

{In his analysis of evangelical texts *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (Paris 1999, ch.4), René Girard compares Jesus' intervention to save the adulteress to the pagan stoning that is performed to bring healing to the community, leaving the gender and kinship issue out. But by relating Christ's anti-victimising stand to this basic issue, we may see how profoundly this has effected both Western history, and the present controversies in global relations. The following article appeared in *Exchange*, Leiden 27 (1998) 2 p.98 -120, and formed a second instalment of a series that started with the analysis of *Adam's (ir)religious finger.*}

## ***Jn 8:1-11, A finger writing down the history***

### **On dialogue beyond canonicity**

A scathing Muslim-revivalist comment on the carelessness with which Christians handle their sacred texts, recently revived my slumbering unease about the exegetical approach to Jn 8:1-11, the notorious 'pericope of the adulterous woman'. The comment called it scandalous that God's revelation was bungled into four discordant Gospel texts and that the only evidence of Jesus' own handwriting was ignored or even discarded. A clear reference to Jesus writing on the ground in Jn 8:6, a text which many Bible commentaries skip, as not belonging to the Fourth Gospel. We shall consider this issue, not only because of the much needed dialogue with Islam, but also for more clarity on fundamentalists' claims about the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. More important still, however, considering how Christianity has handled this controversial text, are the lessons to be drawn for our debate on inculturation and on the young churches' right to their own approach of the sacred scriptures. Some new studies, both on this text and on the Church's wrestling with marriage matters throughout history, present a fascinating, yet complex challenge, in respect of this "lost pearl of ancient tradition" (as W.Heitmüller called the episode), which has featured so prominently in popular piety. Could this text contain a lesson about the evangelic mission in present conditions of intercultural encounter?

A text resisting canonization

There is little doubt that Jesus' refusal to be the adulteress' judge carries a more fundamental missiological charge than is commonly admitted. If the pericope's curious textual lot has prevented it from playing a role in the ecumenical or inter-religious dialogue, we may actually ask what has become of Jesus' gesture and his new law of mutual understanding.<sup>i</sup> Was it meant to set up a new authority, allowing his followers to sit in judgment besides Daniel's son of man? Or was it rather intended as a hermeneutical light to show how God's love leads humankind, down the history, by writing into the social fabric a call to dialogue?

Down the history - so tell us sermons and dogmatic treatises - God's Spirit guides his people in the correct understanding of his revelation. The three protestant '*Solas*' profess that God's grace alone can bring the true faith, needed to apprehend the revealed texts. Recent developments within various religions, notably within Christianity and Islam, have coloured this belief in fundamentalist ways, claiming that strict adherence to the letter of the Bible or Qur'an is the sole sure access to God's finger guiding us, like a column of fire in the desert. Without trying to analyze the fundamentalist claims, or the very notion of God's providential involvement in history, we shall take a more indirect approach, by considering the lot of the curious text of Jn 8:1-11 which continues to puzzle many an exegete, as it seems to prove those Muslims right, who claim that Christians have made up their bible as they went along. The text on Jesus and the adulteress, which the major churches now accept as part of the Fourth Gospel, has actually caused exegetes grave problems, since most of them take its location between Jn 7 and 8 to be disputable. Uncertainty about this position in the manuscripts, down to the tenth century, has many a commentator skip it as a foreign body in this Gospel text.<sup>ii</sup>

This presents a problem that far exceeds the exegetical aspects, on which we can touch only in passing. For, we must note the fact that the exegetes' hesitation finds no echo among the faithful. On the contrary, besides the childhood and

passion stories, this pericope may count among the best-known parts of the Gospels. In conjunction with the parables of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan, it forms a favourite trilogy, both for Christian spirituality and iconography; a triptych, so to say, of Christian love in conjugal, parental and intercommunal affairs, which deals with the gender, authority and ethnicity divides respectively. It is not without ground, therefore, that the theologian-psychiatrist E. Drewermann has recently taken this controversial episode to be of the essence of the Gospel. But in so doing, he exposes a rather awkward case, not only in pastoral, but also in theoretical sense.

If we realise that this text has doubtlessly played a pivotal role in the shaping of the western family structures, and the ensuing forms of (anti)-feminism, we are invited to read the tradition's wavering attitude in its respect as an ambiguous comment on religious patriarchy and other forms of authoritarianism. Yet, feminist theologians seem hesitant to exploit this as much as might seem logical.<sup>iii</sup> Which leads us to our main topic: the intricate ties between the social history and religious tradition, which militate against any form of fundamentalism. Indeed the curious fate of the pericope's insertion and subsequent exclusion from the manuscripts would seem to be linked with social developments surrounding family and marriage matters, economics and moral rulings. It urges us to consider again the Muslim accusation that Christianity has woefully falsified the identity of the Prophet Jesus, by turning him into a divine being, sent to redeem sins. The text on the adulterous woman is crucial in this respect, because of the Muslim-revivalist claims that the western libertarianism is linked to its imperialist attitude and that these two stem from the mistaken belief that Jesus channels the forgiveness of sins, on the condition of our adherence to his Church. However legitimate this critique might seem, though, we can also perceive it to be self-contradictory. So, while looking at the role this pericope has played in the shaping of western Christianity, we shall be touching on the sacramental view of forgiveness and the underlying idea of the

'original sin' as well. But first and foremost, we are interested in its social and missiological implications.

### Family structures

Before examining the exegetical case, we may fruitfully look at some recent anthropological studies on western (Euro-Christian) society. This may help us formulate some new questions about this text and about the Bible's role in matters facing the intercultural encounters. Indeed, anthropology, as a discipline which matured in the study of colonised 'primitive societies', has markedly changed its focus of research after the post-war process of decolonisation. It was forced into a profound auto-critique and recognise that itself had been guilty of the very sin it had so often accused the missionaries of: of being an accomplice (or as some would say: a daughter) of colonialism. It thus came to recognise the social-historical analysis of western structures as an equally urgent task, to which it had now apply the tools it had forged and applied abroad.<sup>iv</sup>

J. Goody has built a career along this line, researching the western family structures in relation with their social-economic settings, and comparing them to other regions. This was part of an encompassing search by western scholars for the factors that have triggered off the continent's puzzlingly unique (economic) progress. Our interest in his work is sharpened by his recent study proving on that the so-called western lead is rather relative, as it mainly hinged on a temporary edge in a few commercial sectors.<sup>v</sup> He upholds the claim of most historians that Christianity has played a pivotal role in the shaping of the European mind. However, following the French structuralist view that marriage rules are the deciding force in any social system, he basically sticks to his earlier major works, showing how Europe developed its identity mainly via a special family and marriage pattern, which not only deviated from most other kinship systems, but also stood in sharp contrast to the East/South and the West/North Mediterranean. In his opinion, the confrontation between Muslim

