

From the beginning feminist theology has striven to see and understand the exclusion of women and women's experience from theological reflection and church practice even in churches that have a strong social gospel. It became quickly apparent to many that the issue was not simply that the churches and theology had lost their way in terms of their view of women but rather that the very fabric of theology itself was patriarchal rooted in the absolute maleness of Jesus who became the male Christ. This raised the question as to whether a male saviour could save women because it was believed for most of Christian history that Christ could only save what he had experienced and clearly he had not experienced being a woman. As Elizabeth Johnson put it:

The idea that the Word could have become female flesh is not even seriously imaginable so thoroughly has androcentric Christology done its work of erasing the full dignity of women as christomorphic in the community of disciples.

Rosemary Radford Ruether was concerned to examine where this denial of the female first infiltrated a religion that declared a new social order in which all were equal. She was never an advocate of a blissful matriarchy in our pre-history but she did believe that there was a time when gender inequality was less devastating than it has been throughout Christian history. She finds the origin of the denial of the feminine in the classical Neo-Platonism and apocalyptic Judaism out of which Christianity was born. Here we find the combination of a male warrior God with the exaltation of the intellect over the body. The alienation of the masculine from the feminine is the basic sexual symbol that sums up all the other dualisms which are mind and body; subjective self and objective world; individual and community; autonomous will (male) and bodily sensuality (female) and the domination of nature by spirit.¹The Hellenistic influence has shaped concepts such as Logos and Christ in devastatingly androcentric ways.² While Christianity has never claimed that God was literally male the Hellenistic underpinning has led to many assumptions about the nature of God and normative humanity. Women then find that they do not simply require salvation because of their humanity but in addition because of their female humanity – a double jeopardy from which it has been hard to recover.

The last 30-40 years have provided some very interesting images and theological moves in the area of feminist Christology and I would like to say that a huge contribution has been made by feminist theologians to the doctrinal and pastoral elements of these debates. The debates have not been without controversy of course and not always from the advocates of traditional theologies, some feminist theologians have called each other to account as the debates unfolded.

¹ Rosemary Ruether 'Motherearth And The Megamachine: A Theology Of Liberation In A Feminine, Somatic And Ecological Perspective', in *Womanspirit Rising*, Carol Christ [ed]; p44.

² Rosemary Ruether, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*, Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, p82.

Time does not allow for all the work to be placed before you and so a few examples will have to suffice- please do not think that those not referred to are seen as less significant than those mentioned.

An early step towards female faces of Christ was CHRIST the Liberator which is not surprising as feminist theology has its roots in liberation theologies. In the west Rosemary Ruether was amongst those who declared that Christ was best understood as a liberator, not in the spiritual sense but in real terms in the political and social realm. Aware, as she is, of the demands for justice in the world she nevertheless set out a biblically based argument for an understanding of Jesus as liberator. Ruether wished to take seriously the Jewish roots of Christianity and Christian thinking and so was not prepared to merely brush over Hebraic messianic thought with the gloss of Greek metaphysics. Central to Jewish messianic hope was political action since for the Jews religious and political life was synonymous. Even when their ideas around the Kingdom became more transcendent they never lost sight of the importance of politics. The Messiah was always understood as a political figure that would champion the poor and the oppressed and the Messianic Kingdom was one with its feet planted deeply in the earth, it was both political and social. However, it appears that it was also deeply patriarchal and this is not entirely surprising given the patriarchal nature of much contemporary Judaism and the increased understanding of the Messiah as a warrior king. Ruether suggests that Jesus did not appear to accept such a hierarchical scheme. He did not evoke Davidic Kingly hopes, rather he praised the lowly and outcasts for responding to his message while the reigning authorities stay encapsulated in their systems of power. Further, he did not envisage the Kingdom as otherworldly, nationalistic and elitist.³ He saw it come on earth when basic needs were met and people could live in harmony. In this new community we would not simply be servants but brothers and sisters, thus replacing the old idea of patriarchal family with its inevitable inequalities [Matthew 10:37-38; Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21]. Ruether says:

'Jesus, restores a sense of God's prophetic and redemptive activity taking place in the present-future, through people's experiences and the new possibilities disclosed through those possibilities. To encapsulate Jesus himself as God's 'last word' and 'once for all' disclosure of God, located in a remote past and institutionalised in a cast of Christian leaders is to repudiate the spirit of Jesus and to recapitulate the position against which he himself protests.'⁴

