

The Women Around Jesus

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub. 1982),

Jesus, the very special man for women

“Psychoanalytical research has demonstrated that Jesus was the only man not dominated by the *animus*; Hanna Wolf calls him ‘the integrated man’, i.e. a man who integrated and brought to maturity the masculine and feminine attitudes which are to be found in any human being. As a result of this he was capable of entering into a more absolute partnership with women. This does not mean that he was less the Son of God. It simply enables us to have a better understanding of the psychological and social side of the story of Jesus and to incorporate it into our own existence.

¹

As Moltmann-Wendel notes, Jesus was very different from other founders and followers of religion.

She calls it ‘liberating acceptance which had social consequences.’

She continues;

“It broke down the ‘androcentricism’ of the ancient world, to use Hanna Wolf’s term, i.e. the masculine orientation, the adoption of masculine models and standards. The coming of Jesus released new values.”²

Women often enjoyed more respect in Gnostic circles than in the mainstream church which was gradually coming into being. The mainstream church, adapted to the patriarchal social structures of society, did not offer women the same opportunities as Gnostic groups.³

People read the Bible with new eyes, gain a new understanding and find it liberating because they feel personally affected. Luther found in the Bible the justification of the godless, and as a result, for him the clerical social order and the demand of the conscience of the individual underwent a change. Josephine Butler, the English pioneer in the struggle for the vote for women, who carried on a successful fight against state-sponsored prostitution, read it as the great book of liberation which proclaimed the same justice for men and women. For her the word ‘redemption’ was too weak to express what Jesus had brought to women:⁴

Martha

베다니에 마르다와 마리아 자매가 살고 있었다. 눅 10: 38-42 에 나오는 마르다와 마리아의 이야기에 서는 예수님은 베다니에 오시면 마르다와 마리아 자매 집에 오시는 데 마르다는 재빨리 부엌에 들어 가서 손님대접하려고 음식준비에 항상 바빴다. 마리아는 주님의 발 앞에 앉아 그의 말씀에 경청하고 마르다를 도울 생각을 하지않아 마르다는 주님께 불평했었다.

요 11:25-27 에 나오는 이야기는 죽은 이 두자매의 오빠를 주님께서 살리는 배경에서 나오는데 주님과 마르다의 죽음 과 부활에 대한 대화에서 "나는 부활이요 생명이니, 나를 믿는 사람은 죽어도 살고, 살아서 나를 믿는 사람은 영원히 죽지 않을 것이다. 네가 이것을 믿느냐?" 고 주님께서 물으시니 "예, 주님! 주님은 세상에 오실 그리스도이시며 하나님의 아들이신 줄을 내가 믿습니다." 라고 마르다는 대답했다.

¹ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 3.

² Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 3.

³ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 5.

⁴ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 6-7.

이와 병행하는 그리스도에 대한 고백을 한사람은 베드로 밖에 없는데 (마 16:16) 여성인 마르다의 입에서 이런 그리스도에 대한 고백이 나온 것이다. 초대교회에서 그리스도를 이렇게 고백하는 것은 사도의 특징으로 여겨졌었다. 교회가 베드로의 고백위에 세워졌다고 해서 오늘날 까지 [가톨릭] 교황은 자신들이 베드로의 후계자라고 생각하는 것이다. 그렇다면 이런 고백을 한 마르다도 역시 초대교회의 사도 같이 지도역에 놓아야 하는 것이다. 그러므로 마르다는 초대교회 공동체에서 끈기있고 현명하고 투쟁적이고, 자신감 있고, 많은 것을 책임진 그러면서도 자유로운 여성이었다. 요한은 마르다를 믿음의 힘으로 상징하려고 했다. 여기서 요한은 여성이 많이 놀리운 때에 마르다 같은 지도력이 강한 여성을 높이 들어 세우기 위함이었다. 그 당시 공동체에서 마르다는 남자 지도자들과 같은 위치를 가졌고 같은 존경을 받은 것이라고 Wendel-Moltmann 은 주장한다.⁵

Thus John placed the confession of Christ on the lips of a woman, a woman who was known for her openness, her strength and her practical nature. This is a confession of Christ which takes similar form only once more in the other Gospels, where it is uttered by Peter. For the early church, to confess Christ in this way was the mark of an apostle. The church was built up on Peter's confession, and to this day the Popes understand themselves as Peter's successors. However, we must conclude from this story and this confession that Martha is also a leading personality, like the apostles in the early church. John wanted to use Martha to portray the strength of faith;⁶

Regarding **Mary Magdalene** Moltmann-Wendel suggests:

