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**Article:**

van Klinken, AS and Smit, PB (2013) Jesus Traditions and Masculinities in World Christianity. *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, 42 (1). 1 - 15 (15). ISSN 0166-2740

<https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543X-12341247>

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This is the pre-print version of the article published in *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research* 42/1 (2013), 1-15.  
<http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/10.1163/1572543x-12341247>

## Introduction: Jesus Traditions and Masculinities in World Christianity

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### *A Male Saviour*

Some decades ago, feminist theology entered the scene of Christian theology. One of the fundamental questions that were raised was whether a male saviour can save women.<sup>1</sup> Striving to understand the exclusion of women and women's experiences in church organization and theological reflection, a first generation of feminist theologians came to realize 'that it may be the very fabric of Christianity that caused the exclusion' and that 'the maleness of Christ may be part of the difficulty'.<sup>2</sup> Since then, feminist theology has further developed and diversified. Under the influence of postcolonial criticism and thanks to the emergence of feminist theologies outside the western world, nowadays it is acknowledged that women's experience is not a uniform reality. Consequently it is realized that the maleness of Jesus Christ is not necessarily a problem for Christian women in general. On the contrary, female theologians from Africa and Asia have argued that Jesus Christ is a liberating figure for women and that he, precisely because he was male, provides a basis to criticize exclusionary and oppressive practices against women in church and theology as well as in the wider society.<sup>3</sup>

Even though the meaning and consequences of the maleness of the body of Jesus Christ are evaluated differently by feminist theologians from various contexts, it is clear that feminist theology has opened up the debate on the gendered nature of Jesus Christ and its implications for the construction of gender in Christianity. Thus far, this debate has mainly focused on women. Put briefly, the controversy is whether the idea of Jesus Christ as a male saviour is problematic for women or not. Little attention has been paid to the meaning of the male figure of Jesus Christ for men as

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<sup>1</sup> R. Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology*, Boston: Beacon Press 1983, 116.

<sup>2</sup> L. Isherwood, *Introducing Feminist Christologies*, London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press 2001, 16.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see V. Fabella, 'Christology from an Asian Woman's Perspective' in R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Asian Faces of Jesus*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1993, 212; A. Nasimiyu-Wasike, 'Imagining Jesus Christ in the African Context at the Dawn of a New Millennium' in N.W. Ndung'u and P.N. Mwaura (eds.), *Challenges and Prospects of the Church in Africa: Theological Reflections of the 21st Century*, Nairobi: Paulines 2005, 108; M.A. Oduyoye and E. Amoah, 'The Christ for African Women' in M.A. Oduyoye and V. Fabella, *With passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1988, 43-44. See also M.T. Frederiks and M. Brinkman, 'Images of Jesus: Contributions of African and Asian Women to the Christological Debate (1982-2007)', *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 19:1 (2009), 13-33.

gendered beings, and to its effects on the construction of male gender identity or masculinity. Yet feminist theology is part of a broader academic discourse, the study of religion and gender, where issues related to men and masculinity are increasingly discussed.<sup>4</sup> This development is informed by the realization, in the words of Ursula King, that ‘a balanced gender studies approach involves the study of masculinities as well as femininities. To work for greater gender justice, however understood, requires profound social, political, economic, religious and cultural transformation for both genders.’<sup>5</sup> As a result, a new field of studies – some scholars even speak about a new sub discipline – has emerged, which often is called (critical) men’s studies in religion or the study of men, masculinities and religion.<sup>6</sup> It is in this context that, again, the question of the significance of Jesus Christ, in particular the gendered body of Jesus Christ, is raised and is discussed in new ways.

### ***Men and Masculinities in World Christianity***

In the emerging study of men, masculinities and religion, masculinities are understood as historical and cultural specific constructions of men’s gender identities and men’s position in gender relations. The focus is on the role of religion in the way masculinities are shaped and reshaped in particular contexts and traditions. According to Björn Krondorfer and Philip Culbertson, the task of this new body of scholarship

is to bring gender consciousness to the interpretation and analysis of men in relation to any aspects of religion. Studies in this new field are, on the one hand, critical of normative models of masculinities and, on the other hand, also supportive of men struggling to find their place in religion and society.<sup>7</sup>

