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**Reading the Bible through the eyes of
Women and the Oppressed: In search
for Justice and Liberation in Malawi**

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

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A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Ph.D.

University of Glasgow

April 2004

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare and affirm that this thesis expresses in its completeness my own special work formed by myself, and no part of this thesis has been successfully presented in return for any degree in this University or elsewhere. All noteworthy quotations have been acknowledged in the footnotes.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the importance, in the search for justice and liberation in Malawi, of reading the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed. Serious questions have been raised in Malawian Church and Society concerning the inferiority and subordination of women and the oppressed, particularly the poor and marginalised groups and their role and place in the holy ministry. Since the establishment of the Presbyterian Church in Malawi nearly 130 years ago, women and the oppressed groups have been discriminated against in various ways. They have not taken an active share and responsibility in the whole community life of society, and have not participated fully and more widely in the various fields of the Church's structures.

The coming of Missionaries to Malawi set a solid Christian foundation. The bible which they brought has been used by the church and individual members for cultural, educational, socio-political and religious transformation. However, despite this foundation, women have continued to experience a subordinate social status both domestically and in society. Their low status stems from traditional values and cultural practices, as well as religious prescriptions, low education and low economic status. Men have taken advantage of their societal and religious position to exploit and marginalise women and the oppressed groups. The problem is located in the understanding and interpretation of the bible. The patriarchal religion found in the bible has immensely contributed to the oppression and exploitation of women in our churches and societies. The biblical readings that have dominated in churches are patriarchal and androcentric. These patriarchal readings put women and the oppressed on the periphery and displace them as if they are insignificant in history and social life.

In respect to this, the thesis critically challenges the patriarchal reading of the texts which oppresses and marginalises women, and seeks to bring respect and dignity to them by employing a historical critical reading that leads to a liberative reading. Since patriarchal reading of the texts does not bring justice and liberation to women, the thesis engages in a liberative reading that traces and restores women's history in Mark. Our liberative reading claims that the Christian past is not just a male past where women participated only on the fringes or were not active at all, but it is as well a women's own

past. Hence, the readings of Mark 5:24-43 & 7:24-30 provide sufficient indicators for such a history of women as followers of Jesus and leading members of the early Christian communities. Thus our historical critical reading seeks to transform patriarchal reading of the texts to liberative readings that incorporate all people, men and women, upper and lower classes, different cultures and races, the powerful and the weak. Reading Mark 5:24-43 and 7:24-30 liberatively, the Markan Jesus announces the in-breaking of God's Kingdom as good news to the impoverished (e.g. the hemorrhaging woman is defined her impurity) and outcasts (e.g. the Syrophenician woman is defined by virtue of her nationality, as pagan) among its people. This inclusiveness of the Markan Jesus involves female members of Israel and Gentiles as equal members of the community. The reality of these women's engagement and their encounter with the Markan Jesus portray an active leadership and thereby precedes the androcentric injunctions for women's role and behaviour. These texts of Mark should be understood as faith responses to concrete historical situations, because biblical revelation and truth are given in these texts. Therefore, critical liberative reading transcends the patriarchal frameworks and allows for a vision of Christian women as historical and theological actors and subjects. Reading these texts critically challenges the patriarchal domination within biblical religion and seeks to recover the biblical heritage of women and the oppressed for the sake of empowering them in their struggle for justice and liberation. These discussions provide new lenses that enable one to read the biblical texts in a liberative light, in order to engage in the struggle for women's liberation inspired by the Markan vision of the discipleship of equals. I believe this reading enables us to re-evaluate the question of the role and place of women and the oppressed in the present Church and Society by attempting to read the bible through their eyes. This new reading and understanding in this area finally comes to influence and affect the life of every Christian in the Church and Society. In our interpretation of the biblical texts, we employ the results of current biblical scholarship and attempt to remain free of the culturally conditioned presuppositions of other eras.

The specific interest in this reading is to provide a necessary standard of judgement which ensures critical readings of the texts. My reading the bible with ordinary readers in Contextual Bible Studies (CBS) attempts to structure the relationship between ordinary readers and trained readers whereby all of us are involved in the act of reading, and hence constitute a community of readers within our particular socio-cultural realm.

Both readers see the bible as the major source from which we as a community of readers work. Even though each one of us works from different standpoints and perspectives with different agendas, by coming together and interacting in such a way contributes to working out of each other's agendas. And this contributes to bringing about justice and liberation for women and the oppressed in Malawi. This reading inspires Christians to participate in social justice, so ensuring that every individual is treated as an equal human being. Social justice, freedom and equality for all are natural things for every individual in the Church and Community for mutual existence. We need to realise that basic elements of justice and freedom for women and the oppressed cannot be resolved by violence and fraud, but through love. Reading the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed offers the possibility for harmonious society which could produce a life of partnership of equals in the community.

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Abbreviations of Periodicals, Other Reference Works and Names

AACC	All Africa Council of Churches
<i>ADB</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AEA	Association of Evangelicals of Africa
<i>AFER</i>	<i>African Ecclesial Review</i>
Aford	Alliance for Democracy
AICs	African Independent Churches
ALC	African Lakes Corporation
<i>AM</i>	<i>Atlantic Monthly</i>
BAGD	W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker, <i>Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
b.	Babylonian Talmud
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BI</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BIS</i>	<i>Biblical Inter-textuality Studies</i>
BR	Biblical Review
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theological Bulletin</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>Bible Today</i>
<i>BQ</i>	<i>Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
CBS	Contextual Bible Studies
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>Cross Current</i>
CCA LI	Church of Central Africa Livingstonia
CCAP	Church of Central Africa Presbyterian
CCM	Christian Council of Malawi
CLAIM	Christian Literature Association in Malawi
<i>CSSH</i>	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
<i>CTP</i>	<i>Concilium Theology Periodicals</i>
<i>CQR</i>	<i>Church Quarterly Review</i>
CYF	Christian Youth Fellowship
<i>CW</i>	<i>Catholic World</i>
DRCM	Dutch Reformed Church Mission
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>ET</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>EvTh</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
FBBS	Facet Books, Biblical Series
GABLE	Girls Attainment of Basic Literacy and Education
GEAW	Global Education Action Week
GK	Greek
<i>HBD</i>	<i>Harper's Bible Dictionary</i>
HI	History in Israel
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HST	History of the Synoptic Tradition
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary

<i>IDB</i>	<i>International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>IHS</i>	Integrated Household Survey
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBT</i>	<i>Journal of Black Theology</i>
<i>JCE</i>	<i>Junior Certificate of Education</i>
<i>JCG</i>	<i>Journal of Cultural Geography</i>
<i>JES</i>	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal for Expository Times Series</i>
<i>JFSR</i>	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
<i>JH</i>	<i>Journal of Humanities</i>
<i>JIT</i>	<i>Journal of Inculturation Theology</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JRC</i>	<i>Journal for Religion and Culture</i>
<i>JRH</i>	<i>Journal for Religion and Health</i>
<i>JRH</i>	<i>Journal for Religion and History</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSOT Press</i>	Journal for the Study of Old Testament Press
<i>JSPSup</i>	Journal for the study of Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
<i>JSR</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Religion</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTSA</i>	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal for Theological Studies</i>
<i>JTSS</i>	<i>Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls</i>
<i>Lis</i>	<i>Listening</i>
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah
<i>MASAF</i>	Malawi Social Action Fund
<i>MCC</i>	Malawi Council of Churches
<i>MCP</i>	Malawi Congress Party
<i>MDHS</i>	Malawi Demographic Household Survey
<i>MIITEP</i>	Malawi Integrated In-Service Teacher Education Programme
<i>MNA</i>	Malawi National Authority
<i>MSCE</i>	Malawi School Certificate of Education
<i>MSSSP</i>	Malawi School Support Systems Programme
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic text
<i>NAC</i>	Nyasaland African Congress
<i>NALP</i>	National Adult Literacy Programme
<i>NedTTs</i>	<i>Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
<i>NLH</i>	<i>New Literary History</i>
<i>NSO</i>	National Statistical Office
<i>NT</i>	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NTT</i>	New Testament Theology

<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
OT	Old Testament
<i>OTP</i>	<i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i>
PAC	Public Affairs Committee
PACWA	Pan African Christian Women Alliance
PSLCE	Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RHI</i>	<i>Researches in the History of Israel</i>
<i>RL</i>	<i>Religion in Life</i>
SAARC	Southern Africa Alliance of Reformed Churches
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJBC	Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNT	Studies in the New Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and its World
SOT	Studies in the Old Testament
SR	Studies in Religion
t	Tosephta
<i>TB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TMC</i>	<i>The Modern Churchman</i>
<i>Trans</i>	<i>Transformation</i>
<i>TT</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UDF	United Democratic Party
UMCA	Universities Mission to Central Africa
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen
y	Yerushalmi = Jerusalem
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Problem

During the proclamation of the Gospel message in Africa by Western Missionaries, Africans were taught the importance of believing in Jesus Christ for assurance in ending their spiritual and physical sufferings. Africans were also made to believe that they were on a pilgrimage, moving towards an imminent Parousia. Therefore, it was needless to concentrate on the earthly problems that plagued them. However, as Paul Sampley¹ notes, there was little reflection on the fact that believers are also citizens of this world, living their lives here and now. They are facing the daily problems involving social, economic, and political instability as they wait for the final consummation. Sampley points out that ‘though one’s commonwealth is elsewhere, citizenship is exercised in this world despite one’s dissonance with the world and those who live according to it.’² Through biblical teachings, missionaries presented Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world, upon whom all must rely for salvation. The coming of Jesus Christ into the world meant release to the captives, regaining of sight by the blind and the liberation of the oppressed (Lk. 4:18-19; cf. Isa. 61: 1-2). But what went wrong with that sound christological teaching to the extent that the African people, especially women, have constantly found themselves under the most extreme, devastating and dehumanising circumstances anyone can imagine, such as, poverty, famine, political instability, oppression, subordination, suppression, torture and disease?³

Critics of Christianity in Africa have blamed these problems on christology claiming that the Christ preached to African people was wrapped in foreign cultural clothing. As Nicholas Mbogu argues, Africa,

‘clings to a Christ taught in foreign images. The call for an African christology is aimed at de-colonizing Christ and consequently theology in the sense that what we received is no longer adequate for our present state of Christian reality. This does not mean that what we received was not true message, but is a sign of growth after “two thousand years of African Christianity.”’⁴

¹ Sampley, J.P. *Walking Between the Times: Paul’s Moral Reasoning*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, p.28.

² Sampley, J.P. 1991, p. 28.

³ My understanding is that sound christological teaching would neither put an end to these problems, nor does Scripture give assurances. Even the approach of christology does not rule out the people’s frustration in a christology which they believe has not helped them very much, but a christology which concentrates on the relationship and behaviour of people in the community can surely make a difference. In this sense, if we take into considerations the cultural, philosophical, economic, social and political problems of African people.

⁴ Mbogu, N.I. “Christology in Contemporary Africa: A prologomenon foa a Theology of Development” in *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)* 33, no. 4, August, 1991, pp. 214-230, but here pp. 223-224.

Looking at this statement, especially the use of words, “de-colonizing Christ”, I would assume that Mbogu does not distinguish between colonisers and missionaries. While I agree that there were circumstances where missionaries aided colonisers in their mission to colonise the African people⁵, this need not also convince me to conclude that Christ was also “colonised.” The main issue to me is not of developing a new Christology, but rather reverting to the bible and examining how various writers present the message of Jesus Christ. In this sense, we need to decolonise biblical readings not Christ, to recognise an imperialising text, so that its effects are exposed and ways are sought to perceive and promote difference. It is factual that missionaries did not take into consideration the cultural, philosophical, economic, social and political problems African women were facing. The flaws of the early teachings in Africa make it incumbent upon African theologians to develop some biblical readings relevant to the African people and the situation.

Furthermore, missionaries were greatly impeded in their perception of both African religion and African humanity as a whole by their prejudices against them. They were further inhibited by the then evolutionary view of the human race and of religions. According to Kibicho, this explains why conversion to Christianity had to involve,

‘The abandonment and renunciation not only of traditional African ways of worship, sacrifices to the Supreme Being, communion with the ancestral spirits and other holy rites – but also the abandonment and renunciation of African cultural customs and practices including songs and dances. All of them together were referred to as “things of the devil.” Almost the whole of the traditional African culture was seen as being the Kingdom of the Prince of Darkness, and the African peoples were summoned by the missionaries to come out of it completely, root, stock and branch.’⁶

Given this stance by missionaries, modern African biblical scholars were challenged to reclaim the bible for an African church that has been using Western missionary approaches which do not resonate with the concerns, questions and insights of the ordinary Africans. African biblical scholars were to take into serious consideration the traditional African beliefs and practices which were abandoned or overlooked by Western missionaries in interpreting

⁵ Mishra, V. and Hodge, B. “What is Post (-) colonialism?” pp. 276-90, in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Mishra and Hodge say ‘on the African continent more so than anywhere else colonialism was justified and effected through Christian Religion, (see p. 288). The classic approach of Dr. David Livingstone eloquently sums up, imperialism and colonialism in African nations was championed through a complex network of ‘Christianity, Commerce, and Civilisation’, in Thomas Norman E. (ed.), in *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995, pp. 67-68.

⁶ Kibicho, S. “The Continuity of the African Concept of God into and through Christianity: A Kikuyu Case Study”, in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, edited by E. Fasholeluke, R. Gray, A. Hastings & G. Taise, London: Rex Collins, 1978, pp. 370-388, but here p. 378.

the bible for African use. Thus, as Teresa Hinga reiterates, the bible has been the focus of scholarly attention for being one of the main resources for biblical studies. Academics seek to present the bible in its own terms by seeking to analyse the bible as literature (literary criticism) and as history (historical criticism).⁷ Since African nations are struggling to emerge from the whole experience of being subjected to this dehumanising oppression and exploitation, one cannot leave aside the question of how can we read the Bible as post-colonial subjects?⁸

The low status of women in Malawian society stems from traditional and cultural values, religious prescriptions, and low economic status. Men tend to take an advantage of their societal perception to exploit women and girls to satisfy their interests. The overall subordinate status of women, both domestically and in society, is the underlying cause of their weaker economic position. Consequently, my motivation to research about reclaiming the bible for the oppressed and marginalised women in church and society by doing liberative readings started soon after ordination to the Priesthood in 1991. For a long period since the Presbyterian Church was established in Malawi in 1875, women have been oppressed and subordinated. Though they are in the majority in most congregations and though some churches like Blantyre and Livingstonia Synods have begun ordaining women to ministerial positions, the church structures continue to be patriarchal and male-dominated. For instance, in other churches women are excluded from performing baptisms and distributing Holy Communion and there is a pervasive attitude arising from a complex interplay of cultural practice and the Levitical texts that women are unclean as a result of menstruation (Lev. 15). The conflict over women arises because pastors have been trained to maintain the status quo and uphold the interpretative methodology of the church establishment, which in most cases marginalises women and does not resonate with the concerns, questions and issues related to women. Thus the church too remains a site of struggle, and because of this I want to reclaim the bible through liberative readings that sometimes challenge conventional church readings that oppress women, in order to bring justice and liberation to them. In this sense, women will survive in their churches and communities by criticising the power dynamics in both church and society, particularly, in the area of their subjugation. As far as the society or community is

⁷ Hinga, T.M. 'Reading With: An Exploration of the Interface between "Critical" and "Ordinary" readings of the Bible: A Response', in *Semeia* 73, 1996, pp. 277-284.

⁸ Dube, M.W. 1996, p. 122.

concerned, male dominance subjugates women by employing traditional beliefs and practices, while in the church conventional readings of the church establishment are used.

Even though the Government of Malawi prescribed that women have the right to full and equal protection by law and invalidated any law that discriminates against women on the basis of gender or marital status⁹, nevertheless, they are lagging behind. And despite making advancement in eliminating customs and practices that discriminate against women and despite little improvements in their status, women continue to face serious constraints in achieving equality with men. Some of the problems that women face today are: sexual abuse; heavy workload; restrictive societal attitude; harassment; domestic violence; lack of equal access to education; a weak decision-making position; deprivation of property and lack of economic opportunities. Thus, this thesis would like to look at issues relating to women's rights and the social, political and economic spheres in which women need empowerment. Throughout the above social and ecclesiastical history, the Bible has played and will continue to play a significant role in the life of Christians in Malawi. The question many people have been asking is, 'what does the bible say to us in this situation?' This thesis is trying to work out what God says in the bible in this context of women's suffering, oppression and marginalisation.

Given these circumstances what kinds of biblical readings can African biblical scholars develop? How can Jesus Christ, who was not originally known to African people in their 'African Traditional Religions'¹⁰, be preached to people who are still very much embedded in their traditional practices? How possible is it for African biblical scholars to develop their readings based on the bible, while at the same time using relevant elements from their African Traditional Religions, without making a compromise? How can African biblical scholars develop biblically and culturally based readings which address the political, economic, and social problems that exist in Africa today without being accused by their Western counterparts of politicising and syncretising biblical texts? How are African believers in Jesus Christ

⁹ The Republic of Malawi, "Rights of Women", in *The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi*, Lilongwe, Malawi, 2000.

¹⁰The expression, 'African Traditional Religions' is used to refer to traditional practices and concepts that are foundational and handed down from generation to generation, and are still practised by men and women in Africa today. These are inherited practices and concepts which connect the practitioners to the past and the present, and likewise it prepares them for the future. These practices and concepts have a very strong grip on the African people.

particularly women going to behave today in the church and community, knowing their subjugation and exploitation, as they await the Parousia? In general, how are Africans going to find solutions to their problems? All these questions and problems, I believe should be addressed in the course of this thesis.

The thesis would like to challenge the perpetuating patterns of domination and subordination women experience in their churches and communities. It wants to empower women to speak out rather than following the traditional biblical interpretations. The thesis would also like to bring conscious awareness of the fact that biblical texts were not born in an imperialist setting particularly Mark's Gospel. Although they have been unique in sponsoring imperialist agendas over different times and people therefore we need to be integrated in the readings that are for justice and liberation. To engage in dialogue with biblical texts, we need to get involved in what Lategan calls 'critical activity'.¹¹ Lategan points out that the 'very critical activity which is the core business of the critic depends on an (ongoing) act of reading, and everything said about the text, its origin, background, and history.'¹² To use a phrase from J.C. Scott, we need to engage in 'a more nuanced literary reading of the written text in order to bring out the hidden elements of resistance that it contains.'¹³ Musa Dube is also of the view that readers must become 'decolonising readers'¹⁴ to demonstrate awareness of imperialism as a persistent and explosive force.¹⁵ Readers must demonstrate a conscious adoption of resistance to imperialism and must struggle to map ways that are liberative of interdependence in the multi-cultural global world. Therefore, if one perpetuates decolonising, he/she is likely to maintain the imperial strategies of exploitation and subjugation and does not build necessary political coalitions among feminists of different cultures, nations, colours, classes, and sexuality.¹⁶

The bible as a book introduced by Westerners is bound to its imperialist history of subjugation and oppression. As Mary Tolbert asserts, 'the observation that the impetus towards

¹¹ Lategan, B. "Scholar and Ordinary Reader – More than a simple interface", in *Semeia* 73, 1996, pp. 243-255.

¹² Lategan, B. 1996, pp. 243-244.

¹³ Scott, J.C. *Domination and the Acts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven & London: Yale Press, 1990, p. 160.

¹⁴ Dube, M.W. 1996. A 'decolonising reader', according to Dube is, 'one who strives to recognise an imperializing text: how it represents other lands and people, how it claims a self justifying power to travel, to enter different nations, to observe and to teach them, and how it uses gender to legitimize the exploitative imposition of universal standards.' She goes further to say, 'a decolonizing reader strives to arrest the violence of an imperializing text by exposing its effect and seeking ways of perceiving and promoting difference', (p. 123).

¹⁵ Dube, M.W. 1997, p. 22.

¹⁶ Dube, M.W. 1997, p. 22.

recognising oppression and struggling for liberation is in part constituted by the perspectives of Christianity.¹⁷ Tolbert is of the view that the bible justifies oppression, but the only tool at hand to dismantle these oppressive patterns are ironically the insights provided in the same bible by different patterns. The point she is making here is that we should not only look at the bible as a justification for oppression but also as a justification for liberation. Thus, this imperialist history has constructed all of us, and we cannot bracket its reality from our critical practice without perpetuating the history of unequal inclusion. Therefore, we are challenged to become decolonising readers to build true conversations of equal subjects in the post-colonial and multi-cultural world.¹⁸ Although, there are differences of race, sexuality, religion and class, women of the world should be treated as equal subjects. Hence the critical practice should be multi-cultural in a post-colonial open-space. The bible, then, is not only a book that has justified slavery, economic exploitation, and sexual oppression; it is also a book that has informed liberation, the infinite worth of the individual, and the call to fight against evil.

We are aware that the bible came into existence in a strongly patriarchal environment and is a product of its time hence a patriarchal bias in the text itself is to be expected. Christian ideology has indeed contributed to the oppression of women. The oppression of women has eventually made some to think that the bible is one of the primary tools of patriarchy and thus they have abandoned it as a source of authority, direction, or comfort. I agree with Phyllis Tribble that dismissing the bible is a big error, because ‘in rejecting Scripture women ironically accept male chauvinistic interpretations and thereby capitulate to the very view they are protesting.’¹⁹ However, others believe that the bible is the authoritative word of God and that ‘any discussion of its patriarchal ethos is at best nonsense and at worse heresy.’²⁰ The bible is regarded literally as God's own divinely inspired word and directly communicated to human beings, hence it has authority over people's life, and should therefore, be accepted without question. But their view is not convincing because they interpret the bible as the divine word of God literally. But the truth is that the bible is also patriarchal and androcentric.

¹⁷ Tolbert, M.A. “Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics”, in *Semeia* 28, 1983, p. 120.

¹⁸ Dube, M.W. 1997, p. 23.

Tribble, P., 1973, p. 31.

¹⁹ Tribble, P., 1973, p. 31.

²⁰ Thurston, B. *Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998, p. 1.

Given the subordination and marginalisation of women, the most important school of justice is the biblical tradition. We have to engage with the primary task of feminist interpreters to present the bible in ways that neutralise oppressive potential and that invoke its liberating power on behalf of the victims of church and society. In doing this, we need to remain firmly within the Christian tradition or church and community. The patriarchal readings of these texts motivated me to find further liberative readings by looking at them in a historical critical perspective and from the perspective of the oppressed women. It is against this one sided reading of the text or the attention to one voice, that the bible needs to be reclaimed through liberative readings that bring justice, peace and freedom to women. It is this lack of wholeness and interconnectedness in churches and societies alike that necessitates a complete rethink of religious and secular structures. Thus, liberative readings of the bible point to this lack and offer a solution away from competitiveness and domination. The thesis is an attempt to discuss the role and place of women in churches and societies, bearing in mind their limitation, oppression and subjugation. Hence, it is about telling the leadership in churches and societies of the hurt and slight liberation done to women and felt by women. It is also about articulating the experiences felt by women in their churches and societies. As Dorothea McEwan asserts, it is 'a feeling of disillusionment, frustration, impatience with incomprehension displayed by leadership when dealing with women.'²¹

The fact is that the praxis of religion is restrictive to women, and not holistic, inclusive, interconnected and not a liberating experience. The churches continue to overlook the totality of their mission by concentrating their efforts on safeguarding discipline and tradition. By overlooking the totality of their mission, I feel that the churches are sadly dragging behind their own rhetoric of justice and peace while at the same time ignoring this vision of inclusiveness and interconnectedness to the wider society. Therefore, the critique of Christianity is not a question of reforming a theology and biblical reading which have been formulated and pursued from a male perspective, but transforming a one-sided theology and biblical reading into a universal experience built on male and female perspectives.

²¹ McEwan, D. (ed.), *Women Experiencing Church: A Documentation of Alienation*, Great Britain: Billing & Sons Ltd, 1991, p. viii.

1.2. The Purpose of the Thesis

Throughout church history, Christians have been engaged in trying to understand and figure out the role and place of women in churches and societies by focusing their attention on the bible. Some have looked at the bible and concluded that it is the source of all the problems women are facing today for its patriarchal and androcentric stance. The bible has supported the subordination of women. However, others have made substantial efforts by looking at the bible and discovering the potentials of women's history. As Constance Parvey²² rightly noted, the New Testament gives us two messages with regard to women. First, it presents a theology of equality in Christ, that is, a vision of equality on the theological level. Second, in practical exhortation many New Testament passages support women's subordination, that is, they present a status quo ethic on the social level. Parvey's analysis is fundamentally correct. In trying to answer the question, how does the bible portray the role and place of women? the thesis would like to adequately address the concerns and issues that affect the daily living of women in churches and communities. Looking at the bible from two angles leaves us with two issues. The issue that the bible is to blame for the low status of women in churches and societies, for supporting subordination; and the issue that the same bible is to be praised or used for improving the status of women, that is, for standing with women in search of liberation. That is, the bible is indeed a symbol of the presence of the God of the life with women. So even though many people are Christians in Malawi, especially women, the bible is both the oppressor and the liberator. The latter is what this thesis wants to achieve in reclaiming the bible from the patriarchal and male-dominated readings to universal and liberative readings.

Given the above situation, firstly, the purpose of this thesis is pastoral. I want to see a liberative and holistic approach to bible readings, examining what God has done in Jesus Christ and humanity's response. With regard to women, I want to demonstrate that early Christianity was a movement of liberation, in which the God of the New Testament revealed in Jesus Christ is the God of Hebrew Scripture. Truly, he/she is a God of justice, a God with an ear especially turned toward the oppressed and disenfranchised. I want to argue further that cultures and societies presented or described God in male or patriarchal terms, but this does not make God male or patriarchal. The New Testament is the literary record of God's dramatic

²² Parvey, C. "The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament", in *Religion and Sexism*, edited by R.R. Ruether, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974, p. 124.

attempt to be better known by human beings. If Authors of the bible in some ways fell short of God's self-revelation, it is not the fault of God, but theirs. After all, it was the Word that became flesh not book.

The thesis will, therefore, concentrate on how we can reclaim the bible through the readings that liberate women and the oppressed. In order to achieve this, we have to concentrate our focus on the proclamation of the good news Jesus brings to humanity. It is the message of salvation which transforms life through partnership and equality. Focusing on Jesus Christ who is the chief liberator and liberates holistically, we have to examine how faith in Jesus Christ affects one's action in the community in the face of economic devastation, social injustice and political upheavals. To achieve this, we need to critique the distortion of the Gospel message of equality by patriarchy and the patriarchalisation of authority in the churches and societies. Conducting liberative readings of the bible is a move to locate the Gospel message and its application in daily life in the person and community of believers and not in the bureaucratic apparatus of the male-dominated churches and societies. As Christ's faithful we share in the concerns and goals of our faith community. As churches and societies do not exist in vacuum, the good of any church and society involves an open relationship of the faithful with each other.

Secondly, the purpose of the thesis is to argue that the bible is a liberating book. This point is against some of the advocates of the women's movement who argue that the bible is patriarchal and therefore should be abandoned or rejected completely. Instead, I will focus my attention on the Gospel of Mark, by arguing that Mark brings out the liberating egalitarian vision of the Gospel. Mark also came to understand that the Gospel of Jesus Christ broke down traditional barriers in his society. And the barrier of gender is but one example of the wider issue for Mark. While I admit that it is also an androcentric or patriarchal text, I will argue that this is a liberating Gospel in the Christian Testament for oppressed and marginalised groups. The narrative portrays the availability of God's blessings now and draws on the apocalyptic worldview. For Mark, God's new age had begun with Jesus' ministry. The present evil age will be consummated with the new age. Hence the narrative's liberation begins in the present. Mark had a vision of human liberation. The Markan Jesus acts to include and make whole all peoples. Thus, Mark points forward to a new egalitarian community, and his teaching and practice with regard to women were radically egalitarian. Therefore, the bible contains liberating resources, for it subverts oppressive powers and brings

those who are at the margins of society to come to God's Kingdom. This is what we will encounter in Mark 5: 24-34 and 7: 24-30. So the liberating message that the bible brings is the proclamation of the good news which calls hearers to be followers of the risen Jesus, to participate in the blessings of the realm of God that is already present, and also the suffering and persecution that discipleship entails.

Thirdly, the other purpose of the thesis is to advocate democracy in the church and society. Churches played an enormous role on political democratisation in Malawi but have not practically applied the very tenets of democracy in their own places. So the purpose of this thesis is to remind the churches that Christianity is an “inside-out”. It is about practising what we preach starting from inside (our churches) and progressing outside (secular world). It is about removing your own beam first before removing your friend's beam (see Mat. 7:3-5). The advocacy, therefore, is for a full and equal participation of women in churches and societies. It is a vision of change and acceptance of change. It is about expanding women's role, not role reversal, the exclusion of men. By knowing that the bible liberates and shows no partiality, the thesis would like to urge church and society leaderships to take immediate steps towards women's justice and liberation. They have to know that talents, skills, charisms and insights are not the monopoly of men, but are freely given to all women and men by the Creator. Thus, women too want to bring into their churches and societies their gifts, talents, insights and skills as women, not modeled on old territorial structures, but born out of practical living by networking and mutual support.

In support of this purpose, chapter 6 looks at contextual bible study (CBS) which is seen as a catalyst for women's democracy in Malawi.²³ The aim of carrying out CBS is to provide resources for people to read the bible independently, thereby, assisting individuals, communities and society to transform and deepen their love and knowledge of God, the scriptures and one another. It also seeks to make a difference through their faith-in-action. Reading the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed gives us a belief that God's words have liberating and transforming power in people's lives.

²³ West, G.O. *Contextual Bible Study*, Pietermaritz: Cluster, 1993, p. 65. According to Gerald West, the CBS starts with the needs and concerns of the poor and marginalised black communities in South Africa. Similarly, my CBS reading starts with women and other oppressed groups who have also been marginalised and subordinated by the patriarchal readings of the texts.

This power can be discerned especially through insights and concerns of the marginalized, subordinated, voiceless, and oppressed in society and in our faith community. The democracy, therefore, comes in the value of creating a dialogue between the scriptures and experiences of contemporary humanity. As the community of believers, all Christians are called to express their faith in action that seeks to transform the world.

When people read the bible democratically or independently, they bring their own special positive contribution of experience, insight and faith which encourage and inspire a positive experience of sharing one's faith in a group context. So, the purpose of CBS is to let people engage in a dynamic dialogue with the scriptures rather than in a more passive way. Here people see for themselves what the texts are saying and how they have been abused or misused. Thereafter, they go on judging and eventually putting them into action. To achieve this, they take a communal, close, contextual and critical reading of scriptures. As they read the scriptures, they read as a group or as an individual by being sensitive to the word spoken afresh in this community of believers gathered around scriptures. They read closely with extra care by polishing or refining their interpretative skills and theological reflection. They also pay close attention to the languages and structures of the texts themselves. In doing this, they faithfully and creatively critique their traditions. In all this the methodological principle is to encourage the transformation of individuals and groups in their particular social and religious contexts. Therefore, the CBS is a catalyst for women's democracy, whereby people exercise their freedom to read or see scriptures, then judge and finally act upon what they have seen and judged through their own experiences, insights and faith. This is achieved by taking a communal, close, contextual and critical reading of scripture.

Thus, the thesis looks at the gender of women as freely bestowed on them by God and not as a deficiency as measured against the male-norm. In this sense, the widening of societal concerns to be inclusive will touch men and women and will be liberating for men and women. The purpose of the thesis, therefore, is to remind churches to look again at the early churches which were truly democratic institutions, open to men and women, Jews and Gentiles, even if some members of the churches found it difficult to welcome Gentiles. But it did happen and it was a vital step towards the development of Christianity, for the understanding of the Gospel message by the individual. Using the historical critical reading enables us to move beyond the Gospel texts to the historical reality of Jesus and his inclusive movement. Why can't the church of the 21st century revert to the democratic principles of the

early churches? I believe this thesis points to the vision of wholeness and total acceptance of everybody, as the way of affirming everyone and transforming everything. Undoubtedly, the Gospel authors did not simply want to establish what Jesus said and did, rather, they attempted to comprehend what Jesus meant to his first followers and what impact his life had for their own time and communities. Similarly, the goal of this thesis is the transformation of religion, the affirmation of the believers, women and men, in the spirit of wholeness. We are all Christians because of the salvific message of Christ and not because of conventional and cultural setting which are conditioned and officiated in churches and societies. If the church and community are to build up the Kingdom, they have to do so locally, democratically and inclusively.

1.3. Limitation to Mark's Gospel

My interest in reclaiming the bible for Malawian women through liberative readings resonates with the concerns and questions of women. I want to take into serious consideration the readings that can liberate women and put them on equal standing with men in church and society. These are the readings that have been overlooked by male-dominated churches in interpreting the bible in Malawi. My interest, therefore, has been kindled by the Gospel of Mark which was the first amongst all the Gospels to be written. Like all Gospels, Mark, the earliest Canonical Gospel, is a popular work intended to evoke faith that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. Scholars suggest that the Gospel was probably written around the time of the Jewish War, that is, between 65 and 75 AD. Most scholars think it was before the destruction (cf. Mk 13) of the Temple in 70 AD, since its destruction does not seem to be reflected in the text. Having said this, it is not my intention to make an investigation on the liberative readings based on the whole New Testament and the history of Christian Church. However, this does not contain or limit by research to Mark's Gospel only, but further references to other biblical texts are employed.

Given its earliest compilation, I have chosen to do my research with Mark's Gospel for three reasons. Firstly, it contains or represents early traditions or materials that are liberative to women and the oppressed. The Gospel draws on the apocalyptic worldview which was very common among first-century Jews and Christian. For Mark, God's new age had begun with Jesus' ministry (cf. 1:1; 2: 22-24), where the present evil age will be consummated with the new age. Hence the narrative liberation begins in the present. Therefore, the narrative portrays the availability of God's blessings now. The purpose of the Gospel of Mark is not to provide

information about the life, work and death of Jesus, but to proclaim the good news. It is about comprehending the meaning of his life to our individual and communal life of our own time. That is why Mark calls hearers to be followers of the risen Jesus and to participate in the blessings of the realm of God that is already present and also the suffering and persecution that discipleship entails (cf. 8:34-35; 9:35).

Secondly, Mark is open in terms of women on purity. The treatment of women on purity if exploited in a popular view, as we shall see in chapters 3 to 5, in a critical and contextual manner brings justice and liberation to women and the oppressed. Hence, it is a liberative Gospel to bear fruits in Malawi. Mark presents a Jesus who acts to include and make whole all peoples regardless of sex, gender, class or colour. His views differ from the Jews who protected God's holiness from pollution, impurity or uncleanness. But Mark presents a Jesus who has contact with the unclean people or things that pollute the pure (see chapters 4 & 5). For instance, women were considered less pure than men and were a threat to male purity (see chapter 3). The Jews; as chapters 3 to 5 discuss, applied these purity rules strictly. But the Markan Jesus had an alternative view, instead of understanding contact with the unclean as polluting the pure, he enacted God's holiness by ignoring boundaries and declaring clean what was unclean (e.g. 7:15). The Markan Jesus, therefore, wipes out the distinction against women that was based on the pervasive purity codes.

Thirdly, the Gospel of Mark presents a non-authoritarian egalitarian view of the community. It regards women and the oppressed in their own right, no longer as property of men (cf. 10:31). Similarly, the children who were considered the weakest are at the centre of God's realm (cf. 9: 35-37; 10:1- 3, 42-45). Instead, those with more power are called to serve, not to exert their power on the less privileged and status (8:34-37). They are also called to take up their crosses and follow, to lose their lives for the Gospel of Jesus; and also to be "last of all and servant of all" (9:35). Looking at the Jewish ethos of the story itself and taking into account the wider Greco-Roman culture in which the story occurred and recorded, for women to become prominent disciples and witnesses of the Markan Jesus is undoubtedly the prime example of the last becoming the first.

Having identified my interest in focusing on the Gospel of Mark, I now want to discuss in detail the reason for this choice and the message the Gospel of Mark communicates. It is not possible to treat each of the 16 occurrences of women in Mark's Gospel in detail, but a

detailed analysis and commentary on two choices is essential. The following reasons complement my choice of Mark's Gospel, especially 5:24-34 and 7:24-30. In the 16 chapters of Mark, there are 13 texts in which women are central to the narrative. These are 1:30-31; 3:31-35; 5:21-24, 35-43; 5:24-34; 6:3; 6:14-29; 7:24-30; 12:41-44; 14:3-9; 14:14, 66-69; 15:40-41, 47 and 16:1-8. The appearance of these women makes one recall that the many Markan "crowd scenes" would have been made up of both women and men. The Jewish women in rural Palestine enjoyed a fair degree of freedom of movement. The hemorrhaging woman in Mark 5 is evidence of this. Truly, Mark's frequent reference to "people", "crowd", and "multitudes" (e.g. 1:4-5, 32-34, 45; 2:1, 12; 3:7-12, 20; 4:1; 5:14; 6:30-36, 53-56; 7:14, 33, 37; 8:1-9; 9:14; 10: 34, 46; 11:1-11; 15:8) would have included women. Thus women would have experienced Jesus in his public role as miracle worker and teacher. They would have been amazed, followed, participated in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and perhaps the call for Jesus' crucifixion. When picturing these crowd scenes, it is important to picture them with women present.

However, Mark's Gospel like all other biblical books is patriarchal and androcentric. In the Gospel of Mark, women tend to be invisible and are mentioned in exceptional plots. The way he portrays women followers of Jesus assumes male as human norm and females inferior. He mentions disciples throughout the narrative and it is only in chapters 15 & 16 where women are mentioned, who had travelled, followed and ministered with Jesus. In this sense, Mark is minimising and obscuring the role and place of women. But despite this it is a liberating Gospel which, according to Elisabeth Fiorenza, 'presents a non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian egalitarian view of community.'²⁴ Fiorenza is of the view that the Gospel understands women as people in their own right, not as the property of men. So Fiorenza aims to show that the Gospel bears witness to the egalitarian stance of the early Christian community.²⁵ As far as Mark is concerned, the followers of Jesus Christ include the disciples (1:18, 20; 6:1; 10:28), the crowd (1:16-20; 3:13-19), women (5:24-34; 7:24-30; 14:3-9; 15:40-16:8), and certain exceptional individuals like Jairus (5:22-24a, 35-43), Bartimaeus (10:46-52), the Centurion (15:39) and Joseph of Arimathea (15:42-46). It is also anyone who takes up His cross and

²⁴ Fiorenza, E.S. (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary* (vol. 2), SCM Press, Britain, 1995, 470.

²⁵ Fiorenza, E.S. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, Great Britain: SCM Press, 1983, p. 316.

follows Him (8:34-38); and whoever does the will of God (3:31-35). Women used to follow Jesus and provided for him when he was in Galilee (15:40-41). Significantly, “to follow” is a technical term for discipleship throughout Mark's Gospel. Also, the word for “διηκονούν” is probably more accurately translated “ministered” or “served”, the term which describes the central aspect of Jesus’ own ministry and that required of his disciples. Furthermore, Mark 15:41 notes that there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem (cf. Lk. 8:1-3). This is an indicator to the original circle of Galilean disciples that it included women and that perhaps they were present when Jesus gave special instructions to disciples. Therefore, Mark 4:10 and 15:40-41 suggest that so much as we picture women in the crowds in the Gospel of Mark, perhaps we must as well include women in the group we picture when encountering the term disciples. Mark's narrative portrays the women disciples rather better than do the male followers of Jesus.

However, these followers are portrayed in positive and negative ways in relation to Jesus Christ. For instance, the disciples misunderstand the meaning of discipleship, that is, Jesus’ person, mission, and teaching (e.g. 6:35-36, 49, 52; 8:16-21; 9:32-37, 38-41; 10:35-45; 13:1). Both the disciples and the crowds abandon Jesus (14: 10, 43, 50, 66-72; 14: 43, 56; 15: 8, 11, 15); women followed Jesus at his crucifixion, by looking ‘at a distance’ (15:40). Thus, the disciples, the crowd and women are all fallible followers. So the message Mark communicates clearly and powerfully, as Elizabeth Malbon reiterates, is that, ‘anyone can be follower, no one finds it easy.’²⁶ The depiction of disciples, the crowd and women as fallible followers succinctly narrates that discipleship is ‘both open-ended and demanding; followership is neither exclusive nor easy.’²⁷ However, the exceptional individual characters of Jairus, Bartimaeus, the Centurion and Joseph of the Arimathea exemplify to the reader what following Jesus entails. Furthermore, Tannehill makes note of these characters in relation to Jesus and the disciples that these characters ‘replace the disciples in the roles which they fail to fulfil’, and ‘point the way which contrasts with the disciples’ failure.’²⁸

From the first-century Jewish and Jewish-Christian point of view, one could hardly be more of an outsider to the central dramas of religious faith and practice than a Roman Centurion or

²⁶ Malbon, E.S. “Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark”, pp. 29-48, in *The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics*, *Semeia* 28, 1983, p. 46.

²⁷ Malbon, E.S. 1983, p. 32.

²⁸ Tannehill, R. “The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role”, in *JRJ7*, 1977, p. 405.

a woman. But the good news of Jesus according to the good news of Mark bases the reversal of “outsiders” and “insiders”. For instance, as Malbon asserts, ‘being family (expected insider status) does not necessarily make one a follower (true insider status, see 3:31-35); instead, being a follower makes one family (see 10:28-31).’²⁹ Mark elaborates the point by saying, ‘many who are the first will be last, and the last will be first’ (10:31). Truly, in the first-century Jewish world, Roman Centurions were surely among, “the last”, and in the first-century Jewish, Christian and Roman worlds, women were surely among “the last”.³⁰ So, according to Mark, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is indeed the beginning of the end of that old order, which was limiting and exclusive. However, Winsome Munro claims that Mark is so caught up in the old order that his narrative suppresses the discipleship of women that was an historical part of the new order inaugurated by Jesus’ ministry and the early Christian response to it.³¹ But I want to contrast Munro’s view by taking up Malbon’s view that the narrative of Gospel of Mark is ‘permeated by the reversal of expectations - historically conditioned expectations.’³² Malbon is of the view that the Gospel of Mark seems to support together the status and discipleship of the historical reality of women, by making a surprise narrative reality of women characters who serve as an example to the demands of discipleship.

So, my interest in the Gospel of Mark relates to the dramatic turning point between the old order and the new age in the message of Jesus Christ. Since my main focus in this thesis is liberation and justice for women in Malawi, I find Mark portraying the same message. We shall see in the course of this thesis the detailed arguments why I find the Gospel of Mark portraying an inclusive ministry. I am fully convinced that Mark sees the message of Jesus focusing on creating a new community where barriers between men and women, and between Jews and Gentiles are broken. Thus, the new creation in Mark points forward to a new egalitarian community. It is a community where we shall see women disciples of Jesus moving forward from the male-dominated family to a new eschatological community where God alone is Father (cf. 3:35). As Fiorenza reiterates, the description of God as Father (11:25; 14:36) defeats the power and status of human fathers in the patriarchal structures of the

²⁹ Malbon, E.S. 1983, p. 33.

³⁰ See Stendahl, K. “The Bible and the Role of Women”, in *FBBS 15*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966, pp. 25-28.

³¹ Munro, W. “Women Disciples in Mark?” in *CBQ 44*, 1982, pp. 225-42, but here pp. 234-41.

³² Malbon, E.S. 1983, pp. 42-43.

Greco-Roman World.³³

That is why Tolbert argues that the accounts of the Hemorrhaging woman (5:24-34), the Syrophenician woman (7:24-30) and the woman who anoints Jesus (14:3-9) feature women breaking boundaries and can therefore apply to women members of Mark's community who have set aside traditional behaviour to become Christians. Boundaries structure our world, but when these boundaries are changed, our structures no longer function in the ways we are accustomed to, and there is room for growth. The Gospel of Mark precisely focuses on the new creation which has room to accommodate all who take up the cross of Jesus and follow him, and also all who do the will of God.

1.4. Methodology

The first procedural step has been the determination of the problem that warrants my motivation to research about the reclaiming of the bible for women through liberative readings. For African (Malawian) women to see justice and liberation from the male-dominated churches and societies, we need to go back to the bible and re-read the texts taking into account the concerns, questions and issues of women and the oppressed. In order to establish the basis for reclaiming the bible for women, it is necessary to read the texts closely, critically and contextually. In this thesis I have approached my research by using historical critical and contextual studies to critique the traditional or conventional readings in search for justice and liberation for women and the oppressed. The problem that we have had in churches is the traditional reading or dominant interpretative discourses of biblical texts. In early Christian history, androcentric culture and religion have defined women hence this is an object of our historical analysis. The historical analysis in this thesis critically reveals what patriarchal history is all about, and thereby attempts to reconstruct the history of women in Mark as a challenge to historical-religious patriarchy. While a patriarchal reading does not bring justice and liberation to women in our texts a historical critical reading model integrates with them positively by moving beyond the androcentric biblical text to its social-historical contexts. The historical critical reading enables us to argue that women were not marginal in the earliest beginnings of Christianity; rather biblical texts and historical sources have produced the marginality of women and the oppressed. The historical critical reading attends to different voices in the texts, in our case, what the Markan Jesus says to the hemorrhaging

³³ Fiorenza, E.S., 1983, pp. 147-48.

and Syrophenician women (5:24-34 & 7:24-30) respectively and what they say to him. By attending to different voices in the texts we engage in a liberative reading whereby we trace the patriarchal reading of the texts on one hand and a liberative reading on the other. In this way, this analysis gives us a glimpse that reflects the biblical texts in their patriarchal cultural environment but also continues to allow a glimpse of the Markan Jesus' movement as a discipleship of equals. In the discipleship of equals the role of women is not peripheral or trivial, but at the centre and thus of utmost importance to the praxis of solidarity. The Kingdom vision of the Markan Jesus calls all women without exception to wholeness and selfhood as well as solidarity with those women who are impoverished, the wounded, and outcasts of our society and church.

Since the bible is not only a historical collection of writings but also Holy Scripture, a Gospel for Christians today, as such it informs not only theology but also the commitment of many women today. By employing historical analysis of these texts through liberative readings, we bring about a Christian history in which women are not hidden and invisible. For instance, although the Syrophenician woman respects the primacy of the "children of Israel" (7:28), she nevertheless makes a theological argument against limiting the inclusive Messianic table fellowship of Jesus to Israel alone. Undoubtedly, such a theological argument placed in the mouth of a woman is a sign of the historical leadership women had in opening up Jesus' movement and community to "Gentile" sinners" (cf. Gal 2:15b). This historical development was of utmost significance for the beginnings of Christianity. Women who had experienced the gracious goodness of the Markan Jesus were active participants in expanding his inclusive missionary movement in Galilee and in developing a theological argument from his traditions as to why pagans should have access to the Kingdom of God and share in the superabundance of the Messianic table fellowship. By challenging the Galilean Markan Jesus' movement to extend its table sharing and the Kingdom of God's power which is experientially available also to the Gentiles, these women safeguard the inclusive discipleship of equals called forth by the Markan Jesus to be discovered and realised by women and men today. This woman whose skillful argument opened up a future of freedom and wholeness to her daughter, I believe, has also become the historically visible advocate of such a future for Gentiles. She has become, as Elisabeth Fiorenza asserts, 'the apostolic "foremother" of all Gentile Christians.'³⁴ Biblical texts and tradition formulated and codified by patriarchal readings will

³⁴ Fiorenza, E.S., 1983, p. 138.

remain oppressive to women unless the stories and history of women in Mark are historically critically conceptualised as an integral part of the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the historical critical reading of Markan texts in this thesis aims at empowering women and the oppressed in their struggle against such oppressive patriarchal religious structures. It seeks to bring about change by rejecting the cultural premise of the historical invisibility of most women and the oppressed. It also brings to the attention that women are also historical agents who have also produced, shaped, and sustained social life in general and Christian socio-religious relations in particular. Thus the thesis attempts to make women more visible within and central to its historical nature. Its basic point asserts the fact that both women and men have acted in history and shaped socio-political, cultural and religious life in the past.³⁵

Similarly, when we do the CBS process, we read the texts critically and liberatively. This process is also aware that cultural conditions and perspectives of the bible are that of patriarchy. It is also aware that patriarchal imagery and androcentric language are the form but not the content of biblical message. Hence, reading the texts contextually stresses the interaction between the text and situation. This reading challenges the traditional readings of the text, and makes clear that Christ's work was not first of, as Letty Russell asserts, 'all that of being a male but that of being the new human.'³⁶ This new humanness incorporates women and men so that the Gospel can become again a power for the salvation of us all. The CBS process enables people to read the texts through their own eyes, perspective or context in such a way that texts speak to and are illuminated by their own contexts and perspectives. It enables men to read with women and, therefore, to have their subjectivity enlarged, beginning to move to a community of equals. This reading is a responsible reading for it involves the choice we make and subverts traditional readings that are dominatory.

In sum, the patriarchal readings of the texts are limited in their indebtedness, for they are bound by their culture and their reading of the text is one-sided. However, the historical critical study and contextual study that are used in this thesis are a medium which provide a close, careful and critical reading of the texts. They identify elements used to abuse or capable of abuse. But, at the same time, they also show how texts are liberative, that is, how the bible

³⁵ Canning, K. "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historizing Discourse and Experience," *Signs* 19, 1994, pp. 339-404.

³⁶ Russell, L. *Human Liberation in a feminist Perspective*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974, p. 79.

may empower women, how Jesus empowers women. They also allow people to read the texts through their own eyes and to subvert dominant readings. These readings are critical of how scripture has been used, hence they attend to both voices, that is, different voices, different things told. Reading texts in this way constructs meanings and enables people to interact with texts. It rejects the dominant reading or traditional reading/interpretation of texts used by missionaries and male-dominated churches in Malawi. Instead, it serves the purpose of empowering women and the oppressed by showing the presence of a discipleship of equals. Thus, both readings seek to recover the Christian heritage of women and the oppressed because this is their power, as Judy Chicago says, 'our heritage is power'.³⁷

That is why I have chosen to conduct an exegetical and an analytical study of the Hemorrhaging woman (Mk 5:24-34) and the Syrophenician woman (Mk 7:24-30) by reading these texts liberatively. These are my foundational texts for this thesis. In these texts, Mark records Jesus breaking boundaries by healing the impure woman and the daughter of a foreign nation; and also by annulling the Jewish purity codes, and thereby widening the table fellowship among the Jesus' followers. The breaking down of Jewish purity codes and crossing boundaries set free these women from chronic ailment and death. Hence, they are liberated from their oppression and exploitation and have now claimed their wholeness. As they were "outsiders" through impurity and by virtue of nationality (Gentile), the Markan Jesus liberates them from their bondage. So, these texts set the goal of my thesis, which is, bringing justice and liberation to Malawian women through the means of a liberative readings.

As an African, I would apply the positive principles of reading the texts from an African context or perspective. However, I am aware that Africans are not living on an island, cut off from the rest of the world, to run away from ideas, information and categories used by other civilisations. Truly, ideas are interdependent just as there is economic interdependence. Hence, African biblical scholars can discreetly make use of both Western and African traditional values in developing liberative readings that address the plight of women in Africa socially, economically and politically. The test of adequacy for the plight of African women requires that salvation for them must include economic, social and political liberation. The link between economic, social and political liberation stems from the fact that life in Africa is

³⁷ Chicago, J. *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage*, New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1979, pp. 241-51.

perceived in its wholeness. Africans view life not in terms of dichotomies of the sacred and the secular. Instead, African people understand and interpret everything religiously. Therefore, when Africans talk of their faith in Jesus Christ, they include the economic, social and political upheavals that are in existent in their societies today. It is for this reason that my thesis would endeavour a holistic approach towards women's justice and liberation in church and society. Because Jesus died for all, the Gospel message is not a private matter; it has to be lived in the community and shared with others. Although every individual makes his/her personal response to the Gospel message, it becomes the involvement of the whole community when it comes to living that same message. After all, believers practice their faith in community. That is why Leonardo Boff criticises the privatisation of the Gospel message and accuses the West of reducing the Gospel message 'to a decision of faith made by individuals without relation to the social and historical world, their natural context,³⁸ he believes that the message of Jesus Christ is relational. As he says,

‘The message of Christ assumes a critical liberating function against repressive situations, be they religious or political. He did not come to found a new religion but to bring a new humanity. Thus, Jesus Christ and his mission cannot simply be put into the framework of religious canons. He transcends the sacred and the profane, the secular and the religious.’³⁹

Jesus Christ is at the centre of all human struggles and he is the only one to bring change in the life of an individual. The message that Mark tries to communicate to us is an announcement, a call of faith inviting the believer to take up the cross of Christ, and thus justified, to participate in the resurrection. Therefore, believing in Jesus Christ is an experience and achievement of redemption. As indicated by Boff, belief in Jesus Christ has to shape and work out an option in society.⁴⁰ That option which I am providing for African society, particularly women, is reclaiming the bible for women through liberative readings, which I believe will bring solutions to economic, social and political problems. Unless there is justice and liberation, women will continue to lag behind. Unless they are empowered, they won't be able to actively participate in the economic, social and political life. For women to achieve these things the bible is the main resource. But, since the bible has always been read

³⁸ Boff, L. *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989, p. 25.

³⁹ Boff, L., 1989, p. 26.

⁴⁰ Boff, L., 1989, p. 29.

and interpreted from a male perspective, and their readings have been oppressive, suppressive and exploitative to women, it is high time to search for liberative readings. And this is precisely what this thesis would like to work on.

The thesis is divided into 8 chapters. Chapter 1 sets the stage for the whole thesis and covers material relating to the background upon which the thesis is built. It starts by stating the problem under investigation, in this case, the oppression and subordination of women in churches and societies. It is because of this that we need to reclaim the bible for women by using liberative readings. The chapter also states the purpose of the project that is, reclaiming the bible for women through a liberative and holistic approach; arguing that the bible is a liberative book; and advocating democracy in churches and societies. The chapter also raises the question as to why I made the choice of Mark's Gospel, particularly, 5:24-34 & 7:24-30, as my main interest for this research. Finally, chapter 1 indicates the methodology used.

Chapter 2 sets the historical situation of the beginning of the Presbyterian mission in Malawi, particularly, my own church, the Livingstonia (Mission) Synod which was founded in 1875. The chapter discusses the establishment of Livingstonia Mission and the impact of the mission on cultural, educational, socio-political and religious transformation. It also discusses the concerns about a male- dominated church which oppresses and subordinates women. It also focuses on the dream of Dr David Livingstone who set up a Christian Foundation to Malawi. In his dream he wanted to open a gateway to Christianity and Commerce to Africa. Furthermore, chapter 2 analyses the impact of the Livingstonia mission in individual and societal transformation, looking at three main tools which missionaries used such as, commerce, education, and evangelism. Lastly, the chapter examines the role and participation of women in Malawi, particularly the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Livingstonia Synod from 1875 to 2000. This relates how women responded to the call for equality in the church and society by fellow African Christian women theologians and other women movements.

Having discussed the impact of the bible brought by missionaries to Malawi and the way that Malawians received the Gospel message, I will analyse the reading of Mark's Gospel (5:24-43 & 7:24-30) through the historical critical study in search of justice and liberation for women and the oppressed. I feel this reading helps Malawians because it criticises the traditional understanding and interpretation of the bible. It is not critical of or rejecting the bible itself but

rejecting the traditional or conventional reading interpretations. That is, rejecting the one-sided reading of the text or dominating one text, instead attending to both or different voices or different things told in the text. Therefore, this historical reading broadens the interpretation and thereby enables one to sharpen those issues affecting women in their struggle for justice and liberation. The reading also overcomes all impositions on women and offers the chance to every reader to read these texts differently, in my case, reading through the eyes of women and the oppressed. Therefore, historical reading empowers and assists a contemporary reader in understanding the social context of these stories. In summary, this reading raises awareness of how the bible has been misused and therefore encourages a liberative mode of reading the bible. It is one way of recovering the bible because it empowers women and the oppressed.

Chapter 3 sets the stage for chapter 4, in which I underline two main lines of interpretation of Mark 5:24-34. In this chapter, some scholars argue that this story is not about purity and it is not about setting aside purity regulations by the Markan Jesus. They say it is only about the miraculous healing of the hemorrhaging woman. But some of them admit that though the story is not about purity, it does not mean that Mark is not interested in purity, for in 7:1-23, Mark records about Jesus annulling purity food laws. However, other scholars argue that this story is about purity and the setting aside of purity laws. They look at the healing of the bleeding woman who according to Levitical purity laws was impure. But the Markan Jesus dialogues with the woman and eventually heals her from her chronic ailment. To them, the Markan Jesus' association with this woman and the healing shows that the internal boundaries are crossed. As for me, I support the latter view, and this is what I argue in this chapter. My argument in support of purity and the setting aside of purity laws by way of revision is based on three points. Firstly, I look at the linguistic echoes between Mark and Leviticus 12:7 and 15:19-33 LXX. Secondly, I argue by exploring the general views about purity in Mark's wider work. And lastly, I base my argument by looking at the issue of menstruation in Mark's cultural environment. The issue about purity is the real issue I faced in Malawi when carrying out my CBS process which is discussed in chapter 6. Therefore, these texts can be read as liberating women from the social stigma and discrimination attached to such conditions. After laying the foundation that the story concerns purity and the crossing of internal boundaries by the Markan Jesus, then we will now look at the detailed exegetical part of the story. This is precisely what chapter 4 discusses.

Chapter 4 analyses the detailed account of the healing of the hemorrhaging woman and also discusses the impact of raising Jairus' daughter in relation to the hemorrhaging woman (Mk 5:24-43). While it is true that this story discloses a miraculous healing of the hemorrhaging woman and the raising of Jairus' daughter, there is also an issue of purity in the background. According to Leviticus 12 and 15, the hemorrhaging woman and Jesus transgress the law by touching a garment and the daughter of Jairus respectively. Furthermore, the chapter explores the redefinition or revision of purity rules in Mark. It also looks at the model of discipleship this woman portrays in the Markan community. Lastly but not least, chapter 4 examines the Christological prefiguration of the women's bodies. Thereafter, it explores the implication of these miraculous healings, which signal the breaking in of the Kingdom of God and thus the creation of the new order, according to Markan perspective.

Chapter 5 concentrates on an encounter of the Markan Jesus with the Syrophenician woman and the raising of her daughter (7:24-30). It is about Mark's presentation of Jesus, whereby He breaks barriers and crosses boundaries, thereby introducing a new order. The chapter opens by looking at the Jewish understanding of Land and Purity, and also Mark's understanding of Land and Purity. Thereafter, it engages in a detailed exegetical analysis about the dialogue between Jesus and the woman and her witty response. Furthermore, it focuses on the importance of faith-response; the setting of an inclusive mission which Mark drives at; and the Eucharistic imagery that is echoed in this story.

Chapter 6 looks at the impact of Contextual Bible Study on women's justice and liberation. The chapter analyses and reflects on the CBS process conducted in the Northern Region of Malawi with ordinary readers of five different denominations. The aim was to see the usage and readings of the bible by ordinary people. The chapter focuses on liberative readings by considering the concerns, questions and issues affecting women and the oppressed. In the five CB Studies that we read and discussed, we (that is, 'I' as trained reader and 'Participants' as ordinary readers) brought the interests and perspectives of women to our readings of these texts which are patriarchal in nature. Firstly, an elaboration of the importance, aims and commitments that were undertaken when carrying out a series of bible studies in various churches is made. Questions (*see index 1*) were designed to enable the participants to read the texts closely and communally. They were designed to help participants draw out the relationship of the text to their context and the context of the text itself. Detailed responses from participants are recorded in this study. The chapter concludes with the outcome and the

findings from these extensive bible studies, by way of evaluation of ordinary readers who participated in reading with trained readers using the CBS hermeneutical practice. The study finally concludes with an evaluation of the entire research work that the researcher carried out in Malawi. It looks at the importance of the CBS process with the ordinary readers or untrained Christians and the way forward to achieve a liberated community of women and men in the church and society. The researcher hoped that this process would empower women and map ways of reading and living that fight gender oppression and affirm the agency of women.⁴¹

Chapter 7 is a study of the questionnaire. My interest in using this particular survey is because of the issues concerning the relationship between ordinary readers and the bible. My need was to investigate the relationship between the ordinary reader and the biblical texts and concepts. I wanted to find out how ordinary readers read the bible. The questionnaire circulated among eighty people. The theme to the questionnaire was ‘Women and Empowerment.’ This survey was used to have detailed information on people’s attitudes, knowledge, inner feelings, fears and desires as they relate to scriptures. I wanted to explore the liberative readings ordinary people use to interpret the bible. The questionnaire was designed with four sub-parts (*see index 2*), that is, personal identification; the role and place of women in church and society; ordination of women to Sacramental ministry; and the impact of tradition and culture. The objective of this Questionnaire was to determine the attitudes of ordinary people to their understanding and interpretation of scriptures as regards women’s issues and the way they apply this in their daily lives, homes, workplaces and public life. And secondly I wanted to determine the cultural influences on the interpretation and use of the scriptures.

Furthermore, I was influenced to include the third part of my chapter from the responses that I got from the respondents on my last question in the questionnaire. The question says, ‘*Do you have any further comments to make on this questionnaire?*’ The responses that I got enabled me to include in my study the concept of Gender and the factors that influenced Gender imbalance. From the responses, it seems people have not understood this term properly hence

⁴¹ Dube, M. W. “Readings of Semoya (Spirit): Batswana Women’s Interpretation of Matt. 15: 21-28,” in *Semeia* 73, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996, p. 122. Also compare Anderson J. C. *Mark & Methods: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, pp. 103-34.

its contribution to women's subordination and oppression in church and society. From my assessment the real problem lies with illiteracy where women are the most vulnerable. It is because of this that I conclude my study by looking at the impact of Girls Education as a major way of narrowing the gender gaps and achieving the goal of empowering women in church and society.

Finally, chapter 8 is a summary and recommendations for reclaiming the bible for women through liberative readings. The conclusion stipulates the overall message that the thesis addresses and the way forward to achieving women's justice and liberation. It summarises that the bible and women's experiences are the resources for women's empowerment in the church. Therefore, readers should encounter texts differently, knowing their experiences, questions, concerns and issues that affect their daily livelihoods. Since the bible does not contain a single voice, readers should read the bible from their own perspective. In the case of this thesis, I have argued that we should read the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed, in search of justice and liberation in Malawi. In this way, we are reclaiming it for women and the oppressed through our liberative readings. So, the bible being the main focus of this thesis for Malawian women's justice and liberation, our second chapter explores how the bible was brought to Africa (Malawi). It sets the foundation for all that is going to be discussed in the thesis. Therefore, the establishment and development of Livingstonia Mission by the Free Church of Scotland in 1875 is the starting place for exploring women's justice and liberation, and thereby reclaiming the bible for them through liberative readings.

Chapter 2

The use of the Bible in the Livingstonia Mission of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) 1875 – 2000: In the light of liberative goals for women’s justice and active participation

2.1. Introduction

The Churches in Malawi have been doing tremendous work since the establishment of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by the early missionaries in 1861.⁴² Thus, missions in Malawi preceded colonial Government which was established in May 1891 when the British Protectorate was declared. By this time there were already three Presbyterian Missions working in the area. Since that time remarkable things have happened and the Churches have grown tremendously in terms of population.⁴³ Surely, the impact of Christianity is one of the great themes in the modern history of Malawi as we shall see later in the chapter. The formidable work that took place was their involvement in challenging ‘the cultural and political independence of the area’, as McCracken asserts.⁴⁴ The bible which missionaries brought to Africa is and has been one of the basic sources for Malawians and indeed our theology. However, in these 125 years women have been oppressed and marginalised in a number of ways. Patriarchy has constructed women in such a way as to influence their image of their place and role in Church and society.⁴⁵ Men have dominated in most of the decision-making bodies and church administration; hence women have been pushed to the periphery of meaningful participation and the discipleship of equality.

⁴² The first mission to come to Malawi after the inspiration of Dr David Livingstone’s speech and appeal to the University of Cambridge in 1857 was the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), a high Church Anglican body. They arrived and established their first station at Magomero near Lake Malawi, under the leadership of Bishop Mackenzie. The Scottish missions, that is, the Free Church of Scotland and the Established Church of Scotland came in after more than fourteen years and established their first mission stations in 1875 and 1876 respectively.

⁴³ About 66% of the population in Malawi are Christians, which gives a rough record of close to 7 million people out of a population of 11 million. For instance, in particular to Presbyterian Church of Livingstonia Mission, Dr. Robert Laws in his book *Reminiscences of Livingstonia*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1934, p. 177, records that: there were 9 men and women in the first ten years of mission work who converted to Christ, but the number had grown to 24, 361 communicants at the close of 1932. Today, Livingstonia Synod has more than 150,000 communicants.

⁴⁴ Mc Cracken, J. “Religion and Politics in Northern Ngoniland, 1881-1904,” in *The Early History of Malawi*, edited by B. Pachai, London: Longman Group Ltd, 1972.

⁴⁵ Phiri, I.A.. *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi*, Blantyre, Malawi: CLAIM, 1997, p. 12.

When Christianity came to Malawi, it is a fact that it came as a male dominated religion. Thus anything that was incompatible with this view was subdued completely and women were not spared in their oppression and subordination. As Adrian Hastings rightly argued, women were not a special case in the impact which missionaries made upon 19th century Africa.⁴⁶ This means, according to Isabel Phiri's analysis, 'that freedom from cultural oppression for African women, as a result of the coming of Christianity, came as a coincidence rather than a formulated understanding of their salvation.'⁴⁷ The policies of the missionaries in their work with the cultures of local people depended on the rulings of their home mission.

Given this background, the aim of this chapter is to show that during those 125 years, the Church has on the one hand used the bible in freeing and empowering women from oppressive cultural practices; however, on the other hand, the Church has maintained a patriarchal theology that oppresses and subordinates women and restricts them from meaningful participation in Church and society. The oppression and subordination of women has impelled me to re-read the bible because it has remarkable resources to reclaim the glory of women that was experienced in the life and ministry of Jesus of the early Church. Therefore, the bible does not only oppress women but it has also liberating potential for women. As Gerald West asserts, 'the cry of the poor and the oppressed to re-read the bible arises from the recognition of the bible as both a problem and a solution, as both oppressive and liberatory.'⁴⁸

The relation of the bible to the oppressed can be captured in a story by Mofokeng which says, 'when the white man came to our country he had the bible and we had the land. The white man said to us "let us pray". After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the bible.'⁴⁹ According to West, Mofokeng's story spells three significant realities. The first thing is that, it reiterates how 'the bible occupies the central position in the process of oppression and exploitation.' Secondly, there is a reflection of truth between 'the oppressor and the oppressed sharing the same Bible and the same faith.' And thirdly, 'the repeated telling of the story reminds us of the victims of biblical interpretation and challenges us to read the bible and its interpretations critically.'⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Hastings, A. *African Catholicism: Essays in Discovery*, London: SCM Press, 1989, p. 36.

⁴⁷ Phiri, I.A., 1997, p. 48.

⁴⁸ West, G.O., 1993, p. 61.

⁴⁹ Mofokeng, T. "Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation," in *JBT* 2, 1988, pp. 34-42, but here p. 34.

⁵⁰ West, G.O., 1993, p. 61.

In relation to Malawi, this story reminds me of the establishment of colonial rule under the British Protectorate in 1891, where the Malawian understanding of political power, according to Kenneth Ross, ‘was conditioned by 70 years of alien colonial rule.’⁵¹ But we reclaimed and regained our land, dignity and identity in 1964 when we became independent. Therefore, the story of Mofokeng recalls another thing, that is, the way Malawian Christians have critically understood and interpreted the bible in relation to the poor, oppressed, marginalised and subordinated groups in Church and society, in which women are the most affected group. In this study I would like to look at the bible as the liberatory tool that many Malawians and their forefathers have found in their own experiences and in the struggle against women’s oppression. I would discuss how the bible has inspired and sustained them in their struggle.

My concern for the Church at this time is that in the Malawian context, people are not very much aware that the oppression of women has yet to be adequately addressed. The subordination and marginalisation of women had a long history even during the time of missionaries.⁵² Cultural assumptions about the inferiority of women to men, the understanding that the job of women was restricted to the house and the rearing of children denigrated the place and role of women in the family, society and community.⁵³ These cultural attitudes had great impact in making men superior to women. The coming of missionaries introduced the bible to Malawians, and they did their best to preach the gospel of peace and to encourage a desire for social change. In theory, as McCracken asserts, both ‘African and Scottish agents had a single view in seeking to break the control of polygamous husbands over their wives, thus transforming the position of women in society.’⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ross, K.R. “The Transformation of Power in Malawi 1992-94: the Role of the Christian Churches,” in *God, People and Power in Malawi: Democratization in Theological Perspective*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Blantyre: A Kachere Monograph, CLAIM, 1996, p. 15.

⁵² Chanock, M.L. “Development and Change in the history of Malawi,” in *The Early History of Malawi*, edited by Pachai, B., London: Longman Group Ltd, 1972, p. 438. Here Chanock reiterates that, “most innovating of missions did not make a startling attack on the position of women in society.” Indeed, even though both churches and sects attracted large numbers of women, the educational opportunities for them were even more restricted than those for men, claims Chanock. Similar views are asserted by McCracken, J. in his article, “Livingstone and the Aftermath: the Origins and Development of Livingstonia Mission,” p. 251 in *Livingstone: Man of Africa*, edited by Pachai, B., England: Longman Group Ltd, 1973. He reports the observation of Major C.A. Edwards in 1897 that the “girls school at Livingstonia ... called up visions of housekeepers and female servants in the days to come.” This tells us that women’s oppression was an issue that even missionaries could not address appropriately.

⁵³ McCracken, J. *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in Northern Province*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p.253. McCracken observes that “the skills taught” at the Overtoun Institution “were frequently of use only in a subordinate and domestic role.”

⁵⁴ McCracken, J., 1977, p. 253.

However, in practice, the impact of the Church was much more limited because many girls married early or were refused additional school fees by their families.⁵⁵ This later statement shows that to a certain extent some cultures and customs of native Malawians also contributed to the marginalisation of women. Hence, little was done to remove the negative cultural attitudes that oppressed and marginalised women in church and society. Patriarchal rule was reinforced even when the church became autonomous, headed by native church leaders; hence very little was done to address the situation. The image and understanding of the role and place of women in the church was based on the particular interpretations of Scriptural texts which were often used in this way. They quoted scriptures like Gen. 3:16; Num. 30:3-12; 1 Cor. 14:34-38; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 2:18; Tit. 2:5 and 1 Tim. 2:8-15 to support their objections. These texts were interpreted as divine sanctions against women's equal participation in the church and society, and were interpreted as saying that women were created from men, after men and were for men's advantage.⁵⁶ The temptation that the woman endured in Genesis 3:16 was believed to be the basis of the divine law that man should be the head of the woman. The problem was that such texts were read literally, uncritically and without reference to their wider context. In her book, Catherine Booth echoes that 'these texts were read very differently even in the last century'⁵⁷ from other texts of the bible. She says, other texts such as the Gospels that provide guidelines for handling women's issues in the church and society were entirely ignored.

Moreover, it seems, according to the Churches' understanding and interpretation of these texts, that the ruling power was only granted to men and not to women.⁵⁸ Consequently, it would be theologically wrong for the Churches to give power to women. For instance, in the Questionnaire that circulated to all three CCAP Synods in Malawi from the Co-ordinator of Women's Ordination Project of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), there was an interesting response from Rev. Augustine Mbezuma Mfuno the former General Secretary of Livingstonia Synod dated July 03, 1990. In his response he said, 'While I do not have reasons to deny women's ordination, there is no one who has so far felt the call to Holy

⁵⁵ McCracken, J., 1977, p. 253.

⁵⁶ Drury, C. "Christianity," In *Women in Religion*, edited by Jean Holm and John Bowker, Great Britain: Biddles Ltd, 1994, p. 34.

Phiri, I.A., 1977, p. 60 note 41. Isabel Phiri is right to treat this response as representing the personal views of the respondent, as he says, "I" and not of the General Synod of Church of Central Africa Presbyterian.

⁵⁷ Booth, C. *Female Ministry: Woman's Right to preach the Gospel*, London: Morgan & Chase, 1959.

⁵⁸ Phiri, I.A., 1997, p. 59.

Ministry. In the fullness of time women will be ordained.’⁵⁹ If one considers and analyses Mfune’s response critically, the main blockade to the ordination of women to Sacramental Ministry was that of timing. Interestingly, the respondent takes for granted as if the Synod had advertised to the Congregations and nothing had come out from women. Furthermore, the response does not say what is meant by ‘fullness of time.’ Is it five years from that time, or ten years, or twenty years or fifty years or hundred years? It is, therefore, against such religious and cultural discrimination that a search for women’s liberation in the church and society needs to be sought. It is against this religious and cultural denigration that women have experienced so far, that they need to be empowered. It is against these official teachings inherited by the church that have made things unchanged, that liberation in this context is sought. It is against these man-made interpretations of the bible that the yoke of limitation needs to be broken.

2.2. Dr David Livingstone: Setting a solid Christian foundation

Malawi is land-locked Country, known as Nyasaland in the colonial days. Geographically, Malawi borders Tanzania to the north, Zambia to the west and Mozambique to the east and south. The Christian Churches were the main contributors to the historical development of the Country. The first European to travel extensively and identify the Shire Highlands as a suitable area for European settlement was Dr David Livingstone, the Scottish Missionary. He hoped this settlement might become an open path to Africa for Christianity and Commerce.⁶⁰ Livingstone had for a long time acquired a horror of the slave trade and was immensely distressed to hear of the imports of sugar and cotton to Britain as a production of slave labour in the southern States in America.⁶¹ In order to bring slavery to an end in the Western world, he planned to find a land where these products could be cultivated efficiently by free labour to bring commercial benefit to the native people. As Williams asserts, Livingstone ‘thought that opportunities were being wasted and the prodigality of the Lord was being spurned.’⁶² He insisted, as Seaver observes, ‘how many millions might flourish in this Africa, where but hundreds dwell.’⁶³ Surely, the influence of Livingstone on British opinion was considerable before he embarked on the Zambezi expedition, and this was far greater at the time of his

⁵⁹ Phiri, I.A., 1977, p. 60 note 41. Isabel Phiri is right to treat this response as representing the personal views of the respondent, as he says, “I” and not of the General Synod of Church of Central Africa Presbyterian.

⁶⁰ Pachai, B. “The Zambezi Expedition 1858-1864: New Highways for Old,” in *Livingstone: Man of Africa*, edited by B. Pachai, London: Longman, 1973, pp. 29-60.

⁶¹ Williams, T.D. *Malawi: The Politics of Despair*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 39.

⁶² Williams, T.D., 1978, p. 40.

⁶³ Seaver, G. *David Livingstone: His Life and Letters*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1975, p. 89.

death in 1874.

Livingstone addressed a meeting at Cambridge University Senate House on the slave trade in Africa before his long expedition to Central Africa. His perfect sentiments were, 'I direct your attention to Africa. I know that in a few years I shall be cut off in that country which is now open; do not let it shut again. I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for Christianity. Do you carry out the work which I have begun. I leave it to you.'⁶⁴ He stressed the need for the introduction of the civilising influence of Christianity to Africa, and he captured completely the public sympathy. Both religious people and politicians supported this campaign against the slave trade. The then Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, as John Pike asserts, had campaigned for sometime against 'the Atlantic slave trade and he now gave his support to an expedition which would combat the trade in East Africa.'⁶⁵ Certainly, the support he got from religious people as well as political leaders influenced Livingstone to spend the remainder of his life seeking to eradicate the slave trade. His desire to open up the heart of Africa to new forms of commerce and religion could only be materialised after the eradication of the slave trade. He believed that the slave trade blocked the fostering of Christian endeavours and the destruction of several obstacles of ignorance, poverty and isolation, which would lead to the growth of civilisation.

The majority of the hearers when he made his famous speech were members of the Church of England, the Anglicans. His speech evoked a response from a wide variety of people. When he appealed for religious reinforcements and for a full-scale attack upon the slave trade, British people listened to him. His appeal for men to join him in building 'a highway for Christianity and Commerce', in Central Africa led to the formation of the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA).⁶⁶ This was a high Church Anglican body, disowning the name of Protestant even though Livingstone was a Free Churchman of Scotland.⁶⁷ This gives the interesting spectacle, as John Weller and Jane Linden say, of 'a staunchly-protestant explorer being the immediate cause of the foundation of a staunchly-catholic missionary

⁶⁴ Rotberg, R.I. *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa: The Making of Malawi and Zambia 1873-1964*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 4, in Monk, W. (ed.), *Dr. Livingstone's Cambridge Lectures*, London, 1860, p. 168.

⁶⁵ Pike, J.G. *Malawi: A Political and Economic History*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1968, p.71.

⁶⁶ UMCA was established by the committees from the Universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Dublin and Durham, as a result of Dr. David Livingstone's famous speech he made to the University of Cambridge in 1875.

⁶⁷ Hanna, A.J. *The Story of the Rhodesians and Nyasaland*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1960, p. 53.

society.’⁶⁸ Certainly, Hanna is right to say that this high Church Anglican body acted like the Apostle Paul, who did not care who preached the Gospel so long as it was in fact preached.⁶⁹ Therefore, the UMCA made the first attempt to penetrate the area from the East-coast. In the course of his Zambezi expedition, Livingstone guided the UMCA to their destination in the Shire Highlands. He successfully pressed them to establish their headquarters at Magomero, because he thought the presence of the mission there would provide a barrier against the slave trade. Livingstone believed that the presence of the mission among people who were harried and enslaved by slave trade would provide a shield and eventually liberate them from the catastrophic situation they were experiencing.

Livingstone was instrumental in founding the first Christian mission to Malawi under the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) in 1861 and in revealing Africa’s geography to Europe. But perhaps, according to Pike, his greatest achievement was in not only being the first European to travel extensively to Central Africa, but in his desire to understand Africans with sympathy and make them intelligible to his fellow Europeans as human beings created in the same image of God.⁷⁰ His immense influence over Africans and his inspiration to other Europeans is the legacy which even today lingers on. Even though David Livingstone died prematurely on the first week of May 1873, his death opened up the heart of Africa to White missionaries, settlers, and colonial governments. Indeed, many in Britain were inspired by the circumstances of his death and his exemplary life and this rekindled their concern with the evangelisation of the Gospel of Christ to turn their attention to Central Africa. The news of his death and his burial ceremony at Westminster Abbey was indeed, as Hanna reiterates, ‘one for rededication rather than for mourning.’⁷¹ Certainly, I would say Livingstone died for Central African people to live. He set the solid Christian foundation that his fellow British people came to build upon. We cannot dispute the fact that tribes had declined because of slave trade. As Pike reiterates, the decline of tribes due to slave trade ‘became so dominant by the second half of the nineteenth century, that some tribal societies seemed almost paralysed.’⁷² But he set a solid foundation to curb the sufferings and nightmares of the native people by clearing a way for his fellow country men to go through, as John the Baptist did for Jesus in Mark 1:1-8.

⁶⁸ Weller J. and Linden J. *Mainstream Christianity to 1980 in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe*, Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984, p. 34.

⁶⁹ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 53.

⁷⁰ Pike, J.G., 1968, p. 70.

⁷¹ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p.54.

⁷² Pike, J.G., 1968, p. 4, which he quotes from G.B. Jones, in *Britain and Nyasaland*, p. 17.

Truly, as Seaver notes, ‘the end of his geographical feat was the beginning of the missionary enterprise.’⁷³

2.3. The establishment and development of Livingstonia mission: The impact of early missionaries

Livingstone died when his vision for Central Africa was not fully realised and it was now proper and realistic to carry on his vision and launch a mission in his memory. For this reason, his vision inspired the Scottish Presbyterian Missionaries to establish mission stations in Malawi in honour of the great explorer, and thereby bring Malawi under the jurisdiction of British people which was eventually realised in 1891.⁷⁴ Dr Stewart was a young minister who was a member of the Free Church and he responded strongly to Livingstone’s appeals. He was also trained as a doctor and visited the Shire while UMCA Missionaries were there. However, Dr Stewart disappointed Livingstone by advising the Free Church not to venture in exploration and establishing mission because conditions were too unsettled and not ripe. In 1866, he sailed to South Africa and began his long and distinguished service at Lovedale,⁷⁵ a great mission in Eastern Cape. In 1874, he was home on leave and was able to attend Livingstone’s funeral and his ceremonial burial in Westminster Abbey.

A few weeks after this occasion, Dr James Stewart strongly revived his mind on the vision which was never completely out of his mind, of a mission by his church to the areas Livingstone had earlier explored. He therefore went to Scotland to consult some influential friends about the mission in honour of the great explorer. He made a notable and moving speech at the General Assembly of the Free Church. In his speech, he proposed that the Free Church of Scotland should commemorate the great explorer by establishing a mission in Africa to carry the name of this very great explorer and to stand as a living memory in his honour for his appealing ideals. The name that he proposed was Livingstonia, as he puts it, ‘a memorial of Livingstone, and the one of all others which I knew very well he would have

⁷³ Seaver, G., 1975, p. 267.

⁷⁴ Ross, A.S. *Blantyre Mission and the Making of Modern Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM, 1996; also Pachai, B.1973, pp. 70-80.

