best summarised by Jesus himself, as he explained to his disciples: “For the Son of Man also came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45). Here we see the blurring of distinctions between the designation of Jesus as “the Christ” and “the Son of Man”. But they are distinctions rightfully blurred, as they point to the single saving event of the crucifixion.

The death of Jesus reveals that he is the Christ and the Son of God (see 15:26-39). Yet, Mark began his Gospel by claiming that this was “good news”. How is that possible? Is there no sign of a victorious Messiah, as one might get in some Jewish streams of thought (Psalms of Solomon, Dead Sea Scrolls), or the return of the Son of God to his Father, as one finds in other places in the New Testament (Paul, Luke and John)?26 No such signs of ultimate victory for the Christ and the Son of God appear in the Markan interpretation of Jesus. He is the Christ and the Son of God as the crucified one. Only in the Markan presentation of him as the Son of Man is the crucified Jesus vindicated through the resurrection on the third day (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34). He will return as judge in glory at the end of time (8:38; 13:24-27).27 For Mark, Jesus is the crucified Christ and the crucified Son of God. It is in and through crucifixion that Jesus fulfills God’s messianic design, and shows that he is the beloved Son of God, in whom the Father is well pleased (1:11; 5:7; 15:39). Thus, the tragic end of Jesus’ life is not a dreadful fate that simply falls unjustly upon him. Mark wants his readers and hearers to be aware that the crucifixion of God’s Son and Messiah are part of God’s larger design. This aspect of the christology of the Gospel of Mark is a sign of the originality of the author’s interpretative activity.

This unique and surprising theological agenda led Mark to shape his story of the Roman crucifixion of Jesus (15:1-47) in a way that places the physical crucifixion of Jesus at the centre of the narrative (v. 20b-25).

26 For a thorough recent, but minimalist, survey of the biblical notion of “messiah”, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The One who is to Come (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). As James C. VanderKam writes in his review of this book (Catholic Biblical Quarterly 70 [2008]: 600-601), “is it necessary to restrict its application to those places where an agent is actually called a messiah?”

27 On this element in the Markan Christology, see Moloney, Mark: Storyteller, 143-52.

ONE OF MY FAVOURITE PASTIMES IN READING scholarly books is to peruse the dedications, the acknowledgements and the forewords. Somehow or other I feel that I gain a slight glimpse of the person who has performed the writing. Occasionally I glean an insight into the motivations for the scholarly work that demonstrates what I have long suspected, namely, that academic research and scholarly writing are deeply personal and are influenced by heartfelt concerns about the world, one’s self, one’s associations and commitments.

The force of the style of presentation of academic results, by and large, demands an objectivist stance that generates the impression that the views here delivered are clearly respectable, certainly beyond those other views which are refuted in the course of argumentation; and all this at a distance from the personal attitudes of the writer. This frequently intrudes on the dedications, at least so that not too much “is given away”. Any writing, whether warm dedication or cold scientific treatise, can veil and unvel at the same time.
Some would say that critical writing is a scrambled form of autobiography, which seeks to conceal the self. Others argue that even amidst the fabrication and fabulation, some truth about the personal may be found. Still others push harder and argue that all the wording and wordiness is not merely coming from some flesh and blood preformation and understanding but is actively seeking embellishment and experiential understanding — a constant replication of the incarnation, a "sort of human theater where speech becomes action, takes possession of souls, leads bodies and gives rhythm to their walk." Others push equally hard in the opposite direction using the accusation, all too familiar in history-of-Jesus research, that the resultant Jesus bears "an uncanny resemblance to the researcher," thereby adopting the rhetorical stance that not only are the reviewers immune from their own attack but that so also should be research. Even so, whether dedication or critically distanced essay, the autobiographical keyhole (sometimes porthole or foxhole, rarely portal) can offer both a partial albeit unstable view of the human being at work in discovery and a renewed appreciation of the written in life.

I read the dedication of that nineteenth century giant of New Testament commentators, Brooke Foss Westcott, to his 1901 book, Lessons from Work: "I had purposed to dedicate this book to my wife, for forty-eight years my unfailing counselor and stay: I now dedicate it to her memory." Here I catch a glimpse of Westcott's deep humanity, a counterweight perhaps to the meticulous intricacy of scholarship that exudes from his volumes. I read with deep appreciation Walter Wink's opening to his Manifold for Biblical Studies in which he writes of the loss of vibrancy in his relationship with the bible as he moved from his southern Methodist biblical foundations into the demands of critical biblical studies; of the crisis in his life that came as he attended a Jungian Institute's approach to the bible that sought to integrate historical critical analysis with personal insight and change, and how, he, the learned, benignly

4. See, as but the latest in a succession of inquisitors, S. Barton, "Messages and Miracles," in M. Beckwith (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Jesus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 56-71, see p. 65. Curiously, there does not seem to be a consideration that perhaps these authors have misread their lives and research on the Jesus they have seen.
6. Wink's initial tract was re-published as The Bible in Human Transformation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973) unfortunately de-personalizing the impact of his own engagement with the story of the paralytic.
reader's receptive reading, not just of the text that is read, for the formation of meaning has been carried in some quarters a greater acknowledgment of the interactive dimensions between text and personal story that shape the representation of the text. The representation of the self may be suppressed beneath or hidden behind the appearance of objective methodology and objective results, such as through the use of "third person pronouns and passive verbal constructions". 11 But, as Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger writes, "Each given reading and interpretation is based on the effect a text has on its readers. This also holds true for those critics who consider themselves 'purely objective' and 'neutral'." 12

Moreover, the interrogation of the reader has led to the dissolving of the autonomy of the text, just as it has dissolved the hidden autonomy of those who tried to model themselves, or rather their work of commentary, on that supposed autonomy. Although blame is often attached to the nineteenth-century emphasis on scientific empiricism, others consider that belief in the autonomy of the text is "a holdover from print culture, and is fading rapidly in the Electronic Age". 13 Both are variations on the notion of autonomous knowledge, something as insecure for the "results" as for the "self" identified as achieving them.