It is acknowledged that both gender and religion are intricately related to power, and that there is a long tradition of male dominance in various religions. Therefore Krondorfer has emphasized the critical edge of the study of men, masculinities and religion. He calls for a ‘scholarly approach of critical empathy’ that engages issues of men and masculinities in the sphere of religion with ‘critical sensitivity and scholarly discipline in the context of gender-unjust systems’ such as patriarchy, androcentrism, the oppression of women, heterosexism and homophobia.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> U. King, ‘General Introduction: Gender-Critical Turns in the Study of Religion’ in U. King and T. Beattie (eds.), *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, London: Continuum 2004, 1-12; U. King, ‘Introduction: Gender and the Study of Religions’ in U. King (ed.), *Religion and Gender*, Oxford: Blackwell 1996, 1-38; A.-M. Korte, ‘Openings: A Genealogical Introduction to Religion and Gender’, *Religion and Gender* 1:1 (2011), 1-17.

<sup>5</sup> U. King, ‘General Introduction’, 5.

<sup>6</sup> S.B. Boyd, ‘Trajectories in Men's Studies in Religion: Theories, Methodologies, and Issues’, *Journal of Men's Studies* 7:2 (1999), 265-268; S.B. Boyd, W.M. Longwood and M.W. Muesse (eds.), *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 1996; B. Krondorfer (ed.), *Men's Bodies, Men's Gods. Male Identities in a (Post-) Christian Culture*, New York: New York University Press 1996; B. Krondorfer (ed.), *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader*, London: SCM Press 2009; B. Krondorfer and P. Culbertson, ‘Men's Studies in Religion’ in L. Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd ed.), Detroit and New York: Macmillan 2004, 5861-5866; M.T. Wacker and S. Rieger-Goertz (eds.), *Mannsbilder: Kritische Männerforschung und theologische Frauenforschung im Gespräch*, Münster: LIT Verlag 2006; H. Walz and D. Plüss (eds.), *Theologie und Geschlecht: Dialoge Querbet*, Münster: LIT Verlag 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Krondorfer and Culbertson, ‘Men's Studies in Religion’, 5862.

<sup>8</sup> B. Krondorfer, ‘Introduction’ in B. Krondorfer (ed.), *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism. A Critical Reader*, London: SCM Press 2009, xvii.

The academic study of men and masculinities in religion has mainly developed in North America and is said to be ‘heavily located within the scholarly traditions of the West, specifically Christianity and Judaism’.<sup>9</sup> As far as Christianity is concerned, the focus is on Western Christian contexts and traditions. It is largely ignored that Christianity is a world religion with a strong and ever growing presence in Africa, Asia and South America. However, there is enough reason to widen the scope of the study field and to investigate men and masculinities in the multiple contexts of contemporary World Christianity. According to Philip Jenkins, at grassroots level the recent rise of Christianity – in particular, Pentecostal Christianity – on the continents of Africa, Asia and South America has ‘effected dramatic changes in gender attitudes,’ which has resulted in ‘new concepts of masculinity’.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, Jenkins does not substantiate this statement empirically. He only makes a very brief reference to the ‘reformation of machismo’, that is ‘the spread of “Victorian values” of thrift and chastity’, which in his opinion is ‘excellent news for Christian women around the world’.<sup>11</sup> In the interdisciplinary study of world Christianity there is a large body of scholarship on gender in global Christian traditions and communities. However, the focus of this scholarship has generally been on women.<sup>12</sup> Yet there is an emerging interest in men and masculinities in world Christianity. Some initial studies on African Christianities, for example, explore the new concepts of masculinity developed in African churches and Christian movements.<sup>13</sup> Research in a South American context speaks of a ‘reformation of machismo’ taking place in evangelical circles.<sup>14</sup> It is questionable whether the changes in masculinities observed in these studies are simply good news for women, as Jenkins suggest. The discourses on masculinity in African, South American and other Christian contexts often are rather ambiguous in terms of their complicity with patriarchal ideologies and structures. Moreover, they are generally defined in a heteronormative way and are sometimes explicitly homophobic. These are precisely the issues that need further investigation and critical interrogation in the study of men and masculinities in contemporary world Christianity.