⁷⁵ Lovedale Institution is the Free Church of Scotland higher educational Mission Institution in South Africa which was headed by Dr. James Stewart in early 1870s and was responsible among other jobs, for the training of Artisans and Evangelists. The most prominent persons trained at Lovedale who shaped the history of Livingstonia Mission were William Koyi, Shadrach Ngunana, Isaac Williams Wauchope and Mapas Ntinili, who were selected by Dr Stewart to assist in establishing the mission station at Cape Maclear. These Lovedale men were regarded as the agents of the mission and were all second-generation Christians. As John McCracken asserts, “they were paid at comparable rates to their Scottish colleagues and lived in the same types of houses as did the Scots”, in *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940*, p. 190.

himself preferred.⁷⁶ He thought this was to be an institution for industrial, educational and spiritual awakening, to teach the truths of the Gospel and the arts of civilised life to the natives of the country.⁷⁷ He expressed the hope that ‘it might grow into a town and afterwards into a city, and become a great centre of commerce, civilisation and Christianity.’⁷⁸ Stewart thought the time had come to revive the project after the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) had withdrawn to Zanzibar. He proposed establishing a mission in Central Africa that would carry an ideal living memory for the name of the great explorer. This led to the formation of the Livingstonia Synod that the next section will discuss in detail, under the Free Church of Scotland. Thus, by the end of 1874, both the Free Church and the Established Church of Scotland had committed themselves to memorial missions of David Livingstone. Stewart and Sir John Kirk, who had travelled extensively in Nyasaland (Malawi) recommended that the two Scottish Churches should send their missionaries to ‘the slave-hunting region around Lake Nyasa.’⁷⁹

2.4.i. Life and work at the first station - Cape Maclear

The pioneer party reached the mouth of Zambezi in July 1875, and was headed by Edward D. Young, who had been a member of Livingstone’s Zambezi expedition. For this reason, he had valuable local knowledge. He was working for the Royal Navy which had now given him two years’ leave, hence it would be his task in that period to get the mission established on the shores of Lake Malawi. The other important figure in the party was a seaman, a carpenter, a blacksmith, an engineer, an agriculturist and a doctor, known by the name of Robert Laws. He was a member of the United Presbyterian Church, and it was this Scottish Church that loaned him to join Edward Young. When they arrived at the area, the first thing the new mission brought was the boat known as *Ilala*, after the area where Livingstone had died. The Yao chief Mponda warmly welcomed missionaries and gave them permission to choose a site in the district to establish the mission, and Cape Maclear was therefore chosen. The choice of this site came about because it was lightly populated and was away from the main slave routes. As the agriculturist in the party wrote bluntly, ‘the separation of the people from their tribal chief is, humanly, the only conceivable way in which they can be laid open to the

⁷⁶ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 58.

⁷⁷ Wells, J. Stewart of Lovedale: The Life of James Stewart, London, 1908, p. 125.

⁷⁸ Thompson, J. “The Presbyterians in Malawi”, in Weller J. and Linden J. *Mainstream Christianity to 1980*, p. 40.

⁷⁹ Hanna, A.J. *The Beginnings of Nyasaland and North-Eastern Rhodesia, 1859-95*, Oxford, 1956, p. 13.

reception of Christianity.⁸⁰

After settling down, Missionaries began to implement their policies. Their presence attracted the steady growth of the population. For instance, a census taken in 1880 at the station showed the population of the community in the first 5 years, consisted of 141 men, 202 women, 119 girls, and 128 boys which made a total of 590 in all.⁸¹ When Edward Young returned to Scotland, Dr Stewart who was given leave from Lovedale was now the in-charge for the time being. He brought with him four recruits from Britain, who had joined him at Port Elizabeth - a second minister-doctor, a second agriculturist, an engineer-blacksmith and a weaver. He also brought four Fingo and Xhosa evangelists whom he had recruited at Lovedale; one of these was William Koyi. When the reinforcements arrived, the missionaries were more adequately able to carry out the four tasks which their historian J.W. Jack defines, as, evangelistic, educational, medical and industrial (including agriculture).

There was progress seen in each direction with the command of the diversity of talents by the missionaries. On the Medical and Industrial sides, the results were speedily obtained. Dr Laws, within a few months, begun to perform medical practice. The surgical operations practised by Dr Laws attracted much wonder and drew Malawians from distant centres of the population to the mission. In order to fulfil the vision of Dr David Livingstone to bring commerce to Africa, missionaries also demanded revolutionary economics by asking the native Yao⁸² to abandon trading of slaves and turn to commerce in the Shire river lines.⁸³ Unfortunately, their demands were unacceptable, since natives were deeply involved with the Arabs of the East Coast trade. Hence, there was little impact on the slave trade that was made by the Missionaries in the six years that they spent at Cape Maclear from 1875 to 1881. Subsequently, the Yao increasingly turned to Islam as an alternative historic religion.

The educational side encountered a number of problems. Many of these problems arose from the presence of Kololo Princes from the Lower Shire, who had been sent with attendant slaves by their fathers, Livingstone's former companions. These young men were not willing to be

⁸⁰ Thompson, J., 1980, p. 40.

⁸¹ Livingstone, W.P. *Laws of Livingstonia: A Narrative of Missionary Adventure and Achievement*, London: Holder and Stroughton, 1967, p. 179.

⁸² The Yao originated in the Mangochi District, and they constitute most of the population of Malawi's Southern Region. Their language is Chiyao and the second President of Malawi Dr Bakili Muluzi was a Yao from Machinga District.

⁸³ McCracken, J., 1972, p. 215.

disciplined, but believed they were at liberty to murder their slaves.⁸⁴ However, despite these set backs, the Free Church of Scotland opened a school where reading and writing were taught and parts of the New Testament were committed to memory. Shadrach Ngunana of Lovedale was the best educated teacher and did some commendable work before his death in 1877. By the beginning of 1881, there were 59 boys and 39 girls in the school. The work on education yielded great results, whereby they began systematic school-work and had regular services with the workers in their daily employment. The most important factor was the translation of Christian texts into African languages. They started with the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, then a summary of the parables and miracles of Christ, which paved the way for the translation of the Gospel. The first Gospel Mark was chosen first for being the shortest and the simplest of the Gospels. The first translation of the Gospel of Mark was sent down to Lovedale to print a thousand copies.

The translation of the entire New Testament was done with the selected pupils in their schools who were most competent to work with Dr Laws. To test the translation work, it was read at public worship daily and natives were asked to inform them of any mistakes. The older pupils who were working with Dr Laws used to borrow his manuscript and went out to the villages in the afternoons, and read part of the Gospel to the people there and explained its meaning to them. During his furlough in Scotland, Dr Laws appealed to the National Bible Society of Scotland who kindly agreed to print edition of the five thousand copies of the New Testament, which was in common use until other missions came to different sections of the Nyanja speaking peoples using different dialects.⁸⁵ This led to the formation of a committee composed of representatives of several missions in touch with various dialects of the Nyanja language. By common consent a revised version of the NT was prepared which was later followed by the OT Scriptures. The whole of the bible has now been translated and is published in Nyanja (Chichewa), Yao, Tonga, Ngonde, and Tumbuka. At first there was no written language, but the extension of school work and the preparation of school books in the vernacular prepared the way for the spread of the scriptures. This was the progress made by the missionaries. Natives had the word of God now in their own hands, reading in public and at their village homes.

On the evangelistic side, the work took longer to produce results. From 1875 to 1880, the

⁸⁴ Thompson, J., 1980, p. 42.

⁸⁵ Laws, R., 1934, p. 132.

missionaries had managed to convert none to Christianity. For a long time, their preaching produced what Weller and Linden call, ‘the blank, open-mouthed stare of wondering ignorance,’⁸⁶ but after a time, interest began to be aroused. However, they did not get disappointed with the length of time they spent at the station. Interestingly, the fruit of Dr Laws’ work was realised in a diligent scholar Albert Namalambe, the promising lad who became the head monitor of the school. He was one of the slaves who had been brought to school with the Kololo Princes. Firstly, Dr Laws watched him closely for some time before he handed over to him the bible lessons that he had lived for. According to Livingstone, Albert said, ‘I have listened to some of his appeals to the scholars to believe in Jesus and obey God which for pointed earnestness I could not wish to see excelled.’⁸⁷ The respect and inspiration Albert received from Laws influenced him to take part in the native meetings. Together with fellow lads he would sing and pray in the hall to a late hour. Eventually, Dr Laws took Albert to the Out-Stations and helped him in the services. Albert Namalambe gave a courageous and straight talk to many people. Certainly, Dr Laws was much delighted: as he notes, ‘they can find plenty of excuses to ignore the White man’s teaching but there is no way of escape from Albert’s searching words.’⁸⁸

However, the reality of Albert’s commitment to Christ was realised in February 1881, when he made an enormous decision which he had waited for sometime to spontaneously surrender to the Lordship of Christ. In his words when he met Dr Laws, he said, ‘I have made up my mind to live as a Christian and wish to profess my faith in obedience to our Lord’s command. My only doubt is whether I am fit, and I want you to decide.’⁸⁹ In response to this heartening decision, Laws was much moved in the spirit and said, ‘your daily life is the answer.’⁹⁰ Consequently, Albert was baptised in the crowded schoolroom on 25th March 1881, which Dr Laws observed as a red-letter day in the history of the mission. As the ordinance of baptism was taken, Albert, humbly and respectfully and in a manly way⁹¹, narrated to the participants his decision to obey God’s Law and witness to his faith. He thereby, humbly and earnestly urged and pleaded with his native people to give up their old lives and give themselves to

⁸⁶ Livingstone, W.P., 1967, p. 180.

⁸⁷ Livingstone, W.P., 1967, p. 180.

⁸⁸ Livingstone, W.P., 1967, p. 181.

⁸⁹ Livingstone, W.P., 1967, p. 181.

⁹⁰ Livingstone, W.P., 1967, p. 181.

⁹¹ McCracken, J., 1972, p. 216.

Christ. Thereafter, Albert conducted many services when Laws was away and was the only Malawian among the little company of seven people who helped the dispensation of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Meanwhile, Dr Laws and the Free Church decided to move the station up north to the western shore of Lake Malawi. They found that the original site was not suitable as a central place of evangelistic ministry to the main concentrations of the Country's population. Dr Stewart was the first missionary to be convinced that Cape Maclear was unsuitable as the permanent site for Livingstonia mission. It was unhealthy, for instance, Shadrach Ngunana was one of the several including the second doctor, William Black who died in the first few years. The continued high incidence of sickness appeared to increase the bleakness of the prospects of the mission. Another disadvantage was geographical in nature. The mission was faced by a shortage of fertile land near the station. Moreover, the lack of a surrounding population to turn to Christianity contributed to moving the station north-wards. The Cape had water on three sides, while on the fourth where they hoped to yield fruits the Yao were turning to Islam instead and were heavily involved in the slave trade. However, in my opinion this last reason is to be viewed as a weakness to the missionaries. I believe their mission was to stop slave trade and convert them to Christianity, not just running away from the reality. Even though the Yao were turning to Islam and they remained heavily involved in the slave trade, they would have still remained at the Station and continued propagating the Gospel of Christ. For instance, it took them six solid years to convert one to Jesus Christ, but, no matter what, the fruit was realised. Similarly, they would have waited for more time since people were now beginning to understand the Gospel of Christ. Although Dr Laws initially opposed the proposal made by Dr. Stewart to move the site, he abandoned his resistance by 1880. Thus, in October 1881, almost six years to the day of their arrival, the missionaries moved to Bandawe in Nkhata-bay district. The first convert, Albert Namalambe, took charge of Cape Maclear as an Outstation in 1884.

2.4.ii. Life and work at the second station – Bandawe

When Missionaries landed at Bandawe, they found that the Tonga people had been harried and oppressed by the northern Ngoni from 1850 under their leader Mombera from Mzimba district. As a result of this, the Tonga lived huddled together in a small space in large, filthy villages on the edge of the lake, with others scattered in narrow shelves and in caves on the face of the mountains. Even though the Ngoni were defeated at Chintheche in 1877, the Tonga people failed to prevent the recurrence of further raids in later years.⁹² Therefore, this situation initially retarded the work of missionaries from helping the Tonga people materially or spiritually. Unless the missionaries won the Ngoni tribe that was keeping the Tonga in abject terror, their mission was going to be fruitless. Thus, the Tonga people in Bandawe saw the coming of missionaries as a welcome gesture, as they saw them as a diplomatic ally and protectors from their neighbours, the Ngoni, who were terrorising them. As McCracken notes, ‘they (the Missionaries) used it (the mission) partly as an envoy through which negotiations could be profitably transacted, and partly as a source of military strength, capable of using its contacts with the Africa Lakes Company as a means of averting Ngoni attacks.’⁹³ However, Dr Laws steadfastly refused to adopt this role of conquering the Ngoni in a military sense. Instead, he took up an attitude of strict neutrality and believed that a missionary could bring peace to the area through the exercise of moral influence. In respect to this situation, Dr Laws visited the Ngoni leader, Mombera in 1879, and won his respect to a degree similar to Robert Moffat who influenced Mzilikazi to change his mind in respect of the work of missionaries among the Matabele.⁹⁴ This visit marked the beginning of one of those friendships between the ruler and missionaries. The respect accorded to Dr Laws enabled two or three members of the mission to be sent to reside at Mombera’s village from 1882 until 1887 to beg him not to attack the Missionaries and Tonga people. One of the members who volunteered to go out and meet the Ngoni war - party was William Koyi, who knew their language. The visit by Koyi convinced the Ngoni who later made arrangements for him and Namalambe to visit the King. The King warmly and happily welcomed them and invited them to settle among the Ngoni. Koyi appealed for reinforcements, and in 1885, he was joined by Walter Emslie, one of the distinguished series of minister-doctors who served Livingstonia in its early days. One of the reasons that influenced the Ngoni to adopt Christianity was the prayer for some much-needed rain said by Koyi and Emslie, which duly fell the next day. The Ngoni were deeply impressed

⁹² McCracken, J., 1972, p.216.

⁹³ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 59.

⁹⁴ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 59.

with this prayer and they saw Christianity as a peaceful mode of existence as a result of missionary persuasion, not military conquest. Unfortunately, William Koyi died, a contented man, at the very time when permission was granted by Chief M'mbelwa for full-scale missionary work among his people. However, the most significant part was that, after ten years as narrated below, the Ngoni had a Christian Chief.

Hence, from 1887 the missionaries ceased to be in danger and this enabled their work to become increasingly fruitful. Even though Mombera himself was not converted to Christianity until his death in 1891, he had great love and respect for Dr Laws. The outcome of his great love and respect was seen in commanding his warriors not to make any further raids on the Tonga at Bandawe Station.⁹⁵ However, his warriors continued to raid in other directions, but as the influence of the mission grew, they eventually became entirely peaceful. The fruit of the work of missionaries climaxed in 1897, when a Christian from the Ngoni clan was elected to their chieftainship. The conversion of the Ngoni to Christianity enabled the Tonga to acquire confidence and self-respect. This was done under no other than 'the influence of Dr. Laws and his staff, to develop into the most educated and enterprising people of Nyasaland' (Malawi).⁹⁶

Having won the battle with the Ngoni in planting Christianity among them and instilling confidence and self-respect among the Tonga, Dr. Laws and his team continued the work that they came for. Having returned to normal village life, the Tonga began to be baptised in considerable numbers. It was not until 1889 that the first Tonga converts were made which included mostly teachers and scholars. According to the Monthly Record, it is said, 'some have been at school with us at Cape Maclear, others joined us as occasional scholars soon after work was begun at Bandawe.'⁹⁷ From 1895 to 1898, people in Nkhata-bay district were swept by the religious enthusiasm that missionaries brought to them. The outcome of this exodus was the response of listeners who attended church services in thousands and surely hundreds more came forward in search of baptism after committing their lives to Jesus Christ. Again the Monthly Record notes, the attendance and interest of people from village to village

⁹⁵ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 59.

⁹⁶ Free Church of Scotland Monthly Record, August 1889, April 1890, p. 106, from McCracken, J., 1967, p. 216.

⁹⁷ Free Church of Scotland Monthly Record, October 1903, p. 457.

grew gradually until people were coming ‘according to their houses.’⁹⁸ The fruits of mission work in the district are seen in the Livingstonia Mission Report of 1906 where over 14,000 hearers attended Sabbath services each week in 98 centres.⁹⁹

Despite the maximum response by the Tonga Christianity, the place was no longer adequate as to accommodate all the activities that the missionaries had wanted to do. Moreover, the recurrence of fever which inflicted missionaries made the place not conducive to fulfil all their dreams. Thus, they moved the mission station farther north along the western shore and established a mission station at Khondowe now Livingstonia.

2.4.iii. Life and work at the third station - Khondowe/Livingstonia

As early as 1894, Dr Laws moved his mission station from Bandawe on the lake-shore to the little plateau of Khondowe, now Livingstonia, which projects out towards the lake from the great mass of the Nyika Plateau. During the first ten years of mission work at Khondowe, according to Robert Laws, only nine men and women had come forward to profess their faith in his church. However, in contrast to this, by 1932, ‘there were 37 Native Congregations, 15 Ordained Native Pastors, 589 Elders, 24361 Communicants, 8656 Catechumens, 1974 Adult and 1912 Infant baptisms.’¹⁰⁰ By 1945, there were 34 ordained African Ministers in Livingstonia Mission. The drastic increase in numbers as opposed to the first ten years that the missionaries were at Livingstonia was due to the collective works of missionaries and the native Christians. As Laws reiterates, the native Christians became pioneers of the ministry of Jesus after receiving baptism and thus promised to become missionaries to their own people in their homes, their own village and also, the surrounding villages.¹⁰¹

The growth of a Christian elite, which was initially composed of teachers and evangelists, led not only to the evangelisation of other societies, but also created the conditions where new ideas could be propagated successfully and new men could emerge as spokespersons for their own people.¹⁰² In the terms used by Wrigley¹⁰³ for Buganda, McCracken agrees that ‘no

⁹⁸ Livingstonia Mission Report 1906, p. 32.

⁹⁹ Laws, R., 1934, p. 177.

¹⁰⁰ Laws, R., 1934, p. 177.

¹⁰¹ Laws, R., 1934, p. 177.

¹⁰² McCracken, J., 1972, p. 215

¹⁰³ Wrigley, C.C., “The Christian Revolution in Buganda,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11, 1959.

Christian revolution took place in Malawi; there was no transfer of power within the existing society from a traditional ruler to a new dynamic body of converts.¹⁰⁴ However, defining this in a broader sense, it may be argued that such a Christian revolution which occurred, was spearheaded by the activities and responses of the first Christian converts after hearing and committing their lives to Jesus Christ from the message brought by missionaries. It was the local people who spearheaded the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There was certainly a profound change in relations of the first generation of Christian converts with the wider world, which took place in the time of early mission work by the Free Church of Scotland. Thus, the varied responses made by different societies in the time of spearheading the mission work to the opportunities provided by the Free Church of Scotland are indeed of immense importance for understanding the educational and political patterns that emerged later in the historical development of modern Malawi. As McCracken notes, ‘the history of expanding Christianity is the history of African initiative.’¹⁰⁵

The missionaries came to Central Africa to open the path for Christianity and Commerce. They also wanted native people to be self-supporting by becoming their own gardeners, brick-makers, carpenters, builders, cooks, housekeepers, teachers and medical attendants. They believed this could be done through an enormous and unquenching persuasion of natives to enter their employment in order to learn how to do some of these jobs. This could only be done after industrial training, which missionaries considered to be an essential part of their task. As Hanna asserts, missionaries ‘held that habits of regular work must be among the aims of a sound moral training, and that a sound moral training was a necessary part of Christian teaching.’¹⁰⁶ The Livingstonia mission guided by Stewart and Laws saw this as an important task and thus attached very great importance to it from the beginning of their mission. That is why at Livingstonia mission station Dr Laws founded the Livingstonia Institute, known as the “Overtoun Institution.”¹⁰⁷ This became a combined Institution for training of teachers, church ministers and technical work. Here, Dr Laws instructed his pupils not only in Christian doctrines, and various manual skills which he himself had mastered, but, according to Hanna, he also instructed them ‘in such things as the importance of public order, the necessity for

¹⁰⁴ McCracken, J., 1972, p. 215.

¹⁰⁵ McCracken, J., 1972, p. 215.

¹⁰⁶ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 66.

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, J., 1984, p. 114. Overtoun Institution was named after Lord Overtoun, one of the many Scottish businessmen who lent support to the mission.

taxation, the usefulness of sanitation, and the virtue of thrift.¹⁰⁸ It is true, as Hanna rightly puts it that Dr. Laws did this not as a prejudicial favour of White culture, but as a considered conviction that any culture ought to have these things.¹⁰⁹ This was a great conviction of Dr Laws, as W.P. Livingstone quotes him saying, ‘I have always held very strongly that in the foreign field the native churches should grow up on their own lines and in their own surroundings if they are to be strong and healthy, and should not be Presbyteries of any of our home churches.’¹¹⁰ Realistically, Dr Laws supported the importance of indigenous responsibility toward mission work. And for this he spoke of ‘the hindrance to the life and growth of the church brought by trying to clothe an infant with adult garments of the growth of centuries instead of swaddling bands corresponding to its life history.’¹¹¹ Certainly, these are the words of wisdom from a man who, according to Hanna, ‘discriminates between the essential values of Western civilisations and the non-essential imperfect, historically conditioned forms in which they were embodied and expressed in his own generation by his own fellow countrymen.’¹¹² Reverend David Scott, one of the great leaders of the Established Church set up at Blantyre, in the Shire Highlands had similar views. He said, ‘Africa for the Africans has been our policy from the first, and we believe that God has given this country into our hands that they may train its people how to develop its marvellous resources for themselves.’¹¹³

Here, Scott believed that it was the duty of missionaries to impart the knowledge of civilisation to the indigenous people, who are also ‘co-inheritors of civilisation.’¹¹⁴ Ross reiterates that one of the objectives of the mission should be ‘to give the native the place in the development of this land to which he is called to prove he is fit for it and to see him through.’¹¹⁵ Thus, it was an intention of the missionaries to foster economic and social change in Malawi that would eventually end the slave trade, eradicate poverty, and enable Malawians to claim their human rights and duties as indeed co-inheritors of civilisation.¹¹⁶ All the missions aimed at fostering the growth of a church rooted in indigenous African soil.

¹⁰⁸ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 66.

¹⁰⁹ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 66.

¹¹⁰ Livingstone, W.P., 1967, p. 308.

¹¹¹ Livingstone, W.P., 1967, p. 308.

¹¹² Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 66.

¹¹³ Ross, A. “The Origins and Development of the Church of Scotland Mission, Blantyre, Nyasaland, 1875-1926,” a *PhD Dissertation*, University of Edinburgh, 1968, p. 204.

¹¹⁴ Ross, A., 1968, p. 204.

¹¹⁵ Ross, A., 1968, pp. 103-105

¹¹⁶ Ross, A., 1968, p. 204.

2.5. The impact of missions for individual and societal transformation

The image brought by the missionaries was that Christianity was a modernising religion.¹¹⁷ As Oliver writes, ‘Christianity had not so much to drive out the old gods, which were already doomed, as to temper by industrial and religious education a social and economic revolution inexorably pressing in from the outside at a rate which threatened to be physically and morally overwhelming.’¹¹⁸ Oliver’s observation here is that missionaries were both agents and servants of inevitable change in a society. In this study, I want to discuss three main achievements missionaries brought to Malawi that brought change in the lives of people, and these are commerce or industry, education and evangelism, which were the dreams of David Livingstone.

2.5.i. Commerce as a resource to development

The vision of Dr. David Livingstone to open a gateway for commerce in Central Africa influenced the missionaries to come to Malawi to develop an enterprising people. The benefactors of the Free Church Mission which was sent to Malawi were Glasgow businessmen. These were the same people who set up a trading company called the African Lakes Company, with a capital of about £30,000.¹¹⁹ The intention of the company was to provide supplies for the missions to encourage the development of legitimate commerce among native people. They expected to see a reduction of dependence on the slave trade. As the trade was Christian oriented, sales in either armaments or alcohol was not permitted. According to Macmillan, the benefactors expected this business to be profitable and hoped that it would supply a basic foundation for the development of a maximum range of commercial activities.¹²⁰

The main target of this commerce which missionaries wished to change was the slave trade. This commercial system had shown considerable strength and resilience despite the far-reaching political revolutions of the middle years of the century.¹²¹ This was the commercial system which the missionaries wished to change though it was not easy, because it had deep

¹¹⁷ Chanock, M.L., 1972, p. 436.

¹¹⁸ Oliver, R. *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, London, 1952, p. 16.

¹¹⁹ Williams, T.D., 1978, p. 46.

¹²⁰ Macmillan, H.W. “The Origins and Development of the African Lakes Company, 1878-1908,” a *Ph.D. Dissertation*, University of Edinburgh, 1970, pp. 157-160. Macmillan discusses the company accounts, and continues on page 172, where he says that, “after nine years’ work, it appeared to be about to enter a new and more successful period.”

¹²¹ Williams, T.D., 1978, p. 32

roots and it involved a considerable number of the people. As Macmillan asserts, ‘the task which commerce and Christianity were called on to perform was not an easy one.’¹²² However, in spite of these difficulties, the company eventually established a viable basis of operations during the 1880s. Hence, by the middle of 1885, the company was making an enormous profit. It began to obtain an increasing share of the ivory trade and had set up a successful trading station at the north end of the lake. There, it apparently achieved a cordial and mutually beneficial trading relationship with Mlozi, who was a powerful Arab trader. Mlozi had established both a military and a commercial presence at Mbande hill near Karonga.¹²³ The early relationship between the African Lakes Company and Mlozi was ‘not one of commercial rivalry but one of partnership.’¹²⁴

The main achievement of this commercial trade was through the awareness campaigns for the change in slave trading. As Macmillan asserts, ‘it was the Arab war which created the first awareness of the company and the missions outside their own immediate circle and prepared a wider public to take an interest in their future welfare.’¹²⁵ Eventually, it fulfilled its goal by introducing ivory trade rather than slaves. Although it took time to end this business, the efforts made by missionaries were relentless and worthwhile. The other achievement though to a limited extent, was the employment of native Malawians to assist the owners of the company. As Williams observes, ‘like the missions, (they) had to take others who were in Nyasaland only because they could not find employment elsewhere.’¹²⁶ The employment of native labourers boosted the morale of individual families, who had now the means of earning their living. The introduction of commerce saw the beginning of the end of slave trade. This was to accomplish the dream of David Livingstone to open a pathway to Christianity and Commerce to Central Africa. The missionaries laid foundations that Malawians built upon and are enjoying today.

¹²² Macmillan, H.W., 1970, p. 39.

¹²³ Williams, T.D., 1970, p. 47.

¹²⁴ Macmillan, H.W., 1970, p. 252.

¹²⁵ Macmillan, H.W., 1970, p. 297.

¹²⁶ Williams, T.D., 1970, pp. 46-47.

2.5.ii. Education as a gateway to success

The Livingstonia mission guided by Dr. Stewart and Dr. Laws attached great importance to education from the beginning of their mission. From 1875 the demand for education grew tremendously. Schools became the channels through which Christian teaching flowed. In almost all cases, for instance, the school-teacher was also the local evangelist. The school curriculum then contained time for religious studies, and some of the early reading books were parts of the bible. The school also served as the church on Sundays, and the same pupils made up the Hearers' and Catechumens' classes. The number of school pupils, for many years, outweighed the number of church members, and the pupils themselves provided an endless flow of baptismal candidates. Livingstonia mission was the only mission operating in northern Malawi, and was leading in education before the First World War. More than half of all the pupils being educated in Malawi were taught at Livingstonia schools. For instance, in 1905, there were 834 schools, of which 512 were run by the Livingstonia Mission which gives us a percentage of over 60.¹²⁷

When we look at the mission education in Malawi, the rural mission education provided an improved literacy and this led to a great exodus of men seeking employment outside the country. As Oliver and Atmore observe, this great exodus was realised when Malawians went to work in Rhodesian farms or mine compounds.¹²⁸ The founding of the Livingstonia Institute (Overtoun) in 1894 by Dr Laws combined the colleges of teacher training, theology, medical training and technology (which included carpentry, stonemasonry, printing and telegraphy) and made an immense impact on the native Malawians and others from neighbouring countries such as Zambia and Zimbabwe. As Jack Thompson reiterates, 'this Institution produced the best students from all the outlying schools of Livingstonia Mission, as well as some from Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola.'¹²⁹ The Overtoun Institute was indeed widely renowned throughout Central Africa. The work of teachers and craftsmen trained at this Institute enabled men from Malawi to gain the reputation for being better educated than any other workers, indigenous or migrant in northern or southern Rhodesia.¹³⁰ These colleges trained native teachers, pastors, evangelists, medical assistants and artisans, with the aim of equipping them to become leaders of their native communities. As Oliver and

¹²⁷ Thompson J., 1984, p. 114.

¹²⁸ Oliver, R. and Atmore, A. *Africa Since 1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967, p.157.

¹²⁹ Thompson, J., 1984, p. 114.

¹³⁰ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 237.

Atmore write, ‘the mission school soon emerged as a clear avenue for the advancement along which the ambitious could escape from the narrow discipline of village life into a wider world.... (they) were introducing Africans into the modern world into which they were now entering.’¹³¹ McCracken has written that in 1880, the Tonga in Nkhata-bay turned ‘to education supplied by Livingstonia in order to obtain the necessary techniques for grappling with the new Shire Highlands-based Western economy.’¹³² In highlighting this motive, McCracken emphasises the degree of understanding which Malawians had of the new environment. According to his account, this degree of understanding follows increasing efforts to control this new environment with, as he says, ‘the new men taking the process of betterment into their own hands.’¹³³ The emphasis, then, on the reception of education is that it was part of a forward-looking understanding of modernity.¹³⁴ After graduation in their fields, they went out in search of employment, and in many cases became leaders in companies, business or politics, not only in Malawi, but also in Southern Africa.

And while the achievement of Livingstonia was particularly outstanding, the other missions too were vigorously active in educational matters. The effect of making the northern region the most advanced area in terms of educational activity of all Central African Countries was due to the dynamic response of various peoples in the north of Malawi and the combination with Livingstonia’s own exceptional concern for change. By 1904, 60% of the pupils receiving education in Malawi came from the mission schools of Livingstonia.¹³⁵ Moreover, almost all those obtaining post-primary training attended the Overtoun Institute at Khondowe. Even though by 1920s there was a drastic fall in the proportion of pupils¹³⁶ and schools at Livingstonia, the essentials of the established pattern continued unchanged.¹³⁷ The education at the Overtoun Institution was the earliest and the best in Central Africa. The large numbers

¹³¹ Oliver, R. and Atmore, A., 1967, p.157.

¹³² McCracken, J. “Livingstonia Mission and the Evolution of Malawi 1875-1939,” *Cambridge Ph.D.*, 1967, p. 10.

¹³³ McCracken, J., 1967, p. 358.

¹³⁴ Chanock, M.L., 1972, p. 436.

¹³⁵ McCracken, J., 1972, p. 231.

¹³⁶ Thompson J., 1984, p. 119. This dramatic fall in the proportion of pupils, according to Jack Thompson, was due to the First World War where most teachers were taken by the King’s African Rifles (KAR) as interpreters, clerks etc and many missionaries, especially doctors and nurses, were called up on active service. This made the educational system of the missions to be hard hit. For instance, at Livingstonia, all higher educational courses, including the theological course, were closed down for a number of years. However, things began slowly to get back to normal when the War ended.

¹³⁷ McCracken, J., 1972, p. 231. According to McCracken’s calculations, Livingstonia Mission possessed 61% of all schools in Malawi in 1904-05, 31% in 1910, 16% in 1924 and 10.18% in 1934. However, in the same year, 1934, 32.45 % of assisted upper and lower schools were run by Livingstonia. Thompson J., 1984, p. 116.

involved at village level (over 50,000 by 1914) meant that only the best got to the top. Livingstonia turned out graduates who, both in ability and in training, were outstanding and natural leaders wherever they went.

No wonder, education was a part of the missionaries' package, and the main purpose of education was conversion. Education was seen as a means of evangelism, where people were taught to read the bible. Mission education placed large numbers of impressionable children for long periods in schools. Missionaries saw this as a way of keeping children away from traditional life which was considered inferior to the new way they were trying to offer. Later, it became a normal practice to baptise only those who could read or write, although very old people were exempted from this rule. Scottish Missionaries also saw education as a branch of western civilisation. For this reason, education was regarded as a means of uplifting the natives through a provision of knowledge and skills which would influence their way of life. Furthermore, education was seen as a means of providing skilled workers for the mission. On the technical side, the truth on this matter was that hundreds of carpenters, bricklayers etc were employed by the missions. Again, on the educational and ecclesiastical side, most of the teachers and evangelists who graduated from Overtoun Institution found employment in mission service. But the missions could not absorb all their own products when the educational system developed and grew further. Hence, many of the graduates found employment with the government and with the European planters. However, some historians have argued against the educational system developed by Livingstonia and Blantyre that it was primarily designed to benefit the missions themselves, rather than the local native population. The truth in this accusation was that these two missions did not put much emphasis on agriculture and village industries which were the basic needs for local native population. Instead, they placed more emphasis on western industrial techniques. But Nkhoma Mission placed much emphasis on agriculture and village industries. They sought to train natives for life in their own villages, rather than for wider service. It was no wonder that in 1924 the Phelps-Stokes Commission on education highly praised the emphasis of Nkhoma on agriculture and village industries. It said that the Nkhoma method of agricultural instruction 'has not its superior in all the Nyasaland schools'¹³⁸. However, this emphasis again had its disadvantage or shortfall, because Nkhoma Christians were not nearly so prominent in national life as their counterparts from Blantyre and Livingstonia. To this, we can say that

¹³⁸ Thompson, J., 1984, p. 116.

Nkhoma mission did not contribute a lot to the national life of its natives.

2.5.iii. The Bible as a resource for evangelism

When missionaries came to Malawi, to a certain extent, natives believed in God, for as Donald Fraser reiterates ‘God is to them an absentee deity.’¹³⁹ They called God, Chiuta, which might mean a great bow. Chiuta is known as the creator and the master of life and death; and by him the world was made, and everything that has life. Chiuta is known as the one who sends the great diseases and death, and also as the cruel God who takes away the children, though where he lives and what he thinks no one knows. To the general imagination, God has withdrawn from the world, and has nothing to do with it, beyond sending death or disease. Natives had also localised deities who were believed to be dwelling on mountains or hills and had special control of the rains and other natural forces. These natural objects such as hills, wild-waterfalls, great trees and deep pools were revered as dwelling places of some deity or spirits, as animate and divine.

Therefore, worship of the hills and trees, like that of the deities, was not an independent individual action, but a united invocation of a local clan. The most active spiritual agents are the ancestral spirits, which are everywhere, and continuously intervene for good or evil, although their influence is linked to the affairs of their relatives. But the spirits were not always so good. It was they who sent all calamities, and when sickness could not be expelled, great efforts were made by the specialists to find out which ancestral spirit was offended and punishing the victim. Thereafter, offerings were made of beer, or meal or cloth. When good luck came, they said, ‘I have a beneficent spirit.’ When evil luck came they said, ‘I have an unfriendly spirit’, and they sought to appease it.¹⁴⁰ In sum African people have always believed in and worshipped God, “Supreme Being”. But they had never known the connection between God and God’s Son, Jesus Christ. It was not until the preaching of the Gospel on the African Continent by the Missionaries that Africans came to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Prior to the era of Missionaries in Malawi, the concept of God having a Son was not in existence.

According to Chanock, ‘the religion of missionaries was one among many in which old

¹³⁹ Fraser, D. *Winning a Primitive People*, London: Seeley, Service & Company, 1914, p. 120.

¹⁴⁰ Fraser, D., 1914, p. 127.

superstitions were rejected for new ones.’¹⁴¹ The superstitions which Chanock refers to are the beliefs that illness, childlessness, poverty, accidents, deaths, calamities and hardships come from evil spirits and witchcraft and sorcery. It was against these beliefs that the bible was brought to bear fruits. But as Livingstone observed, ‘many expected to be transformed at once into civilised men possessing the clothing, goods, arms, horses and wagons of the more favoured portions of humanity.’¹⁴² Many missionaries have testified that many converts regarded the bible as a magical key to a new life and thus it was not unusual for missionaries to present the bible as having magical dimensions. In this sense, in relation to the superstitions that the missionaries rejected, the bible could be used to ward off evil spirits, witchcraft and sorcery. When Riddle made his first visit to the Ngoni of Mombera, he said, ‘I showed them a bible, and told them that it was it that made our nation rich and powerful.’¹⁴³ This was not the approach only of Riddle in his isolated missionary work, but even Lord Clarendon, then Her Majesty’s Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, approached the bible in the same way. In his official letter given to Dr. David Livingstone before his expedition to Zambezi, he made his advice to the chiefs saying, ‘as we have derived all our greatness from the divine religion which we received from heaven, it will be well if you consider it carefully when any of our people talk to you about it.’¹⁴⁴ That was the reason why Malawians came to believe that the bible can invoke the power of God that could overcome evil spirits, witchcraft and sorcery. However, Dr Walter Elmslie had to discourage later the ‘superstitious belief about a mere book.’¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the bible was seen and received as a sense of a new magic which promised greater wealth or power, or understanding of the supernatural. It was also embraced in place of the old, for many saw Christianity as a more powerful war medicine, and for others, as Chadwick observed, the ‘pressure of dreams’¹⁴⁶ and the desire for their interpretation was an important motive for conversion. Similar traces can be found in attitude towards writing, books and education. Gamitto comments of the Marave that ‘they think that our method of

¹⁴¹ Chanock, M.L., 1972, p. 436.

¹⁴² Quoted by Shepperson, G. in *Religion in Africa*, p. 50.

Quoted by McCracken, J. in *Religion in Africa*, p. 90.

¹⁴³ Quoted by McCracken, J. in *Religion in Africa*, p. 90.

¹⁴⁴ Blaike, W.G. *The Life of David Livingstone*, London, 1916, p. 196.

¹⁴⁵ McCracken, J., 1967, p. 172.

¹⁴⁶ Chadwick, O. *Mackenzie’s Grave*, London, 1959, p. 73 and Ross, A.C., 1968, p. 135.

communication by writing is magic.¹⁴⁷ Similar views are also shared by Rev. Donald Fraser who describes the visit of a village headman to the Manse saying, ‘as he passes through the study and sees the shelves filled with books he is silent as in the presence of potential magic.’¹⁴⁸ These sorts of testimony amplify the motives for embracing the impact of the bible in evangelising even to the rural Malawians. Undoubtedly, these motives were instrumental in shaping development and change in Malawian society. That is why the church and the school usually occupied the same building, particularly in the villages, where a lonely mission teacher or evangelist combined the spiritual and temporal duties. Therefore, people saw the bible as a book that promised immediate spiritual and material benefit. Similarly, education was seen in the same vein, promising the same benefits with the same immediacy.

Another example that proves the effectiveness of the bible in evangelism is the way Malawians believed and responded to it. For instance, Rev. Hetherwick of the Established Church of Scotland which was established in the Shire Highlands, now Blantyre in 1876, was greatly opposed to the extreme drunkenness in which the natives indulged when their supplies of beer permitted it. Hetherwick even forbade his converts to touch beer at all. One time in the days of the British Protectorate, a High Court Judge asked a witness, ‘Are you a Christian?’ The witness answered, ‘No, I drink beer.’¹⁴⁹ This response shows that natives were taught that beer drinking was not for Christians/believers but non-believers. Even today the Presbyterian Churches in Malawi don’t allow their communicant members to either prepare or drink beer.

In general, people regarded the bible entirely as a book of devotion, a rule of life, the supreme rule of faith and conduct, and a norm for morality. It is no doubt that in 1899, 309 adults were baptised in a single day in Ngoniland. That is why, by 1914, Livingstonia Mission was claiming a Christian Community of 40,000, including children and adherents. As one native teacher at Kasungu, then a Livingstonia station remarked in 1905, ‘many people are coming to hear the words of God. We have never seen it like this before: I cannot get sleeping at nights for coming to speak to me about the things of God.’¹⁵⁰ But what made native Malawians to have great interest in Christianity? One of the reasons was that natives were

¹⁴⁷ Gamitto, A.C.P. *King Kazembe*, Lisbon, Trans. I. Cunnison, 1960, p. 79.

¹⁴⁸ Fraser, D. *African Idyll*, London: Seeley, Service & Company, 1923, p. 21.

¹⁴⁹ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 60.

¹⁵⁰ Thompson, J., 1984, p. 113.

lacking a strong tribal or traditional government.¹⁵¹ For this reason, as reiterated earlier on, missionaries were seen as protectors against other tribes that were terrorising them. The classic example of this was the relationship between the Tonga and Livingstonia Mission.¹⁵² The second reason was the high standard of efficiency and general organisation of the Presbyterian Missions in Malawi. Stephen Neil describes the Scottish Missions in Malawi as ‘certainly among the best organised mission projects in the World.’¹⁵³ Nevertheless, difficulties were there such as the loss of life among missionaries at both Blantyre and Livingstonia. However, in terms of staff, communications and financial support, they were strong and resilient enough to curb the situation. The third reason was the early and extensive use of indigenous Malawians as Evangelists and Teachers in spreading the Gospel of Christ. M.W. Retief claims that the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) missionaries learnt the slogan from the Scottish Missionaries that ‘Africans must be evangelised by the Africans themselves.’¹⁵⁴ Many local teachers and evangelists were preaching the new religion up and down the country, although the decision-making structures of the missions were firmly in the hands of Missionaries (Europeans). The preaching of the Gospel in the early days of the mission was even done by members who were not yet baptised. This, undoubtedly, contributed to the growth of the local church. The fourth and last reason was the stress on education by all missions. But all I want to emphasise is that Christianity soon became a gateway to opportunity. Elsewhere in many mission situations, it was extremely difficult to convince and interest the local people in education. But Malawi was special, particularly in 1900s, where there was a direct and immediate form of employment by the missions themselves, and also in the newly-established Colonial Government, or the growing number of European planters in the Shire highlands.

In conclusion, the missionaries saw the bible as an immense resource for evangelisation to the natives. Their first task was to impart knowledge and understanding of the bible. And their second task was to share the faith and moral principles¹⁵⁵ with Malawians. In this respect, missionaries did not just expound the teaching of Christ to Malawians, but led them to Christ. As Puxley reiterates, it is good for religious teachers and evangelists to hold a firm belief in

¹⁵¹ Thompson, J., 1984, p. 113.

¹⁵² I have discussed this fully in the life and work at the second station – Bandawe, where Tonga saw the arrival of Missionaries as allies and protectors against the Ngoni tribe.

¹⁵³ Neil, S. *History of Christian Missions*, 1968, p. 113.

¹⁵⁴ Retief, M.W. *William Murray of Nyasaland*, 1967, p. 114.

¹⁵⁵ Davidson, R. *The Bible in Religious Education*, Edinburgh: The Handsel Press Ltd, 1979, pp. 3-4.

an unchanging God whose voice on earth is the Church.¹⁵⁶ It is for this reason that missionaries used evangelism to inform the natives with a Christian content, giving a Christian context and basing upon the bible as its text and source book.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, missionaries taught the bible to the natives because it is the word of God, the supreme rule of faith and conduct, and indeed an inspired, infallible document. As Goldman asserts, ‘Christianity should be taught because it is true: because it answers the deepest needs of human nature, and without knowledge of the love of God and a relationship with him man and women will lead impoverished lives.’¹⁵⁸ The bible calls upon the believing community to remember and to celebrate their faith.

2.6. The use of the Bible: A case study on Malawi’s political democratisation

The bible is used as a resource for understanding Christ by ordinary readers and also as means of grace for its believers in Christ. Churches in Malawi both the Mainstream and African Instituted, are relentlessly using the bible as a basis of their expositions and pastoral work. When the bible came with the missionaries, it encountered cultural beliefs, customs and practices of natives and this encounter led to their transformation. Having discussed at length the impact of the Gospel of Christ brought by missionaries to Malawians, I want to discuss how Malawians have used the bible from 1992-1994 on their road to Multi-party democracy that citizens are enjoying today.

Thus, on the socio-political aspect, Malawians clearly used the bible to transform the country from one party system of government to a Multi-party system of government. Briefly, Malawi got independence in 1964 under the leadership of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who became first the Prime Minister and later the first republican president. Soon after attaining the presidency and the leadership of the party, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), Dr Banda quickly reorganised the Malawi Congress Party machinery to suit his personal authority. Hence, this led to an autocratic style of leadership which Malawians challenged after nearly thirty years of his rule.

However, to some extent, the Christian Churches in Malawi contributed to the creation of Dr

¹⁵⁶ Puxley, H.L. (ed.), *Religious Education in a pluralistic society*, New York: Religious Education Association, 1976, p. 110.

¹⁵⁷ Rice, P. *Common Ground*, edited by A.R. Rodger, Dundee College of Education, 1977, p. 6.

¹⁵⁸ Goldman, R.J. *Readiness for Religion*, R.K.P., 1965, p. 59.

Banda's dictatorship. Interestingly, the Christian Churches were deeply involved in the struggle for self-government in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the Nyasaland African Congress movement. Here, churches were in the forefront fighting for justice and peace. However, from 1964, the churches became more and more politicised and compromised their prophetic ministry. They were also so close to Dr Banda's government to the extent that they failed to develop a critical stance as a prophetic voice against the government and the regime. Thus, from independence the leaders of the Christian Churches felt that their role was to give the government and its leadership all possible support in building Malawi. The general meaning of the church's message on socio-political issues is seen on an illustration made on the 10th Anniversary of Independence by a Joint Message from the Catholic and Presbyterian Churches. It reads,

‘What has been achieved during this period in all fields is so unbelievable that it confounds even the most optimistic expectations of most of us and there is no doubt that all this achievement is due to the untiring efforts, dedicated, selfless, and responsible leadership of His Excellency the Life President Ngwazi Dr H. Kamuzu Banda. If this has grown from the ranks of the poor nations into a nation with a viable booming economy, with a healthy educated people, it is due to His Excellency's own dynamic leadership and the stable and peaceful conditions that leadership had created.’¹⁵⁹

From this Joint Message, one can see how the churches praised the leadership by ascribing all the development work Malawi had achieved in her last ten years to Dr Banda himself. There is no room for praising both the government personnel and the ordinary people who worked collectively with Dr Banda. All the untiring efforts in developing the country of Malawi was attributed to Dr Banda himself, as if he was like God who could do everything in his divine knowledge and power. One cannot doubt why churches adopted and continued with this style of writing statements of praises to the head of state and government at all Synod meetings. Surely, it is not wrong to issue a statement to the head of state and government praising his leadership and the stability which people enjoy. However, the only problem with what the churches in Malawi did was to attribute the development, stability, quality education, economic prosperity and quantity food supplies in the country to the dynamic leadership (as Malawians used to say) of Dr Banda alone without mentioning or challenging any shortfalls.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted from K.R. Ross, 1996, p. 19. This was a Joint Message from churches of Malawi on the 10th Anniversary of Independence, signed by Most Rev. James Chiona, Catholic Archbishop of Blantyre, and the Very Rev. J.D.Sangaya, General Secretary of the CCAP Synod of Blantyre, 1974, p. 2.

Moreover, the churches failed to take account of the role of individual Malawians in contributing to the development and economic vibrancy of the country. In terms of quality education, missionaries made a remarkable contribution with the Overtoun Institution in Livingstonia. It is here that Dr Banda himself, as he used to say, got his early education before moving abroad to further his education. However, given this alignment and assimilation of churches with the leadership of Malawi, it was very hard to use their prophetic voices to admonish the leadership and his government. The silence of the churches cost many Malawians their lives or caused them to spend their time in notorious prisons. In that respect, the churches seemed to support the dictatorship of Dr Banda and thus appeared to legitimise unquestioningly the one-party system of government. That is why churches after realising the trap into which they had fallen, came to confess later. For instance, in January 1993, the Blantyre Synod of the CCAP issued a statement narrating the history of the CCAP during the time of struggle with Independence and their support for the Nyasaland African Congress, (NAC, later MCP), their assimilation and alignment with MCP, and their praying and participating at various government functions. This closeness to the government had enabled the churches to lose the authority to admonish it, and thereafter confessed for the immense mistake the church made and ensured that it would retain its prophetic voice throughout the coming years of Malawi's history.¹⁶⁰ This promise really materialised where the churches emerged as a force to reckon with in the democratisation of Malawi.

When the churches became prominent in their struggle for democracy in Malawi, members began to point out the prevalence of an oppressive one-party system of government within the life of the church. Their main interest was the need for accountability and democracy in the structures of the church. Certainly, members believed that championing the cause of political reform and calling for freedom, justice, accountability and democracy needed to be sprung back upon the church's own structures, because it seemed to have forgotten its ecclesiastical authority. Hence, many observers had an assumption that churches could be written off as a potential force for reform and renewal in politics in Malawi under Dr Banda's regime. Every Sunday, leaders of all denominations prayed for the long life and prosperity of the dictator who was ruthless and brutal in exploiting and oppressing his own people. Similarly, at every national function, church leaders provided religious justification for the political rule of Dr

¹⁶⁰ This is a "Statement on the Role of the Church in the Transformation of Malawi in the Context of Justice and Peace", produced by the *Administrative Conference, Blantyre Synod CCAP*, January 22-23, 1994, p. 4.

Banda. The emotion of Malawian citizens from grassroots to upper levels was only fear.¹⁶¹ As Ross reiterates, ‘in the land where silence ruled who could break the spell of fear?’¹⁶² However, even though some people seemed to have entirely written off the authority and prophecy of the church, nevertheless, some Malawians still expected that the church would be the source of such change. This expectation came to fruition when the churches after realising their accountability to God’s people and knowing their shortfalls, began to challenge the leadership and his government, particularly his one-party system of government.

2.6.i. The Catholic Bishops’ Pastoral Letter of 1992

The first to come up publicly were the Roman Catholic Bishops who issued their Pastoral Letter in March 1992 entitled *Living our Faith*.¹⁶³ The main issues raised in that pastoral letter were human rights, education, health services, wage structure, and the democratic accountability of government. In their challenge to the government, the Catholic Bishops used the bible in support of their position. The key text of the bible which determined their understanding and meaning of human rights and society was Genesis 1:26-27. This passage affirms the sacredness of man and woman because they are created in the divine image, and thus deserve the personal protection of God. Thus human life, as Felix Chingota asserts, ‘is inviolable.’¹⁶⁴ Bishops expressed plainly by observing that, ‘many people still live in circumstances which are hardly compatible with their dignity as sons and daughters of God. Their life is a struggle for survival. At the same time a minority enjoys the fruits of development and can afford to live in luxury and wealth.’¹⁶⁵ They noted the following things: education, illiteracy, decrease in standards, overcrowding in classes, shortage of teachers and learning materials, unequal access to education and indiscipline in schools. As for health services, the main concern was lack of sufficient health centres and personnel, overcrowding in hospitals, poor standard of medical care, and inequality in treating patients.¹⁶⁶ These were the realities, but it was hard to express them publicly for fear of being labelled seditious. As the Bishops assert, ‘People will not be scandalised to hear these things; they know them. They

¹⁶¹ “Human Rights in Malawi: Report of a Joint Delegation of the Scottish Faculty of Advocates, the Law Society of England and Wales and the General Council of the Bar to Malawi”, 17-27 September 1992, p. 8.

¹⁶² Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 23.

¹⁶³ *Living our Faith* – This was the Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Malawi which was read in every Catholic Church on 8th March 1992; it was later published under the title *The Truth Will Set You Free, Church in the World 28*, London: CIIR, 1992.

¹⁶⁴ Chingota, F.L., “The Use of the Bible in Social Transformation”, in *God, People and Power in Malawi*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Blantyre: CLAIM, 1996, p. 41.

¹⁶⁵ Catholic Pastoral Letter, *Living our Faith*, 1992, p. 2.

¹⁶⁶ *Living our Faith*, 1992, pp. 4-7.

will only be grateful that their true needs are recognised and that efforts are made to answer them. Feeding them with slogans and half-truths – or untruths – only increases their cynicism and their mistrust of government representatives.¹⁶⁷ The power of the Pastoral Letter lay in voicing the realities that every Malawian knew but could not express publicly. The Bishops, therefore, broke the culture of deceit and silence which pretended everything was right.

Interpreting the biblical text in that way, the bishops therefore continued further to critically expose the economic and political life of Malawian society. They stated, ‘Accountability is a quality of any good government. People are entitled to know how their representatives fulfil their duties. No disrespect is shown when citizens ask questions in matters which concern them.’¹⁶⁸ In my view, the most powerful part of the Pastoral Letter was a section entitled *The Participation of all in public life*. In this section, Bishops used biblical texts such as Ephesians 4:7-16 and 1 Peter 4:10-11 and also traditional African proverbs by arguing that society can be strong only when they work collectively, that is, through participation of all members. But if human persons are not honoured, cannot search the truth freely by expressing their views and opinions and are not engaged in creative service of their community in all liberty within associations of their own choice, the effects are enormous.¹⁶⁹ What do these effects create? ‘It creates an atmosphere of resentment among citizens. It breeds a climate of mistrust and fear. The fear of harassment and mutual suspicion generates a society in which the talents of many lie unused and in which there is little room for initiative.’¹⁷⁰ The Bishops, therefore, called for accountability to the people and proposed steps to restore the climate of trust and openness. These were, the establishment of an independent and impartial press, open places for public discussions, free social and political associations of citizens, Government accountability, and establishing courts of justice that are independent, impartial and able to be reached.¹⁷¹ These were the measures that Bishops thought would restore the government’s accountability to its citizens, and thereby increase an enjoyable participation of every Malawian in political spheres. Thus, the call for the government to be accountable to the people characterised the genesis of a process of democratisation which was to transform the political life of Malawians

¹⁶⁷ *Living our Faith*, 1992, p. 10.

¹⁶⁸ *Living our Faith*, 1992, p. 10

¹⁶⁹ *Living our Faith*, 1992, p. 9.

¹⁷⁰ *Living our Faith*, 1992, p. 9.

¹⁷¹ Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 25.

during the coming two years.¹⁷²

The Bishops indicated what they thought was against the Word of God. The Pastoral Letter was explicitly based on biblical exposition. As Ross rightly asserts, it made ‘the system accountable to the norms and values of the kingdom of God.’¹⁷³ The church was therefore measuring government policies and actions against the standard of judgement of the biblical message of the kingdom of God.¹⁷⁴ Given the existing order of government and the impeding demands of God’s kingdom, the bishops openly supplied a standard measurement to ordinary Malawians to assess the present system and act accordingly. In his influential *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutierrez of Peru argues that, ‘the struggle for a just society is in its own right very much a part of salvation history.’¹⁷⁵ According to him, divine salvation is not exclusively reserved for the next world, but it takes effect now in the world we live, as we struggle to eradicate injustice, violence and oppression. In short, we experience divine salvation in the human liberation. Undoubtedly, the Pastoral Letter with reference to the exercise of power accountable to God was an inspiring political challenge in a country like Malawi where Christians predominate and the message of the bible resounds tremendously. Thus, one can observe that an engagement with the biblical text was central from the beginning in struggle for a change in Malawi’s social and political aspects from 1992.¹⁷⁶ The establishment of several kinds of accountability by the Catholic Bishops, as Ross observes, ‘ensured that Malawi would never be the same again.’¹⁷⁷ The only thing that remained now was to put the inspiring vision of bishops into effect if Malawi were to develop a peaceful process of political change.

¹⁷² Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 25.

¹⁷³ Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 26.

¹⁷⁴ Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 26.

¹⁷⁵ Gutiérrez, G. *A Theology of Liberation*, London: SCM Press, 1988, p. 97.

¹⁷⁶ Chingota, F.L., 1996, p. 41; Chakanza, J.C. “Pro-Democracy Movement in Malawi: The Catholic Church’s Contribution”, in *Church, Law and Political Transition in Malawi, 1992-94*, edited by Matembo S. Nzunda and Kenneth R. Ross, Kachere Books No.1, Gwero: Mambo Press in Association with the University of Malawi Department of Theology and Religious Studies, 1995, PP. 59-74; and Mijoga, H.B.P. “The Lenten Pastoral Letter: A First Public Declaration of the Hidden Transcript”, in *Journal of Humanities 10/11, 1996-97b*, pp. 55-68.

¹⁷⁷ Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 26.

2.6.ii. An open letter by leaders of CCAP and WARC

The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) belongs to an international fellowship of mutual accountability, namely the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). According to Ross, it was noted by Bas de Gaay Fortman that ‘in international Presbyterian and reformed circles there was discontent with the neutral attitude which the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi had adopted in the tense situation in the country.’¹⁷⁸ In respect to this situation in Malawi, the leaders of the WARC Southern African region met in Lusaka in early May and issued a strong letter in support of the Catholic bishops and therefore called the CCAP in Malawi “to be prophetic.”¹⁷⁹ Since CCAP is a member of WARC, the delegation from WARC came in June 1992 to meet the leaders of the Presbyterian Churches in Malawi. As a follow up to the Catholic bishops’ Pastoral Letter, the leaders of CCAP and WARC jointly issued an open letter, presented to Dr Banda, entitled *The Nation of Malawi in Crisis: the Church’s Concern*.¹⁸⁰ They also quoted a passage from Proverbs 14:34, ‘Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people.’ As an endorsement to this letter, 55 ministers of Livingstonia Synod, of which I was one of the signatories, agreed to read it out in our congregations.¹⁸¹

The open letter referred directly to the Bishops’ Pastoral letter and urged the government to address the raised issues.¹⁸² The church leaders called the government to appoint a widely based Commission who should be mandated ‘to make specific proposals for structural reform towards a political system with sufficient checks and balances on the use of power, and guarantees of accountability at all levels of government; to review the judicial system, in line with the rule of law; to look into the distribution of income and wealth required by demands of social justice.’¹⁸³ Like the Pastoral Letter, the open letter demanded that the government should take immediate steps to abolish injustices such as, ‘end the practice of detention without trial; release or bring to early and fair trial all political detainees; reform conditions of imprisonment in accordance with human dignity; allow freedom of expression and

¹⁷⁸ Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 27. He quotes B. de G. Fortman, “No Nobodies”, which is an unpublished paper issued in 1995, p. 2. Professor Fortman was a member of the WARC delegation who came to Malawi in June 1992.

¹⁷⁹ Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 27. This was a “Statement on the Current Situation in Malawi”, issued by the *Southern Africa Alliance of Reformed Churches (SAARC)*, who met in Lusaka on 29th April to 5th May 1992.

¹⁸⁰ “The Nation of Malawi in Crisis: the Church’s Concern”, Geneva: *World Alliance of Reformed Churches*, 2nd June 1992.

¹⁸¹ *CCAP Synod of Livingstonia*, “Statement to CCAP General Synod”, 9th June 1992. “The Nation of Malawi in Crisis: the Church’s Concern”, 1992.

¹⁸² “The Nation of Malawi in Crisis: the Church’s Concern”, 1992, p. 2.

¹⁸³ “The Nation of Malawi in Crisis: the Church’s Concern”, 1992, p. 2.

association, so as to encourage open discussion of the nation's future.¹⁸⁴ To substantiate these demands, the Western donor community suspended all development aid to Malawi in May 1992 to see remarkable efforts by the government in respect for human rights and good governance.

As a result of Church's demands and the cutting off of development aid, the government took drastic measures to proceed with reform. To prove this to the world the government invited the International Committee of the Red Cross to inspect the prisons. The other reform was the stoppage of the practice of forced donations that Malawians were giving Dr Banda and the harassment of people who did not possess Malawi Congress Party cards. Although the change was progressing at a slow pace, the foundation for a change was laid and the door to freedom of expression and association was widely opened. Furthermore, Dr Banda responded to the open letter by extending a cordial invitation to church leaders to meet with his ministers. Even though one can conclude that Dr Banda was not pleased with the reform process by not inviting church leaders to meet and discuss with him personally, the truth could be there because even if he delegated his ministers to meet the church leaders, there was some reluctance to form a forum. As Ross notes, 'the government stalled and was clearly reluctant to accede to the formation of a forum where fundamental political issues would be addressed.'¹⁸⁵

However, the wind for change had blown and there was no way to obstruct the people of God. The Presbyterian churches invited the Muslim Association, the Malawi Law Society and the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry to form a national and representative Commission.¹⁸⁶ On 26th August 1992, the Christian Council of Malawi (now Malawi Council of Churches) wrote to the government calling for a referendum on the system of government. The signatories of this letter were the Anglican Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Seventh Day Baptist Church, the Churches of Christ, the Zambezi Evangelical Church, Providence Industrial Mission, the Baptist Church and many other related church organisations.¹⁸⁷ To prove to the government that there was no turning back, another letter was written hardly two days later but now with the addition of signatories from the Roman

¹⁸⁴ "The Nation of Malawi in Crisis: the Church's Concern", 1992, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ Ross, K.R., 1996, p 28.

¹⁸⁶ Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 29. According to an interview by Rev. Misanjo Kansilanga, "the lack of response of the MCP government forced the church leaders to invite other people who were interested."

¹⁸⁷ Christian Council of Malawi, Open letter to the Government of Malawi, 26th August 1992.

Catholic Church, the Muslim Community, the Business Community and the Malawi Law Society.¹⁸⁸ In the history of Malawi for the first time it was an enormous achievement for the Christian and Muslim leaders to publicly unite in taking strategic initiative in the socio-political reform. That was the beginning of all Malawians regardless of religious affiliation getting to know each other and to discuss issues of national interest which they had never done before. Consequently, the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) was formed.

The tireless, relentless and effective efforts of PAC led to the call for a national referendum on 16th June 1993 where the electorate voted for a multi-party system by a two-thirds majority. Certainly, the victory in the National Referendum led to the General Election which was finally held on 17th May 1994, and now legalised political parties. The main parties that won seats in parliament were the United Democratic Front (UDF, 86 seats), Malawi Congress Party (MCP, 56 seats) and Alliance For Democracy (AFORD, 36 seats). Dr Bakili Muluzi,

leader of UDF, won the presidential seat and became the first democratic President of the republic of Malawi. That was the defeat of Dr Banda's regime and his 30 years of autocratic rule and consequently it marked the end of an era of single party system of government and opened a new chapter of multi-party system. That was an outstanding achievement of the church, stakeholders and the ordinary Malawians and indeed history was made.

In conclusion, the bible was central to the proponents of change. With no doubts the church played a remarkable role as what Ross calls, 'power brokers.'¹⁸⁹ The church leaders were not seeking political offices themselves, but their untiring efforts brought a distinctive influence in dismantling the one-party system of government. Even though churches in the past had failed to criticise Dr Banda and his regime, it was now an ideal time to stand up and face the reality no matter what would happen. However, not only did the church use the bible, ordinary Malawians also used the bible in the process of socio-political change. According to Felix Chingota, a survey was carried out to find the influence of the bible in their decision to vote in the referendum from the ordinary Malawians.¹⁹⁰ According to this survey, there was a mixture of opinions in the need to change the system of government from single system to a

¹⁸⁸ Letter of Rt. Rev Dr. Silas Nyirenda and Rev. Misanjo E. Kansilanga to the Hon Minister of State Mr J.Z.U. Tembo M.P., 28th August 1992, Public Affairs Committee File, 1992.

¹⁸⁹ Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 35.

¹⁹⁰ Chingota, F.L., 1996, pp.41-62. Chingota, F.L., 1996, p. 46.

pluralist system. According to Chingota, about '280 answered positively, 49 answered negatively while 12 were undecided.'¹⁹¹ The 280 respondents wanted a change of the system of government and backed their views with biblical passages which I cannot cite them here because they are very many. Nevertheless, the 49 respondents did not see any need for a change of system of government and likewise gave their supporting biblical passages. According to the survey, the reasons given were that, 'the leadership of the country was anointed and therefore to seek change was really to conspire and to rebel against God (Ps. 2:1-3); during this period there was harmony (Ps 133:1; Prov 16:7; Matt 5:9); people should therefore be submissive to the anointed leadership (Prov. 1:1; Eccl. 4:5; Titus 3:1-2). The advocates of change were motivated by hate which was without justifiable reason (John 15:25).'¹⁹² Moreover, ministers from the Nkhoma Synod of the Presbyterian Church who withdrew when churches and other stakeholders were spearheading for a change in a political system preached in Sunday worship urging Christians not to change the system of government¹⁹³. Pastors went to the extent of pronouncing that Dr Banda's 'regime was ordained of God.'¹⁹⁴ Truly, for 30 years some Malawians associated Dr Banda with the divine ruler, the Messiah, to the extent that they said he was the saviour. However, there were some concerned Christians who questioned the divine nature of Dr Banda, nor could there be another Messiah other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God.¹⁹⁵

My own identification here is that, those who did not see any need for a change of system of Government read the bible both *behind the text* and *in the text itself*.¹⁹⁶ They looked at the past events under the leadership of Dr Banda and saw no need to change the system of

¹⁹¹ Chingota, F.L., 1996, p. 46 – But some of the passages cited are Gen. 1:27; 1 Kgs 11:11; Prov 28:21; Dan 3:1-10; Matt 27:21; Lk 4:7-8; Exod 3:8 Deut 16:1-6; 2 Chron 32:15; Eph 6:9 etc.

¹⁹² Chingota, F.L., 1996, p. 49.

¹⁹³ Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 29; Chingota, F.L., 1996, p. 49. Chingota quotes Mr G. Chigona who conducted an interview at Madisi, 29-30 November 1994 and noted that Nkhoma Synod Pastors of the CCAP "would very often admonish people to vote against any sort of political change." Indeed, as Chingota asserts in his note 19, p. 49, "It is significant to note that Nkhoma Synod was not a signatory to the letter of 2 June 1992 written to the then Life President, Dr Banda, by the delegation from WARC and leaders of the Presbyterian Church, a letter which called for a change of political system. Moreover, Rev Maseko of Nkhoma Synod was forced to withdraw his name from the letter written by the Christian Council of Malawi, a letter he co-signed, and in which the Council called for a change of political system."

¹⁹⁴ Chingota, F.L., 1996, p. 49.

¹⁹⁵ *The Independent Paper*, 12-19th June 1993.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. West, G.O., 1993, p. 27. Gerald West introduces three modes of reading the bible critically. The mode that emphasises the historical and sociological context of the bible is reading *behind the text*. The mode that emphasises the literary and narrative context of the bible is reading *on the text itself*. But reading *in front of the text* concentrates on thematic and symbolic context of the bible as a whole. I adopted these modes in examining and interpreting the way Malawians read and interpreted the bible in their arguments for and against the need for a change of system of Government.

Government. They said Dr Banda brought peace and harmony in the country; and there was no need to change the system of Government for fear of losing their peace and harmony. Instead, they advocated a continued loyalty and submission to the anointed leadership (Ps 2:1-3; Ps 133:1; Prov 1:1; 16:7; Eccl 4:5; Matt 5:9 & Titus 3:1-2). Also reading in the text itself, some went to the extent of pronouncing that Dr Banda's regime was ordained of God, by quoting Mark 9:7 where God says "this is my beloved Son: hear him". Similarly, those who quoted Rom 13:1, maintained that citizens of a country are ordered to submit to the earthly rulers, because even Jesus recognised the power of Pilate, the judge (John 19:11). Thus, the Church should not trespass the spheres of the government because it has got its own particular role to play in society and that is preaching the Gospel of Christ and making people repent of their sins and be directed to Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18-19; Mk 16:15-16). In this way, they saw the Kingdom of Christ as not of this world, hence the spheres of the Government (Politics) and the Church are not mates but separable (1 Tim 4:1; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). According to the views of Pastor Masoka of the Seventh Day Adventist Church expressed in the *New Express Paper* of 11-17 June 1993¹⁹⁷, he said if the Government intrudes upon the sphere of the Church, then the Church should respond by calling upon the intervention of the Lord in prayer. He said, the Lord will do this at his own time rather than involving the Church directly into politics. Therefore, single party sympathisers argued that religious leaders have nothing to do with political matters, because the two are incompatible. As one clergyman made it clear in the *Malawi News* of 5-11 December 1992, 'I am not a politician, I am a man of God and the two are rarely mixed'.¹⁹⁸ Those who wanted the single party to continue dubbed the Catholic Pastoral Letter as the work of the devil who throws and turns the atmosphere of peace and stability into confusion and chaos. I believe some of the advocates of a single party rule seemed to believe that, as citizens of heaven, they were on a pilgrimage, moving towards an imminent Parousia, hence, it was needless to concentrate on the earthly problems that plagued them.

However, those who argued for a change of system of government read the bible both *in front of the text and in the text itself*. They looked at the bible and saw that human beings are created in the image of God, but they are oppressed. They also believed that believers are not only citizens of heaven, but also citizens of this world, where they live now and face the daily problems involving social, economic, and political upheavals as they wait for the final

¹⁹⁷ *The New Express Paper*, 11-17th June 1993.

¹⁹⁸ *Malawi News*, 5-11th December 1992.

consummation. Therefore, they hungered for righteousness and deliverance from oppression.¹⁹⁹ The people looked at Dr Banda's regime as oppressive and victimising, and therefore felt the need to be delivered from this regime and his autocratic rule by exercising their democratic rights (Josh. 24:15; 1 Sam 8:4-9; Job 34:4; Matt 27; Lk 2:1-7; 20:25). The majority of the people were dissatisfied with the situation in Malawi and described it as a period of darkness where people were anxious and hopeless, and therefore, needed liberation from slavery and empowerment. Therefore, the results of the Referendum and General Election in 1993 and 1994 respectively were described as the dawning of a new age and the victory for religion. Looking at the present situation in Malawi, the church needed to recover the power of God's liberating acts. Thus, the church ought to have resisted any attempt of domesticating or politicising with the Government.

Following Presbyterian theology, inspired by Calvinism, Kenneth Ross has argued that the church and state should be understood on the model of two concentric circles. He says the Christian church forms the smaller inner circle while the civil society forms the larger outer circle.²⁰⁰ However, the central part of the two circles is Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the kingdom of God. Thus, Calvinists expect that the political order should in some measure reflect the character of the kingdom of God. In this respect, those entrusted with political office have that mandate. As Calvin reminded Francis I of France, 'that king who in ruling over his realm does not serve God's glory exercises not kingly rule but brigandage.'²⁰¹ To state it positively, Calvin says, 'if those who govern remember that they are vicars of God, they should watch with care, earnestness and diligence, to represent in themselves to men some image of divine providence, protection, goodness, benevolence and justice.'²⁰² Although Calvin resists the absolute tendencies in politics, he also 'invests political life with a powerful positive vocation in the service of God and his kingdom.'²⁰³ In this sense, the church has a role as a prophetic voice in the political spheres. Therefore, it is naïve to note that church (faith) and politics should be kept apart. As Jürgen Moltmann has summarised, 'the church

¹⁹⁹ Some of the passages from both the Old and New Testaments quoted in their arguments for change of Government are: Gen. 1:26-27; Exod 20; Num. 11:16-20; Deut. 5:6-8; Isa. 41:1-4, 8-10; 43:1-5; 61:1-3; Jer. 34:8-22; Ezek. 13:10; I Sam. 15:35; Dan. 2:44; Acts 1:1-26; Col. 1:16; Lk. 4:7-9; Eph. 6:9; Matt. 5:6; 7:7-8; Jn. 8:32; 24:1-14; 1 Thess. 5:3. These passages speak about the creation of mankind in the image of God, about oppression and deliverance from oppression, and change of leadership.

²⁰⁰ Ross, K.R. *Gospel Ferment in Malawi: Theological Essays*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1995, pp. 31-48.

²⁰¹ Calvin, J. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by J.T. McNeill and F.L. Battles, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, Vol. 1, p. 12.

²⁰² Calvin, J. *Institutes*, IV xx6.

²⁰³ Ross, K.R., 1995, p. 35.

wants the State to point towards the kingdom of God, not away from it. It wants God's grace to be reflected in the external, temporary dealings of the political life.' He also goes further, 'The church does not divinize politics, but it does not demonize politics either.'²⁰⁴ Such understanding of the political life clearly falls within the remit of the theologian, and according to Calvinist understanding, theology is one of the disciplines which must concern itself with political life.²⁰⁵ In this way, we can recognise that politics needs religion, because the ruler must be moral and religious. As Philip Wogaman observes, 'Any political philosophy remains incomplete unless it has reference to a vision of what is ultimately true and ultimately good, and that is the contribution of theological traditions.'²⁰⁶ When the churches in Malawi came up and spoke against the ills of Dr Banda's regime, they were really exercising their prophetic ministry. The churches were no longer in ideological captivity into which they had often fallen because of their assimilation and alignment with Dr Banda's government and his party, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). In the words of José Miguez-Bonino, 'We urgently need a Christian ethic of politics, precisely in order that we may avoid a wrong politicization of Christianity.'²⁰⁷ All we need is the rule of love which is our Christian faith. This Christian faith has to be lived and this also includes political expression. At its Cardiff meeting of 1925, Karl Barth told the World Alliance, that the 'old Reformed Creed was wholly ethical', in that it always addressed the public sphere.²⁰⁸ Therefore, faithfulness to the ethical demands of the Gospel held closely the political life as an area to express the meaning of the Christian faith and discipleship. That is why for centuries, Calvinists have been convinced to express and work out their faith in the political life of the community. Surely, as Ross reiterates, 'this is not a matter of unwarranted "meddling". It is built into the very meaning of faith.'²⁰⁹

Both the advocates of a pluralist system of government and defenders of a single system of government sought legitimation for their positions from the bible. This shows that the bible could be used to support oppression. The other problem of those who supported a single system of government was that there was no critical interpretation of the texts as regards to

²⁰⁴ Moltmann, J. *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, London: SCM Press, 1984, pp. 88-89.

²⁰⁵ Ross, K.R., 1995, p. 35.

²⁰⁶ Wogaman, J.P. *Christian Perspectives on Politics*, London: SCM Press, 1988, p. 110.

²⁰⁷ Miguez-Bonino, J. *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983, p. 17.

²⁰⁸ Ross, K.R., 1995, p. 36; Cited from De Gruchy, J.W., *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Cape Town: David Philip, 1991, p. 211.

²⁰⁹ Ross, K.R., 1995, p. 36.

the context and the situation Malawians were experiencing under Dr Banda's regime. However, the plan and thoughts of God are not man's plan, as it says, 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord', (Isa. 55:8). Similarly, I agree with the writer of Revelation who says that the angel to the church in Philadelphia has the key of David thus, when he opens no one will shut and when he shuts no one will open (Rev 3:7b). I believe that God opened the door for Malawians after He had heard their afflictions and cries and the result was the change of a system of government that the people of Malawi are enjoying today. In this respect, I believe that the decision to vote in the Referendum and General Election for a change was influenced by the bible. Looking at the specific passages given, one can observe that there were two vital biblical traditions referred to during the transitional period.

These were the liberating acts and God's empowering wisdom.²¹⁰ Given these studies undertaken and the letters from churches, a conclusion is that the bible played a pivotal role in the socio-political transformation of Malawi between 1992-1994. The process of change based on the bible with the churches and ending with peoples' decision to vote for change brought significant results that both parties fought for, and indeed the change occurred whereby Malawi attained a multi-party system of government on 17th May 1994. Therefore, no one can dispute the fact that the bible played a transformative role in the cultural, educational, socio-political, and religious life of the people of Malawi. Thus, the bible is the power for both individual and societal transformation.

In the section above, we have looked at the impact of the bible brought by missionaries and the way Malawians responded to its message. Apart from the economic enterprise and education, the bible brought enormous impacts in transforming some of the biased cultural and social customs. But more importantly, the bible influenced people to change the system of Government. I would say people analysed the pathetic historic situation they were in, and looked at the bible critically. This critical analysis enabled people to construct meanings as they searched for justice and liberation from Dr Banda's regime which they saw as oppressive and brutal. Therefore, the bible has a divine power that transcends human conceptions and equally brings individual and societal transformation. Having looked at the transformative role of the bible in the cultural, educational, socio-political and religious life of the people in

²¹⁰ Chingota, F.L., 1996, p. 60.

Malawi and the way some Churches spearheaded the reform programme, the next section in this chapter discusses the role and participation of women in the Presbyterian Churches since its establishment to the year 2000 AD. In this section, I will concentrate much on how churches which fought hard to bring democracy in Malawi have accommodated women in their search for justice and liberation; and the impact of ecumenical organisations in their fight for the discipleship of equals. While Churches stood for the voiceless by ushering their prophetic voices, how did/do they treat women within their Churches? Did/do they practice what they preach in terms of love, justice and unity? Or are women's views heard and accommodated? This is what we will look at in the coming section of this chapter.

2.7. The role and participation of women in the Presbyterian churches, 1875 –2000: Churches and Women's response to ecumenical awareness in search for justice and liberation in Malawi

The churches in Malawi are not immune to the temptation of exercising power in authoritarian terms. This is seen in its position of power balance between men and women. Women have been discriminated against in Malawian society and culture. Many women look to the church to lead, but unfortunately sexism remains deeply entrenched in the church. It is for this reason that this study focuses at the impact of churches and other ecumenical bodies in search for women's emancipation from an oppressive patriarchal rule. I will concentrate my study in the Presbyterian churches, particularly, the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Synod of Livingstonia. Briefly, in Malawi we have three Synods of the CCAP namely: Blantyre, Nkhoma and Livingstonia. These Synods work autonomously, though they are under the umbrella of the CCAP General Synod (General Assembly) which also has CCAP Synods of Zambia and Harare in Zimbabwe as members. Women in Malawi have experienced and are experiencing oppression at various levels and in various ways. They struggle with the meaning and interpretation of the full liberation which the Gospel of Jesus Christ offers. All they want is to be present and participate in decision-making positions in the church and society. They want to feel that they are part and parcel of the existing community.

2.7.i. The work of the early missionaries

The coming of Christianity to Malawi recognised women as full human beings created in the divine Image. Therefore, the missionaries too wanted women to participate fully in church and society. As Miss Walker of Livingstonia Mission reported to the first conference of women missionaries in 1949 saying,

‘My friends, do you see it? Do you realise what is happening? We are people. In our own village, where are we women, when plans are being made or discussed for the good of our people? It is men who are inside the kraal, we, women are cut out. Now here in the church we are brought inside. We have been given a place and work to do in the kingdom of God. Here in the church we are people.’²¹¹

In this statement Miss Walker quoted Ngoni women from Mzimba district: according to Ngoni patriarchal culture, the plans and discussions that involve the community were made by men only. Here, women were sidelined and therefore had no say in the life and work of the community. The emphasis in this statement is “people”; hence these women understood that men and women as people need to work together for the betterment of their lives and the community. As people they also need to participate in any plan or discussion that would bring glory to the entire society. In this sense, women were deeply crying that their thoughts and capabilities were not utilised fully for the good of the community. The call in this statement was that they needed to feel that they were part and parcel of the community; hence the need for collective responsibility. It was for this reason that they now praised the work of missionaries in considering them as people. For this reason, they were brought inside the church and were given the place and work to do. They felt the church had made them participate, while their patriarchal culture denied them.

However, the statement does not specify what kind of place and work the church has given them to do in the kingdom of God. In relation to the statement made by Walker, one can feel that though the Ngoni women felt recognised as full human beings by the missionaries, the patriarchal syndrome was still existing. Women had not been fully liberated because males were (are) still dominating the church and society. The freedom from cultural oppression despite the inception of Christianity was not rooted out. Given the responses against the ordination of women to Sacramental ministry which were discussed after more than 125 years since missionaries planted the Gospel in Malawi, one can see the immense internal prejudices against women. Certainly, even if women are members of the church and society, it seems as if they have their own place and work, as if it was God’s intention to do in the Kingdom of God, hence there is total inequality.

²¹¹ Walker, E.J. “African Women against their Background”, *The Life and Place of Women in the Church and Community*, papers presented at the first meeting of women missionaries, 1949. This is printed in Kenneth R. Ross (ed.), in *Christianity in Malawi: A Source Book*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996, pp.98-99.

In terms of educational opportunities, Chanock observes that there is little that 'has been told of the presence or absence of the progressive new women in Malawi.'²¹² Even though not much has been said about the progress of women after attaining education in these mission schools as opposed to men, women were also taught some skills and some got employment in either mission schools or elsewhere. For instance, at Livingstonia village schools, girls filled some 30 to 40% of student places, but they could not proceed with their education, because many married early since their families could not afford additional fees. According to Annual returns for the Overtoun Institution, '52 girls sat for their examinations out of 232 pupils in 1898; only 27 out of 193 in 1900; 5 out of 110 in 1935 and none at all in the next four years.'²¹³ Moreover, the skills taught to the girls were frequently of use only in a subordinate and domestic role. As McCracken asserts, 'when co-educational classes were conducted at the Overtoun Institution, the Senatus decided in 1903 to reduce the academic standard of the girls' school and to concentrate instead on subjects as cooking, sewing, nursing, housemaid work and laundry work.'²¹⁴ In 1910 the ordinary duties that were regarded as of the girls' department were sweeping, dusting, scrubbing, washing and ironing. According to the Educational Diary of the Overtoun Institution, sewing lessons were carried on and a 'good deal of pounding of maize took place.'²¹⁵ However, girls were once more admitted to the same classes as men in 1917, but they achieved unimpressive results. In comparison with the significant proportion of Scottish women teachers employed by the mission, there was rare recruitment for Malawi women teachers. For instance, in 1927 only 13 women got employment in mission schools as opposed to 1403 men, while in 1939 only 12 women out of 1334 teachers.²¹⁶

Undoubtedly, these statistics show that the subordination of women was prevalent even during the time of missionaries. As a result of male domination in learning Institutions and working places, the transformation of the position of women in church and society was limited. In respect to the educational opportunities open to women, the missionaries contributed to the subordination and lack of meaningful participation of women. As Chanock observes, 'educational opportunities open to women were even more restricted than those for

²¹² Chanock, M.L., 1972, p. 438.

