Gospel of Luke: The Humbled Will Be Lifted Up

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The Gospel of Luke follows the structure of Mark's Gospel (except for the omission of Mark 6:45–8:26); it presents parts of the Q source, which is also the basis for Matthew's Gospel, and it reworks parts that are found exclusively here (special material). In the following discussion we will focus especially on these parts, because they contain many narratives in which women play a central role. However, this does not mean that we are limiting ourselves in terms of content, since themes central to the entire book are addressed in the special material. In the history of the interpretation of Luke, it was often assumed that the special material could be based on a female source. Many called Luke the "women's evangelist." An analysis of these texts is intended to show whether the community reality reflected in Luke's Gospel becomes transparent by revealing the actions of women, or whether it does not instead intentionally circumcise women's activity. This latter view is taken particularly in recent feminist discussion. Our purpose here is to make women's practice, their hopes and longings for change, their visions and their actions visible through the texts and to uncover the conflicts that arise in this connection. We see our research as a contribution to the development of a feminist social history of early Christianity.

Many speculative hypotheses have been proposed regarding the origin of these texts and their place in the Gospel. Luke 1:2 especially has been assumed to come from Jewish-Christian circles, and many authors assume this is true for the rest of the special material as well. But even if one presupposes Jewish or Jewish-Christian authorship of these texts, the question remains how Luke relates to these sources. It is often hypothesized that he incorporated the sources available to him into his own presentation of the *Heilsgeschichte* (redemptive history), and edited accordingly. We assume, however, that the texts of the special material represent ideas and theological foundations of Lukan communities and originated in their circles. They were incorporated into the Gospel not merely for historical reasons, but instead represent core texts of Lukan theology. Furthermore, we assume that the Lukan writings are to be located in Jewish-Christian circles, based on their re-

working of First Testament traditions and their creative interaction with them. Many elements locate the community within the Jewish diaspora: their eschatological expectations and the descriptions of the kingdom of God as "near at hand," their belief in the Jewish Messiah Jesus, and their confession of faith in the hope of Israel, to which they hold fast despite the missionary activity practiced among them by Gentile peoples. We see the Lukan churches as a part of the Jewish-prophetic-messianic liberation movement within the Pax Romana.

The *Heilsgeschichte* (Redemptive History)

Scholarly representations of Luke's redemptive history have been especially influenced by the conceptual framework posed by Hans Conzelmann, who sees a tripartite structure to the narrative: (1) the period of the law and the prophets, in which Israel is the bearer of the promise (from the creation to John the Baptist); (2) the time of Jesus, which is characterized by the realization of salvation; (3) the time of the church, which henceforth is the bearer of salvation (from Jesus' ascension to heaven until the parousia, the second coming). According to Conzelmann's scheme, Luke is making clear in his work that the beginnings of Christianity are closely tied to the synagogue and the temple, but that "the Jews" hardened their hearts and did not fulfill their responsibility as a chosen people. Therefore the church as bearer of salvation is becoming "Israel." In this view, Christians fulfilled the law at the beginning but were freed from it in the course of history.

We wish to critique this presupposition in its very foundations. The concept of a Gentile Christianity free of the law in Second Testament times must be fundamentally disputed (see Schottroff 1994, 27-30; 1996; 1995a, 11-14). The discriminatory view of the "law," that is, the Torah, does not yet exist in biblical times; it cannot be considered a stereotype used to marginalize Judaism until the postbiblical era. There is no longer any basis for dividing the history of redemption in Lukan writing into three parts. Instead it should be considered against the background of Jewish history in the first century. The experiences of devastation and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. are of central importance here. They necessitated a correction to the messianic expectations. The community saw itself confronted with the question whether their expectation of an end to all oppression and all suffering (cf. 1:46-55; 2:38) had not been totally annihilated by the victory of the Romans and the destruction of the temple. Was Jesus really the promised Messiah? Luke's Gospel makes it clear that Jesus' suffering and the suffering of the people are part of the story of salvation (cf. 24:21, 44-49). With Jesus' coming, the kingdom of God was not yet fully at hand; God's reign would only be fully realized with the parousia. The eschatological coming of the Messiah will bring liberation; the destruction of Jerusalem and the occupation by the Romans are limited (cf. 21:24, 28). In the Lukan writings that are universally directed toward mission among the peoples, too, salvation remains linked

with Israel (cf. Acts 1:6; 26:6). With Jesus, the Jewish Messiah has come into the world. His presence signals the beginning of the messianic era of salvation in which the nations, too, will participate if they confess faith in him (cf. Luke 2:32).

