

Those, then, are a few brief indications of a Christian transformation of politics. To transform politics in that fashion constitutes a political mode of religious practice and experience. Social interaction thus opens out upon the Transcendent and mediates an experience of the Beyond. The response to that experience is the animation of political activity with Christian values. But I want to do more than defend the legitimacy of the political mode of religious faith. I would argue that social and political activity is today the privileged locus of religious experience. The reason is that contemporary society is struggling with a strong temptation to turn its back upon the poor and the weak for a policy of self-interest unrestrained by compassion. Because the welfare state has run into economic difficulties, the powerful are protecting their own interests with a cynical disregard for the victims. The rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer on both the national and international level. At the same time, an illusory search for an unattainable ultimate security is producing a suicidal reliance upon nuclear arms. In this situation Christians cannot withdraw into a religion of inwardness and watch the remnants of Christian society being swamped by an egoistic individualism. They are called upon to mediate a healing grace that will purify, guide and restrain the working of self-interest in human affairs and then further to transform those affairs by relating them to a transcendent order of values. That is the religious performance imposed upon us by the signs of the time. It is there we find the primary locus for religious experience today. An appeal to a supposed primacy of contemplative religion, combined with a collusion with the existing social and political order, is the major temptation at present for religious people, especially for those in authority.

The Greenham Vigil : a women's theological initiative for peace

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On August 31st 1984, ten women arrived at Blue Gate, the entrance to the American Cruise missile base at Greenham Common to do the night watch for the peace camp there—and simultaneously to keep the vigil of the Passion based on the gospel of St. Mark. It so happened that that weekend was the anniversary of the women's peace camp—three years

since it had been set up in 1981. The camp had been evicted and destroyed many times. But the women return and remain, gathering around the fire, huddled under sheets of polythene at night and in the rain. Old prams stand at the ready for the women to wheel away their few possessions when the bailiffs come in the morning—as they do most days.

The women of the camp welcomed the night watchers and extended the hospitality of their fire, before going off to sleep under the polythene sheets. The vigil women remained around the fire to keep the watch, gathering each hour on the hour to face the guarded gates of Greenham, to sing a psalm, read from the bible and pray. Towards morning at 6.00 a.m., as dawn came up over the base, and Mark's gospel told of Jesus being led away and delivered to Pilate, the night watch prepared to depart. Meanwhile, another woman was getting up in London and going to continue the vigil in the church beside her house.

Without the presence of the women's peace camp at Greenham, this theological initiative for peace on the part of Christian women would not have taken place. The Greenham women's peace camp has become internationally known in a way that other protests have not. This is because it has marked a new departure in the peace movement—a going beyond the traditional politics of protest to a new politics of bodily witness. The stress at Greenham is not so much on the moral or ideological position of righteously indignant individuals, but on their bodily one. The vulnerability of the women's settlement speaks of the fact that a whole community is under threat of death; and this bodily vulnerability has been accepted by them as a means to testify to a message that is urgent for the continuing life of humanity.

When seen in this way, it is not difficult to recognize that Greenham is a form of peace action that has important implications for Christians. This recognition has led several Christian women to join the camp at Greenham. It has also led others to set up the Greenham Vigil. Part of my purpose here will be to demonstrate in what way the founding and maintaining of the vigil can be understood as a women's theological initiative.

The women who took part on the first occasion of the vigil were mainly from the London borough of Tower Hamlets. All of them had a full quota of commitments—full-time jobs in schools, parish or community plus a fair share of family and domestic commitments as well. But, like many women in a similar position all over the country, they wanted to find a way of registering support for the women of Greenham Common, whose prophetic action had been a sign of hope for them, demonstrating that it is possible to live and affirm life even in the shadow of death that falls over our generation. As Christian women, they also wanted to affirm this hope in the context of Christian

tradition—a tradition which centres on a story where hope and faith ultimately survive betrayal and tragedy.

