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WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE
WITH REFERENCE TO THE SITUATION OF TODAY'S AFRICA

Moderator

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

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STUDENT DECLARATION

I, the underlined, declare that this long essay (thesis) is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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*“Him whom the heavens cannot contain,
the womb of one woman bore.
She ruled our Ruler,
She carried Him in Whom we are;
She gave milk to our bread.” (St Augustine)*

To my dear mother and all the women who inspired me in my road to life.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CE	<i>Cahiers Evangile</i>
IDP	<i>Internally Displaced People</i>
NTM	<i>New Testament Message</i>
RSV	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The gospel of Luke is often called “The Gospel of the Poor,” just as it is called “The Gospel of Women,” meaning that Luke’s concern for the marginalised and oppressed is apparent. It is important to analyse the link between these concerns, since most of the poor in every age are women, and the children who are dependent on them. This Gospel contains a challenge and a promise for women, because a close reading of the Gospel can be an empowering education.¹

The number of women depicted in Luke and the emphasis on their presence in the narrative are surprising. Women characters are taken over from Mark and from Q, and many others are found only in Luke’s special source called (L). Throughout the Gospel, the technique called “pairing”² is noticeable.

In our investigation, we would like to pay attention not just to the number of women but mostly to what they are doing and saying. But because of the limitation of our work, we will just pick up some examples in which, after some analysis, we will see the intention of Luke in portraying these women as models for us.

Therefore our first chapter will be to look at the biblical text as it is. This will probably provide us with some information to draw some conclusions on the chosen passages and the intention of Luke. We will then be able to see some of the challenges that Luke gives in portraying these women as models in the society of that time.

¹ J. SCABERG, “Luke” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 275.

² That is, one version of a story or teaching refers to a man and the other to a woman, reinforcing the message and encouraging woman as well as men to identify with the characters (13:18-21; 15:4-10; 7:12; 8:42; 13:10-17; 14:1-6 etc).

In the gospel of Luke, the writer seems to tell us that it is not only a direct call to follow Jesus that is constitutive of discipleship, but the positive response to Jesus and openness to the word of the Lord. And this is what many of the women did in this Gospel. In his two-volume work (Gospel and Acts), the writer of Luke wants to show how women, from the beginning to the end of the public life of Jesus, participated in the proclamation of the reign of God. In a very special way, the Gospel of Luke mentions women who follow Jesus in his journey through Palestine (8:1-3; 10:38-42)

In his infancy narrative (1-2) Luke, who shows a certain interest in women's stories³, begins his gospel account with the tales of three women (Elizabeth, Mary and Anna) whose faith held potent expectation⁴. Luke also tells us that a follower of Jesus must leave "everything" for there is no true discipleship without suffering. In Luke, the whole life and ministry of Jesus is described as a journey; a journey that leads to Calvary. In this journey Jesus meets people (women and men) in their daily life. In reading the gospel of Luke one has the impression of watching a live-movie with date, places, people (by name) etc. so that in the end s/he sees that for Luke, to follow Jesus seems to be an imperative invitation to all of us.

Consequently, we are invited to make this Gospel real and alive in our present life. In the third chapter we will draw some conclusions about how women, who took part in the salvific movement, can still help us today to work for a true and liberating Christian society, where women also have their place and dignity. The women of Jesus' time followed Jesus with and in their own suffering and limitation. But they never lose hope that they can be well again (8:43-48); that true liberation will come from God

³ Not only does Luke have more stories featuring women than the other gospels, but the language of his stories illustrates female concerns: see for example the term "womb" (1:15, 31, 41, 42; 2:21, 23).

⁴ Cf. M.A GETTY-SULLIVAN, *Women in the New Testament*, p.4-5.

(1:46-55). If so, can we count on the faith, the courage and hope against hope of our mothers and sisters in building up, in binding and reconciling the African people, who seem to be in a dark and hard time.

When things go bad human beings always try their best to solve the problem. But sometimes solutions are sought in a wrong way or unilaterally. It is time now that men listen to the voices of women, that they “democratise” the way to the solutions by allowing the other half of humanity to speak, act and profess what they believe. Women have a role to play as they try to remain close to their true liberator, Jesus Christ.

Chapter I

Women as models in the Jesus movement: The portraits of Luke

Introduction

The women introduced to us in the New Testament are of mixed social, economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds. The writer of Luke, who gives us several accounts of women in the Jesus movement, also tells us about their faith commitment. In his two-volume work, the writer of Luke wants to show how women, from the beginning to the end of the public life of Jesus, participated in the proclamation of the reign of God. In a very special way, the writer of Luke mentions, in his report of Jesus' journey through Palestine, the women who follow Jesus (8:1-3; 10:38-42).

In this chapter, we want to look at some of these women who can be and actually are models for our Christian living. We will accomplish this by staying as close as possible to the way Luke portrays them. We do not pretend to be exhaustive; we will examine only some of these models.

The first model is certainly Mary, the mother of Jesus, whom Luke portrays as a woman of expectant faith and a perfect disciple. Then we shall look at the unknown woman with a haemorrhage in 8:43-48, who is healed because of her faith. According to Luke, she actualises Jesus' call to faith. This story is linked with the story of Jairus' daughter. Our third model is the "woman who has shown great love."⁵

⁵This title is borrowed from Barbara E. Reid in her book, *"Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke"*, 107-108.

After this we shall see the case of Martha and Mary portrayed to us by Luke as disciples each one in her own way. We will finish this section with Mary, the woman from Magdala.

1.1 Luke's portraits of some Women

1.1.1 Mary, the Mother of Jesus

a) Some preliminary observations

To begin with, let us note that in all the Gospels, we have but few known historical events in the life of Mary. However, the faith interpretations of these few events are many, both in the Gospels (Luke and John) and in subsequent Roman Catholic tradition.

There is no indication in the Gospel of Luke that Mary was a follower of Jesus in his public ministry as other men and women disciples were (8:2-3); and Acts 1:14 speaks of Mary and the brothers of Jesus praying in the upper room after the ascension of Jesus.

However, it is quite probable that Mary was with the post-resurrection Lukan community. Therefore we can conclude that Mary's perseverance in faith in Jesus as the Risen Lord would have made it possible for Luke to conclude that she was a disciple of Jesus. Once he accepted this theological insight, it was not impossible for Luke to read back and conclude that Mary, who was the mother of Jesus, was already a disciple when the annunciation of the birth of Jesus was made to her.

b) Mary as Model of Faith and Discipleship

Let us limit ourselves to the infancy narrative and especially Luke 1:26-38. Here Mary is portrayed as a model of faith, hope and discipleship.⁶ Mary's motherhood will serve the Lukan picture of Christian discipleship (8:19-21; 11:27-28; Acts 1:14).

Mary is a Jewish woman and part of an oppressed and suffering people (4:18); she is among the poor of her people (the *Anawim*: the poor little ones), the country population of Galilee (v.26) who are hard pressed by the daily experience of economic hardship etc. This situation places her hope and expectation very high that one day, the promises of God would be fulfilled. And this is what she expresses later on in the "Magnificat."

In the reply of Mary to the message of the angel (v.38), Luke portrays Mary as the true, enthusiastic and obedient disciple (8:19-21; Acts 1:14). And in the words of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Luke uses *genoito* (be done unto me), to express a wish that is attainable.⁷ "Mary is the woman of faith whose "yes" is unequivocal!"⁸

The angel of the Lord tells Mary that she "has found favour with God."⁹ Thus Mary is the favoured one, the object of divine benevolence. "You have found favour (*charis*); *charis* is a favourite Lukan word not used by either Mark or Matthew. Mary is therefore described as the recipient of divine favour, that is, Mary is "favoured by God" to be the mother of the descendant of David and the Son of the Most High (v.31-32).

Mary, the young girl from Galilee, is covered by "the power of the Most High" and overshadowed by the "Holy Spirit" (v.35); this is clearly an allusion to the cloud of

⁶ However, one must notice that this passage is primarily read as a Christological text and only secondary as a Mariological one; this because the text wants to show that Jesus comes from humanity just as he comes from God.

⁷ See J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke I*, 352.

⁸ L.T. JOHNSON, *The Gospel of Luke*, 38.

⁹ In the Jerusalem Bible: "Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour!" And in RSV: "Hail, O favoured one."

God's presence in the Exodus (Exodus 40:34-35). "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" is intended to convey that the child to be born will be a "gift" of God in full grace. René Laurentin suggests that the "power of the Most High" signifies the very presence of God and it is connected to Exodus 40:34; God now dwells in Mary.¹⁰

The faith of Mary (v.36-37) is directly expressed in what is called the spirituality of the *Anawim* where nothing is impossible to God.¹¹ The spirituality of the *Anawim* is a spirituality of trusting completely in God for everything.

We have already seen how the writer of Luke reads back the events to portray Mary as a disciple. According to Luke, Mary was related to Jesus right through his life here on earth, from the conception to the ascension, not only physically but also spiritually. But one can still ask the following question: in what sense can we say that Mary is a disciple of Jesus? A very good part of the answer to this question is given by Luke in his first two chapters. That is, Mary is a disciple because she is a listener and a doer of the Word of God (8:19-21). To some extent, for Luke, Mary as disciple is more valuable in the eyes of Jesus than Mary as a mother¹² (cf. 8:19-21).

To reconcile this apparent conflict between Mary's motherhood and discipleship, P.J. Bearsley proposes a solution, which consists in taking Mary's discipleship as a paradigm with which to view and explain her divine maternity. This means that Mary's motherhood should be understood in the light of her discipleship and not vice versa.¹³

¹⁰ R. LAURENTIN, *Structure et Théologie de Luc 1-2*, 78.

¹¹ R. ROHR, *The Good News According to Luke: Spiritual Reflections*, 69.

¹² Cf. P.J. BEARSLEY, *Mary the Perfect Disciple: A paradigm of Mariology in TS 41*, 478.

¹³ *Ibid.*

c) Some Concluding Words

In the New Testament, only the Gospel of Luke speaks of Mary as a perfect disciple. According to some prominent Johannine scholars, the Gospel of John includes Mary as a perfect disciple only at the end of Jesus' life on earth. Mark does not seem to include her in the circle of discipleship. Matthew seems to be closely following Mark. The Roman Catholic tradition seems to have placed Mary more on the divine side of Jesus.