Against this background the everyday experiences of women become valuable as disclosers of the divine redemptive process, rather than expressions of alienating 'otherness'. Ruether challenges Christianity to see the events of Jesus' life as eschatological, as realities towards which we are still moving, and not as historical events that form the base of an established church. This early step did not necessarily give us a female face of Christ but it did give us a less patriarchal system in which the face of Christ/God was not entirely male and warrior like. The building blocks for further feminist

³ Rosemary Ruether, *Sexism And God-Talk*; London, SCM, 1983, p120

⁴ Ibid; p122.

reflection were also there- Jesus was not in Ruether's eyes the last word of God, nor the Christ a once and for all event. Her work moved the debate on a long way.

However she was not without her critics. Rita Brock is critical of Ruether claiming that she places Jesus in the position of a hero thus disabling his followers. We give away our own power to those we consider heroes and this is made no better by the fact that we view the hero as benevolent or even the Christ, we are still left bereft of control in our lives. Brock is only too well aware of how dangerous this is and so warns us against casting Jesus in such a role. She is adamant that basing Christology on an historical figure is a mistake since it confuses the concept with the phenomena⁵. We should be placing the saving events of Christianity in a much broader context than that of the person of Jesus. She understands the shift in feminist Christology to be from seeing Jesus as the focus of redemption to seeing him as the locus of faith. To illustrate her point she looks at the miracle stories which she does not wish to explain way rather she wishes to claim them as normative statements about the nature of Christian community. They show clearly what is possible when we are functioning from the level of connection and not operating with a power-over model. In other words they illustrate the liberative power of Christ in relation and the political nature of illness. Healing, then, is not something bestowed by one with power but is striven for by the whole community in a relationship of power equality.⁶

Rita Brock believes that when speaking of Jesus as powerful we have to be quite clear about what type of power we are speaking of; it is she feels erotic power. This leaves us in no doubt about where the source of this power lies; it is not an abstract concept but is deeply embedded in our very being. It does not descend from on high but is part of our nature; it is our innate desire to relate for justice and growth. This kind of power is wild and cannot be controlled, living at this level saves us from sterility that comes from living by the head alone. Eros allows us to feel our deepest passions in all areas of life and to reclaim it from the narrow sexual definition that has been used by patriarchal understanding. Brock is convinced that erotic power and the relationality it propels us towards will redeem both the world and Christ.

The major Christological implication from this way of thinking is to reject the way Jesus has been portrayed as a static figure who is a victim and who had to be delivered to some outside force and placed in an abstract realm where he dwells in non present reality as the redeemer. Brock says we need to redeem Christ from being a victim and from being a hero, liberation theology still has the sin salvation model with Jesus in the role of hero for the community if not for the individual. She wants to liberate Christ from this understanding. We need to stop seeing him as the exclusive revelation of God and then we can remove ourselves from the place of simply being acted upon by him. We should begin to see Christ as larger than the historical Jesus and in that way the Christ becomes more accessible to us. The erotic power of Christ that worked in Jesus becomes accessible to us and acts as the spur for us to go and do as Jesus did, but it is not a guarantee of redemption.

⁵ See Rita Brock, *Journeys by Heart. A Christology of Erotic Power*, New York, Crossroad, 1988.

⁶ There will be more of Rita Brock's erotic Christology in chapter 3.

This reading of 'the Christ' means Brock sees the healings and the exorcisms in a different light they are not actions carried out by an all powerful God/man but rather by a connected broken hearted healer. Exorcisms are not performed by Jesus because he has the power to forgive but because he has experienced those same demons and so has been empowered by his own experience to release others. Brock claims the same is true of us once we name our own demons we have the power to help others claim their erotic power. In this way erotic power is not only political but also relational.⁷ How intimate this power is and how physically based it is can be seen by Jesus using breath, spittle and blood to heal. Miracles do not require the bestowing of hierarchal power or ritually pure surroundings, they require connection [Mark6:6] in which even the healer needs healing and Brock uses the anointing of Jesus to illustrate this point.

Brock says:

'Heart is our original grace. In exploring the depths of heart we find incarnate in ourselves the divine reality of connection, of love..... But its strength lies in fragility. To be born so open to the presence of others in the world gives us the enormous, creative capacity to make life whole. Yet such openness means that the terrifying and destructive factors of life are also taken into the self, a self that then requires loving presence to be restored to grace.'⁸

This struggle to remain open and relational in a harsh world is the redemptive power of Christ which throbs in all of us as individuals and in community. Brock refers to Christa community which she understands as broken hearted healers relating together not as saviours, victims or heroes but as vulnerable hearts unfolding together.

