TOWARDS A FEMINIST HERMENEUTIC OF MARK 7.24-30

by

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ABSTRACT

Behind the overt sexism and racism exhibited in Mk7.24-30, lies a message of liberation. This message of liberation is discerned through understanding the text as primarily reflecting its context of origin.

This thesis argues that inherent in the bible is a message of liberation for all; and that this message has been lost through being written, redacted and interpreted, in a primarily androcentric environment. The task of this thesis is thus to discern whether this message of liberation is reflected in Mk7.24-30, and if so, to expose it and develop a feminist hermeneutic based on this understanding.

Mark must be recognised as existing specifically as a text, and recognising its textual nature is crucial to understanding Mk7.24-30. This thesis holds that every text is shaped by the environment in which it is set and created, it is also shaped by the anticipated readers. In examining Mk7.24-30, the setting of the story is recognised as Palestine, and the audience for which it was written is seen to be the Roman Christians. Both Palestine and Rome are examined from a Historical Materialist perspective, in an attempt to discern ways in which the two environments contributed toward the shaping of the text.

Once the text is recognised as primarily reflecting the dominant patriarchal ideology of the day, this thesis attempts to discern whether Mk7.24-30 contains a message of liberation.

In reading the text from the perspective of the Syro-Phonoecian woman, and by examining the actions of both Jesus and the woman, we show how the text may indeed be liberatory to woman, and all marginalised people, despite the harsh racist and sexist overtones.

PREFACE

On the surface, the bible seems to condone the continued oppression of women and other 'marginalised' people. Women are seldom referred to, and when they are, it is usually within the stereotype of the mother, wife or prostitute. Does this imply that the bible offers tacit support to the notion of the inferiority of women? If so, the bible contradicts the understanding of the inherent equality of people, and as such should be rejected.

It was through searching the bible for a message of liberation, that this thesis was born. By reading the bible from a feminist perspective, it became clear that behind the often oppressive texts, was a message of liberation for all. On recognising this message, we approached a text which seemed completely offensive to women and Gentiles, and through using a feminist hermeneutic, the true message of liberation was exposed. We firmly believe that other 'oppressive' texts may also be liberated by using a feminist hermeneutic.

We believe that it is essential that the bible be 're-read', and that through this new reading, the inherent equality of all people will be affirmed.

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Finally, thank-you to all those unnamed people, who through words and actions, showed me that in recognising the inherent equality of all people, all may be liberated. I believe that this feminist hermeneutic of Mk7.24-30 will display that neither racism nor sexism may claim legitimacy from the bible.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1. THE WAY FORWARD

For centuries women have been oppressed. This oppression is deep-rooted, and for years has never been questioned or criticised by religion. Theological interpretations of Christianity and Judaism have in fact served to entrench notions of the inferiority of women.

Recognising this situation, critical feminist theologians have sought to redress the problem. After examining biblical texts, they feel that the true message of liberation exhibited in many texts has been lost and that sexist, oppressive interpretations do an injustice both to women as well as to the bible.

It is the contention of this paper that the use of the bible is critical to a meaningful discourse of feminist theology. It recognises the limitations and restrictions of the bible, but nonetheless proposes that the bible has to be consulted if feminist theology is seeking validity and/or acceptability.

If one accepts the use of the bible in feminist theology, one has to recognise that the bible exists specifically as a text. There is no other way of entering the "world" of the bible, or more specifically of "Mark", or of understanding what is being said or understood, other than through careful examination of the text.

How is the text in question to be studied however? Literary criticism has "existed" in many forms, yet has undergone several significant, fundamental changes over the years. New

tools are being used to work toward new goals. The philosophical approach has made way for the sociological approach.

This paper holds that the most effective way of getting to the context behind the text of Mark 7.24-30 is through the historical materialist approach. We shall justify the selection of this approach (notwithstanding its inherent limitations) as opposed to other forms of textual analysis.

The reader, whether the original reader or someone today who might choose to glance through the bible, plays a vital role in discerning the meaning of the text. The reader will always bring some expectations or presuppostions to bear on the text and it is thus vitally important that any attempt to understand the text should incorporate an understanding of the role of the reader. In chapter 4 we shall develop an understanding of the dynamic relationship between the text and the reader, the writer and the critic.

What of the two characters in Mark 7.24-30, Jesus and the Gentile woman? Is the woman demanding, argumentative and "out of line"? Is Jesus exhausted and acting out of character or is he participating in the inherent sexism and racism of the day? Does this pericope reflect an actual tradition about Jesus or is it making an important statement about the church's mission? Why was the story retold by Matthew and Mark and yet not by Luke? How would this story have been read and understood by the earliest "audience"? It is the aim of this paper to begin to find answers to these important questions.

Thus, using a historical materialist methodology and being rooted within the feminist discourse, this thesis shall critically examine Mark 7.24-30 and shall show how the text might be liberated for today's readers, and how once liberated, it might be embraced by all as its "real" meaning becomes clear.

Chapter 2: WHY A FEMINIST THEOLOGY?

2.1. THE DISCOURSE OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Feminist theology must not be viewed in isolation, but should be seen in context with other liberation theologies, as they all stem from a mutual feeling and experience of unjust oppression. Society, and the dominant ideology, is patriarchal and oppressive to women. Feminist theologians recognise that there is a need to liberate the bible from its sexist ideological framework, and in so doing, allow the inherent message of liberation which is to be found in the bible, to become accessible to all.

The principles for a feminist hermeneutic are that women are fully human and are to be recognised as such [1], and that through the engendering of a feminist consciousness, women's experience is to be recognised as important and as a valid tool of criticism.

Both sexism and the oppressive nature of patriarchy need to be exposed as false ideologies, rooted in androcentric expressions and arising from a specific context [2]. The contexts must be examined in terms of the ways in which a patriarchal ideology was dominant, and the ways in which this dominant oppressive ideology has become reappropriated to validate continuing sexist interpretations and practices.

Feminist consciousness needs to operate within the religious

framework to raise the yet unspoken and unrecognised truths, to show up false, untrue ideologies and attitudes and to recreate a new understanding of the fully human woman, whose acceptability is evident in the message of the bible but is hidden in its androcentric mechanisms of expression.

2.2. LIMITATIONS IN THE USE OF THE BIBLE

The bible is recognised by many as being so sexist and patriarchal in nature and ideology, that the legitimacy of using such a document has been widely questioned. There are two main schools of thought on this area which might be termed the revolutionary or exclusive perspective and the reformist or inclusive perspective.

The first is exemplified by the approaches of Mary Daly, Naomi Goldenberg and Carol Christ who believe that the bible, church structure and authority need to be shown up for their limitations and oppressively sexist statements, and that their demands for female subservience need to be shown as illegitimate. They believe that the bible and the message which it offers is so inherently sexist that it must be rejected out of hand. Many adherents to this approach have moved into a "post-Christian" perspective as exemplified by Daly in the post-script of her book The Church and the Second Sex, which she entitles: "New Archaic Afterwords by the Author" [3]. The revolutionary perspective claims no affinity to the bible and in terms of an often radical policy of segregationalism, many women would also be excluded from their

"community". A further important point to note in terms of the revolutionary "school" is that sexism is perceived to be the key to all oppression, this perception is at best eclectic. One must acknowledge that this "school" is a form of radical feminism as opposed to radical feminist theology.

The second "school", exemplified by many scholars like Reuther, Fiorenza and Russell believe that use of the bible is valid within feminist theology, although they recognise its many shortcomings. Fiorenza makes an important point in asserting her call for a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion, when she explains that certain texts may be used when arguing against the women's struggle for liberation because there "are patriarchal texts and therefore [these texts] can serve to legitimate women's subordinate role and secondary status in patriarchal society and church"[4].

Within this second "school" there is a difference of opinion as to the extent to which the bible may be used, with some, like Farley [5], believing that only parts of the bible may be appropriated, while rejecting other parts; and other scholars like Mollenkott [6] believing that the bible in its entirity should be approached, although she certainly agrees that the texts dealing specifically with - or about - women's issues, need to be emphasised. The many differences between the scholars in the reformist tradition will be further discussed at a later stage, the one feature common to all scholars within this school however, is that they recognise the inherent value of using the bible in developing a feminist hermeneutic. At the outset we need to state that this thesis would naturally

fall into the reformist category, which holds that the bible should be used in developing a feminist theology.

Accepting the use of the bible as being of fundamental importance does not preclude us from showing up the limitations and problems of appropriating the texts. In fact, such a discussion is essential, and the bible must be exposed as being a "limited", often oppressive, collection of writings [7].

The bible must be recognised as having been written in a patriarchal society; further, it was canonised and later theologised about within a similar context. The bible and much of its interpretation thus has to be recognised as being male dominated through the context of its "creation". The bible is patriarchal in nature in order to justify male dominance. The important question which now begs answering is that of whether there is any underlying message of fundamental human equality coming through the texts which may now be appropriated? This paper holds that the message or ideal of the bible is one of liberation for all people, be they economically, sexually or politically oppressed. This message is often hidden or smothered by the androcentric mechanisms of expression. It is because this message is recognised that we claim validity in using the bible.

When using the bible one must recognise that the mechanism of expression is to be seen within a historical context, and be seen as reflecting the context of origin. As Eagleton contends, history operates on the text through an ideological determination [8]. While the context must be recognised and

examined, one must be wary of attempting to reconstruct history, because in so doing, the reconstructioner merely reads her/his bias and ideology into the situation. Recognising the patriarchal origin and the androcentric mechanism of expression of the bible must not be seen as an excuse for the obvious bias and oppressive nature of the texts, rather these issues need to be critically exposed. Feminist theologians need to discern, through the use of the bible, the degree to which the texts may be used in order to liberate both women as well as the bible. Both theology and the church need to be liberated and "humanised" if they are to serve people and not oppress them.

When using the text one must beware of "absolutising" the meaning. By saying this we mean that the text should not be viewed as a static artefact which has only one message, viz. the message of popular interpretation. The bible must rather be recognised as being dynamic, lending itself to a new reading. This new reading, which we see as the message of liberation for all, is latent in the bible and has to be freed and recognised.

Recognising the bible as being value-laden and a culturally conditioned document allows us to see interpretation as being relative to each specific situation. As Mollenkott suggests, we need to perceive the difference between that which was written for an age and that which may be perceived as being "true" for all times [9]. Here naturally we would see the oppressive side of the texts as specifically pertaining to an age and context, and the liberative perspective as being the "eternal" message.

Because this chapter intends to deal essentially with the issue of whether using the bible is appropriate for feminist theologians, and because we intend to persue this end by examining the ideas and writings of specific feminist theologians, we cannot afford to become encumbered by a discussion on ideology or the way it is present within the texts, as this is a tangential issue. A brief discussion of a number of points raised by Eagleton would not be amiss, however.

The text (in this case the biblical material) is seen as a production of ideology, as opposed to an expression thereof [10]. This point is important to recognise as it reiterates our understanding of the dominant role played by the patriarchal ideology prevalent when the texts were written. It further supports our understanding of the texts as being covertly sexist in nature, as opposed to overtly sexist. Ideology is also recognised as signifying a "false consciousness", but through which elements of the real may be seen [11]. This understanding supports our contention that the often patriarchal, oppressive message of the text is to be viewed as a false consciousness and that an element of the real may perhaps be perceived to be the liberative ideals, hidden within or behind the androcentric mechanisms of expression.

A further important point raised by Eagleton holds that ideology pre-exists the text, yet the ideology of the text does not have pre-existence and is not premeditated [12]. Accepting this point we may argue that oppressive ideology which is

dominant in the texts is the result of the dominant ideology of the day, yet was not intentionally included in the texts. This understanding thus allows us to see that the oppressive nature of the texts is a result of the conditions of production, and that it cannot be seen as the "true message" of the bible.

Having examined some of the limitations involved in feminist theologians appropriating the bible, we need to turn to examine the broader understanding of the specific aims and principles upheld by certain scholars in their quest for a feminist theology.

2.3. AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Naturally each feminist theologian will have her/his own agenda, and will see certain issues to be more important than others. These areas of perceived importance will thus receive more attention than others. This does not mean that in the overall picture any one theologian may be perceived as being more "correct" than others. Rather, each theologian needs to be assessed in terms of the contribution of their work. What we plan to do here is to raise a number of the issues discussed by the scholars consulted in an attempt to discern an overall picture of the aims and principles of feminist theologians.

Recognising that society and religion has engendered a sense of subservience and inferiority in women, thus denying them full humanity, many feminist theologians go beyond examining the issue of using the bible, and also call for a restructuring

of social institutions [13], for without the institution altering significantly, feminist theology will not be appropriated to its fullest degree. By drawing an analogy with the parable of the wineskins one is able to show how a new theology cannot be fully operable within the old, limited context of understanding.

Hoover sees that feminist theology needs a three pronged attack. It needs to challenge the theological view of women; it needs to challenge religious laws and customs which bar the ordination of women and further, it must demand that the professional status and salaries of women be upgraded [14]. While these demands are certainly important I would suggest that the main concern should be with the first point, and that the other two may be attempted only once a new theological view of women is accepted.

Farley has a far simpler and I believe more important understanding of the principles of feminist theology. She believes that women are fully human and are to be valued as such, and secondly that feminist consciousness needs to call for the recognition of the importance of women's own experience. She further stresses the importance of the acceptance of the principle of mutuality [15]. Farley has accepted that the aims of these principles may be facilitated through a selective use of scripture. Importantly, she also recognises the restrictions which these principles may imply [16], in that they limit the liberation of women to certain spheres of struggle.

What we need to recognise, having looked at a few understandings of the principles of feminist theology, is that the one common element which they share is the stress on the recognition of the inherent equality of women. If this is a principle shared by all feminist theologians, we need to ask whether the use of the bible facilitates this principle. The answer to this question would naturally depend on the way in which the individual views the bible. It is the contention of this thesis, however, that the bible offers a view on basic equality for all; that this understanding needs to be exposed and appropriated and that when its inherent truth is recognised, that women may claim a "legitimate" equality, basing it upon a "true" interpretation of the bible.

2.4. USING THE BIBLE

Thus far, at the conclusion of each area which we have examined, we have stressed that the bible may be used. We now need to discern how the bible is to be used and how much of the bible is to be used.

Sakenfield defines three main ways in which the bible is used in feminist theology [17]. The first option is to look at texts about women to counteract "famous" texts which are used "against" women. The second is in looking at the bible generally in an attempt to discern a "theological perspective offering a critique of patriarchy" [18]. The third option calls for a look at texts about women to discern the ways in which they, and modern women, may live and strive for freedom within

a patriarchal culture. I would suggest a further alternative, rooted strongly in her second option. I believe that the texts should be examined in terms of their "basic" message, that if this message is oppressive to any sector of society, its authority and "truth" be rejected, but that this rejection should be carefully explained. One should then work with the remaining "acceptable" texts, viewing them as the heart of the message of liberation which I see the bible to encapsulate. These texts would serve as a critique of the others and as a base for a universal acceptance of the equality of women and as a recognition of the importance of their experience.

We shall now critically examine each of the above options in an attempt to see which is the most appropriate methodology to achieve the principles set out, and more particularly, which approach is most appropriate in attempting to "liberate" the text at hand, Mark 7.24-30.

2.4.1. Looking to Texts about Women to Counteract those used "against" Women:

This approach is certainly important but also definitely limiting. If one uses this to the exclusion of others, then the ideological bias of the full gamut of texts is never challenged. All that this would achieve would be to accept the bias and oppressive nature of the texts without suggesting in any way that the texts may be used to further the ends of the struggle of feminist theologians.

Sakenfield shows how this option may be used in two different responses: either the well-known texts (eg:1 Cor.14; Eph.5 &

Gen.2) may be approached from the feminist "angle" and reinterpreted in this new hermeneutic, or texts which have largely been forgotten (eg.John 4) and which present women in a more positive light may be unearthed and actively used. Both of these approaches are valid and both should be appropriated to some degree, but not in exclusion. As Sakenfield correctly points out, this approach enables one to see the diversity in the bible more clearly [19]. A further important point which she raises is that the very presence of material "positive" to feminist interpretation shows that the bible cannot be rejected outright as only showing a patriarchal bias.

Sakenfield raises two issues which she believes are the two most important areas of limitation, viz: excegetical uncertainty in that reinterpretation of the texts has not yet gained universal acceptance and that even a single accepted methodology may produce different end results. Secondly, in the light of some texts which may obviously not be reinterpreted because of their inherently oppressive nature, questions on the authority of the bible are raised [20]. Accepting her reservations, I believe that the second issue is not an insurmountable problem, but rather a task to which feminist theologians need to address themselves. One cannot blindly accept the bible as being authoritative in all instances and a critical questioning of authority is an essential task which must be addressed (this issue will be raised in more depth at a later stage). Recognising Sakenfield's reservations, I would still assert that this option may be effectively used in feminist theology, but needs

to be used critically and in conjunction with at least one of the other available options.

2.4.2. Looking to the Bible Generally for a Theological Critique of Patriarchy:

This approach does not intentionally select texts which may seem liberative, but rather approaches the body of the texts aiming to recognise the true message of the bible and then apply it to women. The important starting point of this approach would then be to discern the "central witness" of scripture and then use this as a yardstick against which the interpretation of other scriptures may be measured. The problem with this is the multiplicity of understandings of the central core or witness. Russell, for example, sees that the central core lies in the understanding of the liberating nature of partnership and equality [21]. Conversely, Reuther sees an "egalitarian, counter cultural vision" [22] which needs to be discerned between the lines of the bible, to be the central witness.

The important aspect of this approach is that in approaching the entire bible, including those texts not directly about women, feminist theology may be viewed as incorporating the "heart" of the biblical witness and is not to be relegated to secondary status. The message of equality and wholeness which this approach seeks to identify with more than only women, captures people in all areas of life and challenges any instances of oppression and subservience as being biblically unsound. In other words, this approach may be employed by all

experiencing oppression, while recognising that the equality of women and the importance of their experience remain the basic principles of feminist theology. It is nonetheless vital not to view the discourse in a void, but rather to recognise it as part of the broader discourse on liberation. This second approach facilitates this understanding.