Since the first occasion, the vigil has continued each month with some women coming to do the night watch at Greenham, and others participating in their homes, convents or churches or elsewhere. The vigil has been running for over a year now, and has involved many women of different ages and stages, of different denominations and different religious orders. It has involved feminists who are deeply dissatisfied with the patriarchal structures of their church, as well as other women who have not seriously considered this issue but are drawn to witness at Greenham out of a deep commitment to their faith and to peace. Some men have also been involved in the vigil, both from families and from religious orders; they have participated by taking care of children whose mothers were at Greenham or by keeping the watches of the vigil in their houses or in church. The women who began the vigil felt strongly that it should not be a form of peace action that privileged those who were relatively free to act; but that it should represent the opportunity for all women, whatever their situation, to pray 'at the foot of the cross', including those who are sick, elderly, handicapped in any way, or who care for these groups or for young children.

I have described the vigil as a women's theological initiative for peace. One aspect of this is that the vigil is linked through its time scheme and form of meditation to the theological time scheme of Mark's passion narrative. In a recent article in *New Blackfriars*,¹ John Navone suggests that Mark's time scheme probably corresponded to the way in which the early church commemorated the Passion and meditated on its events. Thus, in Mark, the last day of Jesus' life is divided into 8 periods of 3 hours, in each of which an important event is recorded. The vigil follows the same schedule for liturgical prayer—based on the Jewish prayer pattern—beginning at 6.00 p.m. on Friday and going through till 6.00 p.m. on Saturday, with 4 night-time watches, and 4 daytime watches. Thus, Mark's passion narrative, used as a theological structure for the vigil, enables 20th-century women and men to take up the prayer pattern of the early church and continue the vigil for the life of the world in our times and places.

Mark's way of handling the events of the Passion also shows us something about his way of doing theology, the way in which he laboured to produce the good news for his community. His theology is not expressed in a system of concepts but in a narrative. And this narrative belongs to a community, the body of people who have been born out of the story of Jesus. And by using the liturgy, the 'people's work', as a frame to perceive and portray the events of the Passion, he brings the community back into the story. The theology of Mark is thus not divorced from the body of the community which has shaped it and

been shaped by it. Both have their origin in the Passion of Christ which has given birth to them. Thus the form of Mark's gospel, its mode and context, can be understood as a revelation of equal importance to its content. But many subsequent theologians seem to have ignored this vital aspect of the gospel, preferring to organise the spiritual cosmos in grand conceptual designs in a mode similar to others of their class and gender who ruled empires in the secular sphere. In so doing, they discontinued the work of the first theologians, like Mark, and prescinded from the profound insight of one of them that: 'If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, one is known by him' (1. Cor. 8.2)

Love is a word almost worn out by abuse, but it is clear that for Paul this theology that is 'being known by God' was the painstaking work of building up the body of the community; not spinning abstractions, nor erecting an impressive intellectual edifice, but cultivating the tender plant of the gospel while sorting out quarrels, tensions, ideological hijacks and personal rivalries, the masquerading self-interest as well as the genuine misconceptions. Paul was always finding it necessary to suckle the community, to nurse it, wean it, train it, struggle and despair over it and suffer any amount of heartache on its behalf. And this was not due to some special apostolic privilege of his, but a consequence of the calling that belongs to us all if we take seriously Christ's command to preach the gospel. If it is truly the gospel that we are preaching, then we shall find the Word being continually reborn in the life of the ecclesial community. And we are likely to find it as demanding and exasperating as any other new-born infant.

Thus theology, as modelled for us in the New Testament, can be seen as a matter of coping with the consequences of being known by God. As women theologians, this is the mode of theology that we are affirming for both sexes. It is to this pattern that the Greenham Vigil belongs as a theological initiative. Bearing the Word for our times means to find ourselves in the midst of an ecclesial community that is unestablished, unsanctified by society, and struggling to be heard. This was the situation of the first Christians, and of the first ones to write their gospel, and it is also ours. These reflections that follow are shaped by a community in process and are thus by their very nature provisional.

