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Stranger in a Strange Land: Reflections on History and Identity*

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.¹

It is moth-eaten, this fabric of the past.
But Stella's moth-holes do not coincide with
Judith's moth-holes, it would seem. Of course not.
Unreliable witnesses, all of us.
We select the evidence, or something does.²

Evidence and the selection of evidence, whether conscious or unconscious, shapes all of what we recognise as science. This is a truism which applies to all sciences and all disciplines, although the definition of evidence and the criteria of selection clearly vary in different disciplines. It is particularly true for the historian, for given the wealth of material available from the past, the selection of evidence is of primary importance in shaping the history which will result. But, as Penelope Lively is concerned to point out, the selection of evidence defines not only science, in the sense of the way in which we look at the world, but ourselves and our identities. How we see the world is intimately bound up with the way in which we see ourselves, our place in the world and our past. The selection of evidence, in the sense of the unconscious and conscious sorting and sharing of memories, defines our own selves, our own identities. On one level, then, the writing of history is intimately bound up with our definition of our selves, our understanding of what it is to be who we are.

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¹ L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1998), 7.

² Penelope Lively, *Spiderweb* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1998), 166.

History and identity are not simply connected, but are interwoven. Our selection of evidence defines our history and with it our selves, and at the same time we ourselves, our context, and our own history define the process of selection. The psychotherapist Michael Jacobs suggests that:

As individuals we construct our personal history in much the same way as a nation constructs its national or cultural history, in order to support our way of seeing things. However objective we try to be, and whatever facts we try to put forward to inform our judgements, all historical views are inevitably biased, since they consist not simply of facts, but of selected facts, one weighed against the other, to support a particular position.³

Personal interests shape what is interesting to us. Academic communities shape which problems are recognised as worthy of consideration and what evidence is deemed worthy of selection.⁴ Personal faith or philosophical conviction weights our approach to the available evidence. Inevitably, history is “written from the perspective of the present; history fulfils a need of the present.”⁵

If in the process of writing history we define our identity, at the same time, as scholars, we allow that definition to be questioned; the writing of history, as with the exploration of our own past, includes the confrontation with different interpretations of the past. The study of history moves in a hermeneutic spiral from what we know, through that which is new, to a new understanding of what we thought before. In recent years, this process has often been seen in terms of the possibility of reading and understanding or interpreting texts, with much attention being paid to the limitations of what texts – in this case historical sources – can convey.⁶ Seeing history in terms of textual interpretation reminds the historian of the provisional nature of interpretations, but it is prone to neglecting the weight of the cultural differences which face the historian who journeys into the past. Precisely because, as Hartley puts it, “the past is a foreign country” where “they do things

³ Michael Jacobs, *The Presenting Past: The Core of Psychodynamic Counselling and Therapy* (Buckingham: Open University Press ²1998), 28.

⁴ Compare Kuhn’s definition of “normal science”: Thomas Kuhn, *Structures of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press ²1970), especially 36-37.

⁵ John Lechte, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers* (London: Routledge 1994), 111.

⁶ For a review of this discussion, see Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta 1997), 75-102.

differently”,⁷ I wish to suggest that the experience of living in a foreign country may offer useful insights into the complexity of questions of historical interpretation and understanding which may help the historian to reflect on her work.

Moving to another country – even to a country where the native language is ostensibly the same – inevitably requires a shift of both culture and of language. If learning or understanding is to take place, the blocks and barriers erected by the differences between culture and languages must be surmounted:

How such blocks can be removed is problematical. What does seem clear, however, is that the language learner must first be made aware of himself [sic] as a cultural being. Paradoxically, most people, of whatever nation, see themselves and their compatriots not as a culture but as “standard”, or “right,” and the rest of the world as made up of cultures, which are conglomerates of strange behavior. Once people are disabused of this notion and recognize that they are, truly, products of their own cultures, they are better prepared and more willing to look at the behavior of persons from other cultures and accept them non-judgmentally, if not favorably. Along with this acceptance come acceptance of their language and a greater willingness to let go of the binding ties of the native language and culture – a willingness to enter, at least to a degree, into what can be the exciting adventure of another language and culture.⁸

To frame the task of the historian in these terms is to require her to approach her work in the knowledge that she is confronted with another, foreign culture, the shape of which she seeks on some level to interpret and to understand on its own terms. It is to take seriously the foreignness and strangeness of the past we seek to know, and to be conscious of the extent to which our inability to visit it and interact with this past directly restricts what we can know of it. This article draws upon theories of language learning and acculturation (the process of becoming adapted to another culture) to reflect upon the way in which the historian can and cannot claim to represent the past. It reflects upon the way in which our writing of history, our understanding of the past shapes and is shaped by our identity, our situation here and now, and

⁷ See note 1. The application of this metaphor to history is not original: compare the title of David Lowenthal’s discussion of tradition and heritage in history, David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985).

⁸ Joyce Merrill Valdes, “Preface,” in: Joyce Merrill Valdes (ed.), *Culture Bound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986), vii-xi, here vii.

thus moulds our future. Such a reflected understanding of history is vital if church historians, as theologians, are to develop an understanding of the living tradition in which our theology is rooted and from which it derives sustenance. In defining ourselves, we draw upon the past in a way which empowers us to live in the present and to move into the future, an important element in realising the lives to which God has called us.

I. Language

When I look to the past I encounter difference, and one of the primary factors in that difference is language. Language implies far more than simply the formal linguistic system in which a given text is composed, for both content and reading are shaped by the intimacy of the relationship between language and culture. When we read a text from the past, even a text which is apparently written in our native language, we are reading a text which comes from another culture:

Culture is a deeply ingrained part of the very fiber of our being, but language – the means for communication among members of a culture – is the most visible and available expression of that culture. And so a person’s world view, self-identity, his [sic] systems of thinking, acting feeling, and communicating, are disrupted by a change from one culture to another.⁹

It is important to be aware of this disruption when we read a text from the past. If the language is familiar, that very familiarity may deceive. We need in our reading always to take into account that language itself is individual, and that boundaries or associations that exist in one language cease to exist in another (or in the same language in another time). Taken from Poland to Canada by her parents at the age of thirteen, Eva Hoffman had to learn a new language:

The words I learn [in Canada] don’t stand for things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue. “River” in Polish was a vital sound, energized with the essence of riverhood, of my being immersed in rivers. “River” in English is cold – a word without an aura. It has no accumulated associations for me, and it does not give off the radiating haze of connotation. It does not evoke.¹⁰

⁹ H. Douglas Brown, “Learning a Second Culture,” in: Merrill Valdes (ed.), *Culture Bound*, 33-48, here 34 [excerpted from H. Douglas Brown, *Principles of Second Language Learning and Teaching* (Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall 1980), 129-144].