Various forces have operated to bring this about. The history of interpretation has forced people to recognize that throughout church history, there have been multiple readings of the same passages all of which served some purpose and achieved some benefit in their time. 14 The history of interpretation has also awakened people to the recognition that the interpretation often touted as the plain and natural reading is nothing other than the inheritance of a particular community of readers across time, become natural and plain simply by repetition, the desire to belong, and assumed consent. 15 Textual studies have also worked to undermine the text's autonomy, not only by the recognition that a critically edited text is nothing other than a probable approximation of what any author wrote (and that privileging it has itself been

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14. See my "The Fall, the Samaritan and the Wounded Man: an example of multiple readings of Scripture" (Ec. lit. 29-37); in S. Cowperthwaite and M. Porter (eds.), Lost in Translation?: Anglicans, Contexts and the Bible (Thornton: Desbrook, 2004) 155-84.


19. Brett, "Self Criticism", 113, demonstrates how supposedly "dominant" members of a given social system can yet be marginal.
there is to the "I" who is writing. The "I" is only notionally a cohesive, unitary, totally authentic self; in a reality itself dynamic and variable, the "I" is multiple, mobile, fragmentary, improvisational. Hence, some prefer the term "positional analysis." While Dietrich Bonhoeffer's poem, "Who am I?" is often recalled as both demonstration and schema for these arguments, a more rigorous broad-based analysis is to be found in Erving Goffman's sociology of "the performance of the self in everyday life." The self changes according to the circumstances of its placement, precisely because it seeks to present a creditable and credible self in that location. Inevitably, it draws upon that location for its formation in order to contribute to it. Accordingly, the personal voice in biblical interpretation is as much a construction as objectivist linguistic performance, even if it identifies the self more overtly. Hence, those works that provide at least a partial foundation of autobiography for their motivation or structure are themselves, right at the level of autobiography, open to critical appraisal.

Autobiographical criticism is not a high-sounding phrase intended somehow to exonerate (or dry-clean) drippy, devotional ignorance that explodes over text, reader and author with sugar-sweet spumante. It takes seriously a multiplicity of critical methodologies but it also affirms that the interests and experiences of the interpreter are inextricably formalional of her/his representation of the text, just as the engagement with the text is a contributor to the formation of the writer. This criticism is therefore critical, in that the exegetical results are correlated with the "interested" nature of an interpreter's involvement in the text. It is dialogical or democratic, in that the temporal and cultural specificity of the results is therefore able to be related to other temporal and culturally specific results - say from a non-first world interpreter. Speaking for others yields to speaking with others. And it is ethical in the sense that an author acknowledges the critical place of her/his own commitments and interchanges with the text-in-interpretation, indicating the subjectivity that has been involved in the making of meaning. This in turn

23. See especially Stanley's critical analysis of Marcus Borg, Sandra Schroeder and Mikael Parfson in "The Future of Lies" (see n. 16 above). Needless to say, Stanley himself can become subject to his own paradigm, for to his own inventive reconstructions of his subjects' autobiographies, he becomes almost insistent on a greater revelation, a desire perhaps for greater connectedness and friendship to compensate for the originating experience of victimisation that he himself admits (see pp. 127, 160).

means that interpretation is not just about the transmission of meanings, but the transmission of values.

Autobiographical criticism explicitly brings to the surface those values as something for which an author is to be accountable, not merely as a personal stance of identity or preference but as bearing effects upon others. It is no longer possible, with autobiographical criticism, to hide behind the text and claim that, as one interprets it, others must be subject to it. So much of modern Western scholarship has moulded itself on the veiling of its interests and power. This has meant that its results have tended to ideologise certain established positions, providing a metaphorical written rationale for the very institutions that have provided training, support and an oligarchy for the interpreter. Mary Ann Tolbert comments, "the analysis of what it means to live as a more privileged person in relation to other people in the world is in general strikingly absent from most First World scholarship." Recent recommendations that "Critical Race and Whiteness Studies" become a topical course in universities are designed precisely to reveal such privilege. Accordingly, the personal voice in critical academic discourse by its visible or auditory presence can invite the reader into her/his own ethical evaluation of meaning and stance relative to text and interpretation and text-in-interpretation.

But this is where there is considerable risk. Where the personal has been obscured in the course and style of writing, critics of the writing have as likely as not, decided that the supposed "objective" results can be radically and vehemently disembodied without regard for the writer, only to find that the writer has indeed been affected by the critical attacks, perhaps mortally. This mode of criticism delivers "the obligatory pat on the back before the stab in the entrails." Most pronouncedly, the attack on a person's work can become lethal in intent and sometimes in result precisely because it disperses, again under the

guise of objective analysis, a supposedly dispassionate disclosure of the author's personal life, real or constructed. It mimics the ancient philosophical practice of denigrating another’s ideas by reference to his companions, his financial interest, his sexual practices, his failure to conform to accepted canons. And, occasionally, all these were applied to a “her” as well, as in Cicero’s hatchet job on Leontion the Epicurean. This does not bode well for the provision of personal information by the interpreter even when she/he feels a critical as well as an ethical invitation to do so. Being accountable is one thing; being held accountable by another person operating under another set of principles and possibly with the full force of some scrutinising institution behind him/her, is quite another thing again.

