

PART - I
ON THE LUKAN WRITINGS

WAS JESUS OF NAZARETH DIFFERENT?

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In this article I wish to reflect in the light of Luke's Gospel on gender and Jesus of Nazareth. I shall focus attention on Luke's presentation of Jesus and also at times go behind the narrative to make statements about Jesus of Nazareth.

Some of the Concerns

I judge that many writers depend too much on later Rabbinic writings about Judaism and the position of women. Because of such dependence they make Jesus much less sensitive to gender issues. Were the situation of women so oppressive and their dignity denied in such basic ways, then we must ask why Jesus did not address such issues. They do not pay attention to the nature of life in Galilee and do not differentiate between the influence which Pharisees and Scribes had in Jerusalem and their influence in Galilee.¹

1 I judge this to be the case with the early study by Swidler. Leonard Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism*, Metuchen, The Scarecrow Press, 1976. Many of his conclusions and judgements cannot be applied without much care to the status of women in rural Galilee at least. Ruether in a recent book paints a hurried picture of the Jesus' movement emphasizing equality, with special concern for gender equality. She develops the idea of marginalization in terms of the many divisions between pure and impure, most of which also affect women. Here sources for the divisions are rabbinic. However in a footnote she observes: "Rabbinic sources on women focus on careful observance of taboos, such as those involving menstruation, but these patterns of separation are not mentioned in the wealth of inscriptional evidence of Jewish women in the first centuries C.E. This raises questions about how much the taboos were actually observed by ordinary Jews". Yet this observation makes no apparent difference to her description of Jesus breaking down barriers and building a community of equals. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1998, 13-21 and fn. 9, p.285.

I also judge that writers are not willing to face the overwhelming influence the patriarchal and androcentric worldview and attitude had on Jesus himself. While underlining his human life they exempt him from attitudes and influences in some areas which today are taboos. Patriarchy and androcentric attitudes to reality are looked upon as sinful and bad and so Jesus is exempted.

Furthermore some texts which highlight women's role in Jesus' ministry and at his death and resurrection are milked dry to be able to assert early ministry of women which was killed as the communities of faith moved further from the golden age of the primitive community of faith. The fact that women feature in Luke's Gospel more often than in the other Gospels and the narratives about women in the Gospel are also squeezed to find justification for various aspects of feminist critique of contemporary Christian life and practice.

In her opening comments on Luke's Gospel Jane Schaberg has this to say:

The Gospel of Luke is an extremely dangerous text, perhaps the most dangerous in the Bible. Because it contains a great deal of material about women that is found nowhere else in the Gospels, many readers insist that the author is enhancing or promoting the status of women. Luke is said to be a special "friend" of women, portraying them in an "extremely progressive" and "almost modern" fashion, giving them "a new identity and a new social status." But read more carefully.

Even as this Gospel highlights women as included among the followers of Jesus, subjects of his teaching and objects of his healing, it deftly portrays them as models of subordinate service, excluded from the power center of the movement and from significant responsibilities... The danger lies in the subtle artistic power of the story to seduce the reader into uncritical acceptance of it as simple history, and into acceptance of the depicted gender roles as divinely ordained.²

2 Jane Schaberg, "Luke" in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, edited by Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, London, SPCK, 1992, 275. The article has many wise and insightful comments about the questions related to the issue of women in Luke and the situation of women in Jewish and early Christian society. I judge she exaggerates the point that Luke purposely wanted to restrict women's roles and was over influenced by "the conventions of the imperial world" (279).

Too many authors depending on the rabbinic sources do not describe the place of women in Jewish society and specifically in rural Galilee in an acceptable way. Much is unknown about women's position because of the scarcity of the sources, because the sources are official texts and because texts deal predominantly and explicitly with the public life of the people with much less attention to the 'more private or domestic arena of daily life'. An area which is not given full attention is the family as such, joint family really, in the rural world and the importance of the family rather than the individual person. The individual male or female is not important as such as the person fulfilling a role within the structures of the family and society. This point ought to be easily understood by many Indian readers who will see less serious oppression and injustice in Jewish rural family life than readers from other cultural backgrounds.³

Horsley has explicitly studied Galilee. He discusses the sources indicating that the Torah and rabbinic literature "express the interests and concerns of Jerusalem-based priestly and scribal classes or of rabbinic circles."⁴ He critiques the sources including Deut 18-25 and their applicability to Galilean village life.⁵ He underlines the importance of the family, the joint family really and comments on gendered roles and relationship in context of "reproduction of the family so central to traditional agrarian life in Galilee."⁶ He uses