In addition to the dynamics of Christian masculinities at grassroots level studied by scholars of religion, Christian theologians in various regions have also engaged in discussions about masculinity. For example, some Afro-American

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<sup>9</sup> Krondorfer and Culbertson, ‘Men’s Studies in Religion’, 5864.

<sup>10</sup> P. Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006, 165.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See the more general surveys and discussions in K. Kim, ‘Gender Issues in Intercultural Theological Perspective’ in M.J. Cartledge and D. Cheetham (eds.), *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes*, London: SCM Press 2011; Kwok Pui-Lan (ed.), *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women’s Theology*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2010; Kwok Pui-Lan (ed.), *Women and Christianity*, London: Routledge 2009; D.L. Robert, ‘World Christianity as a Women’s Movement’ in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30:4 (2006), 180-188.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. E. Chitando, ‘A New Man for a New Era: Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, Masculinities and the HIV Epidemic’, *Missionalia* 35:3 (2007), 112-127; J.E. Sothill, *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana*, Leiden: Brill 2007, 181-218; A.S. van Klinken, ‘St. Joachim as a Model of Catholic Manhood in Times of AIDS: A Case Study on Masculinity in an African Christian Context’, *CrossCurrents* 61:4 (2011), 467-479; A.S. van Klinken, ‘The Politics of Biblical Manhood: A Critical Study on Masculinity Politics and Biblical Hermeneutics in a Zambian Pentecostal Church’ in M.R. Gunda (ed.), *Bible and Politics in Africa*, Bamberg: Bamberg University Press 2012 (forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> E.E. Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia*, Austin: University of Texas Press 1995.

scholars have provided critical and constructive accounts on masculinity, building on traditions of black and womanist theology.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, African theologians, out of a concern about the levels of HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence in their communities, have engaged in a quest for ‘liberative’ and ‘redemptive’ masculinities on the basis of a theology of gender justice.<sup>16</sup> A similar concern and commitment has recently been expressed by some ecumenical organisations. The World Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, for example, in 2010 published a volume entitled *Created in God’s Image: From Hegemony to Partnership*. The volume is intended to be a manual for use in local churches globally to promote ‘positive masculinities’.<sup>17</sup> The WCC General Secretary, Olav Fyske Tveit, in his preface to this volume positions the quest for positive masculinity in the tradition of the ecumenical movement of ‘seeking ways of building a “just peace” community of women and men, in which men play their role side by side with women, in nurturing mutual partnership and especially in ending violence against women.’

All these developments – the changes in masculinities at grassroots level in global Christian contexts, and the engagement of academic theologians and ecumenical organisations with men and masculinities – make clear that it is time to explore new fields, both in the study of men, masculinities and religion, and in the study of gender in World Christianity and in Christian contextual theologies. The processes in which male gender identities and concepts of masculinity are shaped and actively reshaped in the multiple contexts of contemporary World Christianity need further and critical investigation. This is the objective of the present special issue of *Exchange*. It wants to examine how concepts of masculinity, at the intersection with other social categories such as race, class, sexuality and ethnicity, are constructed, defended, contested or re-imagined in global Christian contexts. Because both masculinity and contemporary world Christianity are inherently plural, a volume on masculinities in global Christian contexts by definition is diverse in terms of subject matter and in its perspectives. In order to create coherence, the special issue takes the figure of Jesus Christ as a unifying focus to investigate masculinities in world Christianity. The central question is how texts, images, symbols and doctrines related to Jesus Christ (both the historical Jesus of Nazareth and the kerygmatic Christ) do function in the construction of male gender identities and men’s position in gender relations in specific contexts in world Christianity, and in relation to concrete social, cultural and political issues. Our interest in the role and significance of Jesus-traditions in the construction of masculinities is informed by the feminist problematization of the gendered nature of Jesus Christ. However, we also problematize the suggestion sometimes made by feminist theologians that the notion of Jesus Christ as a male saviour almost automatically reinforces male dominance and

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. K. Baker-Fletcher, *Xodus: An American Male Journey*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1995; D.N. Hopkins, ‘A New Black Heterosexual Male’ in R.T.H. Dolamo, A.M. Tepedino and D.N. Hopkins, D.N. (eds.), *Global Voices for Gender Justice*, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press (2003), 25–41.