The Women's Peace Camp as Prophetic Witness

The women at the peace camp have undertaken to maintain a bodily presence at the sites of evil—and thereby to make visible the threat to humankind that rests in the nuclear weapons at these bases. The intention of the government has been to keep the presence and reality of the weapons as obscure as possible. The intention of the women has been to draw attention to what is being done in our name. By making visible

the threat, they have helped to make it possible for the rest of us to face up to its existence. In order to warn us of our false security, they have elected to speak from a position of great insecurity, thus delivering a challenge that is far more effective than one that is spoken from a position of moral security and physical protection. They have thus translated their convictions into a way of life which constitutes a challenge to the status quo, and thus becomes a target for the law and forces of the establishment. The law serves as a guardian of the existing order, and when that order is based on weapons of mass destruction and world-corporate suicide, the forces of law and order become guardians of the way of death. Those who seriously challenge it, like the Greenham women, are likely to suffer conviction for their convictions. They have embarked upon a mode of life which should be clearly recognizable—to Christians especially—as the practice of witness.

What does it mean to describe the women's peace camp as a prophetic witness? The peace camp and its undertaking have resonances in biblical tradition. In the Old Testament, we have the story of a people who through their prophet Moses chose the wilderness rather than slavery. In the wilderness they learned a primary dependence on God for defence, rather than on the fortified camps of Pharaoh's Egypt. Later, after they had settled in the Promised Land, they too began to rest their defence on fortified camps, and on alliance with powerful neighbours. What the prophets did was to raise the question of who really has the power to defend—the powerful neighbours with the latest weapons (horses and chariots) or Yahweh, who had provided daily food without cultivation for those who were in the wilderness? Prophets like Isaiah challenged their rulers' pursuit of national security through alliance with the super-powers, and exposed their dependence on the symbols of state power. This dependence they saw as the worship of idols. They sometimes engaged in strange actions to proclaim their allegiance to the God who was the nation's true security. Isaiah, for instance, went around barefoot and naked for three years to demonstrate the fate of Judah if the nation put its faith in alliance with Egypt: they would become exiles and captives (Isa. 20). Greenham women have been engaged on a similar project: their action exposes the fallacy of the 'defence' provided by nuclear weapons—weapons which are the apotheosis of male violence, and which leave the civilian population as defenceless as the women squatting outside the USAF base at Greenham Common. They too are engaged in the business of defence—the defence of life on earth. Their camp does not employ the weapons of mass destruction for this end, but has available to them only the sort of power that the prophets had.

As Christians, then, we may consider the peace camp as standing in line with the work of the prophets. But it may also speak to us of the New

Testament part of our tradition. It may serve to remind us of our fundamental vocation as Christians—the call to live in the body of Christ and to share the fate of that body. If we lived in a totalitarian society, we would perhaps understand far better what it means to be implicated in the fate of one who has died for us. Thus in South Africa today, if a woman is arrested on a charge of subversion her friends, family and comrades are likely to be in danger of their lives. They will have become implicated in her fate. As long as the regime lasts, they will continue to be vulnerable. Yet although the regime of sin still rules our world in this time before the second coming of Christ, we who live protected and privileged in Western society do not, on the whole, live in fear of our lives because of our commitment to Christ. But recently, the growing threat of nuclear annihilation has brought some of us to fear for our lives and for our children's lives. Tardily, we begin to face and feel the vulnerability that is already ours through our membership of Christ. Paradoxically, this nuclear fear has the capacity to recall us to a deeper understanding of our faith. For it throws into relief the simple fact, so constantly and tragically obscured by our divisions, that we are one body, one human race sharing a common fate and destiny. And this simple fact is also the substance of our faith—that we are called by God to live in the one Body that is Christ, our humanity.

And so, for us, the consciousness of being one body begins as it began for the early church, with fear for our lives. This fear was what the disciples experienced when they witnessed their leader being taken away to be crucified. The story of the Passion that follows this arrest is at the heart of our faith, and we enact it in our eucharist each Sunday. But in these evil times, more than our presence in church is needed to make clear its meaning to believers and non-believers alike. We need to be standing in the right place when we recall the Passion. That place is the foot of the cross. And in our day, it is places like Greenham, where the global crucifixion of Christ is being prepared, that have become the foot of the cross for us.