However, the Second Vatican Council,¹⁴ while affirming the Roman Catholic Tradition, placed Mary within the context of the pilgrim Church. Mary is now experienced as a pilgrim with the pilgrim people of God, on a pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem. She is with us and we with her. In this context Mary is seen and should be seen today as a model, a model of faith and a perfect disciple, presented especially in Luke as one who was always open to the will of God during her entire life.

1.2 The Woman with a Haemorrhage (and Jairus' daughter)

1.2.1 The Narrative Technique of Luke in this passage

Structurally, the story of the woman with a haemorrhage is sandwiched between that of the ruler and his daughter (8:40-42, 49-56). They thus serve to interpret one another. Luke has taken these two stories from Mark (5:21-43). We are looking at Luke's version of the two stories and therefore it is good to see how the writer of Luke managed to put them together without altering either of them.

¹⁴ The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (LG) devotes an entire chapter to The Blessed Virgin Mary; "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and The Church."

In this linked episode, the Evangelist, through the technique of intercalation, presents the simultaneous unfolding of these two narrative events.¹⁵ The technique of intercalation is a literary technique used by Luke to alternate one story with another. The result is that each story enables one to understand the other better. Thus in our reflection on this episode, we will not separate the two stories, though we will develop more the case of the woman with a haemorrhage.

1.2.2 The Woman with a Haemorrhage: A saving faith

What is common in both stories is that they bring out the opposition between faith and fear. Both women are introduced in terms of their extreme religious and social poverty. One is a young girl on the point of dying and who actually died (49). The other has a condition that leaves her physically, spiritually, financially and socially empty and alone. Hence, the woman whom Luke introduces provides the evangelist with another opportunity to define “the poor” to whom the Good News is brought (4:18-19; 7:22; 8:1).

Various aspects in her life made things worse. First of all, the simple fact that she was a woman in Palestinian society already marks her as one of relatively low status. Then she was sick; that sickness is not only causing her physical problems but it is devastating her socially. On the spiritual side, her haemorrhage renders her ritually unclean. She is living in a perpetual state of impurity. As a result of this she is put aside by her community for twelve years. Her suffering (twelve years) is contrasted with the life of Jairus’ daughter (she is twelve years old v.42).

¹⁵ B.J. GREEN, *The Gospel of Luke*, 343.

According to the law this woman is excluded from her spiritual and social community. She is emotionally sidelined. No physician was able to help her. The writer of Luke tells us that fact, confirming her material impoverishment. In addition to all that, and given her condition it is difficult to imagine that this woman was married.

1.2.3 *Contrasting faith and fear*

In this situation, one may ask the following question: what is it that pushed her to resolutely cross the borders, from her socially isolated zone, to risk the rebuff of the crowds, and of the synagogue ruler? The only person she could speak to now is herself. She knows from within herself that Jesus is more than all these physicians who have been unable to heal her. She also knows that she has lost everything. Yet this woman still has a precious gift deep within her: she has faith. It is that faith, that saving faith that gives her the courage to touch Jesus, the physician *par excellence*.

This is the story of her determination to cross the borders of legitimate behaviour to gain access to divine power.¹⁶ The immediate effect of touching Jesus' garment is that her bleeding stops (v.44). But Luke does not stop here. Her physical problem may be solved, but she is not yet healed.

Vv.45-46 introduce the beginning of the real healing process of the woman. The "*dynamis*" (power) that came out of Jesus has been provoked by her act of touching and is what brings about cure and healing. In an article published in the series Bible Today, volume 38 No. 5 of September 2000 (the title of the article reads, "Who Touched Me?") John J. Pilch gives us the meaning of the verb "touch" and the different kinds of

¹⁶ Cf. B.J. GREEN, *The Gospel of Luke*, 347.

messages this verb can convey. In the context of our study, the touch of the woman belongs to “the healing touch.”

Many in the crowd pressed on Jesus, but he knew that one had touched him with faith and was healed. Just as Jairus was told by Jesus to have faith and his daughter would be saved, the woman is told explicitly by Jesus that her faith had saved her. Faith saves. Luke T. Johnson sees this in terms of Luke’s overall narrative. He therefore concludes that these stories continue the demonstration of the programmatic statements in Jesus’ interpretation of the parable of the sower (8:11-15).

The conclusion that Luke gives to both stories is very significant. The two women who are saved, are also restored to their community. This is something more than just getting cured. The case of the haemorrhaging woman is even more impressive. After twelve years of isolation and denial of right and dignity, she is now reconciled with her people and can take part in the life of her community.

1.2.4 Conclusion

To widen our view, let us notice what is important to Luke. In the whole sequence of stories, Luke emphasizes the call and saving of the poor and the outcast (7:36-50; 8:22-25; 7:36,39). In this episode, the two stories present a picture of Jesus as Lord over sickness and death. These two women joined by the isolation of sickness, death and impurity, are addressed as “daughters”, and saved by faith.

The authenticity of the faith of the haemorrhaging woman is manifested in her willingness to cross the barriers of acceptable behaviour in order to obtain salvation.¹⁷ However, in relation to our reflection, it is a pity that Luke has left out a very important

¹⁷ Cf. B.J. GREEN, *The Gospel of Luke*, 349.

aspect, which identifies the woman in her suffering with Jesus. If we read Mark's version of the same story, we see that Mark introduces the woman as one who had "suffered much" (Mark 5:26). Mark also uses the same expression to describe Jesus' prediction of his passion (Mark 8:31; 9:12). Mark continues to tell us that the woman told Jesus the whole truth (5:33). In Mark 12:32, the Scribe recognises that Jesus speaks truthfully. Likewise some Pharisees asserted that Jesus is truthful (Mark 12:14). All these possibilities of the reader to identify the woman with a haemorrhage with Jesus seem to be eliminated by Luke.

Nevertheless, one should notice that Luke gives us food for thought in this story by saying that this woman openly confessed why she had touched Jesus and how she had been immediately healed, in the "presence of all the people" (v.47). According to Luke, witness to faith is the basis of true discipleship.¹⁸ True discipleship is obedience to God while taking bold new steps toward wholeness for the entire community.

Most importantly, this woman illustrates that we all need to have a personal encounter with Jesus in order to be cured and healed of whatever we might be suffering from. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is a matter of personal contact with the person of Jesus.

We mentioned how the two stories interpret one another. Thus the resuscitation story draws out the deeper implications of Jesus' cure (43-48), and the latter shows how Jesus' salvific power responds to a human being's turning to Jesus in faith. When Jesus heals, he grants life (55-56), and his granting of life is a response to faith and a source of peace (48).

¹⁸ M.A., GETTY-SULLIVAN, *Women in the New Testament*, 70.

1.3 The Woman who showed great love

1.3.1 Observations

Some scholars see a resemblance between Luke's version of the story and the other gospels version found in Mark 14:3-9; Matt 26:6-13 and John 12:1-8. Therefore they think that there must have been a shared tradition among the four Evangelists.

However, we notice that Luke's story takes place in a completely different setting in the narrative.¹⁹ While the other three evangelists have the anointing taking place immediately before the Passion account, Luke's version is set in the midst of Jesus' Galilean ministry and the focus is on repentance, forgiveness and love. Actually in Luke the scene is set in Galilee rather than Bethany. For Luke the host is Simon, a Pharisee, rather than Simon the Leper (Mark and Matthew). John has named the woman anointing Jesus; it is Mary the sister of Martha whereas the synoptic stories have an unnamed woman.

Again, in Luke, the objection comes from Simon. In John it is Judas who objects. In Matthew, the "disciples" object and in Mark it is "some" who object.²⁰ In Luke the centre of the objection is the woman's sinful past, while in the other three it is the cost of the ointment used, which is a waste when the money could have been used for the poor. Therefore the best explanation for these similarities and differences is that there are two strands of tradition here.

¹⁹ According to B.E. REID, the story of this nameless woman is often confused with that of the woman who anointed Jesus for burial (Mark 14:3-9; Matt 26:6-13; John 12:1-8).

²⁰ Cf. B.E. REID, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 108-109.

1.3.2 *The Woman's action as loving much*

In v.37, we are told that this woman was a sinner. However, we don't know the nature of her sinfulness. Nevertheless, it must have been sufficiently public to be known by Jesus' host. In v.39, Jesus is designated as "prophet". We are again taken back to the thematic statement: the prophet can see the heart. The irony here, as observed by many scholars, is not only that Jesus knows the woman's heart, but that he can also read Simon's thoughts. We are reminded here of the prophecy of Simeon "... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (2:35).

Luke is telling us that the woman is extending the hospitality, which Simon did not show to Jesus. And this is what Jesus reproaches Simon with his reply to the complaint. Fred B. Craddock puts the attitude of the two leaders (Jesus and Simon) in front of the sinful woman in the following way: "One has the understanding of righteousness which causes him to distance himself from her; the other understands righteousness to mean moving toward her with forgiveness and a blessing of peace."²¹ Evelyn R. Thibeaux describes the interaction between Jesus and Simon as a conflict of honour.²²

V.47 could be confusing. Indeed, it seems to say that the woman's love earned her forgiveness. In fact, it is the contrary; it is because she was forgiven much that she loved much. After all, the recommendable quality of the woman in this story is not her faith but her love. And as it stands in Luke's gospel, this story is a moving illustration of the desired response to Jesus' preaching. More importantly, v.50 summarises Jesus' ministry in terms of "preaching good news of peace."

²¹ Cf. F.B. CRADDOCK, *Luke*, 105.

²² Cf. E. R. THIBEAUX, *Known to be a Sinner*, *BTB*, .23 (1993), 153.