Brock offers in these early years a far more female centred picture of Christ/a than hitherto seen. The attributes are one might argue more feminine [this may be a problem] and the once and for all nature has been entirely removed at the same time as Christa is introduced as a community not just a redemptive figure.

Another feminist theologian who carries forward the theme of erotic power as Christic power is carter Heyward but she goes in different directions from Brock. Heyward's starting point for seeking to understand God is taking human experience seriously. She says:

'We are, left alone untouched until, we choose to take ourselves - our humanity - more seriously than we have taken our God.'⁹

Her emphasis is on experiencing God as a living reality not as a plausible abstract concept. Theology lived by women is not about systems of dogmas, doctrines and categories, but is rather:

⁷Ibid; p82.

⁸Rita Brock, *Journeys By Heart. A Christology of Erotic Power*, New York, Crossroad, 1988, p17.

⁹Carter Heyward, *The Redemption Of God*; pxix.

'A revelation of a living God whom we believe to be Godself defiant of all static, rigid categories and concepts.'¹⁰

The traditions have to be tried in relation to women's experience and if they are crushing not liberating they have to be discarded. Indeed they have to be declared blasphemous and idolatrous because they lie about the nature of God and limit the unfolding of the Godself. This is not a task to be done alone but is a relational task. Heyward makes it abundantly clear how important relating is in the creation of theology in the introduction to 'Touching Our Strength. The Erotic as Power and the Love of God.' Here she tells us that in order to come to the point of being able to write theology she had to ground herself, to situate herself in her embodiedness through touch, smell, taste and memory. Memory of those she had cared for and of the battles that had been fought and were being fought both personally and internationally. She had to spend painstaking time and playful time with friends and she had to make love. All these actions grounded her, embodied her and placed her in relation. Only then could she reflect theologically. God's creative power is the power to love and to be loved. Heyward declares it was this incarnate, loving dynamic, relating God that Jesus, made visible and that the Church lost Heyward suggests that Jesus saw no difference between our love for our God and our love for our neighbour [Mark 12: 28-31]. Therefore we are labouring to create a new life based on mutual love, one in which: 'We are dealing with a real love for man for his own sake and not for the love of God.'¹¹ There can be no passive observance if we are to be in mutual relation. Heyward is convinced that this is what the life of Jesus showed us and she embarks on a task she calls 'imaging Jesus'. This is a process of expressing something about reality, of expressing a relation that we know already between ourselves and that which we image. Reimaging may mean letting go of tradition. One such letting go is realising that Jesus only really matters if he was human and if we view his incarnation as a 'relational experience.'¹² Heyward believes it is a crippling mistake to see Jesus as a divine person 'rather than as a human being who knew and loved God. It is crippling because it prevents people claiming their own divinity. She does not deny the possibility of incarnation, indeed if God is a God of relation then incarnation is bound to be not only a possibility but a desirable necessity. She is not devaluing the reality of incarnation but rather exposes the limits of exclusivity. By re-imaging Jesus she also re-images human beings by realising the amazing power and relation that lies dormant in human nature.

Although the gospels tend to imply Jesus' innate and complete divinity, Luke hints at its growth when he says: 'and Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature and in favour with God and men' (Luke 2:52) . Heyward does not wish to deny God's parenthood of Jesus but wishes to re-image beyond genetic terms and therefore as the source of power in which Jesus was grounded. Once we really value Jesus' humanity the dualistic gulf between humanity and God is breached. It becomes possible to assert that our own humanity can touch, heal and comfort the world and in so doing strengthen

¹⁰Ibid; p12.

¹¹ ibid, p16.

¹² ibid, p31.

God. At the same time it becomes apparent that a God of love is as dependent on us as we are on her.