¹⁰ Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (London: Minerva 1991), 106.

As a foreigner I speak a language which is often opaque, in which shades of meaning may merge, in which I may be conscious that what I am saying is not what I mean. My competence slips: I cannot speak about some areas in which I am in fact competent, because I do not have the vocabulary. But this is not only a question of linguistic facility: in the foreign language, I will be confronted by assumptions which seem inexplicable to me but normal to the culture in which I am living. Inadequacies in my native language may become apparent if I am asked to say or do things in the foreign language which I would never say or do in my own; as long as my own language remains my primary analytical language, it may be very difficult for me to understand what is required or to think about how to go about saying or doing these things. At the same time the interference and interaction between languages awakens associations for me which will not exist for a native speaker. Communication becomes far less self-evident. I see that people have made some sense of what I have said, but I am far less certain of what I think they may have heard than I would be if I were working in my first language. Confrontation with life in another language, prolonged interaction with a different culture, may be deeply frustrating on some levels, but it also changes my perception both of my own original language and of my possibilities. And in doing so it changes who I am.¹¹

The realisation of difference is already a step on the way to language or culture acquisition. On first moving abroad, things may look much the same; it is only on closer appraisal that the changes become obvious:

At first things look pretty much alike. There are taxis, hotels with hot and cold running water, theatres, neon lights, even tall buildings with elevators and a few people who can speak English. But pretty soon the American discovers that underneath the familiar existence there are vast differences. When someone says “yes” it often does not mean yes at all, and when people smile it doesn’t always mean they are pleased. When the American visitor makes a helpful gesture, he may be rebuffed; when he tries to be friendly, nothing happens. ... The longer he stays, the more enigmatic the new country looks.¹²

¹¹ This is drawn from my own experience, but is documented by many studies. See for instance, Brown, “Learning a Second Culture.”

¹² Edward Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York: Doubleday 1959), 59; cited in Brown, “Learning a Second Culture,” 35.

Research indicates a number of different stages in the process of learning a second language or settling into a foreign country. Brown identifies

four successive stages of acculturation. The first stage is the period of excitement and euphoria over the newness of the surroundings. The second stage – culture shock – emerges as the individual feels the intrusion of more and more cultural differences into his [sic] own image of self and security. In this stage the individual relies on and seeks out the support of his fellow countrymen in the second culture, taking solace in complaining about local customs and conditions, seeking escape from his predicament. The third stage is one of gradual, and at first tentative and vacillating, recovery. This stage is typified by... *culture stress*: some problems of acculturation are solved while other problems continue for some time. But general progress is made, slowly but surely, as the person begins to accept the differences in thinking and feeling that surround him, slowly becoming more empathic with the persons in the second culture. The fourth stage represents near or full recovery, either assimilation or adaptation, acceptance of the new culture, and self-confidence in the “new” person that has developed in this culture.¹³

Correlating their own results with those of other studies, William Acton and Judith Walker de Felix define four stages in language acquisition:

1. *Tourist*. The early phase in which the new culture is almost totally inaccessible;... Learners draw extensively on first language strategies and resources, survivor, immigrant and citizen.
2. *Survivor*. The stage of functional language, and functional understanding of the culture....
[The Acculturation Threshold]
3. *Immigrant*. The degree of acculturation we expect of an educated learner, one who is literate in his or her own language....
4. *Citizen*. The stage that is almost at the level of the native speaker, in which one has acculturated to the degree that one is only rarely tripped up by the subtleties of the language and culture.¹⁴

In the theory of Alexander Guiora, the acculturation threshold marks the transition from identity as defined only through the first language to the establishing of an identity in the second language.¹⁵ It is the threshold which must be crossed if language acquisition is not to remain “fossilised” at a pidgin stage in which the foreign language is spoken primarily according to the rules

¹³ Brown, “Learning a Second Culture,” 36.

¹⁴ William R. Acton and Judith Walker de Felix, “Acculturation and Mind,” in: Merrill Valdes (ed.), *Culture Bound*, 20-31, here 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26-28.

of the native language.¹⁶ That is, the acculturation threshold must be crossed if we are to engage with the foreign culture on something approaching its own terms rather than simply assimilating it into our first language-first culture world view.¹⁷

The challenge to us as historians is to pass beyond the acculturation threshold without the advantage of being able to up sticks and visit the past, immersing ourselves in the foreign culture. All of us are foreigners when we come to read a historical text, and our primary problem may be, not that the words of our historical sources do not evoke, but they do. We need to remember that the evocative moment of a historical text is our own, just as the evocative moment of a foreign language is always, however well acculturated we are, not that of a native speaker. The words of a text will not evoke for us what they did for the author, or for any contemporary reader. We come to our sources, not as anonymous readers, but as ourselves.

However extensive our attempts to reconstruct the context of our sources, we read them through the spectacles of the texts which we know, the structures and institutions within which we exist, the traditions with which we have grown up. Whether or not these latter are formally defined as sources,¹⁸ these cultural givens shape how we understand the written sources we encounter. Understanding this and seeking to recognise the spectacles we wear will help to move us beyond the naive assumption “these people are just like me” to a recognition of difference, that is, to cross the acculturation threshold. Nevertheless, even when our reading of numerous documents brings us to a deeper knowledge of the language and the context of a particular source or group of sources, we will always lack the associations, textual or aural, which were available to the author or contemporary reader.¹⁹ As Caroline Walker Bynum has pointed out:

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹⁷ It may be important to remark here that, although acculturation is not the same as assimilation, there are nevertheless likely to be situations and groups for which it is preferable to remain on the native speaker side of the acculturation threshold. The importance of preserving group identity in certain situations will be discussed below: p. 56.

¹⁸ There is certainly a case for doing so: see, Christoph Marksches, *Arbeitsbuch Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck 1995), 20-22.

¹⁹ On the problem of language in sources, see Evans, *In Defence of History*, 89. Note too that contemporary readers would also have had a range of associations and thus of meanings for their terms.

