

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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WISDOM COMMENTARY

Volume 45

Acts of the Apostles

Linda M. Maloney

with Ivoni Richter Reimer

Afterword by Willie James Jennings

Mary Ann Beavis

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Barbara E. Reid, OP

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A Michael Glazier Book

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In loving memory of Luise Schottroff†,

and

*For Bernadette, Bonnie, Irmgard, Eloise, and Elizabeth,
five Daughters of Wisdom who sustained me through it all.*

—Linda Maloney

*For my mother, Frida Richter†,
and for my friends and colleagues Marlene Crüsemann,
Erika Stückrath, Elsa Tamez, and Karin Volkwein.*

—Ivoni Richter Reimer

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Abbreviations

ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt</i>
AUS	American University Studies
AV	Authorized Version (King James Bible)
BAFCS	The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensis
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BTS	Biblical Tools and Studies
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CurTM	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>

DBL	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains</i> (Swanson)
ECNT	Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
EJL	Early Judaism and its Literature
ETL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FCNTECW	Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IECOT	International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament
IFT	Introductions in Feminist Theology
IK	Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JFSR</i>	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supple- ment Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KNT	Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LCR	<i>Lutheran Church Review</i>

LD	Lectio Divina
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	The Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NABRE	New American Bible, Revised Edition
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NHL	<i>Nag Hammadi Library in English</i> . Edited by James M. Robinson. 4th rev. ed. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIV	New International Version
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>NTApoc</i>	<i>New Testament Apocrypha</i>
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NYRB</i>	<i>New York Review of Books</i>
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
PL	Patrologia Latina
<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SNTSMS	Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>SVTQ</i>	<i>St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>
SymS	Symposium Series
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>

<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WCS	Wisdom Commentary Series
WGRWSup	Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

Contributors

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Foreword

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

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza
Harvard University Divinity School

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. See the discussion about nomenclature of the two testaments in the introduction, page xxxix.

Editor's Introduction to Wisdom Commentary

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

Barbara E. Reid, OP

General Editor

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

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

A Symphony of Diverse Voices

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

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

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

Woman Wisdom

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

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

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

Feminism

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

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

Feminist Women and Men

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

Feminist Biblical Interpretation

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

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

1. See Martha Rampton, "Four Waves of Feminism" (October 25, 2015), at <http://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism>; and Ealasaid Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," *Political Insight* (September 2013), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/2041-9066.12021>.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11. See, for example, her most famous speech, “Ain't I a Woman?,” delivered in 1851 at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, OH; Modern History Sourcebook, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp>.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

15. The first volume, on the Torah, appeared in Spanish in 2009, in German and Italian in 2010, and in English in 2011 (Atlanta: SBL). The other available volumes are as follows: *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2014); *The Writings and Later Wisdom Books*, ed. Christl M. Maier and Nuria Calduch-Benages (2014); *Gospels: Narrative and History*, ed. Mercedes Navarro Puerto and Marinella Perroni; Amy-Jill Levine, English ed. (2015); *The High Middle Ages*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Adriana Valerio (2015); *Early Jewish Writings*, ed. Eileen Schuller and Marie-Theres Wacker (2017); *Faith and Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Religious Communities*, ed. Michaela Sohn-Kronthaler and Ruth Albrecht (2019); *The Early Middle Ages*, ed. Franca Ela Consolino and Judith Herrin (2020); *Prophecy and Gender in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. L. Juliana Claasens and Irmtraud Fischer (2021); and *Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Tal Ilan, Lorena Miralles-Maciá, and Ronit Nikolsky (2022). For further information see <https://www.bibleandwomen.org>.

taries on the Old Testament. The parallel series, *Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff and Maria Mayo Robbins (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001–2010), contains thirteen volumes. These two series are not full commentaries on the biblical books but comprise collected essays on discrete biblical texts.

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

Methodologies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Feminist scholars who use historical-critical methods analyze the world behind the text; they seek to understand the historical context from which the text emerged and the circumstances of the communities to whom it was addressed. In bringing feminist lenses to this approach, the aim is not to impose modern expectations on ancient cultures but to unmask the ways that ideologically problematic mind-sets that produced the ancient texts are still promulgated through the text. Feminist biblical scholars aim not only to deconstruct but also to reclaim and reconstruct biblical history as women's history, in which women were central and active agents in creating religious heritage.²⁰ A further step is to construct meaning for contemporary women and men in a liberative movement toward transformation of social, political, economic, and religious structures.²¹ In recent years, some feminists have embraced new historicism, which accents the creative role of the interpreter in any construction of history and exposes the power struggles to which the text witnesses.²²

Literary critics analyze the world of the text: its form, language patterns, and rhetorical function.²³ They do not attempt to separate layers

20. See, for example, Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1994); Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, eds., *Women and Christian Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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

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

23. Phyllis Trible was among the first to employ this method with texts from Genesis and Ruth in her groundbreaking book *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). Another pioneer in feminist literary criticism is Mieke Bal (*Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987]). For surveys of recent developments in literary methods see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: University of

of tradition and redaction but focus on the text holistically, as it is in its present form. They examine how meaning is created in the interaction between the text and its reader in multiple contexts. Within the arena of literary approaches are reader-oriented approaches, narrative, rhetorical, structuralist, post-structuralist, deconstructive, ideological, autobiographical, and performance criticism.²⁴ Narrative critics study the interrelation among author, text, and audience through investigation of settings, both spatial and temporal; characters; plot; and narrative techniques (e.g., irony, parody, intertextual allusions). Reader-response critics attend to the impact that the text has on the reader or hearer. They recognize that when a text is detrimental toward women there is the choice either to affirm the text or to read against the grain toward a liberative end. Rhetorical criticism analyzes the style of argumentation and attends to how the author is attempting to shape the thinking or actions of the hearer. Structuralist critics analyze the complex patterns of binary oppositions in the text to derive its meaning.²⁵ Post-structuralist approaches challenge the notion that there are fixed meanings to any biblical text or that there is one universal truth. They engage in close readings of the text and often engage in intertextual analysis.²⁶ Within this approach is deconstructionist criticism, which views the text as a site of conflict, with competing narratives. The interpreter aims to expose the fault lines and overturn and reconfigure binaries by elevating the underling of a pair and foregrounding it.²⁷ Feminists also use other post-

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

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

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

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

27. David Penchansky, "Deconstruction," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Steven McKenzie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196–205. See, for example, Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise:*

modern approaches, such as ideological and autobiographical criticism. The former analyzes the system of ideas that underlies the power and values concealed in the text as well as that of the interpreter.²⁸ The latter involves deliberate self-disclosure while reading the text as a critical exegete.²⁹ Performance criticism attends to how the text was passed on orally, usually in communal settings, and to the verbal and nonverbal interactions between the performer and the audience.³⁰

From the beginning, feminists have understood that interpreting the Bible is an act of power. In recent decades, feminist biblical scholars have developed hermeneutical theories of the ethics and politics of biblical interpretation to challenge the claims to value neutrality of most academic biblical scholarship. Feminist biblical scholars have also turned their attention to how some biblical writings were shaped by the power of empire and how this still shapes readers' self-understandings today. They have developed hermeneutical approaches that reveal, critique, and evaluate the interactions depicted in the text against the context of empire, and they consider implications for contemporary contexts.³¹ Feminists also analyze the dynamics of colonization and the mentalities of colonized peoples in the exercise of biblical interpretation. As Kwok Pui-lan explains, "A postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible needs to investigate the deployment of gender in the narration of identity, the negotiation of power differentials between the colonizers and the colonized, and the reinforcement of patriarchal control over spheres

The Subject of the Bible's First Story (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); David Rutledge, *Reading Marginally: Feminism, Deconstruction and the Bible*, BibInt 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

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

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

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

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

where these elites could exercise control.”³² Methods and models from sociology and cultural anthropology are used by feminists to investigate women’s everyday lives, their experiences of marriage, childrearing, labor, money, illness, etc.³³

As feminists have examined the construction of gender from varying cultural perspectives, they have become ever more cognizant that the way gender roles are defined within differing cultures varies radically. As Mary Ann Tolbert observes, “Attempts to isolate some universal role that cross-culturally defines ‘woman’ have run into contradictory evidence at every turn.”³⁴ Some women have coined new terms to highlight the particularities of their socio-cultural context. Many African American feminists, for example, call themselves *womanists* to draw attention to the double oppression of racism and sexism they experience.³⁵ Similarly, many US Hispanic feminists speak of themselves as *mujeristas* (*mujer* is Spanish for “woman”).³⁶ Others prefer to be called “Latina feminists.”³⁷ As a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative, many today use *Latinx* or *Latine*. *Mujeristas*, *Latina* and *Latine* feminists emphasize that the context for their

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

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

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

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

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

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

theologizing is *mestizaje* and *mulatez* (racial and cultural mixture), done *en conjunto* (in community), with *lo cotidiano* (everyday lived experience) of Latina women as starting points for theological reflection and the encounter with the divine. Intercultural analysis has become an indispensable tool for working toward justice for women at the global level.³⁸

Some feminists are among those who have developed lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) interpretation. This approach focuses on issues of sexual identity and uses various reading strategies. Some point out the ways in which categories that emerged in recent centuries are applied anachronistically to biblical texts to make modern-day judgments. Others show how the Bible is silent on contemporary issues about sexual identity. Still others examine same-sex relationships in the Bible by figures such as Ruth and Naomi or David and Jonathan. In recent years, queer theory has emerged; it emphasizes the blurriness of boundaries not just of sexual identity but also of gender roles. Queer critics often focus on texts in which figures transgress what is traditionally considered proper gender behavior.³⁹

Feminists have also been engaged in studying the reception history of the text⁴⁰ and have engaged in studies in the emerging fields of disability theory and of children in the Bible.

