

Peter-Ben Smit

Simon Peter's Mother in Law Revisited.

Or Why One Should Be More Careful With Mothers-In-Law

In diesem Beitrag wird die kritische Besprechung der traditionellen und feministischen Auslegung von Markus 1:29-31 von Deborah Krause kritisiert und revidiert. Hauptanliegen ist ein Versuch, anhand einer genderbewussten Hermeneutik unter Einbeziehung sowohl der Ergebnisse der Erforschung der Umwelt des Neuen Testaments wie der narrativen Exegese die genaue Bedeutung des Dienens der Schwiegermutter von Simon Petrus zu ergründen. Es wird gefragt, ob hier möglicherweise auch ein christologischer Gewinn zu erzielen wäre und nicht nur, wie dies häufig der Fall war, ein ekklesiologischer, zum Beispiel auf die Nachfolge bezogener Gewinn. Hinzu kommt die Frage, inwiefern die Schwiegermutter als Nachfolgerin Jesu interpretiert wird, ob sie sich selbst in dieser Nachfolge sieht und wie Jesu eigenes Dienen zu verstehen ist.

In New Testament studies Simon Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31, 1 Corinthians 9:5) is either considered to be insignificant,¹ or to be a model-disciple.² According to Deborah Krause, however, she is the model of a Mediterranean housewife, whose existence is all but pleasant – at least according to contemporary western (feminist) standards.³ In all three cases, the discussion focuses on the Markan use of the word *diakoneō* in Mark 1:31. Whereas “traditional” exegesis tends to pay little attention to the use of this word in its particular context, this use has been highlighted by more feminist exegetes, who emphasise that this verb is the central keyword in Mark's conception of discipleship as service.⁴ Reading along these lines, Simon Peter's mother-in-law would then be a model of Christian discipleship. This interpretation has been questioned by Krause, who does not perceive Simon Peter's mother-in-law serving Jesus and the disciples as something positive, but rather understands this service as that of a housewife who is simply fulfilling her duties. In what follows I wish to discuss and challenge Krause's interpretation. I will first outline her exegesis and arguments. Following this I will try to shed some more – if not necessarily new – light on the role of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. Finally, in my conclusion I hope to arrive at a more differentiated understanding of this character in the Gospel of Mark.

Krause's Position

Krause sees a bitter irony reflected in the description of Simon Peter's mother-in-law, as she remarks, "Healed just in time for supper, indeed!"⁵ As a scholar in the tradition of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Krause first of all takes as her point of departure a (feminist) hermeneutic of suspicion, which presupposes "that biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and serve patriarchal functions."⁶ She combines this with a second principle taken from Tolbert, who states that "male texts merit a dual hermeneutic: a negative hermeneutic that discloses their complicity with patriarchal ideology and a positive hermeneutic that recuperates the utopian moment."⁷ Furthermore and by way of third principle, Krause sets her reading of Mark 1:29-31 in the context of reading and teaching experiences that she has made with groups of women in bible courses / bible study groups. Krause is surprised to find deviation from these three principles in mainstream feminist critical commentaries on Mark 1:29-31. Tolbert, Schottroff and Schüssler Fiorenza, for example, emphasize only the 'utopian moment' of a text.⁸ As Krause puts it: "Simon Peter's mother-in-law is thus heralded as the 'woman who *ministers* to Jesus', and as an example of an early disciple."⁹ Krause herself disagrees with this interpretation, because it "represent[s] a positivistic exaggeration of women's discipleship in the Gospel tradition at the expense of critically examining the context and object of Simon's mother-in-law's service."¹⁰ She also rejects the 'traditional' interpretation, which views the service of Simon Peter's mother-in-law merely as a proof of the miracle performed by Jesus.¹¹ Perkin's more sociological interpretation, which suggests that the inability of Peter's mother-in-law to serve her guests implies a loss of honour, prevented by Jesus, subscribes to the patriarchal role pattern as well.¹²