Our readings will change because we change, both as individuals and as a culture. No one of us will ever read more than partially, from more than a particular perspective. Indeed, it is exactly because we admit that we are particular individuals, at a particular historical moment, using and affirming our own standards, that we move with confidence to speak of the beautiful, the cogent, the intellectually courageous and the moral in past writings and events. We know that what significance or nobility we find is significant or admirable to the particular “us.” But also we learn from texts, and the events they describe and incite, because we find in them the ignoble, the insignificant, the self-contradictory and the paradoxical.²⁰

Our readings will change, and so will we, just as we change and are changed when our understanding of a language deepens, and we begin to perceive both the foreign – host? – and our native language and culture differently. Our readings of sources will change with our knowledge of other sources, the work of other historians, our own context, and our understanding of ourselves will change too: we learn how we, like historians before us, and read and continue to read our own presuppositions and wishes and fears into the sources we consider. “If we are humble,” adds Walker Bynum, “we learn something as well about our own capacity for self-contradiction.”²¹

II. Meaning

Learning a language can be an exercise in self-contradiction; it changes who I think that I am; it changes who I am perceived to be, and it changes who I am:

I’ve never been prim before, [writes Hoffman] but that’s how I am seen by my new peers. I don’t try to tell jokes too often, I don’t know the slang, I have no cool repartee. ... I become a very serious young person, missing the registers of wit and irony in my speech, though my mind sees ironies everywhere.²²

The confrontation with a new language brings shifts in identity, but it brings also confrontation with the relationship between articulated words and meaning. In a new context, words take on new connotations: “English kindness has a whole system of morality behind it, a system which makes ‘kindness’ an entirely positive virtue. Polish kindness has the tiniest element of irony.”²³ Meaning is rooted in culture and context; divorced from that culture and context words become

²⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone 1991), 23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²² Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*, 118.

²³ *Ibid.*, 108.

just themselves. ... this radical disjoining between word and thing is a dessicating alchemy, draining the world not only of significance but of its colors, striations, nuances – its very existence. It is the loss of a living connection.²⁴

And yet communication takes place. Hoffman writes her book about the experience of losing one language and gaining another, and on some level she shares her experience. In the foreign language, I say something, aware that it is not quite what I wanted to say, and my listeners respond to the words I have spoken. Communication – on some level – takes place. The foreign-language-speaker's enhanced awareness of the gap between what s/he thinks s/he has said and what responses indicate that s/he has been heard to have said may serve as a salutary reminder that this gap exists also in the mother tongue and, by extension, in every text. Moreover, this gap serves to expand the number of possible meanings: most authors have the experience of being told that they have said something they were not aware of having written, and of coming to see – in some cases at least – that this meaning may in fact be present. In this sense, authorial intention, if it can be said to exist at all, is essentially irrecoverable; inevitably, a text can and does present its readers with meaning – or, better, a range of meaning.²⁵

Clearly this range of meaning is fundamental to the knowledge which can be derived from historical sources. It is central as well to defining the relationship between the history we write and the past events and ideas which are “documented” by our sources. Language is opaque here also: as Evans points out, “the language of historical documents is never transparent, and historians have long been aware that they cannot simply gaze through it to the historical reality behind. Historians know, historians have always known that we can only see the past ‘through a glass, darkly’.”²⁶ But, on the other hand, “the fragmentary nature of the traces left to us by the past is no reason for supposing that historians’ imagination is unfettered when it comes to reconstructing it.”²⁷ Walker Bynum phrases the provisional nature of history as it exists between these limits in terms of the literary theory of comedy:

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁵ This relationship has been the subject of many studies in literary theory. See, for instance, Umberto Eco *et al.*, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992).

²⁶ Evans, *In Defence of History*, 105.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

A comic stance in doing history is aware of contrivance, of risk. It always admits that we may be wrong. A comic stance knows that there is, in actuality, no ending (happy or otherwise) – that doing history is, for the historian, telling a story that could be told in another way. For this reason a comic stance welcomes voices hitherto left outside, not to absorb or mute them but to allow them to object and contradict. Its goal is the pluralistic, not the total. It embraces the partial as partial.²⁸

The writing of history does not result in a once-and-for-all definitive statement, but neither can it be regarded as purely arbitrary.

Evans might object to Walker Bynum's suggestion that history must of necessity be written in the comic mode, because of the tragic events which lie at the root of much of that history:

Auschwitz was not a discourse. It trivializes mass murder to see it as a text. The gas chambers were not a piece of rhetoric. Auschwitz was indeed inherently a tragedy and cannot be seen either as a comedy or as a farce. And if this is true of Auschwitz, then it must be true at least to some degree of other past happenings, events, institutions, people, as well.²⁹

But surely this is to miss the point. To assert that history is a discourse is not necessarily to deny that there is an underlying reality. Walker Bynum's understanding of history as comedy in the literary sense is not trying to suggest that the themes about which historians write are themselves comic, but that our knowledge of them can be only partial, selective, and shaped by ourselves. "The Holocaust was our fairy-tale,"³⁰ writes Anne Karpf, daughter of holocaust survivors. In telling it, "perhaps it becomes another story. You mythicise it, structure it round the rhetorical devices and narrative features of the other fables you know."³¹ This is not to deny the truth or the brutality of what happened to her parents, but to make their story manageable, "relatable". To acknowledge that the writing or telling of history results from a provisional process is to recognise that the story as it is told is not identical with the experiences of her parents experienced, nor does it include all that she knows happened:

Through constant recounting, my mother's story also acquired a sort of mythical quality. It was as if the narrative had taken on a life of its own, detached from the

²⁸ Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 25.

²⁹ Evans, *In Defence of History*, 124.

³⁰ Anne Karpf, *The War After* (London: Minerva 1997), 94.

³¹ *Ibid.*

original events to which it referred. I found, curiously, that I could never remember those details of either of my parents' wartime experiences which fell outside my usual account.³²

In the telling, the story of the Holocaust experiences of Anne Karpf's parents has become history. It is a partial story; it is a discourse which shapes other's understanding of what the Holocaust means. But this recognition of the partiality of what is being said, which is the essential aspect of understanding that history is discourse, is in no way a denial of the reality of the events which lie at the root of the events that are being described.

