*. The use I make here of Hunt's definition of women-church is not in complete accord with her thinking. In an article reporting on a women-church conference, entitled 'Meeting the Women of Women-Church', in *The Christian Century*, Vol. 106, No.16, 1989: 493, Gretchen E. Ziegenhals says: 'Hunt scoffed at the growing spirituality movement which she called 'fluffy', and she distinguished women-church from the Goddess movement, which she feels is sometimes romantic and irresponsible'. I want to distinguish my own position from the one attributed to Hunt where she appears to exclude the spirituality movement from having any political impact. Its very existence is a political

statement. And whatever about the 'fluffiness' in the practice of the Goddess movement in the US (which may simply be a corrective to the hard-edged realism of patriarchal churches), it is clear that some of the sharpest critical thinking is associated with this movement. See, for example, the work of Carol Christ, especially *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1987. Some women feel uncomfortable with Goddess imagery and others with christian imagery, but women-church need not split over this unease. In Australia, women-church uses the symbols of both Christianity and neo-paganism, and the journal *Women-Church* publishes articles affirming both.

18. This example appears in *Knowing Otherwise*: 142-3 in the context of a more detailed discussion of the tensions within women-church: 134-149. One tension not raised in this paper is that between Christian symbolism and Goddess symbolism (see previous note). Although much work has already been done on Goddess symbolism in studies of both the modern religion of neo-paganism and the prehistoric religions of Europe, more work needs to be done on the relations between Goddess symbolism and the symbolism of Judaism and Christianity. As I see it, one of the main challenges to women-church is to think through these relations in the light of the traces that remain, and to live out the political implications of these relations. Although some women-church groups already call on a combination of these symbol systems, there is still much work to be done before the relations between pagan and christian symbols become part of common historical consciousness.

19. The group to which I belong began in April 1985. This group consists of about 80 women with 15-30 attending the bi-monthly meetings. It does not have a high public profile being most concerned with supporting and educating its own members. The group did, however, publish a 'Protest Creed' in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (22 November, 1986)

at the time of the visit to Australia of Pope John Paul II, an activity that attracted some media coverage. The group also publishes *Women-Church: An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, GPO Box 2134, Sydney 2001. Sometimes in Australia, the name 'women-church' is associated exclusively with this local group. This is incorrect and shows a lack of awareness of the existence of groups calling themselves 'women-church' in many parts of the world.

20. For example: Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW) which began in Sydney in 1983 and became national in 1984 and Women and the Australian Church (WATAC), a national movement initiated in 1983 by women and men of Catholic religious orders.

21. In the context of a women-church conference, 'Women-Church: Becoming Who We Are', held in 1989 in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont USA, Hunt reminded participants that 'women-church is not an umbrella term for christian feminists', and black women publicly said they are not part of women-church: Joan Martin, black campus minister at Temple University, is reported as defining herself as 'a sister of women in women-church, but not part of the movement. "Name yourselves as women-church", she urged, "but don't name me." Although for white women, women-church may now be a necessity, Martin made it clear that women-church is still a luxury that black women can't afford.' (Gretchen E. Ziegenhals 'Meeting the Women of Women-Church' :493). As far as I know the conversation with black women has not proceeded so far in Australia. There is,

however, an absence of black women in women-church and the movement here remains largely white and middle class.

22. Janice Raymond, *A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection*, The Women's Press, London, 1986.

23. Schüssler Fiorenza 'Daughters of Vision and Struggle' :15.

24. This conference, which took place in Sydney 24-26 May, 1991 was televised and formed a segment on the ABC TV Program *Compass*, June 23, 1991.

25. Compare with Schüssler Fiorenza's naming of some of the 'deadly sins' of women-church ('Daughters of Vision and Struggle' p.20): 'psychologism that does not allow for any critical debate, but infantilises women by 'mothering' them; anti-intellectualism that understands serious intellectual work as male and therefore unfeminine; collectivism that does not recognise and respect creative leadership but usurps it by manipulating groups instead; horizontal violence that thrashes women who refuse to remain feminine victims; guilt-tripping and confessionalism that repeats the litany of patriarchal sins without ever doing something about them; exclusivism that insists on women-church as the gathering of the truly true feminists and dehumanises men as evil; dogmatism that draws its boundaries in doctrinal terms rather than welcoming a diversity of gifts and visions'. All these 'sins' represent pathological understandings of the Same, the Other and the Similar.



Indian Women

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From the 1920s when Katherine Mayo decided that 'lack of initiative and originality...weakness of life vigour itself - all are traits that truly characterise the Indian...' ¹, up to and beyond Mary Daly's claiming of Mayo as a 'sister' in her popular work *Gyn/Ecology*, 'western' women's writing about India and Indian women has with very few exceptions and even at its best, assumed an implicitly superior, more knowing theoretical and practical subject status. In this brief essay, I will review some of the problems encountered by both Indian and non-Indian women scholars in recognising and attempting to dismantle destructive ideologies and misrepresentations relating to women in India and their religious traditions.

It is not a matter of simple rejection of elitist ethnocentric universals. Intercultural discourse about women (as about everyone else) is a great deal more complicated than that, and all the more so between cultures which have previously been in a colonial relationship. With its powerful religious traditions and a long colonial experience, India reflects powerfully all the contradictions involved in representation, both by outsiders and in self-reflection. The problems currently being experienced in speaking about women in India from 'outside' and in Indian women's speaking about themselves ² further magnify contemporary uncertainties about valid inter-cultural discourse. That the more fundamental problems of 'intractable contradiction, paradox, irony, and uncertainty in the ex-

planation of human activities' ³ have led to the widely acknowledged 'crisis of representation' in the human sciences is both a result of inter-cultural discourse failure and a loss of faith in home-brand totalising theories.

To speak about women in a culture such as India involves not only the crisis of faith in speech and text, not only the fact of hegemony in ethnocentrism and lingering visions of 'empire', but the question of perception of difference in relation to gender in a context which queries the validity of any such abstraction. To speak about Indian religions and women taps the most extreme sensitivities, given the part Christian religious thought and practice has played in both the development of totalising forms of metaphysics and in the enterprise of empire.

Within the varieties of mainstream western feminist thought a major factor affecting views of Indian women has been the denunciation of the patriarchal structures and certainties of western religions. Just as non-Christian religions were seen as degraded forms in the nineteenth century, they are now seen as more patriarchal and more deserving of condemnation than Christianity (and, to a certain extent, Judaism) by feminist revolutionaries in western societies. There is an assumption that Hinduism and Islam in particular are not only responsible for vicious attitudes towards women, but that the cultures these religions dominate are backward and undeveloped in every possible way because of their inherent nature as Hindu or Is-

lamic. Although Edward Said himself presented a totalising monolith as the final 'ism' to destroy all 'isms', finding nothing but colonising discourses in western scholarship, no scholar of religion can afford to ignore the challenge of his critique. There is no doubt that versions of the attitudes described by Said are well entrenched in feminist theory and practice. Kristeva's *About Chinese Women*, aspects of Irigaray's understanding of 'the East', Germaine Greer's view of Indian village life, Kate Millett's *Going to Iran*, Daly's treatment of foot-binding, *sati* and clitoridectomy, many works on 'women and development' and not the least important, the general assumption of the superiority of an indiscriminate and exclusive individualist 'equality' over 'hierarchy' in any form... are all signs of deeply held assumptions about 'other' women ('non-Western women are what we are not'⁴) that seem to be very difficult to eradicate⁵.

For those whose cultures have both resisted and valued the intellectual insights of a colonising power, there is not a pure 'indigenous' position. The clear separation of 'the West' from that which has been colonised is not possible. In her analysis of the opposition 'The West': 'Third World', Kulpana Ram speaks of 'the pain of ambivalence, confusion and the schizophrenia that is the hallmark of colonial subjectivity'. For her, "'the West' is not an external reality-it invades and redefines the interiority of the colonial subject'⁶. Madhu Kishwar makes a related point when she insists that in India, 'the liberal, secular intelligentsia is rooted more in the western liberal tradition and is often unable to comprehend, leave alone appreciate, the sentiments and cherished beliefs of India's diverse peoples.' The result is

seen by Kishwar as a 'brutal neglect of indigenous learning and knowledge systems', such that 'in the name of promoting secular education, the Western educated elite has deliberately promoted ignorance about India's rich heritage'⁷.

What Kishwar identifies as 'the Nehruvian brand of secularism' (*ibid* p.2) is closely tied in with the classical opposition 'modernity:tradition' which is used to analyse Indian society and which implicitly underpinned the struggle for independence and 'nationhood'. Where 'modernity' means 'modern-as-in-the-west', the fragmented colonial subject would seem to have to struggle to resist identification with the locus of power, thereby becoming more alienated still from the 'traditional' as essentialised from 'outside'⁸. In relation to women, the figure of the stereotyped 'traditional woman' emerges. She is 'backward', her religion is the 'litttle' tradition and she is perceived as needing to be educated out of her village mind into modern discourse.

In this context, the impact of post-1970 feminisms from the west on the 'modern, secular, western-educated' Indian woman (although this phraseology neglects differences within this stereotype), has created problems. Divisions have occurred which centred around the ambivalence of the well-educated towards imported theory and practice and the temptation to impose some of those interpretations and solutions on the pan-Indian problems of women. The emphasis on literacy as a single issue is a case in point. Many official literacy programs assume that illiteracy 'is the same as ignorance and lack of intelligence'⁹ and also the root cause of poverty. The ideology implicit in these programs places the blame particularly on

women for their own situation. Rather than expose the various economic and social conditions which affect access to resources, the programs admonish the illiterate for their backwardness and make it their responsibility to accept such outside ideals as the 'planned nuclear family, mothercraft, sanitation, balanced diet, improvement of technology...' (*ibid*) without any hope of structural change and without being centred in the strengths and styles of village women. The teaching method is one developed along the lines of the knowing speaking to the ignorant and unworthy.