and Christian rules in medieval Spain best illustrates how Europe, ever since the late Roman empire, has created a pattern of its own, markedly different from the Muslim approach (even though the two resemble each other in such matters as the dowry, in which they collectively differ from the bridewealth practices in Africa South of the Sahara). In a number of crucial aspects (such as the system of descent, kin groups, matrimonial alliances, conjugal bonds, the position of the women and the notion of honour) it thus appears that Europe's "contrast with Islamic societies is dramatic", as shown e.g. in the easy dissolution of Arabic marriages, which gives great 'freedom', mainly to men.<sup>vi</sup> However, Goody warns against linking this to elements of purely religious nature. He argues that the western stress on the conjugal couple and nuclear family, which various historians wrongly attribute to the Industrial Revolution, the Reformation or some medieval factors, actually originated rather early, not so much due to some different ideals, but to production relationships which have greatly determined the western identity. He notably points at the Church's struggle with the forbidden degrees of close kin marriages. Whereas the Near-East, mainly in line with the scriptural ordinances, has continued to favour close kin (cousin) marriages, the West has chosen to enforce very strict exogamy laws. The Church's role in marriage regulations mainly concerned this exogamy law, which not only favoured conjugal bonds in a nuclear family (as an economic unit) but thereby also, eventually, the individualisation of all spirituality.<sup>vii</sup> However, rather than pursuing this fascinating inquiry into the roots of western particularities and their impact on the economy, technology and politics, we shall now concentrate on the Church's involvement in this process and the underlying theological and missiological questions, of how to handle the authority of the Scriptures and how to deal with differing traditions in that kind of operation. This theme is basically theological, but with a profoundly historical interest.

A different closeness

The western Church has rigorously expanded and enforced the laws against close kin marriages, thereby following the Germanic traditions rather than the Middle-Eastern and Celtic practices. The Anglo-Saxon fervour to enforce the laws urged by the Gregorian reform is striking, in hindsight, given the fact that Henry VIII started his conflict with Rome by accusing it, not so much of having forged non-biblical restrictions in this area, but rather of having unduly granted (or better: sold) him a dispensation from these laws. Still, if the financial abuses surrounding these laws and dispensations may explain the Anglican revolt, the theological problem clearly lay elsewhere. Goody to query: "Why should the Christian Church institute an entirely new legal pattern in matters of kinship and marriage, when this ran counter to the customs of the habitants she had come to convert, counter also to her Roman heritage and counter to the very teaching of the sacred texts?"<sup>viii</sup>

The Church had clearly embarked on a process of creating a type of social structure based on a nuclear family, into which people entered at a mature age by a personal decision, in which kin groups or additional bonds played a reduced role, and in which divorce was excluded. Although the Reformation has jettisoned the sacramental view of marriage and the Church's juridical involvement in it, and relaxed the rigorous rules about close kin marriages and divorce, it has strengthened rather than weakened the underlying ideal of the nuclear family. There is a clear divide between this western pattern and the Muslim traditions, in which the (patrilineal) kin groups and their honour (or interest) play a key role, and where divorce is much more a practical matter, whereas forgiving an adultery is rather hard to imagine. Without analysing the implications of this difference here, we should keep in mind the social-economic component of this divide, as we listen to the Muslim accusation that Christianity's handling of its scriptures has been casual and a cause of its moral decadence.

We note that all western denominations have indeed kept rather tight to this social framework, which the ecclesiastical

legislation, as from the fifth century onwards, has greatly fostered, even though the scriptural basis was extremely thin, or non-existent.<sup>ix</sup> Laws on exogamy and incest are indeed still defended along other hermeneutical lines than a fundamentalist *Sola Scriptura* would justify. On which grounds did the Church act, and how is she now to approach the non-Christian traditions?

From these studies of Goody and others, a working hypothesis emerges about the Church's engagement in the social field. Within an ambience that tended to strengthen the marriage, as an economic device to guard and enhance the private property, at the expense of wider kin ties, the Church acted on several levels, with obviously ambivalent results, to promote an allegedly evangelic view. She chose to foster the economic unit, so as to strengthen the personal contract of the conjugal bond and thus to enhance wider realms of exchange, by countering all close kin alliances. If thus the stress on personal consent by the conjugal pair was to diminish the clan influences and to serve the double objective of countering the Manichean disregard of procreation and proclivity to divorce, its defence of the 'non-biblical' prohibition of close kin bonds was ideological, and had unforeseen effects. Theologians such as St Augustine and St Thomas would certainly stress the importance of the personal contract and the need to widen the circle of social exchanges, by ruling out any libidinal element from the close kin group. But the further developments in this field forbid us to consider only this official reading and ignore the unintended (?) side effects, in the form of a capitalist mentality and gender divide.\* If close conjugal bonds were to foster wider social contacts, the nuclear family, with its paternal dominance and mainly capitalist orientation, did harbour dubious aspects, that seemed to be subconsciously pursued, despite a contrast with some Middle-Eastern practices and biblical ideals, which most non-western denominations as well as Islam held in common.

For the sake of a true dialogue, this cluster of themes requires a more extended study than we can envisage here. For our part, we shall focus on the curious usage of scriptural

evidence in this context. In urging its western matrimonial ordinances, the Church clearly used anything but a literalist, hermeneutical approach. By relentlessly prohibiting what the Thora permitted or even enjoined (levirate, close kin marriages, polygyny), so as to strengthen and protect the conjugal bond against external forces and interferences that were said to lead to easy divorces, the Church eclectically chose to boost a few significant texts of the New Testament. She did so from a theological perception of her own role and that of the Scriptures. If various reformers, claiming a return to original traditions, have rigorously questioned and changed some details of this approach, they also enhanced some of these hermeneutical traits. To grasp the complexity of this issue, and its implications for the intercultural dialogue, we may now look at the lot of that pivotal, but enigmatic text of Jn 8:1-11. This obviously deals with the very same social realm; yet, for a very long time, the Church remained *in dubio* in its respect, so much so that exegetes have attributed it to a so-called "floating tradition".

Go and sin no more.

Can the curious adventures of the text about Jesus' refusal to endorse the adulteress' conviction be linked to the western Church's struggle for a new marriage pattern? I shall not try to prove this link historically, but rather look at the implications of such a likelihood. The question if the pardon for adultery makes more sense in the western option for an enduring exclusive conjugal contract than in the alternative setting of greater kin group influence, is hard to answer. But if this likelihood seems arguable, we should investigate how this beloved text of popular faith has fared in the Church's hermeneutical process. The history of this text is indeed a most fascinating and enigmatic *cause célèbre*.