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- 3 There are two short articles, which are available rather easily to many readers. Carol L. Meyers, "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible" in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, Edited by Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, London, SPCK 1992, 244-251 and Phyllis A. Bird, "Women (OT)" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Edited by David Noel Freedman, Vol.6, 951-957. The article of Amy L. Wordelman, "Everyday Life; Women in the Period of the New Testament" in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 390-396 and Ben Witherington III, "Women (NT)" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 6, 957-961 are less helpful. Wordelman concentrates more on the Hellenistic world and Witherington holds on to some typical unexamined presuppositions.
- 4 Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People*, Valley Forge, Trinity Press International, 1995, p.197. Two articles by S. Safrai deserve attention. Though he uses the Mishnah as a major source, refers more regularly to customs and ways of life in the south, seems to be less explicitly aware of the rural world and does not expressly address gender issues as problematic, yet he gives a good picture of Jewish life obviously within a patriarchal world. S.Safrai, "Home and Family and Religion in Everyday Life," in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions*, edited by S.Safrai and M. Stern, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1976, pp. 728-792/793-833.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp.197-198.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p.198.

rabbinic sources and yet reminds readers that Galilean rural village life was different. He comments: "The customs governing mutual expectations and obligations of husband and wife in the different regions of Galilee, moreover were likely expressed less in terms of his proprietary rights and her obligations than apparent in rabbinic rulings."⁷

Commenting on the relationship of husband and wife Horsley makes a number of valuable comments in a long footnote. I shall quote parts of it:

The Hebrew biblical and Mishnaic subordination of women to men is now highly problematic for a culture concerned for more egalitarian values and social practices. The Hebrew biblical and "Jewish" representations of gendered social positions and roles, however, are no more (or less) patriarchal and misogynist than other major literate cultural traditions, such as that of classical Athens... If the teachings of Jesus as represented in the Gospels seem more egalitarian, it may be because they are rooted in a popular agrarian ethos, in which the division of labor and specialization of roles was not as highly developed as among the rabbinic sages or the slave holding "democracy" of classical Athens. To a modern Western understanding of social relations in terms of individual rights and private property, the rulings of the Mishnah appear to represent women as a conflicting combination of the chattel of their fathers/husbands with regard to sexuality and persons with certain rights and responsibilities with regard to the division of labor and economic sustenance (See Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah*, [Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988]). Feminist theorists, particularly anthropologists have offered suggestive explanations for the subordination, confinement, and anomalous representations of women in most societies... It may facilitate our understanding, in the case of ancient Galilean villages and rabbinic rulings, to realize that, in contrast with modern Western individualism and private property, individuals as well as economic resources were embedded in the fundamental social form of the patriarchal family household. Both the appearance of the treatment of women as chattel with regard to their sexuality/fertility and the husbands control of the *usufruct* of the wife's dowry-property can thus be explained from the customary vesting authority and responsibility for the management of the traditional family

7 Ibid., p.200.

inheritance and other productive and reproductive resources in the patriarchal head of the *bet'av* (house of the father).⁸

Patriarchy and Androcentric Attitude in the Ministry of Jesus of Nazareth

The first observation I wish to make is that the whole atmosphere and culture, in which Jesus was born, grew and lived was that of a patriarchal society. The Jewish story he heard and maybe read, the worship in which he was educated and in which he shared was patriarchal. A good technique to make ourselves aware of this is to pray the Psalms changing all the male language about God and about the community of believers. I have been doing this for some months and I am shocked into realizing how profound is the male character of all the language, the symbols and the stories.

If I wish to argue that Jesus distanced himself from this then I must be able to show in his ministry and teaching that he had done so in a consistent and clear manner. Behind any assertion that Jesus distanced himself from his culture in this area is the presupposition that patriarchy is evil and was perceived by Jesus as evil.

I can argue that in his attitude to sinners, to the outcaste, to the dangers of wealth, to the nature of God's mercy and love he was very consistent. I can show that in his criticism of hypocrisy, in his radical commitment of God's will as he discerned this will, in his affirmation of the human person and community, his rejection of interpretations of his Jewish religious heritage in which human customs and teaching undermined the will of God, in his living of the double love commandment within his consciousness... he was consistent. In many areas of his life and teaching there is no ambiguity and no compromise with what he has judged to be truth.

However, in the area of patriarchy and viewing reality and the human from a male perspective is there any hard evidence that he ever addressed these issues? Is there a consistent affirmation of the rights of women or a consistent awareness and action in favour of women and clear statements in which he uncovers the injustices and oppression of women? Does he ever teach in such a way to indicate that he is aware of the attitudes to and teaching about women which

8 Ibid., footnote 38, p.330. The full title of Wegner's book was added. Unfortunately I am unable to use this book.

authors today find in rabbinic writings and from which they describe the situation of women in Galilee? We need to remember that probably most of Jesus' life was passed in Galilee as well as most of his public life unless John's narrative becomes the norm for his ministry. Jesus never addressed the relationship of father and husband to daughter or wife. He did not pay attention to the supposed exclusion of women from much of religious life. Did he ever address the claimed common attitude expressed in prayer that it is better to be a man than woman and that women were not fully members of God's people?

