Nameless Women in the Canonical Gospels

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1. Nameless Characters: The Scope of the Investigation

Historically, narrative analysis has long focused on the main character along with the leading characters. The interest shown in the so-called "minor characters" is recent. What is the ground for this change in perspective? It has been observed that minor characters play a far from secondary role in the strategy of a story because they make identification by readers much easier as well as more advantageous. Thus, these characters are the product of a clear narrative choice, which therefore should not be considered "minor."

How can we define a "minor" character? The definitions devised by scholars are so diverse[1] that in this essay I address the feature of the "nameless character" with particular regard to the female characters. Accordingly, this analysis pursues a threefold objective. First, since women are bound to go unobserved and unnamed in history (in any story), why should we apply this research standard to women? Exactly because of this "handicap," knowing how many and who these women are and how they are presented by the individual authors can allow us more accurately both to appreciate how they were regarded by the given author as well as by his readers/audience and to know what values they represent. Second, it would appear necessary to compare the depictions of these women with the male world of the story, that is, with the nameless male characters—which also exist—in order to appreciate emphasis and/or intention, which is also to appreciate how gender roles operate in the text. Third, but not least, I will try to highlight some outstanding nameless

1. See Gianattilio Bonifacio, *Personaggi minori e discepoli in Marco 4–8: La funzione degli episodi dei personaggi minori nell'interazione con la storia dei protagonisti*, AnBib 178 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2008), 18–22. Additional bibliographic references appear there.

women. This approach will provide additional insight to help readers appreciate features and contents that might escape a cursory analysis.

We can assume—although the claim is yet to be verified—that anonymous women characters are not common in contemporary Greek and Roman literature of similar genres to the Gospels; the cases known, which appear mostly in healing stories or are secondary characters in Hellenistic romances, are not comparable with those found in the New Testament given the generic and structural differences. Examples of female anonymity similar to those in the New Testament can be found—as far as I can determine—in the Old Testament as well as in Jewish literature, for example, the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:7–24), Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11:29–40), the medium at Endor (1 Sam 28:4–5), Samson's mother (Judg 13), and the Shunnamite in the Elisha cycle (2 Kgs 4:1–37). In light of the background of women's particular and limited anonymity in literature contemporaneous with the New Testament, I now turn to analyze the information available in the Gospels.

2. Nameless Women: Relevant Texts and Types of Narration and Character

How many nameless women are there in the canonical Gospels, and who are they? How should we assess their anonymity? To understand the value of female anonymity, we must consider, in parallel, the statistics of male anonymity. To that end, I now consider—in a statistical perspective aimed at exhaustiveness—all the characters, whether male or female, and then narrow the analytical scope to individual characters (excluding the leading character Jesus) that are actors in the story as well as to fictitious characters that are actors in a narrative context (e.g., in parables); conversely, I will not take into account those characters referenced by way of quotations or allusions.[2]

I have collected the materials concerning women according to a strict criterion, that is, their name, in order to identify "named" and "nameless" women. However, this criterion must be adjusted given certain narrative conventions. For example, the "daughter of Jairus" is nameless, although the father's name was the standard used for identifying women and in particular young, unmarried women. In these cases, the relevant passages will be assessed by taking account conventional terminology. Additionally, special consideration will be given to some female characters that are mentioned in the parables but that do not play any active role in the narrative (e.g., in the parable of the yeast), since parables seldom rely on female characters.

2. This applies to the only female character, Rachel (Matt 2:18), alongside many male characters.

Within groups (disciples, family, friends, crowds, sick people, children) women rarely receive explicit mention (e.g., Matt 15:38; 27:55; Mark 9:29–30; 15:40; Luke 8:2; 23:49, 55). This explicit albeit anonymous female presence can be considered significant in light of the broader scope of this analysis and is accordingly considered in a separate part of this paper (part 3).

Two tables in the appendix are meant to facilitate an overview of the materials considered (Table 1: Anonymity Percent Rate among Female Characters; Table 2: Anonymity Percent Rate among Male Characters). I describe these materials summarily below by way of a critical analysis aimed at highlighting the types of narration and character. The remaining characters will be analyzed in greater depth in part 4.

Out of the thirty-four women mentioned in the Gospels, only fourteen names are extant. Among the latter, three are characters of the past (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth), and the remainder are historical figures from Jesus's time. Mary, his mother, is a fully autonomous character in the Fourth Gospel, where she is consistently referred to as "the mother of Jesus," and her name is never mentioned. This lack of name should not be construed as a mishap; in fact, it points to the historical as well as theological significance of a character regarded as fundamental in John's community, which is aware of the preceding traditions where she was named. Apart from Herodias, Herod Antipas's second wife, who had her husband execute the Baptist, all the women mentioned by name are Jesus's disciples and are witnesses to his crucifixion and/or the empty tomb and/or the first resurrection appearance. This clearly shows that the rationale for naming characters consists in the value of their testimony as related to the establishment of the initial community. A typical feature is the uniformity of tradition: each named woman is usually mentioned in several sources and/or texts, which supports a claim of high historical reliability.

As for the remaining twenty nameless women, their narrative features are more varied. There are fictitious characters along with historical characters; many of them are the recipients of miracles; some are family members, and others are foreigners. There are women who show a partial lack of understanding and others who are outstanding examples and who are extolled as paragons.

The wife of Uriah is one of the four (foreign) women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy along with Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth; these women serve to anticipate the universal mission culminating in Matt 28:19. From a literary standpoint, preference was given quite early to her name, Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:3), over other concurrent descriptions[3] that established a connection with

3. She is mentioned several times in the Old Testament (see 2 Sam 11:3; 12:24; 1 Kgs 1:11, 15, 16, 28, 31; 2:13, 18, 19), as well as here in the New Testament; however, she is

King David and the death of her husband Uriah. The phrase "wife of Uriah" identifies her with the same degree of certainty as if she were called by her first name, of which, however, she is deprived in this account. She is part of a remote past, which does not remember her name.

Let us now consider, in greater depth, the category of single anonymous female characters in the Gospels.

First, there are seven women who are direct or indirect beneficiaries of miracles and/or salvation actions: Peter's mother-in-law, who is healed of her fever (Matt 8:14); the little daughter of a synagogue ruler (whom Mark 5:22 and Luke 8:41 name Jairus), who is resuscitated, and a woman who had been sick for twelve years and is healed from her flow of blood, mentioned jointly as part of a complex narration (Matt 9:18–20); the daughter of a foreign woman, a Canaanite (so Matthew) or Syro-Phoenician (so Mark), who is freed from a demon and healed (Matt 15:22–28; Mark 7:24–30); a widow from the city of Nain, whose son is resuscitated (Luke 7:12); the woman who had been bent over for eighteen years and is healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:11); and, finally, the adulteress against whom nobody dared throw the first stone (John 8:3, albeit she is not part of the original Gospel).

These narratives prompt the following observation: none of the women asks something for herself; in fact, they either plead for someone else (Matt 15:22–27), are the subject of someone else's pleadings (Matt 8:14; Matt 15:28 Mark 5:22–24, 35–42), or are saved by way of Jesus's spontaneous pity (Luke 7:12; 13:11; [John 8:3]).[4] The hemorrhaging woman—who does not plead, as she rather knows she can receive—stands out conspicuously from this group of women. She is a unique case, since (as I show in part 4) she is socially marginalized. This is why she directly touches Jesus by way of her faith without pleading; that is, her request takes the shape of touching and receiving.

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called by her first name only ten times. For the remainder, she is "the wife of Uriah" (see 2 Sam 11:3, 26; 12:15) or "the mother of Solomon" (see 1 Kgs 1:11; 2:13). Anne Gardner, "The Identity of Bath-Sheba," *RB* 112 (2005): 521–35, reads the name "Bathsheba" as a patronym, meaning "daughter of Sheba." Others interpret it as a proper name with different possible meanings: e.g., "daughter of (an) oath" (Helen Leneman, "Portrayals of Power in the Stories of Delilah and Bathsheba: Seduction in Song," in *Culture, Entertainment and the Bible*, ed. George Aichele, JSOTSup 309 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000], 139–55) or as "daughter of abundance" (Gale A. Yee, "Bathseheba," *ABD* 1:627–28). Because the name of her father is given in 2 Sam 11:3 ("This is Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite"), it cannot be a patronym.

4. The latter is the single case (along with the similar case in John 5:6–8, where a male character is involved) in which a miracle is effected without being requested beforehand. Jesus here shows his true communicative as well as missionary intentions by way of his healings.

Another leading character among these "nameless" women is the Canaanite (Matt 15:22; see part 4 for additional details), who pleads for her daughter by relying on the strength of her faith even though, being a foreigner, she is utterly socially disadvantaged. Additionally, the fact that the two resurrection cases concern a woman (Matt 9:18–19, 23–25) and a man (Luke 7:12–15) does not support any gender-related conclusion for these examples. On the whole, these women are either providers or recipients of support as well as beneficiaries of Jesus's mercy and witnesses to the coming of the kingdom through his person.

This "passive-receptive" role of beneficiaries of salvation stands in contrast to the active role played by a woman—nameless in the Synoptic Gospels—who anoints Jesus while he reclines at table in the Pharisee's house (so Luke 7:37–50) or shortly before the passion if we follow the other three evangelists. The fourth evangelist identifies this woman as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 12:3); however, placing her among the nameless women would appear to be more in line with the initial Gospel testimony. That the narrators consider her gesture to be highly significant is shown not only by the fact that her story appears in all four canonical Gospels, but also by the explicit motif of the memorial, which Mark 14:9 mentions first: "Truly I say to you, wheresoever this gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world, *this* also that she has done will be spoken of as a memorial to her." We can point out the unquestionable peculiarity of her unique gesture of love and mercy vis-à-vis Jesus; the various meanings and interpretations of this gesture are discussed in part 4 below.

Another gesture that is regarded as an ethical paragon concerns the nameless widow who throws her last two coins into the temple treasury (Mark 12:42–44). Because of her exemplary features, which stand out against the anonymous rich (male) characters who contribute substantial sums, this woman also deserves more in-depth considerations (part 4).

Among the anonymous women, there is a brilliant example of an intelligent counterpart to Jesus: the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7). Unlike the Canaanite woman, who (almost?) annoys Jesus by pleading with him, the Samaritan woman is a privileged partner in the dialogue, since it is Jesus who speaks to her in breach of the social codes demanding silence between a woman and a man and hostility between Jews and Samaritans. Given her privileged position and the depth of the dialogue, which gives this woman clear features, she also receives an in-depth analysis in part 4 below.