Heyward therefore re-images divinity as something we grow towards by choice and activity. This shift requires her to look critically at the notions of authority and power. She is anxious to move away from the idea that authority is something that is exercised over us by God or state and to come to an understanding of it as self possessed. Heyward notes that two words are used in the gospels. One is 'exousia' which denotes power that has been granted, whereas 'dunamis' which is raw power, innate, spontaneous and often fearful is not granted it is inborn and this is the authority that Jesus claims. This is why Jesus could not answer his interrogators, they were not speaking the same language because they were interested in authority while he was concerned with power. Nor could he be understood by those who wished to equate authority with religious and civil government. What was new about Jesus was his realisation that our dunamis is rooted in God and is the force by which we claim our divinity. By acting with dunamis we, just like Jesus, act from both our human and divine elements. We can overcome the suspicion of human power and initiative placed in our religious understanding by the story of Eve and her actions in Eden. Of course we have to re-image the kingdom as a place where the lion lies down with the lamb and the tools of destruction are changed into instruments of creativity. When humans dare to acknowledge their divine nature through dunamis, this is the kind of kingdom that is imaginable and must be made incarnate through radical love.

Radical love incarnates the kingdom because intimacy is the deepest quality of relation. Heyward says that to be intimate is to be assured that we are known in such a way that the mutuality of our relation is real, creative and cooperative. It is possible to see Jesus' ministry as based on intimacy since he knew people intuitively, insightfully and spontaneously. Heyward's re-imaging makes it clear that Jesus does not have exclusive rights to dunamis. Indeed he facilitates our knowing and claiming of God as dunamis through relation. He reveals to us 'the possibility of our own godding.' Heyward's Christ is one who meets us where we are between the 'yet' and the 'not yet' and impresses upon us not so much the nature of the Christ but the meaning of who we are.¹³ She says: 'God's incarnations are as many and varied as the persons who are driven by the power in relation to touch and be touched by sisters and brothers.'¹⁴ Most of all Heyward's Christology is fully embodied, sensuous and erotic seeking vulnerable commitment, alive with expectancy and power.

While she does not necessarily speak of a female Christ the way in which she understands Christology makes it clear that all people possess dunamis and the power to incarnate what has been understood as exclusively the divine attributes of a male Christ. Heyward does not only open the way for women but for all sexualities and genders by her exploration of relational christologies.

¹³ Heyward, *The Redemption of God*, p163.

¹⁴ *ibid*; p164.

A theologian who explicitly proclaims women's bodies as Christic is Maria Clara Bingemer who argues that women's bodies are Eucharistic. She understands the eucharist to refer to the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ and declares that women,

'possess in their bodiliness the physical possibility of performing the divine eucharistic action. In the whole process of gestation, childbirth, protection and nourishing of a new life, the sacrament of the eucharist, the divine act, happens anew.'¹⁵

What difference, if any, does she see between the divine action of the Eucharist and the divine creative action of women? It appears there is no difference. She extends the divinely creative actions of women's bodies beyond those of giving birth to toiling in the fields and factories in order to provide life for others. Most of all the bodies of women in Latin America are placed in the struggle for liberation. She says,

'Woman's body, eucharistically given to the struggle for liberation, is really and physically distributed, eaten and drunk by those who will - as men and women of tomorrow - continue the same struggle.'¹⁶

Bingemer moves the Christological debate on many steps when she equates the bodies of women with the eucharistic body of Christ. Not least because these are real bodies that experience the pleasures and pains of being fully incarnate. These women laugh, cry, love, hate, make love, are raped or beaten, are violated by the system and often abuse others. Can these bodies really be the body of Christ in the eucharistic sense? A resounding 'yes' is the answer. Bingemer is not referring to women being the body of Christ in the community sense of church but rather in their own embodied existence, in both the good and the bad. Their embodied struggle is the essence of Christ. This places a new slant on Jesus as 'companero', or fellow revolutionary. He has been understood almost as the 'ultimate revolutionary' This is not, however, the way in which some feminists wish to see him. His part in their struggle is far more intimate, he is not their leader, Christ is the struggle, Christ/a is their embodiment within it. What is raised here, in a striking way, is the notion that incarnation and perfection do not sit easily together. The Christ of otherworldly, yet enfleshed, perfection is taken to task and found lacking.

On a visit to Mexico I had a startling encounter with an elderly 'orthodox' catholic woman who wanted to talk about prostitution. She pointed to a number of women in the room and said 'they sell themselves for their children- they are Christ'. I wondered if selling sex was something she might look at as 'sinful'. She looked at me as if I was from another planet- did I not know it was no fun, dangerous, demeaning and led to much bad health – these women feed and raise their children – they are Christ. There was the end of the matter and I had placed before me in that room by an

¹⁵ *ibid*, p317.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p317.

unlikely orthodox catholic woman a diverse range of Christas who had one thing in common the ability to incarnate radical love.