Watching in the Gospels: Women watching at Greenham

The gospel story makes it clear that one of our primary Christian duties is to keep watch. In the garden of Gethsemane before his passion, Jesus says sadly to his exhausted disciples 'Could you not watch with me one hour?' One of the features of Mark's gospel is this frequent misunderstanding of Jesus by the disciples, and their failure to discern the response that is needed in the circumstances. Yet it is the Markan gospel that underlines especially the commitment and fidelity of the women disciples. In first century Palestine, women were socially marginal, religiously inferior and culturally unclean. Yet in Mark's gospel (and also in John's) it is the women who become the primary

witnesses for the three central events of the Christian kerygma—the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

As we begin to read the Passion story in Mark, we enter a world where the stage is set for an impending tragedy. As we keep the watch at Greenham and look in through the gates of the base, we may have a sense that the stage has been set for tragedy in this place too. The story has echoes in our surroundings. In Mark, the day of passion begins at sunset (6.00 p.m.) when Jesus and the disciples eat the Passover meal together. The women share food around the camp fire, and night watch women sometimes bring food to share with them and among themselves. Jesus speaks of betrayal, and overwhelmed as we are by the apparent inevitability of the holocaust, we may also reflect on how we have been betrayed—and how we have betrayed. At 9.00 p.m. they sing a hymn and go to the garden of Gethsemane. We rise to say our office by the gates and sing Ps. 130 (129) 'Out of the Depths'. Jesus' agony in the garden may speak to us of the fear and despair that grips us when we try to take stock of the future, fear for ourselves and our children. The disciples, exhausted by the physical and emotional stresses of this strange and difficult day, begin to drop off. Women who may have driven many miles to Greenham after a demanding day's work also feel the urge to sleep. At midnight we read of Jesus' arrest...and arrests may be taking place on the base that night. The disciples make a show of resistance but Jesus implies that resistance of that kind is futile. Their sense of powerlessness is complete—a feeling shared by many of us in the peace movement and outside it. Confused and disheartened, they scatter.

As Jesus is led away, Peter follows at a distance. He is bold enough to enter into the high priest's courtyard and sits there with the guards, warming himself at their fire, frightened to death of being recognized as an outsider. Meanwhile a trial is being prepared, the trial of Jesus, our humanity and our world. A woman challenges Peter to acknowledge his allegiance. The women of Greenham sometimes challenge the soldiers about their allegiance: 'Which side are you on? Are you on the side of genocide etc' (Greenham Song). At 3.00 a.m. the night is far gone, we have ceased to talk much. In that strange hushed time before morning, things and people reveal themselves. In Jerusalem, in the first century, the cock crows and Peter bursts into tears. At Blue Gate too, the cock crows—usually a bit later. And perhaps we ask ourselves; have we denied humanity three times? Has the judgement been passed? Is the time now at hand?

The women in the gospel keep the vigil at the foot of the cross throughout the dying agony of Christ, and later they return to the tomb to perform the last act of physical care for their dead friend. And so it happens that through faithfulness to their vigil, they find themselves in the right place at the right time to hear the Good News, the news that this

tortured and persecuted friend whom they loved has been raised to new life. By their presence in body and spirit alongside this suffering human body these women were in place to become the first witnesses of the Resurrection. That this tradition has survived in all four gospels is amazing—and precious to us—in view of the fact that women were not considered valid witnesses in contemporary Judaism. And indeed, as Luke records, the male disciples who receive the message from the women do not believe them. They have witnessed their leader executed and are now living in fear of their lives behind locked doors. That is reality for them. The rest is an idle tale.

In a society governed by the nuclear threat most people are, like the disciples, living behind locked doors in one sense or another. Either, like the government, they are now busy building bunkers, burrowing deep into the earth for protection, while at the same time exposing that same earth to destruction through the insanity of the arms race; or, like the majority of the population, they have retreated into mental bunkers, where reality is filtered through the screen, and imagination prefers the fantasy of horror to its imminent actuality.

