

LUKE ON THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN: PERSPECTIVE OF FEMALE DISCIPLESHIP

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Abstract

History has been accused of relegating the dignity of women to the background and feminism has continued to advocate for a kind of levelling of gender roles. Luke's writings have been extantly used to buttress this quest of complete elimination of dichotomies between the male and female disciples of Jesus. The writings of Luke are examined. Luke is a forbearer of Jesus' radicalism against the backdrop's attitudes on women. Luke's boundaries on this radicalism defines his insight into the dignity of women. There is no relegation of women to the background but their roles are a crown of their natural endowments.

Keyword: Dignity of women, female discipleship, gender, feminism

Introduction

The social world in which Christianity was born had a long and complex history. The Jewish tradition was not the only great civilization in ancient times that trickled into Christianity. There were the earlier Persians' and Assyrians' traditions amongst others. These were all patriarchal societies where women were relegated to an inferior and subordinate position. Swindler (1976) said that the ancient Sumerians of the third Millennium BC allowed women to own and control property, to be educated and to be able to take more than one husband legally. But in the second millennium these rights were, as it were, usurped by Patriarchy. The surviving civilization imbued with a kind of gender equality that infiltrated into the Hellenic culture was the Egyptians. Tetlow (1980) wrote that in the last three millennia BC, marriages in Egypt were monogamous and by mutual consent. Women acquired wealth and political power because they had as well an equal right of inheritance with the men. A few women were pharaohs! These experiences filtering served as an antithesis to the thesis of the patriarchal societies of the Greco-Roman and Jewish world. Christ, the revolutionist, goes beyond the frontiers to found a new dispensation community, where these cultural barriers give way for faith, love and service in the Spirit. The one barrier now is the Spirit and the criterion, baptism. Other things are not necessary. Restrictions begin to appear

glaringly as the Apostles dance off the stage, which find expression in the household codes, that is, in the post-apostolic era. This time Christianity becomes a mirror of the cultural patriarchal structure, where a woman is not saved by faith and works in Christ alone but firstly by childbearing (Cf. 1 Tim 2:15). This is sad. Was the Lucan tradition influenced by all these misogynist cultural conceptions? What are his breakthroughs and thus his idea of women's dignity.

The Person of Luke

Traditionally, Luke had been taken as the author of the Gospel of *Luke* and *Acts of the Apostles*. It is not useful to this project to pry into problems of Luke's identification of authorship. It suffices us to know here that Luke was acclaimed by an end of second century extra-textual prologue to the Gospel as a Syrian of Antioch and a physician by profession. Fitzmyer (1981) quotes Tertullian,

Luke, however, was not an apostle, but only a man of apostolic times (apostolics); not a master, but a disciple, inferior indeed to a master – and at least as much later (than they) as the apostle whom he followed, undoubtedly Paul (was later than the others) {*Adversus Marcionem* 4.2,2}(p.40)

Fitzmyer (1981) continues to say that Luke was thus not a witness of the Lord himself but a *fellow worker* (Phlm 1: 24), the *beloved Physician* (Col 4:14) and the *sole companion* (2Tim. 4:11) of Paul. As it were, his gospel was a *digest* of Paul's gospel. Tertullian called Paul *Luke's inspirer*. Nevertheless, he was first the disciple of the apostles before becoming a follower of Paul. However, Luke's gospel was billed for the gentile converts after Mathew and Mark had written theirs. Luke was a good Greek stylist. He served the Lord without distraction, without wife and children (1Cor. 7:32)

Female Discipleship

'Disciple' is taken from the Latin word *discipulus* meaning 'student'. Female disciples are thus women students of Christ. These are not followers who are just interested in the miracles of Jesus but those who accept all His teachings and are members of the Christian group. The depth of their involvement in the new religion as recounted by Luke bespeaks their dignity as perceived by the same evangelist.

Dignity

“Dignity” is defined in *Microsoft Encarta* as worthiness: the condition of being worthy of respect, esteem, or honor. Thus one can see the dignity of somebody by the way (s)he is esteemed or respected. Feely (2011) captured the Catholic Social Teaching on dignity:

Human dignity originates from God and is of God because we are made in God’s own image and likeness (Gn 1:26-27). Human life is sacred because the human person is the most central and clearest reflection of God among us. Human beings have transcendent worth and value that comes from God; this dignity is not based on any human quality, legal mandate, or individual merit or accomplishment. Human dignity is inalienable – that means it is an essential part of every human being and is an intrinsic quality that can never be separated from other essential aspects of the human person. Human beings are qualitatively different from any other living being in the world because they are capable of knowing and loving God, unlike any other creature. Belief in the dignity of the human person is the foundation of morality.

This shows that human dignity does not arise from humans themselves; it is not worked for but it is given by God in whose image humans are made. As such, it is an intrinsic quality; it cannot be separated from the essence of a person; it is sacred and transcendent because of its divine origin. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2002) defines it as;

The dignity of the human person is rooted in his/her creation in the image and likeness of God. It is fulfilled in his/her vocation to divine beatitude. It is essential to a human being freely to direct him/herself to this fulfillment. By his/her deliberate actions, the human person does, or does not, conform to the good promised by God and attested by moral conscience. Human beings make their own contribution to their interior growth; they make their whole sentient and spiritual lives into means of this growth. (p. 383)

The Catechism says that even though the dignity is given, there is a part the individual will perform and this is living out his life in accord with the beatitudes. However, this does not remove the intrinsic quality, dignity, but it brings fulfillment. This shows that vocation fulfills dignity but when vocation does not conform to the good promised by the Creator, it does not negate dignity but shows a disorientation of the person in question. Pope John Paul II (2005) ties women dignity to their vocation in *Mulieris Dignitatem* as he maintains that;

The moral and spiritual strength of a woman is joined to her awareness that God entrusts the human being to her in a special way. Of course, God entrusts every human being to each and every other human being. But this entrusting concerns women in a special way -- precisely by reason of their femininity -- and this in a particular way determines their vocation.... A woman is strong because of her awareness of this entrusting, strong because of the fact that God entrusts the human being to her (p.471).