The image of traditional religion used in these programs is a contradiction in itself. Selected icons of the virtuously compliant and self-sacrificing Goddess are used to promulgate particular ideologies of gender-state control. Literacy programs which promise to empower women use a woman-image of lowered eyes and bent head - as Kamala Bhasin remarks, 'What a contrast to the strong confident, hard working women one sees in the countryside!' (*ibid* p.6). There is a cynical manipulation of the Goddess tradition which, following Kishwar's reasoning, would seem to derive from ignorance of, or deliberate repression of the complexity of that tradition. At the same time, the elite secularist model, while increasingly under threat from militant politico-religious movements, is still the ideal of many Indian intellectuals. Programs developed in contradistinction to the government sponsored model described, often assume that liberation and emancipation means the rejection of all aspects of traditional religion, in which case the message for women can be just as disempowering in terms of the rejection of highly regarded values and the imposition of an ideology of 'rationality' and secular

modernity. The associated condescension of the concept of 'false consciousness' further complicates the matter.

This pattern would seem to be connected with the experience of the educated elite described by Mary John as a 'process by which we learn to avow and remember certain knowledges and devalue and forget others. We grow up repudiating the local and the personal in favour of what will get us ahead and away...' ¹⁰.

'First-world' views of Indian traditional ('undeveloped', 'third world') culture and of traditional women as passive victims locked in sati-frames of impotence and ignorance would seem to be at odds with 'first-world' views of Indian religious traditions as worth lifetimes of scholarship. But it would seem that these views are actually closely connected. Right from the beginning of contact with English missionaries, lawmakers, administrators and scholars, Hindus have received conflicting messages about the quality of their culture. The so-called 'great tradition' of Brahmanical learning has been universally admired; the actual culture in which the traditions of the majority are lived out day to day has often been considered beneath contempt or reflected in romantic, but distanced views of village life in a glow of timeless otherness. The Indian woman stands at the centre of this race/class axis in the paradoxical form of boundary 'other', both alien-erotic 'feminine' and sign of disruption in a stable scholarly world ¹¹.

Yet 'western' feminist discourse has seemingly colluded with traditional scholarship in this area, even when attempting to subvert it. Aihwa Ong identifies feminism as 'reproduced within the Western knowledge of the non-Western world', thus betraying 'a view of non-

Western women as out of time with the West, and therefore a vehicle for misplaced Western nostalgia...Third World women are often represented as...ever arriving at modernity when Western feminists are already adrift in postmodernism¹². Within this schema, one finds religions reduced to unified, static and a-historical entities which somehow operate outside economic and social relations as causes of 'underdevelopment', gender 'inequality' and general inferiority¹³. If a 'pluralist' position is adopted in response, one moves to the notion of 'their' [Third World, Indian, indigenous] feminism, 'equal' to, but 'different' from 'our' [Western, European] feminism. This is no subversion at all of course. Indeed, it falsifies all positions by reduction to flat binary opposition with a hidden hierarchical underpinning.

Kulpana Ram and others point out that in categories such as victim/agent and domination/resistance, the victim can be subject and actor simultaneously, just as the dominated can resist, deep in the context of their own oppression.

I would add that this subversion of the oppositions is in fact a normal state of affairs in human experience; that it is not only the dissatisfaction of colonised groups with their totalised representation of 'victim'/'oppressed group' status that has alerted them to these forms of reductionism. Nor is it accidental that in western feminisms the stress on 'woman-as-universal-victim' has undergone a major reversal. It is our experience that has told us differently. That each term in an opposition gives meaning to and depends on its polar opposite, and as Derrida stressed, that neither term can have total presence is perhaps not a miracle of the post-modern but a (sometimes

courageous) acknowledgment of the 'real' relations of dualities based on personal experience.

Above all, religious mythologies tell us this. It seems to me that totalising reductionism in categories of 'secular' discourse goes hand-in-hand with both the 'elevation' of myth to dogma and also its reduction to economic and social functions. Western feminisms have rejected the first, but taken refuge in the second and nowhere is this more obvious than in the clumsy defensiveness of many feminist analyses of gender in Hindu and Islamic cultures. I might add that in my experience, both India's mythologies and the multiplicity of actions and insights of women in India confound dualities at a very deep level. Only by disparaging both Indian and other women and non-Western understandings of the 'sacred' have we been able to hang on to grand and ludicrous notions of ourselves as modern (read 'non-traditional') and post-modern (read 'ahead of everyone else') western women.

What is not so obvious is where meaning can now be found in cross-cultural feminist exchange. Our 'western' feminist ideologies have been found wanting and we have responded awkwardly with apologies for our 'situatedness' and the invention of a different kind of Difference, which is anything but difference. We have lately decided that 'we' are fragmented subjects, but that 'they' now deserve to be given at last the status of full Subjects - always a step behind. There is a problem here that perhaps was first spoken about by Bell Hooks in relation to white American women asking now to be instructed at length by African-American women on the correct ideology to adopt in relation to them. Aboriginal

women in Australia have similarly complained¹⁴.

There is a sense however in which we need to be reminded regularly of our errors, although this can be interpreted as another form of self-absorption. The field of Indology (as the study of language, text and culture) for example and especially in its textbook product, has shown very few signs of responding to either post-colonial or feminist critiques. Recognition of the necessity of interaction with anthropological expertise, together with the current debates on ethnography, is slow in coming. All are needed to tackle the problems of representation of Indian women and religion.

There may be after all a space in which 'we' can move. Just as the post-colonial intellectual both partakes of and resists 'western' ideologies and can resist the categorisation of 'native'/'indigenous', so the western 'outsider' scholar of another culture cannot legitimately be regarded as absolutely other than 'native'. There used to be the simplistic choice between maintaining 'objectivity' or 'going native', but this has proved to be a very revealing false choice. 'Native' intellectuals should not discount the possibility (and I would say, the advantages) of the student of Indian cultures having his or her interiority re-defined by close interaction with them. A distanced romantic nostalgia has no part in this. I mean interiority in the same sense as used by post-colonial intellectuals.

Yet this may be regarded as arrogant and certainly a westerner can be persuaded that there is no chance of 'real' understanding of another complex culture. Although this is always and necessarily 'true' (for both insiders and outsiders), insistence on its total truth is nothing but a

defensive reinforcement of that culture's Otherness and Difference.

There may be no comparison between the colonised subject's experience of invaded interiority and the free choice exercised by the 'outsider' acquiring knowledge and 'succeeding' in an alien system. In spite of the difficulties, I see this minute space as the only one in which the problems of representation can lose some of the obscuring burden they carry. Cross-cultural feminist representations are especially laden with the threat of marginalisations and distortions.

Perhaps India has the answer. If (as I heard recently) the United States does not need the post-modern 'because they had Jimmy Hendrix', it is possible that India needs the post-modern even less because of the Goddess. In her Indian habitat,

The goddess is a powerful symbol of linkages. She bridges realms and levels, hierarchies and schisms: between the autochthonous and alien, conquerors and conquered, between brahminised and lower ranking castes and between caste and tribe, between mainstream and protestant philosophy, between sophisticated theology and living cults, between reified ritual and the immediacy of local practice: hook-swinging, fire-walking, blood, meat and liquor, between classical sanskrit text and oral tradition, between materials: metal, stone and clay. Inverted, neutralised, absorbed, mainstreamed, she still exists as a disturbing presence; by daring to exist, she begs to differ¹⁵.

Instead of stealing representations of the decontextualised Indian Goddess for our own altars or reducing her to a causal factor in any analysis which takes our fancy, perhaps we should take the risk of

allowing her powerful mythic presence to invade our interiority.

Notes and References

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2. See for instance, Julie Stephens 'Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category "Non-Western Women" in Feminist Writings on India' and Susie Tharu 'Response to Julie Stephens' in Ranajit Guha (ed) *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989; Madhu Kishwar 'Why I am Not a Feminist', *Manushi* (December, 1990), 'In Defence of Our Dharma', *Manushi*, no 60 1990; 'Review of Women's Studies', *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol.XXV, nos.42 & 43, October 20-27, 1990; and 'First and Third World Feminisms', *Asian Studies Review*, Vol.15, no.1, July 1991
3. George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*. Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1986, p.15
4. Aihwa Ong, *Inscriptions*, Special Issue on Feminism and the Critique of Colonial Discourse nos.3/4 (1988), cited in Irvin Cemil Schick 'Representing Middle Eastern Women: Feminism and Colonial Discourse', *Feminist Studies* 16, no.2 (Summer) 1990 p.370
5. For an analysis of a number of texts on 'Women in the Third World', see Chandra Mohanty 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Feminist Review* 30 (1988), 61-68. In Mohanty's words, third-world women are 'defined as: religious(read 'not progressive'), family oriented(read 'traditional'), legal minors(read 'they-are-still-not-conscious-of-their-rights'), illiterate(read 'ignorant'), domestic(read 'backward'), and sometimes revolutionary(read 'their-country-is-in-a-state-of-war;they-must-fight!'). This is how the 'third-world difference' is produced.' p.78 Maria Mies' *The Lacemakers of Narsapur* (1982) is pointed out as an exception to this kind of categorisation.
6. Kulpana Ram, "'First" and "Third world" Feminisms: a New Perspective', *Asian Studies Review*, Vol.15, no.1, July 1991 p.92
7. Madhu Kishwar 'In Defence of Our Dharma.', *Manushi*, no.60, 1990, p.2,p.15.
8. A classic statement of binary opposition occurs for instance in Rita Gross 'Hindu Female Deities as a Resource for the Contemporary Rediscovery of the Goddess', *JAAR*, (XLVI/3,269-291): 'Traditional societies, which are extremely role-bound, in which sex roles are functional and necessary, cannot be compared with a modern society in which sex roles have become obsolete.' (p.274)
9. Kamala Bhasin, Literacy Monograph, *Jagori*, New Delhi, n.d.
10. Mary E. John 'Postcolonial feminists in the Western intellectual field; anthropologists and native informants?', *Inscriptions* 5 (1989), 55, cited in Kulpana Ram (*op.cit.* p.92
11. See for instance the discussion of Kipling's views in Irvin Cemil Schick's review essay 'Representing Middle Eastern women: Feminism and Colonial Discourse', *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 2, Summer 1990 pp.358 ff.
12. Aihwa Ong *op.cit.*
13. Chandra Mohanty *op.cit.* p.70-71
14. *Coming Out Show*, ABC Radio, May 31, 1991
15. Kamala Ganesh, 'Mother who is Not a Mother: In Search of the Great Indian Goddess', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XXV Nos. 42 and 43 (October 20-27, 1990) p.WS63

Women in the Jewish Tradition

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The Jewish tradition derives all its laws from its source book -the Torah - which was given to all the Jewish people, old and young, male and female, wise and simple. The Torah speaks in the language of mortals which is intelligible to all audiences. It was the Jewish scholars and teachers who interpreted the Torah, speculated on its real meaning and found explanation in its words, sentences and ideas. These interpretations - known as the Oral law - grew and were eventually written down, first in the Mishnah in about 200 CE and then as the Talmud in about 500 CE. Oral tradition and interpretation has continued since then and still continues today. To understand any Jewish law or tradition, both Oral and Written law must be taken into account.