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

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

40. See Sharon H. Ringe, "When Women Interpret the Bible," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 5; Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, eds., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); Yvonne Sherwood, "Introduction," in *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Feminists also recognize that the struggle for women's equality and dignity is intimately connected with the struggle for respect for Earth and for the whole of the cosmos. Ecofeminists interpret Scripture in ways that highlight the link between human domination of nature and male subjugation of women. They show how anthropocentric ways of interpreting the Bible have overlooked or dismissed Earth and Earth community. They invite readers to identify not only with human characters in the biblical narrative but also with other Earth creatures and domains of nature, especially those that are the object of injustice. Some use creative imagination to retrieve the interests of Earth implicit in the narrative and enable Earth to speak.⁴¹

Biblical Authority

By the late nineteenth century, some feminists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, began to question openly whether the Bible could continue to be regarded as authoritative for women. They viewed the Bible itself as the source of women's oppression, and some rejected its sacred origin and saving claims. Some decided that the Bible and the religious traditions that enshrine it are too thoroughly saturated with androcentrism and patriarchy to be redeemable.⁴²

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

Language for God

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

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

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

to visually destabilize our ways of thinking and speaking of the divine. Rosemary Radford Ruether proposed *God/ess*, as an unpronounceable term pointing to the unnameable understanding of the divine that transcends patriarchal limitations.⁴³ Some have followed traditional Jewish practice, writing *G-d*. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has adopted *G*d*.⁴⁴ Others draw on the biblical tradition to mine female and non-gender-specific metaphors and symbols.⁴⁵ In *Wisdom Commentary*, there is not one standard way of expressing the divine; each author will use her or his preferred ways. The one exception is that when the tetragrammaton, YHWH, the name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14, is used, it will be without vowels, respecting the Jewish custom of avoiding pronouncing the divine name out of reverence.

Nomenclature for the Two Testaments

In recent decades, some biblical scholars have begun to call the two Testaments of the Bible by names other than the traditional nomenclature: Old and New Testament. Some regard "Old" as derogatory, implying that it is no longer relevant or that it has been superseded. Consequently, terms like Hebrew Bible, First Testament, and Jewish Scriptures and, correspondingly, Christian Scriptures or Second Testament have come into use. There are a number of difficulties with these designations. The term "Hebrew Bible" does not take into account that parts of the Old Testament are written not in Hebrew but in Aramaic.⁴⁶ Moreover, for Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox believers, the Old Testament includes books written in Greek—the Deuterocanonical books, considered Apocrypha by Protestants.⁴⁷ The term "Jewish Scriptures" is inadequate because these

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

44. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet; Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 191n3.

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

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

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

books are also sacred to Christians. Conversely, “Christian Scriptures” is not an accurate designation for the New Testament, since the Old Testament is also part of the Christian Scriptures. Using “First and Second Testament” also has difficulties, in that it can imply a hierarchy and a value judgment.⁴⁸ Jews generally use the term Tanakh, an acronym for Torah (Pentateuch), Nevi’im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings).

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

Translation

Modern feminist scholars recognize the complexities connected with biblical translation, as they have delved into questions about philosophy of language, how meanings are produced, and how they are culturally situated. Today it is evident that simply translating into gender-neutral formulations cannot address all the challenges presented by androcentric texts. Efforts at feminist translation must also deal with issues around authority and canonicity.⁴⁹

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

Art and Poetry

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

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

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

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

Glossary

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

A Concluding Word

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



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exegesis: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza the first of so many—limited space allows me to write only that I have been infinitely lucky to know them.

Ivoni Richter Reimer wishes to pay loving tribute to the memory of Prof. Dr. Luise Schottroff, in which her coauthor also joins.

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Half a lifetime ago (in 1984!) Professor Gerhard Lohfink set me the task of studying the book of Acts to see what it can tell us about how to live in Christian community and testify to the world of all that God has done for and with us. I hope that readers of this book will find my conclusions helpful.

—Linda M. Maloney+
Enosburg Falls, VT
Summer 2022

Author's Introduction

Translating Worlds

The Acts of the Apostles is said to be the first church history. More precisely, Acts is the first work of its kind to have survived from Christian antiquity. But what is a “history” and what is, or was, “the church”?

History?

A history is not a “story of what happened at some time in the past.” It is a story of what someone in a particular time and place, with a particular set of questions, wrote about what she or he discovered in answer to those questions and in relation to events in another time and place that was “past” from the author’s point of view but was “present” to those within the story. The questions themselves are historically conditioned in every case by the circumstances of the one asking them. So in reading Acts we, in the twenty-first century, are approaching the book with our own questions, related to our own time and situation, and we are addressing those questions to an author whose time and whose world are only dimly known to us—an author who, in turn, was posing her or his own questions to a time and set of events still farther in the past. That author, moreover, had an explicit purpose in writing, and that intention shaped the events selected for the story and how they were interpreted. In the case of Acts, the character of the author and her or his intention

have been subjects of profound dispute throughout the modern era and remain so today. It seems certain now that the author of Acts wrote for a community, or multiple communities, of Jesus-followers within a time frame around the end of the first and early decade(s) of the second centuries CE, probably in Ephesus and its neighborhood. The story was intended to help them shape their lives as followers of “the Way” of Jesus (not necessarily a fully defined group at the time, certainly not yet known, at least to themselves, as “Christians”) in the face of the particular contemporary challenges in their life as a community. One set of questions the author most certainly did *not* pose overtly was the set with which we are most directly concerned: feminist questions about the roles and status and viewpoints of women and of other people marginalized in their society for various reasons. Part of our task will be to discover what is *not* in the text; another part will be to relate what *is* in the text to what we otherwise know about the political and social situation of the first and second centuries CE.

Still, we will do well to keep in mind that Acts, unlike the Gospels, is not concerned to teach Jesus’ *message* or *ethics* or *morality* as such. It is not preaching for outsiders; it is instruction for insiders on how to be the community of Jesus, the people of the reign of God. The author evidently takes it for granted that people devoted to the Way of Jesus will not lord it over one another (Matt 20:25; Mark 10:42; Luke 22:25) because of gender or any other characteristic.

In *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*,¹ Isabel Wilkerson eloquently describes the invention of skin color, eye color, and other such features as ways of distinguishing “superior” from “inferior” groups of people, focusing especially on the Americas and particularly the United States. The “racialized” caste system she describes was created by Europeans in the “age of discovery” (!) to mark the persons they subjugated and/or enslaved as inferior. Such a system did not exist in the Roman world. Being “Roman” was superior to being “non-Roman,” but the boundaries were fluid and not tied to specific physical features. There *was* a fixed caste system in that world, though, one that was created before the dawn of history and persists today: that of gender. At least since the moment when male human beings discovered that they played a role in reproduction, male has been accounted superior to female throughout

1. Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020).

the natural world (from a human, or at least a masculine, point of view), and a generous body of philosophy, physiology, and literature has developed and maintained the idea and its consequences. An awareness that the author of Acts, and almost all of its audience, regarded the situation as “natural” must inform our critique of the author’s attitudes and language. Very much in the same way, enslaved persons were regarded as inferior, and the idea went virtually unquestioned. We will meet enslaved persons (all of them apparently young) in the Acts of the Apostles, but there is no overt critique of slavery, here or in the Gospels. Likewise we will meet women (and two of the three enslaved characters are women). Authors and scholars from antiquity to modern times have viewed their leadership activities as anomalous. In this commentary we will look at those matters differently.

While scientists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have shown that there is no physical difference between people of different “races” as defined by color or other forms of caste distinction, discrimination against women continues to be justified by the difference between women’s and men’s bodies. Now, however, even that barrier is being broken down, as transgender and nonbinary persons show us that gender is not based in physiology and can be altered, even without body-changing surgery. The reaction on the part of those for whom a necessary classification of persons as “better” or “worse,” “superior” or “inferior” is a fundamental principle of their view of humanity and society has been swift, widespread, and often violent. Laws prohibiting transgender women and girls from participating in women’s and girls’ sports, and other laws forbidding any acknowledgment of “different” identities in schools, are an expression of the desperate need, on the part of some, to cling to immutable “difference” (that is, arbitrarily defined inferiority or superiority).

The author of Acts² is notably (and unusually in that time and place) *indifferent* to such ideas. In chapter 8 he includes a detailed story of the conversion of an Ethiopian, a man surely with dark skin, but not a word is said about color. The Ethiopian is also a eunuch, but that is not an issue either. This author accepts existing gender roles (in society at large), but he makes no effort to characterize any group of persons as inferior or “other.” In fact, Acts 8 contains several nudges toward a more open community of worship—one that includes Samaritans and people with altered bodies (cf. Deut 23:1; Isa 56:3-4)—before the gentiles come into the picture at all.

2. Whom we will call “Lukas,” for reasons explained below.

A central issue in *all* of our inquiries, in fact, will be that of “the other.” The author of Acts seeks, by telling a story (or many stories), to construct an “us” for the audience—really a series of “us”es in different places, times, and circumstances, each of them defined over against a “them,” a “not-us.” One way of doing so is to put forward exemplary figures for imitation, by no means all from the same mold. We will see this repeatedly, and some of those exemplary figures are women—Tabitha, Lydia, Prisc[illa],³ and others not named. One, Sapphira, is a counterexample: she illustrates how a woman ought *not* to behave. Another aspect of this “othering” process is the more subtle practice of “queering” individuals or groups, destabilizing their racial, gender, or national identities and thereby also undermining the caste system, the “us versus them” dichotomy. Our aim in such cases is to make room for ambiguity and ultimately to evaluate the claim that the Movement of Jesus-believers transcends social and gender/caste barriers and is open to all who choose it.⁴

That does *not* imply that all who join the Movement become *Jews* or that Jews within the Movement cease to be Jews. We must affirm with Jacob Milgrom that

Israel’s separation from the nations is the continuation (and climax) of the cosmic creation process. Just as YHWH has separated mineral, vegetable, and animal species to create order in the *natural* world, so Israel must separate from the nations to create order in the *human* world. Israel, in its quest for holiness, is simultaneously manifesting the universal or primordial life process.⁵

The author of Acts tries to make that point while affirming the role of those who followed Jesus as an aspect of Israel’s journey. That he was so understood in the early decades of the book’s life is clear from the fact that the early apologists (Justin, Ignatius, et al.) who attacked “the Jews” and proclaimed separation from emergent Judaism made no use of Acts; it was only when Irenaeus applied his own interpretation to the

3. She is known in Acts by the diminutive “Priscilla” (18:2, 18, 26), but Paul, in his letters, calls her Prisca (see Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19).

4. See, e.g., Raimo Hakola, Nina Nikki, and Ulla Tervahauta, eds., *Others and the Construction of Early Christian Identities*, Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 106 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2013).

5. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 179, quoted in Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 138.

book in contending against Marcion (*Adversus Haereses*, ca. 180 CE) that it began to be read as anti-Jewish, an interpretation that has had fatal and long-lasting consequences.