Recognising the positive contributions offered by this option does not preclude any limitations or problems which it may encapsulate. Fiorenza raises two important reservations which she has in employing this methodology. Firstly, she feels that this approach may conceal patriarchy in the biblical witness in that it attempts to focus upon the broader understanding as opposed to a specific analysis of texts [23]. This approach may be too inclusive in that in using it one might assume that any critique of oppression naturally included oppression of women, when in many instances this does not seem to be the case. The second problem which she raises lies in the understanding of the existence of some "timeless truth" which most texts seem unable to capture. She feels (and in this I must support her implicitly) that in searching for this "timeless truth" scholars run the risk of ignoring or overlooking the culturally conditioned parts of the bible [24]. In adopting this approach, feminist theologians need to be aware of maintaining a continuous critique of patriarchy, and also need to be aware that the search for a coherent core should never replace the contingent character of the bible. They need also to be aware of the possible "non-existence" of this core. I believe, however, that a central understanding of the liberative message

is vital, as it is evident in many parts of the bible.

This approach thus has a number of strong points and raises issues and questions which are essential to an effective, critical feminist theology. As with the earlier option, it too needs to be used in conjunction with other options, but certainly offers a valid starting point when doing feminist theology.

2.4.3. Looking to Texts about Women to Learn about Ancient and Modern Women Living in Patriarchal Societies:

This option specifically examines texts where women are seen to be oppressed, in an attempt to discern a meaning for modern feminists. In this option the bible is not considered to represent the ideal way of living and so does not reject the sexist texts, but rather confronts them,

> "rather, the bible is viewed as an instrument by which God shows women their true condition as people who are oppressed and yet who are given a new vision of a different heaven and earth and a variety of models for how to live toward that vision" [25
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An excellent example of a scholar who successfully uses this option is that of Schussler Fiorenza in In Memory of Her. In this work she reconstructs the early practices which she sees the authors of the New Testament as ultimately rejecting. Recognising the androcentric and patriarchal bias of the bible, she asserts that throughout the texts "a struggle for equality and against patriarchal domination" may be seen [26]. The

underlying notion in this approach is that modern women may appropriate the tradition through identifying both with the oppression of women in the bible as well as through the excercising of their freedom.

The problem which comes to light when using this option is the question of authority. If texts are openly acknowleged as being oppressive, what is their authority, and how can one use a text if the authority is doubted or rejected? Perhaps Fiorenza overcomes this issue in that she does not seem to be suggesting that the texts hold any kind of ultimate authority, but rather uses them as a vehicle to discern oppression and to raise the option of freedom from this oppression.

2.4.4. Looking to Texts in Terms of Their Message of Liberation, and Rejecting Others in Terms of Authority and Truth:

This option should also not be viewed in a vacuum, but rather should be assessed in terms of its relationship with other methodologies. This option holds that there is a central tenet of the bible which calls for liberation and a release from oppression for all. It holds further that the bible should be examined in an attempt to discern the level of this liberative message, and that where this message is lacking or where the texts are actually oppressive to women and others, they must be rejected as having no authority or essence of "truth". While this option is very similar to the second one (which was discussed earlier) in that they both recognise the presense of some central "truth" or witness, it is different in that by

specifically concentrating on the issue of the oppression of patriarchy, the criticism of it being too general cannot hold true.

This option can and must be used in conjunction with one or more of the other options. It is not limited to merely examining texts dealing with women, but rather accepts and works with any text offering support to the ideal of liberation. It does, however, accept that certain texts can never be reinterpreted in a non-oppressive light, and that as such these texts must be rejected.

While this option does not offer anything specifically original or new in its approach, I believe that its strength lies in the fact that it has arisen out of careful consideration of the other suggested options, and that in bearing the criticism of these in mind, it has sought to offer a working alternative. I would not suggest that this option should be employed to the exclusion of the others, but rather that it should serve to strengthen and guide any other complimentary methodologies. It is this approach which will inform the feminist aspect of the methodological approach to Mark 7.24-30.

2.5. THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE IN THE FEMINIST APPROACH

The question which is continually raised by scholars who choose to use the bible in support of feminist theology is;

where does the ultimate authority of the bible lie. Can one select texts, claiming some as authoritative and reject others? What makes a text authoritative? Does a selective acceptance of the bible not reduce the whole of biblical interpretation down to a solely personal bias? These questions are all relevant and need to be raised and dealt with before one can accept or reject the use of the bible in feminist theology.

Feminist theologians need to be aware that it is not sufficient to use the bible in terms of a new feminist hermeneutic and through this expect that the dominant patriarchal structure of the bible will disappear. Rather, as Fiorenza claims, feminist biblical interpretation must "challenge the scriptural authority of patriarchal texts and explore how the bible is used as a weapon against women struggling for liberation [27].

On the surface the texts will remain constant. The patriarchal, oppressive bias of some texts will always remain the same, no matter how they are read and interpreted. In the light of this then, can one say that the whole bible needs to exposed to a new feminist hermeneutic, or is it not more acceptable to insist that certain texts must be rejected and exposed in the full sense of their bias? Fiorenza argues that the litmus test for invoking Scripture as the Word of God must be whether or not biblical texts and traditions seek to end relations of domination and exploitation" [28].

If one accepts that certain texts are to be rejected, on what

grounds can one accept or reject texts as authoritative? The text can only be perceived to be authoritative if it is recognised to be "true" and if its meaning is upheld. An unquestioning acceptance of the authority of the bible has to be shown to be both blind and limiting. Russell correctly questions the Christian and Jewish faiths by asking whether the faiths should remain faithful to the scriptures or whether they should not rather remain faithful to "their own integrity as whole human beings"[29]. Clearly there is some discrepancy between ones integrity and the message which the bible often seems to be proclaiming.

Before one may accept or reject texts, one must see if they meet ones criterion. This chapter has acknowleged that there is a central witness of liberation, a strand, running throughout the pages of the bible. Russell and Reuther identify that "the bible has a critical or liberating tradition embodied in its 'prophetic-messianic' message of continuing self-critique" [30]. Further, the scriptures should "provide a source of meaning and hope for our lives" [31]. The witness to liberation is seen as the biblical "truth" and the source of meaning and hope, and the ideal toward which all should work. Any text therefore that is openly oppressive or that condones exploitation clearly then cannot be seen to reflect the essence of the message of the bible or offer any hope for those experiencing oppression, and as such must be rejected. If the message is perceived to be false or misleading, then it can have no power or authority over people and it is thus wasteful to consult it, unless to show up its limitations and bias.

Naturally, those texts which on the surface seem to be oppressive (but are really only reflecting the patriarchal background in which they originated) need to be carefully interpreted in an attempt to discern their bias'. If, despite the androcentric mechanisms of expression, these texts may be seen to bear witness to the ideal of liberation and equality for all, they must be read and appropriated. It is in this context which I view Mark 7.24-30, on the surface it certainly seems to be an incredibly oppressive, both to gentiles as well as to women, yet, as this paper holds, this surface is rather a reflection of the patriarchal bias of its context and inherrent in its core is a message of liberation for all.

This selection of scripture should in no way be seen to limit the bible. The bible is not being limited, but rather its bias is being exposed. Only after the bias is exposed may the bible be viewed as "true". The texts need to be carefully examined and the androcentric mechanisms need to be reinterpretated and transformed into a liberative framework. The biblical message must be seen as not restricted or defined solely by the texts.

> "In and through structural and creative transformation, the bible can become holy scripture for women-church .... [we do] not identify biblical revelation with androcentric texts and patriarchal structures, but maintain that such revelation and inspiration is found among the discipleship community of equals in the past and the present"[32]

Only after the message of the bible is liberated from its oppressive texts, may women be liberated. This re-examining process should be viewed as a liberative cleansing process in order that freedom and full equality may be claimed by all.

2.6. CONCLUSIONS

Having examined the various approaches taken by a number of feminist theologians, this paper asserts that the bible must be used in doing feminist theology. Its limitations have been noted and while recognising the oppressive nature of many of the texts, this paper still claims that the bible has an intrinsic message of liberation and equality which may be appropriated.

We have not examined the work of Daly or others in the "revolutionary" school at all, but recognise that they would reject this approach, because of its acceptance of the use of the bible. The bible must be examined, even if only to liberate women from the understanding of inferiority which the bible is seen to engender in many women. Thistlethwaite's frightening article [33] about the way women accept violence and abuse because they do not see the bible as challenging these acts, is a practical reason for supporting our claim that the bible needs to be re-examined and reinterpreted. The existing false interpretation is extremely harmful both to women as well as to any other oppressed sectors of society seeking liberation.

Accepting the fact that certain texts can never be perceived in a liberative light, and that these texts are damaging to the "truth" of the bible, this paper calls for their authority to be rejected and their message to be exposed as "false".

At no stage have we specified how this new hermeneutic is to

be realised. There are many debates centering upon the nature of God and the trinity and upon using a new unbiased language in rewriting the bible. These debates have not been examined, because they are seen as being outside the intended scope of this thesis. This thesis recognises however that if one is to appropriate the bible (which we see as essential) then these debates have to be entered into before adopting even parts of the bible.

This paper affirms the stance of Reuther, who after examining the bible, denounces the patriarchal ideology exhibited in many texts. We further recognise the importance of her approaching the text with a "hermeneutic of suspicion", and her acknowlegement of viewing the bible as embodying a tradition which provides a principle for feminist hermeneutics.

The bible must be recognised as having been created in a predominantly patriarchal society and its bias must be exposed. To accept using the bible in feminist theology one needs to recognise the message of equality and liberation evident in its pages, and forcefully denounce the authority of texts which deny full humanity to anyone. The dynamism of the bible must be recognised, and through this recognition, the bible must be used and reappropriated in feminist theology.

Having recognised the importance of exposing the oppressive, patriarchal nature of certain texts we must turn and focus on the text in question, Mark 7.24-30. As was suggested earlier, this text seems on the surface to be both racist and sexist. It seems to relegate the Gentile woman and all whom she may

represent to the realm of sub-humanity. Yet this paper holds that there is more to the story and its message than meets the eye.

In order to understand the text in its correct context, we need to enter the world of Pre-70 Palestine as the setting of the story, and then also examine how the earliest readers (the Christians in Rome), would have understood the message. We shall enter these two contexts through sociological methodology. This stance shall be further developed and explained in the following chapter.

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1. Mollenkott, 1979, p230
2. See Thistlethwaite, 1985, p100
3. Daly, 1968 [included in 1985 rendition]
4. Schussler Fiorenza, 1984, pXII
5. Farley, 1985, p44
6. Mollenkott, 1979, p222
7. cf. Fiorenza, 1984, pXIIff
8. Eagleton, 1976, p75
9. Mollenkott, 1979, p222
10. Eagleton, 1976, p72
11. ibid, p70ff
12. ibid, p92
13. see Fiorenza, 1984, p190
14. Hoover, 1979, p385
15. Farley, 1985, p44ff
16. ibid, p49
17. Sakenfield, 1985, p57

18. ibid, p59

19. ibid, p58

20. ibid, p59

21. Russell, 1981, p98

22. Reuther, 1983, p23

23. Fiorenza, 1983, p14ff

24. Fiorenza, 1985, p131

25. Sakenfield, 1985, p62

26. Fiorenza, 1983, p92

27. Fiorenza, 1985, p129

28. Fiorenza, 1984, pXIII

29. Russell, 1985, p137

30. Reuther, 1985, p116

31. Russell, 1985, p139

32. Fiorenza, 1985, p136

33. Thistlethwaite, 1985, p96ff

Chapter 3: WHY A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH?

3.1 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SEARCH FOR A VALID METHODOLOGY WITH WHICH TO DISCERN THE INTERFACE BETWEEN TEXT AND CONTEXT OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The Gospel of Mark exists for us specifically as a text. There is no other way of entering the "world" of Mark, or of understanding what is being said or believed, than through careful study of the text.

How is the text to be studied? Literary criticism has "existed" in many forms, yet has undergone several significant changes. New tools are being used to work toward new goals. The philosophical approach has made way for the sociological approach. One now needs to discern whether these approaches are inherently different from the old. Will the new methodologies lead to different results or interpretations, or do they merely constitute a new language used to reproduce the same ideas or concepts?

Prior to selecting a methodology, one has to articulate the ultimate aims of one's research. In attempting to "liberate" Mark 7.24-30, this paper holds that the most appropriate methodology would be that which analyses the text as a specific class production. Further, this paper holds that the "audience" (in this case, the Roman Christians) of a text plays a significant role in prescribing to the author (Mark) the contents of the text. Thus, armed with this understanding,

this paper holds that a form of sociological analysis should be appropriated in the attempt to "liberate" the text in question.

3.2 BENEFITS AND USES OF SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Why sociological analysis? Robin Scroggs writes that sociological analysis arose out of "impatience with fragmented knowledge produced by biblical scholars" and that this has

> "encouraged the attempt to 'put body and soul together again' after long over-emphasis on the inner spirituality and doctrinal views of early Christians." [1]

More important perhaps than why sociological analysis came to be so widely used, are the different ways in which this form of analysis developed. Before immediately opting for a preference of the Historical Materialist methodology, one should be aware of the other available options with their benefits and shortcomings.

Scroggs, for example, raises five diverse theoretical frameworks, all of which have certain limitations [2]. These are Unconscious Social Protest; Cognitive Dissonance; Role Analysis; Sociology of Knowledge and Historical Materialist interpretation. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to present an in depth critique of these approaches, it must be recognised that despite their limitations, they have all

contributed much toward the overall store of biblical knowledge, and thus need to be briefly assessed. We shall briefly critique the first four theoretical frameworks discussed by Scroggs before entering into a fuller assessment and evaluation of Historical Materialism.

3.2.1 Studies of Unconscious Social Protest

The main proponent of this form of analysis (based on the insights of Troeltsch) which we shall examine is Scroggs [3]. This form of analysis examines the implications of sectarianism and, having satisfactorily settled on the nature of a sect (seen primarily as being in opposition to established social organisation), views Early Christianity as a sect. This analysis thus sees Early Christianity as a form of "unconscious social protest" [4]. In his article, Scroggs refers to an unpublished paper by Snyder [5], who uses a similar methodolgy, which sees Early Christianity as being in tension with the "trans-local tradition" (the tradition of the prophet, intellectual, etc.) as opposed to the "local tradition" (the social matrix in which the person is rooted) [6]. This tension is also made manifest in a form of "unconscious social protest".

This understanding of Christianity being an unconscious form of social protest is useful in a psychological examination of the early "sect", yet surely the one problem which will be encountered if this view or methodology is used alone, is that of reductionism. Scroggs himself states that reductionism means "to explain any societal phenomenon completely in terms

of a hidden, unconscious social dynamic" [7], yet shortly after making this statement, the description of his own work tends to fall into the very trap which he has just noted.

The understanding of Early Christianity in terms of a social dynamic, namely unconscious social protest, is valid only if the proponent of the model acknowledges her/his dependence on sociological models (such as the Marxist analysis of society), which are a prerequisite to this model. One cannot understand Christianity as being in a situation of tension with society, unless the society is first examined, which implies the use of another model. This dependence on another model certainly does not negate the usefulness of Scroggs' framework of analysis, but it is essential to view this framework in the context of other methodologies.

In examining the interface between text and context, this model could be used in an attempt to discern whether the Early Christianity which existed in Rome can be viewed as a form of unconscious social protest, yet this is definitely beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, the extreme limitations of Scroggs' approach have got to be acknowledged.

3.2.2 Cognitive Dissonance

Scroggs uses John Gager as his example of work using the cognitive dissonance model. The theory holds that the cognitive dissonance model works when a specific community experiences disconfirmation of a belief which had been held as central. Instead of disconfirmation causing the demise of the community, the belief will rather be intensified and the

community will begin proselytising. The theory of this model depends on five preconditions [8], all of which Gager believes are met by the phenomenon of Early Christianity. Gager sees the "death" of Jesus, the Messiah, as the disconfirmatory event [9]. Coupled with the "death" of Jesus, Gager sees that another important factor in the creation of cognitive dissonance was the disappointment of eschatological expectations experienced by the Christians. He believes that these two factors lead to the fervour which characterised Early Christianity [10].

The single positive comment levelled by Scroggs on this form of analysis is that it casts a new - if somewhat shocking - light on the understanding of early missionary zeal [11]. While this may be a valid comment, it is insufficient to rate an important theory merely in terms of its "novelty". Gager's work in Kingdom and Community is certainly novel, but more, it is an important psychological examination of the motivating features or factors of Early Christianity. My criticism of the Unconscious Social Protest model still stands with respect to this model: that is, while a psychological analysis of the phenomenon of Early Christianity is certainly valid, it cannot be done in a void. The "driving factors" of the community have to be seen in the context of full socio-economic analysis. The communities hold a certain postion in society and their "psyche" must be seen as dependent on that position or setting. Importantly, Gager uses the model in conjunction with other sociological tools such as social analysis, but the relevant question remains "How useful is the model in adding to our knowledge of Early Christianity?"

3.2.3 Role Analysis

Scroggs identifies the use of this model with Gerd Theissen. This understanding of Christianity makes wide use of both social data as well as sociological models. The open or acknowledged use of sociological tools makes this understanding of Early Christianity more acceptable in that the theory arises out of the specific context within which the Early Christian movement operated. Role Analysis emerges from a structural functionalist approach to the social dynamic, and specifically looks at the

> "description or self-understanding of people who adopt or accept certain roles within the society, whether such roles are defined by social status, relationship of person to group or kinds of activity expected of the role. [12]

An important base to Theissen's work are the four major social structural factors which Theissen identifies and uses extensively in his work [13]. Working in these four areas implies that the ground-work for interpretation has been well covered. The reading of the text is not made in a void, but rather in the broader social context. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the findings of Theissen's research; suffice it to say that Theissen contends a "sociological theory of conflict" as being the appropriate manner for understanding the Jesus Movement in Palestine, and a "sociological theory of integration" as being the appropriate analysis of early Hellenistic Christianity [14].

Mosala, in criticism of Theissen's conclusions, raises an

excellent point, one which may perhaps be levelled at other scholars doing sociological analysis of the text. This criticism is that Theissen presupposes the accessibility of one set of data independently of another set. In the specific context of Theissen's work, Mosala is suggesting that Theissen is attempting to study Palestinian Christianity without acknowledging the Hellenistic culture pervading the texts [15]. While we are certainly informed about Palestinian Christianity, this information is coloured by the language and culture describing the phenomenon. Without specific reference to this "colouring" process and an acknowledgement of the limitations thus imposed on the study of the text, Theissen's methodology and conclusions are doomed to failure from the outset.