The fundamental view of Jewish women is derived from Genesis 1:27-28 - 'God created man in his image; in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them; and He blessed them'. Man and woman were created by God and on both was bestowed God's blessing.

What is this blessing? They are both looked on as people in their own right and they are both equal in God's eyes. This means that the commandments that guide the life of the traditional Jew and which cover all spheres of life, both private and public, apply equally to men and women. The exceptions are twofold: those which are gender linked and given specifically to one gender or the other, such as circum-

cision for males at 8 days and laws regarding menstruation for females; and those which are linked to the differences in role of men and women. These (cited in Mishnah - Kiddushin 33b) exempt women from 'time-bound' positive commands because the demands of their families take precedence and could make the onus of keeping these commands too difficult. They included exemptions from saying certain prayers, but there was no exemption from praying generally or from saying Grace after Meals. There is also an exemption from having to wear the *tallit* (prayer shawl) or *tefillin* (prayer-boxes) which men wear to pray.

Legislation for or concerning women was not given to her as woman, but in one of the categories in which she could find herself during her life: as unmarried daughter, betrothed woman, wife, mother, widow and divorcée. As single daughters, girls helped with necessary chores, with agricultural duties, with drawing water and other domestic tasks. Daughters were entitled to an education with their brothers (being able to read and write was considered basic). It was the parents' responsibility to find a husband for their daughter, but she had a right to concur and could not be forced into a marriage not of her choice. Girls could remain single but this was unusual and was considered undesirable, as women saw their fulfilment as within marriage, as wives and mothers.

When a mother became betrothed she entered into a legal contract to marry and had time to prepare herself and her belongings. In ancient days she moved from her home and village and often never returned to her birthplace. The betrothal period generally lasted a year (today betrothal no longer pertains in this way). In Biblical times the bridegroom compensated the girl's father in some monetary way for the loss of his daughter as a working member of the family. In later times the girl's family gave a dowry hoping to find for her a Torah scholar or man of a good family. The husband had three duties towards his wife: providing her with food and with clothing, and cohabiting with her as man and wife. The Rabbis added another seven duties which included: providing the wife with a marriage document; medical care; and support and residence in his home during her widowhood. Women had three special duties: lighting Sabbath candles; baking the Sabbath loaves; and keeping of family purity laws. (These provided for times of coming together and times for abstaining from marital intimacy in accordance with her menstrual cycle. The recommencement of cohabitation was marked by immersion in a ritual bath or Mikveh.) These still pertain today. In Judaism the religion of the children follows that of the mother. Therefore children of a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father are Jewish. However Judaism opposes mixed marriages.

Widows, and orphans, were protected by a complex system which enabled them to glean the corners of the fields, gather the forgotten sheaves, the single grapes and those which fell to the ground and collect the second tithe and the ownerless growth. (Orphaned children in later times were duty bound to be educated by the

community). Property rights of both married and unmarried women were respected and if a married woman wished to keep her earnings she could forego maintenance by her husband.

Legislation for a 'Bill of Divorce' (called GET in Hebrew) is found in Deuteronomy 24:1 and it generally came to be considered as divorce by consent; both parties signified their agreement to the divorce, the man by having it written and the woman by accepting it. The legislation for divorce was, however, tipped in man's favour. This was because biblical society had been a polygamous one and if a woman refused to accept a GET there were always ways in which a man could circumvent the divorce and take another wife. (Official Jewish enactments against polygamy were not made until the year 1000 C.E., but by then polygamy had long since ceased to be the practice among Ashkanazi or occidental Jews. Sephardi or oriental Jews who lived in countries where polygamy was practised were allowed to take more than one wife. This is not allowed in Israel today.)

As far as public worship was concerned man was the dominant figure who conducted the service and organised the Temple ritual. There was a special women's compound or section in Temple times and it is generally agreed that women were separated or segregated from men during the service. Some women were educated enough to teach and judge - notably Deborah - but women saw the best expression of their lives in service, to husband and family, and to others. Man's service was through study and learning so that he could elevate himself and come closer to God.

Today, the women's liberation groups and feminist movements have made this generation re-think many accepted Jewish

approaches to women. The main areas of conflict can be divided into two groups: those to do with personal status, and those to do with women in public worship and prayer.

The legal enactments for women to do with the GET have had far-reaching ramifications especially in this country, as until now divorce was a rare occurrence in Judaism. Without a GET a Jewish woman cannot remarry in accordance with Jewish law. If she remarries civilly and has children, the status of these children comes into question and they are called illegitimate (MAMZERIM); this stigma remains with them forever. Since the husband has to agree to the GET and sometimes withholds his consent, everything possible is done by group pressure, counselling and community censure to persuade him. In Israel where there is no civil law in regard to personal status, there have been cases of recalcitrant husbands languishing in jail rather than giving their wives a GET and thereby freeing them to marry. Their wives share the same fate as those women whose husbands are missing -- in battle or in some disaster - without definite knowledge that they are dead. There is no presumption of death in Jewish law and, although the law is very lenient as to evidence of the death, if there is no proof the wife cannot remarry. Various ways around these areas have been suggested and lobby groups in different countries are working hard to achieve some relief. In countries outside of Israel a GET is issued after a civil divorce and the idea of a pre-nuptial agreement - whereby both parties agree to a GET within a certain timeframe should there be a civil divorce - has been suggested. This is already working in several countries and in Australia a number of rabbis and community leaders are trying

to find an acceptable form of words for it to be used here.

This does not negate the lack of equality here for men and women. Where a woman refused or was unable to accept a GET a man could sometimes circumvent it by seeking the agreement of 100 rabbis to marrying a second wife. It is done very rarely but none the less it exists to help men. Women today want the rabbinic authorities and scholars to show courage and enlightenment in their interpretation of the Law, as there are Talmudic precedents for rabbinic annulment of a marriage *ab initio* in cases where a husband refuses to grant a GET. As was pointed out at the first Jerusalem International Conference on Women and Judaism in 1987, Jewish women fared better in the 10th century than they do today and that the factors which had caused the rabbinic restriction of woman's freedom in the last 1000 years were determined as often by sociological considerations as by religio-legal ones.

In relation to women in public worship and prayer, a distinction must be made between Orthodox and Reform Judaism. Since the reform movement does not accept the automatic authority of Scriptural and Oral law, it has made many changes in synagogue worship. Men and women are not segregated during the service and women are called to the reading of the Torah and perform their part equally in the service with men. For some decades the Reform movement had ordained women as rabbis.

In orthodox services men and women are segregated and although in theory there is no law prohibiting the calling up of women to the Torah reading, it is not done. There is also a restraint in the Talmud (Berachot 24a) banning men from listening to a woman's voice in song, and

as most of the service is chanted, women cannot lead the congregation in prayer. However, there is nothing to stop women conducting a service for themselves and so special women's prayer groups have sprung up (mostly in the U.S.A.). These groups have not received support from the majority of the orthodox rabbinate nor from the majority of orthodox women who do not feel the need for this kind of liturgical innovation. The Women of the Wall (a group who conducted services at the Western Wall in Jerusalem) have been unsympathetically moved on by the Israeli rabbinate. At best the rabbinate tolerates these groups which were spear-headed by the feminist movement looking for **identical** roles for the sexes rather than **parallel** ones. At the time of writing there are no such groups in Australia although there have been sporadic attempts at establishing them.

In all sections of the Jewish community today women are represented in community life, on councils and boards of

management, on synagogue and educational committees, and as spokespeople for communal and public bodies. Hand in hand with this public liberation of women has come the phenomenal rise - especially in Israel - of women's colleges and seminaries where women can study the sources and become knowledgeable and learned. Does this mean the traditional role of women in Judaism is changing? To marry - to be a wife and mother - is still considered to be the dimension of her life which can bring the most personal fulfilment. This does not negate other aspects of her life and Jewish women in most circles today have professions and combine homes and careers. But the home - where the Sabbaths and festivals are celebrated, where the atmosphere is redolent of culture and lovingkindness, where hospitality and charity are not words but experiences, and where Judaism is the life style - is seen as the most important arena of a woman's life.

Some Thoughts of a Jewish Feminist

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In my childhood I thought that was how it was and had to be; in my teen years I felt confused; as a young adult I came to feel excluded and angry; lately I feel excited about the possibilities. I'm talking about my Jewish identity as a woman - a vast area of exploration of which I hope to share a glimpse here. This is not a comprehensive guide to feminist issues for Jewish women; it is an offering, a taste of some features from my own journey.

It took a while to notice that some of the discomfort and feeling of marginalisation, came from the fact that only men ran the synagogue service, and that men sat in the centre of the action while women were relegated to the periphery. Only men and boys had to cover their heads before God with the yarmulke, while girls could wear a hat or not, it didn't seem important. Men and boys put on a *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries) - girls didn't. I didn't even know we were

allowed. I saw every thirteen year old boy celebrate his barmitzvah by reading the Torah in public, thus achieving high status and accolades, a personalised speech from the rabbi, and numerous gifts. My barmitzvah was voluntary and took place in a gaggle of white-clad girls on a Sunday when there was no service at all. At weddings I listened to men vow to provide and protect while brides promised to cherish and obey. I grew alarmed when people said to me the traditional and well-intentioned wish at such events, 'soon to be you'. Later I discovered that, under Jewish law, only the man can grant a divorce, and that a woman remains married to him until (and if) he does. All the rabbis I saw or heard of until recent years were men, but the only classes I was invited to attend were those run by their wives for women, about the laws of 'family purity' and kosher cooking.

As interpreted by male rabbis down the centuries, women's role in Judaism (caring for the household and its Jewish practices, raising and educating children, and possibly doing paid work as well) is fairly well-defined and valued, and has offered great satisfaction to many who follow it. Woman is praised every week in the Sabbath prayers for her hard work in the house and fields, her provision of food and clothes and happiness to her household, her wisdom and loving kindness. She is expected to perform certain religious and moral tasks, but is not required to perform those which are time-bound, in case there is conflict with her childbearing duties. In practice, even more than in theory, though, the valued role for women serves to exclude us from the traditionally most highly prized aspects of Jewish life - Torah study, com-

munal prayer, public worship, communal leadership.