The risen Jesus is able to pass through even the barriers erected by our fearful obsession with security. He brings his message in person to these doubtful and despairing men, and prepares them for the coming of the Spirit. The way out of their hopeless situation is Pentecost, their experience of empowerment. For us, as Christians, Pentecost is also our possibility. But as long as we confine ourselves only to our churches, we shall exclude ourselves from Pentecost. For our churches, by and large, have become protected institutions, religious ‘reserves’ resting on the security of the nuclear state. If we settle for the security/salvation offered by the nuclear state, we cannot at the same time truly share in the insecurity of Christ in whom there is true salvation. The journey to recover hope needs to begin with a refusal to hide our fear in a bunker...or a church. It becomes necessary to go out from the captivity of the churches into the wilderness, the margins of society. Here, where we are free of protection, we are also free to receive the Spirit, the Spirit that gives power to build not bunkers but ‘bridges beyond our divisions’ (Greenham Song). Here, where the Spirit is ‘old and strong’, we may discover the meaning of witness—not as a pious demonstration of a superior conscience, but as a bodily expression of the relevance of our faith. To witness is to demonstrate with our bodies the vulnerability that we share by our participation in the death of Christ. Because we cannot at one and the same time trust in the security of the nuclear state and put our hope for salvation in Christ, we are committed to the tradition of Christian witness against idolatry.

It is the commandment to watch in the gospels (Mk. 13. 35—37, Mt. 24:42; 25:13) which points out to us how we can show forth Pentecost

and practise witness against idolatry. Keeping watch is one of the fundamental themes of the New Testament story. It is a theme we can rediscover and practise throughout the seasons of our Christian life. To keep the vigil regularly at Greenham is to become newly aware of the changing seasons—their richness and beauty both in nature and in the liturgical year. In mid-winter, when the razor wire at Greenham is crystalline with frost and the base has a stark, breathtaking and ironic beauty, we commemorate the Holy Innocents. The innocents were slaughtered on the sharp edges of domination, and are still being slaughtered daily and hourly by the arms race of the Herods all wanting to be king alone.

In the church's calendar the events of the Passion are celebrated on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. Because our vigil is a Passion Vigil, these days are the liturgical climax of the annual cycle of the vigil. And we have begun to celebrate them at Greenham, beginning with the Passover. In spring, the woodland trees at Blue Gate acquire their new leaves, and snowdrops, daffodils and bluebells appear in all their glory. They survive and return to the margins of the lovely common which they once clothed, and now has become the devastated wilderness of a military base. With the woodland flowers, we gather at the gates to celebrate the feast of our Jewish ancestors in faith, who were brought by God out of the land of oppression, and do not forget each year to bless the ruler of the universe who... 'with love gave us festivals for happiness, holidays and seasons for rejoicing, like this day the feast of the Passover, the season of our freedom which is a holy assembly in remembrance of the going out from Egypt...'. Celebrating this Passover, we recall their Exodus from Egypt into the wilderness which became an opportunity for freedom. Sitting at the gates of Greenham, it becomes easier to understand what that means. At this same Passover, Christ washed his disciples' feet. As we perform this ceremony, women are reminded that women belong to the footwashing workers of the world—and are startled to see that Christ left this express instruction to his male disciples: that they adopt this pattern of ministry as their own, not the hierarchy and ecclesiastical lordship that we have inherited.

And so the vigil comes to the Day of the Passion, and we pace out a stations of the cross, created for Greenham by Pax Christi; and we recall the sufferings of women and their children across the world, and offer them as a participation in the redemptive sufferings of Christ.

Each time is also a first time, and here at Greenham it may be the first time that women have had the opportunity to arrange and lead worship at such celebrations and to preach the gospel. It is an ancient feast that is always at the same time a new festival. As women gather on the common to celebrate the anniversary of our vigil, with bread and wine and the *agape* of sisterhood, we may be uniquely placed to

understand how the Good News is precisely good news for us. Women whose ministry has been downgraded and discounted in their work, their homes and their church for too long are those whom the Spirit now calls to develop and nurture a new spirituality, one that rests upon watching and witness to the new age. Before his passion, Jesus tells his disciples: 'Watch therefore, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming' (Mt. 24.42) and the vital nature of this command to watch is emphasised in the parables of the End-time (Mt. 25). In an age when systems of male dominance have spawned a lethal technology that threatens the whole of creation maybe it is given to women to show how the command to watch is to be obeyed in our generation.

