

**MARY MAGDALENE IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN IN THE
CONTEXT OF READINGS BY SOUTHERN AFRICAN
TOWNSHIP CHRISTIAN WOMEN**

By: 

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the reading responses of Township Christian women in Southern Africa to Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John are explored. The study concludes that Mary Magdalene, in the Gospel of John can empower the lives of these women.

This thesis also compares the role of Mary Magdalene in the death rituals of her time and the roles of the Southern African women in the death rituals of their loved ones.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this whole thesis is the result of my own work.

Gloria Kehilwe Plaatjie

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction

My topic for this work is "Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John in the Context of the Readings of Southern African Township Christian Women."

Women form the bulk of the people who attend church services or the mass every Sunday (Courtney Sampson 1991: 55), yet their voice or their opinion on theological matters is not of concern to mainstream theology. They all have to listen attentively to the stories about people in the Bible, especially about women who are supposed to be exemplars for all women. The women preached or read about in the Bible, appear in the stories from a male perspective, in other words, the stories women hear about are written by men and interpreted for them by men. The social, political, economic and Christian values in the New Testament or even in the whole Bible, norms and African traditional rituals involving these women are created by males for the so-called stability of the whole community or nation.

These kinds of concerns motivated my interest to look at Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John with Township Christian women. These women are considered to be "marginalised" in as far as hearing their theological voices are concerned. Gerald West (1991), calls these readers ordinary readers, and his term of ordinary reader also includes those who have an ear for the gospels and who can retell the gospel stories as they were narrated to them (1991:89).

Bringing their marginalised theological voice to the centre of mainstream feminist theology is my aim for this work.

I have chosen to do this research with township Christian women irrespective of their educational background. The reason for this is that most of them do not have a theological voice or training in that regard and thus they are ordinary readers of the Bible. They are

reading the bible pre-critically, as West terms it (1991: 89). I am quite aware that some of those who are not educated will be intimidated by the responses of those who are educated and that this might not give a proper picture of what their theological point of view is. This will be guarded against.

My experience is that Southern African women always perceive the Bible as "The Word of God". They do not challenge its teachings nor even its perceptions of women, for this was also my upbringing in understanding the Bible. For these women, the church and the Bible are their only source of hope; these two religious symbols are like a fortress for them, and they are also powerful pastoral instruments, as Sampson suggests (1991: 56). Asking these women to criticise the Bible and the church as an institution, and as the house of God, is like asking them to critique God. For God, through Moses and other revered figures, is the author of the Holy Book and Jesus is the head of the Church just as their husbands, fathers and male relatives are the heads of their respective homes. When they are asked again to critique motherhood as it is perceived, this is equally tantamount to a curse, for motherhood is also regarded as holy, for a woman will be saved through bearing children.¹ This itself has been a problem in their emancipation and in empowering them in their Christian and their social lives. Though some women in the townships are trying to challenge this norm with care, they do not want to rock the boat. They also do not want to be seen as abnormal women who do not want to accept what is "normal", for they might find themselves marginalised by everyone in the church as well as in society².

Now that the country is in a process of change, women in the country also want change in the way they have been ill-treated both socially and politically. They feel that they have to

¹. *The first letter of Paul to Timothy, chapter 1:15*

². *Most of these experiences by township women were gathered through informal discussions with township Christian women I have met in conferences that were organised by the Institute for Pastoral Education in Grahamstown in January 1995; the Umtata Women's Theology Group in January 1996 and the two conferences that were organized by the Southern African Council of Churches in July and November 1996.*

shake off the yoke of oppression, discrimination against women in society, in politics, health, economics and in the judicial system of the country. Nothing of note has been said by Township Christian women in relation to the same injustices practised in the church as yet³. I suggest that this is because for most of them, religion cannot be questioned. Questioning religion and the way the Bible is interpreted, might be tantamount to questioning God in the eyes of patriarchy.

Township Christian women are important because they are in between urban and rural life experience, although in a better position than the women from rural areas. Their African Traditional life expectations are tearing them apart, since some of the traditional rituals are accepted and some are done secretly in townships. Going to a diviner (Sangoma) is something Christians are prohibited from by both their religion and society to a certain extent. Many are shy to do so in the open and yet they do become regular visitors of the diviners in the evenings. Some of the rituals (child birthing, wearing black for your deceased husband for six months, etc.), are termed old fashioned, since most of the women are either working or some of the ritual clothes they are supposed to wear are not allowed in the police force or nursing, or any work place where they are required to wear a uniform. Some of the women feel that the ritual of mourning and all that goes with it is oppressive, but they do comply with whatever needs to be done in the ritual for fear of bad luck and for fear of being suspected to be the ones who have killed their husbands or for having extra marital affairs. These fears were clearly spelled out through the interviews (which will be dealt with later in this work) I had with some women in Kimberley and in Klerksdorp.

Economically, quite a substantial number of Township Christian women still depend on their husbands and sons - some of those who do not have husbands depend on relatives. Even though most Township women work, they are underpaid. Some of them have to fend for their families alone, because some of their male relatives and husbands who used to be

³. *This problem was noted by Dr. B. Pityana, when he delivered a paper at one of the Conferences that was hosted by the South African Council of Churches (SACC) from the 5 - 9 July 1996 in Gauteng.*

breadwinners have been retrenched (Klugman 1993: 195). So, I suggest that for these women, there is a forced social reversal of roles, yet society does not recognise this. Those who are working and do qualify to get bank and housing loans, or to open accounts from a shop, are still required to get the approval of the man who is not supporting them financially. This forced social reversal of roles makes men in the townships feel inferior and it really demoralizes them since a man is only considered a man in the townships, if he can feed and clothe his wife and children and/or his relatives. If he cannot do this, he loses the people's respect and the women have to cope with this problem. Their husbands, and for those who are not married, their brothers, uncles, fathers, often resort to alcohol abuse, and become deviant, and they end up abusing women verbally and physically. Most Township Christian women are victims of these circumstances.

Fortunately, some women do find a voice to fight the social injustices as well as abuse. There are Non-Governmental Organisations that deal with women's issues and the electronic media also plays a vital role in Townships to conscientise women as to how they can challenge these social and legal injustices. These women have come to realize that their socialization into accepting that men are superior to them in all respects does not hold water any more. Their daily experiences in life make them realize this fallacy. It is this awakened self awareness that is important for my work, because these women might be able to tell their own story.

A very high percentage of these women are practising Christians. They attend Church every time the bell rings or every Sunday. Most of them are in Sodalities in their respective churches, some are in the choir, some decorate the church and the altar regularly and most of them are Sunday School teachers. These women are the fundraisers of their churches, but most of them do not hold high positions in their respective parish councils, if there is such a body in their parishes (Brigalia Bam 1991: 363 - 364).

Education does broaden people's perception of life and their patterns of thinking. It should also make people independent thinkers. Township Christian women, who are empowered

by the education they have, do have a problem reconciling what they have come to discover as oppressive with what they have become.⁴ I suggest that education has made them aware of the oppressive systems that societies can have through social, political, economic and religious beliefs. This does not exclude some of the traditional cultural aspects of their lives that belittle them and that make them perpetual social dependants. These women are the ones who are most torn apart by what they believe in and cannot disclose with courage or even practice their beliefs, nor can they challenge what they are expected to do in their communities and societies.

Their scope of choosing how they want to lead their lives, i.e as women pursuing professions only, or professional women who are married and who are mothers is difficult. Their township communities expect every woman to be married at a certain stage and to produce children.

These are the women I am interested in my research. Their reading of John's Gospel on the Mary Magdalene material will form the bulk of my research. A reader response method will be used to bring their readings into mainstream Feminist Theology.

Before I deal with the Reader Response theory, I will give a brief outline of my work in order to introduce the different chapters.

⁴ *I do not suggest that they have to abuse their power of knowledge and education to become the oppressors of their societies and communities. This subject is brought up because it has problems of its own and these women do experience problems, such as being marginalized by their male counterparts who perceive them to be a threat to their ego as men. Most of these women are also accused of having copied white women's way of life since it is still perceived that white women are the only one's who speak back when they are wronged, or when they do not agree with what is done against their wishes.*

1.2 Outline

The intention of this section is to introduce the different chapters in this work.

In chapter 2, I have made a summary of the reader response theory. This summary illustrates the different opinions scholars have as to who should be considered a reader and what criteria are used to determine who a reader is and what the purpose of reading a text is.

Because I am dealing with the Gospel of John, in chapter 3 I made a brief analysis of scholars' views on the background to the Gospel of John. This is because scholars have their differences as to what the intention of the Gospel is and who its author is. The date and its theology are also doubted by a number of scholars. Our purpose for giving a brief summary of this background is for us to create an exegetical and hermeneutical context.

I then continue in the fourth chapter by giving a summary of the interpretations of a number of Western Feminist Scholars of the Mary Magdalene Story in the Gospel of John.

Chapter five will then concentrate on the rituals and perception of Southern Africans on a violent death.

Jesus' death is interpreted by ordinary Christians as an act of atonement while scholars have their views on the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection. Chapter six will deal with these concepts and what they meant in the context of the world of the New Testament. This will also be studied in conjunction with the social world of the reader. The readers rituals of death and their perception of life after death will also be studied.

In chapter seven, I will do an exegesis of the story of Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John 19: 25 - 27 and John 20: 1 -10 and 11 - 18.

Since people have different contexts of life that determine their interpretation of texts and their outlook of life, the story will then be re-told in Setswana, but will be explained in English in chapter 8.

In chapter nine, I will give a profile of the women with whom I have carried out this research. How they read the Bible will also be critiqued in this section.

In chapter 10, I will give a summary of the readings of Township Christian women. Lastly, a final conclusion of this work will follow.

CHAPTER 2

2. READING RESPONSE THEORY

2.1 Introduction

As we have said in our introductory chapter, the Biblical readings of Township Christian women are among some of the readings that are not considered to be scholarly by most academics who do not take the readings of ordinary readers seriously. Trained Biblical readers are the ones who usually are expected to voice the voices of these readers, as they (Township Christian Women) are not trained to engage in any theological debate.

In some instances, it will be ironic to call these readings readings, since reading is associated with text and literacy. Most of these women cannot read, as we have said in the previous chapter. They have good listening skills. Scholars who are concerned with the responses of non-literate "readers" have realized that most of these "readers" re-tell the bible "stories" as they have heard them from those who can read. They even know the texts off by heart and in most cases know where to find a certain text (Kalilombe 1991:398 - 399). It might be difficult to term their responses "reading responses", but maybe one may term them oral-reading responses of Township Christian women, since some of them can read, while the others repeat what they have heard and interpret what their literate counterparts have read to them. The reader-response theory, on the other side, takes it for granted that every person can read. The non literate person is excluded from this theory, but nonetheless, we can explore it to see what it has in store for us.

Some scholars have begun to take the readings of the untrained readers seriously. They have come to realize that these readings are valid on their own and they do not need a trained reader to do the reading for them. The reading -response theory, which declares the responses of the individual reader as an important goal to literary study, will be explored as a device to focus on the readings of Township Christian women's reading of John 19: 20:1-18.

2.2 Reader-response Theory and Critique

Jane Tompkins (1992), like many of her counterparts, has challenged the Reader-Response criticism to strengthen its commitment to the Reader. The responses of the individual reader for this school of thought are considered as the true subject of literary study. They are opposed to the belief that meaning can only be located in a literary text (1992:201).

She has also noted that both New critics and reader-response critics, assume that to specify meaning is criticism's ultimate goal. She further explores her work by comparing it to other older literary works that have preceded reader response theory. These older literary methods, which also show an interest in audience response are from the Classical period, the Renaissance, and the Augustine writings (1992: 201 - 202).

Her analysis of critical literary works and audience response of the Classical period, the Renaissance, and the Augustine writings shows that these were all concerned with the power language has on an audience. The purpose of language for those different periods of reading was for political power and for gaining the support of the powerful. For language has an overwhelming influence on human behaviour and the centre of critical consideration should be mastering its techniques and exercising ethical control over its uses, she argues (1992: 204).

What she refers to as audience response can be slightly different from what Patrick A. Kalilombe, Jonathan A Draper and Gerald West understand of the communities they have researched. What is common for the aforesaid periods and the Southern African/African context is orality. Most of the people in the Classical period and now in modern Southern Africa cannot read and write. Though their inability to read and write does not hinder their quest for meaning from whatever they hear from their literate counterparts.

For meaning is also what the Township Christian Women are concerned with. The Bible as the "Word of God" has to have some relevant meaning for them, though some of them cannot read it for themselves.

Elizabeth A. Flynn (1991), on the other hand critiqued the work of Louise Rosenblatt. She points out that Rosenblatt's reading is feminine but can provide a framework for a feminist theory. Rosenblatt's concern is mainly on the discussion of student response statements and her motive for doing this was to empower student readers, and *to disrupt the traditional hierarchy whereby critics and teachers have greater interpretive authority than nonprofessional readers (1991: 169).*

According to Flynn, Rosenblatt advocates a transactional process that is the result of the merging between the text and the reader. The term is best defined in relation to reading events and motives for reading. For her, reading does not depend on the reader as it does for the reading-response critics (1991:173).

The context from which the literary transaction takes place is important. Rosenblatt rightly points out that historical, social and political factors affect what she calls the literary transaction. Reading is an emotional as well as an intellectual experience. Her reader is an individual who feels and thinks, i.e. who has emotional and intellectual needs (1991: 169-170).

It is quite apparent that the readings of the ordinary reader are left out of the picture here (Gerald West 1991). Most of these ordinary readers are the ones who form the bulk of our church communities or congregations. Their voices are not heard as it might be argued that they are not trained theologically to make their voices heard in the theological arena.

Gerald West (1991), is interested in the Biblical readings of the poor and marginalised communities. His ordinary readers also include people who cannot read and write; i.e

people who have heard, and are retelling and discussing the Bible stories as they have heard them (1991: 89).

Patrick A. Kalilombe (1991), is also interested in non-literate communities or people who depend on "literate sisters and brothers" to read the bible for them. Unlike Gerald West, he realises that there is a problem for the non-literate people and communities. For him the disadvantage of all this is that the literate sisters and brothers can choose what is suitable for the ears of their non-literate sisters and brothers which he sees as "a special predicament of the non-literate (1991: 398 - 399).

He further explains how non-literate people do repeat the bible stories. He says that they employ mnemonic devices like repetition or variation of analogous visual aids. He further explains that they have such potent tools as acting, retelling in their own words, or responding through gestures or emotion-filled expressions (1991: 403).

Jonathan A. Draper (1996), who is also interested in non-literate readers, includes "Revivals" as some of the gestures or emotion-filled expressions the non-literate people express themselves through (1996: 12). For him and the interns who were supposed to conduct a research into reading the Bible in Sobantu, they experienced that Bible studies, especially formal Bible Studies, were not part of the experience of the Sobantu Christian Group they were in contact with. It did not provide them with a meaningful spiritual guidance they needed.

Draper further critiques Tompkins by pointing out that she assumes that everyone reads and everyone's life is re-structured by textuality (1996: 2).

He points out that the vast majority of South Africans live in a context of either primary orality or, for most, of residual orality. He says that they function in an oral culture in which text plays a minimal role. For him, this does not mean to say that these people are

illiterate. Their world view is structured by a kind of orality and not reading or writing as the reading-response theorists assumes of every one (1996: 3).

The Black communities Draper refers to have displayed difficulty in seeing the Bible as a text. For them it was the Holy Word of God, and nothing else. I guess it is because they do not have the literary and theological skills Luther had. He' could distinguish between the printed text which all Christians have inherited now, and the word of God; and they cannot. Thus the printed text of the Bible is highly operative in the Black communities (1996: 6).

He says that the group in Sobantu had a reverential attitude to the Bible, which they uniformly regarded as "the Word of God." The holy status of the Bible was symbolic and not literary (1996: 10).

He further quotes Weli Mazamisa, who distinguished between the participatory reader and a listening reader, where the latter has no access to the written text, but participates through listening (1996: 10).

Kalilombe, Draper and West agree with Mazamisa's observations, for they are also interested in the non-literate "reader." These people are the ones who interact with the Bible, and they are the ones who want to derive meaning out the Bible, which is unfortunately not a text but "the Word of God." They are interested in getting the readings or the interpretations of these people in the centre of the theological arena.

Though these Scholars have the desire to bring the ordinary readers interpretations of the Bible into the theological arena, they are still restricted by some hermeneutical rules they have to adhere to. The Reader-Response hermeneutics is said by Anthony Thiselton to have to guide the responses of the reader.

Reader-response hermeneutics has a role to play in guiding the interpretations of the bible texts. For Anthony C. Thiselton, the theories of Biblical and Literary interpretation share much in common. Most of the questions raised in literary theory have some bearing on issues in Biblical interpretation, though Biblical hermeneutics raises additional theological questions of its own (1985:79).

He further raises issues of concern such as the special status the Bible has for Christians, and because the Bible is a sacred text and a text which provides normative values, additional questions for the Biblical interpreter are posed. In some traditions, like the protestant tradition since the Reformation, the interpreter of the Bible allowed the Bible to control and mould her/his own judgements, and the text still holds a higher position to her/his own interpretive tradition (1985:80).

He also noticed that unskilled readers of the text usually bring in what they have heard about the text or know about it. So, the interpreter should be prevented from a number of things, like looking at the text shallowly, for this might be seen as the official authority of the text. He also suggests that communities have shaped their lives and beliefs on what is intended to seem to be "biblical" truth but have turned out to be distorted (1985: 80).

Some of the distortions can also arise when the Bible becomes allied with a theological conservatism which reduces biblical hermeneutics to a defensive device for maintaining the status quo of the interpretive procedures of a religious community. Thiselton says the approach sees no difference between what he calls a "common sense" interpretive tradition and what the text itself says. For the sake of safety, the past interpretive tradition is made to be inseparable part of the text itself, so that openness to new truth and to correction by the text is suppressed (1985: 80).

In critique of the role of the reader in the literary and philosophical hermeneutics, it is sometimes expressed in such a way as to imply an infinitive relativism on the part of the text or its author. He further points out one weakness of a literary approach, i.e, that

questions about meaning are reduced entirely to questions about language-effect in the modern world (1985: 81).

He also uses the work of Francis Bovon who says that:

When we have rushed from reading the text first in itself, understood for itself, apart from all reference to an author, and have moved toward a reflection on our status as readers, eventually we come to see that progress in hermeneutics comes along with the recognition that diverse ways of access are possible, and that each one reveals an aspect of the landscape (1985: 82).

The experiences of all the scholars who have an interest in "ordinary-readers of the Bible", as Gerald West 1991 has termed them, have relevance in my work. It is true that most of Southern African women are non-literate but that does not exclude them from "reading" the Bible and interpreting it for their contexts.

It is also true that some interpretations can be used to protect a status-quo of a certain community, as Thiselton has rightfully pointed out. This has been an experience of most Southern Africans who had to live under an Apartheid government that legitimised their destructive power over the majority of Southern Africans for decades. The then government justified its rule by seeing themselves as a Christian government that ruled according to how God wanted them to rule. I suggest that this was a distortion of the Biblical message and also of the Word of God.

The women that I am interested in are a product of this kind of theology and they are a mixture of both literate and non-literate women. I am interested in both groups because for me they still retell and read and even preach the scriptures just as they have heard them from their priests or ministers. They do not have any theological training and they do interact with the Bible whenever they come together. //

2.3 Conclusion

Finally, their social, political, economical, marital, emotional and intellectual status is either affirmed by the Bible or even challenged by the same Bible at the same time. The meaning of their lives as a whole is derived from the Bible. The Bible is highly regarded by these women. Like the groups that Draper referred to, the Bible has a high role in these women's lives. It is Holy and cannot be challenged. When all fails, the Bible is like a fortress for these women. It gives them a purpose to continue to live against all odds.

I will give a full description of these women and how they interpret the Bible for themselves will also be analysed later in my work. Before I do that, I will first give a summary of scholars interpretations of the Gospel of John and what the Evangelist intended for his audience then in the next chapter in order to create a safe hermeneutical and exegetical context.

It is my belief that an analysis of the historical context of the text is just as important as the analysis of the historical context of the reader. This enables us to build a bridge between the context of the text and the context of the reader, which Leonardo Boff calls a correspondence of relationships or a relationship of relationships between the New Testament and its context and the context of the readers. (1987:140).

CHAPTER 3

3. SCHOLARS' VIEWS OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with Reader-Response theorists. Their main concern was where meaning was derived, i.e either from the text or the reader. We have also seen that there were also some who were interested in the responses of "readers" who could not necessarily read, but who could re-tell the Bible stories as they have heard them. There were those who were concerned with the text being interpreted without distorting or interpreting it to suit their own agenda.

The purpose of this section is mainly to create a context for interpreting the Gospel of John, especially the Mary Magdalene story in the Gospel in an acceptable manner. The readings of the Township Christian Women I have worked with are not necessarily the readings or interpretations of Johannine scholars as they do not have the analytical tools that these scholars have. But nonetheless, their interpretations of the Gospel, as well as their placing of the Gospel in its proper context, will be of help for the coming chapters in this work.

New Testament scholars, who are interested in the Gospel of John have suggested what may have motivated the author of the Gospel of John. The reasons vary from scholar to scholar and these are all influenced by their different interests.

There are those who say that there are many who have found an apologetic or missionary motif in the Fourth Gospel. The proposed groups, to whom the message may have been directed, include the followers of John the Baptist, "the Jews", and various heretical, Gnostic, or Docetic groups. Other scholars stress that John was written to confirm Christians in their faith. Raymond A Brown says that it is perfectly legitimate to speak of the several aims of the Gospel (1966: LXVII).

What period could have constituted a group with different needs and different groupings or movements, if one has to term them movements? This leads us to the date of the Gospel of John and who the author of this Gospel is.

3.2 The Date and Author of the Gospel of John

Modern scholarship tends to question its authorship, its place of origin, its theological affiliation, its background and its historical value. As early as the second century, certain conservative and otherwise orthodox Christians, the so called "Alogi", denied its apostolic authorship. They regarded its teaching as unorthodox (George Arthur Buttrick et al 1962: 932).

It is evident that the authorship question is very tricky. Who is this disciple? Who is "we" and "I?" The traditional view of the Gospel is open to question.

The above questions have been taken up by different scholars in later periods. I suggest that these doubts might have been brought about by the fact that the author of the Gospel differed from or emphasised some theological issues which were not stressed by Luke, Mark and Matthew; or that the author was not one of the known disciples of Jesus at his time on earth but joined a community which had experienced the good deeds of Jesus, and thus became the recorder of the activities of Jesus on earth as was witnessed by the community. These claims will be supported later.

Even though the origins, the theology, the author and the background of the Gospel of John are questioned, tradition has it that it was written by John, the son of Zebedee (1962: 932).

Ruldolf Bultmann (1955), on the other hand, supports the claim that the author of the Gospel is John, but he does not say which one. He says that it is not known where this Gospel was written. He suggests that the Gospel must have originated some time after the

first literary fixation of the synoptic tradition, but very probably still within the first century; since its existence is testified by quotations in papyri that come from the beginning of the second century (1955:10).

To support his suggestion of John as the author, Bultmann further says that the Evangelist used an original Aramaic (or Syriac) source in certain places, viz for the prologue, the sayings and discourses of Jesus wherever they are not derived from the synoptic tradition or from a collection of miracle-stories which also served him as a source (1955:10).

Bultmann could be right, because the beloved disciple, traditionally known as John, qualifies better than the son of Zebedee. His mother's house was in Jerusalem. In John 18:15, the beloved disciple has a priestly connection in Jerusalem. He was also one of the twelve. To prove that he was one of the twelve, he is mentioned at the washing of the feet in John 13:23; in 19:26ff, he was with Mary, mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene at the crucifixion; in 20: 2 -10, after Mary Magdalene came to report that Jesus has resurrected from the dead, he was the one who ran ahead of Peter.

