

LUKE 1-9

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WISDOM COMMENTARY

Volume 43A

Luke 1–9

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Shelly Matthews

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A Michael Glazier Book

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible series
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
AYBD	Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
BCE	Before the Common Era
BDAG	Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemerium Theologicarum Lovniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation series

<i>BibRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BTS	Biblical Tools and Studies
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CahRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
CBA	Catholic Biblical Association of America
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CE	Common Era
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
ECL	Early Christianity and Its Literature
EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature
EPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FCNTECW	Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings
FSR	Feminist Studies in Religion
<i>FT</i>	<i>Folia Theologica</i>
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
GNS	Good News series
HNT	Handbuch zum neuen testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies

IFT	Introductions in Feminist Theology
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JDS	Judean Desert Studies
J ECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JES	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRE	<i>Journal of Religious Ethics</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NT	New Testament
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OT	Old Testament
PBS	Public Broadcasting System
<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series

<i>RelSRev</i>	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLStBL	Society of Biblical Literature Studies in Biblical Literature
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SNTSMS	Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
SSEJC	Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity
SymS	Symposium Series
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976.
<i>ThTo</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WCS	Wisdom Commentary series
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Contributors

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Foreword

“Come Eat of My Bread . . . and Walk in the Ways of Wisdom”

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

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Jewish feminist writer Asphodel Long has likened the Bible to a magnificent garden of brilliant plants, some flowering, some fruiting, some in seed, some in bud, shaded by trees of age old, luxurious growth. Yet in the very soil which gives it life the poison has been inserted. . . . This poison is that of misogyny, the hatred of women, half the human race.¹

To see Scripture as such a beautiful garden containing poisonous ivy requires that one identify and name this poison and place on all biblical texts the label “Caution! Could be dangerous to your health and survival!” As critical feminist interpretation for well-being this Wisdom Commentary seeks to elaborate the beauty and fecundity of this

1. Asphodel Long, *In a Chariot Drawn by Lions: The Search for the Female in the Deity* (London: Women’s Press, 1992), 195.

Scripture-garden and at the same time points to the harm it can do when one submits to its world of vision. Thus, feminist biblical interpretation engages two seemingly contradictory insights: The Bible is written in kyriocentric (i.e., lord/master/father/husband-elite male) language, originated in the patri-kyriarchal cultures of antiquity, and has functioned to inculcate misogynist mind-sets and oppressive values. At the same time it also asserts that the Bible as Sacred Scripture has functioned to inspire and authorize wo/men² in our struggles against dehumanizing oppression. The hermeneutical lens of wisdom/Wisdom empowers the commentary writers to do so.

In biblical as well as in contemporary religious discourse the word *wisdom* has a double meaning: It can either refer to the quality of life and of people and/or it can refer to a figuration of the Divine. Wisdom in both senses of the word is not a prerogative of the biblical traditions but is found in the imagination and writings of all known religions. Wisdom is transcultural, international, and interreligious. Wisdom is practical knowledge gained through experience and daily living as well as through the study of creation and human nature. Both word meanings, that of capability (wisdom) and that of female personification (Wisdom), are crucial for this Wisdom Commentary series that seeks to enable biblical readers to become critical subjects of interpretation.

Wisdom is a state of the human mind and spirit characterized by deep understanding and profound insight. It is elaborated as a quality possessed by the sages but also treasured as folk wisdom and wit. Wisdom is the power of discernment, deeper understanding, and creativity; it is the ability to move and to dance, to make the connections, to savor life, and to learn from experience. Wisdom is intelligence shaped by experience and sharpened by critical analysis. It is the ability to make sound choices and incisive decisions. Its root meaning comes to the fore in its Latin form *sapientia*, which is derived from the verb *sapere*, to taste and to savor something. Hence, this series of commentaries invites readers to taste, to evaluate, and to imagine. In the figure of *Chokmah-Sophia-Sapientia-Wisdom*, ancient Jewish Scriptures seek to hold together belief in the “one” G*d³ of Israel with both masculine and feminine language and metaphors of the Divine.

2. I use wo/man, s/he, fe/male and not the grammatical standard “man” as inclusive terms and make this visible by adding /.

3. I use the * asterisk in order to alert readers to a problem to explore and think about.

In distinction to traditional Scripture reading, which is often individualistic and privatized, the practice and space of Wisdom commentary is public. Wisdom's spiraling presence (*Shekhinah*) is global, embracing all creation. Her voice is a public, radical democratic voice rather than a "feminine," privatized one. To become one of Her justice-seeking friends, one needs to imagine the work of this feminist commentary series as the spiraling circle dance of wisdom/Wisdom,⁴ as a Spirit/spiritual intellectual movement in the open space of wisdom/Wisdom who calls readers to critically analyze, debate, and reimagine biblical texts and their commentaries as wisdom/Wisdom texts inspired by visions of justice and well-being for everyone and everything. Wisdom-Sophia-imagination engenders a different understanding of Jesus and the movement around him. It understands him as the child and prophet of Divine Wisdom and as Wisdom herself instead of imagining him as ruling King and Lord who has only subalterns but not friends. To approach the N*T⁵ and the whole Bible as Wisdom's invitation of cosmic dimensions means to acknowledge its multivalence and its openness to change. As bread—not stone.

In short, this commentary series is inspired by the feminist vision of the open cosmic house of Divine Wisdom-Sophia as it is found in biblical Wisdom literatures, which include the N*T:

Wisdom has built Her house
 She has set up Her seven pillars . . .
 She has mixed Her wine,
 She also has set Her table.
 She has sent out Her wo/men ministers
 to call from the highest places in the town . . .
 "Come eat of my bread
 and drink of the wine I have mixed.
 Leave immaturity, and live,
 And walk in the way of Wisdom." (Prov 9:1-3, 5-6)

4. I have elaborated such a Wisdom dance in terms of biblical hermeneutics in my book *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001). Its seven steps are a hermeneutics of experience, of domination, of suspicion, of evaluation, of remembering or historical reconstruction, of imagination, and of transformation. However, such Wisdom strategies of meaning making are not restricted to the Bible. Rather, I have used them in workshops in Brazil and Ecuador to explore the workings of power, Condomblé, Christology, imagining a the*logical wo/men's center, or engaging about the national icon of Mary.

5. See the discussion about nomenclature of the two testaments in the Editor's introduction, pages xxxvii–xxxviii.

Editor's Introduction to Wisdom Commentary

"She Is a Breath of the Power of God" (Wis 7:25)

Barbara E. Reid, OP

General Editor

Wisdom Commentary is the first series to offer detailed feminist interpretation of every book of the Bible. The fruit of collaborative work by an ecumenical and interreligious team of scholars, the volumes provide serious, scholarly engagement with the whole biblical text, not only those texts that explicitly mention women. The series is intended for clergy, teachers, ministers, and all serious students of the Bible. Designed to be both accessible and informed by the various approaches of biblical scholarship, it pays particular attention to the world in front of the text, that is, how the text is heard and appropriated. At the same time, this series aims to be faithful to the ancient text and its earliest audiences; thus the volumes also explicate the worlds behind the text and within it. While issues of gender are primary in this project, the volumes also address the intersecting issues of power, authority, ethnicity, race, class, and religious belief and practice. The fifty-eight volumes include the books regarded as canonical by Jews (i.e., the Tanakh); Protestants (the "Hebrew Bible" and the New Testament); and Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern

Orthodox Communion (i.e., Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach/Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, including the Letter of Jeremiah, the additions to Esther, and Susanna and Bel and the Dragon in Daniel).

A Symphony of Diverse Voices

Included in the Wisdom Commentary series are voices from scholars of many different religious traditions, of diverse ages, differing sexual identities, and varying cultural, racial, ethnic, and social contexts. Some have been pioneers in feminist biblical interpretation; others are newer contributors from a younger generation. A further distinctive feature of this series is that each volume incorporates voices other than that of the lead author(s). These voices appear alongside the commentary of the lead author(s), in the grayscale inserts. At times, a contributor may offer an alternative interpretation or a critique of the position taken by the lead author(s). At other times, they may offer a complementary interpretation from a different cultural context or subject position. Occasionally, portions of previously published material bring in other views. The diverse voices are not intended to be contestants in a debate or a cacophony of discordant notes. The multiple voices reflect that there is no single definitive feminist interpretation of a text. In addition, they show the importance of subject position in the process of interpretation. In this regard, the Wisdom Commentary series takes inspiration from the Talmud and from *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss; New York: URJ Press and Women of Reform Judaism, The Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, 2008), in which many voices, even conflicting ones, are included and not harmonized.

Contributors include biblical scholars, theologians, and readers of Scripture from outside the scholarly and religious guilds. At times, their comments pertain to a particular text. In some instances they address a theme or topic that arises from the text.

Another feature that highlights the collaborative nature of feminist biblical interpretation is that a number of the volumes have two lead authors who have worked in tandem from the inception of the project and whose voices interweave throughout the commentary.

Woman Wisdom

The title, Wisdom Commentary, reflects both the importance to feminists of the figure of Woman Wisdom in the Scriptures and the distinct

wisdom that feminist women and men bring to the interpretive process. In the Scriptures, Woman Wisdom appears as “a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty” (Wis 7:25), who was present and active in fashioning all that exists (Prov 8:22-31; Wis 8:6). She is a spirit who pervades and penetrates all things (Wis 7:22-23), and she provides guidance and nourishment at her all-inclusive table (Prov 9:1-5). In both postexilic biblical and nonbiblical Jewish sources, Woman Wisdom is often equated with Torah, e.g., Sirach 24:23-34; Baruch 3:9-4:4; 38:2; 46:4-5; 2 Baruch 48:33, 36; 4 Ezra 5:9-10; 13:55; 14:40; 1 Enoch 42.

The New Testament frequently portrays Jesus as Wisdom incarnate. He invites his followers, “take my yoke upon you and learn from me” (Matt 11:29), just as Ben Sira advises, “put your neck under her [Wisdom’s] yoke and let your souls receive instruction” (Sir 51:26). Just as Wisdom experiences rejection (Prov 1:23-25; Sir 15:7-8; Wis 10:3; Bar 3:12), so too does Jesus (Mark 8:31; John 1:10-11). Only some accept his invitation to his all-inclusive banquet (Matt 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24; compare Prov 1:20-21; 9:3-5). Yet, “wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” (Matt 11:19, speaking of Jesus and John the Baptist; in the Lukan parallel at 7:35 they are called “wisdom’s children”). There are numerous parallels between what is said of Wisdom and of the *Logos* in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1-18). These are only a few of many examples. This female embodiment of divine presence and power is an apt image to guide the work of this series.

Feminism

There are many different understandings of the term “feminism.” The various meanings, aims, and methods have developed exponentially in recent decades. Feminism is a perspective and a movement that springs from a recognition of inequities toward women, and it advocates for changes in whatever structures prevent full flourishing of human beings and all creation. Three waves of feminism in the United States are commonly recognized. The first, arising in the mid-nineteenth century and lasting into the early twentieth, was sparked by women’s efforts to be involved in the public sphere and to win the right to vote. In the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave focused on civil rights and equality for women. With the third wave, from the 1980s forward, came global feminism and the emphasis on the contextual nature of interpretation. Now a fourth wave may be emerging, with a stronger emphasis on the intersectionality of women’s concerns with those of other marginalized groups and the increased use

of the internet as a platform for discussion and activism.¹ As feminism has matured, it has recognized that inequities based on gender are interwoven with power imbalances based on race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual identity, physical ability, and a host of other social markers.

Feminist Women and Men

Men as well as nonbinary people who choose to identify with and partner with feminist women in the work of deconstructing systems of domination and building structures of equality are rightly regarded as feminists. Some men readily identify with experiences of women who are discriminated against on the basis of sex/gender, having themselves had comparable experiences; others who may not have faced direct discrimination or stereotyping recognize that inequity and problematic characterization still occur, and they seek correction. This series is pleased to include feminist men both as lead authors and as contributing voices.

Feminist Biblical Interpretation

Women interpreting the Bible from the lenses of their own experience is nothing new. Throughout the ages women have recounted the biblical stories, teaching them to their children and others, all the while interpreting them afresh for their time and circumstances.² Following is a very brief sketch of select foremothers who laid the groundwork for contemporary feminist biblical interpretation.

One of the earliest known Christian women who challenged patriarchal interpretations of Scripture was a consecrated virgin named Helie, who lived in the second century CE. When she refused to marry, her

1. See Martha Rampton, "Four Waves of Feminism" (October 25, 2015), at <http://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism>; and Ealasaid Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," <https://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/feminism-fourth-wave>.

2. For fuller treatments of this history, see chap. 7, "One Thousand Years of Feminist Bible Criticism," in Gerda Lerner, *Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 138–66; Susanne Scholz, "From the 'Woman's Bible' to the 'Women's Bible,' The History of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible," in *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*, IFT 13 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 12–32; Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, eds., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

parents brought her before a judge, who quoted to her Paul's admonition, "It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1 Cor 7:9). In response, Helie first acknowledges that this is what Scripture says, but then she retorts, "but not for everyone, that is, not for holy virgins."³ She is one of the first to question the notion that a text has one meaning that is applicable in all situations.

A Jewish woman who also lived in the second century CE, Beruriah, is said to have had "profound knowledge of biblical exegesis and outstanding intelligence."⁴ One story preserved in the Talmud (b. Ber. 10a) tells of how she challenged her husband, Rabbi Meir, when he prayed for the destruction of a sinner. Proffering an alternate interpretation, she argued that Psalm 104:35 advocated praying for the destruction of sin, not the sinner.

In medieval times the first written commentaries on Scripture from a critical feminist point of view emerge. While others may have been produced and passed on orally, they are for the most part lost to us now. Among the earliest preserved feminist writings are those of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), German writer, mystic, and abbess of a Benedictine monastery. She reinterpreted the Genesis narratives in a way that presented women and men as complementary and interdependent. She frequently wrote about the Divine as feminine.⁵ Along with other women mystics of the time, such as Julian of Norwich (1342–ca. 1416), she spoke authoritatively from her personal experiences of God's revelation in prayer.

In this era, women were also among the scribes who copied biblical manuscripts. Notable among them is Paula Dei Mansi of Verona, from a distinguished family of Jewish scribes. In 1288, she translated from Hebrew into Italian a collection of Bible commentaries written by her father and added her own explanations.⁶

Another pioneer, Christine de Pizan (1365–ca. 1430), was a French court writer and prolific poet. She used allegory and common sense

3. Madrid, Escorial MS, a II 9, f. 90 v., as cited in Lerner, *Feminist Consciousness*, 140.

4. See Judith R. Baskin, "Women and Post-Biblical Commentary," in *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (New York: URJ Press and Women of Reform Judaism, The Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, 2008), xlix–lv, at lii. See Excursus on Mary Magdalene and Beruryah at Luke 24:1–12.

5. Hildegard of Bingen, *De Operatione Dei*, 1.4.100; PL 197:885bc, as cited in Lerner, *Feminist Consciousness*, 142–43. See also Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). See further comments on Hildegard at pp. 160–61.

6. Emily Taitz, Sondra Henry, Cheryl Tallan, eds., *JPS Guide to Jewish Women 600 B.C.E.–1900 C.E.* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2003), 110–11.

to subvert misogynist readings of Scripture and celebrated the accomplishments of female biblical figures to argue for women's active roles in building society.⁷

By the seventeenth century, there were women who asserted that the biblical text needs to be understood and interpreted in its historical context. For example, Rachel Speght (1597–ca. 1630), a Calvinist English poet, elaborates on the historical situation in first-century Corinth that prompted Paul to say, “It is well for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Cor 7:1). Her aim was to show that the biblical texts should not be applied in a literal fashion to all times and circumstances. Similarly, Margaret Fell (1614–1702), one of the founders of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, addressed the Pauline prohibitions against women speaking in church by insisting that they do not have universal validity. Rather, they need to be understood in their historical context, as addressed to a local church in particular time-bound circumstances.⁸

Along with analyzing the historical context of the biblical writings, women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began to attend to misogynistic interpretations based on faulty translations. One of the first to do so was British feminist Mary Astell (1666–1731).⁹ In the United States, the Grimké sisters, Sarah (1792–1873) and Angelina (1805–1879), Quaker women from a slaveholding family in South Carolina, learned biblical Greek and Hebrew so that they could interpret the Bible for themselves. They were prompted to do so after men sought to silence them from speaking out against slavery and for women's rights by claiming that the Bible (e.g., 1 Cor 14:34) prevented women from speaking in public.¹⁰ Another prominent abolitionist, Isabella Baumfree, was a former slave who adopted the name Sojourner Truth (ca. 1797–1883) and quoted the Bible liberally in her speeches¹¹ and in so doing challenged cultural assumptions and biblical interpretations that undergird gender inequities.

7. See further Taylor and Choi, *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, 127–32.

8. Her major work, *Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed by the Scriptures*, published in London in 1667, gave a systematic feminist reading of all biblical texts pertaining to women.

9. Mary Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (New York: Source Book Press, 1970, reprint of the 1730 edition; earliest edition of this work is 1700), 103–4.

10. See further Sarah Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838).

11. See, for example, her most famous speech, “Ain't I a Woman?,” (quoted on pp. 25–26 below) delivered in 1851 at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, OH; <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp>.

Another monumental work that emerged in nineteenth-century England was that of Jewish theologian Grace Aguilar (1816–1847), *The Women of Israel*,¹² published in 1845. Aguilar's approach was to make connections between the biblical women and contemporary Jewish women's concerns. She aimed to counter the widespread notion that women were degraded in Jewish law and that only in Christianity were women's dignity and value upheld. Her intent was to help Jewish women find strength and encouragement by seeing the evidence of God's compassionate love in the history of every woman in the Bible. While not a full commentary on the Bible, Aguilar's work stands out for its comprehensive treatment of every female biblical character, including even the most obscure references.¹³

The first person to produce a full-blown feminist commentary on the Bible was Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902). A leading proponent in the United States for women's right to vote, she found that whenever women tried to make inroads into politics, education, or the work world, the Bible was quoted against them. Along with a team of like-minded women, she produced her own commentary on every text of the Bible that concerned women. Her pioneering two-volume project, *The Woman's Bible*, published in 1895 and 1898, urges women to recognize that texts that degrade women come from the men who wrote the texts, not from God, and to use their common sense to rethink what has been presented to them as sacred.

Nearly a century later, *The Women's Bible Commentary*, edited by Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), appeared. This one-volume commentary features North American feminist scholarship on each book of the Protestant canon. Like Cady Stanton's commentary, it does not contain comments on every section of the biblical text but only on those passages deemed relevant to women. It was revised and expanded in 1998 to include the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical books, and the contributors to this new volume reflect the global face of contemporary feminist scholarship. The revisions made in the third edition, which appeared in 2012, represent the profound advances in feminist biblical scholarship and include newer voices. In both the second and third editions, *The* has been dropped from the title.

12. The full title is *The Women of Israel or Characters and Sketches from the Holy Scriptures and Jewish History Illustrative of the Past History, Present Duty, and Future Destiny of the Hebrew Females, as Based on the Word of God*.

13. See further Eskenazi and Weiss, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, xxxviii; Taylor and Choi, *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, 31–37.

