

Why Feminist Theology?

Rev Dr Robyn Schaefer

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Handout; Thoughts for reflection; Seminar paper.

Seminar Handout for small group discussion

Sites of feminist struggle:

The male image of God

- Problem of consistent use of male pronoun or slotting the feminine into existing concepts
- The God is male, therefore male is God heritage
- the image of God in the OT and NT as accentuated by tradition (including God as perpetrator of the cross event), and the eclipsing of female images
- contemporary parallels and heritage

Dr. Marie-Henry Keane, Professor in Systematic Theology at the University of South Africa, in *Woman and the image of God*,* notes

Among the several misconceptions subscribed to by the Fathers was the belief that woman was not made in the image of God. At best the woman merely reflected the imago Dei in a secondary sense. Diodore of Tarsus, for instance, wrote in his commentary on Genesis that woman was not made in God's image, she was not man's equal but was placed under his domination. Augustine agreed. Augustine did, however, later grudgingly concede that "the woman together with her husband is the image of God", What is particularly significant is the long term effects of Augustine's teaching concerning the imago Dei. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) was certainly affected by it. He subscribed to the Aristotelian view that woman did not have a rational soul, and supported Augustine in holding that woman was not made in the image of God. The female soul, he said, was inferior to the male soul; Physically, he said, woman was a "misbegotten male." "She was made only to assist with procreation".

How does this heritage manifest today?

What is our hope?

The Church

- its structure
- its debates
- its positioning of women
- its language
- its theology
- its ignoring of women's issues, suffering, and social position

- lack of recognition of women's intellect and skills
- fear of the female body

True religion should not say to us, "Obey! Conform! Reproduce the past!" it should call upon us to grow, to dare, even to choose wrongly at times and learn from our mistakes, rather than being repeatedly pulled back from the brink of using our own minds.

Kushner, H. S. (1987). *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*. London: Pan Books.

How does this heritage manifest today?
What is our hope?

The Bible –

- language (non-inclusiveness and addressing men directly)
- male issues and concepts
- representation of women (often as disposable chattels along with livestock)
- male writers
- male interpretation (hermeneutics)
- it's stand-alone authority and irrefutability

Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, the tenets of which we have perpetuated down through at least two millenniums. (but, of course, the fact that Paul thinks this way indicates that this theology goes back way beyond the time of the historic Jesus). 1 Corinthians 11:3, 7. 'But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of man.'

How does this heritage manifest today?
What is our hope?

Jesus as male saviour and his disciple

- apostolic succession
- the exclusion of women in the twelve
- women and redemption
- the idea that women cannot icon God, because the 'Son of God' is a man
- the skewed notion of women's spirituality
- sacrificial and atonement/redemptive theology problematic for women (ref: Eve's sin)
- the gendered access to God through a male 'saviour'

Dory Previn (1990) gives wings to this 'Cinderella' aspect of the Christian faith for women. She writes,

did jesus have a baby sister? was she bitter? was she sweet?
did she wind up in a convent?
did she end up on the street?
on the run? on the stage? did she dance?
did he have a sister? a little baby sister?
did they give her a chance?

did he have a baby sister? could she speak out by and large?
or was she told by mother Mary, ask your brother he's in charge
he's the whipped cream on the cake
did he have a sister? a little baby sister?
did they give her a break?

her brother's birth announcement
was pretty big, pretty big, I guess
while she got precious little notice
in the local press
her mother was the virgin, when she carried him
carried him, therein

if the little girl came later, then
was she born in sin? and in sorrow? and in shame?
did jesus have a sister?
and what was her name?

did she long to be the saviour, saving everyone she met?
and in private to her mirror, did she whisper
saviourette? saviourwoman? saviourperson?
save your breath!
did jesus have a sister? a little baby sister?
was she there at his death?

and did she cry for Mary's comfort
as she watched him on the cross?
and was mary too despairing,
ask your brother, he's the boss
he's the chief he's the man he's the show
did he have a sister? a little baby sister?
did jesus have a sister? **doesn't anyone know?**

How does this heritage manifest today?
What is our hope?