1.3.3 Conclusion

Who was that woman? We are asking this question because there is a lot of confusion in this story especially, regarding the sinfulness of the woman. Everybody seems to jump to the conclusion that she was a prostitute. Luke tells us that “tax collectors and sinners drew near to Jesus” and the righteous “Pharisees and scribes” objected that Jesus “welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Can we conclude that the “sin” of all these people is prostitution? And what might have been the type of sins of Simon Peter when he said “I am a sinful man?” (5:7) No one accuses Peter of prostitution.²³

Far from all sexual connotations, the action of the woman was focused on Jesus. According to the reply of Jesus, neither challenging nor correcting her, but affirming her, this woman’s action represents hospitality. She has and shows some marks of the ideal disciple.

We have the impression that the woman has been forgiven before, maybe during a previous encounter with Jesus, because Jesus uses a past tense to speak of her having been forgiven (v.47). Anyway the point of the story is that she had been forgiven and is not seen by Jesus as a sinner.

B.E. Reid tried to see the woman’s action in connection with Jesus. She says, “Her pouring out of the expensive ointment out of love prefigures Jesus’ pouring out of

²³ M.A. GETTY-SULLIVAN, *Women in the New Testament* 110. Cf. also REID, 115. Nonetheless, some find in 7:36-50 proof of the woman’s prostitution in the details of her loosening her hair, possessing an expensive alabaster flask of perfume, and emptying it out on Jesus’ feet. It is true that in Leviticus and Number there are references to dishevelled hair as a sign of mourning, uncleanness and shame (see Num 5:18). However, there is no indication in Luke 7:36-50 that this woman’s loosened hair connotes adultery, shame or uncleanness. The narrative does not say that she entered with her hair dishevelled or that it was already loosened. Cf. also 1Cor 11:2-16; but it is very difficult to determine precisely what is the issue Paul addresses here.

his precious life-blood on behalf of those whom he loves (22:20).”²⁴ In speaking of her tears, we are being referred in a contrasting way to Peter who wept bitterly after denying his Master (22:62). Her kisses stand in contrast to the betraying kiss of Judas (22:47). Her position at Jesus’ feet is the position of a servant. Jesus asked his disciples at the Last Supper to “let the greatest among you be as the youngest and the leader as the servant” (22:26). He even told them, “I am among you as the one who serves” (22:27).

We are still being asked this question, “do you see this woman?” No matter what we might call her, the essential point is that she is changed. Jesus’ words about her great love, her faith, her salvation and her peace explain why she is worthy of remembrance.²⁵

Finally, to accept Jesus’ establishment of the New Israel, along with its ethnic diversity and the way it reaches out to both Gentiles and Jews and in particular to sinners, one must recognise him as the Lord and as the human being *par excellence*. Such recognition requires love and faith, two keys to forgiveness and salvation, and the grounds for receiving the Lord’s peace (v.47-48, 50). Without these, Jesus’ identity remains a question, and one does not enter into the *Shalom* of the New Israel.

1.4 Martha and Mary: partners in ministry

1.4.1 A story from Luke’s unique source (L)

This story of Martha and Mary comes from Luke’s special source (L), because it is not recounted by the other two synoptic gospel traditions. Some scholars suggest that there could be a contact with a Johannine tradition.²⁶

²⁴ See E.B. REID, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 122.

²⁵ Cf. M.A. GETTY-SULLIVAN, *Women in the New Testament*, 113.

²⁶ See FETZMYER for example. He thinks that the possibility is there but not the certitude.

The episode has been an object of several different interpretations. As B.E. Reid states it clearly, “the tensions imbedded in this story raise more questions and interpretative problems than any other Lucan text involving women.”²⁷

1.4.2 The Behaviour of Martha and Mary

In this little scene (10:38-42), Luke presents a vivid image of the problems resulting from the socially prescribed role of women for the women disciples of Jesus. Martha and Mary are not depicted as individual people but as types that represent a role, a certain behaviour.

But before we come to their behaviour, let us underline something very important to Luke. He tells us about women of Galilee (8:1-3) supporting Jesus and the twelve in their travels. At this stage of the public ministry of Jesus, we are told that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, when he interacts/meets with different groups.²⁸ On the one hand, we have the eager disciples and on the other the watchful and increasingly hostile adversaries. Now in this more hostile territory, Jesus finds another receptive household. Jesus is a guest in the house of Martha and Mary and the two sisters vie with each other for his attention.

So far Jesus is the main personage in the entire gospel. In this scene, Martha is the principal personage. It is she who receives Jesus into her house, who joins Jesus in dialogue, who presents a problem and whose problem is resolved. Mary on the other hand is simply Martha's sister and an important source of Martha's problem, at least as the latter sees it.

²⁷ E.B. REID, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 144.

²⁸ L.T. JOHNSON, *The Gospel of Luke*, 174.

Mary is hearing the word (v.39), the pupil sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to the teacher's words, whose words are the word of God. "Mary chose the better part", that is, she made the right choice of what was necessary. Luke uses *agathos* rather than *kalos*, therefore there is a moral dimension to her choice: by her listening, she has received the person of the prophet, for the prophet is defined by his "word" (8:11-15). Luke T. Johnson states: "Throughout Luke-Acts, sitting at the feet indicates acknowledgement of authority"²⁹ Martha plays the role of the woman in the house; the "serving" (*diakonein*) task in the sense of preparing meals and taking care of the house. Her behaviour is to dramatise what the fate of most women is, except for the rich: she works in the house.

After the complaint of Martha (v.40), Jesus does not accept Martha's solution. He does not even accept her assessment of the problem. As in the story of the Samaritan who showed himself a true neighbour (10:30-37), Jesus goes to the heart of the matter and tells Martha that her real problem is that she is anxious and troubled (v.41). Jesus reminds her that it is more important to listen to what he has to say. The proper "service" of Jesus is attention to his instruction not an elaborate provision for his physical needs. The response of Jesus to Martha's anxiety (v.42) is not perfectly clear; hence the many different readings.³⁰ However the symbolism seems clear enough: the word of God and not food is the one thing "needful", necessary. Deut 8:3-5, Luke 4:4 and John 6:27 remind us that we do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. And this is the portion or dish Mary has chosen.³¹

²⁹ Cf. Luke 7:38; 8:35, 41; 17:16; Acts 4:35, 37; 5:2; 22:3.

³⁰ Manuscripts differ on v.42: some read, "One thing is needful"; others read, "Few things are needful" or "only one." Is Jesus referring to the many dishes Martha is preparing?

³¹ See comments and more details on the "one thing necessary" in *CBQ* 27 (1965).

According to Luke, “a *diakonia* that bypasses the word is one that will never have a lasting character; whereas listening to Jesus’ word is the lasting good that will not be taken away from the listener.”³² However the fact that Martha was busy about many things was the way she was answering her call and her faith-commitment.³³ And as M.A. Getty-Sullivan puts it, it is not that she is choosing a wrong way to follow Jesus, but that she ought not dispute the right of other women, like her sister Mary, to pursue a less traditional form of service to the Church.³⁴

1.4.3 Conclusion

Beyond all the interpretations given to this episode, we believe that there is much to gain by looking at a deeper reality that is behind the actions of Mary and Martha and Christ’s words to Martha. This is certainly a vast task and the limitation of our work does not allow us to do it here.

What we want to underline here is that, contrary to the other episodes, except in the case of Mary, Martha speaks to Jesus. In most cases, women do not address Jesus, at least not in spoken words as Martha did.

It is also amazing to observe that throughout the gospel, only women characters are the subjects of *diakonein* (4:39; 8:3; 10:40). In contrast, *diakonein* is used only of men in Acts. It will be good also not to be quick in drawing conclusions from this scene because, as some scholars proposed, we think that Jesus disapproves of Martha’s feeling

³² J.A. FETZMYER, *The gospel According to Luke II*, 892.

³³ In their book: *Jésus Parole de la Grâce selon saint Luc*, Philippe BOSSUYT and Jean RADERMAKERS, commenting on Martha and Mary said: “Quand à vouloir tirer argument de ce texte pour démontrer la ‘supériorité’ de la vie contemplative sur la vie active, c’est une réduction à laquelle le texte résiste vigoureusement: il forme diptyque avec l’agir miséricordieux du Samaritain, et ce dans un contexte de Parole Missionnaire.”

³⁴ M.A. GETTY-SULLIVAN, *Women in the New Testament*, 198.

burdened (v.40) and her anxiety and worry (41), not of her service. In Luke 8:14, anxiety is one of the things that chokes off growth of the word.³⁵ Jesus constantly reassures his followers not to worry (12:11, 22, 25). He also warns them against the “anxiety of daily life” that can prevent growth and vigilance.

Mary might have “chosen the better part” but we are not told how she will act on the word that she hears. Here only the dimension of hearing is emphasized. Let us say that Martha’s preoccupation is not about the kinds of worries about what will happen tomorrow or what to say or daily life (eating, clothing etc). Her worry concerns much more serving,³⁶ serving the Lord. Therefore, we don’t think it is necessary to contrast the attitudes of the two sisters by assuming Luke 10:38-42 to mean “one who serves actively can only do so after having listened to the word at the feet of Jesus”. Even though this is a true lesson for Christian life, one should ask the following question: is that the message Luke really intends to convey here?³⁷

Finally, we should ask ourselves another question, if it is true that listening to the word is more important than serving, why, in a gospel where serving, *diakonein*, epitomises the very mission of Jesus (22:27), does he reprimand Martha for doing just that? And last but not least, why is only hearing the word valued in this instance, when all through the Gospel there is a constant refrain that discipleship consists in both hearing and doing the word (6:47; 8:15, 21; 11:28).³⁸ The unit points to the primacy of

³⁵ E.B. REID, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 145.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Cf. STOGER, A. *The Gospel According to Luke: New Testament for Spiritual Reading*, 211.

³⁸ These questions are well answer by E.B. REID in chapter 11 of her book.

Jesus and his word in table fellowship and in the Christian life, which it epitomises. Apart from these basic values, nothing else matters.³⁹

1.5 Mary, the woman from Magdala (8: 2; 24: 10)

1.5.1 *The Woman from Magdala*

There is no doubt that Mary Magdalene is one of the most popular characters of the New Testament. All four gospels mention her at the cross and also as a witness to the resurrection.