My Jewish identity has always meant a great deal to me. It has encompassed a sense of cultural and historical belonging to a people, and the importance of the religious side has fluctuated at different times in my life. Yet the history and culture cannot be wholly separated from the religion. The Old Testament is our Bible and our history, the five books of Moses are the foundation of our religion and our law; every week a section is read out in the synagogue, almost always by men, almost entirely about the lives of men.

The story of the Exodus, retold at Passover every year, is my story and the story of my people, incorporated into a religious ritual which contains little of women's voices or experiences and is told from a male orientation, using male language, male ritual and an extremely masculine God. Traditionally, women do lots of cooking and cleaning up, light candles, listen and occasionally take a small part in the telling of the story.

For a woman who is outside the traditional roles of wife and mother, things are even tougher. There is limited involvement for child-free couples, and no formal place for a single woman (let alone a lesbian, God forbid!) within traditional Judaism. When a single woman's parent or loved one dies, for instance, who will say Kaddish, the traditional mourning prayer, if she has no male relative to do so? How are significant events in the lives of women, other than marriage and the circumcision of a son, to be marked?

Many books have been written which systematically critique Jewish law and practice, and it is not my task here¹. A few examples illustrate some of the ways many women, including myself, have long felt torn; that we are asked to choose

between aspects of ourselves, Jew and feminist. I have refused to make that agonising choice; instead I have sought like-feeling women to explore and create alternatives. As Judith Plaskow, American Jewish feminist theologian, recently wrote:

*'If we are Jews not despite being feminists but as feminists, then Judaism will have to change - we will have to work to change it - to make a whole identity possible.'*²

Jewish feminists are consciousness-raising from our own experience, studying Jewish practice and ritual and beginning to develop our own, recovering and reconstructing women's experience and history, finding our voices by speaking our experience and by singing, and we are exploring reinterpretations of Jewish law and writings by feminist scholars and women rabbis.

We are also becoming more aware of differences as well as commonalities. There are major differences between the strivings of orthodox Jewish women to interpret women's experience within Jewish law, and those of liberal, reform, reconstructionist, and non-affiliated Jewish women to reinterpret text and history, and develop new practice, ritual and prayer. There are varying degrees of difference between the problems and needs of Ashkenazi (of western origin) and Sephardi (of eastern origin) women, between Israeli and diaspora women, between Jewish women of longstanding Australian background and women whose origins lie in the experience or the aftermath of the Holocaust, and many other groups.

I have found great strength from the feminist version of the story of Lilith³,

from the writing of both orthodox and reform Jewish women⁴, from the recovery of women in Jewish history⁵, from writing about feminist spirituality both Jewish and non-Jewish, from the development of alternative rituals⁶, such as the naming ceremony for my daughter, from singing with other Jewish women, from sharing personal/Jewish issues with my Jewish feminist group and also its occasional contact with Women-Church, and from the support of unusual rabbis, both male and female. Finally, I draw strength from the enthusiastic, if also scared, reception from many other women starving for recognition of our full contribution as Jews and as people.

Notes and References

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2. Plaskow, J. 1990. *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco, Harper and Row, p.x
3. See Hazleton, L. 1977. *Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myths*. New York, Simon and Schuster, Chapter 5; and Koltun, *op. cit.*, pp.8-10.
4. For example, Greenberg, *op.cit.*; Biale, R. 1984. *Women and Jewish Law: An Exploration of Women's Issues in Halachic Sources*. New York, Schocken; *Generation: A Journal of Australian Jewish Life, Thought and Community*, 1990, No.2, pp.32-52.

5. See for instance, Henry, S. and Taitz, E. 1990. *Written Out of History: Our Jewish Foremothers*. New York, Biblio Press (4th Ed.)

6. For example, Adelman, P. 1986. *Miriam's Well: Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year*. New York, Biblio Press.

A Progress Report on Denominational Differences in Australian Lay Church Members' Attitudes Toward Women in Ministry

This article is included with the permission of the Editor of National Outlook.

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The current wave of the feminist movement has been pressing for social and cultural changes in Western societies for about the last twenty years. Its general agenda has been to organise women and men in sympathy with feminist values to bring about changes in the position of women in all aspects of social life. The movement has been especially concerned to rectify women's experiences of a lack of control over their own lives and destinies, and it has systematically sought to remove barriers to women's full participation in the life and functioning of the society. These goals have begun to restructure the gender-based allocation of rights and duties in most institutions. Changes are especially apparent in business, mass media, medicine, law, and higher education, where the number of women working as equals with men has gradually increased over the last two decades.

This report deals with another institution where pressures for change have

been visible during this time period, i.e. institutional religion. Over the last twenty years or so religious feminists have questioned traditions found in religious culture, focusing on what they perceive as sexually exclusive language, possibly biased religious history, selective Biblical exegesis and exposition, and leadership structures restricted to men. Feeling that they have been systematically excluded from full participation in the life of the Church, they have proposed changes in language, theology, Biblical interpretation, and the distribution of leadership positions (e.g. Christ and Plaskow, 1979; Weidman, 1985)

This study focuses on the last of those points - the distribution of positions of formal leadership in two religious organisations in Australia, i.e. the Anglican Church of Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia. Women have sought - and in some cases have obtained - access to the ordained ministry, a leadership position normally occupied only by men

in recent church history. Religious feminists have organised to challenge this male exclusivity. As they have done so, other religious devotees have created counter movements to resist opening the ordained ministry to women, and there has been considerable public and private conflict over the issue.

Of the two denominations involved in this research, one, the Uniting Church in Australia, has endorsed women's ordination. They have in fact elevated the principle of open access to ministry to the point of being a criterion of fellowship within their denomination. Acceptance of women's ordination is one of their 'bases of union', indicating that congregations will be accepted into the denomination only if they also endorse women's ordination and that persons may be ordained as Uniting Church ministers only if they accept that principle.

The other denomination taking part in the study, the Anglican Church of Australia, has made no such policy. The question of the ordination of women to the priesthood has been a matter of heated debate for many years amongst Anglicans in Australia. The issue has found its way into the media several times a year as leaders of various pro and con groupings have thrust and parried with each other to control the situation and have their perspective carry the day. The Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW) has formally organised to press for change, and the opposition has also formally organised to resist MOW's efforts.

One of the things that has been missing in most of this discussion has been systematic evidence of **what the lay members of these churches think about the issue of the ordination and placement of women as clergy.** What do the ordinary people in the pews think about women in

ministry? The matter of lay opinion is no insignificant concern. After all, without lay participation both denominations would quickly cease to function and would fade from history. The lay members constitute the organisational and financial base of the churches. The clergy as religious leaders sit atop a fragile structure of lay support - clerics depend upon hundreds of thousands of plain folk to support them programmatically and financially. Yet discussions of the pros and cons of the integration of women into the ranks of clergy usually take place in a lay vacuum. The debates typically have been amongst the clergy only.

The Focus of the Research

What do lay church members in these two denominations in Australia think about the ordination and placement of women as clergy in positions of formal leadership in their churches? That is the central question underlying this undertaking. Previous studies of lay receptivity and resistance to women in ministry in the United States and the United Kingdom have indicated wide differences in attitude amongst lay church members (e.g. Carroll, et al, 1983; Lehman, 1985 and 1987). This study sought to replicate those earlier works to see whether Australian lay persons manifested the same diversity. Previous research has also indicated that lay members' attitudes toward women in ministry also differ from one denomination to another. Do we find the same patterns in Australia?

The study used a social survey collected from a probability sample of lay church members in the Anglican and Uniting Churches in Queensland, New South

Wales (including the Capital Territory), Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia.

Analysis

Church members' receptivity to women in ordained ministry (priesthood and ministry of the Word) were conceptualised in terms of three commonly accepted dimensions of attitudes.

(1) a cognitive dimension referring to what they thought clergywomen were like.

(2) an affective dimension concerning their feelings about ordained women, and

(3) A behavioural dimension involving how they were prepared to act toward the ordination and placement of women.

Lay Perceptions of Clergywomen

The questions on the 'cognitive dimension' reflect a series of stereotypes women commonly encounter as they move into occupational fields formerly dominated by men. A number of patterns are discernible in the data:

1. Typically only a minority of members view clergywomen in stereotyped terms.

2. Most members view the inclusive language issue as divisive.

3. On each measure, more Anglicans than Uniting members hold stereotypical views of women as priests and pastors.

4. Members appear to be more concerned about a woman's ability to balance the cross pressures of work and home than they are about her basic dependability as a church worker.

Lay preferences for men or women in clergy roles

The 'affective dimension' compares Anglicans and Uniting Church members on the extent to which they actually prefer

a man in various positions and clergy roles.

1. The detailed patterns of response to these questions indicate that the basic pattern of preference amounted to a distinction between preferring a man and having no preference at all.

2. The item on which the most lay members indicated that they preferred a woman was the one dealing with personal counselling. Most of the members indicating this preference were themselves women.

3. In most instances, more Anglicans than Uniting members indicated preferences for men in clergy roles.

4. On average about twice as many members preferred a man in the position of parish priest or parish minister in comparison to their preferences for men or women in the activities parish clergy actually perform. The 'position' appears to be held to be more sacred than the functions carried out by the incumbents.

5. Preferences for men in the positions of power (priest, minister, bishop, synod secretary) are about twice as prevalent as preferences for men in subordinate positions (assistant priests, second in team, deacon, elder).

Lay dispositions to behave toward clergywomen

Some obvious patterns in the data which indicate differences in how lay church members are disposed to act toward women clergy are:

1. About the same proportion of Anglican church members (70% - 72%) would vote in favour of ordaining women as priests today as would allow women ordained abroad to function as a priest in Australia.

2. More Uniting Church members than Anglicans accept the legitimacy of ordaining and placing women as pastors/priests.

3. Most Uniting Church members would support the recommendation of a woman as their minister even in the face of potentially divisive congregational conflict about the matter.

Summary and Discussion

Analysis of data from a national sample of Anglican and Uniting Church lay persons in Australia indicates wide differences in church members' receptivity and resistance to women as ordained clergy. Most members did not hold stereotypical images of clergywomen, but instead viewed them in open and flexible terms. Only about 20 to 30 percent of members held stereotypical views of women ministers. Similar proportions tended to prefer men in clergy positions and role activities, while two-thirds or more typically expressed no preference for either men or women for these roles. The majority of members also expressed explicit motivation to act receptively toward the possible introduction of women clergy into the life of their church. Cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally, most lay church members in these two denominations manifest basically positive attitudes towards women as ordained clergy.