In three cases, individual anonymous women show lack of understanding and/or nonreceptivity to Jesus and his disciples. We shall see whether and to what extent they may be relevant to this analysis. The first is the woman from the crowd who, admiring Jesus, praises his mother as blessed for having born

such a son (Luke 11:27); the second is the mother of the sons of Zebedee, who makes a request on behalf of her sons (Matt 20:20); the third is a slave (or two slaves, according to Matt 26:69, 71) of the high priest, who verbally attacks Peter and charges him with being Jesus's disciple.

The first woman, who hails as blessed "the womb and the breasts" (Luke 11:27) of Jesus's mother, translates her heart-felt praise for Mary and, accordingly, her own deep admiration for Jesus into realistic, popular language.[5] Praising parents for the achievements of their children—and vice versa—is fully in line with contemporary custom and should come as no surprise. What is striking here is that this initiative is taken by a woman. This points to her courage in raising her voice and speaking before the crowd in a context where women usually kept silent. Indeed, we should highlight the respectful discretion she shows: she refrains from addressing a man directly, and she conveys her praise by way of his mother, as if this were a woman-to-woman thing. At the same time, her praise shows how popular Jesus was with the crowd despite the numerous rejections he experienced elsewhere (see Luke 4:28–30; 5:30; 6:11; 7:34; 9:53; 11:14–16). The pericope is aptly construed as a "tribute to the Christ."[6]

This is the appropriate starting point for interpreting Jesus's reaction. Does he reject this praise, or deny this praise for his mother, or even spurn the woman's words as if they were out of place? Jesus actually welcomes her words; indeed he amplifies them by correcting their direction.[7] Jesus's comment, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28), anticipates what he says in Luke 8:21, "My mother and my brothers are these who hear the word of God, and do it." Thus, if Jesus's true relatives are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice, his mother is certainly to be blessed, being the slave of the Lord who acted according to his will (Luke 1:38). The anonymous woman praising her can be blessed as well along with whoever does the Father's will. Not only does Jesus welcome this woman's praise, he also gives her an opportunity to become part of this same praise by indirectly calling upon her to become a disciple. In his disciples, Jesus sees a blessed people; as Luke 10:23 shows, "blessed are the eyes" of the disciples, because they can see the revelation of the Father through the Son and the love of the Son for his Father. Accordingly, it cannot be argued that

5. Referring to a woman's womb and breasts is by no means disrespectful or inappropriate; the same words are spoken by Jesus in Luke 23:29. As for the occurrence of realistic expressions in the Semitic environment, see Josef Ernst, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, RNT (Regensburg: Pustet, 1977), 377.

6. "Christusakklamation." See Ernst, *Lukas*, 377.

7. See μενοῦν μακάριοι (Luke 11:28a), which can be translated "truly blessed."

the quick exchange between Jesus and this woman sheds an unfavorable light on the woman. At the very most, one might argue that hers is a case of flawed understanding that Jesus addresses by sharing her intentions.

The mother of the sons of Zebedee is mentioned twice in Matthew (20:20; 27:56) without ever being named, which is unique for a nameless woman both in the Gospels and in parallel literature. Such anonymity always takes place in a negative context, which makes Matthew sound almost misogynous compared with the other Synoptic Gospels. Matthew 20:20–21, following directly the third passion prediction, states that this woman "came to [Jesus] with her sons, kneeling and asking for a certain thing of him" (20:20), which is "that these, my two sons, may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand, in your kingdom" (20:21). Mark and Luke tell the story differently. Luke refers generally to the group of apostles (22:24; see Luke 22:14), whereas in Mark 10:35 it is not the mother who asks for something so inappropriate (in terms both of contents and of context) but her sons (James and John), who speak on their own behalf while the other apostles remain in the background (Mark 10:41). Gospel readers were unlikely to find it surprising for the disciples—in particular James and John (see Luke 9:54)—to behave inappropriately; there are several examples of this behavior, including Mark 8:32b. Nor was it surprising for the disciples to speak inappropriately; see, of the many examples, Mark 8:16; 9:6; John 11:12–13. Conversely, it is hard to believe that a woman of that time could assume such an important role as to request favors for others, such as nonunderage, nonsick, nonendangered sons. It would be even less plausible for both Mark and Luke to take pains to spare this woman from appearing as a very negative figure by substituting two apostles for her. Therefore, it seems that the conduct of the mother of the sons of Zebedee should not be included among the features of the "nameless women in the Gospels" for the purposes of my analysis; rather, albeit granting that this character is, statistically, an anonymous woman, her conduct should be regarded as designed to display Matthew's theological and narrative agenda. In a rehabilitative perspective,[8] this mother surfaces once again at Golgotha (Matt 27:56) among the women under the cross; she is mentioned only by Matthew; the other evangelists do not mention her. Matthew changed Mark's text.

The third case concerns the slave of the high priest and her conduct following Jesus's arrest (Matt 26:69). This is a female character that is clearly hostile, if not directly to Jesus then at least to one of his closest disciples. What

8. An overview of the solutions devised to account for the reappearance of the mother of the sons of Zebedee in Matthew (none of them convincing, in my view) can be found in Emily Cheney, "The Mother of the Sons of Zebedee (Matthew 27:56)," *JNST* 68 (1997): 13–21.

does her being a woman add to the narrative? Several men in the court of the high priest speak to Peter with increasing hostility (Matt 26:73; Mark 14:70; Luke 22:58–59; John 18:25–26), however the narrator focuses his attention on this young woman whose words certainly counted less than those spoken by men. The underlying rationale is quite clear: apart from possible historical reminiscences, the objective in recounting the story consists in highlighting Peter's weakness as opposed to his statement of resolute loyalty and his claim to go as far as accepting martyrdom (Matt 26:33, 35). The narrative strategy is evident: it is not honorable for a man to be afraid of other men, but being afraid of "a little maid" (μία παιδίσκη, Matt 26:69) is a tell-tale sign of breakdown. The underlying conceptual framework concerns the social roles and conduct considered to be appropriate to the sexes. However, because both men and women attack Peter, we cannot resort to a gender-related perspective in order to interpret the author's intentions. There is no "gender-related" bias here. Conversely, that Matthew makes reference to two female slaves (26:69, 71) further confirms (see Matt 20:20–21 concerning the mother of the sons of Zebedee) Matthew's unfavorable stance vis-à-vis women.

The analysis of these three cases allows us to conclude that the first one is not a negative example; the second would appear to be an unconvincing fabrication by Matthew; and the third one is not meant to level criticisms at Jesus and does not exist autonomously but rather functions to describe Peter's breakdown.

The remaining nameless female characters are all mentioned in parables.[9] They include a woman mixing dough with yeast, symbolizing the coming of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 13:33); the ten virgins, some wise and some foolish, who go out at night to meet a bridegroom (Matt 25:1–13); the woman who, having lost one of her ten drachmas, seeks it until she finds it and rejoices—being an image of God's dedication to the salvation of each and every person, who, if lost, is found joyfully just as Jesus welcomes and seeks sinners (Luke 15:8); the widow who bothers an unjust judge until he relents and she can obtain justice—which is a model of staunch faith, but is also the opposite of the relationship between God and humanity: to God, it would be enough for someone to turn to him with faith in order to come immediately to his support, "Nevertheless when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:3, 8). These female characters are largely positive: they symbolize the mystery of the growth of the kingdom; they shed light on features of Jesus and God's stance towards humanity; they personify resolute

9. See Mary Ann Beavis, ed., *The Lost Coin: Parables of Women, Work, and Wisdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002).

faith. Only the parable of the ten virgins is neutral, since five of them are wise and five are foolish. Their presence is probably related to the structure of the story, which compares the bridegroom to the Son of Man at the parousia and accordingly required a female character as a counterpart. Their "female" traits are not connotative since they represent the community as a whole. There is no gender-focused conceptual framework underlying this text; the author actually describes the group as fully balanced between the wise and the foolish. Moreover, the virgins form an anonymous group and, accordingly, fall outside the scope of this analysis, which is aimed at individual characters.

We might also include Jesus's relatives in a consideration of individual nameless characters—in particular, his sisters and, for the Fourth Gospel, Jesus's mother (Mark 3:32–35; 6:3; John 12:1; 19:25). However, the sisters are also part of a group, and Mary the mother of Jesus is nameless only in John's narrative—less to enshrine her in anonymity than further to strengthen her bond with her Son. Thus, these women will not be taken into consideration.

Based on the analysis of the information gathered so far, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- there is a higher number of nameless women than named women;
- nameless women show a larger range of traits and narrative functions;
- named women strongly reflect historical and evidentiary interests;
- nameless women include highly positive characters; indeed, there are several outstanding examples of model discipleship among them.

3. Nameless Men

Starting from this data, we can now fruitfully analyze the male characters. We begin with the description of some basic traits applicable to them.

The canonical Gospels present over 130 male characters, not including the thirty-nine men in Jesus's genealogy (according to Matt 1:1–17) or the seventy-seven men in the genealogy according to Luke (3:23–28). Ignoring the genealogies can be justified by the fact that the characters mentioned are taken from ancient accounts and do not play any role in the current story. On the other hand, we should not fail to consider the social value of the reference made to one's ancestors, even in Jesus's case; males are usually the only ones mentioned, as noted above in the discussion of the women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth) from the past. Since the number of generations differs considerably between Matthew and Luke, it is highly difficult to perform statistical calculations. Accordingly, it is probably appropriate not to ignore the importance of the genealogy but at the same time to consider it in a separate accounting.

There are eighty nameless men in the canonical Gospels, and fifty-five men who are called by their names—if we include Jairus (who is simply "a ruler" in Matt 9:18) and Caiaphas (who is only referred to as the "high priest" in Mark 14:53) and if we consider Lazarus from Bethany (John 11:1) and Simon the leper (Mark 14:3) as separate characters.[10] If we add the information contained in the genealogies, we find over one hundred male first names (specifically, 132 or 94, as the case may be). Compared to that figure, nameless men (80) are found to comprise almost two-thirds of all male characters; twenty-eight out of these eighty nameless male characters are mentioned in parables.

