

WOMEN'S BIBLE COMMENTARY

*Revised and
Expanded Edition*

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GOSPEL OF LUKE

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INTRODUCTION

Warning! 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. Claiming the authority of Jesus, this portrayal is an attempt to legitimate male dominance in the Christianity of the author's time. It was successful. 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.

This Gospel also contains challenge and promise, however, because close reading of it can be an empowering education. It stimulates valuable questions rather than provides final answers, and points to issues that demand rethinking. Those whose study of Luke is informed by contemporary critical methods and by the concerns of women will fully appreciate this new promise.

It is necessary to distinguish different aspects of the text (historical, ideological, theological,

and literary) and the different levels of transmission. The reader is challenged to recognize the ambivalence of the tradition, both to enter into the text to appreciate it, and to stand apart from it in order to assess its truth and helpfulness. Insights valuable for the building of an egalitarian society and of a theology that preserves and respects women's experience are indeed present in Luke. But learning to untangle and free them from the harmful elements of the tradition is a difficult task.

The author of Luke is interested in the education of women in the basics of the Christian faith and in the education of outsiders about Christian women. The Gospel attempts to meet various needs, such as instructing and edifying women converts, appeasing the detractors of Christianity, and controlling women who practice or aspire to practice a prophetic ministry in the church. One of the strategies of this Gospel is to provide female readers with female characters as role models: prayerful, quiet, grateful women, supportive of male leadership, forgoing the prophetic ministry. The education that the study of Luke offers today involves a conscious critique of this strategy. It is not at all the education Luke had in mind!

Narrative Summary

This Gospel is organized into eight parts. It begins with a prologue (1:1-4) setting forth the purpose of the work. The author, a third-generation Christian, has researched and written "an orderly account" of the events concerning Jesus, in order to reassure "Theophilus"

and other readers about the instruction they received. This named addressee (literally "Friend of God") may have been a Christian convert being instructed in the faith, perhaps a leader of Luke's community, or else a symbolic name referring to Gentile "God-fearers" who may have made up the majority of Luke's community. The description of Theophilus as "most excellent" suggests that the Gospel is directed to people of high status. Luke writes *about* "the poor," but *to* those whom Jesus has called to accept a special responsibility for those pushed to the margins of their society. The "orderly account" does not claim factual accuracy, but only that the author's presentation of the traditions about Jesus is deliberate and carefully chosen. That "order" itself is part of the writer's message, which traces Jesus' story from his conception in Galilee, through ministry there, then on a journey that culminates in Jerusalem. There he dies, and the Risen One is met in Jerusalem and its suburbs, where the community gathers at the beginning of Acts to begin the second volume of Luke's account.

Following the preface, an infancy narrative (1:5–2:52) parallels and intertwines the annunciations of conception, the births, and the childhoods of John the Baptist and Jesus. Mary and Elizabeth are the focal characters of this part of the story, as our progress through the account follows the rhythms of their pregnancies and deliveries. The larger framework for their personal stories is set by the identification of the political leaders at the time: King Herod, Caesar Augustus, and Quirinius the governor of Syria (1:5; 2:1–4). This story of God's action is anchored in human history. Furthermore, the literary style in which these chapters are written sounds "biblical." In other words, it mimics the style of the Septuagint. The author does not explain this factor: perhaps it was present already in the source on which the author drew, or else it may have been a deliberate choice by which to affirm that these stories are part of the narrative of God's commitment to God's people that is contained in the Bible they knew so well. (See detailed comment below.)

The third part (3:1–4:13) entails preparation for Jesus' ministry: John the Baptist's preaching, the baptism of Jesus, his (all-male) genealogy, and his resistance to temptation by the devil. Except for the genealogy, this section interweaves Mark and Q, the sources Luke drew upon, much the same as in the parallels

in Matthew. One difference that might be overlooked seems rather to be significant. In 3:5–6, the quotation from Isaiah 40:3–5 is longer than in either Mark or Matthew. The part found only in Luke, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God," reflects Luke's affirmation that God's holy, "chosen" people now includes Gentiles as well as Jews. This affirmation is mirrored in Luke's genealogy, which traces Jesus' ancestry back to Adam, and not only to the patriarch Abraham (3:38). The sequence of tests presented to Jesus by the devil has theological significance in both Matthew and Luke. Matthew's account culminates in the Shema (Matt. 4:10), while Luke's follows the pattern of the narrative of Jesus' life, climaxing at the temple in Jerusalem (4:9–12).