Also appearing at the centennial of Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* were two volumes edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza with the assistance of Shelly Matthews. The first, *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), charts a comprehensive approach to feminist interpretation from ecumenical, interreligious, and multicultural perspectives. The second volume, published in 1994, provides critical feminist commentary on each book of the New Testament as well as on three books of Jewish Pseudepigrapha and eleven other early Christian writings.

In Europe, similar endeavors have been undertaken, such as the one-volume *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*, edited by Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), featuring German feminist biblical interpretation of each book of the Bible, along with apocryphal books, and several extrabiblical writings. This work, now in its third edition, has recently been translated into English.¹⁴ A multivolume project, *The Bible and Women: An Encyclopedia of Exegesis and Cultural History*, edited by Irmtraud Fischer, Adriana Valerio, Mercedes Navarro Puerto, Christiana de Groot, and Mary Ann Beavis, is currently in production. This project presents a history of the reception of the Bible as embedded in Western cultural history and focuses particularly on gender-relevant biblical themes, biblical female characters, and women recipients of the Bible. The volumes are published in English, Spanish, Italian, and German.¹⁵

Another groundbreaking work is the collection *The Feminist Companion to the Bible Series*, edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–2015), which comprises twenty volumes of commen-

14. *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, trans. Lisa E. Dahill, Everett R. Kalin, Nancy Lukens, Linda M. Maloney, Barbara Rumscheidt, Martin Rumscheidt, and Tina Steiner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). Another notable collection is the three volumes edited by Susanne Scholz, *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect*, *Recent Research in Biblical Studies* 7, 8, 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013, 2014, 2016).

15. The first volume, on the Torah, appeared in Spanish in 2009, in German and Italian in 2010, and in English in 2011 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature). Five more volumes are now available: *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2014); *The Writings and Later Wisdom Books*, ed. Christl M. Maier and Nuria Caldich-Benages (2014); *Gospels: Narrative and History*, ed. Mercedes Navarro Puerto and Marinella Perroni; Amy-Jill Levine (English ed.) *The Bible and Women: An Encyclopedia of Exegesis and Cultural History, New Testament 2.1* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015); *The High Middle Ages*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Adriana Valerio (2015); and *Early Jewish Writings*, ed. Eileen Schuller and Marie-Theres Wacker (2017). For further information, see <http://www.bibleandwomen.org>.

taries on the Old Testament. The parallel series, *Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff and Maria Mayo Robbins (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001–2009), contains thirteen volumes with one more planned. These two series are not full commentaries on the biblical books but comprise collected essays on discrete biblical texts.

Works by individual feminist biblical scholars in all parts of the world abound, and they are now too numerous to list in this introduction. Feminist biblical interpretation has reached a level of maturity that now makes possible a commentary series on every book of the Bible. In recent decades, women have had greater access to formal theological education, have been able to learn critical analytical tools, have put their own interpretations into writing, and have developed new methods of biblical interpretation. Until recent decades the work of feminist biblical interpreters was largely unknown, both to other women and to their brothers in the synagogue, church, and academy. Feminists now have taken their place in the professional world of biblical scholars, where they build on the work of their foremothers and connect with one another across the globe in ways not previously possible. In a few short decades, feminist biblical criticism has become an integral part of the academy.

Methodologies

Feminist biblical scholars use a variety of methods and often employ a number of them together.¹⁶ In the *Wisdom Commentary* series, the authors will explain their understanding of feminism and the feminist reading strategies used in their commentary. Each volume treats the biblical text in blocks of material, not an analysis verse by verse. The entire text is considered, not only those passages that feature female characters or that speak specifically about women. When women are not apparent in the narrative, feminist lenses are used to analyze the dynamics in the text between male characters, the models of power, binary ways of thinking, and the dynamics of imperialism. Attention is given to how the whole text functions and how it was and is heard, both in its original context and today. Issues of particular concern to women—e.g., poverty, food, health, the environment, water—come to the fore.

16. See the seventeen essays in Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, eds., *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), which show the complementarity of various approaches.

One of the approaches used by early feminists and still popular today is to lift up the overlooked and forgotten stories of women in the Bible. Studies of women in each of the Testaments have been done, and there are also studies on women in particular biblical books.¹⁷ Feminists recognize that the examples of biblical characters can be both empowering and problematic. The point of the feminist enterprise is not to serve as an apologetic for women; it is rather, in part, to recover women's history and literary roles in all their complexity and to learn from that recovery.

Retrieving the submerged history of biblical women is a crucial step for constructing the story of the past so as to lead to liberative possibilities for the present and future. There are, however, some pitfalls to this approach. Sometimes depictions of biblical women have been naïve and romantic. Some commentators exalt the virtues of both biblical and contemporary women and paint women as superior to men. Such reverse discrimination inhibits movement toward equality for all. In addition, some feminists challenge the idea that one can "pluck positive images out of an admittedly androcentric text, separating literary characterizations from the androcentric interests they were created to serve."¹⁸ Still other feminists find these images to have enormous value.

One other danger with seeking the submerged history of women is the tendency for Christian feminists to paint Jesus and even Paul as liberators of women in a way that demonizes Judaism.¹⁹ Wisdom Commentary

17. See, e.g., Alice Bach, ed., *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002); Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross Shepard Kraemer, eds., *Women in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Irene Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997); Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001); Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary*, *Companions to the New Testament* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

18. J. Cheryl Exum, "Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters: Women in Exodus 1.8–2.10," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, FCB 6, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 75–97, at 76.

19. See Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation," in *Searching the Scriptures, vol. 1: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza with Shelly Matthews (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 1:117–29; Amy-Jill Levine, "The New Testament and Anti-Judaism," in *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 87–117.

aims to enhance understanding of Jesus as well as Paul as Jews of their day and to forge solidarity among Jewish and Christian feminists.²⁰

Feminist scholars who use historical-critical methods analyze the world behind the text; they seek to understand the historical context from which the text emerged and the circumstances of the communities to whom it was addressed. In bringing feminist lenses to this approach, the aim is not to impose modern expectations on ancient cultures but to unmask the ways that ideologically problematic mind-sets that produced the ancient texts are still promulgated through the text. Feminist biblical scholars aim not only to deconstruct but also to reclaim and reconstruct biblical history as women's history, in which women were central and active agents in creating religious heritage.²¹ A further step is to construct meaning for contemporary women and men in a liberative movement toward transformation of social, political, economic, and religious structures.²² In recent years, some feminists have embraced new historicism, which accents the creative role of the interpreter in any construction of history and exposes the power struggles to which the text witnesses.²³

Literary critics analyze the world of the text: its form, language patterns, and rhetorical function.²⁴ They do not attempt to separate layers

20. For an overview of the work of Jewish feminists see Mara H. Benjamin, "Tracing the Contours of a Half Century of Jewish Feminist Theology," *JFSR* 36 (2020): 11–31.

21. See, for example, Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, eds., *Women and Christian Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

22. See, e.g., Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), whose aim is to engage in biblical interpretation not only for intellectual enlightenment but, even more important, for personal and communal transformation. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (*Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001]) envisions the work of feminist biblical interpretation as a dance of Wisdom that consists of seven steps that interweave in spiral movements toward liberation, the final one being transformative action for change.

23. See Gina Hens-Piazza, *The New Historicism*, GBS, Old Testament Series (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

24. Phyllis Trible was among the first to employ this method with texts from Genesis and Ruth in her groundbreaking book *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). Another pioneer in feminist literary criticism is Mieke Bal (*Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987]). For surveys of recent developments in literary methods,

of tradition and redaction but focus on the text holistically, as it is in its present form. They examine how meaning is created in the interaction between the text and its reader in multiple contexts. Within the arena of literary approaches are reader-oriented approaches, narrative, rhetorical, structuralist, post-structuralist, deconstructive, ideological, autobiographical, and performance criticism.²⁵ Narrative critics study the interrelation among author, text, and audience through investigation of settings, both spatial and temporal; characters; plot; and narrative techniques (e.g., irony, parody, intertextual allusions). Reader-response critics attend to the impact that the text has on the reader or hearer. They recognize that when a text is detrimental toward women there is the choice either to affirm the text or to read against the grain toward a liberative end. Rhetorical criticism analyzes the style of argumentation and attends to how the author is attempting to shape the thinking or actions of the hearer. Structuralist critics analyze the complex patterns of binary oppositions in the text to derive its meaning.²⁶ Post-structuralist approaches challenge the notion that there are fixed meanings to any biblical text or that there is one universal truth. They engage in close readings of the text and often engage in intertextual analysis.²⁷ Within this approach is deconstructionist criticism, which views the text as a site of conflict, with competing narratives. The interpreter aims to expose the fault lines and overturn and reconfigure binaries by elevating the underling of a pair and foregrounding it.²⁸ Feminists also use other post-

see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); Michal Beth Dinkler, *Literary Theory and the New Testament*, AYBRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

25. See, e.g., J. Cheryl Exum and David J. A. Clines, eds., *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993); Edgar V. McKnight and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, eds., *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994).

26. See, e.g., David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Three Structural Analyses in the Old Testament*, JSOTSup 7 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1978).

27. See, e.g., Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010); Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

28. David Penchansky, "Deconstruction," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Steven McKenzie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196–205.

modern approaches, such as ideological and autobiographical criticism. The former analyzes the system of ideas that underlies the power and values concealed in the text as well as that of the interpreter.²⁹ The latter involves deliberate self-disclosure while reading the text as a critical exegete.³⁰ Performance criticism attends to how the text was passed on orally, usually in communal settings, and to the verbal and nonverbal interactions between the performer and the audience.³¹

From the beginning, feminists have understood that interpreting the Bible is an act of power. In recent decades, feminist biblical scholars have developed hermeneutical theories of the ethics and politics of biblical interpretation to challenge the claims to value neutrality of most academic biblical scholarship. Feminist biblical scholars have also turned their attention to how some biblical writings were shaped by the power of empire and how this still shapes readers' self-understandings today. They have developed hermeneutical approaches that reveal, critique, and evaluate the interactions depicted in the text against the context of empire, and they consider implications for contemporary contexts.³² Feminists also analyze the dynamics of colonization and the mentalities of colonized peoples in the exercise of biblical interpretation. As Kwok Pui-lan explains, "A postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible needs to investigate the deployment of gender in the narration of identity, the negotiation of power differentials between the colonizers and

See, for example, Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); David Rutledge, *Reading Marginally: Feminism, Deconstruction and the Bible*, *BibInt* 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

29. See David Jobling and Tina Pippin, eds., *Semeia 59: Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 2007).

30. See, e.g., Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, ed., *Autobiographical Biblical Interpretation: Between Text and Self* (Leiden: Deo, 2002); P. J. W. Schutte, "When *They*, *We*, and the Passive Become *I*—Introducing Autobiographical Biblical Criticism," *HTS Theologesie Studies / Theological Studies* 61 (2005): 401–16.

31. See, e.g., Holly E. Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones, eds., *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009).

32. E.g., Gale Yee, ed., *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Warren Carter, *The Gospel of Matthew in Its Roman Imperial Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); Judith E. McKinlay, *Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2004).

the colonized, and the reinforcement of patriarchal control over spheres where these elites could exercise control."³³ Methods and models from sociology and cultural anthropology are used by feminists to investigate women's everyday lives, their experiences of marriage, childrearing, labor, money, illness, etc.³⁴

As feminists have examined the construction of gender from varying cultural perspectives, they have become ever more cognizant that the way gender roles are defined within differing cultures varies radically. As Mary Ann Tolbert observes, "Attempts to isolate some universal role that cross-culturally defines 'woman' have run into contradictory evidence at every turn."³⁵ Some women have coined new terms to highlight the particularities of their socio-cultural context. Many African American feminists, for example, call themselves *womanists* to draw attention to the double oppression of racism and sexism they experience.³⁶ Similarly, many US Hispanic feminists speak of themselves as *mujeristas* (*mujer* is Spanish for "woman").³⁷ Others prefer to be called "Latina feminists."³⁸ As a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative, many today use *Latinx*. *Mujeristas*, *Latina* and *Latinx* feminists emphasize that the context for their

33. Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 9. See also, Musa W. Dube, ed., *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000); Cristl M. Maier and Carolyn J. Sharp, *Prophecy and Power: Jeremiah in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); L. Juliana Claassens and Carolyn J. Sharp, eds., *Feminist Frameworks and the Bible: Power, Ambiguity, and Intersectionality*, LHBOTS 630 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

34. See, for example, Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995); Susan Niditch, "My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man": *Hair and Identity in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

35. Mary Ann Tolbert, "Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods," in *Searching the Scriptures*, 1:255–71, at 265.

36. Alice Walker coined the term (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967, 1983]). See also Katie G. Cannon, "The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 30–40; Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: Lura Media, 1988); Nyasha Junior, *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015).

37. Ada María Isasi-Díaz (*Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996]) is credited with coining the term.

38. E.g., María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez, eds., *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

theologizing is *mestizaje* and *mulatez* (racial and cultural mixture), done *en conjunto* (in community), with *lo cotidiano* (everyday lived experience) of Latina women as starting points for theological reflection and the encounter with the divine. Intercultural analysis has become an indispensable tool for working toward justice for women at the global level.³⁹

Some feminists are among those who have developed lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) interpretation. This approach focuses on issues of sexual identity and uses various reading strategies. Some point out the ways in which categories that emerged in recent centuries are applied anachronistically to biblical texts to make modern-day judgments. Others show how the Bible is silent on contemporary issues about sexual identity. Still others examine same-sex relationships in the Bible by figures such as Ruth and Naomi or David and Jonathan. In recent years, queer theory has emerged; it emphasizes the blurriness of boundaries not just of sexual identity but also of gender roles. Queer critics often focus on texts in which figures transgress what is traditionally considered proper gender behavior.⁴⁰

Feminists have also been engaged in studying the reception history of the text⁴¹ and have engaged in studies in the emerging fields of disability theory (see p. 42, n. 4 in authors' introduction for examples) and of children in the Bible (for examples, see notes in the commentary at 9:43b-48 and 18:15-17).

39. See, e.g., María Pilar Aquino and María José Rosado-Nunes, eds., *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, Studies in Latino/a Catholicism (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007). See also Michelle A. Gonzalez, "Latina Feminist Theology: Past, Present, and Future," *JFSR* 25 (2009): 150–55. See also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, The Bible and Women 9.1 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), who charts feminist studies around the globe as well as emerging feminist methodologies.

40. See, e.g., Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women Partners in the New Testament," *JFSR* 6 (1990): 65–86; Deirdre J. Good, "Reading Strategies for Biblical Passages on Same-Sex Relations," *Theology and Sexuality* 7 (1997): 70–82; Deryn Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael: Lesbian Feminist Hermeneutics* (London: SCM, 2011); Teresa Hornsby and Ken Stone, eds., *Bible Trouble: Queer Readings at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011); Joseph A. Marchal, "Queer Studies and Critical Masculinity Studies in Feminist Biblical Studies," in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, The Bible and Women 9.1 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 261–80.

41. See Sharon H. Ringe, "A History of Interpretation," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, 5; Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, eds., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); Yvonne Sherwood, "Introduction," in *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Feminists also recognize that the struggle for women’s equality and dignity is intimately connected with the struggle for respect for Earth and for the whole of the cosmos. Ecofeminists interpret Scripture in ways that highlight the link between human domination of nature and male subjugation of women. They show how anthropocentric ways of interpreting the Bible have overlooked or dismissed Earth and Earth community. They invite readers to identify not only with human characters in the biblical narrative but also with other Earth creatures and domains of nature, especially those that are the object of injustice. Some use creative imagination to retrieve the interests of Earth implicit in the narrative and enable Earth to speak.⁴²

Biblical Authority

By the late nineteenth century, some feminists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, began to question openly whether the Bible could continue to be regarded as authoritative for women. They viewed the Bible itself as the source of women’s oppression, and some rejected its sacred origin and saving claims. Some decided that the Bible and the religious traditions that enshrine it are too thoroughly saturated with androcentrism and patriarchy to be redeemable.⁴³

In the Wisdom Commentary series, questions such as these may be raised, but the aim of this series is not to lead readers to reject the authority of the biblical text. Rather, the aim is to promote better understanding of the contexts from which the text arose and of the rhetorical effects it has on people in contemporary contexts. Such understanding can lead to a deepening of faith, with the Bible serving as an aid to bring flourishing of life.

Language for God

Because of the ways in which the term “God” has been used to symbolize the divine in predominantly male, patriarchal, and monarchical modes, feminists have designed new ways of speaking of the divine. Some have called attention to the inadequacy of the term *God* by trying

42. E.g., Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, SymS 46 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); Mary Judith Ress, *Ecofeminism in Latin America, Women from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

43. E.g., Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: A Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973).

to visually destabilize our ways of thinking and speaking of the divine. Rosemary Radford Ruether proposed *God/ess*, as an unpronounceable term pointing to the unnameable understanding of the divine that transcends patriarchal limitations.⁴⁴ Some have followed traditional Jewish practice, writing *G-d*. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has adopted *G*d*.⁴⁵ Others draw on the biblical tradition to mine female and non-gender-specific metaphors and symbols.⁴⁶ In *Wisdom Commentary*, there is not one standard way of expressing the divine; each author will use her or his preferred ways. The one exception is that when the tetragrammaton, YHWH, the name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14, is used, it will be without vowels, respecting the Jewish custom of avoiding pronouncing the divine name out of reverence.

Nomenclature for the Two Testaments

In recent decades, some biblical scholars have begun to call the two Testaments of the Bible by names other than the traditional nomenclature: Old and New Testament. Some regard "Old" as derogatory, implying that it is no longer relevant or that it has been superseded. Consequently, terms like Hebrew Bible, First Testament, and Jewish Scriptures and, correspondingly, Christian Scriptures or Second Testament have come into use. There are a number of difficulties with these designations. The term "Hebrew Bible" does not take into account that parts of the Old Testament are written not in Hebrew but in Aramaic.⁴⁷ Moreover, for Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox believers, the Old Testament includes books written in Greek—the Deuterocanonical books, considered Apocrypha by Protestants.⁴⁸ The term "Jewish Scriptures" is inadequate because these

44. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1993).

45. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet; Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 191 n. 3.

46. E.g., Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992). See further Elizabeth A. Johnson, "God," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 128–30.

47. Gen 31:47; Jer 10:11; Ezra 4:7–6:18; 7:12–26; Dan 2:4–7:28.

48. Representing the *via media* between Catholic and reformed, Anglicans generally consider the Apocrypha to be profitable, if not canonical, and utilize select Wisdom texts liturgically.

books are also sacred to Christians. Conversely, “Christian Scriptures” is not an accurate designation for the New Testament, since the Old Testament is also part of the Christian Scriptures. Using “First and Second Testament” also has difficulties, in that it can imply a hierarchy and a value judgment.⁴⁹ Jews generally use the term Tanakh, an acronym for Torah (Pentateuch), Nevi’im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings).

In Wisdom Commentary, if authors choose to use a designation other than Tanakh, Old Testament, and New Testament, they will explain how they mean the term.