Nameless male characters make up a varied set, albeit to a smaller extent than the named characters. There are twenty-four Jews, including lawyers, Pharisees, scribes, persons speaking from the crowd, "false witnesses," guards and servants of the high priest, the mysterious young man who flees naked in the night when Jesus is arrested (Mark 14:51), nineteen sick and/or demon-possessed individuals, seven disciples, and even two Roman centurions (Matt 8:6; 27:54). The remaining twenty-eight are fictitious characters playing the leading role in a parable. Among the evangelists, Luke is the one most capable of sketching individual characters that, though anonymous, stand out distinctly.

It is impossible to pinpoint a unified or prevailing stance in these characters vis-à-vis Jesus. Except for the two centurions—one is a paragon of faith; the other personifies receptiveness to revelation—there are definitely conflicting features in each category. A lawyer reproaches Jesus (Luke 11:45) and a scribe praises him (Mark 12:32–34); one Pharisee seeks him with sincerity, defends him, and becomes his disciple (John 3:1; 7:50; 19:39), and another Pharisee invites him to dinner only to test him (Luke 14:1). The Beloved Disciple (John 13:23, passim) contrasts with the disciple who is not yet ready to follow (Luke 9:61); there is the good thief (Luke 23:40) and the one who reviles Jesus (Luke 23:39). Even after miraculously healing those suffering from leprosy, Jesus has to ask, "Were not the ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there none found who returned to give glory to God, except this stranger?" (Luke 17:17–18). We can find model male characters among the characters of parables, for example, the faithful steward awaiting his master

10. Christian tradition tends to identify biblical characters by conflating different accounts. For instance, according to Mark 14:3–9//Matt 26:6, Jesus was anointed in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper; according to John 12:1, the anointing does not happen in Bethany but in the house of Lazarus; Luke 7:36–37 only refers to an unspecified city and the house of a Pharisee called Simon (Luke 7:40). In fact, the Gospels do not provide any identifying details with respect to any of these characters.

(Luke 12:42–44), as well as his opposite, the unfaithful steward who is a model of iniquity (Luke 12:45–59); of the men going to the temple to pray, one (a tax collector) is the sinner who is pardoned (Luke 18:13–14) and the other (a Pharisee) is the nonrepentant sinner (Luke 18:11–12). There is the son who disobeys his father and the son who obeys (Matt 21:29–30); and so on.

Compared to the uniform features of the nameless women, this set shows markedly unbalanced traits. The distinction paves the way for a comparison aimed at highlighting the key features of the function nameless women play in the canonical Gospels.

4. Nameless Female and Male Characters in the Gospels: A Comparison

Insightful information can be derived from comparative analysis and even just by a statistical perspective (see Table 3: Comparison between Anonymous Male and Female Characters).

Among nonfictitious characters, names are preserved for the majority of males, but the women are mostly anonymous. There is a considerable gap between nonanonymous male and female characters as well: while the women named in the canonical Gospels are—except for Herodias—disciples and/or relatives of Jesus, there is a striking variability with the male characters. They range from contemporary political figures (kings, tetrarchs, caesars, officers, centurions, etc.) to historical and religious figures in Israel (elders, prophets, heads of synagogues, etc.) and in the newly founded church (apostles, disciples) to local figures (sentenced individuals like Barabbas, sick people like Bartimaeus,[11] officials like Zacchaeus). These data are fully in line with the nonpublic role allocated to women in ancient societies.

However, males also prevail among fictitious characters: all of them are anonymous except for Lazarus, the poor man covered with sores (Luke 16:20). References are made frequently to servants, kings, princes, slaves, sons, fathers, workmen, masters, stewards, rich men, travelers, and the like—almost never are women mentioned.[12] We can also observe that while there are both

11. One might argue that Bartimaeus is not named, because "bar-Timaeus" means "son of Timaeus." However, some names include "bar" ("son of") as part of the name: Barachel (Job 32:2), Barkos (Ezra 2:53), Barabbas (Matt 27:16–17), etc.

12. Of the three parables depicting women as the main characters (Matt 13:33; Luke 15:8; 18:3—see above), the first can be plausibly traced back to the historical Jesus (see Hans Weder, *Die Gleichnisse Jesus als Metaphern: Traditions- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Analysen und Interpretationen*, FRLANT 120 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978]). The remaining two exhibit substantial features of authenticity.

good and bad examples among the male characters in parables, the women in parables provide only brilliantly positive examples.

These observations—which are unquestionable—do not affect the strict androcentric perspective followed by the evangelists, which was typical of their society and culture. However, the data also show an open-minded approach that is not gender-related. A woman, even a nameless one, may be unimportant in her society, but this does not prevent the evangelists from using her as an example that is equal or even superior to the one men provide. These women, in particular the nameless ones, are proof that female qualities overrode the quantitative predominance of males in the evangelists' androcentric conceptual framework.

The gender-based comparison between individual anonymous characters does not point to any specific gender-related pattern such as the conventional male-active versus female-passive, male-brave versus female-fearful, or male-rich versus female-poor dualisms. Conversely, the texts present an extremely varied picture, in particular regarding women: there are active women who speak up (Luke 11:27) or step in (Mark 5:25) and rich women who sponsor Jesus (Luke 8:3) alongside reversed situations such as the lord serving his servants (Luke 12:37). There is, however, no dearth of brave men (John 9:24–35) or men to be feared (Mark 12:9) along with a fair share of passive women (Luke 7:12–13). In short, the writers' conceptual pattern inevitably reproduces the usually subordinate position, usually secondary role, employment that usually included humble and menial tasks, expectations, and social and cultural self-consciousness that applied to women in those days. However, these patterns are not bound by the gender-related categories whenever faith or a woman's relationship to Jesus is involved. To the contrary, actions are described as breaching gender roles and as eliciting scandal along with amazement and/or awe (see Luke 7:39; John 4:27; Matt 15:28). It is exactly nameless women—much more so than named women and all the male characters—who personify and convey this open-mindedness, which impacts and surpasses gender-related patterns.

Along with these individual characters, the male disciples (collectively anonymous and often mentioned) and the female disciples (collectively anonymous in Luke 8:3 or else, as in Matt 27:55, mentioned simply as "many women") also play significant roles.

I noted above that references to women in anonymous groups (disciples, family, friends, crowd, sick people, children) are quite infrequent albeit very significant (see Matt 13:56; 14:21; 15:38; 27:55; Mark 3:32; 6:3; 10:29; 15:40; Luke 8:2; 23:27, 49, 55). To what does this group anonymity point in particular for female characters? First, the women mentioned explicitly are historical rather than fictitious characters, and the emphasis they receive

in the story is all the more significant in that women, especially in groups, tend to disappear because they are absorbed into and made invisible by the male grammatical gender. What is then so peculiar about these women as to compel the narrator to mention that *also* women are part of the story? We turn to several examples.

Matthew 14:21 ("Those who ate were about five thousand men, besides [χωρίς, "excepting"] women and children") and 15:38 ("Those who ate were four thousand men, besides [χωρίς] women and children") at the end of the first and second miraculous feedings mention women—by exclusion—along with the other minor category of children in order to enhance the greatness of the miracle. This mention by exclusion would appear to be a formulation peculiar to Matthew: the parallel passages not only in Mark (6:44), who is known to be sensitive to the female viewpoint,[13] but also in Luke (9:14) and John (6:10) do not mention the women at all; indeed, they simply consider the males (ἄνδρες). This Matthean detail is consistent with his interest in the female group merely in terms of numbers, even though the reference conveys historical data that are both useful and alien to the story's rationale.

Mark 10:29–30 ("And Jesus answered and said, 'Truly I say unto you, there is no one that has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life") mentions mothers and sisters, which are fundamental components of family and affections, the core foundation of life, economic security, and social integration. This passage is especially interesting when compared synoptically. Matthew (19:29) refers, like Mark, to the same female categories, but unlike Mark he does not repeat them in the following line and only records the hyperbole, "he will receive one hundred times." The same applies to Luke 18:29–30, who however refers additionally to wives.

The radical nature of the message should be highlighted; that is, freedom from whatever bonds in terms of family and/or affections also applies to those who are already married. Also notable is the metaphorical nature of the promised compensation, as it would be difficult otherwise to apply the wording "he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time" to a relinquished spouse. Given this emphasis, the passage should be construed as an invitation less to waive certain things with a view to a compensating reward than to achieve freedom

13. An example is provided by Mark 10:1–12 on divorce, where the woman's viewpoint is explicitly considered.

from family bonds so as not to prevent genuine, total dedication to the message of the coming kingdom.

To conclude, we might argue that this passage shows that women were a major, permanent presence in the new community founded by Jesus and that this community, which is both awaiting and living in the factual reality of God's kingdom, was bound by affections comparable to those existing in a family, which accordingly included all the affections related to members of the other sex. Without women, Jesus's family cannot exist. Women are so important here that it is not enough to "subsume" them—and implicitly cancel them—under the grammatical "male gender." In fact, it is necessary to specify that there are sisters, mothers, and wives.

Jesus's sisters[14] (Mark 6:3; Matt 13:56) comprise an anonymous neutral group of historical importance;[15] they signify Jesus's human, ordinary nature. Another passage mentioning Jesus's family (Mark 3:31–35; Matt 12:46–50) refers to his mother and brothers as uncomprehending actors although they are concerned for and desiring to protect Jesus. No mention is made of his sisters, who are added at the end of a pericope (Mark 3:35; Matt 12:50) as members of Jesus's true family in that they do God's will: "Whosoever shall do the will of God [Matthew: "of my Father, who is in heaven"] the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."

Luke 8:1b–3 ("With him were the twelve, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; Susanna; and many others; who ministered to them from their possessions") refers to "many other" women alongside the Twelve in connection with Jesus's itinerant preaching (8:3). The focus here is not on the Twelve, whose presence starting from Luke 6:13 is taken for granted. Rather, emphasis is placed on these nameless women, whose historical existence as a group is documented by the names of three (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna) who represent them all. These anonymous women are mentioned

14. Here the focus is on his sisters, since they are the only group at issue while his mother is an individually named character.