Although all Christian denominations agree that the text, if not canonical, undoubtedly is authentic to the corpus of evangelical traditions, many a commentator discards it or

treats it in an appendix. Not its authenticity, but its place within the Fourth Gospel is at stake. Internal (stylistic) as well as external (textual) arguments are said to prove that it originally did not belong in this composition.<sup>xi</sup> Yet, although its canonicity as part of this Gospel was not firmly established until the eleventh century (and later questioned again by the Reformers), there are some early witnesses for its pivotal role. St Jerome indeed claims to know of old manuscripts, both Greek and Latin, that do include it. And the story itself appears in so many early settings that there is little doubt about its role in early Christianity, making the uncertainty about its canonical location even more curious.<sup>xii</sup> An interesting, indirect proof of its topical role is the report about Muhammad taking the opposite line. Like Jesus, he too was confronted by Jews with a case of adultery; but unlike Jesus, he ordered the culprits to be stoned right in front of the mosque, as he wanted to be the first to enforce the old laws of God's Book.<sup>xiii</sup>

Several authors argue that the lot of this pericope is due to hesitations about the way adultery and repentance were to be treated. Schnackenburg, while upholding that this text is alien to the Fourth Gospel, insists that it suits the core of Jesus' message, namely the call to conversion and the offer of forgiveness to go with it. He accepts the influence of Daniel's views on the divine judgment, and notably of Dn 5:12 about the writing on the wall at Belshazzar's feast, calling for conversion.<sup>xiv</sup> But what must be appreciated, is the lengthy process by which the Church has struggled to integrate this idea of pardon into her evangelic view on this crucial field of marital relations. If Jesus neither called the woman's sins irrelevant, nor the males' rights paramount, can we then say that by refusing to be her judge, he indeed forgave her sins? In which sense was he pronouncing God's pardon by telling her to go and sin no more? Around this notion of pardon, the Church has elaborated her most original insight: the mutual resolve to faithfulness. But what a tortuous road it has been (and still is!). Before considering this process, let us first return to this text.

A topographic message

There is no summarising the debates on why this text was inserted at the beginning of chapter 8 of the Fourth Gospel. Although I do not intend to join these arguments, I shall draw attention to some underrated aspects. While the *Form-* and *Redaktionsgeschichte* seem clear here, the files on the text criticism and the history of its tradition have not yet been closed. Although the text looks Lukan in origin, the questions whether the Lukan and Johannine traditions are so distinct, and if the latter has perhaps been transmitted in various forms, keep cropping up. This justifies us to ask what it means to say that our text is "a foreign body" in the Fourth Gospel. More concretely, we may ask if our text does, in effect, cause a narrative breach, by (briefly) interrupting a "relentless build-up of the Jewish plot against Jesus".<sup>xv</sup> In other words, we ask if the tradition may perhaps have chosen this place judiciously, in view of the Johannine line of thought, and if we should not speak of an inspired act. If so, we are invited to look both at the message contained in this choice and at the way the Church has viewed its historical and canonical mission. Are we not to discern God's revelatory finger well beyond the biblical canon?<sup>xvi</sup>

We note that our text appears right in the middle of the pivotal fourth section of John's so-called Book of Signs. The chapters Jn 7 and 8, making up this section, speak of the light and life of the world, in a build-up of seven disputes with the hostile Jews, at the Feast of Tabernacles. In this well-constructed narration, full of references to the place and festival, our text precedes the fifth dialogue, the beginning of which (as is noted by commentators such as Schnackenburg) is only loosely linked to Jn 7:52. Are we to suppose that those who inserted the text here, were unawares of the message it thereby was going to carry? On the contrary, they must have understood the symbolic contents Jesus' writing finger was thus to get. Although most commentators look for some peripheral

links between our story and the two chapters which it is made to connect, notably by referring to Jesus' rejection of any human judgment over sinners (see Jn 7:24 and 8:15), its role within the narrative framework, far from interrupting a relentless build-up of the disputes between Jesus and the Jews (as Brown, Reinhartz, Wallace a.o. hold) is quite meaningful. Let us then look at the narrative order of in this central section in John's Book of Signs.<sup>xvii</sup>

At the opening of Jn 7, Jesus is in hiding; at the end of Jn 8, he returns into hiding, after having turned the threat of stoning away from the woman onto himself (see Jn 8:59, and later again Jn 10:31). The theme of the stoning introduces an element of great narrative, as well as theological value, right in the middle of this key section, illustrating, as it does, how Jesus assumes the load of human sin. The triangular plot between Jesus, the woman and the leaders is of great import. This section's seven disputes with the Jewish leaders are to be divided into two groups: the four in Jn 7 are conducted in the absence of the leaders themselves, as is pointed out by Nicodemus, who reminds the latter that they must hear Jesus in person, if they wish to judge him (see Jn 7:45-51). Via the adulteress, which they use to entrap Jesus, they respond to that challenge, so that henceforth the narrative can have Jesus address them in person (see Jn 8:13). Moreover, the Court of Women, lit up during the Feast of Tabernacles, forms a perfect setting for this confrontation and for Jesus' subsequent discourse on being the light of life. So, although Lukan in style, the text and its narrative insertion in this place, far from being an interruption, appear to make perfect compositorial sense.

While thus being narratologically well-placed, the text is also given a high-profile theological charge, as many comments admit, and is born out by recent studies, focusing particularly on the issue of judgment and the law. Taking seriously the link to the Daniel-tradition (stressed by J. Derrett, but played down slightly by R.Schnackenburg), they argue an eschatological dimension in Jesus' writing the new law and inverting the primal curse. Writing on the ground, the way God inscribed the

Mosaic law on stones and wrote a warning on Belshazzar's wall (Dn 5:8), is one of the many gestures and signs of Jesus that have (or have not?) been recorded for the people "so that they might believe and thereby have life" (Jn 20:30-31). Minnar's idea especially, of seeing this as the true inversion of the Adamic fault, needs pursuing.<sup>xviii</sup> Indeed, as I have shown elsewhere, this primordial fault consisted, less in disobeying a divine law than in the abuse of the power of judgment (i.e. of 'the knowledge of good and evil') by Adam, in pointing his discriminatory finger at Eve.<sup>xix</sup>

There should have been a straightforward grasp by the Church of how Jesus proved to be the true light and the life of the world, as he undid Adam's abuse of the 'knowledge of good and evil' and declined any right of capital judgment, while he wrote his new law on the ground in the Court of Women. Alas, history tells a different story, notably as it turned into a clerical his-story, based on man's institutional lordship over the woman's person and matrimonial assets.<sup>xx</sup> It needs a wider study than is possible here to understand the enormous historical influence, against so many odds, of Jesus' stance as the true shepherd and judge (Daniel's *Son of Man*, see Jn 10). The message behind his decline of the divine prerogative of judgment, which eventually draws the deadly discriminatory bile of all mankind upon himself, had a laborious path to go.<sup>xxi</sup> Yet, it can be said that our text, with its many cross-references to other key passages in "the great history of God from Genesis through the Apocalypse" (G. Facre), has become a real, albeit ambiguous gem and crux of the Church's spirituality.

Jesus' act of writing on the ground, reminding us of God's finger writing His law, has marked all history as an ambiguous symbol. Indeed, it appears both as positively edifying (see Ex 31:18 and Dt 9:10) and as profoundly disturbing for stubborn leaders (see Ex 8:19, Jr 17:13 and Dn 5:8). It is a redeeming and revelatory symbol that drives out the evil one. But at which price? By transferring the animosity between the religious leaders and the sinful woman unto Jesus, the text indicates how the true shepherd becomes the true light and source of pardon, by becoming the Lamb that will be slain.<sup>xxii</sup>

We must return to the notion of pardon later, but let us note here that, far from disrupting the biblical story by inserting this highly significant text, the Christian community was justified and 'well inspired' to place it at this very centre of John's Book of Signs.<sup>xxiii</sup> Still, this only heightens our curiosity about the intriguing lot of this pivotal text in the Church's history and its theological implications.

The battle for the family.