The actual date of the Gospel is contested because some scholars say that it was written in the first century while others say that it was written in the second century, i.e over sixty years after the death of Jesus. The date might not be that important at the moment but the reasons put forward for these different dates will be examined later on in this chapter.

Cullmann says that the sons of Zebedee, John and James, were Galileans and they were not from Judea, where the author of the Gospel originates. He further claims that external evidence has it that John the disciple was the authority and John the presbyter was the author of the Gospel (1976: 69).

Having someone writing for someone else or using a name of some authoritarian figure was common practice during those days. John the Evangelist may not have been able to

write, as most of the people in Galilee could not write during those times for most of them were peasants. For the statement in Acts 4:13, which says:

Now when they beheld the outspokenness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were men unlettered and ordinary, they got to wondering. And they began to recognise about them that they used to be with Jesus;

This verse supports the suggestion that John was not educated and thus could not have written the Gospel. Further comments about some of the important events that are mentioned in the synoptic Gospels (like the Transfiguration) but are not mentioned in the Gospel of John will be noted in this work. These are the missing events in the Gospel of John that some scholars use against John being the author of the Gospel.

Cullmann further says that the content of the Gospel indicates that the author is from a Jewish background that is different from mainstream Judaism and has been shaped by alien influences. The author is also interested in John the Baptist.

He further notices that great significance is accorded to the mission in Samaria and to those who introduced the Gospel there, the "Hellenists" of Jerusalem. The special interest in Judaea indicates that he is from Judea because of the selection of narratives, e.g the Passion narrative - which seems to have greater historical value than that of the synoptic gospels (1976: 66).

Cullmann continues deny that the evangelist was one of the twelve. Other intimate disciples of Jesus like Nathanael and Lazarus appear at decisive points. In addition to the common tradition, he has special recollections at his disposal which go back to a different milieu from that of the Galilean fisherman. Other people who also emerge in the Gospel belong to another social stratum. He (the author) belongs to a group and a community which cherishes a Christianity different from that of the Synoptic and Paul, despite the common tradition, because his intensive concern is to provide a link between the incarnate

Jesus and the Church. These are the general characteristics of the author, according to the content of the Gospel, apart from the passages relating to the unnamed beloved disciple (1976: 69 - 70).

Cullmann says the Fourth Gospel is the work of the Beloved disciple for he was an eye witness of the ministry of Jesus. Raymond E. Brown agrees with Cullmann and further points out that the Beloved Disciple was idealized, but for him he was a historical person and a companion of Jesus because of the Gospel's ecclesiology. He also suggests that the claim to possess the witness of the Beloved Disciple, and not of Peter or the twelve disciples, enabled the Johannine Christians to defend their peculiar insights in Christology and ecclesiology (1979: 31).

What Cullmann suggests is that the Beloved disciple was not one of the twelve, he was just an eye witness to the things Jesus did. His suggestion is contrary to that of Bultmann and that of the Gospel of John.

In conclusion, it is evident that the date and the actual author of the Gospel of John is very tricky. This is because a number of candidates are suggested for this gospel and different locations and dates of the origins of the Gospel are also suggested to suit the location and dates of these particular candidates. We cannot clearly identify the real author of this Gospel, though the traditional view is that John is the author of the Gospel.

This leads us now to the purpose of the Gospel of John and who its intended recipients were

3.3 The Purpose of the Gospel of John

Like the authorship and date problem we had with the Gospel, the purpose of the Gospel is also another problem, for some authors think that it is a historical document while others believe that it alludes to some historical events which might have taken place, but it is not

overtly a historical document. There are also those who believe that the Gospel's intention is clearly spiritual and nothing else.

Bultmann (1955), is deeply rooted in the history-of-religions school, for he combines "historical reconstruction" with "existentialist interpretation." For Bultmann, John is a gospel without history. It contains the experiences of the people during the time when Jesus was alive. In other words, it is subjective history. For John was not trying to write facts, he argues (G. Hazel 1978:82-83).

Bultmann further says that John is directly dependent on Gnostic traditions. The relationship of John's Gospel to the Gnostic view of the world is twofold:

1. In John, Jesus descends from heaven, like the Gnostic Redeemer, to bring the saving message to people, and he returns to the Father, after completing his work (1971:8)
2. In the author's Gnostic form, a pointed anti-Gnostic theology is expressed. A person is not seen dualistically in John. Flesh and spirit do not stand opposed as substances of the demonic and divine realms. Rather, the Redeemer became flesh, and showed his glory as the One made flesh (1971:9).

His eschatology does not describe the last things which are still to come in time, or the doctrine of the last things. Eschatological salvation meets human-kind in their historical situation, in other words, the life of the believer is life in salvation (which is only made possible of course by God's grace), because he believes that people are transformed to the authenticity of their existence only by the gracious saving act of God.

He further points out that the history of salvation perspective is lacking in John. The idea of God's covenant with Israel or of the new covenant, God's election of Israel and God's

guidance of the people play no role. For the history of salvation term for the congregation (ekklesia 6:2; 10:1) does not occur in John (1955: 8-9).

O'Day (1986), on the other hand, is one of those scholars who argue that John was written so that people may believe. She raises the question of the intended audience of the Gospel and does not treat it well or rather leaves it at that point. Her main interest is to approach the question of revelation as a verb and not as a noun, by examining the interrelationship of narrative mode and the theological claim of the Fourth Gospel. Why revelation as a verb and not as a noun? She argues that revelation as a noun is static, especially when it is defined through categories of dogma, doctrine, or philosophy. It is dynamic and generative as a verb, thus she opts for this latter suggestion (1986: 2).

She, like most New Testament Scholars, believes that the clue to the intended purpose of the Gospel is found in John 20: 30 - 31. She also questions the intended audience because the phrase, "That you may believe" in John 20: 31 is not clear if it is addressed to believers or non-believers (1986: 93).

She further recognises two basic dimensions of this statement of purpose. The first being Christological: "That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." The second basic dimension she also recognised is soteriological: "That believing you may have life in his name." According to her, these purposes transcend those of the intended audience. The community addressed here is one grounded in and empowered by the name and identity of Jesus, she suggests (1986: 93).

For her, irony is a characteristic of Johannine style of writing which she believes the author used to achieve a goal. She argues that this literary technique has a theological significance (1986: 3).

She further says that the reader of this Gospel is quite important and the reader, she argues, is able to accept or reject the revelations of Jesus about God and the reader can also

interpret these revelations in the light of her/his understanding. The Fourth Gospel also depends on a shared frame of reference about Jesus and God, that is the frame of reference of the author and that of the audience. This common context is attained from the post-Easter perspective and the centrality of this perspective is the Paraclete which O'Day suggests is introduced by the Evangelist. She stresses two levels of comprehension, that is one before and another after the teaching of the Paraclete. For example, the disciples remembrance and full understanding of Jesus' temple saying, was only achieved through the Paraclete¹ (1986: 7 -8).

Thomas Brodie on the other hand agrees with what O'Day says about the purpose of the Gospel. He sees the purpose of writing not only "that you may believe" but that the believing should be rich and content that Jesus is the anointed, the Son of God and that through this richness of believing "you may have life in his name." He suggests that the statement on the purpose of writing spells out some of the meaning of blessedness, because those who believe were said by Jesus to be blessed or fortunate (1993: 572).

Finally, Barnabas Lindars does not see the book or the Gospel of John as a Gospel dealing with moral questions. Good and evil are treated in terms of truth and falsehood, and sin is usually a matter of refusal to put faith in Jesus. The only moral issue is the love command in 13: 34 - 35; 15:1-7 (1990: 14 -15).

If the purpose of the Gospel is that you may believe, who were the audiences of this gospel and why did they need such reassurance from whoever wrote this Gospel? This then leads us to the community of the Gospel of John or the intended audience of the Gospel.

¹. *John 14:25*

3.4 The Johannine Community

Most of the Johannine community members were expelled from the Synagogue. This gives Rodney A. Whitacre the reason to suggest that they were of Jewish origin. He further says that the most natural interpretation of 7: 35 and 12: 20 refers to Greeks who were interested in the culture and religion of Judaism. Christianity was obviously a form of Judaism and some Gentiles and Jews who joined and became Christians wanted to know what continuity Christianity had with Judaism. Thus, the author's assurance would be of value to both the Jewish and the non-Jewish members of the community (1982: 11 - 12).

Whitacre further argues that a considerable portion of the author's audience seems to be upset because they are, as he quotes P.S. Minear saying, "disciples at second hand." There is a contrast between two groups - those who had been present in the events narrated and those who had not been present. A clear reference to those groups is found in 17: 20, for example, the "other sheep" of 10:16 could refer to the disciples at second hand, whose place in a united flock is here assured to be the will and work of this self-sacrificing shepherd. There is much discussion on whether these "other sheep" are Gentiles or Jewish Christians in synagogues in the Diaspora, but the text itself does not speak explicitly in such terms.

Minear argues convincingly that these disciples at second hand were in need of "reassurance because their distance in time and space from Jesus created difficulties." The nature of these difficulties were:

- (a) The observation that "it is almost certain that in John's day the hostility of the synagogues was undermining the courage and poise of John's community.

- (b) The Johannine Christians have not only experienced expulsion from the synagogue, but also at least some of them seem to feel separated from their own community's past as well" (1982: 12 - 13).

I suggest that it is difficult to cope with the present as well as the future if you are cut off from the past; and the past is what usually people are used to and what they are sometimes comfortable with. I suggest again that in most cases, marginalised poor communities are not happy with the present but they do learn how to cope with their present circumstances. They are not at ease with the future because they are not sure what it has in store for them.

I think that it might also be true that such communities hope for a bright future which might bring better living conditions for them. In that case, they go to the extent of joining movements and following people or leaders who seem to them to have the ability of delivering a good future for them. This might also have been true for the second hand Johannine community. They had high hopes in the movement but it might not have delivered anything good for their life contexts and instead of an improved life situation, they might have been faced with a worse one which might have included being persecuted. Thus people had to find an alternative for consoling these disillusioned members.

3.5 The Historical Aspect of the Fourth Gospel

A number of the historical Jesus scholars do not perceive the Gospel of John as a historical document that does justice to the chronology and events pertaining to the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Most of these scholars strongly argue that the gospel of John is a theological gospel and does not have anything to do with the quest for the historical Jesus, while others do believe that there are overtones of history in the Gospel.

Brown further cautions scholars to proceed with care on whether or not the Fourth Gospel can be a witness to the historical Jesus. Although scholars need to be careful about the use of John in scientifically reconstructing in detail the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, he

(Brown), does believe that John is based on a solid tradition of the works and words of Jesus, a tradition which at times is very primitive. He believes that John gives an accurate historical information about Jesus that no other gospel has kept, for example that the ministry of Jesus lasted for a year (1976: LI).

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, one can say that, despite the fact that scholars do not agree on who the author of the Gospel of John is, where the Gospel was written, or what its date of origin is; most of them agree that it is faith nourishing. Most of them also agree that the intention of the author of the gospel was that people may see, believe and live.

Most of the research done so far is done by men on Mary Magdalene, with no reference either to the context of the text or that of the readers as women.

This leads us to the interpretations of the Western Feminists work of Mary Magdalene in John and see if they empower or do not empower Southern African Township Christian women.

CHAPTER 4

4. WESTERN FEMINIST SCHOLARS' INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MARY MAGDALENE STORY IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined scholars' views on the background of the Gospel of John. In this section, I will give women reading of the story of Mary Magdalene as opposed to a patriarchal reading. My task in this chapter is to give a summary of the interpretations of Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John from the Western Feminist point of view.

This is because Western Feminist interpretations of the bible are dominant in the field of Feminist biblical scholarship.

Are their works important for Township Christians, who are not scholars in the Biblical field? Are their concerns the concerns for Southern African Township Christians? Are the issues they bring up issues at all for Township Christians in Southern Africa? The interpretations of the Bible in the townships have been influenced by the West too. And who are the recipients of these interpretations in the township Churches?

The bulk of the membership of the churches in townships are women. Most of them read and interpret the bible during their Manyano meetings on Thursdays. It is true that they are not trained theologians or interpreters of the Bible. Their interpretations are marginalised for that reason.

One of the problems is because there is no single work done by any Township Feminist Theologian that we can refer to as yet. Most of the work that has been done by Feminists in the townships is on the social, economic, political struggles of township women during

the times of Apartheid. Little has been done on the religious or theological aspect of their lives, especially their interpretation of the Bible.

In this chapter, I will summarise the approach used by some feminist Theologians who interpret the story of Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John. I will also examine where they fail to reach the Township Christian Women, their churches and life today. Does the way they interpret the story have some effect in the empowerment of the Township Christian women? For me, social, political, cultural, traditional, economic and religious experiences constitute a holistic Christian life. Are all these met by Western Feminist Scholars? And are these issues related to the context of the Township women's daily experiences? Let us now examine their work.

4.2 Ben Witherington III

Ben Witherington III (1987), is more interested in the study of Jesus's attitude to women and their roles as reflected in His earthly life. He uses the historical critical method to try to illuminate the relationship of Jesus to the women who were his followers. He also uses the text, as well as extra canonical texts, to try to establish the role these women played in the ministry of Jesus. Mary Magdalene, for instance, is not discussed alone in Witherington's work, she is rather grouped with the women who followed Jesus. His concentration is also more on the Synoptic Gospels and in the literary meanings of some phrases used by the Evangelists.

Witherington is further interested by the patterns used by the Evangelists in portraying the roles of women in stories related to the work of Jesus in the world. He asserts that some of these women, and not the twelve apostles became the primary witnesses to the crucial final events in Jesus' earthly career - his crucifixion (1987: 118).

He also says that Mary Magdala, as the author refers to Mary Magdalene, might have played a crucial role in the Passion and the resurrection events (i.e historically). Thus the evangelist mentions her by name, for reasons best known to the evangelist, says Witherington (1987: 121)

Witherington rightly points out that Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John is not mentioned first. He suggests that this might be so because Mary Magdalene was not an important witness at the foot of the cross.¹ (1987: 121)

He further suggests that the Beloved Disciple and Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross are representative of male and female disciples (1987: 122). He also rightly points out that the material of Mary Magdalene on the cross in John 19: 25 - 27 is unknown to the evangelists of the Synoptic Gospels. For according to him, the location and scene is historically improbable. He thus questions whether the Beloved disciple was a historical figure, for he is not one of the twelve. In John, Mary Magdalene is portrayed as one who witnessed Jesus' death and was ushered into the community of faith, and thus became a fully fledged disciple (1987: 123).

4.2.1 Is his work empowering to any woman?

First of all, some Johannine scholars like Raymond Brown challenge scholars like him, concerning their tendency to question the historical probability of the existence of the Beloved Disciple. Brown accepts that the Beloved Disciple was idealized, but he is a historical person and was a companion of Jesus of the Gospels ecclesiology (1979: 31).

Secondly, Witherington's whole interpretation of the role of Mary Magdalene in the Gospel, as well as that of the other women like that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is quite

¹. Scholars do believe that people in the world of the Gospels were mentioned in the order of their importance. The one who is mentioned first is more important than the one who is mentioned last.

depressing, because he perpetuates the traditional roles that western feminist scholars oppose and which the liberated Black women of Southern African Township churches are trying to get rid of.

His ideal roles for women are those of mothers, of dependents and of people who are ushered into the faith community. For he said that the community of the Beloved disciple is best served by these women as mothers and not as leaders. His perception is that women cannot handle leadership positions, but they can handle all the domestic responsibilities that they are already used to and they are best as mothers and wives. They cannot take charge but they have to be taken charge of. For him, a woman's dignity is only restored when she fulfils her traditional role as mother. He believes that, in this way, the community of the Beloved disciple is served by traditional roles and relationships.

His work is dangerous for ordinary Southern African Township Christian women who are already practising these roles and who find respect through being mothers and wives. But the reality of their daily lives has proven that they cannot rely on their male relatives for survival any more. In fact, most of them are breadwinners in their homes. His work is also not empowering to feminist biblical scholars in the Townships.

What are the perceptions of other scholars on the role of Mary Magdalene?

4.3 Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel

On the other hand, Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel (1987), has a thematic approach to her work. In contrast to Witherington, she looks at Mary Magdalene as a character on her own and she also explains and challenges how traditional Western theology has limited the character of Mary Magdalene to disputes or petty talks of sexual moral issues.

Like Witherington, her work is not limited to the Gospel of John. She deals with the character Mary Magdalene in all four gospels. She does not confine herself to the Bible only; she also examines the historical developments of how the church and its theology or theologies portrayed this character to suit their own ideological purposes. Feminist perspectives of the character of Mary Magdalene are also studied, as well as poems that were written on Mary Magdalene.

Her interest is not in Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross and no reason is given for that. She begins by critiquing the role of Mary Magdalene when she met with the risen Jesus in John 20: 11 - 18.

She further cites a poem that was written by Ernest Egglemann. Mary Magdalene is seen as a lover of Jesus. But the author of the poem talks to Jesus and he can imagine how Jesus was in love with Mary Magdalene and refers to that love as a divine love (1987:63).

Some of the themes used by the church in the past are also examined by Moltmann - Wendel. Such themes are: "Care for those in danger". This theme was based on morality, health and occupation. This concern is said by Moltmann-Wendel to have started in the Middle Ages in the religious order of Penitents of St. Mary Magdalene, (the 13th century Magdalene convent). She says a number of Mary Magdalene convents were formed to empower women or young girls with house skills or house managing skills like sewing, ironing , washing, helping in the garden, etc.² (1987: 63 - 64).

Some of the opinions of the male apostles like Peter and Church Fathers like Augustine on Mary Magdalene are also examined. In the Apocryphal Gospel of Mary Magdalene, Peter questions the status of Mary Magdalene as a messenger from Jesus. Augustine on

² Moltmann-Wendel has taken this information from the Caliver Kirchemlexikon, 1973.

the other hand accepted Mary Magdalene as the Apostle of the Apostles who was given this position through the Holy Spirit (1987:64).

The second theme of Moltmann-Wendel also examines is that of "A Great Sinner." She is suggesting that our picture of Mary Magdalene is due to the literature and art of Western tradition. Protestant theologians also fell "victims to this error" she says even when they understood themselves in terms of the Word of the Bible. She challenges the history of the Western Church to look at Mary as a woman with her own personal history, rather than as a prototype of the sinful woman (1987: 64 -65).

She goes on to suggest how this fateful development began. She does that by citing Biblical narratives which place Mary Magdalene closer to Jesus, while his mother did not have anything to do with the Jesus movement. She (Mary Magdalene) stood by Jesus throughout his life, sensitive and understanding (1987:65).

She then goes on to explain the origins of the name Mary, which she says was made fashionable by Queen Mary, Herod's first wife.

This trend had the sorry consequence that church fathers, Popes, Bishops and those following them, artists and writers, could throw all the Maries into the stock pot and take out again and present an appropriate selection from them in accordance with their needs. The spice for this was provided by the story of the woman who was a great sinner, which precedes that of Mary Magdalene's call. The Church has tormented women of all ages with the view that they are sinful like Maries and of doubtful piety. (1987:65).

Furthermore, she studies Luke 8 and she says that this passage got its entry into the medieval journals which say that women who are sexually promiscuous end up being mentally sick. She challenges this concept and she sees it as fateful, for these kinds of interpretations are sexist and are detrimental to the empowerment of women.

She also continues to challenge the biased conceptions of the patriarchal church on sin. The sin and impure lives of the male disciples she says are not seen by the patriarchal church as a prototype of sin. Sin is constituted as feminine. The structure of Mary Magdalene was to kindle male fantasy. This kind of Mary according to the author, was brought to women through sermons and paintings and she says Western women are challenging this image (1987: 66).

Her third theme is "The Biblical Mary Magdalene". She says, originally, Magdalene was only known as Mary from Magdala, a commercial town on Lake Gennesaret.

In male fantasies, she usually seems to be unmarried, young and beautiful. But perhaps she was already aged, had a marriage behind her which provided the means with which she was able to help the Jesus movement, and showed traces of the illness which she had overcome (ibid).

She might have been a leader. Thus she also suggests that there might have been a conflict between those who went contrary to the household of patriarchy. (ibid).

She says that John says the obvious about Mary Magdalene at the tomb. That means that John agrees with all the other Evangelists on what actually happened between Jesus and Mary Magdalene at the tomb. But the only strange phrase according to her was,

Do not touch me! I have not yet returned to my Father.

The phrase is cold, strange and rejecting and it destroys all feelings of returning happiness. For her, the whole scene is like a continuity which women want with Jesus and it is broken by such a phrase (1987: 71).

For her, Mary Magdalene experienced physical salvation that no one else experienced. She loved Jesus. The lost body of Jesus makes her doubt and not his living body. She

became a broken person according to her. She further translates the phrase, "Do not touch me", as

Grow up, be mature! Accept the grief of parting.

For the author, the sin of women is not pride, but persistence. And for her, Mary Magdalene may be regarded as the first Apostle. She ends this sub-section by challenging women of today to write a theology of Mary Magdalene (1987: 75).

Her other theme is "Biblical elements in the tradition about Mary Magdalene." She begins this section of her work by questioning how the Church accepted the fact that Jesus had a special love for a woman who was once mentally ill. She continues by breaking Mary Magdalene's story into further sub-themes which feature in the Bible.

start
(i) Mary Magdalene preaching. It is said that Mary Magdalene was a great preacher during her times and Catholic women who are pro-priesthood of women in the Catholic church use her to illustrate that there was an apostolic women's ministry in the early church. One of its known representatives was Mary Magdalene who had a leading position in the Church. In John she is the bearer of the tradition in a concealed form (1987: 75 - 76).

The author uses other gospels which are not in the Canon to illustrate her point. She says in the Gospel according to Magdalene, Peter complains to God that the Redeemer has revealed himself privately to a woman. He asks if they now have to repent in order to listen to her. According to the experiences of the early church, she is superior to the male disciples (1987: 77). In Gnostic writings, she had to become a man in order to be saved. This is because the "logos" is male and the true Gnostic has to recognize the "logos" within her and him and set it free to be re-united with the Christ "logos." In other words, she does not have to change physically to become a male but spiritually (1987: 78).

The author also analyzes art in relation to the role of Mary Magdalene from the Middle Ages. The Medieval Ages tradition was predominantly male and the official Church History does not have a trace of women. In the 11th and 12th centuries legends grew up around Mary Magdalene as a result of which her role as the Missionary Saint to France became increasingly clear. Early legends quotes her exiled from Palestine and coming to Provence with her spiritual director Maximinus. The tradition about her is exclusively that of a sinner, and for the reform movement of Cluny she became the symbol of the victory of spiritual over worldly life.

In the second series of the legends, she becomes emancipated from her spiritual director Maximinus and she begins to preach, to convert, in one instance she even baptizes (1987: 78). In art, she is still depicted as a subordinate of Maximinus. She is a preacher in the 13th century.

In Chartres Cathedral in 1230, Mary Magdalene was represented as merely a saint with a halo. Only in the 16th Century at Chalonsur-Mame do we find a picture of Mary Magdalene also baptizing - "The woman has regained the role that she has lost." (1987:79).

In Lubeck she can be seen performing the task of enthroning her brother Lazarus as Bishop of Marseilles. In one manuscript, the holy Spirit is hovering over her in the form of a dove. " For a short period Mary Magdalene has left her role as a sinner and returned to her task of proclamation. The brief but impressive, emancipation ended with the Reformation" (1987: 79-80).

(ii) "The healing and call of a mentally ill woman." The church was not able to cope with the demonic illness of a woman who had an intimate relationship with Jesus. Mary Magdalene has become a monster, a prime example of sin and sexuality,

because her exciting choice and unique story was available for corresponding fantasies (1987: 81). And in sexual questions, the early church remained profoundly uncertain, because of the practice of Jesus - The fact that Jesus commissioned these immoral women were facts which were difficult to cope with in the solid development of Christian morality (1987: 82).