<sup>16</sup> I.A. Phiri, ‘Major Challenges for African Women Theologians in Theological Education (1989–2008)’, *International Review of Mission* 98:1 (2009), 107. See also E. Chitando and S. Chirongoma, ‘Challenging Masculinities: Religious Studies, Men and HIV in Africa’, *Journal of Constructive Theology* 14:1 (2008), 55–69. For a survey, see A.S. van Klinken, ‘Transforming Masculinities Towards Gender Justice in an Era of HIV and AIDS: Plotting the Pathways’ in B. Haddad (ed.), *Religion and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Terrain*, Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press 2011, 275–296.

<sup>17</sup> P. Sheerattan-Bisnauth and P.V. Peacock (eds.), *Created in God’s image: From Hegemony to Partnership. A Church Manual on Men as Partners: Promoting Positive Masculinities*, Geneva: World Communion of Reformed Churches and World Council of Churches 2010.

buttresses dominant forms of masculinity. Recent biblical, historical and systematic scholarship argues that the gendered nature of Jesus Christ, and even the maleness of his body, is rather instable, complex and ambiguous. Consequently, also the significance and implications of “the male saviour” Jesus Christ for the gender identities of Christian men and for the (re)construction of Christian masculinities is complex and sometimes complicated.

### ***Jesus Christ and Early Christian Masculinities***

In the field of the study of early Christian origins, or, more narrowly, New Testament studies, a similar dynamic can be observed as within religious studies with an interest in question of gender at large, as was outlined above. That is to say that in research on early Christian anthropologies and the role of men and women in early Christian communities, the understanding and role of women has been studied extensively and fruitfully.<sup>18</sup> However, the study of the construction and role of men and masculinities is only beginning.<sup>19</sup> Studies that explore this field seek to redress a situation in which, on the one hand, masculinity, men, their role, and construction – including e.g. Jesus’ view of male sexuality, as is addressed by Gunda in this volume – are taken for granted, while, on the other hand, women as treated as “special cases” that need to be approached through the lens of gender studies and gender-sensitive exegesis. Many insights for the study of the construction of early Christian masculinities, not in the last place the masculinity of Jesus as it is described and constructed through early Christian writings and practices, derive from the broader field of the study of the first-century Greco-Roman world and the study of masculinity that takes place there.<sup>20</sup> Of

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<sup>18</sup> See e.g. the overviews provided by Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele: *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse*, London: T&T Clark 2009; idem, *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, Leiden: Brill 2006; idem (eds.), *Her Master’s Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*, Atlanta: SBL 2005.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. J.C. Anderson and S.D. Moore (eds.), *New Testament Masculinities*, Atlanta: SBL 2003; C.M. Conway, *Behold the Man! Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, Oxford: Oxford University 2008; F. Ivarsson, ‘Christian Identity as True Masculinity’ in B. Holmberg (ed.), *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2008, 159-171; B. Kahl, ‘Nicht mehr männlich? Gal. 3,28 und das Streitfeld Maskulinität’ in C. Janssen, L. Schottroff and B. Wehn (eds.), *Paulus: Umstrittene Traditionen, Lebendige Theologie. Eine Feministische Lektüre*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2000; M. Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity*, Chicago: University of Chicago 2001; J. Larson, ‘Paul’s Masculinity’ in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123:1 (2004), 85-97; M. Leutzsch, ‘Konstruktionen von Männlichkeit im Urchristentum’ in F. Crüsemann et al. (ed.), *Dem Tod nicht glauben: Sozialgeschichte der Bibel*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2004, 600-618; D.B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox 2006; M. Mayordomo, ‘Construction of Masculinity in Antiquity and Early Christianity’ in *Lectio Dificilior* 2 (2006), 1-33.

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. M. Wyke (ed.), *Parchments of Gender: Deciphering the Bodies of Antiquity*, Oxford: Clarendon 1998; L. Foxhall and J. Salmon (eds.), *Thinking Men: Masculinity and its Self-Representation in the Classical Tradition*, London: Routledge 1998; idem (eds.), *When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power and Identity in Classical Antiquity*, New York: Routledge 1998; M.W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*, Princeton University 1995; M. Golden and P. Toohey (eds.), *Sex and Difference in Ancient Greece and Rome*, Edinburgh University Press 2003; J.P. Hallett and M.B. Skinner (eds.), *Roman Sexualities*, Princeton: Princeton University 1997; R. Langlands, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome*, Cambridge: Cambridge University 2006; T. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University 1990; D.B. Martin and P. Cox Miller (eds.), *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*, Durham: Duke University Press 2005; E. Meyer-Zwiffelhofer, *Im Zeichen des Phallus. Die Ordnung des Geschlechtsleben im antiken Rom*, Frankfurt: Campus 1995; T. Späth, *Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit bei Tacitus. Zur Konstruktion der Geschlechter in der römischen*