A much more subtle aim of the text of Acts is to downgrade and condemn "pagan" religion, and with it the imperial cult. This appears mainly in the speeches placed in the mouth of Paul, but not only there. It was a dangerous move; later Christians criticized the cult of the emperor overtly, choosing the "witness" (*martys*) of martyrdom. We will note anti-imperialistic rhetoric at various points, but one thing should be clear from the outset: being anti-imperialistic did not involve being egalitarian. Whatever social changes the author of Acts envisioned, sweeping as they were and are, they did not include the elevation of the status of women in general (or slaves or others on the fringes of society). In that regard we have to continually read against the grain.

Church?

The other questionable word in our definition is "church." We need to understand at the outset that, at the time this author wrote, there was no such thing. In fact, it is a word the author uses sparingly, preferring to refer to "The Way," or "The Movement" (ἡ ὁδός). It is dynamic, not static. It is not what we think of as a church; it has no fixed structure other than that of individual communities with remembered ties to a "mother community" in Jerusalem. It was most certainly *not* a "religion" as the Greco-Roman world understood that term, nor was its parent, the people of Israel.

As recent scholars have convincingly shown, the separation of the Jesus movement from the way(s) of the Jewish people was very gradual and highly disorganized, simply because neither movement was "organized" from the outset in the ways we are accustomed to seeing in what are now the "religions" of Christianity and Judaism. The various sects and movements among Jews—with the possible exception of the Jerusalem *politeia* that, by the time Lukas wrote, was also a thing of the past—were just as varied and just as little organized as were those of the "Christians." There were even significant numbers of Jewish thinkers whose concept of God approached a *logos* theology like that of the Fourth Gospel (minus the identification of the *logos* or *memra* with Jesus). It was not until a few decades after Acts was written that the Greek word *hairesis* ceased to mean something like "sect" or what we now call "denomination" and began to mean "heresy" in the sense of "false teaching." That

development awaited the establishment of some kind of regional or central authority that could say yes or no to a teaching or practice—that, in other words, was able to “other” certain groups and ultimately define them out of the Movement. Then, with the gradual establishment of the monepiscopacy in Christianity and of authoritative rabbinic teaching in Judaism after the Second Revolt in 132–136, real separation and “excommunication” could begin. The existence of a structure of authority was the precondition, in turn, for the recognition of Christianity, beginning with Constantine (ca. 313 CE, two full centuries after the composition of Acts), as a *religio licita*, an approved religion, and ultimately *the* official religion of the Roman Empire. That was the time when the two ways definitively began to part, with all the disastrous consequences (for both!) that we can now begin to understand.⁶

In spite of the fact that the author of Acts is not speaking of a “church” as such, he is interested primarily in ecclesiology, the formation of Jesus-believing communities, and not in a developed doctrine or theology like what emerged with the later apologists and “fathers” of the church. That is to say, he wants to gather, not to define, because *defining divides*. Identifying teaching as “ours” versus “theirs” is the beginning of heresiology: “we” have the true teaching; “they” don’t belong with us. Lukas’s Christology and ecclesiology are elastic, but his aim is inclusion. Since later apologists, notably Tertullian, personified heresy as a woman, we may say that Lukas’s ecclesiology was much more “feminized,” or at least inclusive of women, even though they remain for the most part invisible in the story.

Kyriocentrism

At the same time it was altogether true and taken for granted in this kyriocentric (lord-and-master-centered) world that, as the saying goes, “men are people; women are the female relatives of people.” Men were the exemplary (indeed, the *real*) human beings. Discourse was likewise gendered: reason, piety, and control of the self and others were associated only with men, and men were measured by the degree to which they

6. For the development of this view of religious relationships in the first two centuries CE see especially Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), and Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

exhibited those qualities.⁷ The next-generation apologist Justin would, indeed, insist that the fullness of *logos*, reason, could be attained only through Christ (who in the Fourth Gospel in fact embodies the *logos*). But while Acts also asserts that Jesus is Lord, he is never called “Word.” What the apostles and other Jesus-believers preach is “the word of the Lord” or “the word of God.” Still, he embodies the accepted male = human model, and the language of Acts is thoroughly phallogocentric;⁸ that is to say, Lukas has no other language than the one he knows, and that language—Greek—“sees” the human landscape as made up of men, who are the paradigmatic human beings; women, people who do not fit the binary gender pattern, and slaves in general are only shadows or story props. Consequently, we are surprised to find at least two women characters in Acts who display the supposedly “male” characteristics of reason, piety, and self-control: namely, Lydia and Prisc[ill]a.

The feminist reader of Acts cannot help noticing that the author’s presentation of three major issues that created a rupture between traditional Jews and Jesus-believers focuses on matters of primary concern only to men: the Jerusalem temple, table fellowship, and circumcision. The temple was a less divisive issue for Jewish women because they had only limited access to it and for gentile women because they had essentially none at all. Circumcision was obviously something that concerned only men.⁹ Why was *that* tradition the make-or-break issue? Table fellowship was indeed of concern to women, as the battles between Paul and the women of Corinth reveal,¹⁰ but we never read in Acts of any input on the subject from women. If a major obstacle in that context was the prohibition of meat offered to idols or improperly killed, it would surely have been a nonissue for the vast majority of women in the new communities, who were lucky if they tasted meat once a year. As for the elite women, they would not have had to sully themselves with food preparation:

7. See Jennifer Knust, “Enslaved to Demons: Sex, Violence and the Apologies of Justin Martyr,” in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 431–55.

8. The term was coined by Jacques Derrida and has been examined in a feminist context by Luce Irigaray and others.

9. Female circumcision was not an issue in Mediterranean cultures; Western awareness of the practice is quite recent. See Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

10. On this see especially Antoinette C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); eadem, *2 Corinthians*, WCS 48 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019).

that was for their slaves to perform. Slaves who joined the Movement might have had qualms, but we do not hear of them. And, by the way, why is there no discussion whatsoever of the slaves who appear in the text from time to time? Clearly, only a few decades after Acts was written, the authors of such New Testament texts as 1 Peter and the Pastoral Epistles found it necessary to insist on a code of household behavior that encompassed women, children, and slaves.¹¹

The Jewish Lukas

In recent years a growing number of scholars have begun to question the conventional wisdom that the author of Acts was a gentile, suggesting instead that Lukas may have been raised and educated in a primarily Jewish setting, probably in the Greco-Roman diaspora. Several lines of evidence support this idea.

First, from a theoretical standpoint the last three decades of New Testament research have witnessed serious challenges to the notion that “Judaism” and “Christianity” were distinguishably separate religions in the first few centuries of the Common Era. While the

so-called Parting of the Ways between Jews and Christians was once thought to have occurred around the time of the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE (or at the latest by the Bar Kokhba Revolt), recent analysis has pushed the date of final separation much later, perhaps even by centuries.¹² If Judaism and Christianity did not in fact coalesce into discrete “religions” until much later, this should compel readers of Acts to reconsider its status as a “Gentile Christian” text.¹³

Second, knowledge of Acts among early Christian writers is comparatively scarce, and few writers saw fit to comment on Lukas’s ethnicity.¹⁴ Irenaeus

11. A reader attuned to the gendered nature of these issues, especially circumcision, is first puzzled and then amused when reading many standard works on Acts that lavish gallons of ink on the reception or nonreception of the Torah doctrine on circumcision and the divisions it created between Jews and gentiles without once acknowledging that the subject does not concern women *at all*.

12. See nn. 4 and 6 above.

13. David Smith, “Luke, the Jews, and the Politics of Early Christian Identity” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2018). See, however, Jill Hicks-Keeton, Lori Baron, and Matthew Thiessen, eds., *The Ways That Often Parted: Essays in Honor of Joel Marcus* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018).

14. See Andrew Gregory, *The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period before Irenaeus: Looking for Luke in the Second Century*, WUNT 169 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

is the earliest Christian writer to identify the author of the Third Gospel with Lukas, the physician and companion of Paul mentioned in Colossians 4:14 and 2 Timothy 4:11.¹⁵ Since the author of Colossians does not include Lukas alongside Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus Justus as “the only ones of the circumcision among [Paul’s] co-workers for the kingdom of God” (Col 4:10–11), some early Christian writers reasonably assumed that this meant Lukas must have been a gentile.¹⁶ Origen of Alexandria speculated that the author of the Third Gospel may have been the same as the *Loukios* (Lucius) whom Paul claims as a “relative” in Romans 16:21,¹⁷ while Ephrem the Syrian attributed Acts to Lucius of Cyrene (Acts 13:1).¹⁸ Still other traditions identify Lukas as one of the seventy

(-two)—presumably Jewish—apostles commissioned by Jesus himself (Luke 10:1–20).¹⁹ Intriguingly, the author of the Muratorian Fragment describes Lukas as “one zealous for the Law [i.e., Torah],” which would be a highly unusual designation for a gentile.²⁰

Both Luke and Acts are also replete with internal literary evidence that strongly suggests Jewish authorship. The author of Acts is intimately familiar with the history, Scripture, and theology of Israel and weaves it throughout the narrative with the express aim of illustrating the means by which gentile followers of the Way have been “grafted” into Israel’s grand narrative of salvation history. While not impossible, it is nonetheless highly unlikely that a gentile—even one who had become a Jewish proselyte—

15. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.1.1; 3.10.1; 3.14.1–4. Curiously, Irenaeus makes no mention of Paul’s reference to Lukas in Phlm 24.

16. It is unlikely that “ones of the circumcision” means simply “Jewish” here, since the three men mentioned in Col 4:10–11 are certainly not Paul’s only Jewish coworkers!

17. Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 10.39.1–2.

18. *Ephræm Syri: Commentarii in Epistolas D. Pauli: Nunc Primum Ex Armenio in Latium Sermonem a Patribus Mekithartistis* (Venice: Typographia Sancti Lazari, 1893), 103.

19. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 1. *Anacephalaeosis* 1: *De Incarnatione* 4.3–6. (“Apostle” is used here in its root sense, “one who is sent,” not in the specific Lukan usage that refers it to the Twelve.)