As Krause further points out, mainstream feminist interpretations of this story are a reaction to this "traditional" interpretation. These interpretations commonly focus on the verb *diakoneō* in the story, interpreted in terms of the other occurrences of this verb in Mark, the first case being that of the angels serving Jesus (1:13), the other two cases appearing in stories about discipleship (10:45 and 15:41). Krause rebukes her fellow exegetes here stating that they ignore the specific context of Mark 1:31 and simply impose a meaning on the verb, which it may have in other contexts, but not necessarily here, as *diakoneō* is capable of bearing a whole range of meanings.¹³ Krause also rejects Tolbert's attempt to read Mark 1:31 in terms of the ministry of the angels to Jesus (arguing against different translations of *diakoneō* in 1:11 and 1:31). Tolbert identifies the ministry of the angels with that of Simon Peter's (unnamed) mother-in-law. However, the ministry of the angels in Mark 1:13 should rather be

viewed in terms of Psalm 2:7 with its royal imagery, where the angels are serving a king.¹⁴ Moreover, in Mark 1:13 the angels serve Jesus alone, $\alpha\upsilon\chi\omega\zeta$ but Simon Peter's mother-in-law serves many people, $\alpha\upsilon\chi\omicron\iota\beta$.¹⁵

Another attempt at 'rescuing' the text, as Krause calls it, has been made by Marla Selvidge, who, reading Mark 1:31 in terms of Mark 10:45 argues that "Mark intends to portray Simon's mother-in-law as a model, even Christ-like character in the Gospel."¹⁶ Krause counters this interpretation by pointing to the different narrative contexts: in 10:45 Jesus is explicitly referring to the nature of discipleship, whereas in 1:31 the narrative relates how a woman is serving guests in her household. One need not interpret the one in terms of the other, especially as the contexts are so different.¹⁷ In addition to this, Krause points out, that in 10:45 discipleship is presented as something that changes the lives of the disciples, whereas in 1:31, the status quo is restored. Jesus' hardly positive evaluation of Martha's domestic duties (*diakoniā*) in 10:38-42 does not support the 'discipleship'-interpretation of household duties in Mark 1:31 either.

Finally, both Schüssler Fiorenza and Schottroff have argued for an interpretation of Mark 1:31 in light of Mark 10:45 as well as 15:41.¹⁸ The context in which the verb appears, is again decisive here. In 15:41 the reference is to serving as a follower of Jesus, not to serving in a household, which might suggest that two kinds of serving are meant here and that 1:31 should not be seen as denoting the same kind of serving present in 15:41.

What was the role of a first century mother-in-law?¹⁹ This question, which is often overlooked, serves as a starting point for Krause's own argument, which draws heavily on work by Winsome Munro.²⁰ According to Munro, one should pay attention to the different narrative contexts of the service of women to Jesus in Mark's Gospel, and allow for the appreciation of a whole range of roles for women: "from traditional, patriarchally inscribed roles of domestic servitude to more non-traditional, egalitarian roles of discipleship."²¹ The positive aspect of this observation lies for Munro in the fact that the Gospel of Mark does at least testify to the presence and importance of women in the early Jesus movement.²²

Referring to Dewey's work on Mark 1:31,²³ Krause expresses her suspicion that feminist scholarship on Mark 1:31 has been heavily influenced by the wish that "no sister be left behind." In other words: Simon Peter's mother-in-law has been pushed into a role which she

may not have played at all.²⁴ “Is it not possible that the Gospel traditions bear witness to the fact that women were active participants within the Jesus movement, as well as to the fact that women lived within patriarchally organized gender roles in the movement and that within those roles they were subject to the practice of unpaid domestic labour?”²⁵ In response to this observation and the inconsistency of the work of her fellow exegetes, Krause’s suggestion is to view the various portrayals of women in the Gospel of Mark as portrayals of women who are still engaged in a struggle with and against their gender roles. It allows also for a Jesus who is not the great feminist liberator, but one who comes a little closer to the Jesus who historically existed.²⁶ In the end, a Gospel of Mark that depicts liberation next to oppression might be more realistic and therefore more liberating than a Gospel that only depicts glorious liberation.²⁷

The Utopian Moment

In what follows, I will discuss Krause’s position from the point of view of the ‘historical’ mother-in-law of Peter, her narrative function, trying to subvert the text by means of the text, and keeping in mind the possibility of a utopian moment beyond that of Krause. I will begin with a sociological and historical sketch of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law, and proceed from there to the other points.