We ought also to note that there are many issues, which Jesus never addressed from the evidence we have in the Gospels. Unlike John the Baptist he never gave guidelines to soldiers and tax collectors. He did not apparently address the evil of Herod and his court. He made no comments about debt, about the loss of land and the slavery of Gentile or even Jewish women and men. He made no specific comments about the way that land was held. He made no comments about rape, kidnapping, dacoity, sexual inequality, and sexual harassment. He did not refer to the type of worship in the temple or the form of prayer and instruction given in the community meetings for worship referred to under the term 'synagogue'⁹. I think we presume that Jesus addressed all types of issues in his ministry. Probably some of his teaching has not been handed down to us through the Gospels.

Many writers on religious subjects and interpreters of the Gospels search for justification for attitudes and action which are obligatory for Christians today with our consciousness and analyses of society and its structures, of the human person and community and its characteristics, culture and its strengths and weaknesses. We look for strategies in the Gospels and 'proof texts' to justify our theological statements and our action plans. However, the Gospels and the historical life of Jesus provide little which is immediately applicable

9 Horsley argues convincingly that synagogues were not buildings but refer to the gathering of the people for religious and socio-economic and political matters in some common area of a village despite Lk7:5. He also critiques the common opinion the scribes and/or Pharisees controlled the synagogues - seen as buildings - as places of worship and education. He questions whether they were even members of the assemblies (synagogues). Horsley, "Synagogues: The Village Assemblies" in *Galilee*, 222-237.

to the way we must think and act as genuine humans and Christians today.

Patriarchy and Androcentric Attitudes in Jesus' Teaching

I shall confine myself to Luke's narrative. I take it for granted that readers know about the nature of the Gospels.

The Parables

We take it for granted that most of the parables found in the Gospel of Luke originate with Jesus and that in the reinterpretation the major structure of the narrative has not been changed. Though this may be heavy for the reader I shall just list the parables. The vast majority of the parables, the more important vehicles for Jesus' teaching, are from the world of the male and indicate an implicit affirmation of patriarchy and androcentric attitude to life. We shall begin from the parables which occur in the travel section of the Gospel beginning with 9:51.

Illustrating his teaching about petitionary prayer Jesus does not even mention that the man's wife is in bed with him as well as his children (11:5-9). The reassuring examples used to illustrate God's goodness and readiness to hear and give good gifts deal with the father giving gifts to his son (11:11-13). In the small stories used to rebut the slur that he used the power of Satan to exorcise and heal Jesus describes a strong man and his house (11:21-24). We note that Satan and the demons are presumed to be male! Presumably women light the lamps in the homes (11:33).

The exemplary story about the Good Samaritan has a man among robbers (presumably men) and a priest, Levite, Samaritan and an innkeeper. Where is his wife? In Luke 12 we find many parables. These include the brother anxious about property and the story of the rich land owner (12:13-21), the night watchmen (12:36-38), the owner of a house (presumably male) and a thief (12:30-40), and finally the master of the house and his wise manager/dissolute slave with the men and women slaves (12:42-47).

To illustrate the need for repentance Jesus told the story of a man and his fig tree planted in his vineyard and the gardener, presumably male.¹⁰ Presumably a man sows the mustard seed since a woman

¹⁰ Normally in Galilee the women in the house would look after the few fruit trees. Jesus must be picturing a wealthy man who owns a vineyard and has servants.

hides leaven in the dough (13:18-21). The owner of the house who shuts the door is a man (12:25-27).

The parable of the great banquet is an all male affair: even the guests who excuse themselves are all men (14:15-24). The new guests are the riff raff and probably included women and men. The cautions about bold enthusiasm to be a disciple are both male stories about a man building a tower and a king going to war (14:28-32).

The man with one lost sheep is parallel to the woman with one lost coin and the friends and neighbours called to share the joy are left undefined. However in the parable of the forgiving father all the women are invisible (15:11-32).

When Jesus again addresses the subject of wealth (cf.ch 12) his illustrations are taken from the world of business – the owner and his manager (16:1-9) and the rich man, Lazarus, Abraham, Moses and the remaining five brothers, again no women in the household (16:19-31).