²¹³ Annual returns for the Overtoun Institution, MNA – McCracken, J. *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 253.

²¹⁴ From Senatus Minutes, entry for 1st July 1903 - McCracken, J., 1977, p. 253.

²¹⁵ Institution Educational Diary, reports for 1910 and 1911 – McCracken, J., 1977, p. 253

²¹⁶ McCracken, J., 1977, p. 253.

men.²¹⁷ Since the skills taught to women were of use in a subordinate and domestic role, women remained at home with limited experience and exposure to a wider world. But this was not the case with men whose migration gave some an additional code of rules to which to conform. McCracken reports the observation of Major C.A. Edwards in 1897 that the ‘girls school at Livingstonia called up visions of housekeepers and female servants in the days to come.’²¹⁸ Thus, given the limited educational opportunities to women as opposed to men, Chanock is right in saying ‘even the most innovating of missions did not make a startling attack on the position of women in society.’²¹⁹ Thus, on the one hand, the mission schools established in Malawi, for instance, helped most Malawians to understand their own history and enabled them to start analysis and reflection of their histories in the light of its imperial domination. However, on the other hand, whilst operating these missionary schools, the missionaries were at the same time imposing European Christianity on Africans (Malawians) through imperialistic theology that they propagated in the churches they established. In this sense, the European mission to Malawi contains both seeds of liberation and oppressive elements. Ironically, Africans utilised the seeds of liberation sown by missionaries to subvert the European oppressive imperialistic theology.

When we come to the response of women to the evangelisation missionaries brought, women formed a big percentage of members in the church. They heard the Gospel and surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ. As Walker asserts, women were given a place and work to do in the Kingdom of God.²²⁰ A similar point is made by Hanna, ‘the wives were fully as dedicated to the work as their husbands, and their presence contributed to the life and influence of the mission stations a graciousness which would otherwise have been lacking.’²²¹ The presence, dedication and influence of women brought grace to the shape of the church, and it is for this reason that Africans found celibacy incomprehensible. The respect and dedication of women in the church enabled women to play an active role in Congregations. As McCracken notes, ‘In Ngoniland (Mzimba), as a result of Fraser’s efforts, the Balalakazi (Female Elders) played an active role as Congregational advisers, settling disputes and supervising morals among

²¹⁷ Chanock, M.L., 1972, p. 438.

²¹⁸ McCracken, J., 1973, p. 251.

²¹⁹ Chanock, M.L., 1972, p. 438.

²²⁰ Walker, E.J., 1949, p.99.

²²¹ Hanna, A.J., 1960, p. 60.

women.²²² However, their role as advisers was only for their fellow women and not to men. Again, this shows the subordination of women and inequality as regards to division of labour and their position in the church. Despite being active members of the Church, women were not yet appointed as Church Elders which could have paved a way to full membership of the Sessions. Certainly, the spiritual life of the church is best served by the selection of Christians whose knowledge, probity, character and wise judgement are trusted by their fellow members and these are appointed as elders. But these elders, according to Dr Robert Laws, 'were chosen from among men who, while having fine Christian characters, were lacking in education and were sometimes unable to read the Scriptures fluently in public.'²²³ However, there was a proposal that women should be eligible for the eldership that the Presbytery of Livingstonia (now Livingstonia Synod) had approved in 1921. But, as McIntosh asserts, as the union with Blantyre Presbytery (now Blantyre Synod) was imminent, the Livingstonia Presbytery decided to consult Blantyre Presbytery before they took a final decision.²²⁴ Surely, the union between Livingstonia and Blantyre Presbyteries to form the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) took place in 1924 and by this time women were not yet admitted to full membership in Sessions, despite their active contributions to the life and work of the church. Nevertheless, they were not even considered as late as 1935, as Agnes Fraser pointed out, 'they had not been admitted to full membership of the Sessions and had never been invited to participate at Presbytery.'²²⁵ In this case, Livingstonia Synod opened up new areas where men were supreme rather than encouraging the genuine emancipation of women. And though African Church leaders commented in 1936 on the absence of training facilities for women, there is little evidence, according to McCracken, to suggest that church leaders were interested in extending opportunities significantly.²²⁶ Even though women were admitted as full members of Sessions in the early 1950s, they were not liberated and empowered fully because the church had no female ministers until 1998. But this was not strange to the Livingstonia Synod because the Mother Church, the Church of Scotland had its first female minister in 1968.

²²² McCracken, J., 1972, p. 253.

²²³ Laws, R., 1934, pp. 136-37.

²²⁴ McIntosh, H. *Robert Laws: Servant of Africa*, Scotland: The Handsel Press Ltd, 1993, p. 188.

²²⁵ From Minutes of N. Livingstonia Presbytery of CCA LI 1/3/24, 1/8/1921.

²²⁶ Presbytery Minutes of Livingstonia Presbytery, entry for 5th July 1935.

2.7.ii. The Impact of Ecumenical Movements on women's equality and liberation

These ecumenical movements brought women together to voice their concerns for equality and liberation from patriarchy in church and society. The first ecumenical movement was the Pan African Christian Women Assembly (PACWA).²²⁷ This is the product of women delegates to the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar General Assembly which was held in Lusaka, Zambia in 1987. The objectives of PACWA are:

‘To stop the tide of ungodly liberalism and secularism with its resultant materialism. To assert the true dignity of women as found in Jesus Christ and contained in the Bible. To inject into African society biblical morals and values through women, who are the mothers of any society. To deliver Africa from decadence and ultimate collapse. To make disciples of African Nations for Christ in the Continent of Africa.’²²⁸

In Malawi, PACWA was officially launched in 1990, where women pledged to witness for Christ by getting involved in the provision of moral and spiritual support to HIV/AIDS patients. They also pledged to raise money to build an orphanage and a girl's hostel to re-educate them because of massive drop-outs due to early pregnancies.²²⁹ Hence through PACWA, Malawian women have learned that they are part of African Christian women from different denominations. As a result of this, they realised that time has come for African women to, as Beya says, ‘emerge from the shadows to speak up for themselves and define in their own way the woman-man relationship in the heart of the church and society.’²³⁰

This advocacy encouraged women to go beyond their normal church activities in women's organisations and made them become more involved with the issue of women at an ecumenical level. Therefore, through PACWA, women have gained a voice to make known what their fore-mothers and fore-fathers were doing. Women have sought recognition from an African emphasis based on the message of Ephesians 5:21, which calls both parties to subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. I think Paul recognised the fact that man and woman are equal partners before God and towards each other. In effect, PACWA has

²²⁷ McCracken, J., 1972, p. 253. From “Resolutions of the Native Session in attendance at the 5th General Conference of the Federated Missions of Nyasaland”, 1926, Livingstonia Correspondence Box 1, MNA.

²²⁸ The Christian Women called themselves the PACWA at the Conference held in Nairobi in 1989. However, at their regional conference held in Zomba, Malawi, Malawian women agreed to drop the word Assembly and replaced it with Alliance because since 1994 they have been part of the total Assembly of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar, the Association of Evangelicals of Africa (AEA).

²²⁹ *PACWA Covenant*, A Commission of Association of Evangelicals Africa and Madagascar on Women Affairs, 1990, 2.

²³⁰ Phiri, I.A., 1997, p. 140.

emphasised the importance of a Christian home consisting of one man and one wife. In this respect, they have condemned polygamy and the abuse of childless marriages prevalent in Africa.²³¹ They have also put the responsibility of both parents to the family blessed with children to nurture and teach them properly, so that they become responsible citizens.

Another Ecumenical movement for women is the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. This idea of forming this movement originated from the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1987. It was in response to the United Nation's Decade for Women. What the WCC did was not only to outline the need for the decade for their Church members and other interested churches, but also to establish the women's desk responsible for this. They gave an example by launching the decade in 1988 at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, in which they declared that 1988-1998 was to be the decade in question. The purpose of the decade was defined as follows,

‘Empowering women to challenge oppressive structures in the global community, their country and their church. Affirming-through shared leadership and decision-making, theology and spirituality-the decisive contributions of women in churches and communities. Giving visibility to women's perspective and actions in the work and struggle for justice, peace and integrity of creation. Enabling the churches to free themselves from racism, sexism and classism; from teaching and practices that discriminate against women. And encouraging the churches to take actions in solidarity with women.’²³²

This decade coincided with the establishment of two major groups of African women. The first group was the African Women Theologians who since 1983 had been planning to get together. Hence with the encouragement of the decade, the Circle of African Women Theologians was inaugurated in 1989, under the theme *‘Daughters of Africa Arise.’* This theme was based on Jesus' encounter with the Hemorrhaging woman and the daughter of Jairus as recorded in Mark 5:21-43 and Luke 8:40-56. The second group was the Women's desk of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). The decision to establish this desk was made at the AACC's fifth Assembly in Lome, Togo in 1987. Here, women delegates requested a women's conference that would critically analyse the ministry of women in church and society. The first women's conference of AACC was again held in Lome, Togo from October 16-21, 1989 under the theme *‘Arise and shine for your Light has come,’* based

²³¹ Beya, M.M. “Doing Theology in the Perspective of African Women,” in *Our Advent: African Women's Experience in the Lutheran Tradition*, Addis Ababa, LWF, 1991, p. 1.

²³² Phiri, I.A., 1997, p. 142.

on Isaiah 60:1. Since the woman's desk of AACC was established just when the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women was launched, it was mandated to uphold and follow the purpose for which the decade was established. In the words of the first Secretary, Omega Bula, 'the conference offered African church women the opportunity to examine, analyse and assess the struggle for justice, peace and integrity of creation from women's perspective. It was called as a challenge and source of encouragement for the churches in Africa to work in solidarity with women.'²³³

Even if the conference embraced the ideas of the decade, it had made its own objectives. These are summarised as follows: critical analysis of women's ministry in church and society; Forum provision for sharing on issues of justice, peace and integrity; affirmation of the importance of women's participation in the ministry of church and society and the strengthening of women's fellowship and sisterhood in Africa.²³⁴ These objectives were further translated into conference sub-themes of justice, peace and integrity of creation; community life issues; people's participation in church and finally education and training. In continuation of the spirit of 1989 Lome women's conference, the launching of the decade in Malawi in 1991 was aimed at translating the sub-themes into Malawian Issues. Thus, women in Malawi decided to examine fully the last three sub-themes of the Lome Conference.

2.7.iii. Malawian women theologians' response to Ecumenical Movements

In respect to the above reality, women theologians in Malawi came to the realisation that they needed to break their silence and speak out in honour of their appeal for total equality and authority in the church and society. Thus, the first group of Malawian Women in Theology was organised by the CCAP, Synod of Blantyre, Chigodi women's centre in 1990. The Blantyre Synod sponsored the consultation with the intention of getting together all women doing theology to know each other and identify their concerns in order to make their voices heard in church and society. The invitations were sent to all member-churches of the Malawi Council of Churches (MCC) formerly known as the Christian Council of Malawi (CCM). By doing so, Blantyre Synod who sponsored this consultation envisaged an ecumenical group to attend this first consultative meeting. Surprisingly enough only sixteen women responded to

²³³ This is what is stated in the "Brochure of the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with women 1988-1998," WCC, Geneva, p. 1.

²³⁴ *All Africa Conference of Churches*, "Report on Women's Continental Conference, Lome, Togo, October 16-21," 1989, p. 1.

the invitation and all of them were Presbyterians. I agree with Isabel Phiri that suggesting that participants were all Presbyterians might give the impression that other denominations which are members of MCC were not ready to get involved in the consultation.²³⁵ The Synod of Blantyre managed to send twelve participants, while Nkhoma Synod sent only one delegate and Livingstonia Synod sent three participants namely, Mrs Esnat C. Munthali, Mrs Catherine Manda and Mrs Martha B. Mwale. The limited number of participants to that consultation reflects the minority of women theologians in Malawi due to limited opportunities of getting theological education.

At the consultation²³⁶, women voiced their concern by stating the need to allow more women to undergo theological studies which was forwarded to their mainstream churches. They also shared their experiences of oppression, prejudice and injustices against women in church and society. Consequently, they felt the need to produce some bible study materials based on issues affecting women. To continue this process of consciousness-raising they planned to have similar meetings at Presbytery and local Congregational level. They decided to adopt an inclusive approach by attempting an equal participation between men and women at their future meetings. This was surely a way of emphasising their desire to build a community of men and women in church and society. They also saw the need to raise awareness in other churches to support women as they propose the negotiations for an increased participation in leadership and decision-making positions. Certainly, this was very crucial in the sense that women had been conditioned to think that men were the only capable people for leadership and decision-making, despite women being in the majority both in church and society.

The other point that the consultation raised was the reconsideration of the churches on their stand against the ordination of women to the ministry of Holy Sacrament. The consultation rightly spelt out that women who feel called by God to ministry should not be denied their call. Instead they should be given an opportunity and space to answer God's call without anyone blocking or limiting the grace of God. They also wanted the acceptance and definitions of the role of single women in church, although the culture of Malawi did not recognise them.²³⁷ Finally, the consultation demanded that the church should take a stand as

²³⁵ Phiri, I.A., 1997, p. 146.

²³⁶ This is in the "Report of Malawian Women in Theology Event, Grace Bandawe Conference," Blantyre, Malawi, 1990.

²³⁷ Phiri, I.A., 1997, p. 137

regards the legal rights of women in relation to ownership of property and land,²³⁸ as enshrined in the constitution of Malawi. In conclusion, these ecumenical women's movements enabled Malawian Church women to break their silence and speak up against the feeling that women are inferior to men. Through these ecumenical organisations, women declared their intention to fight against sexism in church and society, which they consider as a sin. By reading the bible with new eyes, they affirmed that they are equal with men in church and society. They are continuously asking the church to be a prophetic voice in condemning cultures that have mistreated women.

2.7.iv. Presbyterian churches' response to women's appeal for justice and liberation

Since the Presbyterian Mission was established in 1875 and 1876 respectively, male dominance in the Church has continued. There has been little progress on the role of women in the church. It is for this reason that the CCAP, General Synod²³⁹ decided in 1988 to hold a seminar on the participation and empowerment of women in the church. The resolutions made at this seminar included: the appointment of women to all positions; representation of women on Sessions, Presbyteries, Synod and General Synod; granting of all voting privileges; consideration of the ordination of women as ministers; establishment of a women's desk at General Synod; the desk should work towards uniformity in structuring women's work in the Synod; encouragement of women to study theology, and sponsoring women's meeting once every two years.²⁴⁰ The General Synod accepted the proposal for the establishment of the women's desk, whereby Mrs Christina Phiri from Livingstonia Synod became the first Co-ordinator. But despite its acceptance, the General Synod did not give her an office instead she was operating from Livingstonia Synod. One can take it that the General Synod took this proposal lightly. Accordingly, women commissioners who attended the General Synod meeting in 1994 wrote a letter to the Senior Clerk of the General Synod expressing their views. In the letter, they appreciated their representation at the two consecutive General Synod meetings, but expressed their dismay at the limited number of women represented.

²³⁸ Phiri, I.A., 1997, p. 138.

²³⁹ The General Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) consists of five Synods: Livingstonia Synod in northern Malawi, Nkhoma Synod in central Malawi, Blantyre Synod in southern Malawi, Harare Synod in Zimbabwe, and Madzimoyo/Zambia Synod in Zambia. The secretariat is in Lilongwe, Malawi, which is headed by a full time Senior Clerk. The Moderator of the General Synod does not have a full time office, instead he operates from his Synod, where he works full time in a Congregation or church related Institution.

²⁴⁰ Women's report on seminar on "Women in the 1990s", Chilema, 6-9 December 1988, submitted to the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, General Synod.

They were right that women outnumber male counterparts in churches, although their representation on the decision-making bodies of the churches is very limited. Hence, they called upon the General Synod of 1996 to encourage its Synods to include women in all decision-making bodies of the church and therefore, to increase the number at Presbytery, Synod and General Synod meetings.²⁴¹ In respect to this letter, women noted their inability but similarly they spoke out for themselves. Even though their representation at this General Synod was very small as opposed to men, they managed to make a meaningful contribution in airing out their views for women. At this meeting, the General Synod endorsed that all Synods should go and debate the issue of the ordination of women in their respective Synod's meetings and report back their responses in four years' time. That is why women in the same letter written to the Clerk of the General Synod made the following remark:

‘On the Ordination of women into the Holy Ministry, we are glad that some synods are already considering the full Ministry of women and there are training programmes for women. It is our prayer that more will be exposed to Theological Education. We request the Synods concerned not to relax in their dialogue on ordination of women into Holy Ministry.’²⁴²

In respect to the General Synod's endorsement on the debate of women's ordination to Sacramental Ministry, Livingstonia reported back that it had made a breakthrough by endorsing that women could be ordained. According to the Livingstonia Synod, they argued that there was no adequate ground for preventing women to be ministers of Word and Sacrament. However, the reports of other Synods and the ruling of the General Synod were as follows:

‘Blantyre Synod reported that the matter was discussed but still the majority were of the opinion that time is not ripe for the ordination of women. Nkhoma Synod ignored the issue altogether, while Zambia Synod reported that the matter has not yet been discussed. Harare reported that they have just started accepting women deacons. The meeting ruled out at this juncture that the matter would be left out to the separate synods themselves. Those who find it fit to ordain women can do so and the rest can consider their positions as they see fit.’²⁴³

The fact that Livingstonia Synod had accepted the ordination of women to Sacramental ministry, news about this breakthrough in Malawi was received with little amazement. Given the fact that this breakthrough came after 125 years of the Presbyterian tradition in Malawi,

²⁴¹ Women Commissioners letter 11 November 1994, signed by Mrs. C. Phiri, Mrs. D.K. Kumichongwe, Mrs. E.F. Mtika and Mrs. C.M. Chibwana.

²⁴² Women Commissioners' letter, 11th November 1994.

²⁴³ *CCAP Synod of Blantyre vol. 2*, November 1994. The writer of this report was H.S. Vokhiwa.

no wonder that one could have thought that church reports and the media could have made a brief broadcast about this breakthrough in the history of Presbyterian Church in Malawi. Unfortunately, this was not the case altogether. I believe the silence in reporting this breakthrough made by Livingstonia Synod tells a lot about how lightly the churches and societies took these women's issues. Isabel Phiri gives her observation as to why Livingstonia Synod was the first to make a move by saying, it 'is a predominantly patrilineal society, the male members do not feel threatened by sharing leadership power with women members.'²⁴⁴ In northern Malawi, females follow their males in marriage hence, it seems as if females are under the control of males and are not powerful. That is why males do not feel threatened in sharing the leadership power with women. But this is not the case with the central and southern parts of Malawi where males follow their females in marriage. In this sense, the writer observes that females have the control and males cannot accept sharing their power and domination of church activities with females, who are already controlling or have an upper hand in marriages. While there could be some truth in Isabel's observation, my understanding is that, Livingstonia Synod found no convincing reasons to deny the ordination of women to become ministers by looking at the cultural and theological points of view. Livingstonia Synod was convinced that as far as anyone experiences the call of God in his/her faith and obeys the message of Jesus Christ who is the Lord of the Church, he/she is fit to undergo theological training and be ordained into Holy Ministry. The Synod understood that the ministry of Jesus does not deny women because of sex. That is why women followed and ministered to Jesus Christ throughout his ministry and even at his resurrection.

But for the Livingstonia Synod to come to that conclusion was not all that easy. Even though the ordination of women to the office of deacon and elder has not been a problem, it had taken sometime to admit women into these offices. Surprisingly we have more women deacons and elders today than men. But the idea of ordaining women into the sacramental ministry took us 125 years from the establishment of mission. The church's image and understanding of the place and role of women in the church was mainly based on a specific interpretation of

²⁴⁴ Phiri, I.A., "Marching, Suspended and Stoned: Christian Women in Malawi 1995," in *God, People and Power in Malawi: Democratization in Theological Perspective*, edited by K.R. Ross, Blantyre: CLAIM, 1996, p. 70.

biblical texts as discussed earlier on. The other reasons were prejudice and cultural bias that were in the minds of men. Women were thought to be poorly self-imaged. They said there was division of labour between men and women. Women were only responsible for looking after families. Others described women as people who easily lose their tempers while church leadership requires patience. Moreover, they said culture does not allow women to rule over men but to show respect through silence. From here one can see that culture decides what is women's work and men's work. People interpret cultural demands as God's will for women. They thought God willed that woman's place is in the home, giving birth and rearing children. Hence although women can be called by God to leadership positions in the church and society, house-work was valued above church-work. This gives an immense imagination about the preconceived reasons for barring women to sacramental ministry.

However, positive responses were also available in the Synod's discussions. Some of those who argued in support of ordaining women based their principles on their experiences with God. They argued that women in their personal faith experience God differently from the way male members do. Thus, women are also called by God into his ministry. All through out, liberal passages such as Mk 5: 24-34; 7:24-30; 14:3-9; 16:1-8; Mt 28: 18-20; Jn 4:7-42; Gal 3:28 etc were quoted in support of their argument especially the ministry of Jesus toward women. Those arguing for ordination continued to say, it is ironical because in Livingstonia Synod women are ordained to the offices of deacon and elder where they exercise leadership in preaching, counselling, pastoral work, serving Holy Communion etc, what then was special with ordination to sacramental ministry? Did Jesus only ordain men to sacramental ministry? They challenged the opposers to look critically at what discipleship entails. They questioned that if women are suffering worst, what kind of happiness do men achieve for themselves? Hence, they urged the opposers to accept and do the will of God and not to please a person. And this will of God includes what is in the bible as well as what God is saying now.

However, it was not until 1999 that the wind blew bringing a theology of liberation where women were recognised as fellow human beings fit to be used by God for his ministry. The first woman minister ever, named Reverend Martha Mwale was licensed and ordained in the year 2000 after undergoing a normal year's probation. Although the Synod has abolished the injunction to bar women to sacramental ministry, nevertheless differences are there. This is mostly seen in decision-making bodies where women are not included or are in the minority.

The number of women participating in deliberations at Presbytery and Synod levels makes one feel that the problems are still there. In that respect all decisions are made for them by men, even in issues that effect their relationship with God. It is for this reason that justice needs to be exercised for women to be liberated fully and form a new community of men and women working together in harmony.

Although Livingstonia Synod made a breakthrough in allowing women to be ordained, the radical questions that kept on coming from many Malawians were on the role of the Church in Transformation as a nation. People wanted to know the ecclesiastical use of power in championing the cause of political reform. Looking at the impact of the church in the socio-political arena, women and other men brought their observations as to why the church sought justice and peace in Malawi, while at the same time she was failing to be exemplary in the relationships between men and women. They felt the barriers which divide women and men within the church communities have broadened since the inception of Christianity in Malawi. They discovered that the church was lacking partnership between men and women. It was for this reason that they called upon the church to be accountable and democratic in its structures. They wanted the church to show that their call for freedom, justice, accountability and democracy from single party rule to multi-party rule should spring back upon its own structures.

For instance, in 1995 women of Blantyre Synod having taken all necessary measures, marched to the Administrators' meeting to present their petition in which they expressed their complaints and called for 'Justice and Peace in the Church.'²⁴⁵ They raised 'issues on the conditions of service and violence against women in line with the concerns of women nationwide.'²⁴⁶ Surprisingly, the most unfortunate thing that Blantyre Synod did was to refuse to receive the petition and to pass a resolution to suspend all women workers of the Synod.²⁴⁷ On behalf of the Administrators meeting, the Deputy General Secretary refused to accept the petition, arguing that women failed to follow acceptable channels in presenting their petition. However, his argument was invalid because, according to Isabel, he had known that since 1988 women had followed the right procedures but to no avail.²⁴⁸ Given the fact that the

²⁴⁵ "Justice and Peace in the Church", A Statement by Women Representatives Meeting at Chigodi Women's Centre from 30th November to (date omitted) December 1994.

²⁴⁶ Phiri, I.A., 1996, p. 72.

²⁴⁷ Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 22. From *The Monitor News Paper*, 18th January 1995.

²⁴⁸ Phiri, I.A., 1996, p.73.

women had started airing their grievances sometime back and given the peculiar decision the Administrators made in respect to the marching of women, it is indeed an immense surprise. This is so because the Blantyre Synod and sister churches played a vital and unceasing role in the liberation of Malawians from an autocratic rule to democratisation in Malawi. The Blantyre Synod and other churches laid a true and solid foundation on which to rebuild the national life of all Malawians. They directly faced and dealt with ‘the fact that thousands upon thousands of Malawians were terrorised, exiled, beaten, maimed, robbed, imprisoned, tortured and murdered under the Banda regime from 1964 to 1993.’²⁴⁹ However, the decision the Blantyre Synod took against the marching of women, hardly two years after challenging and winning democracy is surely very ironical. As the writer of *The Nation* noted, ‘It is not a fitting epithet that a body which played so pivotal a role in such a noble enterprise as the liberation of a people from the yoke of a seemingly invincible servitude should go down as just another male-dominated institution of social oppression with antiquated ideals.’²⁵⁰

However, the church realised her mistake and took further steps to address the issue of women justly and peacefully. So far in relation to church activities things have changed now as regards to the ordination of women in Livingstonia and Blantyre Synods respectively. The Livingstonia Synod has now one ordained minister and an ordinand who are serving in their congregations, while Blantyre Synod has one ordained minister and three ordinands. This is a major breakthrough in considering the liberation of women from oppression by male dominance. However, three other Synods namely Nkhoma, Zambia and Harare have not yet resolved the issue. This tells in itself how rooted male domination is and this will take a while before everything is set aright. But the change has come and despite patriarchal resilience, the truth will triumph. I am aware this will involve relentless efforts and pain to achieve justice and peace, but our chief example is Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God who suffered on the cross to achieve justice and peace into the world, and thereby make us to live. Certainly, if churches are aware that the exercise of power is accountable to God which is revealed in Jesus Christ, they need to conceive what Kwame Bediako calls ‘non-dominating power.’²⁵¹

Nevertheless, male superiority has not completely gone despite the fact that we now have

²⁴⁹ Ross, K.R., 1996, pp. 225-267, but here p.227.

²⁵⁰ *The Nation*, 10th February 1995.

²⁵¹ Bediako, K., “De-sacralisation and Democratisation: Some Theological Reflections on the role of Christianity in Nation-building in Modern Africa”, in *Transformation*, Vol. 12 No. 1 (January/March 1995, pp. 5-11, but here p.9.

female church ministers. The new freedom has unveiled the serious abuse in the relations between women and men. For instance, marriage relationship is believed of master and slave rather than sharing a joyous relationship in the discovery that men and women were created in sharing the image of God. Thus, the church has a lot to do in order to bring justice and peace in the church and society. There are various forms of violence against women such as rape, inheritance rights, male infidelity, female insecurity, abuse of women in employment etc. As Zeleza points out in his novel *Smouldering Charcoal*, 'They claimed they were fighting for justice, yet they mistreated their wives.'²⁵² It is ironical that men who were most active in the struggle for justice and peace in Malawi are showing oppressive domestic behaviour. All these need the church to be so concerned and address the issues affecting women amicably.

2.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, the dream of Dr David Livingstone to 'open a path for Christianity and Commerce' came into effect by launching the mission work to Africa, in particular to Malawi. One of the groups of missions founded in the aftermath of the death of David Livingstone was the Livingstonia Mission under the Free Church of Scotland. They established the first mission at Cape Maclear in 1875 and moved north to establish a second station at Bandawe in 1881, and moved farther north along the western shore and established a mission station at Khondowe now Livingstonia in 1894. It was here that Dr Robert Laws and his devoted colleagues established an educational Institution and medical out-stations and the beginnings of a truly indigenous church. Certainly, the dynamic response of Malawians in the north and the outstanding concern for change with the Livingstonia mission had a remarkable impact in making the northern region the most advanced area as regards to educational activity of any in Central Africa.

When we look at the modern history of Malawi, the impact of Christianity is indeed one of the formidable themes. It was involved in a challenge to the cultural and political independence of the country. The key to cultural and political change is the Gospel of Christ which missionaries brought to Africa. What missionaries did to natives was to show them what the bible was and to set them free so that the bible should make its own impact upon them. Consequently, Malawians believed the message from the bible and unhesitatingly thought of it as an important book which helped them to find a way in a religious pilgrimage

²⁵² Zeleza, T., *Smouldering Charcoal*, London: Heinemann, 1992, p. 131.

as they moved ahead. The direct access to the bible and the application of its reading have influenced the spread of the Gospel mission in Malawi. Undoubtedly, the power of the bible is seen in the transformation of Malawian politics. The proponents of political and cultural transformation used the bible in support and legitimacy of their position as we have seen. Therefore, evidently the bible played a pivotal and transformative role in the cultural, educational, socio-political and religious life of the people of Malawi.

However, despite the enormous transformative part the bible played, it has also been used to oppress and subordinate women. It is this oppression and subordination of women that invite us to read the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed in search for justice and liberation. The cry of women for justice and peace arises from the recognition of the bible, as Gerald West describes, 'as both a problem and a solution, as both oppressive and liberatory.'²⁵³ However, this subject on re-reading the bible will be dealt with in other chapters. Meanwhile, women in Malawi have found in their own experience the inspiration and sustenance of the bible in their struggle against women's oppression and marginalisation. It is for this reason that they called upon the church to desist from dehumanisation and destruction of their faith in God the liberator. Thus for them, the bible is a book full of stories and messages of survival, resistance and hope.

The ordination of women to Sacramental ministry is indeed a breakthrough in the history of Presbyterian tradition in Malawi. Similarly, I want to recognise the worth and dignity of women and those victimised by the abuses of a male-dominated church. Surely, in the Christian perspective 'the commitment to solidarity with the oppressed and the victimised is based on the biblical teaching that true peace must be founded on justice.'²⁵⁴ That is why Malawian women sought justice by trying all peaceful means in confronting the abuses of the past. Through their Christian experience women were convinced that the guilt of oppression, marginalisation, subordination and inequality must be dealt with before they could enter a new life of liberation and equality. Otherwise Malawian women had not fully attained the very substance of what it is to be a Christian, because they were not living a life of freedom, peace and joy as enshrined in Jesus Christ. Thus, women were calling for the power which God has unveiled in Jesus Christ, not a male-dominating power as seen in the church and

²⁵³ West, G.O., 1993, p. 61.

²⁵⁴ Ross, K.R., 1996, p.226.

society. It is the same power that engages in a new way of overcoming violence, suffering, domination, retaliation and hostility. As Kwame Bediako recognises in the way of the Lord that: ‘Jesus’ way was one of engagement and involvement through a new way of overcoming arising from a unique concept of power – the power of forgiveness over retaliation, of suffering over violence, of love over hostility, of humble service over domination. Jesus won his way to pre-eminence and glory, not by exalting himself, but by humbling himself, to the point of dying a shameful death. In other words, his conception of power was that of non-domination.’²⁵⁵ Based on the original life of Jesus whose power and goodness built the foundation of the church, Christians and the church today must bear witness to Christ and act in his name by conforming to his way. It is only if the church adheres to the Lordship of Jesus Christ that the exercise of non-dominating power will bring distinctive results. Truly, ‘it is only when a transformation of the exercise of power in the direction of the Jesus-style power of the kingdom of God has been effected in church and society that the yearning for’²⁵⁶ women’s emancipation and the concern for justice and peace will begin to triumph.

In pursuit of justice and peace in church and society, I am impelled to go back to the bible and read these texts, as West asserts, ‘from the perspective of the questions, needs, and interests of women.’²⁵⁷ Having looked at the impact of the bible brought by missionaries and the way male-dominance in the churches has oppressed women, I will now present in detail a liberative reading of the encounter of the Markan Jesus with the hemorrhaging woman and the Syrophoenician woman. The next three chapters discuss the way the Markan Jesus breaks internal and external boundaries in his society in pursuit of women’s justice and liberation. I will use the historical critical study in reading these texts by paying close attention from the perspective of women and the oppressed. Moreover, I will read these texts contextually to replace the dominant readings. The purpose of approaching texts in this way is to seek justice and liberation for women and the oppressed, and also to argue that critical reading is attentive to both voices, that is, different voices or different things told. This is a dominance-free-discourse and it broadens the historical interpretation by attending to different meanings in the text. This is the subject of my next chapters. The first one (Mk 5:21-43) proposes a women’s

²⁵⁵ Bediako, K., 1995, p. 9; cf. McCracken, J., 1972, p. 216

²⁵⁶ Ross, K.R., 1996, p. 267.

²⁵⁷ West, G.O., 1993, p. 52.

liberative reading by looking at the issue of purity which has been the thorn in the flesh in allowing women to participate in Sacramental ministry in the Church. Thereafter, we will discuss how the Markan Jesus broke the social and religious customs to establish justice and liberation for women and the oppressed. And chapter 5 (Mk 7: 24-30) looks at the way the Markan Jesus paves the way for the establishment of an egalitarian community, whereby he shatters the dividing wall between two opposite parties (Jews & Gentiles, Women & Men, Slaves & Freed).

Chapter 3

The issue about purity in Mark 5: 21-43: Setting women's liberative reading

3.1. Introduction

Before discussing the detailed exegetical analysis in chapter 4 of Mark 5:24-43, I want first of all to start by stating that this story has purity in the background. The story of Mark 5:21-43 has two main lines of interpretation. Some commentators argue that this story of a bleeding woman depicts an individual who is marginalised in Jewish society because of both her gender and purity regulations. Hence, while the woman is marginalised in Mark's Jewish environment because of its interpretation of biblical law, Jesus overcomes or transgresses such legal concern. As Marcus Borg puts it, 'Jesus substitutes a system of purity with a system of compassion.'²⁵⁸ Jewish practices have been transgressed or overcome as other feminist scholars such as Selvidge²⁵⁹ claim. That is to say the Markan Jesus abrogates the laws of physical purity that is fully exemplified in the dietary regulations in 7: 1-23.

However, other commentators argue that this story is not about purity and is not about the setting aside of purity regulations by the Markan Jesus, but about the miraculous healing of the hemorrhaging woman.²⁶⁰ They argue that there is nothing in the story which could prevent this woman from participating in normal human relations. According to them, the woman is not inhumanly restricted or socially isolated. There is no prohibition against touching anyone. Therefore, this pericope rather emphasises Jesus' conformity to the law and his concern for healing those who seek his power. Thus, it is about the woman healed of her sickness. It is not that Jewish practices have been transgressed or overcome as other feminist scholars interpret. Mark does not abrogate the laws of physical purity any more than the dietary regulations in 7: 1-23. However, they do agree that though this story does not concern purity, it does not mean

²⁵⁸ Borg, M. *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1994, p. 26.

²⁵⁹ Selvidge, M.J. "Mark 5:25-34 and Leviticus 15:19-20: A Reaction to Restrictive Purity Regulations," in *JBL* 103, 1984, pp. 619-23.

²⁶⁰ Cotter W.C.S.J. "Mark's Hero of the Twelfth Year Miracles: The Healing of the woman with the Hemorrhage and the raising of Jairus's Daughter (Mark 5: 21-43)," pp. 54-79; Levine A.J. "Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman," pp. 70-87; Cohen S. J.D. "Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity" in *Women's History and Ancient History*; D'Angelo M. R. "(Re) Presentations of Women in the Gospels: John and Mark" in *Women and Christian Origins*; Fonrobert, C. "The woman with A Blood-Flow (Mark 5: 24-34)".

that Mark is not interested in purity at all because 7:1-23 clearly shows that he is. Instead, the Markan Jesus appears as someone who has powers to heal a woman with a severe illness, where others have failed. Therefore, this story is one among many in which the Markan Jesus appears as a miraculous healer, and which contrasts Jesus' power to heal with that of regular doctors.

Given the above contrasting views of biblical scholars, I am of the view of the former approach that this story is about purity and about revising purity regulations. I am in support of this view on historical and exegetical grounds. And this runs contrary to one of the reasons for denying the ordination of women to sacramental ministry in the Presbyterian churches in Malawi which was that women are unclean and therefore cannot dispense the holy sacraments. This text in conjunction with Leviticus 15 was quoted as the theological/biblical base for objecting the move to ordain women. Recently, when I conducted the Contextual Bible Studies in 5 different denominations, after Blantyre and Livingstonia Synods had made a breakthrough in ordaining women ministers the issue about the purity of women was faced. Some of the participants argued that in some cultures, women, when menstruating and after child-birth are not allowed to do domestic/household duties or to associate with others until they are free from their menstruation. In respect to this, they argued that even though some Presbyterian churches had made a breakthrough, women are not fit to become ministers with their impurity because holy sacraments cannot be served with uncleanness.

However, others argued that the Synods had done the right thing in allowing women to be ordained to the Word and Holy Sacraments. They argued that Jesus Christ had abrogated purity regulations and gave wholeness to everyone who believes in him and carries his cross to the end. Again, my view to these participants is that they read the texts through the eyes of women, and saw them as liberating women from such disabilities. However, the details of these discussions will be dealt with in chapter 6. But when we look at these differing arguments, both groups seem to agree that there is a relationship between this story and the biblical impurity regulations stipulated in Leviticus, and also agree that purity or impurity of women is an issue affecting various cultures and churches. Hence, women are excluded socially because when menstruating or giving birth they are rendered unclean until such a time that they are free from this state of affairs. In relation to these discussions, I am of the view that this story is about purity and about the setting aside of purity regulations by the Markan Jesus. Before assembling my evidence in support of this move, I will discuss in detail

some scholars' views against this move.

3.2. Some Scholars' views against purity

Against the former approach, some scholars fail to substantiate the theme that Jesus opposes Jewish religious custom/law in this story. In challenging such interpretations, Wendy Cotter argues that Mark himself is quite ignorant of Jewish scriptures and customs. She looks at Mark's opening of 1:2 as a quote from Isaiah when it is a conflation of Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1. Therefore, she argues, if Mark knows little of the scripture, he even knows less of Pharisaic prescriptions as his awkward and inadequate comment in Mark 7:3-4 makes clear.²⁶¹ Cotter is of the view that there is no relationship between this story and the biblical impurity regulations stipulated in Leviticus. Therefore, there is no linkage of this story to introduce a conflict over Torah, which is not coherent with Mark. This story according to her and some other scholars is not about purity but concerns the miraculous healing of the hemorrhaging woman.

However, I am not with the view of Cotter that Mark's conflation of Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1 defines Mark to be ignorant of Jewish scriptures and customs. My understanding of Mark's conflation of these texts, given the wide quotations in his Gospel means that he is immensely knowledgeable in regard to Jewish scriptures and customs. Hence, such conflation of Old Testament texts is not peculiar to Mark only. Similar conflation of Old Testament texts, according to Kee, is familiar from postbiblical Judaism and is common in the Dead Sea Scrolls.²⁶² Thus, I agree with Joel Marcus who asserts that Mark is responsible for the combination of Exodus 23:20/Malachi 3:1 with Isaiah 40:3.²⁶³ Marcus is of the view that the combination of Malachi 3:1 with Isaiah 40:3 reflects a knowledge of the Hebrew or Aramaic text in the Masoretic Text and the Targum, but not in the Septuagint. However, since Mark 1:2 and 1:3 retain different Greek translations of the Hebrew or Aramaic expression, we may

²⁶¹ Cotter, W.C.S.J. "Mark's Hero of the Twelfth year Miracles: The Healing of the woman with the Hemorrhage and the raising of Jairus's Daughter (Mark 5:21-43)," pp. 54-79 in A.J. Levine with M. Blickenstaff (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Gospel of Matthew*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.

²⁶² Kee, H. C. "The Function of Scriptural Quotations and Allusions in Mark 11-16," in *Jesus und Paulus: Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. E. E. Ellis and E. Grasser (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975, p. 181. He says, "Thus the most significant parallel between Markan exegesis and the exegetical method employed at Qumran is the juxtaposing of scriptures that in their origins had little or nothing to do with each other, but which in the hands of the exegete are shown to be mutually illuminating and to give rise to theological perceptions that were not anticipated in any of the original components and that thus define the eschatological community, its hopes and obligations."

²⁶³ Marcus, J. *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, pp. 12-17, but here p. 16.

suggest that Greek versions of Exodus 23:20/Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 were already part of scriptural testimony enjoyed by Mark's community. If this was the case, then Mark brought the two passages together partly on the basis of his knowledge that they contained the identical expression in the Hebrew or Aramaic text. Thus, Mark would be writing for a Greek-speaking community, though he himself has a rather good knowledge of the Hebrew or Aramaic text of the Old Testament.²⁶⁴ Thus, against Cotter's view, Mark himself emerges from our analysis as the person responsible for the present form of 1:2-3. He is the one who has seen, on the basis of his knowledge of the Hebrew text, that Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 are linked and as a result of this he has prefaced the citation of Isaiah 40:3 with the conflation of Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1.²⁶⁵ Mark has probably retained the ascription of the passage to Isaiah with knowledge of the Hebrew text. He has not done this out of ignorance as Cotter claims, but out of some sort of theological intention of trying to highlight the theme of the way and the parallel between 'our way' and 'the way of the Lord.' What Mark has done is to accent the importance of the Old Testament citations and move the whole block of them from their position after the introduction of John the Baptist to their present place between the Gospel's superscription and the description of John.²⁶⁶

Furthermore, Cotter questions Mark's treatment of the woman in 5:33 that her behaviour requires an excuse in such a trembling and fearful state. She argues against some scholars who suggest that the woman is ashamed because she has violated the Torah by entering into a crowd and touching Jesus when she has an emission. She rather, thinks the woman violates or transgresses the modesty of women. But how can someone explain the shyness of the woman and her fearfulness before Jesus? According to Cotter, this allusion can be seen and understood in the context of the general world of Greco-Roman antiquity, where the ideal

²⁶⁴ Hengel, M. *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, p. 24. Hengel cites 3:17-19; 5:41; 7:11; 8:34; 10:46; 11:9-10; 14:1, 32, 36, 45; 15:22, 34 and comments: "I do not know any other work in Greek which has as many Aramaic or Hebrew words and formulae in so narrow a space as does the second Gospel. They are too numerous to be explained as the barbarisms (ρήσις βαρβαρίχη) of the miracle worker and magician ... Most of these foreign-sounding words are omitted by Matthew and Luke." Indeed, the frequency of Aramaic words in the Gospel supports the contention that Mark knew that language.

²⁶⁵ Marcus, J., 1992, p. 17.

²⁶⁶ Marcus, J., 1992, P. 17.

woman was expected to be found at home, surrounded by her family, modest and quite.²⁶⁷

To clarify these expectations, she cites a few examples. First, the first-century historian, Valerius Maximus provides a discussion of the punishment of wives for indiscretion. He says:

‘Rugged too was the marital brow of C. Sulpicius Galus. He divorced his wife because he learned that she had walked abroad with head uncovered. The sentence was abrupt, but there was a reason behind it. To have your good looks approved, says he, the law limits you to my eyes only. For them assemble the tools of beauty, for them look your best, trust to their closer familiarity. Any further sight of you is to be mired in suspicion and crimination. Nor did Q. Antitius Vetus feel otherwise. He divorced his wife because he had seen her in public talking tête-a-tête with a certain common freedwoman.’²⁶⁸

In this quotation, Valerius notes the severity of the punishment to wives who move out in public, but he does not contradict the values directed towards these wives. The same values are also substantiated by Pliny in praising the awards given to the Emperor Trajan on the virtue of his wife Plotina, he says, ‘How modest she is in her attire, how moderate in the number of her attendants, how unassuming when she walks abroad!’²⁶⁹ To echo this statement, Tertullian says, ‘A female would rather see than be seen.’²⁷⁰ However, we are not sure whether or not Tertullian meant this of the modest women. But as for Cotter, this narrative would therefore help to explain the copious excuses for the hemorrhaging woman, who violates the modesty of women and deliberately touches Jesus. She also comes toward exposing her identity in public and telling Jesus the whole truth. Therefore, seen through the lens of the Greco-Roman world, the woman initially trembles and fears because as an upright woman, she was not supposed to be seen in public.

However, Cotter does not give us a convincing reason why women were denied this opportunity of social association in public. Moreover, this does not reflect the true reason for divorce and again these texts reflect the lives of upper class women rather than the majority of

²⁶⁷ Cotter, W.C.S.J. “Mark’s Hero of the Twelfth Year Miracles: The Healing of the Hemorrhage and raising of Jairus’s Daughter (Mark 5:21-43)”, p. 58. For the general ideals of the upright woman, Bruce Malina has described thoroughly in his book, “Honour and Shame: Pivotal values of the First-Century Mediterranean World,” *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, revised edition, 1993, pp. 28-62, especially pp. 48-52.

²⁶⁸ Maximus, V. *Severity* translated by D.R. Shackleton Bailey, 3 vols, London, England and Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000, pp. 2, 6, 10 & 11.

²⁶⁹ Pliny the Younger, *Panegyricus*, translated by Betty Radice; 2 vols; London: Heinemann, 1969, pp. 2, 83.

²⁷⁰ Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, IV*, New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1905, p. 17.

poor women. While there could be some sense in her point, I probably believe this was not the intention of Mark in his perspective. I am of this view because Mark's characters right away from the beginning of his Gospel include women and men amongst the crowd that follows Jesus (e.g. 2:1-3, 13; 3:7-12, 20, 31-35; 4:1-3; 5:21-43 etc). Thus, the crowd that was touching Jesus in this story includes men and women. If it were only a male crowd, I don't think the hemorrhaging woman would have been bold enough to be amongst the crowd that was predominantly male. But, since the crowd was a mixture of women and men, the woman had strength, courage and freedom to struggle through until she touched his garments. Hence, I don't think that the shyness and fearfulness are the result of the feeling that the ideal woman was supposed to be found at home rather than seen in public. Therefore, this gives me an understanding that there was something wrong as I shall argue later that this story is really about purity.

Another scholar who argues that this story is not about purity is Amy-Jill Levine, though she argues from its Matthean parallel.²⁷¹ According to her, Matthew's intercalated story does not present Jesus as abrogating the Law or as coming into contact with individuals marginalised because of gender or ritual impurity. She says this pericope rather emphasises Jesus' conformity to the Law and his concern for healing those who seek his power. It is about the woman healed of her sickness. It is not that Jewish practices have been transgressed or overcome. Matthew does not abrogate the Laws of physical purity any more than the dietary regulations.

She argues further that there is nothing that could prevent this woman from participating in normal human relations.²⁷² The woman is neither inhumanly restricted nor socially isolated. There is no prohibition against her touching anyone. She concludes that, instead, this pericope describes several functions of Jesus. He is both the miracle worker and the exemplar. He shares much in common with the woman, whose physicality is reflected in the depiction of her body. The woman suffers, bleeds, acts in humility, retains her faith but does not speak. Jesus too will suffer, bleed, act in humility, remain silent and yet retain his faith. The story only depicts the healing of the woman's body from an ailment that could affect anyone. It is not about purity or impurity that was dismissed by Jesus in order to pave the way for the

²⁷¹ Levine, A. J. "Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman", pp. 70-87, in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew* edited by A.J. Levine, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.

²⁷² Levine, A. J., 2001, p. 77.

establishment of an egalitarian community.

Jacob Milgrom is also of the similar view in arguing that the concern in the Law is only for a woman's bedding and anything on which she sits.²⁷³ This can only mean in fact that her hands do not transmit impurity. The consequence is that she is not banished but remains at home, neither is she isolated from her family. According to Fredriksen, this is so because uncleanness is not a disease, and it requires no moral censure. It is just a ritual state in which both men and women likely found themselves most of the time.²⁷⁴ There are no laws obliging those who come into contact with a niddah, or a corpse to appear before a court. The only consequence of such cultic uncleanness primarily involves restriction from the Temple precincts. But there was little if any reason for most people to go to the Temple, since both Matthew and Mark locate the woman not in Jerusalem but in Galilee (Matt. 9:1; Mk 5:21).

In supporting this view, Cohen also reiterates that the Gospel story does not give any indication that the woman was impure or suffered any degree of isolation as a result of her affliction.²⁷⁵ He argues that there is no clear evidence that any Jewish group in the second Temple period isolated the menstruant from society. He says men of Qumran lived in an exclusively male community far removed from any contact with the pollution of the world, especially women.²⁷⁶ For most Jews of the second Temple period, the locus of God's presence was the Temple and the Temple mount. Hence, as long as those affected with impurity stayed away from the sacred precincts, Jewish society did not care about their impurity. Thus the Gospel story, clearly a case of zaba (irregular bleeding), does not give any indication that the woman was impure or suffered any degree of isolation as a result of her suffering.

D'Angelo also expresses her views by saying that Mark's narrative shows no interest in purity.²⁷⁷ She argues that the story is set in Galilee and the ritual purity that would be lost by touching a menstruant was required only for participation in the Temple in Jerusalem. But,

²⁷³ Milgrom, J. *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB; New York/London: Doubleday, 1991, p. 936.

²⁷⁴ Fredriksen, P. *From Jesus to Christ*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, p. 106 n.14 and also Sanders E.P. *Jesus and Judaism*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, pp. 182-83.

²⁷⁵ Cohen, S. J. D. *Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity in Women's History and Ancient History* edited by Sara B. Pomeroy, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991, p. 279.

²⁷⁶ Cohen, S. *The Temple Scrolls 3 vols.* Edited by Y. Yadin, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983, pp. 1:285-89, 291-93 & 304-7.

²⁷⁷ D'Angelo M. R. (Re) *Presentations of Women in the Gospels: John and Mark in Women & Christian Origins* edited by R. S. Kraemer and M. R. D'Angelo, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 140.

since purity was easily reacquired by waiting until sunset and bathing, it was of interest only once the family's strenuous journey to Jerusalem had already been made. However, D'Angelo reiterates that Mark has interest in purity. In the early part of the Gospel, Jesus is presented as upholding the temple's authority to recognise the cleansing of the leper (1:44), and he complains about the Pharisaic insistence on washing hands before meals and on pure vessels for food (7:1-23). But it is surprising that there is no comment on impurity in 5:24-34. She therefore concludes that, because the story does not show any controversial elements at all, one can easily conclude that Mark's narrative shows no interest in purity.

Also, Fonrobert says this story is one among the many in which Jesus appears as a miraculous healer.²⁷⁸ It only underlines the contrast between Jesus' power to heal and that of regular doctors. Similarly, the instantaneous healing at the end of the story represents a characteristic typical of miraculous healings. Thus the classic weight of her touching of Jesus' garment lies in the healing power of the touch. After the doctors have tried with their human wisdom whatever treatments, a mere touch of Jesus suffices to heal. Furthermore, she says, because the Gospel narrators leave the woman's ethnic identity unspecified, this keeps the possibility open that her impurity according to priestly regulations in Leviticus is of no interest to them, since they are primarily concerned about the healing miracle. As a miraculous healing, then, the story became popular and lived on in the popular religious imagination in later centuries.

In summary, scholars above have been discussing and arguing that Mark 5:24-34 is not concerned about purity but mainly about the miraculous healing of the woman. Therefore, it is not about setting aside of purity regulations by the Markan Jesus. The story is just about mere healing of the woman who suffered for twelve years. However, some scholars seem not to deny the fact that purity is there in Markan narratives, though Mark 5:21-43 is mainly concerned with the miraculous healing of women. They do agree that Mark has interest in purity particularly in 7:1-23 where he abrogates the dietary laws. However, in the following section I want to bring forward my counter-arguments in support for purity in this story. These are the linguistic echoes of Leviticus 12:7 LXX and 15:19-23 LXX in Mark; the wider work of purity in the Gospel of Mark; and the discovery whether menstruation was an issue in Mark's cultural environment in first century Palestine. These reasons have convinced me that

²⁷⁸ Fonrobert, C. "The Woman with A Blood-Flow (Mark 5:24-34) Revisited: Menstrual Laws and Jewish Culture in Christian Feminist Hermeneutics," in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel* edited by Evans C. A. and Sanders J. A. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, p. 126.

this story concerns purity, and I will now present details of my counter-arguments.

3.3. My views in support for purity

In support of the view that there is purity assumptions implicit in this story, I will start by presenting three main points to substantiate my opinion. The first point discusses the language by which Mark echoes Leviticus 12:7 LXX and 15:19-23 LXX. Here, I compare the intertextual connection between the two books. It is this linguistic similarity between Leviticus and Mark 5: 24-34 that undoubtedly proves to me that this story concerns purity in Mark's interpretation. The second point hints to the wider work of Mark on purity. I will look at various aspects of purity as recorded by Mark in his entire Gospel to prove his concern for purity. The final point will mainly discuss whether or not menstruation was an issue in Mark's cultural environment in first century Palestine, by bringing evidence from the ancient historian Josephus and other texts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Mishnah and the Babylonian Talmud.

3.3.i. Linguistically Mark echoes Leviticus 12: 7 and 15: 19-33 LXX

Mark 5: 25-34 may stand preserved because it recalls an early Christian community's understanding of the revision of the Jewish purity system which restricted and excluded women from cult and society. These textual similarities between Leviticus and Mark are recognised in these texts. Both ἐν ρύσει αἵματος (5:25) and ἡ πηγή τοῦ αἵματος αὐτῆς (5:29) are purposefully employed by Mark as direct expressions for normal and abnormal gynaecological conditions associated with menstruation. Selvidge notes that these verbal similarities in 5:25 and 5:29 describe the condition of the woman similar to menstruating women in Leviticus γυνή ὃ εἰάν ρέῃ ρύσει αἵματος ρυσίς (Lev.15: 25 LXX) and πῆς πηγῆς τοῦ αἵματος αὐτῆς αἵματος (Lev.12: 7 LXX).²⁷⁹ Similar references to the account are also found in Lev. 15: 2-3, 13, 19, 25-26, 28, 30, 33; Lev. 20:18; Deut. 23:10-11; Job 38:25 and Sirach 51:9.²⁸⁰ Moreover, the healing account of the hemorrhaging woman focuses on the power of touching Jesus, which may be seen as particularly appropriate to concerns with ritual purity. Moreover, the linguistic background for the present phrase 'flow of blood' in 5:25 and for 'the fountain of blood' in 5:29 lies in the statutes in Leviticus regarding the

²⁷⁹ Selvidge, M. J., 1984, pp. 619-23.

²⁸⁰ Here the term "ρύσει αιματος" is found in Hatch E. and H. A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint: And the other Greek Versions of the Old Testament* (Second Edition), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books House Company, 1998, p. 31.

ritual uncleanness²⁸¹ incurred by menstruation (Niddah)²⁸² and irregular bleeding (Zabah).²⁸³

According to Leviticus 15:19-30, anyone and anything the menstruating woman touches will be made unclean. Hence, her blood is a source of impurity and therefore threatens others, since blood was believed to contain life (Lev. 17:10-14). Also, the duration of menstrual impurity is set at seven days after which the woman immerses herself and is thereby purified for both of the above noted purposes. In Leviticus 15:1-18, a man was also restricted if he had some type of seminal discharge. In Mark 5:24-34, the woman may be expected to render the Markan Jesus unclean by her touch, but instead he has the power to heal her and restore her to health.

The other point that could probably refer to purity is ἀκούσασα περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ (7:27). The woman only hears about Jesus, whereas Jairus sees him (5:22). According to Joel Marcus, this may reflect her seclusion from society because of her ritual impurity.²⁸⁴ The touching of Jesus' garment is also very important in relation to purity in this story. Moreover, Freedman interestingly suggests that the woman touches only Jesus' garment in order to avoid passing her ritual impurity on to him.²⁸⁵ Although the penalty of impurity contracted through contact with clothes is less serious than contact with flesh (Lev.15: 7 and cf. Milgrom, Lev.1, p. 914), nevertheless, it is defiling. Otherwise the instruction to wash one's clothes would be senseless (Lev. 15: 11, 21-22; cf. m. Kelim 27-28 on the impurity of clothes). The woman suffering from a hemorrhage touches Jesus' clothing hoping to be healed. Elsewhere in the Gospels people touch Jesus' clothing hoping for healing (Mk. 6: 56; Matt. 14: 36; and Lk. 6: 19). Quite apart from the physical difficulties the woman's condition would have kept her in

²⁸¹ For instance, Leviticus 12:7; 15: 19-30; 20:18 cf. Selvidge M. Mark 5:25-34 and Cohen S.J.D. Menstruants.

²⁸² Epstein, R. (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud*, London: The Soncino Press, 1948, p. xxvii. The term Niddah is applied in Biblical and Rabbinical literature to a woman in menstrual period who by reason of her uncleanness, is subject to certain restrictions during her periods and for a varying number of days subsequently. It is isolation, impurity, hence a menstruant is isolated from her husband and keeps away from other persons and things because, being in her impurity she renders them ritually unclean if she comes into contact with them.

²⁸³ Cohen, S. J. D., 1991, p. 274. The term Zabah is also applied in Biblical and Rabbinical literature to a woman who has a non-menstrual genital discharge (cf. Lev. 15: 25-33), that is, an irregular bleeding or discharge outside of, or in addition to her regular period. She is impure for as long as the discharge continues and for an additional seven days. After the seven days are over she is purified through the bringing of an atonement sacrifice.

²⁸⁴ Marcus, J. *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York/London: Doubleday, 1999, p. 358.

²⁸⁵ Freedman, D. N. (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

perpetual state of impurity.²⁸⁶ Presumably, her action in touching Jesus while in a state of impurity would have been viewed as offensive. According to purity laws, her touch would render Jesus ritually impure (Lev. 15:26-27; Numb. 5:2-3). Davies and Allison allude that her infectious state can be transmitted through touch and they cite m. zabim 5:1, 6.²⁸⁷ They add that because of this, it is possible that the woman comes up from behind and must accordingly try to touch Jesus without anyone observing them. The Markan Jesus does not rebuke her for touching his garments, but applauds her action.

Therefore, admitting the presence of Old Testament allusions, it is most certainly helpful in understanding the New Testament. When we look at these women both in Leviticus and Mark, we find that they participate in features of the other, by contact and also by comparison. This is against the view of Wendy Cotter who views that Mark is ignorant of the Jewish Scriptures which he regularly quotes.²⁸⁸ Instead, Mark feels the strong sense which the first century Christians had of the great background of their faith and the Gospel was not something completely new, but a historical continuation and fulfilment of God's revelation and promise to Israel. Mark saw in John the Baptist the fulfilment of the prophecies here recorded from Malachi and Isaiah. Thus, Mark is not ignorant of the Jewish Scriptures as claimed by Cotter. Furthermore, Jesus bases his own reform programme on those same scriptures, though he viewed them from a different perspective. Nevertheless, Mark's reform rules are grounded on God's Word. For instance, in justifying the breaking of the Sabbath for food consumption purposes (2: 23-26), the Markan Jesus appealed to the example of David in 1 Samuel 21: 1-7. In criticising Pharisees' divorce laws, he appealed to God's original Law in Genesis 1 and 2, not what 'Moses wrote because of the hardness of your hearts (10: 2-12; see also Deut 24: 1-4). Again in reforming the Temple system (11: 15-19), the Markan Jesus appealed to traditional prophetic criticisms of Israel's system in Isaiah 56: 7 and Jeremiah 7: 11. While commenting on the Pharisees' tradition of Korban (7: 5-12), he insisted on the primacy of one of the Ten Commandments, 'Honour your Father and Mother' (Mk 7: 10; cf. Exod 20: 12) as well as Isaiah's critical remarks (Isa 29: 13). Moreover, Jesus knows the Law. In Mark 12: 29-31, he proclaims as the core of the law both the Shema (Deut. 6: 4-5) and

²⁸⁶ Leviticus 15:25-28; cf. m. Niddah – Guelich R. Mark 1-8:26, WBC 34, Dallas: Word, 1989, pp. 296-97, states "she defiled anything and anyone she touched." See Lev. 12: 1-8; 15:19-30 especially LXX Lev. 15: 25 (ῥέη ρύσει αἵματος).

²⁸⁷ Davies, W. D. and Allison, D.C. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. 3 Vols., Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988-97, p. 128.

²⁸⁸ Cotter, W.C.S.J., 2001, pp. 54-79.

Love of neighbour (Lev. 19: 18). He further enjoins the Ten Commandments on the man who asked what was necessary to inherit eternal life (Mk 10:19). Thus, given the wide quotations from the Old Testament, Mark is neither ignorant of the Law nor disrespectful of it. He bases the reform programme of purity rules precisely on the Old Testament Scriptures (Mk 2: 23-26, cf. 1 Sam. 21: 1-7; Mk 10: 2-12, cf. Gen. 1 & 2, Deut. 24:1-4; Mk 7: 5-12 & 10:19, cf. Exod. 20:12, Isa 29: 13, Lev. 15:19-30, 19:18; Mk 11: 15-19, cf. Isa 56:7 & Jer. 7:11 to mention but a few. Mark therefore, is knowledgeable about Jewish Scriptures, hence the story of the hemorrhaging woman echoes the language of Leviticus. Thus this story can really be read against the background of biblical impurity regulations stipulated in Leviticus. But as to whether the Markan Jesus goes against the Jewish Law or maintains it, we shall discuss this later in the chapter. In this way our narrative which features a woman character, acts as a precedent for the issue of purity regulations.

3.3.ii. General views about purity in Mark's wider work

The description of purity and pollution in the social context of the first century is the kind of information that enabled the first-century readers to make an informed response to the Gospel. At the very beginning of his Gospel, Mark is concerned with Jesus' purity. He affirms that Jesus is holy and close to God. This is exemplified in the call of Jesus for repentance as the Kingdom of God is at hand (1:15). This is a call to purity that sinners should turn from the realm of sins and seek the circle of God's favour and holiness. Mark presents Jesus as the commanding figure who has authority on earth to forgive sins (2:10) and as the Son of Man he is Lord even over the Sabbath (2:28). But the Son of Man is also an example of humility; he is not served, but he serves, ultimately giving his life as a ransom for many (10:46). Nevertheless, the Son of Man will again come in glory and power, with angels to usher in the Kingdom of God (8:38-9:1; 13:26; 14:62).²⁸⁹ Jesus calls people to believe (πιστεῖν) that he is the authoritative messenger of the Kingdom, and he forgives sins and cures the ills of those who have faith (πιστις) in him, for instance, the hemorrhaging woman (5:34). Hence, in Mark's view, Jesus is indeed holy, for the Holy Spirit comes upon him at the baptism (1:10) and is therefore called the Holy One of God (1:24). When we read Mark further, Jesus drives out "unclean spirits" (1:23; 5:2); he cleanses a leper (1:40-45).

²⁸⁹ Fredriksen, P. *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988, p. 44.

Mark has an interest in purity. In the early part of the Gospel, Jesus is presented as upholding the temple's authority by recognising the cleansing of the leper (1:44). The Markan Jesus upholds the purity codes by instructing the healed man to appear before the priest and offer the sacrifice commanded by Moses (cf. Lev. 14:1-9). With this instruction the Markan Jesus is acknowledging the authority of the priest. The healing stories of 1:4-45, 5:24-34 and 35-44 involve the touching of a ritually unclean person and thus they transcend the Levitical purity restrictions. It is therefore relevant in this regard, according to Marcus, to apply Numbers 5:1-4.²⁹⁰ In this passage God commands Moses to remove both males and females from the camp of Israelites the following: the leper (5:2); anybody with a discharge/irregular bleeding (5:2) and anyone who is unclean by contact with a corpse (5:2). Looking at the Gospel of Mark, Marcus is absolutely right that Jesus treats the same three categories in precisely the same order. He starts by healing the leper in 1:40-45 and then the hemorrhaging woman in 5:24-34 and finally he raises the daughter of Jairus who was dead (corpse) in 5:35-43. In this sense, Jesus spreads purity by touch and gives wholeness to all who come to him in faith and truth. As Marcus notes, Jesus can do so, because he has the healing power of God's new age, together with the coming of the eschaton which have ramifications for the interpretation and the substance of the law.²⁹¹ Consequently, all characters here have experienced in their bodies the power of God's new age.

Moreover, in 7:1-23, Mark presents Jesus who reforms the Levitical and Pharisaical purity regulations which regulate the Jew's conduct to one another and those outside by means of ritually reinforced barriers. Mark's interest in purity is fully regulated in this narrative. Here the purity rules are developed because in addition to the Pharisees hypocrisy (7:9), their acceptance by the Christians would force these latter to remain in a closed circle from which less zealous Jews and the Gentiles would of necessity be excluded.²⁹² The rules that count are those that will enable the community to open its doors wide and live in peace. These rules are those of simple, natural morality which result in mutual tolerance and peaceful co-existence (7:17-23).

However, the custom of washing before meals by the Pharisees and 'all Jews' (7:3) has

²⁹⁰ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 368.

²⁹¹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 368.

²⁹² Trocme, E. *The Formation of the Gospel According to Mark* (translated by Gughan, Pamela), Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975, p. 140.

brought various interpretations among scholars. The main issue at stake is, did they really all do it or it was Markan addition? Josephus writes that the Pharisees had passed on to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the Laws of Moses (*J.A. 13. 288-300*). It is for this reason, says Josephus that they were rejected by the Sadducean group who held that only those regulations which were written down in Scripture should be considered, and those which had been handed down by former generations need not be observed. Hence, the Pharisees have the support of the masses. However, some scholars such as Neusner observe that the Pharisees were Jews who believed one must keep the purity laws outside of the Temple.²⁹³ Others such as Sanders²⁹⁴ believe by following the plain sense of Leviticus 22: 1-16, purity laws were to be kept only in the Temple, where the priests had to enter a state of ritual purity in order to carry out such requirements as animal sacrifice. They likewise had to eat their food in a state of ritual purity, while lay people did not. Everyone who went to the Temple had to be ritually pure, but outside of the Temple the laws of ritual purity were not observed, for it was not required that non-cultic activities be conducted in a state of Levitical cleanness.

Johnson also argues that this extension to all lay people could have been adapted only recently by the pharisaic brotherhoods, and does not seem to have been generally binding before 100 AD.²⁹⁵ This could be so because only priests were required to make an ablution before partaking of the sacrifices (Lev. 22: 1-16). However, as Neusner puts it, 'that the Pharisees required an act of purification before eating suggests that Pharisaism saw the act of eating as a cultic rite and further implies that Pharisaism compared the table to the altar, the home to the Temple, and the private person to the priest.'²⁹⁶ As Neusner points out, this corresponds in a general way with the earliest stratum of rabbinic law codified in the Mishnah and Tosefta, which is primarily concerned with ritual purity, tithing and other food laws, and Sabbath and festival observance.²⁹⁷ Furthermore, both Mark and Josephus say that the Pharisees relied for their distinctive interpretation of the law on a 'tradition of the elders' delivered to them from earlier times (Mk 7:3 and *J.A. 13. 297, 408*). This practice was extended to laymen and to

²⁹³ Neusner J. *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973, p. 83.

²⁹⁴ Sanders, E.P. *Jesus and Judaism*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, pp. 182-85; *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies*, 1990, pp. 131-254; *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66CE*, 1992, pp. 428-43.

²⁹⁵ Johnson S. E. *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark*, London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960, p. 131. However, Mark 7 is an evidence against his view because the Gospel was written between 60-70 AD, and this presumably was a problem, that is why Mark recorded this story in his Gospel.

²⁹⁶ Neusner, J. *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, SJLA 1, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973, p. 3.

²⁹⁷ Neusner, J., 1973, p. 80, and also Saldarini, A. *Pharisees*, pp. 212-13.

ordinary foods on the principle of a fence about the law in an unbroken chain of transmission (Mishnah Aboth 1.1), which says, it is good for priests to be holy, and it is appropriate for all the holy people. In respect to this, Neusner, therefore, suggests that the Pharisees held that even outside Temple, in one's own home, the laws of ritual purity were to be followed in the only circumstance in which they might apply, namely at the table. Therefore, one must eat secular food in a state of ritual purity as if one were a Temple priest.²⁹⁸ Hence, Pharisees, then, were lay group who wished to bring the purity of the Temple into the common home. As the Essenes appear to have applied to themselves the model of the army of God, the legislation of the war-camp, so the Pharisees saw themselves as the heart of the Kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6) which was Israel. Marcus shares a similar view that this policy motivates the magnification of God's holiness through the extension to lay people of purity laws that in Leviticus had been only applicable to priests.²⁹⁹

However, even though modern scholars have accepted and worked with Neusner's elements of model and reconstruction, a recent and sustained attack has come from Sanders and others such as Guthrie and Schwartz.³⁰⁰ According to Guthrie, this has been thought by some commentators as an exaggeration, since the earliest Jewish authority on the subject, Leviticus as well as the Talmud (450 AD), makes the ablutions obligatory only on the priests in the time of Jesus.³⁰¹ The ordinary layman was not concerned with such questions of religious defilement unless he was about to enter the temple and make a sacrifice. Sanders also holds similar views by questioning the claims of Neusner that the Pharisees were primarily concerned with purity and table fellowship and that they wished to extend priestly purity rules to lay people.³⁰² He also notes that Josephus does not mention dietary matters in his description of the Pharisees, and asserts that there is little evidence for Neusner's contention that the Pharisees ate ordinary food in a state of ritual purity. Moreover, according to Sanders³⁰³, when the Pharisees expressed concern about purity, they were attentive only to the purity of members of their own eating clubs and not to that of people outside those clubs. Hence, their influence on Judaism before the destruction of the Temple was exceedingly

²⁹⁸ Neusner, J., 1973, p. 83.

²⁹⁹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 520.

³⁰⁰ Guthrie D, Motyer J.A. (eds.) *The New Bible Commentary* (Revised), England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970, 866. Schwartz, D.R. "Kingdom of Priests – a Pharisaic Slogan?" In *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity*, WUNT 60, pp. 57-80, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992. Sanders, E.P., 1985, pp. 182-85; Sanders, E.P., 1990, pp. 131-254; Sanders, E.P. 1992, pp. 428-43.

³⁰¹ Guthrie D, Motyer J.A. (eds.), 1970, p. 866.

³⁰² Sanders, E.P., 1985, p. 192, cf. Marcus, J., 1999, p. 521.

³⁰³ Sanders, E.P., 1985, pp. 182-85; Sanders, E.P., 1990, pp. 131-254; Sanders, E.P., 1992, pp. 428-43.

limited. In summary, Sanders presents three main arguments, namely, that Neusner has misunderstood the texts he cites; that the texts themselves indicate that the model of priestly purity was still being debated at a much late stage and finally that it would be sociologically impossible for folk to live as priests.³⁰⁴ A further critique of Neusner's position is implicit in the assertion of Schwartz. He says even if the Pharisees were concerned about purity, there is no proof that they wanted to live like priests. He notes, 'one must differentiate uncompromisingly between priesthood and holiness.'³⁰⁵

However, De Lacey argues against Sanders by saying that Pharisees strove for a purity analogous to, but neither identical to nor a replacement for, that of the priests. Sanders is well aware that purity was indeed a significant issue for the Pharisees. They developed their own rules about it and made what Sanders calls 'minor symbolic gestures towards priestly purity,'³⁰⁶ but he thinks their model was purely secular. He notes that it is most likely that the Pharisees had a desire for purity for its own sake; purity symbolised not just the priesthood, but Godliness which derives from the common belief that even handling the priests' food must be done in purity.³⁰⁷

Furthermore, De Lacey asserts that there is no hint here in Neusner's analysis of usurping or replacing priests, but there is a clear model of establishing a scale of purities and moving as far towards the priests on that scale as possible.³⁰⁸ According to him, Godliness was in practical terms focused on the Temple, and the priesthood therefore stood as an obvious model for Godliness, especially as it was subjected in the Torah to more stringent rules of purity. Hence for him, emulation is a better term than Sander's implied substitution.³⁰⁹ He notes that long after 70 AD it was realised that the Temple would not be rebuilt, thus we may surmise that this extension did indeed become a replacement when one's own table might be seen more truly as an altar. Hence, in that case, we may well understand why later rabbis had to debate afresh all those issues which Sanders sees as denying the presupposition of a priestly

³⁰⁴ De Lacey, D.R. "In Search of a Pharisee," in *Tyndale Bulletin* 43, 1992-93, pp. 353-72, but here, p. 361.

³⁰⁵ Schwartz, D.R. "Kingdom of Priests – a Pharisaic Slogan?" In *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity*, WUNT 60, pp. 57-80, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992.

³⁰⁶ Sanders, E.P., 1985, p. 192, cf. Sanders, E.P., 1990 p. 233; Sanders, E.P. 1992, p. 438.

³⁰⁷ Sanders, E.P., 1985, pp. 106 & 192.

³⁰⁸ De Lacey, D.R., 1992-93, p. 370.

³⁰⁹ De Lacey, D.R., 1992-93, p. 370.

model.³¹⁰ Moreover, Dunn suggests that the failure of Josephus to mention a concern of the Pharisees for dietary matters as Sanders claims reflects how sensitive he was to his Roman audience, which he believes would have been more suspicious of these special dietary laws as an indication of strange worship.³¹¹ Dunn further points out that the issue between Jesus and the Pharisees in Mark 2: 15-17 does seem to involve purity, because the Pharisees object to Jesus' eating with tax collectors and sinners. Thus, Marcus notes, this passage cannot be dismissed as late; it is at least pre-Markan, and that means that it almost certainly predates the transformation of the Pharisees from a sect to a ruling party, which took place in the decades after the Jewish war.³¹² Similarly, Sanders' assertion that Mark simply does not know what he is saying when he says that 'the Pharisees, and all the Jews' wash their hands before every meal (Mark 7: 3) is not convincing. I support Marcus' view that Mark knows what he is saying and does so presumably because the Pharisees wish to eat all meals in a state of purity.³¹³ Neusner and his advocates are more plausible in their assertion that we must take Mark's evidence seriously, and that while 'all the Jews' might be an exaggeration, a degree of influence on other Jews corroborated by Josephus is reflected (*J.A. 18. 15*).

While Sanders, Schwartz and Poirier are right to emphasise the distinction between purity and priestly purity, the notion of extension to lay people still remains. I agree with Marcus that it remains true that the Old Testament limits handwashing before meals to priestly families, while the Pharisees seem to have extended the requirement to lay people and to have challenged those who did not conform to it (Mark 7: 1-5).³¹⁴ Similar views are also observed by Alon who believed that it was fundamental for the rabbinic attitude to see that all people are in a state of ritual purity.³¹⁵ For this, Alon argued that there were two fundamental principles, governing the life of Pharisees. He says, their first aim was to make sure that halakah accords with the needs of the living. And their second fundamental aim was to extend holiness (*qedushah*) to every person (not only to the priests) and to every place (not only to the Temple) and to every moment of time. According to Alon, this second principle made it necessary for the Pharisees to teach ritual purity to Israel and to demand complete

³¹⁰ Sanders, E.P., 1985, pp. 171-73.

³¹¹ Dunn, J.D.G. *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, pp. 61-88.

³¹² Marcus, J., 1999, p. 521.

³¹³ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 521.

³¹⁴ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 522.

³¹⁵ Alon, G. "The Levitical Uncleaness of the Gentiles," In *Jews, Judaism and Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud, 146-89*, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977, p. 149.

separation.³¹⁶ What united the two principles was the belief that Torah, if given by God, must be able to be kept. If one knew what the Law meant, he would know to keep it and this was what the Pharisees intended to do to all people.

Thus De Lacey points out that Sanders twists Neusner's analysis into an assertion that the Pharisees meant to replace priestly purity with lay purity. Neusner's analysis only claims that the Pharisees wanted to extend priestly rules to the lay people. However, in view of the Bible's clear demarcation between the two groups, this does not mean that they thought that the distinction between priests and the lay people had thereby been totally eliminated. But as the Bible treats priests and lay people as distinct groups, the Pharisees nevertheless seem to have moved in the direction of the admittedly paradoxical notion of "lay priesthood."³¹⁷ As Marcus points out, this parallels the internal tension within Episcopalianism, which embraces the idea of the priesthood of all believers on one hand and maintains a distinct office for priests on the other hand.³¹⁸

As regards this scholarly analysis, therefore, some Christian scholars agree that ritual handwashing did begin to become obligatory on all the laity. If that was the case, the Pharisees and Scribes might certainly have expected a religious leader such as the Markan Jesus to exact the highest standards from his followers. The Jewish practice of ceremonial washing of the hands before meals was a ritual act, intended to remove the defilement incurred by contact with the Gentiles. The devout Jewish practice of hand washing before meals was for a purpose not of cleanliness but of consecration. It was a ceremonial elaboration by an act of the principle involved in the thanksgiving before and after partaking of food. Every meal was an occasion both for thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία), since food was the gift of God and for religious fellowship (cf. Acts 2: 46-47). Mark's comment illustrates the

³¹⁶ Alon, G., 1977, p. 176.

³¹⁷ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 522.

³¹⁸ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 522.

care with which the rule was carried out, but shows also that like other good customs this practice had degenerated into formalism. The concern for the minute details of ceremonial had supplanted genuine religious faith and devotion (cf. Matt. 23: 23). The attitude of Jesus according to Mark is not that such observances are wrong, but that they are receiving a disproportionate attention, to the neglect of the things which really matter.

Investigating the Jewish society of Palestine in the first century, we realise that issues of purity and pollution prevailed the culture of the day.³¹⁹ Similarly, in understanding Mark, we see that the forces of purity and defilement relate to many aspects of the story, for instance, Holiness (1:21-28, 40-44; 5:1-20), Sabbath (1:29-31; 2:23-28; 3:1-6), Sinners & Tax collectors (2:1-17), Hemorrhage & Corpses (5:55-43), Gentiles (7:24-30; 8:1-10), Foods (7:1-23), and so on. Thus, the issues of purity are well presented across the pages of Mark's story. When we turn to the depiction of the Jewish nation in the Gospel of Mark, the above mentioned aspects are seen throughout the Gospel. The leaders of the nation uphold the laws of ritual purity by separating from the unclean in Israel (2:15-17); guarding the holy Sabbath from defilement (2:23-3:6); guarding God from blasphemy (2:1-12; 14:53-65); guarding the Temple from unclean people (11:15-18) and blemished sacrifices (12:32-33, and guarding the body from impure food (7:1-23). These authorities guarded boundaries and saw them as means of protection, hence, withdrew from uncleanness and avoided contact with any defilement. By contrast, Jesus revises these rules and regulations because he saw them as oppressive and limiting to the Gentiles and women. Mark therefore presents Jesus and his followers revising the exclusive and limiting boundary lines. In this respect, I believe this could be the reason why Mark preserves a tradition that reacted strongly to such exclusive practices. Mark remembers an early Christian community's understanding of Jewish purity system that restricted and excluded women from cult and society; and now writes about Jesus' revision of these purity laws.

³¹⁹ Anderson J. C. and Moore S. D. (eds.), 1992, p. 144.

3.3.iii. Menstruation in Mark's cultural environment

Menstruation was indeed an issue in first century Palestine. Josephus says the ancient purity laws were strictly practised even during the first century AD. He designates Moses as the author of purity laws and upholds the laws of ritual purification for all menstruants and people having sexual relations (J. A. 3:268). According to Josephus, it is not only lepers who are forbidden entry into the city, but also people having a discharge (J. W. 5: 227). Here, he says the temple was closed to women during menstruation and even when free from impurity, they were not permitted to pass the boundary mentioned. He reiterates further his position by saying that 'the outer court was open to all, foreigners included: women during their impurity were alone refused admission' (J. W. 2 103-04). The explanation of the command to allot a special place in the cities 'for women during their menstrual uncleanness and after childbirth' is that they may not defile the cities with menstrual uncleanness (II Q Temple 45:16-17).

Similarly, G. Alon³²⁰ also comments by reading from Josephus that 'he banished from the city alike those afflicted with leprosy and those with contagious disease (having discharge). Women, too, when beset by their natural secretion (menstruants), he secluded from contact with clean individual until the seventh day, after which they were permitted to return to society' (*Antiquities* 3: 261). Again the Pseudo-Philonian Biblical Antiquities support menstrual purity regulations but protest the ritual bath for men. They say, 'for it is absurd that a man should be forbidden to enter the temples save after bathing and cleansing the body, and yet should attempt to pray and sacrifice with a heart soiled and spotted' (*Biblical Antiquities* 3:8). However, this tells us that nothing is seen challenging the menstrual laws and their limiting effects upon human relationships. Instead, it upholds the menstrual laws by saying, 'whenever the menstrual issue occurs, a man must not touch (have sex with) a woman but during that period refrain from intercourse and respect the Law of nature' (*Biblical Antiquities* 7. 32-33).

The Mishnah (Niddah 7:4), which discusses houses for unclean women - namely, for menstruants proves that, in the Tannaitic period, women during menstruation were put in special houses so that men, vessels and food would not be defiled. This is also the practice of

³²⁰ Alon, G., 1977, p. 68.

the Samaritans and the Falashas.³²¹ Both the school of Shammai and Hillel describe the one who sees an appearance of flux (zab or zabah) as the one who awaits day against day or like one who has had a seminal emission.³²² Hence, all are susceptible to uncleanness through flux. Therefore, anyone who touches the zab (an irregular bleeding for a man) and the zabah (an irregular bleeding for a woman), the menstruating woman, the woman after childbirth and the mesora (a bed or a chair) imparts uncleanness at two removes and renders unfit at one further remove.