15. Regardless of the dogmatic issues raised by the presence of Jesus's brothers and sisters (see Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markus-Evangelium*, HThKNT 2/1 [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1984], 322–24), their historical reality is unquestionable. Arguments for the restrictive interpretation of "brothers and sisters" as biological siblings can be found in Camille Focant, *L'évangile selon Marc*, CBNT 2 (Paris: Cerf, 2004), 154–55. A broader, more general interpretation of the words to mean "male and female cousins" or "step-brothers/step-sisters" is expounded in Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 19–32.

because they "minister" to Jesus and the apostles who follow him (8:1). In the Gospels, Jesus is relied upon or else hindered or threatened; at the most he is followed without being understood. Only these women, in all four Gospels, can pride themselves on helping Jesus, the Son of Man who "has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58; Matt 8:20b). And they minister to him from their possessions—an interesting piece of information in many respects, historically and sociologically as well as theologically. Suffice it here to observe that in order to minister to him from their possession they did not need to follow him. But they mainly follow Jesus, like disciples, like the apostles, and even more. They stand out from the narrative as grand characters, and their anonymity makes this testimony all the more valuable in my view. They are not just two or three rich ladies from the top political and cultural circles, mentioned simply to add luster to Jesus; indeed, there are "many others," an anonymous female crowd, who love Jesus, follow him, and make available to him all their possessions. They are models for the perfect disciple who gives what he has and follows Jesus (see Matt 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22). They cannot be ignored, even if they are not all mentioned by name.

These women in Matt 27:55 ("Many women were there watching from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, serving him") comprise the backdrop to the awed statement by the centurion and the guards at the cross: "Truly this was the son of God!" (Matt 27:54). The women do not speak except by way of their presence. They are the sole witnesses on Jesus's side in the Synoptic Gospels: the male disciples are absent. The women watch, and in watching they are with Jesus, thus continuing in their vocation of "following" and "ministering to" him uninterruptedly. Once again, they represent the perfect disciple who follows and ministers to Jesus regardless of whether he understands or shares his views or is afraid. Matthew mentions them as do the other evangelists (Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49; John 19:25 refers to the leading members of this group by their names) because the women are model disciples, existed historically as witnesses, and what they did is fundamental to the building up of the early church. Only women play this role.

Luke 23:55 ("The women, who had come with him out of Galilee, followed after, and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid") reaffirms and emphasizes this function by also referring to them in the scene at the tomb. Since the active characters in this part of the narration are males (Joseph of Arimathea and Pilate), the women's presence is more significant than their actions, for what woman would have ever been allowed to appear before Pilate? In the household, where their activity is subject to no limitations, they take the steps required to render the ultimate service as they hope ("They returned and prepared spices and ointments" [Luke 23:56])—an activity they undertake jointly as a nameless group. On Easter morning, they recover their

names and take on their role as witnesses (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:10; John 20:1).

An even more anonymous group of women consists of the "great multitude ... of women" (Luke 23:27) following Jesus along the *via crucis* (23:27–31). They mourn and lament him in accordance with contemporary practices, which did not deny the accompaniment of a dirge even to convicts to be executed. These are no disciples; they are simply a crowd of people. But Jesus addresses the women as "daughters of Jerusalem" and thereby singles them out from the male crowd who follows him without mourning. In the Jewish tradition, indeed in ancient Mediterranean culture in general, lamentations are stereotypically associated with women. While men are expected to restrain their emotions, it is the women's role to cry out and mourn.[16] The words Luke has Jesus speak turn these women into mirror-like reflections of parallel destinies: they are mourning him, and he is concerned about them and their "children," that is, Jerusalem. If his destiny is appalling, theirs is by far worse; if he is the green tree, they are "dry."

Does not this description also apply to the male crowd following him? Why should Jesus address only the women, who are not his disciples but probably spontaneous mourners, perhaps members of a sort of "brotherhood/sisterhood of the peaceful death"?[17] Once again, Jesus is shown to be closer to female characters in that they are more perceptive of this destiny—at least in Luke, the evangelist of female compassion. The crowd following him to the cross is not mourning him; in fact, the crowd is depicted as idle, hostile, and abusive (see, among others, Luke 23:18, 21, 35–37, 39). Conversely, women side with the sentenced, and this participation turns them into worthy counterparts.

Their lamentations for Jesus and Jesus's lamentations for them reflect Jesus's other lamentation concerning Jerusalem: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name

16. Kathleen E. Corley, "Women and the Crucifixion and Burial of Jesus," *Forum* NS 1 (1998): 181–225 (202). See Corley, *Maranatha: Women's Funerary Rituals and Christian Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

17. "Perhaps they were charitable women providing assistance to people sentenced to death, a sort of "brotherhood/sisterhood of the peaceful death"; see Gianfranco Ravasi, "Maria e l'ascesa di Cristo al Golgota tra letteratura e tradizione: Volti di donne in un vociante corteo," *L'osservatore Romano* (11 April 2009), 3, perhaps based on rabbinic traditions (b. Sanh. 43a).

of the Lord!'" (Luke 13:34–35; Matt 23:37–39). The passages are comparable insofar as they share the lamentation motif.[18] However, we should clearly distinguish their underlying rationales and different emphases. In Luke 23, Jesus's lament is addressed mainly to the daughters of Jerusalem (see 23:28) and through them to the city as a whole, including its symbolic value as the people of God. In Luke 13, conversely, men are the main addressees in that they are killers of prophets. Further, Luke 13:34–35 is a warning issued to those who are about to kill Jesus, whereas in Luke 23:27–31 the women are not reproached, and they are not responsible for Jesus's death; to the contrary, they are addressed as victims of the same (or a worse) destiny involving death, perhaps at the hands of the same killers. Similarly, the prophetic scenario is different. In Luke 13:34–35, the city will be left desolate because Jesus is killed; in 23:27–31, the scenario is an apocalyptic one that goes beyond Jesus's death, and it reflects the historical memory of Jerusalem's destruction.

In conclusion, the women mourning Jesus are not disapproved or threatened by him; in fact, they are associated with him and realigned in the direction of his message. Taking away Jesus means taking away life, and they, being women and mothers and thereby the close cooperators of life (Luke 23:28–29), are best suited for receiving Jesus's lamentation over the destiny of all those who forsake the way of God.

This short overview allows one to draw several conclusions. Generally speaking, there are many more individual anonymous male characters than female characters. Considering the proportions as well as some notable variants, we find the same variability in terms of female and male examples (people who are healed; disciples and outsiders; those who have faith in Jesus; real and fictitious characters). However, one outstanding feature is typical of, and unique to, male characters: their set includes a considerable number of Jesus's enemies as well as examples of lost/flawed faith. This feature is utterly absent for female characters.

We now turn to the depictions of these women in greater depth to analyze the message conveyed through them.

18. Wilfried Eckey, *Das Lukasevangelium unter Berücksichtigung seiner Parallelen 2: 11:1–24:53* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004), 937–38. Based on the comparison with Luke 13:34, Eckey construes "daughters of Jerusalem" as a metonym for the city as a whole, which has rejected Jesus; accordingly, Jesus rejects their lamentations and counters them with a prophetic threat. The differences in the two passages led me to interpret them in a different perspective.

5. Analysis of Some Outstanding Nameless Female Characters: A Common Denominator?

Out of the many nameless women, some characters stand out from the narrative because of their specific traits. Different criteria may be applicable in identifying outstanding characters; two are considered significant in this case: recurrence and narrative depth (activity or message). The single example of a recurring female character is the mother of the sons of Zebedee (addressed above). A greater number of characters fits the category of narrative depth in that they convey important messages and/or play important roles:

- the woman with an issue of blood (Mark 5:24b–34; Matt 9:20–22; Luke 8:42b–48);
- the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24–30; Matt 15:21–28);
- the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4–42);
- the widow casting two coins into the treasury (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4);
- the woman who anoints Jesus (Mark 14:3–9; Matt 26:6–13; "Mary" in John 12:1–8 // the pardoned sinner in Luke 7:36–50).

5.1. The Woman with an Issue of Blood (Mark 5:24b–34; Matt 9:20–22; Luke 8:42b–48)

This well-known story has been handed down in all three Synoptic Gospels. Readers from the patristic period on have been struck by the length of the narration—which is unusual, especially in Mark, given that this is a miracle story—as well as the intercalation where a miracle (Mark 5:25–34) frames another miracle (Mark 5:21–24; 35–43) with both linked by the symbolic number twelve shared by the woman healed from her bleeding and the dead girl.

This analysis focuses on Mark's version, which is both the oldest extant one as well as the most detailed. Mark's story has attracted considerable interest because of its intercalation, the plasticity of narration, the psychological analysis of characters, and the atypical "passive role" of the healer. More recently, the emphasis placed on female characters has turned this story into an ideal exegetical subject.[19] There is no need here to repeat the contributions provided by numberless studies that seek to understand and interpret the passage; we rather reflect on the anonymity of these women and the message they together convey. The story of the resuscitated girl works as a sort of interpre-

19. Selected bibliographic references in Focant, *Mark*, 206–7; Simon Legasse, *L'évangile de Marc*, 2 vols., LD 5 (Paris: Cerf, 1997), 1:352–53.

tive framework for the story of the hemorrhaging woman who touches Jesus and who is rightly regarded as the focus of the narrative.

The girl's story creates a sound interpretive framework. Both accounts offer female characters: a woman of indefinite age, although this can be inferred, and a twelve-year-old girl. The former is unusually active, full of faith and daring; the latter is totally passive; indeed she has died. The number twelve links their destinies in life as well as in death. At the age of twelve, a Jewish girl was ready for marriage; this was the age when a woman's life started, according to contemporaneous custom, so that it could yield the gift of children, the fruits that make life both livable (e.g., Gen 30:1, 6) and lived.[20] But this girl died before she could start living: "dead at twelve" is tantamount to "dead before living." Life, which in Jewish tradition resides in the blood flowing throughout one's body, is the same thing for which the woman who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years is fighting; to her, stopping this issue of blood means to be able to live.[21] The number twelve (used for numbering the years) and the reference to blood are closely related; the two women, despite their age difference, personify the same fate: a woman's life gnawed at by death. Thus, the narrative framework is fully appropriate (Mark 5:21–24, 35–43) in that it focuses on death as the somber backdrop to the tragedy experienced by the woman who touches Jesus: fighting against disease, breaching the prescriptions on purity, and—above all—finding the faith and boldness at the very threshold of her existence.