central hermeneutical importance is in this respect that what is generally seen as the “conventional” view of Greco-Roman masculinity.<sup>21</sup> Some of its main characteristics may be summed up as follows

Masculinity was viewed as an attribute only partially related to an individual’s anatomical sex. (...) Because masculinity was all but identified with social and political dominance, there was no assumption that all males must be masculine. The masculinity of slaves, for example, was by definition impaired. Personal dignity, bodily integrity, and specific details of one’s appearance were all factors in individual self-assessment and in men’s evaluation of one another’s masculinity. Elite men of the day were constantly concerned with the maintenance of their masculinity, because it both displayed and justified their positions of power. Unlike noble birth, which was immutable, masculinity was a matter of perception. While elites always represented their masculinity to outsiders as innate, among insiders it was implicitly recognized that masculinity was a performance requiring constant practice and vigilance.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, masculinity was always something embodied and represented by more or less masculine personalities that were seeking to establish and maintain both their social status (“honor”) and, with that, their masculinity. The question that arises out of this situation is, then, how central figures from the early Christian “story”, such as Jesus and Paul, would relate to such an ideal. A limited number of studies have sought to address this question, both with regard to Paul,<sup>23</sup> Jesus, and others, including women.<sup>24</sup> Though the most important character of the early Christian story would be Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ (or “Jesus Christ”), the importance of the embodiment and performance of particular forms of masculinity by other early Christian figures, both in their lives and in literary representations (autobiographical or otherwise), should be taken into account as well, given that the identity and masculinity of Christ was transmitted by personal example and embodiment as much as it was through oral and written teaching.<sup>25</sup>

### *Christ’s Conflicting Masculinities*

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*Kaiserzeit*, Frankfurt: Campus 1994; R. M. Rosen and I. Sluiter (eds.), *Andreia. Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity*, Leiden: Brill 2003.

<sup>21</sup> See H. Moxnes, ‘Conventional Values in the Hellenistic World: Masculinity’ in P. Bilde, T. Engberg-Pedersen, L. Hannestad and J. Zahle (ed.), *Conventional Values of the Hellenistic Greeks*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 1997, 263-284.

<sup>22</sup> Larson, ‘Masculinity’, 86.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Mayordomo, ‘Construction,’ Larson, ‘Masculinity,’ as well as P.-B. Smit, ‘De voorbeeldige man is *queer*. Paulus’ mannelijkheid in de brief aan de Filippenzen’ in A. van Klinken and N. Pruiksmā (eds.), *Onder de regenboog. De Bijbel queer gelezen*, Vught: Skandalon 2010, 153-163. See also B.R. Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox 2007.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. K. Aspegren, *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1990; A.-J. Levine, “*Women like this*”: *New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1991; even salvation in general may be imagined as regaining one’s *andreia* or masculinity, see P.-B. Smit, ‘Justification as *Andreia*’, *Lectio Difficilior* (2012), 1.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. O. Merk, ‘Nachahmung Christi: zu ethischen Perspektiven in der paulinischen Theologie’ in H. Merklein (ed.), *Neues Testament und Ethik*, Freiburg: Herder 1989, 172-206, as well as D.W. Ellington, ‘Imitating Paul’s Relationship to the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 8.1-11.1’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33:3 (2011), 303-315.

While the field is still in motion, with some claiming that Jesus represents an alternative masculinity throughout and others rather making the opposite claim, by stating that the depiction of Jesus in the New Testament is already well on the way towards subscribing to Greco-Roman ideals of masculinity,<sup>26</sup> with again others arguing that it was precisely Paul's instable answer to the question as to what gender differences amounted to (and where they originated from and/or were located) that haunted the early Church to such an extent that definitive answers were never given,<sup>27</sup> it is much too early to attempt to formulate a consensus already. Rather some examples may be given here, as to how Christ, as a man, was and was not represented and constructed by early Christian authors. Three instances of Jesus' depiction will be considered here. First, Jesus' speech will be considered. Second, an example of a miracle story will be discussed. Third, aspects of the crucifixion and resurrection are looked at. By considering these, it will become clear how multifaceted the depiction and construction of Jesus as a man is and how precisely this can help to explain, at least partially, the diverse constructions of "Christian masculinities" in the aftermath of Jesus' death and resurrection.