Of course this wonderful woman was perhaps the first but not the last to place the unexpected female face of Christa before us. Marcella Althaus Reid also has a 13 year old female prostituted by 2 men in public toilets in Buenos Aires as a corrective to what she sees as the perfect liberator Christ figure such as the romantic Peruvian peasant in pristine white clothes hanging on a cross. Althaus Reid believed that even in telling sexual stories as the realities of people's lives- and after the manner of Heyward arguing that these too have dynamis within them- we are committing a Christic act as we are challenging normative rules that cripple us.

Althaus-Reid offers a very challenging image of Christ as Xena, warrior princess. A leather clad dyke hanging on a cross, declaring love into eternity for the woman she loves. This is a strange Christ indeed, one that challenges traditional images on many levels. She is not passive, she is screaming obscenities at the soldiers who pin her there and telling them what she will do to them if she could get down. But she also tells her lover hanging alongside her that she can't get down, she can't save her and her heart is breaking. So this is no passive saviour or wonder working heroine but she is courageous and transgressive just as Jesus of Nazareth was; so is she a Christ? Certainly she is because she destabilises neat patriarchal hierarchies which rest on Christ the male celibate heterosexual. She is the sort of Christa that women need, one who will free them from preconceptions of womanhood and the death of stereotypes. The embodied Christa is emerging in many forms, some of which are on display here today, and with each incarnation political/religious issues are addressed and the creative/redemptive space we share is expanded.

The next example is given to us by Kwok Pui Lan who picks up on what she calls an organic model of Christ. If Christ is the vine and those who follow him the branches then she says there is a clear interrelationship between humans and the cosmos. If Jesus conveys wisdom then through Asian eyes this wisdom comes from the earth and challenges human ways of acting. Kwok challenges the once and for all model of Christ and shows how an embodied wisdom version also challenges anthropocentrism and colonialism, she declares an epiphanic Christ- one not bounded by humans but manifest is all that has life. This means that women who work for the earth, as is evident in many Asian countries, they and the earth, viewed as their mother, work in Christic partnership. Perhaps as Heyward would say, godding each other through their interactions. In this model Christa becomes the earth along with all other living beings.

As we have seen feminist theologians have engaged in creative theology in order to dislodge the most oppressive aspects of the Christ symbol. This task has called for hermeneutical skill, imagination and moral courage in addition to the unshakeable belief that a more inclusive and liberating symbol may emerge from the wreckage of the patriarchal mindset. No small test of faith! In their attempts to put a female face to Christ some theologians as we have seen posited the Christa or Christa community. Edwina Sandys sculpted the first contemporary Christa, a female hanging on the cross, for the United Nations Year of Women in 1975. This image was greeted with

pleasure and disgust. Indeed the title Christa is embraced by some feminist theologians and rejected by others as too close to Christ. Some prefer the name Sophia. Before Christian theologians were directly using the notion of Sophia in their Christological debates authors such as Merlin Stone¹⁷ were reclaiming her for the Goddess tradition. Her argument was that the earliest religious impulses of humans were directed towards female deities and the people whose stories are told in biblical literature were no different. She and others¹⁸ suggest that the female divine was suppressed in biblical religion due to the over emphasis of the male monotheistic God. This emphasis means that Sophia's role in creation [Proverbs 8:22-31] is totally down played and the question is not asked about her existence before Yahweh. We tend to forget that the world of antiquity understood the cosmos as a creating mother and so for them a female creator was quite natural. Sophia is always involved with the people and thrives in chaos, not wishing to set in place the numbing rigidity of the disembodied word. Sophia is referred to throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and is often viewed as the Queen of Heaven, who was, surprisingly, worshipped in the Temple of Solomon for hundreds of years. It is, then, not that Sophia, the female divine, never existed but rather that she was overcome by the agenda of patriarchal religion. While she is never fully vanquished she is side lined and once the Christian story begins she is subsumed in the Messianic imagery surrounding Jesus. This highlights the power of language; when Sophia became Logos it was not just her gender that was changed but rather the whole concept underpinning her was transformed through disembodiment and the imposition of absolutes. It is from this starting point that feminist theologians have attempted to uncover and reclaim the power of Sophia.