However, Talmudic tradition records an inexorable process of increased stringency by which the niddah was equated with the woman who experienced an extraordinary discharge of blood placing her in the state of “zabah.”³²³ Until the woman undergoes ritual immersion, she remains both impure and forbidden. The Talmudic halakhah related the question of niddah on two different planes. On the one hand, there was the question of ritual Purity. It was until the woman underwent the prescribed waiting period and ritual purification; she was barred from entering the Temple in Jerusalem or from coming into contact with sacred things such as sacrificial meat, heave-offerings and certain types of tithes.

The Laws in the Temple Scroll are even harsher than in the Mishnah. They bar all bearers of impurity from the city and require of them three days of purification, probably based on the holiness regulations of Israel at Mount Sinai (Cf. I Q 28a i. 26).³²⁴ Sexual intercourse is forbidden in the city according to both the Temple Scroll (II Q 19 45:11-12) and the Damascus Document (CD 12: 1-2). All persons discharging sexual fluids (menstrual blood or semen) are to be removed from Jerusalem and quarantined within ordinary cities (II Q 19 48:13-17). However, the Temple Scroll does not mention installations for women in Jerusalem during their times of impurity. Since no sexual intercourse is allowed there, it apparently proves that no women were to live in the city.³²⁵ However, it is possible, according to Schiffman and Vanderkam that there were such installations in Jerusalem in the Second Temple period for women with fluxes (Nid. 7:4; A.R.N. 2:3; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Lev.12:2; Jewish Antiquities 3:261).³²⁶ Impurity is a more penetrating force in the Scrolls

³²¹ Alon, G., 1977, p. 172.

³²² Neusner, J., 1988, pp. 1108-1117.

³²³ Woolf, J. R. *Medieval Models of Purity and Sanctity: Ashkenazic Women in the Synagogue*, pp. 263- 280 in *Purity and Holiness*.

³²⁴ Schiffman L. H. and Vanderkam James C. (eds.), 2000, p. 725.

³²⁵ Yadin Y. *The Temple Scroll*, 3 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983-1:285-89, 291-93, 304-307.

³²⁶ Schiffman L, and Vanderkam, J., 2000, p. 726

than in the Mishnah. For anyone who touched either an impure person or an individual in the process of purification became impure and was not allowed to eat until bathing and laundering his or her clothing. Josephus states that among the Essenes, senior members would not touch junior members for fear of defilement (J. W. 2:150). Even objects on which the impure person had lain or sat or which he or she had merely touched could transmit impurity to other persons (4 Q 274; cf. CD 12:17).

However, the key to understanding the maximal interpretations of purity in the Scrolls lies in the recognition that the writers were primarily priests.³²⁷ For this reason, priests had to make sure that there were a large number of miqvaot and pools as a process of ritual immersion for purification before the Temple. The large number of swimming pools at Jericho in the second Temple period may suggest that swimming may have been part of the process or means of ritual immersion, though not an end in itself. The multiplicity of miqvaot and pools in Jericho may be related primarily to the large and varied population which gathered at Jericho for purification. We learn of the diversity of the bathers at the swimming pools of Jericho from Josephus (Antiquities 15:54). The diversity of miqvaot at Jericho may also have been related to the abundance of priests in the city during the second Temple period (cf. B Ta'anit: 27a). The miqvaot excavated at Jericho contributed not only to an understanding of the development of ritual baths and their regulations, but also to the study of the extensive and flourishing Jewish community in Jericho at the end of the second Temple period.³²⁸

The laws relating to ritual purification in a miqve, to which the Mishnah devotes an entire tractate, are based upon the interpretation of Leviticus 11:36: 'But a spring or a cistern holding water shall be clean, while whatever touches the carcass in it shall be unclean.'³²⁹ According to this interpretation, water has a purifying effect if it flows from a spring or rainwater collected in a pool or a cistern built into the ground, as opposed to water drawn by vessels and transported manually.³³⁰ As a minimum purification from any impurity,

³²⁷ Schiffman, L. H. "The Temple Scroll and the Systems of Jewish Law of the Second Temple period", in *Temple Scroll Studies*, edited by G.J. Brooke, *Journal for the study of the Pseudepigrapha*, Supplement series 7, Sheffield, 1989, pp. 249-255; Schwartz Daniel R. "On Two Aspects of a Priestly view of descent at Qumran", in *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The New York University Conference in memory of Y. Yadin*, edited by L. H. Schiffman, *Journal for the study of the Pseudepigrapha*, Supplement series, Sheffield, 1990, pp. 157-180.

³²⁸ Levine L. I. (ed.), *The Jerusalem Cathedra: Studies in History, Archaeology, Geography and Ethnography of the Land of Israel*, Yad Izhak Ben – Zvi Institute, Jerusalem, 1982, p. 106.

³²⁹ Levine, L. I. (ed.), 1982, p. 118.

³³⁰ Shenberger Y. *Miqvaot (Hebrew)*, Jerusalem, 1973, p. 58.

laundering, bathing and waiting for sunset are required (4 Q 396 4:1; II Q 19 1:8-9). It was only the clean water that could be used for purification and it had to cover the whole person (4 Q 267 17:8-9; CD 10:10-13). The Qumran sectarians required immersion for ritual impurity as well as moral impurity. Sinners were instructed to immerse themselves in water in order to be purified. However, without repentance, immersion was meaningless (I QS 3:3-9; v. 13-15). The same view is endorsed by both John the Baptist, who baptised repentant sinners (Matt. 3:6-11), and Philo of Alexandria (The Unchangeableness of God 7-8).³³¹

The rule of the community also describes the standard of purity that was in practice at Qumran. The ordinary food was eaten in a state of purity. All members of the community had to bathe before eating the pure communal meal 'the tohorah' (I Qs v. 13; cf. J. W. 2:129). According to other sources, community members changed into white clothing before eating the communal meal and no physically impaired person could participate (J. W. 2:129-131; I Q 28a 2:3-10; J. A. 18:21; cf. I QM 7:4-6). The exclusion from the communal meal was a penalty for members who violated the community rules (I Qs 7:2-21; 8:22-24; J. W. 2:143). The candidates for membership in the community were put on probation and examined for an entire year before they were allowed to eat the meal; at least two years of probation were necessary in order to drink communal liquids (I Qs 6:17-21; J. W. 2:138; cf. CD 15:14-15).

As regards communal meals, in the third century there were two Christian documents, the *Epistle to Basilides of Dionysius of Alexandria* and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, which confirm the diagnosis of treating the menstruant woman. The anonymous Christian author of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* attempts to persuade the newly converted women in his community to abolish their observance of menstrual separation from prayer, eucharist and study. Hence, he summons his power of authority and persuasion against the practice of these women. As one of his arguments, he introduces the story of the hemorrhaging woman by saying:

‘And again you shall not separate those (women) who have their period. For she also who had the flow of blood when she touched the border of our Saviour’s Cloak, was not censured but was even esteemed worthy for the forgiveness of all her sins. And when (your wives) have those issues which are according to nature, take care, as is right, that you cleave to them, for you know that they are your members.’³³²

³³¹ Schiffman L. H. and Vanderkam J.C. (eds.), 2000, p. 727.

³³² Voobus, A. “The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac with English translation,” (CSCO, 2 vols.), Louvain, 1979, pp. 401-402, 407-408

In contrast, Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria and a student of Origen wrote in response to the inquiry of Basilides, a colleague in rank saying:

‘The question concerning women in the time of their menstrual separation, whether is proper for them when in such a condition to enter the house of God, I consider a superfluous inquiry. For I do not think, that, if they are believing and pious women, they will themselves be rash enough in such condition either to approach the holy table or to touch the body and blood of the Lord. Certainly the woman who had the discharge

of blood of twelve years standing did not touch (the Lord) Himself, but only the hem of his Garment, with a view to her cure.’³³³

In these two contrasting views, the former tried to convince women in its community to partake in the Eucharist while they are menstruating, whereas the latter attempts to keep them away from it, as well as from the altar and the Church altogether. The attitude of the latter shows that purity was still an issue to be adhered to, despite the teaching of the Markan Jesus. Again the hemorrhaging woman is representative of any woman who has her menstruation. But now she becomes exemplary for barely having touched Jesus Himself, and her touch is not really any touch at all. Thus, if that was the case, Marcus is of the view that the debate reflected the actual Jewish Practices.³³⁴ Hence, it was a debate concerning the purity of women and their admission into the Eucharist and Church during their menstrual period. According to John, purity comes by association with Jesus (Jn 13:10,15:3). Also the author of Hebrews, too, believes that Christianity has replaced the physical cult and its purity laws (Heb. 10:1-25). This gives us an understanding that although menstruation and irregular discharge did mainly focus on the Temple and sexual relations, people were generally anxious about contacting an impure person before purification.

Therefore, restoring a person to the community required repentance, healing and sacrifices, as she or he undergoes purification. Most impurities such as menstrual blood, corpse contamination, however, are incurred in the normal course of life and are not the result of sin. That is why the hemorrhaging woman in Mark 5:24-34 is neither a sinner nor sinful to touch Jesus. These people were easily purified, primarily by immersion in water and the passage of time. Likewise, the hemorrhaging woman in Mark touches Jesus and is purified from her

³³³ Kraemer, R. (ed.) *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religion in the Greco-Roman World*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.

³³⁴ Marcus J., 1999, p. 368.

scourge instantly. Though discharging blood was legally not wrong except in relation to the Temple and sexual relations, most people were probably still very anxious about contacting an impure person. The most persuasive view according to Milgrom is that items are impure because they are in some way connected to or representatives of death.³³⁵ The discharge of genital fluids represents a loss of life-giving forces. To substantiate this, scripture teaches that obedience will lead to blessing and life, while sin leads to curses and death (Deut. 30:15-20). Hence, what is associated with death must be avoided at all cost because it is incompatible with the holy God who gives life.

Cohen asserts that even Christians did not always believe that their faith in Christ freed them from the impurity rules and food taboos of Leviticus.³³⁶ Thus, it is no wonder that some authorities in Mark's cultural environment were still clinging to their old style of life (7:1-23). Generally speaking, the fact is that the menstruants and those with flux were not allowed to enter the Temple until they were purified. This could probably have created a precedence of unwillingness for people to associate with the impure. This I think might have had some negative impact on the impure people. Moreover, because people were probably anxious about contacting an impure person for fear of transferring impurity from them, they tried as much as possible to avoid that by way of disassociation. Hence, socially people would not want to touch impurity.

Furthermore, the social anxieties of people touching the impurity (Menstruants) are strengthened by the concepts of purity and pollution as described by Mary Douglas.³³⁷ In her view, purity represents the notion that there are places for things and things are in their place, while pollution represents the notion that some things have no place or that things are out of their place. Hence, purity and pollution imply an ordered classification of things and people with corresponding boundaries. Purity is best understood in terms of its binary opposite, 'dirt'.³³⁸ Douglas points out, when something is out of place or when it violates the

³³⁵ Milgrom, J., 1991, p. 936.

³³⁶ Cohen, S.J.D., 1991, p. 279.

³³⁷ Douglas, M. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1996; idem "Pollution", *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 12, edited by D. Stills, New York: MacMillan, 1968, pp. 336-42, idem, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975; idem, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, New York: Pantheon, 1982.

³³⁸ Neyrey, J. H. "The Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel in Social-Scientific Criticism of the New Testament and Its Social World," in *Semeia 35, JBC*, Decatur, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1986, p. 92.

classification system in which it is set, it is dirt, hence dirt or that which pollutes is matter out of place. For instance, soil belongs in a garden it does not belong in a house. When it is in a house, we consider it to be dirt because it is out of place. Hence, coming with dirt inside the house is unclean. That is, the wrong thing appears in the wrong place, hence the outside is impurity inside. Therefore, purity is a map of a social system which co-ordinates and classifies things according to their appropriate place. This is an analogy for the whole purity-pollution system.

Douglas's analysis of the ancient Hebrew system of purity-pollution illustrates the model clearly. The ancient Hebrew culture as reflected in Leviticus is a purity-pollution system based on Holiness. The notion of holiness is rooted in two concepts: wholeness and set-apartness. First, holiness has to do with what is whole. That which is pure and holy conforms wholly to its classification. That is why human beings with deformities were considered marginal and unclean and animals with blemishes were considered unclean and not to be offered to the Temple (Lev.11). This is so because they were not considered to be whole and therefore did not fit wholly within their classes. Thus, we would say that the hemorrhaging woman was not whole because of her chronic illness. By spending all her financial resources on physicians for twelve years, she was trying to make herself whole or fit wholly within her community. She finally comes to Jesus and with the miraculous healing Jesus makes her whole. She is wholly fitted within an ordered classification.

Secondly, holiness has to do with things and people that are set apart. That is, things which by virtue of being in their place are kept away from certain things. Hence, things are holy when they are in their place, but when they don't appear where they belong, they are characterised as unholy or unclean. Thus, this gives us an understanding why blood, spit or semen are considered unclean (Lev.19). It is so because they belong inside the body, but when they come out of their place, such as in a menstrual flow, they are unclean and will defile people. Hence, the story according to this interpretation is about purity or impurity, because it concerns a woman who has an irregular discharge of blood. That is why she comes to Jesus to be cleansed of her impurity. Therefore, this story is really about purity, because the oozing of blood which belongs inside the body, comes out of its place and makes her and other people unclean. Looking at the ordered classification of the world with proper places for people and things, we know that things or people that did not fit this classification were considered to be unclean and capable of making other things unclean. In Mark's depiction of the Jewish nation,

the authorities support this system.

3.4. Conclusion

The idea of purity is therefore very important in this story in understanding Mark's presentation of Jesus and the Christian community. Mark does not repudiate the system of purity by presenting Jesus contesting certain purity rules, rather he portrays him according to a reformed idea of purity, in which lines are being redrawn and boundaries loosened. While at the same time, we can account for Jesus' reforming suggestions about God's mercy and how this structures a more inclusive group with weaker purity, which is less particularistic than that of the Pharisaic concepts of purity (cf. 7:24-30; 8:1-10). In our passage and the entire Gospel, Mark presents Jesus who brings cleanness, forgiveness of sins and wholeness to God's covenant people.

Truly, it is indisputable that menstruation or irregular bleeding was not an issue at all involving censure, apart from entering the Temple and sexual relations. As Sanders comments, purity was an issue within the realm of the Temple.³³⁹ Purity was a necessary requirement for a priest, if he were to minister in the Sanctuary, and for a non-priest who wished to enter the Temple precincts. Hence, failing to purify seldom interfered with most aspects of ordinary life and only represented a separation from what was holy: touching any sacrificial food or entering the Sanctuary. But we have also seen that this was also extended to lay people for them to serve God faithfully and wholistically. Therefore, Mark 5:21-43 has purity in the background. Mark echoes Leviticus and presents purity and Jesus' interpretation of it in his wider work of his Gospel. Although touching a person or any object while in state of impurity is not legally wrong, nevertheless I feel people were very anxious of preserving their holiness both in the Temple and outside the community. That is why, during the ancient Judaism and Christianity, Levitical laws were still very important for the welfare of people to God and one another within a community. Hence, during the period of the inception and expansion of the early Jewish movement Jewish writings were permeated by the Levitical laws restricting the menstruous woman.³⁴⁰ The portrait of the woman with the flow of blood is in direct similarity to the portrait of the woman preserved by the androcentric Levitical writers. Having counter-argued that our story has purity in the background, I now turn to the

³³⁹ Sanders, E. P., 1990, p. 29.

³⁴⁰ Neusner J., 1973, pp. 35-58.

detailed exegetical analysis of the hemorrhaging woman in chapter 4. Even though the exegetical part is primarily based upon this woman, the entire lesson of this chapter focuses on two characters, namely: the hemorrhaging woman and the daughter of Jairus.

Chapter 4

Women and purity in Mark's presentation (5: 21-43): Breaking Social and Religious Custom for liberation

4.1. Introduction

The narrative of the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus' daughter builds from the healing of one woman to the raising of another. Jesus returns to Jewish territory after his first voyage and exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20). Immediately upon his way, Jesus is approached by Jairus, the synagogue president, who, because of his desperate need, forgets his pride and position and falls at Jesus' feet begging his aid for his daughter who is at the point of death (5:23). Jesus complies and sets off to his house to heal his sick daughter. Upon this journey, the hemorrhaging woman who advances near to him and secretly touches his garment interrupts Jesus from the crowd. Miraculously, her flow of blood immediately stops and she feels in her body that she is healed of her disease (5:29). The story of the woman here seems to delay the journey until the arrival of the messengers in 5:35 suggesting that it is too late for the Lord's coming to be of any avail. Against the inclination of his disciples (5:29), Jesus attends to the poverty-stricken woman (5:26), but as a result arrives too late to save the daughter. The story's tragic end is surprisingly reversed by Jesus' powerful deed of raising the young girl back to life.

Our account links two females in need of Jesus' miracles. Several commentators, such as Achtemeier³⁴¹, have noted the linkage of these stories, which describe two females, who are desperately in need of Jesus. Mark again here uses the form of intercalation to interrelate these two episodes. They are also linked rhetorically by several elements especially the number twelve. The theme of twelve years indicates the length of illness the woman suffered (5:25) and the age of the girl (5:42). Gerald West suggests that twelve years may in the case of the young girl be an allusion to the onset of menstruation and the beginning of fertility.³⁴² The flow of blood to the younger girl meant that life was possible, but to the woman life was impossible. The twelve years of age for a younger girl is a narrative reminder of the child that the older woman has not been able to bear.

³⁴¹ Achtemeier P.J. "Towards the Isolation of the Pre-Markan Miracle Catena", in *JBL*, 1970, pp. 276-79.

³⁴² West, G. "Constructing Critical and Contextual Readings with Ordinary Readers, Mark 5: 21-6:1," in *JTSA*, 92, 1995, pp. 60-69.

Again the element of the name ‘daughter’ with which Jesus addresses the woman (5:34) is similar to the relation of the sick girl to Jairus (5:23). Similarly, the account of contrast of public and private in Jesus’ public exposure of the woman who is cured (5:32), and the privacy of Jesus for the raising of the girl (5:40-43) link two females in need of Jesus’ help. Finally, our account portrays the links between the contrast of the woman who needs to touch Jesus for her healing (5:27-28) and Jesus, touching the girl by bringing her back to life (5:41-42).

However, in relation to Mark’s sandwiches of these stories, many commentators such as Dibelius³⁴³ ask whether Mark joined these stories as was his habit elsewhere in the Gospel (3:20-35; 5:21-43; 6:7-32; 9:2-14; 11:12-26; 14:1-11 & 14:10-25, 54-72). Or, were the miracles linked already in the Pre-Markan stratum? Dibelius sees the number of linkages between the stories as so dense that he assumes that they were joined prior to Mark’s own work. Wendy Cotter also supports Dibelius’ judgement that the stories were linked prior to Mark.³⁴⁴ In view of the comparative absence of connecting links of this kind in Mark, Schmidt notes that the interweaving is due to historical recollection.³⁴⁵ In support of this view, Taylor believes that the connection is historical and not literary.³⁴⁶ However, Marshall believes that the intercalations are attributed to Mark himself, although the actual technique may have been suggested to him from the tradition.³⁴⁷ He asserts that Mark generally brings these episodes into some kind of mutually interpretative relationship, in order to achieve some rhetorical effect in the narrative.

The other link of the stories is the parallel structure of each episode. In each the woman is defined by her social location, need and Jesus’ response to her need. For instance, the daughter of Jairus is unclean by her death (corpse), and the woman is unclean (hemorrhages) and there is contact and touching between Jesus and her. Furthermore, Jesus speaks to the woman and there is healing and restoration of the woman to the religious and social community. Moreover, both women are initially identified in terms of patriarchal social

³⁴³ Dibelius M. *From Tradition to Gospel* (translated) by B. L. Woolf., London, 1934, p. 219.

³⁴⁴ Cotter, W.C.S.J. “Mark’s Hero of the Twelfth-Year Miracles: The Healing of the Woman with the hemorrhage and the raising of Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:21-43),” in A. J. Levine (with Marianne Blickenstaff (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Gospel of Matthew*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, pp. 54-78.

³⁴⁵ Schmidt K.L. *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*, Berlin, 1919, p. 148.

³⁴⁶ Taylor, V. *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, London: Macmillan & Company Ltd, 1952, p. 289.

³⁴⁷ Marshall, C. D. *Faith as a theme in Mark’s Narrative*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 92.

systems, not in their own right. The hemorrhaging woman and her uncleanness (Lev. 15:25-30) is defined by the purity system of first century Palestine. According to Leviticus this would render her perpetually unclean. The daughter of Jairus is defined in terms of her relationship to a male, her father, leader of the synagogue. Although the daughter of Jairus controls respect from the status of her father, the power of disease shows no discrimination. As a result of this, when she dies, she too becomes the source of ritual impurity (Num 19:11). They are therefore both defined according to their relation to the world in which they live. Although they differ in social status, they are suffering from severe diseases, although one is very severe, she is dead.

The hemorrhaging woman, according to our passage, may have been very wealthy, because she spent a lot upon doctors. Her wealth is now gone and she has become destitute. Cranfield concurs that the phrase *Τὰ παρ' αὐτῆς*, (7:26) may be translated as her wealth (cf. Lk 10:7; Phil. 4:18).³⁴⁸ Marshall also observes the wealth of Jairus, who is a man of high standing and his family since they own a house covered with rooms (5:35, 40), unlike the houses of the poor which are simply one-roomed.³⁴⁹ Moreover, the woman is portrayed at the opposite end from Jairus socially, economically and religiously.

Marshall has noted several differences between the woman and Jairus' daughter.³⁵⁰ Jairus is named, wealthy and a respected male leader of the synagogue (5:22, 36, 38, 40). The hemorrhaging woman is nameless, poor due to payment of doctors who have just aggravated her condition and unclean because of her condition and thus probably excluded from the religious community (5:25, 26, 28, cf. Lev. 15:25-27, 33 & 12:7; 20:18). Jairus has a family and a large household (5:22, 35, 40), while the woman must live in isolation because of her condition (5:27) which would tend to preclude marriage and child-bearing and lead to social isolation (cf. Lev. 15:7; Num. 5:2). Jairus comes to Jesus' feet begging him to heal her sick daughter who was at the point of death (5:23), while the woman touches Jesus' garments, in faith that this action will make her healthy (5:28,34). Jesus requests the woman to come forward (5:30,32), while he urges Jairus not to fear but to keep faith (5:36). Jesus raises Jairus' daughter in privacy with only his three disciples and her parents (5:40), while the

³⁴⁸ Cranfield C.E.B. *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1959, p. 184.

³⁴⁹ Marshall, C.D., 1989, p. 95.

³⁵⁰ Marshall, C.D., 1989, p. 104.

woman is healed in public (5:29,33,34). Marshall also notes some significant differences in style between the two stories. He observes that the story of Jairus is written mainly in the historic present with frequent use of ‘καὶ’, while the story of the woman is written in the aorist and imperfect with longer sentences and many participles.³⁵¹ In relation to this, Osburn suggests that the use of the past tense reflects the stylistic device to show that the scene is subordinate to the main episode.³⁵² Hence, most exegetes such as Gnilka are convinced that despite these dissimilarities, there were two originally separate traditions that were intertwined by either Mark or sometime in the Pre-Markan phase.³⁵³ He observes that the similarities may have encouraged the linking of the traditions in the first place.

Despite these differences, Marshall concludes that what is important for our purposes is that at the narrative level each story participates in the features of the other: together they constitute a literary whole. Indeed, both stories concern the healing of females through physical contact, who were ritually unclean because of menstrual disorder and death, for a period of twelve years (5:25), and at the age of twelve years (5:42) respectively. Mark has interwoven the passages to show the correspondences the woman who is an outcast and the daughter of Jairus the ruler of the synagogue. In both stories the petitioners desire full restoration, σωζέσθαι, (5:23, 28, 34), and both fall down before Jesus (πίπτει, 5:22, προσεπέσεν, 5:33). Likewise, Jairus seeks help for his θυγάτριον, (5:23); cf. 5:35 and the woman is addressed as θυγάτηρ, (5:34). Furthermore, both stories reiterate the response of faith since the woman experiences great fear φοβείσθαι, (5:33) and Jairus is told by Jesus not to fear but to have faith (μὴ πιστις σοῦ, 5:36). Hence, these verbal contacts draw attention to the differences and similarities between the woman and Jairus’ daughter. They also invite a comparison between the behaviour and attitudes of the synagogue ruler and those of the woman, which are measured by faith. The faith Jairus displays for the saving of his daughter is parallel and related to the faith the woman exhibits in order to be saved from her scourge.

³⁵¹ Marshall, C.D, 1989, p. 92.

³⁵² Osburn, C.D. “The Historical Present in Mark as a Text-Critical Criterion,” *Bib.* 64, 1983, pp. 486-500.

³⁵³ Gnilka J. *Das Evangelium nach Markus. Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 2 vols*, Zurich, Einsiedeln, Koln: Benziger/ Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 8, 1978/79, p. 210.

4.2. The healing of the hemorrhaging woman (5: 25-34)

According to Mark, the experience of a sick person touching Jesus is not a unique occurrence. In 3:7-12, many people who had heard the deeds of Jesus (cf. 5:27) fell upon him and touched him for healing from their scourges (cf. 5:29, 34); and in 6:56, many who touched even the fringe of his garment were healed (cf. 5:28f). In this view, our account constitutes a case study of what this manner of approaching Jesus in the crowd entails and especially the operation of the woman's faith in relation to Jesus' power. The narrative is readily divided into two parts, that is, the healing event (5:25-29) and the account of Jesus' response and interaction with the woman (5:30-34). In the first part the woman knows in her body that she is healed, and in the second part Jesus also knows in himself that power has gone forth.

4.2.i. Description of woman and her scourge (5: 25-26)

The hemorrhaging woman in our account has no name. She belongs to the crowds and has no one to defend her as Jairus defends his daughter. She is a destitute and Mark describes her destitution in four successive participles (5:25).³⁵⁴ She is poor and outcast (5:26). Perhaps, as Taylor points out, the squandering of money upon negative medical care was a perennial problem of the poor in antiquity.³⁵⁵ However, Mark's parenthetical comment which is dropped by Matthew and Luke, is sharp and even cynical (5:26). In contrast, the true physician (2:17) will cure her without charge. Lagrange echoes that it was customary to consult as many physicians as possible, and with the result that multiplicity of prescriptions given made the patient worse.³⁵⁶ He further remarks that even today, it is common to employ a multiplicity of doctors in the case of serious disorders. But their diagnoses and prescriptions frequently conflict and result only in expenditure of money with no effect, leaving the problem aggravated.

The woman in our account had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. It is probable that the woman's disease was such as to render her ceremonially unclean (Lev. 15:25). In any case it was difficult to attract our Lord's attention in such a crowd, and in the public. According to purity regulations in Leviticus, any woman who has a regular monthly period was termed unclean and remained in that state for at least seven days (Lev. 15:19, 28). In a Jewish context, her bleeding placed the woman in a state of perpetual cultic impurity

³⁵⁴ Myers, C. *Binding the Strongman: A Political Reading of Mark's story of Jesus*, New York: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 201.

³⁵⁵ Taylor, V. *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, New York: St. Martin's, 1963, p. 290.

³⁵⁶ Lagrange J.L. *Evangile de Jésus-Christ*, Paris: Lecoffre, 1929, p. 140.

(Lev. 15:25-30). That would not only have prevented her from participating in cultic activities and sexual relations, but would also have made her unclean and anyone who touched her, lay on her bed or sat on her chair. Perhaps her twelve-year agony of impurity besides draining her finances had also isolated her socially from friends and kin. Her illness, then, placed her outside the religious community and perhaps outside the honourable human community.

4.2.ii. The decision to touch his cloak repays her (5: 27-29)

Having heard the reports of Jesus' miracles, she decides to touch him. These reports were of the healing ministry. Mann notes that the Greek phrase literary (ἀκούσασα περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 5:27) is reminiscent of Luke 23:37, 24:19, 27 and Acts 1:3, 17:25.³⁵⁷ So far, the participles in our account have denoted the particulars of the woman's state, previous to her coming to Jesus and this identity of relation had led to the use of (καὶ or ἀλλὰ) to connect them. Now, the narrative passes over to a new relation and the conjunction is dropped.³⁵⁸ The woman heard either the reports concerning Jesus, so Taylor, and this suits (ἀκούσασα) well,³⁵⁹ or else the deeds of Jesus or events in which Jesus had been concerned, so Moule, (cf. Lk 24:19, 24; Acts 1:3, 18:25; Phil. 2:20).³⁶⁰ Moule says if the latter alternative is right, we have an accusative with (ἀκούω) of the thing about which the person hears (cf. 13:7). The woman's desire to approach Jesus secretly may have been dictated by the fact that her complaint made her permanently ritually unclean (Lev. 15:25), so that she would be generally shunned. This, then, indicates that her action is founded upon a belief that mere contact will affect a cure. The idea of the healing effect of contact with a holy person's garments even without his conscious intention is repeated in 6:56.³⁶¹ It is extended in Acts 19:12, where the handkerchiefs and aprons from Paul's body which were brought before the sick had the power to heal. According to Davies and Allison, these passages seem to presuppose that there is a sort of power which is resident in the holy person's body that can be transferred to other physical objects.³⁶² Hence, the narrative provides us with enough reason that the woman's

³⁵⁷ Mann, C. S. *The Anchor Bible, Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York/London: Doubleday, 1986, p. 285.

³⁵⁸ Gould E. P. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896, p. 97.

³⁵⁹ Taylor V., 1963, p. 289.

³⁶⁰ Moule C.F.D. *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963, p. 184.

³⁶¹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 359.

³⁶² Davies, W.D. and Allison D.C. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988-97, p. 130.

faith in God's healing (cf. 3:10; 6:56) had been kindled by what she had heard of Jesus and now saw of him.

Parallel to this, Matthew's version refers to the tassels attached to the corners of the cloak (cf. Num. 15:38, Deut. 22.12). It indicates the woman's thoughts and this is made more explicit in Matthew's addition ἐν ἑαυτῇ, (9:21). As said earlier, in ancient belief even handkerchiefs and aprons carried from the (Acts 5:15 healer's person possessed healing virtue, cf. Acts 19:12) and also his shadow. Thus the healer's person himself was regarded as potent, and his garments or shadow, were looked upon as extensions of his personality.³⁶³ Ironically, Gundry³⁶⁴ points out that the idea of power resident in the person's body is also present in the Old Testament. For instance, a corpse that is cast into Elisha's tomb miraculously revives when it touches his bones (2 Kgs 13:20-21). Moreover, the position of Moses' hands determines whether or not the Israelites prevail in battle (Ex. 17:11-12). Likewise, in our account the woman wants to touch Jesus and the expression καὶ τῶν ἱματίων αὐτοῦ, (5:28) marks the intensity of her desire. The idea has been extended from the holy person's body to his garments.

4.2.iii. The power of Jesus surpasses everything (5: 29-30)

The power which resides in and issues from Jesus, is the personal power of the personal God. When Jesus notices that the power has gone forth from his body, it denotes the inwardness of his knowledge, which proceeds from his own feelings, not from his knowledge of what the woman had done.³⁶⁵ According to Gould, this feeling is where Jesus' knowledge of the facts began, and signifies that he had no conscious part in the miracle. Gould suggests that the expression 'the power gone out from him' indicates that the narrator conceives of the cure effected not by the conscious exercise of power of Jesus, but by power that went out from him involuntarily, and of which he became conscious only afterwards. It is possible that the miracle took place without Jesus' intention, but by a direct Divine Act, as in the other cases in which the throng about him sought to touch even the hem of his garments, and as many as touched were healed. Only, in this case, Jesus knew in some way that there had been a touch

³⁶³ Taylor, V., 1963, p. 290.

³⁶⁴ Gundry, R.H. *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993, p. 280.

³⁶⁵ Gould, E. P., 1896, p. 98.

on him different from that of the crowd, and chose to trace it. He wanted to bring himself into personal contact with the person from whom it proceeded, instead of allowing their contact to remain in the impersonal form.

Although the τὴν ἐξεληθοῦσαν αὐτοῦ δύναμιν, (5:30) is awkward, Mark's phrase is meant to describe the outgoing of a personal power in Jesus to heal, appropriated by the woman. The word 'power', according to Susan Miller, is variously used in Mark (cf. 6:2, 5, 14; 9:1, 39; 12:24; 13:25, 26 and 14:62).³⁶⁶ The work of power is used in this Gospel at 6:2, 5, 14 and 9:39, whereas in 9:1 it is the power with which the reign of God comes to men through his Kingdom. In 13:25, it is used of the heavenly beings or the spirits which reside in them. In 13:26 it is used of the appearance of the Son of Man, in his Parousia, while in 12:24 and 14:62, the word becomes a substitute for God. Again, common in the pagan world, the word is associated with the worship of a manifestation of elemental might. Ramsay notes that the power was what the devotees respected and worshipped; any exhibition of power must have its cause in something that was divine.³⁶⁷ In the New Testament, its use is wholly determined by the majesty of the Living God or by any work which manifests that majesty. Hence, in our account, it is the divine healing power which resides in Jesus (cf. Lk.5: 17) and proceeds from Him (cf. Lk. 6:19). Jesus knows about the woman and wills to honour her faith in the efficacy of his power. Hence, the cure does not happen automatically, but by God's free and personal decision in Jesus. As Marshall notes, Jesus' power is ultimately under the governance of God, and it carries an inherent disposition towards receptive faith.³⁶⁸ He comments, whenever faith is present, power is released not automatically, but because of faith, as Jesus declares at the beginning that God has determined to unite the present manifestation of his Kingly power to the arena of repentant faith (1:15).

However, given her unclean condition, her touch would also transfer her impurity to Jesus, the bearer of the Holy Spirit. Hence, her condition contrasts with that of Jesus who is holy and pure. When Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove (1:10). Jesus is called the Holy One of God (1:24). Looking at the prologue, John the Baptist also prophesies that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit (1:8). All this suggests that Jesus has

³⁶⁶ Miller, S. *Women in Mark's Gospel*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2002, p. 9

³⁶⁷ Ramsay A.M. *Recent Discovery*, London, 1946, p. 118.

³⁶⁸ Marshall, C.D., 1989, p. 106.

power which both rests upon him and resides in him. The use of spirit has also the eschatological connotation, which is anticipated in the Prophets (Joel 2:28-29; Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 36:26-27). The opposition between the Holy Spirit and unclean spirits is illustrated in the healing of the unclean spirit in the synagogue of Capernaum (1:21-28).³⁶⁹ In Jewish interpretation, an unclean spirit is associated with a demon. The demons want to know why Jesus is taking such a hostile attitude toward them. According to Wrede,³⁷⁰ they recognise Jesus because, like him, they are spiritual beings. But Jesus is the Holy One of God, that is, separated from the profane realm. Reflecting this idea of holiness as separation from impurity, the unclean spirit in Mark acknowledges its estrangement from Jesus, the Holy One of God, and fears for its destruction. Hence, the person with the unclean spirit is worried that Jesus has come to destroy him, because Jesus is the Holy One of God (1:24). Furthermore, this opposition is seen in the Beelzebub controversy, where Jesus is accused by his enemies that he is possessed by an unclean spirit (3:30). These enemies fail to identify the importance of Jesus' mission hence they confuse the power of the Holy Spirit working in Jesus with an unclean one.

4.2.iv. The woman's genuine faith warrants healing (5: 27, 34)

The manner of the woman's approach from behind is often taken as an expression of superstitious or magical belief in the healing virtue of physical contact with the garment of the miracle healer. Commentators like Rawlinson³⁷¹ think that her action proceeded from the natural superstitious idea that a kind of supernatural virtue which went forth from the great healer, could be disseminated even by his garments. Moreover, Hull suggests that the woman shows no interest in the person of Jesus at all; she only seeks his impersonal magical power.³⁷² He comments, faith is in the power and what the woman wants is the power, not the Christ. Derrett is also of the view that her act of touching Jesus' garments is capable of evoking magical and even sexual connotations.³⁷³ However, Cranfield argues by insisting that the narrator makes quite explicit from the outset, that it does not express superstition nor a mixture

³⁶⁹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 357.

³⁷⁰ Wrede, W. *The Messianic Secret*, Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971, p. 25.

³⁷¹ Rawlinson A.E.J. *St. Mark: With Introduction and Commentary and Additional Notes (third edition)*, London: Methuen & Company Ltd, 1931, p. 68.

³⁷² Hull, J.M. *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, London: SCM Press, 1974, p. 109.

³⁷³ Derrett J.D.M. *Mark's Technique: The Haemorrhaging Woman and Jairus' Daughter*, *Bib.* 63, 1982, pp. 474-505; also Theissen Gerd. *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1983, p. 134.

of ‘incipient faith and quasi-magical beliefs’, but a genuine perception of faith.³⁷⁴ Schenke observes, when the narrator recounts the inner thoughts of the woman (5:28), he is anticipating the concluding hermeneutical judgement of her behaviour as an expression of faith (5:34).³⁷⁵ He observes that 5:28 signals the same purpose as 5:34. Therefore, 5:34 cannot be regarded as something of an afterthought, as Kertelge claims.³⁷⁶ Moreover, Marshall observes, the woman’s faith cannot be tied to her approach in 5:33 alone as Roloff implies in *Kerygma*.³⁷⁷ The stress on the woman’s utter confidence in Jesus, despite her previous frustrations at the expense of other human healers, and the use of *σωθήσομαι*, (5:28), signify that her deep trust resides not in some magical source of power, but in the presence of God’s saving power in Jesus. Similarly her act of touching Jesus’ garments does not imply that she manipulates magical superstitions. The confidence of the woman centres on the person of Jesus (5:27) and the expression ‘even his garments’ marks the intensity of her conviction. Her secret approach expresses fear and embarrassment at the public exposure of her unclean condition and her act of apparently contaminating the Jewish male healer. Mark implies this interpretation by making verbal contacts with the relevant Levitical passages noted earlier, and by describing the woman’s fear and trembling at the prospect of discovery by Jesus in 5:33.

The genuineness of the woman’s faith is ratified by her immediate experience of healing power (5:29). The faith of the woman completes the process and allows the power of God (*δύναμις*), which goes forth from Jesus to the powerless woman. The correct use of the Greek tenses here is notable as it was in 5:18 and 19 above. The aorist (*ἐξηράνθη*) and (*ἐγνώ*) being used of definite past actions which indicate the completed action, while perfect (*ἵαται*) she was cured, indicated abiding or lasting results.³⁷⁸ The cure is immediate, the flow of blood ceased. In our account, the restoration of bodily wholeness is in the foreground.

³⁷⁴ Cranfield, C.E.B. *Mark*, p.185; Lane, W. L. *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, p. 192.

³⁷⁵ Schenke, L. *Wundererzahlungen des Markusevangelium*, Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibekwerk, 1974, p. 202.

³⁷⁶ Kertelge, K. *Das Markusevangelium: Wunder Jesu*, Die Neue Echter Bibel, Wurzburg: Echter Verlag, 1994, p. 115.

³⁷⁷ Marshall, C.D., 1989, p. 105. This is taken from Roloff, *Kerygma*, p. 154.

³⁷⁸ Mann, C., 1986, p. 285; Taylor, V., 1963, p. 291.

Myers is right to say that only here does Mark stress both the symptoms and the cure.³⁷⁹ This is dramatised in the double realisation of physical sensation by both the woman and Jesus (5:29 & 30a). At the same time, as in the story of the cleansing of the leper (1:40-45), the purity code is very much at issue. Although she touches Jesus, Mark again revises the purity codes by referring to him four times in 5:27-31. The woman who was permanently outcast is restored to social as well as physical wholeness. Marla Selvidge goes so far as to see this story as Mark's protest against the marginalisation of menstruating women by the purity code.³⁸⁰ Although Jesus seems not to know who touched him, the primary significance of this episode lies in the fact that Jesus accepts the priority of the importunity of this woman over the request of the synagogue leader. The most important symbolic reversal here is the status of the destitute woman. From the bottom of her honour scale, she intrudes upon an important mission on behalf of the daughter of someone on the top of the honour scale.³⁸¹ But by the conclusion of the story, the woman herself has become the daughter at the centre of the story (5:34). Not only is she restored from integrity, but she also receives a grant of status superior to that of Jesus' own male disciples, who are without faith ἔχετε πίστιν, (4:40). The same profound reversal of dignity will occur again to the destitute Jew, the blind beggar Bartimaeus (10:51).

4.2.v. The remarkable state of fear and trembling (5: 32-33)

The woman's state of fear and trembling in 5:33 is regarded by some exegetes as a positive expression of Mark's admiration motif (cf. 16:8; 1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:15; Eph. 6:5; Phil. 2:12).³⁸² Luke attributes the woman's fear to the fact of her being discovered (Lk. 8:47), an interpretation disavowed by the subsequent clause in Mark. Other suggested motives make it possible that her fear may have been increased by her knowledge that she had rendered Jesus ritually unclean.³⁸³ But Mark rather ascribes her re-action to the cure itself, and perhaps also, since he mentions the searching glance of Jesus, to her perception that he desires her to make herself known.

³⁷⁹ Myers, C., 1985, p. 201.

³⁸⁰ Selvidge, M. J., 1984, pp. 619-23,

³⁸¹ Myers, C., 1985, p. 202.

³⁸² Marshall, C.D., 1989, p. 107. This idea is reflected in Schmithal's "*Wunder Jesu*", p. 88,91; Gnllka, "*Markus*", 1, 215.

³⁸³ Taylor, V., 1963, p. 292.

The woman's secret behaviour of fear and trembling is made necessary because of her condition, which is apparently chronic vaginal bleeding. The woman's dilemma is therefore profound. According to her conception, she must come into physical contact with a healer in order to be cured by him. But she is unclean and her touch defiles, and therefore there is a danger that any physical contact will annul Jesus' miracle working power and wreck the whole effort. However, instead of asking Jesus to touch her, she touches him. Immediately, something like an electric shock goes through her body, drying up her discharge. In contrast to the doctors who relied on human wisdom and subsequently failed to cure her, the magnificent divine power which breaks forth from Jesus cures her instantly. On the Matthew parallel, Davies and Allison put it, 'Instead of uncleanness passing from the woman to Jesus, healing power flows from Jesus to the woman.'³⁸⁴ Thus the healing, like the ones in 1:40-45 and 5:35-44, involves the touching of a ritually unclean person and thus the transcendence of Levitical purity restrictions.

The woman's fear is also due to the divine power she has just experienced and the fact that she had presumed to touch Jesus. She receives no rebuke, rather, she is assured: 'Daughter, your faith has saved you, go in peace and be healed of your disease' (5:34). Her healing is all the more impressive in that it takes place unconsciously on Jesus' part. In relation to the parallel in Luke, Fitzmyer is correct to say that "daughter" is used to reassure her that she is now to be recognised as part of Israel.³⁸⁵ This is to say, her uncleanness has been removed hence she is no longer in a state of impurity. She may now go home in peace, that is, in a state of wholeness and restoration.³⁸⁶ What is interesting in Jesus' pronouncement is the association of salvation, understood not only as deliverance from disease but restoration to the community and cleansing from a condition of perpetual uncleanness. Therefore, the healing of the hemorrhaging woman is as much a purity miracle as it is anything else. Instead of conveying uncleanness to Jesus, whom she touches, cleanness is conveyed to her.

The woman through fearing and trembling, knowing what has happened to her, after an initial hesitation, comes forward and throws herself at Jesus' feet and narrates the whole truth (5:33). The situation is also probably similar to the Markan Christians, according to Marcus. They,

³⁸⁴ Davies W.D. and Allison D.C., 1988-97, P. 130.

³⁸⁵ Fitzmyer, J.A. *The Gospel according to Luke, AB 28 and 28 A*, New York: Doubleday, 1981-85, p. 747.

³⁸⁶ For the significance of peace and its semantic field, C.A. Evans and S. Talmon (eds.), discuss thoroughly in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders (B IS 28)*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997, pp. 75-115.

too, having heard of Jesus and believing in his words and deeds, are to be aware that metaphorically the miracle has happened in them and can never be the same again, because they have repented and believed in the good news (1:15). They are therefore impelled to overcome timidity and demonstrate their devotion and total allegiance to Jesus and narrate the whole truth like the woman in our pericope. The woman, therefore, is a model which may function as an encouragement to the members of the Markan community to profess their faith in Jesus boldly and not to hold back out of fear of the results. Although those results may be severe (8:38 and 13:9-13), and may result into trial and execution, they are still to persevere. They should avoid strong temptations of hiding one's association with Jesus, as Peter himself did in the Gospel (14:53-72).

Perhaps the words εἰδὼν ὃ γέγονεν αὐτῇ, (5:33) provide a hint of what may have been an even more important cause of her fear. Her realisation that the miracle had been wrought upon her (cf. 1:22 'ἐξεπλήσσαντο') makes the woman fear and tremble. She has realised that the divine power has flowed into her and this triggers the inevitable human reaction of holy dread and awe.³⁸⁷ The other interpretation, as Lohmeyer³⁸⁸ points out is that this reaction is natural in the situation, but fear is also the standard biblical response to theophany (an appearance of God) from Genesis onward (eg. Gen. 15:12; 28:17; Judg. 6:22-23). The combination of fear and trembling occurs in a theophanic context in 4 Macc. 4:10; and Phil. 2:12, which implies the presence of God in the Christian community. The phrase is linked with salvation, as in our account. Therefore, the woman's consciousness of healing (5:29) is the reason for her courageous transcending of the final obstacle of her fear to reveal her presence to Jesus, whose presence she has experienced. In order to counter her fear and in view of her complete turning to him, Jesus assures the woman of her full restoration. The use once again of a familial term of affection 'Θυγάτηρ' (cf. 2:5; 5:39,41), signals the establishment of a personal bond between Jesus and the woman. It emphasises, along with the differentiation of the woman's touch from the physical jostling of the crowd in 5:32, the individualism of faith.

³⁸⁷ Lohmeyer, E. *Das Evangelium des Markus, 11th edition*, Meyer K, Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951, p. 130.

³⁸⁸ Marshall, C.D., 1989, p. 107.

4.2.vi. Jesus' reassurance to the woman (5: 34)

The Lord reassures the woman with affectionate words, addressing her as 'Daughter'. He informs her that her cure is the reward of her implicit faith. The woman's cure is ascribed by Jesus to her faith in the healing power of God, as he does also to Bartimaeus (cf. 10:52). In the New Testament, Faith is not a name for an inner experience, but describes primarily a committal of trust to God, which in turn is made effective by God's response to that trust.³⁸⁹ Taylor also notes, faith in God (cf. 11:22), for example, is not a purely subjective, but a spiritual experience which begins in a venture of spirit and is constituted and made effective by God himself.³⁹⁰ Similarly in our account, this idea is echoed in the fact that Jesus is conscious his spiritual resources have been drawn upon by the woman's faith. The faith of the woman contrasts with that of the disciples. The response of the disciples in 5:31 reflects the theme of their incomprehension which will become increasingly important in the later section of the Gospel (6:52; 7:18; 8:14, 14-21)

We are aware that the woman is not related to Jesus and as Marcus observes, she is not necessarily younger than Jesus.³⁹¹ However, in the Old Testament and later Jewish traditions 'my daughter' is a typical respectful and affectionate mode of address to females regardless of age or family relationship (e.g. Ruth 2:8; 3:10). But for the readers of Mark, this address may also render the concept of the Christian community as a new family (cf. 3:31-35; 10:29-30).³⁹² Hence, the woman enters into a new Christian family, for her faith in the power of God working through Jesus. In the Markan context this benediction implies that the woman has become part of the new family around Jesus, who are connected to him through their actions of doing the will of God (3:35; cf. 10:28-30). This approach is also found in the prophetic traditions, where people are exhorted to trust or have faith, and promised that if they do so they will be rescued from dangers (e.g. Isa. 28:16; Hab. 2:4), although here the language of salvation is not used. Later in our Gospel, in a similarly prophetic context, Jesus will speak of being saved but not of faith, though the necessity of faithfulness will be implied (13:13).³⁹³

³⁸⁹ Mann, C., 1986, p. 286.

³⁹⁰ Taylor, V., 1963, p. 293.

³⁹¹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 360.

³⁹² Miller, S., 2002, p. 12.

³⁹³ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 361.

Looking at the concluding benediction on the woman he has healed (5:34) the Markan readers, too, are reminded of the time when their own faith saved them from the world of death and put them on the road to eschatological peace and wholeness. Hence, the story of the woman, then, is indeed their story. They have been touched by the power of God and separated from the faceless crowd by their fearful and wonderful knowledge of what has happened to them through Jesus. They have found the courage to confess this truth and enter the Christian community through the help and power of the gentle probing Jesus. In baptism Jesus has turned to them and confirmed that through faith in him, they now stand within the sphere of the new age. When persecution, apostasy and death threaten to engulf them, their faith will save them.³⁹⁴ Even if Markan readers live or die, they will go into the peace of the new age.

As Selvidge puts it, menstrual blood had the effect of separating the woman from man's world; but this woman's radical faith disregarded legal bounds in order for her to find healing.³⁹⁵ The faith of the woman compels her to meet Jesus despite her condition and consequences. She is bold enough that, even if results may arise out of her action she has decided to follow Jesus forever. Hence, the story of the hemorrhaging woman invites strong reader identification.³⁹⁶ The commendation of the woman's faith and the use of peace are unique in all the Markan narrative. The woman plays the stronger narrative role, by calling the reader to faith in Jesus. However, the woman's faith contrasts to the disciples' lack of faith (4:40) and unbelief (6:1-6). In our passage, the disciples are shown to have little faith in Jesus and little understanding by questioning why Jesus would ask who touched him in such a big crowd. Hence, Jesus' words meant more than his disciples' superficial interpretation. Therefore, the response of the woman throws faith into bold relief. Her faith emerges sharply as the focus of the narrative's call and reader identification. In the first three chapters of the Gospel, Mark presents Jesus' call to faith as the first step to discipleship, therefore, the woman emerges as the clearly commended model in the entire part of the Gospel ending at 6:6a. The woman is active, she is not restricted in the sequence of the narrative. She touches, knows, discovers and then acts (5:27, 29, 33). The woman encountered Jesus directly and told him the whole truth hence the way is cleared for the work of wholeness to be completed. Her

³⁹⁴ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 369.

³⁹⁵ Selvidge, M. *Daughter of Jerusalem*, Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1987, pp. 35-58.

³⁹⁶ Swartley, W. M. "The Role of Women in Mark's Gospel: A Narrative Analysis" (*Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27), New Jersey, 1997, pp. 16-22.

sense of alienation from God is removed by the address 'Daughter' and especially by the blessing 'go into peace', as discussed below (5:34).

4.2.vii. The woman goes away peacefully (5: 34)

The phrase 'go into peace' is an exact Hebrew 'lesalom' which translates for the salvation used in saying farewell. This is a traditional Old Testament and Jewish departure formula which corresponds to the Hebrew of 1 Kgs. 22:17; Judg. 18:6; 1 Sam. 1:17; 29: 7; 2 Sam.15:9; and is subsequently taken up by the early church (cf. Lk. 7:50; 8:48; Acts 16:36; Jas 2:16. It is not a mere formula of dismissal, but a word of reassurance that all is well. Henceforward there will be no recurrence of her malady.³⁹⁷ Thus the word 'shalom' carries the meaning of wholeness, soundness, rather than the sense of an absence of strife. According to Foerster, the word 'εἰρήνη, peace' does not have its Greek meaning, peace in the New Testament, but one imported directly from the Hebrew, general well-being or in our account, health.³⁹⁸

Taylor is right that the phrase 'peace be with you' is capable of bearing the meaning which the speaker puts into it.³⁹⁹ Moule says the openings and endings of the New Testament Letters have traditional forms which are explicitly filled out with Christian meaning.⁴⁰⁰ From this exhortation, we infer that the benefit which she had obtained was fully ratified, when she heard from the lips of Christ what she had already learned from experience. Calvin also notes, we do not truly or with safe conscience, enjoy God's benefits in any other way than by possessing them as contained in the treasury of his promises.⁴⁰¹ But in the eschatological Markan context, this ordinary greeting would render an added dimension. Marcus observes, the 'into' is construed more literally and the formula becomes an invitation to the woman to

³⁹⁷ Rawlinson, A.E.J. *St. Mark*, p. 69. A number of legends subsequently grew up about the woman who is subject of this story. Eusebius mentions a tradition that she comes from Paneas (Caesarea Phillippi), and describes a group in bronze, still existent there in his time representing a woman kneeling as though in prayer, with her hands outstretched towards the figure of a man, who in turn extends his hand towards the woman. Also the apocryphal Acts of Pilate gives the name of the woman with the issue as Bernice or Beronice, or in the Latin and Coptic versions Veronica. However, Rawlinson says, Lagrange could be right in thinking that the statue was a funeral monument representing a woman stretching out her hands in longing for her dead husband and being consoled by him.

³⁹⁸ Foerster, W. "Eirene, ktl." In *TDNT*, 1964, 2.400-420, but here pp. 405-8, 412-15.

³⁹⁹ Taylor, V., 1963, p. 293, Lagrange, J.L., 1929, p. 142.

⁴⁰⁰ Moule C.F.D. *The Epistle to the Colossians*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957, pp. 153-55.

⁴⁰¹ Calvin, J. *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, Grand Rapids:Eerdman, 1949.

depart into the fullness of well-being and this peace is associated with the new age.⁴⁰² The words may express the wish that the woman may remain free of the affliction from which she has just been freed. This would then correspond to Jesus' later command that an exorcised spirit never returns to its former host (cf. 9:25).

In conclusion, this valediction wishes God's peace on the recipient, that sense of wholeness and completeness of life, which comes from standing in right relationship with God. Best comments that the peace is not merely health but peace with God, through the reconciliation that has taken place with him in healing and therefore in the restoration of the congregation of Israel.⁴⁰³ Ideally, the deliberate exposure of the woman's need, and Jesus' public and authoritative assurance of the permanence of her cure, paves the way for the reception of the outcast back into normal human society.

4.3. Redefinition or Revision of purity rules in Mark

The healing of the woman and the raising of Jairus' daughter involve the touching of or being touched by a ritually unclean person (cf. Lev.15: 25-30; Num.19: 11-13). Like the healing of the leper in 1:40-45, the healings of the hemorrhaging woman, a zab (5:25-34) and the daughter of Jairus, a corpse (5:35-43) transcend the Levitical purity restrictions. Given this background and in relation to our story, does the healing of these three characters mean that Jesus is abrogating the Levitical purity rules? In my opinion, the Markan Jesus does not abrogate or break the purity codes completely, instead he upholds them by way of redefinition or revision. As Neusner rightly says, Jesus does not eliminate the line distinguishing God's people from others, but redraws the boundary line in terms of moral behaviour rather than ritual impurity.⁴⁰⁴ But how does Mark redefine or revise these rules in relation to our account and elsewhere in his Gospel?

In the first place, the Markan Jesus upholds the purity codes by instructing the healed leper to appear before the priest and offer the sacrifice commanded by Moses (1:40-45; cf. Lev. 14:1). By this instruction, the Markan Jesus is acknowledging the authority the priest establishes.

⁴⁰² Marcus, J., 1999, p. 361.

⁴⁰³ Best, E. *Temptation and Passion: Markan Soteriology*, SNTSMS 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965, p. 107. Similar views are echoed by Taylor, V., 1963, p. 293.

⁴⁰⁴ Neusner, J., 1973, p. 28.

Looking at this story, Chrysostom asserts that this description is deliberately provocative, since it overlooks the Old Testament or Jewish rules about touching the ritually impure person.⁴⁰⁵ He contrasts it with 2 Kings 5:1-4, where Elisha avoids contact with the man whom he cures of scale-disease (Numb. 12:9-15). Similarly, the Markan Jesus' anger at the disease or demon is mixed with compassion and by touching the man, Jesus risks contracting ritual impurity. But instead of impurity passing from the man to Jesus, the purity of Jesus' holiness (cf. 1:24) passes from him to the man and he is therefore cured (1:42).⁴⁰⁶ At least this could be part of Mark's reason for placing the passage here, ahead of the controversy stories in 2:1-3:6.⁴⁰⁷ As Hooker observes, the narrative shows that Jesus respects the Law, in spite of the clashes with its scribal interpreters that will immediately ensue.⁴⁰⁸ But ironically, the narrative tells us that the man who previously would not have been permitted to appear in public, now goes everywhere proclaiming Jesus' deeds. But Jesus himself cannot appear publicly because of the fame this publicity entails. Moreover, Marcus asserts, the ability of Jesus, particularly his power to heal (1:40), has now become the cause of his inability to move about (1:45).⁴⁰⁹ Although initially, this result seems to contradict the intention of Jesus' mission, the man's disobedience causes Jesus' fame to spread further abroad not only to Israel but everywhere (cf. 1:39). The result, undoubtedly, reminds the Markan community of the situation in their own time, when the Gospel was being propagated to all the nations (cf. 13:10). The message that this man broadcasts causes others to repeat his experience of coming to Jesus. The man's preaching foreshadows that of the disciples preached after resurrection (cf. 6:7). Such universal propagation of the good news is an eschatological sign (13:10). The healing of the man fits in this eschatological context, since this was seen as equivalent to a resurrection from the dead and thus a sign of the dawning of the new age.⁴¹⁰ Truly, this was central to Jesus' message (cf. Matt. 11:5, Lk. 7:22).

Likewise, when Jesus heals the woman and raises the daughter of Jairus, both the woman and Jairus share an immense conception that one must come into physical contact with the healer in order to be cured by him. Although the woman and Jairus' daughter are unclean and their

⁴⁰⁵ Chrysostom, D. Homily on Matthew 23:2

⁴⁰⁶ Chrysostom, D. Homily on Matthew 25:2

⁴⁰⁷ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 210.

⁴⁰⁸ Hooker, M. D. *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark: Black's New Testament Commentaries*, London: A & C Black, 1991, p. 82.

⁴⁰⁹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 210.

⁴¹⁰ Kertelge, K., 1994, p. 65.

physical contact could probably annul Jesus' miracle working power and disturb the whole effort, instead the Markan Jesus heals them instantly. In this sense the Markan Jesus seems to be breaking the purity codes by not rebuking the woman for making him impure by her touching. But this is not the case because Jesus is the Son of God who is anointed by the Holy Spirit (1:10), and therefore the Spirit dwells in him (1:24). Although the woman seems to risk her life in approaching and contacting Jesus the Holy person in her state of impurity, the healing power of Jesus removes her impurity. The woman, whose genuine faith is commended, draws the healing power from Jesus' body and frees her from her disease. Hence, the Holy Spirit moves outwards from Jesus and casts out her disease. Eventually, the woman realises through a change of her body that she has been healed from her disease (5:29).

The Markan Jesus, then, redraws the purity rules by healing and bringing the woman to cleanness. In this sense her new life is different, a wholeness which is not defined in terms of purity but of the Kingdom. As Davies and Allison put it, 'instead of uncleanness passing from the woman to Jesus, the healing power flows from Jesus to the woman.'⁴¹¹ In this sense, we see Jesus revising the purity notion by removing the Levitical purity rules of separation and exclusion by coming into contact with impure people. According to our story, Jesus crosses the internal boundaries by healing the woman from her uncleanness and putting her into a status of purity. As the authorities in Mark guarded boundaries, withdrew from uncleanness and avoided contact with that which defiled as means of protection, Jesus and his followers ignored them. His movement sought contact with all people by crossing boundaries, because they saw them as oppressive, exclusive and limiting. As the leaders in Mark had power by staying within ordered boundaries, Jesus' movement expressed power by crossing them. That is why when we read Mark further, Jesus drives out 'unclean spirits' (1:23; 3:22, 30; 5:2). Marcus notes that Jesus can do this because the healing power of God's new age and the coming of the last things have ramifications for the interpretation and even the substance of the law.⁴¹² Likewise, the woman has experienced in her body the power of God's new age. This is also true when the Markan Jesus touches the daughter of Jairus. Jesus brings the daughter to life hence she is no longer unclean (corpse).

⁴¹¹ Davies W.D. and Allison D.C., 1988-97, p. 130.

⁴¹² Marcus, J., 1999, p. 368.

The climax of the assault upon purity code is seen in 7:1-23. As Booth says, this climaxes what the Markan Jesus began by making clean the leper in 1: 40-44.⁴¹³ By declaring that all foods are now clean (7:19b), Mark is here publicly abrogating the dietary laws. This is the place where Mark openly shows Jesus breaking the Levitical dietary rules. However, it seems Mark is getting rid of the same Old Testament food laws which he tries to maintain (cf. Lev. 11 & Deut. 24). Hence, as Cranfield notes, he seems to be setting aside the cultic law as unimportant but maintaining the moral law (7: 20), since elsewhere he shows himself conservative toward the cultic law (e.g. 1: 44), and he regards the Spirit rather than the letter of the moral law.⁴¹⁴ In this sense, does Mark, therefore, see Jesus abrogating the purity laws altogether or only Old Testament food laws? According to Riches, the saying of 7: 15 seems to mean that the Markan Jesus is explicitly rejecting the Mosaic purity laws, and he observes that these are probably not restricted to dietary laws.⁴¹⁵ In his view the Markan Jesus is first rejecting the Levitical and Pharisaical purity regulations which regulate the Jews' conduct by means of ritually reinforced barriers. Many interpreters understand the saying as a polemical statement on the Torah.

'If nothing that enters into a person from outside can defile him' as Mark claims, then the Levitical and Pharisaical food laws are actually set aside. In respect to this, I am of the view that the Markan Jesus is here abrogating the Old Testament dietary laws altogether, not all external Mosaic purity laws as claimed by some scholars. I agree with Räisänen that the saying is concerned with food and not with all external influences upon a person.⁴¹⁶ To substantiate this view, there is no general statement made concerning purity in Mark's narrative. In Mark's view, the saying about purity in 7: 15 which is emphasised in 7: 19 is a pronouncement that Jesus performs and it accomplishes the purification it announces. It is like the heavenly voice which tells Peter about the acceptability of eating profane foods in Acts 10:15, which uses the same language as in Mark's narrative.⁴¹⁷ Neusner also shares similar views. He says, Jesus only eliminates dietary boundaries and ritual defilement that come by external contact with unclean things, but he does not abrogate purity notions altogether.

⁴¹³ Booth, R. P. "Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History in Mark 7," in *JSNT, Supplement Series 13*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986, p. 120.

⁴¹⁴ Cranfield, C.E.B., 1959, p. 244.

⁴¹⁵ Riches, J. K. *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980, p. 136.

⁴¹⁶ Räisänen, H. "Jesus and the Food Laws: Reflections on Mark 7:15," in *JSNT 16*, pp. 79-100, but here, p. 81.

⁴¹⁷ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 457.

Rather, Jesus redefines purity of people and times in terms of faith and moral behaviour enjoined by the law and prophets (7:14-23; 12:28-34).⁴¹⁸ Likewise, the hemorrhaging woman who was impure, but her faith enabled her to wholeness.

Although the Markan Jesus seems to abrogate food laws, he redraws the dietary purity codes by bringing in a new teaching (7:15). Here Mark introduces that the true site of purity or impurity is the heart. He says, it is not what goes into people but what comes out of them that defiles (7: 20). According to Mark, the evil inclination is the inner enemy of God lodged within the human heart (Gen. 6: 5; 8: 21; Cf. Mk 7: 20). As Marcus observes, Mark identifies the heart as a wild force that propels people into actions that are opposed to God's will.⁴¹⁹ These are sexual sins, murders, adulteries and actions motivated by greed are all infractions of the Ten Commandments. These problems as analysed by Mark are general human ones that cut across any artificial division between the Church and the World. Here, Mark seems to be saying that the basic problem Christians should be mindful of, is not how or what one should eat but the internal corruption of the person (7: 23). It is this sort of thing that usurps the life out of tradition and turns it into an enemy of God, hence brings injustice, vengeance and hatred. As Douglas notes, notions of pollution, however, involve the opposite, that is, the concern for things that enter the inside from the outside.⁴²⁰

Therefore, Mark in the same manner revises things with Jesus' apocalyptic pronouncement that all foods are now clean.⁴²¹ The Old Testament food laws that divided the Jews from Gentiles are here abrogated (cf. 7: 24-8: 10). As such Mark sees Jesus as a witness in whom the Law is accomplished (1: 2-3). Matthew says 'until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished' (cf. Matt. 5: 18). In this sense, the elements of the law such as sacrifices, circumcision, food are no longer binding in the sense in which they were before Jesus' coming. Although in our story the Markan Jesus does abolish parts of the law, he is rewriting or redrawing the Law of God, and in that sense he is accomplishing what Matthew has just said. Though still valid as witness to him, his appearance fulfils the law as it bears witness and as he obeys its radical demands.

⁴¹⁸ Neusner, J., 1973, p. 28.

⁴¹⁹ Marcus, J. "The Evil Inclination in the Epistle of James." *CBQ* 44, 1982, pp. 606-21 and "The Evil Inclination in the Letters of Paul." *IBS*, 1986, pp. 8-21.

⁴²⁰ Douglas, M. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London: Ark, 1984, pp. 336-42.

⁴²¹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 457.

Since the Markan Jesus has come, some elements of the Law such as sacrifices, circumcision, foods, though still valid as witness to Christ, are no longer binding in the sense in which they were before his coming.⁴²² He fulfils the Law both by being the one to whom it bears witness and also by fully obeying its radical demands. The mystery of the parable recorded in 7: 15 is, then, no other than the mystery of the Kingdom of God in the person of Jesus. Thus Jesus was challenging the Jewish law by his whole Kingdom movement. If the Kingdom was indeed coming in his work through his deeds, healing, feasting with outcasts, casting out the kingdom of darkness, then the way that Pharisaic traditions had been pointing for long enough was simply ruled out from the start.⁴²³ According to Mark, Jesus' deeds point to the fulfilment of the scripture (1: 2-3).

4.4. Portrayal of the woman as model of discipleship

One of the striking features of discipleship is following. Mark's primary view of Jesus is that of 'suffering Servant.'⁴²⁴ The pivotal point of the Gospel is Mark 10:45 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many.' The Markan Jesus is selfless, kind, giving and caring for all. He heals (1:40-45), exorcises (5:1-13), touches (5:41), holds children (10:13-17), and the diseased (1:30-31). He feeds, supports and converses with all class of people (5:37), the crowd (8:1-10), disciple (9:28-29), and all classes of people including women (5:25-34; 7:24-30), and those who choose not to follow him (outsiders, 7:1-23). His service even extends to a violent death (14:36). Therefore, disciples as followers of Jesus are to serve, not taught to manipulate power for their own benefit or profit. Following is also a matter of self-denial and allegiance to Jesus (8:34). This is what the Markan readers should expect.

In the rest of the Gospel, individuals and crowds follow Jesus (3:1; 5:21-43). Likewise, disciples are called to follow Jesus on the way to the cross (8:34). But in our account, first Jesus follows (ἀκολουθεῖ, 5:24) the daughter of Jairus to his house, then we saw earlier the

⁴²² Cranfield, C.E.B., 1959, p. 245.

⁴²³ Wright, T. *Mark for Everyone*, London: SPCK, 2001, p. 89.

⁴²⁴ For emphasis on Jesus as a "Suffering Servant", detailed analysis comes from Cranfield C.E.B, *St Mark*, pp. 341-44; Kelber W. (ed.), *The Passion in Mark: Studies on the Mark 14-16*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976, p. 117; Martin R. *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1973, p. 118; Meize, Rp. *Jesus an the Twelve: Discipleship and Revelation in Mark's Gospel*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968 and Weeden T.J. *Mark: Traditions in Conflict*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, p. 53.

woman also followed Jesus in order to be healed (5:27). In our story the woman is depicted as the model of discipleship by following and confessing her faith (5:27,34). In this sense she is portrayed as a Christ-like figure who suffers and eventually finds life. Although she ignores the purity laws in order to be healed, her faith exemplifies a model of discipleship. Hence, she foreshadows those people who according to Mark will lose everything in order to save their lives (8:35). The woman is providing a model of discipleship which is something leaders in the Markan community must do. The connotation of discipleship for Mark indicated the proper use of authority and shows Jesus as the model of discipleship.

According to Kingsbury, following has the connotations of discipleship when it involves personal commitment and cost, hence there is some personal sacrifice involved.⁴²⁵ The hemorrhaging woman in our passage probably risks condemnation by putting aside the Pharisaic purity rules so that she fulfils her intention. Probably she is aware that risking one's life for the sake of Jesus is far better because in that sense she will gain it (8:35). Similarly, the woman gained what she intended, she was healed of her disease (5:29). Besides being the miracle, Jesus recognises the faith of those in need hence he is the exemplar who shows both by his healing and willingness to follow how other disciples are to behave. As Matthew records, Jesus is a ruler who can command the flute players and who can follow and adhere to a request when appropriate (Mat 9:23).⁴²⁶ Likewise, the woman suffers from her disease and comes to Jesus for healing. As Jesus gives his life as a ransom for many (10:45), the woman also portrays a model of discipleship that the Christian community should emulate.

When we look at Mark's concluding benediction and the commendation of the woman's faith and Jairus whose daughter has just been healed (5:34), Markan readers are therefore reminded of the time when their own faith saved them from the world of death and put them on the road to eschatological peace and wholeness.⁴²⁷ Marcus comments, they too have been touched by the power of God and separated from the faceless crowd by their fearful and wonderful knowledge of what had happened to them through Jesus. Hence, the story of the woman is

⁴²⁵ Kingsbury, J. D. The verb *Akolouthein* ("To Follow") as an Index of Matthew's view of his community, *JBL* 97, 1978, pp. 56-73.

⁴²⁶ Levine, A. J. "Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law and Hemorrhaging Woman," in A.J. Levine (with M. Blickenstaff) eds. *A Feminist Companion to the Gospel of Matthew*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, pp. 70-87.

⁴²⁷ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 369.

indeed their story and this is what discipleship entails. They should realise that by doing the will of God, they have found courage to confess their truth like the woman and enter the community of Christians through the help and power of Jesus. When they come into baptism, they should always remember that Jesus had turned to them and confirmed their faith in him, thus they now stand within the realm of the new age. Consequently, when persecution, apostasy and death threaten to rule them, their faith will save them.⁴²⁸ In this sense, even if Markan readers live or die on this earth, they will go into peace of the new age like the woman (5:34). In the first three chapters of the Gospel, Mark presents Jesus' call to faith as the first step to discipleship, and so the woman emerges as the clearly commended model in the entire part of the Gospel ending at 6:6. The woman is active, she is not restricted in the sequence of the narrative. She touches, knows, discovers and then acts (5:27,29,33). This is what is expected of all Markan readers as they profess their faith in Jesus and to the world.

Thus, both miracles point out the fact that Jesus greatly respects our earthly life, so as to heal illness and to bring back a child to her family. The stories, therefore, affirm Jesus as divine, powerful and benevolent and therefore someone who can be trusted to care about our health and the life of our children, right now. In this narrative, however, the world of women is more directly engaged and it is that world that is exposed to Jesus. The miracles are important to Mark for the credibility they give not only to Jesus' divine power, but because they illustrate the character of Jesus' power, the way Jesus cures them, the way he seems unable to refuse anyone who calls on it. Moreover, the miracle portrays the importance of the faith the woman exhibits which warrants the cure from her scourge.

4.5. Christological prefiguration of the women's bodies

The other important significance that the stories in our passage share with the Markan Jesus is reflected in the depictions of their bodies. Mark prefigures in this episode what will emerge as the central theme in the second half of the Gospel. The resurrection symbolism of the raising of the little girl anticipates the 'death/life' paradox (8:35) that Jesus teaches and embodies. Upon the announcement that 'your daughter is dead', the narrative of mission begun in 5:23 came to a grinding halt. However, the Markan Jesus ignored this message (5:36) and exhorted faith. So, too, will the Markan community have to ignore the message of Jesus' death as the close of the narrative of the Messianic on the journey. Again, the term here describing the

⁴²⁸ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 369.

observers' astonishment at the little girl's recovery (5:42) appears again only once in Mark when the women are told that Jesus too had risen from the dead (16:8). According to Marcus, Mark apparently wants his readers to link this rescue from death with Jesus' own resurrection.⁴²⁹ He says Jesus tells the girl to rise ἔγειρε, (5:41), just as he will be raised from the dead ἠγέρθη, (16:6). The little girl arises ἀνεστη, (5:42), just as Jesus will arise from death after three days ἀναστῆσεται, (8:31; 9:31; 10:34).⁴³⁰ These two verbs and their cognate nouns were commonly used for Jesus' own resurrection in the early Christianity. Consequently, Mark's readers would immediately get the implications that the power by which Jesus raised Jairus' daughter was the same eschatological power through which God later raised Jesus from the dead.⁴³¹ The linkage is made explicit in a later Aramaic magical bowl that juxtaposes the magician's invocation of Jesus' power to his client with reference to God's resurrection of Jesus.⁴³² And within Mark itself this connection between magical power and resurrection is confirmed in Mark 6, when King Herod asserts that Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead, and that is why the powers are at work in him (6:14). Moreover, this is supported by a Qumran fragment which says that someone either God or Messiah, will at the end heal the sick, raise the dead, and preach good news to poor (4 Q 521 1:12; cf. Isa. 61:1-2 and Lk. 4:16-18). This description roughly corresponds to Jesus' actions in Mark 5:21-43 and 6:1-6. The linkage between our account of the raising of Jairus' daughter and Jesus' own resurrection helps to explain the command to silence that concludes the story (5:43). And this prohibition, says Marcus, makes sense in the overall logic of Mark's Messianic secret motif.⁴³³

If the healing of Jairus' daughter foreshadows Jesus' resurrection, then in a sense that healing is premature at this point in time. It must therefore remain a secret until Jesus himself has arisen, just like the Transfiguration which must remain disclosed until the Son of Man has arisen from the dead (9:9). By placing the miracle under a secret command, Mark shows that faith stands in an implicit relationship to the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁴³⁴ The faith

⁴²⁹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 372.

⁴³⁰ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 372.

⁴³¹ See Barrer W, Arndt W.F. Gingrich F.W. and Danker F.W. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd edition, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979, 70, pp. 214-15.

⁴³² Marcus, J., 1999, p. 373.

⁴³³ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 373.

⁴³⁴ Marshall, C.D., 1989, p. 100.

placed in Jesus is the same faith experienced in the crucified and risen Lord and receives in hope the benefits of his passion, death and resurrection. The three disciples, Peter, James and John who witnessed the transformation (9:2-8), reappear in the Gethsemane scene where the importance of Jesus' passion is spelled out (14:32-42). This signals to the Markan readers that the raising of the dead girl acquires its fullest meaning when viewed in relation to the cross and resurrection of Jesus.⁴³⁵ Although the disciples are not yet prepared to understand it, the miracle is intended to symbolise the hope of the impending fate of Jesus himself. Furthermore, the miracle suggests the faith of the woman placed in Jesus secures the accomplished work of the cross at the end of the story. Here, her faith resembles the faith of a Centurion at the cross. It is this faith that makes Jairus to receive in advance the serving benefits secured when ironically the unbelieving (15:32) religious leaders put the divine life-giver to death; for through his dying, death is finally consummated.

Mark recognises also the suffering of the woman in society as similar to that which Jesus experienced before his death.⁴³⁶ The Markan Jesus, however, brings to an end the woman's physical and social suffering with no reference to ritual contamination for touch (see Lev. 5:3). As Selvidge observes, it is bold faith not bodily purity that is a criterion of followership or discipleship.⁴³⁷ Looking at the structure of the story, Graham is right that the woman suffered (*παθούσα*, 5:26) for twelve years, a verb otherwise used only of Jesus in this Gospel (8:31; 9:12), no others are said to suffer. Furthermore, the woman experiences her illness as a scourge (*μάστιξ*, 5:29), again the same term is used later by Jesus to predict what will happen to him (*μάστιγῶν*, 10:34), and like Jesus, she is said to tell the truth (5:33; cf. 12:14,32).⁴³⁸ The vocabulary is only effecting an identification of their experiences. Thus, as Selvidge observes, her illness enables her to understand the pain and social outrage that Jesus experiences before his death, in a way that no one else shares.⁴³⁹

Furthermore, the image of blood is related to suffering and to woman's inability to give birth during the twelve years. Graham notes, like her Jesus will suffer, unlike her through his blood

⁴³⁵ Marshall, C.D., 1989, p. 99.

⁴³⁶ Munro, W., 1982, p. 254.

⁴³⁷ Selvidge, M., 1984, p. 622.

⁴³⁸ Graham, S. L. "Silent Voices: Women in the Gospel of Mark," in *Semeia* 54, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1991.

⁴³⁹ Selvidge M. "And those who followed feared (Mark 10:32)," *CBQ* 45, 1983, pp. 396-400.

new life will come.⁴⁴⁰ The same view is shared by Kinukawa that several words appear only in the depiction of the hemorrhaging woman and of Jesus himself. For instance the woman ‘suffers many things, blood, body and plague’.⁴⁴¹ Hence, the language suggests that Mark dared to identify her suffering with Jesus. In touching Jesus, she is healed, that is, she takes on this new life, so that an image of death is infused with an image of life. Jesus recognised the power going forth from him (5:30). That power, related to the creative power of God, can bring wholeness in those who have faith, that is, those whose personal relationship with God allows the power to work.

Graham further notes two other things standing out in this narrative.⁴⁴² She says, firstly there is silence; no word is spoken aloud in this healing, it is only touch. Therefore, the narrative provides an image of a relationship which is both non-verbal and intimate, perceived internally by both people. And secondly, the theological implication of the tactile images is also very significant. The theology of touch is related to the Eucharist in Mark, for Jesus instructs his disciples to take and eat, not to look and listen (14:22-25).⁴⁴³ Thus, this image governs his relations with the woman and underlies the woman’s handling of or dealing with him. In that sense, Jesus is present to the woman in a non-linguistic experience, for which the healing then becomes the sign.

Furthermore, scholars like Schreiber think that the fully Christian idea of saving-faith includes the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁴⁴⁴ He suggests that the woman’s faith is related to the cross and resurrection both by the description of the woman’s following Jesus (5:24, 27), and by her act of touching the same garments which are divided at his death (15:24) and shines at his exaltation (9:2-8). He therefore proposes that the woman sees the lowly state of the exalted one, the Son of God, and trusts him and is therefore saved (5:28,34). However,

⁴⁴⁰ Graham, S. L., 1991, p. 103.

⁴⁴¹ Kinukawa, H. *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese feminist perspective*, Mary, N.Y: Orbis books, 1994, p.34 and also Selvidge M. J. *Women, Cult and Miracle Recital*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1990.

⁴⁴² Graham S. L., 1991, p. 149.

⁴⁴³ Graham, S.L., 1991, p. 149.

⁴⁴⁴ Schreiber, J. *Theologie des Vertrauens Eine redaktiongeschichtliche Untersuchung des Markusevangeliums*, Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1967, p. 239.

Marshall observes that this outruns the direct evidence that our passage notes.⁴⁴⁵ According to Marshall, the link between the woman's faith and the cross and resurrection of Jesus lies not in her conscious awareness of Jesus' divine Sonship, but in the structure of faith. Her confident reliance upon Jesus as bearer of God's saving power for release from her scourge is structurally the same as the attitude required of those who encounter the crucified and risen Jesus. In fact, both scholars agree that the faith of the woman in Jesus enables her to be healed. What is important is that the woman had persistent confidence in the healing power of Jesus that even touching his clothes could heal her (5:28).

In conclusion, the woman suffers, bleeds, acts in humility by coming up behind Jesus. She retains her faith but does not speak. Jesus too will suffer, bleed, and act in humility (14-16). Like the daughter of Jairus, Jesus is the ruler's Son. At the same time of his death, he will be surrounded by a commotion, by people who laugh at or mock him. Again like the girl, Jesus will die and similarly he will be raised from the dead. Moreover, the report of his resurrection will also spread throughout that district. Given this similarity, women's bodies thus provide a model for the body of Christ. Their suffering of Christ and their healing provides the model for the resurrection of Christ. Thus this is the Christological prefiguration that we explore in Mark's presentation of the healing stories of the hemorrhaging women and the daughter of Jairus.

4.6. The breaking in of the Kingdom of God

The healing of the woman and Jairus' daughter extends and deepens the scope of the Kingdom's social inclusivity, which was first introduced by Jesus' fellowship with tax collectors and sinners in 2:1. The healing of Jairus' daughter is specifically framed around the healing of the woman. This articulates that they are all included in the Kingdom mission. The object lesson can only be that, if Judaism wishes to be saved and live (5:23), it must embrace the faith of the Kingdom, a new social order with equal status for all. This alone will liberate the lowly outcast and snatch the noble from death. Mark's narrative of symbolic action thus achieves the same effect as Matthew's announcement to the Jewish leaders that 'tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the Kingdom of God before you' (Matt. 21:31). Mark further prefigures in this episode what will emerge as the central theme in the second

⁴⁴⁵ Marshall, C.D., 1989, p. 110.

half of the Gospel. Through dramatic enactment, he continues to prepare the way for the 'last shall be first' and least shall be greatest (10:31,43). And the resurrection symbolism of raising of the little girl anticipates the death/ life paradox (8:35f) that Jesus teaches and embodies.

