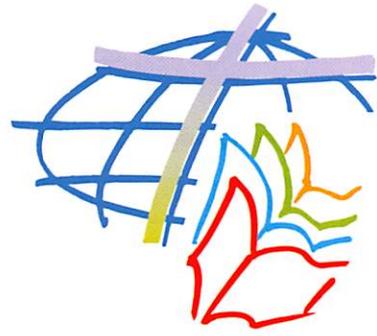


# DEIVERBUM

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## **Women and the Bible**



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#### Editors

Ludger Feldkämper  
Alexander M. Schweitzer

#### Production and Layout

Rita Maria Forciniti

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#### CATHOLIC BIBLICAL FEDERATION

General Secretariat  
Postfach 10 52 22  
D-70045 Stuttgart  
Germany

Tel.: +49-(0)7 11-1 69 24-0  
Fax: +49-(0)7 11-1 69 24-24  
E-mail: bdv@c-b-f.de

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The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is an "International Catholic Organisation of a public character" according to Canon Law (CIC, can. 312,\$1, n. 1).



## EDITORIAL

### Dear Readers,

After almost two thousand years the Christian world is beginning to discover women in the Bible. Only two biblical women have always been in fashion: Eve and Mary. Many however have been simply forgotten, as for example the women who anointed Jesus' feet with precious ointment in his darkest hour. Accordingly, the Christian ideal of woman has only to a limited degree absorbed the richness and variety of the woman-images found in the Bible. Most notably, women have not been allowed the freedom of action that women in the Bible exhibit - in spite of all the culturally imposed limitations.

Thanks to the theological research of women today, we are now better able to appreciate the biblical image of women - and of men - in all its complexity. At the same time the extent to which the image of women in the Bible is defined and limited by socio-cultural ideas and values is becoming more clear. Here distinctions must be made and real "interpretation work" accomplished.

For this edition of the Bulletin we have asked Teresa Okure of the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Nigeria, to formulate a few thoughts regarding women in the Bible from an African perspective and with an eye on the praxis of a biblical apostolate. But the subject of women in the Bible involves not only dealing with the question of the role of women in the Bible itself, but also with the question of how to interpret the relevant biblical texts in the Church today. In her contribution, Maribel Perutz advocates a reading of the Bible in the context of woman, a biblical hermeneutic from a female perspective. Such a hermeneutic can provide a fresh stimulus for the dialogue of the reader - and not only the female reader! - with the Bible.

The Gospel of Luke is a good place to start for a closer look. By studying the parallels between women and men, Josef Stricher shows that wom-

en in Luke are not just extras; rather, they play an independent role, often on an equal footing with men. By the use of inclusive language, explicit naming and thereby "equal treatment" of women Luke underscores the new style of relationship between women and men that corresponds to the example given by Jesus of Nazareth.

In the Final Statement of its 1996 Plenary Assembly in Hong Kong the Catholic Biblical Federation committed itself to promote the use of inclusive language (cf. 8.1.8). This confession provided the stimulus for a "critical dialogue" among members of the Federation. In his essay, then, the president of the CBF, Bishop Wilhelm Egger, presents some fundamental reflections on the use of inclusive language.

Since the possibilities, the limits and the problems of inclusive language translations are as many and varied as are the corresponding language and cultural communities themselves it would be a difficult undertaking to present examples at the level of the Federation - which is to say at a world-wide level. Nevertheless, we will attempt in this issue, through the use of one particular Bible translation, not only to point out translation problems specific to individual languages, but also to call attention to fundamental questions, and especially to the translation principles involved in resolving tensions that exist between the original text and a modern language. The author who addresses these issues, Hellmut Haug, while commenting specifically on a German Bible translation, has made a special effort to keep in mind the international readership of our Bulletin.

We too made the same effort in compiling the news items from the Federation. In doing so, we send a hearty greeting to all.

*Alexander M. Schweitzer*



FEATURE  
ARTICLES

## Contemporary Perspectives on Women in the Bible

TERESA OKURE, SHCJ

*This article takes a closer look at the image of women in the Bible. As compilations of a variety of literary genres of various periods, cultures and authors, the biblical texts are subject to the influences of place and time, reflect the personal perspectives of their authors; in short, they are limited by their context. It is important, therefore, for interpretation and for reading, to distinguish carefully between the biblical word as Word of God and its human dress, precisely if the Bible is to serve as a reference point for us Christians in the matter of the sexes, as it does in other ways.*

*Attention and alertness are necessary however not only with respect to the biblical image of women itself; they must also be applied to the history of interpretation and above all to one's own personal stance. The suggestions for practical exercises and the corresponding passages from the Old and New Testaments are valuable aids for the private reading of the Bible and are well suited as an introduction to the praxis of the biblical apostolate.*

*Teresa Okure is the Dean of the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, and professor of exegesis. She gave a lecture at the Plenary Assembly of the CBF in Hong Kong in 1996.*

The standpoint from which we view an object or person determines largely what we see in the person or object. This could be the front view, side view, rear view or partial view. If we change our standpoint, or move the object around, we get a different view of the same person or object. The same applies to our knowledge of persons, even those whom we believe we know intimately. When we are personally involved or when it touches people dear to us, we perceive and judge reality and situations differently. One could demand that criminals be put to death or jailed for life. When the criminal in question happens to be oneself, a friend, a relative or one's child, then one would like to see the criminal pardoned or, at least, placed in a remand home. Where we stand and how we relate to persons, situations and events influence what we see and how we judge the persons, situations and events concerned.

These above observations are important for a discussion on women in the Bible. Where we stand and where we locate the issue greatly determines how we see, judge and respond to it. Often the question of women in the Bible is viewed as a female issue, by both men and women. Seen in its proper perspective, the women question today is a humanity issue. The issue concerns the nature, status and role of women in church and society in relation to men, "the other half" of humanity. Gen 1:26-27 reports that God created the human species "male and female" in the divine image and likeness. If they are equal in nature, what practical implications does this hold for both men and women in their self perception as a sex, their mutual relationship and in all fields of human endeavor?

### The Women Issue - A Humanity Issue

Put this way, the women question is for all humanity, not just for women. What is at stake is humanity's true





self-understanding as intended by God who created them "male and female" conjointly in the divine image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27). This true self-understanding challenges humanity to review its beliefs about the male and female sexes and to grow into that wholeness intended by the Creator. What at the beginning was tagged the women's movement, is today best understood as a movement of human revolution. Human beings have carried out all kinds of revolutions: industrial revolution, scientific revolution, technological revolution and so forth. They have studied nature and the animal and sea worlds. The women issue calls on humanity to focus on itself, not individually psychologically, but as a species, created male and female. This human revolution permeates all aspects of human life where gender issues are concerned. While sex is a gift of God to each human being, gender roles are fixed by human beings. They are roles decided by society.

The issue of how humanity sees the female sex and the gender role it assigns accordingly to this sex is discussed today in many fields of study: anthropology, philosophy, sociology, science, politics, economics, religion, theology and the

## The women question today is a humanity issue

Bible. The Bible is a center point for this discussion; as God's inspired Word, it contains the account of God's creation of humanity as male and female, and its contents have a divine authority behind them. The Bible is also God's Word expressed in human language by sinful and

limited human beings. The divine and human standpoints permeate every biblical narrative, and need to be discerned. Women biblical scholars and theologians, in particular, hold that in our reading of the Bible we need to consider both the divine and the human viewpoints. They contend that in the heavily patriarchal Jewish culture within which the Bible was written, women were, at best, treated as second class citizens. Their primary reason for existence was allegedly to be in function of the man, particularly, the husband. A typical biblical example is Prov 31:10, traditionally captioned "the ideal woman". Here the woman, "a perfect wife", is evaluated and praised principally for her intrinsic usefulness to her husband. "She brings him good, not harm all the days of her life." (Prov 31:12). Women scholars contend that though the Bible is God's Word, the patriarchal, cultural viewpoint colours its entire portrayal of women in relation to men. The Old Testament reflects a culture where only the man had legal status, with corresponding rights and obligations.

This perception of women as existing in function of the man, and lacking legal status exists in many world cultures. The universal declaration of human rights in this century has sought to tackle this problem. Though the picture of women in the Bible is predominantly negative, it is not comprehensively so. In the Old Testament, the High Priest Joakim calls Judith, "the highest honour of our race" (Judith 15:9). Israel as nation is portrayed as God's cherished bride. Similarly the church, the new Israel, and each individual Christian are seen as Christ's bride (Eph 5:25-32), though focus on the wife's subjection to the husband present in Ephesians often diverts attention from this great mystery. The new creation, comprising all the redeemed from every tribe, language and nation, is the bride in whose midst God and the

Lamb dwell forever in perfect love (Rev 21-22). Mary, the mother of Jesus, filled to the brim with God's grace is, more so than Judith, "the highest honour of our race". Beside Christ, God incarnate, she alone of all creatures and of all women was destined to be God's own mother.

The picture of women in the Bible is complex. Though woman is viewed positively in certain instances in the Bible, the negative image dominates. Earlier studies on women in the Bible showed that this negative view of woman originates from sinful humanity, not from God's created will. The effort to discern the human dimension was and, for many, still is a necessary process of clearing the ground for a more positive and balanced evaluation of women and men. Such clearing is necessary if we are to become aware of our own inborn prejudices, turn away from them and together grow towards the attainment of our full humanity as God intended it. This re-reading of the biblical stories about women invites one to discern with the help of the Holy Spirit between what is from God and what is from limited, even sinful human cultures.

### Approaches to the Problem

Scholars have identified ways in which women are treated negatively in the Bible. First, it is contended that the contributions of women in the Bible were either left out or played down. One hears often of "the God of our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", but not of "our Mothers, Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel/Leah". Yet in Ruth 4:11, Rachel and Leah are called "the women who together built up the house of Israel". They were the mothers of the 12 tribes of Israel, Jacob's immediate sons or the ancestors of the Jewish nation. In Jewish thought and culture, a man (and consequently a nation) was what the wife (or the nation's women) made him or it, good or bad.



The common saying among the Rabbis about whether a man was good or bad, was: "It all depends on the woman". This cultural belief helps to explain why in Gen 3 Adam blames Eve for his having eaten the forbidden fruit and why the New Testament accuses Eve even more strongly and exonerates Adam (cf. 1 Cor 11:3-10; 2 Cor 11:13; 1 Tim 2:11-15).

Yet viewed closely from God's perspective, the Genesis account gives greater blame and responsibility to the man. God personally gave Adam the command not to eat of the forbidden fruit even before the woman was created. After the fall, God looked for the man and asked him what he had done. True to his cultural instinct (the cultural instinct of the biblical author), Adam threw the blame on the woman and implicated God in the process: "The woman you [emphasis mine] put with me gave me the fruit and I ate" (compare Gen 2:16-17 and 3:9-12).

In the Bible itself and throughout the history of biblical interpretation, Eve has been vilified as solely responsible for the current plight of humanity, the one who introduced sin into the world. Many women theologians today do not see her as a weak character, at least not weaker than Adam. She acted because she wanted knowledge. They ask why Adam, "who was with her" throughout the conversation with the serpent (Gen 3:7), ate without even recalling the command which God had personally given to him before Eve was created. Adam, the 'stronger sex', simply took and ate

without even an objection. Moreover, only after he had eaten did the eyes of both open. When God came to judge the situation, he held

Adam most responsible for the sin. Consequently, Adam's punishment affected not only himself but the earth: "accursed be the soil because of you" (Gen 3:17-18), whereas the woman's punishment was restricted to her personally: pain in childbirth and subjection to her husband. Adam's sin

and punishment, not the woman's, brought travail to the entire earth. Men, today, especially husbands, cannot disclaim responsibility for their actions or for the fate of their families and nation. To blame women for men's failings is to dehumanise men.