The historicity of the actual existence of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law is accepted by most scholars on the basis of I Corinthians 9:5 as a witness independent of Mark 1:29ff. and on that basis the question about her historical social location is even more justified.²⁸ In general, as confirmed by a host of literature on the subject,²⁹ the few hints we get about the mother-in-law of Simon Peter, confirm the general picture that women were defined in terms of their (most important) male relatives.³⁰ This is also the case with Simon Peter’s mother-in-law who does not have a name of her own, but is defined by her relationship to Peter.³¹ Moreover, the social space of women was the household and they were not supposed to do much outside of it. The story confirms this by having Jesus enter the house (i.e. entering her social space, even if defined not as her house, but as that of Simon and Andrew) and heal her there. Afterwards she does not leave the house but serves Jesus and his disciples within the boundaries of her social space.³² This is all true, and Krause is right in referring to these points. But there is, for example, also the question of honour and shame, which Krause has addressed, but not answered – Perkins’ proposal is only dealt with in a footnote.³³ One can imagine that being ill – which in first century Palestine meant more than not feeling well, but rather was associated

with the risk of dying – and also being impure, prevent the mother-in-law from doing what she was supposed to do: taking care of her guests.³⁴ This means shame: loss of honour for the house of Simon Peter.³⁵ Jesus prevents this and crosses a (further) boundary: he touches a somewhat strange and, because of her illness probably impure, woman and enables her to fulfil her duties, i.e. serve him and his disciples as her guests. In fact, Jesus prevents her, and with her Simon Peter, from losing honour in their village community. Probably it meant redeeming someone from an unclean state also. Indeed, this is not at all Jesus the great feminist liberator, as Krause puts it, but Jesus redeeming someone within the boundaries of a social system – apart from his crossing of the social boundary between the inside (women's space) and the outside (public, male space) and his touching a strange woman in a culture in which it was common that men only communicated with strange women through the male relatives of the women concerned.³⁶

In my view however, more could be said with respect to the narrative level of the story. Here the input of Monika Fander is of major importance, as she pays attention to the narrative structure into which Mark incorporated the tradition of the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law.³⁷ According to Fander the story of the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law is one of a whole series of healings in which aspects of inside and outside, private and public, and the various reactions of the people involved play an important role. After the introduction to the gospel in Mark 1:1-15, another sequence begins, which consists of a proleptic summary of Jesus' teaching, fitting him into the chronology of events as the successor of John the Baptist, and followed by the vocation of the first disciples (1:16-20). In 1:21 Jesus enters a city (Capharnaum) for the first time in the narrative. This sequence runs (at least) until 2:17, and can be subdivided in the following way.³⁸

Mark 1:21-28: Jesus preaches in the synagogue in Capharnaum, where he expels a demon from an unnamed person. The action is public, but there is no reaction recorded of the person being healed. The only things that happen are that the demon gives a loud cry, and that the rumour about Jesus begins to spread through Galilee.

Mark 1:29-31: The healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law, who remains unnamed. The action is private rather than public (in a private house). The reaction of Simon Peter's mother-in-law is that she serves Jesus and his disciples, who are her guests.³⁹

Mark 1:32-34: Next, a series of healings and the expulsion of demons are recorded, the action is probably public, the only reaction to the expulsions is that the demons remain silent.

Mark 1:35-9: Jesus leaves Capernaum and goes around healing in Galilee, the exorcisms are probably all public (taking place in the synagogues mentioned here?), but no reaction is recorded.

Mark 1:40-45: The healing of a leper begins as a private encounter with Jesus, but the reaction of the healed leper – in spite of Jesus' demand to remain silent – is to go around proclaiming the good news of his healing, forcing Jesus to retreat into the desert.