Translation

Modern feminist scholars recognize the complexities connected with biblical translation, as they have delved into questions about philosophy of language, how meanings are produced, and how they are culturally situated. Today it is evident that simply translating into gender-neutral formulations cannot address all the challenges presented by androcentric texts. Efforts at feminist translation must also deal with issues around authority and canonicity.⁵⁰

Because of these complexities, the editors of the Wisdom Commentary series have chosen to use an existing translation, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which is provided for easy reference at the top of each page of commentary. The NRSV was produced by a team of ecumenical and interreligious scholars, is a fairly literal translation, and uses inclusive language for human beings. Brief discussions about problematic translations appear in the inserts labeled “Translation Matters.” When more detailed discussions are available, these will be indicated in footnotes. In the commentary, wherever Hebrew or Greek words are used, English translation is provided. In cases where a wordplay is involved, transliteration is provided to enable understanding.

Art and Poetry

Artistic expression in poetry, music, sculpture, painting, and various other modes is very important to feminist interpretation. Where possible, art and poetry are included in the print volumes of the series. In

49. See Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew*, 193–99.

50. Elizabeth Castelli, “*Les Belles Infidèles*/Fidelity or Feminism? The Meanings of Feminist Biblical Translation,” in *Searching the Scriptures*, 1:189–204, here 190.

a number of instances, these are original works created for this project. Regrettably, copyright and production costs prohibit the inclusion of color photographs and other artistic work.

Glossary

Because there are a number of excellent readily available resources that provide definitions and concise explanations of terms used in feminist theological and biblical studies, this series will not include a glossary. We refer you to works such as *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, edited by Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), and volume 1 of *Searching the Scriptures*, edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza with the assistance of Shelly Matthews (New York: Crossroad, 1993). Individual authors in the Wisdom Commentary series will define the way they are using terms that may be unfamiliar.

A Concluding Word

In just a few short decades, feminist biblical studies has grown exponentially, both in the methods that have been developed and in the number of scholars who have embraced it. We realize that this series is limited and will soon need to be revised and updated. It is our hope that Wisdom Commentary, by making the best of current feminist biblical scholarship available in an accessible format to ministers, preachers, teachers, scholars, and students, will aid all readers in their advancement toward God's vision of dignity, equality, and justice for all.



Acknowledgments

There are a great many people who have made this series possible: first, Peter Dwyer, director of Liturgical Press, and Hans Christoffersen, publisher of the academic market at Liturgical Press, who have believed in this project and have shepherded it since it was conceived in 2008. Editorial consultants Athalya Brenner-Idan and Elisabeth Schüssler

Fiorenza have not only been an inspiration with their pioneering work but have encouraged us all along the way with their personal involvement. Volume editors Mary Ann Beavis, Carol J. Dempsey, Gina Hens-Piazza, Amy-Jill Levine, Linda M. Maloney, Song-Mi Suzie Park, Ahida Pilarski, Sarah Tanzer, and Laress Wilkins Lawrence have lent their extraordinary wisdom to the shaping of the series, have used their extensive networks of relationships to secure authors and contributors, and have worked tirelessly to guide their work to completion. Four others who have contributed greatly to the shaping of the project are Linda M. Day, Mignon Jacobs, Seung Ai Yang, and Barbara E. Bowe of blessed memory (d. 2010). Editorial and research assistant Susan M. Hickman provided invaluable support with administrative details and arrangements. I am grateful to Brian Eisenschenk and Christine Henderson who assisted Susan Hickman with the Wiki. I am especially thankful to Lauren L. Murphy and Justin Howell for their work in copyediting; and to the staff at Liturgical Press, especially Colleen Stiller, production manager; Stephanie Lancour, production editor; Julie Surma, desktop publisher; Angie Steffens, production assistant; and Tara Durham, associate publisher.

Authors' Introduction

A Feminist Commentary on an Ambiguous Gospel

To Write a Feminist Commentary

To explain our approach to writing a feminist commentary, we begin with a negative: To write *as a feminist* should not be equated with writing *as a woman*. Such an equation works from two mistaken assumptions: first, that “woman” is a unitary category, that all women are essentially the same and share a universal common perspective; second, that all women share a perspective that is “naturally” feminist. Easy equations between women and feminists are problematic insofar as they overlook the fact that not all women challenge patriarchal/kyriarchal¹ systems of oppression. Some openly embrace and support them.²

1. Throughout this commentary, *kyriarchy*—rule of the masters or lords—will often be used in place of *patriarchy*—rule of the fathers. Kyriarchy is a neologism first introduced by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as a better term than patriarchy for theorizing domination and oppression, in that it facilitates the understanding that power relations are pyramidal and interlocking, rather than simply binary. Those with most power in society are at the top of the pyramid—as masters or lords, and not all men are equally empowered. See, for example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 102–34.

2. In the US context, Phyllis Schlafly (1924–2016) has epitomized the antifeminist woman. Schlafly, a constitutional lawyer and political activist, was known for

Though we both identify as women, it is not our gender identity that makes this a feminist commentary but rather our politics.³ This is a feminist project, first, because we recognize that in kyriarchal cultures, both ancient and modern, women and other nondominant persons are commonly subject to oppressions by those who rule over them by means that include silencing, denigration, impoverishment, enslavement, sexual abuse, and other forms of physical violence such as maiming and killing. Further, we recognize that these oppressions are not just the product of individuals engaging in random acts of bad behavior but that they owe to the kyriarchal nature of social institutions—political, religious, economic, legal—such that we might speak of this oppression as systemic or, more colloquially, as “baked into the system.” Finally, it is feminist because in our commentary, insofar as our partial vision allows,⁴ we identify and

staunchly conservative social and political views, including opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution. In the realm of dystopian fiction, consider the antiwoman, “pro-Gilead” Aunt Lydia in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006). Aunt Lydia is responsible for the “reeducation” of handmaids into docile receptacles for the sperm of the male heads of household. She spews misogynistic arguments throughout the novel. Thus, she demonstrates how women can be complicit in the most egregious forms of patriarchal rule.

3. Here we take our inspiration from the Black feminist theorist bell hooks, who stresses the importance of politics over identity in the work of liberation and thus argues that the phrase “I advocate feminism” serves better than “I am a feminist” to communicate feminist perspectives and struggles. See bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 28–30. See also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s distinction between the “logic of identity” and the logic of democracy/praxis in *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 102–32.

4. Of course, our own social locations and limited perspectives constrain our identification of what is liberating and what is oppressive in the biblical text. Readers should recognize these evaluations as partial and limited and always subject to further debate. For one instance of how criteria for what constitutes liberation can change as new evaluative paradigms come into view, consider feminist interpretation of the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21–28. While this pericope was often celebrated as a triumph of the missionary impulses of the Jesus movement in feminist work from the 1980s and 1990s, Musa W. Dube subsequently provided a strong critique of the colonizing impulse in that celebration, from her postcolonial perspective. See Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Atlanta: Chalice, 2000). For a more recent example of a new evaluative paradigm coming into view, consider the impact of disability studies on biblical interpretation. While it once may have been standard to celebrate biblical stories of healing from physical impairment as stories of “liberation,” disability scholars now question how conditions such as blindness or deafness are stigmatized vis-à-vis the “normate” body. See, for instance, Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper, eds., *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong, eds., *The Bible*

critique instances of such oppression while embracing aspects of the text that can serve as resources in our struggles for liberation.

As a feminist commentary this volume takes special interest in narratives of women in Luke, but our analysis is not restricted to the question of women alone. We also incorporate gender analysis, a mode of study that pays attention to how notions of masculinity or femininity are understood and valued in a given text.⁵ In the ancient world gender was typically conceived on a sliding scale, with dominant forms of masculinity, such as those attained by elite statesmen and valiant warriors, on the highest end of the scale. Clustered on the lower, feminine end of the scale were not just women but also “unmanly men,” including male slaves and nonelite men. Though masculinity was valued over femininity, it was not something that automatically accrued to anyone born with male genitalia. Rather, it had to be achieved through acts of dominance, such as superior speaking skill or physical mastery of a weaker opponent. In ancient sources, gradations of masculinity and femininity were commonly organized around questions of insertion and reception, “where those with more power ideally and phallically penetrated those with less.”⁶

We utilize gender analysis when we take up Luke’s narratives of Satan and the demonic, where we take note of this gospel’s special emphasis on the virility of Jesus and his male disciples in their heroic combat with

and Disability: A Commentary, Studies in Religion, Theology, and Disability (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017); Anna Rebecca Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body: Representations of Disability in Early Christian Texts*, ECL 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018).

5. For gender analysis of Luke, see Mary Rose D’Angelo, “The ANHP Question in Luke-Acts: Imperial Masculinity and the Deployment of Women in the Early Second Century,” in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff, FCNTECW 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 44–69; Shelly Matthews, “The Weeping Jesus and the Daughters of Jerusalem: Gender and Conquest in Lukan Lament,” in *Doing Gender—Doing Religion: Fallstudien zur Intersektionalität im frühen Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, ed. Ute E. Eisen, Christine Gerber, and Angela Standhartinger, WUNT 302 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2013), 385–403; Brittany E. Wilson, *Unmanly Men: Refigurations of Masculinity in Luke-Acts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Caryn A. Reeder, *Gendering War and Peace in the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Brittany E. Wilson, “Masculinity in Luke-Acts: The Lukan Jesus and Muscular Christianity,” in *Luke-Acts*, ed. James P. Grimshaw, Texts@Contexts (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 23–33; Christopher B. Zeichmann, “Gender Minorities in and under Roman Power: Race and Respectability Politics in Luke-Acts,” in Grimshaw, *Luke-Acts*, 61–73.

6. For this quotation, see Jason Edwards, *Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick*, Routledge Critical Thinkers (New York: Routledge, 2009), 21. For an important analysis of ancient Roman gender ideology, with attention to issues of penetration, see Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Satan (see commentary on Luke 9:37-43; 10:1-20; 11:14-26; 22:31-32). We will also ask whether the depiction of all of Jesus's women followers as having been penetrated by demons (Luke 8:1-3) is a means of underscoring their femininity/weakness.⁷ We raise the question of the gender of Jesus himself as we consider the import of his weeping at the sight of Jerusalem (19:41) and also as we consider the crucifixion narrative of Luke 23. With respect to the former passage, we will argue that this depiction of Jesus weeping does not feminize him, as it conforms to a literary topos of acceptable "manly" tears (see commentary on Luke 19). With respect to the crucifixion, we note that there was no surer way to feminize an ancient person than to penetrate them, and crucifixion was a quintessential form of Roman penetration and humiliation.

Furthermore, as several strands of feminist theory have taught us, including Black feminist theory, intersectional feminist theory, and transnational feminist theory, we regard gender as only one facet of identity and recognize that oppression cannot be analyzed along the axis of gender alone.⁸ This is because systemic oppressions are produced by the intersection of multiple identity factors, including gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, class, race, nationality, religion, and citizenship. The influence of these identity markers on questions of domination and oppression cannot be treated in isolation, as if they were akin to pearls on a necklace or slices of a pie. Rather, because these identity nodes intersect, the resulting force of oppression for those bearing nondominant status markers is multiplied.

As an illustration of how this intersectionality bears on our analysis of Luke, consider the following: While Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza (8:3), the widow who offers her copper coins to the treasury in the temple (21:2-4), the slave-girl who challenges Peter during Jesus's trial (22:56-57), and the daughters of Jerusalem admonished by Jesus on his way to be crucified (23:28-31) are all women, their respective identities are also inflected by factors such as wealth, marital status, slavery, and Lukan prejudice against Jerusalemites. All of these factors, and not merely their gender, weigh into questions of where these women stand with respect

7. For a gender analysis of these Lukan passages on Satan and the demonic, see also Shelly Matthews, "'I Have Prayed for You . . . Strengthen Your Brothers' (Luke 22:32): Jesus's Proleptic Prayer for Peter and Other Gendered Tropes in Luke's War on Satan," in *Petitioners, Penitents, and Poets: On Prayer and Praying in Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Timothy J. Sandoval and Ariel Feldman, BZAW 524 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 231–46.

8. See, for instance, hooks, *Feminist Theory*; Kimberlé Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings* (New York: New Press, 2000); Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism* (New York: Routledge Press, 1997).

to kyriarchal structures. Because each of these wo/men⁹ bears multiple identity markers and stands in a different relationship to oppression, each passage raises a different set of questions for analysis and evaluation.

Because we are aware of the multiaxial nature of oppression, we will also highlight passages in the Third Gospel that bear on other questions of power and domination, such as status, (dis)ability, and prejudice owing to racial, ethnic, and religious difference, even when women, or gender issues, are not in view. Because the Third Gospel contains numerous passages that can be read to support anti-Judaism, and because anti-Judaism has long plagued Christian biblical commentary, including feminist Christian biblical commentary, we attempt to be especially attuned to this problem in our analysis.

Coauthors

Like many of the volumes in Wisdom Commentary series, this one has two principal coauthors. While sharing much in common, we also have our differences. Shelly Matthews is an ordained United Methodist minister and has been teaching at the Brite Divinity School since 2011. Born to a farm family of European ancestry in a sparsely populated region of North Dakota, she is a first-generation college graduate. The tiny Methodist church she attended in the Dakotas became an escape hatch to a considerably wider world owing to the UMC's connectional process that binds small local churches to a global Methodist community and to its generous funding for theology students. She gravitated to the wing of the church committed to justice issues, as articulated in the UMC's

9. In order to signal our awareness that not all women are the same, and that in patriarchal/kyriarchal cultures nonelite men are often negated as women, we will sometimes employ the term wo/men rather than women when analyzing particular texts. This interrupted or broken spelling of the term reminds us that women are not unitary but fragmented according to the multiple factors of their identity. It also enables recognition that marginalized men, "unmen," and nonbinary persons can also be included under the sign.

Here we acknowledge our indebtedness to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who proposed this way of writing wo/men "in order to lift into critical consciousness the linguistic violence of so-called generic male-centered language. . . . To use 'wo/men' as an inclusive generic term invites male readers both to think twice and to experience what it means not to be addressed specifically." She also uses the term "to avoid an essentialist depiction of 'woman' and to stress the instability of the term. Wo/man is defined not only by gender but also by race, class, and colonial structures of domination. Thus, 'wo/men' can also be equivalent of 'subordinated people'" (*Ephesians*, WCS 50 [Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017], xlv); see also Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 107–9.

statement of social principles.¹⁰ While earning her master of divinity degree at Boston University School of Theology, she took several courses with Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel. Concerns with the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism in the post-Holocaust era have continued to fuel her study of biblical texts. Study with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza at the Harvard Divinity School has also been a foundational influence for her. Though she loves engaging with Christian Scripture constructively, with an eye both to teaching and to proclamation, she aims still to be an unflinching critic of kyriarchy interwoven into the Scriptures and into the history of their interpretation.

Barbara Reid is a Roman Catholic Dominican sister of Grand Rapids, Michigan. She is from the US Midwest, born in Detroit, and has been teaching at Catholic Theological Union, a Roman Catholic graduate school of Theology and Ministry in Chicago, since 1988. Being White, from a lower middle-class background, with advanced education, and with the security provided by the religious congregation to which she belongs, she regards herself as privileged. She also considers herself most fortunate to have had many experiences of living with and interacting with people in cultures and places very different from her own, having lectured in over a dozen other countries and teaching students at CTU who come from all over the world. Fluent in Spanish (her undergraduate major), she especially appreciates the many opportunities she has had to interact with people in Latin America. Some of those experiences will be brought into the commentary. Keenly aware of the restrictions in her religious tradition that prevent women from being ordained and from taking on many leadership positions in the church, she nonetheless has found encouragement and freedom to develop her feminist lenses and advocate for change as she works within the Roman Catholic Church.

This commentary has been greatly enriched by our collaboration. As the introduction by the general editor, Barbara, notes, there is no one way of doing feminist biblical interpretation and no singular interpretation of a given text by feminists. We often saw different things in the same text. Most of the time we agreed with one another even as we appreciated the richer insights gained in conversation. In a few instances where we hold strongly different positions and/or where one of us has offered distinctive views on the question in previous publications, we indicate these distinctions. While in most of the commentary we have woven our comments together,

10. For the current statement of the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, see <http://ee.umc.org/what-we-believe/social-principles-social-creed>.

one of us having done the initial drafting and the other having added her comments, discerning readers will be able to detect which of us took the lead in drafting which sections, as our writing styles are different. Rather than attempting uniformity of style, we let our diverse voices interweave.

Although we are both White women, we rely on the work of womanists and Latina, Asian, South Asian, African, and Middle Eastern feminists. This will be evident both in the works we cite and in the contributing voices in the excurses. While we recognize that differences in social location lead to different ways of being feminist, for expedience we use "feminist" throughout the commentary in a way that intends to include diverse perspectives.¹¹

We turn now to introductory questions concerning the author, composition, date, place, genre, structure, and major theological themes of the Third Gospel.

The Author of the Gospel

The ascription ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΛΟΥΚΑΝ, "Gospel according to Luke," appears at the end of P⁷⁵, a papyrus considered the Gospel's oldest existing manuscript. There is no additional external evidence for the evangelist's identity. Writing at the end of the second century, Irenaeus identifies the third evangelist with "Luke, the beloved physician" (Col 4:14), Paul's coworker (Phlm 24; 2 Tim 4:11).¹² Some current scholars still hold that position,¹³ while others, ourselves included, do not think the author of our gospel, whom we will call "Luke," was personally acquainted with Paul.¹⁴

11. See also comments about distinctive approaches by womanists, Latina feminists, etc. under the subtitle "Methodologies" in the general editor's introduction.

12. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.1.1 and 3.14.2-3.

13. E.g., Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 56-57.

14. There are substantial divergences between the portrait of Paul in Acts (if the author of Luke and Acts is the same) and that which emerges in Paul's own letters. As for the gospel's supposed traces of vocabulary and medical knowledge (W. K. Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke* [London: Longmans Green, 1882]), these can be found in the works of other ancient Greek authors, as shown by H. J. Cadbury, *The Style and Literary Method of Luke*, HTS 6/1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920). Some scholars interpret the "we" passages in Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16) as evidence that Luke was present with Paul on those sea voyages; others, ourselves included, consider them a literary device (e.g., Susan M. Praeder, "Acts 17:1-28:16: Sea Voyages in Ancient Literature and the Theology of Luke-Acts," *CBQ* 46 [1984]: 683-706).

Luke 1:1-80

An Orderly Account for Lovers of God

To Most Excellent Theophilus (1:1-4)

The Third Gospel is the only canonical gospel that begins with a formal preface addressing a named reader, explaining the purpose of the account (διήγησις), and including an authorial “I.”¹ This account of events “that have been fulfilled among us” is less a list of historical details than a narrative connecting past and present events of God’s saving action toward humankind and pointing to its future unfolding.² Others have told the story of Jesus, but we must tell it again, in our own words, and say what it means to us and to our communities in each new time and place. No one tells the whole story; we all have our biases and emphases. As we interpret Luke’s story in this commentary,

1. See Loveday Alexander, “Luke’s Preface in the Context of Greek Preface Writing,” *NovT* 28 (1986): 48–74, and her fuller study, *The Preface to Luke’s Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1*, SNTSMS 78 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Alexander, examining Greek prose prefaces from the fourth century BCE to the second century CE, shows that Luke’s preface is more akin to explanatory prefaces found in ancient scientific texts than in ancient historiographies.