20. See the English translation in Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 305–6. The Fragment (or “Canon”) was traditionally dated ca. 170, a dating Metzger accepted, but some more recent scholars have objected, putting the date as late as the fourth century. See, e.g., Albert C. Sundberg Jr., “Canon Muratori: A Fourth-Century List,” *HTR* 66 (1973): 1–41; Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1: *The Ancient Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

could have gained such a skilled mastery of Israel's Scriptures. Moreover, Lukas tenaciously defends both Jesus and Paul as consummate fulfillers of Torah, from Jesus' circumcision and purification in Luke 2:21-24 to Paul's insistence that even after his "conversion" to Christianity he nonetheless remains a Pharisee (Acts 23:6).²¹

The field of linguistic interpretation has also opened up new horizons in the reading of Acts. Albert Hogeterp and Adelbert Denaux have identified Semitic Greek in the vocabulary, syntax, and every level of narrative discourse in Luke and Acts.²² In 1988 Marilyn Salmon raised an important question: If the term "gentiles" (τὰ ἔθνη) was Jewish "insider" language typically employed as a reference to non-Jewish "outsiders," why would Lukas be so fond of the term if the author was not Jewish himself?²³ Similarly, Lukas does not self-identify as a Christian (Χριστιανός), a term that appears twice in Acts and is used only by non-Christians, but rather

speaks of "the Way" (ἡ ὁδός; Acts 9:2; 16:17; 18:26; 19:19, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 24), which recalls Jesus' speaking of the Way of Torah (Exod 32:8; Deut 9:12; Isa 30:21; cf. Luke 20:21; Acts 18:25, 26).

A major consequence of this understanding of Lukan authorship is that it produces a coherent and comprehensive reading of Luke and Acts in which the gentile mission is understood not as a *supersession* of Jewish belief and practice but rather as an *extension* of Israel's salvation history. Reading Luke and Acts as Jewish texts therefore reframes these narratives as accounts of intra-Jewish conflict rather than as a triumphalist story of the eclipse of Judaism by gentile Christianity. Given the sharp increase in anti-Semitic, white supremacist, and Christian nationalist violence in the United States and other Western countries in recent years, understanding the Jewish roots of Acts has seldom been more urgent than it is today.

Joshua Paul Smith

21. See Isaac Oliver, *Torah Praxis after 70 CE: Reading Matthew and Luke-Acts as Jewish Texts*, WUNT 2.355 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); Matthew Thiessen, "Luke 2:22, Leviticus 22, and Parturient Impurity," *NovT* 54 (2012): 16–29.

22. Albert Hogeterp and Adelbert Denaux, *Semitisms in Luke's Greek*, WUNT 2.401 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018). See also Adelbert Denaux, Rita Corstjens, and Hellen Mardaga, *The Vocabulary of Luke*, BTS 10 (Leuven: Peeters, 2009).

23. Marilyn Salmon, "Insider or Outsider? Luke's Relationship with Judaism," in *Luke-Acts and the Jewish People*, ed. Joseph B. Tyson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 76–82.

Acts 1:1-4a

Preface

Both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles have prefaces addressed to one “Theophilus,” which is certainly a prime reason why the two books have been attributed to the same author. In fact, the only word the prefaces have in common is “Theophilus,” the addressee. Theophilus may have been a historical person and the author’s patron, but given the long time span between the composition of the two books (see the introduction), that seems improbable. We may instead consider “Theophilus” (“lover of God”) to be a paradigmatic Christian, probably a gentile Christian, a collective person¹ representing the authorial audience² of Acts. The convention of subsuming the female grammatically within the male is operative here too: “Theophilus” is a Christian *person*, not limited to males in the audience. The author signals to readers that in this book gender will almost always have overtones of ambiguity.

1. See Ivoni Richter Reimer’s exposition below.

2. This term refers to the ideal audience as the author imagines it and implicitly configures it in the text.

Acts 1:1-4a

^{1:1}In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³After his suffering he presented him-

self alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father.

Theophilus

We consider "Theophilus," to whom the two Lukan works³ are addressed, to be a representative of a collective, of a community. The name itself can allude to a mostly gentile identity of this community and, as a representative of a diverse collective, it includes men and women of all ages, classes, and ethnicities who have been added to the Way/Movement. This is, therefore, also the audience the author

addresses. The community is a "lover/friend of God" who knows the work of Jesus and now, in a new historical context, is called to continue his movement. This continuity is not a simple "repetition"; it is a process of rereading and reconstructing Jesus' work in other contexts. As a result it is marked simultaneously by discontinuities, new complexities, and ambiguities, all recorded narratively.

Ivoni Richter Reimer

This observation by Ivoni Richter Reimer is of crucial importance for understanding Acts in its original setting. This is not a "gospel," a portrayal of Jesus' life and teaching for the benefit of those outside or those newly gathered into the community and in need of instruction. Acts is a book for *insiders*, for women and men who have absorbed and accepted Jesus' teaching and who need support and encouragement in living the community life his teaching demands. Nowhere in Acts do we find a "doctrinal discourse"—no sermon on a mount or on a plain. It is not preaching but "signs and wonders" (cf. 2:22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12) that draw people; once they have "repented" (lit. "turned around"), been baptized, and received the Holy Spirit, they must learn a

3. See the introduction, also in relation to the authorship of Acts.

new way of life in which it will be the community itself that will instruct them in the ways of the reign of God. Lukas never proposes, anywhere in Acts, that women should behave in one way and men in another: quite the contrary, as the Sapphira and Ananias episode will show. This could be a counter to writings like the Pastorals⁴ or even to some passages in Paul's authentic letters; however, the former are more likely to be later than, and a push-back against, the egalitarianism of Acts.

The scope of the preface to Acts is debated. Loveday Alexander, in her examination of the preface to Luke's Gospel,⁵ devotes only four pages to Acts 1:1, which, as far as the comparison with Luke is concerned, constitutes the whole of the preface. She implicitly assigns Acts to a different genre than the Gospel(s); the burden of her analysis is that Luke's preface resembles those of popular scientific works, but the Acts preface, which fails to give any recapitulation of the previous book, is more like those of multivolume historical works. Obviously, Acts is of a different genre than any Gospel, but it implicitly claims at the outset to be a history as understood in the ancient mold.

In addition, Acts makes no claim to being definitive, something Luke's Gospel (1:1-4) emphatically does. The Gospel author's purpose in writing, "after investigating everything carefully," is that Theophilus "may know the truth" about Jesus' story—the implication being that the other accounts, however "orderly," are somehow deficient. In the preface to Acts, Lukas implies the same claim regarding the Gospel, but as far as this second work is concerned it is to be an account of how the apostles spread the teaching entrusted to them by Jesus both pre- and post-Easter. Moreover, unlike the Gospel, it is open-ended: in the course of the story we hear of the death of only one apostle (James), and at the end Paul, the great missionary, is very explicitly said still to be alive and teaching at his lodgings in Rome. "The Movement"⁶ continues, and others will write about its further course.

The text here gives a first impression that during the forty days after Easter Jesus restricted his appearances to the Twelve. "While staying with them" (συνελθόντες ἡρώτων αὐτὸν) more properly means "while eating

4. 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.

5. Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1*, SNTSMS 78 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

6. Or "the Way," ἡ ὁδός; see Acts 9:2; 19:23; 24:22. Lukas also uses the word ἐκκλησία, but in Acts it can refer to the assembly of Israel in the wilderness, to the gatherings of the Way, or to any public assembly (cf. Acts 7:38; 9:31; 11:26; 15:22; 19:32, 39).

with them,” which seems to make these meals an extension of the Last Supper account, in which (at least in the Synoptics) only “the twelve” or “the apostles” figure—unlike many other meals recounted in the Gospels.⁷

Masculine Identifiers

The change from verse 2 to verse 3 marks a narrative discontinuity: there is a break in the narrative flow, a signal of the complex literary composition of the entire work. Verse 2 (in Greek) ends by stating that Jesus “was taken up [ἀνελήμφθη] to heaven,” and with this 1:1-2 has already forged the editorial bridge with “the first book.” It is important, however, for the author to give more information about what happened before Jesus’ ascension, after his resurrection. Thus verse 3 begins with the relative pronoun “to whom” in the dative masculine plural, οἷς, referring to the “apostles” (1:2). The author has

thus made efforts to connect his preface (1:1-2) with an existing tradition about the forty days⁸ of action of the Risen One with his disciples. With this pronoun the author directly identifies the group of people gathered (1:3-9) with the apostles. If we understand the term “apostle” in a reduced way as referring to the Eleven/Twelve we have here an androcentric authorial characterization that deprives women of their status as evangelical witnesses of the resurrection, but if we understand the term “apostle” as symbolic (twelve tribes of Israel) or in an extended sense, then the narrative includes women and men.

Ivoni Richter Reimer

Thus while the restriction of the title “apostle” to the Twelve⁹ emphasizes the continuity of the new community with Israel of the twelve tribes it is also understood by most interpreters as permanently masculinizing the leadership of the Movement. The preface to Acts—and here it is distinctly discontinuous with the Gospels—stresses that it is the “apostles” who are the witnesses to the resurrection and are commissioned to give

7. See, e.g., Luke 22:14; cf. Mark 14:3; Matt 26:6-7. Mark and Matthew refer to those with Jesus at the Last Supper as “the twelve,” the equivalent of Luke’s “apostles.” John, who has no particular affection for the Twelve (and is averse to the term “apostle”) characterizes those at the Supper as “his own” (τοῦς ἰδίους).

8. This information appears only in Acts, which is an indication of efforts to connect the history of God open to “gentiles” with its Jewish liberation origins (exodus).

9. Paul and Barnabas are called “apostles” twice in chapter 14 (vv. 1, 14), but apparently in their roles as “sent” by the community at Antioch. Lukas is not interested in applying the cherished title to Paul in its primary sense, as if he were equal to one of the Twelve.

public testimony to it, in apparent contradiction to the accounts in all four Gospels, in which it is women who first receive that news and convey it to the Eleven. Insofar as future testimony is to be public—and Acts makes very little reference to nonpublic witness, as we will see—it is to be men’s work, for the public sphere is theirs.

Whereas in the Gospel the “apostles” were only the Twelve, that ceases to be the case in Acts. The symbolic number twelve is restored by the election of Matthias, but that is the last we hear of him or of any others of the Twelve except Peter and (marginally) John and James (when he is killed).¹⁰ The verb ἀποστέλλω, “send,” is very prominent in Acts, and once the community moves beyond Jerusalem those who are ἀπόστολοι, “sent ones,” are nearly always sent by a community, not by Jesus or any other individual figure.¹¹ The local community and not some central institution becomes the authority by whom people are sent on mission to spread the Movement.