In the Kingdom of God, everyone is equal before God. What is good for one person is also good for his or her neighbour. Even though the Markan Jesus is delayed by liberating the woman from her scourge, she does not deter the girl's life at the age of twelve years. She, too, can be healed, because there is enough eschatological power of Jesus that is present to anyone. Thus the fortune of Jairus and his daughter seem to be suddenly reversed. The loss of time for Jairus becomes her gain. And the same crowd that has slowed Jesus' progress toward Jairus' daughter who was on deathbed, offers her the opportunity to be healed. However, earlier in Mark 2:2-4, such a crowd was an obstacle to healing, but here it provides a chance for the woman to make contact with Jesus without being observed. Marcus is right to say that the Kingdom of God has no time factor.⁴⁴⁶ In relation to the Kingdom of God, the messengers' words carry a promise, for they refer to Jesus as 'the teacher' (5:35). This is what is spoken from the beginning of the Gospel that Jesus' authority comes from heaven or is divine and so his miraculous power which works against all evil forces (1:21-22, 27; 4:38; 6:2; 9:17, 38). In accordance with the promise implicit in the word 'teacher', Jesus urges Jairus to trust in his miraculous power even at the moment when his daughter is dead; just as Jesus himself ignores the message that Jairus' daughter had died (5:36). As Lane notes, 5:36 indicates that Jesus asks Jairus to maintain the same faith which he had already manifested when he first sought the healing of his daughter.⁴⁴⁷ When we look at the amazement of the crowd (5:42), it characterises a response to the miraculous raising of Jairus' daughter, hence, it points to the breaking in of the Kingdom of God into the world.

The general context for the operation of the Kingdom power in Mark is the condition of human powerlessness.⁴⁴⁸ In our account, Jairus experiences such power despite his possession of social and religious power. The power of his daughter's sickness reduces him also to the point of impotence. Despite his position and the presence of a very large crowd, he comes himself to Jesus and falls at his feet. He thereby adopts the same posture of humility before

⁴⁴⁶ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 370.

⁴⁴⁷ Lane W.L. *The Gospel of Mark: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, p. 75.

⁴⁴⁸ Marshall, C.D., 1989, p. 94.

Jesus as the unclean leper (1:40), the Gerasene demoniac (5:6), the hemorrhaging woman (5:33) and the Gentile Syro-phoenician woman (7:25). In so doing, Jairus evidences the same standard of judgement towards social rank and prestige that Jesus does in his teaching (3:35; 9:35; 10:23; 10:42-45; 12:13-17, 38, 41-44) and his deeds (2:15-17; 10:13-16, 17-22). The very fact that Jesus later interrupts his journey to the ruler's house to seek out a mere frightened woman confirms that he too shows no regard for the priority of social status; priority belongs to faith alone (cf. 5:36). Mark indicates the character and content of this initial venture of faith through the language he uses to phrase Jairus' petition. The events in Jairus' story, therefore, illustrate the power of Jesus over the combined forces of death and unbelief, just as they are also a demonstration of the necessity of faith for the appropriation of the saving power of the Kingdom's presence. Jairus' faith consisted in the cognitive perception that the saving and life-giving power of God was resident in Jesus, and a corresponding entrusting of his daughter's extreme need to this power. This entailed a concurrent recognition of his own powerlessness to help, and of the irrelevance of his social status to winning divine aid.

Thus, in the existing eschatological situation, with the breaking in of God's Kingdom, uncleanness or impurity is a matter of heart and not a physical condition (7:15). For Mark, Jesus does not want to destroy but to forgive, heal and restore the lost and fallen (cf. 7:24-30). That is why Jesus welcomes all people regardless of gender or ritual status, who call upon him in faith, a sign that the power of the Kingdom is at work in the world overcoming the powers of darkness and evil. The real power in the world is the divine forgiveness and love which can overcome man's hatred and fear, which are powers of darkness and evil. Mark, therefore, tells us that with the breaking in of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, people will find mercy, forgiveness and love when they believe in the good news (1:15). This breaking in of the Kingdom of God is a dramatic transformation of the world in which all may share regardless of sex, ethnicity, colour etc. It is indeed the power fulfilled in Jesus Christ which is exemplified in his ministry of word, teaching and healing. This is what the Markan readers are called to, having been liberated from the power of darkness and evil. The task now is to preach the Gospel to all nations (13:10). It is for this reason that Mark is proclaiming the Kingdom of repentance and belief in the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man (cf. 1:15). For anyone who comes to him in faith and believes in his words, he welcomes him/her, for whoever does the will of God is his mother and brother and sister (3:31-35).

4.7. Conclusion

From this chapter, the hemorrhaging woman whose condition would probably render her ceremonially unclean (cf. Lev. 15:25), touches Jesus with the hope to be healed from her chronic ailment. Immediately, the woman is healed and praised for her faith. Jesus suggests to the woman that God's peace or wholeness now rests upon her and so she is free to work with her own society. Jesus perhaps suggests that she needs to know and accept that she is now whole again. He confirms her reincorporation by providing her with what she lacked at the opening of the episode, by saying 'Daughter your faith has made you well' (5:34).⁴⁴⁹ In this sense, Jesus has now become her Kinsman. Although any physical contact with Jesus should render Jesus unclean, instead Jesus restores her to purity and makes her whole.

This story is very strong in our search for justice and liberation for women and the oppressed in the Church. I want to summarise some important issues in this story which I believe will bring justice and liberation to women. Firstly, the woman herself is our model in search for justice and liberation. Interestingly, the woman in this story is very active. Even though she knows her status and its implication, she is not restricted in the sequence of the narrative. She ignores everything instead she touches, knows, discerns and then acts (5: 27, 29, 33). Her menstrual problems have caused her anguish and kept her cloistered from society (5:26), as Levitical writers would mandate (Lev. 15:19, 28). As the Markan Jesus speaks with her, an attention is drawn to her strength (faith) first, and then her healing (5:34). The most important symbolic reversal here is the status of the destitute woman. From the bottom of her honour scale, she intrudes upon an important mission on behalf of the daughter of someone on the top of the honour scale.⁴⁵⁰ But by the conclusion of the story, the woman herself has become the daughter at the centre of the story (5:34). Not only is she restored from integrity, but she also receives a grant of status superior to that of Jesus' own disciples, who are without faith (ἐχέτε πιστιν, 4:40). The same profound reversal of dignity will occur again to the destitute Jew, the blind beggar Bartimaeus (10:51). Therefore, this story strengthens the morale of the marginalized women and the oppressed whereby they are granted a superior status of being "daughters", that is, Jesus' kinsman.

⁴⁴⁹ Newsom C. A and Ringe S. H. (eds.) *Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded edition with Apocrypha*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998, p. 355.

⁴⁵⁰ Myers, C., 1985, p. 202.

Secondly, the response of the Markan Jesus to the woman is so significant in the sense that traces of restricted purity obligations survive in the miracle story (5:25, 29), only to be revised by a Jesus' movement that centred its emphasis not on restricting women but on preserving stories about women who were liberated from physical and social problems. As far as the marginalised women are concerned, Jesus has a concern for them. Though they might be rejected and belittled by the male-dominated churches, the Markan Jesus has a concern for them. As the Son of God, he has power and compassion that is available to any one who calls on him faithfully. Moreover, the story of the woman encourages the community to call on him for miracles and signs of his ongoing benevolence, even as they await his coming on the clouds of heaven. Her trust in the Son of Man experiences the in-flow of the eschatological power that restores her. The story, therefore, brings marginalized and subordinated women and the oppressed into God's blessing and makes possible for their restoration to human society. They can now serve God freely for they have been brought to wholeness in his covenant. Therefore, the Markan Jesus plants an inclusive mission whereby Jesus brings cleanness, forgiveness of sins and wholeness to God's covenant people. He propagates and plants an inclusive mission which will be exemplified later in 7:24-30.

Finally, the message that these stories portray is that the impure, sinners, Jews, Gentiles, women, men etc are all touchable as far as Jesus is concerned. The attitude of the Markan Jesus was bound to affect the marginalized of society in a positive way, including both sexes. As the Markan Jesus crosses the internal boundaries, he allows marginal, unclean people to be welcomed in God's new covenant group. This is indeed good news for the marginalized women and those oppressed that they are welcomed into his Kingdom. The only condition is having faith in him and doing the will of God (3: 31-35; 8:34-36).

In chapters 3 and 4 I have argued that Mark concerns purity and the setting aside of purity regulations. He redraws or revisits the purity codes by crossing internal boundaries through healing the hemorrhaging woman and the daughter of Jairus. These healings pave the way for the marginalized communities to believe that Jesus welcomes them as far as they have faith in him. As he crosses internal boundaries, he sets an inclusive mission which accommodates all people who believe in him. As the woman believed in Jesus, others too are called to believe in him to be in God's inaugurated Kingdom. In the following chapter I want to continue looking at purity but from a different perspective. I will discuss the dialogical encounter of the

Markan Jesus with the Syrophoenician woman, an outsider. Here again the Markan Jesus now crosses external boundaries, thereby continuing his ministry of revising the purity regulations. Having said this let me now turn to chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Mark's presentation of Jesus: Shattering the wall between Jews and Gentiles, between Men and Women through breaking barriers and crossing boundaries (7: 24-30)

5.1. Introduction

There is nothing that every creature is so proud of as the places they occupy. There are also a number of things that influence our daily livelihoods, such as physical features, landscapes, and climate. However, all these things are not our own making, but were created by God. As human beings, we have geography and climate that shape us. But sometimes we shape our environment for good or ill; hence there is long history of our human interaction with nature. Moreover, the different continents or countries we inhabit and our attachments differentiate us from one another. This shapes our social identity and reality.

In chapter 4 we discussed at length the issue about purity and how the Markan Jesus encountered the hemorrhaging woman. In that story we saw how the Markan Jesus crossed the internal boundaries of his community by healing the woman and the daughter of Jarius. In that sense, the Markan Jesus strengthened the social relations within the group. In the story of Jesus and the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:24-30 which we are about to encounter, Mark raises issues about literal boundary crossing, outside the land and thereby making cross-cultural encounters with those outside the group wherever he went. Mark illustrates how the tradition of Jesus' exorcising the demon-possessed daughter serves to break down the boundaries of sacred geography or space. In this story Mark has emphasised the importance of restricting the mission of Jesus to his own people (children, 7:27). The woman's appeal is turned down on the grounds that the children of Israel must be fed first. In this story of Jesus' entry into the area of Tyre and Jesus' encounter with the woman, Mark confronts the issues of group boundaries more directly.

Interestingly, Mark himself underlines the sense in which this story is about precisely the boundaries which protect the Jewish group. In parallel to Matthew, it is right that the woman's identity is underlined by using a term which is rich in associating Israel's history of the occupation of the land, a Canaanite (Matt 15:22) and she in turn refers to Jesus as Lord (Matt

15:25).⁴⁵¹ Mark substantially develops the motif of her rejection, and creates a new exchange in which when he refuses to answer the woman's plea the Markan Jesus reaffirms the restricted nature of his mission. The contrast between children and dogs replaces the language of clean and unclean of the earlier part of the chapter (7:1-23). Therefore, if this is read in this context, it suggests that the woman is being compared to those who are seen as unclean and outside the group. This is so because the dogs are generally seen as scavengers (Ps 22:16; 59:6,14) who eat unclean meat (Exod 22:31). Hence it is not good to give the food of children to those whose proper food is that which is unclean.⁴⁵² But the woman's response turns things around. According to Luz, the woman takes the language of the children/dogs to refer to a hierarchical division within the household.⁴⁵³ That is to say, the dogs are not threatening or out of place; they are part of the group, although of different lower status. As Riches asserts, the woman's rejoinder to the Markan Jesus is a challenge to him to accept that there is a common bond as well as differentiation of status within hierarchies, that even the dogs get something.⁴⁵⁴

In the story of the Syrophenician woman, the Markan Jesus is now presented as travelling outside Galilee in Gentile territory. Hence, the progression from 7:1-23 to 7:24-30 is very logical. In retrospect it is also clear that in creating a distance from specifically Jewish practices, the two discussions on ritual washing and dietary laws preceding this section have paved the way for Jesus' contact with Gentiles. Having challenged the Pharisaic purity regulations and dietary laws that separated Jews from Gentiles, the Markan Jesus after initial hesitation will now accept the request of the Syrophenician woman whose daughter was possessed with a demon. Mark has special interest in exorcism, which together with preaching is looked upon as the distinctive work of Jesus (1:39) and the twelve (6:7). In all the healing miracles there is a complete tendency of doing superficial things, and again and again faith is either required or assumed.⁴⁵⁵ Chrysostom⁴⁵⁶ notes that, the sequence of 7:24-30 corresponds to that of Acts 10:1-33, in which Peter's vision about the allowance of eating unclean food paves the way for his acceptance of a Gentile into church. The Markan Jesus regularly wants to get away from the public by retiring alone or with others to a house or a lonely place. He

⁴⁵¹ Riches, J. K., 2000, p. 244.

⁴⁵² Riches, J. K., 2000, pp. 244-45.

⁴⁵³ Luz, U. *Das Evangelium nach Matthaus*, EKKNT I/1-3, Zurich: Benziger Verlag, 3 vols, 1990, p. 435, n.59.

⁴⁵⁴ Riches, J. K., 2000, p. 245.

⁴⁵⁵ Taylor, V. *The Gospels: A Short Introduction*, London: The Epworth Press, 1960, p. 54.

⁴⁵⁶ Chrysostom, *Homily on Matthew* 52.1

does not fail in his attempt, as in the case of our episode, where Jesus, upon arriving in the region of Tyre, is approached by a Gentile woman. Thus, as Marcus notes, the story of the Syrophenician woman transcends the Jewish particularism and looks forward to the increasingly Gentile church of Mark's own day.⁴⁵⁷ However, Mark chooses a peculiar way of expressing this point, for he records Jesus who initially seems to refuse to heal the unclean Gentile 'dog' (7:27).

As regards this peculiarity, scholars have adopted various methods of explaining this and also the mixture of genres in the passage. Scholars such as van Iersel⁴⁵⁸ and Kertelge⁴⁵⁹ have suggested that the narrative was originally a pure miracle story to which the dialogue in 7:27-28 was added. Furthermore, others like Lohmeyer⁴⁶⁰ and Burkill⁴⁶¹ have argued that the miracle story has grown out of the dialogue. However, scholars like Bultmann⁴⁶² and Schenke⁴⁶³ assert that the dialogue and the miracle story have always belonged together. Focant⁴⁶⁴ adopts the view of Bultmann and Schenke for he does not see the Markan Jesus refusing to offer the healing miracle. I am also of the view of Bultmann and Schenke that the story records the request and intention of the woman to have her daughter healed from demons. It is out of this request that the dialogue between Jesus and the woman transpires and ends up offering as assistance to the woman who had lodged her request before Jesus. Thus, I am not of the view that the dialogue was just added, as Iersel and Kertelge claim; or that the miracle story grew out of the dialogue, as Lohmeyer and Burkill have argued. Mark has recorded a number of incidences where miracles have been worked through dialogues (e.g. Mk 1:40-45; 5:1-13; 21-34 etc). According to Marcus, Mark 7:27-28 seems to recall an early Christian view of salvation history, and this fits into the general pattern of events in this section of Mark's first feeding of Jews (6:30-44), then a feeding of Gentiles (8:1-9).⁴⁶⁵ In the

⁴⁵⁷ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 466.

⁴⁵⁸ Van Iersel, B. M. F. "The Gospel according to St. Mark – Written for a Persecuted Community?" *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 34, 1980, pp. 15-36.

⁴⁵⁹ Kertelge, K. *Die Wunder Jesu im Markusevangelium: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, SANT 23, Munchen: Kosel, 1970, p. 157.

⁴⁶⁰ Lohmeyer, E. *Das Evangelium des Markus*, 11th edition, MeyerK, Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951, p. 48.

⁴⁶¹ Burkill, T. A. "The Syrophenician Woman: The Congruence of Mark 7:24-31," in *ZNW* 57, 1966, pp.23-37.

⁴⁶² Bultmann, R. *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, New York: Harper and Row (orig. 1921), 1963, pp. 38, 64.

⁴⁶³ Schenke, L. *Die Wunderezahlunge des Markusevangeliums*, SBB 5, Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1974, pp. 67, 254

⁴⁶⁴ Focant, C. "Mc 7, 24-31 par Mt 15, 21-29, Critique des sources et/ou etude narrative." In *The Synoptic Gospels: Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism*, ed. C. Focant, BETL 110, 39-75, Leuven: Leuven University press, 1993.

⁴⁶⁵ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 466.

overall Markan context this narrative forms an inclusion with the narrative of the hemorrhaging woman in 5:25-34. When the hemorrhaging woman hears about Jesus, she receives healing from him. Likewise, the Syrophenician woman's daughter is also healed. Interestingly, these two female combinations surround a more sinister mother/daughter combination, Herodias and her daughter (6:14-29).⁴⁶⁶

5.2. The Jewish understanding of Land and Purity

Even though physical features, landscapes and climate were created by God, human beings have constructed the entire map of the world with the territorial boundaries and the allocations of particular peoples to their places. For instance, Jewish identity in the Diaspora and the Land was influenced by their understanding of sacred space or geography. Jackson and Henrie define sacred space as 'that portion of the earth's surface which is recognised by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion, loyalty or esteem. Sacred space is sharply discriminated from the non-sacred or profane world around it. Sacred space does not exist naturally, but is assigned sanctity as man defines, limits and characterises it through his culture, experience and goals.'⁴⁶⁷ Mircea Eliade,⁴⁶⁸ has similarly connected this notion with that of sacred and profane space, which is common in human societies. He says, 'sacred space is that space which has manifested an irruption of the divine and which alone, therefore, is real or possesses being.'⁴⁶⁹ Hence, the religious person desires to live as close to this sacred space as possible and regards this abode as his own land, the centre of the world. This central place embodies cosmos and order, while chaos is outside where demons and alien spirits rule.⁴⁷⁰ In Ezekiel 38:12, the people of Israel are described as those who dwell at the centre of the earth. Also, the idea emerges in Ezekiel 5:5 with a demographic emphasis that the centrality of Jerusalem offers a visible conduct to world nations.

Such notion of sacred space is easy enough to apply to biblical and post-biblical ideas of sacred territory. Similarly, a second-century text, Jubilees, gives a clear example in 8:19. Here, the Garden of Eden, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion were created as holy places facing each other. The book of Jubilees has indeed distinguishable motifs in its sacred geography.

⁴⁶⁶ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 466.

⁴⁶⁷ Jackson, R. H. and Henrie, R. "Perception of Sacred Space," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 3, 1983, pp. 94-107, but here pp. 93-4.

⁴⁶⁸ Davies, W.D., 1974, p. 5.

⁴⁶⁹ Davies, W.D., 1974, p. 5.

⁴⁷⁰ Eliade, M. *The Sacred and Profane: The nature of Religion*, New York, 1959, p.20.

The sacred spaces of Zion, Sinai and Eden mark out central areas of the world. They all fall in the territory of Shem though they do not coincide with the borders of the Land. Sinai is forever associated with Moses and the desert wanderings of the Jewish people; while Eden is the lost paradise from which Adam and his descendants have been cast out, which yet foreshadows the expected restoration of the presence of God in the Temple.

Similarly, the priestly ideology asserted that the presence of God in the Temple was a guarantee of the integrity of the Land (cf. Ps 18:48, Judith 5: 5-21, 4 Macc 4). God would leave the Temple and abandon the Land, if the people sinned and contaminated the Land and polluted the Temple through their immorality and idolatry (Ezek 9-11, cf. Jubilees 1:13). Jubilees' sense of the absence of God from the Temple (Jub 1:13), is given expression in the future predictions, even though Zion is still designated a holy place. The writer sees the experience of invasion, desecration and subsequent division on how to implement the law, as fundamentally one of rebellion from God causing him to withdraw from the Temple. The root cause of all this is Israel's forsaking God's ordinances and 'the feasts of my Covenant and my Sabbath and my Sacred place' (Jub 1:20). Hence, this rebellion has led them to sacrifice their children to demons (1:11), so that the spirit of Beliar rules over them (1:20). Nevertheless, they will repent and God will circumcise them spiritually (1:23-25).

The biblical traditions about the Land make it clear that it has been given to the Jews by God in recognition of Abraham's righteousness (Gen 12). The book of Leviticus portrays the Land as the sacred realm, therefore, Jews are to live in it, in so far as they remain faithful to God's laws, otherwise he will vomit them out as he vomited out the Gentiles because of their abominations (Lev. 20: 22-26). Hence, Jews must make a clear distinction between clean and unclean animals to distinguish themselves from the lawless Gentiles, lest they too corrupt the land and meet the same consequence. Such views are conspicuously represented in Jubilees, immediately after the passage where God has set the spirits over the Gentiles (Jub 15:34). As long as the Jews are faithful, they will remain; otherwise God's wrath will be upon them and cast them out. Similar voices within Jubilees are found at the end of the book, in the section of 'The laws pertaining to the Sabbath' (Jub 50:5).

However, within a fairly standard view of Israel's relationship to the Land, Jubilees betrays a darker view, where the whole earth is polluted by evil spirits and bereft of God's presence. Similarly, the book of 1 Enoch talks about the universality of demons' control over the world

in such a way that the old territorial boundaries make little difference. Satan reigns either inside or outside the Land, and therefore, men and women are subject to him. It is only God's elect, to whom the mysteries have been revealed, who are free of his control, though they must suffer nonetheless.⁴⁷¹ When God descends to restore his rule, it will be on Sinai but it will be to re-establish his rule over the whole earth. The sacred sites of old will be restored but for the time being their importance is minimised. Riches notes that the cosmic perspective of such dualist eschatologies has the effect of diminishing the significance of the Land and its borders.⁴⁷²

On this view, the Temple is the centre of holiness in the Land, with its high point in the inner Sanctuary and with concentric circles of holiness radiating out from the central place. This view is developed more fully in the discussions of the Temple in Ezekiel 40-48 and Haggai 2:10-19 and Zechariah 2:8-9; 8:9-13. For Ezekiel, once the glory has returned, the power and life which flows from the rebuilt Temple, is symbolised by the waters which flow out of the Temple (47:1-12). Likewise, Alexander argues that 'a simple model of the world is generated by the notion that the Land of Israel is holy in contrast to the rest of the world; Jerusalem is holier than the rest of the Land; the Temple precinct in Jerusalem is holier than the rest of Jerusalem; and the holy of holies in the Temple is holier than the rest of the Temple.'⁴⁷³ The Jewish nation was a Temple State under the control of the Roman Empire.⁴⁷⁴ Their religious, political and economic life was centred on the Torah and Temple in Jerusalem. Therefore, the Torah and Temple became their respective constitution, the religious and political centre of their corporate life. They believed God dwelt on earth in the Temple, hence his presence would guarantee the nation's prosperity through proper worship, as well as land's productivity and proper security from foreign enemies. Hence, loyalty to these central institutions functioned to insure the survival of Israel.

The prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied the return of the Jews from exile to the Promised Land. They looked at this return as an era of Jewish deliverance and hope for their future. They viewed God as punishing his own people for their disobedience, but so too showing mercy through guidance and leading, and restoring them to the Land promised in the

⁴⁷¹ Riches, J. K., 2000, p. 59.

⁴⁷² Riches, J. K., 2000, p. 59. Davies W. D., 1994, p. 370, notes a similar effect within early Christianity.

⁴⁷³ Alexander, P. S. "Geography and Bible (Early Jewish)," *ABD*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, pp. 2, 977-88.

⁴⁷⁴ Rhodes, D. "Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries" in *Mark and Methods: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* edited by Anderson, J.C. and Moore, S.D., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 144.

covenant, if faithful to him. Therefore, the notion of Land is of central importance, for it marks the goal of their journey in the wilderness and the return from exile (Isa 40). It is the place where they enjoy the presence of God who preserves them. It is a place where they recall all the glories of God's dealings with them in the past, deliverance from Egypt, and all his promises ahead. Therefore, the land of Israel was Yahweh's land and thus holy.

Furthermore, both Jews and Gentiles were commanded to preserve the holiness of the land (Lev 18:26). Thus the condition for living in the holy land was obedience to the Laws of holiness: because the land was holy, it was to be kept clean or pure. Neusner asserts that the close connection between purity and holiness and the holiness of the land and Temple connected directly to the emphasis on purity among both Pharisees and Essenes.⁴⁷⁵ Therefore, preserving the holiness of the land and the condition for being permitted to live in it required the observance of Torah, especially its laws on purity. However, Davies asserts that the question of the relationship of God to the land of Israel is not to be treated in total isolation from the relationship of Yahweh to the whole universe.⁴⁷⁶ According to Davies, the God who created the land of Israel is the same God who is working and caring for his entire universe. He set aside the nation of Israel to exemplify his glorious power and holiness to the entire nations.

In fact, in the Old Testament, the notion of God creating the world in totality was not very much used. It was not until the return of Jews from Exile that they came to believe God as the creator of the whole universe and entire source of all natural gifts, apart from his special relation to Israel. In this context, Israel differentiated her land from the land of Egypt. They thought their land was cared for by God by giving them rain and having constant concern for it, while the land of Egypt was less directly the object of God's care. They thought Israel was under God's immediate supervision in a way Egypt was not. Hence the soul of Israel received water by direct will and decision of Yahweh (Deut 11:10-12). It is the land where the people of tradition dwell in families. It also provides the framework in which honour or shame and traditions are knitted together with the land into a single whole. Accordingly, the Israelites will be blessed and honoured if they obey the commandments, but they will be cursed and ashamed once they disobey God and his commandments. The Jews thought of the Land as a gift of God, and therefore were the most privileged people (Deut 5:28-33; Prov 2:20-22).

⁴⁷⁵ Neusner, J., 1973, p. 108.

⁴⁷⁶ Davies, W.D., 1974, pp. 12-13.

Other lands and peoples who dwell in them are unclean (Lev 18:24-25; Deut 20:15-18). Therefore, the control and maintenance of the Land (family property and national borders) are not simply matters of survival, but are questions of honouring God and receiving his blessings or disobeying God and receiving shame and curse (Deut 19:14; Isa 5:8). Hence, expulsion from the land is a catastrophe because it is violation and destruction of tradition and the families who live by it (Ps 137) and the restoration of it is the cause for rejoicing (Ps 126).

In conclusion, the Jews believed that Yahweh was holy and his people living by separation or imitation were to be holy. Again the land itself was holy and was to be kept pure. Other lands and their inhabitants were unclean because the presence of God was not dwelling amongst them. For this reason, the Jews had to make sure that they kept and controlled the land faithfully by obeying and honouring God. The Temple and Torah were both essential to holiness. The Temple was the centre of holiness and thus the holiness of the Temple, Land and People depended upon the careful observance of Torah. Hence, loyalty to Torah and Temple in the quest for holiness made Jews resistant to any mixture with foreigners.

5.3. Mark's understanding of Land and Purity

According to Mark, the issue of land and purity was very important as it symbolises Israel's separateness and set-apartedness. He begins Jesus' ministry in Galilee (1:5), which I believe is very important in his perspective and the entire New Testament. Mark also records Jesus' visit to the Temple and his determination to deliver his message (1:21) and the post-resurrection appearances (16:12). Hence, Galilee or Jerusalem is the birth-place of Christianity which proceeded from the geographical and spiritual heart of Judaism.⁴⁷⁷ It was indeed a ministry that was born in this place and went out to the rest of the nations. I believe Mark shared the belief that Israel had been chosen to be Yahweh's special people, through whom the world would be addressed by its creator (cf. Mk 7:27). Similarly, he also had the same view with the first-century Jewish eschatology in claiming that the one God would soon act within history to vindicate his people, the elect, and establish justice and peace once and for all (Mk 13). It was within this context of world expectation that the Markan Jesus began to announce that Yahweh, Israel's God was now at last becoming King (1:14-15). The mission and message of the Markan Jesus was about Israel's story reaching its climax, about Israel's history moving

⁴⁷⁷ Cohn, R. L., 1981, p. 77.

toward its decisive movement.⁴⁷⁸ Because of all this, Mark believed that the Kingdom was breaking into Israel's history in and through the presence and work of Jesus. While Jesus' ministry is centred on Galilee, it is by no means restricted to it, and he frequently enters Gentile territory, of which his various crossings of the lake are symbolic.

The land in Mark, therefore, drives us to ponder the mystery of Jesus, who by his cross and resurrection broke not only the bonds of death for early Christians, but also the bonds of the land. The land symbol functioned particularly to reinforce the belief in terms of God's care for his people. Jesus' movement was a land-based movement of social revolution, though he was landless. It would have had a suitable social setting among the lower, alienated strata of the village culture which he and his movement supported, even though Jesus and his disciples did not come from that social stratum themselves. This is exemplified in the miracles exercised that transcended class divisions, poor and rich alike. They were all the beneficiaries and Jesus had concern for their conditions as expressed in the sayings (3:7-12). Jesus' ministry was cross-cultural; however much of its primary focus may have been directed to the peasant ethos of Galilee to those who were fired with the ideology of the land, its actual territorial boundaries were highly significant. Even Josephus' careful delineation of the borders of Galilee illustrated that point (J.W. 3:35-44).⁴⁷⁹ Therefore, the boundaries of the land were very definite reminders of Israel's separateness and the experience at the time of the Hellenistic reform that led to an increased sensitivity in that regard subsequently, among all strands of second Temple Judaism.⁴⁸⁰

In our story, his encounter with the Syrophoenician woman symbolises his unlimited and universalistic ministry. His ministry or mission is certainly not restricted to the Land, even though, he first protests that his ministry is to be restricted to the children of the household of Israel. It is a ministry which even in Jesus' life-time flows backwards and forwards across the boundaries of the Land, and which after his resurrection, propels the disciples out to the ends of the earth. Hence, Mark portrays Jesus as having scant regard for boundaries, especially those established by Scribal authority or Pharisaic piety (cf. 7:1-23). The dimension of his understanding of the Kingdom is already implied in his unconditional call to repentance on

⁴⁷⁸ Wright, N. T., 1999, p. 34.

⁴⁷⁹ Freyne, S., *Galilee Jesus and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations*, Dublin: Gill and MacMillan Ltd, 1988, p. 245 – J.W. 3: 35-44.

⁴⁸⁰ Freyne, S., 1988, p. 245, and Hengel, M. *Judentum Und Hellenismus*, pp. 555-64.

announcing its advent (1:14). According to Mark, table-fellowship was to be shared with others of his type as well as with sinners (2:13-17). That is why Mark lists both Jewish and Gentile regions among the places from which people came to follow Jesus (3:8; 5:1-20; 7:24-30).

In relationship between the Land, and the Temple, the cleansing of the Temple (11:15-17) symbolises the enactment of Jesus' judgement upon the people of God and his hope for them, a hope including the Gentiles.⁴⁸¹ As the Shekhina left the Temple in Jerusalem (cf. Ezek 11), the same action is subsequently reflected in the presence in the Temple of the abomination of desolation (Mk 13:14). Consequently, holiness, purity of heart is now to be found in those who take up their cross and follow Jesus, enduring to the end in the way which he teaches them (8:31-10:45). Mark is not simply setting up Galilee in opposition to Jerusalem, but there are, as Riches notes, both continuities and discontinuities.⁴⁸² It is evident that Jerusalem no longer has the central place as occupied in the Isaianic scheme. The main institution, the Temple, is clearly replaced (cf. Mk 15:38) and also Galilee is confirmed as the future place of encounter with the risen Lord. Nevertheless, Galilee does not simply replace Jerusalem as the goal of the way. From Galilee the disciples will be sent out to preach the Gospel to all nations. Thus, both Isaiah and the Markan story underline a salvation historical view which sees God as enabling his people to overcome sin by teaching and leading them throughout his entire life.

Though the Markan Jesus was concerned with his own people (cf. Mk 7:27; Mt 10:6; 15:24), it was a concern to create the community of the people of God not as constituting a national entity, a chosen nation (cf. Mk 3). This was the meaning of Jesus' call of the 12 tribes (disciples), of his friendship with the lost. The Jews in their quest for a holy, separated nation had made of the Temple a 'den of violent ones.'⁴⁸³ He expelled all merchants typifying that separation by their activity because his Temple was for all nations (Mk 11:17), not a centre of resistance. Therefore, instead of being a fountain of resistance, Von Rad observes, Jerusalem with its Temple was meant to be the city set on a hill whose light would reach the nations.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ Davies, W. D., 1974, p. 342.

⁴⁸² Riches, J. K., 2000, p. 140.

⁴⁸³ Borg, M. J. *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus*, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1984, p. 188.

⁴⁸⁴ ⁴⁸⁴ von Rad, G. "The City on the Hill," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1966, pp. 232-42.

It was the purpose of the Markan Jesus to bring into existence the restored nation of Israel promised in the Old Testament prophecies. This restoration would be accompanied by Gentiles in the Kingdom of God (Mk 13:10, 27).

That is why the Markan Jesus criticised the Jewish quest for holiness and warned of the consequences of continuing to follow that path. Instead, he proposed an alternative path grounded in the nature of God as compassionate. Thus he gathered a community based on that paradigm, and sought to lead his people in the way of peace that flowed intrinsically from the paradigm of inclusive compassion (Mk 5:1-23; 7:24-30). Caird finds in the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD the vindication of the cause of Jesus, ‘an open demonstration that Jesus was right and the nation was wrong.’⁴⁸⁵ Similarly, Jesus went to Jerusalem to offer a chance to hear his challenge for the creation of a community of God.⁴⁸⁶ Hence, his aim was focused on the creation of a new community worthy of the name of the people of God within Israel and outside. And this community was to be governed by selfless service alone. His activity, then, was not aimed directly at changing any national policy, but at creating a community through his teaching, preaching and healing. As Dodd asserts, this community might become effectively members of the new people of God which was coming into being.⁴⁸⁷ Therefore, the emergence of a community in which there was neither Jew nor Greek, in which Jews and Gentiles were called upon to eat together compelled the reassessment not only of the place of the law and the land, but of eschatological hopes.⁴⁸⁸

Mark understood Jesus as creating a witnessing community that understood itself as a majority and inclusive community with a mission purpose. It was to be a Christian community glorifying God and more centred in his mysterious plan for the new creation in Christ Jesus. As Stendahl⁴⁸⁹ notes, in the Lord’s prayer (Mt 6:9-13), there is an extended cry for the coming of the Kingdom. In this sense, we pray for the whole creation to recognise God the creator as God, his Kingdom to be realised here on earth as in heaven. We also pray for a gathered community to be fed, forgiven and rescued from all calamities, that only his power, glory and victory should reign forever. Though the Lord’s prayer is not recorded in Mark’s

⁴⁸⁵ Caird, G. B. *Jesus and the Jewish Nation*, London, 1965, p. 20.

⁴⁸⁶ Davies, W. D., 1974, p. 352-52.

⁴⁸⁷ Dodd, C. H. *The Founder of Christianity*, London, 1970, p. 81-83.

⁴⁸⁸ Barth, M. “Jews and Gentiles: The Social Character of Justification in Paul,” in *JES*, vol.8, 1968, pp. 241-267 and Mudge, L. “Jesus and the Struggle for the Real,” in *JR*, vol. 51, 1971, pp. 229-43.

⁴⁸⁹ Stendahl, K. *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 236.

Gospel, an implication of inclusive ministry is seen in the coming of communities from all walks of life to hear his message (3:8), an encounter with the Syrophoenician woman (7-24-30) and the feeding stories (6:35-44 8:1-9). Mark's Gospel portrays images and motifs that suggest that the text comes from a group with a strong sense of its identity as distinctive from all other groups in the world. It is the community of the sighted, by contrast with the rest of the blind world. It is a family of God, by contrast with all others who do not do his will. The Gospel of Mark enjoys knowledge of the mystery of God's purpose for the world.

Therefore, the Markan Jesus' treatment of the land-symbol translated its basic meaning into a universal symbol that did not regard the confines of the land as important. He deals with this theme of universal care through images taken from the land in its primordial significance of the created universe, rather than in its capacity to symbolise Israel's special election. The use of the images 'the birds, the trees (olive and wine), flowers and seeds – are used to probe the depths of the vision and to instil in his hearers a confidence in the message, based on their everyday experience in the land.'⁴⁹⁰ This means that, though the Markan Jesus recognises Israel's special election and upholds the notion of the land, he is critical of her performances and beliefs. This probing, therefore, suggests that Jesus' attempt was to reinterpret the land-symbol in terms of God's universal care of all his creation. He certainly knew the love of his native land, but his concentration on a loving, universal community suggests that the land itself played a minor part in his mind (cf. Lk 13:6-9; Mat 25:14-30; 5:5 and Mat 19: 28/Lk 22:30. From these sources, Jesus paid little attention to the relationship between Yahweh, and Israel and the Land.

⁴⁹⁰ Tannehill, R. "The Sword in his Mouth. Forceful and Imaginative Language in Synoptic Sayings," in *Semeia Supplements 1*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, pp. 60-67.

5.4. The Markan Jesus encounters the Syrophenician Woman (7:24-30)

5.4.i. Crossing boundaries (7:24)

The encounter with the Syrophenician woman is set by the Markan Jesus' entry (ἀπήλθεν εἰς τὰ ὄρια Τύρου, 7:24) into the region of Tyre, an area primarily inhabited by Gentiles. This entry is the Markan Jesus' first entry into a gentile area since he was asked to leave Decapolis after exorcising the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20). However, a number of MSS omit the words καὶ Σιδῶνος, (cf. Mat 15:21), which may have been probably assimilated to the mention of Sidon in Mark 7:31 and Matthew 15:21.⁴⁹¹ Presumably Mark was not so much concerned to furnish a coherent geographical scheme but was content that Jesus crossed the boundary into territory to the west and north of Galilee.⁴⁹² In the Markan context, it is a topographic statement with a theological implication, for what follows will be a confrontation of Jesus with a pagan world.⁴⁹³ In fact, Tyre and Sidon were cities of Phoenicia, which was part of the Roman province of Syria. When, under Joshua, the land was being partitioned out, the tribe of Asher was allocated the land even unto great Zidon and to the strong city of Tyre (Josh 19:28-29). They had never been able to subdue and enter into their territory.

The Markan Jesus' entry beyond the bounds of Galilee apart from the account in 9:30-50 is concerned with the events which take place beyond Herod's jurisdiction. Thus it has been thought by some scholars like Klausner, that Jesus went into retirement because of suspicion of Herod Antipas who put John the Baptist to death, and had now aroused his anger against him.⁴⁹⁴ However, his view is unconvincing because Mark does not suggest that this was a flight to avoid arrest, although there is no question his enemies would have desired this. Surprisingly, Mark only mentions that Jesus was seeking privacy (7:24). As Manson suggests, it was a flight not from menace of Herod or the Pharisees but from misguided enthusiasm of his friends,⁴⁹⁵ but his view has no evidence in the text. There is also an impression formed that the Markan Jesus departs to the borders of Tyre and Sidon from fear of Pharisees and Herod Antipas, just because the prophet Elijah went to Zarephath of Sidon from fear of Ahab and Jezebel and the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 17:8-24; cf. Lk 4: 25-26). However, Klausner argues that in this case there is no attempt by Mark to approximate Jesus to Elijah, but only that the

⁴⁹¹ Metzger, B.M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1971, p. 95.

⁴⁹² Anderson, H. *The Gospel of Mark*, London: Bulter & Tanner Ltd, 1976, p. 189.

⁴⁹³ Hengel, M., 1985, p. 543.

⁴⁹⁴ Klausner, J., 1929, p. 293.

⁴⁹⁵ Manson, T. W. *The Servant Messiah*, London, 1956, p. 71.

plight was similar, since Jesus was persecuted by both the civil and the religious authorities.⁴⁹⁶

5.4.ii. The secrecy motif unveils (7:24)

The going in without anyone knowing (οὐδένα ἤθελεν γινῶναι, 7:24) into the house whose owner is not mentioned is contrary to the practice of the pious Jew (and thus omitted in Matthew 15:21).⁴⁹⁷ However, Mark says that Jesus would have liked to remain unnoticed but his fame had become so widespread that he could not hide (7:24, cf. 3:20). In the oral tradition this was a means of expressing the irresistible influence of Jesus as expressed in 7:36.⁴⁹⁸ The more the Markan Jesus ordered them to shun publicity of his healing miracles, the more zealously they proclaimed them. It seems unlikely that the Markan Jesus' attempts to shun publicity reflect a desire to avoid Gentiles, other than serving to demonstrate his charismatic power, which cannot be hidden.⁴⁹⁹ For instance, we have three passages concerning Gentiles, in which Jesus fails to hide, or forbids disclosure of what he has done (5:19-20; 7:24, 36-37), and the other one (1:40-45) involves transgression of a Jewish purity regulation.⁵⁰⁰ The combinations of the motifs of Gentiles and inability to hide are probably not coincidental, for Jesus' glory cannot remain a secret. This is for the same reason that the good news will not stay permanently bottled up within Israel: 'The word of God is not chained' (2 Tim. 2:9).⁵⁰¹ In his theological narrative, Mark's strategy used the secrecy motif to make the reader aware of the fact that the full understanding of Jesus' personality and mission is possible only from the post-Easter point of view.⁵⁰² This is the most probable meaning of the Messianic Secret in Mark. Nevertheless, the motif of broken secrecy signals the coming conflict between Jesus' intention and its transformation in 7:29.⁵⁰³

Moreover, the Markan Jesus' persistent quest for seclusion is not always successful (cf. 1:35, 45; 2:1; 3:20; 6:31; 7:24). These passages confirm the picture of notices about the spread of Jesus' deeds which stand at the end of the miracle stories. At once the Markan Jesus' fame

⁴⁹⁶ Klausner, J., 1929, p. 294.

⁴⁹⁷ Laymon, C.H. (ed.), *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Book*, PA: Abingdon Press, 1971, p. 656.

⁴⁹⁸ Gnilka, J. *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, EKK 2/1, Zurich: Benziger/ Neukirchener, 1978, pp. 167-72; Luz, U. "The Secrecy Motif and the Marcan Christology." In *The Messianic Secret*, edited by C. Tuckett, IRT 1, Philadelphia: Fortress Press; London: SPCK, 1983, pp. 75-96

⁴⁹⁹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 467.

⁵⁰⁰ Marcus, J., 1999, p.467.

⁵⁰¹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 467; Luz, U., 1983, p. 79.

⁵⁰² Pokorny, P. "From A Puppy to the Child: Some Problems of Contemporary Biblical Exegesis demonstrated from Mark 7:24-30/ Matthew 15:21-28," *NTS*, 1985, pp. 321-337.

⁵⁰³ Dewey, J. "Mark as Interwoven tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience," in *CBQ* 53, 1991, pp. 221-35 and by E. S. Malbon, "Echoes and Foreshadowings in Mark 4-8, in *JBL* 112, 1993, pp. 211-30.

began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee (1:28; 3:7-8). However, on the other hand, the Markan Jesus secures the seclusion he desires (cf. 1:35; 3:13; 4:10,34-35; 6:45; 7:17; 8:31; 9:30-32; 10:32-34; 13:1; 14:32). Thus, Mark is inclined to think of a house as a place of retreat from the multitude, an inclination that is evinced in 6:31-8:26 as well as in other parts of the Gospel in 7:17,24; 9:33; 10:10.⁵⁰⁴ Similarly, Mark is also inclined to think of the boat (3:9) in the same connection. Despite wanting to hide, he was noticed and this conjures up a picture of Jesus' magnetic attraction for the crowd even outside of Israel because wherever he moved his glory shines through and constrains people to flock around him. Hence, the secrecy motifs express the explosive and the boundary-effacing power of God revealed in Jesus. Marcus is right that this movement into the region of Tyre and Sidon has Old Testament precedent, because Elijah performed a miracle for a Gentile woman in the same region (1 Kgs 17:8-16; cf. Lk 4:25-26).⁵⁰⁵ According to Marcus, this miracle is especially relevant because Jesus and John the Baptist echo the activities of Elijah and Elisha in Mark 1:1-6, 12-13, 19-20; 6:30-44).

The tendency to depict Jesus as one who seeks seclusion and does not secure it needs to be considered in relation to the injunctions to silence in 1:44; 5:43; 7:36 and 8:26. In these four passages human beings are enjoined to keep quiet, each time concerning a miracle which Jesus has just performed. Mark's intention is to make it clear to his readers that Jesus' Messianic status necessarily expresses itself only in the form of a miracle worker's widespread fame.⁵⁰⁶ In Mark's view, the mighty works of Jesus are works of the Messiah himself and he maintains that it was part of the divine plan of salvation to be so. The more Jesus charges the witnesses not to tell anyone about the miracles, the more they publicise them. In this sense, the tellers of Jesus' miracles defy his express wishes. Thus, the impression is given that the miraculous deeds of Jesus are proclaimed against his will. Similarly, the order to keep silent in Matthew 9:30-31 is violated. The Matthean Jesus wishes that no one should know of the healing of the two blind men, but they went away and spread the news about him throughout that district. Also two analogous passages in Acts confirm that it was a general presupposition that miracles would be spontaneously recounted (cf. 9:42; 19:17). And similar situation is reminiscent of that in 7:24, where the Markan Jesus, having entered a

⁵⁰⁴ Burkill, T. A. *New Light on the Earliest Gospel: Seven Markan Studies*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1972, p.65.

⁵⁰⁵ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 467.

⁵⁰⁶ Burkill, T. A., 1972, p. 66.

house in the region of Tyre, desires no one to know it and yet he cannot be concealed. But, as presented earlier on, the idea intended is not that Jesus was foiled, rather that his essential nature being what it was, he could not escape winning great fame as a performer of miracles.⁵⁰⁷ In other words, Mark's mode of representation in this connection is intimately bound up with his soteriological philosophy of history which has its focal point in the concept of Jesus as Messiah, the Son of Man and the Son of God (cf. 14:62).⁵⁰⁸ The significance of Mark 7:24 is that Jesus despite his reserve, wins great fame as a worker of miraculous deeds, fame that in this case goes before him into the region of Tyre and Sidon.

5.3.iii. Hearing motivates response (7:25)

In the expository part of a miracle, the appearance of the one seeking help is sometimes motivated by hearing about Jesus' marvellous deeds. Likewise, the explosive power of the news about Jesus enables the Syrophenician woman to take the initiative. She hears about Jesus (ἀκούσασα γυνή περὶ αὐτοῦ, 7:25), approaches, and throws herself at his feet. This is a symbol of self-abasement and supplication. This description is closely related to the hemorrhaging woman, who also heard about Jesus, came and fell down before him (5:27, 33). The likeness of these women is increased by the fact that the Syrophenician woman, by virtue of being a Gentile, is ritually impure like the hemorrhaging woman.⁵⁰⁹ Moreover, her daughter has an unclean spirit. Yet, despite their impurity, both women hope for healing from Jesus (5:28; 7:26, 28). Similar accounts are also found in Mark, in the Poor Widow (12:41-44) and the woman who anoints Jesus at Bethany (14:3-9). Fander is right that they compelled Jesus to a decisive action or statement.⁵¹⁰ In parallel to Luke, the Centurion from Capernaum sends the Jewish elders for Jesus after having heard about him (7:3; cf. Jn. 4:47).

Therefore, one can take for granted that during Jesus' lifetime people were telling stories about his deeds, as we usually do today. We also hear of Jesus' native town that he could not do any miraculous power there (6:5). But the rumour of his miracles had already reached the town before he got there (6:2). According to Mark 6:14, even Herod Antipas must have heard about Jesus' miracles. Otherwise, he would not fear that Jesus might be the resurrected John

⁵⁰⁷ Burkill, T. A., 1972, p. 67.

⁵⁰⁸ Winter, P. "The Markan Account of Jesus' Trial by the Sanhedrin," in *JTS* XIV, 1963, pp. 94-102, esp. p. 100.

⁵⁰⁹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 467.

⁵¹⁰ Fander, M. "Frauen in der Nachfolge Jesu: Die Frau in Markusevangelium," in *Ev. Theo.* 52, 1992, pp. 423-33.

the Baptizer, and for this reason 'these powers are at work in him.' Similarly, in response to John the Baptist's question, his messengers are even entrusted directly with stories of Jesus' miracles (Mat 11:4-5). Here, the Matthean Jesus says, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.' In summary, the thronging of crowds to the Markan Jesus from 'Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, Perea, beyond the Jordan and the regions of Tyre and Sidon' is explained by their 'hearing all that he was doing' (3:8). Thus, Mark's readers would presumably share this trust, not only because they were Christians but also for the healing miracles (cf. 3:8; 5:27; 6:55; 10:47).

The woman who is the mother of a girl with an unclean spirit has come to plead with the Markan Jesus to heal her daughter (7:25). The unclean spirits were considered subjects like persons, and so they appear also in Mark. But, according to Pokorny, they have only the negative features of a person hence they are 'personal only as a personal menace.'⁵¹¹ In concrete stories the Markan Jesus has so far met possessed persons only accidentally (1:23-24; 5:6-7). And there are also cases of people bringing demoniacs to Jesus, which have been mentioned in brief summarising passages (1:32,39; 3:11; 6:55-56). However, this is not the case in the story of the Syrophenician woman, who comes alone begging the Markan Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter. There is some similarity between this woman and Jairus (5:21-24, 35-43). Both are worried about the health of their respective daughters, which enable them to leave their homes and set out themselves to ask the Markan Jesus to help them. Similarly, for both of them there is no question in their account about Jesus having power to do so if he wishes. However, Van Iersel distinguishes the differences between these healing stories. He says one of the differences between the two healing accounts concerns the nature of the illness.⁵¹² The Woman's daughter is in the power of a demon, while Jairus's daughter is critically ill. Another difference concerns the content of the proposals they make. Jairus proposes that Jesus should come along to his house and lay his hands upon his daughter and so save her life, whereas the Syrophenician woman merely asks Jesus to free her daughter from the power of the demon, without specifically identifying the method of healing.

⁵¹¹ Pokorny, P., 1985, p. 323.

⁵¹² Van Iersel, B.M. F. *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* (JSNT Supplement Series 164), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, Ltd, 1998, p. 249.

5.4.iv. Woman's social and cultural description (7:26)

Mark calls the woman “Συροφοινικίσσα” which identifies the woman as Greek (Ἑλληνίς, 7:25). This may refer either to the religion or language she is accustomed to use. Thus, as Theissen notes, she belonged to the higher middle class of the city inhabitants.⁵¹³ The parallel passage in Matthew calls her a Canaanite woman, the Aramaic name for Phoenicians (Mat 15:22). By nationality, she is a Phoenician from Syria and by religion she is a pagan, a Gentile distinct from a Phoenician or Liby- Carthaginian.⁵¹⁴ The woman tells the Markan Jesus what she wanted. The purpose of Jesus is however frustrated; a woman who is described as Greek that is Gentile (cf. Gal 2:3) by religion and Syrophenician by race, hears of him and comes to seek healing for her child. Though the nature of the child's problem is not in any way discussed, Mark's emphasis is entirely on who the woman is and Jesus' response to her witty words of humility (7:28). Although the woman may be a pagan by religion, it is striking that the term Ἑλληνίς, (7:26) is also a frequent designation for God-Fearers in Josephus, Acts, and the Gospel of John.⁵¹⁵ There are accounts in the New Testament that portray Gentiles who are not proselytes, but are sympathetic to Jews and Judaism (cf. Jn 12:20; Lk. 2:10; 6:5; 13:43; Acts 14:1; 17:4; 18:4).⁵¹⁶ Also, ancient writers such as Philo and Josephus give similar accounts. According to Philo, ‘not only Jews but almost every other people particularly those which take more account of virtue, have so far grown in holiness as to value and honour our laws. In this they have received a special distinction which belongs to no other code’ (Vit. Mos. 2:17). Josephus makes similar sweeping claims by saying, ‘our laws have to an ever increasing extent excited the emulation of the world at large’ (*J. A. Apion. 2:279*). The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances (*J. A. Apion 2:282*). He mentions here the Sabbath, the fasts and the lighting of lamps and food laws. Josephus further claims that Moses welcomes ‘all who desire to come and live under the same laws with us’ (*J. A. Apion 2:210*). In some passages, Josephus refers specifically to the ‘Greeks’ (*J. A. Apion 2:123, 463; J. A. 3:217; J. W. 7:45*) in connection with the adoption of Jewish customs, as the author of Acts of the Apostles does (14:1; 17:4; 18:4).

Therefore, as in the case of Luke-Acts, Gentiles were sympathetic to Jews and Judaism by adopting at least some of its customs and laws. Similarly, Philo and Josephus support the

⁵¹³ Theissen, G., 1991, p. 70-72.

⁵¹⁴ Anderson, H., 1976, p. 190; Taylor, V., 1963, p. 349.

⁵¹⁵ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 464.

⁵¹⁶ De Boer, M.C. “God-Fearers in Luke-Acts,” edited by Tuckett, C. M., in *Luke's Literary Achievement: Collected Essays*, (JSNT Supplement Series 116), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, pp. 50-71.

view that such Gentiles were not all that exceptional. Indeed, de Boer is right that the God-Fearers of Luke-Acts are often people (especially women) of considerable social standing (Lk. 7:1-10; Acts 8:27-28; 10:1-2, 7; 13:50; 16:14; 17:4,12; 18:7).⁵¹⁷ This is also true of other evidence from Reynolds and Tannenbaum who support Luke's usage that lists οἱ φοβοῦμενοι, (2 Chron. 5:6 LXX) as a group distinct from 'the whole Congregation of Israel'⁵¹⁸. However, Sanders argues that Luke uses the term (Ἐθνη) to designate pagan Gentiles.⁵¹⁹ If this is so in Luke, de Boer questions whether 'Ἕλληνας' is another technical term for God-fearing or worshipping Gentiles in Acts.⁵²⁰ In response to this, MacRay⁵²¹ says, in the New Testament times the term 'Greek' became somewhat of cultural designation, referring to anyone who also accepted Greek culture and spoke the language. He therefore suggests that Luke probably reserves the term 'Greeks' for non-Jews who worship the true God (Acts 14:1; 16:1,3; 17:4,12; 19:17).⁵²² But given the term 'Greek' in Mark 7:26, does the evangelist wish to suggest that the Syrophoenician woman is a God-fearer? Interestingly, in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies (13.7.), she is described as a proselyte to Judaism.⁵²³ Although Mark does not say so, the hearing about Jesus and coming to approach him in such a humble way (7:25) plays a part in the story that she fears about Jesus. Moreover, her response to Jesus undoubtedly proves that she fears and believes in God (7:27-28). It is because of this feeling that she eventually wins an argument and is granted what she hoped for from the Markan Jesus.

⁵¹⁷ De Boer, M.C., 1995, p. 68.

⁵¹⁸ Reynolds, J. and Tannenbaum R. *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisias: Greek Inscriptions with Commentary*, (Supplementary Volume 12), Cambridge: Cambridge Philosophical Society, 1987, p. 65. Similar views are also found in Callan, T. "The Background to the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25)," in *CBQ* 55, 1993, pp. 284-97.

⁵¹⁹ Sanders, J. T., "Who is a Jew and who is a Gentile in the Book of Acts?" in *NTS* 37, 1991, pp. 434-55, but here pp. 440-41.

⁵²⁰ De Boer, M. C., 1995, p. 69.

⁵²¹ MacRay, J. "Greece," in *ABD*, II, 1992, pp. 1092-98, especially p. 1093.

⁵²² A similar view is also found in Reynolds J. *Jews and God-Fearers*, p. 51; note that in John 12:20 "Ἕλληνας" come to Jerusalem to worship at feast.

⁵²³ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 464. Cf. b. Pesah. 112b where R. Judah the Prince's reference to "a Syrian woman" is interpreted as an allusion to a proselyte.

5.4.v. The astonishing dialogue (7:27-28)

This is one of the most difficult sections in the Gospel. It seems to show that the Markan Jesus is unwilling to extend his ministry of healing and exorcism to Gentiles and shared the circumscribed outlook of the most rigid of his contemporary and later fellow Jews. But the extraordinary thing is that, such a section as this should appear in Mark, in strong contrast to the exorcism in 5:1-20 and the healing in 7:31-37, which follows the present passage, both in Gentile territory and among pagans. The Syrophoenician woman and Mark's audience hope that the plea made by the woman about the healing of her daughter (7:26) will be answered accordingly. Surprisingly, the Markan Jesus in his response to the woman's plea seems to dash this by saying: Ἄφες πρότον χορτασθῆναι τὰ τέκνα οὐ γάρ ἐστὶν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ τοῖς κυναρίοις βαλεῖν (7:27). In response to the woman's request, the Markan Jesus uses a terminology that was as insulting in the ancient times as it is today. In effect, the Markan Jesus says that his ministry is limited to God's children (τὰ τέκνα, 7:27), the Jews, and does not extend to dogs (τοῖς κυναρίοις, 7:27), the Gentiles, like the Syrophoenician woman and her daughter. Feldmeier⁵²⁴ asserts that this statement is a typical example of the ethnocentrism that characterised some Jewish teachers. The Jewish scholar Klausner says with justifiable bitterness that the answer to the woman was so rude and pompous so that 'if any other Jewish teacher of the time had said such a thing Christians would never have forgiven Judaism for it.'⁵²⁵ Similarly, Theissen adds, the answer of the Markan Jesus is morally offensive. He says, 'it is as if a doctor would refuse to treat a foreign child.'⁵²⁶ Moreover, Theissen points out that Jesus' response is an exegetical problem, for the bread metaphor does not fit the woman's request. The Markan Jesus is not being asked for food, but his help as a physician and exorcist.⁵²⁷ However, Theissen fails to grasp the symbolism of bread in regards to the two feeding miracles (6:30-44 and 8:1-9), where these feedings echo the Eucharistic imagery that Mark will tell us later in 14:22-25.

⁵²⁴ Feldmeier, R. "Die Syrophonizierin (Mk 7,24-30)-Jesus verlorenes Streitgespräch?" In *Die Heiden, Juden, Christen und das Problem des Fremden*, edited by R. Feldmeier and U. Heckel, WUNT 70, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1994, pp. 211-27.

Klausner, J., 1929, p. 294.

⁵²⁵ Klausner, J., 1929, p. 294.

⁵²⁶ Theissen, G. *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, p. 61.

⁵²⁷ Theissen, G., 1991, pp. 61, 65.

However, Marcus points out that, despite the offensiveness of the saying, the most straightforward reading of the statement on the historical level is a literal one.⁵²⁸ He says, the Markan Jesus was initially inclined to refuse the woman's plea, and his subsequent decision to heal her (7:29) represented a change of mind. However, some exegetes have tried to evade this conclusion with rationalisations; for instance, Taylor hypothesises that the Markan Jesus was talking to himself, not to the woman in 7:27.⁵²⁹ Similarly, Filson commenting on Matthew 15:26, suggests that the facial expression of Jesus and his tone of voice enable the Syrophenician woman to tell that his refusal was not final.⁵³⁰ As a result of this, the woman quickly shows him that he can help her even though his concentrated mission is to his fellow-Jews. In a similar vein, Hassler⁵³¹ speculates that Jesus may have been sleeping. However, all these rationalisations lack support from our text. If this is the case, we must accept, as Marcus points out that the statement of the Markan Jesus in 7:27 was meant as a refusal, probably because Jesus viewed his mission as limited to Israel (cf. Matt. 10:5-6).⁵³² Similar views are also held by Rhoads⁵³³ who thinks that Mark meant that the ministry of Jesus was limited to his people, the Israelites. He goes further to say that Jesus only changes his mind about his ministry to the Gentiles after his encounter with the Syrophenician woman and this is immediately demonstrated by going to the region of Decapolis, a Gentile region (7:31). But the ending of the Markan text *Διὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ἔπαυε* (7:29) creates problems for this interpretation. Does it imply 'because you have changed my mind' as Rhoads interprets? In the Markan context, I think this refers to the test of faith, although Mark does not indicate it here. But elsewhere in his Gospel, Mark often ascribes the healing power of Jesus to people's persistent faith (2:5; 5:34; 10:52; cf. Matt 15:28). Moreover, the Markan Jesus heals a demon-possessed child whose parent intercedes for him and also for showing faith (9:14-29). The parent's plea is not immediately met when we look at the Markan Jesus' initial response that sounds like a refusal (9:19). But still more that turns out to be a ploy designed to evoke a significant expression of faith on the part of the parent (9:24; cf. Matt 8:5-13/Jn 7:46-54). In this view, Marcus is possibly right to say that the saying of 7:29 is more likely to mean

⁵²⁸ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 468.

⁵²⁹ Taylor, V., 1963, p. 350.

⁵³⁰ Filson, F. V., *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, Black's New Testament Commentaries, London: A & C Black, 1960, p. 180.

⁵³¹ Hassler, I. "The Incident of the Syrophenician Woman (Matt XV, 21-28; Mark VII, 24-30)." In *ET* 45, 1934, pp. 459-61.

⁵³² Marcus, J., 1999, p. 468.

⁵³³ Rhoads, D. M. "Jesus and the Syrophenician Woman in Mark: A Narrative-Critical Study," in *JAAR* 62, 1994, pp. 342-75, but here pp. 361-62.

‘because you have passed the test’⁵³⁴. Thus, this is probably the Markan meaning here, as Pokorny points out, that Mark’s plot of words in 7:27 are in the nature of a test of faith.⁵³⁵ But more on test of faith will come later.

But even if Mark understands Jesus’ words in 7:27 as a test of faith, the statement is definitely very harsh to the Gentiles. The Markan Jesus answers the Syrophenician woman in a metaphor. The people to whom Jesus is sent are compared to Children (τῶν τέκων, 7:27) while the ‘others’ such as the woman and her daughter are compared to dogs (τοῖς κυναρίοις, 7:27). The Greek words ‘πρῶτον, τέκνα, κυναρίοις’ (7:27) are symbolic. The word ‘first’ is symbolic of the mission of Jesus to his own people. Mark always uses this neuter singular form of this word for events on the eschatological time line. He uses it when he explains the coming of Elijah before the Messiah (9:11-12), the binding of Satan before the despoiling of his house (3:27), Jesus’ ministry to his fellow Jews before the Gentile mission (7:27), and the expansion of the Gospel beyond Israel before the eschaton (13:10).⁵³⁶ It was only after these events have occurred in their divinely ordered sequence that the end can come (cf. 4:28). It was only after the Jews rejected him that full attention was now paid to the Gentiles (13:10; cf. Jn.1: 11) and as Paul’s mission in Acts 13:44-45, 28: 25-28 portrays. The use of this word further intimates that there was mercy in reserve for Gentiles, and not far off. Perhaps it is an echo of the later controversy over the admission of the Gentiles settled by Paul in his famous formula ‘To the Jew first and also to the Greek’ (Rom.1: 16 & 2:10). However, we are not sure whether Mark’s Pauline-sounding formulation meant that he knew Paul or whether it just meant that he moved in the same circles that Paul did.

The word ‘Children’ is symbolic of Israel, the children of God. The Jews are thus designated the children from the standpoint of origin.⁵³⁷ It represents Jews to whom Jesus’ mission was first directed, so that they in turn fulfil the duty of becoming a blessing to all nations through the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel. This designation is common enough in the Old Testament (cf. Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1; Hos 1:10; Isa 1:2; 63; 8) and in Jewish literature both the Apocrypha (Wisdom of Sol. 16:21) and the Mishnah (Abot 3; 20). In view of the text, the Markan Jesus is saying that the Jews have all the miracles wrought for them, for they are

⁵³⁴ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 468.

⁵³⁵ Pokorny, P., 1985, p. 328.

⁵³⁶ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 463.

⁵³⁷ Oepke, A. “Pais, ktl,” in *TDNT*, 5, 1967, pp. 636-54.

God's chosen people. Therefore, it was not right to throw away the children's bread to non-Jews, who were little dogs and not children. In this sense, the Markan Jesus seems to accept the point of view that the Jews are God's children, and nowhere else does he deny this identification or transfer to the Gentiles. Thus he is right in the initial sense by saying, let not that which was intended for them, be thrown to those who are not of God's family and have no knowledge of him and interest in him, who are dogs. But despite this fact, Mark is aware that Jesus' brothers and sisters are those who do the will of God (3:31-35). It is for this reason that Mark records the ministry of Jesus which crosses boundaries in order to bring the entire family back to him regardless of race, colour, sex or by birth.

The word 'Dogs' is symbolic of Gentiles. A dog sleeping in the manger was not only a Greek proverb, but it also appears as Jesus' saying in the Gospel of Thomas (log. 102). Such a role of the dog is implied also in the saying from Matthew 7: 6 on giving dogs what is sacred and casting pearls before Swine. The overtones of Jewish ethnocentrism here are alien to the general spirit of Mark, but emphasis is on the acknowledgement of early Gentile Christianity that 'salvation is from the Jews' (Jn 4:22) or that the actual order of priority is the Jew first and also the Greek (Rom. 2:10). According to Burkill, the sentence about preferring of children to dogs in 7:27 may also have been a proverbial saying similar to 'charity begins at home'⁵³⁸. However, this was a common Jewish term of reproach applied to Gentiles. To call someone a 'dog' was indeed an insult. It is a dirty word, as Theissen notes, therefore a comparison with this animal is regarded as degrading (cf. Exod 22:31; 1 Sam 17:43; Isa 56:10-11) and it symbolised what is despicable (Eccl 9:4; 1 Sam 24:14; 2 Kgs 8:13 and Prov 26:11).⁵³⁹ The New Testament continues this way of speaking, for instance, the fact that Lazarus cannot even keep the stray away from him is a sign of his deep misery (Lk 16:21). Similarly, opponents and heretics are made contemptible by being called 'dogs' (Eph 7:1; 2 Pet 2:22; Phil 3:2; Rev 22:15).

As regards to the peculiarity of the statement by the Markan Jesus (7:27), various scholars⁵⁴⁰ observe that the harshness of the statement is softened by the use of the diminutive form

⁵³⁸ Burkill, T. A. "The Historical Development of the Story of the Syrophenician Woman," in *Nov Test* 9, 1967, pp. 161-78, esp. p. 176.

⁵³⁹ Theissen, G., 1991, p. 62, n.1.

⁵⁴⁰ Turner, C. H. "Marcan Usage," last edition in J. K. Elliott, ed., *The Language and Style of the Gospel of Mark*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993, pp. 1-46, esp. p. 124; Burkill, T. A. "Historical Development," p. 170,172; Pokorny, P., 1985, p. 324; Marcus, J. 1999, p. 463; Luz, U. *Das Evangelium nach Mathans 1.2*, Zurich: Beziger/Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1990, pp. 435-36; and Rhoads, D.M., 1994, pp. 356-57; 324.

meaning little dogs or puppies. These puppies were family pets not wild dogs of the street. Although, the statement is harsh, a discouragement and an insult to the woman, the seeming harshness of the Markan Jesus' expression is softened by the fact that the term denotes not the vicious, wild scavengers that roamed the streets, but little dogs (κυνάρια) that lived as pets in peoples' houses. The Markan Jesus told this Gentile woman what he had told a Samaritan woman, that at this time all were dependent on Israel for Messiah and his blessings (cf. Jn. 4:21-23). The Markan Jesus had healed Gentiles on the other occasions (5:1-20), but here in Phoenicia he had to be careful not to give the impression that he was abandoning his own nation, Israel (cf. Matt 4:24; 8:5). Barclay explains that the Markan Jesus did not use the usual word instead he used a diminutive word that in Greek is characteristically affectionate.⁵⁴¹ Undoubtedly, as Barclay claims, his tone of voice makes all the difference. I think Barclay is right, that the same word can be a deadly poison and an affectionate address, in respect to the tone of the voice someone uses. In any event the Markan Jesus did not shut the door to anyone who professes in him. In view of this statement (7:27), I think Mark understood Jesus to mean the children must be fed, but only 'first'; for there is still bread left for the household pets (the woman and her daughter) and the entire Gentiles. It is true that Israel had the first offer of the Gospel, but only the first; there were others still to come such as Gentiles who will be considered as well.

Moreover, according to Marcus, the image of the dog is not always negative in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition.⁵⁴² He says, there are friendly dogs that appear in some manuscripts of Tobit 6:1 and 11:4 and in b. Abod. Zar. 54b. Moreover, domestic dogs can symbolise righteous Gentiles in Midrash Ps.11, who are compared to Gentiles, like in our text. In both passages the dogs get to eat at the eschatological banquet, though they do not eat as the invited or as the family do (cf. Lk 14:15-23). It is likely, therefore, that dogs at the banquet was a fixed image for the participation of righteous Gentiles in the eschatological blessings of Israel.⁵⁴³ The woman's rejoinder as a dog that is within the house, but inferior to that of the children, corresponds to the way in which Gentiles sympathised with the Jews and Judaism (cf. 1 Enoch 50:2).⁵⁴⁴ Hence the woman's rejoinder seems to imply that she understands the dogs to be the little household pets. In this sense, her response shows that she

⁵⁴¹ Barclay, W., 1956, p. 182.

⁵⁴² Marcus, J., 1999, p. 464.

⁵⁴³ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 464.

⁵⁴⁴ Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-Fearers*, pp. 48-66, and S. J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew." In *HTR* 82, 1989, pp. 13-33.

was not offended by Jesus' reply. Thus, no more must Gentiles be offended that God in his own mysterious way had chosen to make himself known in history through a particular nation (and through a particular person, woman). Neither must they resent the fact that the Markan Jesus had come from where he primarily ministered to them. This is the way other people are also heirs of God's help. The woman is right by saying, 'I know the children are fed first, but can't I even get the scraps that children throw away?' For such a clever saying, the Markan Jesus loved her and gave her what she deserved. Thus, here was a woman whose sunny faith would not take no for an answer and here was a woman with the tragedy of an ill daughter at home. Hence, the gulf is transcended by the greatness of the woman's faith, and this motivates Jesus to cure her daughter.

Theissen attempts also to explain the oddity of this statement (7:27) by reconstructing the social and political situation in Galilee and Tyre. He suggests that the Markan Jesus' initial rejection of the woman expresses a bitterness that had built up within the relationship between Jesus and Gentiles in the border regions between Tyre and Galilee.⁵⁴⁵ He says, Tyre was a wealthy city that needed to buy agricultural produce from the Galilean hinterland. In the crisis of supply that occurred periodically, Tyre was financially powerful enough to buy grain for itself in crisis situations. Hence the farmers in the territory inhabited by Jews would often have the feeling of having to produce for the rich city dwellers while they themselves lived in need. In this situation, Theissen points out, the Markan Jesus' statement in 7:27 has a powerful impact. Moreover, when people mentioned food in the border regions of Tyre and Galilee, and spoke of children (Jews) and dogs (Gentiles), they simultaneously addressed the general economic situation, determined by a clear hierarchy that was just as clearly reversed by Jesus' words.⁵⁴⁶ Perhaps the Markan Jesus, in response, was able to make connections with a well-known saying shaped by this situation. Thus in view of this reconstruction, Theissen concludes that the Markan Jesus' answer was a criticism of the Hellenisation and social exploitation of Jews in that territory. Also Newson and Ringe suggest that the 'social and cultural conventions and political institutions,'⁵⁴⁷ paved the way to the initial rejection of the Markan Jesus to the woman. It is said that there was a philosophical movement associated with Diogenes Sinope in the fourth century BCE. This movement began in Greece and was highly critical of current social and cultural conventions and political institutions. The

⁵⁴⁵ Theissen, G., 1991, p. 65.

⁵⁴⁶ Theissen, G., 1991, pp. 61-80.

⁵⁴⁷ Newson, C. & Ringe, S. (eds.), *The Women's Bible Commentary*, London: SPCK, 1992, p. 269.

adherents of this movement criticised the established social customs and some of them shunned all conventions in their lifestyles and behaviours. It is because of this aggressive, rude and shameless behaviour that they were described as ‘dogs’, a name that was adopted to describe their philosophical movement which is called ‘cynics.’⁵⁴⁸ Thus, it is quite appropriate for the foreign woman’s unconventional behaviour and its challenge to customary social roles, to be described a cynic. However, we are not sure whether Mark had this understanding in mind, since he does not mention any tension between Jews and Gentiles. Moreover, Pokorny argues that the interpretation made by Theissen does not help us to understand the story as a whole.⁵⁴⁹ He is of the view that the main influential interpretation was based in terms of the history of salvation. According to this hypothesis, salvation had to proceed from the Jews to the Gentiles. In favour of this interpretation is the word first (πρῶτον, 7:27a). In Mark’s redactional intention, this must have been the indirect justification of the post-Easter pagan mission.

5.4.vi. The woman’s witty response pays dividends (7:28-30)

The response of the woman to the Markan Jesus in 7:28 is also very important. The ἀπεκρίθη καὶ λέγει, (7:28) is an Old Testament formula which usually introduces words of Jesus in Mark (3:33; 6:37; 9:19; 10:3,24,51) and often expresses the main point of the passage (8:29; 11:14,22).⁵⁵⁰ According to Lammert,⁵⁵¹ the verbs ‘ἀπεκρίθη’ and ‘λέγει’ introduce the answer in an almost solemn style and the time of telling the story slows down compared with the real time of the event. This signals that the key scene is coming. It is highly significant for the woman to call Jesus Κύριε, (7:28) because she is the first Greek woman to call him Lord, an expression of basic Christian confession of Jesus in Mark.⁵⁵² The woman in her encounter with the Markan Jesus’ basic statement uses a polite rather than a religious form. In all three later Gospels, the disciples frequently employ ‘Κύριος’ in the vocative when addressing Jesus, and no doubt the meaning ‘Lord’ a favourite Gentile equivalent of ‘Messiah’ is intended.⁵⁵³ As Rhoads remarks, the woman ‘steals the scene.’⁵⁵⁴ The recognition of Jesus as Lord is credited solely to Gentile devotion and insight. The verse is closely related to 15:39,

⁵⁴⁸ Newson, C. & Ringe, S., 1992, p. 269.

⁵⁴⁹ Pokorny, P., 1985, p. 325

⁵⁵⁰ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 464.

⁵⁵¹ Lammert, E. *Bauformen des Erzählens*, (3rd edition), Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1968, pp. 22-24.

⁵⁵² Johnston, S. E. *A Commentary on The Gospel According to St. Mark* (2nd Edition), London: Adam & Charles Black Ltd, 1972, p. 137.

⁵⁵³ Burkill, T. A., 1972, p. 89.

⁵⁵⁴ Rhoads, D.M., 1974, P. 361.

although it misses Mark's point here to render 'Lord' as 'Sir' as in several modern translations. Mark never uses the 'Κύριος' in narrative and never employs the vocative except in the woman's response, thus Mark may understand, according to Burkill, the Κύριου, (1:3) in its full Christian significance, applying it to Jesus rather than to God.⁵⁵⁵ Moreover, this is the only miraculous healing recounted in his work in which the patient is definitely identified as a Gentile. Hence, in view of the exceptional character of the account, it may well be that Mark means the vocative Κύριε, (7:28) to have its integral Messianic import. The woman's knowledge then stands in dramatic contrast to the disciples' lack of insight, a motif greatly stressed in the general context of the story (cf. 6:52; 7:17; 8:14-21).

In the Matthean parallel, the woman's form of address is understood Messianically, the title υἱὸς Δαβὶδ, (15:22) is set in apposition with κύριε, (15:22). The woman's plea becomes reminiscent of Mark 10:47, where blind Bartimaeus cries Υἱὲ Δαβὶδ Ἰησοῦ ἐλέησόν με, (10:47). Apparently, Matthew is associating Mark 7:24-30 with Mark 10:46-52, a presumption that finds some confirmation in the explicit commendation of faith at Mark 10:52 and Matthew 15:28. Thus, it is a move that the same association is operative also in the thought of Mark himself. Therefore, the woman's response in 7:28 is very significant in a sense that, even during the earthly ministry, before the Messiah's final rejection by his own people, a representative of the religiously underprivileged world can address Jesus as Lord in a moment of deep insight. The woman recognises in Jesus the Lord of the Christian Church who offers himself as the bread of life for the salvation of humanity. Likewise, the Markan Jesus instructs the cured man to make known what the Lord has done for him. It should also be observed that in Mark 15:39 the Roman Centurion acknowledges the divine Sonship only after Jesus has breathed his last.

Finally, Mark records the response of Jesus to the woman by giving her what she requested in 7:26. Mark tells us the going away of the demon in the woman's daughter though healing is not played up, and he does not mention astonished bystanders as he does in other passages (cf. 1:27; 5:43). Instead, the woman hears the joyful news, returns home and finds her daughter free from the demon. In this account, as Taylor points out, we are not sure whether Mark regards the story as an example of Jesus' supernatural knowledge or his 'telepathic

⁵⁵⁵ Burkill, T. A., 1972, p. 89.

awareness' of what is happening.⁵⁵⁶ However, given the strong assurance that ἐξελήλυθεν κτῆς θυγατρὸς σου τὸ δαιμόνιον (7:29) it may be that Mark regards the incident as a cure wrought from a distance, though he does not expressly record it as such. The usual Markan tradition is that cures are wrought by contact (1:31,41; 2:5,11; 3:5,10; 4:39; 5:41; 6:51; 7:5,56) or by a commanding word (1:25; 5:8; 9:25), and if the incident was one of direct healing, we should expect an account more like Matthew 15:28. There is also no mention of any power emanating from him like in the story of the hemorrhaging woman (5:30). It is only the casting out of the demon which takes place from a distance and in the presence of no other witness but the victim herself.⁵⁵⁷ However, the assurance that the demon has gone out from her daughter and the objective character of the Markan narrative suggest, as an alternative to the hypothesis of healing at a distance, the explanation of supernatural knowledge.⁵⁵⁸ Such knowledge is born of an incomparable sense of communion with God sustained by prayer and made possible by unmatched consciousness of Sonship. Hence, it is not a surprise with complete certainty, as Taylor asserts, to say to the woman 'Because of this saying go, the demon has left your daughter.'⁵⁵⁹ Similarly, Gundry says the asyndeton with which the announcement begins and the perfect tense of 'ἐξελήλυθεν' (has gone out), emphasise his power in accomplishing the exorcism at a distance and the supernatural knowledge displayed in announcing the exorcism (cf. 2:8).⁵⁶⁰ Therefore the final emphasis falls on the evidence that the demon has indeed gone out. So great is the Markan Jesus' power that he has not needed to pronounce a word of exorcism in the presence of the demon. This underscores his supernatural knowledge in the Markan Jesus. Mark's main interest in this story as we have seen lies in the breaking down of the barrier between Jews and Gentiles rather than in the exorcism as such.⁵⁶¹ This is against Schweizer's interpretation, which states that Mark's main interest lies in the exorcism.⁵⁶²

In contrast to the story of Jairus whose house is full of people who have first to be sent away by the Markan Jesus (5:38-42), here the girl is the only one in the house. The Syrophoenician

⁵⁵⁶ Taylor V., 1963, p.351.

⁵⁵⁷ van Iersel, B. M. F., 1998, p. 251.

⁵⁵⁸ Taylor V., 1963, p.348

⁵⁵⁹ Taylor, V., 1963, p. 348.

Gundry R. H. *Mark, A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993, p. 375.

⁵⁶⁰ Gundry R. H. *Mark, A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993, p. 375.

⁵⁶¹ Gundry, R., 1993, p. 375.

⁵⁶² Schweizer, E., *The Good News according to Mark*, Atlanta: John Knox, 1970, pp. 152-53.

woman only witnesses the effect of Jesus' power on her return home. Hence, according to Iersel, the cure of her daughter is the mirror image of the cure of Jairus's daughter. In the sense that the latter is woken up from her sleep (death) and then gets up, while the Syrophenician woman's daughter is made to fall asleep quietly without being woken up, but the demon has left her.⁵⁶³ This is an account of miracle-healing at a distance (cf. Matt 8:5-13), by which the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile began in 7:1-23 is broken down. Hence, in this story, the new dispensation pointed in 7:1-23 is seen in operation. Thus the modern reader, as Theissen points out, is impressed by the fact that, along with this demon, the equally threatening demon of prejudice between the members of different nations and cultures was 'driven out'.⁵⁶⁴

5.5. Faith-Response analogy

Mark has special interest in exorcism, which together with preaching is looked upon as the distinctive work of Jesus (1:39) and the twelve disciples (6:7). In all the healing miracles one can expect magical things to happen, for Jesus a word is enough. In these healing miracles faith is again and again either required or assumed. As illustrated in the Gospel of Mark, Findlay defines faith 'as a painstaking and concentrated effort to obtain blessing for oneself or for others, material or spiritual, inspired by a confident belief that God in Jesus can supply all human need.'⁵⁶⁵ The Markan Jesus often ascribes healing to people's persistent faith (2:5; 5:34; 9:24; 10:52).

But when we read the story of the Syrophenician woman and the healing of her demon-possessed daughter, Mark does not mention or ascribe it to faith as Matthew does in 15:28. He only says, 'Because you have said this' (7:29), which literally means 'because of this word.' The absence of the word 'faith' has left some scholars like Gundry to put much emphasis on the healing power of Jesus that exorcises the demon.⁵⁶⁶ Moreover, Gundry is of the view that Mark does not engage in the speculation that Jesus is testing the woman's faith when he initially shows reluctance to heal her daughter (7:27). However, in this passage, I want to emphasise that the faith of the woman motivated the exorcism by the Markan Jesus. In the Matthean parallel the answer of the woman is explicitly motivated by her faith (15:28). Even though the word "faith" does not appear in this narrative, I am of the assumption that the trust

⁵⁶³ Van Iersel, B. M. F., 1998, p. 251.

⁵⁶⁴ Theissen, G., 1991, p. 80.

⁵⁶⁵ Taylor, V., 1963, p. 55, n. 2. This is a description by J. A. Findlay in his book: *Jesus as the saw Him*, p. 107.