There appear to be no women in the home of the master who feels no obligation of gratitude to his slave who works in his fields and then serves him his meals (17:7-10). A widow becomes one of Luke's examples of persistent prayer, while she was the model for Jesus' audience to trust in God (18:1-8).¹¹ The tax collector in the temple parallels the woman at the meal in the Pharisee's house as examples of true repentance and religiosity over against the self-righteous Pharisees (7:36-50; 18:9-14). All the types of sinners the Pharisee mentions are male. In Gospel narratives there are certain typical characters, namely the widow, the tax collector, the child, the sinful woman, the sinner, the crowd and Pharisee and Scribe. The final parables in Luke concern the nobleman destined to be made king and his ten slaves, presumably men (19:11-27) and the vineyard owner, his tenants, the servants whom they maltreat and the son whom they kill (20:9-16).

In the earlier parables of the sower and the lamp which Luke shares with Mark the audience would have probably understood that a man sowed the seed and a woman lit the lamp (8:4-8, 16).

¹¹ The widow is a typical character in stories and not specifically a gender character. She is a prime example of the needy and defenseless.

Were we to examine the parables in detail we would observe that men and women have clearly defined roles within and outside the home. We would also note that many parables concern people who would belong to the social elite. Apparently much of the teaching contained in the parables is meant for all, yet the teaching is couched in terms of the human seen from the angle of the male.

Jesus' Other Teachings

We would expect in Luke's Gospel at least, if not in the original teaching of Jesus, that divorce would be looked at from the point of view of husband and wife as in Mark (10:10-12). However the Lucan Jesus only addresses the male obligations (16:18). He refers to the normal Jewish marriage custom of 'marrying' (male) and 'be given in marriage' (17:26).

Also the context presumes that the disciples Jesus taught to pray were all men as the narrative mentions the disciples of John and the illustrations are about men (11:1-11). The grateful Samaritan leper and the despised tax collector are models of prayer (17:11-19; 18:9-14). The widow of the parable is also a model. The other models of prayer are Zachary and Mary.

Most of the teachings about wealth and its proper and improper use and its power use narratives in which only men feature (12:13-21, 32-34; 14:12-14; 16:1-13, 14-15, 19-31; 18:18-30;¹² 19:1-10). Jesus addresses all the teaching about the 'servant' mentality essential to leadership within the community to males though it uses the more female imagery of the 'servant/slave' at table (9:46-48; 22:24-27).

If we examine all the texts about being called to follow and being given responsibility as disciples, we must conclude that no woman is included. The call narratives concern the brothers (5:1-11), Levi (5:27-28) and unnamed men (9:57-62). In the last text the context presumes that all three figures are men. Again in the late instruction about the radical nature of discipleship the text omits 'leaving husband' and the examples are so masculine (14:25-33). I presume that Zacchaeus is presented as a disciple. We note that after the

12 There are a few sayings of Jesus about leaving all. In these leaving house, wife, brothers, parents, children feature but never husband (19:29; 14:26. Note 9:59 'bury my father'). In the text about tension within the family there is no mention of the son in law (12:49-53).

resurrection no woman in Luke is given any commission. In Matthew and John women/woman are to take messages to the men. When we read the two 'commission' narratives within Jesus' ministry we realize that no women are included in the texts (9:1-6; 10: 1-12). This is explicit in the first text addressed to the Twelve and implied in the second. Often attention is drawn to the women who accompanied Jesus and provided for him from their resources. However, how much we try we cannot force the verb from the root *diakon* in this text to take on meanings related to either service at the Eucharistic/community meal table or to preaching the word.¹³

The sermon on the plain does not seem to be gender specific though taking of a coat, property and lending indicate the male world. This is quite explicit in the promise of 'being sons of your Father' (6:35). Certain teaching is addressed to the Twelve (last meal together) and normally the term 'disciples' implies a male group. This we can argue by looking at the teaching and the examples given and issues addressed.

Jesus' Healing and Exorcisms

What is often remarked when dealing with these narratives is the number of women who are included in this Gospel. Care is needed. We must look at the proportion.¹⁴

We also note the women missing from Luke, namely the Syrophenician woman, an exemplar of faith and Mary of Bethany who anoints Jesus' feet. We also underline how many of the women who appear are silent and take on just passive roles. Anna the

13 Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1996, 138-139. Joseph A. Fitzmyer *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*, New York, Doubleday Company, 1979, 696. 698, He notes: "What the episode of 8:1-3 does indicate, however, is a recollection about Jesus which differed radically from the usual understanding of women's role in contemporary Judaism" (696). I am not sure what Fitzmyer would include under 'Judaism' in Galilean villages at that time.

14 Schaberg compares the ways men and women are depicted in the Gospel. She pays attention to "those elements constitutive of character: name, speaking and being spoken to, action and responsibility. No real case can be made for the empowerment of women." Jane Schaberg, "Luke", 280-281. I do not judge that there is adequate evidence to claim that the original community of believers was egalitarian in senses, which would respond to the meaning of this word today. Quite a number of authors, women and men argue that the primitive community was egalitarian. Gradually this was changed. Even if this historical supposition is correct, it is not the basis for belief, interpretation and the creation of theology from the Gospel.

prophetess, the sinful woman, the bent woman, the widow of Naim, Jairus' wife and even Martha's sister are all silent. Only Martha speaks apart from Mary and Elizateth. One of the maids of Matthew and Mark's scene of Peter's denial is absent.