Literary Aspects

The literary authorial effort is an important element in the construction of the work. Here verses 3-4 clearly summarize the narrative in Luke 24:13-43, highlighting that Jesus is alive and that he teaches and eats meals together with the group who had accompanied him from Galilee to Calvary and to the now empty tomb (cf. v. 21): Jesus lives! The narrative objective is to make the group remain in Jerusalem

(Luke 24:47, 49, 52-53; Acts 1:4a) to reconfigure the history of God in the holy city. This is different from the tradition recorded in Mark 16:7; Matthew 28:7, 10, 16, which reconstruct history from Galilee. This literary and theological effort has to do with the objective of the work: starting from Jerusalem to take the gospel to all peoples (Acts 1:8) without breaking with the liberation origins of Israel.

Ivoni Richter Reimer

10. The “James” most prominent in Acts, Peter’s ostensible successor as leader of the Jerusalem community, is the “brother of the Lord” and not either of the two Jameses in the Synoptic list or the one Lukas names at Acts 1:14.

11. The great exception is Saul/Paul, who regularly insists in his letters that he was called and sent by the risen Lord and not, e.g., by the church in Jerusalem. Lukas lets Paul affirm this twice in Acts as he tells of his encounter with the Risen One (cf. Acts 22:6-21; 26:12-23); the claim (for good or ill) was widely known. Still, it is apparent to the careful reader that Paul is first “vetted” and sent by the community at Damascus (9:19b-20, 27), then by that at Antioch (13:1-3), then *to* Antioch by the mother community in Jerusalem (15:22-30) and *by* the Antiochene community thereafter (15:40).

Acts 1:4b-14

Ascension

The author apparently means “they” throughout the passage to refer to “the apostles whom he had chosen” (v. 2), but “when they had come together” implies additional persons. Jesus’ forty days of instruction have not shaken the ingrained expectations of at least some of his followers. They are still thinking in the paradigm of a restored (earthly?) “kingdom,” presumably with Jesus at its head, wielding his messianic power confirmed by the resurrection.¹ Jesus’ answer leaves the future open-ended (as the book of Acts will be). He does not even promise his followers wisdom or understanding, only “power” for witness. Lukas’s apostles have authority, but they have to struggle for insight.

1. Here Jesus, in Lukas’s portrayal, seems more in tune with currents in Jewish thought as regards messianic figures in the first centuries CE (and since) than are the apostles; see at Acts 2 below. As Paula Fredriksen has written, the focus on (eternal) salvation “never defined Second Temple Jewish culture or ideas of covenant, nor did it universally shape centuries of Jewish relationships with their non-Jewish neighbors in the cities of the diaspora. Jewish ancestral practices—inherited protocols for aligning heaven and earth—focused, rather, on the business of living Jewishly.” (Review of Joshua D. Garroway, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Paul, Philippi, and the Origins of Christianity* [Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018] in *RBL*, June 2020, online at <https://www.bookreviews.org>.) But Acts, whether we date it early or late, is contemporary with a wave of Jewish apocalyptic literature such as Jubilees, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and 1 Enoch (which is explicitly quoted in the late first-century letter of Jude), and those writings were most definitely focused on the end time and the life beyond.

Acts 1:4b-14

^{4b}“This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But

you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

What Did Jesus Really Say?

The obstinate adherence of the disciples to their familiar ways of thinking as pictured here, even after forty days of instruction from the Risen One, should recommend some caution about the received understanding of what Jesus actually said during his lifetime. The evangelists recorded what they heard him say, or what they were told by eye- and ear-witnesses that he had said, or what had been handed down, and the words, so far as they go, may well be authentic. But there is surely a surplus of meaning to which we ought to attend.

Almost no one in the twenty-first century affirms the

institution of slavery as biblically warranted or commanded, but Scripture is still cited to affirm the subordination of women; the ostracizing of LGBTQIA+ persons; the establishment of class barriers based on color, immigration status, education, wealth and poverty, age, even body types—and, of course, religion (anti-Judaism, anti-Islamic prejudice, and on and on). A norm of full equality seems an ever-receding eschatological goal to many (a future horror to some for whom the prospect of a “majority-minority” population portends only a *reversal* of discriminatory norms). That does not absolve the rest of us from pursuing the goal.

We must be clear, however, that in citing a messianic expectation of the restoration of Israel’s political independence—one of the common currents in apocalyptic thought contemporary to him—Lukas signals for the first and by no means the last time that he honors Israel’s election and its faith; he uses language throughout Acts that coincides with first- and second-century CE Hellenistic Jewish polemic against the Roman

¹¹They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room up-

stairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

usurpation. The assertion that the Way is in continuity with Israel can be read consistently as a counter to views like those of Marcion² (whose “New Testament” apparently included an edited version of Luke’s Gospel together with the letters of Paul, but *not* Acts). Various currents in Jewish thought, including different views of the messiah, were still part of the active debates in which Lukas must have engaged.

In a larger sense the whole discourse of kingdom, and of Jesus’ authority as subject to that of the “Father” God—in other words, the power structure of society writ large that is the background of Acts—continues and reinforces the kyriarchal pattern of power and dominance that is assumed as normative not only by Acts but by the biblical writings as a whole (though the New Testament and later writings vary in their desire to impose those norms on the Movement itself). Lukas writes in carefully nuanced language that challenges both the Greek and Roman power and its related cult,³ but he never alludes to the kyriarchal structures of

2. All that we know about Marcion comes to us from his opponents. His dates are uncertain as well. He regarded the God of Israel as a false and vengeful deity unrelated to the God of Jesus Christ. (It seems that his version of Luke’s Gospel omitted the early chapters describing Jesus’ embeddedness in Israel, or it may be that Luke 1–2 were not yet part of the Third Gospel as known to Marcion. See Barbara E. Reid and Shelly Matthews, *Luke 1–9*, WCS 43A [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021], lv–lvi, with the works cited in n. 41 there.) Joseph B. Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), sees Acts as a riposte to Marcion, which is possible, though that would push Acts to a very late date. More probably Acts is part of the ongoing debate, one side of which became a “movement” led by Marcion.

3. The word “cult,” in this context, refers to a system of religious or quasi-religious veneration directed to symbolic or personified deities or to persons or things designated as holy or “divine,” as in the case of the cult of the Roman emperors. Cultic

society, let alone challenges them. The community he envisions is indeed kyriarchal: it has but one *Kyrios*, namely, Jesus. But the androcentrism of such a society on earth is simply taken as a matter of course. This observation should inform our reading as we proceed.⁴

The promise of the Spirit's power and the vocation to witness "to the ends of the earth" will be programmatic for the remainder of Acts; the first part of the promise will be seen to be fulfilled initially, in surprising fashion, in Acts 2, but there will be subsequent manifestations.⁵ Jesus' words are a kind of compound of the commissions in Matthew 28 and Luke 24, though the Matthean scene takes place in Galilee; Matthew's depiction speaks of "authority" (ἐξουσία) and "teaching" (διδάσκοντες); Luke 24 and Acts 1 correspondingly emphasize "power" (δύναμις) and "witness" (μαρτύριον).

There are significant differences as well. Luke and Acts end and begin, respectively, with an "ascension" scene and are the only New Testament documents containing such an event or any reference to it. The two Lukan scenes take place, however, in different locations (though that news comes belatedly in Acts 1:12). In Luke the place is Bethany while in Acts the action plays out on the Mount of Olives. Both use a parallel with Elijah, but whereas in Luke the indeterminate "they" worship Jesus and, after his departure, immediately return rejoicing to Jerusalem, in Acts the "apostles," having displayed their misconception about what is to come next, stand gaping up at the cloud that has removed Jesus from their sight until they are jogged by the "two men in white robes" (cf. Luke 24:4; John 20:12). The message of the two passages inserts the notion of Jesus' parousia, which otherwise plays virtually no overt role in Acts. The book as a whole has nothing to say about an imminent return of Jesus, and its message is directed very much to the progress of the gospel in the here and now.

Another subtle but important difference concerns the scope of the mission. In Luke 24:47 the disciples were told that "repentance and forgiveness

vation was an important mechanism for shoring up and sustaining Roman power, and violation of its norms could (and did) evoke severe punishment.

4. For this subject see especially Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking Beyond Thecla* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), *passim*, as well as two other works edited by Vander Stichele and Penner, *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, SymS 20 (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), esp. Vander Stichele's essay, "Gender and Genre: Acts in/of Interpretation," 311–29; and *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, BibInt 84 (Leiden: Brill, 2007): in this volume see especially the essay by the two editors, "Scripturing Gender in Acts: The Past and Present Power of Imperium," 231–66.

5. Cf. Acts 4:31; 6:3–5; 7:55; 8:15–17; 9:17; 10:44–47; 11:15–16; 13:2, 4, 9, 52; 15:8; 19:2, 6.

of sins is to be proclaimed in [Messiah's] name *to all nations*" (cf. Matt 28:19). At Acts 1:8 nothing is said of "nations"—a term with ethnic and political implications—or of messianic claims; the disciples will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to *be witnesses* "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." It has been conventional for a very long time to see the spatial movement thus described as shaping the whole Acts narrative, with Rome representing "the ends of the earth." But while the real center of Acts is Jerusalem, the second-century audience and those who came after them would have regarded Rome as the *center* of the world, not its end. Augustus completed the conquest of the Iberian peninsula about 19 BCE. Julius Caesar had campaigned in Gaul, as every second-year student of Latin used to know ("*Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres*"—Caesar's *Gallic Wars* was a standard text). Roman forces invaded Britain beginning in 43 CE, during the reign of Claudius, and that conquest was pretty well complete by 83. In other words, in the story-time of Acts "the ends of the earth" would have been represented in the west by the Atlantic Ocean and in the east by the Parthian Empire in what is now Iran, with the Sahara Desert limiting Roman expansion in North Africa. The Way of Jesus must cover at least that much territory and reach all the peoples within it before the end can come, and it is a calling to all people not to submit to a secular power, whether Roman or any other, but to be joined with Israel in its eschatological completion centered on Jerusalem (see Rev 21:2-4).

The Role of Baptism in the First Centuries

Beginning in the 70s CE and given the troubled state of diaspora synagogues after the destruction of the temple,⁶ the debates and proposals about the "restoration of Israel" must

have been intense and marked by conflicts.⁷ According to the question in 1:6, Lukas, his apostles, and Theophilus (= the community) also took part in this discussion. In Acts 1:5 part of this debate is expressed through the understanding

6. See in this regard Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); Luise Schottroff, "Toward a Feminist Reconstruction of the History of Early Christianity," in *Feminist Interpretation: The Bible in Women's Perspective*, ed. Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, and Marie-Theres Wacker, trans. Martin and Barbara Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 177–254.