Secondly it is observed that where women are remembered, they are for the most part treated in a pejorative light, as harlots or prostitutes (Rahab, Josh 2:1), temptresses (Potiphar's wife, Gen 39:7-20), or vicious characters (Jezebel, 1 Kgs 21:4-16). Women as harlots, prostitutes or unfaithful wives are also used to model unfaithful Israel (e.g., Hos 2) and ungodly or evil empires (e.g., Babylon, Rev 17; cf. Isa 23:17; Jer 51:13; Ezek 16:23). This stereotyping in the "Word of God" served to promote and consolidate the negative attitude towards women in the cultures concerned and in church and society generally; they have promoted the same throughout the centuries in the readers of the Bible, both men and women, and in church and society. The influence of the Bible on attitude towards women is not limited to the Jewish, Christian and Moslem traditions, "the people of the book". It

extends to all cultures, for as James states in the Council of Jerusalem, "Moses has always had his preachers in every town" (Acts 15:21). The Bible's influences on world cultures through art, songs, stories, novels and other forms of communication cannot be underestimated.

Thirdly, it is noted that even the positive roles played by women which compare favourably with those of men are often played down or not given their full significance. One may here compare the theophanies to Hagar (Gen 16:6-16; 21:8-20), for instance, with those to Abraham (12:1-7; 13:14-18; 15:1-21). Little effort is made to bring out the theological significance of the former, compared with the latter. In the New Testament, when the Greek word *diakonos* is used of men, it is translated "deacon", when used of women, it is translated "servant". Another key example is Martha's confession in John 11:27, which in its own way parallels that of Peter in Matt 16:17. While Peter's confession has been celebrated to his honour, and a promise attached to it, that of Martha is hardly ever noticed in the same way. Yet in John's Gospel, Martha is the mouthpiece of the faith on which the entire Gospel is based and for which sole purpose it is written, namely, to persuade the readers to "believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God" and so believing to find life in his name (compare John 20:30-31 and 11:27). The anointing of Jesus by the unnamed woman in the house of Simon the Leper (Matt 26:1-13; Mark 14:3-9) and by Mary of Bethany (John 12:1-8) a few days before the Passion plays great significance in the events of the Passion. Jesus declares the one should be celebrated "in memory of" the woman and interprets the other as a preparation of his body for burial. He himself is inspired by the anointing in Bethany to do the same to his disciples at the Last Supper, a few days later. Yet these events have not received the recognition they deserve.

## We have to become aware of our culturally determined prejudices and grow towards the attainment of our full humanity



Mary of Bethany does not even have so much as a "Memorial" status in the church's liturgical calendar, nor does the unnamed woman.

Patriarchally and culturally based interpretations of the Bible further contribute in downplaying the unique contributions of women in the Bible. Conversely, women's sins, real or imagined, are blown up, while those of men are glossed over. Mary Magdalene is stigmatised as a prostitute and has come down in history with this indelible stigma, though no gospel evidence links her with prostitution. Luke alone reports that seven demons had gone out of her (Luke 8:2) but demon possession is not synonymous with prostitution. The Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20) was possessed by a legion of unclean spirits, yet nobody thinks of him as a male prostitute. In the gospels and culture of the time, she is named Mary of Magdala (after her place of origin) just as Joseph of Arimathea, for instance, is named after his place of origin, so, too, Jesus of Nazareth and Paul of Tarsus. In John 8:1-11, where a woman is caught in adultery, which implies that the man was also caught with her, only the woman is brought to Jesus for stoning. In Numbers 12 both Aaron and Miriam revolt against Moses, but Miriam alone is punished. The reader could find other examples of injustice or culturally conditioned and biased views against women in the Bible.

Fourthly, it is observed that women are not very visible in the Bible itself compared to men. Even when they are present, they are marginalised. Luke 8:1-3 reports that many women followed Jesus as he went through Galilee teaching in their towns and villages and then continued to Jerusalem. But though mention is made of the men disciples along the way to Jerusalem, nothing is said of the women till they are mentioned again at the end of Jesus' life journey (on Calvary and at the Resurrection), almost in pass-

ing, as the women who had come up with him from Galilee (Luke 23:49; 24:10; Matt; 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41). These women emerge as the first witnesses of the Resurrection. They knew where to find the men disciples who were hiding behind locked doors, to give them the good news. The implication in all this is that they were present with Jesus throughout his public ministry right up to the events of the Passion and Resurrection. The belief that women were not present at the Last Supper needs to be reviewed in the light of this gospel evidence.

The role of women in the life and ministry of Jesus is an area where God's viewpoint emerges as clearly different from the human viewpoint. Though culturally the testimony of women had no legal standing, since women were treated like minors along with children, Jesus acted counter-culturally when he made the women the first witnesses of his Resurrection (Matt 28:9-10; Luke ) and the designated Mary Magdalene as the bearer of his Resurrection message (John 21:17). Not only Mary Magdalene, but the women witnesses of the Resurrection can be called the "apostles of the apostles"; Jesus commissioned them as a group in Matt 28:10. Even then the men disciples, still operating within the dictates of their patriarchal culture, did not believe them. Their refusal to believe the women's proclamation of the Resurrection was a cultural, not a gospel response. Jesus reproached them for not believing those who had seen him (Matt 16:9-14). Though he appeared later to Peter, we are not told that Peter's report was doubted. Paul's account of the Resurrection appearances (1 Cor 15: 3-8) leaves out completely the appearances to the women, the first witnesses of the Resurrection.

Fifthly, it is noted that the treatment of woman in the Bible affects the treatment of the Trinitarian God. If

God created humanity as male and female in the divine image and likeness, then something of woman must necessarily image God. By depriving woman of her likeness to God, humanity is impoverishing our understanding of God and the way God relates to us. A key image here is the motherhood of God which is very vivid in the Old Testament, in such passages as Hos 11:8-9 and Isa 49:14-15. Wisdom herself is portrayed as God's consort, the one through whom the world was created (see Prov 8: 22-31; Wisd 6:12-21; 7:22-30). In the NT this Wisdom is identified with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the principle of the new creation. Eve's name given to her by Adam after the fall means "mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20). It is in bearing, nurturing and preserving life and in showing mercy, and loving faithfully those who deserve no love (like abusive husbands and ungrateful children) that woman most resembles God. The Hebrew word for mercy derives from the same root as womb. God's womb is God's mercy. We impoverish our knowledge of God by treating "him" only as Lord, mighty warrior and imperial monarch.

The above survey hardly does justice to the complex issue of women in the Bible. Scholars adopt many different approaches in redressing it. These approaches seek to raise awareness that patriarchy is the most comprehensive standpoint from which the Bible is written and interpreted over the centuries and from which both men and women are viewed. Whatever form these studies take, their aim is to restore a balanced view of men and women in the Bible and help humanity to arrive at the christological truth which alone can set the whole of humanity free to remain in God's house as God's children (cf. John 8:31-36).

### Practical Exercises

The reader needs to participate personally in discovering the presence



and contribution of women in the Bible if this discussion is to be of benefit to the individual person. One way of doing this is to compile one's own list of women in the Bible (a kind of stock-taking), to watch what the women are doing and discern the influences at work in the way each is portrayed. There are, for instance, women disciples of Jesus, women prophets (Acts 21:10), church workers (Rom 16: 1-16) women preachers of the word (Acts 18:1-4; 19:24-28; Phil 4:1-3), pastors in their house churches (Acts 12: 12; 16:11-15, 40; Rom 16:3-5); women with special vocations (Acts 9:36-43) and a renowned woman Deacon (Rom 16:1-2). Such a compilation makes women visible in the Bible, at least for oneself. The exercise surprises one at the number of women mentioned in the Bible. This could be a project for group or individual study where the findings could be shared later in groups and with friends. How one classifies the women could serve as an index of one's personal view of them. Members of the study group could act as one another's mirror about whether one's view of women in the Bible is from culture or from God. For this undertaking to be Christ-like, the reader may ask whether what is said about women in any one instance can be attributed to God or Jesus. If the answer is negative, that awareness should challenge one to revise his/her views of women.

Once the list has been compiled, the reader is invited to read each story critically in its own biblical context. This total context is crucial if one wishes to gain a fuller meaning of the stories. The reader should also listen to these stories in the light of her or his Christian faith. The gospel is essentially a message of liberation of the poor and the oppressed from all dehumanising and death dealing forces. In this respect, Jesus himself is the gospel par excellence and all four gospels

do not exhaust the limits of his own person as God's gospel. One

## A re-reading of biblical stories about women invites to discern between what is from God and what is from limited, even sinful human cultures

needs then to identify where the good news lies in these stories of biblical women, or where God's voice is to be distinguished from culturally conditioned human voices and viewpoints. This discernment is necessary, because as said earlier, the Bible is God's Word expressed in limited human language and cultures in a given period of history. The reader thus becomes aware not only of the limited cultural dimensions of the Bible but of his or her own cultural conditionings.

### Resources for the Exercises

#### Old Testament

In compiling and critically reading the list of biblical women, the reader might concentrate on the chief periods in biblical history. Eve briefly treated above, belongs to pre-history. In the story of the patriarchs and matriarchs, God takes the women into confidence as much as, and perhaps more so than their husbands, on the future of their children; they respond accordingly. This is true of Sarah when she seeks to ensure the inheritance for Isaac over Ishmael, Abraham's first born by Hagar, the Egyptian slave. (Gen 21:1-20). We are not here condoning the injustice to Hagar

and Ishmael in the story, but only looking at the events from Sarah's perspective. Many mothers and fathers would probably do the same for their children today. In the story, God takes the part of Sarah without neglecting Hagar. Ironically in Galatians 4, Hagar becomes the symbol of Israel.

This is particularly true of Rebecca (Genesis 27). Traditionally Rebecca has been portrayed as a woman of weak character, guilty of the "sin of deceitfulness". Yet her "deceitfulness" is perhaps not different from that of Abraham who passed Sarah off as his sister in Egypt to save his life and became rich on her account, to the punishment of the innocent Egyptians (Gen 12:10-20). In this story God did not punish Abraham for this deceitfulness but the Egyptians who acted in ignorance of his true relationship with Sarah. Moreover in Rebecca's case, before ever Jacob and Esau were born, God told her that there were two nations struggling in her womb and that the younger would rule over the older (Gen 25:19-26). When subsequently she took measures to ensure that Jacob received the paternal blessing, considered crucial in the culture of the time for a child's future, she was cooperating with God in her own way to ensure that Isaac's blessing fell to the son designated as leader by God before birth. In the cultural ethics of the time, it was a mark of astuteness to succeed in outwitting one's neighbour to secure a blessing. We meet this in Jacob himself when he outwits Laban, his father-in-law, on the issue of the spotted sheep (Gen 30:32-43). The name Jacob itself seems to mean deceiver or supplanter (cf. Gen 27:36; Hos 12:4). Often in the interpretations of these passages Rebecca's "deceitfulness" is emphasized, while the parallel deeds by the patriarchs are passed over.