“Mary Magdalene suffered from a serious mental illness and was one of those women who came to follow Jesus as a result of her cure. We may imagine this cure took a similar course to other healings: Jesus touched her, perhaps embraced her, made her get up, like Peter's feverish mother-in-law or the person possessed by demons. He spoke to her and she had a tangible feeling of nearness and contact. As he spoke, the spell left her. She again became herself, free to feel and decide, free once again to experience the world around her, free to enjoy herself and to learn to live again. But she did not return to her old ways. She left her rich home town of Magdala, even though she would always bear its name. For her, being healed of her illness became salvation. The two things became fused together. And the group around Jesus could feel this well-being; it shared in her happiness.⁷

Mary Magdalene and others, as result of healing and liberation ‘surrender themselves completely, give up themselves up completely to the new way of life. Mary Magdalene has the qualities of a leader, and according to Luke (8:3) she contributed wealth. Gospels agree in reporting that she stood with and was first to go to the tomb on Easter morning. The risen Jesus appeared to her and gave her the task of reporting his appearance to the group of disciples. As long as Mary Magdalene and the women still felt the physical nearness of Jesus, they were unshakable in their faithfulness and perseverance. The encounter between Mary Magdalene and the risen Jesus can only be understood in the light of this special human and personal relationship with Jesus.⁸

Mary Magdalene experienced wholeness. She was accepted into the Jesus community – body, mind and spirit. Because of that she does not run away, but remains. Mary Magdalene may be regarded as the first apostle. She was the first to proclaim the gospel of the risen Jesus.⁹

⁵ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 25-26.

⁶ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 25.

⁷ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 68.

⁸ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 69-70.

⁹ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 72.

Mary Magdalene was born, who stood representative for all the sins of the world and bore on her head a band which read, 'Do not doubt, you who have sinned! Through my example God renews you.'¹⁰

The adulteress whom Jesus did not condemn, the woman of Samaria whom he makes the first apostle to the Samaritans, despite the blemishes in her married life.¹¹

A subversive story (P. 109) – Women and Jesus

The story of the women takes a subversive course, underground. It tells how women from Galilee accompanied. Jesus from the start, had the closest personal contact with them, served them – as they served him. At least one woman foresaw his death. None of them were frightened by his arrest. All remained in close proximity to Jesus as he was condemned and executed. Even after his death they were full of his person and his message. They were there at the burial of Jesus, and an indeterminate hope drove them to the tomb on Easter morning.¹²

The basic idea running through this Gospel of Mark is that God reveals himself in human suffering and that this can be experienced in following Jesus, sharing in his life and suffering. However, the male, human story is a story of complete failure; the Pharisees, the citizens of Nazareth, and finally the disciples fail. The story of the disciples is the most tragic. Jesus called them to personal discipleship and for a while – for example, in Peter's confession – they followed him. However, in the central portion of the Gospel the three great misunderstandings arise; Jesus tells them that his life will end, not with success, but with failure. This confuses, dismays and disappoints the group, which reacts first with resistance, then with dumb desperation and finally with paralysis. (Mark 8:32; 9:30f.; 10:32) From time to time they still have naïve dreams of sharing in power and glory. Thus the brothers John and James (10:35) want to sit at his right hand, i.e. to have legitimate participation in his rule. But in the last part, on the way of the passion, towards Jerusalem, the final failure takes place; Judas betrays Jesus. The others flee when he is arrested.¹³

Where men 'have their dogmatics crossed out', women begin to live. Where official history ends in darkness, the underground has a history of its own. The group of women does not just accompany Jesus from Galilee; it also does what it has come for: it serves. (15:41) In this way the women fulfill Jesus' instruction, 'He who would be great among you, let him be your servant,' and follow the one who has come 'to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.' (9:35; 10:42ff) They stayed with him in suffering, death and burial. They stand 'far off', not out of anxiety, but because the place of execution was cordoned off by the military. There is also a report of two women who were present at the burial of Jesus by the councilor Joseph of Arimathea. (15:47) According to Mark, three women were witnesses of what happened at Easter and are said to have been the first heralds of the resurrection. (16:1ff) Finally it is a woman – the unknown woman – who in contrast to the disciples, rivaling one another for success, understand the death of Jesus and puts herself at his side. (14:3-9) The small group of weeping, but brave women, who in any case have nothing to lose – as has been a widespread view right down to today – takes on profile and stands out from the larger group of women disciples proper.¹⁴

¹⁰ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 83.

¹¹ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 82.

¹² Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 109.

¹³ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 109-110.

¹⁴ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 110-111.

Time and again, in other Gospels as well, women are said to have ‘served’ – to have been true disciples of Jesus. Peter’s mother-in-law serves. Martha serves, the group of Galilean women serve. This discipleship is never reported of the disciples. Thus in all the Gospels there is still a remnant of ancient experience that women were real followers, wage-earners and participants in the life of Jesus. In Mark, ‘to serve’ is not a humiliating activity but a mutual giving and taking, a self-surrender and mutual acceptance, an exchange of love, tenderness, help and comfort. In that case Jesus did not just have women as disciples; for some circles in the early church they were the *real* disciples.¹⁵

¹⁵ Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Pub.1982), 111.