⁵⁶⁶ Gundry, R. H., 1993, p. 375.

this woman had in Jesus is an expression of faith. Mark also must have seen her reaction as an expression of faith, as he records in his characterisation of Bartimaeus in 10:52. When the woman hears about Jesus, she comes and falls at his feet, begging Jesus to heal her daughter (7:25). She trusts that the Markan Jesus will heal her demon-possessed daughter. This signifies the faith that the woman has in Jesus. Her faith is fully disclosed in her dialogue with Jesus and by addressing Jesus as 'Lord' (7:28). As she acknowledges the mission of Jesus to the Jews, she also hopes for Gentiles. Her words are an indication of her faith that the power of God is at work in the Markan Jesus. Hence, this healing is linked with the same kind of faith-response that characterises the other miracles (2:5; 5:34; 9:24; 10:52). Pesch is right to say that, when the woman calls Jesus Lord, she shows faith, since calling Jesus as Lord is also understood as a Christological confession of faith in a Pauline sense (cf. Rom 10:9).⁵⁶⁷ This is confirmed by Jesus' answer in 7:29 where he acknowledges her trust in him and gives her what she has hoped for, that is, the demon has left her daughter. It was through her persistence that the revelation of her conviction that salvation is obtained from Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

It is also possible to understand the effect of the woman's work upon the Markan Jesus as one of mentoring, preparing him for the increase in confrontation he will face in his march on Jerusalem.⁵⁶⁸ According to Ringe, 'Jesus himself must learn about being that sort of Christ (one who offends the privileged while occasioning joy for the poor) from one of the poorest of the poor and most despised of the outcast, a Gentile woman on her own before God and humankind.'⁵⁶⁹ Similarly, Kinukawa also characterises that 'she frees Jesus to be fully himself, hence she has set the stage for him to act out his mission.'⁵⁷⁰ His encounter with her confronts him with the very form of the word he must henceforth bear and become. The woman's gifts and her ministry become the vehicle of the Gospel to Jesus and to us all. Salvation is, in part, a liberation of oppressed voices, a freeing of subjects to speak their own creative words of faith. But if the same Christological discourse is used to shut down 'other speech', to close off the dialogue and creativity, it is functioning 'non-salvifically' or even 'demonically'⁵⁷¹. Brock also comments that this encounter emerges as a power of relationship, which is operating through mutual vulnerability and interdependence.⁵⁷² Hence,

⁵⁶⁷ Pesch, R. *Das Markusevangelium*, 2 vols. HTKNT 2, Freiburg: Herder, 1976, p. 389.

⁵⁶⁸ Ringe, S. H., *A Feminist Gentile Woman's Story in Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (edited by Letty Russell), Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985, pp. 65-72.

⁵⁶⁹ Ringe, S., 1985, p. 72.

⁵⁷⁰ Kinukawa, H., 1994, p. 60.

⁵⁷¹ Perkinson, J. P., 1996, p. 80.

⁵⁷² Brock, R. N. *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*, New York: Crossroad Press, 1988, p. 52.

the Syro-phoenician woman becomes the place from which the word of power issues. She briefly occupies the space of Christ in her dialogue with the Markan Jesus, speaking briefly ‘in his place – without entirely giving up her own.’⁵⁷³ The woman speaks for Christ that is also to say Christ speaks through and for her. She is made to carry out his agenda, enrich his presentation, and submerge her difference in his sameness.

When the woman accepts the metaphor of children and dogs in 7:28, she acknowledges the special role of Israel as the bearer of God’s promises. But she also believes that Gentiles are also heirs in the Kingdom of God, hence, she persistently asks the Markan Jesus to show favour to her daughter. Similarly, Luke’s idealised report on the Council in Jerusalem in Acts 15 confirms the weight of conflict between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, that is, between ‘the children and dogs’. The teaching given by Paul in his message about justification by faith was itself an answer. He acknowledged the special role of Israel as the bearer of God’s promises, when he says ‘the Gospel is the power of salvation for everyone who has faith, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile’ (Rom 1:16; 9:4). According to Paul, the relationship to God is based on faith. Thus the believers are Abraham’s sons, the true people of God and heirs of God’s promises even being uncircumcised (Gal 3:6-4:7; Rom. 4). Since in Mark 12:35-37, Jesus as Lord is declared to be more than David’s Son, in our passage, the Syro-phoenician woman also addresses him in the same way. She had yielded to the claim that the Markan Jesus was indeed the Lord in whom the God of Israel was at work. This, according to Roloff and Nineham, was her great faith.⁵⁷⁴

Mark had to reproduce the woman’s request in 7:26 in a shortened and indirect way in order that her confession of Jesus as Lord may be followed by a positive answer. The verbs describing the woman’s action (heard, came and fell, 7:25) and the calling of Jesus ‘Lord’ underscore our interpretation, since they are expressions belonging to the language of Christian liturgy (cf. Rom 10:14; Phil 2:10-11). Although Mark’s concept of faith is certainly not identical with Paul, there are some analogies.⁵⁷⁵ In his version of our story, Mark understands faith as confession, though he does not use the expressions ‘πίστις or πιστεύειν’ as he does in 2:5; 5:34; 9:24; 10:52. When Luther uses this passage in his Lenten Sermons, he

⁵⁷³ Perkinson, J. P., 1996, 81.

⁵⁷⁴ Roloff, J., 1993, p. 166 and Nineham, D.E., 1962, p. 199.

⁵⁷⁵ Lang, F. “Sola gratia in Markusevangelium,” in *Rechtfertigung* by F. S. E. Kasemann, Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck/ Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976, pp. 322-37.

discusses and explains the secret dimension of God who does not exhaust himself in revelation. Thus, Luther may be on the right exegetical track to exhort Christians to persist in trusting God even when he seems to turn his back on them; they must learn to see the ‘yes’ hidden in his ‘no’ (WA 17/2.200-4). The woman’s acceptance of compassion, the clever reply, and the profound respect for Jesus in her address show that her confidence for Jesus in his power and goodwill has not been shaken.⁵⁷⁶ Indeed, our passage shows how the Syrophenician woman accomplishes her plea and enters into the Markan Jesus’ metaphor and cleverly shifts it to her own advantage.⁵⁷⁷ As Swete⁵⁷⁸ notes, this reversal gives an added meaning to the introductory formula (ἀπεκρίθη καὶ λέγει, 7:28). He says, ‘Her saying was in the strictest sense an answer: she laid hold of Christ’s word and based her plea upon it.’ Thus, the woman’s clever response changes the dog of the Markan Jesus’ metaphor, which is presumably a street dog that lives outside the house, into a domestic dog that lives inside the house. Therefore, the dog though admittedly in an inferior position to that of the children, is still part of the ‘household of faith’ (cf. Gal 6:10).⁵⁷⁹ As Euthymius paraphrases her response: ‘Since then I am a dog, I am not a stranger.’⁵⁸⁰

Marcus points out another remarkable dimension to the woman’s clever response though may not be accessible to her character in the story but would be important to the Markan readers. He says, referring to the leftovers eaten by dogs, the woman’s response recalls the feeding of five thousand of Jesus’ fellow Jews, of which twelve baskets full of bread were collected (6:43).⁵⁸¹ In this sense, we could interpret that the woman understood that the Jewish children have already been fed by Jesus, and there was plenty of food left over for Gentile dogs, they, too, would presently be fed by Jesus (8:1-9).⁵⁸² The Markan Jesus was really delighted with the irresistible confidence in the way she interpreted his statement. She thereby, placed herself unconditionally under Jesus Lordship and received his acknowledgement and promise. Likewise, the positive theological function of this pericope is to test (δοκιμαζεν) the spirits, whether they confess Jesus Christ who came in flesh (cf. 1 Jn 4:1-3; 2 Jn. 7). In other words, the present manifestations of faith must not disagree with the attitudes of the earthly Jesus.

⁵⁷⁶ Lane, W. *The Gospel According to Mark: The New London Commentary on the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974, p. 263.

⁵⁷⁷ Pokorny, P., 1985, p. 328.

⁵⁷⁸ Swete, H. B., *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, London and New York: Macmillan, 1898, p. 149.

⁵⁷⁹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 470.

⁵⁸⁰ Swete, H. B., 1898, p. 149.

⁵⁸¹ Marcus, J., 1999, p. 470.

⁵⁸² Pokorny, P., 1985, p. 334.

According to Kasemann, the earthly Jesus protects us from pious manipulation of the risen Christ of the Christian proclamation.⁵⁸³

The woman's witty words in our passage (7:28) may have had a certain apologetic value for Gentile Christianity as a defence of the "Jewishness" of the Markan Jesus, for here a Gentile acknowledges the distinction between Jew and Gentile and yet expresses dependence on Jesus who speaks out of Israel.⁵⁸⁴ Interestingly, in the Old Testament and later Judaism, as in this text, bright women occasionally overcome male figures in argument by sheer force of cleverness. For instance, the wise woman of Tekoa argues with King David, which enables the King to change his mind about banishing Absalom (2 Sam 14:4-33). Similarly,

Hauptman⁵⁸⁵ describes rabbinic passages in which women defeat male figures in arguments. It is also not strange in the Synoptic tradition for Jesus to change the motif of his programme after human intervention (Mk 1:35-45, cf. Lk 4:42-43; 24:28-29). For understanding our pericope, this is the most important spiritual tradition. It is a phenomenon typical for both the Hebrew and Christian experience, a symptom of an encounter with the Living God who communicates with human beings as a person. As in Genesis 18:20, the woman's rejoinder in Mark 7:28 answers God's declaration of his general intention transcending the fate of an individual. Hence, although she obeyed his particular intention, she surprisingly approved the Markan Jesus' general intention and entered the metaphor by accepting the role of a dog.

⁵⁸³ Kasemann, E. "Sackgassen im Streit um den historischen Jesus," in *Exegetische versuche und Besinnungen* 1, 2nd edition, Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965, pp. 31-68, esp. p. 67. According to G. Ebeling, the earthly Jesus is the hermeneutical key of Christology, in *Theologie und Verkündigung*, HUTH 1, Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1962, p. 52.

⁵⁸⁴ Anderson, H., 1976, p. 191.

⁵⁸⁵ Hauptman, J., "Images of Women in the Talmud," in *Religion and Sexism*, edited by R.E. Ruether, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974, pp. 184-212. Here Hauptman cites from "Erub, 53b where the girl makes a statement, the rabbi responds and then again comes a clever and conclusive retort by the girl. Indeed, this is particularly close to our pericope (7:28) in its general pattern.

5.6. Echoes of Eucharistic imagery

There is also another dimension to the Syrophoenician woman's dialogue with the Markan Jesus in relation to the healing of her daughter. There is a eucharistic imagery echoed in the woman's daughter who is exorcised by Jesus. The Markan Jesus is not physically present to the child, but the healing occurs through mediation of language. Hence, there is also intimacy in this relationship, though it is the intimacy of two people alone together, that is, the Markan Jesus and her daughter. Similarly, in the Lord's Supper, Jesus is not physically present to us, but figuratively and mystically his body is broken for us. Thus there is intimate relationship between the partakers and Jesus himself.

The other dimension to the woman's response that may not be accessible to her, but would be profoundly appreciated by the Markan audience is the reference to the leftovers in the feeding of five thousand Jews (6:35-43). The connotation linking the placement of the story between the two feeding stories (6:35-41 & 8:1-10), and the interchange between Jesus and this woman reflects the imagery of nourishment. Indeed, the response of the woman recalls the account of the Markan Jesus' feeding of his fellow Jews, where twelve baskets full of bread were collected (6:43). In view of this, the Jewish children, then, are already fed by the Markan Jesus, and there is plenty of food left over for the Gentile 'dogs.'⁵⁸⁶ The Gentiles will be fed too by the Markan Jesus (8:1-9). The bread that is literally given to both Jews and Gentiles in the loaves miraculously multiplied will be figuratively given in the body that will be broken (14:22-25). That is why the woman capitalises on the earlier appreciation shown by Jesus of the need of the children to be fed first. She implicitly contrasts it with the 'factual devaluation of the need of her own child.'⁵⁸⁷ The woman recognised that the Markan Jesus as the giver of bread is more than she expected. She got an insight into his strategy and tried to reconcile her daughter's need with his comprehensive mission. This is what Abraham did when trying to save Lot (Gen 18:16-33). The woman insisted on the metaphor of household with all its consequences including the dogs that survive in a community with humans. True, the dogs as carnivores were not able to survive by eating only bread, but such inconsistency only confirms that the bread has a metaphorical meaning, that is, in the house of the Lord the feeding of the children means also life for dogs.⁵⁸⁸ Hence, the Markan Jesus marvels at her faith (7:29; cf. Matt 15:28) not as one who has simply tested her faith and approved it, but as

⁵⁸⁶ Pokorny, P., 1985, p. 334.

⁵⁸⁷ Theissen, G., 1991, p. 80.

⁵⁸⁸ Feldmeier, R., 1994, p. 223.

one who is himself inspired by her faith.⁵⁸⁹ As result of this activity, Jesus changes his mind and becomes the helper and healer to the Gentiles.

The motif of surviving by eating the remnants is firmly rooted in Hebrew tradition. According to Judges 1:7, the defeated Kings survived by picking scraps under the table of the Canaanite King Adoni-bezek. Similarly, the Rich Man from Luke, who did not allow Lazarus to eat what fell from his table (16:21), in fact acted against the Law since it was the duty to let the poor and non-Jewish alien to take the remnants (Lev 19:9-10; Deut 24:19; cf. Ruth 2). In his concluding saying, the Markan Jesus accepts the woman's interpretation of his general strategy. In Matthew, Jesus has indirectly stressed the value of her attitude by comparing the failure of Galilean cities with the implicit faith of her fellow country-men (Mat 11:21).

In John 6, we find a developed metaphor of Jesus as the bread of eternal life, but the same metaphor is present already in Mark 8:14-21. Where we read about disciples who forgot to bring any bread, but they still had one loaf with them in the boat (8:14). Since the Markan Jesus warns them in 8:15 against the yeast (bread) of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod, and reminds them of the feedings of the crowd, it is clear that the one bread is Jesus as

Saviour.⁵⁹⁰ Thus, with this observation we have established a link to the subsequent part of the Gospel (8:1-9) and we can see how the pericope is interwoven with the context. The Markan readers (hearers) must have realised that the verb 'feed' (χορτασθήναι, 7:27) occurs also in the stories about miraculous feeding of the crowd (6:42; 8:4,8).⁵⁹¹ Again the phrase 'take bread' (λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον, 7:27) is a key phrase in the Institution of the Lord's Supper in Mark 14:22-25. And when we read the pericope with these connotations in mind, it is obvious that the problem which was dealt into frame of his book on Jesus, is the same as the problem of table-fellowship. This is more accurately the inter-communion of the circumcised and uncircumcised Christians, which was topical in the time of the Apostle Paul. According to

⁵⁸⁹ Wendel, M. E. *A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey: Perspective on Feminist Theology*, New York: Crossroads, 1986, p. 122.

⁵⁹⁰ Manek, J. "Mark VIII: 14-21," in *NT 7*, 1964, pp. 10-14; Betz, O. "Jesus and the Temple Scroll," in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, pp. 75-103, esp. p. 77. This is also the correct thesis of J. B. Gibson, "The Rebuke of the Disciples in Mark 8:14-21," in *JSNT* 27, 1986, pp. 31-47.

⁵⁹¹ Cf. Focant, C. "La fonction narrative des doublets dans la section des pains Mc 6:6b-8:26," in *The Four Gospels*, FSF. Neirynek, Leuven: University/Peeters, 1992, pp. 1039-62, esp. 1053.

Galatians 2:11-14, Peter yielded to the pressure of James a representative of the circumcised party, and refused to eat (which is similar to celebrate the Eucharist) at one table with uncircumcised Christians.

The most fascinating feature is the way that Mark dealt with the problem of inter-communion in our pericope in its literary structure as well as in its theological intention. He expressed the Pauline role of faith above all through the dramatic structure of his narrative. Undoubtedly, the leftovers after the communion meal (6:30-44) means that there are enough portions (κράσματα δώδεκα, 6:43) for those who were not present there, since twelve is a number of fullness. The Syrophenician woman asking for the remnants (crumbs) from the children's table according to Mark probably asks for this fullness of leftovers from the miraculous feeding. Although, the woman speaks about crumbs (ψιγίων, 7:28) whereas the leftovers after the miraculous feeding are called portions (κράσματα, 6:43), such a difference in terminology, as Pokorny notes, is almost necessary for the metaphorical character of both text units.⁵⁹² What is decisive is the analogy of the motifs of feeding of a special group plus the leftovers which are good enough as full-value nutrition for others, who did not belong to the original table-fellowship. Hence, the readers of Mark can recognise the logic of the woman's reaction since she does know about the fullness of portions which were left. Admittedly, in the Markan narrative, the Syrophenician woman is the first non-Jew to ask for the fullness of these leftovers.

The aloofness and disinterest towards Gentiles that this woman experienced brought compassion and active concern, as evidenced in the feeding stories mentioned above. In her rejoinder, she confessed the Markan Jesus as Lord, thus acknowledging his grace and putting her problem into the frame of his comprehensive strategy. The Markan Jesus now feels and expresses words of compassion for the multitudes of Gentiles, whereas to the woman, at first he did not answer a word. Her story, therefore, may be considered as a link between the first feeding of the Jews (6:30-44) and the second feeding of Gentiles (8:1-9). This, according to Mark, is obviously a common meal of Jews and Pagans from Decapolis (7:31) and from a great distance (μακρόθεν, 8:3) representing the Christian Eucharist (8:6) in a Hellenistic

⁵⁹² Pokorny, P., 1985, p. 334.

setting.⁵⁹³ On the surface of the story the healing of the little daughter may appear as a relapse from the level of feeding and giving life to many, back to the individual healing. Thus, in our pericope, we have seen a direct link between the text and the social dimension of sacramental table-fellowship of the early Church as an alternative space for life.

In the Matthean parallel, his disciples wanted Jesus to send the woman away (15:23), but the Markan Jesus does not want to send the crowd away hungry (8:1-9). As he initially denied bread to the dogs (7:27), here he feeds the four thousand Gentiles with bread and fish. As he intended that only the children should be satisfied, here the multitudes of Gentiles are satisfied at the miraculous feeding. Whereas there would not be bread for the children if it were thrown to the dogs, the Markan Jesus multiplies it, hence there is now so much that seven baskets full of leftovers remain after the feeding. This story in relation to the two feeding stories testifies to 'Jesus' body which is broken for us all, for the remission of our sins' (14:22-24; cf. 1 Cor 11:23-26).

The Markan Jesus is none other than the Messiah and Son of Man, the Lord and Son of God, whose presence is mystically apprehended at the Church's Sacramental meals of fellowship. He is the one who imparts the Eucharistic bread for the nourishment of the souls of those incorporated into the New Israel according to the Spirit. He is therefore the bread of life (cf. Jn 6:22) that comes down from heaven and the one true loaf that is with the disciples in the boat (6:32). All this has an important bearing on the conversation with the disciples in Mark 7:27. In this case, Mark is thinking in terms of the saving power of the Sacramental bread, the grace appropriated by believers at the Church's Eucharistic celebrations. Undoubtedly, the capacity of such bread to satisfy the needs of the world knows no intrinsic limitation. There is always superabundant supply for both Jews and Gentiles. That is why the woman insisted that the crumbs that fall from the children's table are sufficient to provide the dogs with a meal. In this sense, then, the twelve and seven baskets full of fragments gathered after the two miraculous feedings would be preserved for the benefit of Gentiles.

Although in Mark 8:14, Jesus is actually identified with the bread, whereas in 7:27 he is represented as dispensing the bread to the children, such a shift of stand-point, according to

⁵⁹³ Hofrichter, P. "Von der zweifachen Aussendung des Lukas," in J. Hainz, (ed.), *Theologie im Werden*, Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1993, pp. 143-55, esp. pp. 145-48.

Meyer, is not a surprise.⁵⁹⁴ He says this is so since the same kind of ambivalence is present in the earliest available literary sources concerning the Eucharist, and it may well exist in the common cultic tradition lying behind Mk 14:22-25 and 1 Cor 11:23-26. Both the Pauline and the Markan reports imply that the Eucharist was fundamentally a religious meal of communion. Hence, the members of the holy fellowship were all one body as they partook of one loaf (cf. 1 Cor 10:15). Thus the Messiah assumed a dual role of presiding over the Eucharistic rite and also he is one with sacred bread consumed by the Christian Communicants.⁵⁹⁵ As the Messiah's bodily presence had been the rallying point of the disciples prior to the crucifixion, so in the interim period between the post-resurrection and the parousia in glory, the bread of the holy table is the centre and focus of Christian fellowship. Hence the parallelism between the unifying function of the corporeal existence of Jesus during his earthly life and the unifying function performed by the Eucharistic bread through which the oneness of believers is realised. As the bread is broken and given to communities, so the Lord surrendered his physical life in the fulfilment of his redemptive mission in the world.⁵⁹⁶ Hence, this is the act of the Messiah's giving the bread and giving himself sacrificially for the salvation of humanity. That is why the interest in the Lord's astonishing authority (1:22,27) is awakened over a wide area. The Markan Jesus recognises the validity of such interest by visiting the districts even those in foreign countries from which the great multitudes are drawn, thus anticipating and authenticating the Church's mission to the world.

5.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, great emphasis has been placed on the mission of the Markan Jesus beyond the land of Israel. The climax of Mark's interest in Gentile mission is fully regulated in the story of the Syrophenician woman (7:24-34). Here, we are presented with what is evidently intended as a sequel to the immediately preceding section (7:1-23), where the Markan Jesus is depicted as repudiating the doctrine that outside factors can defile the essential life of a person. Hence, the new doctrine is translated into action in 7:24-30, where the Markan Jesus practices what he preaches. Therefore, the teaching enunciated in 7:1-23 is applied in 7:24-30,

⁵⁹⁴ Meyer, R. *Tradition und Neuschöpfung im antiken Judentum*, Berlin, 1965, p. 266.

⁵⁹⁵ Burkill, T. A., 1972, p. 86.

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. Mark 10:45; 14:22; 1 Cor 11:24; Gal 2:20; also G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, Leiden, 1961, p. 1.

thus the words become deeds, for the Markan Jesus actually imparts saving grace to a person who belongs to another nation. The intelligence and implicit faith of a Gentile mother who prostrates herself in Jesus' presence, succeeds in persuading Jesus to respond to her plea. The Jewish people being God's chosen, have prior claims on the saving grace of the Messiah (7:27), as evidenced from the initial answer made by the Markan Jesus that the children are the descendants and privileged members of a house, hence they come first. But this Greek woman discerns the divine status of the Markan Jesus, and in her rejoinder, she enters the world of the Markan Jesus' metaphor and speaks about people of Jesus as children (7:28). In his final statement, the Markan Jesus shares her position and speaks about the child as a daughter (7:29), and the validity of her insight receives signal vindication in the healing of her daughter there and then (7:29-30).

The woman tries to attract the attention of the key person to her child, but she is confronted with an alternative world, in which she cannot claim the privileged role of children. However, she agrees with the non-privileged position for her child and herself since she realises that they, too, can share in his ministry. Thus she asks the Lord to draw the necessary consequences. Similarly, the Markan Jesus accepts her position and through healing her daughter confirms that the child belongs to his household, where unclean spirits are powerless. The Syrophenician woman had received the unprivileged position in order that she may belong to the household of the Lord, as with the prodigal son in the Lukan parable (15:11-32). And accepting this status of unprivileged position, they both received the status of children. Hence, the old dispensation is already passing away. The good news of this story is that the dogs (Gentiles) become the children also.

The story of the Syrophenician woman who wrestles with the Markan Jesus for a blessing is remarkable in many ways. This is the only example in the Gospels of a person who wins an argument with Jesus. But more than that, it is very unusual for the Markan Jesus to be so sensitive to his fellow Jews about their privilege in the history of salvation. Similarly, it is also very unusual for the Markan Jesus to be so harsh about the position of Gentiles (dogs), whose needs come second after the Jews who are God's children and their needs come first. There is nothing of this matter elsewhere in the Gospel of Mark. Moreover, what surprises most is the attitude of the Markan Jesus who is always in conflict with the Jewish leaders as regards to his ministry and challenges their perception (cf. 2:5-8,13-17,21-22; 3:1-6; 7:1-23; 11:12-25; 12:1-9; 13:1-2; 15:11-14,38). Similarly, the Markan Jesus is so anxious and

concerned about Gentiles (7:31; 13:10; 15:39). From Mark's perspective, the future of the Christian movement lies greatly in the Gentile world. This future is foreshadowed as the Markan Jesus makes his tour of the Gentile regions (7:31-37) and feeds the four thousand people (8:1-9).

The woman as a disciple invites a bonding between her and the Gentile readers. But in our context, it is a bonding between her and the male-dominated readings. The woman shows what it means to follow Jesus. Mary Ann Beavis concludes that she 'provides model of faith for both missionaries and their audiences, both Christians and non-Christians.'⁵⁹⁷ Her faith is called great, when disciples in the Gospel have little faith (cf. Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). The woman's response contrasts also to the disciples' exclusivist and nationalist view of Messiahship portrayed in 8:27-10:52. The woman says to all women and the oppressed that like her they can eat the bread of Jesus and by their eating they protect Jesus' Messiahship against exclusivist views. The woman, as a disciple of Jesus, teaches that followers of Jesus are to serve. They are not taught to manipulate power for their own benefit or profit. Again her witty response encourages other women today to learn from her to encounter male-dominated churches with courage, love and mercy. As she challenged Jesus to change his mind and indeed Jesus managed to change and offered her request, they too, can stand up and voice their concern in this male-dominated church and society.

From the last three chapters, I have been looking at two marginalised women who sought an assistance from the Markan Jesus. The hemorrhaging woman is marginalised as far as purity regulations are concerned (cf. Lev. 15:19-20). Similarly, the Syrophenician woman is also marginalised by her nationality and status. Despite their marginalisations they portray remarkable relationship between them and the Markan Jesus, whereby their plights are considered. These women have also portrayed faith and boldness in their encounter with the Markan Jesus. I have looked at these texts by reading liberatively, critically and contextually. These texts have shown me that the Markan Jesus cares for those who are oppressed, marginalised, and subordinated in one way or another. As the Markan Jesus crosses internal and external boundaries, he breaks the divisions or barriers and allows women to be welcomed in God's new covenant group. Hence, he propagates and plants an inclusive mission. In his reform programme, he urges his people to love their enemies, to pay more

⁵⁹⁷ Beavis, M.A. "Women as Models of Faith in the Gospel of Mark", in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 18:3-9, 1988, p. 8.

attention and forgiveness and care than defending barriers between themselves. In this sense, the Markan Jesus was and is significant for women, as Fiorenza claims, ‘because he was the leader of a religious renewal movement in Judaism that advocated a liberating inclusivity and equality for all.’⁵⁹⁸

Reading these texts critically portrays a positive role of women in the bible, as opposed to some official readings are manipulative, oppressive and one-sided. Instead, I read these texts by employing a dominance-free-discourse, whereby an attention was placed on different voices or different things told. Thus the two stories of women relate Jesus to the realities of women’s lives. Therefore, these texts enable theology from below (official discourse). The theology of liberation for women emerges both from their personal experiences of the divine revelation and the biblical witness. Thus, the Markan Jesus who is recognised as both divine and human is, as Grant reiterates, ‘the divine co-sufferer, who empowers them in situations of oppression’.⁵⁹⁹

Having studied the historical critical work in the last three chapters, I will now proceed to the practicality of this reading with the ordinary readers. The next two chapters will look at the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) process and the responses of ordinary readers to the questionnaire. I want to allow the ordinary readers to explore the liberating potential of the texts I have chosen for women and the oppressed. Moreover, I want to empower and encourage women in their endeavours for justice and peace in the church and society. This is the subject of our next chapter.

⁵⁹⁸ Fiorenza, E.S., 1983, p. 65.

⁵⁹⁹ Grant, J.W. *Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989, p. 212.

Chapter 6

Towards recovering and regaining women's identity and worthiness: The use of Contextual Bible Study (CBS) Process

6.1. Introduction

I have discussed thoroughly in chapter two the impact of Christianity as one of the great themes in the modern history of Malawi. The formidable work of the missionaries, as McCracken asserts, was their involvement in encouraging the development of 'the cultural and political independence of the area.'⁶⁰⁰ The bible brought by missionaries to Africa is and has been one of the basic sources for Malawians and indeed our theology. However, I have gone further to say that in the last 125 years since the inception of Christianity in Malawi, women have been oppressed and marginalised in a number of ways. Patriarchy has constructed women in such a way as to influence the image of their place and role in Church and society.⁶⁰¹ Men have dominated in most of the decision-making bodies and church administration; hence women have been pushed to the periphery of meaningful participation and the discipleship of equality.

The aim of Dr Laws in establishing the mission of Livingstonia, according to W.P. Livingstone, was 'to train up in central Africa a bible-reading and a bible-loving people, intelligent and sensible in their outlook, and skilled with their hands.'⁶⁰² Dr Laws and his colleagues did their mission part and when they left Malawi, they had left the mission fully under the natives. However, the identity and dignity of women in the church and society has not been fully realised. It is for this reason that I intend to use the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) as a resource in reclaiming and regaining the identity and worthiness of women in church and society, now that both the missionaries and natives have lost what David Tracy calls, 'our biblical interpretative innocence.'⁶⁰³ As David Tracy appropriately states, 'there is no innocent interpretation, no innocent interpreter, no innocent text.'⁶⁰⁴ Contextual bible study, as Gerald West observes, 'embraces and advocates context, and is committed to the

⁶⁰⁰ Mc Cracken, J., 1972, p. 206.

⁶⁰¹ Phiri, I.A., 1997, p. 12.

⁶⁰² Livingstone, W.P., 1967, p.207.

⁶⁰³ Tracy, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987, p. 79.

⁶⁰⁴ Tracy, D., 1987, p. 79.

real concern of the oppressed.’⁶⁰⁵ The real concern in this study is the exploitation and oppression of women that calls me to become so committed to the context and identity of women who are indeed oppressed and marginalised in church and society. As Elisabeth Fiorenza reiterates, ‘intellectual neutrality is not possible in a historical world of exploitation and oppression’, therefore, biblical scholars and theologians are called to an intellectual change that will see them committed to the context of the poor and marginalised.⁶⁰⁶ Similarly, in this study, I want to raise awareness of how the bible has been misused. Therefore, I want to encourage a liberative mode of reading the bible, which is one way of recovering the bible. In carrying out this research, it was hoped that new insights into how ordinary people approach the interests in the bible would be realised. Such insights including mine as a trained reader would address the concerns of ordinary users and therefore be relevant to the situation of women and the oppressed. Moreover this would serve to bridge the gap between the trained reader and the ordinary readings of the bible.

The inspiration of doing the contextual bible study comes through the initiative of the work of Gerald West of the Institute for the study of the Bible in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, particularly their reading of scripture with township groups during the apartheid era. I shall review the CBS hermeneutical approach discussed by West⁶⁰⁷ later in this chapter. Furthermore, the impetus for CBS initiative came from my Supervisor, Professor John Riches, of New Testament at Glasgow University, who is also an ordained priest in the Scottish Episcopal Church (Anglican). Professor Riches established the CBS group involving a few of his students and other clergy and the religious groups from around Glasgow. Since I happened to be one amongst his few students to get involved in CBS, I therefore saw the need to carry out this work among fellow Malawians in the north, as part of my research. As scholars have showed me what the bible is and its immense impact upon the life of every individual, I have come to believe that it is a decisive book that helps us to find a way in a religious pilgrimage. As we move ahead in the twenty-first century, looking at our own world and beyond, we need to share the insights and achievements, art and culture, as we face the immense disasters. In

⁶⁰⁵ West, G.O. “Contextual Bible Study in South Africa: A Resource for Reclaiming and Regaining Land, Dignity and Identity”, in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, edited by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, Leiden: Brill, 2000, p. 595.

⁶⁰⁶ Fiorenza, E.S., 1993, p. xxi

⁶⁰⁷ The background to CBS Hermeneutical reading can be found in Gerald West’s books: *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of reading the Bible in the South African Context*, 1991, and *Contextual Bible Studies*, Cluster Publications, 1993. We also find similar analysis in Philpott’s book entitled, *Jesus is Tricky and God is Undemocratic: The Kingdom of God in Amowoti*, Pietermaritz: Cluster, 1993.

this religious pilgrimage, despite the immense disasters, we have to go on to discover in the hard way that there are stages in reading and understanding of the bible and there are no short cuts. We must not try to force meaning on the bible. As David Jenkins observes, ‘we ought to have understood that the bible has no use so long as it is just treated as The Holy Book. We have to go beyond that and teach people to concentrate on it, not listen to it as if it was a ‘holy book, but just listen to it.’⁶⁰⁸ In this statement, Jenkins reiterates that the bible must speak to peoples’ conscience, for it has the authority for men and women today which becomes clear and unmistakable to them. Therefore, listening to the bible more consciously means being made more aware, more sensitive to the whole range of human experience, and thus being more aware of what ‘being open to the presence of God’ means.

However, given the fact that the history of the bible and its interpretation has been a history where women have been silenced, I am impelled to go back to the bible and read these texts, as West asserts, ‘from the perspective of the questions, needs, and interests of women.’⁶⁰⁹ We need to reclaim and regain the worthiness and identity of women from the history of the bible and its interpretation that has been a history of silenced women. West rightly points out, ‘women of the bible have been silenced and women who have interpreted the bible have been silenced.’⁶¹⁰ Thus, this history of the bible and its translations ‘has not only been a history of the silencing women, but also a history of women who refuse to be silenced.’⁶¹¹ Whatever mode of reading they use, the starting point of feminist readers is one of ‘hermeneutics of suspicion.’⁶¹² By hermeneutics of suspicion, readers should be aware of patriarchy and androcentrism in reading the bible. They should recognise that patriarchy and androcentrism were stable features of ancient biblical societies for a considerable period before the bible was produced. Hence, in reading any biblical text, feminists have posed critical questions to the bible about its explicit and implicit patriarchal and androcentric perspectives.⁶¹³

⁶⁰⁸ Jenkins, D., 1986, p. 188.

⁶⁰⁹ West, G.O., 1993, p. 52.

⁶¹⁰ West, G.O., 1993, p. 52.

⁶¹¹ West, G.O., 1993, p. 52.

⁶¹² As for the “Authority of Scriptures,” “Reading the Bible from the perspective of Women,” and “Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” these subjects have been widely discussed by the following feminist scholars: Stanton, E.C. *The Woman’s Bible*, Seattle: Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion, 1974; Fiorenza, E.S., 1983; Fiorenza, E.S., 1984; Ruether, R. R. *Sexism and God Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology*, Boston: Beacon; London: SCM Press, 1983; Tribble, P. *God and Rhetoric*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978; Tribble, P. *Texts of Terror*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984; Tribble, P. “Biblical Theology as Women’s Work,” in *Religion in Life*, vol. xlv, no. 1, 1975, Russell, L.M. “Authority and the Challenge of Feminist Interpretation,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, edited by Letty M. Russell, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985 and Solle, D. *Thinking about God: An Introduction to Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1990.

⁶¹³ West, G.O., 1993, p. 52.

The report of the CBS process that will come later in this chapter reflects the aspects of the biblical interpretations of the texts by the ordinary readers that was carried out from July to September, 2001. But, before I discuss the readings of ordinary readers, let me analyse two biblical readings of African women's scholars. All of them read the Matthean story (15:21-28) but from different perspectives. These African women theologians are also concerned with a missing feature of women in the hermeneutical practices. The silence about the concerns, questions and marginalisation of women has enabled them to engage in reconstructing the texts about women to generate meanings that they believe would give fresh insight about the development of feminist hermeneutical practice in Africa concerning women's issues. Their readings are informed by the experiences, concerns, questions and problems that confront African women in their contexts. Their readings are a response to the oppression through both traditional beliefs and practices in the church and society, and the suffering that women undergo in African cultural contexts that are plagued with influx of refugees, ethnic lashes, political instability and harsh economic enterprise. Hence, their readings are an attempt to raise awareness about the position of the Gospel as opposed to the cultural position: by contrasting the violence against women by the cultural position and the liberation that women could derive from the Gospel position. More importantly, they share a common class with their ordinary readers, that is, the oppressed and poor who are dominated by patriarchal modes of reading, and thus are searching for liberative readings that are subversive to patriarchal domination and power dynamics.

6.2. African women's reading of biblical texts

African women interpret biblical texts basing from their experiences, concerns, questions and problems that they confront in their contexts. In this study I want to look at two readings brought by two African women theologians, Musimbi Kanyoro and Musa Dube. I will start by looking at Kanyoro's reading from her article which deals with the following topics: the context of the reader; the socio-cultural context of the text; and dialogue between Jesus and the Canaanite woman. Kanyoro sees the basis of the Matthean story (15:21-28) as the alleviation of 'human misery; misery of the ones close to us and the misery of others not close to us at all.'⁶¹⁴ Her aim in her article is to contrast the situation of the persistent cry of a single mother (pastor) for justice which, as she says, 'stifled in layers of rules and beliefs'⁶¹⁵, that ended in her death, to that of the persistent cry of the Canaanite woman mentioned in

⁶¹⁴ Kanyoro, M., 1996, p. 56.

⁶¹⁵ Kanyoro, M., 1996, p. 52.

Matthew 15:21-28. In Matthew 15: 22, a Canaanite woman cries to Jesus for a help to her tormenting daughter. However, Jesus ultimately hears the cry of this woman and ends up healing or life-saving her daughter (15:28). Kanyoro locates parallel characters from the Old Testament that are comparable with the Canaanite woman. She begins by citing Gail O'Day's comment.⁶¹⁶ O'Day says, 'the Canaanite woman stands fully in the tradition of Abraham and Moses who were not afraid to bargain with God (Gen. 18:22-23); Numb. 11:11-15). She is profoundly linked with all the broken and needy petitioners who sang Israel's songs of lament, with all those who cling to faithfulness to the promise. She is not a Jew – nevertheless fully Jewish.'⁶¹⁷ Similarly, Kanyoro picks up the issues of discrimination and oppression of women by contemporary socio-economic, political and ecclesiastical structures in her biblical reflection on this text. In her reading, she says, this passage is about shaming our communities and churches into caring for 'single parents ... and battered women in our communities.'⁶¹⁸ Furthermore, She says, like the example shown by Jesus in this story, we could also be persuaded to deny gender and cultural biases and to shame our churches into striving for promotion of justice and peace in our societies for all people. This could be achieved by changing structures in the church and in the world.⁶¹⁹

Finally, Kanyoro looks at the attitudes of disciples who urged Jesus to send the woman away (15: 23), which she says is similar to the people in her context who could not offer an assistance to the cry of a single mother (Pastor) for justice. Again she contrasts the attitude of Jesus (15: 24) to that of the people in her context who were unable to assist the battered and divorced woman in her context. She says Jesus showed solidarity in action by his response to the cry of the Canaanite woman's agony. This solidarity, as she describes it, is 'standing with someone at the time of their greatest need, not when they are dead.'⁶²⁰ The message which she communicates to us, is that Jesus ended up by relieving the misery of the woman and her daughter through healing her daughter. But the woman pastor in her context was unable to get any assistance from her church and community in her misery which may have contributed to her death.

⁶¹⁶ O'Day, G. "Surprised by Faith: Jesus and the Canaanite woman, Listening", in *Journal of Religion and Culture* 24, 1989, p. 42.

⁶¹⁷ O'Day, G., 1989, p. 299.

⁶¹⁸ Kanyore, M., 1996, p. 62.

⁶¹⁹ Kanyoro, M., 1996, p. 62.

⁶²⁰ Kanyoro, M., 1996, p. 63.

As regards the reflection of the text, Kanyoro picks up issues of discrimination and oppression of women by the contemporary socio-economic, political and church structures. In her reading, she says that the passage brings shame to the churches and communities in the way they care for single parents and battered women in our communities.⁶²¹ She, therefore, urges us to emulate the example of Jesus in this story to deny gender and cultural biases and to bring shame to our churches and communities into striving for promotion of justice in our societies for all people through change of structures in the church and globally.⁶²²

Another African woman theologian, Musa Dube⁶²³ reads the same story as a revelation of God's willingness to vindicate the oppressed. Dube conducted bible study with women of African Instituted Churches (AICs) in her home country, Botswana. In her article, she writes about four readings, namely: within the framework of Semoya (Spirit); from the wisdom of a creative integration of different religious traditions; in accordance with the feminist model of liberation, and one seeing healing as a political struggle. She begins by saying that Africans were presented with a gospel alien to their context, thinking, and needs, by the western, missionary-founded churches.⁶²⁴ This was so because missionary presentation of the gospel was intolerant of African religious worldviews and cultures as a whole. As J.B. Ngubane points out, colonial preachers 'appeared determined to instil in their converts these western values and a distaste especially for traditional religious values and culture, which were considered inferior and primitive. African converts were expected to adopt a new identity based on the western-Christian order.'⁶²⁵ This alienation underestimated the important issues and meaningful forms of discourse for articulating life such as song, dance, drama and rituals. Furthermore, Ngubane reiterates that 'Africans as a whole were not convinced about the inferiority of their religious and cultural values.'⁶²⁶ Their continued appreciation of African religious worldviews in the face of structured detraction was an act of political resistance against cultural imperialism.

⁶²¹ Kanyoro, M. 1996, p. 62.

⁶²² Kanyoro, M., 1996, p. 62.

⁶²³ Dube, M. W. "Readings of Semoya: Batswana Women's Interpretations of Matthew 15:21-28", in *Reading African Overtures, Semeia 73*, 1996, pp. 111-127

⁶²⁴ Dube, M.W., 1996, p. 111.

⁶²⁵ Ngubane, J.B. "Theological Roots of the AICs and Their Challenge to Black Theology", pp. 71-100. In *The Unquestionable Right To Be Free: Black Theology from South Africa*, edited by Itumeleng Mosala and Buti Tlhagale, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990, p. 75.

⁶²⁶ Ngubane, J.B., 1990, p. 75.

She notes that women claim to read the text and their context from the perspective of Semoya (of the Spirit). The Moya (Spirit) chooses and empowers women and men to be prophets, faith-healers, Church founders, and leaders in the service of life. Moya as God's agent of empowerment and communication with the people justified the position of these women. Firstly, she starts by looking at the framework of Semoya which is central to AICs. She says, it is Moya that empowered women to reject the discriminative leadership of missionary-founded churches and made them to begin their own churches.⁶²⁷ Moya revealed to them from the beginning the beauty of the gospel, its justice and inclusiveness as opposed to the discriminative tendencies of the colonial church. For instance, she notes that her respondents interpreted "Israel" and "Canaan" (15: 21, 24), where Israel has become an all-inclusive category for all those who believe in God. The respondents also emphasised that Jesus came for all people, which gives evidence to their inclusive reading. As Israelites were taken from Egypt to Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, and this Canaanite woman with great faith illustrates to us what it means that their land flowed with milk and honey. Dube asserts that her readers read that the land of Canaanites was rich both materially and spiritually, and this reading subverts the post-colonial reading and invalidates their imperial strategies that employ the rhetoric of poverty and lack of religious faith among the colonised to justify dominating other nations. Therefore, a Semoya framework is a reading that confronts a story that has been used extensively to justify imperial imposition. It is a reading that articulates and affirms a liberating interdependence and healing between different races and nations.

Secondly, Dube looks at this foreign woman (a canaanite) who seeks assistance from Jesus (an Israelite) as a person who promotes cross-cultural understanding of relationship. Therefore, this reading also overthrows this imperial strategy where culture and religious integrity of people were dispossessed through promotion of Christianity as the universal religion. Thus, the reading rejects the imposition of Christianity as the one and only valid religion. The reading, therefore, freely selects from both religious cultures whatever wisdom is offered by these traditions for enhancing life and nurturing difference. According to Dube, a liberative model of reading is the one that allows an encounter and acknowledgement of the strength and weakness of different cultures and learns cross-cultures respectfully.⁶²⁸ She says, this is a reading model that is essential for the multi-cultural and multi-faith of the global village of today. Thus the Moya is the divine agent that enters and empowers women and men

⁶²⁷ Dube, M.W., 1996, p. 124.

⁶²⁸ Dube, M.W., 1996, p. 125.

and is indeed present in African religious spirituality. This creative integration offers a positive model for the multi-cultural and multi-faith global village of today. She teaches us how difference can be encountered, critiqued and nurtured.

Thirdly, she looks at the response of Jesus in assisting the woman (15:28) as a model of liberation for women and the oppressed. Hence, the reading strategy of Semoya offers a feminist model of liberation. The women of AICs insist that the written word has a tradition of wisdom, which is good for all, however, this does not limit them. They maintain that God's agency, the Spirit, is contained but not limited to the written word. The Spirit of God enables them to have deep experience of divine communication and this empowers them for human service. Thus, the women of AICs offer a feminist strategy that breaks down patriarchal and canonical constraints of biblical traditions. This gives them a chance to claim divine empowerment and leadership despite their gender. Furthermore, this feminist model of reading, as Dube claims, is 'biblically grounded, since such books as John provide for a direct dependence on the Spirit (Jn. 14:26).'⁶²⁹ This reading is also godly because the word of the Spirit guides and justifies it. Hence it empowers one with the responsibility to the restoration and enhancement of life through leadership and healing.

Fourthly, the instant healing of her daughter in 15:28 is also very important in comparison with the healing in AICs. Among the AICs, healing is an articulation of political resistance and survival.⁶³⁰ The services of healing are open to the general public, that is, members and non-members, believers and non-believers. These healing practices are not miraculous or limited to prayers and laying of hands, they involve 'drinking holy water, taking cleansing baths, offering sacrifice, using ashes, oil, candles, sea water and techniques of massage and internal cleansing.'⁶³¹ Another significant factor about their healing practices is that it embraces all aspects of one's personal life. It deals with 'unemployment, breakdown of relationships, bad harvests, lost cows, evil spirits, bodily illness, and misfortune.'⁶³² Thus the healing becomes an act of restoration and maintenance of God's creation against all human forces that restrain the accomplishment of individuals in society. This use of healing is absolute evidence for a political struggle against structural forces in life. Thus, by claiming

⁶²⁹ Dube, M.W., 1996, p. 126.

⁶³⁰ Dube, M.W., 1996, p. 126.

⁶³¹ Dube, M.W., 1996, p. 126.

⁶³² Dube, M.W., 1996, p. 126.

that God's Spirit empowers them to heal social ills, the AICs women are working hand in hand with God in his unchanging struggle against institutional oppression and marginalisation. Hence, this space of healing becomes their political speech of confronting social ills as capable beings with full control of changing their social conditions. This confrontation of social ills addresses the political struggles of Africa and offer solutions.

What we have seen in Dube's reading with the AICs women is that, neither the text nor the context alone are relevant to the academic reader who aspires to read with the oppressed. She notes that women claim to read the text and their context from the perspective of Semoya. In this sense, their readings are not "ordinary readings" since they are readings of a people who have been empowered, energised and enlightened by the Spirit (Moya). In this process of reading, as Teresia Hinga observes, 'an academic reader of the bible would have to reckon with the people's self-understanding.'⁶³³ In the perspective of the AICs women readers and context, the written "text" is considered dead unless it is empowered by the Spirit of God. It is only then that it becomes the 'life-giving and empowering Word of God.' Thus, reading with Semoya brings two levels of contact. It is a point of contact between the worldview and the bible, which also centres on the Spirit and, it is also a point of contact with African religious views.⁶³⁴ We have also seen that the bible is not just a text, it is power precisely because Moya (Spirit) charges it. Thus, ordinary readers go to the bible as Pobee also points out, to tap this power, this life-giving power.⁶³⁵

A Semoya reading is very significant to African biblical hermeneutics because African people have been rendered voiceless by the discourse and praxis of domination. In such context the Spirit becomes the voice of the voiceless who have been silenced in their condition of oppression and marginalisation. As Hinga notes, the Spirit literally becomes the voice of the voiceless.⁶³⁶ Thus, for a people who are also rendered powerless by oppression, the Spirit is their source of power par excellence. The experience of the Spirit, that blows where it wills and shows impartiality to all persons, becomes a source of confidence for a people who have been treated unjustly and unfairly, and it reminds them that justice will eventually prevail.

⁶³³ Hinga, T.M. "Reading With": An Exploration of The Interface Between "Critical" and "Ordinary" Readings of the Bible: A Response", in *Semeia* 73, 1996, p. 281.

⁶³⁴ Hinga, T.M., 1996, p. 281.

⁶³⁵ Pobee, J.S. "Bible Study in Africa: A Passover of Language", in *Semeia* 73, 1996, pp. 161-176.

⁶³⁶ Hinga, T.M., 1990, p. 267-70.

As we have seen, Kanyoro claimed that her reading of Matthew 15:21-28 is to shame the African churches and societies for their treatment of single parents, divorced and abused African women. Thus her reading was aimed at sensitising the churches and communities in Africa as regards to oppression and marginalisation of women. In this respect, it is therefore a reading 'on behalf of' African women. Feminist hermeneutics of Kanyoro and Dube are responses to the oppression and marginalisation through both traditional beliefs and practices and colonial imperialism in the society as well as the church. They are also responses to the untold sufferings that women undergo in African cultural contexts that are plagued with the influx and displacements of refugees and ethnic clashes, political instability, incurable diseases and economic difficulties. Therefore, the readings of Kanyoro and Dube are attempts to raise awareness as regards to the Gospel stance in contrast to the cultural and conventional church stance. The latter stance had denigrated the role and place of women in church and society, with all the violence women are experiencing, and the former stance strives to liberate women from this catastrophic stance. Thus, the readings brought by these African feminist scholars are addressed on behalf of ordinary people in the church as well as the African community at large.

Like the approaches of Kanyoro and Dube, the CBS process that I conducted in Malawi was aimed at raising awareness that the bible is a book for women's liberation from oppression and marginalisation. Therefore, women and men need to know that the bible is not only an instrument of oppression but also of liberation. If the bible is to be used to overcome subordination, there is need to engage in a critical contextual study. Hence we need to revisit the contents from women's perspective. Biblical texts assert that Jesus has challenged all oppressive and discriminatory systems. It is, therefore, relevant to have a series of Bible Studies to make men or all those who oppress women in churches and societies more conscious of the structures and attitudes that oppress and marginalise women. In this way, I believe that women can be empowered through engaging in a rigorous search of biblical texts that speak to us today according to our experiences and contexts.

In this study, the main goal is to reclaim and regain the identity and worthiness of women by discovering the potentiality of the bible as a liberating and empowering resource if we also re-read it through the eyes of women and the suffering community. This, I believe will only be achieved by encouraging a liberative mode of reading the bible. Similarly, women will also recognise that this liberation is also for the benefit of men in the Church and society.

Consequently, a new sense of partnership to the Church and the world will be created in the service of Jesus Christ. In order to achieve this goal, I will now discuss in detail the CBS process that I carried out in five different denominations in the northern region of Malawi.

6.3. Commitments for the CBS process

When carrying out the CBS Process, the first commitment was to read the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed, particularly the marginalised and the discriminated. By reading the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed, I mean the interaction of the experiences of them with God and the community. The bible itself explicitly ‘shows that God speaks specifically to specific people in specific life situations.’⁶³⁷ Therefore, reading the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed is of course a concern of God. Since women in Malawi are experiencing various forms of oppression, prejudice and injustice, there is a great need to hear the voices of the poor, marginalised and oppressed women in church and society and to let them know that God is particularly concerned for them, the poor and the oppressed. Therefore, it was necessary to enable the groups to read the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed, that they should realise that they are identified with God and that they are children of God. They should examine their experiences and find hope and power as they read the bible from the perspective of women and the oppressed. Reading the bible in this way shows the concern for justice and righteousness, as God is concerned with them. That is why the choice of the texts for the CBS, as we shall see later, characterise the cry of women, the poor and the oppressed, and the way God hears their cry and sees their suffering. By choosing to read the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed, we choose to hear the concerns of the affected and marginalised and the concern of God for them. Surely, such a concern does not only require acknowledging and recognising the effect of women’s context on ourselves and the readings of the bible, but we also need to understand and analyse the effect of women’s context.⁶³⁸ We have to analyse our context in order to hear the concerns of women as God’s concerns for them. Showing willingness to acknowledge and recognise our own situation in the CBS process and analysing the reality from women’s perspective, enabled the groups to understand the Word of God as becoming alive once they related to their experiences. By so doing, women can be empowered and this will enable them to attain leadership positions that they are denied of in churches and societies.

⁶³⁷ West, G.O., 1993, p. 13.

⁶³⁸ West, G.O., 1993, p. 14.

The second commitment was to read the bible in community with women and different people from different contexts. The “Others” here, are people who are more deprived, with low education, the disadvantaged and those who seriously endorse patriarchal attitudes. The great wealth that we learn in reading the bible with women and others, and listening to each other is the sharing of our personal contributions. These groups of people need to be understood, because they also offer contributive ideas through their experiences. That is why in my CBS process, there were people of different age groups, different backgrounds, different education and different professions and careers. My understanding was that these people have their own identity which values their significant contributions and experiences. I therefore began by looking at their view of reality, their experiences, needs and questions. The reality that these people have faced is mainly the culture of silence. Their readings and interpretations of the bible have been silenced and suppressed by the dominant patriarchal interpretations. Interestingly, some readers from these groups have tended to accept the dominant patriarchal interpretations as their own. However, realising the wealth of the bible and looking at the need of breaking the culture of silence, I found it to be very necessary to work together in order to reclaim the identity and experiences of the oppressed. These people are not really silent, but the only problem is that they are not given an opportunity to be heard. It is only through engaging in mutual partnership and ‘recognising unequal power relations between us, that we can begin to construct transforming discourse.’⁶³⁹ We need to be committed to a communal reading model of the bible. As the bible is full of memories of people who struggled for the values of the community of God, their struggle can become part of, and can inform our struggle for justice and peace today. In addition to this, their faithfulness to God’s calling provides us with an assurance which reminds, challenges and empowers us. It is also important to read the bible communally, because both trained and ordinary readers have equal contributions.

The third commitment was reading the bible critically with the poor and marginalised. In order to do this, we needed to appropriate and develop critical models of reading the bible that would help ordinary readers. However, West states that whatever mode of reading we choose to use, whether *in front of the text*, *in the text* or *behind the text*, what is important is that they all portray critical options for the critical appropriation of the text. Critical reading or

⁶³⁹ West, G.O., 1993, p. 16.

consciousness, according to West, 'includes asking the question "Why?" probing beneath the surface, being suspicious of the status quo, and also a systematic and structured analysis.'⁶⁴⁰

Critical reading is a dominance-free discourse that encourages a liberative mode of reading the bible. Critical reading opens the texts so that people should see how these texts have been misused by patriarchal ideology. It shows elements used to abuse or critical of abuse. But, at the same time, it also shows how texts are liberative, that is, the bible empowers women, Jesus empowers women and that Jesus rebuked men. Critical reading, therefore, is one way of recovering the bible. The bible played a great part in the socio-political spheres in Malawi, as we saw in chapter 2. It was used to change the nature of government from a single party system to a multi-party system. In this way, people in Malawi, especially the oppressed communities, became critically conscious in socio-political matters. They thought and acted critically in their social, economic, and political areas of life, even if they might not have been very systematic or structured in analysing the political transformation. The fourth and last commitment was a focus for social and spiritual transformation within churches, societies and communities. It is a process committed to both personal and social transformation that includes the existential, political, economic, cultural and religious spheres of life. Hence it is committed to transforming all aspects of social reality. To succeed in this, we need first to inquire about the way in which the text is appropriated. Secondly, we need to break the culture of silence of the poor and oppressed. People need to see the reality of God's liberation and that the bible provides just that. This will enable the poor and oppressed to become active subjects and co-workers in this project of God's liberation. Through music, movement, written dialogues, small-group sharing, we can allow the text to unearth that part of our personal and social existence which the text calls forth to be healed, forgiven, and transformed.

This commitment challenges all ordinary and trained readers, including those who come not from poor and oppressed communities, to re-evaluate the ways in which they read the bible and apply its message. It empowers ordinary people and also develops the processes which facilitate the accountability of biblical studies and theological education. Our goal then should be to move among these mighty texts to see transformation. However, to be transformed means more than simply to add something new to an old structure, it means to renovate the

⁶⁴⁰ West, G.O., 1993, p. 18.

structure itself. The renovation of the structure requires the rediscovery of the questions that have themselves evoked the text, and follow them back to their source. We can do this only by entering into shared struggle to comprehend what is moving in the question, and reconstructing the meanings of the texts.

The CBS reading model aims at achieving a critical reading of the texts contextually by trained readers and ordinary readers coming together to generate readings that will eventually lead to transformation of their respective contexts. In summary, the CBS process that was carried in Malawi with five different denominations was committed to reading the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed; to communal reading; to close or critical reading and to reading for individual and communal transformation. This process involved a ‘back and forth movement between the readers and the text.’⁶⁴¹ It was achieved by designing questions related to community consciousness and critical consciousness. Indeed, this is the study we are going to discuss below in the chapter.

6.4. Choice of biblical readings for CBS process

I chose five different groups of passages from the bible in the facilitation of the CBS process. These were Genesis 1:26-31 & 2:18-25; Mark 5:24-34; Matthew 15:21-28 & Mark 7:24-30; 1 Corinthians 14:34-40 & 1 Timothy 2:8-15, and Ephesians 5:21-33 & Galatians 3:25-29. The choice of the texts was guided by the questions, concerns, needs and concepts of ordinary readers, particularly women and the oppressed. I felt these texts were relevant to the issue of reading the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed in search for justice and liberation.

The choice of the readings was made to let the participants know initially that the bible indeed reflects its origin in a patriarchal culture. These are some of the texts that bar or subordinate women for equal responsibility. They are texts that diminish the role of women. The patriarchal culture describes a social organisation in which women are clearly secondary. The texts were also chosen to bring to the participants’ attention that the bible’s patriarchal worldview has become normative in many Christian communities hence many male scholars have in the past rarely challenged this orientation. In this case the bible is a problematic text to study and teach for women and others who are oppressed and marginalised in the text and

⁶⁴¹ Anum, E., “The Reconstruction of Forms of African Theology: Towards Effective Biblical Interpretation,” Glasgow University, PhD Thesis, 1999, p. 68.

the tradition. However, the main focus was to invite the participants' feelings and understandings that this is not the end of the story. The texts were chosen to stress their importance in women's liberation. This was a choice that was not manipulative but central to the role of women. The bible does not only oppress and marginalise but it also liberates and empowers. In order to attain this liberation and empowerment, we need to read the texts through the eyes of women or the poor and oppressed. This reading allows the readers to explore the liberating potential of these texts for women and the oppressed. When people read these texts they should bear in mind and envisage in Jesus that his movement brings to them solidarity, salvation, compassion, liberation and justice. Thus the CBS process brought new insights into how ordinary people approach their interests in the bible. Such insights of course including mine as trained reader addressed the concerns of ordinary users and therefore were relevant to their situation. Moreover this served to bridge the gap that is there between the trained reader and the ordinary readings of the bible.

Generally, these readings were chosen to criticise some of the official conventional readings the church used to diminish the role and place of women in church and society. At the same time, they were chosen to empower and encourage women in their endeavours for justice and peace in the church and society. They were chosen to enable theology from below or official discourse. The texts were also chosen to allow the participants to discover that it was theologically and biblically wrong to prevent women from fulfilling significant roles in the church. The church thought as if God had given power to men only, hence it was theologically wrong for the church to give power to women. Women were not created for men's enjoyment but as co-workers in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The women therefore should learn from their fellow women who encountered Jesus with courage, love and mercy. They challenged Jesus, like the Syrophenician woman, to change his mind and indeed Jesus managed to change and offered her what she requested. The courage and boldness of these women is also a lesson and an encouragement to women today to stand up and voice their concern in this male-dominated church and society. That is why they should read and analyse the bible critically. Even if the bible contains passages that support the subordination of women and were used by the church to silence women, they should not abandon or reject these texts. As John Riches asserts, 'rejecting the texts altogether means running the danger of turning one's back on vital resources for living.'⁶⁴² The Bible brings comfort, strength, and

⁶⁴² Riches, J.K., 2000, p. 98.

liberation to the oppressed people. All we need to do is to employ diverse readings, because the same texts can also bring life or liberation to the same people. Therefore, turning our backs on them will be dangerous and a big loss to our spiritual nourishment.

It is for this reason that I chose the very readings to enable ordinary readers to encounter them critically in the perspective of women. I also wanted readers to be aware that the Bible contains different voices and different emphases. Therefore, readers need to exercise their own moral judgement by learning to make distinctions between the different voices and readings. Readers should not be overwhelmed by the darker side of the bible (instrument of oppression) but inspired by the brighter side of it (instrument of liberation). The transformation of individuals and communities stems from critical and attentive reading of the Bible. John Riches is right to say that critical and attentive reading ‘informs and sharpens the moral sense and provides a moral and religious vision.’⁶⁴³ The vision here is that the Bible is not exclusive that it empowers and gives authority to women and men, who are, poor, marginalised, oppressed and discriminated against by church and society. In respect to the choice of readings, my specific concern, therefore, was to enable ordinary readers to find ways of reading the entire bible rather than using the bible though some might argue that such critical reading is in fact selective. This was to allow the biblical voices that are creative, liberative and constructive so that the understanding of the text is shaped.

6.5. Modes used in reading the texts

The main interest in choosing the above mentioned texts is the concern for the oppression of women in the church and society which had not yet been adequately addressed. Just as the bible has been used to support oppression of women, it is also a tool used to liberate them. Thus reading the bible from the perspective of the questions, needs, and interests of women was the main focus for the CBS process I undertook. Our main modes of reading these texts, as explained below, was reading ‘behind the text’, ‘the text itself’, and ‘in front of the text’.⁶⁴⁴ These modes of reading each makes particular contributions. They bring resources for reading the bible hence they enable the bible to speak to us. Moreover, each mode of reading brings

⁶⁴³ Riches, J.K. 2000, p. 98.

⁶⁴⁴ West, G.O. *Contextual Bible Study*, p. 27. West introduces three modes of reading the bible critically. The mode that emphasises the historical and sociological context of the bible is reading *behind the text*. The mode that emphasises the literary and narrative context of the bible is reading *on the text itself*. But reading *in front of the text* concentrates on thematic and symbolic context of the bible as a whole.

the concern of the context to the reading of the text. For instance, one of the challenging areas of concern facing the church and community in our context is that of women (gender equality). This was one of the reasons that prompted me to conduct a series of contextual bible studies to allow people to come to the bible with some of the needs, interests and questions of women in a systematic and structured way. We adopted the three modes suggested by West which we found to be very helpful in the contextual bible studies that we conducted.

We read 1 Corinthians 14:34-40, 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and Ephesians 5:21-33 by focusing 'behind the text' in order to present a picture of women in the church who were active towards the end of the biblical period. This reading helped us locate and situate the concerns of these selected texts and in so doing assisted us to critically appropriate these texts. Reading behind the text presented us with the picture of women that in Greco-Roman world. At that time, the role of women was perceived as being primarily in the home in submission to the male head of the household. That is why women were to dress modestly to remain silent in public worship. Women were only to receive instruction passively from men and were under the control of male leaders of the church. The male reading of the creation story is seen in the patriarchal perspective on women. This male reading has for centuries dominated the thinking in the church. But by using this mode of reading, the group, however found that these selected texts have the potential of exploding male domination today as exemplified in the egalitarian and inclusive impulses and practices of the early Jesus movement. At the same time they were empowered by appropriating the texts critically.

Genesis 1:26-31 & 2:18-25 were read by focusing 'on the texts themselves'. We tackled these texts with a careful and close reading from the perspective of women by concentrating on the passages which concern women. A careful reading of Genesis enabled participants to understand that man and woman were created equal partners before God. Even though the second account seems to put woman in a subordinate position, God's intention is not to see either sex oppressed and marginalised, but he needs to see unity and mutual co-existence. The aim of reading by focusing on the text was to create an atmosphere of breaking the silence of women. We wanted to free the bible from the dominant male readings, which still prevail. The first concern was to know the sense and meaning of the text by determining its beginning and end. In order to arrive at some preliminary sense of the plot and structure of the story, we had to carefully and closely identify a literary unit of the text. This made us concentrate on the

internal relationship within the text, that is, different parts of the story and different characters. In this way, the ordinary readers read and understood the texts as a whole, by returning to the texts with new perceptions and questions which have been generated by their careful and close reading of the parts. This eventually formed a basis for appropriating the texts for our hearing different voices in the text accordingly.

We also read and understood Mark 5:24-34, Matthew 15:21-28 & Mark 7:24-34 and also 1 Corinthians 14:34-34 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 by focusing 'in front of the text'. The main focus of the research project was to bring back to women the glory of full discipleship and ministry in the church and community as exercised by Jesus in his early Christian mission movement in the New Testament. Since full discipleship and ministry in the church and community were denied to women in 1 Corinthians 14:34-34 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 due to the patriarchal perspective on women, the group needed to project a possible world in which both women and men were called to full participation with fairness. One cannot deny the fact that the Bible is patriarchal, for it commands women to be submissive to men, while at the same time it exalts maleness over femaleness. For instance, the authors of 1 & 2 Corinthians and 1 & 2 Timothy restrict the full meaning and understanding of discipleship and ministry to men. The psychological and sociological religious world of these epistles would not permit women to fulfil the call of Jesus to full discipleship and ministry. But the group read these texts from within the church and community of our time and contexts to see how they spoke to us with more meaning than the author was aware of when he wrote it down. This reading, however, was done in continuity with the direction of the texts and cohered with the total biblical message. This potential meaning of full discipleship and ministry is in continuity with the New Testament as a whole and with the concerns of contemporary women.

6.6. Plan and proposals for CBS process

The plan was to conduct bible study in eight groups. Four groups came from the CCAP Livingstonia Synod, the other four groups came from the following denominations: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Assemblies of God and the Church of the Nazarene. I chose a variety of denominations because I wanted to have a vigorous research in understanding the place and the role of women in churches and society and how ordinary readers read the bible. My desire was to make sure that the CBS process happens within the fellowship of the church of all ages and denominations whose faith and conduct have also been guided by these passages. Therefore, there was need to explore what light the CBS process shed by the faith and life of

the church on these passages and vice versa. Since this problem also involves other denominations, it was my great expectation to learn more on how the issue of women is dealt with in different churches. Firstly, I brought a letter to the leadership of these churches in person with a supporting letter from my church explaining the reasons why I wanted to conduct CBS with the members of their churches. In two cases I was subjected to questioning to find out more about the nature of my engagement in such research. The leaders of the churches and groups wanted to see a profitable interaction with their members. Although some leaders knew the different interests and power bases, they nevertheless welcomed me happily. When the invitation was granted to me, I believe the leaderships of these selected denominations I worked with chose devoted members with long-standing commitment to their churches' tradition. I hope these participants were well-tutored in the official stance of their various congregations.

In respect to the CBS process, the plan was to have ten to twenty people in a group. I was aware that bible study is participatory and could best be done in a group. Furthermore, the group was sub-divided into groups of four or three in order to have a period of individual reflection where thoughts and discoveries about the questions are shared with one another. This was so because having more than this would restrict everyone's becoming involved, whereas fewer people would restrict the available experience and insights that could be shared. This procedure allowed the timid and less eloquent participants to begin to formulate their discoveries by sharing their load.⁶⁴⁵ It also prepared and encouraged them to participate in the subsequent discussion. Each group had an equal number of men and women. This helped to remove the idea of favouritism.

The writer hoped that, by taking active part in discussions, they would discover powers of discernment in themselves that they had never dreamed existed. By so doing they would also be able to articulate themselves where before they had been silent and afraid. I was also aware that some participants had extensive background in biblical studies, while others had none. Nevertheless, we were all equal before the texts and additionally in regard to the personal experiences we were all experts. And since it was the intersection of the texts with personal experiences which evoke insights, none of the participants felt disadvantaged.

⁶⁴⁵ Wink, W., 1981, p. 38.

I selected Five Bible study lessons which were conducted in these eight groups. The groups were spread across both urban and semi-urban of Karonga and Rumphi districts. Each group was given an opportunity to discuss two bible passages and the discussions lasted two hours each. The expectation was that each group would discuss their topics thoughtfully and democratically. Hence at the end of the day, each group together with the facilitator benefited a lot with their significant contributions they made in the CBS process. The proposed Bible study lessons were those already said in the choice of readings earlier on. These Bible studies were purposely chosen and each group had to go through two passages. Each bible study had six to eight questions⁶⁴⁶ that members of each group worked through. These texts were purposely selected because they are the same texts that could empower women as well.

6.7. Choice of questions for CBS process

The choice of questions was shaped by the ordinary readers who were my ‘primary dialogue partners’⁶⁴⁷ in the CBS process. The idea of reading the texts was to read in the perspectives of women and other people who are oppressed and marginalised. That is why specific questions of women and male dominance in the church and society were brought to our reading of the texts. For instance, the first set of questions 1 to 3 are textual questions which are aimed at making participants deal with the text in detail in relation to critical consciousness. The questions like ‘*what is the main topic of the text? Or what is the text about?*’ helps readers to discover what the text is talking about. By reading in front of the text, in the text or behind the text, readers discover what the text is all about. Thus the textual questions endeavour to find out what the text is saying about whoever, or whatever they found the text to be focused on. As West states, this set of questions ‘invited readers to probe behind the text to the society that produced the text.’⁶⁴⁸ This set of questions is related to critical consciousness and it enables readers to read the text carefully and closely. Therefore, the first two or three questions were formulated to introduce reactions to the readers so that they bring close reading of the passages themselves. I would say these questions are focusing on the ‘text itself’, because they pay close attention to the structure of the story. Thus, the first set of questions enables readers to interact with the whole text fully.

⁶⁴⁶ See *Contextual Bible Study Appendix 1*.

⁶⁴⁷ West, G.O., 1993, p. 75.

⁶⁴⁸ West, G.O., 1995, p. 63.

The second set of questions 4 to 5 also look at the text once more, but as well provides opportunity to raise questions about the society that produced the text. This second set from question three to four or five allows the readers to develop their understanding of the text and its context. Since the text is the main focus, conscious and unconscious responses are aroused from readers. Hence, these questions enable participants to enter into dialogue with the meaning of the texts and its contexts at all levels through thought, feeling and intuition. Engaging in this dialogue is not necessarily for finding right answers, but for comprehending the text in its context. In this way, the questions are focusing 'behind the text' and also 'in front of the text.' Thus, the CBS reading process involves small group discussions, plenary discussions as participants go back and forth analysing the text and its context, and also the context of the readers. That is, they read the text using questions which are aimed at creating both critical and community consciousness among them of the bible studies as they deal with the text closely.

Questions 6 to 8 are contextual questions. These are contextual questions like, '*where/what are the parallels in your situation to this story? Or what did you learn from this text? Or how can we take these discussions forward? Or what does the text say to you?*' This set of questions draw together the text and context in an act of appropriation.⁶⁴⁹ They deal with the practical application of the text in the context of the readers. In shorts, they are related to community consciousness as they aim at leading readers to relate the text to their own community. The last set of questions invited readers to amplify and apply the text. By amplification, participants were invited to resonate with the contemporary context, that is, personal, church or society and explore the light these texts shed today. Here participants tried to live into the narratives until the texts became active and lively for them. Truly, 'only as the text comes alive for us can we attempt to hear again the question that occasioned the answer provided by the text.'⁶⁵⁰ In this way, the text enters into us as an activating agent.

In short the 'transformative questions' of a particular group that proceed from a particular action, should lead us in finding definite ways of reclaiming and regaining the dignity and identity of women in the church and society. Reading the bible from the perspective of women and the suffering community enables the readers to resist dehumanisation and destruction of the faith in God the chief liberator and the prince of peace and justice. This is a

⁶⁴⁹ West, G.O., 1995, p. 63.

⁶⁵⁰ Wink, W., 1993, p. 39.

way of moving forwards as we listen to still small voices (that is, personal, societal or communal). In general the last set of questions are focusing ‘in front of the text’ and on ‘application.’ The expectancy of studying the passage by looking forward is that through it God may speak to us in our particular situation here and now. Therefore, we make this exploration as ‘an experiment for discovering whether and how God puts his claim on us by this passage.’⁶⁵¹ In this way, the passage automatically comes alive for us and our situation today as we examine the way it spoke to the first readers and hearers in their time and context. In a similar way, we can critically or closely read the passage with a view of finding out what it has to say for our relationship with our neighbours and colleagues.

The reason for framing questions in respect to women was to enable ordinary readers to come to the texts with conscious needs, questions and interests of women who are oppressed, subordinated, and the suffering community. By framing questions in relation to women and the suffering community, the expectation was to discover and recover the “silenced voice” and look for justice and righteousness. Even though biblical texts are dominated by male perspective, there are still “gaps” in this male perspective, and therefore questions from the perspective of women and the suffering community need to be sought to successfully read in these gaps.⁶⁵² While we recognise and acknowledge male perspective as it is, it is not, West rightly asserts, ‘the universal or the true perspective.’⁶⁵³ As a result of this, we have also to read the texts ‘by bringing the interests and perspectives of women’ and the suffering community ‘to our readings of these patriarchal texts.’⁶⁵⁴ Thus, reading these texts from women’s perspectives and the suffering community, readers are allowed to explore the liberating potential of these texts for women and the suffering community.

The questions were not formulated simply to lead to a “yes” or “no” answer or to a specific answer, but to critically explore the biblical passages or its implications today. This critical exploration, as Weber asserts, ‘gives us a chance to address us as it actually stands, whether we like it or not, whether it confirms or questions our faith, whether it seems relevant to our situation or not.’⁶⁵⁵ These questions were generally framed to open the texts to the readers, and thereby provide an open invitation to discern the texts. They were also framed to allow

⁶⁵¹ Weber, H.R., 1994, p. 274.

⁶⁵² West, G.O., 1995, p. 75.

⁶⁵³ West, G.O., 1993, p. 52.

⁶⁵⁴ West, G.O., 1993, p. 52.

⁶⁵⁵ Weber, H.R. *Experiments with Bible Study*, 1994, p. 274.

people to talk, think and pray freely and democratically. At the same time they were to recognise difficult perspectives and see for themselves how relevant the bible is today.

6.8. Facilitator's role in the CBS process

As a facilitator in the CBS process, I would say my role was restricted to encouraging and facilitating a close and a careful reading of the text. Although I was aware of my advantage in biblical training and the power dynamics implicit in my presence with the groups, I wanted to make sure that substantive contributions came from the resources and experiences of ordinary readers. That is why I tried to set up a dialogue to articulate the issues which have a long time been subordinate to women. In doing so, my role was to 'help the progress and empower others to act, contribute and acquire skills'⁶⁵⁶ necessary in interpreting the biblical texts. I agree with Wink, 'the mode of leadership (facilitation) requires a very high profile in terms of *process*, but a very low profile in terms of *content*.'⁶⁵⁷ According to Wink, the leader or facilitator's authority is to empower the group members to become authorities themselves, so that they eventually speak from their own perspectives, experiences and discoveries to the truth they meet in the text. Therefore, as the only trained reader in the facilitation of this CBS process, my initial role was to plan, prepare and structure it. In short, I was the enabler of ordinary readers. As Nolan states, the facilitators should see themselves as those who are 'to be made use of' by ordinary readers and not who would 'make use of' ordinary readers in the reading process.⁶⁵⁸ However, Patte argues that trained readers are to facilitate the process of reading by providing critical understanding to the epistemological judgements and values that ordinary readers can not possibly achieve on their own.⁶⁵⁹

During the actual meetings with group members, my first responsibility was to invite them into a quiet time. This was to bring them into focus around our common task, to be open to one another, and to be receptive to the Spirit as it speaks through the text, others, and our own depths. We had to open and conclude this movement with a prayer. After the quiet time, I would invite the volunteer to read aloud the texts to be studied. After reading the text, I would give a little background information concerning the text. This background information usually

⁶⁵⁶ West, G.O., 1993, p. 24.

⁶⁵⁷ Wink, W., 1981, p. 67.

⁶⁵⁸ Nolan, A. 'Work, the Bible, workers and theologians: Elements of "workers theology," in *Semeia* 73, 1996, pp. 213-220, but here p. 217.

⁶⁵⁹ ⁶⁵⁹ Patte, D. "Textual Constraints, ordinary readings and critical exegesis: An Androcritical-Perspective.' In *Semeia* 62, 1993, pp. 59-79; "Biblical Scholars at the interface between Critical and Ordinary readings: A response", In *Semeia* 73, 1996, pp. 263-276.

consisted of the historical, social and literary context of the text. This was followed by questions which were discussed in small groups and then reported back to a plenary session for questions and clarification by all participants. In the course of the discussions I would encourage respect, dialogue, clarify what was unclear and listen to group members. My other job was to sum up the discussions and possibly give some contributions, insights, inputs and experiences to the group based on my historical-critical understanding of the text to the discussion. This was to show that a trained reader and ordinary readers are both community readers. There is a shared convention that the biblical texts are to be interpreted by reading communities. Even though I was aware that we work from different standpoint and perspective, we were all involved in the act of reading, and hence constitute a community of readers within our particular socio-cultural realm. As John Riches argues, both ordinary and trained readers belong to 'a community of readers.'⁶⁶⁰ It was not good to work as dominators but as enablers. In dynamic terms, I wanted to assure and establish a sense of trust, confidentiality, mutual respect and positive relationship with the groups. The authoritarian forms of bible study could not develop community and critical consciousness. But there was a need to deploy democratic processes that could only be developed where there is mutual respect, trust and a deep sense of community. It was only in 'such a context that self-confidence', as West asserts, that 'responsibility and accountability grow.'⁶⁶¹ Even though ordinary and trained readers have different agendas, together they interact in such a way that each contributes to fulfilling each others' agendas.

To make provocative questions lead to new ways of thinking, I had to see that there was an open and non-threatening atmosphere. I had to see that a 'dominance-free discourse' was enabled so that every participant could take part fully in the discussions. In this discourse, all voices are encouraged to participate fully without any hindrance or any one person dominating, including the facilitator. Even though some participants are more knowledgeable in biblical studies than others, everyone's experiences and contributions if added together benefit the whole group. Even if patriarchal power relations and models of authority operate in church and society today, they are not universal authorities or powers. Hence, we had to

⁶⁶⁰ Riches, J.K. "Interpreting the Bible in African Contexts: Glasgow Consultation," in *Semeia* 73, 1996, pp. 181-188.

⁶⁶¹ West, G.O., 1993, p. 24.

endeavour to carry out the CBS process by reading the texts through the eyes of women's perspectives and the suffering community. Also, I had to see that a secure and stable environment was there to enable group members to think for themselves by bringing in their perspectives, discoveries and experiences, hence, encouraging group members to have greater responsibility of themselves. Since the CBS process was focusing on the needs of women, the poor and the oppressed, I had to encourage the group members to participate and contribute their experiences freely and democratically.

The other thing that involved me was the writing up of participants' contributions during and after sessions especially full group's discussions on a sizeable plain paper. As questions were discussed in the plenary and small groups of three or four and medium sized groups, participants had to choose their own secretary to write the group discussions before presenting to the full group. The groups' discussions were later pinned on the walls for further reflection after the session. After the end of the bible study, I had to collect all group discussions and compile them into one report by translating other groups' discussions that were written in vernacular languages. Thus the discussions in the following bible studies are the general reports of participants from different denominations where the CBS were conducted. In some instances individual group members' views are underlined, but the entire report is based upon the general views of the participants from all churches. At the end of every bible study, I have analysed my own personal findings as regards to the particular bible study lesson.

6.9. Relationship of this process to my own studies in Mark 5 & 7 (chapters 3-5)

In chapters 3-5, I have been reading these texts in search for women's justice and liberation from oppression that they experience in their churches and communities. The CBS readings would go a long way towards creating equality between women and men in churches and communities. The CBS reading is geared towards reclaiming the bible for marginalised women by doing liberative readings that challenge church's conventional readings which are manipulative and oppressive. Looking at the faith and courage of the hemorrhaging woman and the Syrophenician woman and Jesus' response to their need, the texts subvert power dynamics in the area of subjugation of women.

Both the CBS readings and my own studies in chapters 3-5 are concerned with the needs and concerns of the marginalised women and those who are oppressed in various ways. These are

the subordinates who are being dominated and oppressed. Women in chapters 3-5 are marginalised by their status (one by her impurity and the other one by her nationality). The former one was poor by spending all to doctors (5:26) and the latter received a harsh answer “dogs” (7:27). However, reading these texts critically and contextually showed me how texts are used to abuse and also are liberative. Similarly, the CBS reading enables ordinary readers to see how these texts have been misused and what to do to reclaim them. The liberative reading that I have been using in my previous chapters was aimed at achieving a critical reading of texts contextually that led to empowering women and the oppressed of a liberative mode of reading the bible. The CBS reading also aims at achieving a critical reading of the texts contextually whereby ordinary readers and trained readers come together to generate readings that lead to transformation of their respective contexts.⁶⁶²

The other relationship is on empowerment to women and biblical readers. As the Markan Jesus responded to the needs of the suffering women, he empowered them by making them whole and praising their courage and faith they expressed to him. He empowered them by breaking internal and external boundaries that led to the subordination of women and the oppressed. Women are now understood as people in their own right, no longer as property of men. Those with more power are called to serve, not to exert their powers on the less privileged and status. Thus, worldly concepts of oppressive power are reversed, and those at the margins of society come first (cf. 9:35-37; 10:15; 10:42-45). Moreover, these women who lived on the periphery of life show their firmness to find healing from Jesus, and this is an empowerment to Mark’s audience in their time of oppression. Similarly, when participating in the CBS reading it enables one to learn to distinguish one’s own subjectivity from others and this sometimes leads to enlarging one’s subjectivity. Consequently, this reading helps both critical and uncritical readers to construct their own stories more effectively as they influence each others’ subjectivity. Therefore, as West puts it, this reading process enables the trained reader to empower the ordinary readers.⁶⁶³ It enables ordinary readers to understand what the scripture is saying to them and to take action in transforming their society. It therefore fulfils West’s belief that trained readers have to read the bible for both the on-going academic development and also with the aim of showing solidarity with and accountable to the oppressed.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶² West, G.O., 1995b, p. 67.