Mosala also criticises Theissen for his failure to provide an "adequate systematic location of the Jesus Movement" [16], in relation to the political economy of the Roman Empire. The reason for this important criticism being levelled is that once again the Palestinian issues seem to be viewed in a void, without recognising the influence of the Roman Empire upon life in Palestine. Mosala's criticism is reiterated by Mansueto when he charges Theissen with failing to deal with the economic, social or political issues and contradictions of Palestine, and rather concentrating solely upon ideological conflicts arising out of the above mentioned contradictions [17].

Theissens' works are the expected end-result of a disciplined use of the structural functionalist methods, which ideologically arose to "serve as an instrument of integration for the disintegrating system" out of which it arose [18]. Thus

one of the main criticisms levelled by Mansueto and Mosala against Theissen and his methodology is the clearly recognisable stance which the model employs, which should be acknowledged by the models' proponent, yet is ignored or glossed over. Open recognition of one's point of reference and class commitment is essential for any "honest" sociological approach to the text.

Despite this criticism, Theissen's Role Analysis could be extremely useful in examining the Christian community in Rome, in that instead of examining the role of the individual, one could view the entire community as a single entity, and proceed to examine the role of that entity within the broader social framework.

This form of analysis is also appealing in that it pre-supposes in-depth sociological analysis, which I believe is crucial to any attempt at understanding the relationship between text and community. A "sensitive" user of Theissen's model should begin by discerning Theissen's point of reference and class commitment, and, having acknowledged the possible short falls of the model or methodology (such as that which has been done above), could certainly benefit from a disciplined, thorough use of the Role Analysis model or methodology.

3.2.4 Sociology of Knowledge

This sociological approach has been termed the "most threatening approach" [19]. Its threat lies in the understanding that the world in which we live is socially constructed and that this social construction is communicated

through all language, including theological language. One must understand at the outset that this language is completely dependant on other social realities. Language is intrinsically bound to literature, and literature "is vitally engaged with the living situations of men and women; it is concrete rather than abstract" [20]. If one thus acknowledges the essential link between language and literature, any use of literary theory must rest upon the notion that language is a social construction and yet communicates a social construction.

Scroggs opts for Wayne Meeks and his work on the Johannine Community as his example of this approach [21]. It is unnecessary to enter into Meeks' works; suffice it to say that Meeks asks the important question about what the social function is that the myths are fulfilling. Although his examination is confined to the Gospel of John, this question is still most appropriate when studying Mark. Mark is packed with "special touches" and extra information (such as the detail in the post transfiguration healing), which is specifically characteristic of the second gospel. These characteristics are to be seen as being a definite response to a specific situation: the socio-economic situation which existed for Mark's audience.

Meeks' work is specifically Weberian in that he attempts to study the Early Christians as individuals. Acknowledging, however, that these individuals did not write the texts, Meeks suggests that the individuals rather be found "through the collectivities to which they belonged and glimpse their lives through the typical occaisions mirrored in the texts"[22].

Meeks views himself as a moderate functionalist [23] in that he claims that society "is viewed as a process in which personal identity and social forms are mutually and continuously created by interactions that occur by means of symbols" [24]. He confesses that the model is eclectic, yet despite the eclecticism, sees the only way into understanding social structure as being to understand the individuals together with their subjective choices. Mosala levels a great deal of criticism at this understanding of Meeks' self-confessed eclecticism and says:

> This theoretical and methodological eclecticism seems to us a new way of concealing old theological and ideological perspectives. It moves us one step forward to the extent that it focusses our attention on the social nature of the texts, but it pulls us two steps back in that it not only reintroduces the old ideological hunches inherent in the Historical Critical Methods, but it hides them under the cloak of a more systematic approach, thus blunting the edge of a new social and political hermeneutic of the bible which seeks to liberate the Bible so that the Bible can once more become a liberating tool."[25]

This criticism, although being levelled specifically at Meeks, is one of Mosala's main criticisms of the Social Science approaches. Under the guise of being scientific and thus perhaps more acceptable, they are merely a new way of restating the old ideas and presuppositions inherent in the old methodologies. While this criticism is most certainly valid, Mosala fails to offer an alternative approach and yet concedes limited benefits from this approach.

If one plans to examine the interface between text and community, the Sociology of Knowledge approach is a useful tool for understanding the notion that the "character" of the text responds directly to the needs, demands or life situation of the community for whom the text is being produced. If one may proceed, having noted the eclectic nature of this methodology and acknowledging that the "old ideological hunches" are still present, one may attempt to break through these "hunches" and constructively use the Sociology of Knowledge approach to discern the interface between the text and context in the Gospel of Mark.

3.3 HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

Historical Materialism is viewed as being the scientific study of the structure and development of human social formations. The basic approach that we shall adopt is based upon Marx's theory of Historical Materialism, the outline of which was postulated in The German Ideology and refined in his later writings. This methodology has been successfully used by a number of scholars, including Belo [26] and Clevenot [27] (both of whose works shall be used when doing a materialist reading of Mark 7.24-30 in chapter 6).

Historical Materialism arguably rests upon two premises or rather, two key principles. Firstly, no single aspect of reality can be analysed independantly of the totality of social relations and determinants of which it forms a part. The second principle holds that the material world exists prior to our conceptions of it, the result of this being that the way in

which this world appears to us may distort its essential character. The task at hand is thus to delve behind the realm of appearances in an attempt to discover the essential relations and determinants that give rise to these appearances.

Thus for the biblical scholar who opts for using the Historical Materialist paradigm, the task would be (if somewhat crudely explained) to discern the way in which the ideology perceived in reading the texts is related to both the mode of production and to the superstructure of that specific society at a given moment.

Basically Marx sees that all social organisation, values and ideas (including religion) result from "the way human beings within nature act upon nature to produce their means of subsistence" [28], thereby fashioning their own specific form of social nature. As technology and forms of labour (modes of acting upon nature) change over time, a correlative change of political and social organisation is experienced. Naturally, to give support to these changes an ideology will evolve, justifying and rationalising the afore-mentioned changes.

The most fundamental concept employed by historical materialism is that of a "mode of production". This phrase refers to those elements, determinants and social relations which are necessary both to produce and reproduce life. Within the understanding of a mode of production are three basic elements which remain constant. The first is the object of labour (namely the raw materials existing in nature), the

second is the means of labour (which is to be seen as the tools, equipment, fixed assets etc.) and the third constant is labour power (or human productive activity). These elements are to be found in all societies, but are blended together in different ways which in turn will shape the nuances of that society, and so give it its specific character. When speaking of relations of production one refers to the dispostion of social surplus within society.

The mode of production forms the economic base of society. It presupposes the organisation of individual human beings in ways appropriate to their social function, with respect to the economic base. This organisation is affected by the political, social and religious superstructure and the resulting ideology. The political superstructure maintains the power relations between the various classes in society. The ideological superstructure in turn is the complex of beliefs, symbols etc. which locate individuals in their social world, and the forces which both generate these positions as well as maintain them (eg.family, religious institutions etc). While this is all extremely theoretical, when we turn to applying it to the situation in Palestine, the interrelatedness of mode of production, superstructure and ideology will become clear.

The class struggle is the central dynamic in Historical Materialism. The class struggle is perceived as being the motive force in history. It is primarily the struggle between the classes constituted at the level of the mode of economic integration, in relation to the creative activity of labour (ie. the workers, serfs and proletariat) and the extraction of

the surplus value of the labour by the bourgeoisie. Thus the class struggle is to be seen as the struggle to achieve economic, political and ideological control of the social formation.

While this paper certainly believes that the Historical Materialist framework is the most appropriate framework for studying the society out of which biblical texts were written, it would be naive to imagine that this methodology is without limitations. It is at this point where Eagleton's "Literary Criticism" comes into its own. Eagleton states:

> "any body or theory concerned with human meaning, value, language, feeling and experience will inevitably engage with broader, deeper beliefs about the nature of human individuals and societies, problems of power and sexuality, interpretations of past history, versions of the present and hopes for the future."[29]

The Marxist approach is inevitably restricted in that it needs and uses language to express its ideas and beliefs. Language is intrinsically biased by its very nature and thus by definition, restrictive. Yet while the Historical Materialist approach is governed and even limited by language or methods of expression, its intrinsic value cannot be underestimated.

The value of Marxist or Historical Materialist interpretation lies in the fact that it uses "scientific" tools to look at and to get behind the text, to examine the society which produced the text, thus allowing one to understand how and why the text was produced in that specific way. The text is also viewed by proponents of this methodology as being a possible tool for

liberation and the text is thus translated with this in mind.

This approach forces a move from an idealistic reading of the gospels and instead forces a "materialistic" reading. When applied to the Gospel of Mark, this approach sees Jesus within a specific practice, viz. a rejection of the dominant code of society [30]. This approach has certain economic and political implications; both Belo and Clevenot examine Jesus and the Jesus Movement in terms of these implications. Examining Jesus in the context of his original community, as well as the Gospel in its original context, using a Historical Materialist approach is an invaluable addition to biblical scholarship.

A further appealing aspect of Historical Materialism and the way in which it has been used by Belo, Clevenot and others, is that the writers clearly state their own presuppositions and points of reference at the outset of their investigations. They clearly still see the bible as being able to function as a liberating tool. The proponents acknowledge their own particular bias before approaching the readings; their class commitments are openly discussed and as a result of this "openess", a "fresh" reading of the text ensues.

We have done a careful evaluation of the Historical Materialist methodology and yet despite the unavoidable drawback (viz. its dependance on language which in itself is biased), this methodology must be accepted in its entirety and acknowledged for the invaluable contribution which it has made to biblical knowledge.

3.4 BIBLICAL STUDIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE PARADIGMS - AN OVERVIEW

Much recent biblical scholarship has opted for the use of the Historical Materialist methodology in preference to other methodologies arising from the field of the social sciences. It is becoming increasingly clear that in addition to Form, Literary and Redaction Criticism, the overarching methodology to be used is indeed to be found in the Historical Materialist approach.

With the advent of biblical scholars increasingly using a variety of methodological approaches arising from the sphere of the social sciences, there is a very real danger of them becoming eclectic and in so doing, ignoring the vast number of new spheres open to them. This danger might perhaps be exemplified by the work of Gager (1975) who, notwithstanding a worthy piece of scholarship, fails to relate his findings to a coherent theoretical framework. The danger implicit in his shortcoming is that biblical scholars use sociological categories on a subjectively random basis. Not only does this shortcoming limit and impinge upon the ultimate potential value of their work, but it also does social science methodologies a disservice.

As has been demonstrated, there are numerous sociological paradigms, each providing a specific set of categories through which the social world is both perceived and presented. These paradigms are often viewed as being in constant competition with one another, with adherents to them attacking one another

vociferously on the issue of methodological "soundness". Depending upon the paradigm which the scholar has selected, they might be called upon to make certain pre-suppositions which are not always empirically verifiable. The danger with this lies in the understanding that scholars using sociological paradigms are not always sufficiently well versed in the "intricacies" of their chosen paradigm to withstand even simple criticism.

The solution to this problem which I would offer is that "biblical sociologists" develop an intimate and thorough knowledge of their paradigm; that they do "biblical sociology" as capable sociologists who know how to use the tools as opposed to only knowing where to borrow them!

3.5 THE VALIDITY OF SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

While this thesis has selected the Historical Materialist methodology as the one most appropriate to use in achieving a "liberated" reading of Mark 7.24-30, it is important to recognise and comment on criticism levelled against the social science methodologies. Mosala and others, in their criticism of the social science methodologies, certainly do not fail to acknowledge the positive contributions which these methodologies have made [31]. Their criticism of the social science methodologies is thus not that they contribute nothing to the understanding of the bible or of Early Christianity, but rather that they address the question of "whether these methods as they are used in biblical criticism represent a theoretical

break with the past" [32].

Mosala sees that biblical criticism must be aware of wasting its time engaging "its energies, uselessly, against the kind of absolutist state whose material conditions have been virtually eroded" [33]. He further believes that implicit in the waste of time and energy is an underlying defense of the "contemporary bourgeois international social formation" [34] which was underlying its original foundation. Mosala feels that instead of energy being spent on a wasteful defense of past social formation, scholars should reassess their methodology and the underlying aims of their endeavours; so that they might actively work toward the post-bourgeois era. Scholars are ideologically centered within the old framework and, although claiming to be reexamining the texts in a new sociological state, their own ideological presuppositions and class commitments hinder any steps toward a "new" reading of the text.. The bible cannot be liberated from class-related intepretations or readings until the ideologies undergirding their criticisms are recognised and preferably departed from.

Having levelled this criticism, Mosala still accepts that the social science methodologies have had some positive effect. Most important, he acknowledges that

> "a healthier attitude towards the biblical texts, which sees them as ideological products of social systems and of configurations of social relations internal to these systems is now possible" [35].

A recognition of this possibility as well as the criticisms which have been justifiably levelled, should allow current

scholars selecting to work with from the Historical Materialist approach a better chance to achieve a liberated reading of the text.

Based on Mosala's criticism, I propose that in order to achieve a new "liberated" reading of the text, the text should be viewed as operating on three distinct levels. The first is the setting of and background to Jesus and his work in Palestine. The second is an attempt to discern both the writer and community(ies) for which the text was written (to examine these levels using, I would suggest, a Marxist framework). The third level, the absense of which Mosala tends to be most critical of, is that scholars should recognise that their reading of the Gospel is tainted by their own life experiences; their class commitment would colour their findings in that the very aims and objectives of their investigation would be pre-directed.

For these reasons, the text of Mark 7.24-30 shall only be examined once a Historical Materialist methodology has been applied both to Palestine and Rome and after the role of both the reader of the text as well as the writer of the exegesis has been thoroughly examined. It is the contention of this paper that only once this process has been worked through, can one approach the text and attempt to offer a liberated reading of the material.

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1. Scroggs, 1983, p337
2. ibid. p338ff
3. ibid, p344

5. ibid

6. ibid

7. ibid, p340

8. viz: 1. Beliefs must be held with firm conviction. 2. Committed action is expected on the part of the believers. 3. Belief must be specific enough for disconfirmation not to be denied. 4. Believers must recognise the disconfirmation evidence. 5. There must be communal support for the individual believers.[See Scroggs in Gottwald, 1983, p345]

9. Gager, 1975, p43

10. See Scroggs, 1983, p345

11. ibid, p346

12. Scroggs, 1983, p346

13. 1.Socio-economic factors at the basis of the social rootlessness of the movement. 2. Socio-economic factors related to the organisation of work and the distribution of products. 3. Socio-ecological factors referring to the contradictions between town and country. 4. Socio-political factors relating to the institutionalisation of oppression and exploitation through government machinery. note More detail on this social structural framework employed by Theissen may be found in Mosala, 1986, p27f and Scroggs, 1983, p345ff.

14. See Theissen, 1978, p113ff

15. Mosala, 1986, p28

16. ibid

17. Mansueto, 1983, p11

18. Mosala, 1986, p28

19. Scroggs, 1983, p347

20. Eagleton, 1983, p196

21. Meeks, 1983

22. ibid, p2

23. ibid, p6f

24. ibid

25. Mosala, 1986, p24

26. Belo, 1981

27. Clevenot, 1985

28. Gottwald, 1979, p631

29. Eagleton, 1983, p195

30. Belo, 1981, p282

31. See Mosala, 1986, p15-17

32. ibid, p17

33. ibid

34. ibid.

35. ibid, p16

Chapter 4: UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL OF MARK AS A TEXT

4.1 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCOURSE

"The word "hermeneutics" means the science or art of interpretation" [1]. Although this might be a slightly simplistic definition, the main issue is that if we plan to do a hermeneutical study of the Gospel of Mark, we must both understand the tools at hand, as well as be able to use them effectively. We have already articulated that the Gospel of Mark (henceforth referred to as Mark) exists for us specifically as a text. We have briefly referred to the understanding that because of its textual nature, it must be recognised as reflecting a particular ideology. Up till this point, reference to the textual nature of Mark and the resulting implications has been rather cursory. Before one can proceed with a reading of Mark, however, a more detailed understanding of the implications of the text as a text must be entered into.

In recent years there has been a proliferation of writing focussing specifically on literature, how it is written, why it is written, the importance of the author, the importance of the reader and critic, understanding the literary nature of the text, reception theory and so on. Following on from structuralist exegesis has been a form of "post-structuralist" critical work which has forwarded "the structural impulse by submitting modern critical thought and practice to fundamental

and epistemological critique" [2]. While it is tempting to enter the discussion on these areas, they are outside the scope of this chapter. Instead we shall confine ourselves to examining the areas which this thesis believes are fundamentally important to any understanding of Mark. Thus we shall look at four specific aspects; the text itself, the writer of the text, the role of the reader and the function of the critic.

It shall become evident that this paper closely follows the Materialist line of literary criticism yet places a greater relevance on the role of the reader as co-determinant in shaping the text, than does the materialist understanding. This paper holds that the text is the result of certain conditions of production, that it reflects the interests and commitments of the author (in terms of the ideological conditions of production) and that the author's knowledge of her/his reader(s) and their expectations and ideological commitments will also have a shaping role on the final product of the text (both in terms of what is said, how it is said and what is left unsaid). We shall also argue for an understanding of the text as being dynamic as opposed to having one fixed meaning, or as Casalis says "Not one message or one theology is to be found in scripture, but messages and theologies, because there are different situations and different witnesses" [3]. These ideas shall be further developed in the course of this chapter.

4.2. THE WORKING OF THE TEXT

The materialist literary theory assumes that literary production is a mode of ideological production, or as Eagleton says, "The literary text is not the 'expression' of ideology, nor is ideology the ' expresion' of social class. The text, rather, is a certain production of ideology" [4]. The task before one is thus to examine briefly the shaping role of production upon the text before one can look at the functions and contributions of the writer and reader.