Thus Luke's Gospel does not speak of Israel being superseded in the course of redemptive history (Stegemann 1993). Luke is to be seen as a Jewish book. This is no Gentile Christian speaking who must promote his own tradition at the expense of Judaism. All the conflicts described in the book should be seen primarily as internal disputes among the Jews. One must also bear in mind that every statement in the book occurs in the context of the Roman occupation. The texts of the Second Testament can only be understood in the context of the Roman Empire. The Gospel according to Luke points to this especially by narrating all events in the context of the respective periods of political rule (cf. 1:5; 2:1; 3:1; 9:7).

Gospel of Women or Testimony to Their Subordination?

Even in the feminist discussion of Luke's Gospel the emphasis has been on its tendency to impose limits on women. While it concedes that Luke shows remnants of traditions that reflect gender-equal practices and signs of women serving in leadership positions, it finds that the patriarchal context in which these traditions were located robbed them of their expressive voice and their liberating force. Feminist exegetes have found women in Luke limited to passive, maternally nurturing, and silent roles. They assert that traditional gender roles within the worshiping communities were not eliminated, but only modified. The subordination and service of women to their husbands in patriarchal marriages are seen by some as shifting now to the disciples (Seim 1994). The women's role in the church communities is at home, while the men proclaim the gospel in the public sphere, it is argued. This image of women in the early church, feminists claim, was projected back to the beginnings (Kahl 1987, 145). Thus feminist scholarship on Luke fundamentally questions the widespread acceptance of Luke as "women's evangelist," which is often based only on the number of women mentioned in the Gospel (e.g., Schaberg 1992). Most studies of Luke's Gospel are based on the concept of "patriarchalism of love" that is claimed to have been practiced in the church communities. According to this view, the so-called delayed parousia necessarily resulted in accommodation to the Hellenistic-Roman world. Thus the Christian communities adopted the patriarchal social order that was based on the rule of the paterfamilias over women, children, and slaves (e.g., Schaberg 1992; Stegemann and Stegemann 1995). However, the argument continues, this hierarchy is superseded "in Christ," with the practical consequence that the father as head of the family ruled over his subordinates and was honored and respected by them. "Luke" is seen as the Gentile Christian who sought harmony with the Roman-Hellenistic society and therefore vehemently insisted that women be relegated to the domestic sphere.

Such a consistent practice of "patriarchalism of love" is never explicitly mentioned in Luke. Furthermore, the "delayed parousia" thesis must be regarded as a theological construct of the modern era; it does not correspond to the concepts of time inherent in Jewish-Christian eschatological expectations. Eschatological thinking is not linear. It describes the hope of people struggling for liberation that God stands with them in the present, in their struggle for just social relations (Sutter Rehmann 1995; Schottroff 1995b; 1998). These hopes are still alive in Luke's Gospel; they become powerfully tangible through the testimony of women in the Magnificat (1:46-55), for example.

Could gender relationships in Luke be read differently if one assumes that it arises out of the Jewish tradition, which is not relinquished in favor of accommodating to Roman-Hellenistic culture? A review of the texts shows no grounds for a monolithic view of gender relations in the Lukan writings. The results of our study are contradictory. (1) Important women who are known by name appear in Luke alongside women who are not known by name and are rendered invisible. More men than women are named (the twelve disciples are especially highlighted), but many also remain nameless. (2) In many cases the matter at hand is demonstrated with parallel examples of women and men, whatever the context (cf., e.g., 7:12 and 8:42; 13:10-17 and 14:1-6; 15:4-7 and vv. 8-10). (3) Besides traditions that reveal actions and preaching by women, some narratives deny their activities (e.g., 14:26; 8:21), as contrasted with source material in Mark. Consequently, every statement must be studied on its own; hasty generalizations are to be avoided. When analyzing texts about women, therefore, one should always ask how they are represented, whether they are named, what roles they play in the context of the narrative and compared with men, and whether they speak or are silent. One should always ask who could have what interest in how the narrative is constructed and what conceptual framework of gender relations the narrative bias reflects. Luke as a whole should be understood as a document testifying to a dynamic process of working out differences over questions of equal rights; it shows evidence of conflicts that had to be worked through in everyday life. The women working and living in the church communities do not allow others to silence them; they bring their theological views into the texts. They clearly show what the coming of the realm of God means concretely for them and their sisters. Their story is not silenced even when in many cases they remain nameless. Many texts keep their memory alive despite numerous attempts to dim it. (On the women disciples in the Gospel of Luke, see Bieberstein 1998.)