Though Lot's wife was disobedient (Gen 19:17 23-26), some people today sympathize with her. They ask how she, a woman and mother, could have walked away without looking back while a whole town was burning to death. Her mother's heart and woman's instinct were too strong for that hardness of heart. Besides, it is not said that Lot and his family were lesser sinners than those who were destroyed. God spared them because of his concern for Abraham (Gen 19:29). By looking back and being turned into a pillar of salt, Lot's wife shared the fate of the people to the end. We are reminded today of foreign nationals who are quickly evacuated by their own people whenever there is a war, instead of staying on and helping the people in their crises. Lot and his family were foreigners in Sodom and Gomorrah. Besides, the God portrayed in this whole story cuts a poor image when compared with the God of Jesus Christ. This God would leave the ninety-nine sheep in the desert to go in search of the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7). As a prodigal father he throws a first class banquet to celebrate the return of a lost son whose sole reason for returning is to seek food (Luke 15:11-32).

In the Exodus, the Egyptian midwives, Moses mother, sister and Pharaoh's daughter (Exod 1:15-2:10), and later Moses' wife (Exod 2:16-22; 4:24-26), play an indispensable role in preserving his life. Without the concerted effort and team work of these illustrious women, Moses would never have survived as a child, and later been spared by God. But because of them, he has become a great figure in Jewish history and the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, to whom God spoke "face to face", not through dreams and visions (Num 12:6-8). Legally or by adoption, Moses was in every respect the son of Pharaoh's daughter; she gave him his name (Exod 2:10), which has re-

mained a great name in biblical history. Indeed the Bible as a book owes its origin from his mission to liberate Israel from slavery in Egypt. Since Pharaoh's daughter was an African, Moses is legally (by adoption) the son of a notable African woman.

In the time of the Judges, Deborah (Judg 4: 4-10) emerges as a Judge in Israel when all hope of survival was about gone. She was a prophet (God's spokesperson) and a successful political leader, even leader warrior (4:10) in Israel. Women who aspire to take part in civilian politics may study her as a model and draw inspiration from her. Men who dislike women taking part in politics may also remember that in a culture as heavily patriarchal as the Jewish biblical one, a woman ruled Israel and was followed by men. In our days most women prime ministers ironically come from countries believed to be heavily patriarchal (Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto and Golda Meir).

Ruth is a faithful wife who refuses to allow death to separate her from the husband's family. More importantly, she is an outstanding example of a faith and love which transcend all tribal, ethnic, religious and national barriers. By this faith and commitment to her mother-in-law, she merited to become an ancestress of Jesus, one of the few women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy (cf. Matt 1:5). These women give the Gentiles a place as ancestors of Jesus, when this ancestry is viewed through election, not creation. For while Luke traces Jesus' ancestry to Adam, Matthew limits it to the chosen people whose protogenetors are Abraham and Sarah. Despite this limitation, by including the Gentile women, Matthew's genealogy also includes Gentiles through their presence and mediation.

In the monarchic period, Jezebel and Solomon's wives are foreign

wives held responsible for the evil deeds of their husbands. One is familiar with the cultural rhetoric that Solomon's heart was turned away from God by his foreign wives. Yet he married them, not the reverse. How could he, of the stronger sex and race, allow himself to be led astray by "the weaker sex" and of "inferior race"? The perceptive reader will notice many inconsistencies in these narratives on the roles and capabilities of women and the tendency to exonerate men of responsibility for their actions and throw that responsibility on the women. Yet scripture tells us that God shows no partiality in His judgments (cf. Rom 2:11; Ps 62:12).

In the period after the Exile, while Israel was struggling for national identity and survival Judith and Esther emerged. Judith, a widow, risked her life to save her nation when it was besieged and almost exterminated by the enemy. She went right into the enemy's camp and cut off the head of Holofernes, the captain of their army; then took it back in victory to her people and led them in triumphal procession to Jerusalem. Her story and that of Esther might inspire women on the need to take actions full of risk to liberate their nations "in distress". Esther's prayer is a good example of "prayer in action and action in prayer". Not only does she pray to God to save her people, she also asks God to arm her and use her as an instrument of this liberation of her people as she faces the king. God answered her prayers abundantly.

In this story, however, patriarchy is at work. Esther is given in marriage to a Gentile, though the law forbade such a union. She is in this way used against herself. Secondly she is used against Queen Vasthi, her predecessor. Vasthi refused to be put up for show by the king along with his golden vessels and treasures for the entertainment of his nobles and was consequently deposed. The King's courtiers feared



that her action might lead to the emancipation of women from domination by their husbands and took

## Women in the Bible are God's co-workers. Without them there would have been no Moses, leader of the chosen people, and no Jesus, Saviour of the World

effective means to stamp it out by deposing her as queen. This fear recalls that of Pharaoh who sought to oppress the Hebrews lest they escape from the country. His action caused just the opposite.

Though Vasthi seems to have lost the case, she is justified today by history, not only because women biblical scholars have discovered her, but because the universal declaration of human rights forbids one human being to treat another as his property. The feared emancipation of women marches on and it is no longer possible to clamp it down. Queen Vasthi respected her own dignity as a human being by refusing to be treated by her husband as a puppet for show. Today Vasthi would be regarded as a pioneer of women's liberation, ahead of her times. Women need to be aware of how they can be used against their own interests in God's name. Men and women may reflect on whether they give one another the respect that is their due as people made in God's image and likeness, and more beautifully recreated in Christ. Respect for human right forbids that one human being treat another

as his or her property. For in Christ we are all God's property (cf. 1 Cor 3:23; 6:15-20).

Job's wife (Job 2:9-10) belongs to the period of wisdom literature. Her taunting her husband is to be interpreted against the background of the positions of Job's three men friends, and even of Job himself when he curses the day he was born and takes God to task for treating him unjustly. The main point of the story is that all flesh is inadequate to help us in our times of trial, whether such flesh be our relatives, friends or even our own human judgment of the situation. Only faith in God's infi-

nite wisdom which moves us to submit humbly, while waiting confidently on God's unfailing goodness, can see us through the trials and temptations that come our way. Only faith in God can give us victory over all the trials of our lives. Job personally discovered this truth for himself at the end of his story (cf. Job 42:1-6).

### New Testament

The New Testament narrates however minimally the good deeds of women. In the interpretation only the culturally conditioned sections which prohibit women from taking part in different aspects of the church's life are most remembered and acted upon (cf. 1 Cor 11:3-16; 14:33b-36; 1 Tim 2:9-15; 5:3-16; Eph 5:22-24; 1 Pet 3:1-6; Tit 2:3-5). The women most remembered in the public life of Jesus are mostly the sinners, the woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50), the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11), and the Samaritan women with her marital history (John 4:16-20).

The strength of "the woman who was a sinner" lies in her courage to

repent. The gospel does not report of the repentance of the men with whom she led the "loose life". As a repentant sinner she showed she was a woman of strong character when she braved the contempt of Simon the Pharisee, and ignored cultural and human decency to approach Jesus publicly to seek his forgiveness. Jesus commended her as a woman who loved much because she was aware that her many sins had been forgiven her. To err is human, but to admit one's error, not to talk of sinfulness, is divine. One needs spiritual strength to repent. The woman showed the moral strength which can only come from God, but which many of us lack today, both men and women.

Prostitution operates because men and women form partners in it. If there were no men to pay for "the services", there would be no prostitutes. A man who goes from woman to woman, day after day, offering money for the so-called services, is as much a prostitute as is a woman who does the same, perhaps even to earn a living and feed her children. Jesus was very aware of this partnership in sin when in John 8:7, he asked the men leaders who caught the woman in adultery, to be the first to cast a stone on her if they themselves were without sin. The narrative records that they all "went away one by one beginning with the eldest". As Christians, we need to put on the mind and judgment of Christ in reading these stories. God shows no partiality (Rom 2:11). Furthermore, Jesus was put on trial through the woman. In a reverse case, the Church uses Susanna as a symbol of innocent Jesus condemned to death in the Passion week.

Women's partnership with God in giving and fostering life comes to the fore in the New Testament. In the greatest event of human history, the Incarnation, God chooses to take women, Mary of Nazareth and Elizabeth, into confidence and as



partners in this event. The story of the annunciation is followed by the visitation. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the first to know of this event and to be its unique agent, then Elizabeth at the visitation. Mary did not simply bring up Jesus, as some would emphasize today. Surrogate mothers and nannies bring up children to whom they did not give birth. She was his biological "Mother of Jesus", by the power of the Holy Spirit. John's Gospel consistently emphasizes her physical motherhood by calling her "the mother of Jesus" (John 2:1-12; 19:25). Her greatness lies in her believing that she could become a mother without normal human intercourse. Elizabeth, another woman, was the first to recognize and praise this her faith in the humanly impossible. By accepting to become the Mother of Jesus, Mary also accepted to share in the fate of this Son of God, a stone to be rejected so that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed (Luke 2:34-35).

Mary the Mother of Jesus was not only a woman of great faith. She

was the first evangelist long before the Samaritan woman (John 4:27-20, 39-43). She first brought the Good News of Jesus to her cousin Elizabeth. We read in Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of one who brings good news, who heralds peace, brings happiness, proclaims salvation . . .". Mary's feet sped through the hilly country of Galilee to the hilly country of Judea, to bring the good news to her cousin Elizabeth, and her unborn child, John the Baptist. The child leaped in her womb for joy, showing that the news Mary brought, by her very presence as God-bearer, was truly Good News. Mary's example challenges us as Jesus' brothers and sisters and mother (Luke 19-21; cf. Matt 13:18-23; Mark 3:34-35) to live up to our Christian vocation as those who hear God's Word, put it into practice, and proclaim it to others.

This study has hardly introduced the rich, complex and very challenging issue of women in the Bible. Its main aim was to invite the reader to identify, read and re-read the stories of women in the Bible

with new eyes, ears and heart. When done, one will have developed a genuine love and gratitude to God for the singular presence and contributions of women in the Bible. They are indeed God's co-workers. Without them there would not have been Moses, leader of the chosen people in the OT, or Jesus, the Son of God, Son of Mary and the Saviour of the World (John 4:42).

May the Holy Spirit who alone leads us into the complete truth, guide the reader to re-read the biblical stories about women with the mind of Christ. May he also inspire the reader to compile his or her own anthology based on a renewed or Spirit-filled understanding of the basic truth that, in Christ, there is no longer "male and female", the one seen as superior by nature the other inferior; but that we who have been baptized into Christ "are all one person in Christ" (Gal 3:28). □

*Literature for further reading see rubric 'Books and Material' page 30*



## An Experience of Reading the Bible from the Female Perspective

MARIBEL PERTUZ

*The author calls for and describes a biblical hermeneutic from a female perspective. Such a reading uncovers often forgotten or neglected aspects, stimulates the dialogue of women – and of all readers – with the Bible, sharpens our awareness of roles, clichés and one-sided traditions and above all represents a context-related approach to the Bible – namely, the context of woman. Reading the Bible from a woman's perspective can endow many biblical texts with new theological and spiritual power – for women and for men.*

*Maribel Pertuz belongs to a religious congregation engaged in a labour milieu in Columbia and she is a member of a number of women's groups that meet regularly for common Bible reading.*

We are making advances towards a new reading of the Bible from the point of view of women of Latin America and the Caribbean. This new reading recreates and challenges relations of gender and of ecumenism and stimulates fresh ideas at the levels of theology, spirituality and ecclesiology.