Some authors claim that to call the bent woman 'a daughter of Abraham' is unusual. Others claim that Jesus would be thought to be polluted by the touch of the sick woman or lepers. Would Galilean Jews share these opinions? I very much doubt this.¹⁵ We must counteract the tendency to read scribal attitudes into the minds of the Galilean peasants. We may note that Jesus does not address the issue of pollution in Luke's Gospel unlike Mark (Mk 7:1-22). Women are not projected in any marked way as models of faith. Some would argue that even to project one woman as a model of faith would be extraordinary in that world. The great Jewish story projects a number of women as models of key virtues.

Jesus' Actions and Teaching

There are a series of scenes, which involve women as major characters, which are particular to Luke. Recent students of Luke attempt to take narratives to pieces in various ways and then reconstruct them, guided by gender concerns. In my opinion the narratives are not concerned with gender as such. The writer is dealing with narratives, which have evocative value to teach as aspect of discipleship because of the type of contrast employed by the writer. We list the texts: the *sinful woman*, model of repentance and love who fulfills the slave's duties which Simon, the *Pharisee*, had omitted ordering his slave to do; the *widow* contrasted with the *calculating rich* and the *greedy scribes*; the *defenseless widow* and the *self serving judge* and the woman who does not comply with the sacred duties of hospitality contrasted with her sister. There are other texts which function in a similar fashion where the main characters are males: the rich tax collector and the murmuring crowd, the lone grateful Samaritan leper, Jairus with his dead daughter and the fine centurion, the poor Lazarus at the gate of the very rich man.

15 Often authors indicate that Jesus incurs pollution because of some of his actions and argue from this to his critique of laws of purity. No text in Luke addresses the issue and no one in the Gospel accuses him of being impure!

Gender is not an issue in these narratives. Women and men play gender-specific roles. However the main character and her or his actions function like parables in their evocative and radically contrasting nature.¹⁶

Paired Scenes and Lucan Women Scenes

There are paired scenes in each Synoptic Gospel. Luke does have a tendency to use more paired gender references and scenes. Some are taken from the Jewish story like Naaman and the widow of Zarephath, the men of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba (common) and the titles 'daughter of Abraham' and 'son of Abraham.' Others are taken from daily life and shared with Matthew, as the man sowing seed and the woman hiding the yeast, men sleeping and women grinding. Apart from the pairs found in the Origin Narrative and the healing pairs (Jairus' daughter and the woman with the blood disease) we shall look at the other texts. Special Lucan texts would be the pairing of the two cripple people, the bent woman and the man with palsy and the parable of the woman with coins paired with the parable taken from Q of the man with sheep. Maybe we could include the women at the tomb and Peter's visit and with more imagination Jairus' daughter and the widow's son. Commenting on these texts and other texts which indicate explicitly or implicitly the roles of men and women, Seim says:

The gender-specific duality serves to include women in an explicit way. The presence of women is recognized even in contexts where a masculine terminology otherwise dominates, but the gender-specification also serves to identify distance and segregation. Women and men belong to the same community; they are united by common rituals and live together in mutual material dependence. At the same time, men and women form groups of their own.¹⁷

16 More attention needs to be paid to the narrative function or type of texts. Studies by Tannehill could help in the study of these types of narrative texts. One, which is easily available, is Robert C. Tannehill, "The Gospels and Narrative Literature" in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol VIII, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1995, 56-70.

17 Turid Karlsen Seim, "The Gospel of Luke" in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, edited by Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza. Vol. 11, New York, Crossroads, 730. This is a rich commentary on women's texts in Luke. I think she also makes too much of a supposed Lucan intention to exclude women from authority positions in the community. The paired texts remind us of the composition of the community of followers gathered around Jesus and the early faith community. The followers were normally ordinary men and women. Probably groups gathered

I do not think any particular argument can be made for special gender sensitivity in the person of Jesus because of the use of these pairs nor for a special sensitivity of the Lucan Jesus. The texts reflect the composition of society and the early community.