Augustine sighed over them and regretted that the story of the adulteress was ever included in the Gospel of John. He explained the earlier omission with reference to anxious husbands (1987: 82).

Demonic illness was thought to rise from sexual obsessions. She says Mary's artificially created portrait might have met moral needs, but her history could never again be read without falsification, i.e how the church has come to portray her. She became the example of forgiveness (1987: 82).

Moltmann-Wendel criticises Western theology with its perceptions of a one sided sin, i.e in human corporeality and especially in women. The history of Western Morality is still stamped by Mary Magdalene the sinner. Magdalene convents, refuges and homes took pity on fallen girls.

Luther followed popular feeling, and used Mary Magdalene as the ideal image of his doctrine of sin and grace. Moltmann-Wendel sees this as a misuse of Magdalene (1987: 83-84). In 1903, theologians warned against this misuse in doctrines and preaching of the church. This was a distorted portrayal of Mary Magdalene.

† Women are still suffering from a theology which separates body, soul and spirit and which has made it impossible for us to rediscover our body as God's good creation.

(iii) "The Friend of Jesus." Mary Magdalene is rediscovered in theology as a lover, and this has not done her justice. "When we connect her closely with tenderness, she is misused as compensation for a rough world. When we want erotic needs to be satisfied by her, she becomes one dimensional. Her eroticism may be freed from the ghetto of a sexuality understood in narrow terms, and flow over into different relationships" (1987: 89-90).

4.3.1 Is her work empowering?

Moltmann-Wendel's work is quite illuminating. She traces the original role of Mary Magdalene and thus goes beyond what the church recognises as canonical. For the mere fact that people hover between sinner to proclaimer gives us the right to suspect the validity of the portrayal of Mary Magdalene in the Bible.

For her to challenge the whole concept of women as relational beings who are objects of the love of males, also empowers us who are aware of this kind of socialization that reduces women to nothing better than sexual objects. I choose to say that it is empowering for those who are conscious of such abuse, because most of the ordinary women in the townships do not concern themselves with such issues.

Moltmann-Wendel further suggests that every time has its own problems. The church does not realize that women of the New Testament world do not provide any answers for the problems women encounter today.

Finally, I suggest that her work can also enlighten any ordinary women in the township churches. It fairly challenges the concepts of Western theology and western perception of women and the whole concept of sin as understood and preached by the church. Sin is not only sexual. There are many other sins, and sins that are destructive to the existence of many women, especially African women in the Southern African townships. These sins range from oppressive gender roles, oppressive cultural traditional religions,

downgrading women to roles of supporters of the church coffers only; and saying that they are the best Sunday school teachers because they are nurturers and they understand children better; making them mere supporters in the church and not co-workers as God intended them to be.

We will now examine the work of Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza.

4.4 Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza

Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza (1983) is interested in reconstructing the history of New Testament women. She uses historical critical tools to recover the life situation of women in the early church.

She also uses extra-canonical texts to reconstruct the struggle of women in the New Testament and she reads the Biblical texts carefully in order to recover the buried history of these women.

To be able to do that, she begins with the text to find traces of the role of Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John. For her, the anonymous author of the Gospel of John, puts women at strategic points in the Gospel. Mary Magdalene is the last to appear in the fourth gospel standing under the cross of Jesus. She not only discovers the empty tomb but also is the first to receive a resurrection appearance of Jesus. Through that, she becomes the Apostle of the Apostles. She is the primary Apostolic witness to the resurrection (1983: 332).

She also studies what the other gospels say about the Mary Magdalene tradition and what the Jewish Christian pre-Pauline confession in 1 Corinthians 15: 3 - 6, and the Gospel of Luke which advocates that Peter was the first to see the resurrected Lord say (1983: 332).

She further also uses the extra canonical texts to examine the Mary Magdalene vs Peter traditions. Furthermore, she scrutinizes the theological debate over the Apostolic primacy of Mary Magdalene and that of Peter (1983: 332).

In addition, she continues to warn the readers of the Mary Magdalene story in the garden not to psychologise this episode. She explains her grief as representing the grief of the disciples after the departure of Jesus (1983: 332 - 333). Her view here is contrary to that of Moltmann-Wendel who psychologises the whole scene in the garden for her interpretation of what she calls the cold attitude of Jesus towards Mary Magdalene that Mary should grow up, and accept the grief of parting.

She further also examines the faithful discipleship of Mary Magdalene. She says she was a faithful disciple in three ways, viz:-

1. Jesus addresses her as woman. She also goes on to look into the verb "zetein" (to seek) and suggest that it had a different meaning for the Johannine community, viz to "study" and to "engage" in the activities of a disciple.
2. She recognises Jesus when he calls her by name. She quotes the discourse of the good shepherd in John 10. Mary Magdalene is characterised as one of "his own" because Jesus calls her by name and she recognises his voice.
3. Her response is that of a true disciple - "Teacher." (1983: 333).

In conclusion, Fiorenza suggests that Mary Magdalene and the other women in the Gospel of John are paradigms of women's apostolic discipleship as well as their leadership in the Johannine communities (1983: 333).

She also suggests that the Gospel of John does not advocate an adaptation into the Christian community of the Greco-Roman patriarchal power structures, where the male relative is naturally taken as the head of the family. Instead, the Johannine community became an alternative community where these so called natural structures were non-existent. The power structures of the then patriarchal system were replaced with relationships of equality which were characterised by shifting relationships of power and by alternating leadership and power through alternating services and love among the disciples which was a community of friends.

She further suggests that the Johannine discipleship was inclusive of women and men. She says that women were given prominent places in the narrative.

4.4.1 Is her interpretation of the text and her method empowering?

Interpretations of roles of women in the early church have always been distorted by the androcentric languages of the interpreters, according to Fiorenza. She suggests that a good interpretation will have to consider the context of the original language because translators are influenced by their frame of reference and the way they perceive or experience life.

Her caution is a tool for present Southern African scholars and many others, who are still pursuing New Testament studies. It is good for us to talk of doing theology from grass roots level but we also need to equip ourselves with what the world of scholarship demands of us, i.e knowledge of the original Biblical languages; socio-historical tools to the background of the world of the Bible, and so on.

This shows that her concerns in her work are more academic than anything else, while Township Christian women have other concerns of survival and their present political situations.

Are Diane Jacob-Malina's concerns different from those of Fiorenza's? If so, how?

4.5 Diane Jacob-Malina

Diane Jacob-Malina - begins her work with the study of the Patriarchal system as manifested in the society and its customs. In other words, she is doing an Anthropological study of the patriarchal system in the Johannine community. Her main interest is on the "death" of the patriarchal perception in John. She further studies the social inequalities manifested in the patriarchal system then, for this was how the universe was created, according to the patriarchal system.

The usage of language is another factor that Malina also examines. She says that the language of people limits the relationship between God who is the initiator of the Salvation process and Jesus who is the instrument of this process. As a result, there is inequality of relations between God and human kind, Jesus and people, women and men, spirit and flesh. Above all, no human has ever seen God.

She further says that the ordering of the world as understood by the people of the Middle East was around hierarchies. This perception of the ordering of the cosmos later permeated the cosmological understanding of the West.

Religions have used language to limit who or what God is to people. She uses the Islamic religion as an example.

She also studies the family relations as understood by the people then, and Jesus who was the agent of Salvation. She points out that God is referred to as Father over a hundred times in the Gospel of John, and those who came to believe are referred to as children.

Time is another factor which is also dealt with in her work. She says that time in the West is different from how the Johannine community understood it. For events that took place in the past, for example, Moses giving the Israelites Manna, are referred to as if they were events that took place during the times of the Johannine community. Time in the Johannine community does not have limits, it is endless or eternal.

She also uses the world of the generation of Jesus to show how patriarchy was "abolished" in the Johannine community. It was comprised of those who accepted Jesus and those who rejected him. The world of Jesus was an extension of the Kingdom of God.

The Johannine community did not have a limited perception of the ordering of the cosmos, as was understood by the patriarchal system. The cosmos of patriarchy was limited to human words and language, for God is confined to texts in human language. For her, the action of the Word becoming flesh in the Gospel of John was "the dagger thrust into the heart of patriarchy." She further says that people have limited what is known as holy, only to be the Spirit and all that is matter is reduced to sin.

4.5.1 Is her work empowering?

Language has always been a tool of marginalising people and concepts of life. The reading response theory also contributes to such limiting factors of language and how it is used. According to Malina, language can be a liberating tool or it can also oppress. It is clear from her study of the Gospel of John that language has both potentials depending on the users' intentions.

4.6 What is my standpoint?

I do agree with Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel that art, theological interpretations of the church, the intentions of creating convents that are named after Mary Magdalene, in order

to enhance patriarchal roles for women and girls that keep them inferior and poems that misrepresent the character of Mary Magdalene need to be challenged. I also agree with her that we need to write a theology of Mary Magdalene that empowers women of today.

I also agree with Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza that we need to reconstruct the history of the struggles of the women of the New Testament. The text on its own, will not be enough to do that, but we need to use extra-canonical texts to give us a better picture of who these women were. These tools have proven to be useful and helpful in reconstructing the history of the New Testament women. I also agree with her that reconstructing the history of women in the New Testament is a difficult task because not all the facts are at our disposal.

Diane Jacob-Malina, on the other hand, has also mentioned limitations that are created by language and time, which are human constructed. I agree that human beings have limited who God is because of the limitations of their language and perceptions of life.

I would like to take their arguments further than that, in order to suit my context as a Black Christian woman from a Township church. I share their concerns and I strongly believe that they are valuable to assist us in recreating the history of women in the New Testament world. In addition to those concerns, my township context demands that I wrestle with concerns such as conscientization of women about the fact that the Biblical interpretations of women are not what God intended, for they served the dominant patriarchal values of the world of the Bible. Our traditional and cultural lives are also another concern. I strongly believe that we need to choose what is empowering from our tradition and we need to empower ourselves to abandon what is not empowering us as black women in townships. The limited scope of choice for black women within their context is also of concern to me. Our context does not allow us to be independent women in our own right. These are my additional concerns and this is where I stand as a township feminist.

4.7 Conclusion

It is quite obvious that the translators of the contemporary Biblical versions we use today are products of the androcentric patriarchal mindset of Western Culture and thus could not do justice to texts that speak of Christian women positively. These interpretations presuppose that early Christian ministry was a male task and Biblical texts have been interpreted to suit their own perceptions and agenda (Fiorenza 1983:334).

These agenda could have entailed things like marginalizing written information on the history of women in antiquity, especially in the first century New Testament world. Their interpretation could have also served to manipulate what God's intentions are for the human race, especially with women as an oppressed group.

Finally, it is quite apparent that the Biblical readings and interpretations of these Manyano women, and their life context is non-existent in the reading response theory and the interpretations of the Western Feminist scholars. The concerns of the Western theologians are non-concerns for these ordinary readers of the Bible. Their concerns are how to cope with the violent deaths of their loved ones, who are in most cases their children or their husbands; how to deal with the fact that the bodies of some their loved ones can not be traced; the financial constraints they have; the cultural traditional practices that threaten their lives and their well being, and so on. These issues will be dealt with in detail later. But what follows now is how these women and other people deal with death of their loved ones and what impact death has on the bereaved, especially women. Before I deal with the contexts of the readers, I will deal with the context of violent death in the world of the text.

CHAPTER 5

5. THE POLITICS OF THE DEATH OF JESUS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I made a summary of western feminist scholars' interpretation of the Mary Magdalene story in the Gospel of John. Their concerns were non-concerns for ordinary township Christian women in Southern Africa.

In this section I will examine the context of violent death as background for the discussion of problems experienced by Jews in burying those who died a violent death under Roman administration.

The origin, role and the implications of the death and resurrection of Jesus was not studied from a social-political point of view by the western feminist scholars I have worked on in the previous chapter.

Roetzel (1985), like Susanne Heine (1987), believes that the public charge against Jesus leading to his crucifixion was a political charge. This school of thought does not exclude God's purpose of the Sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to redeem humankind.

In this chapter, I will first examine the social and political conditions that surrounded the crucifixion of Jesus.

However, I am aware that John's context may be different, but it preserves memories and traditions of the earliest Jesus movement. I thus accept Rensberger's description of the ministry of Jesus on earth in the light of this background.

My second step will then be to give a short description of the community of Jesus and all its ordeals. This will then be followed by the Jewish attitudes towards crucifixion as those who were considered to be agitators by the Roman state had to die on the cross.

The death of a hero in the time of Jesus was not an easy thing to accept. Because of that, people had to create a concept of the bodily resurrection; this concept will be dealt with thirdly. How the belief of resurrection began will then follow next and finally, by way of conclusion, I will then summarise the important points in this chapter.

5.2 The social and political context that the Jesus movement

Jesus' ministry on earth, according to Susanne Heine, was in conflict with the Roman State religion and theology of the first century and he was also opposed to the high taxes peasants had to pay because they proved to be demanding on their daily lives and thus left them impoverished. The state of the Temple in Jerusalem and what it stood for, as far as believing in God and sin were concerned, were not what God intended, according to the message Jesus brought to his followers and to those who supported and were in charge of the Temple. This message was perceived as disruptive by the Roman state agents, while it was a message of relief for those who were made unworthy of the love of God because of their poverty which was attributed to sin (1979: 77).

Rensberger also concentrates on the political scenarios in the gospel of John to show us that the mission of Jesus on earth also had political connotations. He focuses on the kingship of Jesus as seen by C.H Dodd. He further quotes Dodd saying that the crowds in 6: 14 - 16 attempted to make Jesus King. He also quotes the fear of the High Priests and the Pharisees who feared the wrath of the Romans on Jerusalem when they saw the large crowd that was following Jesus in 11: 48. This he says reflects the turbulent political situation of pre 70 Palestine (1987: 87).

He further also concentrates on the political nature of the charges against Jesus which he says are given far more emphasis in the Fourth Gospel. He looks at the term "basileus" (meaning king) which he says occur twice as often in John's account of the trial of Jesus (1987: 87).

The political situation of the people in the times of Jesus also had a negative impact in their lives, thus they hoped for the coming of the Messiah. For him, people who hoped for the coming of the Messiah had a mixture of political and religious ideals. The political freedom of the nation which they longed for was viewed as the goal of God's ways (1987: 88 - 89).

What kind of a community was this that hoped for a messiah and that was in constant debt; that paid high taxes; that observed purity laws and were these purity laws meant for the ordinary people and whose interest were they serving?

5.2.1 The community of Jesus

The community of Jesus - was an agrarian society and it had a relatively simple structure which was divided into five percent rulers and ninetyfive percent ruled. The ruling group virtually monopolized political and military power and lived from the produce of the peasants. The rulers took the surplus of the produce of the peasant farmers in the form of tax , rent or tribute to support themselves, the artisans, the military, the scribal retainees who helped them exploit and control the producers (Horsley 1989: 82).

For these peasants, religion was embedded within political and economic realities in the concrete social forms of family, local community and forms of domination by which one group ruled others (e.g the temple in Jerusalem which was ruled by the Herodian families, who were foreigners in Jerusalem) (ibid).

Horseley further says that the agrarian societies had common shared cultural heritage that were shared by the rulers as well as those who were ruled. One fundamental structure they shared was the temple.

This institution was religious, economic and political. The religious dimension served to legitimize the political and economic aspects of the temple and high priesthood. The common people were made to believe that the ultimate head of the community was God. Since the sixth century B.C.E, people owed tithes and offerings to God. This kind of theology in fact served to legitimize the fact that peasant producers supported the Temple and the priestly aristocracy¹ (Horsley 1989: 78).

The Roman State used the Zadokites, who were one of the priestly aristocracy, to exploit the peasants through the temple. Jesus challenged their type of theology; a theology that abused the name of God to gain their ends. The exploitation was not only "blessed by God" but God was made part of it by these priestly families.

Another form of exploitation by the Roman State was the tax system. There was a triple demand for taxes from the peasantry, and these were:

1. tribute to the Romans,
2. tithes and offerings for the temple establishment and priests, and
3. taxes to support Herod's vast expenditure and many Herodian families.

Horsley says that the peasants rebelled and thus the *Pax Romana* was established to mask the underlying repression and exploitation (1989: 80).

The Temple and the triple tax system were not the only forms of exploitation. For these peasants, land was also important. Not only was it a source of food for them, but it also had the remains of their deceased and it was also a source of wealth. During times of

¹. cf *Nehemiah 10: 35 - 39*).

drought, peasants used to borrow from those who controlled larger stores of grain, oil, or money². The peasants had to pay this back with high interest rates. They had to pay 25% for grain or 100% oil³.

The peasants could not afford to pay these high taxes and most of them lived in indebtedness. Some had to seek temporary solutions by borrowing to pay but this could not continue. The others than had to sell their sons and daughters into slavery and in many cases most of them had to give up their family land (1989: 89).

All these legalised means of exploitation clearly illustrated that the community of Jesus seems to have been a society that had deep social and political problems. This community might have experienced social collapse.

Thus the movement of Jesus offered hopes of enough to eat and other blessings for the peasants who had problems of hunger and poverty. This movement wanted to alleviate the poverty and debts of its people, since indebtedness was a serious problem. Above all, these peasants were taught in the Temple that sin in their communities served as an explanation for their suffering and illness and this movement offered an alternative explanation for the reason of their suffering (1989: 70).

The movement of Jesus also challenged the Roman patriarchal household where women were kept in the private sphere of their homes. He allowed them to follow him wherever he went and he also treated them as equals (Fiorenza 1983: 151).

Another belief that was also challenged by the Jesus movement was the purity system which was engineered by the ruling elite to achieve their goals, i.e to subjugate the peasants. For holiness was seen as purity in those times. Thus the temple was the holy of

². *cf* Matthew 18: 23 -33 and Luke 16:1 - 7

³. *cf* Luke 16: 5 - 7

hollies, and it was the focal point of their lives and observing the teachings of the Torah was also a form of holiness. Borg further says that this ideology of purity divided people into different social groups. This very system, also enforced taxation and those who paid the taxes were pure, while those who did not pay were not pure. Tithes, which were another form of the tax system were also enforced on the peasants. Those who did not pay their tithes could not get their crops bought by those who observed the purity laws, as the former's crops were considered to be impure (1974: 108).

All this illustrates that Jesus challenged the central organising structures of the society which was the dominant ideology of the world of Jesus. The author says that Jesus replaced these laws with compassion and inclusiveness. He included the sick, the poor peasants, women and every one who was marginalized in his communities.

Thus these people saw Jesus as their Messiah, who could deliver them from their present system of life. Jesus preached that the kingdom of God is at hand. This was enough good reason for Pilate to "wonder" about Jesus. Roetzel says that Pilate had enough experience with Jewish resistance to know that the kingdom was no spiritualized concept. The gospel of the kingdom would naturally gather on to itself the hopes and expectations of an oppressed people. This proclamation was surely to bring about a rival claimant, a king. Roetzel says that Pilate was thus justified in asking Jesus during his trial, "Are you the king of the Jews?" The trial of Jesus before Pilate is said by Roetzel to reflect the nervousness of the Romans about resistance movements (1985: 18).

This brings us to the crucifixion of Jesus for such people like Jesus were punished by the Roman State by hanging them on the cross. Dying through the cross could have had a different significance for the Jews during the time of Jesus, but for the Christian today, it is a sign of atonement.

5.3 Crucifixion

Crucifixion was a form of capital punishment by nailing or tying to a cross. It was common among ancient Greeks and Romans, and derived from Persia. This kind of punishment was unknown to Jewish law. The custom is said to have had a long history in ancient Palestine. Its exact origins are unknown, but it may have been brought to Palestine during the Persian times (Charlesworth 1992: 278). The first references in Palestine refer to the crucifixion of Pharisees and other opponents by the Haesmoneans (Charlesworth 1992: 287). Many Jews suffered this fate under Roman rule. The New Testament description of the Crucifixion of Jesus clearly shows that the Roman procedure was followed (The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia. 1959. 511).

We have said that rebels or agitators had to hang. In addition, the dead man was refused a burial in accordance with piety; the birds of the air were to devour the corpses. The remains were put in a mass grave. The Roman soldiers then had to keep watch, so that relatives and friends should not steal the body, to pay last respects to the dead (Heine 1987: 77).

The worst punishment was that relatives of the one crucified could not view the corpse of the executed person. They were also not allowed to stand near the place of the crucifixion, this also included the friends of the one who was crucified (1987:77)

It is quite obvious that the death of Jesus was a political death. It could have brought fear and despair to some of his followers while others might have been filled with the courage to continue the struggle. Thus popular beliefs, like the one on the resurrection of righteous people, developed.

This then leads us to the Resurrection and the life beyond, and how these concepts originated.

5.4 The Resurrection and the life beyond

According to Ancient Hebrew "Psychology", a human being is not constituted of three parts called body, mind and spirit nor even is she constituted of body and soul. A person is a unity of personality whose dissolution means the end of life in any true sense of that word. It is accepted that in life she has her body and all other physical properties. However with the departure of her "breath soul," she ceases to be a living person. What survives her is her ghost/shade, not her spirit - retaining a shadowy resemblance to its once living counter part, but bereft of that personal existence which once characterised the person (Russel 1960:144).

For a long time, people believed that a dead person's ghost/shadow went to Sheol, situated beneath the earth or beneath the great cosmic ocean on which the earth stood. Sheol was regarded as a land of forgetfulness, darkness and despair; there is no continuity with life on earth⁴ (Russel 1960: 144).

In some instances, if the dead person was a man of outstanding renown like Samuel, he was given superhuman powers and was believed to possess knowledge of the past and the future as well⁵. For an ordinary person, Sheol was a land of no return⁶. There were no rewards in Sheol - bad and good people were treated equally (Russel 1960. 144).

5.4.1 *How did the belief of Resurrection begin?*

The historical origin of the resurrection of the body was a belief that was established during the martyrdom of many righteous in Israel. This originated in the Maccabean Revolt of 166-160 BC, in which a number of Jews died. It was believed that only the very good were selected. Those who suffered martyrdom must share in the ultimate triumph of

⁴. cf *Psalms 30: 9 and 115: 17*

⁵. cf. *I Samuel 28: 1f*

⁶. cf. *II Samuel 12: 23 and Job 7: 9*

God's people, when God would at last establish God's kingdom on earth. God was expected to bring back, to raise up all those who had shown themselves worthy to take part in God's "basilea", for these reasons, they must have their bodies; the earth must give birth to them again⁷ (1960: 146).

With the rise of the Resurrection belief, the apocalyptists were confronted with the notion of a continuity of this life on earth with that in Sheol, in which the departed, as conscious beings, were not altogether cut off from the fellowship of God whose jurisdiction was supreme, even in Sheol itself (1960: 152). The souls of the departed, who were deprived of their bodies, must await the resurrection for their fullest expression and realization (1960: 153).

The belief in the bodily resurrection of the righteous people proved to have been a very strong belief.

5.5 Conclusion

The social, political and religious lives as it were, of the peasants, during the time of Jesus were very complicated. The Roman State was not just a political body, it was also involved in economic and religious matters, and the economic context of the peasants was legitimized by making the peasants believe that they were paying their due to God.

What is the social, economic and political life context of the Reader of this Gospel? What similarities and differences are there between the death of Jesus and that of the ordinary South African man? What are their perceptions of a violent death, life after death and the resurrection of human beings? These concerns will be dealt with in the next chapter, which will deal with the social context of the Reader.

⁷. ^u*Isiah 24 - 27 and Daniel 12*
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Having examined the implications of violent death for burial in first century Jewish context, I will now examine the implications of violent death for burial in South African context.

CHAPTER 6

6. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE READER

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have discussed the political, religious and social context of the peasant community of the time of Jesus and what their ordeals were. We have also studied the political death of Jesus and what it meant for the peasants then.