Woman

Woman means the second sex of the human gender created with the man in the image and likeness of God. This image and likeness of God is the source of human dignity but this paper is concerned with that dignity as it accrues to the woman and more specifically as Luke the evangelist sees it, which is evident in the assignment he gives them in the work of 'the beatitudes'.

Scope of work:

This paper centres on the two books of the Christian New Testament Bible: *Luke* and *Acts of the Apostles*. Dating Luke-Acts is not the concern of this paper though Watson (1994) says that they will not have been written before Paul's death in AD 60 (p.660). This paper, therefore, sets out to discover Luke's idea of the dignity of women from the roles he assigns to them in his writings enshrined in the Christian Scriptures.

Discipleship in Luke - Acts

The earlier commentators on Luke like Plummer (1981) and Toole (1984) are enthused by the mention of a number of instances that feature women in Luke's Gospel than in any other, for example: Luke, chapters 1 and 2; 7:36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 13:10-17; 15:8-10; 18:1-8; 23:27-31; 49:55-56. Plummer

(1981) writes “the third Gospel is in an especial sense the Gospel for women – all through this gospel they are allowed a prominent place, and many types of womanhood are placed before us”. Toole (1984) sees this as part of the universality of salvation. This is to say that women, as well as men, have souls that can be saved. This has led some scholars to suggest that Luke draws his source from a community, which women lead or that Luke was really a woman, whose identity is disguised.

However, a closer study of Luke reveals rather a certain disgusting feeling of male dominance portrayed therein. We shall come back to this again as we treat some particular texts. Suffice it to say here that recent scholarship regards Luke’s portrait of women as ambiguous and dangerous. Schaberg (1992) says that while women are included in Jesus’ entourage and table community, care is taken not to make them men’s equals. It is thus dangerous to read Luke uncritically with the idea that he is a friend of women.

‘Disciple’ has a Latin origin, *discipulus* meaning “Pupil”. ‘Disciple’ *mathetes* (Greek) is used in the New Testament only in the gospels and Acts. But only Luke used the feminine form of it *mathetria* [Cf. Acts 9:36, the story of Tabitha of Joppa]. Fitzmyer (1989) explains that the teacher-disciple relationship often had the connotation of imitation, *mimesis*, of the teacher in Greek thought. Later on, the relationship added the connotation of veneration of the master in a kind of religious sense. This is what is imported into the gospels. The apostles are differentiated from the disciples as inner caucus of Jesus. Luke says that the name ‘apostle’ refers to those who have accompanied Jesus from baptism of John to the ascension and thus become witnesses of his resurrection [Acts 1:21-22]. As Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy (Eds). (1990) put it; they are thus the bond of continuity between the Kingdom of God in Jesus’ proclamation and the preaching of the Word. However, witnesses to the ministry of Jesus are not just the apostles but the disciples as well, which includes men and women. In Luke 8:2-3, some women are said to accompany him as well as the apostle in the early Galilean ministry. In the Last Supper, Luke interchanges “disciples” [22:11] and “apostles” [22:14]. Osiek (1998) remarks that this suggests the presence of others not just the apostles whom Luke often identifies with the twelve. Meal customs of the time and place even suggest that the women would have been sitting together at a different spot in the room while the men recline closest to Jesus. Thus the mandate to celebrate

the Eucharist in memory of Jesus may have been given to all the disciples, women inclusive. However the gospels are silent over this.

The disciples do not just follow, Jesus makes the initiative but Luke with the finesse of the storyteller differentiates himself by first recounting Jesus' own ministry after his baptism, genealogy and temptations before the call of the disciples. The reason is that Luke wants to offer a kind of motivation or background of psychological preparation for the disciples. In as much as Jesus calls, their fiat cannot be undermined. A good example is that of the fishermen [Lk 5:1-11].

Reid (2001) said that Luke has a lot of identifying characteristics for discipleship. He does not actually go out to define what a disciple is or does but from the course of his writings, one can observe certain characteristics similar in about two, three or more instances as his picture of discipleship. For the categorizations that follow, this paper is heavily indebted to her article on "Separating the Women from the Men: Discipleship in Luke-Acts".

Hearing, seeing and obeying the Word:

This is the beginning of discipleship and has the same notes of peculiarity with Luke as I mentioned above. This is to say that Luke gives the disciples the opportunity to hear Jesus out before responding to his call. Luke is reflecting Paul when he says that faith comes through hearing. Hearing and doing the word is echoed in the following verses Lk 6:27, 47; 8:8; 8:15; 8:21; 9:35, 11:28, 31; 14:35. Some are also made disciples when they see the works of Jesus like the women cured of evil spirits. Other instances include Lk 7:21, 22:18:35-42; 10:23-24; 10:24; 8:10; Acts 2:33. Thus faith comes as well through seeing as in the episode of Thomas [Jn. 20:27]

Response of a disciple:

The fiat of a disciple invited by Jesus to salvation is two pronged: the initial and on-going responses. The initial response involves: receiving the Word, believing in it, repenting and being converted and baptized, while the on-going response includes following, witnessing, praying, teaching and the effect of the spirit.

Receiving the Word: or in other words accepting Christ and his teaching (Lk 8:13, 9:48; Acts 8:14; Acts 22:18).