On the Question of Authorship

The existence of contradictory traditions passed down through parallel narratives raises the fundamental question whether the prevalent concept of "author" can

apply to Second Testament texts. In general, "Luke" is described as a Hellenistic Gentile Christian. His linguistic skills are considered notable, pointing to his upper-class origins and his good education, which must have included Greek rhetoric as well as methods of interpretation of Jewish scripture. Luke is described as a Greek who turned early on to the Jewish religion. Though scholars always point out in the course of their exegeses that the Gospels reflect diverse oral, and to some extent written, sources, the history of these sources takes a back seat to the figure, the influence, and the presumed theology of the author. In the last analysis, a Gospel appears as the work of a single, significant person.

However, there was no such person as one male author "Luke" who alone organized and added to the received source material. Indeed, we should assume as given a process by which texts arise out of community life in the churches, where men and women together composed them, documenting their hopes, expectations, visions, and conflicts. Individual contributions by a single author are few and should be regarded as minimal (Schottroff 1995b, 206-9; 1998, 212-14).

Many have argued that the Lukan writings, because of their tendency to curry favor with Rome, are to be read as having the apologetic intent of presenting Christianity as politically harmless. However, we do not find this interpretation consistent with all the message of this text. The majority of narratives are stories of liberation from unjust oppressive structures. The hope for salvation (cf. 21:24, 28) is a concrete historical-political hope for an anticipated end to the Roman occupation (Cassidy 1978). Presumably the men and women authors as well as the intended audience are Jewish-Christian communities who already have many Gentile Christian members. The language, which picks up on the Septuagint, contains numerous diverse allusions to First Testament traditions. The fact that they cling to Jewish expectations of the coming time of salvation clearly demonstrates this (Busse 1991). The Magnificat especially characterizes the Lukan material as a document of a prophetic-messianic liberation movement within the Pax Romana (cf. 1:71; 4:18ff.). Stories of encouragement from the Bible, the First Testament, were told here and brought into the present context. In these communities people reached out to one another with help and support. These worshiping communities are also the place where traditions of resistance reside; they expect the liberation of Israel and are contributing through their actions and prayers as a community to the realization of the realm of God. Luise Schottroff calls the Gospels a "hymnbook of the poor" to emphasize their community character and origin (1995b, 207; 1998, 213).

Dating the Text

One can assume that Luke was written down after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. This experience of catastrophe raised existential questions about Jewish

identity and the validity of messianic expectations. The Gospel represents a theological reflection about this experience. In spite of many conflicts and theological differences of opinion, the Lukan worshiping communities still considered themselves Jewish. In Luke, one cannot yet assume a division that would have led to separate organizational structures. The date of the Lukan writings is therefore prior to the Bar Kokhba uprising (133-135 C.E.), which can be seen as the decisive date for the separation of Judaism and Christianity (Schottroff 1996).

Luke 1–2 as Key to the Understanding of the Gospel

Luke 1–2 should be understood as the introduction to the entire body of writings; these two chapters raise almost all the theological themes that are then picked up and further developed. The description of the larger community of people and their actions found at the beginning of the Gospel sets the overall standards for the values and principles of the churches for discipleship as followers of Jesus. Elizabeth, Mary, Zechariah, Joseph, Simeon, and Anna prefigure the path of John and Jesus, and that of the other men and women disciples. Their stories provide a key to understanding the events that follow. They personally attest to the continuity with the First Testament traditions; as righteous Jews they see in Jesus' birth the sign of the coming of the messianic era of God's salvation.