Thoughts for contemplation

I am the angel of Wisdom. The ancient one called ‘Sophia’. I am often there in the eye of a storm.

I am the clear thinking in the midst of conflict. The inner voice of calm that directs a path through sadness and horror and disquiet.

I am the wise, and often ignored words, uttered by those who have lived a long time; those who know about life’s experiences and consequences.

I am the one who feels for the recklessness of humankind and longs for all to see and embrace the compassion and justice.

I am the voice of the often ill-valued elderly. I am the wisdom of the very young.

I am the questioning teenager, the wise instinct of a mother.

I am the saving grace when religion threatens to polarise and divide humanity; the sanity when the world has gone mad.

I am the insight that sees beyond the fads and fashions of given eras, and boutique thinking.

I bring to every contemporary generation the benefit of an ancient knowing, to lift eyes above the immediate, and to give a vision of a greater and broader universe.

I am the one who strives to solve mysteries, but I am also content to live with unknowns and ambiguities.

I am the one who yearns deeply for the happiness of every human being.

I love the light, but am also at home in the pitch-darkness.

I love and live in community, but I am also not afraid of being alone to face the things that come to mind in solitary thinking when the rest of the world has gone to sleep.

(All) I am the angel of Wisdom. I am the sacredness of heaven and earth, the connection between the lasting and the fleeting

We share bread and wine

Song: Come Sophia – Words: Miriam Therese Winter

Tune: Wyeth’s Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second

Introduction

We acknowledge that we gather in Wurundjeri country and thank and honour the traditional caretakers of this place. We also acknowledge their spirituality and contribution to world theology

Sister Sophia, light for the road ahead
Bread for our journey, laughter for our souls
Presence in our circle tonight

There are many positive aspects to our Christian heritage. Tonight's reflections do not deny this. But our task tonight is to consider the question, 'Why Feminist Theology?' and that requires us to think creatively and critically about our social and spiritual locations within the faith (or outside it).

Val Webb's article begins with the story of a man and a lion who were discussing the relative strengths of men and lions. The man contended that he and his fellows were stronger than lions by reason of their greater intelligence. And to prove this he showed the lion a statue of Hercules tearing a lion apart. "That proves nothing," said the lion, "for it was a man who made the statue."

One of the pillars of sociology is to challenge the taken-for-granted axioms by asking, where did this come from, who said so, and whose interests does it serve? Or, in Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's words, 'But, She Said'. The hermeneutic of suspicion.

There are four main sites of struggle within the Christian faith that warrant feminist critique and perspective. These are, broadly,

- *the (male) image of God in our tradition and psyche,
- *the image of Jesus as Saviour, teacher, healer and authority figure, son of God, God incarnate, and his band of disciples,
- * the Bible as authority, irrefutability and inspiration,
- * and the structure, traditions and practices of the Christian church.

And there has been a deluge of feminist scholarly, creative, and insightful literature in all of these areas, particularly since the second wave of feminism around the 1970s, so tonight, I'm not going to reinvent the wheel.

We're here to give some encouragement to upholding the practice and application of feminist theology in the *now*; because, despite the proven intellect of these, mainly women, feminist theologians, and all their valid perspectives, over what now amounts to a number of decades, so many people within the Christian church, including otherwise well educated clergy, have never heard of them, and I believe, in some respects, we've even gone backwards with regard to the curriculum in theological institutions, the due credence once included in official university courses (I lectured in Women's Sociology – don't think they have that course anymore), and the lack of progression of liberation theology at local level. So, whilst these groundbreakers have opened the way to raising doubts and engaging in vital critique, their impact upon eradicating oppressive and unequal practices and theology has not evened things up as much as we might have hoped.