According to virtually every measure of receptivity to clergywomen, a greater proportion of Anglican lay persons than Uniting Church members exhibited resistance to women in ministry. Anglicans manifested greater tendencies to view female clergy in stereotypical terms, to prefer a man (over a woman) as incumbent in leadership positions and as the person performing leadership activities, and to indicate that they would not accept a woman as their minister.

One important reason for these denominational variations is the difference in the extent to which denominational norms are clear and unequivocal on the issue of women's ordination and placement as clergy. The denominational policy in the Uniting Church is quite unambiguous on the matter of women in ministry. These norms have been publicised widely in the churches, and most lay members are aware of the policy.

This normative clarity is not to be found amongst members of the Anglican Church. Bishops governing various dioceses have differed widely in their pronouncements on the matter, some pro and others con, and the resulting conflict has tended to polarise clergy and lay persons alike. The official policy is that only men are eligible for ordination to the priesthood, although many church officials are openly questioning that position, encouraging their members to press for replacing those traditional rules with non-sexist norms. Given the fact that the policy specifies a male priesthood, it is quite noteworthy that nearly three-fourths of the Anglican lay members indicate basic approval of women's ordination to the priesthood. Given that level of ground support in the pews, one wonders how long the forces of conservatism will be able to resist the impact of the women-in-ministry movement.

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Arguments Against the Ordination of Women

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The debate about the ordination of women in the Australian Anglican Church continues to drag on. Conservatives from both the evangelical and catholic wings of the denomination remain totally opposed: they are agreed that women must be barred from becoming priests and bishops, the two most significant institutional ministries, but on very little else. What they want to exclude women from and the arguments they use to this end, differ as chalk and cheese. Their joining of hands against women has often been described as an 'unholy alliance'.

The Contrasting Objections

Anglicans of catholic persuasion opposed to the ordination of women do not want women to preside at the altar. For catholics, the eucharist is the focal point of their religion and only an episcopally ordained male priest can preside. In the eucharist the priest consecrates and offers the gifts to God. I have often heard catholic Anglicans say, 'I don't care who gets into the pulpit. Women can preach as much as they like, but no woman must be allowed to preside at the eucharist.' For

catholic Anglicans, the consecrating and offering of the eucharist is the most important and most significant facet of their faith. It is from this central, symbolic act that they want women barred.

The evangelical opponents of women's ordination, in contrast, want to keep women out of the pulpit. For a conservative-evangelical the most important aspect of Christian worship is the sermon. It is 'the royal sacrament'. In the sermon, God speaks to His people. It is none other than a proclamation of the Word of God. Evangelicals often say, 'I don't care who presides at the communion service - anyone can read out of a book of prayers - what is important is that the teaching office be reserved for men'. They argue that in the sermon, God's authority to direct His people is expressed and as God has given leadership to men, only men should be preachers and teachers.

This reasoning suggests that women should never be allowed into the pulpit and this is the ideal held by many evangelicals opposed to the ordination of women, but in the realities of the modern world this is almost impossible to maintain. Women missionaries returning on furlough have to be allowed to speak of

their work, some special services demand a woman speaker and sometimes only a woman lay reader or deaconess is available. Thus the principle is modified to say, only a man should be the principal teacher of a congregation. Again, what is to be noted is that women are excluded or generally excluded from what evangelicals consider to be the central and most significant facet of their faith. It is from this focal, symbolic activity that they want women barred as far as possible. What is most important in the life of the church for the conservative evangelical must be reserved for men.

When evangelicals and catholics combine to oppose the ordination of women we can see why it is called 'an unholy alliance'. They are united only in demanding that the most important symbolic activity in their religion be exercised by men and men only. They are not agreed and never can be on what is the central, symbolic activity from which women are to be excluded.

Seven Arguments Against The Ordination of Women

Because the two groups of Anglican conservatives are not of one mind about what they are objecting to, there is not, and cannot be, one agreed argument against the ordination of women. Many arguments have been put forward, some reflecting evangelical theological concerns, others mainly catholic concerns, but both sides will use each other's arguments, even if they are not believed, so as to further the common goal of excluding women from ordination. Each and every argument against the ordination of women has been challenged and shown to be wanting, and wanting badly, but no

matter how weak they continue to be trotted out. In the rest of this article, I will outline some of the more common quasi-theological arguments used, and briefly note their inadequacies.

1. The Headship Argument

For some twenty or more years, the students at Moore Theological College, Sydney, were taught by the Principal, Dr D.B. Knox, that God had given authority to men to lead in the church and the home and women were to be submissive. It was argued that St. Paul had set the man over the woman (1 Corinthians 11:3) and, in particular, the husband over his wife (Ephesians 5:23). For this reason it was said, the apostles exhorted women to be subordinate (1 Corinthians 14:34; Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1) and to be silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:34, 1 Timothy 2: 11-12). Since it was argued that preaching was the chief way God expressed His authoritative direction to His people, and men had been appointed by God to lead, women should not preach/teach in church.

Basic to this position is the view that the headship of the man and subordination of the woman is 'a creation order' - the ideal. The apostolic exhortations addressed to women are not like those addressed to slaves which are but practical advice. Women are to be subordinate because in the original order of things, before sin entered the world, God created man as the leader. Appeal is made to the second creation story, recorded in Genesis chapter 2, where women is created second and is said to be man's 'helper' (Genesis 2:18) as the basis for this argument.

Most leading Sydney Anglican evangelicals adopt this line of reasoning. It has been spelt out in every one of the Sydney reports opposing the ordination of women

and is put starkly at every Sydney Synod when the issue is raised. It is called 'the biblical argument' and it is said that those who do not accept this point of view are rejecting the clear teaching of Scripture. Because it is the most developed and most quoted argument, more space is given to this case than any other.

Criticism: I have written in detail against this argument in several publications, some of which are listed at the end of this essay. In answer three matters need to be raised. First - the interpretation and meaning of many of the texts quoted is problematic. I cannot go into minutiae, but for example, it is very doubtful that women created second, means she is to take second place. In Genesis, chapter one, man and woman are created last but stand supreme. Furthermore, often something created second is better than the first. Also a helper is not necessarily subordinate. In the Old Testament, God is often said to be humankind's 'helper'. What is more, when Paul says the husband is 'the head' of the wife (Ephesians 5:22), he goes on to turn this world's ideas of 'headship' upside down. The husband is to 'lead' by giving himself in sacrificial service for his wife.

Secondly, the headship argument is doubtful because it cannot explain, why, if it is so basic to the Christian ethic, Jesus never once suggested that men were set over women and said much to the contrary. It is generally agreed that he insisted on equality of dignity and equality of consideration for women. But not only is the subordination of women not allowed by Jesus it is also not mentioned by John and Luke, major contributors to the New Testament, and at times, when speaking about principles, excluded even by Paul (see Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 7:4; 12:7).

Thirdly, the headship argument fails because its foundation is invalid. Everything stands or falls on the creation order premise. No evangelical today endorses slavery although it is clearly taught in the Old Testament, allowed by Jesus and regulated by the apostles. We are told this teaching simply reflects the culture of another age. The exhortations to women to be subordinate and not to speak in church could be passed over on the same basis except for the claim that they are based on an unchangeable creation order. The idea that there are static creation orders has, however, no validity. It is very doubtful that Genesis chapter two intends to subordinate women, as we have pointed out, but even if it did, St. Paul implicitly and explicitly teaches that, 'in Christ there is a new creation, the old has passed away' (2 Corinthians 5:17). By this he means that the new order given by Christ surpasses the original created order. It is true that 1 Timothy 2:13 and 1 Corinthians 11:12 reflect a Jewish idea of a creationally based subordination of women, but there is so much in the New Testament opposed to this idea that to concentrate on texts in isolation is special pleading. When Jesus spoke of marriage as part of God's creation order he appealed to the original ideal state, not to subordinate women, but to insist that man and woman are equal partners in marriage (Matthew 19:3-6).

There are many books which quote the Bible for or against the ordination of women, but the best survey of the biblical material from a scholarly, critical perspective is B. Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, OUP, Cambridge, 1988.

Before either side appeals yet again to the Bible, this book should be carefully studied.

2. The Twelve Apostles Were All Men

The most common catholic argument against the ordination of women is the maleness of the twelve apostles which is claimed determines for all time the sex of those ordained. This case rests on the premise that Jesus ordained the apostles as archetypal priests and the font of all future ordained ministry. As Jesus chose only men as the first ministers, only men can be ordained into the priesthood.

Criticism: This is an argument that needs to be unravelled to see the wood from the trees. First of all the twelve apostles are nowhere depicted in the New Testament as archetypal priests/ministers, let alone as the font from which all other legitimate ordained ministry is derived. It is only Luke who develops a theology of the twelve apostles and in his view the twelves' special and unique role is to **bear witness** to the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1:21-22). Witnesses of this nature can have no successors.

It is true that the twelve were all men, but this is a mute historical detail. It can be interpreted in any direction. In the patriarchal culture of Jesus' day we would expect men normally to be chosen as leaders. This fact would only be theologically significant if a reason were given. It is not. Nevertheless, we can see at least one reason why Jesus had to choose men. In the Jewish culture of that day, women could not act as witnesses - only men. If the twelve's chief function was to be witnesses, then in that culture they had to be men.

In the appeal to the maleness of the twelve apostles, it is seldom noted that besides the twelve who had a distinct and unique role there were other apostles who came onto the scene after the church was

founded. Paul and Barnabas are two such apostles (Acts 14:14) but there were others. Their role was one of proclaiming the Gospel and founding new churches. They can be designated, 'missionary apostles'. Amongst this larger number of apostles Paul lists Junia, a woman (Romans 16:7). Thus to claim that all the apostles were men is simply not true. The risen Lord called others to be apostles besides the twelve and at least one of these was a woman.