2. See comments at 4:16-30 on the theme of fulfillment of Scripture in Luke.

Luke 1:1-4

¹Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the word, ³I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

we come with a feminist³ critical lens, as we try to point to ways in which the narrative can either inhibit or contribute to the full flourishing of all people and all creation.

Luke dedicates the gospel to Theophilus, whose name means “lover of God” or “beloved by God.” Whereas Theophilus could have been an actual patron⁴ who commissioned the work,⁵ his name suggests also a broader audience of any who love God. The adjective *κράτιστε*, “most excellent,” indicates an ideal reader of high status,⁶ so we wonder if Luke had in mind an audience likewise of high status.⁷ Yet among the gospel’s

3. See the general editor’s introduction for definitions of feminism and the authors’ introduction for what we mean by a feminist approach to biblical interpretation.

4. Loveday Alexander (“What if Luke Had Never Met Theophilus?,” *BibInt* 8 [2000]: 161–70) notes that dedicating texts was a literary convention and does not necessarily imply a relationship between the author and dedicatee. Nonetheless, she finds possible that Theophilus was the catalyst for the production of Luke and Acts and suggests that Theophilus could have been the head of a house-church who provided a place where Luke’s Gospel could be performed, not unlike a Greco-Roman *symposium*. While we find the scenario of a “historical Theophilus” plausible, we part with Alexander in her proposal that Luke is writing primarily for a Jewish Diaspora community. We think that Luke was writing for a predominantly Gentile audience (see the authors’ introduction). Dennis R. MacDonald (*Luke and Vergil: Imitations of Classical Greek Literature, The New Testament and Greek Literature*, vol. 2 [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015], 5) argues that the name Theophilus is fictitious. Dedicatory prefaces are frequent in ancient writings, and MacDonald thinks Luke is imitating Vergil’s dedication of the *Aeneid* to Augustus, the *divi filius*, “son of the divinized” Caesar. See further Dennis R. MacDonald, *Two Shipwrecked Gospels: The Logoi of Jesus and Papias’s Exposition of Logia about the Lord*, ECL 8 (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 52–56.

5. On women patrons, see comments at 8:1-3.

6. The same word is used to address the Roman governor, Felix, at Acts 23:26.

7. Greg Carey observes that though the gospel is “designed to challenge insiders and welcome outsiders, Luke does so from the perspective of the prosperous, the male, the religious insider, and the righteous person” (*Luke: An Introduction and Study*

audience would also have been people who were poor, those who serve at the table as well as those who seek the place of honor at the table (14:7-24). For the “most excellent” hearers, whether elite women or men of note, poor people may be merely objects spoken about who illustrate Jesus’s teachings. These teachings will have a different impact on hearers who are of lower social status, as we will point out in our commentary.

The word ἀσφάλεια (v. 4) connotes assurance that the story told will be acceptable, rather than disturbing, to the reader’s core values. The NRSV translation “truth” misses this nuance. As Brigitte Kahl points out, “ἀσφάλεια/*securitas* was a core concept in Roman state ideology.”⁸ Luke writes so that Theophilus “might be reassured” concerning things about which he has been instructed.

As feminists, we are suspicious of the reassurance Luke offers. Luke’s interest in presenting an “orderly account” for the purpose of “reassuring” the “most excellent” Theophilus signals that Luke will be polishing up or idealizing the events, the main characters, and the traditions passed on in his sources to make them more suitable to an audience of Theophilus’s status. We see several instances of such idealization when we compare Luke to Mark, which is widely recognized as one of Luke’s sources. For example, Luke has enhanced the portrait of John the Baptist. According to Mark, the Baptist appears out of nowhere, wears a scratchy coat of camel hair, and eats locusts and honey. That is, he appears as an eccentric figure. Luke both eliminates comments on John’s dress and diet (3:2-3) and provides John an extremely respectable lineage—a father from the priestly order of Abijah, and a mother whose descent is traced back to Aaron. Furthermore, Luke enhances Jesus’s standing by eliminating Mark’s reference to Jesus as a carpenter (Mark 6:3) and presenting Jesus as literate (4:16-30).⁹ Similarly, we suspect that Luke has transformed accounts from Mark and possibly other sources about women by putting restrictions on women’s roles and omitting stories, such as that of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) / / Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21-28), that Luke found inappropriate.

Guide; All Flesh Shall See God’s Salvation, T&T Clark’s Study Guides to the New Testament [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017], 88).

8. Brigitte Kahl, “Reading Luke against Luke: Non-Uniformity of Text, Hermeneutics of Conspiracy and the ‘Scriptural Principle’ in Luke 1,” in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff, FCNTECW 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 70–88, esp. 75 n. 11.

9. See Chris Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee*, Library of Historical Jesus Studies 8, LNTS 413 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011).

Luke acknowledges reliance on eyewitnesses and “servants of the word” (1:2).¹⁰ He depicts women among the eyewitnesses: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Mary the mother of James, and other Galilean women (Luke 8:1-3; 23:49, 55-56; 24:1-11).¹¹ As “servants of the word,” Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women announced (ἀπήγγειλαν) to the eleven and all the rest what they had experienced and heard from the angel at the empty tomb (24:9), and they repeatedly told (ἔλεγον)¹² this to the apostles (24:10).¹³ Moreover, women have always been catechists by their instructing others in the faith.¹⁴ Whether Luke consulted women eyewitnesses or whether those who catechized Theophilus (1:4) included women is an open question.

Righteous and Childless Elizabeth (1:5-7)

Elizabeth and Zechariah are the lead characters in the first vignettes. Only in recent years have commentators, particularly feminists, given attention to Elizabeth rather than to the intriguing story of Zechariah’s

10. See the authors’ introduction, pp. liii–liv, for a fuller treatment of the evangelist’s sources.

11. All the gospels depict Galilean women as witnesses of the crucifixion and as the ones who discover the empty tomb. Only Luke shows them accompanying Jesus during the Galilean ministry (see our comments on 8:1-3). On the differences in the number and names of the women, see comments at chaps. 23 and 24.

12. The imperfect tense of ἔλεγον indicates repeated telling, not a one-time announcement.

13. Carolyn Osiek, “The Women at the Tomb: What Are They Doing There?,” *Ex Auditu* 9 (1993): 97–107, reprinted in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff, FCNTECW 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 203–20, argues that the memory of the women’s role at the empty tomb “was so persistent that it . . . must indicate that something actually happened that Sunday morning at the tomb” (220). See further comments at 24:1-12.

14. Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles include several references to women teachers: Priscilla and Aquila took aside Apollos, an eloquent preacher who was well-versed in the Scriptures, and “explained [ἐξέθεοντο] the way of God to him more accurately” (Acts 18:26). First Timothy 2:12 restricts women teachers: “I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man.” On the principle that prescriptions against a behavior suggest that this behavior is taking place, we cite this passage also as evidence of women teachers. Second Timothy speaks of the faith of Timothy’s grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eunice, that now lives in him (1:5), implying it was they who taught him. See also 2 Timothy 3:15, which infers that the knowledge Timothy has of the sacred writings came from his mother and grandmother. The author of the letter to Titus instructs women to “teach what is good” (καλοδιδασκάλους, 2:3).

Luke 1:5-7

⁵In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. ⁷But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

muteness and his later proclamation.¹⁵ At the outset, what Luke says of Zechariah is matched by what he says of Elizabeth. Both are named, from priestly lineage, righteous before God, getting on in years, and childless.

Elizabeth is named, while the majority of women in the Bible go unnamed or are identified only as the mother, daughter, or wife of an important male. Unnamed women in the gospel include the widow of Zarephath (4:26, also unnamed in 1 Kgs 17:7-16), Simon's mother-in-law (4:38-39), the widowed mother in Nain (7:11-17), a woman who anoints Jesus's feet (7:36-50), many of the "other" Galilean women who followed and ministered (8:3; 23:55-56; 24:10), a woman with a hemorrhage and the daughter and wife of Jairus (8:40-56), a woman bent for eighteen years (13:10-17), Lot's wife (17:32, also unnamed in Gen 19:26), a widow who gives her all (21:1-4), the women of Jerusalem who lament Jesus on the way of the cross (23:26-32), and possibly the companion of Cleopas (24:13). With the exception of Simon's mother-in-law, Jairus's daughter and wife, the woman healed of hemorrhages, and the widow in the temple, all are characters who appear only in Luke's Gospel.¹⁶ One feminist critique of the anonymity of women characters is that it makes them invisible.¹⁷ Likewise, identifying women in terms of their relationship to a man makes

15. E.g., Raymond E. Brown, "The Annunciation to Zechariah, the Birth of the Baptist, and the Benedictus (Luke 1:5-25, 57-30)," *Worship* 62 (1988): 482-96. Surveys by Brown, "Gospel Infancy Narrative Research from 1976 to 1986: Part I (Matthew)," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 468-83; "Gospel Infancy Narrative Research from 1976 to 1986: Part II (Luke)," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 660-80, show no studies on Elizabeth. An example of a feminist retrieval of Elizabeth's story is found in the reflection by Diana Scholl (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices in Biblical Interpretation* [Boston: Beacon, 1992], 193-94), who places Elizabeth center stage and focuses on Elizabeth's personal power and strength rather than her failure to reproduce.

16. No person is named in gospel healing stories.

17. Elaine M. Wainwright, *Shall We Look for Another? A Feminist Rereading of the Matthean Jesus*, *The Bible and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 149 n. 2.

him the central one and masks the importance of the woman. Adele Reinhartz, however, has shown that the anonymity of biblical characters is more complex.¹⁸ Namelessness can be a means of effacing identity, of turning a person into a function. Alternatively, it may emphasize the dissonance between a character and their stereotypical role, as when Potiphar’s wife or the cannibalistic mothers of 2 Kings 6 act in ways that are contrary to what is expected of wives and mothers. Anonymity can also enhance pathos, as in the stories of the Levite’s concubine (Judg 19) or Jephthah’s daughter (Judg 11) illustrate. In addition, not all nameless characters are insignificant, as exemplified by the centurion in Luke 23:47. For us, naming Elizabeth, along with giving her speech while her husband goes mute, has the effect of bringing her to the foreground as a character who reliably communicates God’s word. Her name, אֵלִישֶׁבֶט, which means “My God is the one by whom to swear,” or “my God is satiety, fortune,” points to her being a woman who depends on God and who will be filled to satisfaction by God.

Luke emphasizes that both Elizabeth and Zechariah were “righteous [δίκαιοι] before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord.” For Jews, the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, reveals how to respond in concrete action to God’s love. The commandments and regulations outlined in the Torah are a gift and a privilege, not a burden or impossible to keep, as 1:6 affirms.¹⁹ The Bible rarely describes women as “righteous.”²⁰ The only woman of whom the term is used in the Old Testament²¹ is Tamar when her father-in-law Judah, whom she has tricked into impregnating her, declares

18. Adele Reinhartz, *Why Ask My Name? Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

19. Note also Paul’s assertion that “as to righteousness under the law” he was “blameless” (Phil 3:6). Contrast the speech of Peter in Acts 15:10 suggesting that the yoke (of the law) was something “neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear.” This is a characterization of the law that Jews in Luke’s day would not have recognized.

20. In the LXX, δίκαιος, which translates Hebrew דָּיָק, is used of God (Pss 7:12; 114:5; Isa 45:21; Jer 12:1; Dan 9:14; 2 Chr 12:6), Noah (Gen 6:9), Job (Job 1:1), Daniel (4 Macc 16:21), Ishbaal, the son of Saul (2 Sam 4:11), and the Servant of God (Isa 53:11). In the New Testament, God is called δίκαιος (John 17:25; Rom 3:26; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 John 1:9); as is Jesus (Matt 27:19; 27:24 [some mss, e.g., 8, K, L, W]; Luke 23:47; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 John 2:1, 29; 3:7), Joseph (Matt 1:19), John the Baptist (Mark 6:20), Zechariah (Luke 1:5), Simeon (Luke 2:25), Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50), Cornelius (Acts 10:22), Abel (Heb 11:4; 1 John 3:12), and Lot (2 Pet 2:7).

21. See pp. xxxvii–xxxviii in the general editor’s introduction for an explanation of the term “Old Testament.”

her to be “more in the right than I” (Gen 38:26). In the New Testament, Elizabeth is the only woman to whom the term is applied. The Bible’s androcentric focus on righteous men is interrupted by Elizabeth and Tamar, who are also exemplary in the godly virtue of righteousness, that is, they strive for right relation with God and other people. Today, in light of ecofeminist thinking, we would broaden that striving to include right relation with all creation.

The word *δίκαιοι*, “righteous,” also arcs forward to Jesus’s crucifixion, where the centurion, seeing Jesus die, declares him *δίκαιος* (23:47). This connection is obscured in the NRSV translation as “innocent” (see comments at 23:47). Luke’s story begins and ends with righteous ones who suffer.

The pairing²² of statements about Elizabeth and Zechariah ends with Luke’s assertion that Elizabeth’s infertility, not Zechariah’s, is the cause of their childlessness (1:7: ἡ Ἐλισάβετ στειῖρα). Elizabeth is one of a long line of biblical women facing infertility: Sarah (Gen 16:1), Rebecca (Gen 25:21), Rachel (Gen 30:1), the mother of Samson (Judg 13:2), Hannah (1 Sam 1–2), and the woman of Shunem (2 Kgs 4:8–37).²³ In these biblical instances, it is always the woman who is said to be infertile, and it is she who bears the shame of childlessness, not her husband.²⁴ While 1 Enoch 98:14 (165 BCE) makes a connection between infertility and sinfulness on the part of a woman, there is no hint of such in the biblical stories, especially in the case of Elizabeth, as Luke has stated that she observed all the commandments (1:6). One important commandment in Scripture is God’s directive in Genesis 1:28, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” Luke implies that Elizabeth and Zechariah have tried to fulfill this command, but as in all the stories of biblical women who are infertile, it is God who controls fertility and infertility. Calling attention to Elizabeth’s and Zechariah’s age highlights the likelihood that they will remain childless without divine help. It also underscores their faithfulness to God for many long years despite their childlessness.

22. See 2:36–38 for comments on Luke’s gender pairs.

23. In addition, there is a story in 4 Ezra 9:43–45 of a woman who was infertile for thirty years before giving birth and the story of Anna in the apocryphal *Protoevangelium of James* (c. 145 CE), who was infertile and whose prayer for a child is finally heard by God and she conceives Mary, the mother of Jesus.

24. See Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 111–12, for instances in rabbinic literature that recognize the possibility that not the woman but her husband may be to blame for infertility.

Elizabeth Will Bear a Son (1:8-23)

Attention shifts to Zechariah performing his priestly service in the temple. Elizabeth is also of priestly lineage, a daughter of Aaron,²⁵ but Exodus 40:13-15 restricts priestly functions to Aaron's sons. For Christians whose denomination restricts priesthood to males, it is important to know the lengthy tradition of female priests in both Judaism and Christianity when considering changes in contemporary practice. Feminists who have identified and interpreted evidence of women priests include Bernadette Brooten, Ross Shepard Kraemer, Ute Eisen, Mary Ann Rossi, and Carolyn Osiek.²⁶

The angel of the Lord (1:10) who appears to Zechariah, identifies himself as Gabriel (1:19) and is the first of many divine messengers in the Gospel. Gabriel appears also to Mary at 1:26-38; a comforting angel appears during Jesus's prayer on the Mount of Olives in 22:43;²⁷ and two men in dazzling clothes speak with the women at the empty tomb in 24:4. Their function is to interpret events from the divine perspective.

25. ἐκ τῶν θυγατέρων, translated in the NRSV as "a descendent," is literally "one of the daughters." Also, Elizabeth's name underscores her Aaronic lineage, since the only Elizabeth in the Old Testament was Aaron's wife (Exod 6:23).

26. For inscriptional evidence on women as priests, see Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*, BJS 36 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 73–99. Brooten analyzes three ancient Jewish inscriptions in which a woman bears the title *hieria/hierissa* that range in age from the first century BCE through possibly the fourth century CE. On women priests in the Isis cult, see Sharon Kelly Heyob, *The Cult of Isis among Women in the Graeco-Roman World*, Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain 51 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), esp. 81–110. See Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) on women's religious offices in Greco-Roman pagan settings, including priesthood (80–92), and on Jewish women's religious lives and offices in the Greco-Roman diaspora (106–27). See also sixteen inscriptions naming priestesses from Greece and Rome dating from the first through the fourth century CE in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 300–306. For epigraphic and literary evidence for women presbyters/priests in early Christianity, see Ute E. Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 116–42; Mary Ann Rossi, "Priesthood, Precedent, and Prejudice: On Recovering the Women Priests of Early Christianity," *JFSR* 7 (1991): 73–94; Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, eds., *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

27. Verses 43-44 are lacking in some manuscripts; the NRSV includes them, but in double brackets to signal their questionable authenticity. See comments at 22:43-44 about the authenticity of these verses.

Luke 1:8-23

⁸Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, ⁹he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. ¹⁰Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴You will have joy and gladness, and

many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." ¹⁸Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." ¹⁹The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you

Zechariah questions Gabriel, but the consequences for doing so are quite different than for Mary (1:34-38). Zechariah is left mute for not believing, while Mary receives a fuller explanation. Some scholars resolve this disparity by interpreting Mary's question as a request for further information, not an expression of disbelief: she asks *how* it will come about, not for proof that what Gabriel says is true. This explanation seems to us an overread. Another explanation is that Zechariah's culpability is in asking for a sign.²⁸ Elsewhere in the gospel, sign seekers test Jesus (11:16) and Jesus calls them an evil generation (11:29-30). This explanation also falls short: asking for a sign is not always a bad thing; indeed, in Isaiah 7:11, God tells King Ahaz to ask for a sign. Frequently, God offers signs (e.g., to Moses, Exod 3:12; to Samuel, 1 Sam 10:2; to Ahaz, Isa 7:11) and does not rebuke persons who request them (e.g., Gideon, Judg 6:36-40; Hezekiah, 2 Kgs 20:8). We interpret Zechariah's inability to speak as a narrative device that opens the way for Elizabeth's and Mary's voices to be heard. There is a twist, in that Zechariah, a priest, a mediator between God and the people, would be expected to explain

28. Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel*, rev. and exp. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 32.

Luke 1:8-23 (cont.)

and to bring you this good news. ²⁰But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”

²¹Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his

delay in the sanctuary. ²²When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. ²³When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

the new divine act; instead it is Elizabeth who articulates what God is doing at the conception of John (1:24-25).²⁹

A contemporary example of how silencing men’s voices allows women to be heard is in the practice adopted by the women’s Bible study groups in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, México. In a context where women customarily keep silence and defer to men when they are in mixed gatherings, the leaders of the women’s groups have insisted that only the women speak. If men are allowed to attend, it is with their agreement to keep silent. In this way, the women have been able to learn how to express freely their own understanding of the Scriptures and how God is working in their lives (for an example of their reflections, see excursus at 1:38: “What God Has Determined for Us”).