Accordingly, there will always be a certain political decision about how much personal voice is to be included and how to construct it. Conversely, an awareness is demanded that both critical engagement and readability space can be sacrificed if the personal voice becomes nothing other than a self-aggrandising parade or an underhand effort to make one’s own experience the new dominant paradigm for all. At the same time, the context of the interest in the personal voice is a construction of the self and a mode of disclosure that is decidedly Western. This calls for a massive philosophical discussion in its own right, one which threatens to stall my preparation for the incorporation of autobiographical interweaving with the critical interpretation of a text. However, as we shall see, the confession of the self is not the only mechanism by which the self can be discovered and known, even if this is the dominant Western mechanism.

ME AND THE SYROPHENEIC WOMEN
Pulling back the Curtain

In all my long engagement with them, the Syropheneic women (and it is time that we remembered there are two Syropheneics mentioned in Mark 7:24-30) insisted that hiding behind the closed doors of objectivist results was unacceptable. At least at the level of gender, I initially felt a faint, almost apologetic resonance with the Jesus’ character of the story, even if the overweening extolling of his “power of attraction” and “divine lordship” left me cold. But Jesus secretes himself, not only behind closed doors (v.24b) but also behind a universal policy (v.27). “Speech”, as Patrick Miller observed of the contention about the ordination of women, “could hide the culture”, and abrogate any responsibility for (and appearance of) personal decision behind a seemingly unchangeable and unchanging objective piece of traditional wisdom.

This goes precisely to the heart of Jesus’ words of refusal to the woman seeking the healing of her daughter. Here lies a well-known proverb, emblazoned into two further formal well-known forms (maxim, enthymeme): “Let the children first be fed! It is not right to take the children’s bread and to throw it to the dogs.” The three-part combination places the rationale and responsibility for a decision on the fate of the woman and her daughter in a sequence of ancient rhetorical practices. Everything is “third person”, pluralised, essentialised by the use of infinitives, removed to all appearances from the actual personal rebuff and abusive rebuke of the healer from Nazareth. He is simply the purveyor of universal, antique wisdom, effaced from any personal responsibility by its manifest authority.

A mimetic (and textually authorised?) practice has imbed ecclesiastical protection of the Jesus of this Markan pericope. All manner of contortionist justifications (eliciting the faith of the woman, delivering puppy playfulness, speaking with irony, using non-consensually a Jewish proverb) have been deployed in order to defend a Chalcedonian Christ from criticism, elevating if not further damming the woman in the process. Such (self?)-defense of the surety of tradition is not confined to nineteenth century commentators. Athol Gill, whose death in his mid-50s extinguished a notable Australian light of social reform and Second Testament scholarship, found it alive and well in the reactions of an Anglican Clergy Conference to his suggestion that a woman changed Jesus’ mind or that there was a limited consciousness

31. The thesis is now preserved as A. Cadwallader, Beyond the Word of a Woman: Recovering the Bodies of the Syropheneic Woman (Adelaide: ATP Press, 2008).
32. As for example, in Robert Gundry, Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Crisis (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 372-373.
34. For the detail, see my Beyond the Word of a Woman, chapters 3 and 4.
in Jesus. The reaction of an annual Anglican Bishops’ Conference in 2003 to a similar suggestion of mine was to a significant extent the same. So much had I stretched many (though, thankfully, not all) mitres beyond the normative frame of acceptable meaning that they thereafter decided that bible studies should be conducted by one of their own. The house of Jesus’ hiding is not merely a messianic secret; the whispers rustle in the house of bishops as well!

But the woman would have none of it. This mother spurned the most brilliant reply in the Second Testament. Some have portrayed her response as a “bewailing” of Jesus, but this is an inadequate, agonistic assessment. She rather forced Jesus to get personal rather than relying on distancing, objective ancient authority. Jesus’ self-effacement, his hiding behind a saying as much as he hid in a house, was broken. She adopted not merely the key element of Jesus’ saying and reinterpreted it according to her Greek cultural specificity where dogs were welcome inside the house. She also drew on another ancient form, that of the korematos/antilogo, that is, paired/antithetical sayings (cf. Prov 17:27-28; 26:4-5).

The consequence of such a combination is that a clash of wisdom is generated. Two universals cannot jointly stand, so the universal becomes relativised, the traditional is made contingent. For her, the conjunction of proverb with proverb, rather than the supersession of one by another, compels Jesus to give up hiding behind the policies, regulations, codes, traditions in which he has been formed, to which he gives obedience and behind which he shelters. The particulars of the situation, a situation felt keenly by the mother but merely classified by Jesus, must now be addressed. Moreover, the dismissal of her personal interest and of her identity along with it (as Jesus, following ancient ethical comparisons, “canonises” the woman/women) must now be revisited. Her response, even if demonstrating her verbosity and lack of male embeddedness, yet demands dialogue (cf. Matt 15:22-28 where initial resistant silence, then repelling paradigm, are both overcome). She extends an invitation to see more than one’s own monolithic viewpoint, more than one’s own reflection, more than a narcissistic.

27. Personal communication (over a beer at Naughton’s pub) not long before he died. He seems to have had a positive impact elsewhere however; see, R. Curtis, “The Social Location of Women in the Gospel of Mark,” in D. Neville (ed.), Prophecy and Passion: Essays in Honour of Athol Gill (Adelaide: ATT Press, 2002) 221.

30. The reply is such a complex reworking of another ancient proverb that there is some doubt whether Mark could have composed it, at least going by the register of the language of the rest of the gospel. This has implications for the issue of the historical kernel of the story.


40. Joel Marcus points out that the first half of Jesus’ second reply does not necessarily remove a sense of his antagonism: Mark 7:8 (AB27) (New York: Doubleday, 2000) 470.


the proverb appears to have begun life in a Greek context (warning against sacrificing the well-being of one’s household to an all-consuming compulsion).4 For Jesus, the children’s bread inside was not to be thrown away or outside to the dogs. To this point in the exploration, the dogs remained a racial characterization of a non-Jew.