Southern Africans also experienced political violent deaths. What was the cause of such deaths in South Africa? The social and political context of the Reader will be dealt with first in this chapter. How people handle a political and violent death will be discussed next. This will then be followed by the African traditional concept(s) of death and how they prepare the body for the funeral. Their perceptions of life after death will follow next.

6.2 The social context of the reader

The Apartheid era was established in the era 1948 - 1960. The coming of power of Malan's apartheid government, according to John Pampallis (1991), stimulated the ANC and other liberation movements to shift to the more militant stand advocated by members of the Communist Party of South Africa (1991: 191).

Migratory labour was also the order of the day during the Malan government. Because of poverty and landlessness the families of the migrant workers experienced at the reserves, life became more impossible to bear. Thus the mine workers became more insistent in their demands for higher wages. The new government attempted to counter these developments with their policy of apartheid. They tried to do this by means of restrictions on political activity, the further exclusion of Blacks from parliamentary representation, stricter pass laws, suppression of African workers' rights and other measures. The

separation of races in all spheres of life was also in the frame of the apartheid system (1991: 180-181).

The suppression of Communism Act of 1950 was also a major breakthrough for the new government. Under this act, the Minister of Justice was given the powers to restrict or "ban" any person he considered to be engaged in communist activities. A banned person could be confined to a certain district, which was usually remote, preventing her/him from holding office in any trade union or political organization (ibid).

The group Areas Act of 1950, served to remove Black people from their homes and businesses to various townships in their own "group areas." The 1954 Natives Resettlement Act, led to the removal of thousands of Africans from the Western Areas of Johannesburg including Sophiatown, etc despite mass popular resistance (1991: 183).

In 1953, the Bantu Education Act provided for separate education. In 1963 and 1967 respectively, separate education departments were formed for Coloureds and Indians.

The Bantu education system was meant to provide basic knowledge.

Pass laws which were resisted by both Black women and men alike were also a means to exercise strict measures to control the Black people and to direct labour to where it was needed by white businessmen and farmers (1991: 184 -185). These people resisted this law by staging a large number of anti-pass demonstrations in various parts of South Africa, in both major cities and smaller centres, by burning the passes. A number were arrested and imprisoned. In 1956 Treason Trial arrests, and anti-pass campaigns continued with large rallies and demonstrations. During some of these marches and rallies, a number of people were killed, while some were wounded by police shooting at them. The banning of political organisations was announced on 28 March 1960, and this forced these political organizations to operate underground (1991: 211). A number of activities happened during the time these organisations were forced by government policies to go underground.

However in 1976, and even a little earlier than that, there was a revival of mass movement within the country. The Soweto uprising and student movement became very strong during those years. As the youth became more politicised, they saw the need to overthrow the whole apartheid system and replace it with a democratic government. They believed that this was the only way to improve the situation of Black people, and their poverty, insecurity, political power and inferior education.

In June 1976, pupils in various parts of Soweto marched towards Orlando Stadium to hold a rally. The march was peaceful, but the police opened fire and killed thirteen people on that day. These student uprisings continued till the end of 1977. Some of the youth had to escape by crossing the boarder; the best for them, they thought, was to join the people's liberation armies outside the country. Some of them reached their destination, while others died either in detention or on their way to join these movements (1991:250).

A number of people were then banned and murdered by the State. Steve Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness leader, was murdered in detention in September 1977 and this led to countrywide and worldwide outrage and school uprisings intensified (1991: 260).

This is the situation of the Southern African Black people in a nutshell. I know that the presentation of the history of Black people in South Africa as I have given it here is over simplified. I chose what I thought were major events in the oppressive lives of Blacks in the country.

Some people died violently because they did not obey the orders of the State. Most of those who died were the community leaders in Southern African Townships, while some of them were youths who wanted to join the liberation movements out of the country. How people ritually deal with violent death will now follow.

6.2.1 Violent death

Violent political deaths are not foreign to Southern African people. Township Christian women have experienced such deaths in their homes and those of their relatives. Some of these deaths were inflicted by people, especially the State during the Apartheid era. These women also saw these people die in front of them, while others have died in detention or have gone missing without any trace. Some of those who had missing relatives from the peak times of Apartheid, only came to find out in 1996, through the confessions of the people, who had contributed to their dilemma, to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

All the bereaved can still not accept the pain of losing their loved ones in such terrible ways. Most of them, like Mary Magdalene at the grave of Jesus, want to know where their deceased have been buried. They still want to mourn traditionally. For death is taken very seriously by all people. Untimely death (that of a young person who was not sick) is regarded as a serious interference in a human's life (Berglund 1976: 79). No one is used to the fact that people are born and will later die. People generally can still not deal with death as a concept and as a reality. According to Berglund, when death comes at the right time of life, i.e at old age, it is regarded as a natural continuation of a person's existence (1976: 79).

I suggest that a sudden and violent death of a young and vibrant person is one of the worst blows in our communities. People cannot handle this kind of death very well. They consider such death to be a result of evil (Berglund 1976:80).

A political death, which is usually violent, is still not handled well generally in Southern Africa, as those who were supposed to mourn the death of their loved ones were also harassed by the police for being related to the deceased.

Let us examine the Zulu way of handling a violent death and see what similarities they have with the Jews in handling a violent death. I have chosen Zulu rituals of a violent

death because it is well documented, and some Zulu speaking people still observe these rituals.

6.2.1. The Zulu Rituals of a violent death

For Harriet Ngubane (1977), the cause of death is a very important factor in assessing the degrees of pollution. For instance, she says that a violent death has a special degree of intensity in that its pollution is said to cling to the bereaved in such a way as to cause further disasters and calamities (1977: 81).

As a precautional measure against "umkhokha", a special kind of pollution, people do not allow the corpse within the premises; they are buried outside without a ceremony, and weeping is restrained (1977: 81).

This is because people fear that what has happened to their deceased relative will also happen to them and this has to be prevented by all means.

I also spoke to some people here in Pietermaritzburg who confirmed that this tradition is still strongly upheld in their communities, but those who consider themselves born again Christians do not observe this ritual because they believe that what has happened is God's will.

There are those who still observe the ritual. For these people, it is important to know where this person has died so that they should go and fetch his/her soul to bring it to the homestead. A certain branch of a tree, viz "umlahlankosi" is used to perform this ritual. This branch is carried openly and people understand its meaning and they believe that the person who carries this branch is not supposed to be spoken to. The person who carries this branch, is said to speak to this branch as if she is talking to the deceased. She tells the

deceased that now they are coming to fetch him to take him home and so on. They even tell the deceased when they rest on their way home.¹

Taking the soul of the person home is quite important in a Zulu context, since the dead are considered to be the living dead and still part of the family. If their souls are not taken to where they belong, they might remain where they have died and this might create problems for the surviving relatives.

According to one informant, some of them go to the diviners to establish the reason for the death. This happens even when people know or are told what the cause of the death is. Some of these might be seen carrying a chicken and a branch.

I suggest that in such circumstances where it is important to take the soul of a person home, it is important to know where exactly the person died, so that the ritual should be performed without any problems. This ritual is not performed by Zulu speaking people only. In the Kimberley context, the deceased is just told that they are taking him home. Nothing visible is taken to perform the ritual. Some of those, who go to a diviner, are given some traditional medicine that will not make it difficult for them to bring the deceased home, especially if the deceased did not die at home.

The constant questioning of the women in the Truth and Reconciliation hearings, "Where did you bury him, tell us" might illustrate how important it is for people to know where the person died and where he was buried. Because prisons are associated with bad luck in some communities, it might not be possible to go and fetch the soul from the cell that he died in. Even if these people wanted to do that, they might not have been allowed by the prison authorities, especially in a cell, for they hid many things that happened in prisons from society - as we hear through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

¹. *This information was given to me by one student, who is originally from Nongoma, but is currently an Assistant Warden at Denison.*

Some of the other people who have been killed by the state during the Apartheid era, are either still missing or some of them were buried by their members under strict surveillance of police and army. It is only now, through the assistance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission again, that the public has been made aware of how many people were killed by police and how some of them, whose disappearance still remained a mystery, have disappeared.

Thus, I suggest that missing bodies of these people is a serious problem for most of the surviving relatives of the deceased. They cannot perform the rituals of fetching the soul of the deceased and to bring it to the homestead, nor do they feel in touch with the deceased as living dead.

This is what happened to Southern African state agitators. Unlike the Ancient Roman State, the Southern African agitators could be buried by their family members (including friends), though the numbers of mourners who took part in the burial ceremony were limited and the funeral had to take place during the week, when most of the people were at work.

All the other rituals of mourning were left to those who mourn the death of the deceased. They were left to visit the grave side, and perform all the other rituals.

Those who died in the struggle of South Africa are also considered to be heroes by those who survived them in the struggle. The South Africans, like the Jews in the time of Jesus, also believe that a comrade who has died in the struggle cannot die a simple death. Their death is a consolation and it strengthens the struggle to continue for liberation.

The comrades' perceptions of life after death, is mostly shaped by African culture, and its perception of life after death and the resurrection of the body are quite different from that of the Apocalyptic.

This brings us now to a normal perception of death and rituals of death in general.

6.3 African Traditional Perceptions on death and Rituals of death

Death marks a physical separation of the individual from other human beings. People take pains to prepare the funeral rites properly says Mbiti. The reason for this is that people want to separate the living from the living dead properly, for fear that the living dead might come back and make demands that the living relatives cannot meet (Mbiti 1975: 121).

Ritually, in an African Traditional context, when an individual to whom the living were emotionally attached in a positive or negative way, or both, has died, an emotional separation must be achieved. The departed and the survivors must be released from each other, otherwise the living will remain miserable in their frustrated devotion, and the departed soul will be unhappy (Mercy Amba Oduyoye 1992 : 31).

Women in general are the ones who preside over birth and death. These rituals were carried out extensively in the past, but cannot be performed as they should be these days, due to the pressures of the modern world, especially in the townships. This demonstrates that African culture is dynamic and it is ever changing, especially in the townships, where rituals cannot be performed properly; but nonetheless, it (culture) has firm foundations in tradition. These traditions are the ones that continue to shape women's lives, both directly and covertly (Oduyoye 1992: 80).

This then leads us to the disposal of the body and how this is performed by some people. Who is traditionally allowed to perform this ritual and why will also be dealt with.

6.3.1 Disposal of the body

Burial is the commonest method of dealing with the corpse, and different customs are followed according to Mbiti (Mbiti 1989: 154). He further says that people who were not

given a full burial rite in the past are unmarried people, those who die through suicide or through animal attack, victims of disease like leprosy, smallpox, etc. This has changed and all people are given the same burial (1989: 154).

Contrary to Mbiti (1989), Ngubane (1977), argues that not all people have come to accept a sudden death in South Africa. Most of the people who died a violent death in some parts of South Africa, especially in Natal, as Ngubane said, illustrate that people who have died violently are buried differently from people who died a normal death.

Under normal circumstances, the body is usually washed with either pure water or water and traditional medicine. In other places it is said that people oiled the body through any orifice. The people who do the ritual cleansing of the corpse are usually ritual leaders and elders of a village (Mbiti 1975: 119).

Cleansing the corpse ritually is not common in Townships these days as the mortuaries have taken over this ritual. This is because these facilities are available to people now and, while some of these rituals are not performed any more due to people's fear of witchcraft, these rituals were still performed when the corpse came from the mortuary on the day of the burial.

Mbiti further says that individuals who are not allowed to wash the corpse are children, pregnant women, or suspected witches, so that they should not experience misfortune or their families (1975: 119). This implies that women also partake in the ritual cleansing of the corpse, as long as they qualify through age and marital status.

Though Southern African young women and children in Townships saw dead people in the street, who were killed during boycotts or riots, they are still prevented from performing rituals of cleansing the corpse, where it is still practised.

There is still a strong belief in life after death in townships. But nothing has been done to establish what people believe when their deceased has died brutally and when the corpse

of their deceased has not been buried by them, as it is alleged by these women in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings.

It is generally accepted in African contexts that the deceased still lives in the life after. What are their perceptions of life after death?

6.3.2 Life after death

Once a person has died, she cannot return to human life in her total being (Mbiti 1975: 124). Death is a departure and not a complete annihilation of a person. The deceased moves on to join the company of the body departed, the body decays but the spirit moves on to another state of existence (1989: 153). The deceased becomes a living dead - he is a "spirit" in the sense that he is no longer in the body, and yet he retains features which describe him in physical terms. He still retains his name - he will be referred to his family as so-and-so (1989: 157).

According to Mbiti, the living dead do appear to people, but only to those within his household or family and the deceased rarely appears to people who are not immediately related to him. They appear to the older members of their surviving human families. (1975: 265). There is no affectionate warmth which is usually shown through exchanging greetings between the deceased and the person who sees him (1989: 158). The living dead may give instructions or inquire about the family or make requests to be given something (1989: 158).

Mbiti further says that African people in general do not believe or expect a resurrection of an individual nor even collective resurrection (1975: 265).

What then are the similarities and differences between the death of Jesus and that of a Southern African comrade?

6.4 The similarities and differences of the death of Jesus and that of a Southern African comrade

There is a clear similarity between the death of Jesus and the death of a comrade in a sense that Jesus died a political death on the cross and the comrades also died a violent political death, though not on a cross.

The difference between the death of Jesus and that of the comrades is that Christians later attached religious connotations to the death of Jesus; they came to believe that Jesus died in order to reconcile sinners to God.

The Resurrection of Jesus as experienced by the followers of Jesus, especially Mary Magdalene, is foreign to ordinary human beings. African Traditional Religion does not know of such resurrection, as Setiloane and Mbiti say. The living-dead do visit their relatives but not in the same manner as Jesus at the time of his Resurrection. The kind of Jesus' Resurrection is a belief inherited by the Christians from ancient Judaism.

This stresses the point that Jesus and these South African comrades (including Southern African women), died for a just cause. The memories of what they tried to achieve for their "communities" will always be cherished by their followers. Though the political aspect of the death of Jesus is not known to most ordinary Christians in the townships.

6.5 Conclusion

Finally, it is quite obvious that people always want to pay their last respects to whoever died in the family as well as in the community. This is because, in an African context, a dead person is not dead but the deceased continues to live in the world beyond the present world and keeping the kinship lineage is quite important.

Having examined the problem of violent death and burial for the world of the first century Jews and the South African township society, I will proceed to a reading of the text from a South African feminist perspective.

CHAPTER 7

7. READING MARY MAGDALENE FROM A SOUTHERN AFRICAN TOWNSHIP FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, It was suggested that Jesus was a political and a religious activist who was killed by the Roman State. For in John 18: 33, during Jesus trial, Pilate asked him, Are you the King of the Jews? Furthermore, in vs 35, Pilate said that Jesus was handed over to him by his own nation as well as the chief priest. Such deaths had a number of issues that surround them. In their own contexts, political and religious activists were buried differently from the people who could have died natural deaths.

Southern African comrades, who were killed by the state, also died a political death. They were allowed to be buried by their relatives, though the government decided when and how many people needed to attend their funerals.

A political hero's death is witnessed by a number of people, i.e relatives as well as outsiders/neighbours. Their deaths are perceived differently by different people depending on their social status. Those who kill or order the killing see the person as an agitator and those who follow the person or who see him/her as their leader see the person as a hero.

Mary Magdalene is one such "outsider," in a sense that she is not described as a relative of Jesus nor of Mary the Mother of Jesus or other relatives of the Mother of Jesus who are said to be at the place of crucifixion.

I will deal with scenes that specifically refer to her in the Gospel of John. An exegesis of this literature will be done; examining it in its context.

What will then follow will be the story of Mary Magdalene witnessing the death and resurrection of Jesus from a Southern African Township Christian perspective and the story will be told in Setswana but will be explained in English.

Finally, the empowering aspects of Mary Magdalene as a woman in her context will also be analyzed.

7.2 An exegesis of the Mary Magdalene material in the Gospel of John

7.2.1 Mary Magdalene at the foot of the Cross (19: 25)

In verse 25, she is said by the author of the Gospel to be standing by the torture stake of Jesus.

Nothing is said about her relationship to Jesus, to Mary, mother of Jesus, to Mary, the wife of Cleopas, to Cleopas or even to the disciple Jesus loved most. She is not referred to as a wife nor even as a mother of so and so. In other words, the Gospel is silent about her relations/ or relationships or kinship. She operates outside the traditional patriarchal boundaries.

7.2.2 Mary Magdalene at the grave - 20: 1 - 10

In verse 1, Mary Magdalene comes to the memorial tomb, early in the morning. She is alone and she sees the stone moved away from the memorial tomb.

In John, she is not accompanied by any women. It is not clear what she went to do and yet the Gospel of Mark states that she and other women bought spices hoping to go and anoint the corpse of Jesus, as is customary for the Jews.

In 19: 39 - 40 Nicodemus brought myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. They took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices as was the burial custom of the Jews.

It is interesting how John portrays men active in dealing with the body of Jesus in public. Two men are publicly in charge of moving and ritually preparing the body of Jesus. Both of them are said by the Evangelist to have been secret disciples of Jesus. Joseph from Arimathea in 19:38, and Nicodemus in vs 39 of the same chapter. These two men were not ordinary citizens in the Roman State in that time. They were "government officials."

Could it be that, like some of the Southern African state officials, especially Black police men, that these people could not face being cast out of their jobs and their comfortable life styles, and, like the South African police during the apartheid times, they were only in the jobs to be able to work for their children and wives?

The author of the book of John further portrays Mary Magdalene as helpless; she runs to two men, viz Simon Peter and the disciple Jesus loved most, vs 2. She tells them what has happened.

In fact, the whole of Jewish literature is silent about the role of women in rituals of death. It is quite possible that either the hand of the redactor of the Gospel of John or the sex of the author, or the Church Fathers during the times of Canonization of the Gospels and other material in the Bible, had something to do with the omission of women in these rituals. This could have been done because this was a public and political event, where women were not supposed to have been active.

Having said that, I suggest that Mary Magdalene probably went to the Memorial tomb of Jesus to continue what women were doing in Jewish death rituals. Or the death ritual of anointing and cleansing the corpse of Jesus was not properly done by Nicodemus or Joseph of Aramathea. For what they did was done in haste and in secret. The Gospel of Mark cannot simply say that they went to anoint the body of Jesus if it was not customary for women to do that. For in Mark 16: 1, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought (egorasan) spices in order to come and anoint (aleipswsin) him. This brings us to the many purposes myrrh and aloe had during those times.

The spice of myrrh had many purposes in antiquity. It was a drug used for healing wounds; the perfume had to cover the smell of wounds as wounds smelled badly in that hot climate (1975: 121), and myrrh also helped in fighting bacteria. Myrrh was also one of the components of enaimon - a drug for fresh wounds (1975: 210).

Again, myrrh with frankincense, pure or mixed with fats and oils were sometimes melted over a finished mummy or over the coffin itself (1975: 135).

The word myrrh comes from the Hebrew and Arabic word "Murr" meaning bitter (1975: 212). Myrrh can be planted and it is said by Majno to be tapped from a scraggy, unfriendly tree of crippled appearance, with a grey-white bark, and usually gathered from thickets not over three meters high. It is leafless most of the year, and its rough branches end in thorns. The bark tends to crack spontaneously letting myrrh trickle out even without "human¹-made wounds²". Eventually it hardens into reddish-brown masses.

The fact that it was known to Jewish culture for anointing corpses for burial is suggested by the answer that was given by Jesus to the crowd in the house of Simon the leper at

¹. *My own insertion, for the author said man-made.*

². *Human made wounds on the tree of myrrh can be traced back to an ancient Greek myth on how the tree of myrrh came about.*

In short, according to this myth, Myrrha or Smyrna was a daughter of Cinyras and Cenchreis. She was punished by goddess Aphrodite by making lust after her father. After some time the father discovered that the woman he has been sleeping with was actually his daughter, for she used to cover herself when she came to her father. He became angry and wanted to kill her. The gods hid her from her father and when she reached the forest, she was turned into a tree of myrrh. After nine months the tree burst and Adonis was born. When Myrrh's father learned what had happened to her, and about the whereabouts of the tree, he went and pierced the tree with his spear, and Adonis came forth. When the baby was born, the Naiades anointed him with the tears of his mother, which was the sap that oozed from the tree.

The myth goes on and on. This is not the space to discuss the politics of the myth and the moral teachings it was meant to have (Robert E. Bell 1991:315).

Bethany, when the "sinful woman" known traditionally to be Mary Magdalene poured perfumed oil over the head of Jesus. " [...], she undertook beforehand to put perfumed oil on my body in view of the burial." Her actions and the interpretation of Jesus also indicate that among the Jews, anointing the corpse before burial or for burial was customarily done by women.

I also suggest that Jesus could have been a hero for this woman in Mark 14: 8 and for other women who were marginalised for being publicly known as sinners, for he was different from all those who rigidly adhered to the laws of purity without considering the context and the reasons for the "sin" committed. She knew that the destination of such "rebels" (as the Roman State would see him or saw him) and a hero for people like this woman/Mary Magdalene; who were empowered by his actions and words, was death through the way of the cross. Thus she broke the alabaster jar - a symbol of death and anointed his body by pouring perfumed oil over his head.

In verse 3 - 10, the Evangelist describes how Simon Peter and the disciple that Jesus loved most raced to the memorial tomb.

Nothing was said to Mary Magdalene. These two disciples did not touch the bandages they saw but they just looked at them vs 6. They can only defile themselves with the shadow of death or a corpse by going close, but they did not touch it. It could be suggested that they upheld the dominant laws of purity without being aware of it, or that they were not aware of what they are doing.

The purification laws state that, "He who touches the dead body for any person shall be unclean seven days; he shall cleanse himself with the water on the third day [...]"³.

³. cf. Numbers 19: 11 - 22.

7.2.3 Mary Magdalene - Commissioned by Jesus to spread the Good News - 20: 11 - 18

In verse 11, she stands alone outside the memorial tomb weeping (klaiousa). This implies that this is the only role women performed during rituals of death. Yet in other Gospels women are portrayed as active participants in anointing the corpse with perfumed oils, as we have said before in this chapter.

In verses 12 - 13, the Angels asks her why she was crying. She answers by saying that they have taken her Lord.

If Susanne Heine is accurate with her information on the banning orders that were placed on relatives and friends of the one who was crucified as we have said previously (1987: 77), then one can say that Mary Magdalene was very brave. She wanted to challenge the rules of the Roman State by giving Jesus a proper burial rite; embalming his body. Was she the right person to do that? According to African culture she is not, for we do not know if she was one of the older women in her community who could have been widowed or divorced.

In her state, she says to the person she thinks is a gardener, "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away" (vs 15).

I suggest that Mary seems to want to assume responsibility for giving Jesus a proper burial. It is rather strange that the Evangelist portrays her active in seeking for the body of Jesus and wanting to take it away, if she finds it. She does not think of defiling herself, as the dominant culture has it that every one who comes into contact with a corpse is defiled. Can it be because she herself is defiled every month by menstruating and that because of that she is debarred from a number of things for a number of days monthly; and is ritually cleansed every month that she does not see this (touching the body of Jesus) as a big issue, or could she have been perceived as a "defiled" woman anyway because of the attitudes of the people on account that she was a single woman who mixed with men in public places?

Mary Douglas, suggests that purity laws create boundaries around the ruling class, shutting out the lower classes. She explains that this happens when a community is under threat. Food laws and sex laws are carefully kept in such societies. For pollution rules resolve moral ambiguity and pollution arises where moral transgression is unpunishable (1984:137).

Her analysis of purity laws and why they were kept confirms Horsley's statement that the communities of Jesus experienced a social lapse and were thus under threat.

In vs 16, Jesus calls her by her name, and like one of the followers of Jesus, she recognises Jesus. She calls him teacher.

Jesus could have taught Mary Magdalene a number of things when she was among those who followed him. Being a women in her times, she might have been forbidden from so many things, including from appearing in public and being called by her name; for it was proper then to have been called so and so's daughter, so and so's wife, or so and so's mother. For these roles upheld the patriarchal household at the expense of women in those days; we have said in the previous chapter that Jesus challenged the patriarchal household and all that it stood for.