In Luke 24:10 she is called “Mary, the woman from Magdala” (*hē Magdalēnē Maria*) or in 8:2: “Mary, called the woman from Magdala” (*Maria hē kaloumēnē Magdalēnē*). Unlike others, Mary is not called by the name of a man but by the name of a place. This unique characteristic is apparently connected with her outstanding role in the Jesus movement both before and after Easter. The stance of Mary Magdalene in the Jesus movement won for her the title of the “Apostola apostolorum” (first witness to the resurrection) given to her by the Early Church, for she was sent to proclaim the resurrection to the apostles.⁴⁰ Although Mary had “seven demons driven from her,” the text gives us no reason to connect her to “the sinful woman” of the previous story (7:36-50), though the harmonising tendency of Church tradition has done so. When she is associated with other named women, she is almost always listed first. The gospels define her not only in terms of her place of origin but also speak of her past (Luke 8:2). Here we want to look at Mary of Magdala as a witness to the Resurrection

³⁹ E. LaVERDIERE, *Luke*, 153. A similar problem occurs in the life of the Jerusalem community, when the twelve find themselves unable to cope with the demands of an expanding and increasingly diversified community. Overwhelmed by service at tables, they must expand the community's leadership structure in order to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. Cf. Acts 6: 1-7.

⁴⁰ H. CONZELMANN sees the mentioning of Mary Magdalene in 8:1-3 already as pointing toward the Passion. However this is not all, the women also have a function as “witnesses from Galilee” similar to that to the disciples. Cf. *Ibid. The Theology of St Luke*, 47.

1.5.2 Mary Magdalene (and other women) as witness to Jesus' Death and Resurrection

Luke (also Mark) says that the women come to the tomb with spices and ointment. They are sad but want to remain faithful to their “friend” Jesus. Their intention is to perform a ritual, to give Jesus a proper burial once the Sabbath is over.

Mary Magdalene and Joanna are the first to be told of Jesus' resurrection (24:10, 22). Luke tells us that having found the stone rolled back; the women went inside the tomb to see for themselves, just as Peter does (24:12). By mentioning that the women were puzzled, Luke wants to draw our attention to the fact that the empty tomb does not by itself lead to faith. There is a need of interpretation.

The women are told to “remember”. In 22:19-22, Jesus asks his disciples to “keep doing this in remembrance of me.” Remembrance (*anamnesis*) means to “bring to mind”. It is something more than a mechanical way of not forgetting. More precisely, it is a form of presence. In Hebrew the term *anamnesis* is *zikkron* and it has this strong sense of “keeping in mind”⁴¹ In Deut 16:3 we are given a clear explanation of *zikkron* at the Passover Meal.

Luke does not have the women going to tell Peter and the others but they are asked to “remember,” to remember his “words.” Thus remembering his words is the key to the understanding and interpretation of the Jesus events.

The list of the women who have been following Jesus is repeated in 24:10. It also confirms their faithfulness⁴² to Jesus even after his shameful death. These women are the first witnesses. These are the women who first believed. But their witness is not

⁴¹ See Gen 8:11; 9:15; 19:29; Exod 2:24; 6:5; Neh 1:8; 9:17; 2 Sam 18:18; Ezek 21:23; 29:26; 33:3; Tob 1:12; 2:2.

⁴² R. ROHR, *The Good News According to Luke: Spiritual Reflections*, 190.

believed by the apostles, “This story of theirs seemed pure nonsense and they (the apostles) did not believe” (v.11).

1.5.3 Conclusion

What seems to be sure is this: a group of Galilean women took, after Jesus’ death in Jerusalem, decisive steps that lead to the restoration of the Galilean Jesus movement that had dissolved with Jesus’ crucifixion. Hence, these women were the first among Jesus’ disciples who believed Jesus’ prophecy about the resurrection, even though it took the epiphany of an angel to confront them anew with the truth of Jesus’ promise.

The three synoptic gospels agree that Mary Magdalene and some other women were in the “reign-of-God movement” from the beginning (Mark 15:40-41; Matt 27:55-56; Luke 8:1-3). These gospels also agree that Mary Magdalene, together with some other women played a key role in the continuation of the movement after the death of Jesus (Mark 16:1-8,9-10; Matt 28:1-8; Luke 24:1-9). The Johannine gospel goes even further, mentioning her as the first witness of the resurrection (20:11-19).

Finally, one should notice the response of the two men to the women at the tomb. These two men responded to the women’s perplexity (24:14a) by orienting them away from the tomb toward the community of the living. Hence, we agree with many scholars who say that the empty tomb is not consequently seen as a proof of the resurrection, but only as source of wonderment. And as E. LaVerdiere puts it: “faith in the resurrection springs from the actual experience of the risen Lord”⁴³ (24:13-35).

⁴³ E. LaVERDIERE, *Luke*, 283.

Conclusion of the chapter

We have given ourselves a task in this first chapter, which was to look at some women whom Luke portrays for us as models. We have tried to understand how these women responded to their “vocation” or how some of them were changed by their encounter with the Lord Jesus. The writer of Luke tells us of the faith of these women, the hope against hope for some of them.

To understand more fully the intention of Luke (and Acts) one needs to notice that the writer follows a pattern of narrative argumentation. This is called a rhetorical stasis genre. It aims to show how the Christian community finds a sure knowledge about the salvific meaning of events that have happened among them.

Luke’s purpose is to show that, through a narrative rhetorical praxis of telling and retelling the stories of God’s work through Jesus, Christians can know (gain assurance of, or be certain of) their own salvation (1:1-4). A correlative purpose is to show how their salvation must be embodied in their actions, especially in their loving relationships.

Hence, in all the portraits we have seen the reader is constantly asked to try to identify him/herself with the characters. Now that we have seen the characters, we can try to go deeper into the intentions of Luke. In our following chapter we would like to see how women participated, in their different ways, in the ministry of Jesus.

Chapter II

Participation of Women in the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus

Introduction

We have now seen how Luke portrays women in the Jesus movement. In the second chapter we want to examine these women not as individuals but as a group. Luke is narrating the story of Jesus and his first followers in such a way as to console, guide and challenge his faith communities. The communities' concerns and struggles are revealed in the themes that recur: prayer, Jesus' boundary-breaking practices, table fellowship, material possessions, the spirit, perseverance under persecution, continuity and discontinuity between Israel and the Church, the fulfilment of God's promises and the delay of the Parousia, to name a few.

The general purpose of Luke is to offer guidance to his communities on new questions that arise from within. In reading the two-volume work (Luke and Acts), we can discover that one of the obvious disputed questions concerns the exercise of ministry by women believers.

Another thing among many others that the author of Luke is interested in is the education of women in the basics of the Christian faith and the education of outsiders about Christian women. As we know, in the concept of discipleship, the faith element is very important. In all the five models we have already seen, the faith element seems to be of central importance for Luke.

The task ahead of us now is to see how the women participated in the ministry of Jesus with all that it entails, that is, suffering and death. We are going to look at three main aspects. The first one is to see women and the faith element, that is, how in believing, women have come to symbolise the prayers and longings of the just one of the Scriptures who trusts in God and relies on God for strength and courage and faithfulness. It is also interesting to note that no woman approaches Jesus in the Gospels without faith, and none goes away from Jesus unchanged.

Therefore our second aspect will be that idea of change, which suggests that a person leaves behind one situation or condition and replaces it with another. But one should notice the following carefully: the Gospel stories that feature women are not really about those women at all. Rather, the stories are about Jesus and about how the kingdom of God he proclaims, affects all people.⁴⁴ Women, like men, are changed as a result of their encounter with Jesus.

Lastly, we will examine the aspect of women and discipleship. Because of the ambiguity in defining what discipleship is, we will give ourselves some time to reflect upon whether this term could be applied to the women or at least to some of them “who follow Jesus.”

⁴⁴ M. A. GETTY-SULLIVAN, *Women in the New Testament*, 43

2.1 Women, their Faith Aspect

2.1.1 *Mary was a woman of faith*

Many things could be said of Mary but here we want to limit ourselves to her faith. Luke, who shows a certain interest in women's stories,⁴⁵ begins his Gospel account with the tales of three women whose faith held potent expectation. In the infancy narrative the reader is told what faith means: hope and expectation. This is, indeed, the only definition we have of faith in the New Testament, which includes very much this idea. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us "faith is the realisation of what is hoped for and the evidence of things not seen..." (He 11:1).

In the infancy narrative, the central players enter the story as devout Israelites who hang upon the hope of a liberation soon to come to Israel at the hands of a faithful God. The infancy narrative is not only about the fulfilment of promises, but more, there is recognition, by Mary, of something fresh and unforeseen. This radically extends and ruptures the bounds of conventional expectation. Again, there is continuity, yes, but also a measure of discontinuity as well. Something new, challenging, threatening even, takes place, causing wonder, disturbance and surprise.⁴⁶

In the annunciation scene, Mary is directly in touch with the heavenly world in her dialogue with the angel Gabriel.⁴⁷ She is depicted by Luke as the model of the female believer. In this dialogue Mary is commissioned to be a mother. Hence her

⁴⁵ We have already mentioned Luke's concern for women. For instance, in the infancy narrative, the term "womb" occurs seven times. It certainly seems plausible that such stories would have enjoyed wider circulation among female believers. Such groups could have been Luke's source for these stories.

⁴⁶ In Luke's Gospel surprise is the sign of God's hand.

⁴⁷ In speaking about the transformation that happened in Mary so that she was able to accept and do the will of God, the Cardinal archbishop of Milan, C.M. MARTINI said: "...Elle a dû penser: où Dieu veut-il me conduire, que va-t-il se passer? Marie s'était certainement accoutumée à un certain mode de vie, fait de prière, de piété, de dévouement, de lectures bibliques; mais maintenant elle sent que Dieu la transporte sur un plan différent et qu'elle doit – comme le fit Abraham – laisser la sécurité des choses connues et s'abandonner à un autre dessein de Dieu." Cf. C.M. MARTINI, *L'Évangéliste en saint Luc*, 159-160.

response is to consent freely to motherhood (1:38). It is through this consent in faith that Luke creates the positive portrait of Mary as a model believer.

