

ROLES OF WOMEN IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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THERE ARE several ways of approaching the biblical evidence pertinent to the contemporary debate about the role of women in the Church and about the possibility of ordaining women to the priesthood. One approach is a general discussion of first-century ecclesiology both in itself and in its hermeneutical implications for the present. How does one read the NT evidence about the foundation of the Church and the institution of the sacraments, and to what extent is that evidence culturally conditioned? Following the teachings of the Council of Trent, Catholics have spoken of the institution of the priesthood at the Last Supper. Does that mean that at the Supper Jesus consciously thought of priests?¹ If he did not and if the clear conceptualization of the priesthood came only toward the second century, does the fact that men exclusively were ordained reflect a divine dispensation? Or are we dealing with a cultural phenomenon which can be changed? In other words, do we work with a "blueprint ecclesiology" wherein Jesus or the Holy Spirit has given us a blueprint of church structure in which virtually no changes can be made? While I regard the discussion of these questions as most important, I have written on them elsewhere and shall not repeat my observations here.²

A second approach to the biblical evidence is to discuss the explicit texts that refer respectively to the equality and the subordination of women in society and cult. I am not convinced of the usefulness of such a

¹In this question care is required in interpreting Trent: "If anyone shall say that by the words 'Do this for a commemoration of me,' Christ did not institute the apostles priests. . .let him be anathema" (Denzinger-Schönmetzer 1752). The fathers of Trent did not distinguish between the Jesus of the historical ministry and the developed Christological picture of Jesus presented in the Gospel accounts of the ministry written thirty to sixty years later; thus they did not speak simply of Jesus but of Christ. Today, in loyalty to the 1964 statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on Gospel historicity (see *Jerome Biblical Commentary* [Englewoods Cliffs, N.J., 1968] art. 72, sect. 35), Catholics would have to acknowledge that the divinity of Jesus was recognized *after* the Resurrection and that eventually it was this fuller appreciation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, that was made part of the Gospel accounts of his ministry. Therefore, institution of priests by *Christ*, as taught by Trent, which cites words reported by Luke and Paul (but not by Mark and Matthew), may imply more than was apparent at the historical Last Supper.

²One of my Hoover Lectures delivered at the University of Chicago in January 1975 treated this subject; it is now published in *Biblical Reflections on Crises Facing the Church* (New York, 1975). To what I have said there I would add only a plea for accuracy. The statement is sometimes made that there were no women priests in NT times. Since in the NT itself the term "priest" is applied to Christians *only* in the broad sense of the priesthood

discussion, since for every text pointing in one direction there is usually a countertext. If Eph 5:24 states that wives must be subject in everything to their husbands, Eph 5:21 introduces that section by commanding "Be subject to one another." If 1 Cor 11:7 says that the man (*anēr*) is the image and glory of God, while woman is the glory of man, Gn 1:27 states that both man and woman are in the image of God. If 1 Cor 14:34 rules that women should keep silence in the churches,³ 1 Cor 11:5 recognizes the custom that women pray and prophesy—and prophecy is the charism ranking second after apostleship (1 Cor 12:28), to the extent that Eph 2:20 has the Church, the household of God, built upon the foundation of apostles *and prophets*. I might continue listing contrary voices, but then we would still have the question of how to evaluate the voices that stress subordination. Once more we would have to ask: Is that purely a cultural pattern or divine revelation?

I prefer here to follow a third approach and to consider the general picture of women in one NT work, the fourth Gospel, and in one NT community, the Johannine community.⁴ I have chosen the fourth Gospel because of the perceptive corrective that the Evangelist offers to some ecclesiastical attitudes of his time—his should be a voice heard and reflected upon when we are discussing new roles for women in the Church today. I presuppose⁵ that the Evangelist was an unknown Christian

of the people (1 Pt 2:5; Ap 5:10—i.e., a priesthood of spiritually offering one's life as a sacrifice according to the demands of the gospel), it would seem warranted to affirm that the term "priest" was just as applicable to women as it was to men in NT times. If the more precise claim is made that women did not celebrate the Eucharist in NT times, there is simply no way of proving that, even if *one may well doubt that they did*. We know very little about who presided at the Eucharist in NT times. Yet, there is some evidence that prophets did, for prophets are said to be involved in liturgy (*leitourgein* in Acts 13:2) and to give thanks (*eucharistein* in *Didache* 10, 7); and certainly there were women who prophesied (1 Cor 11:5; Acts 21:9).

