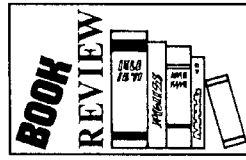


**The Women Around Jesus,**  
By Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel  
Crossroad Publishing 1996 0-8245-0535-2



“History tends to be understood as ‘his story’, the story of males , and Christian history also tends to be regarded from this perspective”.<sup>1</sup> This extract from early on in Moltmann-Wendels book sets the tone for this work; to challenge the patriarchal preconceptions we have of women in scripture.

Moltmann-Wendel takes us through the characters of the key women and many minor individuals in the life of Jesus and forces us to re-examine the evidence for the long standing interpretation of them. The Mary or Martha role for woman is given new light. As we read Moltmann-Wendel, she argues how Martha became a prominent leader of the early church. The meek Mary sitting in quiet homage at the feet of Jesus, is all too often what we are left with the role for women. Not the Women who must speak out, who cannot keep silent, ‘a Martha’. Moltmann-Wendel sees Martha as someone with ‘strength of faith’,<sup>2</sup> ‘a wise combative, competent, emancipated woman’.<sup>3</sup> We are told that for a significant period in the life of the church, the example of Martha was of great importance to significant areas of southern France and beyond which can be seen in church art of the area. There is even a Martha and the Dragon legend to equal St George. Such art shows Martha defeating the Dragon not by brute force of St George but by her missionary zeal.

The character of Mary of Magdala is re-examined drawing us away from the prostitute stereotype to a women of high integrity. This sort of fresh look is continued through out the book .

Moltmann-Wendel also tries to give an insight into how the gospel writers saw the relationship between Jesus and these women, in relation to their context. But this is always a liberating exercise giving us all fresh insight into how the living Son of God saw women. In Jewish society the only standing a woman could have was from the children that she bore. Jesus gives these women around him an identity of their own. Not all of the women are poor and of low status, the oppressed and the down trodden. Many of them had means at their own disposal. We have already mention Mary Magdalene but there is Joanna, wife of one of Herod’s advisers.

Jesus gathers around him women from all areas of life. Moltmann argues that for Luke these women that Jesus has around him, 'Are the flesh and blood embodiment of discipleship'.<sup>4</sup> An easy book to read yet not easy to put down or out of your mind. Well balanced with alternative views given print space. Any one wishing to explore the role of women in today's church would do well to start here with this book. I would like to close by finally quoting this short passage. 'Today, where feminine patterns of behaviour and alternative life styles are again coming into prominence, the Martha symbol is taking on new powers of expression.'<sup>5</sup> It seems all the women mentioned in this book are taking on new powers of expression.


Bibliography

Moltmann-Wendel, E, the women around Jesus, SCM Press, London, 1982

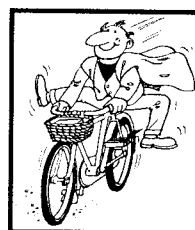
1 Ibid.. pg.. 4 2 Ibid.. pg.. 25 3 Ibid.. pg.. 25 4 Ibid. pg 42 5 Ibid. pg.. 48

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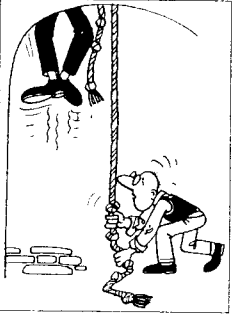
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