In some instances the awareness had better clarity some fifteen or twenty years ago. And society generally has, in many applications, allowed backlashes to feminism to subtly mutate into socially acceptable norms. (we don't bind women's feet anymore – no, we just require them to totter around in very high heels if they want to be considered professional and smart – we may say there is a choice, but choice relies on a lot of things. And women's bodies are still used to sell everything from furniture to toothpaste.) The feminist cause, in some respects, seems to be regarded as a past battle, yesterday's issue (when I was lecturing in social science at Monash University, over the course of the twelve years I was there, many of the young women indicated a *passé* attitude to feminism) and there are very powerful elements within the world whose interests are served by this. To effect change after millenniums of entrenched traditions, thinking and conditioning, especially with regard to that which is considered sacred, is like the pressure put on an elastic band; take the pressure off, and it rebounds to exactly where it was or even further back.

Our traditions, language, viewpoints, social locations, ethics, even our so-called intuition, do not come out of a void. We are products of what has gone before, and we do well to remember that what has been entrenched for centuries is not easily swept away in a few short 'enlightened' decades. Deep-set ways of thinking, especially with regard to what is considered sacred, have a way of resurfacing and morphing in subtle, and often unnoticed nuances. One of the patriarchs of the university once said, 'The last thing I want to do is jeopardise the feminist cause; but it's still on the list!' Val Webb notes, 'Feminist theology challenges the way those in power

have told the story for centuries.’ Critiquing the sacred has been described as tampering with God’s anatomy.

If I agreed with you we'd both be wrong.

How the historic and continuing male image of God, as an exclusive icon, still hurts humanity today.

Firstly, we are not just talking about the image that we now consider antiquated – that is: the kind of Michael Angelo representation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. A formidable figure of masculinity with sinewy biceps and bearded face. No longer relevant? They die hard, these vivid images. And they have a habit of morphing into contemporary disguises.

One of them is within the realm of language, which is more subtle than we think. Words are not just abstractions. They inform our conceptual formations. The female pronoun has been ousted as inappropriate at best, heretical at worst. Now we are seeing some recognition of some female aspects of God, but it is scattered and not central, and still an enigma to many Christians.

Rosemary Radford Ruther, in her classic, *Sexism and God-Talk*, notes that ‘Male monotheism reinforces the social hierarchy of patriarchal rule. Not just in the church, but in general society. Hence the parallel with the word ‘Lord’, and the feudal system of the ancient, and not so ancient, English class system. Ruther notes: **God is modelled after the patriarchal ruling class and is seen as addressing this class of males directly, adopting them as his “sons”. They are his representatives, the responsible partners of the covenant with him.** She then cites the tradition of women in the repressed and servant roles, dependant and connected secondarily to God through male authority.

This phenomenon is evident throughout the Old and New Testaments as God rarely speaks to women directly, even on vital matters that directly affect them. God tells, not Sarah, but Abraham that she is to bear a child in her more senior years. Sarah gets to hear through her husband. Similarly, Elizabeth was told of the birth of John the Baptist by Zechariah, to whom God had spoken. Mary, the mother of Jesus was told of such a momentous advent, not by God directly, but by a male archangel.

Feminist theologians have noted that, once paired images of God and Goddess were destroyed, so long ago, that male monotheism has become the imperative of belief in one God. To be Jewish, Christian, or Islamic, you have to believe in one God, and that one God is male. Now, I'm not saying that there have not been exceptions, and that we haven't personally moved from this, but it has been the dominant thinking, not for decades, or even centuries, but for millennia. And my contention is two-fold: a) this has imposed so much harm on humanity (particularly on women – half the world's population – women are not a minority group). It has been so spiritually erosive for half of humanity. For women, the ultimate mentor, creator, source and essence of our being, is not one of us. This is the model in our sacred scripture.

b) Secondly we kid ourselves if we think that this is now mended. Some time ago, a friend was diagnosed with osteoporosis and was advised to attend exercise classes. She went for about a month and when I later asked about how she was going, she replied, 'Yes, I did all the exercises and now I should be right!' Clearly the seriousness of the condition calls for ongoing vigilance. For the dominant image of God as male continues, not only in the churches with the almost exclusive use of the male pronoun, but has informed much of the texture of society generally.