In the document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, the Pontifical Biblical Commission recognizes the positive contributions of this hermeneutics. Furthermore, it views with satisfaction the growing number of female exegetes who are enriching the interpretation of the Scriptures, bringing to bear a new and perceptive vision and highlight-

ing aspects that have been forgotten. Among the many benefits of feminist exegesis we might note a deep understanding of the image of God in the context of the Old Testament, an understanding that moves away from the patriarchal mentality. Despite some fears and reservations, another attractive contribution of this method is the way it questions the power of the Church through the critical posture which it adopts in this dealing with the Scriptures. In many places, the dialogue of women with the Bible is becoming ever more fruitful and life-generating; in this sense it reflects the meeting of Mary with Elizabeth.

### A reading from the perspective of women

This action of reading through the eyes of women is not the same as the masculine and patriarchal one. Instead it rediscovers alternative roles and analyses the presence of women in the Bible. It holds up to the light the relations that seem to be present there, building new readings orientated towards a new pattern of relationships. This gender identity should be seen in the context of power and politics, because every culture creates socio-cultural models identified with the condition of being man or woman. The scope of this is to legitimate the social relationships so that man and woman learn to situate themselves in the hierarchical society, generating a definite pattern of social relationship. For this reason we endeavour to clarify the lineaments of patriarchal culture in the texts of the Bible.

### We start from the experiences and reality of women

This hermeneutics is universal. It is for all women and men, although at the same time it arises within the context of persons more particularly defined: from the impoverished women of Latin America and the



Caribbean with their personal histories and their actual lives. This way of reading takes great account of what women have gone through in their struggles for freedom from sexism, racism and poverty. Before reading the texts, we read our lives, our experiences of faith, our personal stories, our feelings about what it means to be women in the face of society, of the Church and of the Bible itself. A quotation from Ute Seibert is telling: "presence of women: victims, collaborators, even accomplices; present in our reading of the sacred texts, claiming the right to find there no longer stones but, at last, bread."

So we read the Bible from our bodies, from our experiences which include suffering and joy, silent struggles, celebrations, routines, creativity, burdens and dreams. We women read the Bible with tenacity, constancy, wisdom and delight so as to find there in those texts a fruitfulness that liberates.

Reading the Bible from the body, from the intellect, from the guts and from the hearts of women means finding many areas forgotten by previous interpretation. It means giving priority to facets of life that have been ranked as less important because for centuries only men have spoken on the Bible.

#### **Approaching the text with suspicion**

This reading is risky and critical. It can seem impudent for the demands it poses, for the doubt it expresses about much traditional interpretation, for its recovery of that which has been overlooked or lost and for its description of the experience of God in terms of the feminine. The lost coin spoken of in the gospel and hidden within the Bible itself and in the ways of tradition has to be found again.

The hermeneutics of suspicion has to seek the reality and presence of women behind the words, therefore

our reading must name women and make them explicit.

#### **Starting from women's actual stories**

We have to recover the memory of the suffering and exclusion as well as of the resistance and the struggle of the women of the Bible so as to make possible a universal solidarity between women of the past, the present and the future. We take into account the historical contexts in which the biblical events occurred and which generated this literature, paying special attention to relationships of gender and of power.

#### **From deconstruction and reconstruction**

We draw out the feminine pattern of language, deciphering its symbolic content. We detect patriarchal features; we make our own the structure of the text, the movement of the words, the personalities, the relations, actions and conflicts there described. In a sense the texts are "re-created" with new elements of the world of today; new methods are proposed which give to the texts a sense of the human, of the integration of persons and of liberation.

#### **From feminine theology and spirituality**

It is important to uncover the theological significance of the texts and the power they have among the Christian communities and among women today; also to analyse the way they operate in the present patriarchal culture and to ask how they might be good news for all women and men.

Revelation that is good news is revelation that does not limit itself merely to the texts, but, striving to be concrete and dynamic, creates an encounter with the liberating Word of God, the word that proceeds from the daily story of women, of communities, of children and

of the various peoples with their cultures and religious traditions. Taking revelation in context, we have to distinguish what is particular to the original setting of the text from what is valid in other settings.

#### **From celebration**

Finally, in a creative way, we make the texts present. We experience an important part of the biblical story through recreation, festivities, joy, dance, song, drama and celebrations. The Bible read from this perspective produces theological nourishment for our spirituality as women and sustains us in our struggles and in our processes of organisation.

In all this, let us rejoice that the Bible can be transposed into another reality by women and may then transform our lives. May it strengthen and encourage us; may it enlighten us through creating new hope among our people.

*(Transl.: E. Power)*





## The Men-Women Parallels in the Work of Luke

JOSEPH STRICHER

*"It has been truly observed that Luke seems to be fond of parallel pairs" and that "in many instances the pairs involve in the first case men, in the second women" (Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 1968, p. 233f. Cf. also R. Morgenthaler, *Die lukanische Geschichtsschreibung als Zeugnis - Gestalt und Gehalt der Kunst des Lukas*, 1948). In the following article, Joseph Stricher after giving us the most important instances of men-women pairs in Luke-Acts comes to the conclusion that Luke testifies to a new type of relationship between men and women which is based on the example of Jesus of Nazareth. He transposes into his narrative what Paul had formulated in the abstract: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3,28).*

*The author, Fr. Joseph Stricher, is the director of *Evangile et Vie* in Paris and member of the Editorial Board of *Bulletin Dei Verbum*.*

Since he makes a point of highlighting numerous female characters, a number of commentators present Luke as a feminist author far ahead of his time. Others argue, on the contrary, that Luke is one of the most dangerous of authors for the feminist cause, because he confines women to secondary roles and makes them effectively slaves of men.<sup>1</sup> Without intending to settle this debate, I would like to take up the question of the place of women in the work of Luke by bringing to light the many parallelisms that figure both in the third Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. They are in fact so numerous that they can hardly be a result of chance.

### In the Gospel of Luke

The Gospel of Luke opens with a double annunciation of birth. The same angel of the Lord twice announces the birth of an impossible child, first to a man and then to a woman. The elderly man, a functionary of the temple, demands a sign before he will believe. He obtains a sign... in that he becomes dumb! The young woman, for her part, requests clarification. She obtains it and learns that the Holy Spirit will "overshadow her" and that "the one to be born will be holy and called Son of God." The woman then goes to the house of the dumb man and she speaks. Luke places in her mouth a veritable summary of the Old Testament story. The Word has left the sacred space of the Temple only to come alive in the profane space that is a private home.

The infancy Gospel terminates in the Temple of Jerusalem by a double entry of Jesus into the Holy Place, first as a small child, then as an adolescent. At the time of the presentation, he is welcomed by Simeon, a man inspired by the Holy



Spirit and by the prophetess Anna. Two witnesses, a man and a woman, receive Jesus Savior with open arms. The man sings the praises of one who is a "light for revelation to the gentiles and the glory of your people Israel" (Luke 2:32, 38). In the presence of Jesus, the Temple becomes once again a place of the word. A woman can prophesy there as well as a man.

The final scene of the infancy gospel likewise takes place in the Temple. It is there that Joseph and Mary look for and find Jesus, their child, who says to them: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house"? Mary is the spokesperson of the couple. She is also the one who, according to the evangelist, "keeps all these things in her heart".

### The Teaching of Jesus

In the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus teaches, he often cites female characters. He practices, before the term was invented, what is today referred to as inclusive language. A rapid comparison with the other Synoptics will allow one to highlight this Lukan characteristic. In the parable of the good and the evil servant, Matthew describes the behaviour of the latter: "...if he then begins to beat his fellow servants..." (Matt 24:48-51). Luke writes: "...if that servant begins to strike the menservants and maidservants..." (Lk 12:45). Even if the maidservants only make their appearance here to be the victims of abuse, the passage still provides evidence of the attention Luke pays to persons of one or the other sex. The maidservants do not go unnoticed, they are explicitly named. "No one who has left home, or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel..." says Jesus according to the Gospel of Mark (Mk 10:29). "No one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God..." says Jesus according the Gospel of Luke (Lk 18:29). "Anyone who loves his

father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" says Jesus according to the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 10:37). "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple" says Jesus according to the Gospel of Luke (Lk 14:26). We need not pause here to reflect on the apparent harshness of these words which are intended to shock the audience and to insist on the radical choice Jesus demands of his disciples. We note simply the fact that in each case Luke is careful to add the wife to the list of dear ones.

In the inaugural speech in the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus affirms that the Scriptures are fulfilled in his person. To indicate the universality of salvation, he cites the example of Elijah and Elisha who intervened on behalf of foreigners: the widow of Sarephath and Naaman the Syrian, a woman and a man (Lk 4:25-27). After the discourse on the beatitudes, Jesus realizes what he has announced by effecting a long-distance healing at the request of a pagan officer (just as Elisha did for Naaman) and by restoring to the widow of Nain her only son who had recently died (just as Elijah did for the widow of Sarephath).

In the parables of Luke, it is common for the characters described to include persons of one and the other sex in strict parallelism. This is the case with the seamstress and the wine grower (Lk 5:36-38), with the farmer and the cook (Lk 13:18-21), with the shepherd who loses his sheep and the house-wife who loses her coin (Lk 15:1-10). It is also possible to detect connections between the importunate [male] friend (Lk 11:5-8) and the widow, who insists on justice (Lk 18:1-8). Two examples of "nuisances" who in the end win the day and illustrate the power of prayer.

### Healing and Salvation Narratives

A number of healings that involve a man or a woman follow a similar narrative model in the two cases. This is true of the man with the paralyzed right hand (Lk 6:6-11) and the bent woman (Lk 13:10-17). The same elements are found in the two narratives. The time: a Sabbath day, the place: in the synagogue. The man and the woman are both present in the assembly. They do not ask for anything. In healing them, Jesus attempts to open the eyes of his adversaries. He speaks to them of liberation, of salvation. "This woman is a daughter of Abraham", Jesus says of the woman who was bent over. "He too is a son of Abraham", he says of Zachaeus (Lk 19:9). Perfectly balanced expressions here applied to two persons rejected because of their infirmity, in the one case physical, in the other case moral. A similar balance occurs in the restoration to life of a young man (Lk 7:11-16) on the one hand, and a young woman (Lk 8:49-56) on the other. Finally, a balance in the use of the phrase "your faith has saved you" which punctuates four encounters of Jesus with persons in a situation of distress: the sinner at the house of Simon (Lk 7:36-50), the woman with the flow of blood (Lk 8:43-48), the tenth leper (Lk 17:11-19) and the blind man of Jericho (Lk 18:35-43). Two women and two men. The men express themselves in public. They cry out their distress to Jesus. The two women do not speak, but approach Jesus, in each case coming close enough to touch him. All of these men and women are introduced into a new situation of peace, with others and with God.<sup>2</sup>

### Men and Women, Disciples of Jesus

Like the other evangelists, Luke gives a list of male disciples who follow Jesus (Lk 6:13-16). But Luke also gives a list of women who also form part of Jesus' entourage (Lk



8:1-3). Can one speak of women disciples? The term is not employed here; it will be, in contrast, in Acts with respect to Dorcas who dies and is restored to life by Peter: "In Joppa there was a disciple<sup>3</sup> named Tabitha." The women of Luke's Gospel play only the role of servants of Jesus and of the group of male disciples, of retainers, or better, of patrons, say certain feminist critics. It is not certain though that this last remark is pertinent. According to the gospel narrative, these women follow Jesus all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem (Lk 23:49). They fulfill then the same conditions as Joseph and Matthias who are proposed as replacements for Judas (Acts 1:15-26). Of course they are not chosen to form part of the group of the Twelve, but can one deny them the title of disciple?