The fourth part, Jesus' ministry in Galilee (4:14–9:50), begins with Jesus' inaugural sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth (4:16–30), focused on the jubilee text of Isaiah 61:1; 58:6. The ministry in Galilee includes his teaching, exorcisms and healings, choice of followers and companions, opposition from religious leaders, and predictions and foreshadowings of suffering and glory. The accounts of the call and choice of Jesus' followers (5:1–6:19) feature male characters from beyond the inner circles of religious leadership in Palestine. These men who will become the apostles undergo intensive training for their work (6:20–9:6), training that includes reckoning with the place of women in the alternative "kingdom" or "empire" (*basileia*) of God that Jesus both proclaims and inaugurates. A chapter of vignettes that demonstrate Jesus' identity (9:7–50) concludes the report of his ministry in Galilee: Jesus in Luke is a masterful, emotionally restrained figure, empowered by God and focused on God.

The fifth part of Luke's Gospel is a lengthy account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:27). It details a period of intensive training in discipleship: its demands, powers, and dangers. Much of his public teaching (often by parable) takes place at meals and is about table community and/or the distribution of wealth. This section is less about the geography of the journey than about the escalation of warnings and calls for preparedness that have been introduced earlier. Women such as Mary and Martha (10:38–42), the bent-over woman (13:10–17), the woman who lost one of her dowry coins (15:8–10), and the widow who wrests justice from a reluctant judge (18:1–8)

the dominance of male characters, which still predominate.

In the sixth part (19:28-21:38) Jesus enters Jerusalem hailed as "the king" and teaches in the temple. His now-fatal opposition is primarily from the chief priests, scribes, and elders, who from his popularity. Only the brief story of the impoverished widow (21:1-4)—is she a model to be emulated or a cause for lament?—breaks up the chorus of male voices and actions that set forth this conclusion to Jesus' public ministry.

In the seventh section (22:1-23:56a) the passion narrative begins with the Last Supper and ends with the burial of Jesus. The action slows to a crawl, as we are forced to take in each moment of Jesus' final day. The apostles are given final preparation for leadership and (except for Judas) are not depicted as failing Jesus. He is portrayed as strong in the face of death and innocent (his innocence recognized by Pilate, Herod, a criminal crucified with him, and the centurion). The people at first fail by following their leaders in calling for his crucifixion, but there is a mass repentance after his death.

The final portion of the Gospel concerns the vindication of Jesus—God's verdict of "yes!" to the official "no!" spoken to who Jesus was and to the message he brought (23:56b-24:53). It contains narratives of the empty tomb, appearances of the resurrected Jesus, the commissioning of witnesses, and his ascension to heaven.

Unlike the other three canonical Gospels, the story told by this evangelist continues in the book of Acts in a narrative of the foundation and spread of the Christian movement from Jerusalem to Rome. Because the Acts of the Apostles is implied in its prologue to be the second volume written for Theophilus, and because the style of the author of Acts appears to be that of the third evangelist, almost all scholars hold that the same person wrote both volumes. If this is so, they should be read together. In fact, when they are, it can be seen that the Gospel of Luke lays the basis for Acts' pictures of the church, of salvation, and of the meaning of the Christ. Acts, in turn, is the author's own commentary on the Gospel story and its concepts and tendencies.

Source Theory

In the prologue (1:1-4) the author says that this Gospel builds on the written traditions of others, who themselves utilized the traditions of

"eyewitnesses and servants of the word," and on the author's own careful investigation. This is not, then, the work of an eyewitness or a servant of the word, nor is it the first "orderly account" of the story of Jesus. The theory most commonly accepted, and followed provisionally in this article, is that the author of Luke used the Gospel of Mark (with some omissions, e.g., of Mark 6:45-8:26), a source called Q (available also to the author of the Gospel of Matthew), and sources—probably oral and written—called L (material available only to Luke). Source analysis provides essential clues about the workings of the author's mind, the audience's makeup, and important historical and theological issues.