Transgression and boldness are not typically female traits. This rather trivial remark can be found in all the commentaries, which commend the daring conduct the woman pursues.[22] But why does this boldness not turn into a reason for retaining the woman's name, as would be the case for the heroine of a Hellenistic novel? I can only attempt a reply by focusing in general on lesser characters as well as on the specific rationale of this passage. It appears that

20. See, for instance, Ps 113:9; Isa 54:1 (see Gal 4:27); Luke 1:58.

21. Recovering her health (and as a consequence her purity) is her main objective according to Susan Haber, "A Woman's Touch: Feminist Encounters with the Hemorrhaging Woman in Mark 5:23–34," *JSNT* 26 (2003): 171–92. The issue of blood could not have been continuous; otherwise she would have died rapidly from her bleeding. However, her condition made her ritually impure, undermined her health, prevented her from getting married, and marginalized her from public and religious life. If we assume that this woman was at least 24 (12 + 12) and consider that the mean age of death for a woman then was about thirty-seven years, we cannot but wonder to what extent this woman could hope for marriage and a life of her own. The girl is budding to life; the older woman can already see the end of her life.

22. See Susan Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, JSNTSup 259 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 52–64, in particular 58.

a woman's name is only retained if her character functions as a testimony to one of the founding components of the church, as is the case with the women who witness the passion and announce Jesus's resurrection. Conversely, when a woman functions as a model to convey teachings and experience that everyone is meant to receive, the writer tends to do without giving her individual traits and so makes more room for the message. By "narcotizing"[23] the woman's name, the author can enhance the value of the message, and by emphasizing the message the author places himself even more at the reader's disposal, since a reader can more easily identify with, and benefit from, the character. Since this is not the case to the same extent or as consistently with respect to male characters belonging to this category (e.g., Bartimeus), might this "narcotizing" be due perhaps to a residual mite of male pride?

In any case, the parallelisms and inversions mentioned above point to the unity and connection between the two characters, which in turn should lead us to consider their experience of Jesus in a unified perspective. Whether it is he who touches (Mark 5:41) or who is touched (Mark 5:30), whether his role is a passive or an active one,[24] depends—and this is the fundamental teaching—on when one meets Jesus and the way this meeting is mediated. However, meeting Jesus is always a source of life. The passage in question is a hymn to the simple wish to touch Jesus and be touched by him as the expression of a personal, direct meeting with him, the source of salvation. It is a beautiful thing that this wish is here voiced by a woman, which is additional proof that the evangelists did not remove information and did not harbor any reservations on account of their gender biases. Indeed, the cultural biases of the time would have never allowed a woman, and an impure woman at that, even to imagine she could touch the garments worn by a rabbi. There is something more than gender that dominates their thinking: it is the liberating, direct, factual meeting with Jesus that must be announced to the world.

5.2. The Syro-Phoenician Woman (Mark 7:24–30; Matt 15:21–28)

This nameless woman is mentioned by reference to her being a foreigner: to Mark, she is a Greek woman of the Syro-Phoenician nation, and Matthew (15:22) refers to her (from his viewpoint)[25] as a Canaanite (Χαναναία). Her

23. This word was first used by Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula* (Milan: Bompiani, 1979), 86; see also Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984), 116.

24. See Charles E. Powell, "The 'Passivity' of Jesus in Mark 5:25–34," *BSac* 162 (2005): 66–75.

25. See Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 338; trans. of *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Mt*

being a foreigner places her at a disadvantage vis-à-vis Jesus, and it is exactly this disadvantaged position that plays a key role in her meeting with him as well as in the whole narrative. Thus, while this woman's name was not handed down, the key feature of her story was retained, and she can be identified wholly with the story of her meeting as a source of salvation.

How should we regard her from the standpoint of gender studies?[26] Should we commend her "male spirit,"[27] which dares ask with some insistence, or should we be scandalized by the humbling subjection—a typically female trait—she accepts to such an extent as to compare herself to a dog? Let us turn to the rationale lying behind this narrative.

Based on the story as told in Mark 7:24–30 (the original version as well as containing a core of historical truth[28]), Jesus meets the woman in a gentile or half-gentile area, which he used to visit,[29] although he did not turn his attention to the gentiles. Matthew 15:24 emphasizes this feature by depicting Jesus's awareness that he had not been sent "to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). When the woman pleads for his help, Jesus rejects her pleadings and compares both her and her daughter to dogs, which in Israel are symbols of filth and abjection.[30] Jesus's metaphor must have sounded harsh to his contemporary audience, and it sounds harsh today as well, regardless of the fact that "man's best friends" are so much fussed over in rich countries. Some scholars have referred to the "nationalism" Jesus shows[31] in this context,

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8–17) and *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Mt 18–25)*, EKKNT 1.2–3 (Zurich: Benziger, 1990, 1997).

26. See, among others, Monika Fander, *Die Stellung der Frau im Markusevangelium: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung kultur- und religionsgeschichtlicher Hintergründe*, MThA 8 (Altenberge: Telos, 1990), 63–84.

27. "Masculinum sibi ingerens animum." See Albertus Magnus, *In Evangelium Opera Omnia*, ed. Adolphe Borgnet (Paris: Ludicoricum Vives, 1893), 618 (as quoted by Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 337 n. 16).

28. Rainer Kampling, *Israel unter dem Anspruch des Messias: Studien zur Israelthematik im Markusevangelium*, SBB 25 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1992), 138–39; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27a (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 468; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 338.

29. See, among others, Matt 4:25; Mark 5:1; 7:24, 31.

30. Regarding the customary use of the dog metaphor to refer to gentiles in Jewish culture, see Hans-Josef Klauck, *Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten*, NTAbh 13 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978), 275–77; Marcus, *Mark*, 463–64.

31. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 177; trans. of *Der historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996). Marcus, *Mark*, 468 considers this an "extreme example of ethnocentrism."

although it is unquestionable that he never despised gentiles.[32] Accordingly, we should not rely on such despising to account for Jesus's feeling so closely and exclusively bound to his people. He accepts striking up a dialogue with this woman, and—unique to all the Gospels—this time it is a woman who convinces (or has the upper hand on) Jesus by means of a stronger argument.

Jesus's argument relies on a set of priorities. First (πρῶτον), one has to fill the children. This πρῶτον is based on eschatological requirements:[33] in order for the kingdom to come, it is necessary for *all* children to be filled. As long as there are hungry children, giving bread to the dogs is like robbing them of their bread; it means that one does not love them. Out of respect for the children of Israel to whom he was sent as a token of God's love and providence, he has to reject the woman's request.

In her defense, the woman does not undertake to deny the starting assumption: are gentiles dogs? She replies, "Yes, Lord"[34] [Mark 7:28, KJV]);[35] in fact, she completes the assumption by building from it an image that goes beyond the chronological boundary set by the πρῶτον and toward the ultimate eschatological perspective: the gentiles are dogs under the table eating the *children's* crumbs. Thus, the children have already been filled, and crumbs fall from the table that can also fill the dogs. What then is the difference between children's crumbs and dogs' crumbs if both can fill, and therefore, what is the difference between dogs and children if both can be filled by the same bread? In this manner, the existence of "before" and "after" is debunked as a myth, as if there were not enough bread for all. With Jesus, one enters an eschatological dimension where fullness and salvation are everywhere. The woman can escape the suspicion of competing with the children for bread, and she actually emphasizes the abundance of God's compassionate love, which is enough to save all those who turn to him. Seeing that the woman had correctly understood him in his eschatological mission as paver of the way to the kingdom,

32. See Matt 12:41–42; Luke 11:31–32; Matt 11:21–24; Luke 10:1–2; Matt 8:11–12.

33. See Marcus, *Mark*, 463.

34. The ναί is disputed in terms of textual tradition and is emphasized differently in the various translations ("Ja, Herr" in Luther; "Sir" in the NRSV; "Lord" in Marcus, *Mark*, 461; "Ja, du hast recht, Herr!" in the Unified Translation). Regardless of the ναί, we can argue that the underlying assumption is accepted and not disputed.

35. A parallel to this apophtegma can be found in Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 1.19, where the assumption underlying the whole argument is, however, not confuted. When accused of being like a dog who eats the crumbs that fell from the table, Damis replies by arguing that the table in question is nothing less than the table of divine banquets and the food falling from that table provides divine nourishment. See comments on Philostratus's argument in M. Eugene Boring, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe, eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 104 §119.

Jesus willingly succumbs in the dispute;[36] he recognizes that this woman has a faith that can rehabilitate her, irrespective of any nationalistic, gender-related, and/or misogynist stance. Readers of both sexes can unquestionably recognize, along with her faith, the major dialectic skills vested in this woman, which also raise her well above gender-related female traits.

5.3. The Samaritan Woman at the Well (John 4:4–42)

Like in the Syro-Phoenician (or Canaanite) woman's case, this woman's anonymity is only relieved by the reference to her being a foreigner, indeed, a foreigner who was especially unwelcome by Jews, as she was a Samaritan (John 4:9, 27).[37]

The peculiarity of this character consists in her being chosen by Jesus as a worthy counterpart (4:7) and her offering to act as his first missionary (4:28) to bear effective testimony of her experience with Jesus Christ (4:39), savior of the world (4:42). Once again, the bias whereby women and foreigners are allegedly inferior is rejected both because of Jesus's stance, which goes beyond gender-related taboos, and on account of the narrator, who does not overlook the successful mission this foreigner, unwelcomed by Jews, accomplished.

Although it is not the woman who first speaks, she is not passive in the dialogue; in fact, she actively raises issues and problems (4:12, 20). How does she step into the dialogue, whose development is not immediately easy to grasp? We extrapolate from this narratively complex and theologically deep story only such contents as may be helpful in outlining this character.

One afternoon in Samaria, a man and a woman meet, alone, drawn to the well by their thirst. They are Jesus and the Samaritan woman. She, who is in her own land and who is carrying a jug, would appear to be stronger than he,

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36. See Reinhard Feldmeier, "Die Syrophönizierin (Mk 7:24-30)—Jesu 'verlorenes' Streitgespräch," in *Die Heiden: Juden, Christen und das Problem des Fremden*, ed. Reinhard Feldmeier and Ulrich Heckel, WUNT 70 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 211–27. According to Marcus, *Mark*, 470, Mark's Jesus expanded the scope of his action to gentiles following this dialogue, as shown by the subsequent story of the multiplication of loaves. However, Mark's Jesus does not show any missionary intention vis-à-vis pagans/gentiles (Kampling, *Israel*, 140). To Mark's community, which is handing down this narration, the mission among the gentiles is not an issue; in fact it represents normality (Kampling, *Israel*, 140).