Risks of misunderstanding and misinterpretation are inherent to any process of dialogue and any conversation, but these are particularly acute when the partner in our discussion is not a living person who may perceive and correct our misconceptions of what she has said, but a text or other historical source which is the passive object of our interrogation. There are parallels here with memory, and perhaps especially with the way that we remember those who have died: part of the experience of grieving, as C. S. Lewis wrote soon after the death of his wife, is the way "the reality [of Joy] is no longer there to check me, to pull me up short, so unexpectedly, by being so thoroughly herself and not me."³³ In our reading, especially our reading of the past, there is always the unavoidable tendency to make our interpretation "thoroughly me". One counter to this is our use of sources and other external evidence which serves to ensure that that the history I write is not only me. In his novel *1984*, Orwell notes the importance of such evidence:

The past, [Winston] reflected, had not merely been altered, it had been actually destroyed. For how could you establish even the most obvious fact when there existed no record outside your own memory?³⁴

We need sources to write history, but we consider them always from our context, from our (use of) language, through our knowledge of what has happened between then and now, against the background of a consciously or unconsciously assembled set of texts. All of these factors tend to detach what we read from its own milieu and to lend it a shade which derives from the reader as well as from the text itself. There is thus no sense in which

³² *Ibid.*, 95.

³³ C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber & Faber 1961), 17.

³⁴ George Orwell, *1984* (London: Secker & Warburg 1949; repr. 1965), 39.

a text has “one true meaning”; nor we can ever know what an author “really meant” or how a contemporary reader would have read the text, but an awareness of factors which shape our reading of any given text is essential.

As we write history, as we struggle to find ways to articulate the past, we have to accept that what we write is partial, and one viewpoint amongst many. There are two caveats. The possible interpretations of the material are not infinite: however much our situations and our selves influence our interpretation of our sources, what we write as historians is not fiction, for it is based on the interpretation of sources which through our work, are available to others. As Kathryn Kish Sklar points out, “historians communicate with each other by the documentation they attach to their work.”³⁵ And, however much we might like to, we cannot “tell it how it was” because our sources will not allow us to do so. We will interpret, in ways which shape and are shaped by our understanding of who we are and the context from which we come. We write history which is congruent with our identity.

III. Identity

“History deals with the drama of human life as the affair of human personalities, possessing self-consciousness, intellect and freedom,”³⁶ claimed Herbert Butterfield. Until recently, many of those writing history were likely to expect these human personalities to be male, concurring with John Vincent: “History is about winners, not losers... History is deeply male... History is about the rich and famous, not about the poor.”³⁷ Until the 1970s, there were apparently few women in history. That is, women – and indeed, almost all people, men or women, who were not leaders of nations or did not hold the fate of nations in their hands, who were not the central figures important political or, in the case of Church History, theological, movements – were excluded from history as it was written. But during the last quarter century, the belief that history must portray a drama in which the parts are taken primarily by men – and significant men at that – has come

³⁵ Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Citizen Jane” (review of Gioia Daliberto, *A Useful Woman: The Early Life of Jane Addams*), in: *The Women’s Review of Books*, 17/4 (January 2000), 14-15, here 15.

³⁶ Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (London: Fontana 1957), 40.

³⁷ John Vincent, *Intelligent Person’s Guide to History* (London: Duckworth 1995), 12; 15. Cited by Evans, *In Defence of History*, 212.

to be criticised. Priorities and questions have changed; the development of new historical methods, the assessment of new sources, or of old sources in new ways, have opened up new paths and vistas in the field of historical research. There is no doubt that the writing of the history of previously neglected groups is of enormous importance. The writing of such history can help those who have been effectively written out of history – or, perhaps more poignantly, written into non-existence – to understand where they have come from, upon what traditions they can draw, and thus to begin to define their own identity.

That the process of telling one's own story is central to defining and holding onto identity is recognised by all therapies which are based upon the client's story. Its importance can be seen poignantly in the experiences of those who are deprived of contact with the outside world. "Searching through the complex panorama of the past"³⁸ is a factor common to the accounts of all the hostages held in Lebanon during the 1980s and 1990s who managed to survive years of being locked up in small cells, cut off from the world.³⁹ One of the contributions of women's groups has been to help women to know themselves, to find their own voices and to begin to discover their own identities. Depriving groups of their own stories, or (re-)writing those stories from a particular perspective is a recognised means of oppression, exemplified fictionally in Orwell's *1984*: "'Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past,'"⁴⁰ and seen in the use of history by dictator states such as the communist Eastern Bloc, Nazi Germany, or South Africa under apartheid. History is about knowledge and knowledge is about power. Writing my own history, the history of the group to which I belong, can give me access to some of that power and help to free me to discover my own identity.

It is nevertheless true that, as Richard Evans has pointed out, "the argument that each group in society creates its own history as a means to building its own identity has some problematical implications."⁴¹ In Evan's view, "the recovery of the history of oppressed groups has had far more to do with the desire to expose fundamental structures of inequality in society

³⁸ Brian Keenan, *An Evil Cradling* (London: Vintage 1993), 271.

³⁹ See Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*; John McCarthy and Jill Morrell, *Some Other Rainbow* (London: Corgi 1994), and Terry Waite, *Taken on Trust* (London: Coronet 1994).

⁴⁰ Orwell, *1984*, 38; and see 36-40 for Orwell's understanding of the danger of manipulating history.

⁴¹ Evans, *In Defence of History*, 211.

than with any attempt to bolster political, social, ethnic or gender identities in the present.”⁴² Evans points out that not everyone who writes history which centres upon a particular group is a member of that group: those who write about the history of crime or of vagrancy are presumably not themselves criminals or vagrants, and women are increasingly writing about the history of masculinity.⁴³ Their work is certainly not disqualified by that fact; indeed, their distance may enable them to make useful connections that those within the group and intimately connected with the subject might otherwise miss.

No wonder then that a French view of British history, or a Scottish view of English history, or a Black view of British foreign or social history often challenges the commonly held view that a white British person has of his or her country’s past.⁴⁴

Thus, as Evans asserts, “history is as much about the obviously other as it is about the seemingly familiar.”⁴⁵

The same may be said of establishing identity in a foreign country. If the acculturation threshold is to be crossed, it is necessary that the deep confrontation with another past, another set of cultural values, another way of being entailed by living in a foreign country be allowed to throw boundaries and unquestioned assumptions into sharp relief and thus help both to confirm features of the original language identity and to establish features of the new language identity. Although, as pointed out by Brown, the safety of the native culture group is often an essential and integral part of the experience to those who are experiencing culture shock, recourse to the “own group”, to the articulated experience of – and need for – shared identity expressed in the mother tongue often remains an important factor in the experience of even the most integrated of people living in a foreign country.⁴⁶ The acculturation model reminds us that in our search to understand our selves and our past it is essential to move away from our own perspectives and to hear the perspectives of others. Paradoxically, in doing so we may begin better to understand not just the other, but ourselves, and the group from which we come.

⁴² Ibid., 212-13.

⁴³ Ibid., 212-15.

⁴⁴ Jacobs, *The Presenting Past*, 28.