Mary, seated at the feet of Jesus, has adopted the very posture of the disciple, doing the most important work there is: allowing herself to be taught by the Lord (Lk 10:38-42). An interesting parallel with the man from whom Jesus drove out the demons: "The people came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, *sitting at Jesus' feet* (Lk 8:35). In the narrative of Luke, the Gerasene and Mary represent as it were the true disciples of Jesus, engaged in the one essential task, that of attending to the Word of God. They prefigure the disciples of Jewish or Gentile origin, and the two sexes who will make up the primitive Christian community.

Moreover, can one consider service (*diakonia*) a secondary function in the Christian community? To be sure, Jesus says to Martha, who is engaged in the complications of table service, that Mary has chosen the better part, but this is not to devalue the work of Martha. Immediately before his passion, Jesus says to his disciples: "...the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules

like the one who serves [...] But I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:26-27). A little later, when the community will choose seven of its members for the service of tables, this will not be by way of confining them to a subordinate role. The first of the seven, Stephen, will witness to his faith before the Sanhedrin to the point of martyrdom (Acts 7). The second will evangelize Samaria and baptize the high Ethiopian functionary (Acts 8).

### The Acts of the Apostles

In the Acts of the Apostles, we again encounter Luke's taste for inclusive language. The newly-born Christian community is composed of men and women (Acts 1:12-16). Saul, the persecutor, incarcerates *men and women* (Acts 8:3). He goes to Damascus to seek out "people who belonged to the Way, *men and women*" (Acts 9:2). The Samaritans evangelized by Philip, receive baptism, "both *men and women*" (Acts 8:12). Luke pays special attention to women of a high social class, who, like men of equivalent status, can show themselves either hostile or welcoming to those who announce the Good News (Acts 13:50; 17:4; 17:12). At the end of the book, women of high rank accompany the officials of the Empire before whom Paul must stand. They do not become directly involved in Paul's trial, but they are present to hear his defense speeches, alongside the men. This is the case with Drusilla, the wife of the governor Felix (Acts 24:24) and above all Bernice, sister of King Agrippa. The readers of Acts, men and women alike, have probably heard of Bernice who was the mistress of Titus at the time of the siege of Jerusalem. Thanks to her, the story of Paul's trial becomes anchored in the great history of the Roman Empire. The reader of Acts encounters several other couples, of less elevated social rank. The first among them, Ananias and

Saphira, play a negative role. Having deliberately introduced into the community the deadly poison of dissimulation and deceit, the couple disappears in a spectacular manner (Acts 5:1-11). Conversely, Priscilla and Aquila are a model couple who intervene with Apollos to "explain to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26).

In the Acts, women often play a very important role as household leaders. Two of these stand out particularly, one in Jerusalem, the other at Philippi. At the time of Peter's release from prison, Peter takes refuge in the house of Mary, the mother of Mark. He is met at the door by a maidservant who bears the beautiful name *Rhode* (rose bush). The Jerusalem community meets in this house and has transformed it into a house of prayer (Acts 12:12-17). At Philippi, Paul and his missionary companions address a group of women gathered about Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. They accept her hospitality and so found the first Christian community in that city (Acts 16:11-15). After having been miraculously freed from prison, they then accept the hospitality of the jailer and found another community at his house (Acts 16:16-40). A perfect parallelism between this house mistress and house master who welcome the Christian missionaries into their respective homes.

At Athens, Paul's success is less spectacular than at Philippi. However, when he departs from the city, he leaves behind a small group of believers among whom "Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris" stand out as exemplary characters (Acts 17:34).

We could complete this summary of parallelisms with the matching "resurrection" stories, one involving a woman and the other a man. Peter raises from her death-bed a woman named Dorcas (Acts 9:36-43) and Paul raises from the dead a young man, Eutychus, who had gone to



sleep during his sermon and fallen to his death from an upper-story window (Acts 20:7-12).

### Conclusion

After going through these numerous man-woman parallels, it is difficult to still accuse Luke of being an author dangerous for the feminist cause. In his great narrative that runs from the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist to the arrival of Paul in Rome, women are not simply an exploitable commodity. They play their role alongside men. It is true that they rarely hold positions of responsibility. Neither do they figure in the list of the Twelve who form Jesus' closest entourage, nor in that of the seven Hellenists chosen for the service of tables. Nevertheless, they serve as models that both male and female

readers can emulate. Their fidelity in following Jesus, their devotion to his person, their generosity in making available their material possessions make them an example to all.

Nothing prevents us from theorizing that by the way he highlights the contribution of these women Luke is aiming at a particular category of readers: women of means in the great Greek cities. He is inviting those among them who have come to believe in Christ to imitate Mary of Magdala, Johanna, Suzanna, etc. and to subsidize the needs of the nascent Christian community. He is further inviting them to open the doors of their homes, as did Mary, the mother of John Mark and Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth in Philippi, and to play their role as hostesses. All of this is an indication of the im-

portant place probably held by women at the time of the Church's beginnings.

Finally, by his use of inclusive language, Luke is taking into account the place of women in society and in the Church. They do not simply fade into the background but are explicitly named. By giving them an important place in his narrative, Luke testifies to a new type of relationship between men and women which is based on the example of Jesus of Nazareth. Finally, he transposes into his narrative what Paul had formulated in the abstract: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

(Transl.: L. Maluf)

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<sup>1</sup> "The Gospel of Luke is an extremely dangerous text, perhaps the most dangerous in the Bible." Jane Schaberg in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe editors, Louisville, 1992, p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> [Translator's note] One could add here a further case of balancing between men and woman in the Gospel of Luke. Two individuals in Luke's Gospel explicitly receive forgiveness of sins

from Jesus: a man (Lk 5:17-25), and a woman (Lk 7:36-50).

<sup>3</sup> Acts 9:36. The word *mathetria*, employed here by the author, is a hapax in the New Testament.



## On the Use of Inclusive Language

### Some Reflections on a Recommendation in the Final Statement of the Hong Kong Plenary Assembly

WILHELM EGGER

In the Final Statement "Word of God: Source of Life" of the 1996 Hong Kong Plenary Assembly, the Catholic Biblical Federation committed itself to "promoting the role of women in all activities of the Federation, and promoting the use of inclusive language in its activities at all levels" (8.1.8).<sup>1</sup>

1. As a contribution to a critical dialogue on and assimilation of the Final Statement, Fr. James Swetnam, S.J., of the Pontifical Biblical Institute has submitted some observations on this issue. He writes:

The present writer has no quarrels with the Federation's promoting the role of women in all activities of the Federation and doubts that anyone at the assembly had such quarrels. What is objectionable is

the linking of this laudable goal with the unqualified recommendation of inclusive language ...

The unqualified (i.e. without any restriction) recommendation of using inclusive language in order to promote the role of women in the activities of the Federation includes the recommendation of the use of inclusive language in translations of Scripture in order to promote the role of women in the activities of the Federation. I take this as an abuse. One makes a translation of Scripture to bring out the original meaning as best as possible to the people for whom the translation is destined, not to "promote" anything.

In what follows I shall consider inclusive language only with regard to English spoken in the United

States of America at the present time. I do not consider myself an authority on this subject, but I do feel qualified to point out various considerations, which perhaps are not without relevance to other languages.

Because the Federation is not competent to pass judgement on translations of Scripture, the declaration should at least be qualified to exclude Scripture.

What about the use of inclusive language outside of Scripture? Take the use of inclusive language in the liturgy. It is the prerogative of the Church to control the translations of liturgical texts, so here again there is question of competency. The Federation should at least qualify its promotion of inclusive language for the liturgy by recognizing the role of legitimate authority in fixing liturgical texts.

There is one final consideration which I think worth mentioning. The Catholic Biblical Federation has a certain monopoly as the Catholic Church's universal umbrella organization for promoting the pastoral use of the Bible in the entire world. The Federation should therefore make itself as accessible as possible to everyone who wishes to take part in this goal. Now there are any number of persons in the United States of America, women as well as men, who have strong reservations about the unqualified "promotion of inclusive language at all levels". It would seem much more fitting for this reason alone that the Federation take no stand as regards inclusive (or exclusive) language, and let persons in the United States of America handle this problem on an *ad hoc* basis.

In summary, I think that the statement 8.1.8 as it stands should be eliminated from the official policy of the Catholic Biblical Federation as it applies to the United States of



America, at least until someone can offer a convincing rebuttal of the above arguments. And I think that some of the above arguments are valid universally, so that the simplest thing to do would be to delete the statement as it stands.

2. The issue of "inclusive language" is differently felt in different places, depending to a large extent on the characteristics of a given language. There is also the problem of the use of inclusive language in ordinary speech. Since Fr. Swetnam writes his observations from the perspective of the Church in the United States of America where the issue seems to be a major problem (though he feels that his views are relevant also for other languages and cultures), it may be useful to hear another voice from the United States of America.<sup>2</sup>

**Bishop Donald Trautman**, a Scripture scholar trained at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, now Bishop of Erie, and formerly Chairman of the US Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy writes in an article, *Criteria for the Evaluation of Inclusive Language Translations of Scriptural Texts Proposed for Liturgical Use*<sup>3</sup>:

Five historical developments have converged to present the Church in the United States today with an important and challenging pastoral concern.

- First, the introduction of the vernacular into the Church's worship has necessitated English translations of the liturgical books and of sacred scripture for use in the liturgy.

- Second, some segments of American culture have become increasingly sensitive to "exclusive language," i.e., language which seems to exclude the equality and dignity of each person regardless of race, gender, creed, age or ability.

- Third, there has been a noticeable loss of the sense of gram-

matical gender in American usage of the English language.

- Fourth, English vocabulary itself has changed so that words which once referred to all human beings are increasingly taken as gender-specific and, consequently, exclusive.

- Fifth, impromptu efforts at inclusive language, while pleasing to some, have often offended others who expect a degree of theological precision and linguistic or aesthetic refinement in the public discourse of the liturgy. Some impromptu efforts may also have unwittingly undermined essentials of Catholic doctrine.

To illustrate the fourth point, Bishop Trautman gives the following examples:

Words such as "men," "sons," "brothers," "brethren," "forefathers," "fraternity," and "brotherhood" which were once understood as inclusive generic terms, today are often understood as referring only to males. In addition, although certain uses of "he," "his," and "him" once were generic and included both men and women, in contemporary American usage these terms are often perceived to refer only to males. Their use has become ambiguous and is increasingly seen to exclude women.

It is significant to note that Bishop Trautman sees what is usually referred to as "the problem of inclusive language" as "an important and challenging pastoral concern"!

3. Fr. Swetnam does not object to promoting the role of women. What is objectionable to him is the linking of this laudable goal with the unqualified or unspecified recommendation of inclusive language at all levels in the second part of the relevant paragraph of the Hong Kong Final Statement. This, he says, includes translation of the Bible which would

amount to "instrumentalizing" it to promote the role of women.

Hence, some reflections on gender-related language in Scripture and on the hermeneutics of texts and documents of the Catholic Biblical Federation may be helpful.