³It is frequently argued that 1 Cor 14:34b–36 is not genuinely Pauline. H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia, 1975) p. 246, states: "The section is accordingly to be regarded as an interpolation."

⁴This paper is a development of remarks prepared for the session of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in April 1975. In treating the Gospel, while maintaining that the Evangelist has tradition about the ministry of Jesus, I take for granted that he reports that tradition through the optic of his own times, so that he tells us something about the role of women in his own community. I shall use the name "John" for the Evangelist even though I do not think he was John son of Zebedee; it is more open to discussion whether the Beloved Disciple was John. All the narratives in the Gospel dealing with women will be discussed except the story of the adulteress in 7:53–8:11, which is a later and non-Johannine insertion into the Gospel.

⁵The evidence for these presuppositions may be found in my commentary on John in the Anchor Bible (2 vols.; Garden City, N.Y., 1966, 1970). In particular, see the section on Johannine ecclesiology, pp. cv-cxi.

living at the end of the first century in a community for which the Beloved Disciple, now deceased, had been the great authority. I do not think that the Evangelist was either antisacramental (in a Bultmannian sense) or antiecclesiastical. He took for granted the church situation of his time, which included both structure and sacraments; yet he counteracted some of the tendencies inherent in that situation by writing a Gospel in which he attempted to root the Christians of his time solidly in Jesus. They may be members of the Church, but the Church does not give God's life: Jesus does. And so, in order to have life, they must inhere in Jesus (Jn 15:1-8). The sacraments are not simply church actions commanded or instituted by Jesus; they are the continuation of the power that Jesus exhibited in signs when he opened the eyes of the blind (baptism as enlightenment) and fed the hungry (Eucharist as food). At the end of the first century, when the memory of the apostles (now increasingly identified with the Twelve) was being increasingly revered, the fourth Gospel glorifies the disciple and never uses the term "apostle" in the technical sense,⁶ almost as if the Evangelist wishes to remind the Christian that what is primary is not to have had a special ecclesiastical charism from God but to have followed Jesus, obedient to his word. In short, it is a Gospel that seeks to make certain that in the inevitable structuring of the Church the radical Christian values are not lost. What information does such a perceptive Evangelist give us about the role of women?

I

There is not much information about church offices in the fourth Gospel⁷ and, a fortiori, about women in church offices. Perhaps the only text that may reflect directly on this is 12:2, where we are told that Martha served at table (*diakonein*). On the story-level of Jesus' ministry this might not seem significant; but the Evangelist is writing in the 90's, when the office of *diakonos* already existed in the post-Pauline churches (see the Pastorals) and when the task of waiting on tables was a specific function to which the community or its leaders appointed individuals by laying on hands (Acts 6:1-6).⁸ In the Johannine community a woman

⁶ Cf. 13:16 for *apostolos* in the nontechnical sense of "messenger." *Apostellein*, "to send" (seemingly interchangeable with *pempein*), occurs for sending on a mission, but women can be involved in a mission too. See n. 9 below.

⁷ Although John knows of the existence of the Twelve as a group during Jesus' ministry (6:70), their names are not listed, nor is there a description of their call as a group.

⁸ Originally this scene referred to the selection of leaders for the Hellenist Christian community. Although we do not know if titles were used at this early period, the closest parallel in the titular used in later church structure would be "bishop." Luke looks back on the scene from the 80's, and he may have thought that their work was comparable to that done by the deacons in his time, especially if he had begun to think of the apostles as bishops.

could be described as exercising a function which in other churches was the function of an "ordained" person. But, except for that one passage, our discussion must center rather on the *general* position of women in the Johannine community.