Luke makes a strong contrast between Mary and Zechariah. On the one hand, we have a high religious official exercising his function at the very centre of national life and on the other hand, a young woman in a remote village in Galilee. We have moved from the centre to the margins.⁴⁸ Notice that the first person to believe is Mary (1:45), in contrast to Zechariah who did not believe Gabriel's words (v.20). Mary is declared blessed by Elisabeth for believing what was spoken to her by the Lord (v.45).

Mary prefigures the ideal response of a disciple, and yet she does not appear among the disciples in the Gospel.⁴⁹ Luke provides no further information as to what role Jesus' mother, who first heard and believed the word, plays in the post-resurrection community of disciples.

Mary was a woman of faith and of trust. Lack of trust in God is at the root of all sin; genuine trust in God, which is always intrinsic to faith in God, is essential in establishing the relationship of friendship with God for which the human family was created. Genuine trust in God continually undoes the power of sin.

Luke-Acts highlight Mary as a woman of prayer. Whether we contemplate Mary at Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-20), at the Jerusalem temple (2:22-35, 41-51) or in the mystery of Pentecost (Acts 1:12-14), her prayerfulness accounted for her trust in the midst of enormous difficulties and keen suffering. In the infancy narratives, Luke points out twice the redemptive sufferings of Jesus, which Mary would share most intimately (2:19, 51).

⁴⁸ B. BYRNE, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*, 22.

⁴⁹ In Acts Mary is found among Jesus' followers, gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem, awaiting the coming of the Spirit.

In the theology of Luke-Acts, the explicit references to Mary's prayerfulness, sustaining her in trust and love throughout Jesus' entire life, are meant to be understood also with respect to the Church's life, particularly in situations of suffering. On the basis of this we can say that there are some obvious reasons why the Council's teaching on Mary can help today's Christians understand better how the mystery of Christ is to be lived in the modern world. With the exception of Jesus no other person knew quite so profoundly as Mary did just what the "befriending Spirit" of God can mean in one's life. It is because of God's befriending Spirit that Mary enjoyed a unique relation to Jesus. And through the action of the same Spirit she continues to enjoy a unique role in the mystery of Christ and the Church.

Mary at prayer after the shepherds came to see Jesus was told that her child would be great. But in sharp contrast to what seemed to be predicted, Mary not only found herself in the predicament of using a manger for her baby's first cradle, but also of welcoming poor rugged shepherds as the first visitors. Finally let us underline that the Magnificat proclaims in a prayerful praise the salvific acts of God.

2.1.2 The woman who loved much

The woman who has been forgiven much (7:50) is also said to have faith (*pistis*). We are shown the importance of faith. It makes one whole. We know from Paul and Acts that there were questions about how much, if any, of the Jewish Law ought to be observed by Gentiles (known sinners) in order to be fully accepted into the Church. There was a big debate whether faith in Jesus' messiahship was sufficient for one to be saved or not. In this scene, Jesus' reaction to the woman's gesture seems to settle the issue for good: it is faith that saves.

Through this story, Luke makes a contrast between Simon the Pharisee and the woman who is a sinner, underlining that the latter plays the role of someone who is receptive to the mercy and forgiveness of God. The story finds similarities with the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (18:9-14) and many others (15:11-32; 10:29, 37; 14:15-24; 16:19-31; 23:29-43 etc).

This woman symbolises the attitude of a human being to God's offer of salvation. That is, how should one respond to God's offer? Already in the two figures of the infancy narrative, Zechariah and Mary, we meet the difference: Zechariah hesitates in doubt while Mary permits the renewing, creative word of God to take its course with her (1:38).⁵⁰

In an attempt to set the story within the Christian community of Luke's time, one may come to the following conclusion: first of all the *agape-fellowship*, reconciliation and forgiveness seemed to be of special importance within the context of first-century house churches. Then, also to their temple or synagogue services, early Christians added "gathering" including Gentiles for the "breaking of the bread."

We have already mentioned that the question of full acceptance into the Church arose between the "righteous" people and the sinners. And from Paul and the Acts of the Apostles, we know that arguments about faith in Jesus' messiahship and the observance of the law brought some division in the Church. Therefore, through this story, the writer of Luke seems to say that faith is indeed sufficient. Faith is the primary lesson Jesus teaches as he sits at table.⁵¹

⁵⁰ H. FLENDER, *St Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History*, 29.

⁵¹ Cf. M.A. GETTY-SULLIVAN, *Women in the New Testament*, 112.

As Joseph A. Fitzmyer puts it, it does not seem difficult to understand the message of Luke in this passage, that is, “repentance, forgiveness of sins and salvation have come to one of the despised persons of Israel; she has shown this by an act of kindness manifesting a more basic love and faith, love shown to Jesus and faith in God himself.”⁵²

To conclude, one should retain the rich, however difficult, interrelationships between the words “forgiveness”, “love” and “faith” (v.47-50). On the one hand, the theological problems of these interrelationships are solved when one sees that the sinful woman’s acts of love flowed from her belief that Jesus had truly offered her God’s mercy and forgiveness. On the other hand, faith saves those who turn from their sins (v.50); they show that they have received forgiveness by their acts of charity and thankfulness (v.47).

We don’t have here a psychological description of the woman. However, her attitude denotes a sign of repentance: it is in Jesus that she has understood her sin, in Jesus that she understood the love of God. Very often what is difficult is to accept that we are loved; the danger in our life is despair, the humiliation caused by our sin and the loss of hope. Salvation and faith is to believe that we are loved, though we are sinners.

2.1.3 The Faith of the Woman with a Haemorrhage

The woman with a haemorrhage also shows faith. Jesus’ final statement (8:48) shows that this woman is to be praised for her faith. We see clearly that in this context, the healing is far from being magic. It flows out of her relationship with Jesus, a relationship of faith. Hence, faith brings that wholeness (*shalow*) she had lost. The

⁵² FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke II*, 686.

woman declared in public her faith witness. According to Reid, this woman's faith-announcement prefigures that of Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary, the mother of James in 24:1-12.⁵³ These women truthfully announce their experience of the good news. However, Peter and his companions, not only consider their witness as unimportant but also they refuse to believe (8:45; 24:10-12).

The faith of this woman produced in her a double action. First it cured and healed her from her illness then it saved her. Her faith has brought her back to her faith community. In connection with this story, we notice that Jairus was asked just to believe and his daughter would live again.

Faith is a very important aspect in the disciples' life. During the journey to Jerusalem, the apostles ask Jesus to increase their faith (17:5). After the storm on the lake, Jesus asks them "where is your faith?" (8:25). Jesus tells Peter that he has prayed for him that his faith may not fail. And on the road to Emmaus, the risen Lord rebukes Cleopas and his companion for being "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke" (24:25).

What is important for us to note is that women as well as men are specifically said to believe as a group. However individual women are also said to have faith. We have Mary (1:45), the woman who loved much (7:50) and the woman healed of a hemorrhage (8:48).⁵⁴ These and many others behind the scenes are models for our Christian living.

⁵³ E.B. REID, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 140.

⁵⁴ The list of individual women said to have faith continues in Acts, like Timothy's mother (16:1), Lydia (16:15) and Damaris (17:34).

2.2 Women Changed by their encounter with Jesus

2.2.1 *Most Women presented to us had a need*

Miracle stories are one of the means used by the early Church to express a change that a person can undergo when touched by Jesus. Though the stories of women are not really the focus of the evangelist, what is said does give us an insight into the situation of women in the society of Jesus' time.⁵⁵

We first and foremost know most of the women mentioned in the gospels as disabled. We know some in relationship to a man, like Mary, the mother of Jesus, the daughter of Jairus, the mother of Zebedee's sons. Others are known in reference to where they come from, a certain place, like the widow of Nain. We also know others by their name such as Mary of Nazareth, Mary of Magdala and Martha and Mary of Bethany.

2.2.2 *The Response of Jesus*

When we talk of faith it is always good to underline its dynamic aspect, for faith is not a static reality. Changed circumstances call for a deepening of that faith. The circumstances in which all those women (and men) who encountered Jesus were, probably, helped them to experience this deep change, the turning of their life to believe Jesus and accept him as their Saviour.

In the stories of cures, Jesus demonstrates a particular love for persons who not only knew the pains of various diseases but who like the leper (17:18-19), the woman with a haemorrhage etc, also knew the pains of social stigma.

⁵⁵ M.A. GETTY-SYLLIVAN, *Women in the New Testament*, 43.

Jesus reached out to the son of a widow, to a woman who knew the continual suffering caused by inequality according to law (7:11ff), to a penitent woman ostracised as a sinner (7:36ff), to a little girl, one who must have already suffered from the automatic level of “inferior” simply because she wasn’t a boy (8:40ff), to a woman with a haemorrhage, who for twelve years had borne the stigma of being unclean (8:43ff) etc.

In all these episodes Jesus was manifesting a preferential option for the poor, for those who needed release from all sorts of afflictions, but even more importantly, those who needed assurance of their own dignity and self worth. It is by contemplating Jesus in each of these scenes of human suffering that we get to understand his teaching better.

The Lukan beatitudes are reduced to four: those who are poor, who hunger, who are weeping, who are ostracised and insulted like the prophets (6:20ff). These are the suffering persons who need and will receive God’s special compassionate love.

Jesus constantly confronted the excessive legalism on the part of many religious leaders. This abusive religious stance, not only caused people great physical suffering, but even more tragically caused untold suffering to mind and heart.

Legalists distorted and misinterpreted the law so as to prevent the alleviation of human suffering because of so-called Sabbath observance. However, Jesus’ teaching on the meaning of Sabbath accompanied his Sabbath cures (6:6ff; 13:10ff; 14:1ff). It is exactly in this context of Sabbath healing and teaching that Jesus met with mounting opposition and hostility on the part of many religious leaders. Jesus is the master of the law and he knows very well that a true human transformation cannot come from a fearful and indiscriminate observance of it.

A true encounter with Jesus brings about transformation from within; it brings about salvation. What does salvation mean for Luke? Taken as a dramatic whole, the

story of the woman in 7:36-50 (especially v.50) shows that salvation consists not only in forgiveness but also in the human transformation that the experience of forgiveness has brought about.⁵⁶ When Jesus bids this woman to “go in peace,” she carries with her the messianic peace of one transformed by Jesus’ power to save. The same messianic peace that transforms the person and replaces him/her back in that *shalow*, that wholeness, is given also to the woman with a haemorrhage.