With Mazamisa, we shall concur on the following understanding of materialistic literary theory, viz. that it

> "perceives the text as product on two levels: (a) on the level of the writer, as a written concretisation of his/her ideas and categories, ie. the abstract and ideal expression of the social relations as conceived by the writer; (b) on the level of the social context, ie. the social relations which are expressed by ideas and categories" [5]

In this section we shall thus briefly examine the relationship between ideology and text in an attempt to understand the "significance" of what we read. We shall not however become bogged down in an assessment of Marxism and literary criticism, suffice it to say that materialist criticism has to a large degree informed the approach of this paper [6].

At the outset one has to recognise that one is intrinsically bound by the limitations of language. The text can only

operate within the constraints of the language in which it is expressed. Eagleton correctly states "meaning is not simply something 'expressed' or 'reflected' in language: it is actually produced by it". He continues by saying "we can only have meanings and experiences in the first place because we have a language to have them in" [7]. According to Hawthorn, Marx sees language as "the curse of the spirit". Hawthorn continues by saying that in reality "language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men (sic), and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well" [8]. Language is thus "a field of social forces which shape us to our roots" [9]. One has thus to recognise that the text is inherently dependent on and shaped by the language in which it expresses itself. According to materialist literary theory then, although ideology has relative autonomy [10], it is to a *degree determined* by language as well other forces of production.

In materialist literary theory, the ideological tier (which has an indirect correspondance with the superstructure and base) is constituted by the abstract ideal expression of social relations [11]. Literature must thus be recognised as an ideological product, but importantly, as Eagleton articulates, the text produces itself,

> "but produces itself in constant relation to the ideology which permits it such relative autonomy, so that this ceaseless elaboration and recovery of its own lines of meaning is similtaneously the production *of a determining ideology.*" [12]

Thus in conjunction with being a product of ideology, the

text itself reproduces ideology. "In putting ideology to work, the text necessarily illuminates the absences, and begins to 'make speak' the silences, of that ideology" [13].

Thus in reading Mark as a text one has to recognise that it is a product of the ideology of the day and that it in turn reproduces ideology. The degree to which ideology and the production thereof is related to the economic, political and social instances implies that in order for one to recognise the dominant ideology of the day and its shaping influence upon the text of Mark, one has to do a full materialist study of the society in which the text of Mark was produced. While this important study shall take place in the following chapter, chapter 5, this chapter shall proceed by showing how other factors (like the role of the 'audience') also play an important role in shaping the text as we know it today.

4.3 THE AUTHOR AND THE TEXT

Having recognised the fundamental importance of ideology in shaping the text, it would be naive to imagine that the author of the text did not also play an important role in shaping the final outcome of the text. The author cannot merely be seen to be subsumed in the ideological conditions of production; the author is not just a "tool" to be manipulated, rather, as this section shall show, the author plays an important role in determining the text.

When one suggests that the author plays a vital role in shaping the text, one is not suggesting that the author is the central figure in the production of the text, or as Eagleton states "there is no question of 'centering' the literary text on the individual who produces it; but neither is it a matter of liquidating that subject into 'general' aesthetic and ideological forms" [14]. What one has to discern then is: what is the function of the author?.

This thesis contends that the author is often 'unconscious' of her/his ideological commitments or the role which they play in determining the authors' particular way of presenting a certain set of criterion. Ways of discerning the authors' ideological commitments are many and varied and there can certainly be no sound methodological way of working 'backwards' from the text to the author, then to the author's ideological commitment, and any attempt to do so would be met with frustration and inaccuracies. Eagleton, however, posits a number of distinct factors which might determine "authorial ideology", namely: "social class, sex, nationality, religion, geographical region and so on" [15]. Limiting though these factors might seem, they do point to the number of determinants which shape "authorial ideology".

Taking the ideological determinants which influence the author as given, one must recognise that these factors will shape not only what is said by the author, but also how it is said and what is left unsaid. Foucault claims that

"the author provides the basis for explaining not

> only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions and diverse modifications (through his biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the elevation of his basic design)." [16]

Foucault thus sees that together with the 'background' of the author, the author is the ultimate determinant in the shaping of the text.

In relation to Naumann, Mazamisa concedes the dominant role of the author in the structuring of the work:

> "Through the author-work relation the work receives its specific stature, determined by the totality of production conditions; the author structures the work and thereby creates its specific characteristics which determine its reception" [17]

This thesis concurs fully with this opinion but feels that in as much as the author shapes the work which determines its reception, the author (in this instance of Mark) is certainly aware of who his audience is, and that this factor is born in mind during the creation of the text in order that it might receive potentially the 'best' or most appropriate reception.

Having concurred with Naumann in the above aspect, it is necessary to briefly examine what one perceives the shaping conditions of production on the author are. Clearly the work (text) will reflect the way in which the author perceives reality. The author perceives and experiences reality in a certain way and this paper contends that this experience and perception will be reflected back into the work. One has to recognise that this perception is not conscious, and thus by implication the reflection in the text will also be relatively

'unconscious'. What one has to concede thus is that the work will always be subjective. We have already referred to language and its inherent subjectivity, but it is nonetheless important at this juncture to once again recognise the influence of language upon the author and her/his works.

Although the background of the author plays a fundamental role in shaping the text, one has to concede with Foucault that "the text *always contains a certain number of signs referring* to the author" [18]. Thus with relation to Mark, Foucault would see that the pericope which we intend examining is "transformed, modified and distorted" specifically by the author. While this paper accepts the central dominant role of the author (and her/his perception and experience of reality) upon the texts, it shall be shown that the "distortions" of the specific pericope, and potentially in fact its very presence in the Gospel, might have been influenced by the particular "audience" for which the writer, Mark, intended his text.

4.4 THE READER AND THE TEXT

Having postulated the relationship between the author and the text, one has to now discern whether the reader (both implied and actual) has any particular role to play in shaping the text. Can a text have any meaning without a reader? One has to recognise that unlike an oral discourse, in which the participants are 'present'; in the written discourse, the reader has to discern a form of meaning from the text at hand without the presence of the producer. Iser correctly

recognises that a major difference between reading and other forms of social interaction is that with reading there is no 'face to face' contact [19], thus the physical text cannot be altered to accomodate each new reader. The text is fixed, but this thesis believes that the notion of a 'fixed' text does not imply that the meaning is fixed.

This thesis holds that without the active participation of the reader, the text will be meaningless. More important to the issue at hand, however, is the understanding that beyond giving the text a meaning, the reader is often responsible for shaping the text itself (as opposed to only ascribing it a particular meaning).

Eagleton supports this notion of the importance of the reader when he states:

> "Literary texts do not exist on bookshelves: they are processes of signification materialized only in the practise of reading. For literature to happen, the reader is quite as vital as the author." [20]

In this statement he is referring specifically to the notion of the act of reading giving the text meaning, but this paper suggests that beyond giving the text meaning by the act of reading, that the reader for whom the text was intended (as opposed to a 'secondary' reader) is determinant in shaping the text.

This thesis postulates that every text is written with an intended reader(s) in mind, and that the more knowledge the author has of the reader, the more important is the reader in

determining the final outcome of the text. This thesis recognises that a whole new discipline of study, termed "reader response" has been developing over recent years, but it is not our intention to delve into the intricacies of this discipline. We recognise the fundamental difference between the primary readers for whom the text was produced and the secondary readers who have access to the text but are not the 'intended' audience [21]. Fowler prefers the phrases "real reader" and "implied reader" [22] in distinguishing between 'forms' of reader.

Reading must be seen as being a subjective action. Just as the author's experience and perception of reality (in which this paper includes the perception of her/his 'audience') shapes the course of the writing, so too does the reader's experience and perception of reality determine the way in which the text will be read and appropriated. This point enters us into the realm of reception theory which basically examines the readers' role in literature (again the finer points and short-comings of reception theory shall not be entered into). Eagleton shows how in terms of reception theory "the reader 'concretises' the literary work, which in itself is no more than a chain of organised black marks on a page" [23].

What is important to acknowledge is that literary work is 'created' in terms of being specifically directed or addressed to an audience. In terms of Naumann's theory, Mazamisa importantly states that "the reader approaches the work by way of his socially determined world of experience, and the effect of the work pervades this world of experience" [24]. Thus just

as the author is 'influenced by her/his context', so too is the reader, and ultimately the response to - and reception of - the text is similarly influenced. This notion is echoed to a degree by Jauss' premise which states that: "each literary production projects to the reading public a particular empirical world and therefore is read within a particular literary empirical context" [25]. The reader has certain expectations of the text which are determined by her/his experience of reality. Thus the response of the reader to the text is by definition subjective. The reader is called on to respond to the work on a certain level, but the ultimate response lies with the reader and those perceptions which dictate the readers expectations. This understanding does not fall into the old trap of viewing literature as "an autonomous aesthetic praxis which transcends material aspects" [26], on the contrary, it recognises that at the very heart of the readers response to the text, lie the material (and social) conditions which 'produced' the reader and shaped her/his ideological perspective and thus expectations of the text [27].

While this examination of the reader and her/his shaping of and response to the text has not worked through the notions of reading, meaning, real and implied reader, real and implied author, or language to any great degree, it has outlined a brief understanding of how the reader is to be viewed. This understanding is adequately reflected by Eagleton when he states that

> "every literary text in some sense internalises its social relations of production - that every text

> intimates by its very conventions the way it is to be consumed, encodes within itself its own ideology of how, by whom and for whom it was produced. Every text obliquely posits a putative reader, defining its producibility in terms of a certain capacity for production." [28]

In terms of the text at hand, viz. Mark 7.24-30, one thus has to recognise in doing a hermeneutical study, that accepting as given the production of the text as coming from a Palestinian environment, to the Roman Christians in a different environment, BOTH environments will to a greater or lesser degree shape the text and its meaning. Accepting this, one has to study both situations before a succesful hermeneutical study may be completed.

4.5 THE CRITIC AND THE TEXT

Having recognised the factors which determine the shape and meaning of a text, one has to recognise that the critic also plays a unique role in the process of understanding textual meaning. In this section we shall briefly outline our understanding of the function of the critic, but shall not enter the debate to any great extent. Eagleton writes that

> "the writer's production is merely the appearance of a production, since its true object lies behind or within it; to criticise, therefore, is to reduce the 'externality' of the text to the structure secreted in its 'interior'." [29]

He thus sees that the critic should 'get behind' the text in order to ascertain the "true object" of the text.

Foucault raises an important point on the understanding of the critic's task, he sees that the

> "task of criticism is not to bring out the work's relationships with the author, nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather, to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and play of its internal relationships." [30]

Thus, in partially concurring with Foucault, this paper understands that the critic should not attempt to reconstruct the 'text behind the text' or assume to understand the primary intentions of the text. These attempts would be futile as the critic's own expectations would only be fed back into any further interpretations.

Just as the reader approaches the text with a certain set of expectations, governed by her/his experience of reality, so too must the critic be recognised as approaching the text from a specific context with definite expectations and with the need to communicate to her/his own readers. At this point one is forced to disagree with phenomenological criticism, which focusses specifically on the author's experiences and perceptions of material objects, and as a form of criticism which attempts to achieve "complete objectivity and disinterestedness" [31]. Further, it does not see criticism as

> "a construction, an active intepretation of the work which will inevitably engage the critic's own interest and biases" rather, it sees criticism as "a mere passive reception of the text, a pure transcription of its mental essences" [32]

This thesis holds a contrary view - that is that the critic has her/his own agenda and that critics should not be fooled into believing that an objective review of the text is possible - the critic will have certain expectations of the text which will dramatically alter the way in which the text is perceived. It is vital that all critics recognise their own commitments and state at the outset their expectations of the text.

The author of this thesis is in essence a critic, but does not attempt to give the definitive understanding of the text at hand. The very process of working through the methodology to be employed in this paper is a statement of intent. This author/critic recognises that the text, Mark 7.24-30, has been approached with a specific intention of discerning a liberating message. Thus this author/critic recognises that her reading of the text will be shaped by this expectation. This approach will naturally not alter the empirical facts of the printed words, but will allow a new meaning to come through the old.

4.6 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has sought to explain an understanding of the workings of the text, and its inclusion in the body of the thesis has been vital in that once one accepts that Mark exists specifically as a text, one is then confronted with the question of what this textual nature implies.

In the light of what has been discussed in this chapter, we

shall proceed by examining the contexts of both the author of Mark as well as the context of his intended readers. Throughout this process the role of the critic is recognised as fundamental in discerning the 'meaning' of the text. The critic is not seen as superceding the original author or becoming the final determinant factor in discerning meaning; however, the critic must be recognised as shaping the interpretation of the text. We have confined our examination to a relatively small area and have often merely referred to debates which in themselves are important. This section has however sucessfully outlined an understanding of the implications of Mark existing as a text.

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1. Eagleton, 1983 LT, p66
2. Phillips, 1985, p111
3. Casalis, 1984, p45
4. Eagleton, 1976, p64
5. Mazamisa, 1987 p31
6. For an in depth evaluation of this area, see Eagleton, 1976a
7. Eagleton, 1983, p60
8. Hawthorn, 1984, p44
9. Eagleton, 1983, p87
10. Mazamisa, 1987, p31
11. see Mazamisa, 1987, p31
12. Eagleton, 1976, p89
13. ibid.
14. ibid, p59f
15. ibid. p58
16. Foucault, 1979, p151

17. Mazamisa, 1987, p33

18. Foucault, 1979, p152

19. Iser, 1980, p198

20. Eagleton, 1983, p74

21. For a more detailed discussion on this subject, see Eagleton, 1976, p83ff and Fowler, 1985

22. Fowler, 1985, p5

23. Eagleton, 1983, p76

24. Mazamisa, 1987, p34

25. ibid., p14

26. ibid., p37

27. The debate between Jauss and Naumann is recognised but shall not be discussed - See Mazamisa, 1987, p35ff

28. Eagleton, 1976, p48

29. ibid., p97

30. Foucault, 1979, p142

31. Eagleton, 1983, p59

32. ibid.

Chapter 5 AN EXAMINATION OF PRE 70CE PALESTINE AND ROME

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, we clearly argued that the text is shaped primarily by the environment in which it was formed, with the potential readers of the text also playing an important role in determining its final "shape". The intention of this chapter is thus to concretise the abstract concept, or rather, to ascribe a particular setting and readership to the Gospel of Mark.

The setting or location of the Gospel story is clearly Palestine [1]. Throughout the text there are references to a variety of aspects relating to the social, political and economic instances of early Palestine. These references usually take the form of an indirect response to the existing situation of the day. It is thus vital that before examining any aspect of Mark, one has to critically assess and understand the "world" in which the gospel is set, for it is only through an understanding of this world, that the gospel can be understood as a response to the situation. We shall thus briefly focus on a historical materialist study of pre-70CE Palestine [2].

Recognising that evidence may come to light suggesting a different set of readers, this thesis holds that Mark was

written to the Christians living in Rome between 65 and 70 CE. While this understanding is not indisputable, it is held by the majority of Marcan scholars [3]. We shall thus do a brief examination of the situation in Rome, with specific attention being given to the effects of the situation on the Christians living in Rome. The examination shall be brief because a full historical materialist approach to the Roman empire at that time would be vast and unnecessary to the topic at hand. What is more important, is to grasp an understanding of the Christian community itself, and through this recognise the way in which the needs and experiences of the readers might shape the text.

This paper holds that the writer of Mark was a certain John Mark, an interpreter for the apostle Peter [4]. This naturally implies that the author was male and thus masculine pronouns shall henceforth be used when referring to the writer of Mark.

Only once the situation in which the gospel was written as well as the situation to which it was written, is fully understood, can one successfully examine any aspect of the text.

5.2 A HISTORICAL MATERIALIST APPLICATION TO PRE 70 CE PALESTINE

The situation in Galilee is perfectly suited to being examined under the 'Marxist microscope', and after working carefully through the model, it should be clear that Galilee

was experiencing a period of transition, and was rapidly fulfilling the prerequisites for a feudal state (naturally with a number of elements apparent which would be peculiar to the Galilean situation), with elements of the pre-Capitalist state emerging too. It is within these changes that we are able to perceive the class struggle and that we can begin to detect the ideological response to the existing class struggle.

5.2.1 Mode of Production:

A 'mode of production' must be understood as the relationship between: "the moving forces of society ie: productive forces or units of production" [5], which is the tools or instruments of production, and the people who produce "things" with them, and relations of production or the relationships which people set up during production, eg: primary producers and guilded artisans.

In examining modes of production one has to begin by examining patterns of land ownership. Galilee was essentially a rural province, thus implying that land ownership would "be of primary importance in determining class distinctions" [6]. Despite this previous observation, one should realise that another reason for the land ownership in Galilee being of such major importance is that Galilee was in the pre-capitalist era, in fact it was initially pre-feudal too, and in this era land ownership always defined class positions.

In Galilee there is evidence of both private ownership - in the hands of native peasants [7], as well as royal land which comprised primarily of confiscated land or land won in battle.

Land was also claimed as royal land when a peasant defaulted on his tax repayments. This royal land lends itself to the creation of large estates or latifundia, being worked by landless peasants who thus have no vested interest in the amount which they produce. The class of "peasant" must be understood as the primary economic unit existing in Galilee. There is also evidence of lands being leased, but what is important to note is that even when the land is privately owned the demands of taxation are still applicable (this leads to many repurcussions which will be covered later!).

The traditional framework of a feudal society cannot be applied to Galilee, however, because of the definite existence of the private land-owning peasant (see eg:Luke 15.11-31). Rather, Galilee should be perceived as being in a period of transition, moving from a form of feudalism to a state of "pre-capitalism", found in the development and growth of towns. One must be careful to point out that with the growth of towns, an Asiatic Mode of Production did not evolve, as there seems to be no empirical evidence of any specifically parasitic relationship between the urban towns and the rural areas, and there is definite evidence of private ownership of land.

The rural areas were placed in a position of having to increase their level of production, with surplus production being sold in the towns; but to understand why this happened, or to lay blame at any door, one has to look beyond the towns to the system of taxation which was newly imposed (this factor shall be discussed later). While the growth of towns seems

almost spontaneous, the impact that the growth had upon the society of Galilee must not be underestimated. The interests of the rural and urban sectors must be understood as being virtually mutually exclusive.

The Mode of Production may be used to define four basic groups:

1. The free peasant: This group had direct contact with their means of production, and surplus was extracted in the form of taxation only (extracted in capital). One is to regard the fishermen on the Sea of Galilee as members of this class, although they did not own any "patch of sea" they worked directly for themselves as opposed to any landowner [8].