**3.1 The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith** has worked out "Norms for the Translation of Biblical Texts for Use in the Liturgy," norms presented to the U.S. bishops by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Though not officially released, they have recently come to public knowledge through some reviews, e.g. in *AMERICA* published by the Jesuits and the internet. Here is the text:

1. "The church must always seek to convey accurately in translation the texts she has inherited from the biblical, liturgical and patristic tradition and instruct the faithful in their proper meaning.

2. The first principle with respect to biblical texts is that of fidelity to the words of the texts. Biblical translations should be faithful to the original language used by the human author in order to be understood by his intended reader. Every concept in the original text should be translated in its context. Above all, translations must be faithful to the sense of sacred Scripture understood as a unity and totality which finds its center in Christ, the son of God incarnated (cf. DV. III. and IV), as confessed in the creeds of the church.

3. The translation of Scripture should faithfully reflect the Word of God as expressed in the original human languages. It must be listened to in its time-conditioned, at times even inelegant, mode of human expression without "correction" or "improvement" in service of modern sensitivities.

- a) In liturgical translations or readings where the text is very uncertain or in which the meaning is very much disputed, the transla-



tion should be made with due regard to the Neo-Vulgate.

b) If explanations are deemed to be pastorally necessary or appropriate, they should be given in editorial notes, commentaries, homilies, etc.

4.1 The natural gender of persons in the Bible, including, when evident, the human author of various texts, must not be changed insofar as this is possible in the receptor language.

4.2 The grammatical gender of God, pagan deities, and angels and demons according to the original text must not be changed insofar as this is possible in the receptor language.

4.3 In fidelity to the inspired Word of God, the traditional biblical usage for naming the persons of the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is to be retained.

4.4 Similarly, in keeping with the church's tradition, the feminine and neuter pronouns are not to be used to refer to the person of the Holy Spirit.

4.5 There shall be no systematic substitution of the masculine pronoun or possessive adjective to refer to God in correspondence to the original text.

4.6 Kinship terms that are clearly gender specific, as indicated by the context, should be respected in translation.

5.0 Grammatical number and person of the original text ordinarily should be maintained.

6.1 Translation should strive to preserve the connotations as well as the denotation of words or expressions in the original and thus not preclude possible layers of meaning.

6.2 For example, where the New Testament or the church's tradition have interpreted certain texts

of the Old Testament in a Christological fashion, special care should be observed in the translation of these texts so that a Christological meaning is not precluded.

6.3 Thus, the word *man* in English should as a rule translate *adam* and *anthropos* since there is no synonym which effectively conveys the play between the individual, the collectivity, and the unity of the human family, so important, for example, for the expression of Christian doctrine and anthropology". (AMERICA August 16, 1997)

3.2 The issue of inclusive language is certainly a topic of relevance to and discussion among the **United Bible Societies' Translations Consultants**. So far, no normative rules have been issued of this type in the Guidelines for Interconfessional Collaboration in Translating the Bible. However, there does exist a practice which is gradually becoming solidified and coherent, although discussions, reflections, and differences of opinion continue. A summary of the present situation and climate may be found in the article by J.H. Harris, "Inclusive Language and the Names of God," in: *The Bible Translator – Practical Papers*, vol. 48 (1997) no. 2, pp. 207-217. "Most modern translations endeavor to avoid sexist language in any general reference to people... These kinds of choices in translation include

- avoiding the word "man" when women are included (e.g., Rom 9,20);
- avoiding male pronouns when the gender is not in focus (e.g., Mat 12,30);
- replacing male terms like "brothers" when, clearly, women are included (e.g., Rom 12,1)"

3.3 Keeping both the above mentioned guidelines and the ongoing discussion in mind, the following principles should be held as generally agreed upon:

### Preserving the sanctity of the truth

Our overarching concern in Bible translating is to preserve the sanctity of the truth of sacred Scripture by rendering the most accurate translation possible.

### Translating, not updating the Bible

We have to convey accurately in translation the texts the Church has inherited from the biblical, liturgical, and patristic tradition and instruct the faithful in their proper meaning.

The Bible is time-conditioned, so we cannot update it.

### A twofold fidelity (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* # 4)

We have to respect the original meaning. Biblical translations should be faithful to the original languages used by the human. Every concept in the original text should be translated in its context. Above all, translations must be faithful to the sense of sacred Scripture understood as a unity and totality, which finds its center in Christ, the Son of God Incarnate (cf. DV III and IV), as confessed in the creeds of the Church. The translation of Scripture should faithfully reflect the Word of God as expressed in the original human languages. It must be listened to in its time-conditioned, at times even inelegant, mode of human expression without "correction" or "improvement" to serve modern sensitivities. "The Bible was written in an androcentric environment. The translation must be in accordance with this fact, if the text is not to be manipulated".<sup>4</sup>

But we have also to think about how people understand the translation. Modern language is fluid and undergoes changes in nuance, some sensitivities grow that require periodic updates and revisions. Translations have to be



"faithful" to the readers' capacity to understand. If language changes, translations also have to change. The translations, however, have to preserve the original meaning, also the time-conditioned message.

There are two ways of translating: formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence. Both are based on sound linguistic principles.

### Using inclusive language

Bible translations should not be influenced by illegitimate intrusions of secular culture or by political or ideological agendas.

It is inappropriate to use inclusive language when it diminishes accuracy in the translation of the Bible. There are times when the use of inclusive language may enhance the accuracy of translations.

If a term in the original sense has an inclusive meaning (very often "brothers" in Paul), this meaning should be rendered; if a term was gender-related, the modern readers' should know, also in the translation, that it is gender-related. Commentaries and homilies have to explain the time-conditioned characteristics of the texts.

3.4 The Catholic Biblical Federation has not been insensitive to the "important and challenging pastoral concern" of the role of women in church and society and of inclusive language. Already six years before the Hong Kong Plenary Assembly, in its Bogotá Final Statement (1990), the Federation formulated the following recommendation on the role of women in the Church:

The lay people, and especially women, are going to have an important role in the life of the Church. Therefore, we strongly recommend the following:

- the Church and the biblical-pastoral work should assist in all efforts to emancipate women in the different countries, nations

and cultures. Prostitution and any other exploitation of women, such as in tourism, should be denounced in the name of God;

- women especially should be encouraged to become agents of the proclamation of the Word. They should be given the opportunity to take over responsible and leading positions in the biblical apostolate and in the Church. Women should be better represented in national and international commissions and also in the Federation itself;

- the Bible is very rich in texts dealing with women. These often unknown texts should be given back to the people of God, because the women of the Bible show the way to the Reign of God and throw light on the role of women today. Biblical texts that are hostile to women or stand in a very sexist or patriarchal tradition of interpretation should be proclaimed always with a critical comment made on them;

- women have to be involved in Bible translations and in the revisions of these translations as a guarantee that their needs will be heard.

The much shorter paragraph of the Hong Kong Final Statement of 1996 must be interpreted in the light and context of the document of 1990. This is all the more important since, unfortunately, in the discussion of the drafts of the Final Statement in Hong Kong there was not enough time to give all participants the chance to voice their opinion.

One of the obvious differences between the Statements of Bogotá and Hong Kong lies in the terms "we strongly recommend" (Bogotá) and "the Catholic Biblical Federation commits itself" (Hong Kong). Both terms are valid; they do not exclude each other but emphasize different aspects of the same reality. A strong

recommendation only makes sense if backed up by a firm commitment.

Regarding the areas in which the dignity of women must be promoted, the area of translating the Bible cannot be categorically excluded, as long as this is done responsibly, i.e. respecting the Bible as the sacred text and book of the Church and following the principles laid down by both linguistics and the sense of the faith of the Church.

□



<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. Schreiber, *Integrative Language and Its Use in Bible Translations*: BDV No. 42 (1997) 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> From the same letter: On the other hand, an example where inclusive language has been approved for a good reason is found in the words of consecration of the Mass, where the phrase "for you and for all men" has been officially changed in the United States of America, to the best of my knowledge, to "for you and for all". The use of the word "men" is unnecessary in view of

the original Greek of the New Testament. Its insertion in the original vernacular of the post-Conciliar period was undoubtedly occasioned by the desire to stress the universal applicability of Christ's redemptive death, which a literal translation of the Greek/Latin "many" would not have conveyed. The phrase "Christ died for all men", so common thirty years ago, can easily account for the use of the word "men". At that time the word could be taken as inclusive, but now no longer, for now there are enough persons to take it in an exclu-

sive sense to make its elimination advisable. But the exclusion of the word "men" is done because it could be misunderstood, not because inclusive language is being "promoted".

<sup>3</sup> Bishop Donald Trautman, former Chairman of the Bishops Committee on the Liturgy, *Criteria for the Evaluation of Inclusive Language Translations of Scriptural Texts Proposed for Liturgical Use*

<sup>4</sup> H. Schreiber, p. 20.

The God who is the liberator of Israel, the God who is companion, lover, friend, can at the same time express himself in the feminine. This Yahweh is a fruitful mother active and liberating, the woman who enters into friendship within the tent, the loving mother of our earliest days, sometimes the angry stepmother, often a silent companion, other times a strong word, a rock of self-esteem, often a trusting and shining guide. The Scriptures tell us and the Gospel shows that if we speak of God in one single way then we are guilty of idolatry and arrogance, we are attempting something absurd, something dead-ended. We cannot shut up the ocean in a thimble: how then can we claim to shut up God in a limited and univocal word?

Excerpt from: Mercedes Navarro Puerto, *Dios Padre-Madre en la historia de liberación del pueblo*, 1999



## Today's German Version "Gute Nachricht" - an Example of a Bible Translation in Inclusive Language

HELLMUT HAUG

*Bible translations with inclusive language are relatively rare in the Romance languages. In the Anglo-Saxon and German language realms, however, a number of Bible translations have appeared in the last two decades which have consciously endeavored to accurately translate gender-related terms into the modern languages. Of course translations of this kind are subject to marked differences in terms of the possibilities, the necessities and the problems specific to each language and culture. The fact that translations also exist that regard themselves as "spearheads of emancipation" and that occasionally take questionable liberties in rendering texts in no way detracts from the effort, the seriousness and the quality of competent inclusive language Bible translations.*

*Among such serious translations in the Anglo-Saxon realm we could mention among others: NJB: The New Jerusalem Bible (1985), ICB: International Children's Bible (1986). NCV: New Century Version (1987), NAB: New American Bible (revised 1988, 1990), REB: Revised English Bible (1989), NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989), GNB/TEV: Good News Bible / Today's English Version (1992), GW: God's Word (1995), CEV: Contemporary English Version, Inclusive Language Edition (1996), NIRV: New International Reader's Version (1996).*

*In German translation such an effort may be seen, among others, in the "Neue Gute Nachricht" edition. In the following article, the possibilities and limits of translation in the tension between original text and modern text will be illustrated. With every problem peculiar to a given language, the reflections on translation principles, on idiom and on the function of translations are concerns that transcend any particular culture or language.*

*The author, Dr. Hellmut Haug, is a Protestant theologian and one of the translators of the "Neue Gute Nachricht".*

**B**ible translators around the world today are reacting to the transformed self-understanding of women who are no longer willing to be rated as second-class human beings (the "weaker sex") or to allow their development or their role in society to be obstructed by male supremacy. It is true that particular biblical expressions could and can be appealed to in support of the traditional understanding of the women's role; but in the meantime we have also come to recognize that these expressions cannot be isolated from the witness of Holy Scripture taken as a whole. Particularly in the words of Jesus and of Paul we find impulses for a true equality of status and respect for women – impulses that challenge established societal values and that for a long time have received too little attention, under the influence of a patriarchal society.

