A FRIENDLY GUIDE TO
WOMEN IN THE NEWTESTAMENT

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Friendly Guide to Women in the New Testament illuminates the women who accompanied Jesus on his mission, those he met on the way, those who appear in the letters of Paul as co-workers and members of the early communities of Christ followers and those who are encountered in the growth of the Church in Acts. These women were disciples and apostles, mothers, wives, daughters and sisters, witnesses to the resurrection, and co-workers and followers of Paul in proclaiming Christ to the Gentiles. Naturally, Mary has pride of place as the mother and first disciple of Jesus. Among these women there are some who are unnamed yet take their place as significant women of faith and witness to Jesus, such as the woman who anointed Jesus: “wherever the good news is proclaimed, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her” (Mark 15:9; Matt 26:13). To keep this true to the fullness of the New Testament, some more unlikely characters are included: Herodias and her daughter, and Sapphira.

These are all women of the first century CE living in places across the Greco-Roman world under the regime of the Roman Empire in Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. This is a world and time very distant from our own. To understand these women and their roles, we need to take off our shoes and walk in theirs. We need to enter their world and see with their eyes and Pauline corpus. The portrayals of women are not always consistent across the writings, giving different perspectives and glimpses of these women in narratives written for specific communities and purposes. Always we remember that the focus of the New Testament is Jesus. Mark’s Gospel begins: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ Son of God”. It is the ongoing good news of the initiative of God, who gifts the world with Jesus, God’s son, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As we come to know the women we do so in relation to this meta-narrative. If we are disappointed that there is not more about the women, we also rejoice that they are inextricably woven into the fabric of the life and mission of Jesus from his birth to his death, as first witnesses of the resurrection and in the spread of the good news to the ends of the earth.

These are women of a particular time, whom we glimpse through cultural, political and social lenses that do not always give them voice or precedence. Sometimes there is need to imagine and read between the lines. These women continue to inspire women and men today, and they offer their legacy of faith and service to the story of the Church.

Byzantine icon, copy

their faith. Many are inspirational women, and yet they are also like the women of today, acting authentically to answer their call in their own world.

What we know of the women of the New Testament comes to us from the writings of men, mainly the evangelists and Paul, as well as the writers of the letters outside the

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO
ALL THE WOMEN
WHO HAVE INSPIRED,
ENCOURAGED AND JOURNEYED
WITH ME.
This Friendly Guide introduces the reader to the multitude of women in the New Testament. All take their place in the story of Jesus and the development of the Jesus movement after the resurrection. They are mothers, daughters, sisters and wives living in the first century, with all of its limitations on their participation in public life. Yet they are present, remembered and influential from Jesus’ birth, through his public ministry to his passion and death, and as first witnesses to the resurrection. This volume celebrates their contribution and hopes to inspire women and men today in their faithful service.

A Friendly Guide to Women in the New Testament explores in detail what we know of the women from the biblical text and elucidates their faith, courage and action in the mission of Jesus and also that of Paul and the early days of the developing faith communities.

The Friendly Guide identifies and highlights the women who came to follow Jesus in his time or after the resurrection. It illuminates their faith, their sharing of their gifts and talents and their contribution as disciples, apostles, benefactors, deacons and household church hosts. At its conclusion, the Friendly Guide finds a beginning and an invitation to the saints of today to take inspiration and encouragement from these early saints to proclaim the good news in today’s world.

Dr Rosemary Canavan is a senior lecturer in New Testament, tour leader of the biannual Study Tour to the Biblical Lands and Academic Dean at Catholic Theological College, University of Divinity, Melbourne. Her own faith journey has been inspired by the women in this volume, seeing her take a career change from management in Employment Services to study and research the New Testament with the dream of teaching and bringing the good news to birth in our modern world. Her doctoral thesis “Clothing the Body of Christ at Colossae” and her Honours thesis investigated women in the Pauline Churches in Asia Minor (today’s Turkey). Her lived experience as a Pastoral Associate and in voluntary pastoral ministry informs her perspectives on the lived experience of women in the Church from the beginning.

The Friendly Guides series by Garratt Publishing is designed to provide easily accessible information on themes fundamental to understanding the Catholic faith.

Some of Australia’s foremost scholars and theologians have accepted the invitation to write at an introductory level in their fields of expertise and have produced texts which are clear, concise and readable. The Friendly Guides are bursting with colour and creativity, featuring photos, icons, maps, charts, summary boxes and original artwork. The format is attractive and engaging and will provide an invaluable resource for teachers, students, parish groups, RCIA teams and candidates, and anyone searching for a clear explanation of Catholic tradition.