Believing:

The first person to hear and believe is Mary, (Lk 1:45). She prefigures the ideal response of belief yet she does not appear among the disciples in the gospel. She is a transitional figure playing the role of mother, (Lk 2:6-7), law observer, (Lk 2:22-24, 42), anxious parent, (Lk 2:48) and silent theologian, (Lk 2:19, 51) after Jesus' birth. However explicit the writing on Mary, Mother of Jesus is in Luke, it is interesting to note that most of the events in the life of Jesus under Mary remains hidden or silent even with Luke. Further examples of hearing, seeing and obeying the Word are the Samaritan man with leprosy, (Lk 17:19), the woman who has been forgiven much, (Lk 7:50), the woman of haemorrhage, (Lk 8:48), the centurion, (Lk 7:9) are all examples of believers. Other instances of on-going exhibition of faith include (Lk 22:32; 8:25; 8:50; Acts 2:44;4:32, etc).

Repentance and Conversion

Jesus declares that there will be more joy over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance, (Lk 15:7, 10). He also said that He has come to call not the upright but sinners to repentance (Lk 5:32). One of the mandates given to the disciples is preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations beginning from Jerusalem, (Lk 24:47). Other instances include (Lk 10:13; 11:32; 13:3,5). The Gentiles are said to have been granted "repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18; 15:3).

Baptism:

This is the culmination and epitome of the initial response and it involves a ritual initiation into Christ's followership. It is closely linked to repentance and conversion. However, no baptism of Jesus' followers is relayed in the gospel. Probably, it is presumed. It is in Acts that it takes the prominent position in discipleship. Here stories of individual baptisms are recorded but only a woman's story, Lydia, is recorded, (Acts 16:15). It is of course presumed that at household baptisms, women are included (Acts 10:33). In Acts 8:12, it is explicitly mentioned that both women and men are baptized.

The on-going response includes:-

Following, *akolouthein*

This is believed to be the original word for disciple before the Greek influence. Jesus invites disciples to follow him through his words and deeds. He says “if anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me” (Lk 9:23). Following Jesus cannot really just stand for discipleship; it seems rather to be a radical way of discipleship. In Lk 18:18-23, the rich man who keeps the commandments is asked to go further by selling all he has and following Jesus. From Lk 18:29-30, it is said that Luke only has male followers in mind: there is no one who has left house, wife, brothers, parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much as in this present age and in the world to come, eternal life.

At the event of the crucifixion (Lk 23:27-31), women are said to follow him, but Jesus’ rebuke of them is said to show that they are not disciples. However, in Lk 23:49, there is a mention of a group including women as followers but who stood at a distance watching the crucifixion. Also, though the word, follow, *akolouthein*, is not used in Lk 8:1-3 but those going with Jesus from town to town, it scores the same meaning as followership. Of course, women are included but why did Luke choose not to use this word to depict the followership in this well celebrated passage of Jesus’ radicalism?

Witnesses:

In Acts 1:8 (Cf. Lk. 24:48), Jesus asks his disciples to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. This entails standing for Jesus even if it means suffering for him. Examples are Acts 23:11 and the case of Stephen, Acts 22:20. The women’s participation in being witnesses is unclear. They are the first witnesses to the resurrection, but are not believed. It is true to say here that Luke seems to envision only men as witnesses but the fact that Christ addresses himself to women first as in the incarnation and resurrection is a pointer to the fact that the problem is the human structure – the patriarchal system and not with the Spirit that falls on any freely.

Prayer:

Prayer has a particular note of emphasis in Luke-Acts. Jesus is often at prayer at critical points (Lk 3:21; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28-29; 22:39-46; 23:46). He teaches persistence in prayer with the parable of a widow seeking justice from a judge (Lk 18:1-8). Ejaculations are also recorded (Lk 10:21-23). In Acts, the disciples often gather to pray especially in the face of a need (Acts 6:6; 8:15; 9:40; 13:3; 14:23; etc.) and in Acts 1:14 certain women including

Jesus' mother are among the disciples praying. Lydia with some women is mentioned gathered at a prayer meeting (though not as Christians), where Paul and probably Luke came as well to preach to them (Acts 16:13). However, there are no interesting or impressive stories of women disciples praying, effecting healing, exorcisms, resuscitations or reception of the Spirit by their prayers.

Teaching and Serving:

The disciples also imitate Jesus in his teaching ministry. In the gospel only Jesus teaches while in Acts, the apostles teach (5:21, 25, 28, 42). Priscilla along with her husband Aquila is said to explain the way of God to Apollos (18:26). Probably, Luke was careful not to use the verb, to teach (*didascalain*) for her, rather he uses *exethento* meaning "to explain, set forth". It should be noted that in the Didache chapter XI, prominence of ministries seems to be given to teachers, apostles and prophets. At that time, the structure of the priesthood, diaconate or episcopate was not yet an issue. Thus it seems that Luke wants to restrict the ministry to the male disciples.

In serving (*diakonein*), only women are said to serve in the gospel. Examples are (Lk 4:39) Simon's mother-in-law; (Lk 8:2-3) the women, who provided for Jesus and his followers out of their resources; (Lk 10:40) Martha and Mary's episode. In Acts, however, all references to deacons and diaconal services are to men.

In short, inasmuch as there are women who follow Jesus, their discipleship is rooted only in the initial response of a disciple, i.e., to receive, believe the word and to get baptized. Their activities in the on-going response are as facilitators of the gospel, i.e., they follow Jesus and provide for his needs and his apostles. They also host house-churches.