First, one of the areas in which masculinity was to be displayed and defended, was that of public debate. As Mayordomo has shown for Paul, the way in which a public speaker acted did much for the attribution of masculinity to him (or her).<sup>28</sup> Paul is a somewhat conflicted figure in this respect, as his performance as a public speaker seems to have been less than spectacular – unlike his acumen in letter writing. When the depiction of Jesus as a public speaker is surveyed, however, one gets a different impression throughout. While Jesus is never depicted as writing (with the exception of the *pericopa adulterae* in John 7:53-8:11), nor are any writings of him known, he is certainly depicted as speaking, and as a superb speaker at that. He does not only deliver various lengthy discourses – in the depiction of, especially Matthew and John, that is –, indulges in numerous instances of teaching, making use of various rhetorical techniques, not least of parables, and is presented as a superior debater, without fail putting his opponents to shame.<sup>29</sup> On this basis, one might be tempted to think that Jesus is presented as an extraordinarily masculine person in general. However, this would not be entirely to the point.

Second, in miracle stories, Jesus also demonstrates an extraordinarily amount of authority and power, which is, every now and then, recognized as well, even though Jesus is also at pains to keep things quiet. In the Gospel of John, Jesus' miracles, more specifically his *semeia*, are explicitly related to the notion of glory or honor, i.e. *doxa*, and possessing *doxa* was again essential for anyone wishing to be considered truly masculine. However, when, for example, considering Jn. 2:1-11, the wedding in Cana, where Jesus acts as the stand-in patron of the wedding by providing

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<sup>26</sup> See Conway, *Behold*.

<sup>27</sup> See B.H. Dunning, *Specters of Paul. Sexual Difference in Early Christian Thought*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2011.

<sup>28</sup> See Mayordomo, 'Construction,' and see also: J.A. Harrill, 'Invective against Paul (2 Cor 10:10), the Physiognomics of the Ancient Slave Body, and the Greco-Roman Rhetoric of Manhood' in A.Y. Collins and M.M. Mitchell (eds.), *Antiquity and Humanity. Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001, 189-213; A.E. Richlin, 'Gender and Rhetoric: Producing Manhood in the Schools' in W.J. Dominik (ed.), *Roman Eloquence: Rhetoric in Society and Literature*, London: Routledge 1997, 90-110. See in general: E. Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan 2000.

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. the appertaining considerations in Conway, *Behold*.



a large amount of wine,<sup>30</sup> there is something distinctly odd about Jesus' display of his power and honor: it remains hidden and it is not publicly proclaimed as it would have been necessary for the establishment of his masculinity, given that that attribute of a person only existed when it was publicly embodied and acclaimed. A reading of this oddity that is well possible is to relate it to Jesus' remark in Jn. 2:4 that his "hour" had not yet come. When taking this as a reference to his death on the cross, in the Gospel of John also Jesus' glorification (!), then Jesus' embodiment of masculinity must be related to the crucifixion, which is indeed a public embodiment of something, but can it be considered masculinity? This will be considered next (this question of paradoxical masculinity is also echoed in the ideals of the Spanish Legion described by Jansen and Driessen in this volume).