37. The choice of an appellation related to ethnic and geographic origin in the place of the person's name is no accident, as shown by the fact that the widow in Luke 7:11–17 is not referred to by way of the city (Nain) where the narration takes place. The wording "the widow of Nain" does not reflect the original version, although it is often to be found as the title of this pericope in various biblical translations.

who is a foreigner and who has no means to draw water. The awareness of this superiority surfaces in their dialogue: "Are you greater than our father, Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, as did his children and cattle?"[38] (4:12). Asking from her a drink from the jug she uses to draw water ("Give me a drink" [4:7b]), Jesus knows he is breaching a taboo. Although nobody sees him (4:8), he cannot expect a favorable response on her part. Why, then, is he asking for a drink? Certainly he is not doing so in order to quench his thirst: he refuses to eat shortly afterwards (4:31), which shows that there is no specific need underlying his actions. Beyond the woman's foreseeable huffiness (4:9), Jesus wishes to speak to her ("If you knew ... who it is who says to you 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him" [4:10]) to open up a new horizon for her ("the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" [4:14]), to bring to light her true thirst for love ("I have no husband" [4:17]), and to reveal to her both the Father who seeks worshipers in spirit and truth (4:23b) as well as himself as the messiah who announces him ("I am he, the one who speaks to you" [4:26]).

These topics would initially appear to be mutually exclusive, as the passage shifts continuously from the material-historical level (well, water, jugs, husbands, the patriarchs' early history) to the symbolic and spiritual one (living water that can quench thirst forever, worshiping, the temple, the Spirit). In fact, they consistently develop from one another the key message: the gift of the Spirit Jesus wants to convey. Under the pretense of getting a drink (4:7), Jesus spurs the woman to strike up a dialogue (4:9) in order for him to offer her the kind of water (4:10) she has been seeking. The woman's proud objection (4:11–12) provides Jesus with an opportunity for using the metaphor of thirst as the wish for eternal life (4:13–14). This wish—albeit misunderstood, so far—provides common ground for the two: the woman wishes and finally asks for this water (4:15).

In order to correct the misunderstanding, Jesus gives proof of his omniscience (4:18) and gets the woman to consider what really she is missing: is it water or love? The woman is no prostitute, but she has no husband, even though she has already had five of them (4:17). Her painful, unrelenting drawing of water is like her fatiguing, unappeased search for a relationship she has not yet found ("he whom you now have is not your husband" [4:18]). Jesus is leading the dialogue, but the woman is following the wide-ranging discourse quite well: the water Jesus wants to give her is eternal life (see 4:14), which has nothing to do either with well water or with husbands. God is the issue: but where can one find God? What is the right "place" (4:20)?

38. The μή used to start a question implies that one expects a negative reply.

Jesus's reply concludes his offering of life by fully highlighting the symbolic import of water: the "place" is the Spirit, of which water is a symbol, and true love—the love that saves, that fills up one's life—is the worship of God (4:22). Yet, Jesus adds something more in order to quench the woman's thirst: it is not only she who is in search (of water, husbands, love, and God), God is also in search of her as a worshiper in spirit and truth (4:23). Only one thing is missing in the theology this woman is building up: loyalty to the promise. Revelation does not occur outside of the promise, and it has no doubtful source: it accordingly has to come through the Christ (4:25). Jesus's self-revelation by way of John's typical wording ("I am" [4:26]) cannot receive a reply, because any reply at this point is already action: now that the woman has understood, she goes away to call other people (4:28). Her question ("Come, see a man who told me everything that I did. Can this be the Christ?" [4:29]) is not doubtful. In fact it is a rhetorical question:[39] she is a testimony to the Christ and becomes the first missionary in the Fourth Gospel. Starting on her mission, she leaves her water jar, which means that she will not need it any longer and that she left it to Jesus to grant his initial request for a drink. The two kinds of thirst, thirst for giving love and thirst for receiving love, can be finally quenched in this meeting by drawing from the same well, which is God's eternal love for women and men. While the Baptist (1:19–34) and Nicodemus (3:1–15) represent humanity's yearning for God, the Samaritan woman is the recipient of the revelation of God's yearning for her.[40]

5.4. The Widow Casting Two Coins into the Treasury (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4)

This story was also handed down in two versions. The text cannot be ascribed to Q, but it is quite likely to be based on a saying by Jesus. Luke preserves the sequence found in Mark and only inserts Q's lamentation on Jerusalem before this pericope. Conversely, Matthew concludes his chapter against Pharisees and scribes with the harsh words about Jerusalem's impending doom (Matt 23:37–39) and does not include the story of the widow.[41] Once again, Matthew does not show a favorable stance vis-à-vis female characters.

39. Here μήτι is classed among exceptions (see Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert Funk [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961], 221 §427 n. 2: "In some places, the meaning of μή is slightly modified," where an affirmative answer is implied).

40. Silvano Fausti, *Una comunità legge il vangelo di Giovanni* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 2008), 86.

41. There is no agreement on the underlying rationale. For various hypotheses, see

The issue of how to interpret this female character has not yet been settled.[42] If the focus of the passage is on the comparison between the poor widow and the rich, she can be said to be praiseworthy and a model of generosity. Conversely, if the focus is on the comparison between the poor widow and the heads of the temple—because of the context for both narratives—then hers is a case of the impoverishment pursued by scribes, elders, and Pharisees,[43] and accordingly she is not to be regarded as a model, but rather as a victim.

A Synoptic analysis can highlight some key features of this text and help us find our way out of this dilemma. First, the way Luke shortens Mark's narrative emphasizes the comparison between the rich worshipers and the poor widow; additionally, the poor widow is depicted with a touch of noble sympathy. Not only is she described as πτωχή (Luke 21:3)—a harsh word, meaning "pauper" and "beggar," which is the direct antecedent of Italian "pitocco"—the narrator describes her as πενιχρά (21:2), a poetic and rare word (it is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament). Luke preserved in full the structure of the apophthegma in both grammatical and rhetorical terms ("this poor widow has cast more in [into the treasury of the temple] than all those who have cast into the treasury" [Luke 21:3]). Therefore, there can be no doubt as to what the comparison aims: it concerns the different approach underlying the woman's offerings vis-à-vis those made by the rich. The widow is offering her whole self (she is casting in "all that she had/her whole life"; see both Mark 12:44 and Luke 21:4), while the rich are only casting in from their possessions or out of their abundance. Furthermore, there is no direct connection in the pericope between the rich and the rulers of the temple.

Based on these considerations and in line with the Gospels' and Jesus's emphasis on giving all of one's self and seeking personal involvement (see, e.g., Mark 10:21), I find it difficult to believe that the widow only serves as an example of the criticisms to be leveled against the Pharisees. Such criticisms do exist, and they have already been developed extensively (Luke 21, Matt 23). However, the point now is to show how one can build up a sound, truthful, religious, and pious relationship with the temple, the holy place where God is present. We should take account in this connection of the value Jews con-

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Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 164–65; trans. of *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Mt 18–25)* and *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (26–28)*, EKKNT 1.3–4 (Zurich: Benziger, 1997, 2002); François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, EKKNT 3.4 (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 2009), 150 n. 6.

42. See Bovon, *Lukas*, 149.

43. Counter the argument of Addison G. Wright, "The Widow's Mites: Praise or Lament?—A Matter of Context," *CBQ* 44 (1982): 256–65.

ferred on the temple: it was the house of the glory of God, a visible token of divine presence, a sign of divine promise and protection, the pledge of future vindication, a symbol of joy and hope and, finally, a reference point in terms of national identity. People could not feel they were being defrauded in donating to the temple. This is why the widow—a woman and poor to boot—is presented as a sign to the disciples as an example of truly giving oneself to God and serving the temple. Indeed, her being contrasted directly with the rich highlights her devotion, and this devotion, when seen against the background of the criticisms leveled at priests, zealous temple-goers (the Pharisees), and doctors of the law, suggests the need for a replacement: it is not they who are a worthy example, but she is. At issue are not only money, riches, and poverty; the focus is much more on the *pietas* expressing unconditional love for the Lord God, who must be loved, in accordance with the first commandment (Mark 12:28–30), with all one's heart, without keeping anything for oneself. By turning these values into reality, values that are shared by Jesus and his disciples (see Luke 18:18–30), this woman ranks above the religious hierarchs with all their pomp and might.

5.5. The Woman Anointing Jesus (Mark 14:3–9; Matt 26:6–13; "Mary" in John 12:1–8 // The Sinner Pardoned in Luke 7:36–50)

The last anonymous woman who stands out as an autonomous, clearly outlined character appears in the Gospels when Jesus's story is approaching its conclusion. She is also the female character that is most praised and honored by the narrator, whose perspective tends to merge with that attributed to Jesus. This woman performs such a great and ultimate gesture as to deserve being remembered forever throughout the world wherever the gospel is preached (Mark 14:9). Proof of the sincerity of this judgment along with the unquestionable importance the evangelists accord to this woman is given by the fact that all four canonical Gospels preserve her story.

Her gesture, the outcome of her initiative, is described in different manners, and its interpretations are as varied as the commentators' creativity.[44] Standard features of the narrative include, along with the woman (whom John 12 identifies as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus), the perfumed ointment (a symbol of care that does not limit itself to what is required as it also provides pleasure), its value (which hints at the cost of love), the broken alabaster jar (signaling unreserved donation), wetting the feet with tears (only in Luke 7:38),

44. See, e.g., Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 334–42; Charles Homer Giblin, "Mary's Anointing for Jesus's Burial-Resurrection (John 12:1–8)," *Bib* 73 (1992): 560–64.

and wiping the feet with the hair (a sign of considerable intimacy, affection, and devotion [Luke 7:38; John 12:3]).[45] The variables include, in particular, the pouring of the ointment on the head (Mark 14:3; Matt 26:7)—a detail emphasized by those scholars who regard the anointing as a token of royal consecration—or on the feet (Luke 7:38; John 12:3)—pointing to a humble, dedicated service that can only be understood in the context of close family relationships (e.g., between a wife and her husband).