If, then, we take women's questions seriously today in the churches, we are not simply reacting to a contemporary trend, to a "phenomenon of fashion", rather we are being reminded of our own roots. That this reminder comes to us from the outside, as a consequence of developments in secular society, does not justify closing ourselves off to it; if anything, we should regret having been so slow to develop seeds of a social transformation found already in our own Christian sources.

Even the original translators of the Gute-Nachricht-Bibel (Today's German Version of 1982) had to be reminded that they had fallen victim to androcentric speech habits and prejudices. The translation policy employed by them, which preferred an equivalency approach to a literal rendering (i.e., dynamic or functional equivalence, rather than formal correspondence) had led to a situation in which the male-centered perspectives sometimes became even more blatant than they were in traditional translations. When, for ex-



ample, "father and mother" are rendered together as "parents", or "sons and daughters" as "children", be-

## We take women's questions seriously today in the churches, we are not simply reacting to a contemporary trend, to a "phenomenon of fashion", rather we are being reminded of our own roots

cause today we tend to avoid ponderous coordinated pairs and prefer inclusive generic terms, women are thereby "rendered invisible" and a male-centered prejudice reinforced. It should also be mentioned that the 1982 translation tended toward a certain prudery that could have made women feel discriminated against in terms of the integrity of their bodily being – such as when we used a circumlocution to avoid speaking of a "mother's womb and mother's breasts" in the blessing over Joseph in Gen 49:25.

On the other hand, the Today's German Version was untrue to its own principles when it held to the traditional masculine rendering of inclusive forms and had Paul address his letters to "brothers". It is well-known, if still too seldom observed, that the Greek plural form *adelphoi* can have an inclusive sense, one that includes women, and that the term does in fact most often have this meaning in Paul's letters. (Cf. Phil 4:1-2, where Paul begins a comprehensive admonition addressed to the "brothers", and immediately, in the next sentence, focuses more narrowly on two women, who are not getting on together!)

The publishers responsible for Today's German Version, the (Protestant) Bible Societies and the Catholic Biblical Associations in German-speaking areas, decided for this reason, in the course of a scheduled revision of the translation, to employ even more carefully the "functional equivalence" principle, and to pay due attention to the perspective of a language that includes women. The result appeared in 1997 as the "Gute Nachricht Bibel" published by the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft (German Bible Society) in Stuttgart. (Besides the author of this article, two other male translators participated at a primary level, but a good number of exegetical experts as well as theologically trained women were employed as advisors).

### Possibilities and limitations of inclusive forms

How did the revisers approach the task of an "inclusive" translation and what were some of the things they experienced along the way? Let us begin with the already alluded to example of "brothers". The first thing that had to be done was to determine which passages actually called for an inclusive sense. It was never a question of mechanically inserting "sisters" into each and every text that employed the term "brothers"; that would have been pure ideology. A translation that speaks to people is not one that adapts the biblical text to contemporary thought habits; rather it is one that aims to bring to expression as clearly as possible, in contemporary terminology, what the text actually says in its original formulation. Basic exegetical work was needed here.

The participation of women in ecclesial life, their important role in the Pauline communities, is a fact that emerges with all desirable clarity from the greeting lists of the Letter to the Romans (Rom 16). The real question then was this: in what specific passages are men only intended? They are, e.g., clearly and exclusively in view in the pericope of 1 Thess 4:1-8 (where in one verse the wives of the addressees are alluded to). When, however, in the immediately following verse, 4:9, Paul speaks of "brotherly love", the term can only have an inclusive meaning.

A number of possibilities are available for an inclusive rendering. The most obvious, in German, would have been the term "Geschwister" (which means brothers and sisters); but the expression is customary only in Christian circles. So all that was left was a two-member, disjunctive form. Modern conventions of politeness would require in this case that the female member come first: "sisters and brothers". The revisers decided for the opposite order, however, because they did not wish to obscure the fact that for Paul the precedence of the male is taken for granted (cf. 1 Cor 11:3!). The order "brother, sister" corresponds, in fact, to the one text in which the double-member expression occurs within the (Greek) New Testament itself (James 2:15), and also to the procedure followed by the New Revised Standard Version and the Revised English Bible. Today's German Version, like the first named English Version, adds a reassuring note, which does not, however, as does the note in this English Bible, read "literally: brothers" (Gk *brothers*), since that is incorrect. A note of this kind, moreover, raises the suspicion of translator manipulation because it obscures the fact that the Greek *adelphoi* literally means "brothers" or "brothers and sisters". And it is precisely this latter point that is made by the foot-note in the German translation.



While the inclusive understanding in the case of "brothers" (*adelphoi*) is linguistically certain and generally recognized, from the point of view of content firm conclusions may also be drawn, in other cases, from historical circumstances. For example, in the paraenesis addressed to slaves and masters women also have to be included, since it is certain that there were female slaves as well as slave mistresses (e.g., Lydia in Philippi). Nor has anyone ever asserted that women are excluded from the expression "sons of God" in Matt 5:9 or Gal 4:5. The masculine form in this case stands for the genderless form of angelic existence proper to the children of the resurrection (Lk 20:36). It is also required by the ancient inheritance laws as well as – but even purely grammatically! – by the parallel to Christ as "Son" (see Rom 8:14-17 and especially Gal 4). In these cases a footnote: "literally: sons" is appropriate.

There is some debate over the question of whether there were female "disciples" of the earthly Jesus. Undoubtedly there were women who followed Jesus; this is why feminist theologians argue strongly that these women should be placed on an equal footing with the male disciples and that the plural "disciples" must have an inclusive sense. Now it is perfectly clear that this is the case in the terminology of the Acts of the Apostles, where all members of the community are referred to as "disciples" (e.g., Acts 6:1, 7; 9:1, 19), because the term "Christians" was not yet in use (cf. Acts 11:26). But it is precisely from Luke that we learn that this situation cannot be read back into the time before Easter and Pentecost. The conditions of discipleship formulated by the earthly Jesus and which even Luke the "friend of women" cites unaltered in 14:26f, are clearly addressed to men, who are required to leave behind wife and children. This exclusive sense is connected with the fact that the disciples,

whom Jesus calls to follow him, are being called for the function of witness, from which women were excluded on the basis of Jewish law. It is apparently for this reason that in the much cited passage of Lk 8:1-3, where he explicitly speaks of women who follow Jesus, Luke avoids disciple terminology and sees the women in the function of "service", that is, of concern for bodily well-being and (presupposing here women of some means) of financial support.

This gave us a clear blueprint for the revision. It is to be noted of course that in the introduction to the sermon on the plain Luke names a three-layered audience that anticipates the relationships in the Acts of the Apostles: the Twelve Apostles, the crowds of "disciples", and the great throngs of outsiders, to which the apostolic witness that emanates from Jesus is addressed (cf. Acts 5:12-16 and the situation of the Pentecost sermon in 2:14, compared with 1:13ff). By means of this arrangement Luke wishes to make clear that the directives of Jesus here given are valid precisely for the post-Easter community. In order to reflect this nuance, Today's German Version proceeds with carefully nuanced distinctions at 6:17; it does not speak of female disciples (*Jüngerinnen*) as in the Acts of the Apostles, but instead it says: "a great crowd of his disciples, men and woman, had come together" (with a footnote). On the other hand, for the commissioning scene in Matt 28:19, where in Greek we find only the verb "to make disciples" (in fact literally: "to disciple!"), we employ the post-Easter terminology without reservation: "make all people my disciples" (in German: "meine Jüngern und Jüngerinnen").

A delicate and fiercely debated point are the terms used for God. The biblical image of God has a "male" stamp, though of course this

is a manhood that is far removed from any macho image. As Father, God is he who is merciful and loving; and motherly traits are also ascribed to him (Is 49:15; 66:13). But this does not give us the right, e.g. in the Our Father, to substitute "mother" for "father" or to employ an expression like "father-mother". We even had to ask something of women with our difficult decision to retain the term "Lord" as a substitute for the circumlocution of the Old Testament name for God (the so-called tetragram JHWH, pronounced Jehovah or Yahweh).

However unfortunate this accepted rendering may appear to be from today's perspective, it is so firmly anchored not only in the entire translation tradition, but above all in the New Testament itself that its replacement would have had the effect of tearing the two testaments apart. It was, after all, only this rendering of the Greek term *kyrios* that

A Bible translation is neither a "spearhead of emancipation", nor should make access to the text needlessly difficult for women

enabled the New Testament authors to claim that expressions about the God of Israel had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the "Lord". This happens, for example, with the prophetic word of Joel 3:5 "whoever calls on the name of *the Lord* will be saved", as cited in important New Testament passages (Acts 2:16ff in context and alongside the core expression in 4:12; Rom 10:9-13), though this is often not recognized even by Bible translators and



Christian interpreters. (The very free "Hoffnung für alle" translation inscribes this misunderstanding firmly in Rom 10:12; it does so by adding the word "God", against what is clearly suggested by the context; instead of "the same is Lord of all", namely Christ, we find here: "God is one and the same Lord"!)

Today's German Version retains the term "Lord", but wherever it stands for the Tetragram in the Old Testament, it is written in small-capital script (so LORD, German: HERR), as is also done in the revised Luther Bible. For some women who do not understand this as a "signal", the offense is simply aggravated by this device. But it is absolutely necessary to call attention to the improper sense of Lord, the substitute character of this word, and to distinguish clearly between the divine name and the Hebrew term *adonai*, which actually expresses the lordship of God.

### Linguistic strategies

Naturally, a great many individual problems could still be enumerated. To be even half complete, how-

ever, a few linguistic strategies that were adopted should be mentioned in closing. One problem are the plural forms for groups of persons, which formerly one could assume were understood in an inclusive sense, but today are increasingly taken otherwise. This occurs above all in occupational terms and in designations of peoples. Here, for stylistic reasons, the translation must rely on the old inclusive meaning. We refuse, for example, to speak continuously of Jews and Jewesses, or, in German, "Griechen und Griechinnen", etc. and the division of the community into "Christen und Christinnen" is even theologically problematical. Only in those places where the highlighting of women is appropriate – as in the case of slaves and (in a limited way) disciples – do we use the cumbersome double-term expressions.

Even expressions such as "everyone" (German: *jeder*), "everyone, who" (German: *jeder, der*) or "whoever... he" (German: *wer.. der*) for example constitute a problem in the romance languages as well as in German. Today women increasingly feel themselves excluded by

such expressions. It is no solution here to always avoid the problem by resorting to a plural form ("all who..."). Other means are available, e.g. the masculine form ("he who") can be blunted by suppressing the corresponding, and more pointedly masculine "he": "one (he) who digs a grave for others will (himself) fall into it" (Prov 26:27).