Spirit:

The Spirit bears a particular importance in Lucan narrative of Jesus and his disciples. In the infancy narrative, the Spirit is given to Mary, (Lk 1:35-27); Elizabeth, (Lk 1:14); Zechariah (Lk 1:67); Simeon and Anna, (Lk 2:25-27); Jesus, (Lk 1:80; 4:1, 14). The Spirit reveals the Messiah as in Lk 3:16 after baptism; and in Lk 4:18, it marks the inauguration of his ministry "The Spirit of God is upon me". It can be seen that after the infancy narratives of Jesus, he alone enjoys the prerogative of the dwelling of the Spirit until Pentecost. Joel (2:28) prophesied the pouring out of the Spirit on men and women alike and Peter quotes it in Acts 2:17-21. Thus, it is very probable that women also

(as in the case of Cornelius' household) received the Holy Spirit though it is not explicitly stated.

The above serve as caveats in which Luke articulates his discipleship. They are what Luke knows disciples do. Luke has women as disciples of Jesus but there are levels of participation he has allowed for men and women, which are read from either his emphasis or his silence over some matters. It can be seen that women are involved in all but not really in following (akolouthēin). Luke restrains the women from moving about. He seems to reserve the home for them and taking care of the itinerant preachers. Also, Luke makes the women teach at home and not in the public. Since teaching is a public ministry, he avoids using the word (didaskalein) for women even when they are seen teaching. The male disciples move out to work while the females consolidate the home base. Further analysis on certain passages where women feature will now be picked out.

Some Passages in Lucan Writings

This paper will not go into all the passages in Luke and Acts, where women appear, as this will produce a bulky work, which will be rather redolent with redundant ideas. However, some will be chosen for discussion and mere references made to some others when the need arises. In the following passages, this paper attempts to see the events from two contrasting perspectives in order to pool in the thoughts of many authors. Then in the pairing of male and female figures and evaluation, Luke's position on the dignity of women will be made distinctively clear.

Luke 1:5-2:52:

Luke portrays as one of his themes, the Kingship of Jesus and the irruption of God's Kingdom, which surprisingly are reserved for the poor of society. Thus Mary and her response to God's revelation constitute a forerunner of Luke's rogue's gallery: women, sinners and little people whom no one would expect to respond favourably to God's revelation. It brings to focus the Pauline tradition of no slaves or free, no man and woman, no Jew or Gentile since Christ has brought down the walls that separated us. Thus Luke gives a kind of parallel stories of men and women's responses to God's revelation with women often showing the first paradigmatic responses.

This is why Luke draws a parallel between the two announcements of birth. The Angel Gabriel is the connecting figure coupled with the biological relatedness of Mary with Elizabeth, which paved the way to the visitation

episode. While Zechariah is not at home with the angel, Mary is portrayed as one who has been having communications with angels. In the Protoevangelium of James, Every (1970) recorded that Mary is being fed from the hands of angels; however, there is no evidence of that in the gospels. If Zechariah's silencing is an allusion to the silencing of Daniel by Gabriel (Dan. 10:15), and not a punishment for an objection of disbelief as Brown et al (1990) believe, it then follows that the issue at stake is anguish and fear of the heavenly sight (Cf. Dan 10:15)

Mary is highlighted as a model believer reflecting the tradition of Lk 8:19-21, where Jesus says that those who listen and keep his Word are his disciples, who mean mothers, brothers and sisters to him. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and made a prophecy for the whole nation of the new dispensation. This is to say that prophecy was not just for private elevation of Spirit as the spirituality of women is often characterized in Luke-Acts. One could, however, argue that the prophecy was billed for another woman (Mary) and so it is befitting that Luke puts it on a woman's lips and blesses her among fellow women, not all the children of Eve. On another note, Anna is called a prophetess by Luke. Brown et al (1990) says that Luke presents Simeon (God has heard) and Anna (grace, favour) not as priest but as servant and maid of God, i.e. they embody the heart of the temple cult and of waiting for the coming of the Lord as one can read from their names. One wonders if they are thus historical or fictional figures or that Luke is saying that the man, through a regular work in the Temple, makes the message of salvation heard by all and the woman through a life of grace (prayer) and favour of God does her own proclamation. Luke says that Anna does not live in the Temple but always go there to pray and fast. Luke makes her be around when Jesus is brought to the Temple and she proclaims him to all 'those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem' (Lk 2:38). Richards (1999) avers that the women's prophecies here form a powerful suggestion that in the "coming age of the Spirit ordinary women will have extraordinary gifts!" (p.161). Nevertheless, the insistence in Luke to privatize the anointing of women can still be seen. Anna makes no public proclamation but does a one-to-one witnessing to the arrival of the Messiah. Mary, Mother of Jesus is actually the only one who records a little breakthrough: her own prophecy is that all generations shall call her blessed (Lk 1:48) but she is given an audience of just another woman, Elizabeth.

The whole issue of Mary seems a complete breakthrough of the frontiers of women's exclusion from the ministries. Mary bore Christ in her body and

from her radiated graces that made Elizabeth give a loud cry. What is ministry if not bearing Christ to others and leading others to Christ? It could still be said that Luke presents Mary as an exception from women in Lk 1:42 (Cf. Jg. 5:24; Jdt 13:18). Amadi-Azuogu (2000) writes that she was taken as a Virgin (*parthenos*) and Osiek (1998) adds that she was placed above the curse (Gen 3:16) of women. This is so, Osiek (1998) continues, because we do not seem to know how to treat them as women without their being cast as “woman” the other, the fatal attraction, the paradox of unclean and all-pure, the reminder of dependence and mortality. The traditional way for Christian women of earlier centuries to escape the ambiguity has been to become ‘Virile women’ by celibacy and asceticism (p.108).

Inasmuch as the salvation history began with Mary, she is not exquisitely different from other women as to be God. She is rather a model of believers. If to call her blessed (Lk1:48) is to remove the curse of women, then it also applies to all women and all the lowly of the world who are believers in Christ. This is, as it were, removing their humiliation, which is the theological import of the canticle, *Magnificat*. Nevertheless, Mary recedes to the background, as she is not seen among the disciples.