What does this gesture mean, given all the details? Interpretations that regard it as the recognition of the messiah or as a royal anointing performed exceptionally by a woman[46] are not supported by the textual evidence. The narrative focuses only on the woman's unspoken intention and the interpretation Jesus gives to it. Leaving Luke aside for a moment, it is unquestionable that the woman's thoughts were not on Jesus's burial: the Gospels agree that nobody in those festive days prior to Passover had the slightest idea of the tragic ending Jesus would experience.[47] Even were the woman to harbor this thought, that she should consider him dead and buried even before his conviction would not have been at all becoming as a gesture towards a cherished guest. Jesus's interpretation does not shed light on the woman's intention; it is rather addressed to those who are pestering her, and it reminds them of the mortal destiny that is facing him. The focus shifts suddenly and as if by surprise puts Jesus at the center—for the very first and only time in the Gospels—as a subject of care and love (εὖ ποιῆσαι, "she has wrought a good work" on him, see Mark 14:7). The comparison with the poor is not performed in a competitive spirit, as if Jesus were claiming something for himself by taking it away from them. It is aimed at unmasking the hypocrisy that underpins the

45. Using one's hair as a towel to wipe someone else is far from a common gesture; indeed, it is meant to emphasize the greatness and superiority of the person being served (see Petronius, *Satyricon* 27: "aquam poposcit ad manus, digitosque paululum asperso in capite pueri tersit," although here the context is trivial and ridiculous). Other details of the narration to be found in the Gospels, like spikenard (here in the context of a burial) and the washing and anointing of feet, are also mentioned in *Satyricon*, chs. 70 and 78.

46. The idea of a royal anointing based on John K. Elliott, "The Anointing of Jesus," *ExpTim* 85 (1973–74): 105–107, is mostly rejected nowadays. See Légasse, *Marc*, 2:844; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 814; Focant, *Marc*, 518.

47. It should be recalled that spikenard is not one of the spices used for burial rites, while aloe and myrrh were used for this purpose (Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* [Munich: Koesel, 1977], 308 n. 86). The sources concerning the use of the spikenard as an ointment, ranging from the eighth century BCE to the first century CE, report that this plant was employed for ladies' cosmetic products, as a medical drug, as a perfume, and in erotic contexts.

reproach. The true dilemma is not between giving to Jesus and giving to the poor; it is between giving and keeping. Proof thereof is provided by the alabaster jar, which would still be there, untouched, had the woman not broken it for Jesus: no one had meant to give it to the poor. Though keen on outlining Judas's bleak character as a traitor, John (12:6) unmasks the far-from-noble intention underlying the whole episode: "Now he said this, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief."

Luke 7:36–50 would appear to be quite remote from the corresponding passages in the other Gospels. Timing, setting, structure, and issues (love and forgiveness, rather than burial) are completely different. The anonymous woman, who is not neutral because she is identified from the start as a sinner (Luke 7:37), is waiting for her rehabilitation through Jesus. However, the narrative development seconded by Luke is not in conflict with the basic point, that is, that the woman's gesture is a good work (καλὸν ἔργον [Mark 14:6; Matt 26:10]). Luke writes a multilayered script starting from this data in order to explain the hermeneutic circle of love and forgiveness by means of an example (7:44–46) and a parable (7:41–43): "her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little" (7:47). The woman's gesture is an example of love and the effect of forgiveness.

The four evangelists agree on the basic interpretation that the anointing is a gesture of love, although their narratives differ on certain details, contents, and settings. Even Luke, who changes the context and rewrites the story to the greatest extent, keeps the basic concept of a good work, a token of love for Jesus, which he accepts and protects. At the end of the Gospel (that is, the "good news" that God loves women and men and sacrificed himself for their salvation), this good news gives rise to a gesture of love towards the one who announces it. The circle is completed; the circularity of this love cannot be undermined even by death. This is why the memory of this woman and her gesture, related to the announcement of the Gospel, must be retained: in order for the addressees of the announcement to be provided from the start with a unique model of reception and response.

At the end of this overview and in the light of all the other nameless women to which the Gospels refer, can a common denominator be detected to account for a narrative function applicable to all these women? They do show a significant feature compared with nameless male characters. Anonymous male characters are both positive and negative, whereas nameless female characters display definitely positive traits vis-à-vis Jesus, his life, and the understanding of both.[48]

48. This applies unreservedly to Matthew as well: see Antoinette C. Wire, "Gender

The five nameless women who stand out more clearly are not merely thematic repetitions; in fact, they express, in their own peculiar way, fundamental elements of one's relationship with Jesus as interpreted in the light of his self-conscience. The woman with the issue of blood is a model for the active search of a personal contact with Jesus, a model of boldness and faith. The Syro-Phoenician woman is the only person in the Gospels that has the upper hand in a discussion with Jesus and who changes his mind. The Samaritan woman at the well is, according to the Fourth Gospel, a partner chosen by Jesus irrespective of gender-related taboos in order to develop a theological discourse that reveals God's love to her and that turns her into the first missionary. The widow offering two coins is pointed out by Jesus as an example—she, a woman!—of a truly religious dedication to the temple. Finally, the woman who anoints Jesus is the sole person (among both men and women) to provide recognition as well as a service to Jesus by way of her gesture of love, which is accordingly totally free, given out of her abundance, and performed without seeking any reward in exchange. Only in this case is it said—of a woman!—that her memory is to be preserved forever jointly with the announcement of the gospel.

Women, in particular nameless women, followed Jesus; they welcomed him and understood him more than men; they even ministered to him from their possessions, and they proved superior to male characters in terms of their faith, boldness, undertaking, and dialectical skills. No woman—whether nameless or not—is ever reported to have cried out "*crucify, crucify*" against Jesus.[49] Concluding that these considerations shed full light on the *intentio*

Roles in a Scribal Community," in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross Disciplinary Approaches*, ed. David L. Balch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 87–121, in particular 103 nn. 107–8.

49. A historical reconstruction of the accusers urged by the high priest to appear before Pilate in the early morning to lay charges against Jesus suggests that women would not be included in that group; indeed, women could not give testimony under Jewish law nor could they participate in public life. The latter feature applies—albeit with local variants and few exceptions—to all women that lived in the Mediterranean area in Jesus's time (see Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Urchristliche Sozialgeschichte: Die Anfänge im Judentum und die Christusgemeinden in der mediterranen Welt*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1997), 311–22. In this regard, we should consider an uncompromising text by Philo, at least in a general perspective: "Marketplaces, parliaments, courts, social corporations, assemblies of large crowds, and speaking and working outdoors, in peace and at war, are only suitable for men; women should conversely take care of the household and stay at home" (*Spec.* 3.169–170). In the specific case of Jesus's trial, only one woman is mentioned, Pilate's wife, and she attempts to have him released (Matt 27:19); however, not even she is permitted to appear in public in a political matter concerning men. Indeed, she

operis would be, in my view, hasty as well as unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, we cannot and should not fail to note that these data per se are a distinctive trait of the text as well as a common denominator applying to these female characters. It is through the women that the act of giving freely, boldness, faith and loyalty, love, force, a whole movement in the direction of Jesus can be expressed in exemplary fashion. It is especially touching to observe that this process bears no name. The process is not so much or not only intended to facilitate identification with the given character; it rather aims at enhancing the general, unconditional validity of the anonymous message. Each and every person is called upon to be as liberal in readiness to meet Jesus. From this standpoint, the women in the Gospels pave the way.

6. Conclusion: Nameless Women, Blameless Examples

In the canonical Gospels, there is a higher percentage of male characters compared to female ones, whether named or anonymous. These data reflect woman's subordinate role in ancient societies and are, accordingly, far from surprising.

Generally speaking, fictitious characters are nameless in parables, except for Lazarus in Luke 16:19, in accounts of people miraculously healed and—as is typical for Luke—people speaking up from a crowd. Conversely, historical characters and those that have played (in the author's view) a key role in the early Christian community and/or in the passion are mentioned by name. There are no significant differences between male and female characters regarding this distribution of identity and anonymity.

As for individual nameless characters, there is a basically balanced representation of the two sexes; that is, there is no gender-related bias. Indeed, males are more prevalent, which can be expected given contemporary cultural practices; however, several negative models can be found among male characters to the extent that such characters are depicted as hostile or alien to Jesus and his preaching. There are some cases of flawed understanding among nameless female characters (who are less prevalent), for example, the mother of the sons of Zebedee and the woman mentioned in Luke 11:27, and some women are clearly averse, for example, the slave of the high priest, even though she is averse not directly to Jesus, but rather to Peter. This shows that

sends Pilate a message that advises him against sentencing Jesus. Although it is known—in particular with regard to the Hellenistic Jewish and Roman culture surrounding the Jewish world—that very few women were also highly influential from a political standpoint, it is nevertheless a fact that none of them could ever participate directly in political life (Stegemann and Stegemann, *Urchristliche Sozialgeschichte*, 312–13), and Jewish culture was especially strict in this regard.

the authors' perspective is not grounded in, or biased by, gender-related and/or sexist considerations.

However, nameless women are unquestionably superior to nameless male characters in terms of faith, love, and knowledge of/dedication to Jesus. There are only two cases of flawed understanding in the set of nameless women, as mentioned above, and many of these anonymous women are models of conduct, love, closeness to, and knowledge of Jesus, without any equivalence in the group of nameless male characters. A dialectic counterpart like the Samaritan woman, a woman capable of winning an argument with Jesus like the Syro-Phoenician woman, or a woman like the one from Bethany who offers Jesus a service of love so unique and exemplary that her memory will be preserved (albeit anonymously) forever and wherever the gospel is preached would be hard to find in the set of male characters, whether nameless or not. There are no similar outstanding characters in the male group. Thus, modern readers are justified in their being surprised that these women, with their major narrative as well as theological importance, have been handed down by tradition as nameless, whereas the conversion of Zacchaeus and the compassion shown by Joseph of Arimathea are known historically in detail, including the relevant names. Still, this is exactly the fate women have experienced so far in historical tradition. We could word our conclusion summarily, though in essence correctly, by referring to these characters as nameless women and blameless examples.

TABLE 1: ANONYMITY PERCENT RATE AMONG FEMALE CHARACTERS[50]

Name of Character	Named Women				Nameless Women			
	Matt	Mark	Luke	John	Mattt	Mark	Luke	John
Elizabeth			1:5					
Tamar	1:2							
Rahab	1:5							
Ruth	1:5							
Uriah's wife					1:6			
Mary / *his mother*	1:16	6:3	1:27					2:1

50. In the tables characters are listed according to the first time they are mentioned in the text, including the parallel passages to their first citation in Matthew. Anonymous characters are shown in italics, and fictitious characters in parables are in brackets.