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza approaches feminist Christology in a slightly different way from many of her feminist sisters. She sets out to explore the theoretical frameworks of various discourses about Jesus and not to write revolutionary biography or a post-patriarchal Christology. Feminist movements seek to intervene in the struggle over the control and commodification of knowledge; they try to keep the knowledge of radical equality alive in the eyes of the disenfranchised. This is a hard struggle in the reality of global systems and requires global analysis. Fiorenza believes that theology has to play its part or religion in general and Christology in particular will be a dangerous weapon in the hands of those who wish to reinstate conservative and oppressive regimes. Part of her extensive examination of christologies involves search for divine wisdom, Sophia. This is a difficult task since traces of her are buried in masculinist Christ logical traditions. Nor should we be lulled into thinking that even if we find her the lot of women will be improved. The Hebrew scriptures make her more visible and are positive about her but the lot of actual women was not always a happy one. The Christian scriptures, particularly the Johannine literature, highlight a stage when Jesus is given the attributes of Sophia. Some of the earliest traditions of the Jesus movement understood Jesus as the prophet of Sophia who was to make the realm of God available to the poor and marginalized. As a child of Sophia he also made the message experientially available to all

¹⁷ See Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, New York, Harvester/HBJ Books, 1976.

¹⁸ See Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, New York, Avon Books, 1978; Asphodel Long, *In a Chariot Drawn by Lions*, London, Women's Press, 1991; Alix Pirani, *The Absent Mother. Restoring the Goddess to Judaism and Christianity*, London, Mandala, 1991.

through ministry and miracles. One of the earliest Jesus sayings states that 'Sophia is justified by her children' [QLK7:35] which signifies that Sophia is not only with her children but is made just in and by them. The statements that have been hi-jacked to proclaim Jesus' atoning death can be seen in a different light as confirming that Jesus was the prophet of Sophia as were and are many others.

'Therefore also the Wisdom of God said "I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute."'[Lk13:34]

This suggests that the earliest reflections on the nature of Jesus were sophiology not Christology. Fiorenza wants to argue that Jesus does not close the Sophia tradition by being the last and greatest, this is a contradiction of the tradition rather he opens it yet further. He stands in a long line of Sophia prophets both men and women who have been killed for the message they bring. Their deaths were not willed by Sophia, indeed they are lamented.[QLK13:34]

Many scholars would argue that Jesus replaced Sophia but Fiorenza is adamant that close examination of the texts shows that Jesus is handed the attributes that Sophia always possessed [Mt11:25-27] therefore he received them from her. The baptism of Jesus confirms in ESF's view that he was a prophet of Sophia as she descended upon him like a dove [the grey dove was the symbol of the immanent Sophia while a turtle dove was a symbol of her transcendence: Philo]. Like Sophia Jesus found no dwelling place amongst humans and so was given one in heaven [Sophia: I Enoch42,1-2. Sir24,3-7]. Similarly they were both exalted and enthroned assuming rulership over the whole cosmos [Phil2:6-11; Isaiah45:23] The latter echoes the Isis cult and so it is no surprise that Jesus too is called Lord which was the title given to Isis. The Christ is understood in terms of Sophia as the mediator of the first creation and as the power of a new qualitatively different creation. It is this understanding of Sophia that allowed Christianity to have a cosmic agenda, to believe it could change the world.

Elisabeth Johnson also develops her Christology in terms of Jesus-Sophia. She is convinced that the early church used many of the traditions about personified Wisdom in order to come to an understanding of who Jesus was. Indeed, she asserts that it was only after he had become identified with wisdom that he was understood as the only begotten son. For Johnson the identification of Jesus with personified wisdom does a number of things. It illustrates the importance of everyday living in the unfolding of the kingdom and it offers female metaphors as part of the divine process.¹⁹ It also makes inclusion the central element of salvation. That is to say those who are normally excluded are counted as friends, accepted, sort out and loved not simply tolerated or worse still forgive. Jesus, as the child of Sophia, gives hope for the establishment of right relations across all boundaries. For Johnson the stories of resurrection illustrate how Sophia rises again and again in unimaginable ways, the gift of life cannot be overcome even by extreme torture and death. She will rise. The disciples are then commissioned to make the inclusive goodness of Sophia 'experientially

¹⁹ Elisabeth Johnson, 'Redeeming the Name of Christ', in *Freeing Theology. The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*. Ed Catherine Mowry LaCugna, New York, Harper, 1993, p122.

available'.²⁰ Johnson points out, asserting that Sophia was in Jesus defuses any sexist claims as well as claims to religious exclusivism. Personified Wisdom is at work all over the world and in many different traditions and so Christianity can no longer claim special revelation. Sophia is also inherent in the world and so demands a far greater ecological awareness and striving for balance and right order in the natural world.