Elizabeth — the Exaltation of a Humiliated, Old, Barren Woman (Luke 1)

Elizabeth is the central figure of Luke 1. Her pregnancy structures the chronology of the narrative (cf. 1:24, 26, 36, 56). Her autonomy is emphasized. As one of the few women in the Gospel, she utters a powerful prophecy. Elizabeth is described as a righteous Jewish woman — an extraordinary assessment of the life of a woman who has remained childless into old age (1:6). It is made very clear here that her infertility is not associated with sins or offenses. In the beginning of the narrative, however, she is not the actual subject; she is introduced only as the wife of Zechariah, who is the subject (1:13, 18, 24). From the moment she raises her song of praise (1:25), she appears as an autonomous person, as Elizabeth (cf. 1:36, 40-45, 57). The story of her suffering as a barren, old woman is made visible and serves as a key to understanding the message of the entire chapter. God stands with women and will liberate the people from oppression and humiliation. In her hymn of praise Elizabeth articulates her experience of liberation and her special relationship with God. Here she anticipates the central messages of the Magnificat: God "looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people" (1:25). At the same time, her words accuse this society that assigned her to one of the lowest rungs of the hierarchical ladder and denied her true womanhood

because of her failure to produce a child. She has preserved a sense of her dignity in spite of the insults and humiliations she likely experienced, and she has lived "blamelessly before God" (1:6). She is a believing Jew who is firmly rooted in her traditions, names her son (1:60), and in addition enables Zechariah to find his faith again.

In spite of this, Elizabeth has remained one of the "unknown" women in the tradition of interpretations of Luke. Presumably because of her age and her female gender, many interpreters have seen her merely as an extra, as mother of John the Baptist. Elizabeth is a postmenopausal elderly woman, likely about sixty years old. In gynecological studies of antiquity, older women are rarely encountered because they are past childbearing age and therefore not of interest to the patriarchal mind. The fact that she becomes pregnant in old age flies in the face of all previous experience and the medical science of the time. The motif of the barren woman that is given new relevance in Luke 1 clearly establishes the close link between this text and First Testament traditions and texts. This motif serves to articulate the fears and despair of the men and women authors, but at the same time also their hope for an end to their suffering and for God's intervention. The experience of an old, childless woman who conceives and bears a child through God's help signifies the connection between life and death. At the same time, it describes the experiences that men and women disciples had of the resurrection after the death of Jesus. It connects the beginning of the Gospel with its ending, the women of the First Testament with those of the Jesus movement, Zechariah with Abraham and the doubting disciples, Jesus with the sons of the matriarchs.

Through the emphasis placed on the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary, the reader's attention is focused on the body, the pregnant mother-to-be, which characterizes the two women in a particular way. They seem defined and limited to their role as pregnant women, mothers, and nurturers (Schaberg 1992). In Luke 11:27 we see a similar understanding when Mary, the mother of Jesus, is identified solely in her childbearing function. She is blessed by a woman for only one reason — that she bore and raised her child. She herself, her identity, her capacity for action and independence remain invisible. In Luke 11:28 this narrow view of women is explicitly criticized. Jesus' reply in this context should be taken as a critique of the reduction of women to their capacity as childbearers and mothers. Women can have an autonomous existence; mothers can become disciples too. Elizabeth and Mary are not defined by their role as mothers. Elizabeth praises Mary in 1:45 not for her motherhood, but for her faith. Frequent pregnancies characterize the everyday life of women of antiquity in a significant way. Given this background, to describe the "mother-to-be" as a locus of God's redemptive action means to recognize women's capacity to bear children as a special fact of everyday life that can serve as a springboard for women's activity. This activity is not related solely to nurturing and raising their children, but extends to other areas of social and religious life. God's activity is very closely connected with the creaturely world, with

the way human beings come into being and grow, and with their bodily nature. Luke's narrative does not devalue the body, but describes it as fundamental to human being in relationship to God and other human beings.

The Magnificat — Gospel of the Poor (Luke 1:46-55)

Mary sets out on her way to see Elizabeth. Her autonomous decision to enter as a slave of God *(doulē kyriou)*, an acting subject, into God's redemptive activity, and as a disciple into discipleship, foregrounds her actions and her active character in the narrative. Elizabeth and Mary have often been described as in competition with one another. Mary, as mother of God, is held in higher esteem than Elizabeth, as if the miracle of Mary's pregnancy makes that of Elizabeth even more miraculous. What Luke 1:39-56 describes, however, is quite different: the two women's solidarity with one another binds them into a community of mutual support and assistance. Elizabeth welcomes Mary *en gynaixin,* into the community of women. This signals the creation of a vision of women as able to survive and exist autonomously outside of patriarchal marriage. This community offers a model for a structure of life in which an ethic of mutuality and brotherly and sisterly relationships can become everyday reality. Together they celebrate their liberation and the liberation of the entire people. Their descriptions evoke associations of Zion and its traditions (Janssen 1998, 133). As prophets and disciples who stand firmly rooted in the traditions of the First Testament, as old and new Zion, they praise God. The Magnificat should be seen as their common song — not because the extant manuscripts attribute it sometimes to one, sometimes to the other, but because the Magnificat is embedded in the relationship of the two women (1:39-56). It makes manifest the fact that the encounter of the two women is not merely about individual experiences. The Magnificat describes the signposts of the kingdom of God in objective detail: the reversal of social, economic, and political conditions, the uplifting of those who have been downtrodden or devalued, the option for the poor, the decisive measure of which is the degree to which it is applied to women (Schottroff 1994, 282; 1995a, 193).