The woman’s answer to Jesus took on immense significance for me precisely because, at this first foray, it had been answered on a cultural value that shifted the way of viewing things. Effectively, she had answered Jesus not on his terms, not according to his Jewish background but from her own. Cultural distinctive had become crucial to the interpretation of the story for me. I remember a lecture in Ridley College chapel prior to my beginning the formal study of theology, delivered by the Anglican Deon and academic, Stuart Barton Babbage. The lecture took its lead from Tertullian: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”41 In it, Stuart had lovingly and lavishly repeated one particular line: “The Gospel without culture is anaemic; culture without the Gospel is demonic.” I might nuance his terse aphorism now, but the import of his affirmation resonated with me. Now it found a new expression, not by a reiteration of its general principle, but by the recognition that cultural perspectives were always particular and relative, expressive of particular societies and groups rather than undifferentiated and universal.

Yet, even a particular and relative cultural perspective had the potential to be gospel, a gospel addressed to Jesus (on which see further below).42 This does not require that such a gospel or fragment of good news suddenly acquire the status of the very universal tradition that it had begun by challenging. This would be nothing more than a return to triumphalist displacement of a now-temporary hegemony. It would remove, discredit or marginalise any critique of the conflicted ideological attempts to herald the new beginning as in reality more prismatic and deterministic than that which it had conquered.

This gospel, metaphorised in the language of dogs who have moved from outcast place to domestic space, cannot be formed or have affective operation without its specific cultural genesis, even though almost all commentators43 have wanted to establish a pre-existing


immutability for it. The woman’s life situation glimpsed (but only glimpsed) in her actions and response to Jesus remains specific, for specificity is the motivation for and the result of her actions: the healing of her daughter. The gospel may therefore be contingent upon her cultural particularity but it is not less gospel for that, even if the problem of particularity will preclude or constrain its conversion into a universal for others (most especially in cultures where dogs are or have been unknown). Consequently, a slice of social location however fragmentary, may yet itself contribute to that liberatory impulse named as gospel. Hence more than ethics or apologetics, autobiography, even in its inevitably fragmented and constructed delivery, may yet be both revelatory and transformative.

The Powerful Word of a Woman

There were more discoveries to be made simply in the exchange between Jesus and the woman. In 1984, I had become an inaugural member of the Movement for the Ordination of Women in Australia. Feminist theology was becoming a staple for the movement and in wider circles. For me, it provided a faith perspective on awakenings that had begun long before at Monash University in the study of politics. The necessity to read and hear this foundational feminist biblical text on its own terms, or at least to read and hear it in intertextual connection with other voices being raised, broke an age-long conformity to an age-long interpretative tradition: there was no mention of faith in the story of the Syrophoenician woman. That was the rendition of the story given by Matthew, one which had dominated the interpretation of both Mark and Matthew from patristic through to modern times.44
Later, I would discover that, despite the posture of objectivity which commentators and preachers adopted to expound the text, they had a keen interest in making the story, Mark's as well as Matthew's, turn on faith. In the early Church, the faith of a Gentile offset the constructed insufficiency of the Jews. The story became the paradigm story of the success of the Gentile mission over against the faithlessness of the Jews. The Sunday of the Canaanite early assumed a set day of the Lord in the liturgical calendar. In the nineteenth century, sufftering the twin assaults of historical skepticism and the suffrage movement, the ecclesial authorities through their clerical intelligentsia maintained an emphasis on faith, both as an example for emulation against the encroachments of secularism and as a paradigm for upholding the correct Christian place for women.84 Thus the efforts of women to gain the vote and to secure entry into universities were imperiously dismissed by a number of commentators by appeal to the story of the Canaanite/Syrophoenician woman. James Wells, a "Free Church" minister in Scotland, the United States and Palestine, fashioned the story into this rebuke: "It is an interesting fact that, so far as we know, no woman ever opposed Christ in the days of His flesh. Some graceless women oppose Him in our day in public lectures; but this is a new horror, and a modern monstrosity.85 Indeed, chipped in the Königsberg Professor, Hermann Olshausen, women were to abstain from all such disputations and to exemplify that "faith which is again obviously seen not as knowledge, not as the upholding of certain doctrines for true, but as an internal state of mind - the tenderest susceptibility for what is heavenly - the most entire womanhood of the soul.86"

Moreover, the self-secure rightness of such attitudes gathered a missionary zeal, where the Gentile church now became curiously aligned with a de-sexed Jesus in bringing the gospel to foreign lands. Again, faith became the central anchor for the conversion and civilisation of alien races. It was not difficult to see the precursors and indeed the-shaping of an inherited assumption about the meaning of the story bearing down upon later women's efforts to persuade the church that women as well as men were legitimately to be ordained and consecrated, both in the mother-church and in the missionary field.

Indeed, the adoption of the values and interpretations of the missionary church by the missionised was not merely mimetically advantageous to the latter; it bolstered the self-decent/condescend that those values and interpretations were architural and hence universal.

Mark's distinctive emphasis therefore became central in this debate over women's ordination, precisely because the child was healed not on the efficient cause of faith but because of the word of a woman. Moreover, this was underscored in the introduction to the woman's reply (v. 28). Uniquely in Mark's Gospel, the saying is introduced by a double indicative rather than a single indicative with a dependent participle - literally, "The woman answered and she says to him." It has the effect of slowing down the introduction, bringing a gravity to what follows.85 This prepares us for Jesus' recognition of the saying of the woman as pivotal.