He might have taught her to claim what was rightfully hers. She might have been taught by Jesus to stand up for who she was and not be bogged down by what her society made of her as a woman.

In vs 17, Jesus says to her, "Stop clinging to me (me mou aptou), for I have not yet gone to the father." Why does Jesus not want Mary Magdalene to touch him when he used to allow women to touch him before he was crucified?

I am suggesting that Jesus is in between the past and the future at this stage. In his "Liminal stage", (Victor Turner. 1969. --94), he is not of this world and not yet of the

world beyond this one. He was in between life and death, then and now, the past and the future. Victor Turner explains that:

During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few of none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (1969:94).

This could have been a period of ambiguity for Jesus, for he was in the middle of being of this life and being of the life with the Father. This was a critical period for him as he could not have had powers to heal or to restore life, or even to give light to those in darkness. He had not yet gone through the transformative status of going to the Father.

Another reason why Jesus came into the world was to reconcile it with God as we have said before. Those who were reconciled to God were those who embraced and accepted Jesus according to the theology of John. Could the response of Jesus, "stop embracing me", have meant stop believing in me? If this can be the reason, why then would Jesus give such a command, especially if it is not life sustaining? Could this phrase be the insertion of the redactor? Why did he insert such a phrase?

If the phrase was inserted by the redactor, than I suggest that it might have helped to serve an ideological purpose. It might have been inserted to convince women that Jesus had personally told women to stop following him. Following Jesus for me meant being his disciple.

In vs 17(b) - 18, Mary Magdalene is commissioned to go and tell the Good News to the other disciples of Jesus.

She is the one who first talks with the risen Jesus and she is commissioned to go and tell the Good News. This is not what the Church emphasises in its interpretation of this text.

Instead the Church emphasises what the patriarchal culture is familiar with; the males spreading the Good News.

7.3 Conclusion

Finally, it is quite obvious that the Gospel of John wants to portray men active in ritually handling the body of Jesus. For it is Nicodemus who brought the myrrh and aloe, as is customary in the Jewish culture, as the Gospel says. But the Evangelist is at odds with the Gospel of Mark, which had women buying the ointments to anoint the body of Jesus. I suggest that though the author puts women at strategic points in the Gospel as Fiorenza said previously in this work, the author still wanted to comply with what society wanted women to be; i.e private beings who did not have to participate in political death rituals.

Through such information, I suggest that it is quite obvious that this was a woman's role in the ancient Jewish tradition.

We will re-tell the story of Mary Magdalene in this Gospel from the context of South Africa. The story will be told in Setswana but it will also be translated as it is re-told.

CHAPTER 8

8. RETELLING THE STORY OF MARY MAGDALENE IN SETSWANA

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have seen how the role of Mary Magdalene in Jewish rituals of death was diminished to nothing. Her character and how she related to Jesus is also undermined by the author of the Gospel of John who might have been engaging in male apologetic ideology; he was apologetic because he preferred to adhere to some of the patriarchal role of women, i.e by not writing what exactly they were doing in political deaths like that of Jesus.

This shows that women's stories have always been told but they were told through the eyes of males. They were the ones who determined what should be recorded and what should not on the history of women. They also determined who makes a good woman and who does not, which means the social values were also constructed by them.

I will re-tell the story of Mary Magdalene at the cross as well as at the tomb of Jesus from a Southern African Township perspective. As I have said in the previous chapter, the story will be told in Setswana but it will be translated as we re-tell it. I also will divide the story up the way I have divided it for the Bible Studies I have conducted. In this dynamic translation, I will try to be faithful to the literal sense of the text, but I will translate it conceptually into a Setswana social universe.

In this story, Mary Magdalene will be giving an account of her own experiences when Jesus was crucified to the resurrection.

8.2 Witnessing Jesus being crucified

Hee, ba mo bolaile dinokwane tse. Ke tla bona ke rile eng? A setlhogo se se kana kana. Mmaagwe motho le ena a eme, a bona ngwana wa gagwe a bolawa ke dira tse.

These enemies have killed him. What can I say? What cruelty. His mother also came to witness the killing of her son.

Ke Mary Magdalene. Ko gae ke kwa Magdala, mo motseng wa Galalea. Ke mosadi wa mohumi e bile ke nna ke neng ke thusa mokgatlo wa ga Jesu ka madi a ba neng ba a tlhoka. Barutwa ba bangwe ba a itse gore ke mongwe wa bone e bile ke thusa mokgatlo ka se se tlhokagalang. Ba dirwa ke boikgantso fela go amogela phatlalatsa se ke neng ke se direla mokgatlo. Ga ke bue se ka gonne ke ikgantse kampo ke batla go itira botoka mo go ba bangwe. Ke ipolela fela ka gonne bontsi ga bo bue sepe ka se keleng sona, ba bua fela ka se bona ba batlang go ntira sona, gore ke bonwe ke se sepe mo pele ga ditshabatshaba tsa basadi tse di fitlhang mo morago. Gape be dira jaalo go lo bontshe gore mosadi ga a itse go dira sepe kwantle ga molekane.

I am Mary Magdalene, and I am from Magdala, one of the places in Galilee. I just want to inform you that I am one of the disciples of Jesus and I am the one who was providing for the group financially. The other known disciples of Jesus know exactly who I am but they just want to distort my character to illustrate to you that a woman cannot do a thing without a life partner.

Ke tlile go lela le ba ba lelang ka gonne ke ne ke itse monna o o bapolwang gompieno mo sefapanong. Ke mo itse jaaka mokaolengwe le jaaka comrade ya me.

I have come to join those who are bereaved and I am at the foot of the cross of this man because I know him. He was my brother and my comrade.

Re ne re dira mmogo mo mokgatlong. E bile ke ne ke le mongwe wa ba ba neng ba rutiwa ke ena. Le nna ke ne ke le mo gare ga bao ba ba neng ba leka go tsibosa batho ba rona ka ditshwanelo tse bona le ka mokgwa o goromente wa Roma o neng o dirisa Modimo go gatelela batho le go ikhumisa ka bona.

I was also his co-worker in our movement/organisation. And I was also instructed by him. I was with them when they concientised people on their legal rights and about how the Roman government was abusing God to gain their own ends.

Ka gonne ke mosadi, e bile ga ke nna molekane kampo ngwana, batho ba mpona ke sa siama. Ba mpona ke iphasakaka le banna ba botlhe ba ke dirang le bona. Ga ba leke go batla go itse se ke leng sona. Ba a bobola, ga ba tlwaela mosadi a sena molekane mme a itse go bereka le banna go sena maratano le thobalano. Mo bathung ba, mosadi ke mosadi ka monna le bana. Le fa o ka tsofala o sena monna, o sale mosetsana.

I am not taken seriously by most of these people because I am a woman. For many, a woman can only relate to men conjugally. They are sick, they are not used to an independent woman. One can only become a woman when you are married and when you have children, until then, you are still a girl.

Ka gonne ke sale ngwanyana go ya ka setso sa rona, ga ke a tlamega go dira dilo di le dintsi, jaaka go tlhapisa setopo, go ja dijo tse di rileng, jaalo jaalo. Ba re moetlo ga o letle ngwanyana a dira se se tlamegileng go dirwa ke basadibagolo le bannabagolo ba lelapa kampo ba motse. Fa ke batla go ithuta setso sa rona ba nthaya ba re ke leka go itse thata e bile seo ga se a siama. Ngwanyana o tlamegile go ikokobetsa le go reetsa se bagolo ba se buang. Ga a tshwanela go botsa dipotso. Go botsa dipotso go bontsha bodipa le boganana. Seganana sa ngwanyana ga se bone lenyalo.

Because I am still a girl according to my culture, I am prevented from a number of things like certain foods and ritually washing a corpse, for washing of a corpse is done by either

elderly women and men in the family or in the community. When I tried to understand these customs I was asked to keep quiet for good girls do not ask questions, only stubborn girls do and such girls do not get married.

Ke lekile go lo bolelela ka ga me, ke a tshepa gore lo itse gore ke nna mang, ke tswa kae, e bile ke emetse eng mo botshelong.

I have explained who I am and where I am from and I hope that you now know what my convictions are.

I will also tell you of my ordeal at the grave of my comrade.

8.3 At the grave of Jesus

Jaaka tlwaelo, re tle re ye mabatleng go etela baswi ba rona. Re tle re ba tshase dinkgamonate gore ditopo tsa bona di se senyege kabonako. Ka Jesu, tlotso ya setopo sa gagwe ga e a dirwa sentle ka gone Nicodemase le Josefa wa Aramathea ba ne ba dira ba itlhaganetse ba tshogile gore ba se bonwe ke balekane ba bona. Jaaka o itse, dilo tse di dirwang ka potlako e bile mo mafifing ga di ise di siame gope.

Banna ba ba bedi ba, ba lebetse go phetegatsa ditshwanelo tsotlhe tsa go tlotso setopo. Ga ba a se tshapisa sentle e bile ga ba a se hapa sentle. Ke ka ga moo ke lekileng go reka dinkgamonate tse gore ke tle ke go dira se se tshwanetsweng go phetagatsa ka setso sa bogarona.

Nicodemus and Joseph or Aramathea did not perform a perfect ritual cleansing. I guess it is because they were scared of their fellow Jews. Because of that, I took it upon myself to come and perform a correct ritual on the body of Jesus, that is why I bought all these spices.

Batho ba le bantsi ba ipotsa gore gore eng nna Maria Magdalena ke tlamegile go dira matsapa a go tlotsa setopo sa ga Jesu ke sa nyalwa e bile ke se mongwe wa ba lelapa la gabo Jesu e bile gape ke se mongwe wa basadibagolo ba motse. Fa ba nale bothata ka se ke tlileng go se dira, nna ga kena bothata. Setso se nale le go gatelela batho, e bile nna ke gopola gore motho o itse go tlola melao ya setso fa o itse gore se o se dirang ga o se dire go utlwisa botlhoko. Le fa gotwe eng, senyama ga se boleele jaaka batho bangwe ka dinako tse dingwe.

Many people are questioning what I am doing at the grave of Christ when I am not a relative, or even any of the community old women who have the right to perform this ritual. If these people have a problem with what I am doing here, that is their problem, not mine. I do not believe that people can become unlucky if they perform these rituals on their own accord and without the blessings of the elders of the community.

Fa ke lemoga gore setopo sa ga Jesu ga se mo lebitleng, ke ile ka tlhakanya tlhogo. Ka ntlha ya go tlhakanya tlhogo le letshogo la gore ba utswile setopo sa ga Jesu, ke ile ka tabogela kwa go morutwa o Jesu a neng a mo rata thata le Simone Petoro. Fa ke ba bolelela ka se se diragetseng, le bone ba ne ba ile ba makala. Ka gonne ke mosadi, ga ba a ka ba dumela se ke ba bolelelang sona, ka ba re mosadi o rata go godisa marago ka maje. Ba ile ba tswa ba taboga, ba sa ntherise gore ba ya kae. Ka kutlo botlhoko le go swaba gore ga ba ntseye tsia, ke ile ka boela kwa lebitleng la ga Jesu, mme ka kopana le bona ba tshaba go tsena mo lebitleng.

I did not find the corpse of Jesus in the grave. Out of confusion, I ran to tell the disciple Jesus loved most and Simon Peter. Because I am a woman and men in my community do not believe women, they thought I was lying or exaggerating. I guess they wanted to see for themselves and they just ran out of the house not telling me that they were going to the grave to see for themselves.

Ba tshabile go tsena mo lebitleng ka gonne ba ne ba tshaba gore ba tla itsenya sefifi. Ke a gopola gore lo a itse gore ka segarona, motho yo o dubakanyang le setopo kampo yo o se atumelang kampo e bile a le gaufi le sona, o tsenwa ke sififi. O tlamegile go tlhapa sefifi seo, e seng jaalo ga a dumeletsege go sasaoka mo motseng. Nna ga ke bone botlhokwa jwa tumelo e. E bile gape kgwedi le kgwedi fa ke ya ngweding ba re ke a silafala, ke tlamegile go tlhapa sesila seo. Pharologano ke eng?

The two, the Beloved disciple and Peter were scared to enter the tomb because of our belief that any one who comes into contact with a corpse is defiled and has to be cleansed. The person does not have to roam around in the community. What difference does this purity law make for me. I am used to all this. Every month after my menstruation, I am expected to cleanse myself ritually. So, being defiled by the corpse of Jesus is nothing compared to what I undergo every month.

Banna ba ba bedi ba ba ile ba ntlogela ke le mongwe ke lela ke le tsietsing. Ke ne ke le mo tlalelong ka ke ne ke sa itse gore a ba utswile setopo sa ga Jesu go ya go dira meriana ka sona. Ka batho ba ba bantsi mo motseng wa rona ba totisa kgweebo tsa bona ka dinama tsa batho, le fa bontsi bo re dinama tseo di tlamegile go segwa mo mmeleng wa motho a ntse a phela. Ke ne ke sa itse gore ke nagane eng e bile ke dire eng. Se ke ne ke se batla e ne ele setopo sa ga Jesu fela.

I was left in the lurch by these men. Again they did not tell me anything and I was crying and I was confused. I did not know what to think any more. Could it be that they have stolen the body to make traditional medicine out of it in order to strengthen their businesses? But these people perform such rituals on living people's bodies, not on corpses. All I wanted was the body of Jesus.

Fa ke ntse ke lela, ke ile ka bona banna ba dutse ba apere diaparo tse di galalelang. Ba ba itseng setso ba re ke baengele, nna ga ke itse. Banna ba ba ile ba mpotsa gore ke lelela eng? Go bua nnete ya Modimo, ke ne ke sena ditlhong gore ke bonwa ke mang ke lela.

Fa ke fetsa go ba bolelela se se tlhagileng, ba ile ba nkgomotsa. Au, ba ba ne ba sa tshwane le ba ke dulang le bona. Ba ne ba tlhaloganya gore ke hutsafetse e bile ba leka go nkgomotsa.

Fa ke fetsa go bua le bona, ke ile ka bona monna a eme. Go bua nnete, ga ke itse gore ke eng se se dirileng gore ke gopole gore ke mmona mongwe fela yo o itletseng mabitleng. Fa ole mo tsietsing e e kana, ga o tshabe sepe. Ka go tlalalana, ke ile ka mmotsa gore a ga a ise a bone ko ba isitseng mmele wa ga Jesu teng. Fa ke mo lebelela sentle ke ntse ke lela, ka bona monagano wa gore gongwe o nale kitso ya kwa setopo sa ga Jesu se leng gona.

Still in my confused state, I spoke to two men who wanted to know why I was crying. These two were wearing bright clothes, but at that point in time, that did not mean a thing to me. After speaking to these two men, I saw a man whom I thought had come to the graveyard as we usually do. I was still crying, and he appeared very suspicious to me, and I immediately tried to persuade him to tell me where they have put the body of Jesus.

Monna o o ile a leka go bua mme go mo utlwa gona, ke ne ke sa mo utlwe le gore o ne a leka go tlhalosa a re eng e ne e se nna ke se batlang. Go lela gwa me go ne go kadile matlho a me e bile ke sa bone sentle.

My eyes were blinded by my tears. I could also not hear what this man was trying to tell me.

Morago ga sebaka, fa monna o a lemoga gore go tloga go senyega, ka gonne ke ne ke atimetse go idibala, a mpitsa ka leina. Le fa go twe eng, ke Jesu fela o ne a mpitsa ka mokgwa o monna o o neng a mpitsa ka teng. Ke itse lentswe la ga Jesu jaaka ke ikitse. Ke ne ka retologa. Kwantle ga go nagana, ke ile ka mo kgogogela mme ka mo tshwara. Ka bomadi mabe, o ile a nkgorometsa a nthaya a re ke se mo tlampurele. Ka gongwe o ne a tshaba gore ke tla silafala - mme Jesu o ne a sa tseele meetlo tsia. Ka gongwe o ne a sa kgone go itshoka go utlwa ke lela ka thata e bile mmele wa ka o roroma ka ntlha ya

letshogo le le tlhakaneng le boitumelo. O ne a tshaba gongwe go nkutlwela botlhoko. O ne a nkopa gore ke se mo tlangpurele ka gonne ga a ise a ye kwa go Rara.

This man called me by my name. I turned around to look closely at him, because I could recognise his voice. Out of excitement and shock, I embraced him, only to be pushed away by him and he said that I should stop embracing him for he has not yet gone to the Father. Could he have pushed me away because he feared that I might be defiled? But Jesus did not observe some of these laws of purity. Could it be because he could not handle feeling my body shaking and hearing me crying out of joy?

Se santse e le tlalelano ya me. Ga ke se ke tlhaloganye gore ke eng Jesu a ne a itshwere jaalo.

His action is still a mystery for me. I still cannot come to grips with such a reaction from him.

Nonetheless, our conversation continued.

8.4 The Great commission

Le gale, ke botshelo. Morago ga go tlotla sebaka, o ne a nthoma go bolela barutwa ba bangwe gore o tsogile mo baswing e bile o ile kwa go Rraagwe yo e leng Rraarona. Ke motlotlo ka gonne ke mmone ka ame matlho, ke ile ka mo tshwara e bile ke ile ka bua le ena. Ga ke a romiwa ke motho o mongwe ke romilwe ke ena ka sebele. Ke ile ka tlala boitumelo mme ragoga ka lebelo le le fetang la pele. Ke ile ka ya go ba bolela mme ka o itse gore go bangwe ba ba sa tseyeng lentswe la mosadi, bao bona ba se dumele.

I spoke to him personally and he commissioned me to go and tell the others that he has gone to his Father who is also our Father. I was proud that I have seen him and have spoken to him.

Ka o itse gore ba ba naleng kitso ba nale thata e bile ba kgona go ferekanya batho ka kitso ya bona kampo go aga setshaba ka yona. Bothata ba banna ba ba neng ba gana go amogela lentswe la me ba ne ba diriwa ke boikgantso le gore ke bona fela ba ba tshwanetseng go itse. Kitso ke sebetsa se se segolo.

Some of those who did not believe my message were too proud to accept such a message from me because I am a woman. As you know, knowledge is power, so they wanted to be the only ones who knew and the only ones who got fame by claiming that he has spoken to them personally.

Ka jaalo ge, molaetsa wa ka go basadi ba metsana ya Afrika Borwa ke gore:

Emang ka dinao lo itwaneleng. Ga go ope yo o ka lo emelang e bile ga go ope yo o ka kwalang ka ga lona ka mokgwa o lo itemogetseng ditiragalo tsa matshelo a lona. Ba tla tlhopa se ditshaba di tlamegileng go di itse ka lona.

Itseng gore Beibele e kwadilwe ke batho ba ba neng ba dula le batho ka dinako tse di fetileng. Batho ba ba ne ba nale maitemogelo le mathata a bona. Ba ne ba leka go rarabolola le go leka go tlhalosa gore ke eng mathata a ba a bonang a le teng.

Basadi ba ba mo Beibeleng e ne e le basadi ba dinako tsa bona ka mathata a dinako tsa bona. Mathata mangwe a bona a ka batla a tshwana le a lena, mme fela se se tlisitseng mathata a ga se tshwane le se se tlisitseng mathata a lena ka se sebaka.

Itseeleng se se lo phedisang mo setsong sa lona mme se se sa phediseng lo se latlhele kwa thoko. Bokreste jwa lona bo tlamegile go nna bontlha bongwe jwa botshelo jwa lona. Lo se letleng go tlhakangwa tlhogo ke go nna le matshelo a mantsintsi.

Finally, I would to leave Southern African Township Christian women with this message:

Stand up and fight for yourselves. Know that no one is going to do that for you. Be able to write your own history because those who will write it on your behalf will choose what the next generations have to know about you, they will not write about your actual life experiences.

Know that the Bible is a product of individual communities that existed in a different timeset from yours. They had different problems and they had their own ways of dealing with their problems.

The women in the Bible, like Ruth, Naomi, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and many others, cannot be taken as exemplars for they also existed in a different timeset from that of yours.

Claim what is life sustaining and what empowers you as women from your cultures. Do not compartmentalize your lives, guard against living a Christian life, which is different from your traditional cultural life, and a working life which is going to be different from who you are at home.

Claim what is rightfully yours in your communities and in your churches. In the following chapter, I will give a description of the groups I worked with.

CHAPTER 9

9. A DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUPS I HAVE WORKED WITH

9.1 Introduction

This section will be divided into two sections. One section will comprise of a description of the groups I have worked with while the second will comprise of a summary of the data. The Bible Studies, the interviews and questions will be in detail in the appendix.

In section 9 (a), I will also give a description of how I compiled my data. The problems I encountered will also be discussed in this section.

I will also share the problems I encountered when I met the groups.

Finally, I will also give a description of how these women interpret the text and what the Bible means for them as Christian women.

9.2 A Description of the Groups

The three groups of Township Christian women that I dealt with were not familiar to me nor I to them. How I came to know these three groups will be explained when I describe them individually. They are all from the Mothers Union groups (Manyano), and they all meet on Thursdays to pray together and to give each other financial assistance where needed for the benefit of the group, or other Manyano groups in the area who belong to other denominations. The later activity is only related to the Kimberley group.

9.2.1 *Group One: St. Martin Lutheran Mothers' Union*

I was introduced to the group by Rev. A.A. Matikainen Lecklin who works for the Evangelical Lutheran Church In Southern Africa - Cape Orange Diocese Women's Desk. We met at Umtata during one of the conferences that was held early last year by the

Umtata Women's Group. Unfortunately she was not in Kimberley when I visited the group this year but she arranged that I meet the group with the Chairperson of the group, Mrs Sekiti. She personally wrote a letter to the women in the parish to inform them of my coming. In her letter, she invited the Sisters and the non-Sisters. The non-Sisters do not belong to the Manyano group and how they relate to the members of the Manyano group will be explained later.

The initial meeting with the group was supposed to take place on Saturday, 20 July 1996. Due to the weather, the women did not turn up and we had to postpone the meeting to Thursday, 25 July 1996.

The St. Martin Lutheran Church Mothers' Union consisted of 20 women and 5 young girls from the "Barweetsana" group. The five girls were the ones who were interpreting the questions together with one retired nurse, Mrs Matshediso and one of them became the scribe for group one. There were more than five people in the other group who could read and write, and some of these women are retired nurses and teachers.

Most of the women in the group are either semi-literate or cannot read and write at all. The retired nurses and teachers are the ones who help the group with literary material and some of them can read but are not professional women. Most of the people in this group are domestic workers, and these form the bulk of the group.

One advantage for the group is that people in Kimberley do not speak pure Afrikaans, Tswana, Xhosa or English; they tend to mix all these languages together in one sentence and none of the languages mentioned is a problem when read or spoken, as long as the foreign language will be read or spoken slowly. The main language spoken, read and sung in hymns by the Mothers and the young girls is Afrikaans.

Conflicts and cliques are some normal attributes of groups that meet regularly. I had to be aware of the possibilities for such attributes and I had to handle questions related to group dynamics very carefully.

The non-Sisters were not easily accepted by the Mothers' Union because they do not belong with them or they do not belong to any women's group in the parish. Serious complaints concerning their relationship to the group or not belonging to any group were lodged with me and the only solution that I could think of was for people to revise their Manyano constitution, and they should follow the proper channels, if the circumstances in their parish are forcing them to do that.

Meeting on a Thursday with the group was a problem because the group had to visit another Mother's Union group in the neighbourhood to give the group a donation because one of its member had died. Because of the Bible Study, the members of St. Martin's Lutheran Church divided themselves; some went to give the donation from the group while the others remained to finish the Bible study.

After the Bible study, the members of the Mothers' Union also had to raise funds for the "Barweetsana". We had to rush the Bible study to be able to do that.