One should notice the particularity of Luke who tells us that women have been following Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. In the passion narrative, Mark, Matthew and John admit that women were there at the end. But Luke tells us how they got there. They have been there, in the company of Jesus, ministering, listening to him and supporting his mission. This shows that some women have been transformed not only by being healed from their physical illness but also they were transformed, changed from what they were, sinners, unclean, despised etc. so much so that they followed him up to his crucifixion. As we have already mentioned, it is a dynamic faith that they displayed along the way.

An encounter with Jesus by women has not only led to their own transformation but also to the transformation of those present. For example, according to Luke, prior to the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law, Simon has no relationship with Jesus. Simon is only called in the next chapter (5:1-12) after the healing of his mother-in-law. As Reid puts it, the cure of Simon’s mother-in-law “lays the foundation” for Simon’s call.⁵⁷ Similar examples are given to us in Acts 16:14-15, 40 where a woman named Lydia, who met Paul, opened her home to him and thus her household became the first house church of Philippi.

⁵⁶ B. BYRNE, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke’s Gospel*, 76.

⁵⁷ E.B. REID, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, 102.

The power that went out of Jesus to cure the woman with a haemorrhage is a transforming power. The healing power of Jesus did not only bring back the woman's identity and dignity but also brought about a change that she experienced here and now; hence, her boldness in confessing everything in public. Though her initial courage to touch Jesus' cloak seems to disappear, her response is to prostrate herself before Jesus. As M.A. Getty-Sullivan puts it, her "fear and trembling" and the prostration before Jesus, are not signs of timidity but rather, they are the right attitudes and positions of a believer⁵⁸. Jesus confirmed this deep transformation that the woman experienced by this encounter (8:48)

It is obvious that some of these women, together with Mary, the mother of Jesus, who knew and experienced suffering, not only physical but also emotionally, morally and socially, might have had more compassion for Jesus when he was crucified than anybody else.

2.3 Women and Discipleship

2.3.1 *The Notion of discipleship*

First of all, we want to agree with most of the scholars that there is not a single text or New Testament book that gives us a clear definition of discipleship. Hence whatever is there, comes from our own understanding of what marks or qualities someone ought to have as a disciple. This understanding itself is based on the many sayings and stories we have that depict the relationship that Jesus had and formed with his companions.⁵⁹ The Gospel is constructed around this nucleus of Jesus' companions,

⁵⁸ M.A. GETTY-SULLIVAN. *Women in the New Testament*, 66.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 163.

women and men alike. It is based on the knowledge that each and every one of these companions had of Jesus and this is what was at the heart of the *kerygma*.

If Jesus of Nazareth had made a simple impression on people, if he had not touched the hearts of people, the gospel wouldn't have been good news. In this sense one cannot fail to see that the possession of the word that Jesus pronounces is the possession of Jesus himself. This is what the women had and which was very fundamental to the Jesus' movement. Let us remember that at the time the gospels were composed and written the main preoccupation was not to build churches. Rather, the main task was first of all to accredit the word of Jesus; meaning there was a need to convince first before organising. Faith was still an event not an institution. Therefore, so that the church may not lose this aspect, there is a need to assure the promotion of humble people, those who are most marginalised.

If a person today were to be asked, "Why are you a Christian?" the answer might well be, "Because I consider myself a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth and a follower of the tradition he initiated." Hence discipleship or the following of Jesus has been for centuries a way of characterizing the Christian commitment. This commitment, depending on its degree, gives different meanings to our discipleship.

Our faith is very much linked to the eyes that have looked at (2:36ff; 2:26ff), to the hands that have started the first gestures of adoration (8:47; 7:36-50), to the lips that have uttered the right words (1:46-56), and to the hope of the faithful (8:3; 23:55). Most of the time all these are recognisable in feminine consciousness, which is so deeply embedded in the images of women portrayed to us.

3.3.2 Discipleship as a Christian Phenomenon

To come back to our attempt at defining the word discipleship, let us say again that it is not only a direct call to follow Jesus that is constitutive of discipleship, but a positive response to Jesus and an openness to the word of the Lord. In ordinary language a “disciple” is someone who learns from a teacher.

All the canonical Gospels refer to the followers of Jesus of Nazareth as his “disciples,” *mathetai*.⁶⁰ Some people think that women had to remain near Jesus out of fear that their illness might recur - as most of them were cured of their illnesses. Arguing on this basis they support their stand with 8:2-3, which connects miracles and the disciple relationship. That is, the fact that women are identified both as followers and as recipients of wondrous acts from Jesus, adds further evidence that Luke understood discipleship intimately connected to Jesus’ ability to perform mighty acts. The miracle changed their lives totally and they became disciples of Jesus.

However, this does not concern only women. For example, Jesus’ miraculous power is demonstrated in Luke 4:31-41 before he calls any disciple at all. We have already mentioned the story of the call of Simon (5:1-11), which is in itself a miracle narrative. Those who have experienced his power are called to follow him (5:1-11). The portrait of the women in 8:2-3 includes the same components: the wondrous experience and the consequent departure to follow Jesus⁶¹.

Women are healed to serve the family of God. Healed by Jesus, they actively carry out a function, as is evident from the summary narrative (8:1-3). The women serve

⁶⁰ *Mathētēs* occurs 73 times in Matthew, 46 in Mark, 37 in Luke, 78 in John and 28 in Acts.

⁶¹ We also find a number of miracle narratives in Luke’s gospel where Jesus heals particular women and renews their lives. Half of these narratives are based on Markan material, while half are peculiar to Luke. Cf. 4:38-39; 7:1-11; 8:43-48; 8:40-56; 13:10-17 and some even add 7:36-50. None of them more fully related healing of women ends clearly in a departure to follow Jesus, that is to the kind of itinerant service with Jesus that is supposed in the summary account (8:2-3).

Jesus and the twelve. The miracle narratives contribute to the Lukan description of Jesus as a benefactor also in relation to women. His benefaction consequently makes the women benefactors. The women's share in the social sacrifice, involved, in the movement around Jesus, the new wholeness that Jesus has given them in serving the community. Just like the men who follow Jesus, the women too have departed and set out on an itinerant life with Jesus.

However, taking into consideration the entire gospel, it is clear that the women's service included more than food. The women's use of their property (8:3) is a contributory factor that permits the group around Jesus to be free of concern about what they shall eat or wear (12:22, 30-34). Hence the departure which the call to follow Jesus demands and the costs of discipleship are covered by the new community, the new family (14:26ff).

Women's serving functions are given an exemplary significance for the whole community but, women are not restricted to functions of caring for others; they are also established in roles traditionally reserved for men. For example Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42, have a disciple's learning relationship to Jesus. However, the two sisters are cast in roles, which without becoming caricatures, are almost stereotypes. This has encouraged strong traditions interpreting the two women as symbols of various attitudes, forms of life or theological principles: righteousness by work as opposed to righteousness by faith; Judaism as opposed to Christianity; the *vita activa* as opposed to the *vita contemplativa* etc.

Nevertheless one is not necessarily obliged to confine oneself to only one of these interpretations, because, so far all the efforts to understand the place of this story fail to satisfy. M.A. Getty-Sullivan suggests that this scene (the story of Martha and

Mary) reflects more the situation in Luke's community rather than a situation in the life of Jesus.⁶²

In the context of Luke's community, Martha would represent the women who had taken on "many concerns" in an early church, which had been living more in an apocalyptic age. Without entering into a debate dividing and opposing the two sisters, let us suggest with M.A. Getty-Sullivan that "what Luke is doing with the Martha-Mary story could be defending both forms of discipleship also for women. Each one of them answered the call to follow Jesus and her faith-commitment in a different and unique way.

From this perspective, one should now see that the choice of Martha, who actually is a symbol of those who were expected to give cheerfully without counting the cost, without recognition in return, is not wrong. The problem might be that she ought not dispute the right of other women, like her sister Mary. Mary, her sister, has chosen to pursue a less traditional form of service to the Church.

Conclusion

When one considers the abundant use of the word "disciple" in the Gospels and in Acts, one begins to see why "discipleship" in a religious sense may have emerged as a Christian phenomenon. The Lukan writings reveal an everyday concern for discipleship. The demands of Christian commitment⁶³ underlined by Luke could be summarised as follows: first, the response expected from people to the Christian

⁶² Cf. M.A. GETTY-SULLIVAN, *Women in the New Testament* 93: in the eighth decade, when Luke was writing, the respective roles of women were much debated. At least one of Luke's concerns is showing that being a Christian did not conflict with the Greco-Roman ideals for men and women were pious and observant of religious tradition, that they adhered to accepted standards for behaviour as members of society, that their family life, including the women, was exemplary.

⁶³ J.A. FITZMYER, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of his Teaching*, 128-140.

kerygma. It consists in faith: “believe in the Lord Jesus, and you and your household will be saved” (Acts 16:31), “...only have faith and she will be saved” (Luke 8:50). We have a clear connection between faith and salvation: “your faith has brought you salvation” (7:50, 8:45, Acts 14:9). It consists also in repentance and conversion, which is another way Luke describes the ideal disciple’s reaction to the Christian proclamation. *Metanoia* (conversion) literally means “a change of mind”. However in the New Testament it is very close to a religious turning from sin. It consists finally in being baptised: faith, repentance and conversion lead to the baptism of the follower of Jesus (Acts 2:38).

The second demand is the one of Christian living. This includes the following of Jesus, witnessing to the Lord, prayer and the right use of material possessions.⁶⁴ Lastly and still following the proposition of J.A. Fitzmyer, the third Lukan demand is the community aspect of Christian living. If we consider the two-volume work of Luke, we are not wrong in concluding that Luke has an ecclesial dimension to his writings, which is somehow special and helpful to our Christian living today. The Acts of the Apostles is entirely a wonderful summary of the community living of the companions of Jesus after his death. This nucleus was a source of nourishment for the early Christians.