Of special interest here will be the L material, since much of it features women. Following passages focusing on women are often classified as part of L: sections of the infancy narrative (Luke 1-2, featuring Elizabeth, Mary of Nazareth, Anna), the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (7:12-17); the forgiven prostitute who anoints Jesus (7:36-50); Galilean women followers of Jesus (8:1-3); Martha and Mary (10:38-42); the woman crying out from the crowd (11:27-28); the bent woman (13:10-17); the parable of the Sweeping Woman (15:8-10); the parable of the Persistent Widow (18:1-8); the daughters of Jerusalem (23:27-32); women at the cross (23:49); women preparing spices (23:56).

It has been proposed that Luke may have had access to a women's source—a collection of stories and teachings perhaps written or preserved by women and providing insight into women's experience of the Jesus movement. Scholars have wondered whether 7:11-17; 7:36-50; and 8:2-3 might not have been at one time a narrative collection reflecting the early community's concern about the question of women. Others have asked if the story of the bent woman, "daughter of Abraham" (13:10-17), was once connected with Luke's infancy narrative (see 1:5, where Elizabeth is said to be "of the daughters of Aaron," and 2:36, where Anna the prophet is called "the daughter of Phineas").

There is evidence that much of the material concerning women is traditional, not part of Luke's own editorial work. But if it originally came from a women's source or sources, it cannot be taken as simply expressing the viewpoint or reality of early Christian women. Luke responds to concern about the role of women by incorporating and editing material,

the dominance of male characters, which still predominate. In the sixth part (19:28-21:38) Jesus enters Jerusalem hailed as "the king" and teaches in the temple. His now-fatal opposition is primarily from the chief priests, scribes, and elders, who from his popularity. Only the brief story of the impoverished widow (21:1-4)—is she a model to be emulated or a cause for lament?—breaks up the chorus of male voices and actions that set forth this conclusion to Jesus' public ministry. In the seventh section (22:1-23:56a) the passion narrative begins with the Last Supper and ends with the burial of Jesus. The action slows to a crawl, as we are forced to take in each moment of Jesus' final day. The apostles are given final preparation for leadership and (except for Judas) are not depicted as failing Jesus. He is portrayed as strong in the face of death and innocent (his innocence recognized by Pilate, Herod, a criminal crucified with him, and the centurion). The people at first fail by following their leaders in calling for his crucifixion, but there is a mass repentance after his death. The final portion of the Gospel concerns the vindication of Jesus—God's verdict of "yes!" to the official "no!" spoken to who Jesus was and to the message he brought (23:56b-24:53). It contains narratives of the empty tomb, appearances of the resurrected Jesus, the commissioning of witnesses, and his ascension to heaven. Unlike the other three canonical Gospels, the story told by this evangelist continues in the book of Acts in a narrative of the foundation and spread of the Christian movement from Jerusalem to Rome. Because the Acts of the Apostles is implied in its prologue to be the second volume written for Theophilus, and because the style of the author of Acts appears to be that of the third evangelist, almost all scholars hold that the same person wrote both volumes. If this is so, they should be read together. In fact, when they are, it can be seen that the Gospel of Luke lays the basis for Acts' pictures of the church, of salvation, and of the meaning of the Christ. Acts, in turn, is the author's own commentary on the Gospel story and its concepts and tendencies.

subtly making the point that women must be restricted. Some of the material, however, bears traces of women's greater involvement and leadership. Perhaps it is related to the "old wives' tales" 1 Timothy 4:7 warns against, or was produced in circles like that of the widows whom 1 Timothy 5:2-16 attempts to control.

Distinctive Characteristics

Some of the distinctive characteristics of Luke provide clues about its author, date, and intended early audience and about the context in which women are depicted.

History and Eschatology

Luke is precise about the broad historical and political context of the story of Jesus, marking events with references to specific Roman and Jewish rulers (1:5; 2:1; 3:1-2). The period of Israel (from creation to John the Baptist) is seen as leading up to the period of Jesus (from his ministry to his ascension); the period of the church under stress (from the ascension to the Parousia or return of the risen Christ) stretches ahead indefinitely in a mission to all nations. Imminent expectation of the Parousia and the final inbreaking of the reign of God is modified in Luke by the sense that the reign is already "among you" (17:20-21) and by emphasis on the work to be done before the end (21:12-13). This appears to be a document from the generation that has confronted and accepted the fact of the delay of the Parousia. Accommodations are being made to ongoing life in the Roman Empire.