⁴⁵ Evans, *In Defence of History*, 214.

⁴⁶ Brown, “Learning a Second Culture,” 36 (text cited above: p. 46, n. 13).

This is underlined by the theory of identity implicit in the Johari Window, developed by Joe Luft and Harry Ingham (see below). The Johari window offers a reminder that personality or identity derives not only from my own perception of myself, but from what others see in me and from factors which neither I nor any other observer can identify. Defining identity is not simply a matter of knowing myself or of understanding my own history.

Johari window

	Known to self	Not known to self
Known to others	I: Area of free activity	II: Blind area
Not known to others	III: Avoided/hidden area	IV: Area of unknown activity

Recognising this can help us to uncover unacknowledged aspects of ourselves: Jane speaks kindly about Susan, but an onlooker, Rachel, may hear a jealousy in Jane's words which Jane would initially, at least, deny. Listening to the perceptions of others is an important way of learning about ourselves and the limitations of our own memories. Jacobs points to the fallibility of memory:

When we feel depressed, we tend to remember other occasions when we felt bad, and may perceive past events in this light. ... On another day, in another conversation, when we feel brighter, [the same event] may appear totally different in the way it is remembered.⁴⁷

In the course of discovering our story, "sometimes there are new memories, but all the time there are new possibilities of interpretation."⁴⁸ Different interpretations of the same events are always possible. We learn about ourselves and about our pasts by sharing with others, from other's observations of us and of our behaviour, from the way in which others relate to us. In short, we learn about and discover ourselves, not in isolation, but in relationship.

⁴⁷ Jacobs, *The Presenting Past*, 28.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

However, the process of being open to the perception of others has limits, and these limits are to do with power relations. These may restrict ability both to learn and to perceive: Brown documents research by John Schumann which suggests that “‘bad’ language learning situations” occur when the language learning group is considered, both by the host culture and by itself, to be a discrete group, either dominant or subordinate.⁴⁹ Problems arise because the external observer is never neutral, and may not always be benevolent. If Rachel hears jealousy in Jane’s words and reflects this to Jane, then Jane may well find it useful to reflect on her relationship to Susan with a view to reassessing it. But Rachel’s perception of Jane may say more about Rachel than about Jane. If Rachel is misreading Jane’s reaction or position and she is in a position of power over Jane, then Jane may find it very difficult to defend – or even to articulate – her own perception of what is happening. In the case of a person who has been continually undervalued, other people’s perceptions may be very misleading indeed, and the primary, essential need here may be to find the words to speak out about their story and to discover a new version of themselves, and thus to counter the negative images of themselves which they find in the views of others.⁵⁰ Brown’s term “‘bad’ language learning situation” may serve to disguise situations in which it is advantageous for the identity of the group to maintain a sense of their own identity. Total assimilation is neither possible nor desirable for many people living in a foreign country to achieve full assimilation. Equally, it is important for historians to preserve a critical distance.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Brown, “Learning a second culture,” 39-41.

⁵⁰ For the importance of this kind of remembering to feminist pastoral counselling, see, for instance, the process of “hearing to speech”, described by American theologian Nelle Morton, and discussed in Stephanie Klein, “Von den Erfahrungen von Frauen zu feministischer Theologie. Hören und Erzählen als Ermächtigung zu neuem Sein von Frauen und zu einer neuen Rede von Gott,” in: Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, Lieve Troch and Riet Bons-Storm (eds), *Feminist Perspectives on Pastoral Theology* (ESWTR Yearbook 6; Leuven: Peeters 1998), 47-70. This is the principle which underlies the exegetical work of Ulrike Bail: see her *Gegen das Schweigen klagen. Eine intertextuelle Studie zu den Klagepsalmen Ps 5 und Ps 55 und der Erzählung von der Vergewaltigung Tamars* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1998). The relationship between remembering, history and identity is recognised in the series of volumes considering facets of *Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), and in collections such as Eva Schulz-Jander *et al.*, *Erinnern und Erben in Deutschland. Versuch einer Öffnung* (Kassel: Euregio 1999).

⁵¹ Compare, Evans *In Defence of History*, 48-49.

The fallacy of Evans' argument is that he assumes that all historians treat their results as neutral. However, there is probably a difference between historians of crime, or of vagrancy, who presumably have no interest in using the history they write to limit the possibilities of the criminal or vagrant ("You can't do that because vagrants do not behave like that...") and the history of Black Africa written in the context of the Apartheid system imposed by white South Africans in the 1950s with a very particular interest. Individuals who are members of oppressed or minority groups which have been defined and restricted by a dominant group may have difficulty in having their voices heard against the prevailing norm. Women may be subjected to enormous pressure from external observers to conform to particular stereotypes and may experience immense difficulty in defining themselves as a subject, independent of such stereotypes.⁵² "I'm just interested in women having the chance to develop spiritually by getting to know themselves as people other than wives, mothers and daughters," comments Professor Loretta Staviski to Bishop Charles Ashworth in one of Susan Howatch's novels.⁵³ What has led women to believe that they can know themselves only as wives, mothers, daughters? History, written from the point of view of those who understood women's role in society to be restricted in this way, and which portrays women primarily or exclusively in these roles, must take at least some of the blame. Women's wish and need to write our own history and not simply to accept what has been handed on to us as the result of history done by men has been an important part of counteracting the effects of monochrome view of history. This is not to say that the powerful cannot write (critically) about the oppressed, that men cannot benefit from studying women's history, that men cannot or should not write women's history. But it is to affirm that, although Evans is right to point out the dangers implicit in an exclusive "identity" history which rejects or closes itself off from all other interpretations, it remains important not to underestimate the continuing question of power, not least the power of the academic community.

The question of power is important to the historian precisely because what we perceive is a function of the rules and techniques by which we have learned to gather and process information. Writing of the experience of hav-

⁵² See, for instance, Barbara Baisley, "Being realistic about feminism," in: Hilary Wakeman (ed.), *Women Priests. The First Years* (London: DLT 1996), 97-116.