Mark 2:1-12 records a public healing and a public discussion with Pharisees. The reaction of the crowd is to praise God, as they have never before seen anything similar.

Mark 2:13-17 narrates the vocation of Levi, which happens when Jesus is accompanied by a crowd. The meal at Levi's house later on provides the public place for a discussion with the scribes of the Pharisees. This last pericope is framed by the calling of disciples in Mark 1:16-20 and summarises the meaning of Jesus' healings. It also builds the bridge between the sequence of miracles preceding it and the series of discussions with other Jews which follows.

Although in my view, there is no overarching logic in this sequence, it can be observed that Mark 1:29-31 does constitute somewhat of an exception, because this story is the only one in which the healing of the ill person is followed by a concrete and positive response towards Jesus. This is a very special feature of the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. All other healed people either do not respond at all, or not in the way Jesus would like them to. The reaction of Simon Peter's mother-in-law (her service) might, therefore, be more than just a matter-of-fact statement about a woman resuming her normal duties. A sequence framed by the calling of various disciples may have something to say about discipleship as well.

Looking at the larger (theological and narrative) context of the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law, it seems to me that the story does more than relate a 'historical fact'. It also suggests that the serving of Simon Peter's mother-in-law is about more than simply her actions. It must be admitted though, that her actions are not explicitly commented on by Jesus, and that the word *diakonein* only appears again quite some chapters later. One might wonder whether the auditive memory of the hearers (or the memory of readers) of the Gospel according to Mark was strong enough to make the connection. What is important, however, is that there is a clue for an interpretation which moves beyond that of Krause.

Conclusion

As emphasised earlier, I do not want to exclude Krause's view that *diakoneō* means 'performing household tasks'. In the previous paragraph I merely argued that the meaning of the story is not exhausted by this explanation, and that the very different reaction of Simon Peter's mother-in-law might point to more than just her ability to resume her menial duties. That these views are not mutually exclusive is also argued by Mary Rose D'Angelo albeit slightly differently.⁴⁰ She puts forward the following view: "The woman's literary function must be considered here: the author uses her gender role as a way to introduce Christian terminology into the career of Jesus and to invite the readers and hearers to place themselves within the narrative at its outset; like her they have been raised by Jesus and minister to him."⁴¹ Strong points in favour of this argument are the following.

First of all, D'Angelo takes more into account than just the gospel of Mark, i.e. she also refers to vocabulary which may have been available to the community to describe its religious identity, such as the verb *diakoneō*.⁴² Secondly, she pays more attention to Mark's literary technique, in a way not dissimilar to that of Fander, especially when pointing out the uniqueness of the reaction of Peter's mother-in-law. Thirdly, she also takes the role of the audience into consideration. D'Angelo suggests a catechetical setting for the story. The Markan story may also reflect a redactional technique – also used by Luke – in pairing stories about men and women who are healed, in order to attract the attention of both parts of the audience. This technique is also present in Q.⁴³ If this is correct and Mark not only recounts an event from the life of Jesus but also uses it for a theological (or pragmatic) purpose, (something which I consider to be highly likely), he could be seen picking up language from the 'female' realm of society and using it theologically. In *Frauen im Markusevangelium* Hisako Kinukawa also hints at this possibility.⁴⁴ She accepts first of all what I would call a 'historical' interpretation of the story, calling the response of Simon Peter's mother-in-law an example of the hospitality expected from women.⁴⁵ She also sees a connection between the humble serving of Jesus, the humble serving he expects from his followers (cf. Mark 10:45) and the no doubt rather humble and menial work the woman in Mark 1:31 does. In contrast to Krause, however, she suggests that this is the kind of humbleness Jesus expects, but not only of women. The serving of Christ is nothing but very humble service. It can be subversive and revolutionary as such service is always christocentrically defined. This revolutionary aspect should be emphasised in order to avoid getting trapped in an unqualified and unwelcome

defense of the suffocating humbleness and humiliation of patriarchally defined gender roles. Krause quite rightly warns against this.