*A Literal “Lukan Silence”:
Zechariah’s Loss of Voice
in Luke 1:5-25*

Feminist interpreters often highlight the relative silence of women in Luke’s narrative. Luke assigns far more “speaking roles” to his male characters, and when he does include female characters, he often does so to silence them,

a tendency that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza famously coined “the Lukan silence.” Yet while Luke arguably promotes silence for women in a variety of implicit ways, he begins his two-volume work by narrating the explicit silencing of a man. In the opening scene of his birth narrative (Luke 1:5-25), Luke silences a man in a very

29. Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 30. Ringe sees this as part of a Lukan pattern of reversals, e.g., the powerful brought down from their thrones and the humiliated lifted up (1:52), the hungry filled with good things and the rich sent away empty (1:53); the rich man suffering in Hades and the poor Lazarus held at Abraham’s bosom (16:19-31).

concrete way, for here the priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, literally loses his ability to speak.

Zechariah's silence contributes to the sharp reversal he undergoes in this scene, for Zechariah begins as a faithful, praiseworthy man (1:5-7) but ends as a man who is punished and identified as lacking faith (1:19-23). Zechariah's reversal turns around the question he poses to the angel Gabriel after receiving the news of his impending fatherhood: "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years" (1:18). In response to this question, Gabriel rebukes Zechariah and tells him that he will not be able to speak until the birth announcement is fulfilled because he did not believe Gabriel's words (1:20). Gabriel's rebuke is surprising because Zechariah's response has precedent: it not only repeats information provided earlier by the narrator (1:7) but also mirrors the question the patriarch Abraham asked God in Genesis 15:8. Unlike Zechariah, Abraham receives no rebuke. Unlike Zechariah, Mary also receives no rebuke when she poses her own question to Gabriel regarding the feasibility of her impending motherhood just a few verses later (1:34). Gabriel simply answers her question instead of reprimanding her (1:35-37), and Mary herself concludes the scene by having the last word (1:38).

Zechariah's silence becomes all the more surprising when viewed through the lens of ancient understandings of masculinity. In the Greco-Roman world, men expressed their "manliness" through controlling their own speech and the speech of others. Men could be silent were the silence self-imposed, but being silenced by an outside source undermined a man's manhood. Such an infliction signaled a loss of self-control—one of the cardinal virtues of "manly men"—and also situated men among women, whose "proper" purview was silence, especially in public spaces. Given that Luke's narrative was written in a culture where "true" men had to assert their voices to maintain their manliness, it is suggestive, therefore, that Luke lingers on Zechariah's loss of voice. Indeed, Zechariah remains mute throughout the duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy, a fact that Luke notes at various junctures (e.g., 1:24, 40, 56). More, Zechariah's silence opens up space for both Elizabeth and Mary to speak. Elizabeth's direct discourse concludes Luke's opening scene when she rightly identifies God as the source of her reversal of circumstances (1:25), and Elizabeth's and Mary's speeches continue to dominate the next few scenes as well, culminating in Mary's famous *Magnificat* (1:26-56).

Zechariah's silence is temporary, for he eventually regains his voice when he sings a song of praise after his son is

born (1:67-79). While a feminist reader may interpret Zechariah's restoration as a return to patriarchal norms, Elizabeth's speech enables Zechariah's restoration. Directly prior to his song, Elizabeth exercises her own voice in a public space when she rejects the paternal name "Zechariah" that her relatives and neighbors try to impose on her child (1:59-62). Only when Zechariah agrees with his wife's words (to the surprise of the crowd!) is his mouth opened and he is able to join his voice with the faithful witness of Elizabeth and Mary (1:63-64, 67-79).

Zechariah's reversals involving speech, silence, and gender norms coincide with the theme of reversal found in Luke–Acts as a whole, a theme that Mary programmatically expresses in her *Magnificat* (1:52-53). Yet Zechariah's reversals also anticipate Luke's expectations concerning how men are to act as members of "the Way." As the father of one who "prepares the way," Zechariah prepares readers for how men in Luke's narrative do not always conform to ancient conceptions of what makes a "manly man."

Brittany E. Wilson

God's Favor to Elizabeth (1:24-25)

The focus now shifts to Elizabeth, who makes two important theological assertions. The first is that her pregnancy is God's doing (1:25).³⁰ Second, she acclaims that God delights not in people's suffering but rather in taking away their humiliation (ἄναιδός, "disgrace," 1:25).³¹ This declaration anticipates the central message of the *Magnificat*,³² where

30. Joel S. Baden ("The Nature of Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible," in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, ed. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011], 13–27) shows that in the OT fertility and infertility are both due to God's action. He finds that except for Genesis 20:17-18, barrenness is less the result of human sin than a lack of divine blessing. See further Candida R. Moss and Joel S. Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

31. The question of how to understand God's goodness and power in relation to the suffering of the innocent/righteous is a critical one, which will be taken up in more detail in chap. 22. One important assertion in 1:25 is that God does not send or will suffering.

32. Claudia Janssen and Regene Lamb, "Gospel of Luke: The Humbled Will Be Lifted Up," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, trans. Lisa E. Dahill, Everett R. Kalin, Nancy Lukens, Linda M. Maloney,

Luke 1:24-25

²⁴After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, ²⁵“This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.”

Mary similarly sings of how God “has looked with favor” on her humiliation (1:48) and lifts up all the humiliated (1:52). While Luke does not specify the source of Elizabeth’s disgrace, the narrative sequence implies that, despite her uprightness in keeping all the commandments (1:6), she endured unmerited contempt because of her childlessness, like Sarah did from Hagar (Gen 16:4-5) and Hannah from Penninah (1 Sam 1:6).³³ Such treatment of women who long for children makes their pain doubly difficult to bear.

One way in which Elizabeth’s story is different from Old Testament stories of women who are infertile is that she is not shown as taking any direct action to remedy the situation. Rachel Havrelock has shown that there is a pattern in the stories of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Hannah, the mother of Samson, and the Great Woman of Shunem that parallels that of the male heroes in the patriarchal narratives and that the covenantal promises of innumerable descendants are not fulfilled until these women take action to forge their own relationship to the God of the covenant.³⁴ The pattern of male journeys involves departure, tests, and visual or auditory encounters with God as they seek to conquer, claim, and sanctify land. The steps of the journey for women who are infertile are: (1) barrenness, (2) statement of protest, (3) direct action,

Barbara Rumscheidt, Martin Rumscheidt, and Tina Steiner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 650.

33. See Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 27–42, on the pressure to procreate in agricultural societies, such as ancient Israel, to have more hands to work, to give a safety net to the parents, and to continue the family lineage. They also explore the shame experienced by infertile women such as Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah, made even more intense by living in the same home with their fertile rivals (which is not to say that Sarah’s experience of shame excuses her treatment of Hagar her slave, who is under grave duress in the household).

34. Rachel Havrelock, “The Myth of Birthing the Hero: Heroic Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible,” *BibInt* 16 (2008): 154–78; on the pattern of biblical male journeys, see Ronald S. Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch: The Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel*, HSM 42 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987).

(4) encounter with God, (5) conception, (6) birth, (7) naming. The women do not accept the status quo and voice their protests to their husband and/or to God (Sarah in Gen 16:2; Rachel in Gen 30:1; Leah in Gen 30:15–16; and Hannah in 1 Sam 1:10). Actions follow, such as giving a surrogate to their husband (Sarah and Hagar in Gen 16:3; Rachel and Bilhah in Gen 30:3; Leah and Zilpah in Gen 30:9), by which the women who are infertile claim the body of another as an extension of their own.³⁵ Subsequently, there is an encounter with and response from God, often framed as God remembering, listening, and opening the womb (Gen 30:17, 22; 1 Sam 1:19). The final elements in the pattern are the birth and naming of the child. “The giving of a name affords the mothers the opportunity to tell their story of movement from the barrenness to fertility and to perpetuate their experience through the child’s ascribed identity.”³⁶ Although the mother is “quickly whisked off stage”³⁷ after the birth of the son, memory of her persists “through the record of her deeds and continues to exert influence through the name she bestows on her child.”³⁸

Havrelock makes a case for the agency of the women in the stories she analyzes: “The movement from barrenness to fertility depends on articulation, assertion and action as well as a heroic daring.”³⁹ Reading Luke’s story of Elizabeth against the stories Havrelock studies, we see Luke’s tendency to diminish women characters. In the case of Elizabeth, there is no such articulation or action; in 1:24–25, she is a passive recipient of God’s favor, thus conforming to Luke’s ideal for women.

We see very little in the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah’s childlessness, and the eventual gift to them of their son John, that might speak to contemporary struggles with infertility. Those today who wish for children but who cannot conceive might take some solace that Luke recognizes the pain such unfulfilled desire can cause. They might appreciate the sensitive character portrait of Elizabeth as one who has experienced her inability to conceive as “a disgrace” she has endured (v. 25) if they have experienced their own pain in these terms. But we cannot imagine

35. Havrelock, “The Myth of Birthing the Hero,” 166. The landmark work on the plight of Hagar, the first surrogate in Genesis, is Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, ann. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).

36. Havrelock, “The Myth of Birthing the Hero,” 176.

37. Esther Fuchs, “The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1999), 127–40; here 137.

38. Havrelock, “The Myth of Birthing the Hero,” 178.

39. *Ibid.*

that these small narrative details assuage in any significant way the deep pain childlessness can cause for those wanting children. Further, we reject the biblical view that God intentionally “closes wombs,” along with any proposal that infertility is a punishment from God. We do not believe in a God who intentionally causes such suffering.

Mary’s Prophetic Call and Response (1:26-38)

Many Christians see in this scene a Mary who is a docile, sweet, compliant servant, totally submissive to God’s will, and therefore a model for women to emulate. Barbara stands among many feminist scholars who have argued, instead, that Mary is a strong woman who has a direct encounter with God, who does not hesitate to question, and who does not need the mediation of a man to accomplish God’s purposes. These feminists propose that Luke depicts Mary as a prophet,⁴⁰ aligning her with the powerful women prophets in the Old Testament. This passage has the same elements as call stories of Old Testament prophets.⁴¹

40. Barbara E. Reid, “Prophetic Voices of Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna in Luke 1–2,” in *New Perspectives on the Nativity*, ed. Jeremy Corley (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 37–46; Barbara E. Reid, “Women Prophets of God’s Alternative Reign,” in *Luke—Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Brawley*, ed. David Rhoads, David Esterline, and Jae Won Lee, PTMS (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Papers, 2010), 44–59. See also Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara L. Bingemer, *María, Mujer Profética: Ensayo teológico a partir de la mujer y de América Latina* (Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1988); N. Clayton Croy and Alice E. Connor, “Mantic Mary? The Virgin Mother as Prophet in Luke 1.26–56 and in the Early Church,” *JSNT* 34 (2011): 254–76, outline references to Mary as prophet in the early church fathers, 268–69. See also Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, Studies on Personalities of the New Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); Alice L. Laffey, “Images of Mary in the Christian Scriptures,” in *All Generations Shall Call Me Blessed*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1994), 39–71; Richard I. Pervo, *The Gospel of Luke*, The Scholars Bible (Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2014), 22: “The story seems more like the report of a prophetic calling than a simple announcement.” Mary is not only important for Christians but also revered in Muslim tradition. Muslim feminist Hosn Aboud, “‘*Idhan Maryam Nabiyya*’ (‘Hence Maryam Is a Prophetess’): Muslim Classical Exegetes and Women’s Receptiveness to God’s Verbal Inspiration,” in *Mariam, the Magdalene, and the Mother*, ed. Deirdre Good (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 183–96, outlines how medieval Andalusian exegetes argued for the prophethood of Maryam, mother of Jesus, and then compares her to Muhammad.

41. For a comparison of the calls of Moses (Exod 3:1–12), Gideon (Judg 6:11–24), Isaiah (Isa 6:1–13), Jeremiah (Jer 1:4–10), and Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1–3:11) to Luke 1:26–38, see the table by Croy and Connor, “Mantic Mary?,” 259. Bea Wyler, “Mary’s Call,”

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of

greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the

Comparing the call of Moses (Exod 3:1-12) and that of Mary, we note first that the encounter with God's messenger takes place in the midst of ordinary everyday life. Moses was simply tending his father-in-law's sheep when God's angel appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush (Exod 3:1-2). Mary appears to be an ordinary Galilean woman about to be married when Gabriel appears to her.⁴²

The angel's salutation, Χαῖρε, is not only the common greeting "hail" but also means "rejoice." In the context of a prophetic call, it recollects prophecies of Zephaniah (3:14), Joel (2:21), and Zechariah (9:9). Gabriel calls Mary *κεχαριτωμένη*, "favored one" (1:28, 30); not only males like Noah, Moses, Gideon, and Samuel are favored by God.⁴³ Gabriel then articulates the prophetic mission (1:31-33). Authentic prophets initially resist their commissions and offer sound objections to it.⁴⁴ Prophets know that they risk rejection and suffering (e.g., Num 11:1-15; Jer 18:18; 20:1-6; see Jesus's remark that Jerusalem kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it in Luke 13:34). In the following chapter, Simeon prophesies the pain Mary will endure (2:35).

in *A Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 136–48, sees a similar call to Sarah (Gen 18:9-14) and Manoah's wife (Judg 13:2-20).

42. In two other instances in the OT an angelic messenger appears to a woman: Hagar (Gen 16:7-16) and Samson's mother (Judg 13:1-25).

43. Noah (Gen 6:8), Moses (Exod 33:12-17), Gideon (Judg 6:17), and Samuel (1 Sam 2:26). The term also foreshadows the "favor [χάρις] of God" that is upon Mary's son (2:40, 52) and the favorable or gracious words (λόγοις τῆς χάριτος) he utters (4:22).

44. See Exod 3:11; 4:10; Jer 1:6; Amos 7:14.

house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”³⁴ Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”³⁵ The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

God’s messenger then issues a promise of divine assistance: “nothing will be impossible with God.”⁴⁵ The messenger next gives the prophet a tangible sign: for Moses, it is his brother Aaron, who will act as his spokesman (Exod 4:15); for Mary, it is the pregnancy of her relative, Elizabeth (1:36). The prophet then assents and fulfills the mission with which she or he has been entrusted (Exod 4:15-18; Luke 1:38).

Although Luke does not explicitly call her a prophet, in contrast to Anna (2:36-38),⁴⁶ Mary functions as one when she utters a prophecy in the next scene. She stands on the shoulders of other women prophets who went before: her namesake, Miriam (Exod 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:4), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chr 34:22), the unnamed mother of Isaiah’s child

45. Compare promises of divine assistance: Exod 4:15; Jer 1:8; Isa 6:5-8. “Nothing will be impossible with God” echoes God’s words to Abraham (Gen 18:14) and to the prophet Zechariah (8:6) concerning the restoration of Jerusalem, as well as Job’s declaration (42:2) at the end of his ordeals.

46. The only other references to female prophets in the NT are to the four virgin daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9), the women prophets of Corinth (1 Cor 11:5), and a “false” woman prophet in Rev 2:18-28. Women such as Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18) and the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42) act as prophets by proclaiming the word and bringing people to faith in Jesus and are called such in early church tradition but are not so named in the gospels. In addition, the woman who anoints Jesus (Mark 14:3-9) does a prophetic action akin to Samuel’s anointing of Saul and David as king (1 Sam 10:1; 16:13). In Luke’s version of the anointing woman (7:36-50), it is Jesus, not the woman, who is the prophet. In the early third century, Hippolytus of Rome wrote in his commentary on the Song of Songs (25:6-7) that the women who meet the risen Christ “were made apostles to the apostles, having been sent by Christ.” Origen (ca. 185–253/54) referred to the Samaritan woman as an apostle and evangelist: “Christ sends the woman as an apostle to the inhabitants of the city because his words have inflamed this woman” (*Comm. S. Jean* 4.26–27).

(Isa 8:3), No'adiah (Neh 6:14), and unnamed daughters who prophesy (Joel 3:1-2; Ezek 13:17; 1 Chr 25:3-5).⁴⁷

N. Clayton Croy and Alice E. Connor hypothesize that the reason that Luke does not call Mary a prophet is that he avoids associating Mary with practices in Greco-Roman antiquity that relate virginity and prophecy.⁴⁸ In Delphi, for example, the Pythia who delivered Apollo's oracle was a virgin, thought to be in a state more pure, more receptive to penetration by the god or oracular spirit.⁴⁹ Descriptions in ancient sources (e.g., Virgil, *Aen.* 6.77–80) of the act of possession by the prophetic spirit often have sexual overtones, another thing that Luke wants to avoid associating with Mary. We find this hypothesis credible. In addition, we think that Luke's agenda is to diminish the voices of women prophets so that those of men come to the fore, assuring Theophilus-type readers (1:3-4) that there is nothing disorderly about the Jesus movement.⁵⁰ The only women who are called prophets in Luke and Acts are Anna (2:36-38) and Philip's

47. The Talmud (b. Meg. 14a-b) also recognizes Sarah, Hannah, Abigail, and Esther as prophets. See further Wilda C. Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

48. Croy and Connor, "Mantic Mary?," 270. Greco-Roman sources that speak of women virgin prophets at the oracle of Delphi include Lucan, *Astr.* 21; Diodorus Siculus 16.26; Plutarch, *Def. orac.* 437C-D; Strabo, *Geogr.* 9.3.5. Some sources, e.g., Lycophron, *Alexandra* 1279; Pausanias, *Descr.* 10.12.6, refer to the Sybil as a virgin prophet. Most often she is depicted as an aged woman, "a functional virgin" (e.g., Hermas, *Vis.* 8 [2.4]; Ovid, *Metam.* 14.101–53). See Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 36–40; Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); Jill E. Marshall, *Women Praying and Prophesying in Corinth: Gender and Inspired Speech in First Corinthians*, WUNT 2.448 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

49. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived*, 68–70; Mary F. Foskett, "Virginity as Purity in the Protoevangelium of James," in *A Feminist Companion to Mariology*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Maria Mayo Robbins, FCNTECW 10 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005), 67–76; Croy and Connor, "Mantic Mary?," 265. Virginity can also signify single-minded devotion, as in Paul's exhortation to virgins to remain unmarried and so be solely "anxious about the affairs of the Lord," in contrast to married women who are "anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband" (1 Cor 7:34). Other examples where virginity is associated with prophecy include the Sibyl and vestal virgins of Rome.

50. See the authors' introduction on Luke's overall treatment of women; on Luke's desire to tame and limit prophecy, see Mary Rose D'Angelo, "(Re)Presentations of Women in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke-Acts," in *Women and Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 188–89.

four daughters (Acts 21:9), none of whom is given speech. In the gospel, once Jesus begins his public ministry, he takes over the role of prophet.⁵¹

***Inserted into Their Reality
and Inspired by God: Female
Prophets of the Old Testament***

The significant role that prophetic women play in Luke's accounts must be viewed as a continuation of the public influence of women prophets in ancient Israel. The texts of the Old Testament mention only five women holding a prophetic title. Nevertheless, there are biblical references to anonymous women who exercised prophetic roles (e.g., in Ezek 13:17-23). Also, other women are described as performing actions that can be associated with prophecy: those at the entrance of the tent of meeting (Exod 38:8 and 1 Sam 2:22), the medium of Endor (1 Sam 28:3-25), and the daughters of Heman (in 1 Chr 25:1-7). Women prophets appear deeply inserted into the reality of their people and/or nation. Sent by God and committed especially to the most vulnerable, they prophesied through oracles, songs, and symbolic actions. They also advised or warned leaders and kings.

