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Bauckham, Richard

Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels

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Kenneth D. Litwak
Trinity College
Bristol, England

Eschewing both traditional, androcentric readings of references to named women in the Gospels and feminist readings that treat the Gospels as hopelessly androcentric and hostile to women, Bauckham seeks to read narratives in the canonical Gospels of named women from a gynocentric (woman's) perspective, seeking to uncover all that may be known of these women and to show their role within the narrative and in the early Christian communities. Bauckham's study is a model of careful textual and historical analysis that touches on many related issues along the way. Bauckham is not arguing for a specific thesis as such but treats each named woman on her own terms, forming a "series of deep probes" (xvii). Bauckham asserts that inadequate attention has been paid to evidence from Second Temple Judaism regarding women, and he seeks to remedy this through "painstaking historical work." For example, Bauckham frequently makes reference to *Pseudo-Philo*, which he contends has been largely ignored in relation to the study of women as illuminated through Second Temple texts. His work is informed by intertextuality and the distinction between androcentric and gynocentric perspectives in narratives, as presented by feminist scholars studying the Old Testament. Bauckham suggests the notion of a gynocentric reading of a biblical text, which is authorized by an otherwise androcentric text. This perspective may be liberating for both women and men

in opening new possibilities for the reading of gynocentric narratives, according to Bauckham.

Bauckham sets out his approach and presuppositions through an analysis of the book of Ruth in chapter 1. Bauckham affirms the results of recent studies on Ruth that the story speaks with a feminine voice, giving an Israelite woman's perspective on ancient Israelite society. This is true throughout Ruth, except for the genealogy at the end, which speaks with a male voice. Bauckham argues that the book of Ruth can play a crucial role in forming a feminist canonical hermeneutic that accepts the normative function of canon while resisting the androcentricity of much canonical literature. Seen from a gynocentric perspective, the social structures evident in Ruth are made to work to the advantage of women and are not as patriarchal as they may otherwise appear. The value of the book of Ruth, for Bauckham, lies in making visible what is usually invisible. Naomi and Ruth, rather than being exceptions to the rule, are examples of the Israelite rule that can only be seen if the book is read from a gynocentric perspective. Dealing with the genealogy at the end of Ruth, Bauckham argues that the male voice in the genealogy does not serve to undermine the female perspective of the narrative but "to be exposed by the female voice of the narrative as pitifully inadequate in its androcentric selectivity" (11). The conclusion of Ruth tells the kind of story that official, masculine history omits. The genealogy provides the book a setting within the canon, yet by making visible what is invisible, readers are invited to supply what is elsewhere omitted or suppressed. Ruth, with its gynocentric perspective, enables readers to expose the androcentric perspective of other texts and thus not miss or be content with the androcentrism of other texts. The female voice and gynocentric perspective may also be found in many scriptural texts in which the dominant perspective is more or less androcentric, including the New Testament Gospels. Bauckham states that his proposal for a canonical role for "scriptural exceptions to androcentrism amounts to privileging these texts for a certain purpose" (15). This does not result in establishing a canon with the canon. Rather, it means that gynocentric texts have the role of relativizing or correcting specifically the androcentrism of androcentric texts, not in overturning androcentric texts in every respect. This enables the canon to correct androcentrism in Jewish Christian thought and practice, instead of promoting such androcentrism.

In chapter 2 Bauckham discusses the role of women in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, arguing that Matthew saw each of the four women (not including Mary) as Gentiles and that through this Matthew expressed the idea that the Messiah is for all peoples, not only Israel. He discusses the details of how Rahab the harlot was seen in some Jewish traditions as the wife of Salma. Matthew (or more likely a tradition that Matthew received) carried out ingenious but not uncommon exegesis in order to make this identification. The identification of the women in Matthew's genealogy and the

significance of this for Matthew's presentation of Jesus as Messiah are important when reading the story of the "Canaanite woman" in Matt 15, which likewise challenges Jewish exclusivism. Bauckham suggests that the Canaanite woman, who could be a new Rahab, is encountering the Messiah, who could be a new Joshua. Like Rahab, the Canaanite woman represents the first exception to the policy regarding Canaanites. Through her, "Matthew seems to be indicating that the Canaanite woman's precedent is not to be an isolated exception but the beginning of the messianic blessing of the nations" (45). In this as on other matters, Bauckham presents detailed discussion of the available data but presents his conclusions cautiously when he does not see the data as allowing for certainty. The genealogy shows this to be consistent with the nature of Jesus' Davidic messiahship. In the following chapter, Bauckham treats Elizabeth and Mary in Luke 1:5-80.

Chapter 4 concerns Anna in Luke 2, showing that, contra Raymond Brown and others, Anna's membership in the tribe of Asher would not have been puzzling to a competent first-century reader of Luke's narrative. Bauckham argues that Anna most probably belonged to a family that lived in the Median Diaspora, drawing a possible connection between Anna's name and the story of Tobit. Anna's presence in Luke's narrative signifies that all of Israel, including the northern tribes and exiles, participate in the messianic hopes described by Luke. Discussing Joanna in chapter 5, Bauckham asserts that in Luke's narrative Jesus has two groups of close followers: the twelve and the women. Joanna provided financial support for Jesus and the twelve; Luke does not present her as performing domestic duties for Jesus and the twelve. Joanna was most likely from an elite Galilean Jewish family and married a Nabatean who held a very prominent position in Herod's court. After showing that Junia is a female apostle, Bauckham presents the historical conjecture that Joanna was also Junia. He says that this conjecture is at least as plausible as many commonly held views in biblical studies.

Bauckham argues in chapter 6 that a surprisingly large amount of reliable historical information is available regarding Mary of Clopas. This information may contribute to our understanding of both the role of Jesus' relatives in the early church and the role of women in the early church. Mary could have been the wife or unmarried daughter of Clopas, but the latter possibility should be rejected because, according to Bauckham, an unmarried woman would not be allowed in so public a place as at the cross of Jesus. Contrary to most of the rest of the book, Bauckham bases this assertion on secondary literature only, and the actual evidence for this is debatable. Clopas is likely the father of Simon, who succeeded James, the brother of Jesus, as the leader of the church, and the first readers of John's Gospel would have had no difficulty in identifying Mary of Clopas as Simon's mother. Bauckham next seeks to distinguish Salome, Jesus' sister, from Salome, Jesus' disciple, and examine the tradition concerning the latter in early Christian

literature, challenging Morton Smith's view of Salome in the *Secret Gospel of Mark* (ch. 7).

The final chapter addresses the issue of the credibility of the women as witnesses to the resurrection. Bauckham notes that, since the testimony of women was generally considered unreliable, it is crucial to assess the significance given to the women by all four canonical Gospels as witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. He concludes that the women were considered important sources of testimony and tradition in the early church and played an important role in proclaiming the resurrection alongside the apostles.

This book provides a wealth of historical detail and interacts with a wide spectrum of scholarship, both feminist and otherwise. While one may not agree with every detail of Bauckham's suggestions, he has placed an onus on those who would disagree to produce a similarly close reading of the text with detailed attention to Second Temple evidence. Readers will find *Gospel Women* well worth reading. One small nuisance is that Bauckham ought to choose whether to use "Hebrew Bible," "Old Testament," or "Scriptures of Israel" and stick with that, instead of going back and forth, most often using "Hebrew Bible/Old Testament." While this may be done in order not to offend anyone, this approach is less than satisfactory; he ought to decide which one is most appropriate.