Clearly, our purpose is not to lecture exegetes on their treatment of this text or to intervene in the complex hermeneutics of the Johannine tradition by showing how this text preaches the inversion of the basic fault, in its form of humans (males) judging humans (females). What we strive for, is an understanding of how this pericope has worked in western Christianity and its convoluted spiritual journey. Our aim is to sound what has happened besides (and underneath) the strengthening of the ritualised male grip on women and the ongoing will to maintain the latter's adultery as a capital offence.<sup>xxiv</sup> Which process took place in the western mind, and what is its meaning for the Church's present-day dealing with Scriptures and with its missionary calling? Unfortunately we must draw our lines with rather blunt strokes, though. The links between the spiritual history of the West and the sexual morals are both less direct and more pervading than the popular perceptions pretend. Moreover we are left with such a wealth of insights by great historians, philosophers and theologians (we name Duby, Foucault, Schillebeeckx) that we must focus on a few basic questions.

A return to Goody's analysis of the western family heightens our curiosity about the role of Jn 8:1-11 in the Church's mission. For, we note that the pericope's more regular appearance in western manuscripts, as from 300 CE, coincides with the dramatic shift in the Church's role in social and family affairs generally. The so-called Constantinian Act, turning a persecuted sect into an institutional Church with

power and property-owning status, has caused profound changes also in the theological (we think of the major christological debate) and moral scene. The latter was dealing notably with family structures; but less with moral ideals (of indissolubility, monogamy etc.) as such, than with their legal status and with questions of property and authority. Whereas in previous times, the family had served mainly to strengthen the purity of that persecuted sect, it now became the Church's chief avenue of building a social stronghold and a vast property. The fight against kin influences on marriage, by tightening the ban on close kin bonds, widened the distance between the conjugal pair and the kin group. It increased the individual's moral standing, but also his (and in the case of widows especially: her) option to improve that standing by offerings to the Church. In the millennium following this turn-about, the disputes over the rapidly increasing Church-property proved often closely linked to questions on kinship, family, celibacy and authority. Goody, Duby and others have meticulously analyzed how the Church fought the constant demand for close kin marriages by ever more rigorous laws on incest and prohibited degrees of consanguinity; and concomitantly: on the dispensations to be obtained by payments to the Church's treasury. This gave the clergy ever more say in marriage affairs, both as judges and mediators.<sup>xxv</sup>

Is this to say that the decisive factor in the shaping of western-Christian ideals has been the clergy's cynically lewd greed? And has the insertion of the Jn 8:1-11 pericope just been a ploy, helping to usher in the obligatory confession of sexual sins, and thereby to make the laity dependent on the clergy, as representatives of the forgiving Lord? Even if our text was used to urge husbands to abandon claims of divorce against their wives and urge both partners to rely on the sacramental services of forgiveness, such a derogatory conclusion is hardly tenable. Even if all this were a despicable ploy (as some Muslim authors might argue) to canvas Jesus' divinity and his mediating role, represented by priests who enjoyed ever more prosperity and power, we would still have to study how it worked out in moral and spiritual matters.

That the Christian notion of pardon and the rituals of forgiveness have been a major factor in the shaping of the western mind needs no repeating. But to understand the convoluted path this process has taken amidst social and political forces, we need unusual analytical tools showing (by what I sometimes call 'schism-analysis') how proclaimed goals can differ from the real ones. <sup>xxvi</sup> Medievalists and sociologists like Duby, Goody, Sheenan, Delumeau and Ariès all show the complex effects, especially of religious laws, as personal interests and the proclaimed aims move on different levels. Although here is not the place to discuss the methods for analysing this phenomenon, we are reminded of it, when we read Delumeau's studies on the social effect of the ideas of sin, confession and penance. The casuistry surrounding the confessional has in effect occasioned much refinement and interiorisation of morality, notably via the heated debate between probabilism and probabilliorism. That this process culminated in conditions where laxist hedonism and the heroic engagement could become alternate expression of the same voluntarist approach to law, illustrates the complex analysis that is needed. <sup>xxvii</sup>

Ever since the Enlightenment, the ambivalence of ideological forces has been pointed out by the so-called 'Masters of Suspicion'. The Marxist and Freudian analyses teem with examples of how religious ideals subconsciously can serve oppressive purposes; but the younger adepts of these schools have also shown how the Marxist 'opium' and Freudian 'complex' can nonetheless contain constructive forces of relief from repression. <sup>xxviii</sup> Without insisting on this methodological side, we must return to the curious effect notions of penance and pardon have had in the western society, and how our pericope of Jn 8:1-11 seems to have played a key role in this process. For this we keep in mind three forces: the central idea of 'forgiveness through Jesus', the mental preoccupation with the notions of 'guild and pardon' and thirdly the pivotal role sexual laws have played in this mental landscape.

## Pardon of the symptomatic sin

What was the western Christianity's view of man, as it shaped its notion of sin and forgiveness through the mediation of Christ's paschal mystery? How did the Church's involvement in matrimonial and sexual matters steer this, and with what ambivalent effects? Was the Church's goal truly to create a new type of family, cradling a Christian individual, or was it motivated by power and wealth in a ruthless capitalist setting, as some would claim? What of the sermons heralding the new law of love and pardon, were they no more than a cynic ploy of a power thirsty clergy? A hermeneutical suspicion is certainly called for. The Church undoubtedly advanced a personalist view of marriage as the bond that rests on the individuals' consent and conjugal commitment. However, it would seem that the substitution of the kin group's influence by a celibate clergy's authority has nursed an individualistic and even libertarian spirit, as well, which eventually translated into rebel movements of very diverse convictions. By dramatically enhancing the sacramental and judicial, as well as social-economic and spiritual powers of the clergy, the Church both fostered and also thwarted the idea of the people's personal bond to God, a line which the Reformation compounded, rather than inverted. The question is raised, if a brotherhood of loosely connected individuals, under the umbrella of a monotheist Father, was the right recipe for the biblical bond within God's Family (1 Tm 3:15). Or did it turn rather into a system of one superpower steering and interlinking myriads of individual interests? In its deist version, it seemed to oust all solidarity, leaving only the naked sentiments of a *laissez-faire* rivalry.\*\*ix\*\* Yet, ages of preaching on questions of moral guilt and divine pardon, have not only boosted, and later eroded the Church's grip on the people, especially in sexual matters. They also shaped the individuals' inner forum of moral awareness.

To peruse some of its workings, we may look at the particular dimensions it took in the critique of Kierkegaard on Hegel, in which the idea of pardon was central and the sexual aspect was

of more than symbolic. Hegel's sharp analysis of the human moral predicament, in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, dealt with this basic dilemma: any of our acts is particular, whereas our intentions are universal. This was implied in Kant's ethical imperative: to act in view of universal validity.<sup>xxx</sup> Hegel saw this dilemma as the origin of all individualisation (of sinful estrangement) which the spirit was to overcome. But, whereas Hegel constructed the solution as a part of his dialectical system, and thus part of the human history, Kierkegaard saw that the contradiction was insolvable. It needs a paradoxical leap of faith in the gratuitous divine pardon.<sup>xxxi</sup> We know how Kierkegaard related his deep spiritual search and dread to his hesitations in the sexual domain, as if he perceived the sexual union as an agonizing trapping of the male into a particularising link to a woman.