Peter's mother-in-law					8:14	1:30	4:38	
Widow of Nain							7:12	
Daughter of Jairus / one of the rulers					9:18	5:23	8:42	
Woman with issue of blood					9:20	5:25	8:43	
Woman bent over							13:11	
"(My) sister"					12:50	3:35		
A woman from Samaria								4:7
The adulteress								(8:3)
(Woman who takes yeast)					13:33		13:21	
(Woman who lost a drachma)							15:8	
(Widow before the judge)							18:3	
Herodias	14:3	6:17	3:19					
Syro-Phoenician woman and daughter					15:22	7:25		
Mother of the sons of Zebedee					20:20			
Widow making an offering						12:42	21:2	
(Ten virgins)					25:1			
Woman anointing / Mary				12:3	26:7	14:3		
Pardoned sinner							7:37	
Joanna, wife of Chuza			8:3					
Susanna			8:3					
Martha and Mary			10:38–42	11:1				
A woman from the crowd ("blessed be the womb")							11:27	

Slave(s) in the court of the high priest					26:69, 71	14:66	22:56	18:16
Mary of Clopas				19:25				
Mary of Magdala	27:56	15:40	24:10	19:26				
Mary the mother of James and Joseph	27:56	15:40	24:10					
Salome		15:40						

TABLE 2: ANONYMITY PERCENT RATE AMONG MALE CHARACTERS

Name of Character	Named Men				Nameless Men			
	Mattt	Mark	Luke	John	Mattt	Mark	Luke	John
Theophilus			1:3					
Genealogy	1:1–17		3:23–38					
Zechariah			1:5					
Joseph the father	1:16		1:27					
Herod (the Great)	2:1		1:5					
Caesar Augustus			2:1					
Quirinius			2:2					
Simeon			2:25					
Phanuel			2:36					
Archelaus	2:22							
Annas and Caiaphas			3:2	11:49				
John the Baptist	3:1	1:4	1:60	1:6				
Simon Peter	4:18	1:16	4:38	1:40				
Andrew	4:18	1:16		1:40				
James and John of Zebedee	4:21	1:19	5:10					

Zebedee	4:21	1:20						
Philip				1:43				
Nathanael				1:45				
Demon-possessed man						1:23	4:33	
Cana: chief of the feast; bridegroom								2:9
Nicodemus				3:1				
Judas Iscariot				6:71				
A Jew								3:25
A Man with leprosy					8:1	1:40	5:12	
Centurion of Capernaum					8:5		7:2	4:46
Servant of the centurion of Capernaum					8:6		7:2	4:46
Sick man at the pool of Bethesda								5:5
Man blind from birth								9:1
Lazarus from Bethany				11:1				
Thomas				11:16				
Son of the widow of Nain							7:12	
A scribe					8:19			
Simon: a Pharisee			7:40					
Man with an unclean spirit / from Gadarenes					8:28	5:1	8:27	
Paralyzed man					9:2	2:3	5:18	
Matthew/Levi	9:9	2:14	5:27					
Jairus/*one of the rulers*		5:22	8:41		9:18			
Two blind men					9:27			
Deaf and mute man						7:32		

The blind man from Bethsaida						8:22		
Mute man					9:32			
Twelve Apostles	10:2-4	3:13-19	6:12-16					
Man with a withered hand					12:10	3:1	6:6	
Blind and mute man					12:22			
Someone (from the multitude)					12:47			
Jesus's brothers					12:46	3:31	8:19	
Jesus's brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, Judas	13:55	6:3						
Herod (Antipas)	14:1	6:14	9:7					
[Herod] Philip	14:3	6:17	3:1					
Lysanias			3:1					
(Moses and Eliah)	17:3	9:4	9:30					
Epileptic man and his father					17:14	9:17	9:38	
(Sower)					13:3	4:3	8:5	
(Man casting seed)						4:26		
(A man has one hundred sheep)					18:12			
(A king reconciling accounts with his servants)					18:23			
A disciple/ a certain man: another—on following					8:21		9:57, 59, 61	
One / rich "young" man					19:16	10:17	18:18	
(A master and laborers)					20:1			

One blind man / two blind men from Jericho / Bartimeus		10:46			20:29		18:35	
Zacchaeus			19:2					
Judas, not Iscariot				14:22				
(Two sons)					21:28			
(A certain man / barren fig tree)							13:6	
(A king and the son's wedding banquet)					22:1		14:16	
Lawyer					22:35	12:28	10:25	
One of the lawyers							11:45	
One from the multitude—on inheritance							12:13	
One from the multitude—on the narrow door							13:23	
(Rich man: his goods)							12:16	
(Good Samaritan)							10:33	
(A friend)							11:5	
A Pharisee invites him							11:37	
A Pharisee invites him							14:1	
One of those who sat at the table with him							14:15	
A man with dropsy							14:2	
One of the ten men with leprosy							17:15	
(Prodigal son; his father and brother)							15:11	

(Dishonest manager)							16:1	
(Lazarus and the rich man)							16:19	
(Thief at night)					24:43		12:39	
(Master of useless servants)							17:7	
(Judge with the widow)							18:2	
(Pharisee and tax collector)							18:10	
(Master serving his servants)							12:37	
(Faithful servant/ manager)					24:45		12:42	
(Nobleman of the coins and his servants)					25:14		19:12	
Two disciples					21:1	11:1	19:29	
(Owner of vineyard and his son)					21:33	12:1	20:9	
Servant with a pitcher of water / and master of the house					26:18	14:13s.	22:10s.	
Caiaphas /*high priest*	26:3					14:53		
Simon with leprosy	26:6	14:3						
Beloved Disciple								13:23
Servant of the high priest (cutting off of right ear)				18:10	26:51	14:47	22:50	
Naked youth						14:51		
Another disciple with Peter								18:15
Two witnesses against Jesus					26:61			
An officer of the high priest								18:22

A servant of the high priest							22:58	18:26
(Pontius) Pilate	27:2	15:1	(3:1) 23:1	18:29				
Barabbas	27:16	15:7	23:18	18:40				
Simon of Cyrene	27:32	15:21	23:26					
The thieves on the crosses					27:44			
The good thief							23:40	
Centurion at the cross					27:54	15:39	23:47	
Joseph of Arimathea	27:57	15:43	23:50	20:38				
Cleopas/ *disciples at Emmaus*			24:18				24:13	

TABLE 3: COMPARISON BETWEEN ANONYMOUS MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS

Name of Character	Nameless Women				Nameless Men				Name of Character
	Matt	Mark	Luke	John	Matt	Mark	Luke	John	
Uriah's wife	1:6					1:23	4:33		*Demon-possessed man*
Mary / *his mother*				2:1				2:9	*Cana: chief of the feast: bride-groom*
Peter's mother-in-law	8:14	1:30	4:38					3:25	*A Jew*
Widow of Nain			7:12		8:1	1:40	5:12		*A man with leprosy*
Daughter of Jairus	9:18	5:23	8:42		8:5		7:2	4:46	*Centurion at Capernaum*
Woman with an issue of blood	9:20	5:25	8:43		8:6		7:2	4:46	*Servant of the centurion at Capernaum*
Woman bent over			13:11					5:5	*Sick man at the pool of Bethesda*
"(My) sister"	12:50	3:35						9:1	*Man born blind*
A woman from Samaria				4:7			7:12		*Son of the widow of Nain*
The adulteress				(8:3)	8:19				*A scribe*
(Woman hiding yeast)	13:33		13:21		8:28	5:1	8:27		*Man with an unclean spirit / Gadarenes*
(Woman with the lost drachma)			15:8		9:2	2:3	5:18		*Paralyzed man*
(Widow petitioning the judge)			18:3		9:18				Jairus/*one of the rulers*
Syro-Phoenician woman and her daughter	15:22	7:25			9:27				*Two blind men*
Mother of the sons of Zebedee	20:20					7:32			*Deaf and mute man*
Widow offering to the temple		12:42	21:2			8:22			*Blind man from Bethsaida*
(Ten virgins)	25:1				9:32				*Mute man*

Anointing /Mary	26:7	14:3			12:10	3:1	6:6		*Man with a withered hand*
Pardoned sinner			7:37		12:22				*Blind and mute man*
A woman from the multitude ("blessed be the womb")			11:27		12:47				*Someone (from the multitude)*
Slave(s) in the court of the high priest	26:69, 71	14:66	22:56	18:16	12:46	3:31	8:19		*Jesus's brothers*
					17:14	9:17	9:38		*Epileptic man and his father*
					13:3	4:3	8:5		*(Sower...)*
						4:26			*(Man casting seed)*
					18:12				*(A man has one hundred sheep)*
					18:23				*(A king reconciling accounts with his servants)*
					8:21		9:57, 59, 61		*A disciple / a certain man: another—on followership*
					19:16	10:17	18:18		*One / rich "young" man*
					20:1				*(Master and laborers)*
					20:29		18:35		*One blind man/two blind men from Jericho/* Bartimeus
					21:28				*(Two sons)*
							13:6		*(A certain man... barren fig tree)*
					22:1		14:16		*(A king and his son's wedding banquet)*
					22:35	12:28	10:25		*Lawyer*
							11:45		*One of the lawyers*
							12:37		*(Master serving his servants)*

							12:13		*One from the multitude—on inheritance*
							13:23		*One from the multitude—on narrow door*
							12:16		*(Rich man: his goods)*
							10:33		*(Good Samaritan)*
							11:5		*(A friend)*
							11:37		*A Pharisee invites him*
							14:1		*A Pharisee invites him*
							14:15		*One of those who sat at the table with him*
							14:2		*Man with dropsy*
							17:15		*One of the ten men with leprosy*
							15:11		*(Prodigal son; his father and brother)*
							16:1		*(Dishonest manager)*
							16:19		*(Lazarus and the rich man)*
					24:43		12:39		*(Thief at night)*
							17:7		*(Master of useless servants)*
							18:2		*(Judge of the widow)*
							18:10		*(Pharisee and tax collector)*
					24:45		12:42		*(Faithful servant / manager)*
					25:14		19:12		*(Owner of the coins and his servants)*
					21:1	11:1	19:29		*Two disciples*

					21:33	12:1	20:9		*(Owner of the vineyard and his son)*
					26:18	14:13	22:10		*Servant with a pitcher of water / and house master*
						14:53			Caiaphas/*high priest*
								13:23	*Beloved Disciple*
					26:51	14:47	22:50		*Servant of the high priest (cutting off of right ear)*
						14:51			*Naked youth*
								18:15	*Another disciple with Peter*
					26:61				*Two witnesses against Jesus*
								18:22	*An officer of the high priest*
							22:58	18:26	*A servant of the high priest*
					27:44				*The thieves on the crosses*
							23:40		*The good thief*
					27:54	15:39	23:47		*Centurion at cross*
							24:13		*One of the two disciples in Emmaus*

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