Let us begin with the story of the Samaritan woman. In the sequence of reactions to Jesus found in the dialogues of chaps. 2, 3, and 4, there seems to be a movement from disbelief through inadequate belief to more adequate belief. The "Jews" in the Temple scene are openly skeptical about his signs (2:18-20); Nicodemus is one of those in Jerusalem who believe because of Jesus' signs but do not have an adequate conception of Jesus (2:23 ff.); the Samaritan woman is led to the brink of perceiving that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah; 4:25-26, 29) and shares this with others. Indeed, the Samaritan villagers believe because of the woman's word (4:39, 42: *dia ton logon [lalian] pisteuein*). This expression is significant because it occurs again in Jesus' "priestly" prayer for his disciples: "It is not for these alone that I pray, but also for those who believe in me through their word" (17:20: *dia ton logon pisteuein*). In other words, the Evangelist can describe both a woman and the (presumably male) disciples at the Last Supper as bearing witness to Jesus through preaching and thus bringing people to believe in him on the strength of their word. One may object that in chap. 4 the Samaritan villagers ultimately come to a faith based on Jesus' own word and thus are not dependent on the woman's word (4:42). Yet this is scarcely because of an inferiority she might have as a woman—it is the inferiority of any human witness compared to encountering Jesus himself. A similar attitude may be found in chap. 17, where Jesus prays that those who believe in him through the word of his disciples may ultimately be with him in order that they may see glory (17:24).

That the Samaritan woman has a real missionary function is made clear by the dialogue between Jesus and his male disciples which precedes the passage we have been discussing. In 4:38 we have one of the most important uses of the verb *apostellein* in John.⁹ Jesus has just spoken of the fields being ripe for the harvest—a reference to the Samaritans coming out from the village to meet him because of what the woman has told them (4:35 following 4:30). This is missionary language, as we see from the parallel in Mt 9:37-38: "The harvest is plentiful, but

⁹ See n. 6 above. Another usage of *apostellein* is in 17:18: "As you [Father] sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world," which precedes the prayer "for those who believe in me through their word" (17:20)—even as *apostellein* in 4:38 precedes the references in 4:39, 42 to those who believe in Jesus through the woman's word. A third significant usage of "send" (*apostellein* and *pempein*) is in the postresurrectional appearance of Jesus to the disciples: "As the Father has sent me, so do I send you" (20:21). In the next paragraph of my paper I shall discuss the priority John gives to the appearance of the risen Jesus to a woman disciple.

the laborers are few; therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest that He send out laborers into the harvest." But curiously the harvest of the Samaritans verifies the saying "One sows, while another reaps" (Jn 4:37). Jesus explains this to his male disciples: "What I sent [*apostellein*] you to reap was not something you worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have come in for the fruit of their work." Whatever this may have meant in reference to the history of the Samaritan church,¹⁰ in the story itself it means that the woman has sown the seed and thus prepared for the apostolic harvest. One may argue that only the male disciples are sent to harvest, but the woman's role is an essential component in the total mission. To some extent she serves to modify the thesis that male disciples were the only important figures in church founding.

The phenomenon of giving a quasi-apostolic role to a woman is even more apparent in chap. 20. Essential to the apostolate in the mind of Paul were the two components of having seen the risen Jesus and having been sent to proclaim him; this is the implicit logic of 1 Cor 9:1-2; 15:8-11; Gal 1:11-16. A key to Peter's importance in the apostolate was the tradition that he was the first to see the risen Jesus (1 Cor 15:5; Lk 24:34). More than any other Gospel, John revises this tradition about Peter. Mt 28:9-10 recalls that the women who were leaving the empty tomb were the first to encounter the risen Jesus, but in Matthew they are not contrasted with Peter. In Jn 20:2-10 Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple go to the empty tomb and do *not* see Jesus (also Lk 24:12, 24); in fact, only the Beloved Disciple perceives the significance of the grave clothes and comes to believe. It is to a woman, Mary Magdalene, that Jesus first appears, instructing her to go and tell his "brothers" (the disciples: 20:17 and 18) of his ascension to the Father.¹¹ In the stories of the angel(s) at the empty tomb, the women are given a message for the disciples; but in John (and in Matthew) Mary Magdalene is sent by the risen Lord himself, and what she proclaims is the standard apostolic announcement of the Resurrection: "I have seen the Lord." True, this is not a mission to the whole world; but Mary Magdalene comes close to meeting the basic Pauline requirements of an apostle; and it is she, not Peter, who is the first to see the risen Jesus.¹² Small wonder that in some