7. The proposals were varied, as the letter to the Hebrews also demonstrates. These conflicts had a strong impact on Marcion's position with its anti-Jewish elements.

of the baptismal rite, here represented by two movements of socio-religious renewal: the followers of John the Baptist and the members of the Way; one baptized with water for repentance and the other “with the Holy Spirit.”⁸ This implies different identities:⁹ to receive the Holy Spirit is henceforth to bear the name of Jesus, the Christ (2:36). The construction of this new identity, therefore, is marked by complexities and conflicts regarding the “restoration of Israel” and the character of the groups surviving the Great War of the 70s.

To be baptized “with the Holy Spirit” means to receive dynamic and transforming power (δύναμις) to testify about the life and work of Jesus Christ (1:8; 2:4, 32, and frequently). This involves a profound

conversion (2:38), reflected in the construction of community life through the experience of spirituality and solidarity (2:41-47). This is Lukas’s proposal for “restoring” Israel.

The authorial hand is evident again in verses 9-11 with the second account of Jesus’ ascension (cf. Luke 24:50-52). Variations include the apocalyptic elements of the “cloud” (Rev 11:12; 1 Thess 4:17) and the hierophany of the “two men in white robes” (see Luke 24:4),¹⁰ who announce the future return (ἐλεύσασθαι) of this Jesus. The language is explicitly androcentric: here the two “angels” address the “men” (ἄνδρες, 1:11) who are staring up to heaven, parallel to the two “angels” who spoke to women in the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:4).

Ivoni Richter Reimer

Since the publication of *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu*¹¹ in 1971, Gerhard Lohfink’s historical-critical analysis of the ascension scenes in Luke and Acts has been the starting point for all further analysis. He summarizes the several intentions behind Lukas’s skillful composition in Acts 1:6-8:

- Continuity is established between the time of Jesus and the time of the church through the spatial symbol of continuity, “Jerusalem.”

8. See Acts 18:35–19:6.

9. See below at Acts 2:4; 18:24–19:7.

10. In the narrative of the resurrection Mark 16:5 uses the term “young man” (in a white robe); Matt 28:2 speaks of an “angel” with a white robe, and John 20:12 has “two angels” in white robes; Luke 24:23 also speaks of “angels.” This is the language of “epiphany,” a profound religious experience of the sacred.

11. Gerhard Lohfink, *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu: Untersuchungen zu den Himmelfahrts- und Erhöhungstexte bei Lukas* (Munich: Kösel, 1971).

- Continuity is cemented between the time of Jesus and that of the church by means of a limited time framework. The Risen One appeared for only forty days, allowing little time for extensive secret revelations.
- Still, within those forty days the Risen One could have spoken of some new and secret things. But no!—Lukas emphasizes that he spoke about the “reign of God” (Acts 1:3), that is, precisely what he always talked about during his public activity before Easter, and nothing else.

The parousia question is also addressed. The disciples ask (1:6) about the time of Israel’s restoration, but the Risen One instead points to the world mission in the power of the Spirit; the two “angels” are equally emphatic about that. It is the new Movement’s mission to the world that will bring the triumph of the eschatological Israel.¹²

The note about the “mount called Olivet” (also an eschatological symbol, mentioned almost as an afterthought) and its being “a sabbath day’s journey away” emphasizes the Torah observance of the Eleven and of the Movement as a whole. The distance was later established¹³ as about three-quarters of a mile. Richard Pervo¹⁴ translates σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδόν (lit. “having a Sabbath’s journey”) as “half a Sabbath day’s journey,” since presumably the group would have to have traveled there and back in one day.

12. Gerhard Lohfink, personal communication with Linda Maloney, March 11, 2020. Lohfink stresses that the doubling of the ascension scene and the continuance of the group of the Twelve represent continuity between the Gospel and Acts. That is certainly true, but in this author’s opinion it does not prove single authorship.

13. Cf. m. ‘Erub. 4:3 (second to third century CE). Lukas may know of it from Esene practice (see CD 10:21).

14. Richard I. Pervo, *Acts, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 46n51, referring to C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1994), 85–86. From Barrett’s calculations it seems that Lukas probably derived his information from Josephus, who places the Mount of Olives five or six stadia (ca. 1,150 meters) from the city; rabbinic sources (e.g., m. ‘Erub. 59a; y. Ber. 5.9a.40) set the length of a Sabbath’s journey at two thousand cubits (= 1,120 meters). Since a date forty days after Easter would not be a Sabbath, the reference to “a sabbath day’s journey” is almost surely another Lukan feature intended to establish the disciples’ continued adherence to Jewish law.

Where Did the Movement Begin?

Because of our customary eliding of all differences among the Gospels (and Acts) it has seldom been questioned (until recently) that the Jesus Movement first coalesced in Jerusalem, but in fact Lukas is the only author who says so. According to Matthew and Mark the resurrection witnesses were told to go to Galilee, and it was there that the risen Jesus met them. John 20 breaks off after the scene in the “upper room” in Jerusalem, but the added chapter 21 places Jesus and the disciples back in Galilee, at the Sea of Tiberias.

The historical probability is that the Movement first coalesced in Galilee, where the

“apostles” and at least some other believers had fled after Jesus’ crucifixion and where a base of Jesus-followers remained. Experiences of the risen Jesus eventually led the Galilean leaders to return to Jerusalem, but certainly not within Lukas’s programmatic “forty days.”

Lukas has a different story to tell. Luke’s Gospel begins and ends in the Jerusalem temple; Acts starts in Jerusalem, and its open ending is set in Rome. His Christology—Jesus as suffering prophet and Messiah-King of Israel, bringing about the opening to the gentiles—demands this scenario. This movement neither began nor will remain in a corner (cf. Acts 26:26); it goes forth from Zion.

Returning to the city, the group¹⁵ repairs to the “room upstairs” and engages in prayer. The Eleven are now named, and we are explicitly told that they are with others, including “certain women” plus Jesus’ mother and his brothers. Acts says nothing about disharmony between the apostles and Jesus’ family; though none of Jesus’ brothers is among the “apostles,” one of them (James) will become the leader of the Jerusalem community after the departure of Peter.¹⁶ “Mary” as the name of

15. The “they” who witness the ascension include but are not restricted to the Eleven: see vv. 6, 9. The angelic address, “Men of Galilee” (Ἄνδρες Γαλιλαῖοι), is conventional, like “Men of Judea” (Ἄνδρες Ἰουδαῖοι, 2:14), “Men of Israel” (Ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται, 2:22), and “Men, brothers” (Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, 1:16; 2:29, 37; 7:2, 26; 13:15, 26, 38; 15:7, 13; 22:1; 23:1, 6; 28:17). This address is reserved for Jewish audiences, and only in 7:2, 26; 22:1; 23:1, 6 can it be certainly assumed to be directed exclusively to men because in those passages Stephen and Paul are supposedly addressing the Sanhedrin.

16. In Luke’s Gospel Jesus’ brothers are mentioned only once (at 8:19-21) and not by name. In fact, the Lukan Jesus discourages inviting one’s brothers to dinner (14:12) and approves “hating” one’s family (14:26). See the interesting treatment of the link between Jesus’ family (especially James) and strict Torah observance in the Jerusalem

Jesus' mother is traditional in the Synoptics; this is her final appearance. The names of all the rest of Jesus' female followers known from the Gospels have been "scrubbed," though clearly women make up a large portion of the Jerusalem community. One effect of the focus on Jerusalem and the location of the Movement's origins there is to effectively remove from the picture the group of women who followed Jesus in Galilee. The trajectory of Lukas's story is from Zion (= Jerusalem) through "all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8). Galilee is not even a way station on that road.

What Is Mary Doing in Acts?

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is one of the women with the men of Galilee and Jesus' brothers in the upstairs room in Jerusalem. Lukas makes sure we know she is present here, but he never mentions her again in Acts. Even her witness to the identity of Jesus is underrepresented in this book: Peter chooses a replacement for Judas from among those who were with Jesus from the time of his baptism (Acts 1:22). If her witness to Jesus' prebaptismal life is superfluous to Acts, why does Lukas bother to mention her at all?

To suggest an answer to this question we need to follow Lukas's descriptor of this woman, the mother of Jesus, back into the Gospel. Mary's

story begins powerfully with her assent to participate in the new work of God (Luke 1:38) and her witness to the constant character of the purposes of God (Luke 1:46-55). Luke depicts her as a prophet who speaks the mind and ways of the God of Israel.¹⁷ She is a prototypical disciple, demonstrating power and vocation for witness. The new community, according to Lukas, embodies these ways: those who fear God are fearless before the powerful (Acts 4:19 and 24:10) and they care for the poor (Acts 2:45 and 4:32).

According to the Gospel, Mary and Jesus' brothers follow Jesus, but when they come to seek him Jesus dismisses them in favor of those who hear the word of God and do it (Luke 8:19-21).¹⁸ The reader of the

community in Richard I. Pervo, "My Happy Home: The Role of Jerusalem in Acts 1-7," *Forum* 3 (Spring 2000): 31-55, esp. 36-39. See also the discussion at Acts 1:23 below.

17. Barbara E. Reid, "An Overture to the Gospel of Luke," *CurTM* 39 (2012): 428-34.

18. For an exposition of that story see Gerhard Lohfink, "Compliment and Return Compliment," in *Between Heaven and Earth: New Explorations of Great Biblical Texts*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2022), 49-53.

Gospel knows, however, that this is an excellent description of the mother of Jesus. By naming Mary as present among the disciples in Acts, Lukas reminds the reader that a Jewish woman embodied (literally) a faithful witness to the works of God.

Even briefly noting her presence in Acts affirms her faithfulness and closes her story in an orderly way, establishing her significance as an ideal follower.

Mary's narrative function is different from that of Peter or the other apostles who will carry the story from Jerusalem to the ends of the world. Where they move the story of the Movement across ethnic boundaries, Mary reminds us of the roots of the story in

Israel, through whom God acted for the life of the world. Like the ascension and the events of Pentecost, the accounts placed before and after the prayers in the upstairs room in Jerusalem, Mary draws us into reflection on the deepest mystery of the gospel, "the interface between heaven and earth," and provides a paradigm for living human life in a truly faithful way.¹⁹ *This paradigm is a Jewish woman.* Thus Lukas indicates that the story of the Way is continuous with the story of Israel, as he will affirm again when Peter uses Israel's Scriptures to direct and interpret the nascent life of the community.