2. The tennant farmer on the latifundia: This group should be understood as being dislocated from their lands; many now 'sold' themselves as hired labour (eg: Luke 16.1-6). While being directly in contact with their means of production, surplus was extracted both in terms of tribute (usually in kind) as well as in the form of taxation (capital). It is from these two groups that the Jesus Movement drew much of its support. This factor naturally has a shaping influence on the character of the Jesus Movement.

3. The large scale landowners: While not being directly in contact with the means of production, they extract a surplus from their workers. These 'large scale landowners' thus enjoyed a secondary form of production and were directly dependent on the production of their workers. The surplus which they extract is in the form of kind [9]. These landowners

tended on the whole to be members of the ruling priestly aristocracy, and friends or family of the Herods who had been given the land.

4. The guilded artisans: Many of these artisans were initially alienated from their primary means of production, and then became secondary producers of either services or goods [10]. One should include the itinerant artisan in this class. Taxes were extracted from this class in the form of capital.

Classes such as the members of the army, church or state will not be discussed here, but it is important to realise that it is the very existence of these classes which calls for taxation in its various forms to be exacted from the remaining afore-mentioned classes, although the demands made on them were less than on the peasants.

Before turning to examine the superstructure in Galilee, it is vital to note that there was the beginning of large-scale diversification in agricultural production in Galilee. This fact implies that specialisation ensued, implying forced alienation from ones primary means of production. This state implied an alteration in the superstructure, which was to a large degree answerable to the forms of taxation and surplus extraction which existed in that society.

5.2.2 Superstructure:

The superstructure which existed in Galilee (or any other society) must be seen to correspond directly to the specific mode of production of that society. The superstructure is at

the same time responsible for ensuring that the mode of production remains relatively constant, or that when the superstructure alters, the mode of production alters correspondingly, in that the superstructure dictates the level of production necessary to sustain life. This is not the only scenario however, as a reading of the traditional Marxist approach sees that it is in fact an alteration in the mode of production which would demand a reciprocal change in the superstructure. The reciprocal relationship which the mode of production shares with the superstructure must thus be recognised.

While following Freynes outline [11], we shall examine his sections on the "Distribution of Wealth" and the "Burdens of Taxation" in order to reach an understanding of the existing superstructure. The imposition of taxes saw fundamental changes occurring in society as a result of the new demands placed upon the communities.

The pivotal point in the development of the Galilean superstructure is the understanding of the growth of towns. As towns developed, and latifundia were expanded, there was more call for people to seek employment in the towns. This is <u>not</u> because the latifundia forced them off the land, but it rather seemed to be a matter of survival for the free peasant. Here it is vital to note that the middle class, which is synonymous with the development of towns, was very underdeveloped during the time of the gospels [12]. Being aware of this important point, one should realise that during the times that the gospels were penned, Galilee was undergoing a period of

transition, and people were beginning the move into the towns.

Freyne notes that services beyond agriculture were necessary, and thus the artisans and craftsworkers did succeed to a degree, but he continues to show that in Tiberias, "the Herodian aristocray of that town owed their wealth to their land rather than to commercial or other business enterprises" [13]. This state of affairs clearly demonstrates that despite the move into towns, the primary level of the economy lay in the agricultural sector, and that this area was moving out of the hands of the producers, and was rather being reappropriated by the wealthy "upper class" town dwellers. This is an excellent example of a redistribution of wealth.

The move into the towns must be seen as a result of the new form of extraction of goods from the class working the land. The barter and/or subsistence method had been replaced by a system where "surplus" was extracted and converted into cash. This system became necessary because the state had such a tight control over the market, that there was no room for real competition, and the peasants had to accept the often meagre prices offered for their produce. Fiscal tax extraction occurred whether the producer was able to cope, or not.

The demands of taxation were also laid upon the producers, and in order for the tax requirements to be met, further produce had to be sold on a cash basis. In order to forestall failing to pay taxes, and thus losing their farms and livelihoods, producers were then forced to take out loans. Falling behind on loan repayments often meant that primary

producers had to leave their holdings and sell their labour for wages, either on the latifundia, or occasionally in the towns. Thus the institution of taxation was directly responsible for alienating the people from the means of production [14]. This phenomenon must be seen as being a common factor in the development toward a pre-capitalist state.

If one sees taxation as one of the prime moving forces, it is essential to examine where the tax demands were coming from, and who benefitted from them. There were two main areas which demanded tax, corresponding to the two main "ruling bodies" of the area. Palestine formed part of the Roman Empire, and Roman occupation was primarily symbolised through the presense of a Procurator or Prefect (Pontius Pilate in the time of the Jesus Movement). Daily legislation however was in the hands of the Sanhedrin, who met under the High Priest, who belonged to the ruling aristocracy of Jerusalem. Caiaphas was the High Priest during the time of the Jesus movement, but Annas, the former High Priest still wielded considerable power. Through the person of the High Priest, there were five families controlling the area, both in terms of financial dealings and religious power.

The Roman rulers demanded money for the maintenance of their army, roads etc. The mechanism through which their tax was drawn was through the various regional magistrates, who acted as "tax-farmers, acceptable to the state" [15]. Naturally a portion of the tax collected remained with the "tax-farmer" and with the various regions. The records of the level of taxation seem exhorbitantly high [16], so high in fact that it was often

impossible to meet these demands, and again, people were forced to sell their labour to cover the tax demands. Freyne makes an important point when he shows how any tax concessions offered to the Jews was directed solely at the Sanhedrin, Priestly families, scribes and other occupants of Jerusalem who were in some way in control of the people through the temple [17]. Temple tax was also demanded from the people and was collected by various cult officials. The local sanctuaries also extracted taxes. Jeremias clearly demonstrates how through the use of monopolies, high taxation and income derived from real estate, the Jerusalem temple and the people affiliated to it were becoming increasingly wealthy. The temple owned the monopoly over the retailing of sacrifices, and could thus demand any price deemed acceptable. The five families which provided the chief priests were extremely wealthy, and on the whole, were landowners. They may thus be seen as synonymous with the oppressive class [18]. The Jewish high priest was the recognised ethnarch of the Jewish community and was thus also responsible for collecting from Galilee part of the tribute demanded from Jerusalem by Rome.

It is the contention of this paper that it was the oppulence of the high priests and the families related to the temple, the incredibly high demands which the temple placed on the population of Palestine, and to a lesser degree the Roman imperial control, which Jesus and his followers were responding to [19]. This might thus be seen as an ideological response to the changing situation.

So high was the financial demand on the peasant that "at best

only subsistence farming was possible" [20]. It was suggested by Freyne that Herod the Great had a harsh economic policy, and that the institution of further taxes upon the citizens was often crippling. Herod's tax system did seem more equitable however, in that the town people were also highly taxed, it is further understood that under the reign of his son, Herod Antipas, the economic conditions continued to stabilise.

Having examined the taxation system, it becomes increasingly obvious who the ruling class, those benefitting from the taxes, was. The peasants, labourers and artisans supported two main bodies, viz: the temple and the state, who "ruled" them. The base for both of these powers was in the urban centres, from whence they used their power over the rural areas. This phenomenon is important to note when one realises how the Jesus Movement was primarily located in the rural areas and that the thrust of Jesus' teachings seems to be against the powerful urban groupings.

5.2.3 Ideology:

Discerning the ideology of the period is more difficult than examing the previous two areas. Marx is not particularly definitive when discussing ideology, seeing it primarily as the attempt of the ruling class(es) to legitimise their position. Freyne defaults in this important area, leaving it up to the individual reader to ascertain the dominant ideology.

Basically what is important to note here is that Galilee was almost a theocratic state, with the church obviously being extremely powerful, and the religious rules often concurring

exactly with the state rules. On the whole, in Palestine there was little distinction

> "between the political apparatus of the state and the priestly politico-ideological apparatus, since the chief priests, under the authority of the high priest hold the political power" [21]

- the various nuances of this situation as it existed in the various areas is here acknowleged.

This being the case, the religious writings must be viewed in terms of ideology too. The temple benefitted immensely from the existing state of affairs, and thus sought to justify these benefits. Ideology was also used to convince those who were exploited that it was their "lot" or duty, and that the status quo would never change in their favour. It also served to subtly encourage obedience to all the existing laws.

Although it is beyond the scope of this section, it is important to examine the teachings of Jesus as a reaction to the dominant ideology of the day. It is also important to examine Jesus' attitude toward the relationship of the exploited classes and the Jewish religion. When speaking out at the Jewish authorities, to what degree was he actually speaking out against the Jewish religions' exploitation of the poor and the existing status quo? It is vital to examine the Jesus Movement as reflecting a response or reaction to the ruling ideology of the day, which as we have shown, may be identified with the ideas of the ruling priestly authorities. Although it may be appropriate to study the dominant groups of the time (namely the Pharisees, Saducees, Essenes and Zealots)

it is beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that the ideology and activity of the Jesus Movement differed from all of these.

The most important point to realise is that in examining each of the afore-mentioned instances, the position and role of the temple is dominant. Clevenot's words on the centrality of the temple, show its importance:

> "It was a treasury of public finances, the seat of the Sanhedrin, and a holy place par excellence.... It was the symbol of the entire social formation" [22]

The temple was thus the "financial heart" of the country, a place where taxes were collected and where money was changed (coins from all over the empire were exchanged for the temple shekel). The seat of the state is the temple, and thus any responses to the state should be seen as responses to the dominance of the temple and its corresponding ideology.

5.2.4 Summary of the Trends:

Galilee, in terms of Mode of Production, Superstructure and Ideology, was in a period of transition. The earlier, near feudal system, which existed was being replaced with a new system, which may best be understood as reflecting a pre-capitalist stage. (This is said in the awareness that there were several features of this stage which are not wholly applicable to Galilee.)

The mode of production was changing rapidly, the old barter system of exchange was exchanged for a market/cash system,

taxation was imposed by the church and state - and to meet these tax demands labour was sold, and people gradually began to populate towns, ultimately leading to the creation of a middle class. The ideology, arising from this period of flux, merely served to entrench and legitimise the new system and way of life. The Jesus movement is viewed as being correlative to the changes displayed by society during the period, with the ideology and character of the Movement being a clear reflection of the responses offered to the crises and issues facing both the rural and urban environment of the time. We shall examine the Jesus Movement in terms of its responses to the social and political crises of the day further in the following section.

5.3 RESPONSES OF THE JESUS MOVEMENT TO THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CRISES OF THE DAY

The Jesus Movement must be examined in terms of its responses to the issues and crises facing Palestine during that period, because this understanding will be invaluable when examining Mark 7.24-30. We need to discern how the movement viewed itself, and decide what issues they were responding to. This examination is located within the socio-economic conditions of the day, and is covered exceptionally well by both Pairman Brown [23] and Pixley [24], and to a lesser degree by Riches [25]. Reuther asserts that recent writings have made it increasingly evident that

> "messianic prophecy in first-century Palestine operated as the expression of political oppression both to Roman imperial domination, and to the oppression of the Palestinian poor by the local ruling classes.[26]

. We concur with Reuther on this issue, and argue together with Pixley, that 'Temple oppression' was the central issue against which the Jesus Movement was responding.

Theissen [27] demonstrates how the socio-economic factors of Early Palestine were responsible for shaping the character of the Jesus Movement into being socially rootless "wandering charasmatics" [28]. The system against which the Movement was responding was the dominant socio-economic situation, which was perpetuated and encouraged by the temple. The main concern of Jesus, as reflected by the material of his teaching, the nature of his followers and the situation of his teaching, clearly points to his identifying with the oppressed and working to bring an end to their exploitation. The Jesus Movement may be seen as contrary to the

> "interests of the aristocracy, as it undermines the law from within by claiming priestly privileges for its charismatics.... raising fundamental questions about the necessity to pay religious taxes and in fact only paying taxes by way of comprimise" [29

] This notion supports our claim that Jesus was concerned with highlighting the wrongs of the temple system, and offering an alternative.

The Jesus Movement kept mainly to the rural areas, avoiding the towns and Jerusalem, which was seen as symbolising the heart of the oppressive system. The symbolic cleansing of the

temple and the negative words which Jesus used against the temple and Jerusalem (see Mk 14.48) clearly show Jesus' identification with the rural oppressed and his often unspoken rejection of the exploitative nature of the temple.

Riches chooses to examine other movements contemporary to the Jesus Movement in order to discern the ways in which the Jesus Movement differed. He correctly shows how much of Jesus' support was found amongst the class which was most severely oppressed, although he fails to clearly state the nature or origin of this oppression. Riches believes that Jesus' message to this group was not a call to obedience to the law, or militant rejection of the Romans (as suggested by the Zealots), but rather Jesus called them "to a radical ethic of love and forgiveness" (Riches, 1983, p108). Riches argues that this new interpretation of the kingship language and the vision contained therein has immense social implications, and that a society based on this understanding was the ultimate aim of Jesus.

The problem with Riches' paper is that although comparisons with contemporary groups are made, he does not completely succeed in locating Jesus in his socio-economic context. Following on from this short-coming, Riches fails to identify the forces/people/movements that Jesus was working against in the institution of his new ideas. If one is to accept the Marxist framework, which briefly sees ideology to be dependent on superstructure, which in turn is dependent on the mode of production, then it is impossible to discern the ideological outlook of the Jesus movement without first locating it in its

complete context, something which Riches fails to do. While recognising the problems in Riches' paper, our feminist hermeneutic of Mk7.24-30 will reflect Riches' notion of Jesus calling for the new 'radical notion of love'.

Scroggs [30] also examines the Jesus Movement in terms of other movements, and concludes by asserting a sectarian nature for the Jesus Movement. Importantly, he begins by showing how sects usually begin as a protest, and is related to "reaction against economic and societal repression within a class or classes of society" [31]. While we shall not debate the sectarian nature of the Jesus Movement, we do do acknowledge that the Jesus Movement was reacting to both societal and economic repression. Scroggs sees that the group the Jesus Movement most closely associated with oppression was the Pharisees and their rigid adherence to, and participation within, the existing framework of the day, "into this scene, Jesus steps and his mission is directed toward the healing of the society of his times" [32]. This notion is seen as further support for our understanding that the Jesus Movement was responding directly to the situation of oppression to which the majority of Jesus' followers were subjected and that this oppression is perpetuated by the temple.

Pixley and Pairman Brown examine the Jesus movement through a primary examination of the context in which it was situated. The main difference between Pixley and Pairman Brown is their understanding of who Jesus and his movement were working against, who the enemies of the movement were. Pairman Brown suggests that it was the Roman domination which Jesus was

responding to. He acknowleges that the priestly aristocracy became tools in the Roman hands, and that it was the system of land tenure which the Romans instituted and which was contrary to the previously existing system that Jesus' followers rallied against. He feels that Jesus challenged "both church and state" [33].

While Pairman Brown is correct in his assessment of the alienation experienced by the community resulting from the new land tenure system, he is perhaps too concerned with his attempts to show how Jesus was responding directly against the Roman Empire. Pairman Brown is certainly successful in showing the degree to which Jesus and his movement need to seen in the full context of an oppressed and alienated society, and that the actions and outlooks of this group are a direct response to this situation.

Pixley approaches the issue in a similar manner to Pairman Brown, but identifies the "enemies" of the Jesus movement differently. Like Riches, Pixley examines the notion which Jesus had of the kingdom of God, but unlike Riches, who suggests that Jesus was primarily calling for an ethic embodying love and joy, Pixley shows how Jesus embodied a new understanding of the kingdom of God by working against oppression and the ideology of the priestly temple system.

Importantly, Pixley begins his examination of the aims of the Jesus movement by locating it within the Palestinian context. Pixley shows how Jesus conceived that "the principle obstacle to the realisation of Gods kingdom in Palestine to be the

temple and class structure that it supported" [34]. He moves from this point to show how the impetus behind the Jesus Movement was an "ideological attack" on the aforementioned institution.

Pixley clearly shows that the main support for the Jesus movement was to be found amongst the class which was most affected by the exploitation of the temple priestly system. He continues to show that the main object of Jesus' attack on Jerusalem was not the city but the temple and the system which it represented [35].

Pixley's arguement is well supported when he shows that it is both the priestly aristocracy and others who directly benefitted from the temple system who had the most reasons to feel antagonistic towards the Jesus movement, or in the words of Pixley:

> "Jesus' principal enemies were the Pharisees in Galilee and the priests in Jerusalem - in other words, the principal beneficiaries of the class system and the teachers of the religious ideology which supported it." [36]

While Pixley certainly accepts that the Roman authorities were another "enemy" of the Jesus movement, he still holds that the ideological attack of the Jesus Movement was directed at the temple system.

An important section of Pixley's paper shows the difference between the Zealot movement and the Jesus movement. Both of these movements represented differing social annalyses and strategies for liberation. The antagonism toward the Jesus

Movement and the support of the Zealots (demonstrated by the call for the release of Barrabus) is explained by Pixley in terms that the people of Jerusalem were dependent on the temple for their livelihood - and it was the temple which was threatened by Jesus. A second factor was the notion that direct confrontation with Rome was more appealing to these people than the "passive" approach called for by Jesus. Pixley makes it clear however that Jesus' death implies that we cannot be certain whether he would have ever turned his attack more actively against Rome.

This thesis, along with Pixley, holds that the ideological base to the Jesus movement was an attack on the priestly/temple oppression and secondly on the Roman authorities. Jesus held a unique view on kingship, as demonstrated by Riches, and actively sought to make this understanding accepted by the people. Riches fails, where Pixley and Pairman Brown succeed, in highlighting the ideological base of the Jesus movement. Jesus embodied a new, innovative understanding of kingship, and translated this understanding into actions and teachings against the oppression and exploitation rife in the society.

Reuther claims that Jesus was working for reconciliation, and defines reconcialiation as meaning "the revolutionising of human, social, political relations, overthrowing unjust, oppressive relationships" [37]. This understanding is an important aspect to recognise when examining the Jesus Movement. Clearly both sexual and racial oppression must be included in the phrase "oppressive relationships". If Jesus was indeed working toward this reconciliation as described by

Reuther, this understanding of the Jesus Movement will emerge in the assessment of our selected text, Mk7.24-30.