Hence though we have got very few written reference to the involvement of women at this juncture, it is hard not to think that “the women who had followed Jesus” remained united with the other male followers in their daily struggle for recognition and for life. It is even harder to conceive that these women who have been touched, and freed from exclusion, marginalisation to re-socialisation etc, would forget the one who could do such things not only around them but also in themselves.

⁶⁴ For more detail on the Lukan demands of Christian commitment see Joseph A. FITZMYER, *Ibid.*

Mary, the mother of Jesus, and some women were praying with the apostles: “with one heart all these joined constantly in prayer, together with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts 1:14).

One understanding of a disciple is that someone is called by Jesus, to follow after him on the journey and to spend time with him in his way of life. The other, which is closely linked to the call to discipleship, is the invitation to participate in the mission of Jesus.⁶⁵ If in the gospel we do not have a direct call of Jesus to women, we do have knowledge that women participated actively in the mission of Jesus, while he was still alive and maybe more so after his death.

The reason for this assertion is that in his report on the Jesus’ movement, the writer of Luke-Acts tells us that most of the house churches were cared for by women. The statement in Luke 8: 1-3 gives us a clear notion of the women in the Jesus movement. In a way, women participated actively, alongside the men, in the mission of Jesus, in bringing the good news of the kingdom of God to all.

⁶⁵ J. GILLMAN, *Possessions and the Life of Faith: A Reading of Luke-Acts*, 64.

Chapter III

African Women's Participation in the Suffering and Resurrection of Jesus

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have seen how women, after being changed and transformed by Jesus, responded to his call to follow him in their own way. Considering that we understand the word "disciple" to be, not only a direct call to follow Jesus, that is constitutive of discipleship, but also a positive response to Jesus and openness to the word of the Lord, we can see that the women in the Jesus movement are undeniably inspiring models for us.

Women approached Jesus with various needs and these needs were met by a compassionate Jesus of Nazareth who liberated them from the burdens of disease and ostracism. Needless to mention here that Jesus himself was their companion, friend, teacher and true 'child of women.'

The same Jesus of Nazareth, our risen Lord, yesterday, today and always the same, continues to be in the midst of his suffering sisters and brothers. He is particularly present in the life of many African women who are caught between the blazing flames and the raging waters. It is the risen Lord who walks with them and makes so many of them signs of hope, as he has already done with Mary of Magdala, the woman with a haemorrhage, the woman who loved much and so many others unknown to us through the canonical gospels.

Hope, which is at the heart of our Christian faith, is what Christian African women are called to have and to give to all those who feel helpless, the children, the elderly, and the handicapped in Africa.

However, women are not only called to have and give hope but to participate in the rebuilding of our African society and the African church. To borrow the term of the Synod of the African bishops, women are called to build the church in *Africa as a family*.

This third and last chapter wants to look at how African women, though pressed down by so many miseries and sufferings, can participate in that vast mission in which the risen Lord himself is actively present. In the first place, we will examine some of these miseries and sufferings in which African women find themselves, and then, we shall see that despite difficulties, African women, in their motherly role want to take up the challenge of building a peaceful and Christian society.

3.1 Women's Participation in the Suffering

3.1.1 Women and Misery in Africa

A very quick observation tells us that with modern technological means, the reduction of human suffering is becoming a realisable goal: preventing and healing, averting massive suffering. At the same time this possibility of preventing suffering must be considered alongside the possibility of causing more suffering through technological expertise. Moreover, it is only in this age of modern technology that the question of suffering touches all life, not just human life.

When we apply this observation down to our dear continent it does not seem very difficult to speak of misery and suffering in Africa, and this is a fact. In general,

suffering is a universal phenomenon hence it poses questions in all cultures and each culture has since the beginning, given various explanations for it. More importantly, suffering and misery raise questions about the meaning of human existence and they also raise a critical question about God.

For example we are called to revise our understanding of an “almighty God, all-powerful Father.” For it is simply unbelievable to conceive of a powerful God who could look at the Rwandan genocide, the Sierra Leone and Liberian wars, to name but a few, tolerate them, participate in them, observe them or whatever. In this case, if God is all-powerful, then he is devoid of love. Our understanding of God and such titles given to him would be better if we constantly looked at Jesus. Because in Jesus, we see God in solidarity with those who are powerless. Our God is with the lowly, the marginalized, the ostracised, the women, the children.

Christianity tells a story about Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord. From the very beginning, Christians have claimed that the life, the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus have made a radical difference for humanity. Arguing on this basis, Christianity’s fundamental response to human’s ongoing situation of suffering, evil and death is contained in the Paschal Mystery and its complex symbols. Our human misery and suffering is then explained: in Jesus of Nazareth, God become human; by Jesus of Nazareth the word was made flesh. It is the same Jesus of Nazareth, word made flesh who really suffers.

According to Walter Brueggemann, the fundamental aspect of Israel’s faith has to do with pain.⁶⁶ But this is not only true for Israel’s faith but also for our own. In a very special way, African Christians, women and men alike, should have their faith

⁶⁶ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Revelation and Violence: A Study in contextualisation*, 4.

enlightened from this reality of suffering. However just as Israel never lost hope, women in their painful situation should keep a living hope that there will be a decisive and radical reordering of social power and social goods.

3.1.2 The reality and source of misery and suffering

When I was in pastoral training in Tunisia (1998-2000), I discovered for the first time a very sad and embarrassing reality. In this country, images coming from black Africa were almost always negative ones: famine, killing, walking skeletons, refugees etc. Looking at these images really revolted me. However, the reality is that there is misery and suffering in black Africa. Most of these situations are caused not only by natural calamities but also by our human greed. Almost every day, we are being exposed to such sad news in the media.

Our concern here is not only that misery and suffering exist, but that most of this suffering and dehumanising situations concern women and children. In 1996, I went on holidays in the Northern part of Ghana. Two years before my visit, there was a terrible ethnic conflict between the Dagombas and the Nanumbas⁶⁷, which left some part of the region vulnerable. I got a chance to visit villages ravaged by fire, all the outstation chapels burned down to ashes. In some of those villages the only survivors were elderly women and men and children. Young girls and ladies were abducted and men killed in cold blood.

⁶⁷ In the Internally Displaced People's report, there are details of the event that claimed the life of more than 2000 people. Cf. IDP, *A Global Survey*, Ed. HAMPTON. J., 1998, 41-42.

In October 1984, the BBC television broadcasted a critical famine situation in Ethiopia, which started in 1983. Pictures of skeleton people went around the world. Humanitarian workers suggested that it was the closest thing to hell on earth.

Pope John Paul II during his visit to Sudan in February 1993 said, “In this part of Africa I see clearly a particular reproduction of the mystery of Calvary in the lives of the majority of the people.” This statement was rightly underlining the misery in which the people from Southern Sudan live daily.

The stop-start war in Liberia has caused a lot of damage to millions of Liberians who are still wandering from one place to another to save their lives. It is difficult to see any good news on our TV and other media reports. People are moving, wandering; they are slaves in their own country. In Uganda, the Lord Resistance Army, abducts young girls and forces them to become wives. The future of children is shattered in the name of this rebellious group.

To add to this human-made and natural misery we have some socio-structural realities, which contribute to the misery and suffering of the African people and in a special way that of women.

a) The HIV/AIDS Pandemic

The HIV/AIDS pandemic constitutes a real misery and suffering to the African people. In general, however, because of its stigma, it is now clear that women have borne the brunt of the epidemic. We are referring especially to young girls in their teens who are three times more likely to get the virus than their male counterparts – as older men turn to younger girls in a futile and selfish attempt to escape the virus.

Women are also prone to poverty, discrimination, poor education and lack of career choices, all of which make them more vulnerable to HIV infection. Abandoned women with children are likely to turn to providing sexual favours in exchange for money or upkeep.

b) Some Major obstacles to gender equality

In the midst of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the misery, we are called to revisit some of our cultural practices that are major obstacles to gender equality. The obstacles given below are not exhaustive in themselves but are meant to illustrate to a certain extent the conscious and unconscious discrimination and oppression against women in our contemporary world. Until recently, history has conspired to leave out women and their contribution to the human race. The elimination of women in history, further gave rise to a mentality that women can be forgotten and belittled. As a result, the rise and growth of male domination to the disadvantage of women can be traced from the conspiracy of history. Unless this conspiracy is eliminated, women's voices will never be heard.

For example, some traditional oppressive systems are a source of misery and suffering to women. Gender equality will only be possible when every cultural group fully undertakes the critical examination of its cultural practices, customs and traditions in order to liberate all its members especially women, heavily oppressed through the ages. Our laws and Constitutions, which were given to us together with our independence, should be revised by identifying some discriminative laws. Jael Mbogo,

a Kenyan woman politician spoke of “demystifying constitutionalism” so as to make the Kenyan constitution accessible to all, especially women in order to remove their fear.⁶⁸

There is no doubt that some of our African traditional religions, teaching, rituals and practices are insensitive to gender equality. In my own traditional belief, God is essentially masculine by nature. Women’s misery and suffering continue to rise with prejudices created against them. For example, when we speak of women as the “weaker sex”; myths speak of women’s docility, their inferiority, their weak intelligence etc. We should work to eliminate such prejudices against women which have suppressed the rights and dignity of half of the human population.

Last but not least, we want to underline the fact that most African societies are patriarchal, which give all rights to man and little room to woman. Unfortunately, modernity has not yet managed to help us overcome this system, which is a scenario where men are considered superior to women. Patriarchal culture must be critically analysed to expose its structural injustice against women.

3.2 Women’s Participation in the Resurrection

3.2.1 Women as signs of hope

a) Women in God’s Plan

In Genesis, the name given to the woman, *Eve (Havvah)* did not make the first woman “mother of the living.” Rather, according to Teresa Okure, the name grew from the fact that she was the “mother of all who live.”⁶⁹ In the context of God’s judgement

⁶⁸ Cf. Her interview in *Wajibu*, vol. 17, No. 2, 2002.

⁶⁹ Cf. T. OKURE, *The Role of Women in the African Church*, in *SEDOS* 25, 168.

after the fall, the name *Eve*, which means life, brought hope to humanity. Humanity is judged but the woman will bear the sign of hope, of bearing children.