¹⁰ See the discussion in my commentary (n. 5 above) pp. 183-84.

¹¹ A similar instruction to go and tell Jesus' "brothers" is found in the parallel appearance to the women in Mt 28:10.

¹² The tradition that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene has a good chance of being historical—he remembered first this representative of the women who had not deserted him during the Passion. The priority given to Peter in Paul and in Luke is a priority among those who became official witnesses to the Resurrection. The secondary place given to the tradition of an appearance to a woman or women probably reflects the fact that women did not serve at first as official preachers of the Church—a fact that would make the creation of an appearance to a woman unlikely.

Gnostic quarters Mary Magdalene rather than Peter became the most prominent witness to the teaching of the risen Lord.¹³ And in Western Church tradition she received the honor of being the only woman (besides the Mother of God) on whose feast the Creed was recited precisely because she was considered to be an apostle—"the apostle to the apostles" (*apostola apostolorum*).¹⁴

Giving to a woman a role traditionally associated with Peter may well be a deliberate emphasis on John's part, for substitution is also exemplified in the story of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. The most famous incident in which Peter figures during the ministry of Jesus (and his other claim to primacy besides that of witnessing the first appearance of the risen Jesus) is the confession he made at Caesarea Philippi, especially in its Matthean form (16:16): "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Already the disciples had generally confessed Jesus as a "Son of God" (no definite article in Mt 14:33), but it is Peter's more solemn confession that wins Jesus' praise as a statement reflecting divine revelation. The closest parallel to that confession in the four Gospels is found in Jn 11:27: "You are the Christ, the Son of God";¹⁵ and it appears on the lips of a woman, Martha, sister of Mary and Lazarus. (And it comes in the context of a major revelation of Jesus to Martha; it is to a woman that the mystery of Jesus as the resurrection and the life is revealed!) Thus, if other Christian communities thought of Peter as the one who made a supreme confession of Jesus as the Son of God and the one to whom the risen Jesus first appeared, the Johannine community associated such memories with heroines like Martha and Mary Magdalene. This substitution, if it was deliberate, was not meant to denigrate Peter or deny him a role of ecclesiastical authority, any more than the introduction of the Beloved Disciple alongside Peter in crucial scenes had that purpose. If I interpret John correctly, at a time when the twelve apostles (almost personified in Peter, as in Acts) were becoming

¹³ *The Gospel according to Mary*, in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* 1 (Philadelphia, 1963) 342-44.

¹⁴ J. A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite* (New York, 1950) p. 470, n. 55. The use of "apostle" of Magdalene is frequent in the famous ninth-century life of her authored by Rabanus Maurus: Jesus instituted her apostle to the apostles (*PL* 112, 1474B), she did not delay in exercising the office of the apostolate by which she had been honored (1475A), she evangelized her coapostles with the news of the Resurrection of the Messiah (1475B), she was elevated to the honor of the apostolate and instituted evangelist (*evangelista*) of the Resurrection (1479C).