⁶⁶³ West, G.O., 1995b, p. 70.

⁶⁶⁴ West, G.O., 1995b, pp. 70-71.

In conclusion, both the study of chapters 3-5 and the CBS reading are concerned with women and the oppressed in church and society. Both readings see the bible as the major source from which we work. Both readings are engaged in reconstructing texts about women and the oppressed in order to generate meanings that would give fresh insights and new discoveries that reflect feminist perspectives. Both readings look closely at the experiences, concerns, questions and problems that confront women and the oppressed in their contexts.

6.10. Contextual Bible Study Process

STATISTICS

Denomination	Male	Female	Age	Education	Occupation	Church position
CCAP	12	10	18-60 yrs	2 MA 4 BA	Civil servants, Business, Politicians,	Elders Deacons
RC	8	10		30 MCE 40 JCE	Farmers, House wives, Un	Chair persons, Lay preachers
Anglican	6	7		12 PSLC 2 Semi literate	employed	Catechist
Church of Nazarene	10	10				
Assemblies of God	9	8				
TOTAL	45	45				

***Key:** CCAP= Church of Central Africa Presbyterian; RC= Roman Catholic; MA= Masters of Arts; BA= Bachelors of Arts; MSCE= Malawi School Certificate of Education; JCE= Junior Certificate of Education and PSLC= Primary School Leaving Certificate.

6.10.i. BIBLE STUDY ONE

The Creation of Man and Woman (Genesis 1: 26-31 & 2: 18-25)

Question 1. *What do we learn from Genesis 1:26 and 2:18*

In the first account, the group said, God tells us that man and woman were created in the image of God. Both have been given authority to rule the earth, its nature and all creatures. Thus, there is no difference or job differences, all were given authority over the creatures. Man and Woman were created equal partners before God. The second text tells us that Woman was created from Man. She is just a helper and as a helper, she should just obey her husband. However, other participants in the group said God created a woman as a companion.

Hence, they are no longer two people but one. That is why they were not ashamed when they are naked.

Question 2. *Do these texts not teach that women are completely subordinate to men and that the only purpose of their existence is to reflect the glory of men and to be used by them?*

The first reaction to this question was that woman was not created to be completely subordinate to man, because God created a woman to be a companion and not to be his subordinate. The group interpreted the word ‘helper’ in Gen.2: 8 as a companion, as someone who is always beside the man, in every effort, moral, spiritual and physical. The group unanimously agreed that both man and woman are equal despite difference in gender. Both man and woman are one body, hence the beginning of sacred marriage. Man cannot make one body without a woman (cf. 1 Cor.7: 5-6).

Question 3. (a) *Does Genesis 2:18 mean “Oneness and Mutuality” or “Subordination of the one to the other”?* Explain

(b) *What would it be that women should be subordinate to men if you read Genesis 1:26?*

The group agreed that Genesis 2:18 means oneness and mutuality because the intention of God was to create man in His image. In God’s image, there is oneness and mutual co-existence between one another. God does not intend to see either sexes oppressed and marginalised, but he needs unity and mutual Co-existence. Therefore women need not be subordinate to men because they are all equal partners, created in the same image of God.

Question 4. *If Eve is weak for succumbing to the serpent’s temptation, What can we say about Adam for succumbing to Eve’s temptation?*

It is not that Eve was weak for succumbing to the Serpent’s temptation. If Eve was weak, then Adam too was weak by virtue of agreeing to Eve’s temptation. The group felt that Adam was also weak because he too accepted to commit the sin which he had done. That is why God cursed him too (Gen.3: 17-19).

Questions 5. *Where are the parallels in your situation to this story of the treatment of women?*

6. *In our current context of church and society, how have we interpreted the meaning and understanding of the woman as a “helper fit for him”?*

7. *According to our culture we pay dowries for marriages, don’t you think that these have attributed to the subordination and oppression of women?*

8. *In our current context of church and society, what do we have to regret and let it (them) go? At the same time, what do we need to rejoice and uphold?*

The group had mixed feelings as regards to the understanding and interpretation of these questions. About 10%⁶⁶⁵ felt that wives are subordinate to their husbands. This was so because according to them, whatever they do is senseless and that it brings more evil to them (husbands). This remark raised vehement disapproval from the rest of the group who unanimously thought women were robbed of their equality and understanding before God. They said that sometimes women tend to be subordinate to men because men do not want to be disapproved or opposed by women. The group understood “the helper” as someone who works together in a cordial atmosphere. The group agreed that while bride price, that is, “dowries” (Lobola)⁶⁶⁶ are paid to thank parents for taking care of their daughter to become a responsible and loved human being, the parents of the boy/man need to acknowledge this as a token of thanks. It also helps to keep some marriages stable. Although to a certain extent this is not true, we have seen some marriages breaking up or are unstable despite the fact that dowries have been paid. To the other extent, some husbands have taken this as payment hence they treat their wives as properties they have paid for. Thus she is just an object to be used or molested for that purpose. Four women from CCAP, two from Anglican and one from Roman Catholic expressed similar sentiments. They narrated their experiences that whenever there are a quarrels in their houses, their husbands utter the words saying, ‘You have to honour and submit to me because I have paid a lot in winning you to be my wife.’ With these words, the group felt that this is very unfortunate, since the idea of dowries by forefathers was not intended in that way. It is, therefore, a mistake to capitalise on paying dowries as if they are

⁶⁶⁵ When I say 10%, I mean 9 people from the entire 90 people who participated in the CBS process from different denominations. To be exact these people were all men, that is, three from Roman Catholic Church, two from CCAP, two from Churches of Christ and two from Assemblies of God church. My understanding here was that these people were arguing from patriarchal perspective.

⁶⁶⁶ It is customary for the people of the northern Malawi to pay bride price, ‘Dowries’ (Lobola) to the family of the bride whenever their daughter gets married. This is in form of cattle or money equivalent to cattle, hoes, axes and some small gifts. The number of cattle or money given depends upon the need of that particular family or the wealth the man’s family has dictates everything. However, things are changing now because some families marry their daughters without receiving anything. They only pay while in marriage. All this is paid to thank the parents for bringing up their daughter and to affirm that they are the ones now responsible for the welfare of their daughter. It is also given as a security to the bride’s parents or brothers or other relative. Originally the bride price was not looked upon as the buying or selling of the wife. However, some came to look at this as the case and money was given instead of cattle, hoes, axes and other articles.

hooks for women's subordination and oppression. The intention of dowries is to thank parents like a gift for the job well done.

Hence they made an appeal to the traditional, Civic and Church authorities for Civic education on the part of dowries which have also contributed to subordination and oppression of women in Church and Societies. The groups felt that the culture of oppression, subordination and marginalisation should be opposed, because it causes chaos and disunity in families, societies and nationally. At the same time, the groups agreed that the culture of our forefathers where women were leading figures in society needs to be rejoiced and upheld. They agreed that not all cultures are bad, for that is what shapes the societies. It is for this reason that a woman needs to be given an equal opportunity with men.

6.10.ii. BIBLE STUDY TWO

The Hemorrhaging Woman (Mark 7: 24-30): Focus on action, courage and endurance

Question 1. *What is the main topic?*

After reading the text, the group brought in several points as to the main topic of this study. These included faith or the faith of the woman, faith and courage of the woman and Jesus' approach upon the woman. They recognised that the woman had great faith in Jesus by believing that even if she touches his cloak, she will be healed of her scourge. This led to her courage in approaching Jesus amongst the crowd who used to flock to Jesus. The group recalled Jesus' message that he came to seek and save the lost (Lk 19:10). They also remembered that Mark records that Jesus' ministry was not confined to one particular group or place but was envisaged universally. That is why he had to go to Judah, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan and the region around Tyre and Sodon (Mk. 3: 7-8).

Question 2. (a) *What were the social consequences of bleeding?*

(b) *Why does she come behind Jesus in the crowd?*

Most women and some men agreed that the social consequences of bleeding were that women were neither allowed to touch anything during that period, nor to engage in sexual intercourse. They were kept separate by not defiling the Tabernacle of God (Lev. 15:19-33). Today in some cultures and customs, women are not allowed to cook, put salt in food, use the same bathing basin or walk outside in the public until they are free from menstruation. Moreover, when they give birth, some women are not allowed to cook for almost a couple of weeks. The cooking is done by the guardians from either the family of the husband or wife.

(b) The woman comes behind Jesus because she was fearing the reprisals of touching Jesus and also because she was unclean. It could also be because of the law; she was afraid, hence she came behind Jesus. Others said she knew that when they see her, she might be rebuked and returned.

Question 3. *What are the relationships between the characters and their contexts?*

The group came up by saying that the woman knew Jesus as the saviour, as the doctor who could help her go through her traumatic experience. That is why she decided to approach him and explain to him her ordeal. Jesus after testing her faith heals the woman from her scourge. Even if his disciples seem not to understand Jesus and the intention of his question to the woman, she is finally freed or liberated from her chronic ailment. Hence, there is great relationship particularly between Jesus and the woman and also the crowd. The crowd also contributed to her healing, because their presence enabled her to seek out and touch Jesus. Looking at the reception the woman had from Jesus and their cordial relationship afterwards, the group, especially women participants, were convinced that there is no difference between men and women before Christ, for all are one and receive equal treatment.

The other point that the members saw encouraging was the courage and boldness the woman portrayed in her decision to encounter Jesus, although she knew that she was breaking down the crippling cultural taboos imposed on her. But her decision to reach Jesus directly and be fully restored and integrated as a person with full rights in her society was indeed a remarkable boost in the perspective of women and the suffering community. The woman saw in Christ a liberator, saviour, personal friend and healer, and thereby drew strength from this Christology to struggle for liberation.

Question 4. *As the narrative develops, what is happening to the relative roles of the woman and Jesus?*

Even though Jesus initially wanted to find out who had done this by recognising the going forth of his power, the woman is healed because of her persistent faith and belief in Jesus. Jesus also recognises the faith of the woman and salutes her for this, which finally pays her. Her desire to live a life of happiness, peace and tranquillity is finally awarded.

Question 5. *What are the social consequences of bleeding today in relation to families, churches and communities?*

The group unanimously agreed that, today, in some cultures women are not ‘allowed to cook’, ‘to put salt or soda in foods’, ‘to sleep with husbands’, ‘can’t carry somebody’s baby’, ‘can’t

use the same bed', 'use separate washing basins' etc. Even in churches, especially the CCAP where we have women elders, some women openly said 'they don't accept to participate in serving Holy Communion when they are in this state.' According to the tradition of the CCAP, elders are chosen by Sessions to assist the minister in dispensing the Holy Sacrament to the Communicants. Therefore, when some women elders expressed their views that 'they turn down the offer if chosen by Session', that in itself is a total evidence that they were still clinging to the cultural practices where menstruation was seen as uncleanness, hence could not take part in the celebration for fear of defiling the elements. Even though women bring in other reasons for refusing to take part in the service, deep down in the heart they are aware that there is no other reason apart from menstruation. This tells us that some cultures and taboos are so ingrained in some women that they don't want to change, despite the fact that Jesus has broken this.

On cleanliness, three old women and a man reminded the groups that even today, in some cultures and tradition, there is also parental advice on puberty. They said, once a boy reaches puberty, his parents send him to an old man to give advice about the conduct which a good citizen should maintain. There were no particular ceremonies observed in his case. But he now begins to associate with bigger boys, and to start herding cattle. He is told what fatherhood means and its roles. Hence, he has to behave now like man and leave out all childish manners.

But to a girl, that period of puberty (first monthly period) was subjected to a prolonged ritual, with numerous fixed rules of ceremony. They said, the girl was closed up in a house for a week and was not allowed any contact with a village life. Younger girls of her size were admitted to sit with her for a time. The girl was often found weeping for she saw 'the sorrows and burdens of motherhood approaching and all the simple joys of her childhood disappearing.' After a week she was allowed to come out occasionally and sit under the overhanging roof of the hut. But once she saw any person passing near her, she could not look at him/her instead she had to hide her head with a cloth. Her body was rubbed daily with 'a red power' made from iron scum of stagnant pools on the first days of her seclusion. At the end of the week, the red dust was cleaned off, and her body was 'painted with the grey ashes or white flour' to show that she was now clean. The old women who controlled the ceremonies then took her to the river to wash, and 'anointed her body with a red mixture, and shaved the hair on the top of her head.' Then she was mounted on the shoulders of one of the

women who carried her through the village in procession, and danced with her among the huts. The young girl wriggled about her human growth, development and prosperity, and the people brought to her little presents of beads, eggs and new cloths. She was then taken back to her hut and strictly instructed by the instructors (old women). They gave her commandments responsible for the moral code of the tribe and those that constitute a good woman. Some of the laws given were: 'Secrecy is evil'; 'Men love kindness and hate cruelty'; 'Lies don't build a village'; 'Despise not your husband'; 'Cook for him if hungry'; 'Never give your husband uncooked porridge'; 'Tend your father-in-law and mother-in-law carefully when sick'; and 'Reverence the old people'. Great regard was paid to these instructions of youth, and the parents felt that the future character of their daughters depended on their obedience to their commands. Should she prove rebellious, the old women were sent back again to repeat their precepts.

Questions, 6. (a) *How did this story play in the debate of women?*

(b) *How might this story be used as regards to women in churches and societies today?*

7. *Where are the parallels in your situation to this story we have just read?*

This story has a remarkable meaning in the debate of Jesus with the woman. It tells us that faith is very important in every aspect of life towards Jesus. Again it reminds us that perseverance and persistence are very important in Christianity. The story also teaches us that Jesus does not forsake anyone who comes to him for assistance. Moreover, it tells us that women too are part and parcel of Christianity. Both men and women agreed that the healing of the woman confronts the cultural practices including the traditional understandings of menstrual uncleanness. Therefore, it is a lesson to women to teach their daughters the way to stay both in families and outside, knowing the fact that menstruation should no longer prevent them from participating fully in domestic and church activities. This story also helps women to be free whenever they are in this state, because as some participants said, 'what is more important is purity of heart', in this sense 'faith.'

However, one sub-group comprising of two women and a man said a woman should not sleep with a man during this state. She should not preach in church, and not even serve the Holy Communion. In respect to the Holy Communion, their interpretation was that, this is a sacred and holy Sacrament, hence the unclean things or people should not take or associate with it. The base of their argument was 1 Corinthians 11:27-32, where Paul reminds his readers to examine themselves before eating the bread or drinking the cup in an unworthy manner. They even went further to say, she 'should not even stand before men' whenever there is any

discussion. This is what I reported earlier on that some cultures don't want a woman to come in public while in a state of menstruation. However, this argument shows that some people are so ingrained in their cultures that they feel deeply pressed to continue keeping them. Despite the negative views from this minority sub-group, the general consensus from the entire group members was that women are able to have positions inside and outside Church. They are free to hold positions because there is nothing to restrain them from doing this, since Jesus has welcomed women too. This story therefore tells us that faith moves even mountains. If mountains are moved, this means that everyone is free to exercise his/her ministry before Jesus. This story sets an example today that women are empowered too.

Question 8. *How can we take these discussions forward in churches and societies?*

The group agreed that they would teach their families of the story, and also teach their churches and societies. They also indicated that they needed honesty in going through this. They also asked for further bible studies to enhance people in their freedom and to encourage them to participate in church and society. Men in the group also encouraged women to feel free or to be open and have faith in Jesus, for God is not God of men only but of all. This story empowers women to act responsibly and critically against anything that marginalises them. The group saw this passage as an image for the conditions from which they must arise if they are to attain the necessary will for total liberation. They should address their experiences from the stand-point of Christology, where Christ is their liberator, saviour, personal friend and healer.

The group also saw that the quest for liberation through the bible is not a special preserve of women. Both men and the poor also have recourse to the same book and believe firmly in it. Therefore, the 'word of God' is most capable of fulfilling what it promises. Hence, it becomes most necessary to assure a correct understanding of this word so as to be firmly committed to its liberative truth, that is, the full liberation of women and men, in, by, and through Christ (Jn. 8:31-36). To achieve this, the group felt the need to read the bible critically by looking at our own experiences and understanding in the perspective of women and the suffering community. The other focus of the group was the appraisal of Jesus who ignored the Laws of the outcast to which the woman belonged because of her loss of blood. In touching Jesus, she comes to life and is no longer limited by her illness, which was related to her being a woman. The story, which is Christocentric, is, therefore, liberating and draws the attention away from this woman and her possible position in the church of the first Jesus' communities.

Reading the passage closely and critically by looking at the action, courage and endurance of the woman herself, the story itself empowers women and men who are poor, marginalised and oppressed to stand up in courage and through endurance to act. Men and women in the group agreed to initiate any struggle for liberation, because the woman in the story set an example for them. She initiated by touching Jesus, believing that her touch will be adequate. She breaks through the stigmatisation of being an outcast, which leads to her full presence in the community. By telling Jesus the whole truth, this woman and with many more, can be recognised as the messenger and designer of an alternative theological thinking at the centre of the first Jesus' communities. This creative reconstruction raises the challenge for women today to create their own theology while reflecting on new relationships. Reading the passage in this way, the group saw that revelation begins with their own process of reading and with the challenge to design a new reality.

6.10.iii. BIBLE STUDY THREE

An encounter of Jesus with the Syro-phoenician Woman (Matthew 15:21-28 & Mark 7:24-30)

Question 1. *Describe the main characters in the text.*

The groups came up with the following description of the main characters:

(i) Jesus - He initially seems to ignore the woman. Even when he turns to her he says he is only sent for his own people. However, the group questioned 'his own people', if he meant physical relationship or ironically he also meant spiritual relationship which includes even the woman too. The group recalled what Luke reports that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. In relation to Matthew's account, Jesus only came for the lost people of Israel (his own people as he attributes) or for all people including foreigners as the story further tells. Jesus is honoured by being called Lord from an outsider. Jesus recognises the faith of the woman. Jesus grants her what she needed by healing her tormented daughter.

(ii) Woman – She was the Canaanite or Syro-phoenician by origin. She came from the region and districts of Tyre and Sidon. She comes humbly with contrite heart begging Jesus to have favour on her daughter. She calls Jesus Lord and knows that he is son of David. She sits with Jesus and accepts her status that she is an outsider. The woman knows the children to be fed first but she is also a child on her own. However, she knows for some that Jesus is compassionate and will grant her what she needs. Even if she is termed a "dog," she accepts

this metaphor which then makes Jesus marvel at her faith and trust in him. Her faith made Jesus to reward her afterwards.

(iii) Disciples - As Mathew records, they form part of the group, though the number is not indicated. The group assumed that it was either the entire twelve or his three most favoured disciples in the likes of Peter, James and John. The character of the disciples made the group wonder why would they ask Jesus to send the woman away. The reasons given for Jesus to consider their plea is that she shouts after them. But the question is this, did they want Jesus to send her away after taking care of her request or expect Jesus to chase her away? If so why would Jesus act in that manner? The group suggested that this harsh statement by these disciples enabled Jesus to utter the statement that he was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 15:24). This further suggested that both parties, that is the disciples and the woman were equally granted their requests. They thought the harsh statement some-how pleased his disciples but the woman also was pleased later that she won her argument. But the other group was quick to say that the disciples were wrong to ask Jesus to send the woman away. Similarly, Jesus also seemed to be favouring his own people. However, the readers were pleased that his statement could be a matter of testing her faith because Jesus reverses his statement by attending to the woman by saluting her faith and healing her daughter, which of course indicates a change of mind.

(iv) Daughter - She had an unclean Spirit. She is not present with her mother. She is lying on bed at her home. Her mother works on her behalf. Maybe she was so ill that she could not walk on her own. Jesus heals her and the demon has left. When her mother comes, she finds her free from demon. I think that brought jubilation although neither authors records it.

Question 2. *What do you think is the meaning of Matthew 15:24?*

It could either mean that Jesus was only sent to his own people. OR it could also mean he was sent to his own people but from those the salvation will flourish to other regions as the story proves later. The group was fully convinced with the latter suggestion because the story proves for itself that if Jesus were only sent to his own people, he would not have entertained the request of the woman. Secondly his presence in the districts of Tyre and Sidon proves that his message of Salvation has no bounds. Thus his message knows no boundary, no limitation and is therefore universal. In the Jewish perception, Jesus breaks the boundary because their understanding of the land was so limited. However, Jesus teaches them that his message

knows no bounds, and therefore it is not limited but universal. It is for this reason that he extends it to the outside world.

Question 3. *How do you account Matthew 15:26 and Mark 7:27?*

The group marvelled at the harsh statement Jesus brought to this needy woman. They thought that was a great insult calling someone a “dog”. They therefore questioned critically Jesus’ statement made by Matthew and Mark as why could Jesus utter such a statement to the needy woman who had brought nothing except seeking an assistance for her daughter. The woman only came in good faith and in peace. Furthermore, she came with honour by kneeling down at his feet. But the group was pleased with the statement Mark makes that the children (Israelites/Jews) should be fed first, and later outsiders. This enabled them to ponder that may- be the woman came in when Jesus’ mission to his own people was not finally fulfilled. They knew that everything has its plan and timetable. However, the word “dog” brought in mixed feelings and interpretations. The group finally agreed that it could be that Jesus softened his statement, which the group recalled that even today there are certain words that are insults when uttered to a fellow human being. However, the same words are not insults when uttered softly, but to a person of your age. Again this depends upon the mood of that particular person. It could be in this mood and in this understanding that Jesus could have uttered the word “dog” to a woman. Consequently, the woman became part of the inclusive ministry of Jesus.

The group also identified two levels of belief in this text. One of the belief was through hearing, ‘yet he could not escape notice’ (Mk 7:24). The other level of belief was seen by meeting Jesus directly which would make the encounter personal. Again the other aspect noteworthy of this text was that Jesus actually changed his plans in the course of the conversation. Again the group observed the relationship between Jesus and the woman. It seemed that Jesus and the woman were talking to each other and both listened to each other which enabled the change in their conversation. In this text, Jesus is revealed as the Messiah, the Son of David and this made the group notice the openness of the woman and her acceptance of Jesus as her saviour. Surely, the group highlighted the importance of listening and enabling oneself to be changed by the course of conversation. The group, therefore, drew much attention to the active inclusion of the woman by Jesus.

Question 4. *How would you describe the role of the woman and Jesus in this story?*

The woman's role is very pleasing, admirable and a force to reckon with. She comes humbly, she kneels/bows down at Jesus feet. She states her request. She argues with Jesus but later wins her argument. She reminds Jesus that his role is not only for his own people but for the entire globe. She has faith that warrants her request. She is courageous that even if she is concerned, she does not waiver off. She is also loving and caring to her daughter. In sum, she acts, struggles and wins her request. Jesus is a man who does not take heed to disciple's plea. He ignores them and concentrates on the woman. He is also a loving and caring man who always keeps the needy, marginalised, oppressed and traumatised. Jesus, therefore, shows mercy and tender heart to the woman and her child.

Question 5. *How far does the attitudes of Disciples reflect the treatment of women in Matthew 15: 23?*

The attitudes of the disciples show that they did not bother with the woman. They seem to show that women are not respected, they cannot work or associate with men. Their attitudes also show that women cannot lead in any work through the power of God. This shows that they did not have mercy upon this woman. Regrettably, the group openly said that the attitudes shown by disciples are what women are experiencing even today. Women are treated as second class people with limited intellectual development, power and education. They are subordinate as inferior, disparaged not taken seriously and are just sexual objects. They are therefore victims of violence emotionally, physically, culturally and even institutionally. That is why they lag behind in sharing in decision-making and leadership bodies.

Questions 6. *In Mark 5:1-13, Jesus heals a Gerasene Demoniac (a Male Outsider), but here in Mark 7:24-30 Jesus initially shows reluctance to a Syro-phoenician woman (a Female Outsider) and also calls her a "dog", don't you think that Jesus here supports the subordination of women? How would you describe this situation in relation to our context?*

7. *What parallels does this story have in our own situation?*

The question brought in two suggestions. At least 10% of the women and 30 % of the men agreed that Jesus' statement contributes to the subordination of women. They were baring their argument that both characters were outsiders' one male and the other female, but why did Jesus not call the male outsider "dog"? Their argument was based on Mark 5:1-20 where Jesus healed the Gerasene Demoniac who was also an outsider. By comparing the healing of this man with the woman whom Jesus calls a "dog", these people suggested that Jesus here seems to preach subordination. However, this was not their concrete understanding and interpretation here that Jesus supports subordination of the woman, because he had a different

agenda and the outcome of the story proves that this was not so because Jesus finally heals the woman's daughter. However, the utterance of the word "dog" when we compare two stories leaves those who are against the equality of women believe that this statement proves itself. However another group had the opinion that Jesus by calling her a "dog" does not support the subordination of women. They observed that there are two different stories all together which happened in different places even though all places are foreign lands. They further said that even the context does not prove that this would be the situation. Interestingly, they all agreed that the statement to the woman further strengthens the stand that both man and woman are equal before God. They are all treated equally by getting what they requested.

6.10.iv. BIBLE STUDY FOUR

Women's Church Service (I Corinthians 14:34-40 & 1 Timothy 2:8-15)

Question 1. *What reasons are given for women to be silent in 1 Corinthian and 1 Timothy?*

The group came up with the following:

- (i) It is because of the law, 'as the law says' (1 Cor. 14:34).
- (ii) It shames the church (1 Cor.14: 35).
- (iii) The word of God does not only originate to women nor were the only ones it reached (1 Cor.14: 36).
- (iv) Adam was formed first, then Eve (1 Tim.2: 13).
- (v) Adam was not deceived but the woman (1 Tim.2: 14).

Question 2. *"As the law says", what does the law say? Where is it found?*

'As the Law says', the group observed that may be Paul meant the punishment made by God to the woman in Genesis 3:16, which says 'I will greatly increase your pangs in child bearing. In pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' However the group found it very hard to reconcile the earlier statement made by Paul in 1 Cor.11: 11 where he says 'Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God.' This statement made some to conclude that 1 Cor.14:34 may not have been uttered by Paul. But others observed that they were made by Paul but did not mean that women should be subordinate to their husbands.

Question 3. *What shame did a woman speaking in church bring?*

It was hard to find the shame that Paul talks about in this text. The group thought that may be because they are inferior to men as Paul claims, they could not stand before men. Even if the

group read Genesis 3:19 closely, they could not find an injunction against women remaining silent in churches.

Question 4. *Who do you think is speaking these words? Is it true that Adam was not deceived?*

They knew that Paul was speaking these words and therefore felt that it was his own addition accorded to the church of Corinth at that time. Again looking closely at the story of the fall of man, Adam was also deceived by the woman. If he was not deceived God could not have punished him as well. The punishment would sorely have been laid upon the woman. But by virtue of accepting the forbidden fruit from the woman, Adam accepted the responsibility, hence the outcome. The blame therefore came to both Adam and Eve for not taking heed to what God had originally told them.

Question 5. *Do you know of any women characters in both the Old and New Testament who have spoken out in private and public?*

The group came up with the following list of women characters in both Old and New Testaments who are the leading examples of women's empowerment.

- (a) **Sara: Genesis 12:1-5** - Sarah with Abraham obeys God's call to journey from their home of Haran to the promised land of Canaan. Sarah bears no offspring; this was her shame in that ancient culture. But in Genesis 18, Sarah is promised a child in her old age, when she already ceased this manner of women. Sarah observes by saying "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" and she conceives and bears a son, Isaac.
- (b) **Miriam: Exodus 15:20-21** - The sister of Moses who was a prophetess. She leads the people in song and dance in praise of God's deliverance from the bondage of Egypt through crossing the Red Sea.
- (c) **Deborah: Judges 4:4** - A Judge and a charismatic leader of the ancient Israel. She is also referred to as a Prophetess who was inspired by God. She was able to unify the tribes of Israel and restore their loyalty to God. She also leads Israel in a military victory against their enemies.
- (d) **Huldah: II Kings 22:14-20** - A Prophetess, Wife of Shallum and keeper of the wardrobe. She resided in Jerusalem and was consulted by Josiah, King of Judah, and the High Priest Hilkiyah in 621 BC, when the book of the Law was discovered in the Temple. She prophesies God's judgement upon the nation of Judah because it has abandoned the Lord. She also prophesies peace for Josiah because he returns

to the Lord with a humble, repentant heart. After this consultation Josiah carries out religious reform within the nation of Judah.

- (e) **Hannah: I Samuel 1:2-20** - Like Sarah, she was barren. But during her families annual visit to the Sanctuary of the Lord at Shiloh, she makes a vow to the Lord that if she is granted a son she will dedicate him to God. The Lord, in response to her prayer, blesses her with a child, Samuel, whom she dedicates to the Lord's service. Samuel becomes the Judge and the Prophet.
- (f) **Ruth:** The book of Ruth tells the story of this young Moabite widow, who faithfully accompanies her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem of Judah. This is the Jewish homeland of her late husband. She, however, marries Boaz, a kinsman of her late husband, and she bears a son Obed, who is the father of Jesse, the father of King David. The King David is the lineage of the Christ Child, who becomes the saviour of the entire world.
- (g) **Esther:** The book of Esther also tells the story of this beautiful Jewish maiden, who won the affections of the Persian King and become his Queen. By so doing she was able to save the lives of her people from an edict of annihilation during their time in Persia. She put her life at risk, entering into the presence of the King without being summoned by him, in order to give him the needed information to reverse the edict.
- (h) **A Capable Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31** - Her husband trusts her. She tends the household, is a merchant, purchases fields, plants vineyards, makes and sells linen garments. She is a prosperous businesswoman. She feeds and clothes her household, and feeds the poor and tends to the needy. She is strong, dignified, wise and kind. But more importantly, she fears the Lord. Nevertheless, it is her husband who sits at the city gates making decisions for the community.
- (i) **The Prophet Joel: Joel 2:28-29** - He prophesies the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on men and women that they would dream and see visions in the coming days. This was experienced in Acts of the Apostles where they witnessed and spoke out about the life and work of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This prophecy by Joel was given to all people, that is men, women, sons and daughters to witness to the ministry of Jesus.
- (j) **Elizabeth: Luke 1:5-66** - She was of the priestly descent and wife of Zechariah, the Mother of John the Baptist. Like Sarah and Hannah, she was barren, which was a great sorrow to her. However, her barrenness in her old age, like Sarah's is

miraculously overruled by the hand of the Lord taking away the disgrace she had endured among her people through blessing her with the birth of a child. The child she bears is John the Baptist, who prepares the way for the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. Having filled with the Holy Spirit, she proclaims to Mary saying, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.' When John is born, it is his mother Elizabeth, who names him John, counter to the tradition of the father naming the child.

- (k) **Mary: The Magnificat- Luke 1:46-55** – She prayed to God by thanking him for giving her the saviour of the world. She was proud that generations call her blessed for the great things that the Lord did to her. Indeed, God brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly like her and fed the hungry with good things.
- (l) **A Samaritan Woman: John 4:7-30** - A woman who encounters Jesus at the well and the gift that Jesus was offering to the woman. The woman is so open to him and eventually accepts of him. Indeed, the conversation between Jesus and the woman provides a model for the bridging of cultural divisions and the experience of encountering truth.
- (m) **Women Disciples: In the Gospels** - Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna who were followers of Jesus and accompanied him in his mission. They also helped to finance Jesus' ministry out of their resources (Lk 8:1-3). These women travelled with the twelve disciples and Jesus from village to village.
- (n) **Women witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus** - These were Mary, Jesus' mother, Mary, the wife of Cleopas, Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Salome. They were at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:25). They looked on from a distance and followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him (Mt 27:55-56; Mk 15:40-41) and Lk 23:55-56). They brought spices to anoint Jesus and were to preach the message of resurrection to Jesus' disciples who refused to believe.
- (o) **Anna: Luke 2:36-38** - A Prophetess, married for seven years, then a widow to the age of eighty four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer day and night. She witnessed with Simeon the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple. She praised God and began to speak about the child in the Temple to all who were seeking redemption.
- (p) **Dorcas/Tabitha: Acts 9:36-42** - A disciple at Joppa, who was known for her charitable works. She fell sick and was raised from the dead by Peter. The widows

she had assisted surrounded her bedside, weeping and showing clothing that Dorcas had made for them. And many believed in the Lord through her faith and works.

- (q) **Lydia: Acts 16:11-40** - A business woman from Thyatira, a city in Lydia, in Asia Minor. She was a seller of dyed goods, trading in purple goods, a luxury item, indicating she was financially well to do and influential. She had a home in Philippi and worshiped with a group of Jewish women. She and all her household were converted to Christianity by Paul. She opened her home to Paul and his companions. Truly, the gathering of worshipers in her home became the first Church in Macedonia.
- (r) **Priscilla: Acts 18:18-19:6** - She and her husband Aquila were tent makers, and residents of Corinth. They became partners with Paul, as evangelists and teachers. They also taught Apollos, a brilliant man, who as yet was uninstructed in the teaching on Christian baptism. Again they risked their lives for Paul's life (Rom. 16:3-4).

All these characters remind us that women provided an enormous task in the time of prophets, Jesus and the beginning of the early Christianity. However, the blame for the origin of Sin is put upon a woman. As Ecclesiasticus 25:24 says, 'from a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die.' Also Sotah 3:4 says 'let the word of the Lord be burnt rather than committed to woman....' Again Apion 2:210 says, 'the woman,' says the Law, 'is in all things inferior to man. Let her be submissive.' Also a thanksgiving prayer of Jews in Jesus' day in Menahot 43b says, 'praised be to God that has not created me a gentile; praised be God that created me not a woman.'

In the Temple, women were limited to an outer court, beyond and five steps down from the man's court. These Scriptures claim that women are to submit to the rule of men, they are not to teach men. Although, with few exceptions, Hebrew women had little or no economic power, the way of life in the Old Testament still holds true. This could be the reason that Paul reiterates his stand and attitude upon women based from the way of life women were treated or thought of in the Old Testament era and even in the early century of the New Testament.

Question 6. *What do you think makes women inferior (subordinate) to men in church and society today?*

The group also observed that the bible contributed to the subordination of women in church and society today. The church also seems to have emphasised the fundamental wickedness of women. They are characterised as responsible for leading men astray; the claim that if the woman had not tempted the man, he would not have sinned. This emphasis on Eve's primary guilt is exacerbated by the idea which became prevalent among many Christians that the knowledge which Adam and Eve gained from eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge was carnal knowledge. In other words, Eve was responsible for introducing Adam to sexuality. Women are therefore thought to be the temptresses in what came to be seen in the church as the greatest of all temptations, sex. That is why women are seen as inferior to men as it says, 'A daughter is less desirable than a son' (Lev. 12:1-5). Also the religious view of a woman is not worth as much as the religious view of a man (Lev. 27:1-7).

From this, the group felt that the patriarchal society also contributed to the subordination of women. A woman is under the rule of her husband or father. Sexual intercourse was thought to be for the husband's pleasure and for procreation. Hence women were often treated as property and thus excluded from the Jewish priesthood. Although they may participate in religious festivals women were considered to be contentious, noisy and indiscreet. These scriptural readings and interpretations and the dominance of patriarchal society made women to be on the periphery. This was ingrained in patriarchal society and to let it break down or change this needs an enormous effort and energy. Given this background, three men from the Assemblies of God said the bible does not allow women to stand before men and give instructions and teachings. While Two men from the Church of Nazarene and three women from the Roman Catholic and Anglican argued that women cannot assume leadership roles because by virtue of being married, they are under the control and responsibility of their husbands. They said the bible supports that they belong to them and therefore cannot make an independent decision.

However, the rest of the group from all denominations argued that women are involved in preaching, pastoral work and evangelisation in their wing, so they asked, what is the difference between what they are doing and preaching at a Sunday service? One lady said, 'She did not understand the sacredness of a Sunday service when the same God uses them during the week to preach and win people, strengthen those who are weak spiritually.' She

went further to ask, 'Is the God whom we serve on the working days different from the God we honour on Sundays?' Women from CCAP argued that they are ordained to be elders in the church where they perform all duties according to what an elder is supposed to be. 'So why should women not hold leadership positions like their fellow male elders in church and society?' Therefore, about 95% of the participants agreed that women are capable of handling leadership roles in the church and society if only they are given a chance. One woman rightly said, 'some women have more gifts of preaching or pastoral work than their male counterparts.' She, therefore said, once they are given an opportunity, the church and society will benefit from their gifts immensely.

Question 7. *Looking at our current context of church and society, What do we need to do to break this culture of silence? At the same time, to what extent would that lead to upholding our cultural values?*

The groups agreed that, in order to break this culture of silence ingrained in women due to patriarchal dominance, our main tool is the bible. The bible is full of stories, images⁶⁶⁷, metaphors which empower women to stand up and voice their concerns despite the dominance of men in church and society. There are remarkable stories that empower women and also women characters that we have seen in question five, who have spoken out in private and in public. These stories are an epitome for women to forget about the past and look forward that Jesus cares and loves them equally. Jesus invites women too to contribute in his inclusive ministry. Thus the first tool to break this culture of silence is the bible itself, for it has everything to convince both men and women that they are equal partners in the ministry and kingdom of God, no matter their gender. Therefore, the bible, especially the Gospels, gives a clear evidence of a "discipleship of equals", with women playing an active and important part in key events, remaining at the cross, being primary witness to the Resurrection (John 20: 11-18).

The second tool is civic education to sensitise families, societies and churches. People need to know that women and men were all created in the same image of God. Therefore, they are equal responsibilities before each other and to God. Women need not be treated as properties

⁶⁶⁷ Grey, M. *Beyond the Dark Night: A Way Forward for the Church*, Cassell, London, 1997. Mary Grey looks for ways out of the present dilemma of Catholic Church. She attempts to conjure up the new form of the church, which she hopes will emerge in and through 'dark night'. In her chapter on 'Journeying', she tries to explore the 'condensed symbol of exodus from oppression, wandering in the wilderness – while experiencing the presence of God in a way – and hoping for the Promised Land', p. 48.

but they all have gifts fit for up building of the body of Christ. The group saw the importance of Bible Studies that would make men in their families and congregations more conscious of cultural structures and attitudes that oppress women. The group reiterated the importance of making women and men live and interact in peace and harmony, which leads to upholding of our cultural values. They felt that upholding cultural values that oppress and marginalise women and the poor could not bring peace, development and tranquillity in families, churches and societies. The good thing is that in their CBS there were both traditional and religious leaders who are the main custodians of upholding cultural values. However, they felt the need to change some of the cultural values that are oppressive in nature, for they bring chaos and retard development in their areas.

Question 8. *How then can we take these discussions forward individually and collectively?*

The group saw the need to reread these texts individually and meditate upon them with contrite heart and hear what God will speak to them. They were really encouraged by this question and felt the need to engage in an extensive mission of overcoming the divisions within the communities, although this cannot be done overnight. They also felt the need of asking their religious leaders to put maximum efforts in bible studies because they assist to transform individuals, communities and society by helping groups to deepen their love and knowledge of God, and one another. This enables them to seek and make a difference in their faith through action. Looking at their texts, the group believed the importance of the word of God in liberating and transforming people's lives. In this way, the group was encouraged at every stage of learning in these CBS by reflecting on and critiquing their previous and current experience.

6.10.v. BIBLE STUDY FIVE

Subordination of women and Unity in Christ (Ephesians 5:21-33 & Galatians 3:25-29)

Question 1. *What do you think are these texts all about?*

The texts are about the roles of husband and wife in marriage (Eph.5: 22, 25 & 33), and about unity in Christ (Eph.5: 30, Gal.3: 28). They are about Love, Subjection and Oneness in Christ.

Question 2. *Does submission mean slavery or does love mean domination?*

Neither submission nor love means slavery or domination. The group observed that in marriage submission does not mean slavery because God made man and woman to be sharers of love. They were created to be conduits of His bounty. So when Paul talks about

submission to the wife he means respect and love the wife should give her husband. Likewise, love to the husband does not mean dominating in all discussions. The wife should not be thought as a “Yes Sir” in all things that she thinks are not good. She is at liberty to say “No” to issues that destruct and discriminate in families, churches and societies.

Question 3. *What is the meaning of “Submission” and “Love” in respect to Christ and the Church?*

The group understood submission as an honour and affirmation of the husband’s leadership. It is also a responsibility to a wife to help carry out the husband role according to her gifts. It is a call to yield to the authority and an inclination to follow his leadership. But the group also acknowledged that the husband does not replace Christ as the woman’s supreme authority. Hence the woman should be cautious and must not follow her husband’s leadership into sin. Even if the husband’s attitudes can lead into sin, the woman should show her attitude and behaviour that she longs for him to forsake sin and lead him in righteousness so that her disposition to honour him as head can again produce harmony. Paul describes the unbelieving partner as “sanctified” through the believing partner and the children as holy (1 Cor. 7:14). Peter, likewise urges wives to win their unbelieving husbands to faith “without words” through their Christian behaviour (1 Pet. 3:1).

Thus the group found these statements to be very empowering and exciting for both the husbands and the wives so that their partners can come to faith through their witness of their Christian living. So home is indeed the first place of mission in the Christian’s life. As a husband, wife or child, the duty of a Christian is to win his or her family for Christ through prayer and a life-style in accordance with God’s words. This encourages both Christian husbands and wives married to unbelieving partners to pray for their partners’ conversion and exercise a Christian life at home. Husbands are called by God to take primary responsibility for Christlike, servant leadership, protection and provision in the home (etc. Eph.5: 29). The wife should submit, not in a servile way, but happily to their husband’s love and tender care. Peter also wrote of submissive respect which wives should have to their husbands. He also writes of considerable respect husbands should show to their wives (1 Pet. 3:1,7). Thus, the writer to the Hebrews describes marriage as worthy of honour for all parties.

(ii) “Love” – the husband should also take a special care from Christ (Eph.5: 25). He should lead out in the kind of love that is willing to die and give her life. As Jesus says in Luke 22:26, ‘let the leader become as one who serves.’ One brought a meaningful point which

produced a laughter by saying ‘a husband who just sits himself down in front of the Video or Television or a comfortable chair and orders his wife around like a slave has abandoned the way of Christ.’ He emphasised that Jesus bound himself with a towel and washed the Apostles’ feet, so should the husband’s show that humbleness in their love to their wives. It is a shame to the husbands who think their maleness requires a domineering, demanding attitude towards their wives.

The group noted that if husbands want to be Christian husbands, they need to become servants and not bosses. Husbands need to show and exercise their responsibility under God by provision of moral vision and spiritual leadership as humble servants of their wives and families. They should feel the greater responsibility of taking lead in the things of the spirit, lead out in giving the family a vision of its meaning and vision. They should lead their families in a life of prayer and take the lead in sharing the moral fabric of their homes and in governing its happy peace. The reference Paul draws from this mystery (Eph.5:33) is that the roles of husband and wife in marriage are not arbitrarily assigned, but are rooted in the distinctive roles of Christ and His church. The group were reminded that those who are married need to ponder again how mysterious and wonderful it is that God grants in marriage the privilege to image forth the divine realities, infinitely bigger and greater than ourselves. They saw this as the foundation of the pattern of love that Paul describes for marriage. Therefore the husbands and wives should consciously copy the relationship God intended for Christ and the church.

Question 4. *In your understanding, do you think that submission or love is only ascribed to women and men respectively?*

The group further understood submission and love as ascribed to women and men respectively. The husband too needs to respect and hear the views of his wife. He should give a “Yes” to those that are worth taking and “No” to those that do not contribute to the welfare. Similarly, the wife should not just accept all the views of her husband that she sees are not worthy, but help in building permanent relationship with positive attitudes and views. Moreover, the wife should love his husband as herself. That is why God needed to create a fellow human being to share the love of God. God knew that animals would not share this love and are not heir of the grace of life (1Pet.3: 7). The group understood that God patterned marriage very purposefully after the relationship between his son and the church, which he had planned from eternity. That is why Paul calls marriage a mystery.

Question 5. *How are these texts interpreted in our contexts?*

As observed in some earlier CBS, some people have misinterpreted this text to subordinate women. They have concluded that women were created for men and should therefore submit in everything. The cultural values exert extreme pressure on the woman to keep her from active participation in the world affairs putting her 'where she belongs' the home as others claim. The group expressed their experiences that the primary authority of making the choice of family residence is given to the husband, not to the wife. For instance, in case of disagreement concerning parental authority, the husband is given the upper hand. The husband in this case is thought to be the legal administrator of the conjugal as well as the children's property. The husband's consent is needed before the wife accepts expensive gifts, except from close relatives. The wife has the right to purchase things for the house, but not without the consent of the husband in the case of expensive purchase. The husband has the right to object to the wife's profession (for those working) if the husband can support the family sufficiently. But, the wife does not have the right to object to her husband's profession. In sum, cultural framework views women as having to get married to exercise child bearing, child rearing and housekeeping. Certainly, women are treated as sex objects. Again for the professional women, they are exploited and abused when it comes to promotions and attending overseas conferences or meetings. Women are harassed sexually by some male bosses in order to be considered for these offers. By misinterpreting the meaning of submission bosses exploit and oppress the professional women.

Question 6. *What does Paul mean in Galatians 3:28?*

The group looked at Galatians 3:28 that women are equal partners in building the kingdom of God. Paul empowers women too to lead a life that in Christ we are all one. The ministry of Christ invites all people and does not look at gender, class, ethnicity etc. By virtue of being baptised in Christ Jesus the new foundation is laid upon and new creation surfaces.

Question 7. *If we explore our current context of women's oppression and society, is the church part of or outside of what is going on? How?*

Exploring current context of women's oppression and society, the group agreed that the church has contributed partly towards this. This is so because subordination of women was thought to be divinely sanctioned. As we have seen in the earlier CBS especially the creation story in Genesis, the silence of women in 1Corinthians 14 and 1Timothy 2 and also Ephesians 5, women are interpreted as created from man, after man and for his advantage. Paul also strengthens this argument. The problem lies in the literal and critical reading of these texts. The interpretations ignored that these texts and others in the bible provide guidelines for

handling women. This literal approach of interpreting these texts enabled women to be marginalised and oppressed. It was assumed that women could not do the same church work as men because of their inferiority. This means that women have no authority over men and therefore cannot take a position of leadership in the church, as it would involve ruling men.

About 8 % of people in the group went on to say men and women have different responsibilities. They said women should have their areas of work and so too men. Therefore, women should be content in serving God through their wing or branch as women's guild and managing their homes effectively, while men should concentrate on leadership roles. Some men said women cannot take leadership positions even if offered because they are aggressive by nature. They further said for a long time women have been silenced by their culture so that even now they don't speak out whenever men are around. However, 92% of the group members looked at these responses as a total reflection of patriarchal and cultural attitudes against women. Therefore, this group felt that the culture of silence and belief they have learned from generations is a true need to change. They realised that these internalised prejudices against women which generations have learned to conform need to change in order to liberate and bring equality to women.

Question 8. *With the kind of input and ideas you have in these texts, how can you take these discussions forward with your own situation and involvement at home, church and society?*

The last question inspired them to open up many treasurers for all people to understand that they need mutual coherence in families and societies in order to live a peaceful life. One group suggested to hold a series of Bible Studies that would make men and women in their congregations more conscious of cultural structures and attitudes that oppress women. The groups were empowered to get involved fully in teaching the importance of marriage and unity in Christ Jesus. In doing this, they agreed to continue developing more groups within their particular social and religious contexts, so that transformation of individuals is encouraged.

6.11. Participants' evaluations and responses to the CBS process

There were various comments made by participants but I have just summarised few remarks. On the general reaction to these studies, participants said the texts themselves were wonderful, enlightening, inspiring and empowering. The texts enabled participants to deploy fresh and liberating views by analysing the texts critically. I remember one participant saying, this kind of Bible Study opened up many unseen treasures for all people in the church and society and wished to give them a chance to go through this process. Others commented on the inspirational aspect of prayers, which opened their perspectives of pondering upon the texts. Another comment was directed at the outline of questions which participants thought had enabled them to dig through the text and come up with inspiring answers. One said, 'this bible study has enabled me to study the bible to the maximum. I am now spiritually moved up one step in reading the biblical texts.' The questions were open and engaging which made participants to relate to and take change of the learning and transforming process. The questions led participants to ask more questions and read more of the bible. For this, participants unanimously asked the facilitator to conduct more bible studies. They also pledged to sit down with their church ministers and elders to ask them to introduce CBS in their churches. However, they needed more training in carrying out CBS Process. Furthermore, others commented that time was a big problem, of which I agree as a facilitator. The participants wanted to modify the programme especially the time frame allocated to each question. Surely, most of the times participants were cut short of their discussions to report back their findings and suggestions. Certainly, I found that most had not finished contributing fully their views. They also wanted to see that participants should be given enough time to go through the questions before coming together as a group. However, they admitted that their church ministers did not give them the questions, because the facilitator gave them two days before the actual meeting.

6.12. Findings, evaluations and analyses of group's readings

From my own view, the groups worked pretty well to a well-established contextual bible study model. I saw from the groups' contributions that they looked at the texts closely and invited critical and communal reading through a number of open questions. This was done in small groups of three or four and also in the full group. This method surely encourages an enormous deal of group participation and an idea of learning from and listening to each other. Since the main idea of doing these series of bible studies was to transform individuals, communities and societies by deepening their love and knowledge of God in scriptures, the

groups felt liberated and transformed. Although the groups were not concerned with literary structures, genre or unity, their main focus was on the relationships between Jesus and humankind particularly women and the oppressed. The groups wanted to read the texts for healing of relationships and the belief in the inclusiveness of the word of God. The main emphasis was laid upon healing as an act of restoring and maintaining God's creation against all forces that inhibit the fulfilment of individuals in church and society.

The groups were aware that Jesus came for all people, and challenged any racial discrimination and eventually overcame it. This was an enormous empowerment that they too will overcome the barriers that are there in families, societies and churches that marginalise women, the poor and the neglected. The groups used stories from their own experience, which evoked the texts. A number contributed experiences from their childhood, adolescence and in their marriage lives. They expressed the ways in which the barriers between women and men had been upheld and were beginning to break down. They also reiterated the difference between church communities. One example was that the Roman Catholic Church was so stiff with her tradition in allowing girls (their church members) to have their marriage officiated in Protestant churches if the bridegroom was a member of the Protestant churches. But this was not the case when a Protestant girl marries a Catholic believer. However, these rules are now softened, in that we are seeing many mixed marriages from different churches and marriage (wedding) committees are consisting of members from different churches.

Thus, the bible studies enabled people to see the decisions which affect their communities and helped them to change and become open and caring by true encounters with others. These bible studies, therefore, underlined the opportunities for change and overcoming divisions and boundaries that are prevalent now. The groups also read the texts with the characters found in the texts: Their primary identification was with these characters such as Adam, Eve, the Haemorrhaging woman, the Syro-phoenician woman and their relationships with God/Jesus. As some of these characters sought healing from Jesus, they were changed by listening to him. This healing occurred during the course of their conversation and this enabled change on both sides. Similarly, the stories, which the groups told, proved beyond doubt to be major points of identification. I saw this as an important part of the process of reading with others, which the groups explored. For instance, seeing Jesus' engagement with the Haemorrhaging and the Syro-phoenician woman, and how both parties changed their relationship, the groups were encouraged too in encountering others outside them. The relationship between Jesus and

these women sets an example for women and men to share the same feelings of love, care and mercy to one another despite differences in church traditions and church governments. By showing this mutuality, the groups can be changed and help others to change too, once they wilfully listen to Jesus and are transparent in their everyday lives. Although the groups knew that it was an individual effort to attain this they were encouraged to realise this.

While the CBS hermeneutical approach is very effective in the liberation of the oppressed and marginalised, there are some concerns that need to be ironed out in order to fulfil its aims. One of the concerns is the attainment of equal participation. What I discovered in this study process is that some participants were more knowledgeable in scriptures to the extent of monopolising the discussions. Consequently, those who were less versed in scriptures looked very inferior and contributed less to the discussions. Sometimes, participants were expecting a lot from me as the trained reader to contribute to the deliberations. For instance, participants kept on asking what were my views on each and every question asked. In this sense if the facilitator is not very careful he/she can end up monopolising or controlling the discussions. Hence, I find it difficult for a trained reader and those ordinary readers who are biblically sound to act as “an equal participant” in the reading process. I feel, if not controlled properly, it would lead the trained reader and the knowledgeable ordinary readers becoming “the controller” of the reading process. In this sense, the trained reader with all critical tools available for handling CBS has a hard task in such a reading. The practical question that now comes is, is the trained reader or the knowledgeable ordinary readers reading “With” and “Not” for the ordinary readers? Though ordinary readers are present in the reading process that does not mean that they are actively involved and participating in the CBS reflection being carried. The temptation is that the trained reader and those biblically versed ordinary readers could monopolise the readings and at the end come up with a reading that is entirely his/hers or theirs and not that of the entire group. Therefore, the trained reader who facilitates the readings should work out the reading and see that every reader participates equally without anyone taking a lion’s share in the discussions. The trained reader should be aware that he/she is carrying out a communal reading process where everyone participates freely and equally. The trained reader should be reminded of the following questions: How does he/she work out the reading as “equal participant” in this communal reading process? How does he/she facilitate a dominance-free discourse to make sure it is a product of the entire group? How does he/she rejuvenate and encourage the passive participants to participate actively in the reading process?

The other concern falls on illiteracy. Most Malawians are semi-illiterate or completely illiterate. The problem now lies in marrying illiteracy with literacy to come up with a group discussion at the end of the reading process. I know there is a big gap between trained readers and ordinary readers. The gap is not only in reading area skills but there are also wide differentiations. For instance, a trained reader is identified as an educated, middle class person, an academic, literate and textual reader, and also as an objective/critical reader. He/She is also identified as a facilitator or enabler of ordinary readers. Hence, he/she is equipped with different rules of reading and belongs to the professional social group. Trained readers are therefore ordinary readers who are more versed in linguistic skills and tools in reading the biblical texts acquired through their academic training. An ordinary reader is identified as the person who reads the bible in line with acquired or inherited beliefs and practices. Though ordinary readers may not necessarily lack argumentative and critical discursive competence, they lack critical reading skills associated with classroom education. This implies that trained readers and ordinary readers have different rules and guides in interpreting biblical texts and concepts. The difference here is that trained readers possess a scientific and rational outlook to life while ordinary readers use non-scientific ways such as traditional beliefs and practices. The point here is that in dealing with a reading that involves the literate trained reader and the illiterate ordinary readers, one has to be aware of the difference between them. As Eric Anum states, one needs to be aware of 'elite versus non-elite, scientific and western ways versus non-scientific and traditional ways, urban ways versus rural ways.'⁶⁶⁸ The implication here is that it is not just easy to bridge the gap between the trained reader with critical tools and skills of biblical reflection to come together with ordinary readers who possess non-critical tools and skills. Given these differentiations, trained readers should be able to gain awareness to the difference between them and ordinary readers. But, how would they humble themselves to accommodate the views of the non-critical ordinary readers without losing their criticality? How would they balance and marry the views of the illiterate readers with those of the literate readers?

The questions above give me another concern on the critical and contextual part of reading. I believe the trained reader uses his/her sophisticated critical skills and tools in reading the texts, while ordinary readers employ contextual reading through their experiences and stories. While both the critical and contextual readings are very vital in the CBS process, they need to

⁶⁶⁸ Anum, E., 1999, p. 71.

balance. The problem lies with one being greater than the other which brings some dangers to the reading. The dangers are, as Anum reiterates, 'either going to the extreme of making the study so critical and hence leaving little of its contextuality. Or romanticizing the experiences of non-critical readers to the extent that reading loses its criticality.'⁶⁶⁹ The trained readers should therefore be very cautious in creating a balance between critical reading and contextual reading so that the bible reading should always be equally critical and contextual. But to achieve this, how would the trained reader measure the criticality and contextuality of the biblical reading? How would he/she control so that none of them goes to the extreme? And how would he/she balance the experiences of the non-critical or contextual readers with his/her critical experience?

I hope these concerns, if looked at very cautiously will indeed add the flavour to the remarkable work the CBS process is doing. Given these concerns, the CBS hermeneutical model is a very good attempt at reading the bible not only in academic institutions but also with ordinary readers who are marginalised and oppressed. These concerns raised are attempts to bridge the gap between trained readers and ordinary readers. The trained reader who is the enabler of the ordinary readers should look at them and be aware to create an atmosphere where the trained reader and ordinary readers produce a co-operate and communal reading of the biblical texts. The concerns are not overpowering the strengths of CBS process. I believe looking at them with an understanding mind cautiously will produce effective reading. If these questions tabled above keep on ringing in the facilitator's mind, he/she will facilitate a reading that is entirely a group work.

6.13. My contributions to the liberative readings in the CBS process

In the first place, two of the passages that we studied are those I have been working through in chapters 3-5. In these chapters I have argued at length that these women though marginalised by their impurity and nationality respectively achieved their goal from the Markan Jesus. They were no longer under any imposition because Jesus had broken their internal and external boundaries that separated them. The conversation between Jesus and the women provides a model for the bridging of cultural divisions and for the experience of encountering truth in the unexpected and the other. In this respect, I contributed to the liberative readings of the CBS process by giving a background information on the modes of reading, that is, 'behind

⁶⁶⁹ Anum, E., 1999, p. 71.

the text', 'in the text itself', and 'in front of the text'. Although this is a technical language for the trained reader, participants were encouraged to choose the approach which best opens up the text for them and the context with which they were working. But much emphasis was placed on the importance of taking a communal, close, contextual and critical reading of the bible. This consisted the historical, social and literary context of the text. On communal reading - as readers were reading texts as a group, they were informed to be so cautious or sensitive to every word spoken afresh in the gathering as we discussed the texts. This enabled the group to be open-minded about the bible and the importance of meeting other people, of having conversations with each other and listening to each other. On the close reading - participants were reminded to read the chosen texts with care by refining together our interpretative skills and theological reflection. This was to set up a dialogue to articulate issues which have a long time been subordinate to women and the oppressed. On contextual reading - members were again informed to pay close attention to the language of the text itself. They were again to pay attention not only to the context of the text in the history of God's people but also to the context of them gathered for the reading. Thus this reading opened new avenues in the readers to look at the texts creatively by taking into consideration, the concerns, experiences, questions, and insights of women and the oppressed in the church and society. And on the critical reading - readers were informed to look at the text faithfully and creatively by critiquing our traditional readings which are sometimes bound by our cultures and practices. These traditional readings are limited, subordinative, manipulative and dominatory. This critical assessment allowed readers to see how these texts have been misused by conventional readers whose reading is one-sided.

The background information of the historical nature of each passage we studied enabled participants to focus their attention on the justice and liberation of women and the oppressed. They paid attention to the narrative of interaction between women and the Markan Jesus and in particular to the social and cultural factors which divide them. So my first contribution to the liberative reading was to make a background information on the modes of reading the texts historically, socially and literary based on our theme of justice and liberation of women and the oppressed. The main goal was to encourage the transformation of the individuals and group in their particular social and religious contexts. The historical reality of these women's lower status and the historical reality of their discipleship together support the narrative reality of women characters who exemplify the meaning of discipleship or followership.

Secondly, the way questions were structured enabled readers to identify 'open' and 'closed/engaging' questions. For instance, open questions are designed in the following way: 'tell me ...', 'explore how this is ...', 'what do you think/feel about ...', 'what do you know about ...', 'how important is ...' etc; and closed or engaging questions expect a 'yes' or 'no' answers, 'right' or 'wrong', 'good' or 'bad', or 'guess what is in my head/'. These questions are for opening up the text, providing invitation to discern the text, getting people to talk, think and pray, recognising difficult perspective and making the bible relevant today. The CBS questions were drawn to relate closely to the experience or context of some particular group (in my case women and the oppressed in church and society). The open and engaging questions empowered participants to relate to and enabled them to take charge of the learning and transforming process. In summary my other contribution to the CBS reading was to design questions to enable readers to read the text communally, closely, contextually and critically. This in turn assisted readers not only to drawing out the relationship of the text to their own context but also to the context of the text itself.

As a historically trained facilitator, participants were reminded that the status of the early Christian women and the oppressed were patriarchally conditioned. As women and the oppressed, they were part of a submerged group and as Christians they were part of an emergent group that was not yet recognized by the dominant patriarchal society and culture. The patriarchal society relegated women to the house and assigned men public leadership within the Church. Similarly, even today, women's leadership has become submerged again, transformed, or pushed to the fringes of our Churches and societies. Given this background, I reminded readers not only to analyse the historical oppression of women in biblical religion but also to take a close look at the social reality of the Christian Churches in which the religious oppression and eradication takes its specific historical patriarchal forms. By doing so, they are to engage in social interaction and religious transformation, of Christian vision and historical realization of the struggle for equality and against patriarchal domination. The background information of the historical nature of each passage we studied enabled participants to focus their attention on the justice and liberation of women and the oppressed. They paid attention to the narrative of interaction between women and the Markan Jesus and in particular to the social and cultural factors which divide them. So my first contribution to the liberative reading was to make a background information on the modes of reading the texts historically, socially and literary based on our theme of justice and liberation of women and the oppressed. The main goal was to encourage the transformation of individuals and

group in their particular social and religious contexts. The historical reality of these women's lower status and the historical reality of their discipleship together support the narrative reality of women characters who exemplify the meaning of discipleship or followership.

6.14. Conclusion

What we have done in this chapter is to go back to the bible and let the bible speak to peoples' conscience. We have tried to reclaim and regain the worthiness and identity of women from the history of the bible and its interpretation, though it has been a history of silenced women. We have done this by discovering the potentiality of the bible as a liberating and empowering resource for women and the marginalised groups. The main focus was to reconcile the idea that women like men were created in the image of God, and the one that women were created later hence were secondary and inferior. This latter view became prevalent in church partly because it meshed so well with most secular views in the late antique world in which Christianity grew.

It is for this reason that I decided to adopt the CBS process advocated by Gerald West to liberate women from oppression and marginalisation. In sum, my main focus was reading the bible with ordinary readers. The aim was to provide a critical and contextual reading environment for the ordinary readers to appropriate biblical texts for their contexts with the trained reader. Thus the CBS process was aimed at providing critical resources and facilitation for the benefit of ordinary readers who are oppressed and marginalised. My hope was that the CBS process would enlarge the consciousness of both the ordinary reader and trained reader and thus lead the ordinary readers to construct their own theology and implement their own action plan emanating from the reading. Indeed, the CBS process was hoped to produce results to the community. Participants promised to extend the readings to their communities who were oppressed and marginalised in societies. Because they themselves became more equipped with the critical and contextual readings, they were to carry an effective operation in the civil society. To achieve this they were to use areas of advocacy and democratic awareness, which I hope led to effective performance of their civil responsibilities.

The hermeneutical approach adopted by West resembles that one of Karl Barth. Barth outlines his reading process in his statement in his commentary to the Epistle to the Romans. He says,

one needs to penetrate it ‘until the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent. Paul speaks and the man of the sixteenth century hears.’⁶⁷⁰ Barth is of the view that one needs to penetrate the text until the separating wall between the text and the reader breaks down and this will enable one to hear the text speaking to his/her context directly. West also stresses that the trained readers need to read biblical texts with ordinary readers in order to bring out the hidden elements of resistance that the bible contains. Basically, the CBS process is engaged in critical appropriation of biblical texts through the back and forth of reading analysis of the text and its context; and the context of ordinary readers. The product of this reading process is the generalisation of meaning for both the ordinary and trained readers as they hear the text speaking directly to their context.

God speaks to us in our context in various ways and the bible is one of the primary ways in which God speaks to us. And if we want to hear God speaking to us in our Malawian context in these days, then we must be willing to return to the bible with open ears, eyes and hearts. In understanding what the bible is saying to our contexts today, it may be helpful to use a contextual mode of bible study, as advocated by Gerald West. Therefore, the intention of carrying out a series of bible studies was to read and study the bible in the church and community, to hear God speaking to us in our contexts. As West observes, the importance of contextual bible study is to explore how trained and ordinary readers can work together to read the bible in an individually and socially transformative way in their own particular context.⁶⁷¹ Surely, mutual relationship between trained readers and ordinary readers should always avail. As West reiterates, ‘the relationship between trained and ordinary reader is subject to subject and not subject to object.’⁶⁷² Therefore, the role of the trained reader is to read the bible “With” and “For” ordinary readers.⁶⁷³ Neither should a room for domination be created nor should trained leaders abandon their trained biblical studies. It is only through this process of mutual relationship that we can share the resources of biblical studies with ordinary readers. Therefore, in relation to this, both the trained readers and ordinary readers have something significant to offer to reading the bible and hearing God in our contexts.

⁶⁷⁰ Barth, K. *The Epistle To The Romans*, London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1933, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁷¹ West, G. O., 1993, p. 9.

⁶⁷² West, G.O., 1995b, p. 65.

⁶⁷³ West, G.O., 1995b, p. 65.

Chapter 7

QUESTIONNAIRE AND INFOMAL INTERVIEWS

PART ONE: The Questionnaire

7.1. (A) Personal Identification

Inter- viewees		Marital Status	Marital Status	Marital Status	Age	Education	Occupation	Denomination	Church Position
Sex	No.	Married	Unmarried	Widowed					
Male	36	26	8	2	18- 75 yrs.	4 MA, 5 BA, 6 Diploma, 7 MSCE, 7 JCE, 3 PSLC	Civil Servants, Business, Farmers, Politicians	CCAP, RC, Anglican, Church of Nazarene, Assemblies of God	Elders, Deacons, Chairpersons, Lay preachers
Female	32	24	2	6	18- 65 yrs.	2 BA, 2 Diploma 8 MSCE, 8 JCE, 4 PSLC	Civil Servants, Business, Farmers, Politicians, House wives	CCAP, RC, Anglican, Church of Nazarene, Assemblies of God	Elders, Deacons, Chairpersons, Lay preachers
TOTAL	68	50	10	8					

7.1.i. Introduction

In this section I want to present the findings of participants' views on the questionnaire and the formal interviews that I conducted with them. Thus, the section is sub-divided into two parts. In the first part, a total of 80 questionnaires were equally distributed to women and men of different denominations and age groups. I did this not to create gender imbalance but to have equal representation. However, 68 (85%) participants out of 80 managed to respond to my questionnaire, of which 36 were men and 32 were women respectively. The reasons why the other 12 participants could not respond to the questionnaire vary. Three participants said they had misplaced the questionnaire. However, I managed to photocopy my spare questionnaire and gave them another one, but they couldn't make it either. The rest said they were committed with other engagements but promised to spare time to respond to the questionnaire. Even though I managed to leave them my home address, they couldn't send it

either. Anyway, this is what is expected in anything you undertake. Sometimes it becomes impossible to get 100% response. However, I was very much impressed with the 85% (68) response, which was beyond my expectation. This then gives me an authentic report as far as the research is concerned.

According to the questionnaire, the ages and education of 68 participants vary, as statistics can show on the personal identification. The writer was the only researcher and conducted everything alone. There were 26 questions altogether in four categories.⁶⁷⁴ The first category was personal identification. The second category concerned the role and place of women in church and society. The third category was on the ordination of women to sacramental ministry. The fourth and last category centred on the impact of tradition and culture on women's liberation and their empowerment. Most of the answers given by the respondents were official responses I was looking for to my questions. I assume that perhaps these responses came from devoted members of churches, as church positions could tell. Having introduced the contents of the questionnaire, I now turn to the detailed report of the participants' views and answers.

7.2. Responses to the Questionnaire

7.2.i. (B) The role and place of women in church and society

Question 8

About 58 participants (30 women and 28 men) looked at the role and place of women in the church as very limited, hence not pleasing. They examined the positions and parts played by women as totally very far from male counterparts. They described the "role" to mean the contribution women make, what they do and how they are regarded. They understood that these are positions that both women and men should hold in church. They thought women are complementary with men, they are fellow-labourers together with God (1 Cor. 3). But 10 of them (8 men and 2 women) said this role is discriminatory and an unequal role that women face in the church. All 68 participants agreed that women do not play a greater or an active part because of the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the bible, where women are left on the periphery of life. The other reason is illiteracy which is great among women. Also women's passive role stems from the dictation of tradition and culture in submission to men as a mandate for them and children. This is due to cultural and religious belief that only men

⁶⁷⁴ See *Appendix II* of the Questionnaire

are capable to lead. Even though women constitute over 52 % of the total population, the belief and societal perception that they are to be ruled subordinates and oppresses them. For instance, 60 participants (40 women and 20 men) responded by saying, ‘women have to be quiet when man in general and their husbands in particular address a mixed congregation of men and women.’ They went further to say that it is because of this societal perception and attitude that men tend to take advantage to exploit women and girls to satisfy their interests and needs. Hence, the respondents agreed that this discrimination against women in church services has a negative impact as far as the role and place of women is concerned. This is why it is very difficult for women to influence decision-making that affects their lives, because even in the church a number of cultural and traditional practices continue to undermine women’s status. Generally, all the 68 respondents agreed that women are not holding church positions like men. One man said women are only called in when there is a financial problem, because with their large numbers in the church they contribute generously towards church’s development.

However, even though women play passive role in church all respondents agreed unanimously that they are very active in their movement, that is, the Women’s Guild. Others said even to those church positions which are scarcely filled by women, they tend to participate and work actively. Thus, women have a great role to play in the church, but they need to be given a chance and be in a forefront. Even if women are elders, deacons, even if they can preach and teach others, they can play these roles actively if they are given an opportunity and accepted as equal before God. They were created in the image of God, hence no need of discrimination. The role is to rule together with men with equal position and authority. They need to translate the message of salvation and transform life through partnership and equality. Women do not have their rightful place in God’s work because of the opposition of some church leaders: Ps.68: 11; Acts 2:17-18; Genesis 1:27-28, 2:18.

Question 9

About 52 respondents (28 women and 24 men) said women should hold all positions such as ministers, clerks, elders, deacons, preachers/evangelists and be chairpersons in all committees (1 Cor.11: 1, 1 Tim. 2:8-15). About 12 respondents (8 men and 4 women) said women as full-time family managers can help family members including their husbands who are weak to grow and live as strong Christians. Hence they need to take part in many church activities not only in choir, food preparation, funerals, decorating the church etc. Their role is to help and

assist those who need salvation to come to the Lord. Their roles should be determined by the gifts that God has given them regardless of their sex. However, 4 men responded that women cannot take active role equal to men because ‘they are brought up being ruled by men, hence their passive status limits them from holding top positions.’ They reiterated that their biological roles should be considered when need arises e.g. when expectant.

However, the 64 respondents (32 men and 32 women) based their arguments that according to the word of God, women can also hold posts that men do. They can lead different groups in church through election, appointment and even through voluntary work. They can be given both lower and higher positions, because some of the women are even better than men. They can lead and serve God’s people, by being good examples to the flock and submissive to one another e.g. Ruth. They can show great care in every position. However some positions require maximum efforts hence women need to take maximum efforts too. Given the different responsibilities in the local church, congregation or presbytery, women can be chairpersons at vestry level, session clerks etc. Therefore, women should appear in all leadership positions. They can be voted into any positions or attend interviews just like men. They should be given equal responsibility, so long as they qualify. They need to have equal positions and authority with full participation (Jn 5:19-22; 2 Cor. 11:2). Surely, they can, although very few make their own decisions. Thus they need to be included in preaching programmes, and take any church position in different committees. By faith, they should participate and be included in the church leadership roles as in Judges 4:4-9, where Deborah was a prophetess and saved as a judge for the Israelites. In Mark 16:1-7, the appearance of women at the Tomb tells us that they were the first to see and proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus first appeared to women, and sent them to proclaim the message which shows that they participated in his ministry.

Paul also emphasises the unity in Christ and this tells us that any one is free to hold any position. Two male and four female respondents cited the case of Deborah, where God gives a leadership position to a woman. This is an indication that God recognises her creation in His own image. Thus, as a church we also have to assign responsibilities and roles to women such as preachers, ministers, elders, deacons etc. Truly, women preached about the resurrection of Jesus. Thus, one male respondent suggested that the question should now be like this, ‘should women continue participating and be continually included in the leadership roles in the church?’ This is so because women began to shoulder various roles sometime back in the

societies and even before the birth of Jesus Christ. Today, we need to encourage them to continue playing these various roles they had been doing before. Galatians 3:28 explains that regardless of colour, sex and race, we should equally participate and be included in the church leadership roles with the same zeal, strength, enthusiasm and dedication as we are all alike. Given these facts, they should be nominated and elected to serve in any church positions. Women with gifts for the ministry of Word and Sacrament should be encouraged to apply to their vestries, sessions, presbyteries to be candidates to undergo theological training and be licensed and ordained as church ministers.

Question 10: Participation of women in Church bodies

(i) Session

Women do attend in sessions but do not participate fully, because most of them do not speak. Only few manage to contribute in session matters, although once or twice in a while. Most of them fear or are shy because of the dictates of culture and tradition. The other reason could be low education which makes them feel shy to speak and contribute actively in public. We have women elders and deacons who serve in the session of the church. Some sessions have more women elders than men. However, they seldom speak. They make nominations for various positions but usually nominate a man. They are rarely nominated nor elected to serve in key positions in the church. They do participate but sometimes their contributions are turned down and this leads to their being passive. But some make meaningful contributions. They are so inferior to men, they do not have much say. They can preach in church and are included in parish committees.

(ii) Presbytery

Participation is very poor because they are not appointed or chosen as delegates. Sometimes it is 1 or 2 against more than 20 men delegates. Women only go to the presbytery as representatives of women's Guild (Umanyano) whereby they are not allowed to deliberate or contribute in the meetings except in their own meeting. In this case the participation is excellent in one way to the side of women's Guild because they do not contribute by virtue of not being delegates to the presbytery deliberations.

(iii) Synod

Again women are few in number at Synod Assembly, usually 5 or 6 against 200 delegates. This tells itself their less participation because they seldom speak during the Assembly.

However, they speak more frequently when it comes to synod committees and their own wing. Nevertheless, it is very little compared to men. The reasons are just the same as those given in their participation at session and presbytery levels.

(iv) General Synod:

Again they are few in number compared to men. Those delegated by their synods seldom speak during the assembly. Those who manage to speak do so but not much, even in committees. The problem lies from the grassroots where women are not offered opportunities.

Question 11: Participation of women in families, societies and communities

Again 68 respondents said the full participation in these bodies is very poor due to illiteracy. Tradition and culture also put women on the periphery, that they should exercise respect towards men. It is encouraging with the coming of the Gospel of Jesus that women who are literate take part in decision-making and occupy some leadership positions in societies and communities. However, illiteracy has a major impact upon women's subordination.

(i) Families:

Women are teachers of faith, some lead in decision-making bodies. They also guide their families so that they follow the right way in Jesus and bring up children. They also participate in many more house chores than men. They cook, wash clothes, iron, clean the house, take care of husbands and children, welcome visitors while the husbands just supervise. They take care of the whole family and show love. One respondent said, 'a home without a mother is a deserted home, the same with societies and communities, they are dull without a woman.' In some families, women are more influential than husbands, though very few. In families they are very active though traditionally most cultures vest much authority of families in men. However, most of the household work is run by women. For instance, women rise early to draw water, heat bath water for all family members, cook the meal, clean the house, wash the clothes, care for the children, sow seeds, weed, fertilise, and harvest crops. They also participate in community meetings, do some development works, and assist with tending the crops. In relation to housework, most women carry a much heavier workload than men do.

(ii) Societies and Communities:

Women are also rulers, judges, chairperson, counsellors, chiefs/village headmen, heads of departments, security guards, teachers, nurses, doctors etc. Some of them are Ministers, MPs, drivers, soldiers, mechanics, policewomen etc. They also teach communities the Gospel of Christ and the way to live a Christian life. They participate in funeral services, self help

community development projects e.g. building school blocks, health clinics, roads, moulding bricks, ferrying sand and carrying water. However, in the family, Society and Community the overall picture remains that women remain submissive to men, though this is beginning to change with women holding positions of employment in the business world of the city and in government. But this is only available to those who are educated. Generally, as it was observed, women bow to men, sit on the floor while men sit in chairs and separately from women. Women may or may not be consulted in regard to making decisions but the final decision is at most always the man's decision. Women only manage to speak freely amongst themselves but little amongst men. For the most part, the only power they exercise is passive aggression and manipulation.

The main problems to the low participation of women in families, societies and communities are cultural and traditional bias, illiteracy, which enable men to dominate. Even with uneducated men, women are still subordinate because of patriarchal and cultural biases. One woman lamented about the bias of tradition, in that children are given fathers' surnames. She said, 'why can't children use the mothers' maiden names or surnames?'

Question 12

Women's Guild is a branch within the church. It is through it that they exercise their rights and express their feelings. The empowerment is seen in the increasing number of women joining the guild as opposed to men's Guild. They participate fully within their branch and are able to contribute and make decisions within their wing. However, examining their participation critically women do not exercise their authority as expected. One male respondent said, 'most of their deliberations are not carried out in an orderly way, because of ill temperament, lack of confidence, which leads them unable to express themselves fully.' Another man said, 'most of their conclusions tend to be temporary and they are also fond of refusing to accept and shoulder responsibilities in church and society.' However, women and some men reiterated that some of the characteristics observed above could as well be observed in men's and youth groups. So it is very unfair to characterise women in their groups as if this cannot be observed in males' meetings.

Question 13

When comparing women's guild with Men's and Youth, 66 respondents (32 women and 34 men) said, women's guild is by far stronger than the others. They said, women's guild is above average, very active in doing church's work/activities, e.g. physical, spiritual and

financial participation. They are the best organised group, most effective, active and lively of the three guilds. The men's guild is the weakest. The women's active participation is achieved, as some respondents said, because 'they are able to read and understand what their counterparts did like Esther, Deborah, Huldah, Mary Magdalene, Salome etc.' They are leading and well organised in the Synod. They are many and their faith is much deeper. They are more devoted to Christian work than the other two movements. They participate in a number of activities such as caring for the orphans, visiting and caring for the sick, widows, the poor and the neglected. They work very hard and in terms of financial matters, they square their budgets to presbytery and Synod in time unlike the two groups, who sometimes owe the presbytery and synod respectively.

Women's guild has also boosted the status of women in the church. Having realised that they too were created in the image of God, they saw the need to spread the Gospel. They have indeed seen themselves as co-workers with the Lord Jesus. That realisation of knowledge brought them a special kind of respect that Christianity was offering. The idea of being a daughter of God brought the special claim that they too had received the spirit of God that was poured on everyone. Hence, women were confident that they too could do the work of God effectively.

By way of summary, the respondents said women are now beginning to look at scriptures in a new way and are seeing themselves among those sent by God to do his work. They empower themselves with the word of God by using biblical verses in a new way. They are also recognising in themselves a community of God called to be witness of Jesus Christ. Hence, they are spreading the Gospel to their families, communities and societies and are bringing them a message of salvation. All they are doing is to teach Sunday school and Catechumen classes and also conduct bible studies and adult literacy classes. They are also aware that their faith and Christian living in the home do not depend on their husbands. They work alongside men to teach children the word of God. This shared responsibility gives women self-esteem for their commitment to serving God. Thus, women have shown their use of talents to build and encourage each other and also build God's Church.

However, all 32 female respondents observed that the only setback to the women's subordination is that the writing of weekly bible study lessons is mainly manned by men. Women use these weekly bible study lessons during their services whenever they meet every

Friday in the week. However, male ministers who have undergone theological training take an upper share in writing most of them. While it is not wrong to use male trained ministers to write the weekly bible study lessons, the respondents felt the need to deploy trained female theologians as well. They said, 'it would have been better and more meaningful to women if these lessons were written by women theologians who understand and identify with the fears and hopes of our fellow women.' Hence, there is a need to empower women to be recognised and acknowledged as full human beings. Thus, according to the female respondents, their cry has been to be trusted and elevated from the status of a daughter to that of a partner with men in building the church of God. Looking at their exclusion from decision-making structures in the church and society, they see that the central issue is to find out the experiences, feelings and thoughts of women on all the decisions of the church and society that affect them. At the same time, women also want to know the feelings of men how they look at the appeals of women for justice and liberation from the male-dominated church and society. This second point is so vital because the goal of this study is not simply the liberation of women in the church and society, but the creation of a new community of women and men working together in peace and harmony.