Simeon prays the *nunc dimmittis* and outlays a prophecy while Anna remains a silent witness to the meaning of Jesus for those that long for redemption. Suffice it to say here that they gear towards the portrayal that man and woman stand together side by side before God. In fact, Luke seems to show that sex is not the matter but faith and love of God by anybody. It is not gender differentiation that makes our humanity rather there is gender differentiation because of our humanity. The androgynous myth of unity, despite all its superfluity, at least lends credence to this. It (the myth) maintains that the original creation of humans was sexless. However, this can be inferred from the biblical account of the creation of humans. The Priestly version states that God made “man,” *Adam*, (humankind) and later said that he made them male and female and not male or female, i.e. there are male and female components in mankind with none having an edge over the other. In fact, it is as if male-female are the two dialectics in the same human body. This is a presumed interpretation of the earlier Yahwistic account, where a rib is taken from the one humankind and two resultant human entities appeared, not the woman appearing from the man but the two coming out of the one body. Barth (1957) says “a human being ... never and nowhere [exists] as a human being pure and simple, but always and

everywhere as a human *man* and as a human *woman*" (p.130). Thus before God, everybody has an equal disposition to honour and grace. The feminist, Fiorenza (1983), therefore maintains that God can reveal no text that "destroys the personal and human worth of women" (p.33). We are all endowed with the same gift and responsibilities or at least the same dispositions towards these (Gen. 1:27; Gal 3:28). The environment only helps in suppressing or developing the one it chooses at a time.

As a matter of fact, Luke presents woman as always closer to God. In Mary, woman participates in Godhead. This is to say that the man is not important in the genesis of our salvation. The incarnation event presents the woman as a builder of the stage of sacrifice since the body and blood which Christ used on the Calvary was taken only from her. Mary is silent (*disciplina arcana*) but is seen everywhere in the person of Christ. Little wonder, a woman spoke up in the crowd: "God bless your mother – the womb from which you came, and the breasts that nursed you!" (Lk 11:27). The silence of women therefore, as Luke presents it, does not depict weakness but a kind of strength. Even in the passage of Lk 11:27, where a woman speaks up in the crowd, Jesus seems to have given her a polite rebuke by correcting where she places her priority. In the passages that are to be treated below, women always remain silent or at least cry out and then Christ will shower his graces while their male counterparts, even the demoniac [Lk. 4:31-39], are always given the opportunity of at least expressing their desires. Does this reflect the *disciplina arcana* mentioned in the previous above?

Luke 7:36-50.

This episode is among the little Lucan interpolation stretching across 6:20-8:3. This is so since it does not appear in Mark or related to the three preceding passages. This does not mean that it is Lucan fiction, rather as Fitzmyer (1981) says, it is a most likely "conflated story derived from a pre-Lucan source, 'L'" (p.684). No reason has been adduced for Luke's choice of position of this episode. However, Black (1962) writes that it typifies the Lucan general portrait of an outcast who accepts Jesus vis-a-vis a Pharisee (son of the Kingdom). The patient woman has shown an act of kindness which means more basic love and faith preferred in discipleship than the ostentatious invitation and hospitality of the host, Simon the Pharisee. Fitzmyer (1981) avers that a woman is a beneficiary of Jesus' mercy and forgiveness and the opportunity to teach in a special way the relationship between the forgiveness of sins (by God) and the place of human love and the giving of oneself in the whole process. Again, a woman is closer to

salvation than a man even though society considers her sinful. She shows a greater act of love.

The woman, however, was reportedly silent throughout the episode, never saying what she wanted or asking anything. She resorted to a private way of communicating her desires to Jesus. Would this have been imposed by Luke or is it a simple reflection of the Jewish culture?

Luke 8:1-3

This passage is replete with Lucan Symbolism even as small as it is. It synchronizes with the Lucan role for women, a role of 'equal discipleship' with men. God's Kingdom is preached in word and is conveyed by Jesus' travelling band. The first group of the band is the Twelve not just disciples and the second the women. From this passage, the female followers might be called female apostles as they are put side with the twelve only. This is to say that no other group of followers (disciples) was mentioned as a corollary with the female followers as Luke is wont to doing. This is true when we learn that Luke swims against the cultural current to assert his thesis. Brown et al (1990) says

It was not uncommon for women to support rabbis and their disciples out of their own money, property, or foodstuff. But for her to leave home and travel with a rabbi was not only unheard of, it was scandalous. Even more scandalous was the fact that women, both respectable and not, were among Jesus' travelling companions (p 697)

Thus this is a scandalous novelty for the Greco-Roman as well as the Jewish contemporaries. Women too can learn and pass on to others what they have learnt. Mary in Luke 10:39 is depicted as sitting at the Lord's feet. Oepke (1964) affirms that this means discipleship. Among the Jews of the time, women could be taught in the Synagogue with others, but it is unheard of to teach a woman specifically.

Among the women followers of Jesus, we notice Joanna, the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod Antipas' estate. Therefore, Witherington (1998) avers that it is not half-sane women (as some would imagine owing to the ailing women who followed as well), who followed Jesus about but also sane; not only poor ones for food from Jesus but also the rich who provided not only for him but also for the apostles. Jesus has defied the definition of women

from blood flow, which was the basis for excluding them from both synagogue worship and periodic religious function. Thus they are free to be full-time followers, travelling along with him.