In Mary and Elizabeth we meet two Jewish women who live in Palestine in the first century C.E. The country is occupied and living under Roman control. The security of the occupying authority is achieved through the use of military force. Numerous archaeological artifacts from the various Roman fortresses in Palestine bear witness to this fact. Taxes and tributes were very high and every form of resistance was defeated. In a context such as this, the language of the Magnificat must be seen as a language of resistance. It is a song in which what may not be spoken is sung out loud. It expresses what is not allowed in political discourse because explicit criticism of authority was not tolerated. There are precedents for this song in the Hebrew Bible. Mary and Elizabeth recall these traditions and bring them into

their present reality. They praise God for intervening in history through them. They confess their faith in God, who stands on the side of those who are laid low, who are hungry, who have no access to power. They themselves belong to this group, and in their song they work through experiences of how alien rule, oppression, and military occupation specifically affect women. In 1:48 Mary describes her situation as "humiliation," *tapeinōsis.* This concept is often translated as "lowliness" or "humble stature," that is, of the speaker before God. In biblical usage, however, this concept occurs not in religious contexts, but instead frequently in contexts calling attention to sexual violence against women; it is often used to describe rape (Schaberg 1990, 97ff.). It cannot be clearly ascertained whether the historical Mary actually became pregnant in this way, but because the word used suggests this, one must consider the possibility. Present-day reports of mass rapes in war situations make the realities of a country under alien rule and military occupation horrifyingly real.

According to the narrative of Luke, Mary is not immediately enthusiastic in the moment she receives the news of Jesus' impending birth. She asks thoughtful and critical questions about how this is supposed to happen, but then declares her willingness and seeks out Elizabeth, an older woman whose faith and whose hopes she shares, for understanding support. This meeting signals a radical change in existing sociopolitical and economic conditions. In Jesus' practice and preaching these promises become reality: in his sermon in the synagogue in Nazareth he summarizes his mission, based on Isaiah 61, as a message for the sick and oppressed and as a gospel for the poor (Luke 4:18-19). In the Beatitudes, God's reign is described as both present and future (cf. 6:20-23).

Jesus is described as Messiah, who makes miracles happen in the present: weeping, starvation, and marginalization are brought to an end, the last shall be first and the first shall be last (cf. 13:30). Last and first are understood as social categories; the fact that this saying is recorded in numerous places (Mark 10:31; Matt 19:30; 20:16) suggests that it belongs among the oldest tradition of narratives about Jesus of Nazareth (Schottroff and Stegemann 1978). In many texts the hope of poor people in a just God is spelled out. In Luke 16:19-30 the poor man is even given a name, Lazarus, while the rich man remains nameless. This text contrasts the organizational form and the way responsibility is practiced in the disciples' community with that of well-known forms of dominance and hierarchy: not those who sit at table will be greatest, but those who serve (cf. 22:24-27).

Anna — the Aged Prophet in the Temple (Luke 2:36-38)

The title of prophet signifies special distinction and contains a value judgment that its bearer proclaims the Word of God. As an old woman, Anna stands in the tradition of wise old women of the First Testament who were held in high esteem as ma-