- The persistence of domestic violence as a continuing community and personal tragedy where the majority of instances involve men against women and children, stems, in part, at least to the model of gender dominance, even long after individuals and groups of people have ceased to regard God as central to their lives. And there's a raft of material that makes the link between God as male and the propensity of some contemporary men to claim violence against women as a right. (Violence Against Women. Edited by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary Shawn Copeland)
- The political system was once hand in glove with the religious structures – canon law was state law. And we live with this residual heritage. Men still dominate politics and peace relations between countries (or lack of),
- Education, health systems. My friend, a GP who thought she might try her luck at specialising in gynaecology, sat before a panel of eight male gatekeepers ("Mary Daly seeks, in *Gyn/Ecology*, (1987) a true, wild, Woman's self, which she perceives to be dormant in women,

temporarily pacified by patriarchal systems of domination.” One of the respondents to my research referred to God as a metaphorical male gynaecologist – someone who has socially respected knowledge and kudos; kind, maybe, but with no intrinsic means of internal understanding about what it means to be a woman. According to this image, God’s social peers are men and this leaves women without a direct mentor.

- The justice system; within living memory we still have court judges bringing into relevance what the victim was wearing when she was raped. The heritage of Eve as the temptress still takes its toll if unchecked by feminist outrage
- Big business, church hierarchy, film-making, sport, history writing (Coralie raised the issue of the reformation the other week and whether or not this was good news for women), music, art (note the current exhibition – the old Italian masters), literature. A symbol for research into women’s cancer is the daffodil. Who wrote the poem ‘Daffodils’? Good diary evidence that William Wordsworth’s sister, Lucy had to publish under her brother’s name.

It is presumptuous to assert that this is all down to the ancient exclusive male image of God. But there is a thread throughout history that does suggest a direct and emphatic connection – a very, very, deep underlying basis for the often taken-for-granted and ignored imbalance that impacts upon relations between men and women in our contemporary world. And that is, in part, why we still need feminist theology.

One solution: Mary Daly, in her ground-breaking work, *Beyond God the Father*, notes that the god-man, is only relevant insofar as he represents a broken deity that must be overcome for theological and spiritual health and wholeness for everyone. Daly then goes on to speak of the death of God the Father, and the subsequent ability to participate in God as a verb in community. This was such a radical suggestion and has not really taken off as a general or even commonly known concept. So many of these creative ideas about an image of God have not filtered through to general church communities.

Activity? What are your earliest images of God? How have these changed? What unhelpful images promote inequality? How do we discover and embrace a fair concept of God?

Feminist Theology and the Church

Ecclesia – E S Fiorenza

Women, the backbone of church work – Carol running classes for priests but not allowed to celebrate Eucharist

Lack of recognition of women's intellect

The male image of God has informed the positioning of women and men within the structure of the church. For God is not only male, he is our Father, with children. Sons who are the direct inheritors (a parallel with contemporary farming communities. It is the son who inherits the land), and daughters who do not. The doctrine of apostolic succession has governed church structure for two thousand years ensuring that men are the power brokers within the ecclesia. For those of us who grew up in the church, this kind of inculturation began in childhood – again, not necessarily a blanket practice, but pretty general. Churches of Christ had boys and girls clubs for pre-adolescence. The boys club movement was called the 'Explorers', the girls club, the 'Good Companions.'

The biggest mainstream churches in the world still practice the laying on of hands as a means of ordaining priests and ministers. Both with Anglicans and Catholics, this is seen as a direct line to the original male apostles of Jesus. And that was, and is, a continuing argument *against* the leadership of women within the church. The 12 apostles were not women. I was ordained in 1975 at the age of 24, and was considered an enigma, a deviation from the norm, a temporary clitch. Almost like a dropped stitch in the fabric of perfect succession. I remember representatives from North Perth Church of Christ here in Victoria to interview me. I asked the question, 'Why are you interested in me for your minister?' To which they replied, 'We're desperate and you're available!' Such honesty was good enough for me. But for them to do this, they had to step way outside the accepted norms for church leadership, and withstand the persecution. The indignation did not just come down upon me, but upon my congregation.