Some of the group members had a problem with a certain Evangelist, Mr. Plaatjie, who is not my relative. I also had to make my relationship to Evangelist Plaatjie very clear, for my surname is one of the common surnames in Kimberley.

9.2.2 Group two: Thaba Nchu Methodist women's group

I approached Rev. Zodwa Memela and I asked her to organise a group of women for my research. We agreed that the group need not necessarily be from the Mothers' Union but that it could consist of women who were interested in participating in this research. The group was supposed to be joined by a group of Catholic women who have formed a burial society group.

Due to the cold weather, I was advised by Rev. Memela to postpone the meeting that was supposed to take place on Saturday, 13 July 1996. The meeting was postponed to Sunday, 4 August 1996 at 2.00 p.m. I had fifteen women altogether and some of them were not from the Methodist Church.

Women from the Catholic group could not attend because they had other commitments during that day. I could not meet then on another day because my stay in Thaba Nchu was only for that weekend.

As the minister of the Methodist Church, Zodwa only came to introduce me to the group but did not stay because I did not want trained readers of the Bible to attend the workshop. She is a trained reader because she is a trained theologian from the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg and the other problem was that she could dominate or intimidate the ordinary readers of the Bible. Most of the people who attended the workshop are educated women either still in practice or retired. Some were not educated but can read both English and Southern Sotho or English and Xhosa.

Two of the fifteen women had to leave the workshop before the end because of other commitments. I do not have the names of these women and I did not ask the group to give me their names.

Time was a problem for this group because we met on a Sunday afternoon and they were all mothers who had to prepare for their children or grandchildren to go to school the following day and most of them were also working mothers.

One thing that I enjoyed with the group was that it was a very open group. They were open with each other because they challenged each others answers, particularly on traditional-cultural questions. They had a healthy debate with one another as far as my observation goes.

The group refused to form two or three groups but preferred to deal with the different sections in one group. Their facilitator, Mrs. Sebolai, is a teacher who did a good job and their scribe was a young woman, whose profession I do not know.

9.2.3 Group three: Klerksdorp Circuit Mothers' Union; Presbyterian Church of Africa

I was introduced to the group by their Minister's wife, Mrs. Martha Msikinya whom I know from my youth work. I met her at the Southern African Council of Churches Women's Conference which was held from Wednesday, 5 to Sunday 9 June 1996 in Johannesburg.

I was accommodated at her house in Stilfontein and the Bible study took place at Phelindaba, one of the townships in Klerksdorp. The languages spoken in the parish are Southern Sotho and Xhosa; the predominant spoken, read and sung language being Xhosa.

Some of the women who attended the bible study were not from the Mother's union, but like the Kimberley group, these women were not well accepted by some of the Mothers' Union members in the group. Some of the people who attended were from the "Barweetsana" group as well.

Most of the people from the group can write and read. Two of the women were wives of ministers, one was an Evangelist and one of the women was a teacher while one of the youngsters was a technikon student.

The group had different cultures - i.e Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana and Southern Sotho. The area is also a strong mining area and most of the congregants have husbands and relatives who work in the mines.

The Minister of the Phelindaba Presbyterian Church of Africa, Rev. Msikinya is a police man in the community. I asked him how did the people accepted him as their minister for

he was a police man before he became their minister, for such combinations are unheard of. He said that they accepted him very well, because he grew up in that church and he grew up in front of the elders of the church. He is still young in his ministry because he has been only a minister for 18 months.

I was introduced to the group as Mfundisikazi, meaning a woman/female minister. This was a joke for the group and they kept on smiling when I was introduced. They were not used to a woman minister and they said it would take time for them to have a woman as a minister. They all knew that other denominations like the Anglican and Methodist churches have women ministers and it would not happen in the Catholic church. They teased me when they said that, if I decided to become a minister, I should consider coming to their church; even when they knew that such an event will not happen in their church.

To show that it will take time before there can be a woman minister in this church, I was told by the Minister, Rev. Msikinya, that the people who read and preach on the scripture readings are the elders who are male. The women's role in the church is to pray. According to the minister, women can only preach if there are not enough males in some occasions like the Good Friday service. These women have to be powerful preachers.

The Bible studies all took three hours but this particular group refused to disperse for they said they enjoyed the discussion. After the Bible study, the women organised tea and snacks which took us up to 7.00p.m.

Two weeks before I had to meet the group, Mrs Msikinya phoned to plead with me to wear a dress for the meeting because the women will not accept me in pants. "I know that you like wearing pants, please wear a dress to this meeting, the women will not accept you in pants. You can wear pants at my place, my husband and I do not mind." I was also told that the women were adamant that they wanted to wear their Mothers' Union uniform for, if this was a church meeting, than a member of the Union must had to wear her uniform.

I enjoyed working with the group. They were open with one another. They also challenged me as a single woman and asked me if I think I will get married soon. The joke was that one of the women said she wanted me for one of her sons. They wondered how I felt as a single woman who is leading married women and men; for the group refused to accept that I am not an ordained minister but I am a theological student, because for them a person who is doing theology is a minister.

9.3 Method(s) Used to Collect Data

With all three groups, I conducted a bible study which took the form of a workshop. For the workshop, I divided the questions on the bible study into three sections, viz, section one - Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross (John 19: 25 -27); section two - Mary Magdalene at the grave (John 20: 1 - 10); and section three - Mary Magdalene - commissioned by Jesus to spread the Good News (John 20: 11 - 18).

Each group had only one day with me and each of the Bible studies took three hours. I asked the women to choose between forming three groups to tackle one section each or to form one group, (where it was possible).

The Kimberley group divided themselves into two groups (i.e group one and two); group one answered section one while group two answered section two. Section three was shared between the two groups, for group one took the first three questions while group two took the last three questions from section three. The Klerksdorp circuit group followed the same pattern, while the Thaba Nchu group decided to form one group and answered all questions from all the three sections.

During the workshop, before the groups answered the questions, I read and explained all the questions to all three groups. Thereafter, the groups had to choose a scribe and a facilitator. I monitored the groups and checked with them if they had any problems with the questions or whatever they needed to know concerning what they had to do. There

were times when I managed to take notes of my own concerning the responses I heard, and this was very possible with the Thaba Nchu group, since the group was small and they formed one group only. There were also times when I heard the group members having problems in understanding what exactly the questions said. Some of these questions that they misinterpreted related to the personality of Mary Magdalene and the problems she might have experienced during her times as a woman; the effect the traditional death rituals had on them as women; and how they perceived these rituals affecting their lives as Christian women today. I did not interfere with how they interpreted the questions because one of the agreements with the women was that I will only interfere with their answers or their understanding of the questions, when they asked me.

Interviews were conducted as a follow-up from the Bible studies. They merely served to explain some of the questions that were not clear for me. Individual interviews were conducted with the Kimberley group for I had enough time with them and I also know the place since it is home for me. I managed to visit five women who agreed to be interviewed at their homes respectively. They gave me the times that suited them best.

On the other hand, I could not conduct individual interviews with the Thaba Nchu group nor even could I conduct a group interview due to time and because we also met on a Sunday afternoon. But a group interview was quite possible with the Klerksdop Circuit women for they were not in a hurry to go home after the Bible study.

Questionnaires were left with whoever wanted to take one. These questionnaires comprised of a profile of the women and areas of interest from the bible study. Most of the women were keen to take a questionnaire, but none of them have been returned to date.

All these women were not skilled readers of any text, including the Bible. Some of those who are teachers do not teach critical literary skills to the pupils they teach, let alone the Bible. How do these women interpret the Bible? How do they perceive it? This will be discussed in the following paragraph.

9.4 How do these women interpret the text and how do they perceive it?

First of all, the women see the Bible as the word of God. In chapter 2 of this work, I quoted Jonathan Draper saying that the people he worked with through the assistance of his interns in some of the Natal townships could not differentiate between the Bible as text and as the Word of God. Like the group that Draper wrote about, the Bible is the Word of God for these women. Everything that is written in the Bible is not suspected to have a human hand and human ideological agendas behind it.

These women are not trained at reading the Bible critically. They do realise that there are contradictions in the text but they do not question why there are such contradictions. For example, the two creation stories in Genesis and what "Paul" says in his letters. One of the women I had interviewed in Kimberley said, Mary Magdalene is a good woman, if she was not, she could not have been in the Bible. This answer is an illustration that women in the Township Christian Churches do not read the Bible critically.

Secondly, their interpretation of the Bible is mostly influenced by the manner in which their church ministers interpret the text. I suggest that their ministers interpretation is also influenced by the missionaries' way of interpretation and they have not yet grown to interpret it to suit their own contexts. Most of them are not trained to differentiate between the Bible as written text and the word of God.

In conclusion, my claim will be supported by the answers the women give in the respective Bible studies and interviews that I have conducted with them. There was no time for me to influence their interpretation of their Bible. But the questions which we dealt with amazed them because they said they never thought that they can read the Bible while trying to deal with such questions. This was clear when most women from all the three groups I dealt with said, "Mmh" while reading the questions. I then had to ask them why they made the sound, it was then that they expressed how surprised they were. Most of them said that they would continue to use these questions for themselves.

In the second part of chapter 9, I will give a summary of the data that I have collected.

CHAPTER 10

10. READING THE TEXT WITH SOUTHERN AFRICAN TOWNSHIP CHRISTIAN WOMEN

10.1 Introduction

This section will deal with a summary of the reading responses of the Township Christian women. An analysis of their responses will also be made after summarising what they said. This will follow the same pattern I had used for the Bible studies, by dividing the Bible study into three sections.

Included in this is also the interviews I had conducted. They served to explain some of the answers that were not clear to me.

Finally, I will examine the impact the reading response theory had on the readings of these women.

10.2 Reading the Mary Magdalene Story with Southern African Township Christian Women

10.2.1 Bible Studies

10.2.1.1 Section 1: Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross - John 19:25- 27

Questions 1,2, and 3 dealt with a role of woman in society. *Being a woman, a wife and a mother.*

The Kimberley group of women said that they have to be a good wife, you have to be exemplary, to respect yourself, and do house chores. The Thaba Nchu group found these roles difficult, but did not say why they were difficult roles to fulfil. They still agreed that a woman has to earn her respect and they listed all the virtues a woman has to have in order to be respected in their societies. The Klerksdorp women said a woman is the

umbrella for the nation and a centre of good behaviour, love and she is also the light for her family.

It is quite clear women do realise that their roles are difficult but they still do not question why they are difficult. They seem to accept what the society determines for them without any problems. Of course the Bible also agrees with what societies say a good woman ought to be. This shows that women have still fallen prey to what Christians inherited from the teachings of the Church Fathers on being a good woman, wife and mother. They have to be women of spectacular virtue, whose example should be an inspiration to all later ages or women who have fallen from virtue.

7 *On being a childless, unmarried or a divorced woman.*

All three groups agreed that it is difficult to be trusted by other people in the society if you are a single woman. It even makes matters worse if you do not have children. Another woman from the Thaba Nchu group said that it even makes matters worse when you are married and cannot conceive.

It was interesting to watch the reactions of the Thaba Nchu women when one woman wanted to spiritualise the fact of not being able to conceive. She said that Christian women should be able to accept the fact that she can not bear children and that as a Christian, every child is hers. This other woman, could not bear to be told that since the pain was actually hers. She can not conceive and she was given a tough time by her in-laws and her neighbours.

For these women, children are a help in the house especially in one's old age and when one is sick they said.

All the above mentioned problems illustrates to us that in Southern African Townships women earn their respect through being so and so's mother or being so and so's wife. That

is why it is still a tradition in townships to call people Mrs. So. and so. They are also always proud to make it known that they are married women.

What are the consequences of not having a husband or a man in your life?

Only one woman said that you lead a better life if you are a single woman. She said that life for single women is better in a sense that they control their money and they are in control of their lives.

All the women emphasised that one is not accepted well by other women in the community. They also said that single women have to be trustworthy, they have to respect themselves by not stealing other people's husbands. What was more interesting was the response given by the Kimberley women when they said that the Church does not trust single women, it sees them as being irresponsible.

People are still at ease with what the society and the Bible demands of them. They do have problems with most of these demands but they do not want to rock the boat alone. They do not want to be marginalised for being different and being immune to public opinion. For if you challenge the system quo of Southern African Township or the Bible, you will be seen as the only odd one. You will be ostracised and most of these women have not yet come to the point where they can want to be marginalised on account of their beliefs which are contrary to popular belief, if they have any.

Mary Magdalene's story at the foot of the cross, how can her story be your story?

Most of the women saw her presence at the foot of the cross as coming to console those who are bereaved and they said she was also bereaved. Her presence also signified love for her neighbours and that she was hurt that Jesus was crucified.

Some of the women saw her as an obedient and patient woman. They said that her personality is a good example for Christian women.

It was not difficult for all these women to relate Mary Magdalene's presence at the cross with how they console their neighbours during times of grief. They associate all that with showing love, being merciful and understanding what the bereaved family is going through. Apart from all these things, this is usually what happens in townships during times of bereavement. People usually gather at the home of the bereaved to console them. It does not matter if they are known by the family members or if they knew the deceased.

10.2.1.2 Section 2: Mary Magdalene at the Grave John 20: 1 -10

On the role of each character in this section of the text.

Some women saw Mary Magdalene as an ordinary woman, while other women saw her as the bodyguard of the corpse of Jesus.

They only recognised Simon Peter as a disciple and some of them spoke of the Beloved disciple as an unknown disciple who was loved by Jesus.

It did not dawn on these women to question the fact that the Gospel of John had another disciple who was superior to Simon Peter. They are used to the Simon Peter tradition and nothing else.

None of these women ever linked the story with what they usually do when they visit the graves of their deceased. It is customary in our Township, Kimberley, to go to the graveyard every now and again to put water in a cup that the deceased used to drink from when she/he was alive, to talk to the deceased, especially if the person was senior in the house. They usually tell the deceased about what is happening at home, changes that are happening at home, e.g someone is getting married, and so on. This might not be practised by everyone but most of the people do.

On Mary Magdalene being the body guard of the corpse of Jesus, some of these women who said that, might have had to guard someone's grave at one stage. This happens when people suspect witchcraft. Now a days, people do seal the inside of the grave with cement

after they have put the coffin in the grave. This is one of the best ways of guarding against all what the relatives will suspect, for most of the people cannot afford to do that any more because of their safety or because some of them will be working.

On rituals of death, who performs them and how do people perform them these days.

Single women do not perform rituals of washing the corpse. By single women we are talking of women who have never been married in their lives. Widowed older women can assist in these rituals.

When the women spoke of Mary Magdalene's role as a possibly young and single woman going to anoint the corpse of Jesus ritually, most of them said that she had courage and she was spiritually matured and thus she could go and anoint the body of Jesus. Some of them said that she was in love with Jesus and she only wanted to touch the body of Jesus.

It is quite easy to subject a woman to a conjugal relationship with any man that she has contact with, especially if the woman is a single woman. People are socialised to believe that women can only be relational and men not. This way of categorising people will not be easy to do away with since the electronic media also emphasises it.

All the women agreed that these rituals are not performed in the townships any more because of fear of witchcraft. Some people believe that when people prepare the corpse for the funeral day, they usually trim the beard, if it is a man, cut the nails, cut the hair and wash the body with a white cloth. If any of these items including the white cloth get missing or even only the white cloth, to be bewitched, all the people who live in that house will die.

Some of the women in Klerksdorp said that they still perform these rituals since it is a sign of showing your last respects to the deceased.

It was also not clear who performs these rituals or who used to perform them in the past. Some people said that their parents taught them how to deal with a corpse and they felt that they also have to hand these rituals over to their daughters since these rituals will mould them.

Again all women felt that they were empowered by these rituals, especially rituals of widowhood. Some of the younger women in the Klerksdorp group were of a different opinion. Most of these young women felt that the rituals of widowhood are the worst a woman has to endure. While the older women on the other hand said that if one believes in Jesus, then these rituals will empower you as a woman.

Another area of concern was also on the role of the church in times of bereavement. The women from Thaba Nchu clearly saw the church as the congregants and they said that some of the congregants can console the bereaved while the others see it as a chance to use the Word of God as a whip on the bereaved. The latter normally happened when the bereaved were not regular church attenders or when the deceased was buried by the church because her/his parents were regularly present at church.

The attitudes of the male disciples towards Mary Magdalene were viewed differently by different women. Most women did not see anything wrong with their attitude towards Mary Magdalene. Only one woman from the Thaba Nchu group associated their attitude to that of the males in her church and in their homes. She said that like their men, they did not have respect. They always wanted leadership positions and they also wanted to be the source of knowledge and information.

On asking the women to re-tell the story of Mary Magdalene in their own words, what I got was only a summary of what was in the Bible and what the society expects a woman in her position to be. People do not ask why did she not do anything at the grave except for crying or why was she portrayed so helpless in the story.

This illustrates the fact that women or ordinary readers of the Bible are not critical of what they read in the Bible. What is written in the Bible is perfect, it does not need to be questioned or to be modified to suit their contexts. People do not shape the Bible stories but they allow the Bible stories to shape their lives and the way they think and behave.

Not much was said on what Jesus meant for Mary Magdalene and how they perceived what Jesus was to her. They only picked up that Jesus was a teacher and a Saviour for Mary Magdalene. They shifted the focus to her behaviour and said that Mary Magdalene was caring and she acted like a parent.

Parenting for some of the Klerksdorp group members did not mean parenting your own children only. One can have attributes of parenthood even if one does not have children according to these women.

10.2.1.3 Section 3: Mary Magdalene - Commissioned by Jesus to spread the Good News. John 20: 11 -18

On dealing with Mary Magdalene as being free to follow Jesus and what could it have meant in her context for an unmarried woman to follow a male Messiah.

Most of the women said that Mary Magdalene had faith in Jesus and in what Jesus did. They also said that she had good faith in his teachings and she had accepted Jesus as Christ. They also said that she was free to follow Jesus because she had no children or a husband to hinder her in following Jesus. Only one woman said that following Jesus was her choice.

They also discussed her fate as a single woman. They said that it could have been difficult for her since single women in their own contexts (Southern African Township women's contexts), women are abused verbally and are suspected of all sorts of things. Like any other woman, she was also suspected by some women to have followed Jesus only to trap him into falling in love with her.

Some of her other ordeals as a single woman were that she would have been always suspected of breaking families apart. And her work as a single woman among married people was limited in a sense that she will not be "able" to advise married people. Furthermore, people did not take single women seriously, they did not respect them.

Being called by your name.

No special significance was perceived by the Township Christian women in this regard. It is a non issue for them.

On issue of the limits of women touching Jesus physically.

Most of them said that Yes, because they are impure through menstruation. When some of them said, what they heard of Jesus were stories and Jesus was not a real person for them, thus they could not touch him physically. On the other hand, one woman contested the idea of an existence of a space between them as women and Jesus. She said we should be able to feel Jesus in our prayers.

I am interested in the idea of being impure when a woman menstruates. This shows that people have imbibed the ideas of purity from their communities and societies and they do not see anything wrong with all these concepts of being pure and being impure.

Finally, it was difficult for the women to say in their own words what the text meant for them in their context. I suggest that the difficulty in doing that was a result of not being used to look at the text from their own contexts as I have said before. The other problem can be because the text does not have any overt moral teaching or teachings on how a woman should behave themselves. The text said nothing about Mary Magdalene in moral terms and that people usually use the other three Gospels, i.e Mark, Matthew and Luke much more often.

I am suggesting that they often use the other three Gospels regularly because they are not familiar with most of the content of John, for example, most of them did not know that

there was a disciple whom Jesus loved most. It was always taken for granted that Simon Peter is the one Jesus loved most. In most cases for the women their reading of the text in the Gospel of John was influenced by the story of Mark.

The next sub-section will deal with the interviews of the women I had worked with.

10.3 Interviews

I have said before that the interviews served as a means of clarifying some of the answers from the Bible studies that I did not understand. They were also a means of trying to persuade the women to read and interpret the text beyond the traditional ways of interpretations. The results from these interviews are a reflection of how women treat the Bible and how they read it.

The Bible has always served to place women in their God given places. The Bible supports that good women are supposed to be quiet, obedient, be subject to the authority of their husbands and other male counterparts. Township Christian women in Southern Africa do not have a problem with these virtues, they are just and are part of their daily lives at their respective homes and societies.

It is strange that most of them do not see anything wrong with the Church preaching and subjugating women and yet the very same women are the ones who marched against government laws that were abusive to women in 1950's; they were the ones who marched against all sorts of discrimination against Black people in Southern Africa. Yet it is difficult for them to challenge the Church and to challenge the oppressive interpretations of the Bible as a whole.

It was also obvious that these women did not see it a problem to lead a double life in a sense of being a Traditional Religious person and being a Christian at the same time. Only

a few of them became a bit critical by saying that the Church or Christianity makes them to live a double life.

One of my concerns in trying to find out how people felt about what they did in their funerals and what they professed as Christians was that many people, if not all of them, in the townships, practice a lot of African Traditional rituals which are not seen as valid by the Christian church. These are consulting a diviner in times of death or any kind of ill-omen.

People practised Traditional Christian rituals and they believed in them more than they believed in the rituals of the church, for example, anointing the sick. They called in the Priest when someone has died or when someone was sick and they also called in a traditional healer. A traditional healer was also called in even when people had been told by a medical doctor that the person had died of T.B, just to get a second opinion, which was always different from that of the medical doctor. We have also seen that a traditional doctor is also called in when a person had been killed. Reasons for this vary from revenge to strengthening themselves against any evil that might befall them.

What I have just described above are the daily practices of most Christian women in the townships. These are usually divorced from being Christian or from their Christian life. What concerns me is that I find it difficult to live a traditional life and a Christian life, i.e a double life like this. I wanted to find out how other people cope with all these different roles in their lives because for me being a Christian should be who you are, viz, being African with all that is your culture, being a woman, and what you really are as a person.

I do acknowledge the fact that being an African woman can be a very oppressive phenomenon on its own. What I am professing is that people should be able to sit and critique their culture. For me, culture should be dynamic and it is surely influenced by economic growth, political dynamics and social aspects that are in operation every time. On that score, people should be able to get rid of all that is not empowering to both women and men and to cling to all that is life sustaining and empowering.

FINAL CONCLUSION

The Mary Magdalene story in the Gospel of John is quite a complex story. Reading this story from a ritual perspective, especially the death rituals of Southern Africans, and those of the Jews in first century B.C, illustrates that stories of women in the Bible have been fashioned in a way that serves patriarchal values.

In my introductory chapter, I have given a general description of the social, political, economic, traditional and religious concerns Southern African Christian women have in most townships. Their readings of the Mary Magdalene story in the Gospel of John were quite important, in my opinion, for guiding the modern⁷ April 1997 April 1997 interpretations of women in the Bible.

In my second chapter, I dealt with the Reader-response theory and its critiques. It was quite clear that ordinary readers, as Gerald West (1991) termed them, i.e, those who could listen and re-tell the Bible stories as they heard them told, were not considered by the Reader-response theorists. Their interest is with people who can read.

The majority of Southern African women cannot read and write. This leaves them at a disadvantage, especially if their interpretations are to be taken serious by the Reader-response theorists. Patrick A. Kalilombe (1991), has argued that these non-literate readers are disadvantaged by the fact that their literate sisters and brothers choose what is good for their ears and what is not good for them. This might be because these literate sisters and brothers themselves, do not know of the other stories in the Bible. They can only read and interpret the ones that were read at Church for them as well.

The re-told Bible stories of these women are very important. These women need to be given tools to enable them to re-tell these stories more critically. This might be difficult at first, but once they realise that they do not read or re-tell anything into these Bible

stories, but the stories are written in such a way that they create some loopholes into them. These stories give a critical reader a glimpse of the half told stories of women in the Bible.