As for the Christian Youth Fellowship (CYF), both male and female respondents agreed that they lack mature leadership and they mainly concentrate on choirs and fund-raising festivals. They lack consistent bible studies and fellowship to deepen their faith in the Lord Jesus. However, 16 respondents (10 men and 6 women) agreed that all three groups (Men, Women and Youth) are not good on financial management. They need thorough training in bookkeeping and ledger. At funerals, women cook, make flowers, sing and mourn throughout the night. They cheer and comfort the sick, mourners, poor, orphans, and weak and old people. When it comes to church activities and devotion, most men do not respond quickly if they hear the word of God, but women do. In contrast, the CYF responds quickly but drops out quickly due to early unchristian marriages and lack of active firm faith in the Lord. Hence they are not stable in their faith and Christian principles. Women are most active and contribute a lot to the church in general. They are more organised and stable than Youth. Their activeness is seen in leading to more members joining the group at every meeting they hold. They encourage each other and other women in many ways. The CCAP has three Guilds which operate along the same lines with the same goal of winning the lost souls to Christ.

However, three male respondents had a different view against women and said they fail to

come up with tangible solution or agreement whenever and wherever they meet. Wherever they are, they undermine themselves. But men and youths come up with tangible results from their deliberations. Hence they are able to exercise their authority to its fullness. Moreover, they said the roles of the guilds follow the respective roles of men, women and children in the culture. They said, men are at the top, followed by women then youth, though male youth in CYF will follow in the steps of the men's guild and will often have greater position, power, and authority than a woman in the women's guild. Thus women do not exercise their full power even in their guild they belong to.

Question 14

In the first instance, all the respondents agreed that there is no equality of discipleship. This is so because of the roles of culture and tradition which govern the roles of men and women in the church and society. The church for the most part fails to be a prophetic voice to guide the community of faith into new life as revealed in Scripture through the Holy Spirit. The misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the Word of God has greatly contributed to this. Both men and women are limited in the way they express their discipleship by their roles in culture. Women teach the young children, teach other women and care for the sick. Men teach male adults, lead in evangelism, pray with the sick, preach on Sundays. There are now a few women who are involved in evangelism leadership and who preach during worship. Men make most of the decisions for the church and have the final authority in all matters related to spirituality. This division of roles greatly limits the use of the talents and skills of individuals, whose talents and skills may not fall within the boundaries of these assigned roles.

Furthermore, tradition and education hinder them to do certain things. Tradition underrates and doubts their authority. For instance, there are more literate men than literate women. This brings negative impact upon women which affects their behaviour towards men. They are not talking much in bodies like Presbyteries and Sessions. Women are still lagging behind men, because men still resist the inclusion of women in active roles. May be, as two female respondents reiterated, 'men feel that God values them more than women, that is why they dominate in church activities. Men have higher and more respected responsibilities than women.'

Culture and tradition contribute to making men see themselves as superior to women. They do not have leadership roles due to cultural values as well. Men lead in decision-making and in

authoritative positions. They do not encourage women to exercise their right fully. This informs us that we have not reached a genuine equality yet, although the change is gradually making headway. For instance, some women today are traditional rulers or healers. Traditionally women are still under men. Illiteracy worsens things because women cannot voice up their views in the presence of men.

However, to the other extent the equality is beginning to lay the foundation. Today Christians have understood scriptures that God authorised both man and woman to co-rule over the creation. When Jesus came all the doubts and problems were washed away. To some extent, both women and men are taking the same roles in the church from congregational level to Synod level, though we do not have many reverends/ministers. They are all given equal opportunity as regards to discipleship. They can preach the Word of God and even better than men, because we are all looking for eternal life. They can manage their big membership or group effectively. Where they fail to manage, men too fail to manage in their bodies, hence are all equal even by baptism there is no selection (Mat. 28:19). They are preachers, teachers of Sunday Schools and church classes, lead music in Church, pay pledges etc. It was God's original intent for man and woman to rule together over the renewed creation. So equality of position and authority was God's intention.

However, four male respondents said, more is to be made and desired when we talk of real equality of discipleship. This is so because the positions held by women are also held by men and in some cases women are playing a better role than men. Nevertheless, when we look at these answers or observations, they do not fully give a view as to why women today are not holding leadership positions in the church as compared to men.

7.2.ii. (C) Ordination of women to Sacramental ministry

Questions 15 & 16

The views from the 66 respondents were that, patriarchal dominance in Malawian culture and throughout the world, the male chauvinism, as well as the misinterpretation of Scriptures have contributed to late ordination of women into the ministry. The main reasons behind this lengthy period were, culture and tradition; illiteracy and misinterpretation of scriptures. Men have held positions of dominance throughout history due to their superior physical strength and the widely understood human sin phenomenon summarised in the adage: 'power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely,' said one female respondent. Men have therefore

used their physical advantage to lord it over women in all areas of life. However, two male respondents said women were not interested in joining the work of God, and could not recognise the call to serve God the same way as men. Women also thought that the job of a minister was for men only, given the understanding and interpretation of culture and tradition. This probably made them to have less devotion and interest in ministering to Jesus.

Question 17

According to the indication of Scriptures, 59 respondents (30 women and 29 men) said, in paradise prior to the “fall,” due to human sin, men and women were equal partners made in the image of God. It is not until we hear about the judgement of God on humankind, due to human sin (Gen. 3:14-19), that we hear of man ruling over woman. Throughout Scripture we learn about God calling forth women to positions of power and authority and equality with men, counter to the prevailing sinful patriarchal culture, e.g. Deborah, Esther, Mary Magdalena, Joanna, Susanna, Anna, Lydia, Priscilla, etc. Therefore, Livingstonia Synod did a perfect job which demonstrates people’s advancement in the understanding of the bible. It is a clear indication that the Holy Spirit is leading individuals to interpret the bible critically other than using the worldly wisdom invested in a few individuals. The church realised that women play a greater role in up-lifting the ministry of Jesus ahead. However, 3 males and 1 female said the Synod has gone beyond its limitation and described it as a changing church. Their main basic argument was that ‘Jesus Christ had no woman apostle in his entire mission work, so where is the Synod getting this authority?’ They also went further to ask, ‘who should we follow, Jesus Christ or a changing Synod/Church?’ The other 5 respondents (4 men and 1 woman) were neutral in finding out whether the Synod did the right thing to open a path for women’s ordination in the church.

Questions 18-20

This is not relevant because the ritual laws of the Old Testament related to the culture of the place and time. As Peter learns that God made clean all foods through Christ (Acts 10) and through Jesus Christ the ritual law of circumcision is abrogated. The ritual laws are annulled and the moral laws are fulfilled through Christ. Others said, there is no relationship because purity in Leviticus deals with outside appearance or bodily cleanliness while the Holy Communion deals with purity of the heart. As Romans 6:9-10 says, ‘if a person confesses with his/her mouth and believes in his/her heart that Christ is the Lord and that God raised him from the dead then one will be saved.’ Thus, what is important is one’s dedication to the

Lord, as Hebrews 11:6 says 'it is difficult to please the Lord without faith.' Therefore, what is needed is faith in the Lord and not the outward appearance of an individual person.

However, when we look at questions 19 and 20, Paul was mainly concerned with a particular church. The problem may have been that some women were disturbing worship with their talking. To put an end to this disturbance, Paul worked within the existing patriarchal culture of male domination and authority. However, Paul often taught that people should treat each other well within existing structures, even within the institutions of slavery. At other times in Scripture, he begins to urge the people to transform themselves and their culture through the grace of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. As in the Galatian Scripture, Paul indicates that in Christ there is no longer male and female, no longer slave and free (Gal. 3:28). These categories of inequality are gone, for all are one in Christ. Therefore, people are alike and thus nobody should be segregated from or discriminated against in carrying out certain activities due to sex, race or status. Indeed, this is an advancement to the authentic and full meaning of discipleship as called by Christ. In John 1:12-13, God authorised all people to be his children. By virtue of being the children of God, women are also included. This means that women can also exercise authority in the way Jesus Christ wishes, hence, the appointment into holy ministry.

7.2.iii. (D) The impact of Tradition and Culture

Questions 21- 25

About 65 respondents (33 men and 32 women) agreed that tradition and culture had an impact on the ordination of women into holy ministry. This was so because women were only thought of as the nurturer or child-carer, homemaker, caretaker of the sick and elderly and also for spiritual development. What was limited to them was their intellectual development and education. Hence, they could neither be decision-makers nor be in leadership positions, and their job opportunities were not the same as for men. They were thought to lack power and money. Moreover, they were also thought to keep each other limited by jealousy, infighting and supporting the oppressors. Therefore, women were oppressed by being subordinate as inferior, were also disparaged, not taken seriously. Hence, they were looked at as sexual objects and were also victims of violence, emotionally, physically, culturally and institutionally.

In contrast, men were thought of as the heads of the household, leaders in home, church, civic

groups, government, workplace etc. They were the only decision-makers because of their intellectual development and education. Hence, they had power and money because of better job opportunities than women. But in most cases, they were the perpetrators of violence. The limitations to men were childcare, caring for sick and elderly. They were thought to lack emotional and spiritual development. Given this understanding, tradition and culture has contributed a great deal to the subordination of women in church and society. They influence norms, values, beliefs and practices which in turn influence views about sex, sexuality and gender relations. Therefore, the church must do as Jesus did, minister to people where they are, bring them to Christ and assist them in transforming their lives, tradition and culture through the power of Jesus Christ. The current roles reflect male domination, patriarchy in church, society and community.

The respondents also reiterated that a culture and society prosper most when both men and women are well educated and share power, responsibilities and decision-making. The roles of men and women in the church should be the same because they are one in Christ. Both men and women should work in partnership or jointly with each other in society and community. They have collective organisation of social events and services at community level. Men and Women in the church are supposed to be exemplary to society and community in their deeds and should work hand in hand in spreading the Good news without regard for sex or gender.

Also patrilineal marriages⁶⁷⁵ had an impact on the subordination of women. For women to leave their families and join their husbands seems to create an impression they are inferior to men. As such, they cannot act independently. The hierarchy of male dominion over woman reflects the culture of the New Testament Palestine and present day Malawi. However, within the culture, Paul says that the man and woman are to treat each other with love and respect just as Christ oversees and loves the church and the church is to love and serve Christ. But this is not the way male domination plays itself out in Malawian culture. It seems that holding

⁶⁷⁵ In Patrilineal marriages, the whole responsibility lies with the male parenthood. Here, the bridegroom pays a regular bride price or (Lobola) to the parents of the bride. It usually consists of cattle, hoes, axes, money etc which are paid before the woman goes to her husband's home. At times only part is paid before the marriage, and the rest is paid by instalments afterwards. The origin of this lay in its having been given as security to the parents or brother or any other relative of the bride. The bride price was not looked upon as the buying or selling of the wife. However, some came to look at this as the case and money was given instead of cattle, hoes, axes and other articles. For instance, some parents who receive less than the agreed price take back their daughters until the bridegrooms pay the full amount. This custom is predominant among the Northern people, the Ngoni of central and Lower Shire people of Malawi.

power with love and respect is hard for human beings. That is why God created us to share power equally (transform culture) to form bonds of mutual love and respect.

At the same time, tradition and culture are relevant to the ministry in the church and society because they are the substance of our worldly upbringing and understanding of life in relationship to one another. It also enables preachers, ministers, elders to approach a particular group of people or tribe with new perception. But in order to improve the status of women, we need to change all harmful cultural and traditional practices that undermine women's status. That is why the church, political, traditional and civic leaders need to work collectively to stamp out harmful cultural practices that are detrimental to women's development. As the United Nations' Report asserts, 'a number of advocacy measures should be undertaken targeting a wide range of decision-makers and opinion leaders to generate support for attitudinal changes necessary for creating the cultural environment conducive to enhancing the political, economic and social empowerment of women.'⁶⁷⁶

Question 26

This open question enabled 64 participants to earnestly call upon the church and government to work together wholeheartedly in the promotion of gender equality. They all emphasised the importance of education, particularly girls or women who are lagging behind as opposed to boys or men. The respondents understood that full and complete development requires the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all levels. To comment on equal participation raised by the respondents, it is a fact that, in Malawi, women constitute 52 % of the population but have largely been discriminated against both in terms of participation in development efforts and benefiting from the outcome. However, the social situation of women in Malawi reveals that they are the most disadvantaged in almost every sphere of development. This is indeed largely attributed to social attitudes towards women which have been established firmly in the Malawi culture which discriminates on the basis of sex. As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report notes, 'this gender selection and imbalance has contributed significantly to subjecting most women to severe and harsh living conditions.'⁶⁷⁷ Women shoulder a higher percentage of responsibilities and manage heavy workloads in the community. This imbalance is even openly noticed at policy and decision-making levels, where women's participation is almost negligible and the economic value of

⁶⁷⁶ United Nations System in Malawi, "Common Country Assessment of Malawi, 2001 Report", UNDP, August 2001, p. 38.

⁶⁷⁷ United Nations Development Assistance Framework Malawi 2002-2006, UNDP, p. 34.

their contribution is not acknowledged in the national economy.

The church and government need to appreciate the contributions of women in the society and to ensure that their potentialities are utilised. To achieve this, the church and government should protect the abuse of women's rights. These include invalidating any law that discriminates against women on the basis of gender or marital status. Although the status of women is improving nowadays, nevertheless they face serious constraints in achieving equality with men. As the UNDP Report asserts, there are still 'discriminatory laws and practices; a heavy workload; restrictive societal attitude; domestic violence; lack of equal access to education; a weak decision-making position; and few, if any, economic opportunities.'⁶⁷⁸

The respondents continued to express their views by saying a new covenant from the bible demands wholeness. Men and women are to become fully who God has created them to be. Each person is given gifts for the upbringing of the body of Christ. Therefore, men and women are responsible for sharing their roles. Indeed, both develop intellectually, emotionally, spiritually etc. Both share in decision-making and leadership, both share in nurturing children, caring for the sick, the elderly and the oppressed. Both share money, power and job opportunities. Therefore, men and women should work in partnership with one another. Based on the bible, women are globally fighting against gender inequality/imbalance that is existing in many cultures and societies around. They know that these things are changeable unlike sex, hence a need to foster gender equality/balance among cultures and societies. There is an enormous task of civic education and sensitisation to both men and women to understand the importance of equality for social development in church, society and community. It has been discovered that those people who support and defend patriarchy are fond of using these statements: 'Change will come, but not in our generation,' 'Change will break families,' 'We have to be very cautious with change,' 'We should not disrupt our cultures which have held us together for long.' From these statements, advocates of patriarchy still seek to cling to their colonial mentality. To them oppression and subordination of women is a blessing. However, this change has come and has come to stay whether they like or not, said one female respondent. Their insistence on education for girls enabled me to have an opportunity to meet with some educational officials at government and church levels, to find

⁶⁷⁸ UNDP Report, 3.7.17 Women's Rights, p. 31.

out their commitments towards girls' education. This is the discussion below in search of justice and liberation for women and the oppressed.

7.3. Girls' education a tool for women's empowerment

Women's empowerment cannot be realised fully if women themselves are uneducated. Education is indeed the most potent force to liberate people, not just from the ignorance of not knowing to read and write, but also from ignorance of other people and their ways. As President Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania asserts, education helps people to understand other people better and hence realise that people have more in common than in diversity.⁶⁷⁹ According to him, 'education makes people broad-minded. It makes them critical, logical and rational in their approach to issues. An educated individual cannot just accept any information about other individuals without questions.'⁶⁸⁰ He further hinted that education liberates people from servile attitudes, indecisions and irrationality. Education prepares a person for leadership at every level and makes one socially mobile and reduces ethnic prejudices. In respect to this, women in Malawi are not decision-makers, lack power and are lagging behind men because of lack of education. For instance, according to the National Adult Literacy Programme (NALP)⁶⁸¹, adult literacy rate declined from 50% in 1990 to 42% in 1999. For males the literacy rate increased marginally from 66 to 67% but for females it declined substantially from 44 to 33%. At present the general distribution shows that there are more literate males than females in a total population. According to 1987 Population Census, there were about 51.8% literate females as opposed to 48.9% for males in a population. However, according to the 1998 Population Census, the trend has been reversed where 51% of women are literate compared to 64.5% for the males.⁶⁸² This tells itself how difficult it can be to empower women who know nothing about gender, feminism and the equality of man and woman as enshrined in the bible. Since women lack education which is the key to resolving issues surrounding the three development challenges, governance, poverty and diseases, there is need to motivate girls to attend schools. For citizens to participate fully and democratically, they need to be well informed about their rights and responsibilities, and indeed education is the key to all this. Education facilitates the creation of awareness and contributes to the

⁶⁷⁹ Ligomeka, B. Malawi Standard (NEWS), Blantyre, Malawi, posted to the web (All Africa.Com), May 12, 2003.

⁶⁸⁰ Ligomeka, B., May 12, 2003.

⁶⁸¹ United Nations Development Assistance Framework Malawi, "Adult Literacy", p. 15.

⁶⁸² National Statistical Office (NSO), "Preliminary Results of the Population and Housing Census Report", Zomba, Malawi, 1997/98.

development of human capacity that administers and manages institutions charged with the responsibility of ensuring the rule of law, respect of human rights, gender equality, transparency and accountability in managing public affairs and resources.

It is for this reason that my research work was extended to conducting informal interviews with the education department both at Government level and Religious level. The researcher had great interest in knowing the programme formulation, planning, policy interventions and initiative targets upon Girls' Education, who are indeed women of tomorrow. The Government, Churches and other Stakeholders including Non Governmental Organisations are working in partnership to ensure its success. Historically, girls in Malawi have always lagged behind in education. The enrolment rates have been decreasing due to cultural biases. Some girls leave school earlier because of poverty. Hence, their parents want them to marry once they turn 14 or 15 years. These parents think that doing this would alleviate their problems because they would find someone supporting them. But this has not been the case at all. Other girls leave school earlier to look after their young ones, while their parents are working in gardens. The other reason is the distance of schools that has mostly contributed to girls' low enrolment rates. Therefore, looking at the lowest enrolment rates, cultural biases against girls and poverty, the Government and Churches thought to redress this gender imbalance that had cropped up in the country. This enabled the Government in conjunction with other Stakeholders to campaign for improvement of girls' education. They felt that this would eventually empower women if more girls had access to quality education.

7.3.i. Government's campaign for improvement of girls' education

In order to develop and disseminate a national policy on girls education, increase girls' participation in education, strengthen community involvement in learning, promote and provide alternatives and complementary approaches to education, and strengthen AIDS education among pastoralist communities, the Government works collaboratively in conjunction with other Stakeholders. The prime factor of this approach is to promote a quality-learning environment for girls. The approach is premised on the ground that all children have the right to education as enshrined in the Human Rights. Therefore, the exercise of this right is the principle duty of the government and other Stakeholders. Parents are therefore the prime bearers of this duty while communities are general duty bearers. The bottom line is that everyone ranging from the government to communities has a role to play in ensuring that children enjoy the right to education. Thus, the government, churches, other

stakeholders believe that education will narrow the gender inequalities. This would be a step towards achieving education for all and specifically boosting girls' education globally.

In respect to this, the net primary enrolment for boys in 1991 was 59.3% and 58.2% for girls.⁶⁸³ However, the picture has been reversed in recent times, with enrolment rates changing in favour of girls (78.5% for girls and 77% for boys).⁶⁸⁴ To provide a holistic education that comprises health, sanitation and social values, there was a cross party consensus in Parliament to prioritise education. This was discussed soon after Malawi attained a multi-party government in June 1994. Consequently, from September 1994, the government introduced policy on free primary education. This policy was intended to eliminate inequalities in enrolment and to build a strong socio-economic base for the society. It thereby abolished the wearing of school uniforms and undertook to provide free text and exercise books. The overwhelming response was that, the enrolment shot up from 1.9 million to 3.2 million children in 1994 alone.⁶⁸⁵ As the then Minister of Education, Sam Mpasu MP reiterated, 'it was totally unexpected and delightful. We knew that costs involving text-books, exercise books and uniforms were so very significant to a person who is on a very subsistence level. We did not have to wait for researchers and studies to establish that.'⁶⁸⁶ The introduction of free primary school education enabled the Malawi government to undertake a commitment to transform the country's social and economic structure. The abolition of school fees guaranteed every school-going child a chance to join the race towards a better life and future for society. The government realised that heavy public and private sector investment in education will spur socio-economic development. Before the policy was introduced, the 60% enrolment levels in schools was relatively low in Malawi when compared with other African Countries. Under the old fee paying system, primary education was extremely expensive and a luxury, particularly for the 90% of the population who lived in the rural areas and at subsistence level.

⁶⁸³ NEC: Malawi Demographic Household Survey (MDHS), Malawi, 1992.

⁶⁸⁴ National Statistical Office (NSO): Malawi Integrated Household Survey, Lilongwe, Malawi, 1997/98.

⁶⁸⁵ UN System in Malawi: Common Country Assessment of Malawi, The Development Centre, Lilongwe, Malawi, 2001, p. 14; Business Malawi: The Case For Free Primary Education, December 01, 1997.

⁶⁸⁶ Business Malawi: December 01, 1997.

7.3.ii. Strategies put in place

In making this a reality and achieving education for all, the Government, Churches and other Stakeholders have put strategies in place. One is the provision of bursaries to needy children. For instance, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) put up USD25 million for Girls Attainment of Basic Literacy and Education (GABLE).⁶⁸⁷ This programme which run from 1994 to 1998 was introduced to promote the education of girls, particularly the disadvantaged. It was instrumental in reducing the enrolment gap between boys and girls. This has been a major milestone in improving enrolment rates. Consequently, there has been a significant reduction in gender disparity in primary school enrolment. The GABLE Programme also contributed towards the introduction of the policy of allowing for the re-admission of girls who drop out because of pregnancy.

The introduction of free primary education brought a sudden increase in enrolment and this put severe pressure on facilities. According to UN Assistance Framework Report, ‘the pupil/classroom ratios rose to 140 while pupil/qualified teacher ratio went up from 80:1 in 1990 to 108:1.’⁶⁸⁸ The government embarked on a programme of supplying learning materials such as school text-books and exercise books so that children have access to learning and reading materials. There is also an ongoing programme of Teacher Training to make them acquire the teaching methodologies and also get acquainted with new syllabuses. The Malawi Integrated In-Service Teacher Education Programme (MIITEP) and the Malawi School Support Systems Programme (MSSP) were launched by the government through the World Bank to train more teachers and thereby meet the increased need for qualified teachers. In 1997, because of this programme, the pupil/qualified teacher ratio improved to 74:1, however, the national goal is to achieve a ratio of 60:1.

Again, the introduction of free primary education saw the enrolment numbers almost doubling to more than three million children as already indicated. This created a severe problem. As a result of this, the Government through the World Bank and other International donors made enormous efforts towards construction of more classrooms and teachers’ houses to cater for the higher enrolment rates. One of the programme launched is called Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) which helps communities to develop their areas through building more school blocks, teachers’ houses, improvement of roads, health centres and bridges. This has

⁶⁸⁷ UN Development Assistance Framework Malawi 2002-2006, p. 15.

⁶⁸⁸ UN Development Assistance Framework Malawi 2002-2006, p. 15.

reduced the distances that children were walking to and from schools, because there are many schools opened within walking distances. The goals in promoting these strategies are to redress gender imbalance that exists and to empower the people to take active roles in the socio-economic developments for their communities. The communities, however, are responding by moulding bricks, ferrying rocks and sand, carrying water and the provision of free labour. This is the spirit that is seen in self-help projects that are community-oriented.

However, the setback with the introduction of free primary education is the recruitment of more untrained teachers by the government to arrest the problem of shortage of teachers. Undoubtedly, this is a major setback in attaining the quality education that is expected. These untrained teachers cannot work efficiently and produce quality education. They are not exposed to teaching methodologies and the relationship between a teacher and a child. This is one area that the Government needs to look at, if it is committed to achieving quality education for all.

7.3.iii. Setback to girls' education

The introduction of free primary education and the promotion of girls' education through GABLE programme saw the significant rise of enrolment in primary schools. However, a significant number of primary school-going age children have remained out of school, with a high proportion among girls especially in secondary schools. According to the Ministry of Education, the estimated student ratios for boys to girls were 72% to 28%.⁶⁸⁹ The reason for such a disparity is the high dropout rate for girls during primary education. This is due to sexual abuse and economic exploitation by teachers, male students and sugar daddies, which leads to unwanted pregnancies. However, there is a policy by the government to support and promote gender equality by allowing the pregnant girls to return to school after delivery. The other factors behind non-attendance are: lack of awareness among parents or guardians of the importance of education, and the failure of the government to improve quality education and employment prospects. Again, poverty is also a contributing factor, for it compels children to seek work instead of attending school. In addition to this, the long distance from home to school proves to be a setback to attempt to lower girls' dropout rates. Based on the Integrated Household Survey, 'the average distance from school in rural areas is 3.4km, while in the

⁶⁸⁹ Ministry of Education, "Education Basic Statistics", National Centre for Literacy and Adult Education, Lilongwe, Malawi, 1997.

urban areas it is 2.7km. It is estimated that rural and urban children take 27.5 and 23 minutes on average to reach school, respectively.⁶⁹⁰

Also the increase in girls' dropout rate in schools has been compounded by the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic which has affected girls' education. According to the Deputy Director of Basic Education in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Mr. Mcknight Kalanda, 'HIV/AIDS is a major threat to the girls' education.'⁶⁹¹ He said this at the launch of Global Education Action Week (GEAW) in Nkhatabay, Malawi, whose theme was *Let us join Together in Accelerating Girls' Education*. In his speech, he said, 'HIV/AIDS is one of the major problems that are frustrating the government and other internal organisations which are trying to boost girls' education.'⁶⁹² In most cases girls are affected because they are forced out of schools to take care of the HIV/AIDS victims, or orphans when their parents or someone has died leaving children behind. This has, however, not only affected girls' education, but also quality education among children because teachers are also affected. As Kalanda pointed out, the teachers fail to perform the way they used to because they are also infected by the virus or are suffering from HIV/AIDS related illnesses. He said, 'when teachers are failing to perform their duties effectively the pupils are the victims and by the end of the year they don't learn what they were supposed to have learned.'⁶⁹³

7.3.iv. Conclusion

In conclusion to question 26 particularly on the importance of girls' education as raised by the respondents, it is true that the factors that have contributed to low enrolment, completion and transition rates especially for girls are: insecurity, poor infrastructure, poverty and negative practices according to societies. Hence, there is a great caution against stereotypes that exacerbate gender disparities. In his reiteration at the World Education Forum, the UN Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan mandated UNICEF to take a leading role in implementing a major initiative to boost Girls' Education globally. The UN Secretary General underscored the fact that 'unless gender gaps were narrowed, the goal of achieving education for all would be a pipe dream.'⁶⁹⁴ In the broad sense, unless girls are educated, we can not progress in

⁶⁹⁰ NEC/NSO, "Integrated Household Survey", Lilongwe, Malawi, 1997/98.

⁶⁹¹ Zingani, M. The Chronicle Newspaper, "HIV/AIDS Affecting Girls Education", Lilongwe, Malawi, April, 20, 2003.

⁶⁹² Zingani, M. The Chronicle Newspaper, April, 20, 2003.

⁶⁹³ Zingani, M. The Chronicle Newspaper, April, 20, 2003.

⁶⁹⁴ Annan, K. The UN Secretary General reiterated this at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, 2000.

women empowerment. Women will, therefore, always remain subordinate and oppressive to male counterparts. In ensuring the boosting of girls' education be a success, there is great need for partnership among all stakeholders, including the Non Governmental Organisations, as the saying goes "No man is an Island." The Government alone cannot implement all this. It needs collaborations from all stakeholders to maximise quality education as expected.

7.4. PART TWO: Oral Interviews

Sex	No	Married	Unmarried	Widowed	Age	Education	Occupation	Denomination	Church Position
Male	10	6	3	1	18-65 yrs.	4 JCE, 3 PSLC 3 Illiterate	4 Civil Servants 6 farmers	3 CCAP 3 RC 2 Anglicans 1 Church of Nazarene 1 Assemblies of God	6 Elders 2 Deacons 2 Members
Female	10	5	2	3	18-55 yrs.	2 JCE, 4 PSLC 4 Illiterate	4 Civil Servants, 2 un employed 4 House wives	4 CCAP, 2RC, 1Anglican, 3Assemblies of God	4 Elders, 4Chairpersons 2 CYF leaders
TOTAL	20	11	5	4					

A. 7.4.i. Introduction

Apart from the questionnaire, I had an opportunity to conduct oral interviews personally with 20 men and women from various denominations as per the table above. I used informal, in-depth interviews and observations as my tools in this research. There were 6 married men, 3 unmarried and 1 widowed. As for the women, 5 were married, 2 unmarried and 3 widowed. Their education ranged from Junior Certificate to non-literate. The reason for choosing middle class as well as lower class people in terms of education was to have a wide range of views as to how ordinary people understand the bible and the role and place of women in church and society. According to my plan, I had to spend one hour with each person, but sometimes more time was spent due to the fact that supplementary questions were asked as the interviewees found the subject more interesting. Before I visited each person, I booked in advance for a permission to chat with him or her on the subject which was introduced to each interviewee.

As for the questions, I used the same questionnaire but I did not ask each and every question in it because of time factor and also because of supplementary questions some interviewees were sometimes asking. Moreover, my scheduled plan was almost finished, hence I couldn't make it if we were to discuss each and every question in the questionnaire. However, the questions touched all four categories, as per attached Appendix II. My main focus was finding out their views as to whether the church did the right thing or not in allowing ordination of women, and examining the impact of tradition and culture on the subordination of women. The responses from these oral interviews have been divided into categories. The first category deals with the negative and positive attitudes of men and women toward the role of women in the church and society.

7.4.ii. Men's negative's responses

In summary, given below were the responses made by four men as to why women cannot attain church leadership roles. One man said, 'according to our culture, a woman is there to accept what her husband says but not to lead.' As he argued, 'our culture does not allow women to rule over men, hence it would be difficult for women and men to work together in leadership positions.' The responsibility of church leadership would be too heavy to allow women to take care of their homes and children and also to take care of one or two parishes. He thought it would be too much for women to undertake this. When I asked him, what about the professional women? He said, even though women manage to work both in homes and secular jobs, the church ministry cannot be compared with secular jobs because they have different sources of authority. Hence, you can not mix God's work with either domestic work or secular jobs. Another man touched on the tradition of the church and said, the church does not allow it: 'even Missionaries showed it clearly that women should not hold positions of leadership by not ordaining one in their lifetime.' As a result of this, the church is only following that example which is supported by scriptures. However, I wonder whether this was indeed the position of Missionaries, though they had not ordained one.

The third man was arguing on mere prejudice, just to harm women's rights. He said the emphasis was laid on the division of labour between man and women in church and society leadership roles. It was also said that the emotional nature of women and their physiological functions could not warrant them to attain these positions. They think women have a poor self-image. He even went further to say, 'yes, God can call women to a church leadership position, but they lose tempers quickly.' Hence, they are not fit for the job because it requires

patience. He even asked, 'how was she going to minister when she was pregnant?' But I asked him do men not lose tempers? He answered they do but not so quickly. He emphasised on the time-factor of losing tempers but admitted that they all lose tempers. However, his argument is not convincing because by admitting that they all lose tempers is absolutely showing that men and women are all fallible followers of Jesus Christ, for they all lose tempers and patience.

On biblical bias, the fourth man argued that the bible does not allow women to stand before men and give instructions. Here he was of the view that the woman belongs to man and therefore can not make independent decisions. He cited the injunction given by Paul in the bible especially 1 Cor. 14:36-38 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15 as a general command coming directly from God. He emphasised by asking, 'if God has spoken who can overrule his words?' Woman is strongly believed to have caused Man to sin, hence is viewed as a source of sexual danger to man. Again the fact that God created women with ability to bear children is looked at as a curse which can prevent the presence of the Spirit of God in church if women were to be elevated to leadership positions. Finally, on cultural bias – it was argued that our culture does not allow women to rule over men, hence it would be difficult for women and men to work together in leadership positions. The responsibility of church leadership would be too heavy for women to take care of their homes and children and at the same time taking care of one or two parishes. When asked, what about women's traditional leaders who are chiefs, sub-chiefs, group village head-women and village head-women? He said the reason that they are not many holding these positions tells itself their ineligibility to rule. He thought that would be too much for women. The fact that he could not state whether these traditional rulers were failing to carry their duties effectively seems to show that his arguments were totally based on prejudice and self-esteem. Given these biased feelings against women, one can feel how deep rooted patriarchal ideologies are in church and societies.

7.4.iii. Women's negative responses

Two women held the view that women and men have different gender roles. They emphasised that men and women are different. They made examples that 'women are cooks, mow grass; men are hunters and boys graze cattle, while girls do not.' When I asked them, could men not cook or could girls not graze cattle? They said, they could but that it may be not according to 'the plan of God.' According to their understanding, women have their areas of work and so to men. Therefore, they said, women should be content with serving God through their wing

Umanyano (Women's Guild) and managing their homes, while men concentrate on leadership roles. After all we all work to the glory of God through different branches, they reiterated. However, these women failed to substantiate their views with the bible, as they claimed it was 'God's plan.' But my understanding was that they were influenced by traditional and cultural dictates.

One woman argued further, women cannot take leadership positions even if given to them because by nature they are not aggressive. Women have for a long time been silenced by culture so that even now they do not speak out whenever men are around. According to her, she said, 'we should not disrupt our cultures which have held us together for long.' She wished if change were to come, it should come not in her generation. After making further enquires about this woman, I found that her job is to teach young women and girls how to behave to their prospective husbands or men. Because of this, I am certain that she held her view prejudicially and with passive self-image on women as a result of cultural teachings. It was hard for her to express the oppression and subordination of women because of her status or her job and trust to the public. Perhaps she was aware about women's oppression, but the trust and respect accorded to her by the traditional leaders makes her to stand by those sentiments. For instance, she was aware that culture has for a long time silenced women, but she couldn't question 'why?'

7.4.iv. Positive responses from men and women

Six men and seven women favoured women becoming ministers and assuming leadership roles. The main reasons were based on their personal experiences with God in their work and faith. The central issue was a call by God. They stated that 'Women are elected to the offices of church elder and deacons and are very active women's guild members, where they are involved in preaching, evangelisation and pastoral work. Therefore, they questioned, what is the difference between what they are practising and ordination to sacramental ministry?' There is no profound reason to understand the sacredness of sacramental ministry that should exclude women, when the same God uses the same women to preach and win souls to Christ and strengthen the weak spiritually. They indicated their non-acceptance of cultural reasons to bar women from assuming leadership positions in church and society. They saw that church leaders were aiming at pleasing people rather than listening to the voice of God. Therefore, this group of people saw the need of women becoming church or society leaders as long as

they have been called by God and have undergone proper training. They looked at women as people just as capable as men, as having the same gifts as men.

To them, women have leadership and counselling qualities that can enable them effectively to minister unto God and His glory. Therefore, according to them, the will of God includes what is in the bible and what God is speaking now. They argued that ‘insistence on a concept of “tradition or culture,” of being true to the past and perpetuating it, blocks change in the future.’ They felt that the call to obedience, to acceptance of man-made rules, mechanisms of exclusion, non-employment of women in decision-making posts in churches, contribute to the experience of alienation. Therefore, knowing that women have a new understanding of their own competence, their self-validation and right of participation, they can take up decision-making posts and participate through equal representation in church and society. They said talents, skills, charisma and insights are not the monopoly of men, but freely given by God, the Creator. Therefore, women need to bring into their churches and societies their gifts and insights as women, not modelled on old traditional and cultural structures, but born out of practical living through equal networking and mutual support. The group believed that once the societal concerns are widened and inclusive, they will touch men and women and will be liberating for men and women. My understanding with this group was that they pointed to their vision of wholeness and total acceptance of everybody, as the way of affirming everybody and transforming everything.

7.4.v. Personal findings and evaluations

In analysing the responses of 4 men and 3 women who did not want women to hold leadership positions in church and society, I found that the bible was regarded literally as God’s own divinely inspired word and communicated to human beings. Because of this they revere and submit to the bible as if God directly communicated to them. That is why the bible is interpreted literally, and being God’s word, it has the authority over people’s life, hence it is accepted without question. Perhaps these people are attracted to their traditional society or custom, where authority, more so religious authority, is accepted without question. I presume that was the reason why one participant said, ‘if God has spoken who can overrule his words?’

Again, it shows that patriarchal ideology is still far from over. The responses reflected the impact of patriarchal attitudes on women. They showed what women have been taught over

the generations, such that they have come to believe that what was said about them is true even today. The problem is that they have internalised the prejudices against women and have learnt to conform with that, hence a change to them would ruin their culture and tradition. They would not want to see change in their time. You can't imagine some felt that pregnant women cannot work effectively in the ministry of Jesus. They questioned that when women ministers are pregnant how can they work? It seems as if there is any connection of pregnancy with unholiness or impurity. Furthermore, I totally find that this is prejudicial that women are associated with temper and men with patience. It seems as if there is a biological connection between being a woman with irrational thinking and a man with rational thinking.

The problem with these people was that, they could not differentiate between culture and the Word of God. They therefore took the preconceived view that the bible was against women holding leadership positions. They also felt that men have their own roles and that there are roles that can be shared with women. This shows the prevalence of male stereotypes about women in all cultures of the world. This means that culture decides what is either men's or women's work. Hence, as boys and girls grow up they are taught at home and through their guilds what they are responsible for. Therefore, cultural demands are interpreted as God's will for women. The only place of women is in the home, giving birth and taking care of children, as if God willed that way. The domestic work is believed to be more important, although God can call women to leadership positions in church and society. The central problem here is the assumption that cultural attitudes towards women are unchanging.

However, looking at the positive responses, I felt their observations were a key to creating a new community of women and men working in partnership together in peace and harmony, with a sense that they were all created in the same Image of God. The respondents were claiming that the decisions of women for equality should be heard, hence bringing to an end all their oppression and subordination to men. The most amazing thing was a close examination of figures which show that 7 were women and 6 were men who supported the inclusion of women into church leadership positions. This rings into the researcher's mind that if women were to be present as members at Presbytery, Synod and General Synod meetings and participate in all deliberations with equal voting powers, the discussions would take a different way. It is very likely that the voice of women would influence the decision in their favour.

The 13 respondents agreed that culture and tradition had contributed to the oppression and subordination of women. They thought avoiding those traditional and cultural practices which contributed to the subordination of women such as forced early marriage, women inheritance, deprivation of property, and land ownership denial, would set the Christian free to depend only on God for protection. Their exposure to critical thinking and analysis of one's situation is of great importance in the liberation of women from oppressive elements in their culture. Their analysis led them to interpret anew the biblical passages that ask women to obey their husbands. Thus an analysis of culture and tradition affected the interpretation of the bible in a liberating direction.

These people saw the need for the changes on culture and tradition, and also the bible where women are marginalised, in the light of their liberation from oppression. Hence, there is need to revisit the contents from women's perspective or by reading with women's eyes. To achieve this, we need to go back to the bible and read it through the eyes of women and the oppressed, by considering their experiences, questions, and issues that affect them. Generally, the respondents indicated that they had enjoyed the experience and wished there was more time for further questions and discussions face to face. This was so because it was their first experience and therefore felt challenged to speak up seriously about issues that affect women. They also felt that the dialogue had helped them deepen their faith and closeness with God. However, some expressed their opinions that it was too involving and made someone go deep into the biblical concepts. But they all wished they had another of dialoguing biblical concepts and therefore, expressed enormous thanks for what they had gained in the dialogue.

Throughout this research, there was a normative acceptance by all members on the role of the bible in the church. At the same time, they critically questioned the conservative use of what Isabel Phiri calls the 'Scripture Principle'⁶⁹⁵ to reinforce patriarchy and clericalism. The members were convinced that the bible is the indispensable resource for the task of empowering women and the oppressed because of its liberating trajectories. Both women and men had a wide acceptance that the bible has a unique authority. Their main task was to approach the texts with a critical focus. They noted how their churches used the bible to decide the position of women in the church. They looked at these passages that their churches used to bar women from taking leadership positions. In that case, it was established that the bible has total authority in deciding what the position of women should be. In doing that,

members were aware that their churches used a literalistic interpretation of the passages. However, nevertheless some churches went further to do research on how to understand the passages that relate to women's involvement in church leadership. Thus, they went further beyond the mere text to examine the cultural and historical background of the passages. This hermeneutical process led them to see that in early church, women were holding positions of leadership. However, some researchers were influenced by their understanding of their cultural context, hence they approached the passages in terms of the patriarchal context and biblical societies.

⁶⁹⁵ Phiri, I. A, 1996, p. 151

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1. Conclusion

In this thesis, in our search for women's justice and liberation in Malawi, I based my focus on reading the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed. I started by identifying the bible which missionaries brought to Africa is the centre of oppression and subordination of women and the oppressed. I have also argued that church practice has been influenced by cultural practice with the help of the Levitical texts. Hence, the patriarchal and androcentric readings of the texts put women on the periphery of life. Part of the power of the Markan Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God had to do with the fact that it ushered in an entirely new mode of human existence. The fact that the Markan Jesus broke boundaries in his dealings with people challenges us to break those same boundaries in our dealings with each other. But why did the church lose its original message preached by Jesus Christ? The message carried on by disciples was that the Lord Jesus Christ would soon return to establish his Kingdom. But as time passed, the church seems to have lost its sense, and thinking that the Kingdom was imminent. The church also seems to have lost its will to live as if the Kingdom was at hand. Hence, the creeping in of society's boundaries and patriarchy of the church's teaching, and unfortunately diminished its Gospel proclamation.

It is because of this lost reality and the teaching of the later church that we needed to reclaim the bible for women, and this has been the main goal of this thesis. To achieve this, we explored ways of reading the texts which could offer freedom and liberation to the oppressed and marginalised women and communities. The thesis has been, therefore, a challenge to inequalities facing women, and thus a motivation for them not to put up any longer with the limitations placed upon them by others (patriarchy and androcentrism). Instead, they should start their own thought processes and actions based on their new discoveries and insights. As we read the Gospel of Mark, under the reign of God, men and women are intended to live and work together in a discipleship of equals. The fundamental democratic or egalitarian strain of Christianity, which leads to equality and justice is the formulation of Paul's letter to the Galatians (3:28).

The examples of the hemorrhaging woman and the Syrophenician woman set solid foundations for women and the oppressed to show courage and faith in encountering all of their social, economic and political problems. These two stories are solid motivations for

women, and all those who are oppressed and marginalised. For instance, the Syrophenician woman, an outsider as a Gentile and as a woman, achieves her goal not only because of her “saying” (λόγος, 7:29), her faith and her reasoning alone, but her action as well. She stood up, spoke up and spoke out to Jesus. She apparently “bests” Jesus in debate and teaches him something about the extent of his mission. What can prevent women and the oppressed today to also stand up, speak up and speak out? Though the Syrophenician woman is of the wrong sex, wrong nationality, wrong racial/religious background, she persistently, wittingly and intelligently wins her argument. Certainly, Mark wants to contrast the way religious authorities came to Jesus (7:1-23) with the way the woman has. The religious authorities came with a closed, legalistic attitude; she comes empty-handed and without merit, but opens to Jesus. And she is rewarded, as the Markan Jesus upsets the wall between Jew and Gentile in granting her request for her daughter. By approaching Jesus unhesitatingly and by making Jesus learn from her unhesitatingly, Sharon Ringe has pointed out that the woman ministers to Jesus.⁶⁹⁶ She says, the woman ministers to Jesus by witnessing to his ability as a worker of miracles and by engaging with him in a way that allows him to move beyond taboos and boundaries. Ringe believes that the Syrophenician woman frees Jesus to heal, transcend the racist and sexist boundaries of his society. She, therefore, represents the courage of those having little faith to lose, act boldly in faith on behalf of others.

The courage and active faith characterised in the hemorrhaging woman and the Syrophenician woman involved them in the life-giving power manifest in Jesus. Thus active faith signals discipleship (e.g. Mk 11:22-24), life-giving power (10:29-31). These women shed light on the meaning of discipleship or followership and ministering, by their bold and active faith. They are by and large models of discipleship. For instance, the term “διάκονος” (deacons/servants) is only associated with women (1:31; 15:41) and Jesus (10:45). It is not used of the male disciples in the Gospel of Mark. This proves the point that Mark’s view of discipleship is inclusive. As women who were living on the periphery of life show their determination to find healing from Jesus, they act as an empowerment to Mark’s readers in their time of persecution. This is also an encouragement and empowerment to women and the

⁶⁹⁶ Ringe, S.H. “A Gentile Woman’s Story,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, edited by L. Russell, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985, pp. 65-72.

oppressed today to show the same determination in their struggle for justice and liberation. Also, like their fellow women who stood and remained faithful to Jesus at the Cross their presence too can oppose evil and death.

The appearance of women in the discourses or teachings of the Markan Jesus shows that women are included in the family of Jesus constituted by obedience to God, and they are also included in the persecutions he foresees for that family (cf. 3:35; 10:30). In Mark's Gospel women appear prominently. They move from being passive recipients of miracles, to being active examples of faithful response. Furthermore, they also move to being given an apostolic commission to 'go and tell his disciples and Peter' (16:7), though the commission leaves ambiguous accomplishment. But, as Mark's understanding of discipleship portrays following, serving, and suffering, women are prime examples. Women did not only follow, serve, and suffer, but did so more faithfully than male disciples. Undoubtedly, the basis of the text of the Gospel as we have it, is appropriate to say Mark's community must have had strong women leaders and role models. Written between 62 and 70 AD and comparing to the prevailing attitudes of that period in the Greco-Roman world, it is ideal to say that Mark's Gospel represents an important shift in the positive values it assigns to women in the community of Jesus. Truly, women are depicted as vital witnesses of the public ministry of Jesus, his suffering, death and resurrection. Thus, the Gospel of Mark presents a universally more positive view of women. The positive light of women is shown by the evangelist's depictions of women in their narratives and their reports of Jesus' words.

Therefore, it is hard to conclude that the Gospel of Mark is only a patriarchal text. Although, the history of Mark's interpretation may well have been, the material in his Gospel describes autonomous women who respond to Jesus and to the Gospel. The material also describes women who are affirmed for doing so both by Jesus in the narrative and by Mark in his preservation of the tradition. This, therefore, suggests that the communities from which Mark's Gospel comes must have been communities with strong women who may have held positions of leadership. The narrative on women and Jesus in Mark's Gospel would reflect traditions about Jesus that Mark and his community know, and traditions reflective of the community itself. Therefore, given Mark's depiction of women in his narrative and his report of Jesus' word, I support Feminist commentary on the New Testament that at the earliest stages, Christianity was more egalitarian than it was later in its history. So it is no surprise to find Mark, written around 70 AD reflecting that early equality.

The overall picture we have of women in the Gospel of Mark suggests some intriguing trajectories for Christology as well as for Ecclesiology.⁶⁹⁷ Firstly, when we think of the Markan Jesus as one who proclaimed justice and liberation (Mk 5:24-34; 7:24-30; cf. Lk. 4:18-19/Isa. 61:1-3) that message must include women. The characteristic behaviour of the Markan Jesus of including, affirming and accepting women as equals is part of his larger inclusion of and preference for the marginalised. This is supported by his calling women to be his disciples with men, and this was undoubtedly part of his offence to the eyes of the religious establishment. Generally, according to Mark, the unclean or impure like the leper, the hemorrhaging woman, the little daughter of Jairus, the sinners and tax collectors, Gentiles and so on are all touchable as far as Jesus is concerned. Hence, the attitude of Jesus was bound to affect the marginalised of society in a positive way, including both sexes. Similarly, the faith of the woman and Jairus healed her and his daughter respectively. Anderson observes, instead of Jesus preserving holiness by avoiding contact like what the Pharisees and the Qumran community could do, Mark portrays Jesus spreading holiness by making contact and giving all people the chance to experience the good news of the reign of God (13:10).⁶⁹⁸ Jesus, therefore, makes clean that which was unclean by spreading purity, forgiveness and wholeness (cf. 2:5).

Mark sets a widened table fellowship among all followers of Jesus Christ. Therefore, purity of heart, is now to be found in those who deny themselves, those who take up their cross and follow Jesus, and those who do the will of God enduring to the end in the way which he teaches them (8: 31-10: 45). These are the true family of Jesus, the Messiah, as opposed to all those who are ashamed of him. They are the elect, whom the Son of Man will gather in from four winds at the end of the age. This is a missionary movement which is sent to preach the Gospel to all nations (cf. 3: 14; 6: 6-13; 13: 10). That is why Jesus welcomes the strange exorcist (8: 22-26; 10: 46-52), as a sign that the power of the Kingdom is at work in the world overcoming the powers of darkness and evil. Truly, the mission of the Markan Jesus was not confined to one particular area, he was embodying the presence of God wherever he went. Unlike the Jewish cultic sites that localised God to a particular area by limiting the understanding of the idea of land, the Markan Jesus preaches that God is not only for Jews but

⁶⁹⁷ Thurston, B., 1998, p. 94.

⁶⁹⁸ Rhodes, D. "Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, by Anderson, J. C. and Moore, S. D. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 156.

for all nations (13:10). Hence, the Gospel is preached and heard wherever he goes. The abandonment of the distinction between sacred and profane as marked out by cultic sites and boundaries are finally seen in a drama of God's infiniteness in the passion narrative. Here Jesus is crucified, degraded and destroyed in the place of the skull, over against the Temple, at the same time as the protective Temple veil is torn (15:38), symbolising the removal of all cultic boundaries and therefore the locus of a central position for Jerusalem. God is now to be experienced by all people who profess him in spirit and truth. The episode with the Syrophenician woman demonstrates the overcoming of the Markan Jesus' inhibitions. Therefore, because God's presence is now being experienced by both men and women inside and outside Galilee, Mark finds it relevant to preach this message anywhere. By crossing boundaries, the Markan Jesus launches his ministry outside his own people's vicinity.

Therefore, the Markan Jesus has inaugurated his ministry which invites all his readers to participate. As new people united in Christ, his followers are to set aside pride and notions of exclusivism. They are, like the Markan Jesus, to preach and teach his Gospel of love, forgiveness, liberation and peace into the world. As Neyrey sums up, the boundaries of Jesus' covenant people are more porous than those of the parent synagogue covenant.⁶⁹⁹ In view of this, the crossing of all ethnic boundaries and the introduction of an inclusive missionary strategy which offers full membership to all peoples in the Kingdom of God, is Mark's main focus.

The crossing of internal and external boundaries as we have seen in chapter 4 and 5, allows marginal, unclean Israelites like the hemorrhaging woman (5:25-34) and the Gentiles (7:24-30) as well to be welcomed in God's new covenant group. Hence, he propagates and plants an inclusive mission. In his reformation, he urges people to love their enemies, to pay more attention to love and forgiveness and care than defending barriers between themselves. Jesus' reformation of purity rules implies a quite different attitude towards the external boundaries of the community from that of Qumran. In Qumran, the separation from and hatred of those outside the community was reinforced and regulated by avoidance rules. The Markan Jesus reformed the whole basis of such rules by associating in his meals with collaborators and sinners (2:13-17; 8:1-10). The implication and the ethical counterpart of this is the command by Jesus to love their enemies, which contrasts sharply with Qumran's command to hate

⁶⁹⁹ Neyrey, J. H., 1986, pp. 100-23.

them. By associating with sinners and impure people, Jesus is emphasising the importance of love, and care to one another. In this sense, Jesus teaches that the wicked and idolaters are not the ultimate threat to the Jewish community. Again, the lack of spiritual power to love and forgive would not outdo evil and wickedness, even if this could entail suffering and death. For Mark, the implication in all his healing miracles is that God does not wish to destroy but to forgive, heal and restore the lost and fallen. The real power in the world is the divine forgiveness and love which can definitely overcome one's hatred and fear. What is destructive, as John Riches puts it, is therefore one's opposition to the spirit of love and forgiveness, the refusal to repent and the act of hatred and enmity from the divine spirit of forgiveness.⁷⁰⁰ These are things that pollute someone hence he/she must die to these things if he/she is to find life. Someone must die from the rejection of divine love and forgiveness which thus cuts him/her off.

The faith of the hemorrhaging woman and the Syrophoenician woman challenges us all. We are challenged not to lose faith despite the oppressive situations we may encounter, but to stand up and speak out basing our arguments through liberative readings of the bible. These women strengthen us to have faith and courage to encounter any challenges. As these women lost no hope in Jesus throughout their time of plight, we are also called to emulate them with this encouragement portrayed by them. It is an encouragement never to lose hope in spite of our social, economic, political and ecclesiastical circumstances, because this might then lead to a change of heart among male leadership. If these women had courage to draw near and dialogue with Jesus (as a man), there would be rewards for this trust and faith. What can prevent us (oppressed women and men) to challenge the status quo (imperfect of that matter)? The texts, therefore, tell us to trust, believe, and pray unceasingly. It also tells us not to be shy, but stand up as equal partners with men and enjoy the rights. Jesus intended to use his power to empower the disempowered. The faith of the women enabled them to reach wholeness and to be defined in a new way. Hence, their personhood was now defined by wholeness, not in their plights. Thus, their faith was strengthened and a vision of wholeness was nurtured in the process of reading the text liberatively. Therefore, this liberative reading where we read through the eyes of women and the oppressed, highlights the dynamic forces that operate when a reader and the text are brought together. Undoubtedly, the faith of these women become the source of faith for women and the oppressed in their daily lives of

⁷⁰⁰ Riches, J. K., 1980, p. 139.

cultural, economic, political and ecclesiastical oppression.

The Gospel of Mark, therefore, is a liberative Gospel. It is the Gospel that sees the end of old order and the coming of new order in Jesus Christ. The climax of this turning point according to Mark is the depiction of Jesus' death. At the crucifixion of Jesus, the religious and social boundaries were broken, enabling Jews and Gentiles, women and men to interact. Thus, this new age brings new creation where barriers between men and women, between Jews and Gentiles are broken. The new creation makes a new inclusive community consisting of women and men, Jews and Gentiles, not an old exclusive community. The stories of women we looked at in this thesis express Mark's portrayal of women in an inclusive understanding of discipleship. Undoubtedly, Fiorenza is right that the message Mark is communicating points forward to a new egalitarian nature experienced in the early Christian community.⁷⁰¹ In the course of Mark's Gospel, the narrative moves women who are depicted at the extremities of social life to the central point. Therefore, the reversal of outsiders and insiders is basic to the good news of Jesus according to the good news of Mark.

It is no doubt why some scholars interpret the positive presentation of women disciples in the Gospel of Mark as concrete evidence of the leadership roles by women in Markan community. Fiorenza is of the view that Mark records evidence of the 'apostolic leadership of women.'⁷⁰² In support of this view, the association of the verb "διακονέω" with women in Mark indicates leadership roles. According to Susan Miller, the 'cognate noun (diakonos) is used of leaders in the early church (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; Rom. 16:1; Col.4: 7).'⁷⁰³ Furthermore, Collins says the verb "διακονέω" is also associated with serving of the Eucharist (cf. Did. 14:1-3; 15:1; 1 Clem. 42:4).⁷⁰⁴ The implication is that women are involved in serving the Eucharist in the Markan community. The portrayal of women witnessing the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ is foundational for the proclamation of the Gospel. This suggests their involvement in the continuation of Jesus' ministry. By aligning with Jesus' death and suffering, women disciples are the only witnesses to continue the mission of Jesus soon after the end of the Gospel. Although Mark ends with their silence, the very witness and discipleship acknowledges the renewal of the discipleship group. Even

⁷⁰¹ Fiorenza, E.S., 1983, p. 316.

⁷⁰² Fiorenza, E.S., 1983, p. 334.

⁷⁰³ Miller, S.E., 2002, p. 272.

⁷⁰⁴ Collins, J.N. *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 238.

though they followed at a distance (Mk 15:40), Munro reminds us that upon Jesus' arrest Peter also followed Jesus 'at a distance' (Mk 14:54).⁷⁰⁵ As Malbon suggests, 'presumably a stronger disciple or stronger followers would have drawn nearer to Jesus at the critical moments of trial and crucifixion.'⁷⁰⁶ But, since the mark of followership is to be present at all, however, remaining at a distance like women and Peter, marks fallibility. As Malbon reiterates, 'discipleship is both open-ended and demanding; followership is neither exclusive nor easy.'⁷⁰⁷ What Malbon is saying is that, Mark communicates his message succinctly by saying that anyone can follow Jesus Christ, though it is a difficult task.

The struggle for women's liberation won't go away, even if ignored and suppressed for a long time. To use the words of Gamaliel, 'If this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them in that case you may even be found fighting against God!' (Acts 5: 38-39). In order to discern a uniquely Christian process that both women and men must undertake in the churches, a crucial and critical place must be given to the Word of God. It is here that we are in touch with the inspired written beginnings of the Christian tradition. In my understanding of the earliest days of the Christian phenomenon, the Markan Jesus unleashed an incredible newness and oneness into the balance of relationships between women and men and, consequently, between woman, man and God. This can be traced through a careful and critical reading of the Gospel narratives about Jesus' contacts and associations with women and his teachings in which the role of women is crucial. Markan Jesus not only raised the status of women but put them on equal spiritual footing with men. Hence, women knew Jesus and were leaders in the early church. Women were strong, outspoken and vigorous enough in some Christian communities, that perhaps the male leaders of those communities worried about, and sometimes tried to limit and silence them. I am certain that much of the language and terminology used of male leaders in the early Christian communities was also used in connection with women. Let us rejoice that Mark, who is viewed by some Feminist scholars, as subordinating women, portrays women who knew, followed, served and sacrificed for Jesus. They were later commissioned for service and their positions of leadership in churches were approved. Howard Kee seems to give a balanced conclusion that though the New Testament does not give us sufficient

⁷⁰⁵ Munro, W., 1982, p. 235.

⁷⁰⁶ Malbon, E.S., 1983, p. 43.

⁷⁰⁷ Malbon, E.S., 1983, p. 32.

Kee, H.C. *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980, p. 95.

evidence to suggest the full equality of men and women in the church, however, the prominence given to women is an unusual feature of social movements of early Empire.⁷⁰⁸ Truly, while the New Testament has passages that express disdain for women, on balance there are a striking number of ways in which women are valued.

I believe the relationships between women and men, and the consequent relationship that exists, as they stand equal before God, has only been properly lived by Jesus Christ in our history. To read the scripture in the Spirit is always to be set free. For Paul again remarks, the index of the Spirit is freedom: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17). The Gospel is always a proclamation of freedom. This is clear in its key Old Testament archetypes and foreshadowings: the Exodus liberation and the New Exodus from Babylonian Exile proclaimed by Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-66).⁷⁰⁹ This is effected in Jesus' proclamation and actualisation of the Kingdom in the Synoptic Gospels. All we should consider today is whether we shall allow the texts to imprison us or free us, to stand as Gospel or as Law. But what we should remember is what Raymond Brown reminds us, 'that scripture is always a human expression of the Word of God.'⁷¹⁰ Brown is of the view that scriptural texts should function as Gospel, not as Law. They should open up new visions rather than enclosing in old ones. They should work towards full realisation of God's plan for human beings founded in Genesis 1:26-27 and fulfilled in Christ according to Gal. 3:28. The risen Christ transcends the maleness of his historical existence and becomes one in whom all believers should feel equally at home. It is therefore, appropriate and true that the church, the body of the risen Lord, should reflect and avail this equality.

Our tool for all this as emphasised in the thesis is the bible. For it contains the solutions and principles of actions regarding the problems we have to solve in church and society. It is for this reason that the researcher wanted the ordinary readers to understand the importance of the bible spiritually and physically. To understand this, readers are asked to take the texts seriously in order to minimise the manipulation of the bible. Whatever mode of reading readers use, it should bring the concerns, questions and issues of their contexts to the readings of the texts. Therefore, both trained readers and ordinary readers bring critical resources from

⁷⁰⁸ Kee, H.C. *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980, p. 95.

⁷⁰⁹ Schneiders, S.M., 1991, p. 97.

⁷¹⁰ Brown, R. *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind 44*; See earlier, *The Meaning of the Bible*, New York: Paulist Press, 1981, pp. 1-22.

their contexts for the reading of the bible. Together they can enable the bible to speak to us. Another important issue in relation to witnessing to the Kingdom is unity. Since we all belong to one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, who moreover gave his life for the whole of humanity, let us strive for unity in stamping out oppression and all evil things that are against the word of God. It is scandalous to observe that despite the remarkable progress we have accomplished or are accomplishing, our unity is far from what Christ would expect or would wish it to be. That was why the researcher proposed to conduct a series of bible studies in different denominations with different backgrounds and traditions. In this way, the researcher strove to build an effective unity among all Christians based on the principles determined in common among equal partners and founded on the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, the CBS process became liberatory as it enabled participants to speak unspoken words from their experiences, concerns and questions. In this way, empowerment had resulted through both the process and the product of reading the texts.

In sum, what images God is not the maleness of Markan Jesus, but his inclusive love and his acting in Godlike ways. The Markan Jesus who affirms the hemorrhaging woman and the Syrophenician woman reflects the God who protected and provided for Hagar. The Markan Jesus who criticises a religious system that would demand for a widow and her financial security reflects the God of whom the prophet Amos speaks in his criticism of corrupt religious practices. The Markan Jesus who allows the excessive love of the anointing woman reflects the God of Hosea and the Song of Songs and anyone who rejoices when one whom the soul seeks is found (cf. Lk. 19:10).⁷¹¹ The Markan Jesus who first appears to women and commissions them to proclaim his message of resurrection is indeed the God who knows and appreciates that 'love is strong as death' (Song 8:6).⁷¹² So, the Markan Jesus was a man who undercut the values of the patriarchy of his day. Women were expected to nurture and to serve. Jesus' denunciation of injustice was so potent because it came from the ranks of the oppressors and brought good news to the oppressed and proclaimed liberty to the captives (Lk. 4:18-19). So, this is good news for women and the oppressed, as well as men as they are commissioned to do likewise in the community of God. Will the reader, therefore, respond to it, proclaim it or simply remain silently in fear? As disciples of Jesus, according to Mark, we are to take up our crosses and follow Jesus, we are to lose our lives for the Gospel (8:34-35), and we are also to be 'last of all and servant of all' (9:35). In the Jewish ethos of the story

⁷¹¹ Thurston, B., 1998, pp. 94-95.

⁷¹² Thurston, B., 1998, p. 95.

itself, and the wider Greco-Roman culture in which it occurred and is recorded, for women to become prominent disciples and witnesses of Jesus is a prime example of last becoming first. It is one of Mark's icons of the surprising social reality of the Kingdom of God. As Winsome Munro noted, the rehabilitation of the Twelve and their future authority depended on their accepting the testimony of women.⁷¹³

Therefore, the Markan Jesus called both women and men to service in his church. Despite the fact that women were not equal and were generally subordinate to men in contemporary Jewish, Hellenistic and Roman society, both Jesus and the early Church allowed women to hold and exercise ministerial offices, such as disciple, prophet, deacon, proclaimer of the Gospel and leader of worship. Indeed, the primary model of ministry in the New Testament is described in terms of discipleship and service. The ministry of the Markan Jesus was characterised through the application of the image and theology of the suffering servant. The Gospels portrayed Jesus as teaching his disciples that the nature of their ministry was to be like his own, that is, one of service. The Christian servant was to serve both God and the people through total self-offering even to death. The disciple is a person who is bound in close, loving and learning relationship to Jesus. The disciple is called to be like his or her master, to be a servant. The service of the Christian disciple may be understood as priestly through the model of the priesthood of the suffering servant. The authentic Christian ministry is the priesthood of gratuitous self-offering in atoning love. That is why women ministered to the Markan Jesus up to his final moment of his ministry and his resurrection.

⁷¹³ Munro, W., 1981, pp. 228-33.

8.2. Recommendations for women's Liberation and Empowerment

This study, in summary, has brought a number of issues that perhaps could contribute to the enhancement of justice and liberation for women and the oppressed in Malawi. Given the fact that women in church and society are still lagging behind, and the fact that the Gospel of Mark sets an inclusive ministry, we need to further draw attention to some of the pertinent issues that need to be considered by other churches and theological institutions. To be able to achieve the reading of the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed, we need to put a few things in place or correct this situation. We need to strengthen the relationship between trained and ordinary readers, and also give indications for theological institutions to develop models of reading the bible that are inclusive and non-discriminatory. This final section of this thesis consists of recommendations which could eventually enhance justice and liberation for women and the oppressed in Malawi. I have examined below a number of suggestions that churches and theological institutions in Malawi need to consider in order to realise a liberated community of women and men in church and society working in partnership to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

8.2.i. Unlimiting access to Theological Education

Firstly, we need to have more women in theological education. In Malawi women theologians are not many as said earlier in the thesis. In our case (Livingstonia Synod) we have five women theologians, two have since retired and two are now working as an ordained minister and a probationer respectively, while two are still undergoing their theological training. Synods need to increase the intake of women for training as theologians. It is only when women are empowered that we shall see a difference, because knowledge is power. A liberative reading of the bible requires both a transformation of the patriarchal understanding of God, scripture and the church and a transformation in the understanding of historical-critical scholarship and the theological disciplines. But if we don't have many women intellectuals and if they continue to work in minority, their voices will continue to be unheard. They would not be involved in the production and distribution of knowledge. Hence, Presbyterian churches especially those who have not yet made a breakthrough need to reconsider their stand by returning to the bible with liberative readings. But for those already in the process, they need to encourage more women to undertake theological education.

8.2.ii. Introduction of Feminist Studies in Theological Institutions

Secondly, women's courses should be introduced in theological institutions in Malawi. The exclusion of these courses is an important aspect of their powerlessness in their scholarship and intellectual influence. We have problems in congregations because many male-trained ministers are not very much conversant with this, and sometimes they mix up with gender issues. Hence they end up interpreting the bible literally and uncritically without questions. Again issues relating to women are rarely discussed in congregations. The crux of the problem lies in the interpretation of biblical texts. Hence, scholars and male-trained ministers should be aware that the interpretation of biblical texts about women have long been influenced by patriarchal biases of male commentators. Therefore, such influences need to be eliminated from future understanding of scripture. The study of the bible is a developing science, which changes with and builds upon new knowledge. Current biblical scholarship is in a process of rediscovering the prominent role of women in ministry in the New Testament. New understanding in this area will finally come to influence and affect the life of every Christian in the Church. It is time now for theological institutions in Malawi to repudiate the subordination of women and the oppressed and to suffer the pain which that may entail. Indeed, pain and division are not inherently evil, but very much a part of biblical tradition. And, as the New Testament affirms, suffering leads to the birth of new life. Therefore, introducing women's courses will be an incentive towards the attainment of women's justice and liberation. Even if theological institutions are fully staffed by males, trained male ministers will have an idea of the issues affecting women and know how to encounter them in their prospective congregations. They will now be able to read the bible in a new way from the questions, concerns, and issues affecting women, the poor and the oppressed. Unless theological institutions are keen to welcome the introduction of women's studies in their places, male-trained ministers will continue interpreting biblical texts from their church traditions. Hence, this will make women to continue living on the periphery of life. But if male-trained ministers have the knowledge of these courses, they will be able to find solutions to assist women in their struggle for liberation and equality in churches and societies. So my suggestion is that women's courses should be introduced in the theological curriculum in our Malawian theological institutions. I believe this is the source for women's liberation. Trained ministers will carry the work of training others in their respective churches and this will definitely bring enormous changes as regards to women's issues and their way forward to attaining justice in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

8.2.iii. Delivering untiring message against biased cultural practices and values

Thirdly, churches should continue preaching against biased cultural practices and values. I am not saying that culture is bad, because that is what shapes us. But here, I mean biased cultural practices and values should not be given room to prevail. Although, some people interpret cultural demands as God's will for women, the churches should be able to distinguish between the God-made and man-made things. One of the cultural practices of some societies is allowing their young teenage girls to marry before maturity. Generally, women seem to be shy; therefore the only solution to remove this shyness is education. The church in conjunction with the Government should work hand in hand to mobilise more girls to start schools and emphasise the importance of education in one's life. Generally, the illiteracy rate in Africa is very high in women as compared to men. This is true with Malawi hence the introduction of free education to both girls and boys in primary and to girls only in secondary. All that the Government is doing is to combat an alarming illiteracy rate in women. It is aware that so long as women continue to be illiterate, there will be no meaningful development and women will continue to be oppressed by men. I see this as the main cause of what women are experiencing in Malawi. I am certain that if women are not fully exposed to higher educational standards, they will continue to be suppressed by men. They will, as well, be unable to criticise some biased cultural and traditional customs that impinge them. Churches should know that though they are in the world, they are not of the world. But for them to do this effectively, they need to show their unwavering message practically. By this, I mean, they need to work in partnership with women. Otherwise, their message will be biased because they preach against what they are actually not fulfilling in their particular congregations.

8.2.iv. Introduction and Intensification of Contextual Bible Studies in Churches

Fourthly, we need to introduce or intensify contextual bible studies in congregations. We need to have more systematic, critical reading of CBS process. Christians need to know that the text of the bible does not contain one voice only but there are different voices if read from different perspectives. We need to remove perceptions that because the bible is the word of God and has authority over someone's life, it should be accepted without question. Trained ministers need to teach their members to remove the literal understanding of the bible as God's own divinely inspired word and directly communicated to human beings. Instead, members need to know that the bible is a book that deserves scrutiny and questioning. This will provide ordinary readers with the resources to situate the text both within its literary,

linguistic, historical and sociological contexts. In so doing, it will enable us to appropriate the text more critically. The problem we have in churches is that texts are interpreted literally and uncritically without question. They are also interpreted using the churches' traditions, where some of the issues affecting women and the oppressed are not addressed adequately. I agree with Gerald West that we must not stay with 'what it meant', but struggle with 'what it means' both individually and communally.⁷¹⁴ West is of the view that our commitment to reading the bible should result in individual and social transformation. He sounds a warning against domesticating and taming the texts. He calls upon all trained readers to be aware of the danger of assuming that we already know what the text means. But the untamed and

undomesticated text discloses power to contribute to the contextual reading process. It is therefore very important that bible studies should be intensified in congregations, whereby trained readers and ordinary readers should approach the texts critically and see how they speak to us today. We should know that Jesus challenged all oppressive systems, therefore, senses of bible studies need to make men or patriarchal systems in our congregations to be conscious of the structures and attitudes that oppress and marginalise women. It is only through the bible that women can be empowered. It is a liberating tool hence women should read the bible as women, likewise to men.

Furthermore, I want to agree with Tracy and Moore on the importance of constituting our bible studies with the "Other" that is the ordinary readers who read the bible pre-critically.⁷¹⁵ They are of the view that we seem to have forgotten the ordinary readers in our biblical studies. It is all for trained readers who read the bible critically or post-critically. In our readings of the bible, biblical studies and trained readers need ordinary readers, particularly those "others" from the margins. Though trained readers may read the bible critically, without the presence of ordinary readers, they may not be truly contextual. It is very vital as trained readers to hear from them as well, so that we may provide resources needed by the poor and marginalised communities. It is only through this that our training and expertise may be useful and empowering to them. West sums up that the contextual bible study process of reading the bible with ordinary readers, 'provides a way of reading together in which we partially

⁷¹⁴ West, G.O. "Constructing Critical and Contextual Readings with Ordinary Readers Mark 5:21-6:1," in *JTSA*, 92, 1995, p. 67.

⁷¹⁵ Tracy, D. "Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope," San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987; Moore, Stephen D. "Doing Gospel Criticism as/with a "Reader", in *BTB* 19: 85-93, 1989a; 1989b

constitute each without effacing difference and power relations that come with difference.⁷¹⁶ I support West in this view because together we can resource each other so that we can read the bible contextually and critically. Likewise, I want to urge churches to start or intensify the CBS process as we forge ahead in building the Kingdom of God.

8.2.v. Conscientisation on reading the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed

The last recommendation is on conscientising congregations to read the bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed, in search for justice and liberation in Malawi. Indeed, this is my thesis' title, but my focus has not been on academical attainment, but focusing on the emancipation of women and the oppressed. Churches, government, non-governmental organisations, women's movements and religious organisations in Malawi are tackling the issue about women's justice and liberation. In achieving this, we need to consider the experiences, questions, insights and issues that affect women and the oppressed in life. Once these issues are taken into consideration, men and women will approach the readings differently, and thereby bring in new insights and perceptions towards liberation and equality. I believe if a basic foundation is consciously laid at grass roots level, where any presuppositions or prejudices or stereotypes are removed, there should be no problems when it comes to higher bodies at Presbytery, Synod and General Synod/Assembly levels. Congregations should be mobilised to share the experiences and injustices against women and all marginalised groups. It is only through a new understanding of who they are before God, that they will start disseminating information about the Gospel of liberty. They will truly make the Bible become again the Scripture for the community of faith. This will, however, build in them a desire of creating an equal community of men and women in church and society. However, I want to caution that this should be adopted in an inclusive approach, that is, attempting an equal number of participation between men and women. It should not be one person's operation, but should be done collectively and collaboratively. Both women and men need to bring into their churches and societies, their gifts, insights, new discoveries, new experiences and new understanding born out of practical living by networking and mutual support. I feel that if these proposals are effectively carried out in Malawi, we shall experience remarkable changes in the church and society, and this will eventually lead to

⁷¹⁶ West, G. O., 1995, p. 67.

justice and liberation that this thesis would endeavour to achieve.

Churches must demonstrate awareness of women's subjugation and oppression, and therefore, adopt a conscious resistance to this. They must struggle to map liberating ways of interdependence in our multi-cultural world. My vision in this thesis is the wholeness and total acceptance of everybody, as a way of affirming everybody and transforming everything. Our chief model is our Lord Jesus Christ, who makes no distinction. He struggles to build a compassionate and just community which respects the fine balances of common sympathy which bind humanity together, in love of God against the dehumanising pressure of the world's powers and authorities. It is my uttermost prayer that we will see a changed Malawi, where women and men work together liberatively and equally.

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APPENDIX 1

CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY LESSONS

(JULY – SEPTEMBER 2001)

1. Opening Prayer
2. Introductions to Session
3. Reading of the Texts
4. Questions

BIBLE STUDY I

GENESIS 1: 26-31 & 2: 18-25: THE CREATION OF MAN AND WOMAN

1. What do we learn from Genesis 1:26 and 2:18? (10 Mins)
2. Do these texts not teach that women are completely subordinate to men and that the only purpose of their existence is to reflect the glory of men and to be used by them? (10 Mins)
3. (a) Does Genesis 2:18 mean “Oneness and Mutuality” or “Subordination of the one to the other”? Explain (10 Mins)
 (b) What would it be that women should be subordinate to men if you read Genesis 1:26? (10 Mins)
4. If Eve is weak for succumbing to the serpent’s temptation, What can we say about Adam for succumbing to Eve’s temptation? (5 Mins)
5. Where are the parallels in your situation to this story of the treatment of women? (15 Mins)
6. In our current context of church and society, how have we interpreted the meaning and understanding of the woman as a “helper fit for him”? (25 Mins)
7. According to our culture we pay dowries for marriages, don’t you think that these have attributed to the subordination and oppression of women? (25 Mins)
8. In our current context of church and society, what do we have to regret and let it (them) go? At the same time, what do we need to rejoice and uphold? (25 Mins)

BIBLE STUDY II**MARK 5: 24-34: THE HEMORRHAGING WOMAN**

1. What is the main topic? (5 Mins)

- 2(a) What were the social consequences of bleeding? (10 Mins)
- (b) Why does she come behind Jesus in the crowd? (5 Mins)

3. What are the relationships between the characters and their contexts? (10 Mins)

4. As the narrative develops, what is happening to the relative roles of the woman and Jesus? (10 Mins)

5. What are the social consequences of bleeding today in relation to families, churches and communities? (20 Mins)

- 6(a) How did this story play in the debate of women? (10 Mins)
- (b) How might this story be used as regards to women in churches and societies today? (10 Mins)

7. Where are the parallels in your situation to this story we have just read? (20 Mins)

8. How can we take these discussions forward in churches and societies? (20 Mins)

BIBLE STUDY III**MATTHEW 15: 21-28 & MARK 7: 24-30: THE SYRO-PHOENICIAN WOMAN**

1. Describe the main characters in the text. (10 Mins)
2. What do you think is the meaning of Matthew 15:24? (10 Mins)
3. How do you account Matthew 15:26 and Mark 7:27? (15 Mins)
4. How would you describe the role of the woman and Jesus in this story? (20 Mins)
5. How far does the attitudes of Disciples reflect the treatment of women in Matthew 15:23? (20 Mins)
6. In Mark 5:1-13, Jesus heals a Gerasene Demoniac (a Male Outsider), but here in Mark 7:24-30 Jesus initially shows reluctance to a Syro-phoenician woman (a Female Outsider) and also calls her a “dog”, don’t you think that Jesus here supports the subordination of women? How would you describe this situation in relation to our context? (20 Mins)
7. What parallels does this story have in our own situation? (25 Mins)

BIBLE STUDY IV**1 CORINTHIANS 14: 34-40; 1 TIMOTHY 2: 8-15: THE SILENCE OF WOMEN**

1. What reasons are given for women to be silent in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy? (10 Mins)
2. "As the law says", what does the law say? Where is it found? (10 Mins)
3. What shame did a woman speaking in church bring? (10 Mins)
4. Who do you think is speaking these words? Is it true that Adam was not deceived? (10 Mins)
5. Do you know of any women characters in both the Old and New Testament who have spoken out in private and public? (15 Mins)
6. What do you think makes women inferior (subordinate) to men in church and society today? (20 Mins)
7. Looking at our current context of church and society, What do we need to do to break this culture of silence? At the same time, To what extent would that lead to upholding our cultural values? (25 Mins)
8. How then can we take these discussions forward individually and collectively? (20 Mins)

BIBLE STUDY V**EPHESIANS 5: 21-33 & GALATIANS 3: 25-29: THE SUBORDINATION OF WOMEN AND UNITY IN CHRIST**

1. What do you think are these texts all about? (15 Mins)
2. Does submission mean slavery or does love mean domination? (10 Mins)
3. What is the meaning of “Submission” and “Love” in respect to Christ and the Church? (10 Mins)
4. In your understanding, do you think that submission or love is only ascribed to women and men respectively? (15 Mins)
5. How are these texts interpreted in our contexts? (10 Mins)
6. What does Paul mean in Galatians 3:28? (10 Mins)
7. If we explore our current context of women oppression and society, Is the church part of or outside of what is going on? How? (25 Mins)
8. With the kind of input and ideas you have in these texts, how can you take these discussions forward with your own situation and involvement at home, church and society? (25 Mins)

APPENDIX II QUESTIONNAIRE

PART A. PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION

1. Name Surname.....
2. Age Marital Status
3. Highest Qualification Attained
4. Occupation
5. Name of your Congregation.....
6. Name of your Presbytery.....
7. Position held in the Church

PART B. THE ROLE AND PLACE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

8. How do you understand the role and place of women in the church?
.....
.....
.....
9. Should women participate and be included in the Church leadership roles?
Yes, Why?
- No, Why?.....
10. How would you describe the participation of women in the CCAP Livingstonia Synod at
Session, Presbytery, Synod and General Synod?
(a) Session.....
(b) Presbytery.....
(c) Synod.....
(d) General Synod (Assembly).....
11. Generally, how would you describe the participation of women in Families, Societies and
Communities?
.....
.....
.....

12. Looking at the role of Women’s Guild in the Church today, do you think women have been empowered?

Yes, How?

No, How?.....

13. How do you compare the role of Women’s Guild with the Men’s Guild and Christian Youth Fellowship (CYF)?

.....

14. In your opinion, do you think that there is real equality of discipleship between women and men in the Church today?

If Yes, How and Why?.....

If No, How and Why?

PART C. ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO SACRAMENTAL MINISTRY

15. Why do you think it took almost 125 years to ordain women in the CCAP Livingstonia Synod

.....

16. Do you think the reasons behind this lengthy period are genuine?

Yes, Why?

No, Why?.....

17. Based on the Scriptural arguments, do you think that Livingstonia Synod did the right thing to accept the ordination of women?

Yes, Why?

No, Why?.....

18. Accounting the relevance of Purity in Leviticus 15:19-27 in relation to women, should women serve at the Holy Table/Communion?

Yes, Why?.....
.....

No, Why?.....
.....

19. How do you interpret Paul’s injunction on 1 Corinthians 14:36-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in relation to Galatians 3:25-29?

.....
.....
.....

20. Today in history, Livingstonia Synod has women ministers, do you think this is an advancement to the authentic and full meaning of discipleship and ministry called by Jesus in his early movement in the New Testament period as a whole?

Yes, Why & How?
.....

No, Why & How?.....
.....

PART D. THE IMPACT OF TRADITION AND CULTURE

21. Do you think that tradition and culture had an impact on the delay of women ordination to Sacramental ministry?

Yes, Why?.....
.....

No, Why?
.....

22. Marriages in the Northern Region of Malawi are basically Patrilineal, do think this has contributed to the subordination of women in the Church?

Yes, Why?
.....

No, Why?.....
.....

23. Reading Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul talks about “subordination” and “love” of wives and husbands respectively, how you understand these terms in relation to our tradition and culture?

.....
.....
.....

24. How relevant is tradition and culture in relation to the ministry in the Church and Society?
Relevant, How?.....
.....

Irrelevant, How?.....
.....

25. In your opinion, what should be the roles of women and men in the Church, Society and
Community? Why?
.....
.....
.....

26. Do you have any further comments to make on this questionnaire?
.....
.....
.....

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR SPARING TIME TO FILL THIS
QUESTIONNAIRE. I APPRECIATE YOUR GOOD GESTURE, GOD
BLESS!**