Initially, I pursued the standard grammatico-linguistic analysis of biblical texts, in which I had been formed85 to look at words and compare the usage through the remainder of the writing. The word usually translated "saying" is logos - not just of critical importance in the Christian lexical arsenal on a broad scale but an anchor in Mark's Gospel. In twenty of the twenty-three instances of logos in Mark's gospel, Jesus is the speaker. As regards the remaining three - in one instance (5:36), words (those of the Iairus' servants announcing the death of his daughter) are ignored; a second has a narrative aspect of the leper's professing (1:45).86 But the only direct speech incorporating logos, outside of Jesus' own words, lies with this woman. She has delivered logos, the synonym of "gospel" (cf. Mark 8:32, 38)86 to Jesus. What's

51. J. Wells, Bible Children: Studies for the Young (London: James Nisbet, 1879) 216-217. Presumably, Christ was to be identified with franchised and educated men! See further, Cawdell/Anders, "Dog-Throffing", cited above.
more, Jesus recognizes it. The request by Jesus to the chief priests, scribes and elders in 11:29 provides the striking counterpoint. The leaders are invited to give, literally, “one word” (hēma logos). They refuse. Accordingly, the woman joins in the provision of the word; religious authorities do not.

The poignancy of the parallel with women’s campaigns for ordination could not have been more acute. It was a poignancy with an added edge, given that, at that stage, I was ordained and struggling to work with and within the injustice of that ordering of the church. John Gaden, then principal of St Barnabas College in Adelaide, laid up his priesthood in solidarity with women in their thwarted vocation.45 Graeme Garrett at St Mark’s College in Canberra stalled his migration from the Baptist to Anglican church for the same reason. Me? I peered into the dialectical mirroring pain of the cup of suffering – accused as the unjust church and accusing back with pointed fingers of blessing – at each eucharistic celebration.

Later, the significance of the Syrophoenician woman’s reply unfolded further. I had begun with the assumption that Jesus was the singular agent of healing in Mark, ignoring for a time the disciples’ own acts of healing (6:13) and the exorcisms performed by some anonymous exorcist (9:38). But Jesus’ second reply to the woman unravelled an extra surprise. Again, the standard grammatical-linguistic resources yielded an astonishing result. Jesus did not heal/exorcise the young girl; he merely announced that she had been delivered. Unlike Matthew’s retelling which has Jesus dispatch the woman with the promise that it would be done for her as she wished, Jesus declares in Mark that the demon has already left the woman’s daughter. The tense of the verb, repeated in participial form in the last verse of the pericope, is in the perfect. Consistently, the perfect tense acts as a kind of stative, an already constituted action that can be identified in retrospect in the present.46 Jesus provides the rationale for his observation in the first half of his second reply: “For this word, go your way” – the woman’s word has secured the healing of her own daughter.47

In the context of a specific earnest of women seeking ordination, this delivered a further sharp dialectic. The initial experience of greater wholeness that I felt at the deaconing and then priesting of women in


the Anglican Church of Australia was not the focus of the Syro-

phoenician. She may well have challenged the male authority of the story by exposing and shame his parsimonious, curmudgeonly behaviour – the indolence of his nasty-tongued abuse, his retreat from public space and the failure of vocational leadership connected with it, the dishonour of the lack of hospitality to the stranger. But this was not her prime objective. Hers was not a magdalenean appeasement and restoration of a wearied warrior such as is conveyed by the “every-

thing’s all right” of the Webber and Rice caricature. Her prime focus was her daughter, her sister. The danger that potentially preyed in my response, as in the relief that so many clerics and prelates felt in my initial ordinations, was that the woman had been turned from a damned whore into God’s police.48 From being a conflicted focus of desire and detestation, the woman was now to be an “angel of the house” confirming men in their proper vision and vocation. Either option still predicated its characterisation on a male anchor. The whole point of the final verse of the Markan pericope is that a household of women celebrates (on which see more below). Neither Jesus, nor a husband, father or brother, is present. Small wonder, then, that a number of male commentators have found this verse extraneous and of no consequence.49

The Initial Problem with the Acclaim of the Word of a Woman

Here a problem arose which would have devastating consequences for the traditional inherited meaning of the story, found only by reading at length into the understanding of logos in the ancient world. Logos of course has an enormous range of meanings but its primary accent was reason, which inevitably flowed into the expression of reason, namely speech, and thence sayings generally and of specific kinds. Reason was properly the ordering of the universe and hence was divine. Reason had been given to human beings in contradistinction to the animals who were called logos, without reason, as in Jude 10. The primary focus of reason in humanity however was the male. Women, children and slaves were also declared (by Aristotle amongst others) as atoll, also without


reason, and, like animals, needing to be hedged, bounded and zoned by
reason. For a woman and her daughter to be collated with dogs in Jesus’
first reply was completely in accord with this ancient binary classifi-
cation and would have carried no surprise to Mark’s audience.
Modernity might classify the use of dogs as “a metaphor”; but, in the
ancient world, it was closer to metonymy.56 Accordingly, to an ancient
audience, the astonishment came that one characterised as a dog was
now to be acknowledged as speaking logos. This was new. What this did
to the story was to shift the tensions to a more fundamental level — not
that of race, but of gender. The battle was not between Jew and Greek,
but between male and female.