Jo-Ann Badley

It will appear in the next scene that the criterion for apostleship is having been a witness to Jesus from the time of his baptism by John until his resurrection. This makes Mary the proto-apostle, the original witness.²⁰

19. J. D. G. Dunn, "The Ascension of Jesus: A Test Case for Hermeneutics," in *Auferstehung—Resurrection: The Fourth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium: Resurrection, Transfiguration and Exaltation in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Friedrich Avemarie and Hermann Lichtenberger, WUNT 135 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 302 and 313.

20. On Mary in Acts see especially Jo-Ann Badley, "What Is Mary Doing in Acts? Confessional Narratives and the Synoptic Tradition," in *Rediscovering the Marys: Maria, Mariamne, Miriam*, ed. Mary Ann Beavis and Ally Kateusz, LNTS (= JSNTSup) 620 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020), 47–58. The shift of community and worship from the temple to the synagogue and house assembly gave an important boost to women's leadership and participation. See Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*, BJS 36 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); on the ambiguities of women's status at this point in Acts and later see Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).

What about the Temple?

One problem with positing joint authorship of Luke and Acts is their different treatments of the Jerusalem temple. It is not news that Luke's Gospel begins and ends in the temple (Luke 1:8; 24:52); Jesus is presented in the temple as an infant and greeted there by the prophets Simeon and Anna (2:22-38); in the temptation scene, the third and culminating test takes place "on the pinnacle of the temple" (4:9-12), and Jesus teaches in the temple even as a youth (2:46-50), calling it "my Father's house" (2:49); he returns there to teach at the end of his ministry (19:45-21:38). After the ascension his disciples return to Jerusalem, as instructed, "and they were continually in the temple blessing God" (24:52).

Contrast Acts: In 1:4, as in Luke 24:49, Jesus instructs the disciples to remain in Jerusalem. But in Acts they return from Olivet and go not to the temple but "to the room upstairs where they were staying" (1:13), and apparently that is where they remain, avoiding public notice, until after the Pentecost event; not until 2:46 do we learn that they are now spending "much time together in the temple." (Quite possibly "the room upstairs" is not in Jerusalem but in Galilee and represents the early stage of the Movement before its

return to Jerusalem.) Concretely, Luke 21:38 tells us that "all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to [Jesus] in the temple," but the first temporal notice in Acts says that Peter and John were "going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon" (Acts 3:1). In the Gospel the sun is rising over the temple as Jesus teaches there; in Acts it is declining toward its setting.

What Luke and Acts do have in common in this regard is the characterization of Jesus' enemies. They are those officially associated with the temple and therefore with the Roman occupiers: the priesthood (now appointed by the secular authority), the scribes, the Sadducees—in other words, the Jerusalem *politeia*. In the Gospel the Pharisees are often critical of Jesus and his teaching and are criticized by him, though they also seek to protect him from Herod.²¹ In Acts the portrayal of Pharisees is entirely positive, even though some of them are associated with the temple (Acts 5:34; 23:6-9; 26:5; see the analysis of 15:5 below).

The two texts appear to reflect two very different time periods and historical situations. The writer of the Gospel is still close to the soul-shattering destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, when conflicts

21. On Pharisees in Luke see Reid and Matthews, *Luke 1-9*, 180-82; Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine, eds., *The Pharisees* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).

and recriminations among Jewish groups and sects were especially painful; the temple, its significance and its glory, is a memory to be cherished and a hope to be retained. Acts shows a situation in which the temple is definitively a thing of the past. Dialogue between Pharisees and the Jesus movement is still cultivated, both in the homeland and in the diaspora, and both groups are uneasy about rising political-religious tensions with

Rome that might (and very soon would) lead to further bloodshed and banishment. The early Movement and then Paul (himself a Pharisee: Acts 23:6; 26:5, and cf. Phil 3:5) are rejected by the Roman-collaborating temple authorities (though the Romans are portrayed as more benevolent than the Sadducees!). Acts bows to the past but looks to the future, as do the founders of rabbinic Judaism with whom its author is in dialogue.²²

22. Nadav Sharon, *Judea under Roman Domination: The First Generation of Statelessness and Its Legacy*, EJJL 46 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), argues passionately that, from the time of the Hasmoneans onward, Judaism was living increasingly (even within Judea) in a diaspora situation that under Roman rule “significantly qualified the centrality of and all-encompassing reverence for the temple, thus setting the stage for the postdestruction era” (311). He points to Herod’s choosing the high priests, who were, or were regarded as, his puppets, as well as the fact that in that era prophets (like John the Baptizer) led people into the “desert” and taught there, not in the temple. In addition he speaks of the rising importance of the diaspora institution of the synagogue (identified with the Pharisees, who emphasized teaching and keeping the Torah). Whether one accepts his basic thesis or not, Sharon has assembled important information about the period that is worthy of consideration. See also Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period: Belief and Practice from the Exile to Yavneh* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Acts 1:15-26

Making Up the Twelve (Male) Apostles

“In those days” (ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις) is a favorite phrase of this author (Acts 1:15; 6:1; 11:27; cf. Luke 24:18); as a narrative device it elides any gaps between events. The story moves rapidly here; what is important is that during the undefined period between Jesus’ departure and the promised coming of the Spirit the number of the Twelve must be completed. By the time Acts was written, the theologians of the ἐκκλησία had already formulated the notion of “twelve apostles,” matching the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Matt 10:2; 19:28; Mark 3:14, 16; Luke 6:13; 22:30).¹

Likewise, we first learn here that Peter is the leader of the postascension community. In the Gospels he is a denier of Jesus, just as Judas is the betrayer;² though there are some indications in Luke’s Gospel that

1. It is interesting in this context that the phrase “one of the twelve” is applied *only* to Judas in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 14:10, 43; *parr.* Matt 26:14, 47; Luke 22:3, 47). His sole other designation is “betrayer” (παραδιδούς, participle of παραδίδωμι, lit. “hand over,” thus “one who hands over”).

2. It appears that this man’s name really was Ἰούδας, a common name with some variant spellings that English renders “Judah,” “Judas,” or “Jude.” Though Israel’s history had many honorable men of the name, from Judah son of Jacob to Judas Macabaeus, “Judas” was reserved in Christian polemic for the disciple who allegedly

Afterword

Liquid God

Willie James Jennings

Empire has been cracked open. The book of Acts begins the draining of a world filled with patriarchal power and masculinist privilege. Linda Maloney captures this truth beautifully in this work. The plug has been pulled and slowly but surely the hope of a particular kind of power is dissipating into the nothingness where lurks the demonic. It is a power rooted in the hope for the rise of the great man, the one that will lead us into a glorious new future. Histories have been too often told to encircle the great men, moving constantly around their bodies, their behaviors and moods, their actions and genius from which the world enters its maturity. The book of Acts will have none of that. Jesus will not be the great man. He will be the community formed in his name. Jesus will not be the genius whose cunning reason becomes the paradigm for global victory or domination. He will be the giver of connecting life that binds and elevates all to a shared vision.

The book of Acts is a people's history of God that directly challenges masculinist historiography and the pedagogies of history that continue to teach people to read the world through the actions of great men. In fact, we cannot escape those ways of reading and teaching history simply by rejecting them, because the great men are too strong to be denied in that way. They can only be denied by following the one who killed the great man on the cross and rose from the dead for the sake of the many. Jesus will be known in the many. History must be seen from the many. The

future envisioned by the many will be the future of God. Eschatology is always communal if it is indeed God's last things. Yet the steps of escape from the great man that Jesus provides mark a radical and dangerous egalitarianism. This egalitarianism is deadly, killing equally the ambitions of men and women and all those caught up in masculinist desire to be remembered as the movers and shakers of history, the builders of worlds, and the heroes of change.

If the world of man—patriarchal, kyriarchal, longingly masculinist—is being drained, then what is emerging in Acts? A world filled with the flows of God: Acts gives witness to Israel's liquid God, and this will be the beginning of a new kind of witness, the witness to life after death, the victory over violence without violence—all of it found in the flow. This means that the followers of the risen Jesus will be called to enact a different kind of *Kyrios*, an anti-lord Lord of the flow. Like the effects of a flood, the kyriarchal structures of society will now begin to crumble from the rising flow of the Spirit moving through the Jesus followers.

This will be uncharted territory inside an unfathomed identity for these disciples. It is an identity we are yet to fathom, its depths calling to us. But not for Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is the first true witness. Our witness is anchored in Mary's reality and truth. Mary's decisive position as the bearer of witness and, as later theology will declare, as *Theotokos*, God-bearer, teaches us the truth of the flow, its uncontainability, its uncontrollability, and its inextricable connection to new life, revolutionary life. Mary shows us what is at stake in this liquid witness—a life out of place, a life out of phase with the prevailing patriarchal order, out of phase with heteronormative marriage, and out of phase with safe and quiet existence in a social order. To speak Mary's name is to speak the revolutionary difference of being the witness to her son. The flow of God through Mary will become the flow of God through her son Jesus, and now in the book of Acts that flow will move through the disciples of Jesus.

The disciples of Jesus are seeking to discern this new reality of witness while yet participating in the old ways of witness. A man speaks the truth of another man—this is the old way, an old way rooted in patriarchal power and kyriarchal vision. Such vision convinces people that a sure account, a trustworthy account of the past that will orient us rightly to the future may come only from men. Yet the Spirit comes, and the disciples speak, all of them. Those gathered will, like newborns, utter a marvelous sound: the sound of life. The book of Acts gives us a birthing scene that indicates the opening of the divine womb. God our mother rejoices in giving the gift of God's self. The Spirit wills newness, and we will know

this desire of God for us. Through the joining of flesh and Spirit, God aims at permanence. The Spirit will speak, hovering in, on, under, over, between, and through, permeating creaturely life like liquids that cover the birthing process. Water and Spirit are now forever joined.

It makes sense to associate the Spirit with the feminine, but it makes even more sense to allow God's release as seen in the book of Acts to free what is meant by the feminine from androcentric captivity. What later theologians will recite as a trinitarian axiom—that the external operations of the Trinity are without division (*opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*)—has its home here in Acts' beautiful moments of divine birthing. The triune God pours out holy juices that will never dissipate, and in them and with them a child cries out wonderfully and powerfully, showing new life. Liquid Spirit, Liquid God—new wine is being poured out on flesh. God our mother pours out God's own life, and the disciples will speak.