triarchs and advisers. Anna is found in the temple, not tied down by family commitments; that is, she acts in the public sphere. Her title points to religious and political activity. Her speech shows what God's action through Jesus, the expected Messiah, will mean concretely: she proclaims the liberation of Jerusalem. She prophesies to the people of Israel the fulfillment of God's promises, which become concrete in the actions of Jesus and his disciples. With her service in the temple she gives expression to her hope for the fulfillment of these promises; she expects liberation by God. This hope must not be misunderstood as a passive hope for divine salvation. True worship, true divine service means living by the Torah and actively working for justice. In this sense Anna's service to God is a form of action that must be characterized as resistance, aimed toward liberation and an end to the suffering of the oppressed people. Moreover, the occurrences described in Luke 2 can be understood as a manifestation of Jewish temple piety, which ties its eschatological expectations to this site. Anna's praxis of prayer and worship serves to describe her participation in the Jewish worship practices at the temple and to affirm the validity and significance of these practices for the worship of God (cf. also 19:45-48; 24:53). Anna becomes the iconic opposite of the high priests and the rest of the temple hierarchy who enrich themselves in collaboration with the Romans. Her description implicitly says: "In the temple, it is God who shall be served, not the Romans!" On another level, the insistence on the central significance of the temple even after its destruction — which has of course already occurred at the time the Gospel was written down — means that the Jesus movement must clearly be understood in relation to the other Jewish messianic liberation movements that cling to the temple as a central symbol of Jewish identity.

In the communities of disciples many different women and men came together and found support and resources for mutual caregiving. Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, and Anna are representative of a group of elderly people who are certainly not insignificant. The respect and reverence rendered to the elderly people in Luke 1–2 clearly indicate that they were not regarded as mere recipients of alms. Instead, they signify the continuity from received traditions; surely they had many stories to tell. Together with the other, younger members of the worshiping communities, they were participants in the process that led to the written works in the Lukan corpus.

Women's Work — Women's Poverty: The Realm of God Breaks through in Everyday Life (Luke 8:1-3)

Many interpretations of the Gospel of Luke assume that it is addressed primarily to wealthy women. Evidence for this assumption is seen in the remark in Luke 8:1-3 that many read as meaning that the women disciples supported Jesus financially. Luise Schottroff offers a different translation: "(They served them) according to

what was possible for them in their circumstances" (1994, 307; 1995a, 210). Their resources included not only money, but also their capacity for work, for providing accommodations, their solidarity, faith, imagination, vision, and hopes. Ivoni Richter Reimer's study of Acts (1992) demonstrates that many poor women who had to work to support themselves were active in the Lukan worshiping communities. Compared to Acts, Luke offers even clearer traces of single working poor women. In Luke 15:8-10, for example, one woman's struggle for survival becomes the image for God's action as she searches for a single *drachmē* — the amount of money needed for her daily bread (Schottroff 1994, 139-51; 1995a, 91-100; Lamb 1995). The bleak financial situation of single women provides the backdrop for the story of the persistent widow who insists on her right to receive support (18:1-8). Even more strikingly emphasized is the miserable poverty of the widow who, in offering two small coins, is sacrificing her entire means of subsistence (21:1-4). Further evidence of women's poverty is the fact that prostitutes are mentioned as present in the worshiping communities. The story of the woman who anoints Jesus refers to their existence (Schottroff 1990, 310-23; 1993, 138-57). For many poor women, their body was the only commodity of value they had to offer to earn a living (Kirchhoff 1994; Lamb and Janssen 1995). Alongside their work as a weaver, trader, or laborer, they would work as a prostitute to earn enough to survive, since their wages would be at most half that of a man's. Even a man's wage was often insufficient to support a family. We must assume women's presence among almost all the vocational groups named in the Second Testament texts, though they remain invisible because of the masculine plural noun usage. Women were employed in fishing, tax collecting, arts and crafts, agriculture (cf. 17:35), slave labor (cf. 12:45; 22:56), and in all other areas of life (Schottroff 1994, 122-30; 1995a, 80-85). The everyday life of these women lies behind many of these narratives and becomes transparent for the coming reign of God.

Mary and Martha — Two Servant Women (Luke 10:38-42)

In the Gospel of Luke different texts have been handed down that describe the activities of women as serving *(diakoneō)* (cf., e.g., 4:38-40; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 23:49). Should this service be interpreted as a model for discipleship or as the relegation of women to the position prescribed to them by patriarchal society? Mary and Martha in particular have been the subjects of thorough feminist discussion. One line of interpretation has emphasized the restrictive view of women. This view is seen as discounting Martha's role as mere serving at table as contrasted with Mary's passive listening while seated at the feet of Jesus (Schüssler Fiorenza 1988a; Seim 1994). Others see this text as foregrounding a way of viewing service in general. They see the sisters as modeling discipleship for women as well as men, and Jesus as defending women's discipleship as opposed to their being relegated to the

role of mother and housewife (Schottroff 1990, 132; 1993, 116; Reinhartz 1991). Luke 9:10-17, too, shows that serving at table is not viewed exclusively as a woman's job. It is assumed here that the male disciples, too, feel responsible for shopping, distributing the food, and collecting the leftovers (cf. also Acts 6:1-7). In Luke 10:38-42 Mary remains a passive listener. This does not mean it is written in stone, however, that women are limited to this role.