This presents a particular western-philosophical wording of a dilemma that, as the anthropological and psychological literature amply shows, underlies each kinship system. Male and female fertility differ in that women have a physical link to the 'fruit' of their body, which men lack, except for the matrimonial construct (in whatever form). Whereas for men a sexual union is a particularising act, this has a universalising aspect for women, as their energy flows into a child. Men need the legal construct of marriage to avoid the dreaded particularity, and for that they depend on a female 'key to redemption', as myths eloquently portray. Adultery then is the annulment of this social access of the male sperm's to creative value. If a male thus forswears his universalist calling as father of a child, just for personal pleasure, the woman still keeps her own creative and 'universalist' role. But as she connives with this sin of her lover's particularisation, hers is equally guilty.<sup>xxxi</sup> Although this fault is resented in any society, in the West it has come to capture the mind and the sense of guilt in a special way, and the pericope of Jn 8:1-11 has played a crucial role in it. Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard, in writing their philosophical perception of guilt, as their view of an age-old enigma, formulated a general dilemma in terms of the particular and universal.<sup>xxxi</sup> Marriage

as a social construct tries to solve a mire that affects humans as such, but is symptomatically articulated in the male-female divide. Adultery forms a pivotal sin, in the sense that it represents an attempt to surmount the basic human predicament by ignoring it and by refusing the 'mediating pardon' offered from outside. The sinning partners deny that any surmounting of the particularisation and estrangement must be received from 'beyond', through the social and cosmic setting. And inevitably, they will blame each other for the evils that will befall them, once they have refused in their mind, this mediation that can help them overcome the limiting divide.

Behind Kierkegaard's penetrating studies on anxiety, sexuality, original sin and the paradox of faith in God's pardon, we perceive Christianity's long wrestling with the notion of redemption through faith alone, which has shaped the western society. Our pericope has played an obvious role in this convoluted process. Jesus was understood to show that no social punishment, but only the call to abandon sin can break the logic. Thus Jesus asked both the leaders and the woman to accept that pardon for the 'particularising' sin is not within the reach of one's own system (or: fertility) as such, but must be received as a free gift from 'the other', who does not judge. His call to surmount the dilemma could not but present a radical challenge to the leaders. Belief in the pardon of sin means to move beyond the rules of society and in the final analysis, to surmount the (gender) divide which Adam initiated, by abusing his 'knowledge of good and evil' to disown Eve, who was bone of his bones, yet the occasion of his fall.<sup>xxxiv</sup> After a complex itinerary, western Christianity now tends to follow Kierkegaard and use the phrase 'paradox of faith' to express its deepest insight into this enigma. But worldwide it is challenged to re-examine its trajectory.

### Converging lines

Before drawing our conclusions concerning the dialogue, we need to pause and summarise our findings, both on the text of Jn

8:1-11 itself, and on its role in the shaping of the western mind.

A.

Let us follow Barth and Schöndorf, who assert that this episode deals with the new law, written on the ground by Jesus, in response to the Pharisees' mentioning of the Mosaic law.<sup>xxxv</sup> In terms of narration, this is a perfect joint, rather than an interruption in the middle of the seven discourses of the central section of the Books of Signs. The time-setting is crucial, as the readings at the Feast of Tabernacle close the Thora-cycle and return to Genesis. Jesus' new law thus becomes the light, as first act of the divine new creation (Jn 8:12 clearly refers to Gn 1:3, and also to Jn 1:4, to 1 Jn 1:5+7 and Rv 22:5). His new law annuls the Adamic fault, which consisted in abusing the 'knowledge of good and evil' in discriminatory verdicts against fellow humans. Jesus challenging this can not fail to attract all violence of human sinfulness to himself. Yet, he diverts the threat of stoning unto himself, not by forgiving the woman's sin, but rather by exposing the very essence of sin and inviting the woman to go free and sin no more. In this, he not only embodies the new Moses or Daniel's son of man. But, even beyond Abraham, he is the new Adam, using his finger not to point accusingly at the woman, but to embody the divine life-giving gesture.<sup>xxxvi</sup> This makes him liable to all mankind's deadly sinfulness. The Shepherd-Lamb, inevitably to be slain, if he is to pass the sacrificial divide created by the Adamic sin and become the light (Rev 21:23), the eschatological judge, the son of man, which Daniel describes (see also Mt 25:32).

B.

Speaking of judgment, though, it is an irony that the Church's leadership has assumed precisely the judiciary role in sexual affairs, by using this instrument to enhance the clergy's power. Still, the excessive emphasis on prohibitions and dispensations has also resulted in a deep, but ambivalent spiritual awareness: by stressing the weight of any

individual's conscience *facie Dei* and its heroic power of personal decision, this process ended up by creating a society based on rivalry, which could be kept in check only by ever more complex legal constructs. Called to proclaim God's forgiving and clemency, the clergy's turned to be judges like the Scribes. This has created a societal process of enormous complexity, in which the pericope of Jn 8:1-11 has played a curious role all along. When the *Didaskalia* urged bishops to show clemency, and St Augustine voiced the common concern that this might harm the rights of the husbands, this showed a wrestling with matrimonial issues, in the course of which the Church was to develop its true ideal of the redeeming love. But this ideal became apparent primarily in the realm of (monastic) bonds of friendship, i.e. in fraternal/sororal units of individuals, who mutually challenged and guided each other and for whom the concept of pardon was crucial. Eventually, this ideal also spread to the marriage bond (albeit in a rather indirect way. See Morris 1972, p.107 and 157 ff). This lengthy process of reflection on the divine pardon within human bonds, using the Gospel texts and our pericope in particular, entailed an ambiguous belief in God's grace.

Dialogue beyond canonicity.

Minding the congruence and ambiguity of this social-cultural process, we must now shift from its exegetical and historical aspects, to the pressing missiological side with its question about dialogue. At first glance, the implication of our pericope seems simple. Whereas the Scribes insisted on a rigid application of the canonised Thora, Jesus is seen to favour a lenient dialogue. Yet, his invitation to a sinless and truthful worship, both here and in the case of the Samaritan woman (herself of dubious sexual repute) can not be read as a debunking of the law. The dilemma of law and pardon, of submission and spiritual freedom, has in effect been at the heart of the Christian search for veracity all through history. And when Kierkegaard finally formulated the paradox of faith as

the answer to Hegel's aporia, his profound intuition that human sexuality was the crucial realm of sin and pardon was not just dupe to a Manichaeian streak in western thinking, courtesy of a misunderstood Augustinianism. For, is it not the Church's understanding that to integrate man's sensual desires into the perennial flux of (pro)creation is the prime challenge, and thus the prime realm of sin, which had entered the world in that primordial separation of the male from his female link to creative universality? Adam pointing his finger, throughout history, at the guilty adulterous woman, is redressed by Jesus, who redirects the finger and urges a new togetherness.