¹⁵ In my commentary on John (n. 5 above) p. 302, I show how the elements of Matthew's account of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi are found scattered in John: e.g., Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, confesses Jesus to be the Messiah when Andrew is calling Simon to follow Jesus, and on that occasion Jesus changes Simon's name to Cephas (1:40-42); Simon Peter as spokesman of the Twelve confesses Jesus to be the "holy one of God" (6:69); ecclesiastical authority is given to Simon Peter in 21:15-17.

dominant in the memory of the ministry of Jesus and of church origins, John portrays Simon Peter as only one of a number of heroes and heroines and thus hints that ecclesiastical authority is not the sole criterion for judging importance in the following of Jesus.¹⁶

The importance of women in the Johannine community is seen not only by comparing them with male figures from the Synoptic tradition but also by studying their place within peculiarly Johannine patterns. Discipleship is the primary Christian category for John, and the disciple par excellence is the Disciple whom Jesus loved. But John tells us in 11:5: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister [Mary] and Lazarus." The fact that Lazarus is the only male in the Gospel who is named as the object of Jesus' love¹⁷—nothing similar is said of the Twelve—has led some scholars to identify him as the Beloved Disciple.¹⁸ And so it is noteworthy that John would report that Jesus loved Martha and Mary, who seem to have been better known than Lazarus.¹⁹ Another proof that women could be intimate disciples of Jesus is found in chap. 20. In the allegorical parable of the Good Shepherd John compares the disciples of Jesus to sheep who know their shepherd's voice when he calls them by name (10:3–5). This description is fulfilled in the appearance of the risen Jesus to Mary Magdalene as she recognizes him when he calls her by her name "Mary" (20:16). The point that Mary Magdalene can belong to Jesus' sheep is all the more important since in 10:3–5 the sheep are twice identified as "his own," the almost technical expression used at the beginning of the Last Supper: "Having loved his own who were in the

¹⁶ Such an attitude can be detected in the Synoptic tradition as well. Matthew is the Evangelist who gives Peter the most exalted role as the recipient of the keys of the kingdom of heaven (16:19), but Matthew would never make Peter first in the kingdom. That is a primacy specifically denied even to members of the Twelve (Mt 20:20–26). The criterion for primacy in the kingdom, as distinct from the Church, is not ecclesiastical authority or power but total dependence on God, whence the model of the little child (18:1–4). At a time when we are engaged in a necessary debate as to who among the baptized can be ordained to priesthood or bishopric, it may be useful to remind ourselves that it remains more important to be baptized than to be ordained, more important to be a Christian than to be a priest, bishop, or pope.

¹⁷ See also Jn 11:3, 11, 36, where *philein* and *philos* are used of Lazarus. The significance is not different from the use of *agapan* in 11:5; both verbs are used of the Beloved Disciple (*philein* in 20:2; elsewhere *agapan*).

¹⁸ See the discussion in my commentary (n. 5 above) p. xciv.

¹⁹ Notice the order of names in 11:5. Moreover, in 11:1–2 Lazarus is identified through his relationship to Mary and Martha. The reason for this may be that the two women were known in the wider Gospel tradition (Lk 10:38–42), whereas Lazarus is a peculiarly Johannine character (at least as a historical figure; cf. Lk 16:19–31) who is introduced into the Gospel by being placed in a family relationship to Mary and Martha. This is not unlike the introduction of the Beloved Disciple into well-known scenes by placing him in a relationship to Peter.

world, he loved them to the end" (13:1). On the analogy of the Synoptic Gospels, conservative scholars have argued that the participants in the Johannine Last Supper scene were the Twelve. Be that as it may,²⁰ it is clear that John has no hesitation in placing a woman in the same category of relationship to Jesus as the Twelve would be placed if they are meant by "his own" in 13:1.

II

It is as a continuation of this idea that I now turn to John's treatment of the mother of Jesus, who appears in the fourth Gospel at the first Cana miracle and at the foot of the Cross. There are many symbolisms that John may have intended his reader to associate with the mother of Jesus; in my commentary on the two scenes I have explained some of them at length. But here I am concerned only with discipleship and with the relative importance of men and women in the Johannine community. I shall be concise, since I do not want this paper to be more than a note and since elsewhere I have given detailed arguments.²¹