As far as the emergence of congregational leadership is concerned, the New Testament never suggests that this depended on apostolic direction or appointment. It is true that in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, the missionary apostles Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (Acts 14:23) but this was an exception to the rule. Leadership of local churches seems to have simply evolved to meet the need; diversity was present from the beginning and the threefold order came later. Furthermore nowhere in the New Testament is there any direction on who should preside at the eucharist. Our earliest post New Testament document, *The Didache* suggests a prophet should preside (*Didache* 10:7). The idea that ordained Christian leaders be seen as priests is excluded by apostolic teaching. As far as the New Testament writers are concerned, all Christians are a priestly community given free access into the presence of Christ (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:5) and all are lay persons. The division between clergy and laity was simply not known.

3. Role Allocation

Another quite common argument, usually found on the lips of evangelicals, builds on the idea that people have differing roles in life - we are not intended all to do the same thing - and men and women in particular have different roles

to fulfil. From this it is then asserted that God has given the leadership or the priestly role to men and not to women. We are all equal, we are told, but men and women have different roles.

Criticism: This seemingly plausible reasoning draws on the language of modern functional sociology, but is exposed as special pleading most clearly by sociological analysis. We can agree that the allocation of a subordinate role does not necessarily subtract from a person's status or dignity, especially if it is possible to change one's role. But what this argument claims is that men, and men only, have been given the leading role. They alone can lead in church, and women, simply because they are women, have been excluded. This implies that there is something lacking in all women because the most significant role in the church cannot be given to them. In other words, they are not in a social context equal with men. Thus the issue is not roles at all but status.

We can all agree that only a woman can fulfil the role of bearing a child and breastfeeding, but from this point on it is hard to find a role that both men and women cannot fill. It is obvious to all today, that women make excellent leaders. What is more in the New Testament, we find women leading the church in prayer and in prophecy (1 Corinthians 11:4-5), ministering as apostles, deacons and evangelists and leading house-churches (Colossians 4:15). These are all roles where women are set over others. What then is the force of this argument?

An excellent, more detailed rejection of the role argument is given in *W. Neuer Man and Woman in Christian Perspective*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1988, pp 29-30. His comments are important because he writes as a conservative-evangelical who appeals to the bible to

exclude women from leadership in the church. He concludes that the role argument should be given up 'in the cause of truth'. I agree.

4. The Trinity

Often associated with the above argument is the trinitarian one. We are told that there is an hierarchical order in the Trinity - Father, Son, Spirit - but this in no way lessens the status or dignity of any one of the persons. In 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul places the Father over the Son and then the man over the woman. In the church, therefore, men are to be over women, but this in no way lessens their dignity or status. It is simply how God has ordered things as he has in the Trinity.

Criticism: It is true that the Bible implies some subordination of the Son to the Father in a number of passages, but what is to be noted is that orthodoxy demands that this subordination be carefully circumscribed so as in no way to lessen the full divinity and freedom of each person of the Trinity. Thus it is not a subordination which limits what each member of the Trinity can do. In John's Gospel what the Father does the Son does, and what the Son does the Father does. (John 5:19; 10:30; 14:9-10 etc). In the later developed theology of the Trinity this interchange of roles was elaborated in the doctrine of *perichoresis* - the indwelling of each person by the other so that they are always persons in relationship with one another. Thus the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity allows each member of the Trinity to take part in all the important functions of the Godhead. The Son or the Spirit's role is not subordinated. This means that the very point wished to be made by conservative people in relation to the role of women rather than being substantiated by appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity is excluded by it.

5. Tradition

In the beginning of the debate, tradition was often cited as a reason against the ordination of women by catholic Anglicans. We were told that to ordain women would break a two thousand year tradition which had limited ordination to men. On catholic principles this is a weighty argument, but even for catholics tradition is not an absolute authority. Scripture and reason must also be heeded. Because this argument is not in itself conclusive Anglican catholics have tended to use it less and less, but in one of the paradoxical turns in this debate the great advocate of this argument is now the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Dr Donald Robinson, a staunch conservative evangelical who does not accept either the catholic understanding of the priesthood or of the eucharist. His appeal to tradition is surprising because conservative-evangelicals usually denigrate tradition claiming that Scripture alone is the foundation on which their theology rests.

Dr Robinson says his opposition is not based on particular passages of Scripture, 'but on the specific nexus between the apostolic church and its ministry on the one hand, and on our own church and ministry on the other. Thus our present discussions and search for a solution', he adds, 'cannot be completely free ranging; it takes place within certain limits determined by our Articles and Prayer Book (including the Ordinal), for these commit us to a form of ministry determined by Scripture.'

Criticism: Dr Robinson makes bold and sweeping assertions which sound compelling, but in reality have no substance. The New Testament does not give the threefold order, bishops, presbyters and deacons as the norm. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul lists apostles, prophets

and teachers as the three principal ministries in the church (1 Corinthians 12:27), but as a general rule the New Testament does not prescribe any one pattern of ministry. Diversity is the main characteristic of leadership in the apostolic church.

When the three-fold order does emerge, early in the second century AD, it bears no resemblance to the threefold order now seen in the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions. The bishop was the local minister, the deacons (a large group) were the assistants and the presbyters (again a group) were a governing pastoral council of senior men. This pattern continued for several centuries. Only in the 6th century do presbyters begin to emerge as the regular parish priest. Tradition bears witness to the continuation of three holy terms - bishop, presbyter, deacon (even if the word presbyter was supplanted by the word priest), but not to three holy orders with agreed functions and status. Thirdly, this argument is not convincing for the inclusion of women into the threefold order does not change the order. Even the New Testament allows that women can be members of the first order, deacons. Why then cannot women now belong to the other two orders? A possible parallel is the change in the orders at the time of the Reformation. The Anglican Reformers rejected celibacy for the three orders, encouraging instead marriage for all the clergy. The three orders continued but in a different form.

6. The Priest Represents Christ

Many Anglican catholics tell us that they cannot accept a woman as a priest for the priest represents Christ at the altar and Christ was a man. Only a male priest can stand *in persona Christi*.

Criticism: Until the seventies when the Anglicans and Roman Catholics entered

into serious dialogue the Anglo-Catholic theology of priesthood rested on the idea that a priestly body, the church, needed priestly leadership. The Anglican priest was the priestly representative of the body of Christ and as such he alone could consecrate and offer the eucharist. But on this premise women should be equally eligible to become priests! As the priest is a representative of the body of Christ, and the church is men and women, either sex could equally fulfil this role.

Roman Catholics, however, deny this understanding of priesthood. They insist the priest represents not the earthly priestly body of Christ, but the risen Christ himself. Anglican Catholics without comment have generally changed over to this position in recent years. On this view of priesthood Christ's maleness, we are told, excludes women as priests. The problem with this argument is that in orthodoxy it is not the maleness of Christ which is central, but His humanity. The Son of God became a human being, the representative person, for our salvation. If His maleness is of the essence of the incarnation then He is not representative of men and women. The logic of this would be that the Cross did not effect the salvation of both men and women. Theologians, including many Roman Catholics, have been quick to point this out.

A novel variation of this argument, has recently appeared and should be noted in passing. Some Anglo-Catholics have appealed to a Greek Orthodox idea that the priest before the altar is an icon of Christ. As Christ was a male only a male priest can be such an icon. Once again, the maleness of Christ is taken as the essence of the incarnation. We have already responded to this idea, but the argument is also to be rejected for such an understanding of priesthood has not been ac-

cepted or known hitherto in either Anglican or Roman Catholic theology.

7. The Ecumenical Argument

Because the Roman Catholic church and the Orthodox churches do not ordain women, we are told the Anglican church should not, for to do so unilaterally would hinder or exclude union.

Criticism: Usually Christians believe conviction should lead to action. If something is seen to be right then it should be done no matter what others may think. At the Reformation the Protestants believed salvation was by grace, that the Bible not the Pope was the proper final authority in matters of faith and that the Scriptures and church services should be in the language of the people. Their conscience forced them to enact these principles even if it meant splitting the church. If it is right that women be granted full equality in the life of the church, then the opinions of others should not be a barrier.

Those who appeal to the ecumenical argument usually imply that the Roman Catholic church is totally opposed to the ordination of women, but this is not so. The official position is negative, but many of the best books in favour of the ordination of women have been written by learned and respected Roman Catholic scholars and there are many voices within the Catholic church calling for the inclusion of women in the priesthood. If Anglicans go ahead and ordain women, they might again promote reform and do more for the ecumenical cause than if they do not ordain. However, there is another point to be made. It is simply not true that the ordination of women is, or could be, the one thing which would thwart union with Rome. There are far more profound issues which still divide and have to be addressed - the Papal claim of universal jurisdiction, the con-

cept of papal infallibility, the dogma of the assumption of Mary, and for evangelicals in particular, the Catholic understanding of the Mass.

Conclusion

One could think that with so many arguments against the ordination of women there must be problems with the idea. Surely the more arguments the stronger the case. In answer it can be said that eight buckets without bottoms are no more help than no bucket at all if there is a fire and no running water. The multiplication of arguments rather than showing substance to the objections shows rather, that not one of them is conclusive. In the end, we are struck not by the force of the objections to the ordination of women, but by the poverty of all the arguments put forward.

There are practical problems in including women in the ordained ministry of the mainline churches for the professional ministry as we know it, was devised by men, for men and not surprisingly, women find it an awkward fit. But the objections to the ordination of women we have outlined, do not involve practical issues; they are all objections on principle.

Conservatives simply don't want women filling that role in the life of the church which is most important in their religion.

Suggested Reading

B.L. Field, 'Conflicting discourses and attitudes to the ordination of women in the Anglican Church of Australia', in A.W. Black (ed.), *Religion in Australia. Sociological Perspectives*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1991 :52-62.

K.N. Giles, *Created Woman*, Acorn, Canberra, 1985.

----- *Patterns of Ministry Among the First Christians*, Collins-Dove, Melbourne, 1989.

----- 'Women in the Church with special reference to 1 Timothy 2:11-14', in A. Nichols (ed) :65-87.

A. Nichols, (ed) *The Bible and Woman's Ministry*, Acorn, Canberra, 1990.

M. Porter, *Women in the Church: The Great Ordination Debate in Australia*, Penguin, Victoria, 1989.

E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, S.C.M., London, 1983.

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Book Reviews

Knowing Otherwise: Feminism, Women and Religion

Erin White & Marie Tulip. Melbourne: David Lovell Publishing, 1991. 182 pp. ISBN 1-86355-005-4

With this volume, Christian feminism in Australia has brought down the barriers between the 'secular' and 'religious', 'academic' and 'polito-active' opposi-

tions that haunt feminist writing, particularly in Australia where the burden of empiricism continues to perpetuate and hierarchise these categories. This is Christian feminism with a difference, neither absolutist nor totalising.