What does it mean that Jesus rejects the Thora's stoning order and that the tradition has so hesitantly inserted this passage into its book? Are the Pharisees just peers of the vile elders in Dn 13, reducing the woman to a males' commodity? And is Jesus replacing letter by spirit, canonicity by dialogue? Is the focus on an individual's standing, which the West did so much to develop in its struggle with these enigmata of sin and pardon, a universal, or rather a lost cause which has backfired? Complex and radical, as it is, the process has worked its way down the Christian history; and it seems that its dilemma has caused the 'floating' position of our pericope, which no doubt has been a key text all along. Rejecting canonicity as the prime criteria of moral judgment appears as the faithful return to the primordial openness. In this sense, the text is missiological in purpose, notably in respect of the gender divide, and the intercultural encounter as well.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Yet, when Jesus points God's finger away from a discriminatory use of the law, he is concerned with much more than this male-female controversy. We know that Jn 8:1-11 initiates a chapter which has worked great havoc in the Jewish-Christian relations by its notorious Abraham-dispute. Reflecting on these relations, in 1977, J. Mbiti exclaimed to be unable to fathom, as an African theologian, how western Christians could have faith in Jesus "and at the same time treat his people with such injustice and cruelty".<sup>xxxviii</sup> Did Jesus replace the one legalism with an even more cruel one, and did he wish to poise as the absolute touchstone? Clearly not. The insertion of Jn 8:1-11

before Jn 8:12 illustrates that the true touchstone is the life-giving dialogue that overcomes sin, by demanding trust and thereby exposing one's own vulnerability.

Applying this to history, we might ask of what avail Jesus' law has been. Enough critique of western Christianity has been voiced of late, for us to be allowed also to look in another direction. Could the convoluted role of our pericope in the western wrestling for its Christian identity have been a witness to the evangelic view that textual traditions and bookish truth should never become absolutes, and that the popular piety has a valid part in commenting the biblical text?

That the Church has not rejected this pericope, but has searched its true meaning, while hesitating about its insertion, shows a concern that should endure.<sup>xxxix</sup> Translated in missionary terms, this must first accommodate Genuyt's insight that Jesus subordinated the script to the living word, thereby also avoiding to turn the judgement against the Scribes themselves.<sup>xl</sup> Secondly, if we are right in supposing that the hesitancy about the text portrays the Church's wrestling with its views on the human individual and its spiritual standing, it goes without saying that non-western Christians are called to a similar role. Without arguing for their right to "Rewrite the Bible" (Banana), we may see this as a weighty support for their claim to an inculturation that exceeds the mere liturgical fringes. So, where the western laws of holy matrimony have aimed for certain spiritual benefits, it cannot be excluded that equally valid ideals can be pursued along other lines in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the regime of bridewealth replaces that of the dowry, creating an entirely different setting.

Yet, if this should forestall any rigidly fundamentalist objections against the inculturation process, it also excludes the idea that 'anything goes'. In fact, our pericope implies clearcut criteria, outlawing among others, any legalistic moralism or outright hierarchical rendition of the faith, whatever its value in terms of inculturation.<sup>xli</sup> It would be contradictory here to try and formulate strict rules, to stifle God's Spirit guiding his people down the history. Indeed, some

churches that claim to rely on the Spirit alone, stick to a fundamentalist view on the scriptures, whereas the mainline churches, that find it 'more difficulty to accommodating' the Spirit, show more subtlety in dealing with the textual evidence. Proof of the fact that similar effects can be achieved via different ways.

So, Africans and others should be allowed to stand around the Lord and bow over that pure signifier, God's finger writing about dialogue, and against Adam's abuse of the knowledge of good and evil. J. Mbiti has a valid point in urging Africans to bring their closeness to the biblical world to bear, precisely to prevent any discriminatory and fundamentalist reading of the Word. Traditions still find it hard to hear each other's verdict saying: "I don't condemn you, go and sin no more". In Gospel terms, the highest form of dialogue is to dare and point a finger at one another's sin, not as a judgment, but as an invitation to jointly try and overcome it. The history of our pericope is there to show that this redemptive dialogue can only be the 'strategy of love' that accepts mutual pardon, as Jn 8:1-11 advocates.

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i. W. Barnard (1992 p.170), holds the hot controversy about this pericope's

authenticity to be highly academic, since Christians all over understand it to be "as authentic as life itself". While admitting to its important message, scholars of all denominations often refrain from comment, because of text-critical uncertainties about its original place; some put it in an appendix. Among the more recent commentaries following this option, we mention E.Haenchen (1980) J.Robinson (1985) J.Hanson (1991), J.Ashton (1991), X.Léon-Dufour (1991), M.Stibbe (1993), S.Marrow (1993), J.Charlesworth (1995). Mostly following Bultmann, they refuse to treat the pseudo-Johannine text. In fact, Bernard's commentary on John (*The International Critical Commentary*, Edinburgh 1953) breaks into two parts at this very point, referring our text to an appendix at the end of the second volume. Quite debatably, as we shall see.

- ii. The Armenian tradition, a strong witness for the ancient credentials of this text, had misgivings of its own in 989. Although the reluctance to comment on our pericope seems strongest among protestant exegetes, we note that authors like R.Schnackenburg and K.Barth (in: *Kirchliche Dogmatik* III,<sup>4</sup> Zürich 1969, p.262-269) did give it ample coverage, whereas E.Schillebeeckx' two major Jesus-books hardly refer to it.
- iii. Without ignoring some enlightening feminist comments on this pericope, and its links with Jesus' revelation to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4) and Mary Magdalene (Jn 20), we note that the exegete A.Reinhartz declines to comment on it, although her prime interest "lies in the relationship between the text and the reader", and though she claims that "reading and readers are central to the concern of this Gospel" (See A.Reinhartz in E.Schüssler-Fiorenza 1994, I, p.561). M.de Groot, in her feminist analysis of the famous seven Johannine "I am"-icons, sees no link between this passage (which she rejects as a later insertion) and the light-icon, even though she links the latter to the imitation of God and to Jesus' androgyne approach. (See M.de Groot, 1987 p. 118-120 and 216-218).
- iv. From its very beginning, anthropology had a comparative approach, trying to get an understanding of humankind by going beyond western structures. But its grasp of the latter was taken for granted. It was mainly the marxist linking of anthropology and history which paved the way to a new field, concentrating on the early Middle Ages.
- v. See J. Goody, 1996. He questions the Weberian view that the Protestant ethics has been the crucial condition for capitalism and argues that marriage structures and the Church's meddling with this have been more fundamental.
- vi. See J.Goody, 1983 p.25
- vii. Kinship components of western developments are too often neglected by economic and cultural historians, who tend to stress the more spiritual or ideological causes.
- viii. Ibid. p.42
- ix. Christians generally reject any close kin arrangement of widow inheritance (the so-called levirate), even though it is explicitly commanded in the old Thora. Why forbid what God had ordered or what the Bible clearly allowed? In the inculturation debate this argument keeps propping up in regard of polygamous and arranged marriages.
- x. A study of unintended effects, which we may call '*schism-analytic*' is of

crucial importance in social-religious matters; the hidden, largely subconscious goal that the clergy pursued under the guise of ideological aims, may have been the build-up of individual property and capital of which it profited greatly via donations. How to tell which was the true goal? J.Goody, quoting G.Duby, speaks of 'unintentional' effects in the case of the Church's action in favour of love matches to replace arranged marriages. (See Goody, J. 1983, p.155).