The liquid God is flowing. Beginning at Pentecost and throughout the narrative of Acts we learn that God cannot be captured but only witnessed, in the profundity of divine freedom in liquidity—drenching all children and those who have yielded their life in service to God. There is an equality formed in this liquidity—of water and Spirit. We are yet in the work of divine birthing and the releasing of the creative juices of God. God has come full term—the fullness of time—and the earth herself will signal this moment of the mother. It is therefore no stretch to see in Acts the enacting of the Mother-Daughter-Spirit moment of God, the flows of God that moved through this child of Nazareth and through whom flows the power of God to resurrection now flowing through the disciples of Jesus. There is great danger and power in a released body and a yielded spirit. Its image can and has easily served as the basis for a religious politics of subjugation, especially for women. Too often those longing for power have used that image to establish their willing and wanting as the willing and wanting of God. Yet the releasing in Acts carries narrative and temporal specificity—it is the moment of birthing, the moment when our bodies yield to the new life that must come forward, pressing through the pain that will not, that must not be the last word for our existence. The Mother-Daughter-Spirit God releases and yields: here is the deepest truth of this new faith in Jesus. It was the path of his resurrection, and it will also mark our path in and with Jesus. We release ourselves to the power of God found in Jesus and we yield to the Spirit.

What will this mean? Many things might be said about this yielding shown in the book of Acts, but two matters noted in this commentary

must be given pride of place because they are so close to the heartbeat of this text and to the life of God witnessed through it.

First, releasing ourselves to the flow of God means being drawn toward a new common life rooted in sharing our lives. Sharing has often existed in a malignant and nefarious site where slaves, and women, and children are further established within a patriarchal and androcentric fantasy as collectible commodities. This would be a corrupted common, resisting the new of the Spirit. Yet the sharing formed in Jesus' resurrected body and enacted by the Spirit suggests something far different from and far more radical than the sharing formed of empire. It suggests sharing the body's needs and the body's plight in traversing an oppressive society. Everyone counts—this is the democratic spirit we find in Acts—and everyone has needs. Between the everyone who counts and the everyone who needs flows the radicality we find at the beginning of Acts: of selling possessions and goods and distributing the proceeds to the needy. Both churches and societies have struggled with this radicality because it speaks of endless flows. Such flows erode social and economic hierarchies and weaken the foundations of hoarding societies built on uneven exchange, wealth accumulation, cheap labor, ecclesial coercion, and governmental corruption.

Jesus-disciples, however, leak. Goods, possessions, money do not stagnate in them or with them, because they move from place to place, home to home through a politics of generosity that is both beautiful and unnerving, especially for those whose power and position are threatened by such leaky people.

Such sharing is a direct attack on the hierarchies that constitute social life. Empire is in trouble in the book of Acts: not just the Roman Empire, with its codified and canonized slavocracy and patriarchy, but also its economically structured visions of gender and sexuality. The Spirit is flowing through those not seen as human, not acknowledged as having voice, and bound to the market with prices on their heads. This is extraordinary, and it is also a much needed and much longed-for word for the Jewish diaspora. Diaspora living—alien, exile, stranger, foreigner, marginal—is already life in the cracks, cuts, and rips of a society, and ironically these are exactly the spaces where liquidity is most powerful as it seeps into everything that is stable, central, fixed, and absolute. There the liquid starts to crumble things from within.

Divine liquidity is inescapably and irrefutably good news for women. As Maloney writes powerfully in this commentary, we cannot overemphasize the significance of women in the narrative sweep of Acts, not first

because they are given “prominent roles” in the book, though some have such roles. We must note this significance because women are seen, their invisibility erased by the Spirit of God. Such visibility does not require heroic gestures or masculinist displays of power or cunning actions of statecraft. All that is necessary is yielding to the Spirit. The humanity of women that has always been there, always been seen by God, now has pneumatological bright light cast on it and on lives deeply loved by God. Women will be at the heart of the new joining that is gestured in the book of Acts, the bringing together of Jew and Gentile, the breaking down of the walls of hostility and fear, and the weaving together of Jewish diaspora hope with Gentile longing for thriving life. Yet the yielding to the Spirit requires what both diaspora citizens and empire subjects cannot fathom: moving toward one another in life together, sensing the pull of the currents that are drawing them toward each other.

Chapters 10–15 show us that sensing, and these chapters also show us the beginning of a failure, an understandable one, but a failure none the less. Diaspora cannot imagine what God was imagining: the people of Israel joining the Gentiles in ways of life without adopting those ways of life and without losing faithful identity rooted in Torah. Empire subjects cannot imagine what the God of Israel was imagining: abandoning the gods of their peoples without losing themselves and their hope for a future because they would soon learn that their true Creator deeply loved them, all the way down to the dirt on which they stood, all the way down to the plants and animals they ate, all the way down to the stories they told, all the way down to the shape of their bodies and the contours of their loves—and that, together with Israel, with diaspora, this God found in Jesus would drench them in the divine juices and lead them into a more excellent way to know and love who they are and love the One who is the life-giver.

This good news, however, is a revolution that would touch the routine, and for doing such a revolutionary thing the disciples must suffer. This is the second matter in the book of Acts that must be highlighted. No commentary that is true to the story of Acts can ignore the centrality of the prison, of incarceration and punishment. All will bear the pain of the prison, of loss and absence, of death and torture, but women will bear it acutely as they watch the disciples they know—brothers, and partners, and children, and friends—imprisoned. For many women and children what will come with the imprisonment of loved ones will be the loss of protection and support. But we should not imagine, because the book of Acts gives us no reason to do so, that women were not imprisoned, not

tortured or beaten, not thrown out of places both sacred and profane, not discarded by family and friends and branded as diaspora traitors and theological heretics. Women were imprisoned and women are imprisoned at rates that make no sense for their crimes and for the nonsense that mocks a real understanding of criminality. Women are imprisoned for trying to survive, trying to protect themselves, trying to make life possible in a world that kills them for nothing, brutalizes them for sport, and ignores their well-being as a matter of course.

Under the conditions of empire the prison is always close, nearby in the shadows. Thus to speak the revolutionary name of Jesus, to announce his way, and to yield to the Spirit's flow is to bring the prison out of the shadows looking for its next body to consume. We should understand the prison in Acts (and prisons now) as a technology wielded by the powerful and the resentful to thwart the Holy Spirit by seeking to kill the human spirit. The prison has always been about a way of disciplining the body by means of death for the purpose of creating docile subjects who would live forever marked by death, showing forth its wounding as a sign of death's claim on a life. The prison is death's agent, helping death to mark bodies for an early exit. In this way the prison seeks to stop the flow of the Spirit by ending the flow of life. The resurrection of Jesus, however, breaks the power of the prison and the finality of violence.

The disciples of Jesus in the book of Acts know this. They understand, albeit not fully, the power of his resurrection: here is one who survived a successful assassination and exposed the stratagems of the principalities and powers. Those scare tactics and threats, those operations of physical coercion, those practices of torture, even the deployment of death through murder will not destroy the human spirit because it is vivified by the Holy Spirit. Yet, lest we sound too triumphalist about what we read in Acts, we must remember the life on the ground in that book, where people are on the run for their lives, where they are in hiding, drawing on all the wisdom and practice of diaspora living. This is flow work and flow life, and the women in the book of Acts know it extremely well. As Maloney shows us throughout this commentary, the church forms in homes, in women-space, where the power of the Spirit is in domestic space but never ever domesticated. So too with the women in these spaces who foment and format revolutionary life in the Spirit.

And so it begins in the book of Acts. Disciples will be prisoners. Prisoners will be disciples. Incarceration will mark the journey of holy flesh, redeemed flesh, and the life of witnesses to Jesus. Yet incarceration can never stop the flow of the Spirit, and therefore we cannot be stopped.

The book of Acts, however, shows two ways of not being thwarted. The first is the way of empire that bends and breaks all who oppose its will. Empire will not only destroy life to sustain its life and its way of life but it will seduce all who are near the sound of its voice to believe that this is the only way to sustain life. Empire will not be thwarted even if it must destroy everything in sight: buildings, peoples, animals, plants, crops, land, water, earth, and sky. Empire will not be thwarted even if it must create compounded lies and constellations of falsehoods, even if it must manufacture religions and schools of thought at tremendous expense and over long periods of time. The disciples of Jesus are always close to being seduced by this way of not being thwarted, because it feels so close at hand, so easy to touch. The second way of not being thwarted is precisely seen and felt inside forms of captivity, inside the logics of incarceration, within the strategies used to silence voices, and it is the way of water and wind and drumbeat and song and memory. These are the realities that echo holy flow.

The Spirit can be resisted but not thwarted, and those who live by the Spirit share in the same reality. There is resistance that seems impenetrable. There is blockage that seems permanent. There is opposition that seems endlessly clever and quick. But here is the Spirit of the living God who works through tiny holes, cuts, small seeds, quiet voices that say yes to God. The disciples of Jesus will not be thwarted, because he is risen indeed. And the Spirit flows. This is the good news both to diaspora Israel and Gentile nations: both may share in the divine juices and both may know the power of God to build up through pulling down.

What is the pulling down? The pulling down is being brought all the way down to a rejected cornerstone. This downward motion does not reinforce hierarchies. It exposes their hubris when articulated as divinely ordered by God. Such hierarchies are formed by builders aiming toward a tower of Babel in hopes of establishing godlike existence and pretending to know the divine mind. These builders rejected the true cornerstone and thereby rejected a building project rooted in the divine life. God would build life with us by building up life in and through us by the Spirit. This would be life that draws the poor and the rejected, the outcast and the tormented into the shared work of envisioning and building the new. Jesus is the cornerstone of a new habitation, and he is the only one who rises, above and beyond the ruling class and above and beyond their judgments. Christians have often failed to get this movement correct in the way we understand social life and the way we build life. Too often we have imagined our presence with the powerful

and even the quest to be the powerful as stepping up, using our voices and the cunning of reason to establish a masculinist visibility.

The Spirit of God aims to release us from the stupidity of Babel, where human hubris in the rush to seize power always tramples over human need. We rise with Christ into the commons. We exalt the one who is for the many, and we begin the life of faith precisely in the call to gather together. We are called to gather (*ekklēsia*), and we are called to become gatherers. Indeed, the book of Acts ends where we begin. We are there with Paul at the site of incarceration, watching the fear and apprehension of Jewish diaspora in Rome and seeing Paul turn outward in his imperial captivity, welcoming all who would come to him and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Even in Rome, even under house arrest, even with an uncertain future, even surrounded by fear and disbelief, the Spirit of God yet releases; the juices yet flow. Paul knew this, and so must we.

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