Special Women Scenes

I also do not think any particular argument can be made to support special gender sensitivity on the part of the Lucan Jesus nor the historical Jesus because of the extra women's scenes or parables. The extra women scenes apart from the Origin Narrative are the following: the widow of Naim, woman sinner in Simon's house, Martha and Mary, the woman who blessed Jesus' mother (11:27-28), the bent woman, the widow and the judge, women on the way to Calvary. In each case the women take specific female roles and some are types of the marginalized. In Luke's special material we also find many male texts: the brother concerned about property, the ten lepers, Zacchaeus considered sinner by many, the palsy man at the house of the Pharisee who invited Jesus and whom as the host Jesus instructs (14:1-14), Simeon who carried the cross, the good thief, Jesus looking at Peter... There are also the parables of the Samaritan, the Pharisee and tax collector, the man in bed with his children, the father with two sons, the man and his fig tree, the man and his servant... Proportionately there are more male scenes in Luke's special material. The proportion of the women scenes special to Luke and the male scenes in the common material is not greatly different from the proportion of male and female scenes in the common material. Schaberg correctly remarks that "Attention must be paid not just to the number of women but also to what they are doing and saying and to what they are not doing and not saying."¹⁸

There are some aspects of the women scenes from which authors draw questionable conclusions. The bent woman is called a 'daughter of Abraham,' an unusual designation to the extent that it has not been found in usual written sources. Its use here and the parallel use for Zacchaeus who is called a 'son of Abraham' are both integral parts of

around a famous scribe or those sharing the vision and way of life of Pharisees were more male or exclusively male. Qumran seems to have been predominantly male. In this way Jesus' following was different.

18 Schaberg, "Luke", 279.

Jesus' self-defense under criticism. The mother of the seven sons, outstanding for steadfastness in her religion is referred to 'as a daughter of God-fearing Abraham she remembered his fortitude' (4 Macc 15:28) and 'daughter of Abraham' (18:20). Zacchaeus is more like this mother because his repentance indicates his worth. The bent woman is called a daughter of Abraham who deserves to be liberated from the bondage of sickness associated with the enemy of God's people, Satan. I do not see how you can conclude that this is unusual use of a 'title' unless we suppose that women are only partial members of the people of God.¹⁹

In the scene of Martha and Mary, both Martha and Mary extend hospitality to guests which is the responsibility of women. We are not told why there are no men in Martha and Mary's home. Mary as a listener to the teacher within the home is not unusual and does not carry any specific gender affirmation.²⁰ That women within the home act religiously is not unusual. They have specific roles to play in the area of religion in the home.

The interpretations given to this text are very instructive about the ways some do hermeneutics. Schaberg lists a series of interpretations from those who see the women as abstract types (contemplative and active life) to those who see the text as a reflection of the debate at the end of first century about women's roles and leadership of communities.²¹ The terms which are the focus of attention in feminist studies are *diakonia* and *diakon*-root words. These do at times have the technical sense of service at the community table (Eucharist) and service of the Word. In this text and in 8:2-3, I do not see how the terms related to this root have any other sense than service related to upkeep and hospitality. I do not see the texts as reflecting a

19 For a discussion of the passage see Seim, "The Gospel of Luke," 735-739. I am not sure that the moral status of this woman comes into consideration. Seim says she "is not a paragon of virtue and piety" because she has been bound by Satan for so long (736). This would infer that all the sick ought to be taken under the category of sinners healed and forgiven by Jesus.

20 Schaberg ("Luke," 288) comments: "His action (interpreted as a defense of Mary's right to theological education) is often contrasted - incorrectly - with the denial of the right of Jewish women to study Torah. But no such rule existed in Jesus' day and so to oppose Jesus to Judaism in this way is simply inaccurate."

21 Schaberg, "Luke," 288.

tendency to deny women particular forms of ministry in the Lucan community.²²

The narrative is a corrective narrative in which two major values, hospitality and listening to the Word of Jesus are compared and the pre-eminence of listening to the Word is underlined with force. This is a common theme of the earlier part of the Gospel as the following texts indicate: 8:15 (Word sown in good soil and those hearing this Word); 8:29-21 (correction narrative about blood relationship and the new relationship based on hearing the Word, and doing it) and 11:27-28 (correction narrative where being the prophet's mother is compared with hearing the Word of God and keeping it). We could add 5:1-3 and 6:46-47 which underline the importance of the Word. Probably we need to pay more attention to the fact that many of the narratives are symbolic narratives and pay less attention to 'literal meaning' and far more attention to 'literary meaning'.

The sinful woman is extraordinary for her silence. She expresses her acceptance of God's forgiveness mediated through the person of Jesus the prophet in a female way. Unlike Zacchaeus she cannot repay or fulfill prescriptions of the Law. This scene and other scenes where women are the principal actors or share a major role with men are fraught with problems as they confirm specific roles, attitudes to women and expectations within the patriarchal and androcentric world.²³

The Twelve and Discipleship

In so far as discipleship is described in terms of 'leaving all' and following Jesus, no woman is included within this group. Nowhere does Jesus include 'leaving husbands' in his list of those to be left. In no text are women given responsibilities of proclamation.²⁴ The women at the tomb are not entrusted with any task unlike in Matthew (28:9-10) and John (20:17-18) where Jesus himself gives a responsibility. There are no cogent reasons to include women in the

22 Schaberg *ibid.* 288-289. Seim, "The Gospel of Luke," 739-745 and *passim*.

23 One of the many insightful studies of these texts underlines the ambiguity in all the texts with major women characters. Anne Thurston, *Knowing Her Place: Gender and the Gospels*. Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1998. She studies 13 texts. The cautions she expresses and her use of varied hermeneutical approaches are instructive.