Third, Jesus' death and resurrection, arguably the pivot of the early Christian "story", also need to be considered from the perspective of masculinity in any evaluation of the construction of Jesus' masculinity. Whether one takes the account of any of the (canonical) Gospels or one of the accounts that Paul gives (e.g. in 1 Cor. 15 or in Phil. 2:5-11), the conflicting associations that the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ evoke when read against the background of Greco-Roman conventions regarding masculinity remain structurally similar. Jesus' death on the cross must be regarded as an utterly shameful death, fit for slaves, exposing, penetrating, and humiliating the body in a way that had absolutely no place in contemporary understandings of masculinity.<sup>31</sup> The resurrection, soon conceptualized as a victory over death, however, must be seen as a glorious event that, for example according to Phil. 2:9-11, gave Christ a hypermasculine position and identity. Untying this knot seems to be difficult, especially as, depending on the account one takes, Jesus dies willingly, thus retaining a certain amount of control over the events. One generally accepted way of conceptualizing all this would be Jesus' identification as a martyr, to whose identity a (potentially shameful) death was inherent, but who, due to his (or her) faithfulness to his (or her) cause, would die an honourable death (see also the notion of sacrifice and faithfulness explored by Chitando and Biri in this volume, and compare Saxena's comments on it).<sup>32</sup> Still, the crucifixion does not fit into this line of thought without some difficulties, shameful a death as it remained – and hence a potential source of some embarrassment for early Christians.

In sum, therefore, the representation of Jesus Christ's masculinity in early Christian writing is a highly instable matter and, while there are some models that may do justice to it to a considerable extent, such as the model of the righteous martyr, some instability remains. This instability is a productive one when it comes to the reception and interpretation of Jesus traditions in subsequent discourses on human identity, specifically on masculinity. Examples of this productivity can be found in the work of Gerard Loughlin and Graham Ward. Using insights from queer theory, both theologians employ the notion of (the church as) the body of Christ to argue that 'in

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<sup>30</sup> See e.g. M.S. Collins, 'The Question of *Doxa*: A Socioliterary Reading of the Wedding at Cana', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 25:3 (1995), 100-109, as well as P.-B. Smit, 'Alternative Patronage in John 2:1-11?' to appear in B.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, J. Krans, A. Zwiép and P.-B. Smit (eds.), *The Armor of Light*, Brill: Leiden 2012. See on Jesus' masculinity in the Gospel of John in general e.g. C.M. Conway, "'Behold the Man!'" Masculine Christology and the Fourth Gospel' in J.C. Anderson and S.D. Moore (eds.), *Masculinities*, 163-180, as well as P.-B. Smit, 'Jesus and the Ladies: (De)Constructing Divine Masculinity in John', *The Bible and Critical Theory* 2:3 (2006), 31.1-31.15.

<sup>31</sup> See also Harrill, 'Invective,' and Mayordomo, 'Construction.'

<sup>32</sup> See for a consideration with special attention for the question of masculinity: J.C. Anderson and S.D. Moore, 'Taking it like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117:2 (1998), 249-273.

Christ' masculinity is a deeply unstable category.<sup>33</sup> This is further illustrated in the present volume in various ways: traditions containing this "instable" masculinity can become the source of inspiration for fictional adolescent narratives (see Saxena's contribution in this volume), while they also provide the basis for the macho-masculinity embodied by "Christ the Good Dead" of the Spanish Legion (see Jansen/Driessen in this volume), while both the "messianic" masculinity explored by Neal and the "redemptive masculinity" that is discussed by Chitando and Biri all have their roots in precisely these traditions, that therefore continue to be productive when it comes to the construction of ever new kinds of masculinities.

### ***Jesus-Traditions Explored in this Volume***

Against this background, authors from across the globe were invited to submit papers for the current volume. The result is a rich harvest with contributions focusing on topics from three continents – and from one fictional world –, by scholars using a range of perspectives and operating out of the fields of religious studies and theology, gender studies, cultural anthropology, and literary studies.

The special volume opens with two articles relating to African contexts. The first one, by Masiiwa Ragies Gunda, focuses on an issue that is highly relevant, not only in African but indeed in world Christianity at large: the controversy about homosexuality, and its relation to norms of masculinity. Gunda does not only show how dominant discourses about homosexuality in Zimbabwe are informed by popular readings of the Sodom narrative and by heteronormative perceptions of masculinity. Through a detailed reading of Luke 10:1-12 he argues convincingly that Jesus in this passage both undermines homophobic readings of the Sodom narrative and "de-masculinizes" his followers. Applying this to the Zimbabwean and broader African context, Gunda argues that Jesus challenges contemporary Christians to reconstruct their understanding of manhood so that it can allow for same-sex relationships. Thus, a progressive Jesus-tradition is reinvented and employed here in order to challenge and transform dominant perceptions of masculinity.