In chapter three, I dealt with the views of Scholars on the Gospel of John. These scholars all agree that the purpose of the Gospel was to re-assure its recipients (who could have been the community of the beloved disciple) that, if they live in God and if they believe in Jesus, they will live. The recipients of this Gospel seemed to have suffered at the hands of the Roman authorities at that time. They needed to be comforted and to be assured that God is with them through their suffering, and in suffering, they are like Jesus and thus are in the right direction.

4
The plight of Southern African Christian women is rather different from that of the community of John. Their concerns are the present economic system and policies of the country that still leave a number of them disadvantaged, good family values and acceptable societal norms, being mothers, wives and exemplary women in their societies. Some of their other problems are also about some traditional rituals that do not empower them at all. This then leads us to the following chapter, which dealt with the interpretations of western feminist scholars of the Mary Magdalene story in the Gospel of John. The concerns of Western feminist scholars are mainly on Mary Magdalene being made an apostle of the apostles by being given the command to go and tell her brothers (i.e the other male disciples), that Jesus has risen from the dead. Their concern is also on the male influenced interpretations of Mary Magdalene in the Gospels; and how these interpretations influenced those of the ordinary people.

Most of these concerns are relevant for trained readers of the Bible. Their concerns have been proven by the reading responses of the ordinary readers - the readings of the Township Christian women in Southern Africa to be non-concerns for them. This illustrates to Southern African Theologians today that as long as the readings and interpretations of the stories in the Bible are left in the hands of trained readers, Southern African Township Christian women will continue to be disempowered by these readings.

Their culture, religion, rituals will still be influenced by the male dominated interpretations of what religion and life for women ought to be. We need to learn from the experiences of these women. It is time that the Church should listen to stories of faith of women.

Southern African New Testament scholars have a major task in front of them. Their task is to conscientize the women who are the main recipients of these male biased interpretations in their churches. They have to make them aware that God's intention is not to have obedient and silent women, where it is unnecessary. It is also not to have women who are the glory of their husbands, while their husbands are God's glory; it is also not to have people who have limited choices in their lives - such as being wives and mothers; God's intention is not to have suffering women who are struggling to survive. All these negative and painful realities of Township women are humanly constructed and they need to be challenged.

After conscientization, then, the following task for Southern African New Testament scholars, of Theologians who have the well being of the Township women at heart, should be to strategize to find a suitable movement for Southern African women and a movement which will take cognizance of their contexts.

5 The death of Jesus was for a purpose for his community. His death was a result of challenging the Roman laws of the first century B.C.E. He also challenged the belief system of the said time and thus the Roman authorities saw fit to kill him on the cross. In the fifth chapter, I discussed the social and political context of the Jesus movement. The members of the community of Jesus were peasants and they were expected to pay taxes to the Temple in Jerusalem, to Herod and so on. The economic demands of their day were too high. The peasants had to live on loans in order to survive. Some of them could not afford to pay the loans that they were forced to take, and thus had to sell their daughters and sons for slavery. These problems were different from Southern African Christian women's concerns in the townships. Empowering lessons on how to handle a difficult

political situation can still be learned by these women from the peasants in the time of Jesus.

Heroes at the time could not die and be forgotten. Thus a belief on the resurrection of the body was introduced by the peasants. This belief is foreign to the African belief system, under normal circumstances.¹ Christians have inherited this through the teachings of the church and most of them do not know its origins. Thus it was difficult for the township Christian women to deal with the concept of Mary Magdalene talking to Jesus after he had risen from the dead.

6 Their understanding of life beyond the grave, which I dealt with in Chapter six, was different from those of the Jewish. Township people are visited by the deceased in their dreams. They did not have an experience similar to that of Mary Magdalene, when she was talking with Jesus, and touching Jesus after he arose from the dead.

Death rituals and the deceased are taken seriously though in townships, because they believed that the deceased was still living with the other relatives who long died before him/her. A violent death was difficult to handle and thus the survivors of the deceased who died a violent death, had to take extra precautions to guard against the evil that might befall them.

Where the person died is very important for township people. Bringing the soul of the deceased home is important and if this does not happen, then people believe that they have lost an ancestor. I suggested that, like Mary Magdalene at the grave of Jesus, Southern African women today, through the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, are still looking for either the bodies of their deceased or they demand to know where

¹. *I say the belief on the resurrection of a dead person is foreign to an African belief system under normal circumstances, because there have been claims that people who have buried their deceased, later discovered that the person was "resurrected" from the "dead" through witchcraft and has been turned into a "Zombi" somewhere. Such stories are often reported in newspapers.*

exactly the person was buried. I further suggest that these women want to bring the souls of their deceased to their homes, so that the family lineage should be complete.

The death of Jesus and that of the Southern African comrades was similar, because they all died a political death. I suggest that their death either encouraged their followers or discouraged some of them, who needed an immediate relief from their life threatening contexts. Those who were encouraged, I further suggest, could have seen the death of their leaders as a sign that their resistance had an impact on the ruling bodies of the different times (i.e that of Jesus and that of the comrades) and that their leaders were prepared to die for what they believed in.

Christians came to inherit the doctrine of resurrection, which was a later creation of the church. They were taught that Jesus died for their atonement. Ordinary Christians do not have the background information for this doctrine.

The reading of the story of Mary Magdalene only made sense to me when I re-told it from a township perspective. The author of the book might have omitted some of the important facts that are related to the story, like the role of women in rituals of public-political deaths - especially women who have gone against the norms of the patriarchal household. Her role in the story could also have been diminished to nothing because the author of the book wanted to make people believe that leadership is a man's role and it was constituted by God.

I have previously said that everything that is believed to have been instituted is not challenged by ordinary people. Moses, who is believed to have received direct instructions from God, to write the laws, was an extra-ordinary man according to the ordinary people. Thus some of them could not attach any negative characteristic on the character, Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John. One women told me that Mary Magdalene was a good woman-that is why she was in the Bible. How the character is portrayed in the story is of no concern. Such a concern became possible only when ordinary readers were persuaded

to read the text critically and when they were given background information to the lives of women in the first century B.C.E under Roman rule.

Reading this text with ordinary township women also proved to me that these women are aware that their roles as women are limited and they are not considered important. It was rather difficult for them to question and challenge their roles because they believe that they were God given.

Their readings of the Mary Magdalene, was oppressive because they read it as it was given to them, i.e through the eyes of patriarchy. In patriarchal systems, women can best be mothers and nurturers. Those who are leaders or who fight for power are not considered to be good women in such structures. Power, leadership, money, having direction in life, being independent, are all considered to be attributes of a man in such societies.

It is without doubt that women appear in the patriarchal stories, but they appear through the eyes of the patriarchal system and what is written about them is what was decided by the authors and editors of the Bible who could have been men. Thus, we do not have a true reflection of the lives of women in Ancient Jewish and Roman times.

The readings of the ordinary readers, in this case, the Township Christian women of South Africa, proves to people doing Biblical theology, in this case, New Testament studies, that the readings of ordinary readers of the Bible are also needed in the Theological mainstream. Their readings are also very important in order to shape a kind of theological movement that will consider their frame of references seriously.

Their readings of this story have further illustrated that the needs and concerns of Western Feminist scholars are not the needs of ordinary women in Southern African township churches. While Western Feminists are struggling to be recognised in their own right as who they are, i.e by being called by their names, the Southern African Township women on the other hand, are still struggling to be respected, and the respect they want can only

be earned through being mothers or wives. I do acknowledge that there is a new trend of qualified professional women coming up in the Townships, but they are few and they are still struggling to be accepted as they have chosen their lives for themselves.

I conclude by suggesting that the readings of ordinary township Christian women in Southern Africa are needed in the theological arena. These readings still need to be liberated from oppressive missionary modes of interpretation.

The reading of the Mary Magdalene story by Township Christian women in Southern Africa, has a potential to empower these Christian women. It has the potential to make them aware of their oppressive roles as women, and to make them realize that the Bible as a text, was written by human beings. Through this story, these women can also learn that the women in the Bible, like Mary, the mother of Jesus, Ruth, Naomi and all the others, can never be exemplars for them, since their problems are not their problems.

APPENDIX 1

1.1 Data

1.2 Bible Studies In Workshop Form.

1.3 St. Martin Lutheran Church in Kimberley

Section one - Mary at the foot of the cross

(John 19: 25 - 27)

This section was done by group one and the women in this group were: Sarah Saaiman, Doreen Morobi, Elizabeth Louw, Rachel Moss, Dorcas Bopapi, Catherine Mosime, Elsie Moitsehang, Eunice Morake, Lydia Matshediso, Kedinametse Molelekwa, Masego Letselebe, Magdeline Afrika, Tiola Megalty and Sinah Douw.

Question 1: What does it mean to be a mother in our township?

Answer: You are supposed to be exemplary, to help in the community. We are also rejected by the community due to different denominations, churches, womens' league, etc.

Question 2: What does it mean to be a wife in our township?

Answer: You do all the house work. You are expected to give advice where necessary. Most of the domestic responsibility is on your side; Being a Christian; Respect yourself in order to earn respect from others; You have financial problems.

Question 3: What does it mean to be a childless and an unmarried or divorced woman in our township?

Answer: Your wishes to have a child are undermined and you are also undermined and you are not considered to be matured. Children also look down upon you.

On the issue of being unmarried, married women never trust you and suspect funny things from you; you are given bad names.

Being a divorced woman, people look down upon you; you are always blamed for your divorce.

Question 4: List the Characters in John 25 - 27.

Answer: Jesus, Mary mother of Jesus, Mary wife of Cleopas and Mary Magdalene.

Question 5: What do we know about the Characters?

Answer: Mary is the mother of Jesus; Mary is the wife of Cleopas and Mary Magdalene visited the grave of Jesus.

Question 6: What are the consequences of not having a husband or not having a man "in your life" in our church and in our community?

Answer: If you never had a man in your life, married women and the church regard you as an adulteress. The church regards you as someone irresponsible.

Question 7: In what way is the story of Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross the same story as ours?

Answer: It is a sign of love. To show bereavement.

Section 2: Mary Magdalene at the grave (John 20: 1 - 10)

This section was done by group two, which was comprised of Mrs. Margaret Manong, Mrs. Mieta Job, Mrs. Lydia Mokuchwane, Mrs. Margaret Sekiti, Mrs. Mieta Mentor, Mrs. Maria Mothibi, Mrs. Ena Molefe, Mrs. Ester Tselane, Mrs. Dorcas Moitsehang and Mrs. Maria Plaatjies.

Question 1: List the characters in this scene.

Answer: Maria Magdalene; Simon Peter and the disciple that Jesus loved very much.

Question 2: What is the role of each character?

Answer: Mary Magdalene is an ordinary woman. Simon Peter and the disciple who was loved by Jesus are disciples.

Question 3 (a) The gospel of John does not say whether Mary Magdalene was a mature and older woman who could have been divorced or a single young women. Do we find women like her in our church and in our community? How do we relate to them?

Answer: Yes. Some women are accepted while others are not. A woman who does not behave herself will not be accepted in the community.

Question 3 (b): In verse 1 of this very same chapter, Mary Magdalene goes to the graveyard alone and it is still dark. What "kind" of women go out alone at night in our community?

Answer: Elderly woman will go alone and nurses will also go alone. A woman who does not behave herself.

Question 4 (a): Mary went to the grave to presumably anoint the corpse of Jesus ritually. Does our cultural traditional way of life allow young, single women to perform the ritual washing of the corpse? If not, why? If yes why and when?

Answer: No. Funeral parlours are doing it. Women in the past used to do the ritual cleaning, their marital status did not matter.

Question 4 (b): Are the rituals of washing the deceased still performed in our community? If they are not, why are they not performed?

Answer: The funeral parlours are doing it.

Question 4 (c): Rituals of death and bereavement are long and emotionally taxing. How involved is your church in consoling the bereaved?

Answer: The church usually consoles the bereaved.

Question 4 (d): Do these rituals empower women or do they disempower them?

Answer: They empower them.

Question 5: How do you view the role/action (s) of the male disciples of Jesus in the story of Mary Magdalene? What is their attitude to her? Do they console her or listen to her?

Answer: They just listened to her.

Question 6: In your own words, retell the story of Mary Magdalene at the grave of Jesus early in the morning while it was still dark.

Answer: When Mary Magdalene came to the grave, the stone that closed the grave of Jesus was moved. She looked into the grave and the corpse of Jesus was moved and only the cloths that covered him were in the grave. She began to cry. She was then asked by two Angels why she was crying. She said they have taken the corpse of my God and I do not know where they have taken him to. When she turned she saw someone standing and she thought that the person was the gardener and she asked him what has she done with her God. Then God answered, "Mary, Mary" and she recognised the voice immediately, and she answered, "Raboni" which means, Teacher. God answered: "Do not touch me for I have not yet gone to my Father. Go to the children of my Father for I am going to their Father who is also my Father.

Question 7: Who was Jesus for Mary Magdalene? Does this provide an example for you? In what way?

Answer: He was her Saviour and Teacher. Yes this provides an example for us.

Section 3: Mary Magdalene -Commissioned by Jesus to spread the Good News.

(John 20: 11 - 18)

First three questions of this section were done by the group one women, while the last three questions were tackled by the group two women.

Question 1: Why was she free to follow Jesus as his disciple?

Answer: She had good faith in what he was doing.

Question 2: What do you think it meant in her context for an unmarried woman to follow a male Messiah?

Answer: She never thought about the opposite sex.

Question 3: How do we view the discipleship of a woman who does not have a husband?

Answer: In our view, we would have thought that the woman was after Jesus.

Question 4: When Jesus calls Mary Magdalene by her name, does that have any significance?

Answer: Yes.

Question 5: Is there a limit to our Physical touching of Jesus?

Answer: Yes.

Question 6: What does this text mean for us in our context?

Answer: The text shows that Jesus is Almighty and Holy.

APPENDIX 2

2.2 Thaba Nchu Women's Group

This group formed one group and they answered all the questions from all three sections.

Section 1: Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross.

Question 1: What does it mean to be a mother in our context?

Answer: Mrs. Taye said it is difficult because you have to be exemplary. Sometimes you do not get on well with your neighbours, even if you really try to be exemplary, especially if you do not agree with what they are doing. They accuse you and say that you think you are better than they are.

Mrs Mokunupi agreed with Mrs Taye and she added that it is a little easier to reprimand your children when they are naughty but it is difficult to do the same to your neighbours children these days.

Mrs. Mohapi spoke about the lack of co-operation among neighbours; this is as a result of lack of love among them.

Mrs. Memela also agreed that it is difficult to be a mother. A mother plays a major role in her home and both her children and her husband depend on her. She can teach and build her family members and a Christian mother also needs to do the same in her church and in the neighbourhood. Other mothers are dominating but when you are a Christian mother, you need to built your home first. This also depends on how you were brought up. It is not right to be impatient and do not loose your good self image.

Question 2 and Question 3 were combined.

Question 2: What does it mean to be a wife in our township?

Question 3: What does it mean to be a childless and an unmarried or divorced woman in our township?

Answer: It is difficult to be a childless woman especially if you are married woman, said one of the women. But when you are a Christian woman, you can have children

according to how Christianity is. Mrs Taje made an example with one of her neighbours. She said, her neighbour has strong faith; for she adopted children whom she brought up with love and humility. One of the women said that people differ on bringing up adopted children. Some of the people who do not have children, do not love children at all. She made an example with her daughter in-law.

Mrs. Sebolayi said such women are given bad words and they are scorned at.

Mrs. Kgware spoke from experience because she cannot have her own children. She said that when you are ill, you do not have any child to send to the shops, and you do not have anyone to help you. Your in-laws also insult you, and they tell you that they have paid lobola for nothing. When this happened, I used to pray, for I am a Christian woman, she said. I prayed for strength from God. She said, she usually bought things for her nieces and nephews. She said the woman who is married to her husband's brother, refers to her as a little girl because she does not have a child.

For Mrs. Taje, this problem is similar to that of trying to build a home.

NOT BEING MARRIED - for the group, this problem is similar to the one where a woman is barren. The only difference with a barren woman is that she has a husband who can console her. An unmarried woman does not have anyone to console her when she is ridiculed by the public and relatives, especially when she lives alone.

DIVORCED WOMEN - Mrs. Ledibane said both husband and wife do have their mistakes that made them to end their relationship. Sometimes you are a good wife but your husband still divorces you.

Mrs. Letoane said a divorce is mostly caused by outsiders like relatives who keep on reminding you of the mistakes of the other partner in the relationship.

Mrs. Taje after a divorce, it is difficult for the woman to discipline the children. It will be difficult to gather the children, and it will also be difficult to give them parental warmth and love. The children seem to loose their minds.

Mrs. Sebolai said what Mrs. Taje said can happen when the divorced couple does not agree on certain matters and when they do not settle on how they are going to parent the children after their separation. There are times when a woman consults with her parents about her problems before she decides to divorce. The only advice

a woman always gets is to stay in the marriage and make it work. She challenged the response and asked if one has to come out of the relationship only as a corpse.

She said her last response was based on something that happened in the township where the woman actually died a terrible death; she did not mention names but said that the group knows what is she referring to.

Mrs. Letoane believes that it is better to divorce than to come out of the relationship only when you are a corpse; killed by your husband.

Mrs. Taje said it is better to report an abusive husband to the police and to the church.

Mrs. Sebolai was against that, because for her, the law is slow and only comes in when the wife or the couple is dead. She referred to two cases where the men killed their wives and then killed themselves, in separate incidences. These women used to report their husbands to the police. The police are very slow, she said. Sometimes, or in most cases, the law says it does not intervene in domestic problems, especially problems that are related to couples.

Mrs. Taje said the law can intervene in some cases because she knows of someone who was apprehended for physically abusing his wife. One man was ordered by the court not to abuse his wife physically for five years.

Questions 4 and 5 were also seen by the group as one question.

Question 4: List the characters in John 19: 25 - 27.

Question 5: What do we know about the characters?

Answer: Mary Magdalene. Mary the mother of Jesus and her mother's sister. Mary Wife of Cleopas.

Mary the mother of Jesus, was impregnated by the holy spirit. The other Mary is the wife of Cleopas.

Jesus casted the demons out of Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene went to the grave. She anointed the feet of Jesus with an expensive ointment.

Question 6. What are the consequences of not having a husband or not having a man "in your life" in our church and in our community?

Answer: Mrs Konopi said married women do not accept you well, they think that you will take their husbands from them.

Mrs. Memela said women should know that men do not have a backbone, they cannot resist the temptation of going for another woman even when they are married. You cannot allow a married man to touch you, especially if you are a Christian woman. If you are strict, no man will try you out for an extra relationship. You are supposed to be strong and to be independent.

Mrs. Taje said if you are a woman, you are supposed to trust yourself.

Mrs. Mokonopi said her mother respected them after their father's burial. We have never seen a man walking about our home to visit our mother.

Mrs. Letoane was saying that, sometimes, we as parents are in the wrong by misbehaving in front of our children or allowing our children to come with goods that we do not know where they are from, and we do not even ask where they got it from. When they are grown up, they end up taking other people's husbands, because we have allowed them to be free to go in and out of the house at whatever time without even showing our disapproval.

Mrs. Ledibane said, we are supposed to keep track of our relations.

Question 7: In what way is the story of Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross the same story as ours?

Answer: Mary Magdalene showed mercy on other people when she joined the family of Jesus at the cross, when Jesus was crucified.

Mrs. Kgware said that, for Mary Magdalene to be with the family of Jesus at his crucifixion showed that she was obedient, patient, and merciful. Her personality is a good example for us as Christian women.

Section 2: Mary Magdalene at the grave. (John 20: 1 - 10).

Question 1: List the characters in this scene.

Answer: Simon Peter; Magdalene; Another disciple.

Question 2: What is the role of each character?

Answer: Mary Magdalene sat at the feet of Jesus Christ.

Simon Peter went to the grave to see if it was true that Jesus has risen from the dead.

Question 3 (a): The gospel of John does not say whether Mary Magdalene was a mature and older woman who could have been divorced or a single young woman. Do we find women like her in our church and in our community? How do we relate to them?

Answer: Mrs. Letoane said people are not at ease with single women.

Mrs. Ledibane said she thinks that Mary Magdalene could have been after Jesus for a love relationship. Some women cannot be independent. It is an insult not to be married among us. She said they do not trust single women.

Mrs. Memela: Yes, we do have single women in our church. They are being marginalised. She further said that people need to be educated that there are people who might have chosen to be single, and that these people have come to worship and they are called to serve God. Some of the people are eyes for God, while others are God's ears and the congregation needs to know that these people are also a gift and it is necessary to have such people in their midst. Jesus made it a point to know this Magdalene. It is necessary for the church to include such people in its activities just as they are, there is no need to change their marital status. Jealousy is another problem amongst us, people do not appreciate other people's talents. People are not supposed to be taken into positions of people who pray in the church and be preachers only because of their professions. People are supposed to be taught by the church to realise their talents for there are a number of Mary Magdalene's out there.

Question 3(b): In verse 1 of the very same chapter, Mary Magdalene goes to the graveyard alone and it is still dark. What "kind" of women go out alone at night in our community. (This question was perceived by the group to be similar to question 3(a)).

Question 4 (a): Mary went to the grave to presumably anoint the corpse of Jesus ritually. Does our cultural traditional way of life allow young, single women to perform the ritual washing of the corpse? If not, why? If yes, why and when?

Answer: Mrs Ledibane said Mary Magdalene loved Jesus; " what else attracted her to the corpse of a male?" She had no husband, and yet she went alone to the grave. "Did she want to touch the body of Jesus?"

Mrs. Taje said according to their tradition and culture, a single and young woman is not allowed to touch a male corpse. But because Mary Magdalene was propelled by the love she had for Jesus, she did not want to see the corpse of Jesus rotting. She was spiritually matured and that is why she was not afraid of anything. She was displaying a strong faith.

Mrs. Kgwane said she was moved by the spirit of God. She remembers what Jesus once did for her. She loves Jesus even if he is dead, she was not only in love with the money that she might have received from Jesus.

Question 4(b): Are the rituals of washing the deceased still performed in our community? If they are not, why are they not performed?

Answer: Mrs Taje said these rituals are performed though mortuaries have taken over our job. "I performed this ritual on my uncle but I closed my eyes. My mother used to teach us how to do these things because you will be alone in the future and you will be forced to perform these rituals." She further said that as parents, they are supposed to teach their children these rituals. These rituals mould them.

Mrs. Mokonopi said other people prefer to die at home so that they should be ritually washed by their own people, for it is important to ritually cleanse a corpse. People prefer to cleanse and gather household things, especially the corpse and the belongings of the deceased before they inform people in the neighbourhood.

Question 4(c): Rituals of death and bereavement are long and emotionally taxing. How involved is your church in consoling the bereaved?

Answer: The congregation does that very well through the Gospel, because when people are mourning the death of their beloved one, their emotions are torn apart.

Mrs. Ledibane said the church shapes and comforts them.

Mrs. Mokunupi said this all depends on the individual because people differ, for some, it is difficult to accept and believe that their loved one has passed away. She further said that we are different even when we are from the same church. For her,

some people can console the bereaved while others cannot do that. Some people use The Word of God as a whip against the bereaved.

Question 4(d): Do these rituals empower women or do they disempower them?

Answer: These rituals do empower women. Women have a strength to console the bereaved.

Question 5: How do you view the role/action(s) of the male disciples of Jesus in the story of Mary Magdalene? What is their attitude to her? Do they console her or listen to her?

Answer: Mrs. Memela said that some people have shortcomings and they need to be taught in our churches. These men are like the men we live with now. They despise us and think that we are inferior to them. Men oppress women and they are fond of being in leadership positions. The men only came to the grave and left while Mary Magdalene sat and waited at the grave till she saw some people, who asked her who she wants. This shows that women are powerful. She was strong and matured. She was not afraid of these men. That is why Jesus Christ sent her to go and tell the other disciples that they will meet in Galilee.

Section 3: Mary Magdalene - commissioned by Jesus to spread the Good news.