Romans and Jews

There is evidence that the author had detailed knowledge of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE (21:20, 22; cf. 13:35a). Rome's military triumph is interpreted as punishment for Israel's rejection of its Christ (19:39-44), a harsh anti-Jewish polemic that continues in some circles today. Roman involvement in the execution of Jesus has been downplayed in this Gospel, and responsibility has been shifted so heavily onto Jewish leadership that the impression is given that "the Jews" killed Jesus (22:54; 23:23-26; 24:20; cf. Acts 2:22-23; 3:17; 7:52-58). This historically inaccurate and unjust depiction is due in part to a desire to show the reader that the founder and his movement were not revolutionary and therefore were not

dangerous to the state. Those who are repentant in Israel form the nucleus of the people of God and are presented as a tiny minority within a people called "prophet killers" (11:47-51; 13:34; Acts 7:52). Jewish messianic hopes are said to be "fulfilled," as Luke depicts Christianity as the logical and legitimate continuation of Judaism and thus as a lawful religion in the Roman Empire. The split between synagogue and church is evidently wide, and most of the followers of Jesus for whom this Gospel is written are Gentiles in a predominantly Gentile setting.

Wealth and Poverty

This is often called "the Gospel of the poor," just as it is called "the Gospel of women," meaning that Luke's concern for the marginalized and oppressed is apparent. It is important to analyze the link between these concerns, since most of the poor in every age are women and the children who are dependent on them. In this Gospel the economically destitute are called "blessed" (6:20; cf. 4:18), and a reversal of their situation by God is expected (1:53; 16:19-31). Luke seems to be particularly interested in the help given by Jesus to disabled beggars (18:35-43; Acts 3:1-10) and the hungry (14:13-14, 21). The disciples are called to leave "all" to join Jesus (5:11, 28; 18:22), which is tantamount to joining the poor, becoming poor as Jesus is.

Women do follow Jesus in this Gospel, but not at such a cost; they are benefactors, giving out of their evidently retained wealth (8:2-3). They are like a bridge to what seems to be Luke's primary interest in this regard: interest in the rich. All the rich are repeatedly warned by parable and by short sayings (7:25; 12:13-21; 16:14) that they can be lulled into false security and callousness, ruled by their possessions. They are told that if they hope to participate in the reign of God (i.e., in what God is doing for the poor), they must be transformed and share with the poor by loans and outright gifts (6:30-35; 12:33). The Jerusalem community in Acts functions like those explicitly called disciples in the Gospel: it is demanded that they give up private ownership and eradicate Christian poverty (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32), and for the most part they meet that demand. But for the rest—the women followers in Galilee and others, and the later believers outside Jerusalem—adjustments are made to the normal workings of society. Some have, some do not; those who have are urged to be voluntarily generous. The radical

friendship lifestyle sometimes called "primitive communism" is not promoted for all. An unrelieved tension exists in this Gospel between the ideal and the accommodation, the radical attitude toward wealth and the moderate attitude.

Date and Authorship

The New Testament Gospels are anonymous; that is, they do not name their authors. Tradition going back to the end of the second century CE attributes this Gospel to one Luke, a companion of Paul on his journeys, a physician (Col. 4:14; Phlm. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). Indirectly, Paul's own authority is invoked in the writings of his supposed companion. Many scholars conclude, however, that internal evidence does not support this claim. The theology of Paul in Acts is unlike that of Paul's own letters: there is no evidence of professional medical knowledge, and—most important—Luke-Acts supports values similar to those of other New Testament works from the end of the century, the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus), which also lay claim to the authority of Paul. By the end of the first century and into the second, Paul's name was used to encourage the organization of churches in Asia Minor into patterns of patriarchal domination and submission, assimilating the radicalism of the Jesus movement and the early Christian missionary movement into what some have called "love patriarchalism." In that process of assimilation, inequalities inherent

in social, economic, and political hierarchies and in differentiated roles were to be willingly accepted by those said to possess inner equality "in Christ," and those with power were to wield it nonabusively. In Luke's writings this process of acceptance is reflected and promoted.

The author of Luke, probably a Gentile Christian, was well educated in Hellenistic literature and rhetoric, familiar enough with the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible to be able to imitate its style, skilled and artistic in the use and blending of sources, and theologically creative. It is not impossible that the author was a woman. Women of wealth or status in this period were able to be educated, and some were writers. Female authorship is improbable, however, mainly because of the Gospel's attitude toward women. Further, the narrator speaks as a man (in the Greek of 1:3). But in fact the author's identity is an open question that raises other questions.