Vigil as Vocation

The women who live on the common warn us of the threat to life on earth. Their warning may recall us to that Spirit which led women and men of past ages to found religious communities to embody their vision of faith. The various orders of religious life have at times embodied fundamental insights about the meaning of Christian life. At their best, they have been the 'peace camps' of the past, making visible to society the common life as we are called to live it in Christ. As we keep the vigil on the common, we may feel that this Spirit of the common life is at work in us—and has work for us.

Religious communities are governed by a rule of life that is linked to the saying of an office, and to a discipline that commits the members to a life of obedience, service and penitence. The rule of life functions to proclaim that it is indeed the rule of God, not the rule of men, we live by. In the last analysis, the Christian community is not subject to the rule of the rulers of this world.

And this too is what we hope to affirm by our regular keeping of the vigil at Greenham and in relation to Greenham. It is the rule of God we recognise through our vigil, not the power of the powers that be, who subject us to the threat of nuclear death. Our presence at the gates is an act of obedience to the Spirit who draws us there to proclaim our faith.

The regularity of the rule that is the saying of the office also has its function. It structures the 'new life of the Spirit' over against the structures of society that mould our lives to injustice. It forms the possibility in us of living more vulnerably in Christ, when all our normal instincts are to seek security. To perform the service of living as a sign of hope, it is necessary to learn to live more vulnerably.

The vigil also offers us the opportunity for penitence. For in making the act of the vigil we do not primarily protest our rights, nor claim a moral superiority over those who guard and run the base. Rather, we acknowledge that we are also implicated in the idolatry of the society that now threatens us with nuclear death. Like those on the other side of the

wire, we also stand ultimately under the judgement of God and are dependent on his mercy.

Keeping watch at Greenham therefore may have some of the character of a calling—a vocation to become sisters under the rule of life. Yet to women who are feminists, the idea that becoming sisters for life might involve the religious values expressed by service, obedience and penitence might well seem like heresy. For most feminists, obedience and service are inseparably associated with the subjection of women to the old patterns of thought and dependence on a male dominated society. Their search for liberation has meant learning to refuse obedience to the life-denying rules of patriarchy. It has involved the struggle to end the futile waste of women's lives too often sacrificed in servicing the men who perpetuate a system that emphatically does not serve women. Feminists feel that it is precisely these oppressive systems of male violence and privilege that have brought us to the brink of the nuclear annihilation that we now face. If penitence is due, it should be directed towards adopting the values of freedom and equality.

Yet, as a feminist I have come to believe that the freedom we seek can only be completed by the calling of the gospel; that the true freedom of women is inseparable from gospel freedom; and that the same calling that leads us to break the old bondage leads us to enter new bonds in which the ancient religious values of service, obedience and penitence take on a new meaning for us. We discover that freedom is most binding. At Greenham we may find a surprising dimension of freedom as women are creating it. For it is not so much the rights upheld or the individual freedom of the women involved that impresses itself upon those who come. Rather, it is the sharing-in-bondage undertaken by the women in the course of fulfilling the task they have set themselves. Those who are pledged to keep the camp going, whatever comes, find themselves bound to something which many powerful forces are equally firmly pledged to destroy. As they struggle to keep faith with their purpose they have endured not only the awful physical conditions of the camp, but also harrassment and hostility from the military, police, bailiffs, the legal system and the local residents. This common endurance has brought about a powerful bonding with each other. Yet the bond goes further even than this. Those who have lived at the camp, and been face to face with the rhythms and routines of the base, in full knowledge of the horror of the end to which it is all directed, find themselves powerfully bonded with the place. Many experience the compulsion to return after they have left. It can hardly be the expectation of pleasure that draws them to return nor is being there an expression of freedom as we normally understand it. Yet perhaps those who return sense that this voluntary bondage they have entered is not the antithesis of freedom but in some sense its fulfillment. For in being there, to maintain the camp

against the odds, they are living out a practical solidarity with all those past, present and to come who are the victims of the nuclear arms race and its satanic implications. For the sake of life on earth in all its fulness, they have submitted to the bondage that the vocation to peace lays upon them. In so doing they have uncovered an authentic paradigm of women's freedom—freedom that is lived under the rule of life in the face of death.