The authors have based their work on courses they have developed and taught in recent years and the discussions in each

chapter illustrate the great value of good teaching in preparing the ground for writing. This is rarely acknowledged in academia, where the testing ground of interactive teaching styles is an undervalued exception to the usual round of one-way communications. It is no coincidence that Erin White's and Marie Tulip's book is titled *Knowing Otherwise*. The seriousness of the authors' approach to each theme is reflected in the tragi-comedy of the superb Jenny Coopes' cartoons which leap into vision at well-chosen points throughout the book. An excellent bibliography reflects the authors' thoroughness, especially in relation to relevant Australian feminist writing which is particularly hard for students to recover from such systems as ABN.

The style of the volume is pre-figured in Marie Tulip's honest, sometimes droll and gently abrasive Introduction which places feminism and religion in the perspective of the women's movement as a whole and highlights the two authors' different experiences and approaches. Marie Tulip further contributes the chapters on being born a girl (and what a disappointment this can be for other people), and on what women do all day and whether this is thought sufficiently important to own up to in public (or possibly get paid for).

Erin White takes on 'the issue of blood' and emerges both bloodied and unbowed in the best woman-warrior tradition. She also contributes the chapter on women and violence and the woman-as-victim trap, and completes the work with a rousing, sensible and generous celebration of 'women-church' as womanspace for pluralist solidarity in search of the divine in the widest possible understanding of that.

Marie Tulip's strength is making connections between the 'little' and 'great' traditions: weekend journalism, informal conversations, poetry, meditations and tough-minded scholarship. The chapter on women's work begins with a cogent critique of a newspaper supplement feature 'exposee' of 'non'working women and moves swiftly and effortlessly to an excellent analysis of current feminist critiques of the economics of women's work. In this way, religion-centred readers are led into an integration of the writing of such scholars as Clare Burton and Marilyn Waring with the theological underpinnings of our cultural understandings of the worth of women's labour. Those readers unaware of the subtleties of patriarchal divine reasoning may be surprised to find how thoroughly these particular symbolic structures shape the so-called 'secular' 90s in Australia. Debates about the ordination of women and the threat of displacement of distinctively male labour markets are discussed in the context of employment practices in general. Marie Tulip also discusses voluntary work, a peculiarly gender-related 'for the love of God' arena of labour. She includes in this the beyond-duty load of the welfare professions (teaching could also have been mentioned) and further extrapolates another category called 'politico-spiritual' work. In all these discussions, she pins down the dualisms (public/private, nature/culture for instance) which operate as a basis of division and oppression and situates the theology of work in the wider culture of work in our society.

As in other chapters, the formal practices of the mainline churches are dissected and challenged in a powerful way which re-contextualises Christian churches as participants in social structures

consisting of real people. The churches are seen to be absolutely relevant in the 'wider' society and accountable to it in the matter of the fundamental principles of integrity they espouse in the name of the divine. The authors are not tempted to reduce the church to an empiricist social justice model, but argue within the paradigm of personal and social liberation, effectively challenging the spiritual/material dichotomy which allows the arrogant heresy that loaves and fishes are not the stuff of spiritual life.

As for blood and violence, these are not ladylike concerns of course. Erin White clarifies the central place they in fact occupy in women's lives in two complex, vigorously written and exciting chapters. Her knowledge of the power of the virgin-martyr syndrome in Catholic education of earlier decades evoked in me strong memories of the Maria Goretti medals some of us wore at school, whether as magico-protective devices or a perverse denial of our sexuality I cannot tell. As Erin White points out, protection is the other name of debasement and it is in working out the subtle contradictions which connect women, religion and war in a nexus of violence that the strength of her writing lies. She analyses different feminist positions in relation to woman-as-soldier and woman-as-priest and opens up new analogies for readers who may have previously considered these problems in isolation from one another. I would have liked in addition a discussion of the female body and sexuality in direct relation to women as priests and soldiers in the context of purity, virginity and sexual expression.

The final section of the chapter 'Refusing to be victims' is a hardhitting discussion of abortion morality. By making connections between the prevalence of

abortion and structural discrimination against the exercise of women's moral competence, as well as misogynist violence in Christian myth and metaphor and the spiritualisation of sexuality, Erin White evolves a different kind of defence of women's right to terminate a pregnancy within the framework of the 'morality of the relatively possible'. This defence is important in that it takes into account the 'rich picture' of moral and sexual behaviours (only part of which is an involuntary pregnancy) and does not reduce the argument to 'ownership' of bodies or to dissociated autonomy claims which are the most common ones currently considered. The onus is put fairly on the churches to take note of the violence of their own traditions, examine their own motivations, change structures and listen to and trust women. The abortion question would then recede in importance because more serious violent causal factors would have been examined and dealt with. This is the kind of 'theologising' that speaks not only to hardline 'pro-lifers' but to women in all parts of our society, and perhaps especially to the 'pro-choice' activists who often lack the insights afforded by an analysis in the context of religion.

In relation to that context, my few criticisms of the book involve what I see as a slight neglect of the field of history of religions (or Religious Studies) and this on several counts. First, the field itself does its own kind of patriarchal theologising and to some extent is responsible for isolating scholarship in religions from other more critically aware disciplines in the humanities and human sciences. Its contribution to the loss of the women's voices should be noticed. It must be admitted that there are few feminists interested in religion who have

had an opportunity to influence the direction of the discipline in this country. Tucked away however are a number of women religious whose scholarship is influential in various Australian tertiary courses which include segments on the history of religions as well as theology. Religious Education is a related field in which courageous lecturers and teachers battle with the arrogant patriarchy of official curricula. There are also units of study on women and religion in at least two Departments of Religious Studies, and it would have been encouraging to see Religious Studies and Education acknowledged in the listing of academic disciplines in the book's Introduction (p.xii).

Finally, there are a few lapses in relation to religions other than Christianity. Although it is acknowledged that the book is written from within the Christian context, it is critical to identify those points at which the Jewish tradition might be represented inferentially by a Christian view. So that to mention that 'it is in the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, that the trinitarian God of Christianity is encountered' (p.viii) may be true for Christians but reduces the Hebrew bible to a non-Jewish document; the Jewish Christ may well also have had trouble with the concept. This problem with the intrusion of Christian concepts also occurs with the association of the phrase Holy Spirit with the synagogue (p.11), and the mention of Buddhism as having a 'divine teacher' (ibid), which is only partly analogically true for certain schools of Buddhism. The spelling of 'Moslem' as an adjective could also have been improved. There is also some inconsistency in the acceptance/non-acceptance of the Merlin Stone/Marija Gimbutas hypothesis of the singularity of the age of the Goddess.

These minor blemishes are far outweighed by the generous and sensitive treatment of the central issues, reflected especially in the final chapter 'Women Together'. For these authors, defining 'women-church' in relation to official-church is yet another instance of looking to patriarchy for self-definition and becoming divided in the process. In this way the concept and practice of Women-Church initiated in North America are transformed.

This chapter and the volume as a whole, unlike many empiricist feminist studies, speak to and value all women who have been colonised by the traditions and cultural markers of Europe: reformers and revolutionaries, 'secularists' and 'religious', hardline, mainline and out-of-line women...and optimistically, the growing number of out-of-line men. *Knowing Otherwise* will prove its worth among a wide readership.

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Remembering the Future: Australian Women's Stories, Dreams and Visions for the Twentieth Century

Ranjini Rebera and Michaela Richards
(Editors)

Melbourne, David Lovell Publishing,
1991

pp.177 ISBN 1 86355 010 0. Rrp \$14.95
Women's participation in the World Council of Churches Assembly in Canberra this year marked the production of a book. In deciding to write their stories, Australian women offered to the Assembly a valuable insight into their spirituality as it developed in their personal and religious circumstances. Their aim was creative: 'It is our dream that *Remembering the Future* will lead people who read

it to dream their own dreams and through the dreaming reach out to the future with hope and with faith'.

Although each of the forty-five storytellers expresses her experience in a unique way - through autobiography, prose, verse, liturgy, song or illustration - the book is well-structured. In her introduction to each section Michaela Richard's own dreaming helps to articulate the theology of womanhood.

First come the stories from women living in various parts of Australia. Appropriately, in our multicultural nation, the writers reflect a diversity of cultures and traditions - European, Asian, African and Aboriginal - are well represented. The stories, born in the truth of personal experience, are vibrant with life. Women describe the struggles and triumphs involved in their search for identity and self-fulfilment either within or despite the patriarchal nature of many Christian denominations. I wondered whether storytellers would include women whose needs, dreams and visions were met in other world religions in this religiously-plural country, but they were not represented. The stories are moving, inspiring and always interesting. I enjoyed reading them and felt thankful that such a publication, prepared for a specific event, is made available to all. The stories have both power and purpose, providing a challenge to the reader.

In the second part women are emerging from the dissatisfaction of their conditioning, seeking new models in which feminine creativity plays a natural and accepted role. Julia Lyn explains: 'My generation is breaking new ground, with precious few models. My dream is that life will be different for our daughters, and, just as importantly, our sons. My dream is that their image of the divine

will not be limited by a rigid Church, but be free to blossom into fullness'.

The third section of the book is about world issues, women writing about artificial insemination, domestic violence, intellectual disability, justice and peace. Writers share their vision of a better future. Aboriginal comment in this area is very pertinent.

In the final part on women and spirituality, stories deal explicitly with women's struggles to achieve and extend their own spirituality. Feminist thought has encouraged women to question church beliefs and practices which exclude them and frustrate their creative search for God. But progress has been made, although the few women clergy are still curious and conscious of being 'a minister in a gold fish bowl'. I was particularly impressed by the groups of women who wrote collectively of their writer's group in which experiences were shared, written down and presented quietly to the elders and congregation of their church. The results are encouraging! The editors reflect:

'Out of the visioning and dreaming comes revelation. Out of the experience comes theology. Stories celebrate a theology of life.'

Renewing, transforming, crossing boundaries, they reach the essence of spirituality, the source of symbols, wisdom and energy. In these stories they see the Spirit of God at work, using women's experience for the creation of 'women's scripture'. I recommend this book to women and men of all ages.