xi. While missing in almost all great eastern manuscripts and even in the minor eastern and the western ones, it gets its somewhat regular place only towards 300 CE. Textual evidence, long since summarised by numerous authors like R.Schnackenburg and R.Brown, keeps occupying scholars. A 'statistical' slant, favouring the 'majority' evidence, dominates and most exegetes make little of the fact that at least one early Greek uncial (D, Codex Bezae) contains this text, and that some leave a blank. The view that the latter have rejected it "as part of the Johannine text" (J.Bernard in ICC 1953 p.715) has led to much debate. Remarking that the text has been 'excluded' by some MSS, does not necessarily imply that one does take it to be an original Johannine text, as Wallace seems to argue against Heil. Stylistic grounds for considering it Lukan, rather than Johannine (such as the use of Scribes, or the word *laos*, for: crowd), may hold, even if others point to the typical Johannine use of *woman*, as term of address, and to the admonition "to sin no more" (see Jn 5:14). But how decisive is this discussion?

xii. Eusebius, Papias and the Didaskalia do know the story, which no doubt was hotly debated. So, it seems plausible that its textual location too must have had a theological significance in their arguments.

xiii. See A. Guillaume, *The Life of Mohammad* (Translation of Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*), Oxford OUP 1978, p.267. It is clear that the discrepancy between the two Qu'ranic texts Q 4:15-18 (urging the severest punishment on the woman) and Q 24,2 (only flogging) caused many debates. The majority of schools hold that the Sunna imposes the stoning, even if the Qur'an does not mention it. (See J. Burton 1977, p.72). Burton (ch.4) shows how the issue was most important in a similar debate about the integrity of the *mushaf* (the canonical form of the Qur'an). But we can not study this here, nor indeed the question if Muhammad ever rejected Jesus' approach. The various *hadiths* on the topic show that people of all religious obediences in the area were preoccupied by it, which teaches social science much about the formative processes of matrimonial law.

xiv. But he doubts if the text holds a reference to Daniel's judgment of the innocent Suzanne in Dn 13. His extensive discussion of Daniel's influence on the fourth Gospel is hesitant on this passage of Jn 8:1-11. Since the Suzanne-story is itself deemed apocryphal, it would add little to his quite positive views on this "lost pearl of ancient tradition" of unquestionable historical origin. While viewing Jesus' critique of the Pharisees as the obvious core of this story, he holds its main theme to be the Christian call to conversion. (See Schnackenburg, R. 1967 II, p.224-36; see also his *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, London 1965, p.31+133).

xv. Reinhartz, A. 1994, p.578. The link between the traditions is often attributed to a common dependence on Samaritan input. Those who stress the Lukan nature of the text on stylistic grounds, remark that a few manuscripts (family f) locate it at the end of Lk 21. The literary similarity between Jn 8:1-2 and Lk 21:37-38 would almost suggest a deliberate transfer. Could there have been a reason for that? Having it in Lk 21 would link it with a tendency to relate the

adulterous woman, with the repentant woman in Lk 7 as well as the Mary of Bethany who wiped Jesus' feet. This cluster would give some plausibility to Judas' betrayal on a narrative level, suggesting that his act was more than just greed. Placing our text just before the passion story and Judas' betrayal, would give an excessive and undue weight to this sequence and make the controversy about how to handle adultery the pivotal point in the Christian drama. Transferring it in Jn 8 gives it an equally strong position, but allows a wider theological framework. Minnar (1991) strongly argues the theological (revelatory?) value of the copyists' decision to insert the text at this location, whereas Heil (1991) remains unconvinced that the text was not part of the original composition.

xvi. Looking beyond *Form-* and *Redaktionsgeschichte*, should we not admit that the formation of the message has continued in the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, understood as the effective history of interpretative wrestling with the texts, meant to elaborate; in our case, the redemptive vision on sin, pardon and the gender relations?

xvii. Our suggestion that the internal evidence would argue for a narrative role of this pericope is not meant to meddle with the exegetical dispute, between e.g. J.P Heil (1991) and D.Wallace (1993) about the canonicity of the text. Admitting, with Wallace and the majority of the scholars, that the text has been 'inserted', does not exclude that the place of insertion is well chosen and theologically meaningful (as Minnar stresses). From a semiotic point of view, F.Genuyt comes to a similar stance, but his point that Jesus' solution to the impasse recommences and feeds an interrupted teaching (1986 p.22), can be upheld only in semiotic terms.

xviii. We note especially the recent studies by F.Genuyt (1986), M.Gourgnes (1990), L.Minnar (1991), J.McDonald (1995) and H.Schöndorf (1996). The latter two view Jesus' writing of the new law as an eschatological renewal, in reference to the creation of the light (see Jn 8:12), to the primal curse and to the writing of Moses' law on stone. Minnar, interpreting Jesus' gesture of writing on the ground as an inversion of the original curse of Gn 3 and 4, seems to underrate the crucial gender-component of that curse.

xix. See Eggen, W. 1997a and b. I consider it not immaterial that our pericope deals with a the males' judgment on a female infringement of matrimonial laws, considered to be a male domain. The feminist theologians' reluctance to use this text, has a point in stressing that the theme concerns the human state as a whole. Still, we must note that the case of males judging female adultery symbolises the core dilemma of the 'knowledge of good and evil'.

xx. See Eggen, W. 1997b. I use the term *clerical* deliberately to show how the religious and political were intertwined in their collective 'administration' of marriage laws, dealing with the transfer and heritage of property, which actually did worse than reducing women to property: they turned them into the servants of man's property. The life of an adulterous woman thus became an abject void.

xxi. The Mt 25:32 imagery, of the shepherd-judge separating goats and sheep, has doubtlessly been more prominent in ecclesiastical practices than Jn 10, which can aptly be related to the exemplary event of Jn 8,1-11. The use of Mt 25:32 has mostly ignored that the son of man judges by not judging. That makes him the shepherd "who does not lose those that the Father has given him"; but only so, at the expense of himself becoming the target of all discriminatory bile:

the Lamb slain for all human sin.

xxii. See Lk 11:20. As references for Jesus' exposing the dishonest accusers, exegetes mention Dt 17:7 as well as Jeremy's numerous accusations against the people's unsuitable shepherds. In fact, Jesus is aware that his escape from the Scribes' trap only aggravates his case, drawing his execution ever nearer. The controversy about the Mosaic law will be followed by the dispute on the Abrahamic descent, which is not without reminding us how Paul in Romans relates these two to Jesus' inversion of the Adamic fault at the cost of his own death.

xxiii. In the beginning of our century, Westcott explained the confusion surrounding the variants in the manuscripts by the fact that the pericope was so often read out and quoted that the pages got worn and had to be replaced by new ones. Quoted by I. Moir in T. Baarda 1988, p.174

xxiv. Alleged adultery made John Calvin persecute vigorously Anne le Fret, his sister-in-law, who looked after their common household. Although he could procure no decisive proof of her guilt, he managed to arrange a divorce with the right of re-marriage (against the Roman tradition), and removed her from the house with loss of her children. She was spared capital punishment, as she kept denying, despite seven rounds of torture. Although Calvin's first attempt in 1548 had failed, and his brother Antoine was forced to reconcile with Anne, the text of Jn 8:1-11 has apparently meant little to the case, which was treated by these reformers too, as a clearcut ecclesiastical affair. See Kingdom, R. *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva*, Cambridge Mass. Harvard U.P. 1995 p.71-98

xxv. The Gregorian reforms of the 11<sup>th</sup> century marked a sharp increase of this religious grip on family affairs, as it enforced the divide between a celibate clergy and a laity whose marriages became ever more clearly an affair of mutual consent to procreate and maintain the line and its property. See the contributions of Le Goff, Sot and Duby in Duby, G. 1991.