As a service out of vocation (in the case of Simon Peter's mother-in-law out of healing), it is qualified by Christ and the imitation of Christ.⁴⁶ Interestingly enough, the service expected of followers of Christ is in fact qualified twofold. On the one hand, it is qualified by Christ's call and example, the radicality of which becomes clear in the event of the crucifixion. On the other hand, prefiguring this in a way, there is the humbleness of the service of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. The humbleness of this woman, not a happy fact to be sure (neither was Jesus' service necessarily a happy one, and surely it was [at least depicted as] a humble business), is transformed and transsignified, i.e. qualified by the narrative context of the Gospel at large. Furthermore, the service of this Jewish housewife characterises Jesus' own serving and suffering way, which I think is a powerful statement.

As far as the latter point is concerned, one might argue, that a so-called F-voice is introduced as a way of imparting something essential about Christ and his followers.⁴⁷ F-voices are indigenous products of (and serve as representational and referential clues to) 'women's culture'. In other words: the 'typically female' service of the mother-in-law is both interpreted by and interpreting the serving of Christ and his disciples. The service of the mother-in-law receives a christological interpretation by means of the whole gospel narrative, but, at the same time, tells the reader something about the quality of this Christian service at large by adopting 'F-language', i.e. language and symbolism from the female realm of society. That, as well as the focus on the mother-in-law of Peter as such, could be the benefit of reading Mark 1:29-31 from a gender-sensitive perspective, respecting Krause's thesis, but also moving beyond it.

¹ This is the 'traditional' view, shared by most early historical-critical exegetes, such as for instance R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (transl. John Marsh; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 212; E.P. Gould, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), 26; V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 180.

² This is the opinion of some important feminist scholars (see note 8).

³ Deborah Krause, 'Simon Peter's Mother-in-Law – Disciple or Domestic Servant? Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Mark 1.29-31,' in: Amy -Jill Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 37-53.

⁴ See note 8.

⁵ Deborah Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 39.

⁶ Ibid., 39. This is a quotation from Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984), 15.

⁷ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 41. The quotation is taken from Mary Ann Tolbert, 'Protestant Feminist Hermeneutics and the Bible: On the Horns of a Dilemma,' in: Alice Bach (ed.), *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 15. See also: http://www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showchapter?chapter_id=1779. Tolbert quotes Patrocino P. Schweichart, 'Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading', in: Patrocino P. Schweichart / Elizabeth A. Flynn, *Gender and Reading, Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 31-62, the reference is found on 43-44.

⁸ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 41. See Mary Ann Tolbert, 'Mark,' in: C.A. Newsom and S.H. Ringe (eds.), *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 263-274, esp. 267; Luise Schottroff, 'Women as Disciples of Jesus in New Testament Times,' in: Idem, *Let the Oppressed Go Free: Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 80-118; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 320-321.

⁹ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 41.

¹⁰ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 42.

¹¹ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 42-43. Bultmann is the only German scholar mentioned by Krause, but he is not necessarily representative of mainstream traditional German (or continental) historical-critical scholarship. However, her findings are confirmed by the following commentaries: Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament II/1; Herder: Freiburg, 2001 [1976]), 129ff. See also Gerd Theissen, *Urchristliche Wundergeschichten* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1974), 75. Pesch also views the service of Simon Peter's mother-in-law from the perspective of the theological theme of service within the Gospel of Mark (Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 132). The feminist perspective, therefore, builds to a certain extent on traditional historical-critical research. In Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Society of New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 80; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), the subject is unfortunately not dealt with, although the fact that some or at least one of the disciples left behind a family could shed some light on the family ties of Jesus' earliest followers as well. Also Oscar Cullmann, *Petrus, Jünger, Apostel Martyrer* (Siebenstern Taschenbuch; München: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1967), 22, simply reminds the reader of the established fact that Peter was married and took his wife with him on his missionary journeys. See also Christfried Böttrich, *Petrus, Fischer, Fels und Funktionär* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001), 36ff. His complaint that we find only scattered remarks about Simon Peter's family life is, in my view, unjustified, because we know far more about him than about any other of the twelve. Important is that he pays attention to the wife of Peter (missing in most other contributions to the discussion) on the basis of Mark 10:28-30 and 1 Peter 5:13. As Cullmann and others he also refers later legends about Peter to the dustbin, but this is only partly justified, because these legends may also point towards a rather different ideology of priesthood in mainstream Christianity than is the case nowadays. Both Robert Guelich (*Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary 34A; Dallas: Word Books, 1989, 61-63) and Pheme Perkins, (*Peter:*