Enid Adam

Theology and Feminism

Daphne Hampson. Oxford, Blackwell.
1990. Rrp. \$29.95 paperback pp188

Daphne Hampson's conclusions about Christianity, feminism, morality and truth are easy to read but difficult and provocative to digest. She is straight to her point: the feminist challenge strikes at the heart of Christianity (and all patriarchal religions) which is an unhealthy religion for women who should renounce its place in their lives. It is not that Dr. Hampson, a lecturer in Systematic Theology at the University of St. Andrews, is an atheist. She continues to relate to God but uses the name emptied of male anthropomorphism she asserts, recognising that the substitution of female imagery is no improvement - same play, different actors.

This is a clearly written book, personal in a crisp British manner, honestly recognising that autobiography shapes theology and free of emotive litanies of male sins. Her aim is to demonstrate the irrefutable nature of Christianity.

She argues her point by reference to feminist critique and by refuting the particularity of Christian claims to God's historical intervention in our world. Hampson systematically examines Christian anthropology and Christology. 'The doctrine of man' or 'theological anthropology' has been shaped in response to male experience and often in isolation from both social perspectives and from praxis. Women's changed perception of themselves has arisen out of interaction between women and reflection upon behaviour and patterns of relating, which has led to the **recognition and valuing of difference** (emphasis mine). Citing Carol Gilligan's work on women's sense of the 'web of humanity', Hampson contrasts this with men's socialisation towards separation. Such perspectives are

becoming feminist orthodoxy. Hampson uses these to re-examine sin, salvation, creation and eschatology. Describing sin as 'unjust relations which prevent community', whether personal or political, and consequently, salvation as 'healing', transforming relationality, Hampson supports her argument by citing Iraneaus alongside Mary Daly and Virginia Woolf.

In her discussion on death and eternal life, Hampson (along with Ruether) suggests that individual existence beyond physical death is a male concern to project control of what happens to one's individual self into the future. She does not consider, even to dismiss it, the resurrection of Jesus as Christianity's central claim to life transformed by death. I find this a curious omission, explicable only by her stance towards scripture as inherently patriarchal and thereby unable to illuminate women's experience.

More challenging are the issues feminism raises about Jesus as a male saviour and cosmic Christ. Since Christ has, from the beginning been proclaimed as inclusive of all people, the assertion of one group who experience exclusion is a challenge to the heart of Christology, according to Hampson. She asks, why it is that now women define themselves differently and do not believe 'the male includes the female'. She believes that we have moved beyond the intellectual world which allowed patristic Christology to be historically the most inclusive Christological formulations in Christianity. Thus the carefully argued and finely nuanced theology of Paul, the Fathers and Chalcedon is said to be in a framework of thought no longer possible for us today, she states. Hampson is correct, I think, to point out the extent to which Trinitarian theology has been lost at the level of popular devo-

tion, along with a focus on Jesus as God in a confused and possibly idolatrous misunderstanding of orthodoxy. These are significant insights and point to a failure in catechesis. If we do not grapple with theology in its fullest complexity, acknowledging the limits of language and symbolism, we necessarily reduce Christianity to a horizon we can manage. Thus maleness and God are equated in a distorted way that no other human particularity, such as race, colour or social status is. Arguing that Platonism is of no use today and that the 'cosmic Christ' makes no sense, Hampson fails to show convincingly why this is so. Nor does she satisfactorily examine the Christian feminist assertions that a deeper Trinitarian faith would lead us toward a better anthropology and to a renewed Christianity.

Hampson's own faith journey has taken her from protestant non-conformity, through Anglicanism and out into post-Christian non-atheism. She is not a 'Goddess' movement post Christian but confirmed for me the intuition I had that most 'goddess' spirituality is not focussed on a divine being but is limited to personal immanence. My own experience in Christian feminism suggests that liberal Christianity and goddess religion form a natural progression for some women. But others, whose 'symbol system' (Carol Christ's words) is more sacramental may find the shift less comprehensible, and see a greater need to reclaim the symbols and sacraments for feminist renewal of catholic Christianity.

Daphne Hampson's book cannot be dismissed. She is a woman of intellectual strength and her challenges and questions are vigorous, arising from a passionate commitment to the equality of women and men. Nor ought her book be ignored.

Those who would defend 'the old sexist order' better know the integrity of the challenge of feminist analysis and theology. Those who long to see Christianity renewed by feminism do well to be intelligent about the enormity of the task.

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The Triple Goddess: An Exploration of the Archetypal Feminine

Adam McLean,

Phanes Press, Grand Rapids. 1989

Price \$21.95 ISBN 0-933999-78-X. 122 pages.

This illuminating book is a plea for a balanced psychomythology for our contemporary post-matriarchal and post-patriarchal era. On the assumption that the human psyche is 'human' and not either masculine or feminine, the author sees the need for both males and females to move beyond dualism to explore and appropriate the many three-fold or Triple Goddesses which he presents in this book, as well as the three-fold male facets of Knight, Husband and Artist which balances the female Maiden, Wife and Wise Woman.

His deep criticism of patriarchy targets the rigid, one-sided, destructive patriarchal dualism which emerges and has been maintained over the past two and a half thousand years, in which there is a positive, good, pure, holy, light-filled side occupied by God and his pious devotees and an evil, negative, unholy, demonic, satanic side occupied by evil forces and the enemies of the devotees. The projection of this negative side onto heretics (who later often turned out to be presenting the truth) and females, including in-

nocent, nature-loving witches and goddess worshippers in christian Europe is a sad consequence of this patristic and patriarchal dualistic thinking. Such irreconcilable conflicts can only be dealt with and resolved in the author's opinion by seeing the two light and shadow sides as polarities needing to be synthesised and brought into balance.

Clearly the christian Trinity has triple aspects with a Heavenly Father God above and an Earthly Spirit of God below, with the God-Man Jesus as an Incarnated human and divine figure in between. Likewise, an adult male generally fits into the triple pattern of having a Father and a Son as he stands in between them as both a son to his father and as a father to his son.

This triple aspect is therefore important for bringing about integration, reconciliation of opposites and the desired wholeness or inner mystical marriage within the body, mind and psyche of humanity and its individuals.

Although the book refers briefly to the triple goddess or female depicted in various traditions throughout the world, its main concern is with ancient Greek Goddesses. As a result the contents include a useful introduction outlining the very ancient nature of the triple aspect of the Goddess which was variously linked to the three phases of a woman's life as Virgin/Mother/Crone, to the cycle of the Moon's phases, to the female menstrual cycle and to her relationship with male as Virgin (Athene), faithful wife (Hera) and/or whore (Aphrodite) or as a Daughter or Sister, Wife or Widow.

The chapters then go on to deal with the Daughters of the Night including the Furies, Fates and the Hesperides; the Daughters of the Sea Deities including the Gorgons, Graeae, Sirens and Harpies;

the Daughters of the Sky God, including the Horae, the Graces and Muses; a description of the Demeter and Persephone Myth and some comments about Hecate, Hera and the Judgement of Paris. The final two chapters provide triple goddesses from non-Greek traditions.

The author sees the Goddess as a powerful archetype in the human psyche. He is convinced that our emerging concern for ecology, peace movements, social welfare and alternative communities bring with it a need to understand the energies and qualities of the Goddess. We can do this by reading and studying the myths and symbolic expressions of humanity and then trying to see these images within ourselves as our inherited store of archetypes. In other words, we need 'to drink in the essence of the mythic material surrounding these archetypes' (:115).

Our present scientific, materialistic and secular age tends to boast that it has grown out of silly old myths and childish fairy stories. However, the author affirms in contrast that mythology has to be eternally relived in the soul (or psyche) and cannot be engulfed, encompassed and explained, even by the bright fire of an active intellect (110).

An analogical approach is encouraged by this book which affirms that mythology truly lives as archetype within our souls (110). Thus mythology connects not only the outer and inner realms but also the ancient and modern worlds. Our psyches have not outgrown the symbols and processes so vividly presented in myths and fairy stories, despite what the one-sided, materialistic and patriarchal ideologues like to think and promote.

This book is both theoretical and practical and will no doubt make an important contribution towards the much needed

and slowly emerging balance between the masculine and feminine principles and energies both between and within all human beings, as well as in life in general.

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Women in the Ministry of Jesus

Ben Witherington III. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984, Paperback 1987. 221pp, \$36.00. ISBN 0 521 34781 5

In approaching the first century issue of Jesus' attitude to women, the author attempts to go back beyond the interpretations and embellishments of Jesus' words and teaching by the emerging christian community and Gospel writers to the words and attitudes of Jesus himself within his actual historical context in about 30AD. The Palestinian Jewish and Hellenic background during Jesus' actual ministry is sought in contemporary Jewish writings, especially the Mishnaic material which, although codified several centuries later, reflects this earlier type of Rabbinic theology and morality.

The interesting contents begin with a general overview of typical female roles within the family, religion, and politics in first century Palestine. Then follows a study of women mentioned in Jesus' teachings and parallels, including the Wise and Foolish Virgins, the Queen of Sheba and the Daughters of Jerusalem and a penetrating investigation of Jesus' actual contact with women in need of help and healing, like the Samaritan woman at the well, the Syrophenician woman, Peter's mother-in-law, Jairus' daughter and the woman with the long-lasting flow of blood. Finally are listed the women disciples of Jesus who either followed him from Galilee like his mother and the other Marys together with

Joanna, Salome and Susanna or who entertained him in their homes like Mary and Martha. His dependence on such women is most clear from the list of female disciples in Mark 15:40 and in Luke 8:13.

Of particular interest in the present context of the debate on the ordination of women priests are the influential and highly respected prophetesses Deborah and Huldah in Judges 4:2 and 2 Kings 22:14, as well as Anna in Luke 2:36-8. Also noteworthy is the way Jesus ignores the rabbis' preoccupation with uncleanness. Jesus' new approach opened the way for women to participate more fully in Jesus' own community and in the Kingdom.

Jesus also showed his concern for children by relating them to the Kingdom, something which would have sounded strange to the ears of rabbis. The author also points out the constant pairing of male and female parables and healings which intimates the equality of male and female followers in regard to the Kingdom.

This book is well set out and is most readable, fluent and informative. Originally written as a doctoral dissertation, the author has performed a skilful conversion into an absorbing book yet retained the notes, bibliography and biblical references which enhance its scholarly usefulness. To those reconstructing the life of Jesus on the basis of empirical, historical, archeological, sociological and psychological research and particularly to those seeking to understand his attitudes to women I recommend this valuable and well-researched book.

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