⁵³ Susan Howatch, *Absolute Truths* (London: HarperCollins 1995), 325.

ing her sight restored by an operation after over twenty years of total blindness, Sheila Hocken comments on “the problem of relating the reality of the image transmitted through the eyes to the brain, to the previous reality which was conditioned by touch or verbal description,” which left her often unable to identify objects when she saw them for the first time.⁵⁴ Not only our senses, but our language and our culture shape what we perceive, as Eva Hoffman found:

[Vancouver’s] unfocused sprawl, its inchoate spread of one-family houses, doesn’t fall into any grid of mental imagery, and therefore it is a strain to see what is before me. A few years later, when I am taken to my first football game, I have the same experience of my sight going awry. Since I don’t know the rules of the game, and don’t know what to look for, I can never see where the ball is. You can only keep your eye on the ball, it seems, if you have a rough a priori idea of its trajectory.⁵⁵

Our expectations and presuppositions thus govern our perceptions, and they serve also to determine which questions are admissible, what results are legitimate. To a large extent, it is the academic community which lays down the rules governing what we may see – what it is interesting to see – in history. The validity of new ideas in historical debate depends upon (among other things) the availability of a platform: admission to the historical community and the acceptance of new ideas there. While women’s history has gained acceptance in recent years, there is still a need to counteract oppressive history of women, and, indeed, to fight for the place of women’s history in the curriculum of some universities. We need to recognise that the identity of each of us can be enriched by the understanding that the past, and with it history and tradition, are not one-dimensional but multi-faceted, and that women’s voices and women’s history are a vital part of that multiplicity.

IV. Collective identity

But which women’s voices? Who are these women? Can we speak of a continuity of “women’s experience” at all? Do we need to? Some historians have argued that there is a common thread to women’s experience. Writing in the introduction to *A History of their Own*, a history of women in Europe, Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser explain that (somewhat to their dismay) through writing this book they have come to believe

⁵⁴ Sheila Hocken, *Emma & I* (London: Sphere 1978), 165.

⁵⁵ Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*, 135.

that gender has been the most important factor in shaping the lives of European women. Unlike men, who have been seen as divided by class, nation, or historical era, women have traditionally been viewed first as women, a separate category of being. ... Being born female is the first factor that defines women's experience, separates it from men's, and gives a basic commonality to the lives of all European women.⁵⁶

For Anderson and Zinsser, sex, the biological fact of being born a woman, shapes what women's lives will be like; a woman is always confronted (first) with questions relating to this biological status. However, the apparently common biological denominator of women's experience is to some extent illusory and is certainly not unproblematic. Against interpretations such as that of Anderson and Zinsser, Joan Wallach Scott claims:

Except for the fact of the similarity of their sexual organs, it is hard to find a common identity (based either on objective oppression or on subjective perception) between aristocratic *salonières* in the seventeenth century and nineteenth-century middle class housewives, or between those religious women of the Middle Ages who sought transcendence of their bodies and twentieth-century sex workers whose bodies serve as a source of income.

Feminist history has posited 'women' as a social category that pre-exists history and, at the same time, demonstrated that the very existence of the social category of women varied according to history.⁵⁷

Scott thus regards it as virtually impossible to discuss women as a category, for each woman's way of being woman is different and what it means for her to be a woman is a product not only of her own intentions, but of her social and political context. There is a sense in which to be a woman is not to belong to a group which is defined by some a-historical set of rules. As Denise Riley has noted:

if being a woman is more accurately conceived as a state which fluctuates for the individual, depending on what she and/or others consider to characterize it, then there are always different densities of sexed being in operation, and the historical aspects are in play here.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own*, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1989), xv.

⁵⁷ Joan Wallach Scott, "Introduction" in: Joan Wallach Scott (ed.), *Feminism and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996), 5.

⁵⁸ Denise Riley, "Does a Sex have a History?" in: *Feminism and History*, 17-33, here 22.

Neither “Woman” nor “Women” are fixed categories; what it means to be a woman changes through history and within history.

And yet this is not to imply that it is meaningless to assert that a person is a woman. The comparison with the foreigner is useful here too. However irritating it is to be confronted with sweeping statements such as “The British are always so polite” or “The Germans are always so punctual”, manuals are nevertheless written to help people successfully negotiate cultural boundaries. Although generalisations may be too broadly drawn, and although there are always exceptions, cultural differences do exist, and recognising them can be helpful. As Brown comments, “If a French person is primarily cognitive-oriented and an American is psychomotor-oriented and a Spanish speaker is affective-oriented, ... it is not difficult on this plane alone to understand the complexity of acculturation.”⁵⁹ Indeed, the experience of living in a foreign country often brings the foreigner to understand her own national identity in a different way. “I never felt German until I went to study in Scotland,” is a frequent report from students returning to Germany after an exchange year in there. I could say the same about being British and coming to Germany (or, indeed, English and moving to Scotland). What it is to be German, British, English, or whatever, is not fixed, but there is a common denominator, a body of shared experience, of history and culture.

Women, of course, do not share one culture or one history in quite the same way that German or British or Scottish people do. But then, if we are honest, neither do Germans, or Brits, or Scots. Scott’s suggestion that the tension implicit in the “unresolved question of whether ‘women’ is a singular or radically diverse category, whether ‘women’ is a social category that pre-exists or is produced by history” is “one of the useful and productive tensions worth living with,”⁶⁰ might be more realistically couched as one of the tensions with which we have no choice but to live. Perhaps the crux of the point that Anderson and Zinsser wish to emphasise is that the extent of women’s and of men’s choices in the same situation is different, and that this difference is influenced by their sex. That is, the choices open to men and women are shaped by gender issues; these choices in their turn shape what it means to be a woman or a man living in any given society. Women and men existed in history and continue to live and exist as sexed and gendered beings.

⁵⁹ Brown, “Learning a second culture,” 33.

⁶⁰ Scott, “Introduction” to *Feminism and History*, 4-5.

It is surely necessary also to note that women's identity is not only social and to acknowledge that an exclusive focus upon the constructed category of woman/women may be at the expense of the historical, corporeal individual. As Lyndal Roper has commented, "sexual difference is not purely discursive nor merely social. It is also physical.... We need an understanding of sexual difference which will incorporate, not fight against, the corporeal."⁶¹ "If 'Woman' is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night?" asks the provocative title of Laura Lee Downs' discussion of the tension between "identity politics" and "the postmodern subject".⁶² The biological difference between men and women gives rise to a myriad of social conventions and expectations which vary according to time and place, social class, family, individual. We may wish, with Scott, to ask why it is that the difference between sexes has come to assume the pivotal status that it has,⁶³ but we must recognise, even if we regret the fact, that this pivotal status has influenced the lives of generations of women, albeit in different ways. Riley's comment that "the impermanence of collective identities in general is a pressing problem for any emancipating movement which launches itself on the appeal to solidarity, to the common cause of a new group being, or an ignored group identity"⁶⁴ could legitimately be modified to assert simply that "the impermanence of collective identities in general is a problem." Whatever I assert about any group, there are bound to be exceptions.