They took me on against the backdrop of debate about the worthiness of, not only women clergy and theologically trained women, but the broader dispute

about the role of women in the church generally. Because many of the early church 'Fathers' supported the lower status of women, some of whom did not even believe that women had souls, it was considered, not only *inappropriate* for women to be entrusted with leadership roles within the church, but dangerous. One of the arguments still put forward by some church leaders who were anti women's ordination, was the fact of their menstruation, posing the question, 'How can such a person administer communion? – a pretty direct link with Leviticus 15, proclaiming the uncleanness of women, as surely as Leviticus 18 has been used for homophobic purposes in contemporary times. It was only a few short years ago when a large church community in regional Victoria voted to allow gay membership, but debar this sector of the community from *leadership* positions within the church. And that policy within their church still stands. So the heterosexual, male image of God finds its roots a long way back, and has informed our contemporary church, to which all those on the receiving end of discrimination will testify.

One attempt to trivialise the possible effects of women's leadership and their entry into the priesthood in particular, was a cartoon that appeared in the national Anglican bulletin depicting a church altar overlaid with frills and flowers, bows and ribbons. The caption read, 'Petty coat government'.

The language of the church also continues to take its cue from the Bible and entrenched traditions. The old hymns bear testimony to this eg John Whittier's 'O brother man fold to thy heart thy brother. I remember changing the words to, 'O child of earth fold to thy heart thy neighbour', and getting into trouble for it, and in that church, I would still be in trouble. But there are many contemporary church songs that perpetuate androcentric theology. There are some songs we *still* steer clear of in Alleluia Aotearoa because the language is non-inclusive. And the concepts perpetuate patriarchal images. Even some of our favourites have some slightly uncomfortable images. She Comes Sailing On the Wind, written by a man (Gordon Light), speaks of the male child so full of grace, swept up in the embrace of a female Holy Spirit; and that beautifully gentle song by Shirley Murray, Loving Spirit, still role casts women biologically, and men – 'Like a mother, you enfold me, feed me with your very body – like a father, you protect me, teach me, hoist me up upon your shoulder.' On a documentary of Paul Hogan last night, he offered this piece of advice. When swimming in shark-infested waters, always swim between two people who are bigger than you. The notion of male protection, for women, has had a trade off – their freedom to move

without constraint. Women have strong shoulders too, and men feed children.

Are we being a bit pedantic here? One of the most effective weapons used in this backlash against feminist critique, is the accusation of hair-splitting.

And this is why we need to keep on exploring feminist theology

- lack of opportunities within the church, (when my mother dared to give her opinion about church real estate, she was told to stick to the catering)
- The ignoring of women's suffering
- The absence of women's perspective with regard to some taken-for-granted tenets of the faith (eg sacrifice, suffering and servanthood)
- reinforcement of gender roles within the home,
- the ignoring of domestic violence as surely as the police did,
- the invisibility of women's suffering with regard to childbirth and contraception,
- the laundries as prisons for 'wayward girls', run by the church, with no parallel institutions for the men responsible,
- the tearing apart of women from their children (it was women and children who suffered most within the 'stolen generations' ie. aboriginal, women in England who were duped into parting with their children to be sent out to Australia as slave labour, women who had their children taken from them because they were unmarried. Much of this heartache was inflicted by church run institutions or state run institutions with the sanction of the church
- the fact of predatory men in church leadership positions, and the unspoken policies of moving them on. What does a paedophile get for Christmas? A new parish.
- the church's reluctance to name these acts against women as 'sin'.

Many of these issues are now being addressed, largely because of the work and persistence of feminist voices in the past and in the now.

This is why feminist theology

The Bible

I thought I'd begin by reading a poem by Shakespeare, and then I thought, 'Why should I, he never reads any of mine!' We have lived with the notion that the Bible is a one-way, finite classic to which we dare not add or subtract. We read God's word – does God read ours?