xxvi. This is not the study of how schisms arise, but how each historical factor may operate in opposite directions, often provoking effects that contradict the declared goals. Although different from Deleuze's *schizoanalyse*, it seems to depend on similar facts. See also note 10.

xxvii. J. Delumeau regularly points at the divergent working of religious forces such as these. See 1990, p.11 and 139. This social-religious fact reminds us of some very basic anthropological realities. In their study on the rise of passions and interests, Greimas and Fontanille (1991) emphasise that any human sense of value is rooted in a neutral sensitivity (*phorie*) that precedes both the *euphoric* and *dysphoric*. We also recall phenomenological ideas by R. Otto on the ambiguity of the Holy or numinous, as being fascinating and terrifying. It further calls to mind Plato writing about the *pharmakon*, being both poison and remedy.

xxviii. A classical example of the ambiguity of religious forces we find in the much-debated Weberian analysis of the link between the capitalist spirit and protestant ethics. The secular asceticism of the puritan form of protestantism with its stress on thrifty modesty, on a keen work-ethics and on the Christian stewardship, indirectly favoured a enormous accumulation of wealth, apparently contradicting some essentials of the original ideals.

xxix. Religious ideals thus engendered their very opposite. The debate about (sexual)

sins and forgiveness clearly was at the heart of this process of detaching the individual from the kin group, and eventually from the controlling clergy itself, placing him/her in direct encounter with the Creator. In this process, the notion of pardon seems to have killed off the very notion of God-Creator itself, as the latter's social basis disappeared. Once God became thus exposed as the true and only enslaving Master (after the radical disenchantment of both kin groups and clergy) Nietzsche could not but notice that this is a naked corps of a decrepit emperor. But if Nietzsche drew a nihilistic conclusion from a paradox which had become most apparent, in Hegel's elaboration of Kant, the Kierkegaardian (and subsequently, Barthian) views of sin and pardon in faith can lead to a deeper understanding of what is at stake.

xxx. It also shows in the famous slogan '*think globally, act locally*', which in fact causes many a moral crisis.

xxxi. See the enlightening study on Kierkegaard's understanding of faith and pardon, by A-M. Lhote, 1983.

xxxii. However deplorable the custom of dealing more harshly with the 'seducing' woman in matters of adultery may be, it does imply the important insight that the evil of sin concerns the negative effects people have on each other's moral purpose. When St Augustine argued against sexual pleasures that precluded a procreative purpose, relating this to the very idea of original sin, he targeted the Manichaeans, who fostered this practice for religious reasons. They allowed (and encouraged) a sexual licence that prevented pregnancies, so as to avoid 'encapsulating the spirit into a newborn'. St Augustine held that the participation in the eternal creative act of God was the real justification of sexual pleasure. But both he and Kierkegaard after him seemed to have viewed this as a concession, which couldn't annul the basic contradiction, except via a divine pardon. Thus, these great thinkers regretted the limiting grip lovers have on each other, while underrating its positive correlate. Existentialist in his approach, Kierkegaard is seen to have envisaged rather exclusively the individual's relation to God. But this line of criticism that was started by T. Adorno, in his article 'On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love' (1939), may seem to be too harsh, even though Lhote (1983, p.130) has a point in complaining that he basically robs women of their human status.

xxxiii. We need to understand that this reflection on guilt and pardon, and its link to the gender divide, is a western wrestling with a universal enigma. It can be illustrated by a curious phenomenon among the Central-African Banda. The language of this patrilineal, male-dominated society contradicts its social tenets: it calls male the useless, infertile, small and negative version of things, whereas the useful, fertile and valuable is the female (*eyi*). It shows in their calling low (vibrant) drums female, and even affects the grammar of their tonal language, which uses high (cutting, male) tones for the negative and the past, while low (female) tones are used for the future and ongoing aspects. The Banda explain this by pointing to the life-giving nature of the (soft, vibrant) female.

xxxiv. If religious rituals and morals are about creating the social harmony, we may agree with Lévi-Strauss that the ordering of procreation is its prime concern and object.

xxxv. See K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* III,4 p.263 and H. Schöndorf 1996 p.91-93. They both relate it to the Sinai-event of Ex 31:18

xxxvi. As expressed so magnificently by Michelangelo.

xxxvii. We note that the verb *poreuesthai* Jesus uses to send this woman on her (converted, sinless) ways, is the same as is used to send Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:17) and the disciples as well (Mt 28:19). It refers the confidence of speaking freely, rather than to the depressing obligation, often associated with Paul's "Woe unto me, if..". Let us note also that the sending of the disciples in Jn 20:21 is linked directly to the notion of pardon, a fact which the commentators usually make too little of. See H. Baarlink, 1992, p.153-170, commenting on Jn 20:21 .

xxxviii. J. Mbiti, "African Christians and African Heritage" in: F. Hammerstein, *Christian-Jewish relations in Ecumenical Perspective with special emphasis on Africa*, Geneva 1977, quoted by H. Jansen, *Christelijke theologie na Auschwitz 2. Nieuw Testamentische wortels van het anti-semitisme. A1. Diagnose en therapie in geschriften van joden en christenen.* 's-Gravenhage 1985, p.576.

xxxix. Wallace (1993, p.296) calling Heil's (and others') idea that the pericope has been excluded from manuscripts for moral considerations implausible, seems to overstate his case. He points out that we know of no other example of an authentic passage being omitted for such a reason. He seems to presume an early sense of canonicity, which is not warranted. As Klein points out, scripture has long been subordinate to orality, in which concern for a right understanding prevailed over literal integrity. See A. Klein "De kanonisatie van de vier evangelies" in Baarlink, H. 1992, p.257-267. The Muslim parallel (see n.13) is not without meaning.

xl. F. Genuyt (1986 p.26-27) stresses that Jesus' writing is a pure signifier, which misses any signified correlative. Whereas the Scribes had the word rely on the scriptures, Jesus inversely made the writing of the new law depend on the divine word, as an illustration of his practice of non-judgemental dialogue. The stone in the Scribe's hand thus turns into a touchstone, but without turning the latter into the accused.

xli. This seems to call for some caution about C. Nyamiti's ancestor-theology (1984), which even links African views of ancestorship and authority to the dogma of the Trinity and to the Catholic hierarchal structures. Even though this could facilitate a dialogue with certain trends in other religions, such as Islam, it does call for caution, because the authority of God involves other aspects, both in African and in Gospel terms. A similar remark applies to the parallelism with the local political ideology, described in Pashington Obeng, *Ashanti Catholicism. Religious & Cultural Reproduction Among the Akan of Ghana.* Leiden, Brill, 1996.