Scott implies that the recognition of difference has grave results for our understanding of history since it destroys our ability to make comparisons or to understand the behaviour of other women as a precedent: "the feminist recovery of women for history", she suggests,

simultaneously establishes women as historical subjects operating in time and makes the idea of "women" singular and timeless: those women in the past (or in other cultures) whose actions set precedents for our own are taken in some fundamental way to be just like us. (They have to be like us if the comparisons and precedents are to be meaningful.)

⁶¹ Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge 1994), 17-18.

⁶² Laura Lee Downs, "If 'Woman' is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night? Identity Politics meets the Postmodern Subject" in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (1993), 414-37.

⁶³ Joan Wallach Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," in: *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 796.

⁶⁴ Riley, "Does a Sex have a History?" 31.

But the (ironical?) comment in parentheses would appear to be based upon a false premise. No-one else's experience is ever going to be precisely the same as mine. Moreover, identity is established not only by establishing similarity but by examining difference. Interestingly, acculturation and language acquisition seem to be more difficult for two groups: those who perceive themselves "as either too *close* to or too *distant* from either the target culture or the native culture."⁶⁵ Successful acculturation involves a process of critical distancing from one's own original identity as well as critical understanding of the new.⁶⁶ That is, I may reach a deeper understanding of my own situation, and that of a group with which I identify, by achieving a certain distance from my identity group, as well as by understanding difference, by observing, discussing my perception with others and comparing their view with my own.

Precisely the understanding of how my experience is not like someone else's can help me to understand my own past. Establishing identity takes place in process as well as in community; sharing memories is likely to produce a more textured understanding of the past which can help me not only to better understand my past but to re-evaluate my present and to reshape my future. Foucault has suggested that "the purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation,"⁶⁷ so that we have to move beyond the question of what has been to what is and what could be. Without the twin processes of distancing myself from my own identity (group) and listening to those who see things differently, that is, without the conscious articulation of difference as well as similarity – a perception which at least allows for the possibility of change – there is a danger that our (re-)reading of history will lock us into an a-historical category which precludes any change. The rejection of general statements about "Woman" cannot lead to the assertion of global statements about "Women". Indeed, the ability to distance ourselves from the universal "Woman", and from affirming a fixed identity, whether female or feminine, whether of "Woman" or of "Women", may play an important part of creating a distance

⁶⁵ Brown, "Learning a second culture," 41 [italics in original].

⁶⁶ See to this also the importance of "knowing 'another' personal standpoint besides patriarchy," as described by Doris Brodbeck, "Half-Way Emancipation," p. 165 in this volume, citing Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: de Mintet 1972).

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in: Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (eds. and trans.), *Language, Counter Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Cornell UP: Ithaca 1977), 162. Cited by Riley, "Does a Sex have a History?" 21.

which is necessary if we are to reflect upon our identity as women and to learn from the history of other women. It is through the perception of the complex relationship between similarity and difference, located in the context of social, political and cultural structures, that we can begin to understand the ways in which women – and men – have struggled to make sense of their lives, to play the cards they have been dealt by society, culture, science. In understanding their responses, and reflecting on the ways in which these may or may not be appropriate for ourselves, we may in turn begin to make new sense of our lives and our own identities.

V. Identity and Church History

The continuing need to reflect upon the need for women's/feminist history is perhaps especially clear to those of us working in church history, who find ourselves (in our churches, and at times in our faculties) in an environment which may still have set views of "women's place", based in a particular historical interpretation, packaged as the "natural" (divine) order or the will of God, and leading to the firm admonition to women that they may not teach, preach, or take roles of authority, and must be subject to men. In this situation, we need to remind ourselves that history can and should be associated with action.⁶⁸ and that the history we write does not simply reflect the way the church has been, but shapes the way the church is and acts now. In the final section of this paper, I wish to offer a brief consideration of how the historical approach I have advocated to one aspect of current theological debate: the question of the ordination of women.⁶⁹

Opponents of women's ordination often criticise its proponents as "feminists", protesting that women who wish to be ordained priest bring their own interests, drawn from secular feminism, to the debate. It would indeed be foolish to pretend that many women involved in the late-twentieth-century manifestation of this debate have not been influenced by feminist movements, both within and without the church. The feminist movement is a part of the historical context of the present debate. Supporters of the ordination of women to the priesthood who turn to the study of ancient texts

⁶⁸ See for instance, Marcella Althaus Reid, who argues that history must lead to action: "I know how to make a death spell, but I cannot change history," in: Elisabeth Hartlieb and Charlotte Methuen, *Sources and Resources of Feminist Theologies* (ESWTR Yearbook 5; Kampen: Kok Pharos 1997), 149-156.

⁶⁹ Although it is now over eight years since the Church of England passed legislation in favour of the ordination of women to the priesthood, the question remains a sore point for many.

need to be aware of the positioning of their interests in the late twentieth century. We should not expect to find our questions mirrored in our sources. But the recognition that there was no twentieth-century women's movement in the early church does not negate the discovery that the extensive discussions around the development of the three-fold ministry seem to indicate that women were integrated into the leadership of the earliest Christian communities, that they preached, baptised and celebrated the eucharist, and that they were excluded from these positions only after a fight.⁷⁰ These sources reveal women who were different from me, but who were concerned with questions of authority which I may recognise as parallel to my own.⁷¹

But if supporters of the ordination of women are expected to recognise and take account of the historicity of their approach, the same must be required of the opponents. "We are talking about the apostolic ministry which has been, we believe, God-given and entrusted to us to share and to hand on and which is not ours to manipulate or to change,"⁷² asserted Peter Geldard, speaking against the ordination of women in the Church of England in the debate at General Synod on 11 November 1992. However, the three-fold ministry claimed as apostolic by Geldard did not fall from heaven, but is the result of a historical process. Geldard's high view of this three-fold ministry probably rests upon an understanding of the importance of the three-fold ministry, and in particular the episcopate, in the early church which inspired John Henry Newman and his followers in the Tractarian movement in nineteenth-century England, an interpretation which is itself based upon the unity of the early church as it was

⁷⁰ See, for instance, Charlotte Methuen, "Die Autorität von Frauen in der Alten Kirche am Beispiel der Syrischen Didascalia," in: Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz and Gury Schneider-Ludorff et al. (eds), *Frauen Gestalten Geschichte* (Wiesbaden: Lutherisches Verlagshaus 1998), 9-32.