ESF – The Power of the Word – Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire makes the link between biblical structures and global structures today. Schussler Fiorenza has, generally engaged in a powerful amount of work on re-visioning Scripture and introducing some very creative 'hermeneutics of suspicion' to re-tell the stories of our faith from the underside. This often results in the message from any given story taking the opposite from traditional meaning. The story of Lot's wife is not the archetype of disobedience, but the personification of grief when community is lost. (Scottish pulpit – American audience), and Eve did not cause the whole of the fall of humankind, but fell to freedom (Daly). Some of this critical thinking was brought into focus with our story of the binding of Isaac by Abraham, on Sunday, as we observed the missing voice of the woman, Sarah: and also noted that this was not just an antiquated story, but an allegory for what happens today in many contexts, cultures and levels of society.

Matthew 12, Luke 8, and Mark 3 – record the remark by Jesus, 'Who are my mother and brothers and sisters?' in the face of the woman who was faithful to him all the way to the cross. I have always had a problem with this narrative but felt that I could not raise it at church because of the untouchable-ness of Jesus.

Phyllis Trible, in *Texts of Terror*, focuses on four variations upon the theme of terror in the Bible. She reinterprets the tragic stories of four women in ancient Israel: Hagar, Tamar, an unnamed concubine, and the daughter of Jephthah. In highlighting the silence, absence of the female voice, and maleness of God, as well as God's apparent sanctioning of human cruelty, Trible shows how these neglected stories underscore the misogyny of Scripture and its use in church, synagogue, and academy.

The Bible –

- language

- male issues and concepts
- representation of women, and the black and white traditional perspectives that have ensued from these – Damned whores and God’s Police – Anne Summers saw the connection between biblical representations of women. and contemporary expectations of women. Women have been venerated but the price has been servitude.
- male writers – Val Webb talks about recorded stories told by the winners, and interpreted by winners
- male interpretation (hermeneutics)
- it’s irrefutability

Feminist theology seeks to take a fresh look at the old stories. It seeks to remove the overlay of interpretation, and revision.

Jesus as Problematic

The Maleness of Jesus as Problematic

The rise of feminist thinking within the church has challenged the idea of God as exclusively male and has drawn upon feminine and other images of God. These include:

- *God as verb (Daly, 1986:xvii),
 - *God as Mother (McFague, 1989:139-150; Johnson, 1996:170-187),
 - *God as non-hierarchical (Soelle, 1990:186-187),
 - *God as Sophia-Wisdom (Johnson, E.A., 1996:124-187; Cady et al, 1986)
- and
- *Goddess theology (Morton, 1989; Heine, 1989; Christ, 1979b).

Although none of these are widely accepted within mainstream church life, they do, none-the-less, have arguable biblical bases. However, the Jesus of history as God incarnate has proved more problematic for some Christian feminists. That Jesus was male is not negotiable. Ruether (1996:106) observes, ‘If feminist theology and spirituality decide that Christianity is irredeemable for women, its primary reason is likely to be this insurmountable block of a male Christ who fails to represent women.’

There are many visual representations of Jesus. A predominantly western image of yesteryear on Sunday School walls was that of a handsome young

man with flowing blonde hair, blue eyes and fair skin. He has also been depicted with almond shaped, brown eyes in Japanese churches, and as a Maori in some churches in New Zealand. All these images serve to deliver the message – *he's one of us*.

But there have been people who have felt left out because of perfectionist theology. One man offered:

If you haven't heard of me
I wouldn't be surprised
I bet you know my relatives
Their names will never die
My mother is a saint
And my brother is a god
But all I am is Jesus' brother, Bob

(I think it may go to the tune of 'Bringing in the Sheaves')
Jesus' brother Bob, Jesus' brother Bob
A nobody relative of the son of God

I have to pay the ferry
To cross the Galilee
But not my brother
No not him
He walks across for free

One day when I was home
I heard a mighty roar
There were a thousand people
Right outside our door
Help us, Jesus, help us!
Came the cheering from the mob
But then they got a look at me
"It's just his brother, Bob"