Apostle for the Whole Church, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994, 58-9) suggest that a (mere) confirmation of the reality of the miracle should be regarded as the core of the story. Unfortunately, Simon Peter's mother-in-law does not get much attention in Irene Danneman, *Aus dem Rahmen fallen, Frauen im Markusevangelium, eine feministische Re-Vision* (Berlin: Alektor Verlag, 1996, 70), as the author prefers to deal more thoroughly with some longer narratives. But what Simon Peter's mother-in-law has to do with preaching or being an authoritative person in the community (p. 162), and even leading this community (p. 248, but her role is again reduced to that of a disciple of Jesus on p. 267 and 272) remains unclear. I myself cannot think of a convincing argument in favour of this view. Confessing agnosticism as to the leadership of the community in Capharnaum seems better to me.

¹² Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 42, note 14.

¹³ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 43, for the verb *diakonēw*, see Hermann W. Beyer, 'diakonēw, diakonía, diakonoi', in: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* II, 81-93.

¹⁴ See Hans Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59* (transl. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 129-132.

¹⁵ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 44, she does not combine these two features of the text, but points to it elsewhere; it would have strengthened her argument here as well, of course. See Idem, 47.

¹⁶ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 45, referring to Maria Selvidge, 'And Those Who Followed Feared (Mark 10:32),' *Classical Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983), 396-400.

¹⁷ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 45f.

¹⁸ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 46f.; Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 320-321.

¹⁹ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 47-8 (see p. 48, note 31 for bibliographical references).

²⁰ See Winsome Munro, 'Women Disciples in Mark,' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982), 225-241. For the discussion between Munro and others, see Munro, 'Women Disciples: Light from Secret Mark', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 8 (1992), 49-51.

²¹ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 49.

²² Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 50, confirmed by Kathleen Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 241.

²³ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 50, see Joanna Dewey, 'Mark,' in: E. Schüssler Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction and Commentary* I (2 vols.; New York: Crossroad, 1993), 470-509, esp. 476.

²⁴ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 50.

²⁵ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 50f.

²⁶ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 52.

²⁷ Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 52f.

²⁸ On the basis of I Corinthians 9:5 most scholars accept the existence of Simon Peter's mother-in-law, as Paul states that Peter took his wife with him on his missionary journeys. See Raymond E. Brown / Karl P. Donfried / John Reumann, *Der Petrus der Bibel, Eine Ökumenische Untersuchung* (transl. Erminold Füssl, Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag/Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1976), 35. See also Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 679-682, who refers to Matthew 8:14 instead of Mark 1:29ff. for the 'widely known' fact that Peter was married. Historically speaking, it would have been rather exceptional, if a fisherman like Peter would have remained unmarried.

²⁹ An extensive list can be found in Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 48, note 31.

³⁰ See also Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World. Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 27-57, 134-160. Another view, which is based on less (and only textual) data, is presented by Ross S. Kraemer, 'Jewish Women and Women's Judaism(s) at the Beginning of Christianity,' in: Ross Shepard Kraemer / Mary Rose D'Angelo, *Women and Christian Origins* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50-79. However, this valuable contribution to the discussion seems to be dealing with two quite privileged women, the one a land-owner the other a princess. I suspect, however, that most women in first century Palestine were not exactly rich land-owning widows or successful princesses who were courting Roman conquerors as in the case discussed by Kraemer. At least, nothing suggests that this was the case with Simon Peter's mother-in-law. In another article in the same volume Kraemer also pays attention to the tendency to present a very gloomy picture of the position of women in first century Judaism, in order to have the light of Christ's liberation of them shine all the brighter. According to Kraemer, this view is neither historically justified, nor a good safeguard against anti-Judaism. Kraemer, 'Jewish Women and Christian Origins: Some Caveats', in: Kraemer / D'Angelo, *Women and Christian Origins*, 35-49.