Suddenly, the simple question, how can a woman who is a dog speak
logos, opened up a vast new area for me. Modern ethology and
sociobiology with their frequent naturalistic determinations for women
to be negotiated, precisely because they yielded a lens through
which to explore ancient attitudes. Here was clarified the conjunction
of science and cultural convention where frequent recourse was made to
ancient literary forms (such as proverbs or myths) and to biologically
justified hierarchies where male and female were asserted as the primary
dimorphism of life. Given the hierarchical presumption, an inferiority
was inevitably assigned to the secondary and contrasting element of any
dyadic comparison with an associated need to assign territorial bound-
daries to maintain the proper order of things.57 I became ferociously in
my search for dogs in literature. It meant a scouring of the husbandry texts
that often made judgements that were little more than the projection of
androcentric commitments onto the screen of the animal world so that a
viewing might occur of what was the naturally ordered relationship
between male and female.58 And it meant a search for the use of dogs in
metaphors.

This last was especially revealing, as I found that the use of dogs in
denigration and vilification was not primarily focused on race but on
gender, even in Jewish circles. “Dog” was a general term of abuse that,
when applied to a woman, indicated that she was regarded as a whore.
Pillering, promiscuity, deceit were the characteristics that the metaphor
delivered, in this case to the point where the metaphor so closely

62. See, for example, Aristotle Politeia 1.2.10-13 (1254b). I owe this recognition of the
metamorphosis of metaphor into metonymy to Page Althouse, Seeing the Ridy: 
Psychahedron and Ancient Representations of Women (Chicago and London: University of
63. See my “When a Woman is a Dog; ancient and modern ethology meet the Syno-
64. J. J. Winiker, The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient 
Syro-Phoenician Woman and the Centurion of Capernaum”, Numan Testamentis 15.3 
(1975) 164; G. Schwarz, “SYROPHENOIOTISA – CANANAEYA (Markus 7.24; Matthaeus 15.22)”, 
66. See my “What is a Name? The Tenacity of a Tradition of Interpretation [lustrue a 
and the Clementine Homilies]”, in F. Lockwood (ed.), Festschrift für Victor Pﬂeifer, Luthern 
67. The affirmation is retained in a number of contemporary commentators: see A. Stock,
The Method and Message of Mark (Wilmingom DE: Michael Glizer, 1989) 213; C. Waelters,
A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark’s Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 
1989), 155; T. Bouwens, Starry Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel in Storytelling
68. See M. Feinler, Die Schriften Von der Markustradition (Allerheiligen: Teso Verlag, 
1980) 75-6, 83-4.
69. So A.J. Levine, “Matthew’s Advice to a Divided Readership”, in D. E. Aeene (ed.), The 
Gospel of Matthew in Current Study (Graz Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2001) 36.
70. So A. Derrienne, “Tradition et réduction dans la pétition de la Syrophoniste: 
Marc 7.24-30”, Rewew Méthodique Louvain 8 (1977) 25; C. Osiek and D. L. Balch, Families in the
probably slightly up-market: a courtesan. Accordingly, Jesus’ first reply to the woman is as much a defence of his honour as it would be an expected and acceptable response amongst Mark’s hearers (whether they agreed with it or not). What is certainly not expected is Jesus’ second reply. A volatile woman in the ancient world confirmed her stigmatised unbounded status the moment she (re-)opened her mouth. But that a woman of such status and perceived contajion could speak logos is a radical realignment of who might impart gospel. Her words held enormous potential to give offence to a church bent upon aligning the pure gospel with purity of life.

However, for me, two disturbing implications accompanied the welcome realisation that gospel could flow from a spotted identity as this woman was portrayed as possessing. These were marginal to the historical-critical consideration of the place of prostitutes in the early Jesus movement. The first was decidedly Anglican: the Prayer of Humble Access; the second was decidedly anti-eclectic: the use of women to think with. They proved to be not unrelated.

The Prayer of Humble Access

The Syrophoenician woman had provided inspiration for the most distinctive supplication in the prayer-book so defining of Anglicanism, the Book of Common Prayer. “The Prayer of Humble Access”, as it is called, is set within the early chapters of the Anglican Communion four hundred and fifty years after it was penned. The key allusive line in the prayer: “We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table” was the critical phrase that matched the kneeling posture demanded by the rubries as well as the affirmation, also in the prayer, that the body is sinful. Commentators on the prayer were quite clear that the line was directly derived from the words of the Syrophoenician / Canaanite woman. Hence, admission of wretchedness, expressed by a sinful body in a grovelling position, was set by intertextual relationship to a woman who was recalled as one under the table, a dog. Priests, invariably male when they were required to lead the prayer in the name of the congregation, intoned about corruption via the woman. The hallmark of unworthiness, of sin, and of dependency on a higher mercy, was the woman. Man’s entry into this state is portrayed as a descent into the feminine, or indeed, through the feminine to the bestial. In order to accentuate the destitution of the state, Jesus’ first words to the woman are subtly restored; the denial of crumbs that he espoused is now accepted (“not worthy so much…”), even as that denial is blindered with the woman’s words confirming a position “under the table”.

The perspective inculcated by the prayer was that redemption (ritually enacted by the movement from this prayer through the consecration prayer to the communion) consisted in moving up and away from the animal – the woman – indeed, away from the bodily being of woman. To receive bread was therefore to become a son not a daughter, just as Tertullian had argued. Children and women disappeared from reference, seemingly collated with the animal recalled and left behind in the prayer’s gospel allusion.

This socialisation of generations of Anglican worshippers had been achieved through a liturgical distortion of the gospel. A priest-led prayer reinscribed – and compelled a constant reiteration – of ancient constructions of woman, the body and the animal, and preserved a male identity and control, as of old, through the threat of effeminacy degeneracy. The grovelling self-denigration enjoined by the Prayer of Humble Access now seemed to me to be the antithesis of the gospel story that had been claimed for its wording.