Excerpt from *Jesus' Brother Bob* by 'The Arrogant Worms'

This satire highlights the impact of perfection theology on humanity, well, sort of, because it still ignores the issue of how much further back women have felt. In Genesis, the conservative view of Eve is that of the temptress who caused her own downfall, that of her male partner, Adam, and the whole of humanity ([Genesis 3:1-13](#)). Feminists recognise this theology as

unjust (Furlong, 1988:1;Thiering, 1977a) and the basis of patriarchal conservatism (Pevey et al, 1996:174) that scapegoats women as evil (Grey, 1992:113-115; Reuther, 1996:83) and lacking the moral strength considered endemic to men (Jones, E., 1986:2). This theology legitimises a male saviour and is linked to the notion of women's subordination.

Jesus is taught as the personal link to God (Soelle, 1990:102; Bonhoeffer, 1959). Learned images such as Jesus as 'Son of Man' (Cullmann, 1963:137-192), 'Lord' (pp.234-237) and 'Son of God' and/or 'God' (pp.270-314), have been problematic. Many women, over the years, have reported engaging in cerebral and spiritual gymnastics to somehow revision Jesus as representative of both genders.

You have printed on the handouts, a poem by Dory Previn, titled 'Did Jesus have a little sister. It is a satire on the absence of a taught feminine divine link, as important as Jesus.

Saviour as Problematic.

Conversation with young Islamic man on the corner of Burke and Swanston Streets – your God needed a hostage. Our God just simply forgives. There was not pound of flesh needed. I started to try to give an alternate interpretation of the cross event but he commented, "Irrespective of how you may intellectualise it, this is how most Christians see it." The theology of sacrificing and suffering, as a measure for Christians, has also been a problematic: an impossible yardstick for men as well as women: One man from a group calling themselves 'The Arrogant Worms', in the same sort of genre as Dory Previn's poem, wrote:

Dory Previn (1990) gives wings to this 'Cinderella' aspect of the Christian faith for women evident in her poem designed to be read in 'rap' rhythm.

did jesus have a baby sister?
was she bitter?
was she sweet?
did she wind up in a convent?
did she end up on the street?
on the run?
on the stage?
did she dance?
did he have a sister?

a little baby sister?
did they give her a chance?

did he have a baby sister?
could she speak out
by and large?
or was she told by mother mary
ask your brother he`s in charge
he`s the whipped cream
on the cake
did he have a sister?
a little baby sister?
did they give her a break?

her brother`s
birth announcement
was pretty big
pretty big
I guess
while she got precious little notice
in the local press
her mother was the virgin
when she carried him
carried him
therein

if the little girl came later
then
was she born in sin?
and in sorrow?
and in shame?
did jesus have a sister?
and what was her name?

did she long to be the saviour
saving everyone
she met?
and in private to her mirror
did she whisper
saviourette?
saviourwoman?

saviourperson?
save your breath!
did jesus have a sister?
a little baby sister?
was she there at his death?

and did she cry for mary`s comfort
as she watched him
on the cross?
and was mary too despairing
ask your brother
he`s the boss
he`s the chief
he`s the man
he`s the show
did he have a sister?
a little baby sister?
did jesus have a sister?
doesn`t anyone know?

Women`s off-centredness to God has been argued in the light of atonement theology, that is, it was the *man*, Jesus, who hung on the cross for the sake of humanity (Brock and Parker, 2001; Ruether, 1998a). In this respect, women have been left out of the saving/healing bridging between the human and the Divine. If, indeed, there needs to be any bridging. The lack of value women have been taught to place in one another. The Caged Virgin by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Job inequality, jokes about women, derogatory language used to describe women. Damned Whores and God`s Police – Anne Summers

Now, many do not subscribe to atonement theology today, but the legacy translates into practices and attitudes and, whilst we may decry, *oh, but not in our lives*, if we`re serious about social justice, then we need to heed the philosophy that none of us are free until we`re all free.

I thought I`d begin by reading a poem by Shakespeare, and then I thought, `Why should I, he never reads any of mine!`

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