³¹ See Malina, *New Testament World*, 143ff.

³² See also Sylvia Schroer, 'Häusliche und ausserhausliche religiöse Kompetenzen israelitischer Frauen – am Beispiel von Totenklage und Totenbefragung', *Lectio Difficilior* 2002-1. (http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/02_1/schroer.htm) What she states for the Hebrew Bible seems to hold true for New Testament times as well.

³³ See Krause, 'Mother-in-Law,' 42, note 14.

³⁴ See Malina, *New Testament World*, 33ff.

³⁵ See Malina, *New Testament World*, 43ff.

³⁶ See Malina, *New Testament World*, 47ff. In these respects Jesus is indeed revolutionary, although the result of his actions seems to remain within the social boundaries. Historically speaking, one should also ask if it is fair to expect another outcome, which does not mean that this story could be used as a legitimisation for keeping people successfully unhappy (or happy) within a given system. In other words, one should not read the story as encouraging a Gospel that tells the oppressed to 'just serve us as Simon Peter's mother-in-law did, because that is what the Gospel tells you to do.'

³⁷ Apart from the article mentioned earlier see also Monika Fander, *Die Stellung der Frau im Markusevangelium* (Münsteraner Theologische Abhandlungen 8; Altenberge: Telos-Verlag, 1989), 17-25.

³⁸ Fander, 'Frauen', 413f.

³⁹ Fander, *Stellung*, 21 suggests that the $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\iota\eta$ in Mark 1:31 should have been $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omega\zeta\eta$ in the *Vorlage*, but arguments are lacking here, only Matthew 8:15 actually has $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omega\zeta\eta$ but the text-critical situation is less ideal in Mark 1:31 and in Luke 4:39 nothing can be deduced from this, apart from a 'christologisation' of the story in Matthew.

⁴⁰ Mary Rose D'Angelo, '(Re)presentations of Women in the Gospels: John and Mark' in: Ross Shepard Kraemer / Mary Rose D'Angelo (eds.), *Women & Christian Origins*, 129-159, 139.

⁴¹ Kraemer / D'Angelo, *Women & Christian Origins*, 139.

⁴² See also Esther A. de Boer, *The Gospel of Mary. Beyond a Gnostic and a Biblical Mary Magdalene* (Proefschrift Theologische Universiteit van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland te Kampen, 3-12-2002),

101-103, who argues that menial duties (see also Mark 5:37, 14:12-16) not only belonged to the role of female disciples, but were part of the role of all disciples of a rabbi. In addition to this, she shows that the verb 'to serve' both in Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek was part of the common vocabulary among Jews and Christians to denote discipleship at large.

⁴³ See Mary Rose D'Angelo, 'Women in Luke-Acts: A Redactional View', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990), 441-461, here 447-48.

⁴⁴ See Hisako Kinukawa, *Frauen im Markusevangelium* (Trans. Veronika Merz, Luzern: Edition Exodus, 1995, English original: Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark, A Japanese Feminist Perspective*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), esp. 136-139. Kinukawa's work is unknown to Krause, but known to other contributors in the *Feminist Companion to Mark*. The English edition of Kinukawa's book was unfortunately unavailable to me.

⁴⁵ The fact that the verb is in the perfect tense, whereas the healing itself is narrated in the aorist, might imply that she serves Jesus for the rest of her life, although it is easy to overinterpret this phenomenon. See Kinukawa, 138.

⁴⁶ See Gnlika, *Matthäusevangelium*, 307f. about the proximity of this text in Matthew to the fourth Servant Song.

⁴⁷ 'F-voice' is an expression introduced into the field of biblical studies by Brenner and Van Dijk-Hemmes. See Athalya Brenner and Fokkeli van Dijk – Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts, Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), *passim*. What they have developed for the Hebrew Bible is in my opinion applicable to the New Testament as well. I will not suggest that a woman wrote this part of the Gospel of Mark, but rather, that 'women's culture' resounds so loudly here that the 'F-voice' is heard nevertheless.

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