The article by Ezra Chitando and Kudzai Biri explores the theme of Pentecostal masculinities, offering a case study of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA). Contextualizing the case study in the local Shona culture and engaging with scholarly discussions about gender in African Pentecostalism, the authors show how ZAOGA discourse about masculinity reinforces traditional patriarchal notions of masculinity while at the same time challenging some aspects, such as aggression, and adding new elements, such as the expression of emotion. The figure of Jesus, who in the ZAOGA is presented as a role model for male converts, is part of the same ambiguous masculinity politics and therefore, according to the authors, his potential to present a model of "redemptive masculinity" is not realized. Apparently Jesus-traditions can become part of the politics of hegemonic masculinity as much as they can be a means to transform prevalent perceptions of masculinity.

The third article leads us from Africa to the African-American community in the United States. Ronald Neal offers a critical cultural analysis of what he calls the ideal of 'messianic masculinity' upheld among African Americans, both in liberal and conservative Protestant traditions. Inspired by the messianic example of Jesus Christ,

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<sup>33</sup> G. Loughlin, 'Refiguring Masculinity in Christ' in M.A. Hayes, W. Porter and D. Tombs (eds.), *Religion and Sexuality*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1998, 405-414; G. Ward, 'Theology and Masculinity', *Journal of Men's Studies* 7:2 (1999), 281-286; G. Ward, 'Bodies: The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ' in J. Milbank, C. Pickstock and G. Ward, G. (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: a New Theology*, London: Routledge 1999, 163-181.

passed on through a popular oral tradition of preaching and singing, and represented by elite black American leaders from Martin Luther King, Jr. to President Barack Obama, this ideal of masculinity presents ordinary African American men, in the complexities of their lives, with an impossible standard. Neal, thus, problematizes a particular Jesus-tradition in the construction of Christian masculinities. Arguing for a new vision of ethical manhood, he wants to go beyond unattainable messianic ideals. It seems he cannot imagine how Jesus-traditions could contribute to this, because Jesus by definition represents a too-high moral standard.

The penultimate contribution, by Vandana Saxena, focuses on the interrelation between Jesus traditions and the construction of contemporary adolescence boyhood by studying the connection between these two topics in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Using literary critical methods, and concentrating on intertextual connections between the narratives of Jesus Christ and Harry Potter, Saxena shows how the story of Harry Potter echoes important themes from the story of Jesus Christ, including topics such as temptation, death, and resurrection. Reading the story of Harry Potter as a retelling of the story of Jesus, but cast in the shape of the narrative of contemporary male adolescent, Saxena explores the effects of this combination on the identity as a male adolescent of the hero of the series. Interestingly, Saxena's study shows how Jesus-traditions are still vital and even reappear in a book series that in many ways reflects the secularised, post-Christian British context.

The final contribution, by two scholars, Willy Jansen and Henk Driessen, operating from an anthropological perspective, has the role of "Christ the Good Death" (El Cristo de la Buena Muerte) as it occurs as a central figure and symbol of masculine performance by an elite unit of the Spanish army. This unit, the Spanish Legion, has adopted a more than life-sized processional statue (*paso*) of the crucified Christ, i.e. Christ the Good Death, as its patron and carries it in procession in the context of the liturgy of Holy Week. Jansen and Driessen both consider the kind of masculinity embodied by this particular performance that draws heavily upon traditions associated with Jesus Christ, his suffering, and death, and also discusses recent controversy regarding the Spanish Legion's processions, related in part to changing views of masculinity that are much less martial and are indebted to different views of gender and gender roles in Spanish society at large.

The breadth and depth of the contributions to this volume, seen in the context of the study of religion and gender and of Jesus traditions, shows both how rich and important a topic is addressed here. Constructions of – highly diverse – masculinities continue to be produced and performed in a variety of social, cultural, and religious settings, often providing a key expression of social and religious developments at large. Reading these essays will both give an in-depth impression of the sheer productivity of Jesus traditions in these various settings, as well as of the diversity of constructions of masculinity (and their intentions) that currently exist in global Christian contexts, and will doubtlessly provide the basis for future developments for the construction of "new men in Christ" (after 2 Cor. 5:17).

### **Acknowledgement**

Adriaan van Klinken gratefully acknowledges the support of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO Rubicon postdoctoral fellowship, no. 446-11-006), which has enabled him to work on this special issue.

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