The reference to Maryam appears during the process

of the configuration of Israel as a people (in Exod 2; 15:20-21; Num 12; 20:1; 26:59; 1 Chr 5:29/6:3; and Mic 6:4). Maryam is portrayed as a sister, daughter, and collaborator with God's project of life within a human regime of death (Exod 2). She also remained in the memory of the people as a significant leader of the journey through the desert, together with Moses and Aaron (Num 12; 20:1; 26:59; 1 Chr 5:29/6:3; Mic 6:4). Evidence of the love of the people for Maryam is highlighted in the story about their refusal to move until she was freed from leprosy (Num 12:15). Fulfilling her prophetic role, Maryam sings or "interprets theologically" (ותען) that the event at the Reed Sea was a salvific action provided by the hand of God (Exod 15:20-21).

Deborah's prophetic contribution is found in the book of Judges 4-5. The Deuteronomist presents her as a נביאה, "woman prophet," in Judges 4:4. She is also recognized as a judge and called לפידות, "Lapidot-woman," which can mean a woman "from the city of Lapidot," a woman "married

51. The emphasis on Jesus as prophet is strongest in the Third Gospel. See Luke 4:18-19 (echoing Isa 61:1-2) and the parallels with Elijah and Elisha: Luke 4:25-26; 7:2-10 // 2 Kgs 5:1-14; Luke 7:11-17 // 1 Kgs 17:17-24; 2 Kgs 4:18-37; Luke 9:10-17 // 2 Kgs 4:42-44; Exod 16:4-36; Luke 9:51; 24:51 // 2 Kgs 2:11; Luke 13:33-35; 22:64; 24:19.

to Lapidot" (a man), or a "torch-fire woman."⁵² Deborah was involved in the political and social life of her community. She was the initiator, the brains, and the inspiration for her people.⁵³ She pronounced an oracle of military victory (4:6-7) and the fate of Sisera (4:9), and she called Barak to persevere (4:14). In the song attributed to her (in Judg 5), Deborah is designated as "mother of Israel." A similar title, "father of Israel," was given to Elijah (2 Kgs 2:12) and Eliakim (Isa 22:21), indicating their authority and role as protectors of the community.⁵⁴ Deborah's song proclaimed the victory of the most vulnerable among the nations. Her song links her to Maryam's prophetic action.

During the golden age of prophecy and contemporaneously with the prophet Isaiah, we find the reference to an anonymous female prophet in Isaiah 8:3. The accounts in Isaiah 7–8 show that Judah was being pressured by Syria and Samaria to join them against Assyria. Isaiah, following the command of God, approached the unnamed woman prophet. The verb קָרַב, "come near, approach,"

emphasizes the movement of a husband toward his wife. It seems, however, that she was granted the title, not for being Isaiah's wife, but rather for her action. Isaiah and she bore a child. The name of the child, "Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz" (meaning "Swift is booty, speedy is prey"), constitutes their symbolic action. It warned Ahaz that if he joined the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, Judah would be destroyed.

References to Huldah, her prophetic title, and contribution are found in 2 Kings 22:14-20 // 2 Chronicles 34:22-28. Huldah was sought to interpret a scroll discovered in the temple. She was chosen probably because she lived among those who experienced and processed theologically the disaster of the Northern Kingdom in the Mishneh (second quarter of Jerusalem). Also, she seems to be well known because her husband's name, occupation, and lineage were registered (in 2 Kgs 22:14 // 2 Chr 34:22). Huldah was a prophet of the Word. Her oracles contain the introductory formula "Thus says YHWH" and the concluding formula "Word of YHWH." Her first oracle, which

52. Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 209.

53. Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 63.

54. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Deborah 2," in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible; The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, ed. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross Shepard Kraemer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 67.

was probably reworked after the exile (2 Kgs 23:15-17), addressed the people and presumed the inevitability of a catastrophe. Her second oracle (in 2 Kgs 23:18-20a) confirmed Josiah's piety and humility before YHWH and communicated a promise that he would be buried "in peace" (with his ancestors). Huldah's intervention was taken seriously by Josiah, who initiated and continued eagerly a religious reform (2 Kgs 23 // 2 Chr 34:29-33).

Noadiah's name, prophetic title, and level of influence in Jerusalem during the Persian period is found in a short prayer attributed to Nehemiah in Nehemiah 6:14. She is mentioned together with an anonymous

group of prophets who were frightening Nehemiah. It seems that her prophetic function was exercised in deep solidarity with the poor and the marginalized of her time: the population that was affected by the nationalist and separationist perspective of the returnees from exile. We have no record of her words but apparently Nehemiah could not co-opt her or the rest of the prophets to support his nationalist cause.⁵⁵

The prophetic action of these five women and of many other women made clearer the signs of God's presence in the history of Israel and prepared the people to receive the fulfilment of salvation.

Mila Díaz Solano

While artistic renditions frequently depict Mary praying when Gabriel appears to her, and despite the frequency with which Luke inserts this theme,⁵⁶ Luke says nothing here about her piety. Unlike Zechariah, who is in the temple when Gabriel appears to him (1:8), Mary is at home, going about her ordinary business. Such will also be the pattern when her son encounters fishermen who are washing their nets when he calls them to be his disciples (5:2).

Mary's name, Μαριάμ, is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew מִרְיָם, Miriam, the name of Moses's sister, who was a prophet (Exod 15:20; Num 12:2; Mic 6:4).⁵⁷ It was also one of the most common names for Jewish women

55. Cf. Robert P. Carroll, "Coopting the Prophets: Nehemiah and Noadiah," in *Priests, Prophets, and Scribes: Essays on the Formation of Heritage of Second Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp*, ed. Eugene Ulrich, JSOTSup 149 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 96.

56. See excursus at 11:2 on the pervasiveness of prayer in Luke.

57. See further Deirdre Good, "What Does It Mean to Call Mary Mariam?," in Levine and Robbins, *A Feminist Companion to Mariology*, 99-106.

in the Second Temple period in Galilee and Judea⁵⁸ and may also evoke the memory of Mariamme, the Hasmonean princess married to Herod and executed by him in 29 BCE. The murder of Mariamme, her brother Aristobulus, and Mariamme's two sons by Herod in 7 BCE ended the Hasmonean dynasty. Inscriptions and documents from Galilee and Judea show a marked rise in Hasmonean names in the first century CE.⁵⁹ Parents were naming their babies John, Simon, Judas, Salome, or Mariamme as an expression of their nationalistic hopes for independence. Mary's parents, by giving her a name that had previously been uncommon in Galilee and Judea, express their Hasmonean sympathies.⁶⁰ Mary is well disposed to hear and accept a prophetic call and to articulate not only what God has done for her people in the past but their future hopes for liberation (1:46–55).

Luke provides no information about Mary other than her name, the name of her town, and that she is a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph. He says nothing of her genealogy, other than the fact that Elizabeth is a relative. This lack of detail contrasts with the lineages Luke provides for Elizabeth and Zechariah (1:5), Joseph (1:27),⁶¹ and the prophet Anna (2:36). Joel Green suggests that this surprising lack may be to stress Mary's insignificant social status.⁶²

Determining the socioeconomic status of Galileans of the late Second Temple period is a difficult endeavor. Douglas E. Oakman, who argues from sociological models drawn from peasant studies, asserts that "the historical context of Jesus . . . reflects a social and economic situation in which exploitative urbanism, powerful redistributive central institutions like the Roman state and Jewish temple, concentration of land holdings in the hands of a few, rising debt, and disrupted horizontal relations in society were becoming the norm."⁶³ Other scholars, who base their con-

58. Tal Ilan, "Notes on the Distribution of Jewish Women's Names in Palestine in the Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods," *JJS* 40 (1989): 186–200.

59. Margaret H. Williams, "Palestinian Jewish Personal Names in Acts," in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 79–113.

60. Marianne Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee: Architectures of Contact in the Occupied Land of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 137–40.

61. Although the Greek is ambiguous, most understand "of the house of David" to modify Joseph, not Mary, in accord with Luke 2:4; 3:23, 31.

62. Joel B. Green, "The Social Status of Mary in Luke 1,5–2,52: A Plea for Methodological Integration," *Bib* 73 (1992): 457–72.

63. Douglas E. Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, *Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity* 8 (Lewiston, NY/Queenston, Ont.: Mellen, 1986), 211. See also Douglas E. Oakman, "Execrating? Or Execrable Peasants!," in *The Galilean*

clusions on archaeological evidence, claim that both cities and villages in the Galilee during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods enjoyed a fair degree of economic prosperity.⁶⁴ Because of the fragmentary nature of the archaeological data and the limitations of sociological models, it is not possible to reach a sure conclusion about what would have been the socioeconomic status of the majority of Galileans in the late Second Temple period.⁶⁵ What we can say is that Luke portrays Mary after her marriage to Joseph, not as a poor peasant, but as one who had sufficient income to be able to travel to Jerusalem every year for the feast of Passover (Luke 2:41). Luke lacks references to Joseph and Jesus being woodworkers (τέκτων, NRSV: “carpenter,” applied to Joseph in Matt 13:55 and to Jesus in Mark 6:3), but a likely scenario is that Mary, Joseph, Jesus, and the rest of the family would have been engaged in part-time farming in addition to Joseph and Jesus plying their trade among the villagers of Nazareth and possibly the nearby Sepphoris, being built by Herod Antipas as his capital.⁶⁶ They may have been poor, but theirs “was not the grinding, degrading poverty of the day laborer or the rural slave.”⁶⁷

Virginal Conception

Luke calls attention to Mary’s sexual status by repeating *παρθένος*, “virgin,” in verse 27 along with her assertion *ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω*, “I do

Economy in the Time of Jesus, ed. David A. Fiensy and Ralph K. Hawkins, ECL 11 (Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 139–64; the recent Marxist analysis of Roland Boer and Christina Petterson, *Time of Troubles: A New Economic Framework for Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017); and John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 43–71.

64. E.g., these essays in Fiensy and Hawkins, *The Galilean Economy in the Time of Jesus*: Mordechai Aviam, “People, Land, Economy, and Belief in First-Century Galilee and Its Origins: A Comprehensive Archaeological Synthesis,” 5–48; C. Thomas McCollough, “City and Village in Lower Galilee: The Import of the Archeological Excavations at Sepphoris and Khirbet Qana (Cana) for Framing the Economic Context of Jesus,” 49–74; Sharon Lea Mattila, “Revisiting Jesus’ Capernaum: A Village of Only Subsistence-Level Fishers and Farmers?,” 75–138. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1: *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 282, notes that “the reign of Herod Antipas (4 B.C.–A.D. 39) in Galilee was relatively prosperous and peaceful, free of the severe social strife that preceded and followed it.”

65. David A. Fiensy, “Assessing the Economy of Galilee in the Late Second Temple Period: Five Considerations,” in Fiensy and Hawkins, *The Galilean Economy in the Time of Jesus*, 165–86, outlines both the positive contributions and the limitations of archaeology and sociological models and asserts that both are needed.

66. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1:279–80.

67. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1:282.

not know / have relations with man" (1:34). What is not entirely clear, however, is whether Luke intends to describe a virginal conception. The future-tense verbs in verses 31–33 allow for the possibility that Gabriel is announcing the conception of Jesus that would occur in the natural way after Mary and Joseph marry.⁶⁸ In setting forth Jesus's genealogy, Luke writes, "He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph" (3:23). The phrase "as was thought" does not appear in parentheses in the early Greek manuscripts; the punctuation is the choice of the NRSV translation team. It can be understood either as an assertion that Joseph was indeed Jesus's biological father or that the notion was mistaken.

Andrew T. Lincoln proposes the coexistence of two perspectives in Luke: one that asserts the virginal conception of Jesus (1:34–37) and another that presents Joseph as Jesus's father, through whom he has Davidic ancestry (1:27, 32; 2:4, 7, 11; 2:27, 33, 41–51; 3:23–38; 4:22). He demonstrates that it was a convention for ancient biographers to juxtapose "two different sorts of tradition, one natural and one miraculous, about their subjects' origins." Thus, "Luke holds with the earliest Christian formulations that Jesus was of the seed of David and Joseph's son, but he also holds that in the light of his resurrection Joseph's son was vindicated as God's Son."⁶⁹ Jane Schaberg argues that Luke writes, indirectly, of an illegitimate conception of Jesus—thus Mary was seduced, or more probably raped, by a man other than Joseph, to whom she was betrothed.⁷⁰ Both hypotheses are plausible, but the evidence does not allow a sure conclusion. Moreover, Luke's intent is not to convey the historical circumstances of Jesus's birth but to make a theological and christological assertion.⁷¹ As Elizabeth Johnson explains,

68. Joseph A. Fitzmyer ("The Virginal Conception of Jesus in the New Testament," *TS* 34 [1973]: 567–70) espoused this interpretation but later changed his position. See also *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars*, ed. Raymond E. Brown et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress; New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 120.

69. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin? Reconceiving Jesus in the Bible, Tradition, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 20, 23.

70. Jane D. Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). See also Michael Pope, "Gabriel's Entrance and Biblical Violence in Luke's Annunciation Narrative," *JBL* 137 (2018): 701–10, on biblical rape and biblical impregnation *topoi* in Luke 1. In a subsequent study, "Luke's Seminal Annunciation: An Embryological Reading of Mary's Conception," *JBL* 138 (2019): 791–807, Pope contends that "Luke imports the notion of semen into the infancy narratives by employing language and imagery from both biblical and Greco-Roman literature but prohibits a literal reading of Jesus's conception in Mary's womb" (795).

71. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 517.

“The virginal conception of Jesus . . . signifies theologically that Jesus’ origin lies in the initiating decree of the loving God, so that his existence is not explainable in terms of the inner forces of this world alone.”⁷²

Feminist interpreters differ in how they see Mary’s virginity. Some associate Mary’s virginity with “a misogyny that reifies male power over women, subordinates female sexuality and creativity to a virginal ideal, and perpetuates the notion of femininity as passive receptivity.”⁷³ Other feminists find it offensive that exalting Mary’s virginal conception denigrates women who bear children in the normal way. Still others find in Mary’s virginity a positive expression of female autonomy and power.⁷⁴ The famous speech of Sojourner Truth (see insert) captures this sense. We find value in both strategies: resistance against misogyny and reclamation of female power are transformative when used in tandem.

*Ain’t I a Woman?*⁷⁵

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that ‘twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what’s all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted,

72. Elizabeth A. Johnson, “The Symbolic Character of Theological Statements about Mary,” *JES* 22 (1985): 312–35; here 315 n. 6.

73. Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 2. See also Nancy J. Duff, “Mary, Servant of the Lord,” in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 62.

74. Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 63–68.

75. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp>. Sojourner Truth, born Isabella (Belle) Baumfree (c. 1797–November 26, 1883), was an African American abolitionist and women’s rights activist. She was born into slavery in Ulster County, New York, but escaped with her infant daughter to freedom in 1826. She went to court to recover her son in 1828 and became the first Black woman to win such a case against a White man. She gave herself the name Sojourner Truth in 1843 after she became convinced that God had called her to leave the city and go into the countryside “testifying the hope that was in her.” “Ain’t I A Woman” is her best-known speech and was delivered extemporaneously at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851. In 2014, she was included in Smithsonian magazine’s list of the “100 Most Significant Americans of All Time.”

and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

Sojourner Truth

Active Agency and Free Choice (1:38)

Many feminists see Mary as exercising what womanist Diana Hayes calls “outrageous authority”⁷⁶ as she dialogues with God’s messenger and freely chooses to assent to the mission entrusted to her. Gabriel speaks directly to her, without the mediation of her father or intended husband, much as an angel spoke directly to Hagar (Gen 16:7-12) and to Samson’s mother (Judg 13:3-5). It is a conversation in which both participate. Self-possessed, Mary questions the angel.⁷⁷ Although the future-tense verbs in Gabriel’s explanation to her (1:31-33, 35) might suggest that everything is divinely determined, the case is rather that as with the prophets in the Old Testament, none of what the angel announces can be accomplished

76. Diana L. Hayes, *And Still We Rise: An Introduction to Black Liberation Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 173.

77. F. Scott Spencer (*Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows: Capable Women of Purpose and Persistence in Luke’s Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 71) observes that Mary “displays remarkable moxie and agency in challenging Gabriel and the appropriation of her womb.” See above at 1:18 for various interpretations of Zechariah’s question.

without Mary's consent. Just as Jesus invites disciples but cannot compel anyone to follow him (see Luke 18:18-25), so God's power needs Mary's receptivity in order to accomplish the divine will. Gabriel is not delivering a decree from a dictatorial patriarch but an invitation from One who is able to work through those who have a disposition of hospitality toward God.⁷⁸ Mary's choice invites reflection on women's rights to choose in every arena that concerns their own lives and those of their family and community.

Reproductive Justice: More Than a Woman's Right to Choose

One of the most fraught questions in feminist theology is reproductive choice. Some feminists are ardent defenders of a pro-life stance that opts for the preservation of the life of the fetus in all circumstances.⁷⁹ Others, such as Beverly Wildung Harrison, argue that a woman's well-being is a decisive, morally relevant concern that must be considered. She advances that

abortion is a positive moral good in many cases.⁸⁰ More recently, theologians such as Cristina L. Traina show that the moral issues surrounding unwanted pregnancy are much more complex than a simple choice between the right of the mother over her body and the right of the fetus to be born.⁸¹ Likewise, Tina Beattie demonstrates that absolutist positions do not adequately deal with questions of relationality, consciousness,

78. Kalbryn A. McLean, "Calvin and the Personal Politics of Providence," in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 122–24.

79. E.g., Feminists for Life: <https://www.feministsforlife.org/>.

80. Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion* (Boston: Beacon, 1983).

81. Cristina L. Traina, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place," *JRE* 46 (2018): 658–81; Patricia Beattie Jung, "Abortion: An Exercise in Moral Imagination," *Reproductive Health Matters* 1 (1993): 84–86, lists five competing responsibilities to consider by both potential mothers and fathers: (1) an obligation to sustain their own physical, mental, and emotional health, both for their own sake as intrinsically valuable persons and for the sake of others; (2) obligations to other family members, especially to other dependents; (3) communal and vocation-related responsibilities and obligations; (4) a responsibility to support their child's life; (5) an obligation to serve their child's best interest. To be born is not self-evidently in the best interest of every fetus.

In addition to abortion, there is also the question of the use of contraception. See, e.g., Emily Reimer Barry, "On Women's Health and Women's Power: A Feminist Appraisal of *Humane Vitae*," *TS* 79 (2018): 818–40.

and community that must be in the foreground. She argues for “a gradual shift in emphasis from the primacy of a woman’s right to choose in the first trimester to the right to life of the foetus in the third trimester.”⁸² She concludes with a reflection on Mary’s awakening of

maternal consciousness at the annunciation and sees in her a symbol of eschatological hope as “the new Eve.”⁸³ Margaret D. Kamitsuka reflects on how Mary’s choice in the annunciation offers a different way for women to imitate Mary than the way pro-life Christians

82. Tina Beattie, “Catholicism, Choice, and Consciousness: A Feminist Theological Perspective on Abortion,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010): 51–75, here 51. Tina Beattie also makes this important observation: “The fact that the modern church has adopted an absolutist position on abortion and contraception, while continuing to respect individual conscience on matters of war and the death penalty (albeit with a strong sense of abhorrence), suggests that this may have more to do with the changing status of women in modern society than with a genuine concern for the unborn child. (One might, for example, point to the vast numbers of children—born and unborn—killed in Iraq but, while the church has not declared that war just, neither has it threatened excommunication to those who take part in it.)