However, this can be considered a neo-patriarchalism, teaching women how to provide for preachers. If they are to be at home under the patriarchal tutelage of their husbands, how would they have known the needs of preachers in order to perform this function? As Pace E. Laland says in Fitzmyer (1985) of Mary and Martha, this can be an instruction for the proper entertainment of itinerant preachers by women. That is to say that they (women) listen, get the Word for their private fulfilment and then provide a *diakonia* not directly of the Word but of the preachers of the Word, while remaining silent. It should be noted that at the time of Luke's writing, there are a lot of itinerant preachers who need assistance.

Luke 8:40-56

Oduyoye (1992) avers that this passage has a lot to say about the women's will to rise from the shackles of socio-cultural underpinnings. Christ is the liberator asking them to come forth as he asked Lazarus to come out of the dead. When Jesus calls, nobody can deter it except the called. The woman of haemorrhage cannot come to Jesus face to face to ask for healing because she would contaminate Jesus and it was as well indecent for her to speak in public. As has been noted above, the flow of blood is a contaminating element which makes the woman impure as long as she has it (Lv. 15:25). Conversely, anything that touched a holy person is also sanctified because the holy person possesses a sanctifying power and so Jesus is a spiritual detergent, washing the woman clean with only a touch. At Jesus' request, the woman tremblingly explained what happened in fear of the crowd's reproach. It should be noted that Jairus did not tremble when he asked for her daughter's life, as it was cultural for a man to do that. Jairus was the spokesperson of his daughter not because she was critically ill but also because of the patriarchal structure of the society.

However, Jesus asks the women of haemorrhage to speak out and nobody dares rebuke her when Jesus has set her free. This is as if Luke is proffering a reason for the scandal he committed in Lk 8:1-3. He attributes it to Jesus, who is our model for the new dispensation, where the criterion shifts from flesh and law to the Spirit and love. The life creating powers of women manifested in the flow of blood should no longer be seen as devilish or contaminating but as part of their wholeness, their being. Jesus does not see

them as evil temptresses or sources of defilement but as persons. They cannot go to God with another body, with their husbands' bodies or the angels. They too are children of Abraham and deserve to "live in shalom".

On the part of Jesus, Witherington (1998) maintains that he does not openly condemn these oppressive structures on women. At times, he obeys the tradition and at other times, he merely ignores it. In going into where Jairus' daughter lay, he goes with two witnesses as is customary but in Jn. 4 and Luke 10:38-42, he was with the woman of Samaria and with Mary and Martha even without any witness (of course the witness that counted was only men), which some rabbis considered questionable behaviour (pp. 100-103). Jesus touches the corpse and far from being defiled, he brought back life to the girl of twelve. Christ brings back outcasts and restores them to society. He is the detergent that washes the impure clean. He is thus a social worker, he respects social and human laws but he gives them a new foundation: the spirit and love.

Luke 10:38-39

The episode of Mary and Martha as a female parallel of the Good Samaritan is peculiar to Luke. He must have obtained it from his 'L' source. Fitzmyer (1985) writes that there is a chiasm, according to Grundmann, W, (p. 892). The Samaritan episode illustrates the love of neighbour while this one highlights the love of God. This is to say that the love of God is a motivation for listening to Jesus' instruction. The former is in fact a distraction if the word is relegated to the background. Fitzmyer (1985) avers that "A *diakonia* that bypasses the word is one that will never have lasting character; whereas listening to Jesus' word is the lasting "good" that will not be taken away from the listener." (p.892)

Luke 24: 9-12

Luke succeeds here in making women evangelists. They are the first to announce the resurrection, which becomes necessary issue for the chapter and in Acts. They as well receive revelations this time from the two angels and yet the apostles do not believe them. In fact, it seems that Luke presents to us that before God, men and women stand equally disposed to revelation but the structure of human societies cannot allow for women's ministry. However, he seems to be against the latter issue. The apostles are not only unbelieving, but see the news as pure nonsense. This is to say that the Lord will not rise and show himself to the women first, while they are there. The women's testimony does not cause faith, it gives no assurance but only

arouse curiosity in Peter. Are they only wasp creating hypothesis for the verification of men?

Nevertheless, Peter does not get the revelation like the women, he only sees the empty tomb and the mathematics are left for him to solve. This is part of the theology of Luke, where the weak is made strong and the wisdom of the wise thwarted. (cf. Mt 28:10, 16 – the women’s message is not disbelieved but acted upon; Mk 16: 9-13 – disbelief here is not caused by being a woman and the initial vision is granted to others as well; John 20:18 – No disbelief except for Thomas.). The weak is closer to God with the gift of vision and insight, yet crowned with silence and unbelief. Does this silence come from Luke or that he is presenting the society and its weak points? If Luke believes in their visions of the Lord then it seems more likely that he challenges the silence imposed on women.

Acts 1:14

Here Luke intends to show a plenary prayerful meeting of all believers. He wants to show the numerical strength of those who begin the Church. Also, it is a realization of Jesus’ family (Lk. 8:19-21), not counted by blood-tie relationship but by the spirit-tie relationship. Brown et al (1990) mark that Luke uses *homothymadon* (of one accord) almost as a refrain to show when they act in unison, as a whole (cf. Acts 2:46, 46:24; 5:12) (p. 729).

More importantly is the presence of women and the absence of discrimination because all prayed with one accord, one heart. This entails a unity that strengthens their prayers, (cf. 2:46; 4:24; 5:12). This is the very beginning of the Church and all hands are on deck and there are no dichotomies, which is reminiscent of Pauline Gal 3:28.

Acts 21: 8-11

Watson (1994) notices that in the house of Philip, the four daughters, Philip himself, Paul and Luke, the redactor are together contemplating the end of the first stage of the missionary work of the early Church (p. 682). It is noteworthy that the presence and contribution of women are being recognized though their specific contributions are not recorded. Also noteworthy is the fact of the presence of four prophetesses. In chapter 15:1 and 13:3 of the *Didache*, The prophet in the apostolic era ranks first before the bishop and deacons. Prophets therefore are the president of assemblies. Nevertheless, Philip’s daughters are not shown to have headed Eucharistic assemblies at Caesarea being prophetesses.