24 Schaberg, "Luke," 280.

'mission' texts during Jesus' ministry (9:1-6; 10:1-12). In Acts no woman is entrusted with this type of responsibility though some have the leadership of communities in their homes.

The Twelve (6:12-16; 8:1; 9:1, 12; 18:31; 22:3, 30,47) could be part of Jesus' historical ministry or a valid interpretation of the very purpose of his life in the creation of a community to continue God's work entrusted to himself. The Twelve are the obvious symbol of Israel as God's people. Jesus could not have included women within this symbolic group. He could not have included a Gentile. That he did include a tax collector is significant. In Acts the choice of a replacement is restricted to men. The choice is not a choice of patriarchy as such. The fact that they abandoned Jesus in his public trial and death while women appeared in public with him at his death and went to the tomb ought not to be over-interpreted. The danger to men in such public events is far greater than any danger to women. Women at a death scene and at a tomb would be accepted and expected in that cultural world.

The Origin Narrative

The diptych structure of the Origin Narrative is common knowledge. The narrative of the events in the lives of the two sets of parents, Zachary and Elizabeth and Mary and Joseph with their two sons, John and Jesus both run parallel and intersect. In the story of John the emphasis is upon Zachary and John. While in the Jesus-story the emphasis is upon Mary and Jesus. Elizabeth does play a more important role than Joseph who remains silently in the background.

Forming the background to the scene of the old age of Zachary and Elisabeth and their special child are the narratives of Abraham and Sarah with their child, Isaac and Hanna and Elkanah and their special child, Samuel. The song of Hannah also determines the purpose, character and much of the content of Mary's song.

The scene of the meeting of the two pregnant mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, offers us two deeply religious women. That Elizabeth is moved by the Spirit and praises Mary does not enhance her in any special way. She acts in character and within the narrative nature and structure of the Origin Narrative. Note the scene is a house scene.

In the whole of the Jesus' narrative attention is focused on Mary, favoured by God and the faithful disciple, woman of faith who ponders God's actions. She belongs to the great religious women of

the Jewish tradition. Once we know that she is the virgin mother of the Messiah, Son of God, all the other aspects in the presentation of this great woman follow. Her pondering roots her within the religious history of her people and all peoples. She does not understand. Her role is fundamentally restricted as Jesus must listen to his Father and all his decisions flow from this listening (2:49). Many do not appreciate adequately the full implication of this 'correction' narrative with which the Origin Narrative concludes and comes to a climax (2:41-51).

Two other figures feature in this narrative, Simeon and Anna, who again give expression to the rich and profound piety of the Jewish tradition and are both Spirit filled commentators on the great deed of God set in motion with the coming of Jesus of Nazareth and meaning of Jesus and his mission. Mary, Elizabeth, the angels and Zachary fulfill similar roles with their hymns.

Does Luke make any implied special comments about women in his Origin Narrative? As far as I judge he remains true to the rich traditions of the Jewish religious stories he found in the Septuagint where men and women of great piety belong to the story of God's actions in history at great moments. Though Elizabeth plays an important role as a commentator enabled by the Spirit, more prominence is given to Zachary. He is not sketched as inferior to his wife but rather having lesser religious insight and depth than Mary. Simeon is more memorable than the rather elusive Anna. Naturally Joseph remains in the shadows, as he has no major role to play than to belong to Davidic lineage. This only explains the family's journey to Bethlehem, Jesus' consequent birth in this symbolic town and gives credence to the claim that Jesus was the Messiah. Mary is not overdrawn nor is our attention drawn to her in the narrative without the focus remaining on God and Jesus. The whole narrative does not escape patriarchy.

Conclusion

Apparently in a material way there are more women figures in Luke's Gospel than in the other Gospels. Leaving aside the Origin Narrative proportionately women are less important and less prominent than men are. Some women are remarkable and important figures in the manner they respond to Jesus. We draw attention to the sinful woman, the woman with the blood disease, both praised by Jesus and significant for all women and men in the community. The gratitude of the women who serve Jesus and the twelve is underlined

and their generosity. Again this is important for the early community. Similarly we must remember that Zacchaeus belongs to the category of sinner and sinful in a way that males can be sinful, is praised. Jesus also draws careful attention to the faith of the unnamed centurion and the Samaritan leper whose religio-ethnic character is also important for the community.