“The recent entry of large numbers of women into the previously masculine domains of theology and politics threatens to destabilize ancient and unchallenged assumptions about the meaning of life and the body, sex and death, law and freedom, because all too often when men have reflected upon these questions, they have written their reflections upon the mute and passive bodies of the female sex. It is not surprising that we are currently experiencing a backlash in which ecclesial misogyny is masked by a *faux* concern for embryonic life, while vast numbers of fully formed and conscious human beings continue to be sacrificed on the altars of economic, military, political and religious expediency” (75).

In critiquing the church’s absolutist position on abortion, Beattie also recalls the work of Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982]) that demonstrated how men tend to approach moral decision-making by appealing to absolute principles rooted in beliefs about individual autonomy and freedom, whereas women are more likely to reflect in terms of relationality and care.

For comments on the church’s intimidation of those who criticize the current teaching, see Kate M. Ott, “From Politics to Theology: Responding to Roman Catholic Ecclesial Control of Reproductive Ethics,” *JFSR* 30 (2014): 138–47.

83. See also her prior work with sustained reflection on Mary-Eve symbolism: Tina Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate: A Marian Narrative of Women’s Salvation* (London: Continuum, 2002). Space does not allow us to discuss adequately Mary-Eve symbolism. We have concerns that this kind of comparison often rests on dualistic contrasts and stereotypes that are antithetical to feminist liberationist approaches.

use her to bolster an antiabortion stance.⁸⁴ She sees Mary's *fiat* not as an instantaneous acceptance of motherhood but as the culmination of a process that included perplexity (1:29), questioning (Gabriel), seeking advice (from Elizabeth), and continuing to ponder (2:19).

We agree with those scholars who recognize the complexities in moral decision-making and who see in Mary one whose experience is closer to contemporary women's realities. In addition, we note that when it comes to pregnancy and child rearing, the range of options for a woman with economic means and education living in a country with laws that ensure her equal treatment is vastly different from the choices open to women who are poor, illiterate, and lack

legal protection.⁸⁵ Moreover, in patriarchal cultures, male imposition of their will on females is the norm, a force difficult to overcome for even the strongest of women.

In her comparison of the character of Mary in Luke with the contemporary experiences of surrogate mothers in India, Sharon Jacob demonstrates well the multiple constraints on women's choices. She sees these similarities between Mary and surrogate mothers: "Both conceive without the physical presence of a male; their conception takes place only after their *consent*; they are impregnated by a third party who hails from a superior realm; and finally, their *willingness* to participate in an anomalous birth is driven by their desire to better

84. Margaret D. Kamitsuka, "Unwanted Pregnancy, Abortion, and Maternal Authority: A Prochoice Theological Argument," *JFSR* 34 (2018): 41–57. There are numerous Catholic and evangelical Christian pro-life websites that use Mary to bolster their position, e.g., Jennifer LeClaire, "What if Mary had Chosen Abortion?," *Charism News*, December 18, 2015: <https://www.charismanews.com/opinion/watchman-on-the-wall/53920-what-if-mary-had-chosen-abortion>; Rev. Mark H. Creech, "What if Mary Had Known about Abortion?," *Christian Post*, December 17, 2012: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/what-if-mary-had-known-about-abortion.html>.

85. Recognition that the health and thriving of parents and children, especially in communities of color, have to do with factors beyond the narrower questions of choice and abortion, and includes issues such as poverty and the mass incarceration of reproductive-aged people, Black activist Loretta Ross has spearheaded a movement under the framework of reproductive justice, rather than simply "choice." The movement for reproductive justice affirms three principles: the right to have a child, the right *not* to have a child, and the right to parent children in environments where they are safe and able to flourish. See Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger, *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017). For an engagement with Ross's work in religious studies, see Rebecca Todd Peters, *Trust Women: A Progressive Christian Argument for Reproductive Justice* (Boston: Beacon, 2018).

the situation of their people or their families.”⁸⁶ For Indian surrogate mothers, economic emancipation is contingent on their acceptance of enslavement to another. Likewise, Mary

is neither fully free nor fully enslaved (see excursus on “Slave of the Lord”). Mary is not a monolithic character; she remains ambivalent, not fully fashioned as either subject or object.⁸⁷

Empowered and Being Overpowered (1:35)

In Gabriel’s assurance that “the Holy Spirit will come upon you,⁸⁸ and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (v. 35), some readers have heard resonances of how they have been overpowered and raped. While recognizing the force of those readings, we offer here a more optimistic reading as well. The verbs ἐπελεύσεται, “come upon,” and ἐπισκιάσει, “overshadow,” have no sexual connotation; rather, they evoke God’s protective and empowering presence. The Holy Spirit’s power is not a harmful one;⁸⁹ it creates, sustains, and re-creates new life.⁹⁰ The Spirit that hovered over the chaotic waters at creation (Gen 1:2) and that brings rebirth to God’s people (Ezek 36:26; John 3:3-5) comes upon Mary with that same generative force without usurping her own partnership in the creative process.⁹¹ Likewise, the overshadowing of the Most High need not suggest overpowering. The Septuagint uses the verb ἐπισκιάζειν, “overshadow,” in relation to the cloud of God’s presence that settled on the wilderness tabernacle (Exod 40:35, LXX); the term signals divine protection and guidance for Israel. Just as the glory of the

86. Sharon Jacob, *Reading Mary Alongside Indian Surrogate Mothers: Violent Love, Oppressive Liberation, and Infancy Narratives*, *The Bible and Cultural Studies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), xii (italics in the original).

87. Ibid., 93, 113. See also Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 160–61, who see Mary, the self-described slave, as “cast in the role of Hagar. She is the slave girl, the vessel, the mechanism by which God’s son would be born. . . . Luke does not want us to see Mary as the bride of God. She is the favored vessel chosen to carry his Son; she plays the role of the surrogate.”

88. The Spirit that comes upon Mary is the same prophetic Spirit that came upon Saul (1 Sam 10:10), rested on Elijah (see Luke 1:17) and Elisha (1 Kings 2:9-10, 15-16), filled Micah (Mic 3:8), and fills her son (3:22; 4:18) and his followers, both female and male (Acts 2:17-18).

89. Although in Luke 11:22 ἐπέρχομαι connotes a violent assault on a strong man by one stronger, the context of 1:35 precludes such a nuance.

90. See excurses at 3:22 on feminist understandings of the Spirit.

91. Spencer, *Salty Wives*, 71.

Lord filled the tent of meeting, so the divine presence is with Mary. The term also foreshadows Jesus's empowerment and divine guidance for his mission when the "Holy Spirit descended upon him" at his baptism (3:22), and the cloud symbolizing God's presence overshadowed Jesus and the disciples at the transfiguration (Luke 9:34). The Israelites, Mary, Jesus, and his disciples all remained free to follow or not the directives of the overshadowing divine presence.

The Slave of the Lord (1:38, 48)

Mary's response, "Here am I," is the ideal response of those whom God chooses as prophets and leaders in the Old Testament,⁹² and her self-designation as δούλη κυρίου, literally, "slave of the Lord" (1:38, 48), proleptically fulfills the Pentecost promise in Acts 2:18, where Peter declares, "Even upon my slaves, both men and women [τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ τὰς δούλας μου], in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (quoting Joel 3:1). Furthermore, her words "let it be with me according to your word" foreshadow those of her son on the Mount of Olives, "not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42), showing her to be a model of one who hears God and obeys. But we find Mary's self-designation δούλη κυρίου, "slave of the Lord," highly problematic.

As helpful as it may be to see Mary as linked to the lineage of faithful servants of God, a major problem with the expression "slave of God" remains. We concur with the assessment of Elizabeth A. Johnson: "The master-slave relationship, now totally abhorrent in human society," is "no longer suitable as a metaphor for relationship to God, certainly not in feminist theological understanding. . . . Slavery is an unjust, sinful situation. It makes people into objects owned by others, denigrating their dignity as human persons. In the case of slave women, their masters have the right not only to their labor, but to their bodies, making them into tools of production and reproduction at the master's wish. In such circumstances the Spirit groans with the cries of the oppressed, prompting persons not to obey but to resist, using all their wiles."⁹³

92. E.g., Abraham (Gen 22:1); Samuel (1 Sam 3:4, 5, 6, 8).

93. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 255. See also Clarice J. Martin, "Womanist Interpretation of the New Testament: The Quest for Holistic and Inclusive Translation and Interpretation," in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015); Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan, *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations* (London: Routledge, 1998).

TRANSLATION MATTERS

Mary's self-designation, δούλη κυρίου, literally means "slave of the Lord." Most translations render it as "servant" (NJB, NEB, TEV, NIV, REB, CEB), some as "handmaid" (RSV, JB, NAB), others as "maidservant" (NKJV). These translations mask the reality of the literal translation. The question of how to translate δούλος (male slave) and δούλη (female slave) when they appear in the Bible is complex and is of special concern to womanist biblical scholars, owing to the history of African American enslavement. For ancient Greek literature outside of the Bible, δούλος/δούλη is generally translated as "slave." On the other hand, with the rise of interest in liberation theology, reader-response theory, and the question of how contemporary readers *hear* ancient texts, concern has been expressed about the deep pain associated with the word "slavery" for African American readers of the Bible. As womanist scholar Clarice Martin frames this question, does hearing the term "slave" in a reading of Scripture "recall an image that is painfully reminiscent of that legacy [of slavery]? Is the use of the term *infradignitatem* (beneath one's dignity)? Would it not be better . . . to translate *doulos* regularly as the more euphemistic 'servant'?"⁹⁴ Martin answers these questions with a resounding "no!" in no small part because the euphemistic translation "servanthood" minimizes the cruelty of slavery. But the debate is still a live one for translation committees working to render the Bible into English, who are sensitive both to the text in its ancient context and to the resonance of the text in contemporary worshipping communities.⁹⁵

In his World Day of Peace message on January 1, 2015, titled "No Longer Slaves But Brothers and Sisters,"⁹⁶ Pope Francis named the present-day forms of slavery, such as persons detained against their will in inhuman

94. Martin, "Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament," 19–41, here 23. See also Jacquelyn Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood and the Deliverance of Discipleship," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes, The Bishop Henry McNeal Turner Studies in North American Black Religion 8 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 199–218.

95. Of course we recognize that slavery is both an ongoing problem and an international issue, rather than merely a phenomenon of the antebellum period of the United States. Further, we recognize the intersections of slavery and sexual abuse. One important organization that aims to provide "the knowledge and framework needed to recognize and acknowledge past collaboration in slavery; to engage in restorative justice for slavery; and to create sexual ethics untainted by slave-holding values" is the Feminist Sexual Ethics Project, <https://www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/about/index.html>.

96. For the full text: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20141208_messaggio-xlviiii-giornata-mondiale-pace-2015.html.

working conditions, those forced into prostitution, and young girls and women victims of terrorist groups used as sex slaves. He named as a deeper cause of slavery the corruption of the human heart that allows one person to reject the humanity of another and treat that one as an object. Other root causes of slavery include poverty, armed conflicts, criminal activity, and corruption on the part of people willing to do anything for financial gain. Pope Francis recognized the immensity of the task of combatting these, as he urged all people of goodwill—individuals, institutions, intergovernmental organizations, and businesses—to enter into a shared commitment to end slavery in all its forms.

Although Pope Francis spoke eloquently of the necessity of all people to see others as siblings who share the same nature, dignity, and origin, and thus counter any impulses to subjugate another, he did not address the way that the metaphor of master and slave to describe our relationship with God may also contribute to a mentality that allows real slavery to continue. In our view, reading Mary's self-identification as slave could have a positive effect if it means that she, as a person who is not a slave, chooses to identify with, accompany, and advocate for those who actually are slaves,⁹⁷ thus able to effect change for them, a task to which many contemporary women religious have devoted themselves.⁹⁸ But we doubt that is the rhetorical effect Luke intended for Mary's self-declaration; nor do we think that most contemporary readers see Mary that way. The master-slave metaphor on Mary's lips rather reinforces a spirituality of subservience and servitude, which in turn creates a tension between her acquiescence to servility while at the same time accepting a prophetic mission in which she proclaims liberation from powers that dominate (1:46-55).

Most pernicious is when women choose servility out of a misdirected sense of self-sacrificial love or notions that God intended for women to

97. Slavery was all too real in first-century Roman Judea and Galilee. Mary's home in Nazareth (1:26) was just a few short miles from Sepphoris, whose inhabitants were enslaved by the Romans after they revolted at the death of Herod in 4 BCE (Jos., *J.W.* 2.68; *Ant.* 17.289). Enslavement could also be the fate of those unable to meet Rome's excessive taxation.

98. One of many examples is the launching in 2007 of the International Network of Religious Against Trafficking in Persons by more than thirty leaders of women's religious congregations from twenty-six countries. See Dennis Sadowski, "Women Religious Vow Solidarity in Fight Against Human Trafficking," *America*, October 31, 2018, <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2018/10/31/women-religious-vow-solidarity-fight-against-human-trafficking>.

be subservient to the powerful males in their lives (see sidebar: “What God Has Determined for Us”). Kathleen Gallagher Elkins advances that self-sacrifice can at times be a strategic choice from a position of power. Relating Mary to the *madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, who risk physical and verbal violence as they demand justice concerning their husbands, fathers, and sons who disappeared during Argentina’s “dirty war” (1975–1984), Gallagher Elkins sees in both Mary and the *madres* maternal self-sacrifice that is strategic. The situation is not of their choosing, but they exercise their agency in response to it.⁹⁹

***What God Has Determined
for Us***

Women in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, México, have journeyed toward greater freedom and joy through their participation in women’s Bible study groups under the direction of the Diocesan Council for Women (CODIMUJ). Learning to question traditional biblical interpretations that reinforced their subservience to men, they have discovered their own agency and new understandings of God.

“The worst thing was that we women regarded the situation in which we served everyone else and never did anything for ourselves as natural and that God made it this way. We believed that this is just the way

things are; there is nothing that can be done about it. We felt trapped; we never thought of ourselves as having value in ourselves, or of being capable and free to make choices and decisions about our own lives. Sorrowful, solitary, silent, and enclosed: this was our reality inside our homes in our daily lives—lives that we did not choose and that we thought we had no way to change. In our prayer we would cry to God asking why he had determined this life for us. Our faith did not help us change anything; we believed that God had decided that it should be so. All the suffering we endured we accepted as our way of carrying the cross.”

*Voices of women of CODIMUJ*¹⁰⁰

99. Kathleen Gallagher Elkins, *Mary, Mother of Martyrs: How Motherhood Became Self-Sacrifice in Early Christianity* (Indianapolis: FSR Books, 2018), 21.

100. CODIMUJ is the acronym for *Coordinación Diocesana de Mujeres* in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas in the state of Chiapas, México. Instigated by Bishop Samuel Ruiz, work with women in the diocese by women religious began in the mid-1960s, and eventually a grassroots network of women’s Bible study groups developed. These reflections are recorded in *Con Mirada, Mente y Corazón de Mujer* (México, D.F.: CODIMUJ, 1999), 17–22.

Mariological and Christological Significance

While many interpreters of 1:26-38 focus on its Christological significance, it is equally important to attend to the character of Mary, the main character of the gospel's first two chapters. Although she appears only once more in the gospel (8:19-20) and once again in the opening of Acts (1:14), Mary plays a critical role for Luke's story of Jesus.

Elizabeth and Mary: The Companionship of Women (1:39-45)

Hasty Departure (1:39)

Mary's hasty departure for Judea is often interpreted as an indication of her eagerness to share her joy and to help her aged, pregnant relative.¹⁰¹ The expression μετά σπουδής ("with haste"), however, in classical Greek denotes "an inner condition of the soul, a dynamic process of the mind" rather than a physical sense of rapid movement.¹⁰² Blaise Hospodar proposes that the translation "in a serious mood of mind" captures better the sense of μετά σπουδής.¹⁰³ Another nuance is suggested by the Greek translations of the Old Testament, where it "often has overtones of terror, alarm, flight, and anxiety."¹⁰⁴ For example, in Exodus 12:11 (LXX), the Israelites who are about to flee Egypt are instructed to eat the Passover lamb μετά σπουδής ("hurriedly"); Psalm 78:33 speaks about what befalls unrepentant sinners: "their days vanish like a breath and their years in terror [μετά σπουδής; LXX]."¹⁰⁵ Jane Schaberg finds that μετά σπουδής may be a clue "that points toward a situation of violence and/or fear in connection with Mary's pregnancy, or at least to the idea that she is depicted as reacting with anxiety or inner disturbance to the pregnancy."¹⁰⁶ It is easy to imagine the anxiety Mary would have had in the small town of Nazareth once her pregnancy became known. With others talking about her and looking askance, it is no wonder she goes to Judea to spend time with her relatives there. Alternatively, we can also

101. This interpretation is found as early as St. Ambrose's fourth century *Commentary on Luke* (Lib. 2, 19.22–23, 26–27; CCL 14:39–42).

102. Blaise Hospodar, "META SPOUIDES in Lk 1.39," *CBQ* 18 (1956): 14–18, here 17.

103. *Ibid.*, 18.

104. Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 89. The only other instance in which the expression occurs in the NT is Mark 6:25, where Herodias's daughter returns to the king μετά σπουδής, "immediately," to ask for the head of John the Baptist.

105. See Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 89 for further examples.

106. *Ibid.*, 90.

Luke 1:39–45

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and

blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

imagine that people reacted with compassion and care to Mary's unexpected pregnancy (see reflection by Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder at 1:38–45 on "Another View of Community Mothering") and that her haste to go to Judea is out of concern for her aging pregnant relative Elizabeth.

Traveling Alone (1:39)

Luke makes no mention of anyone accompanying Mary on this journey of slightly more than one hundred miles. For a woman to make such a journey alone would have been highly improper and dangerous. The image of the frightened, solitary, pregnant woman traveling on her own evokes that of many women who have had to flee for their lives from abusive situations. Not all women have a relative across the border or a sense of divine protection. Some commentators squelch such a frightening image in Mary's case by presuming that Joseph accompanied her. A popular fourteenth-century writer, Ludolph of Saxony, says that a train of virgins and angels accompanied Mary to protect her.¹⁰⁷

Wise Mentor (1:40–45)

When Mary arrives, she enters the "house of Zechariah," but it is Elizabeth she greets. Still mute, Zechariah plays no role in this scene. Elizabeth does all the speaking. While we know a number of readers who envision Mary as the stronger one, who travels to help her elderly relative, we see in the scene Elizabeth as the wise mentor to the younger woman. Both

107. *Vita Domini nostri Jesu Christi ex quatuor evangeliiis.*

women are in an unenviable position. Both endure suffering due to the peculiar timing of their pregnancies. Elizabeth has had a long history of being faithful to God and is just the one to help Mary respond with trust to what God is doing in this messy situation.