For Johnson, Sophia pitches her tent in the midst of the world and struggles for life. As Sophia the Christ allows women to rethink anthropology in an egalitarian way since she is available to all and living in the midst of all. Johnson suggests we are able to celebrate one human nature and the interdependence of multiple differences. She claims this is not an argument for complementarity but it appears to be dangerously close to it. Of course, Johnson is saying that the maleness of Jesus was important for him but it is not important for us. As true as this may be it does not seem a strong enough statement in a gendered and sexist world and church where sex does matter. Johnson is clear that while Sophia strives for the flourishing of the world and those who live in it she is also radically distinct from the world. She remains always in her self yet her essence is relatedness. Johnson argues that this can be seen in the life of Jesus where Sophia is acting and animating and grounding him in relationality and community; yet she is not him and her presence can disappear when relation is shattered. Johnson does not wish to lose the idea that God is also absolute mystery, unoriginated origin and goal of the universe. This is the point at which her thought sounds like the Catholic doctrine that formed her and one wonders if the feminist agenda only runs as far as finding a female face to place on an otherwise unaltered body of theology. This is a little too harsh since we can see that Johnson does to some extent remould the Christological debate.

So what has feminist theology put before us in its quest for Christa? The answer in part seems to be a Christa who joins with us in rooting deep, grounding in our world and ourselves and bursting forth from the passion we find within. Heyward has developed the idea of *dunamis* and erotic connection and this seems to be one Christa way ahead. One way in which Christa explodes into the reality of everyday life in an intimate and transforming way is through something as simple and as powerfully frightening as touch. The power of touch, as witnessed in the life of Jesus and others, has been forgotten. Christa then enables the flesh to become word and is not **The Word** made flesh. The colonisation of Sophia [wisdom] into Logos [word] by the Christian tradition was a regrettable step. Not only did it deny the divine a female face it also made very 'heady' a reality that was embodied. Divine wisdom as understood in the Hebrew scriptures was active amongst the people, walking in the market place and connecting people with the earth and everyday concerns. She was understood as the divine who led people to wisdom through rooting and grounding in themselves and their cultures. Sophia wisdom gives us wisdom that we gain through our bodies which goes far deeper and convinces us to a greater extent than that found in our heads alone. It of course also gives women their bodies back as places of divine revelation not sin and guilt. In so doing it encourages autonomy and not blind obedience to God and man as was originally felt desirable. Feminist Christology's ask us to embrace our own power and not to place it in the hands of Jesus the man or

²⁰ *ibid*, p124.

Christ the metaphysical construct. In so doing of course it brings into question the notion of transcendence and traditionally understood. This concept has been reimagined by Heyward as the power within us that propels us forward to transcend/move across boundaries and barriers of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and so on and to more fully embrace our own humanity and that of others.

So this brings us to the question mark in the title. We have made amazing strides and opened large amounts of space for women to express themselves in theology and to claim their Christic power and heritage. In the back of my mind I hear Anthony de Mello, who used to say, the donkey that carries us to the threshold does not carry us into the house/home. Now God forbid that you hear me calling Christa a donkey! Further of course there is no doubt that in order for women to claim any kind of power we need to be reunited with our own embodiment and within Christian theology these bodies have to be understood as carriers of divine reality as much as men's – and as we have seen through women's proclamation of divine incarnation being embodied the planet, indeed the cosmos, has been once again acknowledged as infused with divine dunamis. All this is glorious and it makes me proud to think what has been explored and bravely announced in such a short period of time by women. We have opened ourselves to the transforming power of erotic, embodied incarnation- we have claimed the flesh as word and freed ourselves from the WORD making our flesh.

The question mark asks if this is it now? Through declaring that Jesus was not the once and for all revelation of the divine and placing dunamis as Christic power within and between us we have in part at least dealt with what Laurel Schneider calls 'monotheistic eschatologies that fantasize the end of all difference in the truth of God'. We have multiplied the WORD to many enfleshed bodies as words that carry political as well as religious power and truth. What we still have left to do is to explore more fully and riskily what those bodies truly hold. It is very hard to live outside the stereotypes that even Christa's might hold but I do think this is the next step. We all have to recover a sense of self-worth of empowerment based in our divine natures, "being redeemed/living within Christ" or even Christa may still be one step removed and so just not enough.