We have seen that the hope and trust of Mary the mother of Jesus have come to symbolise an attitude of those who wait for God's mercy and salvation. That is why "all generations will call her blessed." In the Magnificat, Luke presents Mary as a woman who really knows the history of her people. She praises God for keeping his promise to save his people. Mary's Magnificat is a deep spirituality that expresses the whole history of salvation. Mary prays with her whole being, finding strength in God rather than in her own status or merit.⁷⁰

Luke's portrayal of women gives us some interesting insights. In all the studies we have made in the previous chapters, we notice that, from women of expectant faith, like Mary in the infancy narrative to the women who were changed by their encounter with Jesus, Luke gives us not just historical facts but also wants us to see in those women examples of God's gracious will, acting in human lives. These women are heralds and models of a new community of faith based in Jesus and the coming of his kingdom. In the words of M. A. Getty-Sullivan, the stories of these women are relived and re-celebrated in many other people who draw inspiration from their memory and example as the Gospel continues and lives on.⁷¹

Gal 4:4-5 reminds us that "when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children." Therefore, in God's plan, woman is a symbol of life and hope.

⁷⁰ M.A. GETTY-SYLLIVAN, *Women in the New Testament*, 34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 41.

The Church's teaching about Mary and devotion to her as Mother of the Redeemer, confirms that both, creation (the beginning of all things) and eschatology (the final end) emphasise the unique role of the woman as the channel through which God offers humanity life and hope in a doomed situation.

b) Women in the Church

The African Synod had for theme, "The Church in Africa and Her Evangelising Mission Towards the Year 2000: 'You shall be My Witnesses' (Acts 1:8)" Every Christian was then invited to the task of bringing the Good News to others. In the light of the New Testament perspective, evangelisation, proclaiming the Good News, is fundamentally an activity which entails "mothering": giving birth, sustaining life and nurturing it into full maturity. If so, then women are those who are well placed to understand the implications of the Christian proclamation.

Interestingly enough, it is recognised that the strength of a nation lies in its women, who are uniquely entrusted by God and nature with the formation and upbringing of children. In Burkina Faso for example, the government understood this when, in its policy of encouraging the education of girls it opted to say: "to educate a woman is to educate a whole nation." In Africa, one has only to look around to see that women are there with the children: in the churches, in market places, in the schools, in the streets, in refugee camps, etc. When the men leave, the women are there with the children.⁷² Women bear the burden of their husbands as well as their children. In this context therefore it is necessary for the Church in Africa to enable women in every way

⁷² Sadly enough in my home country, Burkina Faso, young men go to the neighbouring country, Cote d'Ivoire to work in coffee plantations for four or five years, leaving behind their wives and children. Most of these women become the breadwinners of the family.

to personally experience the Good News and to equip them to become effective agents of evangelisation.

We believe that what has been done already in African literature could help the Church to effectively empower women to be proud of their dignity as women and signs of hope to our people. To our little knowledge, there are few poems, songs in African literature that exalt fatherhood. On the contrary, many authors and singers throughout Africa glorify motherhood. We can mention here the beautiful poem of the Guinean writer, Camara Laye entitled “Femme Noire, Femme Africaine” (Black woman, African woman). This poem is a magnificent glorification of the African woman, mother, in her multiple roles. In most African societies the woman is not referred to as the “wife of ...” she is rather referred to as the “mother of...” Here in Kenya she is “Mama John” or “Mama Kamau” etc. this is a clear reference to the woman as bearer of life; she has given birth to someone. So she is the mother of...

In the New Testament, Mary is referred to as the mother of Jesus (Matt 2:11; Luke 1:19, 51; John 2:1-12). Even the Muslim holy book recognises Mary as the mother of the prophet Issa.⁷³ From her human body our Lord took our nature.

Women are the pillars and the foundation of the local, national and universal Church, and this is not something new. They were there, following and serving Jesus and his disciples (Luke 8:3). Their constant support to the Jesus movement during Jesus' life and after his death and resurrection is clearly noticed. They provided for Jesus and his disciples with their own resources while the male disciples were preoccupied about what they would gain from following Jesus (Matt 26:27; Luke 24:21; Acts 1:6).

⁷³ Cf. *Surah XIX*. The whole of this *Surah* speaks of the annunciation, the birth of Jesus and his early childhood. *Marium* is the Mother of Jesus, a righteous prophet.

Similarly, for African women and mothers; once they fully understand the Christian faith and its demands; there is no power that can ever undermine the church as *family of God*. African women are being mobilised and sensitised for liberation.⁷⁴ Today, women are asking questions as never before. It is a sign that they are dissatisfied with the rather passive role accorded to them in the past. All over the continent, the Catholic Women's Association has become a place where women reflect and try to find solutions to some of the discriminative behaviour they are facing. The question of Female Genital Mutilation is a clear example where women want to speak for themselves. Early marriages and domestic violence are some of the many subjects, which they discuss.

In Mukuru Slums, catholic women are actively involved in the Justice and Peace Commission. When there was unrest in Kibera slums a year ago, some people were pushing the inhabitants of Mukuru to also fight for their rights. One day during our Justice and Peace meeting after the Eucharistic celebration, a mother told me that she does not believe Mukuru slum dwellers should rise against their landlords. She believes, there are always some hidden agenda. "When we refuse to pay the rent," she said, "we will be sent away to nowhere while those who are pushing us to take such action will still be in their luxurious houses."

Women's movements for liberation ought to be supported by the clergy and catholic men of unselfish vision of the future. Our theology today has to be aware of the fact that almost everything has been done from the male perspective, hence the importance to listen to the other side. There is no doubt today that women's spirituality is qualitatively different from that of men, because women's experience of socio-

⁷⁴ African women are actively involved in National and International Movements for Equal Rights of women, since 1979 with the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

economic realities differs from that of men. Today more than ever before, the problems facing Africa come from this socio-economic sphere. Hence men will gain more from listening and letting women express what they really feel deep inside themselves.

As mothers and educators, women have taken up this role by committing themselves to catechetical work. Women catechists are one of the “*nouveauté*” that will make a difference in the African Church. Women are committed to the SCC.⁷⁵ During my one-year work with the SCC in South B, I have noticed that women were always present in number and in quality and their contributions were always full of insights. To excuse themselves, some men would just conclude that SCC “is a women’s affairs.” This type of statement and many others do not take into consideration that human life is made of complementarity; nobody fulfils him/herself without the other.

Conclusion

We do believe that in the context of Africa today, we need hope and perseverance in working for a better social order. The Church in Africa wants to take up the challenge by asking its members to not only improve their relationship with the risen Lord through their spiritual life but also to abide with the Lord Jesus, in working against all forms of discrimination and segregation.

The Church in Africa, which is committed to liberating Africans, is and should be more concerned with the situation of women in Africa. This because in almost every situation of misery and suffering, women are more exposed and vulnerable. Hence the commitment of the Church and its leaders should be to empower women, to give a listening ear to them. And if need be, the Church should not hesitate to view critically

⁷⁵ Small Christian Communities.

some of our African cultures which continue to sideline and oppress its female members.

The contribution of African women should be seen in the same line with the women who followed Jesus. And if one is tempted to belittle the ministry of women in the New Testament and also in the Church today as being one of humble chores and housekeeping, then one needs to recall that Jesus himself undertook this type of ministry and recommended the same to his disciples, both women and men.

In all his early ministry of mercy and compassion, Jesus was engaging women and demanded the same of his Church, which has no other mission than to continue Jesus' own, of fostering fullness of life in all peoples.

If the role of women, as witnessed by the New Testament is to foster and sustain life, or in the case of Eve in the Old Testament, to bring life and hope to humanity, then it follows that the African Church cannot be fully alive unless it integrates this role of women fully into its bosom and makes it the mainstay of its approach to evangelisation.

Much teaching, from the Gospel and the Church's authority, has been done. Unfortunately, history and the present do not show that the African Church has fully understood and appreciated the indispensable role of women in this regard.⁷⁶

At the end of our study, it is important to ask at least this question: who is Jesus Christ for African women? Notice that this question has a deeper implication not only for African Christian women, but also for African men and specially those who are involved in building an African theology.

⁷⁶ T. OKURE, "*The Role of Women in the African Church*" in Sedos, 171.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In the midst of so many difficulties, human beings in general look for a liberation. African women look for a liberator, somebody who will give them their full dignity as women and mothers. Just as the women, portrayed to us by Luke, found in Jesus their liberator, their life-giver and their reconciler, African women should and will find in him their Lord and Saviour.

In our study we have seen how the women who followed Jesus remained his faithful friends till he died. As some scholars said, if it is true that women remained close to Jesus for fear that their sickness may recur, then it is also true that they found in Jesus someone who understood them better. Their experience of being changed, of being touched and transformed by Jesus was so strong that they decided to follow him wherever he was to go.

Luke told us that, a great number of men and women were lamenting and mourning. What could have been the reason for their sorrow and lament? A possible answer could be this: the women could have lamented bitterly for Jesus, who was crucified because of his life-giving ministry as Sophia's prophet. They could have portrayed Jesus in the best possible way to commemorate him who was faithful to God till the end. The women could have mocked the enemies who killed Jesus, but their most severe accusations or denunciation could have been directed against their own men who did nothing to save Jesus.

If this were true, what would be the lament of African women today? In their suffering, African women, who have embraced the Christian faith know that there is victory at the end. The future of African women is the Resurrection. They are at war

against the prejudices that society placed against them. However they know that they are not alone because Jesus walks with them.

They are put aside but they know that without them humanity is half paralysed. Just like the women who followed Jesus and served him, African women in the church, want to put their rich spirituality, born from a concrete socio-economic milieu, at the service of the African Church as a family. In the church, African women have their place as life-givers, as sustainers and nurturers of that life which is that of the children of God.

With the Apostle Paul, African women can say: "I know that this will be a grace for me because of your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Christ. I am hopeful, even certain, that I shall not be ashamed. I feel as assured now as before, that Christ will be exalted through my person, whether I live or die." (Phil 1:19-20).

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