(John 20: 11 - 18)

Question 1: Why was she free to follow Jesus as his disciple?

Answer: She did not have anything that held her back from doing that. For instance, she did not have a husband or children to hinder her and thus she was free to do the work of Jesus. She could also have chosen not to follow Jesus, it is only that she was spiritually matured.

Question 2: What do you think it meant in her context for an unmarried woman to follow a male Messiah?

Answer: It was not nice at all to follow a male, but because she was spiritually matured, it was not a problem for her to do that. She was also trustworthy, and she was not

afraid of anything. Following Jesus should still be done by the Mothers today; they need not be bothered by what people are saying, as long as they know what they are doing.

Mary Magdalene also understood the teachings of Jesus very well and she also kept these teachings for herself, and she later spread the Good news.

She was not of the flesh but of the spirit.

Question 3: How do we view the discipleship of a woman who does not have a husband?

Answer: It was not nice but you should trust yourself. People will follow you only when they understand you.

Question 4: When Jesus calls Mary Magdalene by her name, does that have any significance?

Answer: This shows how Mary Magdalene and Jesus were close. She knew the voice of Jesus even when she was asleep. Her spiritual maturity also helped her to distinguish between the demons voice and that of God.

Questions 5 and 6 were seen as one question by the group.

Question 5: Is there a limit to our physical touching of Jesus?

Question 6: What does this text mean for us in our context?

Answer: Mrs. Ledibane: We need to know the difference between being Christian and being demonic. There was nothing between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. She did not have any physical touching with Jesus and she also did not experience any stumbling block in her relation to Jesus.

Mrs Sebolai: It is difficult for us today to touch Jesus physically because we are told about Jesus. This is like any story, for we cannot touch him or ask him questions. The Jews saw and spoke with him. We are still weak for there is no physical touching between us and Jesus our Lord.

Mrs. Taje: We need warmth, there should not be an empty space between Jesus and you. This was absent for Mary Magdalene. We usually desire for a lot of

things and we usually do not know how we will get them. This should also be applicable for our Christian life. We should feel Jesus in our prayers. We need to trust God and we should also try by all means that God be with us.

APPENDIX 3

3.1 The Klerksdorp Circuit Christian Women's Group

Group one: Mrs. Margaret Mosia (Minister's wife/Mmamoruti), Mrs. Pascalina Ntoyi, Mrs. Selina Mabitle (Vice), Mrs. Joyce Lemeke (Secretary), Mrs. Agnes Ncwane, Mrs. Lydia Mqobongo, Mrs. Maria Kopane, Mrs. Sophie Num.

Section 1: At the foot of the Cross. John 19: 25 - 27)

Question 1: What does it mean to be mother in our township?

Answer: A woman is an umbrella for the nation.

Question 2: What does it mean to be a wife in our township?

Answer: A wife is the centre of the behaviour, love and she is also the light for her family.

Question 3: What does it mean to be a childless and an unmarried or divorced woman in our township?

Answer: It is difficult because you are scorned at, and you are verbally abused by people.

Question 4: List the characters in John 19: 25 - 27.

Answer: Mary mother of Jesus. Mary Magdalene. Mary wife of Cleopa.

Question 5: What do we know about the characters?

Answer: Mary is the mother of Jesus. There were other people who were there, when Jesus was crucified. They had ointments to anoint Jesus. Those are the people who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus.

Question 6: What are the consequences of not having a husband or not having a man "in your life" in our church and in our community?

Answer: You are not trusted by people, especially married women.
You are called a bitch.
You live a better life.

Question 7: In what way is the story of Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross the same story as ours?

Answer: Mary Magdalene was hurt. I could have avenged for Jesus.

Section 2: Mary Magdalene at the grave. (John 20: 1 - 10)

Group two: Mrs. Elizabeth Ndakana, Mrs. Rebecca Malashe, Mrs. Elizabeth Sibuta, Mrs. Phildah Mjeza, Miss. Anny Mpikashe, Mrs. Felicia Semetse, Ms. Nozipho Dlamini and Mrs Martha Msikinya (Minister's wife).

Question 1: List the characters in this scene.

Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter and one of the disciples.
Simon Peter was the disciple who was trusted by Jesus Christ.

Question 2: What is the role of each character?

Answer: Mary Magdalene was the bodyguard of the corpse of Jesus.
The unknown disciple was a beloved one.

Question 3(a): The gospel of John does not say whether Mary Magdalene was a mature and older woman, who could have been divorced or a single young woman. Do we find women like her in our church and in our community? How do we relate to them?

Answer: Such women sacrifice a lot.

Question 3(b): In verse 1 of this very same chapter, Mary Magdalene goes to the graveyard alone and it is still dark. What "kind" of women go out alone at night in our community?

Answer: Trustworthy women.
Women who have courage and who are not scared.

Question 4(a): Mary went to the grave to presumably anoint the corpse of Jesus ritually. Does our cultural traditional way of life allow young, single women to perform the ritual washing of the corpse? If not, why? If yes, why and when?

Answer: No. In the past, children and young people did not understand the meaning of death. These people were not supposed to know if a person has passed away. They were always told that a person has gone away to visit.
One woman wanted to know what should happen if your own child dies when you are young and single. Should you just leave your child's corpse to be dealt with by other people?
No one could answer this question.

Question 4(b): Are the rituals of washing the deceased still performed in our community? If they are not, why are they not performed?

Answer: Yes. They are performed in order to pay last respect to that person.

Question 4(c): Rituals of death and bereavement are long and emotionally taxing. How involved is your church in consoling the bereaved?

Answer: From the day we get the message that someone has died, we console them by praying with the bereaved, preaching and we also donate money towards the expenses of the funeral.

Question 4(d): Do these rituals empower women or do they disempower them?

Answer: These rituals empower those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Some of the young women were of a different opinion to the older women, who insisted that the rituals are empowering women. The young women believe that these rituals are the worst rituals that a woman has to undergo.

Question 5: How do you view the role/action(s) of the male disciples of Jesus in the story of Mary Magdalene? What is their attitude to her? Do they console her or listen to her?

Answer: They had a good attitude towards her.

They listened to what she had to tell them and they followed him to the graveyard.

Question 6: In your own words, retell the story of Mary Magdalene at the grave of Jesus early in the morning while it was still dark.

Answer: She goes to the graveyard early in the morning to make sure that the corpse of Jesus Christ is still there. She was embarrassed because the grave was empty. She then went to report to Simon Peter and one of Jesus Christ's disciples, who then followed her to see for themselves. Simon Peter got inside the grave and took linen clothes.

Question 7: Who was Jesus for Mary Magdalene? Does this provide an example for you? In what way?

Answer: She was his mother.

Yes. She was caring. She sacrificed a lot and she had attributes of a good parent.

**Section 3: Mary Magdalene - Commissioned by Jesus to spread the Good News.
(John 20: 11 - 18)**

(Group One)

Question 1: Why was she free to follow Jesus as his disciple?

Answer: She had good faith in his teachings.

She had accepted Jesus Christ.

She had witnessed all the beautiful deeds Jesus made in the world.

Question 2: What do you think it meant in her context for an unmarried woman to follow a male Messiah?

Answer: The woman is given all sorts of names.
She is verbally abused.
But Mary Magdalene trusted herself.

Question 3: How do we view the discipleship of a woman who does not have a husband?

Answer: A woman is like a rock, nothing is difficult for her.
A single woman can cause a family to break up.
You cannot advice married people because you are unmarried.
You are not respected by the people.

(Group two)

Question 4: When Jesus calls Mary Magdalene by her name, does that have any significance?

Answer: Yes. She shows mercy.

Question 5: Is there a limit to our physical touching of Jesus?

Answer: Yes, because of what is written in the Bible in John 20:17 that says, "Do not touch me because I have not gone to my Lord (Father).
Jesus feared that Mary will make him impure.

APPENDIX 4

4. INTERVIEWS

4.1 St. Martin Lutheran Church, Kimberley

4.1.1 Interviewee 1: Mrs Rachel Moss.

Gloria: It was not clear what group one said about the meaning of being a mother in the township. Can you comment on that?

Mrs. Moss: It is not nice. One cannot discipline one's neighbours children like in the olden days. Parents differ on how to bring up children and they have different laws at their homes for their children.

Gloria: What does it mean to be widow in your church and in the township?

Mrs. Moss: It is not nice. Your husband could have helped in disciplining the children and they sometimes stop to respect you in the house. The church only consoles you during the time of mourning for the deceased and on the day of the funeral. All the Christians disappear immediately after the funeral. You sometimes struggle to pay all that you have to pay for at the church because you do not have financial income any more.

Gloria: The rituals of washing a corpse are done at the mortuary these days. Your comment please.

Mrs. Moss: A number of years ago, only adults were allowed near a corpse and even to wash it ritually. Children and young people were not allowed near the vicinity. No explanation was given for that.

Gloria: Why have people stopped to wash the corpse for themselves?

Mrs. Moss: People are afraid of all sorts of things, for example, witchcraft; when witches take the nails or something from the corpse.

Gloria: In your own words, tell us the story of Mary Magdalene who went to the grave early in the morning while it was still dark.

Mrs. Moss: Because of love for other people, Mary Magdalene went with the mother of Jesus, she was hurt, she was also a believer. She was there when Jesus was crucified and she also went with her friends to the tomb early in the morning. When they arrived at the tomb, the body of Jesus was not there; she was hurt just like how the relatives of Jesus were hurt when they realised that the body of Jesus was not there. She was with the relatives of Jesus to help them and to console them. She also looked into the tomb and saw that the body of Jesus was really not in the tomb; they only saw the cloths that covered the body of Jesus.

Gloria: Is there any limit for us in touching Jesus physically?

Mrs. Moss: We cannot touch Jesus physically because he is a spirit. Jesus was born like a human being only to come and show us that we will also die and we will go to him but he is born of the Holy Spirit. He only came to explain his way to us as Christians.

Gloria: When you touched or passed a corpse during Mary Magdalene's time or when you were menstruating, you were seen to be ritually impure. Could these possibilities not have been the reasons for Jesus' phrase, "Do not touch me."

Mrs. Moss: No, there was nothing like that. Mary Magdalene was clean; if you talk of spiritual things, she was clean. Because she was of the world, she was not impure. This was all written in the Scripture and it had to happen. Now we people of flesh, when we touch a corpse we have to get a ritual cleansing.

Gloria: What do you clean or wash when you cleans yourself?

Mrs. Moss: You wash the impurity (sefifi). Sometimes you do that to separate the dead from the living.

Gloria: Of what significance is this text to you Mrs. Moss?

Mrs. Moss: It is a lesson. It propels me to do what Mary Magdalene did. It is through love. If I also have that love, I will be able to help people, to console those who need to be consoled. To give those who are in need. The text is beautiful. I am weak but I try sometimes, as I am of the flesh. You are not supposed to count what you are doing for other people. I do not want to be rich, I just want to survive so that I should also be able to help a friend in need and this happens sometimes.

Gloria: Does it mean that Mary Magdalene encourages you to continue your "work of love?"

Mrs. Moss: She gives me strength to continue and even when I do not have, but the little bit that I have, I can share with other people.

Gloria: If we remember well, the text does not say that the male disciples of Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene. Even when she was at the grave, she was left alone. What does this mean for you?

Mrs. Moss: There came a message that go and tell my brothers that I have risen and we will meet in Galilee. I have conquered death. I shall meet them there. Now these disciples were not all at the same place, that is why they rushed to the grave. They only gave out the message to those who were not there when they all assembled at one place. They only rushed to tell the other disciples just as he said he will be raised on the third day. The male disciples were inquisitive; they thought that Jesus was going to live again with them. That is why they left Mary Magdalene.

Gloria: How do you view their action of leaving her alone at the grave?

Mrs. Moss: I do not know how they were thinking. What they did was not good. They were not supposed to do that. Anything could have happened to her; she could have fainted. They were excited. They might have forgotten all about her.

4.1.2 Interviewee 2: Mrs. Elizabeth Louw.

- Gloria: How do you feel to be a parent in the Township? I am asking this question again because your group gave me what ought to happen and not what experiences Township mothers have.
- Mrs. Louw: I am a divorced woman. My neighbours are keeping a close watch over me. I should be my own example as well as an example to them, because I am a member of the Mothers' Union.
- Gloria: What problems do you encounter as a divorcee in the church as well as in the township?
- Mrs. Louw: At our church, I do not have any problems because I have lodged my case. In Tambo Square, where I live, I also do not experience any problems and I have been living here for three years.
- Gloria: Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John does not relate to anyone. Can her story become your story, and in what way?
- Mrs. Louw: Mary Magdalene was a very responsible person and she was very loving. She got on well with her neighbours because she was the one who went to tell them that the corpse of Jesus was not in the grave. I see her as someone who was interested in Jesus Christ. She loved people and she was also generous.
- Gloria: The male disciples did not talk to Mary Magdalene. How do you interpret their behaviour?
- Mrs. Louw: She was worried. She was like that because they saw that she was crying and they were worried about the corpse.
- Gloria: When people go the grave yard, they usually go in groups. Mary Magdalene went alone to the grave. Your comment.

Mrs. Louw: (She laughed at me). I also go alone to the graveyard early in the morning. Before, I used to go with my Aunt and a friend. These people only went to visit the graves of their people and not mine, when I made it a point to go to their graves. I stopped going with them because they were a hindrance to me. I now go freely.

Gloria: Are you not scared to go by yourself?

Mrs. Louw: No, I am not scared. I do not care what people think about me or say as long as I am right. If you want to correct me where I go wrong, I will listen to you and I will take your advice if it is good. That is my motto.

Gloria: You have just said that you are from a court case where the murderer of your nephew won the case; and your brother whom you were close to died not so long ago and your own son has gone missing without any trace. How involved was the church in consoling you in your grieve?

Mrs. Louw: If I was not a church attender, or if I did not know God, I would have been dead by now. The congregants have really consoled me. At our Mothers' Union meeting, they said they were praying for me and that alone gave me strength; to know that people are praying for me. The Lutheran and the Catholic Mothers Union members gave me moral support. With my son's disappearance, the police who were handling the case also gave me moral support.

Gloria: Jesus is teacher and Master for Mary Magdalene. Who is Jesus for you and does who Jesus is to Mary Magdalene encourage you? In what way?

Mrs. Louw: That is a good example for me because I had a lot of problems. I do not want to be pure and perfect like Mary Magdalene because no one is pure and perfect. When I go astray, I want to be directed. So, God is also my Master.

Gloria: Why was she free to follow Jesus?

Mrs. Louw: She was a strong woman and she was loving. She also had a strong faith. She was a darling because she was strong. If she was a woman of our time, being human, we could have accused her of roaming around with a man.

Gloria: How do you view her discipleship to Jesus, as a single woman.

Mrs. Louw: It is not wrong to follow Jesus as you are. People may talk and they can say anything as long as the two of you know that there is nothing between the two of you. Continue to serve your God.

Gloria: How do you interpret the text?

Mrs. Louw: Mary Magdalene is a good example in a sense that if you read the text and try and follow it, you will do good to your neighbours and to the church. Do not care about what people say. We might not be able to match the standard of Mary Magdalene because she was pure. Our Christianity will not be the same, but we can try.

Gloria: Retell the story in your own words, please.

Mrs. Louw: She was a believing and a dear Christian. She was loving. She knew how to cooperate with people. She cried with dignity.

4.1.3 Interviewee 3: Mrs. Moitseman

Gloria: In John 20: 1, Mary Magdalene goes to the graveyard alone and it is still dark. What "kind" of women go out alone at night in our community?

Mrs. Moitseman: It is a person with faith. A person who does not concentrate on what other people are saying. Again in our times, we will ask ourselves what is this person going to do at that time of the day alone at the graveyard. We will suspect the person of witchcraft or we might just think that she has gone to talk with her ancestors.

Gloria: In what way does the life of Mary Magdalene as a follower of Jesus empower us as Township Christian women?

Mrs. Moitseman: Mary Magdalene was a righteous person because she is in the Bible. The Bible is always right. There is nothing wrong she was doing. The Bible cannot be questioned or critiqued.

4.1.4 Interviewee 4: Mrs. Doreen Morobi.

Gloria: Why do people allow the corpse of a deceased relative to be ritually washed at the mortuary these days? Is it right that that should be done at mortuaries?

Mrs. Morobi: It is right that the mortuaries have taken over because a lot of things are happening during the ritual of washing a corpse. People pretend to help you perform the ritual, and they end up bewitching you. Some of them pretend to be praying with us during the day at the Mothers' Union when they know that they are also attending to secret churches in the evenings.

Gloria: Is there a clash between these performed rituals and being a Christian?

Mrs. Morobi: One's faith makes one to ignore or not to practice one's traditional rituals. Prayer is like good medicine.

I believe in seeing visions. Women in our Mothers' Union encourage people who can foretell through these visions.

Gloria: Does your minister know about your talent?

Mrs. Morobi: No. He does not know. I am afraid that he will discourage that from me and he will ask me how much faith do I have in God.

4.1.5 Interviewee 5: Mrs. Matshediso

Gloria: Why are rituals of washing a corpse done at a mortuary nowadays?

Mrs. Matshediso: Because of witchcraft. People tend to deny or act as if they do not believe in witchcraft; we see convincing things that are done through witchcraft.

Gloria: Christians usually call a diviner or a Sangoma to tell why a person has died, especially if the deceased is young. This happens even when they are told by the doctors that the person has died because of cancer. And on top of that, the minister and the congregants are called in to sympathise with the bereaved. Is this not living

a double life? Is there no clash between African Traditional rituals beliefs and Christianity?

Mrs. Matshediso: Christianity makes us live a double life. When a person is sick, we first take the person to the hospital to see a doctor. If the person does not get well, we call in a traditional doctor. If the person die, we still call in a traditional doctor and the minister so that the person should be given a Christian burial.

Gloria: Do the widow rituals empower women?

Mrs. Matshediso: They are a torture, because women need the company of people they are used to, to share their sorrows with them. You are ostracised. People only do these rituals out of respect for the in-laws. The length of time you have to wear black clothes is a torture. If you refuse to perform these rituals, you are accused of having killed your husband; of having another affair and you are suspected of wanting to get married very soon.

Gloria: Nurses wear white uniforms, and they might not be allowed to wear their black clothes if they are still undergoing the widow rituals. How do they deal with such a situation?

Mrs. Matshediso: You wear your white uniform when you go to work. When you come back, you wear your black clothes. I think that the two colours are in conflict with one another, because white stands for light, joy and everything positive when the colour black signifies darkness and everything stressful and negative. I think the best is to do away with the whole ritual because it is confusing and it is a painful experience for women.

Gloria: Do these rituals empower women?

Mrs. Matshediso: They disempower them because you agree to perform the rituals unwillingly. You are told that you are impure "o nale sefifi". You cannot go out to look for a job if you were not employed before your husband died. You are sometimes told that you can afford everything because you have

received a lot of money from your deceased husband's policies, work place and from his bank account. You are not advised on how to live now that you have lost a partner; losing a husband is a trauma. You need spiritual guidance as a widow.

APPENDIX 5

Group interview - Women from the Klerksdorp circuit.

Gloria: What lesson does the Mary Magdalene story have for you? Think about the questions you have answered in the Bible study and the text you have read. Does the story empower you as mothers who are living in the Phelindaba/Klerksdorp Circuit?

Mrs. Masiya: As a believer, if I am hurt, I should not be hurt for a long time. The story teaches me to forgive other people.

Mrs. Lebeke: The text taught me that Mary Magdalene, a female disciple, was always in the company of Jesus and the other male disciples. She was the only woman among these men. She was able to go wherever, and she was not married. This encourages me not to fear anything, I should use my talents, even if I am not educated; not going to university. I can communicate my ideas with these educated people. I should not undermine myself; be who you are.

Ms. Dlamini: If you are a believing woman, you are supposed not to fear anything, even when people perceive what you are doing as dangerous. Trust in Jesus Christ, just as Mary Magdalene did when she went to look for the corpse of Jesus at the graveyard at night.

Mrs. Mjeza: When you are a woman in the Mothers union, you are not supposed to fear anything. When it is difficult, know that you are not alone, you should trust God. If someone has a problem, do not be afraid, pray and God will give you strength.

Mrs. Semetse: In addition, Mary Magdalene was a parent who had parental love, and she was always alert because she was the one who saw that the corpse of Jesus was not there. She was also trustworthy, because she went to tell Peter and the other disciples what she has seen. It also teaches me that one should be independent. When I have problems, I usually trust God more than I can trust people or friends, because God will never disappoint you but friends always do.

Gloria: Why should one not trust one's friends when in trouble?

Mrs. Semetse: They are people of flesh and blood, they change like the weather. They can harbour jealous feelings which I might not know of. God is the only one to be trusted.

Mrs. Ndakana: There is a great need for love, peace and love for all people so that one should be able to come into contact with God.

Mrs. Malashe: I want to remind Mrs. Semetse that in the Bible, God says love one another before you can love Me, forgive each other. You should be able to help a friend who is in need. If you do not help your friend, who will help her?

Gloria: Jesus has risen from the dead, Mary Magdalene hears him calling her by her name, she recognises him and she is happy to see him and she wants to touch him - but he refuses, why?

Mrs. Ntoyi: Jesus is saved.

Gloria: What about Mary Magdalene; was she not saved?

Mrs. Ntoyi: She is not yet dead.

Gloria: Does one's salvation come through death?

Mrs. Ntoyi: No, it does not come through death but the death of Jesus showed us what a Christian death is. If you are dead, you are not really dead, you will be raised to life. I believe that when you die, you will rise from the dead.

Mrs. Masiya: Jesus had a problem, he was unfair. He refused Mary Magdalene to touch him but he allowed Thomas to touch him and not only that but allowed him to touch his wounds. Thomas touched him when he had not yet returned to his Father. Why does he refuse Mary Magdalene to touch him when he allows Thomas to touch him?

Gloria: Can you suggest an answer Mrs Masiya? Or anyone.

Mrs. Masiya: No, I am just asking.

Mrs. Sibuta: Mary Magdalene was a woman. Jesus knew what kind of a person she was. Maybe she was menstruating and now she cannot touch Jesus when she menstruates. Thomas was a male person, that is why he was allowed to touch Jesus.

Mrs. Semetse: I think Jesus refused Mary Magdalene to touch him because she was full of pity for Jesus. We have seen or read about how she went about looking for Jesus, or rather for his corpse. Mary Magdalene is going to hold Jesus back to normal life, and Jesus was refusing that. He allowed Thomas to touch him because Thomas did not believe. He knew that he only believed in what he saw. He was also in a stage where he did not want to be defiled.

Gloria: As a woman who menstruates every month, and as a follower of Christ, how would you react when Jesus says that you should not touch him because you are menstruating; especially if you are his staunch follower?

Mrs. X: This was not nice, Mary Magdalene was happy for Jesus and he was also supposed to have been happy.

Mrs. Msikinya: Mary Magdalene was the one who was guarding the corpse of Jesus - her sorrow will also affect Jesus. That will also affect him going to the Father. When people die these days, they do not allow you to find out that they are dying, but they do change. Jesus did not want to be distracted on his way back to the Father, he did not want to leave anyone distressed. That is why Jesus did not want Mary Magdalene to touch him.

Gloria: What message do you get from this act?

Mrs. Manaso: Jesus wanted to show Mary Magdalene that she should not cry for him, but she should cry for herself - that is why he was saying do not touch me because I am going to the Father.

Ms. Dlamini: Do not pity others, put yourself in their shoes. Rather console them.

Mrs. Masia: I would have been hurt if Jesus pushed me away because I would have lived with him for quite some time. I would have been walking about with him. I might have seen all the beautiful things he was doing on earth. When he has risen from the dead, when I want to rejoice with him, he pushed me away.

Mrs. Ntoyi: Such things happen on earth, especially with friends that you are living with. When you are happy for them, they give you a cold shoulder.

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