5.4 A BRIEF HISTORICAL MATERIALIST EXAMINATION OF PRE 70CE ROME

A full or complete historical materialist examination of Rome and indeed the Roman Empire would be impossible to achieve given the spacial limitations of this thesis. Tomes have been written covering the social, political and economic spheres of the Roman Empire. We shall thus merely present a 'thumbnail' sketch of various aspects of the Roman Empire. We have limited the examination to the period which falls approximately between Tiberius (37 CE) and the year of the four Caesars (69 CE), as it is in this period that Christianity was established in Rome, and during which Mark was written.

Jerusalem had been destroyed by Titus in 70 CE following the Jewish revolt, and Rome itself was in a state of political upheaval as a result of the death of Nero in 68 CE. Civil war was waged on all fronts, between possible candidates for emperor. Finally in 69 CE Vespasian succeeded and became emperor.

Although the Roman Empire was experiencing problems politically, the Empire was still at its peak, and was very strong. Geographically, it had expanded to it's limits, and many territories far from Rome had been conquered and were now under Roman rule. With the conquering of many lands,

lifestyles changed dramatically, not only for the people living in the newly conquered lands but for the citizens of Rome and Italy as well. Changes were experienced economically, politically and socially. These three areas shall be examined more fully, in an attempt to identify with the problems which faced the Christians living in Rome.

A reading of Meeks (1983) and Stambaugh and Balch (1986) in their description of the Greco-Roman urban environment shows that conditions varied completely from city to city. Both of these works are rather functionalist in their approach, in that they assume that their detailed empirical information is self explanatory and they thus display virtually no analytical understanding. A similar problem is encountered when reading historians such as Rostovtzeff (1926) and Frank (1920). A use of the above works (with others) is essential however in ascertaining the material on which a historical materialist analysis may be based.

5.4.1 Mode of Production

Different modes of production existed in different parts of the Roman Empire, yet each was determined specifically by Roman imperialism. This implies that apart from the usual class relations between 'owner' and 'non-owner' - an external power viz. Roman imperialism, shaped the economy to its own benefit. This implies that those who did not own land were expected to rent from the land owners, pay taxes to the administration, and pay a tribute to the emporer in Rome [38]. Cities were important in this process in that it was here that

local power was concentrated [39].

Although commerce and trade links became increasingly important, the economy of the Roman empire was based on agricultural production [40]. Land became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy elite [41]. It is important to note here that the old aristocracy and magnates who used to own the land were being replaced by friends of the emporer [42]. This alteration was a deliberate ploy on the part of the emporers as it was from the old powerful land owning aristocracy that competition for leadership developed. Much land was confiscated, and a new 'sympathetic' group of powerful people was created. These landowners were located primarily in the cities. The other powerful urban group was the familia Caesaris (civil service) who saw to the administrative control of the empire.

The dominant form of labour was slave labour, slaves worked on the land as well as in the cities [43]. Slave labour was preferred because of its cost effectiveness. Once the initial cost of purchasing the slave had been met, further costs were minimal and slave owners also 'owned' any children of the slaves [44], this implied that they could be sold too, naturally increasing their profit. Freemen, on the other hand, obviously demanded a salary and could be conscripted to the Roman army, so the use of slaves grew and the slave population increased dramatically. During the reign of Vespasian, the total slave population living in Rome has been estimated at about half a million.

This dependence on slave labour caused a rapid depopulation of the countryside with the new landless people moving into Rome where they would often be unemployed. Rome became overpopulated, with filthy, unhygenic slums spreading throughout the city [45]. Squalid conditions were only one side of the coin however oppulent, luxurious homes served as a sharp contrast to the depravation all around. At this point it is vital to note that a middle class certainly did exist. The city of Rome was now completely dependent on the slaves and the provinces for survival, and the population of Rome naturally harboured feelings of resentment toward the emperor because of the hardships to which they were being subjected. As was suggested, many people moved to the cities, especially Rome, thus urbanisation increased [46]. Not all were unemployed however, many of those entering the cities became artisans or became involved in commerce, forming what Rostovtzeff terms a 'city bourgeousie' [47]. In the cities, merchants, shopkeepers and craftspeople managed to establish themselves but there were others like the blind, lame and beggars who battled to survive [48].

The city of Rome was becoming a financial drain on the rest of the empire. The conquered lands were taxed extensively, and these taxes, as well as loot from pillaging all made its way to Rome. This situation suited the Roman governors and merchants, and their wealth began increasing dramatically. Small business-men and farmers however were forced out of work as there was no longer a market for their produce. This situation arose as a result of a massive programme of importing which had

begun.

A good example of a farmer who had lost his livelihood is that of the Italian wine farmer. Before importing, his wine and grapes could be sold with little competition on the market in Rome, now however, superior wine was imported from the conquered area of Gaul, and with this added competition, many farmers could no longer survive. Many farms in Italy thus returned to producing corn [49].

It is significant to note that Christianity emerged in the cities where the power was centered. This point is relevent in that urbanisation is a significant shift from the rural base of the Jesus movement. Most of Jesus' ministry (as reflected in Mark) took place in the rural areas as opposed to the urban bases where power was concentrated. The early Christian movement must have thus reappropriated parts of the tradition in order to survive in this different context.

5.4.2 Superstructure

While many aspects of the superstructure have been referred to in the previous section, it is nonetheless important to outline the existing superstructure. The Roman Empire was a military dictatorship [50], ruled by the emperor who was also the commander-in-chief of the army. He possessed all the power which had previously been shared between the senate (which represented the landowning families) and the people, representing the citizens of Rome.

Although Rome was ruled by the emperor, the system was not very stable, with civil wars continually raging between possible contenders for the position of emperor. The year of the four Caesars, 69 CE, is a case in point.

In order to ensure that he remained in power, it was essential for the emperor to have the support of the new imperial bureaucracy, which he was helping to constitute from freed imperial slaves [51]. His new bureaucracy gradually began to take power away from the senators. The reason for the emperor needing support from outside of the senatorial class (his traditional source of support), as has been previously suggested, is that it was from their ranks that competition to his power arose. Rostovtzeff suggests that the new constitution of the senate was the "upper strata of municipal bourgeousie" [52].

Another threat to the rule of the emperor came from the military leaders. Provincial uprisings and military mutinies were common within the bounds of the empire, the rebellion of the Zealots in Palestine exemplifies the form of provincial uprising which the Roman army had to contend with.

The Greco-Roman world was clearly defined along class lines [53]. The ruling classes were made up of the imperial authorities with their administrations, local aristocracies and the new large landowners (these groups were not mutually exclusive). Another major class, as we have suggested, comprised of the slaves and other marginalised city groupings who were largely exploited. A 'middle class' existed,

comprising of artisans, traders and some merchants, yet the dominant economic contradiction existed between the ruling classes and the 'oppressed'.

The question which is now raised is, where did the Early Christians fit into these clearly defined class structures? Because of the urban context of Early Christianity this issue of class commitment is potentially more pronounced than it would have been to the Jesus Movement. This important question will be discussed in the following section, 5.4, but the important distinction which must now be drawn is that Early Christianity was centered in the urban areas and that while its constitution did ultimately alter, it primarily consisted of people from the 'middle class', the artisans, traders and merchants.

5.4.3 Ideology

The ruling senatorial nobility were naturally affected by their immense wealth, and now because they were becoming deprived of their earlier power, they began to drift into a life of luxury and debauchery. Clevenot makes it clear that the ideology of the ruling class was clearly affected by these changes and the "situation of crisis" [54]. Feelings of pessimism, disillusionment and cycicism dominated the writings of the times [55].

The old Roman religion with its concept of a pantheon of gods was becoming increasingly corrupt and "diluted"; resulting in "new" religions from the East increasing in popularity and acceptance amongst the citizens of Rome. These religions found

much support and sympathy amongst the landless peasants, the unemployed and the freed slaves.

While Rome was able to assert its hegemony over the provinces politically and economically, ideologically the influence of the former Greek imperialism was still strong. Stambaugh and Balch show how the dominant culture was influenced by Greek gymnasia and their teaching of rhetoric and philisophy [56].

Despite this dominant culture, Jewish communities preserved their traditions and the synagogues soon became the focus of a different culture. Rome was extremely accomodating as far as the Jewish religion was concerned, and synagogues were built in many of the main cities. Rome itself had a number of synagogues, where the 'Christian communities' tended to originate.

Another feature of life in this period was the predominance of clubs, societies and voluntary associations, which were also not directly influenced by the ruling ideology. These may be broadly grouped in to three categories, namely 'proffessional' clubs, those with a more 'religious' nature, and those which provided financial insurance to its members. The synagogues and Jewish religion were not perceived as belonging in any of these categories, but were rather recognised as a specific religion. The synagogue initially offered a base for the Early Christian movement, so it is unlikely that it was conceived of as yet another form of club. There were numerous cults in existence in the Greco-Roman world, but Christianity cannot be perceived as a cult; in fact the Christians went so far as to

call themselves an ekklesia (those called from amongst the other people) [57], to avoid any possible connotations with cultic vocabulary.

Finally, Rostovtzeff raises an interesting issue when he speaks of the four different types of philosophers, including the cynics who were eventually thrown out of the city [58]. These people who were thrown out were clearly perceived as a threat to the authorities, and their message was gaining in populaity amongst the working classes in the cities.

Thus ideological conditions were extremely complex, with a variety of different factors shaping the ways in which people related to the world which confronted them. The task at hand now is to do a more careful examination of the Chritian community in order to ascertain how it was shaped and affected by the situation in Rome and in the broader empire.

5.5 THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

In the midst of this world of poverty and deprivation as well as oppulence and wealth, we find the Christian community. It is perhaps false to call them a community because the evidence we have (from the text itself) shows that they were a cosmopolitan group, coming from all walks and stations of life, and that their number was not confined to any specific economic or social class alone.

It seems likely that there were Jews living in Rome from the second century BCE, but that they only began to immigrate in

any large numbers the following century. The Jewish community itself was not homogenous, and while a number of Jews pursued lucrative mercantile careers, the majority seemed to subsist at a lower economic level. Unlike many cities of the ancient world, there was more than one synagogue in Rome, this fact added to the diversity amongst the Jewish citizens in Rome. The Christian message would thus have been received differently by the existing Jewish communities of the different synagogues.

It is not certain when the Christian message reached Rome, or how long Christianity had been practised there, but in 49 AD a group, thought to be Christians were expelled from Rome (see Acts 18.2). Romans 1.7 tells us that Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in Rome in 58 AD; and in 64 AD the emporer Nero blamed the Christians for the fire which razed Rome.

Like the Jewish community, the Christian "church" seems to have consisted of a mottled group of people. The names mentioned in Romans 16 show us that the community was made up of Romans, Greeks, Jews, slaves and freedmen. Other biblical references attesting the existence of a Christian community in Rome can be found in Col.4.10ff; 2 Tim.4.21 and Acts 28.15. All that these references really tell us, is that at the time of the emporer Vespasian, there was a relatively large, diverse group of Christians living in Rome [59].

There have been many attempts to locate the Early Christian communities socially, with early popular opinion holding that the Early Christian movement comprised primarily of slaves and various social outcasts [60]. The understanding of the nature

of the Early Christians then shifted to view them as proletarian. Theissen [61] understands most of the Early Christians as coming from "the lower social classes", while Grant holds that Christianity was "a proletarian mass movement" [62]. Malherbe, on the other hand concedes that the Early Christian communities comprised "a cross-section of most of Roman society [63]. We shall not evaluate these three scholars findings suffice it to say that they are describing Christian communities throughout the Roman Period and over a number of centuries. There decisions do thus not accurately reflect the Christian 'community' in Rome [64].

The Christians in Rome probably comprised of an incredibly diverse group of people, incorporating people from all social classes [65], and in the majority they did not seem to be Jewish (see Romans 11.13). One could suggest that on the whole, the group was "middle class" [66]. Prosopographic evidence however suggests that the majority of individuals are of a relatively high position of status and or power. From this evidence we are not to infer however that these individuals are a true reflection of the body of membership. On the contrary, it should be realised that they may have been mentioned because they stood above the rank and file of the membership, or "they they may well have stood out in part because their social rankings were different from those of the majority" [67].

The Christian church at Rome was lead by presbyters (church elders), yet the Christians did not have any official places to use for gatherings and tended instead to meet in peoples homes. Stambaugh and Balch cite examples of how the shops

(work places for many in the community) served as meeting places for discussion on religion, philosophy etc. [68]. This use of small venues may have contributed to diversity within the group as large communal meetings were nigh impossible. Also, the hierarchy and superstructure of the Roman household had to be taken into account in the development of the Christian framework of authority. The Christian movement was affected to some degree by its participation within the household structure but was in no was limited by this participation.

Meeks selects four 'institutions' for comparison to Early Christianity; the household, voluntary organisations, the synagogue and philosophic or schools of rhetoric schools [69]. We have noted the importance of the household on shaping Early Christianity. Christianity was similar to the voluntary associations of clubs and guilds in that the groups were small and membership was not prescribed by birth but by voluntary association. The differences between the groups should not be ignored however: the Christian groups were exclusivist in terms of their identity, yet completely inclusive in terms of the various social levels which were permitted participation, both of these points may be seen as contrasts to the membership and attitudes of the voluntary associations.

As has been suggested, initial support for Christianity often came from the synagogues, which implies that they would have certainly prescribed some of the characteristics of Early Christianity. Similarities such as the community identity, activities in meetings and the practise of meeting in private

homes, affected the character of urban Christianity. The synagogue and its functionaries are probably the institution most closely identifiable with Early Christianity.

The most easily discernable similarity between Christianity and the schools of rhetoric is the understanding that both groups were involved in teaching and the sharing of ideas, and that the schools are reputed to often meet in peoples homes, but these schools are seen to have had little effect on the nature of Christianity.

Having examined the above groupings, it may be seen that in interaction, Christianity may have been shaped to a greater or lesser degree by the other groups, yet certainly remained distinct.

Having claimed 'distinctiveness' for the Christian movement, it must be noted that this tendency was encouraged by the use of specific inclusive language, encouraging a sense of group identity or 'apartness' from the broader society. Compounding this feeling of being a specific identifiable group, was the notion that much like Judaism, they were part of a wider grouping. This understanding would have reinforced their feeling of specificity and withhold a degree of integration.

The early Christians were continually expecting the return of Jesus, and the gospel of Mark, written after Paul's letter to the Romans (58 CE) bears witness to their disappointment that their hope for deliverance had not yet been fulfilled. Mark's gospel also speaks directly to the suffering experienced by the Roman Christians. Emphases, such as the centrality of the cross

(Ch.14-15) and the necessity for suffering and serving within discipleship (8.34-8; 10.38-45 and 13.9-13), show Mark's concern in writing to a community experiencing harsh persecution. The multifaceted make-up of the Christian 'community' in Rome is important to bear in mind when exaiming Mark 7.24-30.

A further aspect which plays a pivotal role in understanding Mk7.24-30 from the perspective of the Christians living in Rome, is their experience of continual oppression from the Roman authorities. This thesis holds that the Christians in Rome could easily identify with the marginalised figure of the Gentile woman in Mk7.24-30. Like the woman, they too were marginalised, and thus Jesus' public acceptance of the woman would have important implications for the group. This text was able to display to the Christians in Rome that they had an equal right to participate in the 'Christian church', and that their predominantly 'non-Jewish' nature did not imply that they were unimportant or that they had fewer rights than the Jewish Christians. This original understanding of the text must be borne in mind when doing a feminist hermeneutic of Mk7.24-30.

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1. By 'setting' we mean where the story 'happened' as opposed to where it was written. There is some contention as to where the text was written [See Anderson, 1976, p26ff]

2. With the destruction of the temple in 70 CE many aspects of life were altered significantly and we shall thus confine ourselves to examining Palestine before the destruction of the temple

3. cf.Barclay,1966, p128ff; Kee, 1977, p77ff; Anderson, 1976, p40ff. We do not suggest that these three scholars are the foremost authorities on Mark, but a reading of them will highlight numerous other scholars who agree on the notion of Mark being addressed to Christians living in Rome

4. See Barclay, 1966, p114 & Guttler, 1987, p21, for evidence supporting this notion

5. Marx & Engels, 1970, p40

6. Freyne, 1980, p155

7. Belo; 1981; p61

8. ibid

9. ibid,p83

10. ibid., p63

11. Freyne, 1980

12. Freyne, 1980, p176

13. ibid, p177

14. See Pairman Brown; 1983; p363 & Belo; 1981; p.65

15. Freyne; 1980; p184

16. ibid, p185

17. ibid,

18. see Belo, 1980, p63

19. see Pixley, 1983, p378ff

20. Freyne, 1980, p187

21. Belo, 1980, p80

22. Clevenot, 1976, p50

23. Pairman Brown, 1984, p357ff

24. Pixley, 1983, p378

25. Riches, 1980

26. Reuther, 1981, p7

27. Theissen, 1978, p30ff

28. ibid, p33

29. ibid, p44

30. Scroggs, 1975

31. Scroggs, 1975, p3

32. ibid, p11

33. Fairman Brown, 1983, p364

34. Pixley, 1983, p384

35. ibid

36. ibid, p386

37. Reuther, 1981, p11

38. See Rostovtzeff, 1926, p93f

39. ibid, p90f

40. Rostovtzeff claims that the main source of wealth was commerce, but this does not contradict our assertion on the economic base of the Roman Empire

41. Meeks, 1983, p14

42. Rostovtzeff, 1926, p99

43. Frank, 1962, p326

44. See Rostovtzeff, 1926, p94, p100 & Frank, 1962, p204

45. Clevenot, 1976, p55

46. Rostovtzeff, 1926, p82

47. ibid, p90

48. Stambaugh and Balch, 1986, p112

49. Rostovtzeff, 1926, p95

50. ibid., p83

51. Clevenot, 1976, p56

52. Rostovtzeff, 1926, p107

53. Stambaugh and Balch, 1986, p110ff

54. Clevenot, 1976, p57

55. ibid.