However, it seems that Luke attaches precedence to the men. Paul stays many days with Philip and the daughters and none of them can prophesy about his journey to Jerusalem. Rather, he puts the prophecy into the mouth of Agabus, who comes all the way from Judaea. To be recognized, the prophecy of the four ladies could not have been a private affair. Luke is fond of making women silent even if they might not have been silent. This seems true if we remember that silence is a patriarchal ideal for women in the Judo-Grecian conception. Is Luke perhaps guilty of a structural sin? Richards (1999) contradicts it and says rather that “Luke’s portrayal of women indicates a restoration of privileges long denied to them in male-dominated society” (p.161)

LUKE’S PAIRING OF WOMEN WITH MEN

Brown et al (1990) points out that Luke is fond of pairing male and female figures. That of Zacharias and Mary is still in mind while others include: the widow at Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian (Lk 4:25-28); the healing of the demoniac and Peter’s mother-in-law (Lk 4:31-39); the centurion of Capernaum and the widow of Nain (Lk 7:1-17); Simeon and the Sinful woman (Lk 7:36-5); the women at the tomb and the Emmaus disciples (Lk 23:5-24:35); Lydia and the Philippians jailer (Acts 16:13-34). Let us examine some of them briefly and diagrammatically. This is intended to bring out the lessons drawn from the ongoing expose above

Luke 1:11-38: Zacharias versus Mary

	Zacharias	Mary
Location	Temple	Galilee
Status	A priest	A commoner
Characteristics	Male Mature	Female Young
Response	Unbelief Challenge	Trust Praise
Consequence	Silenced	Blessed

Zacharias has an exalted position in the religion of the people but the right actions of faith are rather seen in a commoner living in a part of the country that is considered lowly. Richards (1999) says that Unlike Zacharias, who doubted “whether” the promise would be kept, Mary believed, asking only “how”. With a beautiful and simple faith Mary accepted God’s gift and rejoiced in Him. (p. 163).

Zacharias and his geographical closeness to God and the status ascribed by the society is rejected as a model for the new kingdom, while Mary's simple faith is projected. Thus maleness and societal ideals have no value at all in the new kingdom.

Luke 7:36-50: The Pharisee versus the sinful woman

	Simon	The Woman
Status	A Pharisee	A "sinner"
Characteristics	Male Wealthy Respected	Female Poor Outcast
Response to Jesus	Dismissive Doubting	Loving Believing
Consequences	Not forgiven	Forgiven

The significant person here before God is the despicable woman, who shows exceptional love by her actions while the highly placed male, Simon, does not even show the ordinary courtesies. His actions toward Jesus are dismissive and unbelieving; he does not need forgiveness while the woman is confirmed in God's service.

Lk 13:10-17: The synagogue ruler versus the bent woman

	The Ruler	The Woman
Status	Spiritual leader	Member of the congregation
Characteristics	Male An authority Healthy	Female A victim Crippled
Jesus	Rebuked him	Restored her

	Condemned him	Affirmed her
Outcome	Was shamed	Became a cause of rejoicing

The man is a religious leader who cares less about people who suffer than he cares for his farm animals, which he leads to pasture even on Sabbath day. There he is scandalized over the cure on a Sabbath day of a woman who has been sick for eighteen years. This woman is called a daughter of Abraham. Her restoration is a cause of great joy for a multitude (v.17).

Lk 21:1-4: The Poor Widow versus Rich men

	Rich men	The Widow
Location	The Temple	The Temple
Status	High	Low
Characteristics of gifts	Large A part from their abundance	Small All she had out of her poverty
Evaluation	Insignificant	Significant

The wealthy gifts given by wealthy men are dismissed while the very little given by a widow is praised as “more than all” (v.3). Luke’s portrayals show that women’s lowly state is rather the exalted state that is closer to God. Richards (1999) summarizes the on-going thus,

In most cases the pairing presents women in a strongly positive light. The men in such pairs share certain characteristics. They have a relatively high status, a reputation as religious leaders- and often are dismissive of the concerns or needs of the women with whom they are paired. In contrast the women have low status, are lightly regarded, and have deep needs to which the men are insensitive (p. 167).

Since liberation may mean an escape from the lowly state, which is dear to God, can one say that Luke is offering to women a Good News of liberation?

If so, what is the place of *disciplina arcana* in this program of liberation? What kind of status does Luke hold out for the women?

Evaluation

Definitely, Luke views Jesus as a radical prophet and Saviour. He believes that contact with Jesus brings salvation for all believers: Jews and Greek as well. Luke also believes that the tradition of men is quite different from the ways of God. These he learns from Paul who said in Colossians,

Don't let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ. For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body, and you are complete through your union with Christ. He is the Lord over every ruler and authority in the universe. (2:8-10)

Thus what the world regards as strength is weakness before God. Here comes his rogue's gallery of the poor, disadvantaged and of course women. Luke presents that the non-Jews, prostitutes, sinners, outcasts and most especially women are making their ways to the kingdom, while those who think they have arrived are cast away. The women come closer to Jesus and like Mary (Lk 10:42) have chosen the better part, which no one can take away from them.

Why should Luke include women in such gallery? This is because the Jews had a well developed purity laws, where women were taken as contaminating agents like the outcasts, the non-Jews and the leprous. Luke's writings are indubitably radical in nature, reactionary to the social status quo and a foundation of a new dispensation of God's children (Gal 3:28). It is not denigrating therefore when women are included in his rogue's gallery.