Because of the use of Mark as a source, references to the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE), and reflections of some political and social trends of the 80s, the Gospel of Luke is usually dated around 85–90 CE. It was written after Colossians and Ephesians, with their household codes, and probably before the Pastorals (written at the turn of the century), with their even more blatant prescriptions subordinating women. Antioch in Syria, the third-largest city in the Roman Empire, is often identified as the place of composition.

COMMENT

Issues of Special Concern

Women in Luke

The number of women depicted in Luke and the emphasis on their presence in the narrative are surprising. Women characters are taken over from Mark and from Q, and many others are found only in Luke's special source (L). The technique called "pairing" is very noticeable. One version of a story or teaching refers to a man and the other to a woman, reinforcing the message and encouraging women as well as men to identify with the characters. This pairing occurs most often in the discourse of Jesus: for example, the man who plants the mustard seed and the woman who takes leaven (13:18–21 Q); the man

who searches for the lost sheep and the woman who searches for the lost coin (15:4–10 L). Some healings form pairs: the widow's only son and Jairus's only daughter (7:12; 8:42); Sabbath healings of the bent woman and the man with dropsy (13:10–17; 14:1–6). There are two lists of the names of Jesus' followers: one of the male apostles (6:12–19) and one of women (8:1–3).

There is also a noticeable tendency in this Gospel to defend, reassure, and praise women. Luke refers to widows more frequently than do the other Gospels (2:37; 4:25–26; 7:12; 18:3, 5; 20:47; 21:2–3), often in passages that presuppose their economic helplessness in a male-dominated society. The "sinner" who anoints Jesus is contrasted with the Pharisee (7:36–50).

commissioned to preach in the New Testament. The term *diakonia* referred in the early Christian community not to domestic chores but to eucharistic table service and to proclamation of the word (Rom. 11:13; 15:31; 1 Cor. 12:5; 2 Cor. 4:1; 5:18; Acts 6:1, 4). There may be a tradition behind Luke 8:2-3 and Mark 15:41 that women were significant figures in the table community and the intellectual activity that marked the original movement. (The example of Priscilla [Acts 18:26] shows that a woman could be accepted later as an important teacher.)

Other scholars think of the women in Luke 8:2-3 as wealthy philanthropists, "benefactors." However, this does not fit with the widely accepted suggestion that most members of the earliest movement were from the ranks of the poor. Luke's redactional interest, in placing women followers only in financial support roles, cannot be taken as historical memory. The fact that Luke presents the women as providing or serving out of their "resources" is important for an understanding of Luke's perspective on wealth and discipleship, as well as the perspective on women. That they (still) have resources means that they are not among the destitute poor. Nor are they disciples in the mind of Luke, since disciples are called to sell "all" and distribute to the poor (18:22; 14:33; see below, however, on 12:33). The women thus are shown aiding the poor (disciples and Jesus), but as patrons from outside their ranks.

Apart from divestiture of wealth (a practice adopted according to Luke by the early church; see Acts 4:32-5:11), Luke shows special interest in the right use of possessions or resources by the wealthy (12:15-21; 16:19-31; 19:1-10). Although the saying appears in a sermon to the disciples, the command to "sell your possessions, and give alms" (12:33) seems to be exemplified in the behavior of the women in 8:2-3. These women have "purses that do not grow old," which Luke opens wide to the men of the movement. Luke's depiction of a female-supported, male-led organization has been mirrored down the centuries by many Christian organizations.

There is an unintended ironic parallel between the women in 8:2-3 and the widow in 21:1-4, who dropped into the temple treasury "all that she had to live on." This scene follows the saying condemning scribes who "devour widows' houses" (20:47). Thus Jesus is not praising the widow's action but lamenting

it. Despite this overt meaning of the story, however, her story turns out to be that of the women in Luke's vision of the church as well. Unlike wealthy women who may have contributed financially as well as otherwise to the early phases of a movement in which they were historically full members, the women in Luke-Acts are inadvertently described as supporting a nonegalitarian system that subordinates and exploits them.

Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42)

Popular literature and traditions associated with Martha give evidence that many women have long been uncomfortable with this familiar story, which pits sister against sister. A glance at different commentaries will show that there is no agreement about its basic meaning. Jesus is a guest at the house of Martha, who is "distracted with much serving" (*diakonia*). Sitting at his feet listening to his "word" is Mary, who is silent throughout. Martha says, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve [*diakonein*] alone? Tell her then to help me" (my trans.). Her question echoes that of the disciples in the sinking boat in Mark 4:38 (a story Luke does not relate): "Teacher, don't you care if we die?" Unlike the response of Jesus in the storm at sea, which indicates that Jesus does care (he calms the storm), here he gently chides Martha and leaves things as they are. Her request denied, Martha is silenced. She is the loser, with whom the reader is not supposed to identify, but with whom many readers do.

The textual variant found in some manuscripts at verse 42 ("few things are necessary, or only one") is often understood incorrectly as a comment on the menu for a meal and Martha's excessive preparations. However, the shorter reading, "one thing is necessary," is probably more original. Nothing is said about a meal. The "one thing" that is necessary is the "better part" Mary chooses. The implication is clear, that Martha's part is lesser. One traditional interpretation sees the two women as abstract principles or types. For example, they are said to represent active and contemplative lifestyles, or justification by works and justification by faith, or Judaism and Christianity. Another approach pays attention to the fact that the protagonists are women and attempts to read the story in terms of female careers or priorities or jealousies. Some see here a feminist manifesto of the rights of women to theological education.

Jesus defends Mary's right to study with him. His action 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.

Recently the narrative has been read by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as reflecting a debate at the end of the first century CE, both over the roles of women and over emerging offices in the house churches, some of which were founded and led by women. As has been noted above, in Christian usage, *diakonia* became a technical term referring to eucharistic table service, proclamation, and ecclesial leadership. In the story of Mary and Martha, however, Luke distinguishes *diakonia* (Martha) and "listening to the word" (Mary) as two distinct roles. Mary's choice of the latter over the former is praised and defended by the Lord. Luke, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, is thus prescribing for the church of the time, not describing a condition that prevailed then or earlier.

It has long been seen that there is some connection between this story and Acts 6:1–6. In the latter passage, there is also a separation of the two tasks of *diakonia* (preaching and table service) and the subordination of the latter (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17 and 3:8–13). It is clear, however, from the description of the preaching ministry of those devoted to table service (Acts 6:8–7:60), that in the tradition Luke is using, *diakonia* still refers to both ministries. "Service" (*diakonia*) and "the word" are not really split apart, as they are in the story of Martha and Mary, the two sisters who do not even speak to each other. With that split, the *diakonia* of women is reduced and discredited. Finally, it disappears: Acts does not mention any *diakonia* of women, but only of men (Acts 1:17; 6:1; 11:29; 12:25).

Several additional points of contrast should be noted between Mary's *diakonia* of the word and that of various male characters. "The word" is preached by both the Twelve and the Seven in Acts, but it is only listened to by Mary, who never speaks, even to question. Her study is totally receptive and passive, not creative learning. In contrast, the missing twelve-year-old Jesus is found in the temple "sitting among the teachers [not at their feet], listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). The next verse mentions his answers, not his questions. The Gerasene demoniac sits healed at the

feet of Jesus, begs to stay with him, but is sent away to proclaim what God has done for him (8:35–39). Mary's position at the feet of Jesus is like that of Paul, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), but Paul's subordination to his teacher is temporary. In contrast, Luke tells of no subsequent independent teaching or other leadership by Mary.

The disciples and apostles in Luke learn often in dialogues (e.g., 5:1–11; 8:4–15; 9:10–11), but Mary is silent. Her attitude is that of a disciple, but she is not a disciple. She is only an audience. What she has heard and learned at the Lord's feet is private; it does not instruct and shape the whole community.

In contrast to their fate in Luke, Martha and Mary of Bethany, evidently well remembered in the early church, appear in quite a different light in John 11:1–45; 12:1–8. There, both are loved by Jesus, and they are not in competition with each other. Martha, who serves at table, makes the central christological confession of this Gospel, of Jesus as the Christ (cf. the confession of Peter in the Synoptics), and Mary, who also enters into dialogue with Jesus, performs the prophetic action of anointing Jesus' feet. In John's portrait of the two sisters, *diakonia* of the table and of the word remain integrated.

Luke does not present Jesus saying, "I permit no woman to teach or preach" or "Women must be silent" or "Only men can be apostles or disciples or deacons." In the world of Luke, Jesus is not a "divider" (see 12:13). Approved women are shown choosing for themselves the passive role, which the Lord in Luke calls "the better part" (10:42). Martha, who serves unaided, is called "distracted," "anxious," and "troubled" about things that are not necessary. Her request for Mary's help is understood as a spiritual threat to her "sister."