56. Stambaugh and Balch, 1986, p121f

57. ibid, p138

58. Rostovtzeff, 1926, p109f

59. Clevenot, 1976, p59

60. See Gager, 1983, p438

61. Theissen, 1978, p116

62. Grant, 1977, p11

63. Malherbe, 1977, p87

64. A full evaluation of these works is done by Gager, 1984, p428ff

65. See Clevenot, 1976, p59

66. This term has been used while recognising that it is vague and that there is certainly evidence of people from all "classes" being Christian.

67. Meeks, 1983, p63

68. Stambaugh and Balch, 1986, p118

69. Meeks,1983

Chapter 6: UNDERSTANDING MARK 7.24-30

MARK 7.24-30

24. And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house, and would not have anyone know it; yet he could not be hid.
25. But immediately a woman, whose little daughter was possessed of an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell down at his feet.
26. Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.
27. And he said to her, "Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."
28. But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."
29. And he said to her, "For this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter."
30. And she went home, and found the child lying in bed, and the demon gone.

6.1 THE PROBLEM OF THE TEXT

The problem in this text is clear, and is not only discerned by women. Jesus is portrayed as being blunt, even rude, to a woman asking him a favour. Is he perhaps tired, is he participating in the institutionalised sexism and racism of the day, did he even utter these words? Questions like these all contribute to the problem in understanding the text.

A further problem encountered is that if women reading the bible understand "dogs" as referring not only to Gentiles but to women too, is the text then perceived as being oppressive to women? Earlier (in Section 2.5) we noted with Fiorenza that feminist biblical interpretation must "challenge the scriptural authority of patriarchal texts and explore how the bible is used as a weapon against women struggling for liberation" [1].

Thus the task which lies before us is to examine critically

Mk7.24-30, which on the surface is incredibly oppressive towards both Gentiles and women, in order to ascertain whether the words on the surface are not merely a reflection of the patriarchal bias of its context, and that inherrent in its core is a message of liberation for all. We shall not attempt a detailed exegesis of the passage, but shall rather present a feminist hermeneutic of Mk7.24-30.

6.2 THE MARCAN VERSION OR THE MATTHEAN?

The story of the encounter between Jesus and the Syro-phoenecian woman is found in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew (Mt.15.21-28). It is important to note that Luke chose not to repeat the story. If one accepts the modern solution to the synoptic problem, then one would recognise that Luke had direct access to Mark's Gospel and the story of the Syro-phonoecian woman, and yet chose not to repeat it. A reading of Luke would show how he was particularly concerned with women and seems to be the most accepting of the three synoptic gospels of the role of women within the "Christian community" [2]. Luke's gospel is also arguably the most universal of the gospels, and it seems to have been written to a specifically Gentile audience. It is thus pertinant to note that this incident, which is potentially critical both toward women and Gentiles is not retold by Luke.

Although our focus rests upon the Marcan text, it is important to examine the ways in which the accounts in Matthew and Mark differ. If one recognises that Matthew wrote for

Jewish Christians, the overtones in this pericope which differ from Mark are easily understood.

The first important distinction between Matthew and Mark is that in the Matthean account, Jesus is given the title "Son of David" (Mt.15.21), this title is absent from the Marcan version. The use of the title in the Matthean version is important in that it suggests that the divine, messianic nature of Jesus was recognised by a Gentile. It was important for Matthew to stress to his Jewish audience the "Jewishness" and authenticity of Jesus. While this pericope reflects the first healing of a Gentile, it would arguably be important for Matthew's predominantly Jewish readers to recognise that the Gentiles were included in Jesus' mission, but that their inclusion was only sealed after the protagonist recognised Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, and then continued by displaying faith, as seen in Mt.15.28. If one accepts the primarily Gentile nature of Mark's readers the use of this title would be unnecessary.

The specifically Jewish nature of the Matthean account is further enhanced by Jesus' response to his annoyed disciples: "I have been sent only to those lost sheep, the people of Israel" (Mt.15.24). This statement would have clearly acknowledged the primacy of the mission to the Jews and would serve to appease Matthews's readers. It is pertinant to note that this statement is not used by Mark, which would suggest it to reflect an editorial insertion.

A further important difference in the two accounts lies in

the wording of Jesus' response to the woman. In Mark, Jesus states: "Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the childrens bread and throw it to the dogs" (Mk7.27). This statement seems to suggest that Mark is implying that after the children have been fed, the "dogs' may be looked after. Matthew does not reflect this understanding however. The Matthean Jesus says: "It is not fair to take the childrens bread and throw it to the dogs", this statement holds out no hope to the Gentiles, as there is no implication that after the children have been looked after, the dogs will have their turn. Again the needs and demands of the two different sets of readers is clear, Mark - writing for the persecuted Christians of Rome - had to show Jesus recognising the rights of the Gentiles, albeit that they were only granted the "left-overs". To his Jewish audience, Matthew needed to make no such compromises.

Mt 15.27 reflects the woman referring to the Jews as "masters", whereas in Mark, she uses the same word as Jesus, and calls the Jews "children". This difference may also be understood after one has recognised the different set of readers. Mark's readers, as we have shown in the previous chapter, comprised of people from various socio-economic groups, and while they were not primarily slaves, the connotation of economic domination of the "dogs" would have made this pericope even less palatable to the Roman Christians. Matthew's Jewish audience, who viewed the Gentiles as servile would have been further appeased through the use of this word as it implies that merely because the woman (and the Gentiles)

are ultimately accepted by Jesus, this does not mean that they are socially more acceptable. In Matthew, the woman is tacitly acknowledging her social inferiority, through the use of this title.

The final difference in the accounts worthy of mention is that in the Matthean account, healing is clearly a result of the woman's faith, Jesus says: "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire" (Mt.15.28). Mark's Jesus says: "For saying this you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter" (Mk7.30). Thus in the Marcan account, there is no stress on the faith aspect, her words and quick retort assured the healing - faith is not specifically mentioned. Although the woman's faith may be implicit in the Marcan version, it is not specifically recognised, rather the woman herself - and her actions - seem to be the decisive matter. While this point may not seem relevent at this juncture, when we do a feminist hermeneutic of the text, the relevence will become clear.

In conclusion one needs to acknowledge the simplicity and directness of the Marcan account. Matthew clearly based his account on Mark, but through editorial insertions and a reworking of the tradition, the account was made more palatable to the Jewish readers. We have examined the main differences between the two accounts, although other differences do exist. Having acknowledged the primacy of Mark, it was this rendition which has been selected, as it seems to be the original version. Having identified the differences in the accounts, we are ultimately committed to proffering a feminist hermeneutic

of the Marcan account.

6.3 SHORTCOMINGS OF OTHER INTERPRETATIONS

At the outset it must be noted that all the commentaries on Mark which were referred to were written by men. This point has two implications, firstly it explains the inherrent bias encountered in many of the renditions, and secondly, it offers tacit support to our notion that interpreters of the bible are predominantly male. The interpretations studied are thus to be recognised as coming from a specifically androcentric perspective, which would arguably not recognise the inherent oppressive nature of the text.

The standard interpretation of this text is that it symbolised the initiation of the Gentile mission [3]. It is not the intention of this paper to dispute this theological interpretation. Certainly this pericope does reflect the first incident of a Gentile being healed by Jesus, and certainly, other Gentile healings do occur later. Perhaps the resolution of conflict reflected in this pericope might be indicative of a potential resolution of the conflict over the bounds of the Christian mission?

The interpretation of this pericope being only an indication toward the universal scope of the church is limiting, and does little to satisfy the questions raised by Jesus' retort to the woman. To the person reading the bible, the finer theological points which suggest this to be the beginning of the Gentile

mission, would often go unnoticed. What is noticed and puzzled over however, is the dialogue between Jesus and the Syro-phoenecian woman.

In all fairness to the commentaries consulted, most did recognise the problematic nature of the dialogue between Jesus and the woman, but the interpretations of this issue expose the bias and limitations of the androcentric perspective of many theologians. Without exception, all the interpretations attempt to offer some form of apologetic for the words and actions of Jesus. Some understand the words, and their meaning, as unimportant, selecting rather to concentrate on the potential theological message, others in attempting to explain the words and their meaning have arrived at trite, implausible solutions or suggestions. We shall briefly examine some of these understandings in an attempt to show how, in glossing over the issue, they have failed to do justice to the protagonist in the pericope - the woman - and through this failure, the concerns of women and other 'marginalised' readers of this text are ignored. This injustice must be exposed and dealt with.

The one point made by many interpreters is that the diminutive (viz.kunaria) of the word for dog has been used. This is seen as being synonymous with the understanding of pets as opposed to street dogs [4]. This use of the diminutive is viewed as Jesus intentionally taking the "harsh edge" off the word [5]. Johnson goes so far as to suggest that Jesus used the diminutive because he was responding "playfully" to the woman [6]! One cannot justify the use of a word merely because its

"harsh edge" has been removed by the use of the diminutive.

Nineham makes an important point when he suggests that Aramaic and Hebrew have no corresponding form of the word, and that it is uncertain whether the diminutive had mitigating force in contemporary Greek [7]. He continues to say that it is likely that Jesus meant "dogs" as opposed to "doggies" or "puppies" [8]. Of course one cannot be certain whether these words were said by Jesus, or by Mark. What is important is that scholars have attempted to explain away the word "dogs" by viewing the use of the diminutive as being all important. When people read this text, the English translation reads "dogs" as opposed to "puppies" and the harsh use of the word is not 'blunted' at all.

A further grave fault which must be found with many of the interpreters, is that they have a tendency to "read into" the text many notions which are not present there. In an attempt to excuse the words of Jesus, suggestions as to the tone of the statement have been made. Hunter states that "half whimsically and with a smile, Jesus tests the woman" [9]. Anderson feels that Jesus' words only contained an "apparent harshness" [10], and Johnson speaks of Jesus referring "playfully" to the woman [11]! These sugestions may be dealt with, and rejected, as one. In the text there is no suggestion of jest or humour and it is thus completely fallacious to suggest that these elements were present.

Anderson goes so far as to say that "probably too much has been made of the term 'dogs' here as an insult" [12].

Certainly, Anderson might not perceive the phrase as insulting, but to suggest that modern readers would not find it offensive is a gross presumption which cannot pass unchallenged. The very fact that so many commentaries have tried to explain away the "insult" suggests that they recognise it as such, and feel uneasy that Jesus should have used those words.

There are five main interpretations of these words of Jesus these are: 1. the words are intended playfully [13]; 2. that Jesus is suggesting in effect that this is the opinion of his disciples [14]; 3. that through these words Jesus intends to test the woman's faith and invite appeal [15]; 4. that these words refect a perplexity in Jesus as to the scope of his mission [16], and 5. that the dialogue reflects an actual development of Jesus' understanding of his mission [17]. The problem with all these understandings is that none effectively explain to women and/or Gentiles how this passage might not be viewed as oppressive. With the trite explanation of this pericope heralding the beginning of the Gentile mission, interpreters have rested their case. The harshness of the statement, and more importantly, the response of the woman, are glossed over.

At this point it would be useful to examine how the response of the woman has been interpreted. Many interpretations feel that this response is exactly what Jesus was expecting and hoping for, Cranfield quotes Calvin in his statement that "Jesus intends'not to extinguish the woman's faith' by his coldness, 'but rather to whet her zeal and inflame her ardour'" [18].

Johnson states how the woman answers with "cleverness and good humour", he continues by saying that "one cannot help admiring her patience and courage" [19]. Cranfield speaks of how she "persued her course readily through formidable opposition; suffered herself to be annihilated" [20]. Lane recognises that the woman "exemplifies humility and openess to receive whatever she is granted" [21]. Barclay explains the response by making a gross generalisation when he says "Now the woman was a Greek, and the Greeks had a gift of repartee; and she saw at once that Jesus was speaking with a smile" [22]!

One can deal with all these responses at once. Without exception, these interpretations of the woman's response smack of paternalism. The attitude which these scholars have exhibited toward the woman is condescending and unacceptable because they have failed to recognise the important role which the woman and her response has played, both in opening the mission to the Gentiles, as well as in allowing Jesus the opportunity to affirm the full humanity of this Gentile woman, and thus by implication, all other marginalised people. If these scholars had recognised the important role played by the woman, then their statements might be both affirmed and applauded.

A further important point to note when reading these scholars, is that they are attempting to understand the confusing dialogue between Jesus and the woman - in attempting to explain away the dialogue and rather focus on the universal mission of Jesus, these interpretations have failed to notice

that they have brushed over the one aspect of the text which could again make it acceptable to all - namely - the actions of the woman!

6.4 UNDERSTANDING THE WORDS 'KUWN' AND 'KUNARIA'

An important aspect of a reading of Mk7.24-30 is the understanding of the words 'kuwn' and 'kunaria'. Before one can explain away the use of the word 'dogs', one has to recognise the way that the words were used.

The word 'kuwn' refers to the annoying and despised eastern dog of the streets. The word is used both figuratively and literally since the time of Homer. In the Orient, 'kuwn' refers not only to scavenging dogs, the plague of the land, but also to the board of sanitary inspectors. This was the situation in Babylonian cities; and in many parts of the east, this understanding remains today.

Although there are Jews who speak of the faithfulness of the dog, in the main it is regarded as the most despicable, insolent and miserable of creatures. To be compared to a dog is both insulting and degrading. To be eaten by dogs in the street is the sign of a special judgement from God, this judgement is often relayed by the prophets (cf. 1 Kings14.11; 16.14 and 21.24). It is a special indignity to be delivered up to dogs. The midrash says contemptuously of Goliath: "He died like a dog".

In later Judaism it is uncertain whether the dog is

understood to be a domestic animal or a wild animal. When Rabbi Jannai brought in a well-dressed man as his guest, he was astonished at his guest's ignorance of scripture and the Mishna, and because of his ignorance, he was called a dog [23]. The saying excludes the guest from the inheritance of Israel.

In the book of Psalms are many derogatory statements about dogs, God smites the ungodly with a rod because they are like dogs (cf. Ps.59). Rabbi Aqiba calls his dogs Rufus and Rufina, because the Gentiles are like dogs in their manner of life [24]. A person is brought into contempt if she/he is either called a dog, or if a dog is named after them.

In the parable of Lazarus (Lk.16.19ff), it is said that the dogs came and licked the sores of Lazarus (16.21). This is hardly a reference to the sympathy of animals as opposed to the heartlessness of human beings. It is rather a sign of the supreme wretchedness of the poor beggar, he has to endure contact with these unclean animals.

'Kunes' remained a term of reproach in the proclamation of the church, as may be seen form the conclusion of Revelations. He who washes his garments may enter the city (Rev.22.14), but dogs, sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers etc. are shut out (22.15).

In the New Testament, the word 'kunarion' occurs only in the figurative saying of Jesus in Mt.15.26, and Mk7.26. It is debatable whether Jesus is adopting the Jewish habit of calling a person of a different faith kuon (cf. the figurative saying in Mt.7.6). The saying in Mt.15.26 and Mk7.26 compares the

claims of children and house dogs. The choice of the word 'kunarion' shows that Jesus implies little dogs which could be tolerated in the house [25]. The metaphor used by Jesus recognises the distinction which God demands between Jews and Gentiles, accepts the historical priviledge of Israel, and limits the earthly work of Jesus [26].

Mk7.27 interprets the saying as implying that the children of the house must first be satisfied. The answer of the Gentile woman (Mt15.27, Mk7.28) shows that in obedience to the will of God, she recognises the prerogative of Israel. She simply appeals to the readiness of Jesus to help - this readiness knows no frontiers. The faith of the Gentile woman sets itself unconditionally under the messianic lordship of Jesus, and in this unconditional quality, it receives the acknowledgement and promise of Jesus.

6.5 THE POSITION OF WOMEN

One of the most remarkable features of Mk 7.24-30 is that the protagonist is a woman, a Gentile woman at that! A brief examination of the social and economic postition of women living at that time would reveal the degree to which women were discriminated against - socially, economically and legally.

Rabbi Julia Neuberger argues that by the period of the Mishnah

> "women had become far <u>less</u> educated, far <u>less</u> important in the structure of society, than they had

> been in the Biblical period - and this came about presumably as a result of Hellenistic influences on Jewish society." [27]

This arguement understands that it is during this period of the Mishnah, that much Jewish law was formed. Neuberger continues by asserting that "because women were less in the public eye and less educated that, presumably, their legal status was so much lower than that of men" [28].

At no stage is it made clear why women had "become" less educated or less important in societal structures, but what seems clear is that women were increasingly being recognised primarily as objects of possession, and that they could participate in society only in terms of their relationship with men. Women were categorised either as married, in which case their husbands represented them on all levels, or as widows, where a male relative would have had the responsibility of caring for the woman and would be responsible for interceding on her behalf, or she was classified as divorced in which case she had few rights unless a male member of her family agreed to represent her, and take care of her financially. Another way of categorising women was that of prostitute, Ringe asserts that many lone women were "reduced to prostitution to support themselves" [29]. This classification of women as prostitute again sees women specifically in terms of their "relationship" with men. Ringe asserts that many lone women were "reduced to prostitution to support themselves" [30].

The fact that the woman in Mk7.24-30 approaches Jesus directly, and that no male intercedes on her behalf implies that she is either widowed, divorced or a prostitute, and that

she has no "access" to a man to represent her. This situation will become more pertinant when we attempt a feminist hermeneutic of the text. It is also important to note that she asks for healing for her daughter as opposed to a son "in her societies terms that [having a daughter] is a further liability, for daughters were not greatly valued" [31]. Daughters were viewed as an expense (in terms of a dowry) and "were often regarded as troublesome pieces of property weighing on their families until they could be safely married of to a suitable husband" [32].

Jeremias makes the important point that although divorce generally favoured the man (there was however public stigma on the man too), that divorces were relatively rare [33]. In terms of the womans legal position, it is also important to note that "the right to divorce was exclusively the husband's" [34]. The burden, and societal pressure, on the woman in Mk7.24-30 cannot be underestimated. She was a woman, alone and with the responsibility of caring for a daughter, and with seemingly no "access" to a man who would represent her.

A further pertinant point relating to the position of women is that "a woman was expected to remain unobserved in public" [35]. It was also considered preferable for a woman not to go out at all.

> "Market places and council-halls, law-courts and gatherings, and meetings where a large number of people are assembled, in short all public life with its discussions and deeds, in times of peace and of war, are proper for men. It is suitable for women to live indoors and to live in retirement" [36].