Let us begin with the wedding at Cana. Many theorize that there was a pre-Johannine form of the story. One form of this theory suggests that John drew the basic Cana miracle story from a tradition of the *preministry* career of Jesus—a tradition wherein the Christology of the ministry was anticipated by describing Jesus as endowed with divine power and knowledge during his youth, when he was still living with his family.²² In this tradition Jesus spoke freely of his divine mission and worked miracles in order to help family and friends. It is borne witness to in the apocryphal Gospels of the second century (e.g., *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*) and in one other place in the canonical Gospels, namely, the scene in Lk 2:41-50 where as a youth Jesus shows extraordinary knowledge and refers to the Temple as his Father's house. This background would explain many peculiar features in the story of the water changed to wine at Cana: Jesus is still up in the highlands of Galilee (where he does not work miracles in the Synoptic tradition); he has not yet left his home and moved to Capernaum, which will be the center of his public ministry (2:12); he is in the family circle of his mother and brothers (2:12) and he is attending the wedding of a friend of the family (2:1-2); his

²⁰ The "his own" at the beginning of chap. 13 are the replacement of an older "his own" who refused to receive him (1:11); and so, whether or not the Twelve are placed in the scenario of the Last Supper as "his own," in many passages of chaps. 13-17 they are the representatives of all who believe in Jesus.

²¹ In the last of the Hoover Lectures (the one on an ecumenical understanding of Mary) mentioned in n. 2 above and published in the same collection; there I approach the Johannine evidence concerning Mary from another angle—a quest for the historical Mary.

²² This is a development of the thesis proposed by B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John*

mother expects him to use his miraculous power to solve the shortage of wine at the wedding (2:3); the miracle he performs is particularly exuberant (about 100 gallons of wine from the six stone jars mentioned in 2:6).

I have described one form of the theory that a pre-Johannine story underlies the present Cana narrative. There are other forms of this theory, but almost all propose that there was no response of Jesus such as now appears in 2:4—a response which makes the story very hard to understand. It is a seeming refusal; and yet Jesus' mother goes ahead as if he had not refused, and Jesus does what she requested. The substance of the pre-Johannine story may have gone thus:²³

Now there was a wedding at Cana of Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus himself and his disciples had been invited to the wedding celebration. But they had no wine, for the wine provided for the wedding banquet had been used up. The mother of Jesus told the waiters: "Do whatever he tells you." There were at hand six stone water jars, each holding fifteen to twenty-five gallons. "Fill those jars with water," Jesus ordered. . . .

Such a popular picture of Mary's ability as a mother to intervene in Jesus' activities, to ask for a miracle for her friends and to have it

(London, 1972) pp. 126-27. It supposes the legitimacy of several attitudes in modern Gospel research. *First*, in the course of early Christian preaching the Christology developed "backwards": the role of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, was first understood in relation to the future (the Parousia), then in relation to the present (the Resurrection), and finally in relation to the past (the ministry). As part of a reflection on what Jesus was before the Resurrection, Christology was pushed back to his youth and to his conception/birth. Thus, Mark, the first Gospel, has no infancy story but concentrates on Jesus as Son of God during the ministry; the later Gospels, Matthew and Luke, have infancy stories which took their final shape after the story of Jesus' ministry had been preached. In Lk 2:41-50 a once-independent story of Jesus as a youth has been appended to the story of Jesus' conception/birth, leaving us the awkward sequence wherein Mary who has been told that Jesus is the Son of God does not understand when he speaks about his Father (2:50). *Second*, the modern Roman Catholic exegete, following the directives of Pius XII, recognizes the existence of different types of literature in the Bible, including fiction and popular stories which can be inspired by God just as well as history. And so there is nothing contrary to Catholic teaching in supposing that an Evangelist on rare occasions took over stories (of undefinable historicity) from popular traditions about Jesus—certainly that happened in both infancy narratives. Inerrancy comes into play, not in reference to either the origin or historicity of a story like that of Cana, but in reference to its teaching "that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation" (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, no. 11). As we shall see, John did adapt the story to make it conform to the genuine Gospel picture of Jesus' relationship to his family. All of this is treated in detail in the lecture referred to in the preceding note.