A text need not stand out as being "gender-inclusive"; the more unobtrusive inclusive language is the better. A bible translation is not a "spearhead of emancipation", as some feminists demand that it be with their call for a totally purified language. It should not however make access to the text needlessly difficult for women either. The churches owe women some amends. This is not a matter of trendy adaptation or accommodation, but a matter of justice, both in terms of contents and of language. The goal is: equal rights of access for men and women, and the respecting of rights that so many biblical texts, rightly understood, grant to women.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)





Catholic Diocese of Kumasi  
Biblical Apostolate- Diocesan  
Pastoral Centre  
P.O. Box 5624  
Kumasi  
Ghana  
Tel.: +233-(0)51-279 55  
Fax: +233-(0)51-243 61

## Africa

### Biblical Pastoral Ministry in the Diocese of Kumasi, Ghana

On 19-20 February 2000 the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the biblical pastoral ministry in Kumasi diocese will be celebrated. Gatherings will take place in different parishes and input will be given by a core team consisting of members of the Diocesan Pastoral Institute. Most of the speeches and discussions will be in Twi, the local vernacular. Liturgical celebrations in Ashanti style are planned. The biblical apostolate has really 'caught on' in Ghana during the past 20 years and is bearing wonderful fruit today.

The **2-year Basic Biblical Formation Program** is a Bible course intended to introduce the faithful to Sacred Scripture and the Christian Life. The weekend (once a month for 20 weekends, spread over two years) participants spend 16 hours hearing, pondering and sharing the Word of God. Bible topics are treated alongside Christian Life topics.

The methods used include lectures, demonstration, small group and class discussions, role plays, readings assignments, reports on parish projects, the use of TV and video shows and resource persons. By the end of the seventh session, participants have been introduced to the Nature of the Bible, Salvation History, Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church (Dei Verbum), literary forms and methods of Bible study and gospel sharing. During the weekends, participants are guided to lead prayer sessions and prepare the liturgy.

### Dei Verbum Course Ghana in the year 2000

The SVD will mark the celebration of the year 2000 in Ghana by organizing a biblical course modeled after the Nemi Dei Verbum Course called Dei Verbum

A very important feature of the program is the collaboration with Parish Priests. Participants are recommended for formation by their Parish Priests who are also consulted at the end of the program, to ascertain whether the participants are to be graduated and commissioned by the Bishop.

The **Diocesan Biblical Formators Program (DBFP)** accompanies the graduates of the Basic Biblical Formators Program during their work in the parishes. Using the Lectionary, commentaries and study notes, participants are helped at their monthly meetings to prepare the Sunday Gospel-sharing groups in their parishes. The main objective of the DPFP is to offer spiritual enrichment and formation to our people and to help them pray with the Church.

Graduates meet twice a year – in May and November – to deepen their knowledge of the Scriptures and to evaluate their performance. Emphasis is laid on prayerful reading of the Word of God. At the end of these follow-up meetings graduates resolve to implement aspects of final statements of either the Catholic Biblical Federation or Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar which concern the lives and needs of the people of God in the Diocese.

Formation remains the most important activity of the biblical pastoral ministry in Kumasi.

Course Ghana 2000. This course will take place from September 1 to October 13, 2000 (40 days).

Divine Word Missionaries-  
Ghana Province  
P.O. Box 3285  
Accra  
Ghana  
Tel.: +233-(0)21-66 78 36  
Fax: +233-(0)21-23 03 05  
E-Mail: hans@ghana.com



## Asia

### Third South Asian Workshop, Bangalore

National Biblical Catechetical  
and Liturgical Centre  
(NBCLC)  
Hutchins Road 2<sup>nd</sup> Cross  
Post Bag 8426  
Bangalore – 560 084  
India  
Tel.: +91-(0)80-547 23 69  
Fax: +91-(0)80-546 01 94  
E-Mail: dirnbclc@vsnl.com  
E-Mail: theckan@vsnl.com

From 4 to 6 December 1999 the Third Asian Workshop, on the theme "Journeying with the Word of God in a Pluralistic World" took place in Bangalore, India. The conference was held at the NBCLC (National Biblical Catechetical & Liturgical Centre) and delegates from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka were in attendance, together with the coordinators of the Asian subregions and the General Secretary of the Federation.

The theme of the Workshop, "Journeying with the Word of God in a Pluralistic World", was consciously chosen in view of the upcoming Plenary Assembly of the Federation in Lebanon in the Year 2002. A number of group and panel discussions were devoted to this theme. The main papers for the workshop had to do with the areas of inculturation, Christianity in a multi-religion context,

challenges of the Biblical apostolate ("The Asian Image of Jesus", by Jacob Theckanath; "Bible and World Religions - Perspectives on Biblical Ministry in the Pluralistic Context of South Asia - Challenges for the Third Millennium", by Paul Puthanangady) in the preparation process for the coming Plenary Assembly and they treated these important topics from a south Asian perspective.

In their reports, the participants in the workshop provided insight into the work of the institutions they represent, into the situation of the Biblical apostolate of their respective countries and into the situation of the local churches of the South Asian subregion.

In connection with the preparation for the upcoming Plenary Assembly important texts from this and from other workshops will be made available at a later time in the Bulletin Dei Verbum.

## Europe

### Meeting of the Latin European Subregion in Luxembourg

REPORT BY IRENE VEGA

From 8 to 11 October 1999 the yearly meeting of the Latin European Subregion of the Catholic Biblical Federation was held in Luxembourg. Representatives from Luxembourg, Italy, France, Great Britain, and the General Secretary of the Federation took part. Once again the representatives from Lebanon and from the United States made it to our meeting.

The Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Luxembourg described for us the situation of the Biblical apostolate in his small country. Of the 40,000 inhabitants 90% are Catholic, but only 15% are practicing Catholics. Secularization has left deep traces in its wake. Ten lay persons in the Luxembourg Catholic Church are involved in the Biblical apostolate.

There is no highly developed "Bible Culture" in Luxembourg. In a country that did not know the Reformation and that lived the Counter-Reformation in an intense way such a culture has always been an object of suspicion. This meant that the Bible was not traditionally employed in salvation-historical perspective but served rather as a source for educational literature and moralizing readings.

Only in the last few years has the Bible increasingly begun to be read in common (a third of the population are not native Luxembourgers). In 1990 the Service Biblique Diocésain was founded. This institution has played an important role in promoting Bible reading in the country.

The activities of the different countries of the Subregion are very varied. The major-

Service Biblique Diocésain  
Grand Séminaire  
de Luxembourg  
52, rue Jules-Wilhelm  
L- 2728 Luxembourg  
Tel.: +3 52-43 60 51 331  
+3 52-43 60 51 40  
Fax: +3 52-42 31 03  
E-Mail:  
thomas.osborne@ci.culture.lu



ity of them run schools for fundamental and adult education in the Biblical field (Loreto and La Verna in Italy, Los Angeles in the USA, a summer course in Catalonia, etc.). Many countries of the Subregion have publications for the Biblical Apostolate, organize conferences, exhibitions on the topic of the Bible, etc.

On Saturday evening we introduced various activities on the subject of the Jubilee Year. The Plenary Assembly of Hong Kong had called on the participants to take up the theme of debt remission. The Service Biblique Diocésain of Luxembourg was particularly engaged in this area (participation in the national platform on debt remission and publication of a book on the subject).

On Sunday some time was left for debating topics that had been suggested by

the participants (Bible and world, Bible and multimedia), and attention was given to preparations for the next scheduled meeting of the Federation, to take place from 6 to 8 October 2000 in Portugal. This meeting will be devoted above all to the following question: Is there a biblical spirit that pervades the whole apostolate? Do our countries really have ministers of the Word? A program will be sent to all members in preparation for the meeting. At the meeting in Portugal members will also put forward suggestions for the Plenary Assembly in Lebanon.

The Luxembourg meeting once again provided an interesting opportunity to exchange projects and to bring mutual support and strength to each other in our common dedication to the spread of God's Word.

#### **From the Swiss Catholic Biblical Association**

Besides the various courses for the deaneries, ongoing education for catechists, etc., a central concern in the past year has been the education of those responsible for Bible course and education work. For eight weekends, of two and a half days each, twenty three Federation members met to discuss knowledge of the Bible as well as methodological competence in the area of education work with adults. "Common reading and living of the Bible" was a good experience, characterized by a broad spectrum of exegetical approaches, texts, adult orientated methods. For each weekend, different speakers were available.

The cooperation of the Swiss Catholic Bible Agency with the German and Austrian Bible Agencies is of inestimable value for the production of periodicals, and thus for a vital part of our Bible Agency work. The circulation projected on the basis of this cooperation as well as the professional quality of the work in Stuttgart have made possible three high-quality products in the periodicals "Bibel heute", "Bibel und Kirche" and "Welt und Umwelt der Bibel". The demand for written documentation in the field of Bible work is considerable.

The Biblical Association (SKB) was commissioned to write an article on faith-filled Bible reading for material to be sent out to all parishes, spiritual directors, religious communities, etc. on the vocation apostolate on the topic "Spiritual Places and Ways of Experiencing God". Life-experiences from various regions of the Federation had an input here; without the work of the Federation this article would never have been possible. From the Jewish tradition, the article called attention to the "Mystique of Reading and Learning". From the encounter with liberation-theological Bible readings in Latin America and with Carlos Mesters came the impulse for the article "Mystique of Real Life and of Action", and the encounter with Asia and Maria Ko was the impulse for "Mystique of Silence and of Openness to the Infinite". A contribution was also made to *Lectio Divina*, inspired by Cardinal Martini and Bishop Egger, and attention was also called to a form of common Bible reading that has been developed and tested in the Philippines by L. Feldkämper.

**Bibelpastorale Arbeitsstelle (SKB)**  
 Bederstr. 76  
 8002 Zurich  
 Switzerland  
 Tel.: +41-(0)1-202 66 74  
 Fax: +41-(0)1-201 43 07  
 E-Mail:  
 bibelpastoral@bluewin.ch

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## Bible Translations

### First Catholic Version of the Bible in Nepali

The history of this first Catholic version dates back to the late sixties when Fr. F. Farrell, sj, arrived in Singamari, North Point to take up translation work into Nepali. After his death in 1990 the other members of the translation team continued the translation work and now the complete Bible in Nepali has been published. In this issue various memory-aids have been included for most of the seventy-three books, including an introduction and outline for each book and various drawings and maps.

Bellarmino Institute of Language  
Convent Road  
Darjeeling-734101  
India

### Bible in Kikongo

An new edition of the Bible in Kikongo, MPOV'A NZAMBI, has been published by Verbum Bible. Kikongo is a language spoken by over two million inhabitants in the Congo. For further information please contact:

VERBUM BIBLE  
B.P. 7463  
Kinshasa  
Rép. Dém. Congo



The Catholic Biblical Federation (*CBF*) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to ministry to the Word of God. At the present time, the *CBF* membership includes 90 full members and 217 associate members coming from a total of 126 countries.

The activities of these organizations include the preparation of Catholic and interconfessional Bible translations, the propagation of Bibles and in general the promotion of a deeper understanding of the Holy Scripture.

The *CBF* promotes the biblical pastoral activities of these organizations, provides a forum for the world-wide sharing of experiences in the field, searches for new ways of bringing the joy of God's Word to the faithful throughout the world. The Federation seeks collaboration with the representatives of biblical scholarship as well as with Bible Societies of various confessions.

In particular, the *CBF* works toward the promotion of the reading of the Bible within the context of concrete life situations and the training of ministers of the Word in this direction.

The ministry to the Word of God is ministry to the unity of and communication between human beings. A world which grows together with the help of modern communications and yet continues to show signs of hate and destruction needs more than ever words of peace and of fellowship with God and with each other.

**Wilhelm Egger, Bishop of Bozen-Brixen, President of the CBF**