Does this presupposition of Luke completely account for the patriarchal silence he imposes on women throughout his writings because we have discovered that there are no interesting or impressive stories of women disciples praying, talking publicly, effecting healings, exorcisms, resuscitations or reception of the Spirit by their prayers as Reid (2001)

maintains? It is noticed that there is some amount of silence Luke imposes on his women especially when one reads about Philip's four daughters who are prophetesses but remain muted (Acts 21:8-11). Luke views silence as a powerful tool of remaining uncontaminated with the worldly status quo and of coming close to Christ and so he does not want to remove it from women. A paradigmatic example, where silence takes on a spiritual connotation in Luke is found in the story of Jesus' visit to Mary and Martha (Lk 10:38-42). The *silencia discipuli* (disciple's silence) of Mary is extolled over against the 'noisy' Martha. Again, Fitzmyer (1985) avers that "A *diakonia* that bypasses the word is one that will never have lasting character; whereas listening to Jesus' word is the lasting "good" that will not be taken away from the listener." (p.892). This is in line with the proposal of Benedict XVI for World's Communication Day, come 2012, in the *Catholic World News* (CWN). The Pontiff proposes silence for the Media, which does not mean being mute but coming closer to God, who speaks in silence. It means refraining from making the 'word' a tool for propaganda and lying instead of a means of communication, of fairness and truthfulness. This reminds one of Uzukwu (1996), who advocates a listening silence as a prerequisite for being open to God and open to the People of God especially in the area of women emancipation in the African Church. He maintains'

When the community listens to the Lord of the gospel, it may hear the gospel message in all its novelty. As an Igbo saying goes, "Drop the ear on the ground and hear the cry of the tiny ant [agbusi]." The "cry of the ant," the countercultural, constitutes the core of the novelty of the Lord's behaviour and command. (p.138)

For Luke, this silence may mean not belonging to the society with its parameter of greatness but being reformed to the new faith, forgoing everything and humbly submitting to the Word of God. Luke does not advocate women seeking to appear as men since that will take them away from their God-given function of caring for the word. With the analogy of Mary and Martha, Luke means to portray that women have chosen the better part, the part of silently listening to the word, while the men engage in *diakonia*. Chiegboka (2009) in presenting the reason why women are excluded from the Church's ministries refers to the limitedness of Jesus' radicalism in choosing only men as Apostles and regular companions. Luke mirrors Jesus in that. Luke believes that women have a God-infused talent

of caring for life, which is not secondary to men's status but which has a closer semblance to the God of creation and an unflinching affinity to the gospel of Christ. By accepting women as teachers, prophetesses and guide, Luke asserts the equality of men and women as images of God and recipients of his graces. Men have theirs for *diakonia*, service of the Word and women have theirs for caring for the Word and inculcating the message into particular persons under their charge. Thus Luke is careful not to use the terms for public offices in those days (like *didaskalos* and *diakonia*) but actually allows women to enjoy such anointing. Luke does not mean any political exclusion from public offices or one from a disadvantaged point of view but one that is informed by the knowledge of the natural endowments of the woman as life nurturer.

A Jewish Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks in Moore (1978) re-interprets women's role in Judaism. He spends time in explaining that no role of a man is superior to the other men's and no man's role is superior to any woman's because each individual is made to God's image, each is unique and absolute. Quoting Kiddush in 1:7 of Mishnah,

The observance of all positive ordinances that depend on the time of year is incumbent on men but not on women, and the observance of all the Positive ordinances that do not depend on the time of the year, observance of all negative ordinances, whether they depend on the time of year or not, is incumbent both on men and on women (p.34)

He adduces this as the reason why men fill some public functions and women do not, why men put on phylacteries or headbands [Ex. 13:1-16, Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21] to remind them of their religious role and women do not. Thus men participate in institutionalized, congregational prayers while women's prayers are spontaneous and private, though this is not without exceptions. The exemption of women draws strength from the Talmudic precept that "Someone who is currently engaged in fulfilling one religious duty is exempt from others" (Berachot 11a; 16a-b; Sukkah 25a-26a).

Women's roles in the houses are very vital to Judaism because the family is the crucible of Judaism and woman is the positive force of the family. For Sacks in Moore (1978), this is very crucial to understanding Judaism that knows of no higher career than raising a family and creating a house. With the Talmud text, "God endowed woman with more understanding than man" [Niddah 45b], it is evident that man cannot care about the house like

the woman. He refers to an old rabbinic tale in Midrash Genesis Rabbah 17:7. A pious man was married to a pious woman. But being childless, they divorced one another. He went and married a wicked woman and she made him wicked. She went and married a wicked man and made him righteous. It follows that all depends on the woman (p.35)

These show that women are not confined to the homes owing to intimidation but that their charisma of affecting lives and maintaining decorum in the homes is respected and they are encouraged through the interpretations of the Torah to remain in their roles. The Sabbath day is a good example. It does not permit any work, any employment of a man's wealth. He simply retires to his home and shares company with the wife and children. This is a hoped-for celebration and so it defies the allegation that the home or family has a secondary consideration in Judaism. So also when the women are not busy they join the men in out-door celebration like *Simchat Torah* and *Purim*. Furthermore, some laws like those of *Kashrut* and some laws of family purity, the dietary laws are given to the guardianship and expertise of women.

Conclusion

Luke shows that women are made in God's images and thus possess an equal dignity with men. Their natural contingencies do not negatively affect their dignity as they enjoy the same anointing of the Holy Spirit together with men. Rather their natural make up define their role or vocation in the community of the Children of God. Grace builds on nature since it is the same God at work in all of them. This role of **sensitivity**, **receptivity** and **caring** has always been esteemed as close to the gospel messages of faith, hope and charity.

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