It becomes clear from many texts that hearing the gospel is always associated with action. In Luke 1 Mary and Elizabeth speak prophetically; the women mentioned in 8:1-3 accompany Jesus as disciples and show their courage as they observe the crucifixion from afar (cf. 23:49). Martha expresses her annoyance and argues with Jesus (10:40). A woman sets out to search for what she has lost, and joyously celebrates with her women neighbors and friends who are showing solidarity with her (15:8-10). A widow defends her rights (18:1-8); the women at the tomb proclaim what they have experienced (24:1-11). The male disciples do not believe the women when they announce that Jesus is alive, because the men are looking at the tomb and at his death (24:11). In this context, this experience of women says a lot about their struggles in a patriarchal society, but it by no means testifies to women's incompetence to serve as witnesses. Such an interpretation narrows the concept to a juridical level that is not relevant here. In Luke's Gospel we see traces of the struggles of women who made themselves heard within patriarchal structures. They are capable of encouraging us and can set women into motion even today. They describe everyday conflicts without whose solution changes on a large scale are impossible.

Daughters of Abraham (Luke 13:10-17)

The story of the healing of a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years shows especially poignantly how closely such narratives are connected to Jewish traditions and ideas. In the history of exegesis of this text, the separation of the Lukan Christian community from Judaism prior to the writing of the narrative has been consistently assumed as historical fact. Interpreters see the process of separation reflected in the conflict between Jesus and the representative of Judaism, the leader of the synagogue. As a result, exegesis emphasizes this aspect and regards the healing of the woman as merely providing an opportunity for a basic theological dispute between two opposing parties. In this conflict, so the argument goes, Jesus breaks through the barriers of the Jewish social order and the limits of cultic religious practice. He is seen as using his act of healing to demonstrate to the leader of the synagogue the true character of the Sabbath as a day when healing can be experienced, thus exposing the keepers of the law who want to cling to rigid norms and frown upon any disturbance to this order. It is frequently assumed that women were allowed to attend worship in the synagogue only as passive listeners in separate galleries. Thus the very fact of Jesus' attention to the woman is seen as breaking

with the misogynist patriarchal character of Judaism. Bernadette J. Brooten's research (1982) has shown these arguments to be based on an anti-Judaistic pattern of interpretation. Starting from historical sources, she shows that women were active participants in synagogue worship and served in leadership functions. She shows that it is not possible to assume the existence of galleries for women at this time. In the feminist discussion of this text, the focus is on the woman who has previously remained almost entirely invisible. But here, too, Jesus appears as the one who by his actions distances himself from the Judaism of his time (Bauer 1988). According to such readings, he turns his attention to marginalized women (Seim 1994) and rescinds notions of purity and impurity (Seibert-Cuadra 1993).

However, the healing Jesus performs on the Sabbath does not represent a rejection of Jewish Sabbath practice. Luke 13:10 mentions that he participates in worship at the synagogue and reads and interprets the Torah like a rabbi. The conflict with the leader of the synagogue is to be understood as a lively and controversial discussion about the Sabbath that was ongoing within the framework of Judaism and that is extensively documented in the Mishnah and the Talmud. The question at hand in this text is which activities are allowed on the Sabbath and which are not. Jesus' criteria correspond to the First Testament concepts of mercy and preservation of life, which include restoring a person to health. By healing the woman he is thus not breaking the law, but expressing his understanding of the Torah, which he seeks to fulfill. The core of his argumentation is the fact that the woman is a descendant of Abraham, which makes her an heir to the promise of healing and liberation. And it is with this argument that he convinces his opponents in the debate, who show by their reaction that they have to admit to the merit of his interpretation of the Sabbath law.