Using the Syrophoenician Woman as a Literary Construct

The ongoing viability of biblical studies is frequently predicated on the ability to criticise previous interpretations. Again an objectivist facade characterises the metacommentary, as supposedly assured results are newly extracted from a text that retains the privilege of a continued unnarrated existence. Feminist, Marxist and ecological criticisms, however, direct their challenge not merely to the history of hegemonic interpretation but to the text that hides (or is hidden) behind a policy of inscrutability (whether that be called the “inspiration of Scripture” or not) and yet itself sends off invitations to produce such hegemonic interpretation.


Coward, Out of Wordslock 277
Whatever may be the historicity of the identity of the Syrophoenician woman, Mark manipulates her characterisation to achieve certain ends. The withholding of the stereotyping markers of gender, status, race and birth until verse 26 may be part of Mark's agenda to destabilise the prejudices and presuppositions of readers/hearers with the shock that such a person could then be affirmed as speaking logos. The risk is that this politicised rendition might be read not only as an essentialist description but as a warrant for such a use of women (and their characterisation) for “larger” ecclesial ends. The early churches bear sufficient witness to such agendas (such as using women to reinforce conventional family structures) to raise suspicions that Mark may be engaged in competition with other male leaders over the place and significance of women in Christian communities, even should one be sympathetic to Mark's liberationist impulse.74 As one Episcopalian priest, Phoebe McFarlin, chided me: “We don’t need white knights; we want our voices.” The criticism not only ran to me as a male interpreter working through my own engagement with women and feminist issues, whether correcting my own personal attitudes and behaviours or tackling institutional immutability; it also raised questions of Mark him/herself, questions that I was compelled to address.

Most particularly, it exposed the complexity in the affirmation of the word of a woman in verse 29. This is perhaps seen most poignantly in the shift that occurs in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s renditions of the Syrophoenician’s story over a number of years. Initially, she argued that the woman had gained the “last word,” though later, perhaps acknowledging some correction,75 restored this claim to Jesus “when read in an anthropocentric register.”76 A feminist construction might wish to privilege the Syrophoenician’s word as “the last word” and thereby mount a critique of Mark’s received text, through either an historical or imaginative reconstruction.77 But at the metacommentary level, the arena for debate has remained unchallenged. Not only is the formal recognition of the powerful word of a woman retained by a male in the story and probably by a male writing the story,78 but the constraint of the significance of the woman to just her word runs the danger of perpetuating the accent on the word as the defining mark of privilege. Indeed, some commentators in patriarchal and modern periods maintained that the woman, as woman, had not changed from her bastard taxonomy (and hence the word she uttered was either exceptional or not her own). More subtly, any acknowledgement of her identity in relation to the word she delivered, was tied, as word, to the province where logos operated, that is the male. Thus, the Gospel of Philip construed her word as being, like the crumbs, no more than scraps.79 A medieval catena turned the woman, at least at the moment of utterance, into a male.80 The word threatened to become a strawhat.

Mary Douglas nearly two decades earlier had argued that the body as a medium in its own right needed to be considered, “distinct from the words issuing from the mouth.”81 Elisabeth Grosz turned this to both literary and cultural advocacy. She lamented, “Even many so-called radical theories actively participate in a process of salvaging or rescuing reason” and then proceeded to map the integrity of the body as an epistemological and communicative entity.82 In no way was this to be a return to the ancient anthropomorphic duality that regarded reason as male superior and body as female as inferior. Rather it was to subvert the entire hierarchy and structure, and restore to women and to epistemology the critical significance of the body, resistant to any machinic assumption of inscriptional, descriptive and prescriptive control over the body. It was the second Syrophoenician woman who provided a glimpse of an alternative communicative universe, one which both relativised and reconfigured the previously monolithic male pedestal.

The Problem of Privileging the Word

When I first began to consider doctoral studies, my attention had been drawn to children in the New Testament and to an ancient affirmation of Jesus as “The Child of God.”83 These were days of debate...
in the Anglican Church (early 1980s) about yet another contested admission, this time the admission of children to Holy Communion. So much of the debate was a repetition of the ancient emphasis on reason being expressed through speech. It completely ignored both the import of baptism and, more particularly, the recognition that the mere repetition of words could never be the singular or even apex of human communication. One three year old, at a church where I ministered, came each week holding up his hands to receive communion, and each week watched those around him receive bread whilst he was patted down with a blessing. One Sunday it became too much for him and he burst into tears and howled and howled. The following Sunday the congregation became illegal in practice, though I believe we moved closer to Jesus’ affirmation about children and the holiness of God.

The study never eventuated as a thesis but the concern for the voice or, better, the presence of children in the New Testament story remained. Two factors secured a place for the child in the story of the Syrophoenician. First, the Czech New Testament scholar, Petr Pokorny, had recognised that the daughter is the anchor of the entire pericope, “the absent and passive antag who still caused all the actions and statements,”76 mentioned in different terminology seven times – the highest concentration in the Second Testament. His observation stood in marked contrast to the attitude of some interpreters that the child was peripheral to the story, indeed to the simple miracle form.

Secondly, contemporary feminist studies highlighted the problem of a narrow focus on “word” alone. This privileging of word – the red-letter syndrome – had dominated the interpretation of Mark’s story in modern scholarship, though there has been a shift from a focus on the words of Jesus (usually to exonerate him of any unseemly response) to the words of the woman.

The focus on the word was locked into a debate about semantic content. It failed to weigh the narrative frame provided for the words – the movement, the courage, the gestures involved of blocking Jesus’ movement (a very different interpretation of the action of the woman in falling at Jesus’ feet).77 From this perspective, the body was as crucial to the flow of the story through to the final verse, as the words of dialogue. The exercise of reason was dependent upon the use, positioning and exercise of a somatic presence. Here, critical to the efforts to destabilise the domination of word, were debates and discussion with my partner Robyn as she, in her thesis on a medieval saint’s life,78 exposed the male use of writing to impale women into submission and self-contempt.