But if Luke 10:38–42 is called on to authorize women's solid theological education, this text can perform a subversive function—subversive, that is, of Luke's intent, which is to undermine the leadership of women. The educated woman sees through the text, sees its different levels, and sees Luke's strategy. Most important here is recognition of the tone of affection and concern and perhaps exasperation, as in the repetition, "Martha, Martha . . ." This is the kindly voice of what has been called "love patriarchalism." But if one listens—as this passage urges—to the "word of the Lord," in one's own experience and that of other women, one may hear behind the

next another voice encouraging women's leadership and reconciliation.

Women at the Cross and Empty Tomb (Luke 23:49; 24:1-12)

In the final three chapters of this Gospel, the reader enters the world of male politics, violence, and bonding, but also because Luke is describing last preparations and authorization of male figures for future leadership. The near disappearance of women is achieved in three ways. First, the women become part of a crowd. Second, compared to Mark's treatment, their role is reduced in significance as those of male characters gain power and become more positive. Third, they are erased as the essential, designated witnesses. Luke's description of the final events is important for understanding the narrative of the women at the empty tomb.

At the Last Supper in Luke, Jesus sits at table "and the apostles with him" (22:14). They are the nucleus of the eschatological community. The Eucharist is Jesus' legacy, given to them. Jesus confers on the Twelve a kingdom in which there will be continued table community and in which they will "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (22:30). No women are mentioned as present at this scene, or at the Mount of Olives, or at the hearings before the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod.

As elsewhere in Luke, the editing of Mark and the addition of new material present the disciples in a more favorable light. It is stressed that they have "stood by" Jesus in his trials so far (22:28) and that they will stand by him to the end. Simon will be tested, but Jesus prays that his faith not fail and that he will in the end strengthen his "brothers" (22:31-32). Some have read these verses as a special commissioning of Peter (cf. Matt. 16:17-19; Mark 1:17; John 21:15-19). Unlike the other Gospels (Mark 14:27; Matt. 26:31; John 16:32), Luke contains no prediction that all the disciples will lose faith and be scattered. They do not abandon Jesus when he is arrested.

At a crucial point, the "people" fail in their support of Jesus by following their leaders, the chief priests and rulers (23:13, 18). But this failure is not complete. On the road to The Skull (23:33), Jesus is followed by Simon of Cyrene, carrying the cross of Jesus like a disciple (9:23; 14:27). Also following is "a great multitude of the people, and of women who were beating

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their breasts and wailing for him" (23:27, my trans.). The construction and grammar of this sentence, with "who" in Greek referring only to the women, indicate that Luke has added "of the people and" to a source fragment dealing only with the women; this type of addition will be made again in 23:49. The daughters of Jerusalem (23:28), not to be identified with the Galilean women who appear in 23:49, are possibly professional mourners. Representing the city destroyed in 70 CE, they are warned to weep rather for themselves and their children. The coming destruction will be so terrible that barren women will be considered "blessed." Contrasted now with their scoffing rulers, "the people" stand by watching the crucifixion (23:35).

After the death of Jesus, Luke mentions a mass repentance (23:48). Then, in contrast to the other Gospels, which name the small number of witnesses important to the Christian community, Luke describes another crowd: "And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance and saw these things" (23:49 RSV). The important participle at the end of the sentence is feminine plural: the women who had followed him from Galilee "saw." The Greek again shows that Luke has added others (here, "all his [male] acquaintances") to a tradition dealing only with women (cf. Mark 15:40). Most commentators think that the phrase is meant to include at least some of the apostles, but Luke cannot state that they were present if it was widely known that they were not. According to Mark and Matthew, only women followers of Jesus witnessed the crucifixion. In John, four women are joined by the male "beloved disciple." Mark, emphasizing the importance of the women's witness to the crucifixion, burial, and empty tomb, names them three times in the space of a few verses (Mark 15:40, 47; 16:1) and remarks that they had followed and served (*diakonein*) Jesus in Galilee. In contrast, Luke neither names them nor mentions their service at this point in the narrative.

After the body of Jesus is wrapped and laid in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea, "the women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments" (23:55-56). The plan of these Jewish women is to give him a proper burial once the Sabbath is over. (Note that the "acquaintances" have disappeared from the narrative.)