⁷¹ In the same way, introducing her work on early Christian responses to homoerotic relationships between women, Bernadette Brooten notes: "to categorize the analyses of this book as part of lesbian history is not to claim that ancient lesbians thought or lived like contemporary lesbians. For example, I find no evidence of political organizations in antiquity created to promote lesbian rights, nor is there sufficient evidence to speak of a lesbian culture." Nevertheless, she concludes, "To exclude the sources of this study from lesbian history would mean drawing an artificial line" [Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press 1996), 17-18].

⁷² Peter Geldard, in *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood. The Synod Debate. 11 November 1992* (London: Church House 1993), 29.

hypothesised in the nineteenth century.⁷³ It is now widely accepted that the early church was not united, either in theology or in structure, and that the three fold ministry resulted from a long and in some cases painful process of “professionalisation”.⁷⁴

If we can agree to travel together as strangers to the strange land of the past, both supporters and opponents of the ordination of women may find much food for thought. For myself, I can recognise what the modern feminist movement has done much to help me to articulate my own position and to be ordained as a priest in the Church of England, even while I realise and am saddened by the fact that it has led many women to leave the church and has alienated others, both women and men, within the church. I can acknowledge the extent to which the Anglo-Catholic movement has enriched the Anglican church, even while deploring the tendency of some of its adherents to live from an understanding of the past which recent research suggests must be revised. And I can understand that the development of the three-fold ministry, central as it is to Anglican ecclesiology and creative though it can be in today’s church, is not historically neutral, but is bound up with the Church’s need to establish its credentials in certain social systems if it were to survive. I can point to texts which seem to show that women were teaching, baptizing and celebrating holy communion in the churches of the first Christian centuries. I may identify some of the assumptions which underlay the development of this pattern of ministry, and recognise that these include biological theories of sex which are no longer accepted, and social and psychological understandings of gender roles which many people today, including myself, would reject.⁷⁵ While recognising that the questions which I bring to the

⁷³ Newman understood the episcopate as “‘the centre and emblem of Christian unity’ and the guardian of ‘soundness and unity of doctrine’” [Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990), 115]. This view draws upon a historical vision of the early church as initially united and later corrupted by heresy. But more subsequent scholarship has indicated that the early church was not united [see, for instance, Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1971)]. Note also that Newman and his followers were able to appeal to the three-fold ministry only because it had been preserved after the Reformation in England.

⁷⁴ See, for instance, Georg Schöllgen, *Die Anfänge der Professionalisierung des Klerus und das kirchliche Amt in der Syrischen Didaskalie* (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband 26; Münster: Aschendorff 1998).

⁷⁵ For the biological and social understandings which underlie the thought of the early church, see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press 1992), 25-62.

structures of the church today are shaped by my own century, and as such are different from the questions of women in the second or third centuries, I can nonetheless point to evidence that women of that time also had questions about and difficulties with their exclusion from certain aspects of ministry. Further, it seems that those who wished to exclude women from certain offices within the church had to construct a discourse to help them do so.⁷⁶ In short, on closer examination, the debate in which we have been and continue to be engaged arises from a rich, complex, fluid historical process. I would affirm that an understanding of this richness, complexity and fluidity enriches and deepens the tradition of the church.

History done in the recognition that we are strangers in the strange land of the past helps us to recognise that our tradition – all tradition – is living tradition. Anglican theology draws upon scripture, tradition and reasoned experience, but its understanding of tradition is all too often monolithic and unreflected. A living tradition in the present can only profit from the understanding that past tradition was living as well. A church or community which propagates a monolithic, unreflected view of its tradition or history, or which seeks to return to an idealised past,⁷⁷ not only offers a skewed understanding of its tradition, but denies its members, both female and male, access to aspects of the tradition which may be vital in helping them to discover their own identity, and which may ultimately cut them off from becoming the person they were created by God to be. In this respect, church history has something to learn from recent insights in the history of science, which (to the discomfort of some historians) have suggested that modern science did not emerge fully-fledged from a rational “scientific” tradition but sprang from a creative and profoundly “unscientific” mixture of technological developments, experimental magic, theology and natural philosophy.⁷⁸ Investigating

⁷⁶ Elizabeth A. Clark, “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the ‘Linguistic Turn’,” in: *Church History* 67 (1998), 1-31, esp. 15-30, and for the way in which the interests of early church exegetes influenced their reading of the Bible; see also her *Reading Renunciation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1999).

⁷⁷ The appeal to the past to legitimate the behaviour in the present is a particular feature of Christianity, a historically revealed religion, but it also present in other religious groups. See, for instance, Monika Jakobs, “Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Paradies? Zur Hermeneutik von Ursprüngen in der feministischen Theologie,” in: Hartlieb/Methuen, *Sources and Resources of Feminist Theologies*, 126-139.

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds), *The Scientific Revolution in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992), or Lindberg, David C. and Ronald

what did not enter into the dominant tradition can be as illuminating as understanding what did.

A church which claims to take tradition seriously in writing its theology and defining its present, as the Anglican Church does, needs to take history seriously as well. If the writing of history is somehow bound up with our search for identity, for many theologians the search for identity is somehow intimately connected to our search for God.⁷⁹ A church which understands itself as the community of the called must create a space in which all its members can explore what that calling means, that is, in which the members of the church can draw upon scripture, tradition and their own reasoned experience to discover their identity as a person created by God. The church historian's task is to contribute to making that possible, by offering a multi-faceted picture of the past which can be integrated into a deep understanding of tradition. We are and remain strangers in the strange land of our past, but by recognising that this is so, we may find our selves better able to live with the living tradition that springs from that past.

Cet article examine la relation entre l'histoire et l'identité sous l'optique de l'expérience de vie dans un pays étranger. Il étudie les perspectives qu'ouvre l'apprentissage d'une seconde langue et d'une seconde culture (acculturation), en les appliquant aux méthodes de l'historiographie, notamment au débat sur l'identité de la "femme" dans l'histoire des femmes.

Ausgehend von der Erfahrung des Lebens in einem fremden Land untersucht die Autorin die Beziehungen zwischen Geschichte und Identität. Die Einsichten, die beim Prozeß des Erlernens einer zweiten Sprache und einer zweiten Kultur (Akkulturation) gewonnen werden, wendet sie dabei auf die Methoden der Historiographie, insbesondere auf die Diskussion über die Identität von 'Frauen' in der Frauengeschichte, an.

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L. Numbers (eds), *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press 1986).

⁷⁹ This is a fundamental premise of spiritual direction. For a vivid fictional portrayal, see the Starbridge sequence of novels by Susan Howatch.

Thema
Subject
Sujet

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