More particularly, I realised that the preoccupation with words had actually neglected the somatically-dependent performantial aspects of verbal dialogue. There was a careful crafting of the words of both Jesus and the woman that relied on the irrational, or psychagogic, elements of language to create a response. The abusive rejection of the woman and her claim is received in the pre-conceptual, irrational experience of the iambic metre and the harsh verbal constructions imbuing the proverb foundation of Jesus’ saying.79

Just as surely, the woman weaves a brilliantly subtle response, far more sophisticated than that of Jesus, and reliant for its force on an oral delivery. It takes the harshness of Jesus and tunes it into the mellifluous harmonies of long, smooth vowels and it combines a series of different rhythms – all an exemplary use of euphony that can be applied to words to deliver something far beyond and preparatory to the mere semantics.80

Recovering the Body

This accent on the dynamics of the story beyond the delivery of content caused a reassessment of the last verse of the story, a verse long forgotten in commentators’ dismissal of its significance as simply a superfluous proof of the successful outcome of a miracle. The emphasis of the verse rests on discovery (heurēn v.30) but traditional translations and interpretations had diminished the force of the miracle and the culmination of the woman’s quest.81 Variously rendered as “lying,” “thrown on the bed,” “the end of the story was anti-climactic. After all, the phrase was identical in this interpretation, to the state of the paralysed man prior to his healing, when he was carried and lowered to Jesus

80. The detailed analysis will be found in Cadwallader, Beyond the Word of a Woman, chapter 3.
81. See Cadwallader, Beyond the Word of a Woman, chapter 5 for the details.
somatic action and/or oral performance of the mother was now extended, through a somatic initiative by the daughter beyond the initial breakthrough. Both Jesus and Mark the evangelist are withdrawn from mastery over the further life of these women.

So for whom did I write? In the end, it was for my three daughters. The gospel is theirs to shape and extend according to the fledgling liberation that their mother especially has determinedly secured for them. The daughter expands the liberation and so authenticates the woman’s body and its courageous movement, not merely her brave words to a man. Moreover, if some of the reflection from the primacy of the word (over body) can be credited to the evangelist, then he has erased his own text as being sufficient for the life of the body (corporate and singular). His word and the words within that word are not enough. But in so doing, reflexively, he has drawn attention to the text itself as a body both in performance and in material production. The artefactuality of the text is as important as the text itself in a testimony through its own material presence (as book, scroll, inscription, textile, mosaic, painting) that this is precisely what the text hungers for, struggles to exceed itself for. The text hungers for embodiment (not merely oral performance where the body, whilst affirmed, is authenticated as a servant), sheer physical existence.

Moreover, this is so because of, perhaps underscored by, an embodiment that occurs beyond the text’s parameters. For the text to realise this ambition, it must lose its descriptive and prescriptive textuality over the body; it must give up its life in order that life might come. In this sense, Levinas’s “it is not finished” hangs over every text, just as it hangs over every memory that the text seeks to (re-)present.97 For any autobiographical critical exercise this is just as well. The danger of the search for self through a work of textuality is that the body might actually be erased in the promethean effort of verbal examination – precisely what the Syrophoenician women challenged. Life, the life of these women, was to be lived in meaningful relationship – in food, in their place, in movement, in discovery, in freedom – far beyond the words of exchange with Jesus and beyond the word that represented them.

The irony for me was not lost on my examiners. There was a multidimensional proliferation of words and footnotes thrown into the thesis, many of which survive into a severely trimmed book. For a work designed to undermine logocentrism and reassert the importance of somatic reality, the word remained volubly strong. The effort to totalise

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96. See Rancière, The Flesh of Words, 4-5.
97. Jean-François Baudot noted that in every other case in Mark’s Gospel, the verb lekárant is used to Jesus: Les Maitres de la Table: Études syrophéniciens et socio-religieuse de Mt 15, 21-28 et de Mt 7, 24-30 (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1995) 239.
98. See the critique of confession in J. Tamblyn, Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1980).
Like Bread from One’s Mouth: Emmanuel Levinas and Reading Scripture with the Other

Jonathan Ryan

Abstract: Discussions of alterity in biblical hermeneutics wrestle with paradox. While attempts to “speak for” the other frequently reduce to the same, interpretive approaches safeguarding difference are often unable to respond to concrete needs of actual others. Emmanuel Levinas’s efforts to negotiate this paradox serve biblical hermeneutics well, challenging interpreters to recognize the call to responsibility encountered in the face of the other. Levinas himself is not without his others, and conversations with christology and Eucharistic eclecsiology (represented here by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mikolaj Volf, and John Žižek) challenge him toward more coherent accounts of transcendence in the human other, and of the communal obligations of the church toward the other. With these cautions in view, this article commends Levinas as a guide for breaking the bread of Scripture with others, even—and especially—when this demands “the bread from one’s mouth”.

DURING A CRUCIAL STAGE OF WRITING THIS ARTICLE, I was interrupted by a phone call from a neighbour. His tone was urgent as he relayed his predicament: he had been evicted, and as one bearing the marks of a long struggle with mental health, it would not be easy to find replacement accommodation. Would he be welcome in my home? The irony of the situation did not elude me: as he spoke, my preoccupation with biblical hermeneutics and the other seemed too important to be compromised by such hospitality. And yet, from a point beyond these academic considerations, his voice intruded.

While first-person singular anecdotes may appear inappropriate in a discussion of biblical hermeneutics, this illustration succinctly conveys the motivation and argument of this article. Like the priest and Levite on the Jericho road, we are conscious of the Levitical mandate to love one’s neighbour, and have devised interpretive methods to read the Bible

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