In the story, the woman who is healed by Jesus remains without a name and without a voice. Her song of praise is not among the received texts. She is not passive, however. She dares to enter the public sphere with her suffering, takes part in worship, and thereby puts herself in a place where she meets Jesus. She creates the condition for her healing by not accepting her illness as fate and remaining in isolation. At the end of the story all the gathered people rejoice with her. She must be seen as representing the people as a whole, embodying the social and economic conditions of the dregs of society. Her body bears the signs of hard labor, the traces of oppressive conditions of work and life, which bend and cripple human beings.

By calling the woman "daughter of Abraham," Jesus emphasizes her Jewishness, her belonging to the Jewish people. In the Gospel of Luke, Abraham is the bearer of the promise that God gave his people. He will liberate his children out of the hands of their enemies and create a sacred and holy life for them (Luke 1:55, 72-75). Through Jesus' action the promise given to people as children of Abraham is fulfilled. The sick, crippled woman who experiences the healing of her body praises God. She proclaims what she has experienced, the good news that affects all the people: the people's salvation is at hand and can already be felt. The rejoicing over

the healing of the woman should be understood as an eschatological joy like that of Mary and Elizabeth in Luke 1. The healings of individuals are signs for the coming of the reign of God, for the acts of God of which the Magnificat sings: God lifts up the lowly and helps his people Israel (1:46-55). The fact that the woman in the story remains nameless can be attributed to a discriminatory attitude against women on the part of the storytellers, but in the overall context it can also be read differently. She and all she stands for represents many women and men from among the people who suffer from oppressive circumstances as she does. Like other people whose healing is reported, she herself does not speak. Jesus takes the initiative in the act of healing. This corresponds to the pattern of all stories of Sabbath healings, including those when the person healed is a man (cf. 4:31-37; 14:1-6). The blind man healed in Luke 18:35-43 is also nameless, unlike his counterpart in Mark 10:46-52, Bartimaeus. The people who tell of their healing or that of their sisters and brothers surely did not have perfect bodies. Their intention in telling their stories is not to propagate an ideal of health against which all humankind should be measured. Rather, they tell about themselves and their daily life and thereby make visible their suffering and the markings of their life stories that they bear on their bodies. The narratives of healing are stories of encouragement that bring their hopes to life.

Women as Witnesses to the Resurrection (Luke 24)

In Luke 1 and Luke 24, the beginning and the conclusion of the Gospel, we see a number of parallels. Women play an important role in both chapters. They set out on a journey, and begin to act out of a situation of suffering. They do not remain resigned and helpless, but believe in God's message, which they pass along. The men are skeptical at first; they do not believe that change and salvation can begin with women. Zechariah bases his doubts about the annunciation of the angel on his wife's age (1:18); the disciples do not believe what the women returning from the empty tomb tell them (24:11, see above). Chapters 1 and 24 also have similar characteristics in terms of the settings of the action. The temple in Jerusalem is where the Gospel begins (1:8-23; 2:25-35, 36-38, 41-51). The disciples return there at the end to praise God (24:53). Additionally there are important references to Galilee. This is where Mary lives and where she meets the angel; the women at the tomb are reminded of what Jesus told them in Galilee (1:26; 24:6). At the core of both texts is the reference to the words and deeds of God or Jesus, in whom Mary trusts and whom the women at the tomb remember. Angels recall these deeds; they proclaim the good news and speak to the women (1:19, 30; 24:5, 23). Mary, Elizabeth, and the women at the tomb believe in it and spread it further, while Zechariah and the male disciples doubt them (1:20; 24:11, 25, 41). Those who recognize God's signs and can interpret them, like Mary, Elizabeth, and her unborn child, and those who "see" the fulfillment of the promise like the relatives after

Elizabeth has given birth, and the women disciples who in the end believe in the resurrection, react with great joy. Eschatological joy and jubilation describe the basic tone of the texts that began with the description of suffering and (social) death (1:41, 44, 47, 58; 24:41, 52). The Gospel begins and ends with a blessing: Elizabeth blesses Mary and the resurrected Christ blesses the women disciples. These parallels clearly demonstrate the conceptual structure of the Gospel. Luke 1 and 2 must not, therefore, be considered merely "background" material. Here, in the form of stories of births, we have the description of how the movement is carried forward through the initiative of women who proclaim the "Living One" (cf. 24:23) after the horror and shock over the death of Jesus. Beginning and ending belong together; the good news can be heard anew again and again. It must not be seen as a closed chapter but as a present that is ever being made new.

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Translated by Nancy Lukens