The women on the way to the place called 'the Skull' join with the centurion, the crowd beating their breasts (23:48), the watching acquaintances and the women from Galilee and Joseph to indicate attitudes, which the community is to have to their Lord who died for them.

In various types of narratives and in the teaching material the male and female characters are not important because of their gender and gender roles. They act and are portrayed within the structures of the particular type of Jewish patriarchal culture and an androcentric world. However, they reveal the way Jesus sees and interacts with the human and the ways the human person responds to or ought to respond to Jesus, the Lord of the community of faith. Gender is not the concern. Ethnic background is at times important, the socio-economic status and condition of men and women play a major role, the religious status of the person and attitudes of or to the person come into play and the religio-cultural features are important. All of these must be taken into account in so far as they determine, are addressed or subverted in the radical nature of Jesus' actions and teaching and enable the believer to understand the teaching. I do not judge that gender was a major religio-cultural factor neither for Jesus nor for Luke.

Hermeneutics

I judge that various feminist ways of highlighting the patriarchal and androcentric character of the Gospels and the extreme dangers of these traits are very valuable since they are still prevalent in Christian communities today. I judge that the efforts to indicate the silence and absence of women and the roles given to them are very necessary. Within the sphere of feminist concerns the Gospels if not read with care can be quite subversive of attitudes, actions and behaviour obligatory according to God's purpose for Christians today. We need a hermeneutic of suspicion. From a historical perspective to attempt to write the unwritten story of women in the early church is an essential task. To study the type and degree of change between the

community around Jesus and the early communities and the Gospel and New Testament interpretations is a valid venture and part of a historian's responsibilities.

However, in developing theology for today in the areas of feminist concerns as in all others we begin from the actual Gospel texts, not even from the 'discovered' lives of Jesus of Nazareth. I judge that the texts in which women appear or are major players are not more helpful than any other texts. So much apparent hermeneutics is a form of proof texting or sprinkling holy water on good Christian practice or theology (or poor practice and theology) by the use of some sacred texts.

Jesus of Nazareth and the Jesus of the Gospels must be allowed to remain within his culture in all its components and within the limits of the cultures. There is no easy and direct movement from the Gospel texts to appropriate Christian praxis and theology today. The route is much more complicated and secure. Jesus is not actually a model.

We must affirm that the patriarchal and androcentric worldview is not part of the Word of God. Jesus does not affirm these as elements of his interpretation of God's purpose for others. He lives within them. He lives within his culture and subverts aspects of it. One of the limitations of his life is the limit of all human lives. He does not see the evils of many aspects of his culture as we would see them were those aspects imposed upon us today. Gender, as an issue as it is today, was not part of the consciousness of his time. Aspects of social and economic structure were not issues as they are today and have been at different period of history. Many aspects, which we include under human rights, ecology, international political and economic life, warfare, medico-ethical questions, population...were all beyond his awareness. He knew of the systems of slavery, land ownership, government, religious hierarchy and power and 'international' power in limited ways. He addressed little in one sense of the complexity of life in his culture. He models little for us in our complex world order.

What we need to do is to be able to distil from his teaching and his actions the core of his religious vision and en flesh this within the complexity of our lives. At the core of his vision is an understanding of God and his extraordinary love and forgiveness, of the destructive power of whatever is consciously found to be evil, be it personal, social or structural, his affirmation of the human and the dignity of the human with special commitment and emphasis on the marginal.

At the core of his vision is an uncompromising search for God's will in the concrete circumstances of the time. Wealth is a major concern along with authentic religion, and forms of discrimination in God's name. Recently the values of Jesus or the Kingdom of God have become part of Christian talk. At times these values are too limited as searching and doing God's will, searching for and living according to God's Word as spoken within the realities of contemporary life are omitted among other major aspects of Jesus' vision. Prayer, repentance, humility, forgiveness, reconciliation are not always highlighted as values of Jesus.

Text involving men and women, texts overlaid with patriarchy and androcentric values are the places where we mine for the core vision, acknowledging and being more and more sensitive to Jesus' cultural world in order to understand the fine points and the radical depths of his life, actions and teaching. We enter into a real dialogue between our world with all the questions raised by modernity and so many contemporary and historical factors and the Gospel interpretations of Jesus. We are constantly aware that there are no quick answers and so much responsibility is placed on us to find ways of living and understanding, which are efficacious in our world. The Gospel actually forms an inner world and an inner vision, profound sets of values and simple and humble hearts seeking God's will for our world. In one way the Jesus of the Gospels is of little help to us. In another way he makes all difference enabling our living and thinking to reflect the great challenge of loving God with all and being committed to the neighbour with all so as to be followers of Jesus Christ into the next millenium.