A Prophetic Cry (1:42-45)

When Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting, she is filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesies. Although Luke does not call her a prophet, he aligns her with others who are filled with the Holy Spirit and so designated: John (1:15, 76), Zechariah (1:67), Simeon (2:25), and Jesus (4:1, 18-19). Elizabeth makes her proclamation "with a loud cry" (κραυγῆ μεγάλη). While "a loud cry" seems out of place in the narrative setting inside a house, it signals a prophetic announcement, pointing forward to the "loud shout" (φωνῆ μεγάλη) of the multitude of Jesus's disciples as he enters Jerusalem (19:37).

Elizabeth pronounces a threefold blessing. First, she declares to Mary, "Blessed are you among women" (1:42). This declaration echoes that of Deborah, who sings, "Most blessed of women be Jael" for slaying Sisera (Judg 5:24). Likewise, Uzziah sings Judith's praises for beheading Holofernes, "O daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God above all other women on earth" (Jdt 13:18). Brittany Wilson notes that while the blessedness of Jael and Judith came from violently murdering an enemy, "Mary ushers in a new age, in which women are called most blessed for their acts of peace rather than for their acts of violence." Moreover, "Mary's peaceful servanthood foreshadows the life and death of her son, Jesus the κύριος, who overcomes violence through peace."¹⁰⁸ We challenge this reading. There is more violent content in Luke 1-2 than Wilson acknowledges and thus less disjuncture between Mary and these women from the Old Testament (see the excursus below on Luke 1-2 as anti-Marcionite).¹⁰⁹

Elizabeth then proclaims the blessedness of the fruit of Mary's womb (1:42) and a third time declares Mary blessed, this time for her belief in the fulfillment of God's word to her (1:45). Mary's blessedness is not only in bearing Jesus but in hearing and acting on the word of God, a prominent Lukan theme. Mary exemplifies not only the importance of motherhood but also the crucial qualities needed for discipleship and

108. Brittany E. Wilson, "Pugnacious Precursors and the Bearer of Peace: Jael, Judith, and Mary in Luke 1:42," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 436-56; here 437-38.

109. See Matthews, *Perfect Martyr*, 43-53.

for prophesying. This point will surface again when a woman in a crowd raises her voice and says to Jesus, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!” (11:27). Jesus’s response, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (11:28), turns attention to the prime importance of hearing and acting on God’s word.¹¹⁰

Elizabeth declares Mary and her child as blessed and a source of divine blessing for all. Mary accepts this affirmation acclaiming, “from now on all generations will call me blessed” (1:48). Not all pregnant women feel themselves “blessed,” particularly if the pregnancy was unplanned, unwanted, or the result of rape. Elizabeth’s words of benediction can be an invitation to women in any difficult situation to experience blessing and be able to bless others.

Roman Catholics very often call Mary “Blessed Mother” while Protestants have been hesitant to call her “blessed” and in some cases have avoided any reflection on or appropriation of Mary at all. This stems from a wariness about elevating Mary to a position beyond that of the rest of Christians or making her equal to Christ or God.¹¹¹ Recently, Protestant theologians and biblical scholars are thinking in new ways about Mary, “blessing her and being blessed by her,” finding that “to call Mary blessed is to recognize the blessedness of ordinary people who are called to participate in that which is extraordinary.”¹¹²

Companioning Prophets

Both Elizabeth and Mary are depicted as prophets, but unlike many of the Bible’s male prophets, they are not portrayed as solitary figures who alone mediate between God and the people (like Moses in Exod 34:28; or Elijah in 1 Kgs 19:10). Rather, as Mary and Elizabeth discern God’s word and act on it, they are companions like Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1–4) and Moses’s mother and sister and Pharaoh’s daughter (Exod 2:1–10). Although there is a kind of one-upmanship in the step-parallelism

110. See further comments at 11:27–28.

111. Gaventa and Rigby, “Introduction,” in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, 5. At Vatican II, Roman Catholics reasserted the belief that Mary is first among the disciples, placing reflections about her in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (so named for its opening line: “Christ is the Light of Nations,” issued in 1964) 52–69, rather than issue a separate document on Mary as had first been proposed. Elizabeth A. Johnson, a Roman Catholic theologian, also underscores this understanding of Mary in *Truly Our Sister*.

112. Gaventa and Rigby, *Blessed One*, 5.

between the stories of the births of their two sons,¹¹³ there is no competition between Elizabeth and Mary, as there is in other narratives of births of biblical heroes, such as that between Sarah and Hagar (Gen 16, 21), Leah and Rachel (Gen 29–31), and Peninnah and Hannah (1 Sam 1).¹¹⁴ The companionship of Elizabeth and Mary is mirrored by that of the Galilean women who cooperate in financing Jesus's ministry (8:3), work together to prepare the spices and ointments for his burial (23:56), go with one another to the tomb, and together announce to the Eleven and all the rest the message entrusted to them by the heavenly messengers (24:1-11).¹¹⁵ Elizabeth and Mary, who support one another on their journey with God, can serve as a model for women, especially those in churches that do not ordain women, who seek spiritual companionship from other women rather than male clergy.

*Another View of
Community Mothering*

We live for the we.¹¹⁶ As this is the title of a book on the power of Black motherhood, I borrow the line to place womanist maternal thought in conversation with Mary's visit to Elizabeth. A pregnant, uncertain Mary spends months learning maternal ways from one who is further along in years and in her own pregnancy. As they are both with child, Mary and Elizabeth no longer exist for themselves. Their lives are motherly mingled with

the occupants of their womb. The in utero beings growing in these mothers will change the landscape of their communities, towns, and macrocosm. Mary and Elizabeth "live for the we" of their unborn children, their locales, and each other.

Whereas the gospel writer does not depict Elizabeth as displaying any reservation about her maternal path, Mary's motherly misgivings are profound. Thus, immediately after resolving to "let it be," she seeks a fellow mother-to-be,

113. John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 1994), 5–10.

114. Athalya Brenner, "Female Social Behavior: Two Descriptive Patterns within the 'Birth of the Hero' Paradigm," *VT* 36 (1986): 257–73.

115. Not all female partnerships are for doing good. Mark (6:14-29) and Matthew (14:1-12) narrate Herodias and her daughter's machinations that bring about the death of John the Baptist, an episode that Luke does not recount.

116. Dani McClain, *We Live for the We: The Political Power of Black Motherhood* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2019).

Elizabeth. For three months Mary learns from and, yes, grows with her kinswoman. Mary does not have to traverse the mother road alone. Employing the language of communal mother, I aver that Elizabeth helps to mother Mary as both women come to terms with their own maternal status.

My womanist maternal interpretation brings to the forefront voices of African American mothers within this racial, ethnic, spiritual, and sociological context, whether the mothers are biological or women who for one reason or another take responsibility for another's child.¹¹⁷ This umbrella also includes community mothers, those deemed as the matriarchal figure in a neighborhood or larger geopolitical network.

Community mothers may or may not have given birth. Their "seed" is the many women, men, and children who do not

have voice to tell of their own economic plight or the skills to navigate social hardship and class conundrum. The progeny of the community mothers includes anyone who needs an advocate to remonstrate against racial discrimination and class prejudice. Marching to the beat of Mary Church Terrell, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Mary MacLeod Bethune, and mothers of the movement,¹¹⁸ these activist matriarchs yield a clarion call for a new day and a new order. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes notes, "Community mothers are the guardians of community political traditions. Their ability to function as power brokers stemmed from their leadership within the historical African American women's movement and organizations."¹¹⁹

Mary and Elizabeth are Jewish. Womanist maternal thought underscores motherhood through an African American

117. Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, *When Momma Speaks: The Bible and Motherhood from a Womanist Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 13.

118. Sabrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin; Cleopatra Cowley, mother of Hadiya Pendleton; and newly elected Georgia Congresswoman, Lucia McBath, to name a few, now occupy this maternal seat. Trayvon Martin was killed by a neighborhood watch participant later found not guilty of his murder: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/02/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-prompts-a-review-of-ideals.html>. A stray bullet from a gang member silenced Hadiya Pendleton on a playground near her home: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-met-hadiya-pendleton-mother-father-20180827-story.html>. A driver shot into the truck where Jordan Davis was sitting with friends, killing him: <https://atlantablackstar.com/2018/07/27/the-murder-of-her-son-jordan-davis-prompted-her-activism-now-shes-won-the-congressional-primary-in-georgia/>.

119. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 65.

lens. Nevertheless, there is a maternal appropriation that embraces racial identities and cultural contexts. Mary is a young woman with little status. Elizabeth is her literary foil and social antithesis. She is a wife of “old age” married to a priest. It is this status that allows for Elizabeth’s consideration as a community mother and guardian of tradition. In essence, Luke wants to show the distinct social locations of Mary and Elizabeth.

The gospel writer clearly describes Elizabeth’s reversal of fortune. Her pre-pregnancy shame is now pregnancy favor. Coupled with social footing, she has mother(less) experience to share. She knows the brisk nature of public embarrassment. Her task now is to buttress others from such chagrin. Mary becomes the recipient of Elizabeth’s communal mother covering.

The very act of giving birth during the first century was dangerous. Mortality in childbirth was high and affected both rich and poor women, especially mothers in their early teens.¹²⁰ A woman in the Greco-Roman world dare not go the maternal road alone. Elizabeth sojourns with Mary.

As she is about to give birth to a son, Mary first dons a daughter’s posture. Under the maternal wings of Elizabeth, Mary allows a community mother to do her work. A married mother-to-be provides social nurturing, protection, and advocacy for a pregnant, unwed teenager. Theirs is an intergenerational, “we-molded,” womanist maternal model. Elizabeth engages in a form of parental sojourning with a young Mary as she learns how to be Mom to the Most High.

Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder

Mary’s Prophetic Proclamation (1:46-56)

The focus returns to Mary as she first exults in what God has done for her personally (vv. 47-49) and then acclaim God’s saving acts for all Israel (vv. 50-55). This victory hymn rounds out the depiction of Mary as prophet. Along with the other canticles in Luke 1–2, the *Magnificat* was a hymn that circulated in the Christian communities before Luke inserted it into the gospel. Mary’s song echoes that of the prophet Miriam, her namesake, who led the Israelites in singing and dancing¹²¹ after their

120. Joel B. Green, “Setting the Context: Roman Hellenism,” in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 182.

121. As Gafney (*Daughters of Miriam*, 6) shows, prophets not only declare oracles but also engage in “intercessory prayer, dancing, drumming, singing, giving and

Luke 1:46-56

<p>⁴⁶And Mary said, ⁴⁷“My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.</p>	<p>⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” ⁵⁶And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.</p>
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escape from the Egyptians (Exod 15:1-21).¹²² There are also echoes of the victory hymns of Judith (Jdt 16:1-17) and Deborah (Judg 5) and of Hannah’s song (1 Sam 2:1-10). These songs all celebrate God’s intervention, sometimes in desperate situations, with divine saving power. They are among the oldest traditions preserved in the Bible, and thus one might argue that women were the first biblical theologians.¹²³

interpreting laws, delivering oracles on behalf of YHWH (sometimes in ecstasy, sometimes demonstratively), resolving disputes, working wonders, mustering troops and fighting battles, archiving their oracles in writing, and experiencing visions.”

122. It is likely that the whole Exodus hymn was originally attributed to Miriam, and not simply v. 21, which mirrors v. 1. First Samuel 18:7 shows that women were the leaders of the victory songs and dances. George J. Brooke, “A Long-Lost Song of Miriam,” *BAR* 20 (1994): 62–65, proposes that a separate Song of Miriam, partially suppressed in the book of Exodus has survived in part in a Qumran text, 4Q365. See also Rita J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only Through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam*, SBLDS 84 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987); Phyllis Tribble, “Bringing Miriam Out of the Shadows,” *BibRev* 5 (1989): 14–25; J. Gerald Janzen, “Song of Moses, Song of Miriam: Who Is Seconding Whom?,” *CBQ* 54 (1992): 211–20. For a detailed analysis of parallels between the songs of Mary and Miriam, see Barbara E. Reid, *Taking Up the Cross: New Testament Interpretations through Latina and Feminist Eyes* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 103.

123. Carol Meyers, “Miriam, Music, and Miracles,” in *Miriam, the Magdalen, and the Mother*, ed. Deirdre Good (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 27–48, here 41.

These hymns, the *Magnificat* included, are not sweet lullabies.¹²⁴ They proclaim divinely wrought vanquishing of the ruling powers, victory for God's own people in the past, and a vision for God's power and protection in bringing forth a different future. Frequent recitation of Mary's song and the prevalence of images of Mary as a docile, compliant maiden have dulled for us the power of her words. "They have lost their power to stun and offend."¹²⁵ Not so for Christian base communities and liberation theologians in Latin America, for whom the *Magnificat* has served as a rallying cry for political and social change from the 1980s forward.¹²⁶ This image of Mary with a raised clenched fist trampling a skull and a snake captures this sense.¹²⁷



124. See Reid, "Women Prophets of God's Alternative Reign," 44–59.

125. Lisa Wilson Davison, *Preaching the Women of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006), 91.

126. See, for example, Gustavo Gutiérrez's chapter on the *Magnificat*, "Holy Is God's Name," in *The God of Life*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 164–86, originally published as *El Dios de la vida* (Lima, Perú: Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas), 1989.

127. This image by Ben Wildflower accompanied an article in the *Washington Post* on December 20, 2018, by D. L. Mayfield, "Mary's 'Magnificat' in the Bible Is Revolutionary: Some Evangelicals Silence Her," <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2018/12/20/marys-magnificat-bible-is-revolutionary-so-evangelicals-silence-it/>.

The Significance of Imperial Language in the Magnificat: Two Readings

The titles Mary attributes to God—κύριος, “Lord” (v. 46); σωτήρ, “savior” (v. 47); and ὁ δύνάτος, “the Mighty One” (v. 49)—evoke claims made on behalf of the Roman emperors. For example, the *Discourses* of Epictetus¹²⁸ name the emperor ὁ παντῶν κύριος καῖσαρ, “Caesar, lord of all” (*Disc.* 4.1.12). A well-known image from the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias shows the deified emperor receiving in one hand a cornucopia of fruits from the earth and in the other a steering oar, signifying his status as all powerful over both land and sea.¹²⁹ An inscription from Aeraephaie in Boeotia gives Nero the title ὁ τοῦ παντὸς κόσμου κύριος, “lord of the whole world.”¹³⁰



128. The *Discourses* of Stoic philosopher Epictetus are a series of informal lectures written down by his pupil Arrian around 108 CE.

129. See R. R. R. Smith, *Aphrodisias VI: The Marble Reliefs from the Julio-Claudian Sebasteion at Aphrodisias* (Darmstadt: von Zabern, 2013).

130. C. Kavin Rowe, “Luke–Acts and the Imperial Cult: A Way through the Conundrum?,” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 279–300, esp. 292–93; Steve Walton, “The State They Were In: Luke’s View of the Roman Empire,” in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, ed. Peter Oakes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 1–41; John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 15–25.

Beginning with Julius Caesar, Roman rulers were commonly hailed with the term σωτήρ, “savior.”¹³¹ Julius Caesar, for example, was described as “the god made manifest . . . and common savior of human life.” Augustus was called “a savior who put an end to war” and “savior of the entire world.” Claudius was said to be “savior of the world” and “god who is savior and benefactor.”¹³²

The significance of Luke’s employment of terms honoring God and Jesus that were also used to honor Roman emperors is much debated.¹³³ We take up this debate in greater detail at 2:14, “Good News of Peace to All.” Here we note that both of us have worked on this question in the past and have taken different approaches. Barbara has read the *Magnificat* as a clear instance where Luke is countering Roman imperial values by offering Jesus’s service in humility as a contrast to imperial power and arrogance. Shelly has agreed that there is contrast between imperial power and the power of Luke’s God, but she sees Luke reinscribing imperial power rather than overturning it. We offer both readings here, recognizing that both might be compelling ways that lead to feminist critique of dominating power. Readers, of course, can activate different meanings in a text. As we have noted above, liberation theologians and base Christian communities in Latin America have recognized the subversive potential that Barbara’s reading of the *Magnificat* allows. Shelly’s reading, which sees reinscription of imperial power in the *Magnificat*, may explain why many Christians can celebrate the *Magnificat* as a vindication of “our side” while condemning the Other.

Mary Prophesying God’s Alternative Reign

Barbara reads Luke’s use of these titles as having political implications: Luke evokes the titles of Lord, Savior, and Mighty One used of Roman

131. Lance Byron Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology and the Gospel of John*, CBQMS 43 (Washington, DC: CBA, 2007), 85. Only Luke among the Synoptic evangelists uses σωτήρ (Luke 1:47; 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23) and σωτηρία (Luke 1:69, 71, 77; 19:9; Acts 4:12; 7:25; 13:26, 47; 16:17; 27:34; 28:28). In the Fourth Gospel they occur only at John 4:22, 42. For more on σωτήρ and σωτηρία, see comments at 2:11.

132. Walton, “The State They Were In,” 27 n. 86.

133. For a 2015 review of myriad scholarly positions, see Michael Kochenash, “Review Essay: Taking the Bad with the Good; Reconciling Images of Rome in Luke–Acts,” *RelSRev* 41 (2015): 43–51.

emperors in order to counter them explicitly.¹³⁴ Luke would certainly have been aware that these titles were used in imperial circles; he acknowledges as much in Acts 25:26, where Festus refers to the emperor as ὁ κύριος.¹³⁵ Conversely, the opening line of the *Magnificat* proclaims that it is God who is ὁ κύριος. Luke then uses κύριος some two hundred more times in the gospel and Acts in reference to God and Jesus.¹³⁶ Luke also contrasts the manner in which Gentiles exercise their lordship with Jesus's way: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over [κυριεύουσιν] them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves" (22:25-26).¹³⁷

The acclamation of God as "the Mighty One," ὁ δυνατός (v. 49),¹³⁸ highlights the contrast between Roman power and the divine might (δύναμις) of Israel's God. God's power is that which protects the vulnerable, as Gabriel assures Mary (1:35). It resided in Elijah and John the Baptist in enabling them "to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (1:17; quoting Mal 3:1). It is what impels Jesus throughout his mission (4:14) to do good, to heal (5:17; 6:19; 8:46; Acts 10:38), and to cast out unclean spirits (4:36). Jesus's "deeds of power" (δυνάμεις) bring repentance (Luke 10:13) and cause his disciples to acclaim him the "king who comes in the name of the Lord" (19:37) and "a prophet mighty [δυνατός] in deed and word before God and all the people" (24:19).¹³⁹

134. Reid, "Women Prophets of God's Alternative Reign," 44–59. Compare also Amanda C. Miller, *Rumors of Resistance: Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

135. Rowe, "Luke–Acts and the Imperial Cult," 293–94.

136. *Ibid.*, 294. See further comments on Jesus as Lord at 2:11.

137. While the *Magnificat*'s insistence on God being Lord, not Caesar, and Jesus's lordship is later shown to be servant leadership, it is problematic from a feminist point of view to call God or Jesus "Lord." See excursus at 6:46.

138. This title is also used of YHWH in Zeph 3:17; Ps 89:9 (LXX).

139. These examples are of Luke's use of ὁ δυνατός and δύναμις, all of which relate to male exercise of power. There are also instances in the gospel when women exercise power, for example, when the woman suffering from hemorrhages touches the fringe of Jesus's clothes, causing him to ask who touched him, for he "noticed that power had gone out" from him (8:46). On feminist understandings of power, see excursus at 4:1-13.

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