The freedom of the gospel is of this kind. It demands a radical equality among those confronting the hegemony of death. The women at Greenham have maintained a presence at the base now for over four years in all weathers and all seasons. And in the course of this demanding operation they have apparently not found it necessary to determine who gives the orders to whom. They have, it seems, simply set aside the rule of men, with its preoccupation with the order of precedence (Mk. 10. 35f), thus allowing leadership in the community to be exercised in new ways. Such new ways of leadership were commended by Jesus to his disciples (Mk. 10. 42—45) as he began to face up to the imminence of death in his own life. As women committed to the gospel, I believe we are committed to practising these new ways rather than settling for the protection afforded us by patriarchal society. As Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza says in her article 'Call No Man Father'²: 'The fatherhood of God radically prohibits any ecclesial patriarchal self-understanding. The Lordship of Christ categorically rules out any relations of domination within the Christian community'. Being in the body of Christ means in a very fundamental sense to be committed to relations of equality. This certainly means that men are obliged to undertake a thoroughgoing and radical review of their relations with women as well as with other men. But it also means that women must consider very seriously the equality or lack of it in their relations with other women as well as with men. For many of us, women and men, whose adjustment to a patriarchal society is at least tolerably comfortable, it may demand that we be willing to be led into a wilderness of a quite personal and radical kind. Here we may begin to realise—as Christ did in his wilderness—that there are no easy answers as to how gospel freedom is to be sought and lived. We find that the old-style moral comforters are inadequate; but so too are many of the great new panaceas from out of the ideological fruit-machine. Important radicalisms have been quickly reduced to an oversimplified 'new law' which constricts and distorts as badly as the old one had begun to do. The freedom of the gospel is at once most concrete and precise, yet also always shifting and elusive. It is, I think, no accident that the evangelists chose the narrative as an appropriate vehicle for their good news

A story always leads to a particular place and a particular time. Mark's gospel led those first-century women of Palestine to a bare and brutal hillside outside Jerusalem: Golgotha, the place of a skull. It was

here, at this unholy place, they kept their vigil. For some of us, in our time and place, perhaps the story leads again to an unholy place, like Greenham. Here, by a strange reversal, this site of evil that symbolises our nation's 'covenant with death' (Isa. 28:5) becomes the place of new hope, hope that is located in that pathetic perimeter settlement of women, at once so fragile and so indestructible, standing-in for all of vulnerable humanity and creation that is threatened.

The guarantee of hope is in the ending of the story. We are always anxious to know if a story has a happy ending. In Mark's gospel, the women, after their vigil at the cross, go to the tomb to anoint the body of their friend. But instead of a body they find an angel who gives them an unbelievable message—that Jesus is risen, and wants them to take this message to the others. 'Go tell the disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him as he told you' (Mk. 16. 7). But Mark records that the women were overcome with panic 'and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid'.

Subsequent Christians found this ending unsatisfactory, to say the least, and supplied the happy ending. But perhaps we should return to the open-ended uncertainty of Mark. We may discover that it is precisely the mystery of his non-ending that speaks to us in our situation. The message has been delivered to the women—but we have been too afraid to proclaim it. The last episode is missing because we are the last episode. The time has come to break the silence and proclaim what we have witnessed and heard at the empty tomb. He is risen and goes before us to Galilee. And in the mud and rain at Greenham, we await the glory of his second coming.

- 1 John Navone SJ, 'Mark's Story of the Death of Jesus', *New Blackfriars* Vol 65 No 765 (March 1984) pp. 123—135.
- 2 Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'You are not to be called Father: Early Christian History in a Feminist Perspective', *Cross Currents* 29, 3 (1979).