While the protagonist in Mk7.24-30 was not a Jewish woman, similar societal pressure abounded.

Antagonism between Jew and Gentile has been well attested and it is thus unnecessary to spend time describing the enmity. Gentiles were recognised as racially inferior to the Jews and were generally regarded with contempt. It is this understanding which makes Jesus' venture into the land of the Gentiles, and the ultimate acceptance of the Gentiles in to the "kingdom of God" more remarkable.

What is important for us to note is that not only is the Syro-phonoecian woman in Mark marginalised through her marital position, but she is also breaking two societal taboos: as a woman she was participating in public life, and as a Gentile, she was approaching a Jewish "religious leader". These factors will have an important bearing later, when we examine Mk7.24-30 from the perspective of the woman.

6.6 FACTORS WHICH SHAPED THE TEXT

On one level it would be useful to know if this story reflects an actual event in the life of Jesus, which was faithfully recorded and repeated by Mark and Matthew. If it does not reflect an actual incident, is it an insensitive attempt to discuss the extention of Jesus' mission to the Gentiles, with the harsh words ascribed to Jesus really emanating from the Gospel writers?

We will never know with any certainty whether Jesus did respond to the woman in the critical way ascribed to him, in a way this knowledge is unimportant. What is important is that the story, as stands, has been handed down and has become part of church history. Ringe suggests that

> "the very strangeness and the offensiveness of the story's portrayal of Jesus may suggest that the core of the story was indeed remembered as an incident in Jesus' life when even he was caught with his compassion down" [37]

she suggests further that "the story was originally remembered and retold in the community not for its ecclesiastical significance but primarily because of its christological significance" [38]. Recognising that the authenticity of the story cannot be proven, we need to highlight the factors which shaped the retelling of the account.

We are taking as given the understanding that the writer of the Gospel of Mark was a man, and as such the story has been shaped from a mans' perspective. The context out of which the account arises, namely, pre-70 CE Palestine, has been discussed in detail in Chapter 5. While the details in Chapter 5 may be regarded as superfluous, it is the strong contention of this paper that unless one has a thorough knowledge of the situation out of which a text was produced - or to which it was written - a complete understanding of the text can never be achieved.

The text must be recognised as reflecting the androcentric patriarchal society out of which it was produced. In section

5.3 we concurred with Theissen on the notion that the socio-economic factors of Early Palestine were responsible for shaping the character of the Jesus Movement. We also argued that an examination of the material of Jesus' teaching, and of the situation of his teaching, clearly points to the understanding that Jesus identified with the oppressed and was working toward bringing an end to their exploitation.

An important question which begs answering is that of whether Jesus recognised women as falling into the category of the oppressed and whether he was actively working toward ending their exploitation? Clearly contradictory evidence exists. Recently scholars have shown the Jesus Movement as being an egalitarian movement [39] which arguably might imply a recognition by Jesus of women in their own rights, as opposed to only being recognised in terms of their relationship with men. While there is no time to enter the debate on how Jesus recognised or responded to women, we have to note that all the traditions about Jesus are no more than intepretations, told from the perspective of the men who wrote the New Testament. This perspective would clearly reflect the patriarchal context in which the writers were working. Fiorenza correctly asserts that "we cannot cease analyzing and identifying the dominant patriarchal structures of the Greco-Roman world into which Christianity emerged"[40]. On the issue of how Jesus viewed his mission, Fiorenza makes the following important point:

> "The praxis and vision of Jesus and his movement is best understood as an inner-Jewish renewal movement that presented an alternative option to the dominant patriarchal structures rather than an oppositional

formation rejecting the values and praxis of Judaism."[41]

It is important to note that a historical reconstuction of the Jesus Movement is both impossible, because of limited texts, and undesirable because any reconstruction would contain the bias' and particular perspective of the person attempting the reconstruction. Fiorenza supports this understanding on reconstruction and states:

> "exegetes today more readily acknowledge that a value-free interpretation of early Christian texts and an objectivist reconstruction of early Christian history is a scholarly fiction that fails to account for its own presuppositions and scientific models."[42]

A further vital point to bear in mind when examining the past is that the modern writers' societal perspectives of the present will condition the selective reconstruction process. Thus, integral to this thesis is its writers concept both of 1. present realities - that the unjustified notion of the inferiority of women has received tacit support through a continued androcentric reading of the bible; and 2. past realities - that the egalitarian nature of the early Jesus Movement, and Jesus' affirmation of the full dignity and humanity of all people, has become lost through the androcentric mechanisms of redaction and interpretation.

Essential to a liberating understanding of the text, must be the recognition of the marginalised position of women within the society out of which the text was produced, and for whom the text was written. This recognition of contextual factors is important when one asserts with Fiorenza how much "the

androcentric interests of the New Testament authors determined their receprtion and depiction of early Christian life, history and tradition"[43]. This understanding of the reception and depiction of Early Christianity being "coloured" by its context, clearly supports our notion that the egalitarian nature of the early movement is not effectively represented in the texts because of the androcentric context in which the texts were written. The patriarchal language (reflecting the androcentric society which produced it) must be recognised - without conceding a specifically patriarchal content - and the distinction between form and content must be acknowledged.

In saying this, we are not attempting an apologetic of the text. We are not justifying the treatment of women, or the condescending way in which they are referred to within the bible. Rather, we are asserting that despite the androcentric mechanisms of expression (primarily reflecting the 'accepted norms' of the society out of which they were produced) that this text and many other texts which may seem hostile toward women, actually contain within them a strand of liberation and hope for women and all marginalised people. Fiorenza correctly asserts that "patriarchal imagery and androcentric language are the form but not the content of the biblical message"[44]. The oppressive texts must be seen to reflect their contexts and not some timeless truth. The timeless truth indeed is that women are fully human and are to be affirmed as such. This message of liberation must be recognised and affirmed as being the central strand which may be found throughout the bible.

Thus this thesis recognises that the text has been written

in, shaped by, redacted and critiqued, within an androcentric, patriarchal mind set. As long as one sees Mk7.24-30 only in terms of its signalling the beginning of the mission to the Gentiles, and as long as one fails to recognise the important implications of the dialogue between Jesus and the woman, and the patriarchal androcentric context in which this text was produced; this text will remain inherrently oppressive both toward women and Gentiles. The dynamism of the text, and the hope which it offers to women, and others who are marginalised by society, can only be recognised and used once the actions of the woman, and the response by Jesus, are affirmed as reflecting the true message of liberation which runs as a thread throughout the bible.

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1. Fiorenza, 1985, p129

2. While we assert that of the synoptic writers, Luke was the most sympathetic to women, we recognise Fiorenza's exposure of the Lucan works as reflecting the androcentric bias' of the New Testament writers - Fiorenza, 1983a, p401

3. This interpretation is supported by: Hunter, 1949; Moulle, 1963; Johnson, 1960; Barclay, 1954; Nineham, 1963; Lane, 1974; Anderson, 1976 and Taylor, 1957

4. See: Cranfield, 1963, p248; Hunter, 1949, p82; Johnson, 1960, p137; Anderson, 1976, p27 and Lane, 1974, p261. For a fuller discussion of the words 'kuwn' and 'kunaria', see section 6.4

5. Hunter, 1949, p82

6. Johnson, 1960, p137

7. Nineham, 1963, p201

8. ibid.

9. Hunter, 1949, p81

10. Anderson, 1976, p190

11. Johnson, 1960, p137

12. Anderson, 1976, p190

13. Johnson, 1960, p137

14. ibid.

15. Lane, 1974, p261

16. Anderson, 1976, p190

17. Johnson, 1960, p137

18. Cranfield, 1963, p248

19. Johnson, 1960, p137

20. Cranfield, 1963, p249

21. Anderson, 1976, p190

22. Barclay, 1954, p182

23. See Str.-B,1,724

24. Str.-B,1,725

25. See b.Ket.,616

26. cf.Jn 12.20-26

27. Neuberger, 1983, p135

28. ibid, p136

29. Ringe, 1985, p70

30. ibid.

31. ibid.

32. ibid.

33. Jeremias, 1969, p370

34. ibid.

35. ibid, p360

36. See Jeremias, 1969 - reference to Philo - p360

37. Ringe, 1983, p69f

38. ibid.

39. See section 5.3 & Fiorenza, 1983a, p409; Schottroff, 1983, p419ff

40. Fiorenza, 1983, p107

41. ibid.

42. Fiorenza, 1983a,p395

43. ibid, p401

44. Fiorenza, 1983, p15

Chapter 7 THE LIBERATED TEXT

7.1 THE ACTIONS OF THE WOMAN AS A SYMBOL FOR LIBERATION

The true message of liberation for all, female and male, Jew and Gentile which may be found in Mk 7.24-30, has been glossed over by many interpreters and readers. For too long, the text has been read as only signifying the genesis of the mission to the Gentiles. Interpreters have apologetically attempted to explain away the words of Jesus. The nameless woman is dismissed without a second thought. The patriarchal, androcentric setting has been forgotten. The recognised bias of the writer of the text, as well as that of the redactors and critics is ignored. The result of these ommissions, intentional or otherwise, has meant that the text has remained bound within a one sided interpretation. The true message of liberation for all, which is exhibited within this text, must be claimed.

By taking a new look at the text; by seeing it as reflecting the society which produced it and being shaped by the people for whom it was written, the harsh patriarchal overtones might be recognised as being primarily contextual - reflecting the mindset of the day and not some timeless truth. The symbol for

liberation which lies within this text is to be found not in the words used by Jesus, nor in the pejoratative way that the woman is portrayed, but rather in the actions of both Jesus and the woman.

We have discussed the social and economic position of women in the pre-70CE period, and having noted their inferior position in the predominantly patriarchal society, the actions of the Syro-Phoenecian woman are startling and remarkable. Today, the questioning of a religious leader by a woman does not seem remarkable, yet, in the context of the societal taboos of first century Palestine, by persisting in her demands, the Syro-Phoenecian woman exemplifies both courage and integrity. The ministry of the woman is three-fold: firstly, her ministry opens the way for the acceptance of Gentiles into the Christian mission, secondly, her ministry allows Jesus the opportunity of acknowledging and affirming the full humanity of all marginalised people and thirdly, her assertive actions serve as a continuous example of courage and perseverence in the face of adversity. By focussing on these three aspects, we shall show how this text might be liberated from being primarily an offensive, confusing text.

7.1.1 Opening the way for the mission to the Gentiles: In asserting that the Syro-Phonoecian woman opened the mission to the Gentiles, we are not suggesting that without her actions, Gentiles would never have been included in the "Christian" mission. The woman must be seen primarily as a vehicle through which the mission was legitimised and accepted, not only by the later church, but openly by Jesus. It was a vital factor to the

ongoing work of the church that the "extended" mission was not only perceived to be acceptable through interpreting the works of Jesus, but that Jesus himself openly acknowledged the universal scope of his message. The healing of the deaf man in Decapolis, recorded immediately after the incident with the Syro-Phonoecian woman (Mk7.31-37; Mt.15.29-31), serves as confirmation of the scope of the mission to the Gentiles.

Had the woman felt rebuffed at the harsh words of Jesus and had she not persisted with her request, the mission to the Gentiles would surely have gained legitimacy elsewhere. What is important however, is that the response of the woman in the face of adversity ensures that there can be no clouding of the issue. Jesus' healing of the Gentile woman's daughter, after a small altercation, highlights the acceptibility of Gentiles and women. The healing of the deaf man at Decapolis (Mk7.31-37; Mt.15.29-31) hardly refers to the understanding that he was a Gentile, this understanding is rather inferred from the region in which the healing takes place. The healing of the Syro-Phoenecian woman's daughter, however, specifies the Gentile nature of the woman. There can thus be no doubt in the mind of the later church, Jesus openly healed a Gentile, thus implying the ultimate acceptability of Gentiles in the mission of the "church". It is the actions of the woman that make this text stand out, and ensure that the text and its full implications do not become lost.

7.1.2 Jesus' Affirmation of the Full Humanity of all Marginalised People: We have previously stated that case of the Syro-Phoenecian woman is of specific interest in that she

breaks two societal taboos: as a Gentile, she approaches a Jewish religious "leader" and as a woman she not only speaks to a Jewish religious "leader" but is also prepared to publically enter into debate with him. While we have already discussed the role of women and Gentiles in early Palestinian society, we need to again stress that in the context of the day, the actions and determination of the woman are remarkable. The woman did not seek a man to represent her (if she did we are unaware of it and her perseverence in the light of being unrepresented makes her case more special); instead, she spoke for herself and her daughter. A further important point to note is that on hearing the harsh retort of Jesus, she did not remain silent as one would expect, but instead, argued with the rhetoric and confidence that is reminiscent of the scholars and learned men of the day. Thus once again it is the response of the woman that gives this text its unique characteristics.

The response of Jesus to the woman's persistence is also worthy of note. The understanding that this response was ultimately what Jesus was expecting [1] has no basis in the text. This understanding might be correct, but one cannot merely explain away the retort of Jesus in such a simplistic way, in order to "protect" the understanding of Jesus being compassionate at all times. This "explaining away" of the words attributed to Jesus does nothing to enhance the understanding of Jesus being fully compassionate. What does further this understanding, is the recognition that after Jesus hears the woman's response, he truly does respond with compassion. Jesus' initial unacceptable response is replaced

with an instant recognition of the worth of the woman and the wisdom of her words. In a sense one might argue that Jesus recognised the error of his earlier words, and importantly, sought to compensate his earlier response with words that affirmed her worth and acceptability. Thus by responding in the way that she did, the woman is offering Jesus an opportunity to recognise both her right to speak as well as her right to participate in the Kingdom of God.

By affirming the woman (through the ultimate healing of her daughter) Jesus is affirming the right of women and Gentiles to participate fully in the "church". Her ministry of perseverence and faith must be recognised as the catalyst which opened the way for Jesus to openly condone and sanction the full extent of the "Christian mission". As important is the recognition that women and Gentiles were marginalised people in that society, and that through Jesus recognising the right of the Gentile woman to speak and argue publically, Jesus is affirming the full humanity of all marginalised people. Jesus' mission adopts a new dimension, his mission is not limited to those who are in that context already socially acceptable (namely Jewish men), but rather, the woman has exposed the full scope of the mission, and through her actions, the full humanity of the woman and other marginalised people is affirmed.

7.1.3 Her Ministry of Courage and Perseverance in the Face of Adversity: One of the most important aspects of a new liberated reading of Mk7.24-30, is the example of the actions of the woman. She exemplifies determination, perseverance and a sense of self worth, despite the attitude of the society in which she

lived. She openly defies the accepted custom of the day - that women should not speak or debate in public - she also apparently refuses to accept the low esteem in which the society held both her and her daughter. Had she accepted her socially inferior postion, she would certainly not have even approached Jesus.

Her very act of speaking to Jesus and later arguing with him, raises three points: firstly that she must have been desperate to receive help for her daughter; secondly, the healing of her daughter was perceived as more important to her than the scorn which she might receive from others for her audacious act, and thirdly, through acting in this way, she is rejecting her socially recognised position of inferiority, and instead, calls for recognition of her right to participate fully in society, in areas traditionally reserved for men.

While we recognise that it was desperation (as opposed to an innate desire to prove her self worth) which probably drove the woman to confront Jesus, we must note that she did not allow social pressure to withhold her from claiming what was rightfully hers. Whatever her motivation for approaching Jesus, that fact that she did remains paramount to the reading of this text. Her action "appears to free Jesus to respond, to heal, to become again the channel of God's redeeming presense in that situation" [2]. The woman risked rejection and humiliation in approaching Jesus, yet her belief in the acceptability of her request and her own self worth, encouraged her to act forcefully and with determination. In so doing she has left a valuable bequest to all who read her story, her

bequest is that despite opposition and potential rejection, all people should be free to act in the way they believe correct and in so doing they will be affirming their rights as full equal, participants in society.

7.2 CONCLUSIONS

We have displayed a liberated reading of Mark7.24-30 and in so doing made the text accesible to all, women, men and to those who feel marginalised. This new reading has not sought to deny the potentially overt sexism and racism which is arguably displayed in the text, but rather has sought to confront these notions from whence they come. As long as the texts of the bible are read and understood on face value alone, so long will they remain inherrently oppresive to all. What this thesis has achieved is to show that in recognising and confronting the often overt sexism displayed in many biblical passages, and to recognise this as primarily reflecting the society from whence they originated and for whom they were written - as opposed to some timeless truth - one will see that behind the oppressive facade of many biblical texts often lies a message of liberation for all.

It is correct that people should initially be offended at the picture of Jesus which seems to emanate from this passage. However, more importantly, by looking at the actions of Jesus and the woman, by focussing on Jesus' response to the woman's

arguement as opposed to his initial retort, by recognising that the woman exemplifies courage and integrity and that Jesus responded with love and affirmed the woman and her full humanity; this text might at last be recognised as being truly liberatory to both women and men.

The text exemplifies true liberation for women in that the lowest of women (a "single" Gentile with the burden of a daughter) displayed courage in approaching a Jewish religious "leader", and ability through arguing intelligently and with logic - and she was not not rebuffed for her actions. Despite the restrictions placed on her by her society, she believed in herself and her quest, and as such, rose above the petty social rules of the day. Through a new reading of the text, women today might draw on her example, and through this recognise their full worth and potential. By humbly acceding to societal norms and customs in instances where they are oppressive to women, women are doing themselves a disservice. A key lesson for women to learn from the example of the Syro-Phoenecian woman is that they have a right to participate fully in society and to stand up and work for those things in which they believe.

The new reading of the text is also liberating to men however, for as long as women are oppressed through an androcentric reading of the bible, and by the practises which ensue from such a reading, so too are men oppressed. Until the bible is freed from its androcentric mechanisms of interpretation, and until the bible's true message of human liberation is affirmed, men cannot be liberated. It might seem

strange to say that men also need to be liberated, but the truth is that until men are free to recognise the full value, worth and inherrent equality of women, men will remain bound by patriarchal manacles. Once the bible is recognised as reflecting a contextual patriarchy, with a timeless truth of full equality for all inherrent in many texts, then women may reaffirm the bible, and both women and men may be liberated from the false values imbued in patriarchy and all forms of sexism and racism.

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1. Lane, 1974, p261
2. Ringe, 1985, p71

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