



Bauckham, Richard

Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels

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Sharyn Dowd
Baylor University
Waco, TX 76798

Bauckham's method in this study is an eclectic combination of "historically rigorous and imaginatively literary" approaches. He is interested both in historical and in literary questions: "What happened, how the text constructs its literary version of what happened, and how the text invites us to read its narrative are all important, and the first is certainly not accessible at all without attention to the others" (xviii). Perhaps inevitably, given the paucity of historical data, the literary arguments are more persuasive than the often-speculative historical reconstructions.

For example, the careful literary argument that the women in Matthew's genealogy are included because they are Gentiles (ch. 2) and the reading of Elizabeth and Mary in Luke 1 in the context of intertextual echoes and literary foreshadowing (ch. 3) are both more persuasive than the historical argument that "Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza" (Luke 8:3) is the same person as Junia, who, with her husband Andronicus, were "prominent among the apostles," according to Rom 16:7 (ch. 5). It must be added, however, that Bauckham's analysis of the Junia reference is the most comprehensive and persuasive to date; Junia is a woman's name, and Paul does identify her as an apostle (165–86).

There is no denying that it is possible that Mary the wife of Clopas (John 19:25) was the companion of her husband (also called Cleopas) on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:18). It is possible that Jesus had a sister named Salome and a disciple by the same name (ch. 7). Many things are possible that, as Bauckham admits, can never be established beyond the status of speculation. So why spill so much ink on the arguments? The answer is probably to be found in Bauckham's interest in undermining the scholarly tendency to view the various New Testament traditions in isolation from each other—a project reflected in *The Gospel for all Christians* (Eerdmans, 1998).

In the eighth and final chapter Bauckham argues for the credibility of the Gospel resurrection narratives. He finds a threefold pattern common to the resurrection narratives of Matthew, Luke, and John: (1) the tomb is found empty; (2) Jesus appears, usually to a woman or women; (3) Jesus appears and delivers some sort of commission to an apostolic group. Bauckham thinks it probable that the longer ending of Mark was added because this was the expected pattern (265). Two aspects of this chapter merit special mention.

Pointing out that the common observation that women's witness was not accepted in courts of law is not particularly relevant because of the absence in the resurrection narratives of forensic motifs, Bauckham calls attention to the prejudice against women's reliability as it relates specifically to religion, in particular to the reception of revelations from God. Both Pseudo-Philo and *Numbers Rabbah* retell biblical stories in ways that show men disbelieving women's reports of divine revelation and objecting that such revelation should be given to men rather than to women (270–77). This motif is present in Luke, but treated negatively by the Evangelist, and completely reversed in Matthew, where the women are believed by the eleven, who immediately act on the instructions they receive from the women. Drawing upon his analysis of Luke 8:1–3 in chapters 5 and 7, Bauckham argues further that Luke's narrative as a whole would lead the audience to assume that the women were part of the group of “the eleven and their companions” (11:33) to whom the risen Christ appeared and who witnessed his ascension.

Perhaps the most potentially fruitful part of this volume is the first chapter, in which Bauckham lays out his hermeneutical program: a *via media* between a thoroughgoing hermeneutic of suspicion and an accommodation to the androcentric orientation of the biblical texts. In a detailed study of the book of Ruth, he tries to demonstrate what he calls “the canonical role of gynocentric texts” (12). This does not mean that “the scriptural exceptions to androcentrism” should become “a ‘canon within the canon’—even for women.” Rather, the role of “gynocentric” texts becomes that of “relativizing or correcting precisely [the] androcentrism” of the majority of canonical witnesses. “Rather than viewing these texts as surprising survivors of the attempt to suppress such

[gynocentric] literature, we may reasonably suppose that the importance of women in the grassroots processes of canonical selection led to their inclusion precisely as women's literature, in order to counterbalance the andocentrism of the rest of Scripture" (15–16). This proposal will appeal neither to post-Christian feminists nor to adherents of misogynist fundamentalism, but it may provide a way forward for readers who want to combine a high view of Scripture with a rejection of androcentric bias in interpretation.