²³The best reconstruction of the pre-Johannine miracle material is found in R. T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs* (Cambridge Univ., 1970), and I offer here a translation of the first part of his Greek reconstruction of the pre-Johannine Cana miracle story. I (and others) do not agree with Fortna that a whole pre-Johannine gospel can be reconstructed, but all admit that the best evidence for a pre-Johannine miracle collection is in the two Cana miracles which John himself numbers in sequence (2:11, 4:54).

granted, did not correspond with the oldest Gospel tradition about Jesus' attitude toward family. In Mk 3:31–35 we find Jesus strongly rejecting intervention by his mother and brothers in favor of obedience to God's will. And so, when John brought this miracle story into the Gospel, he modified it by inserting 2:4,²⁴ where Jesus carefully dissociates himself from his mother's interests (“Woman, what has this concern of yours to do with me?”) and gives priority to the hour dictated by his heavenly Father (“My hour has not yet come”).²⁵ Thus the fourth Gospel agrees with the other three that Mary had no role in the ministry as Jesus' physical mother. The Jesus who asked his disciples not to give any priority to family (Mk 10:29–30; Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26) was not himself going to give priority to family. This interpretation of Jn 2:4 is valid whatever theory one accepts about the origins of the Cana story.

If one had just Mk 3:31–35, the only scene common to the Synoptics in which the mother and brothers of Jesus play a role, one might conclude that Jesus completely rejected them from his following. According to Mark, when Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were outside asking for him, he replied: “*Who are my mother and my brothers?*” And looking about at those who sat around him, he said: “*Here are my mother and my brothers!*” He then stated that whoever did the will of God was his brother and sister and mother—in other words, his disciples take the place of his family. But this was not Luke's understanding of Jesus' intent. His version of the scene (Lk 8:19–21) omits the Marcan words I have italicized above and reads thus:

Then Jesus' mother and his brothers approached him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. He was given the message: “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside waiting to see you.” But he replied: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

For Luke, the hearers of the word of God do not *replace* Jesus' mother and brothers as his true family; for his mother and brothers hear the word of God and do it and so are part of the true family of disciples. Luke preserves Jesus' insistence that hearing the word of God and doing it is constitutive of his family, but Luke thinks that Jesus' mother and brothers meet that criterion. That this is a correct interpretation is confirmed by Acts 1:14,²⁶ where, among the 120 “brethren” who

²⁴ Fortna points out that this verse, besides creating logical difficulties, is written in the characteristic prose of the Evangelist, something that is not true of the pre-Johannine story Fortna has reconstructed. It is worth noting that in Lk 2:49 a similar modification of the parents' claims appears: “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house [about my Father's business]?”

²⁵ The “hour” pertains to the heavenly Father's domain: “The hour had come for Jesus to pass from this world to the Father” (13:1).

²⁶ Another confirmation is found in Lk 1:38, where Luke dramatizes Mary's reaction to

constitute the believing community after the Resurrection-Ascension, Luke lists "Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers."

This is also John's understanding of the role of Jesus' mother in relation to discipleship, as we see from the other scene in which she appears (19:25-27). At the foot of the Cross there are brought together the two great symbolic figures of the fourth Gospel whose personal names are never used by the Evangelist: the mother of Jesus and the Disciple whom Jesus loved.²⁷ Both were historical personages, but they are not named by John, since their primary (not sole) importance is in their symbolism for discipleship rather than in their historical careers. During the ministry, as we saw in the final Johannine form of the Cana story (especially 2:4), the mother of Jesus was denied involvement as his physical mother in favor of the timetable of the "hour" dictated by Jesus' Father; but now that the hour has come for Jesus to pass from this world to the Father (13:1), Jesus will grant her a role that will involve her, not as *his* mother but as the mother of the Beloved Disciple. In other words, John agrees with Luke that Jesus' rejection of intervention by Mary did not mean that his natural family could not become his true family through discipleship. By stressing not only that his mother has become the mother of the Beloved Disciple, but also that this Disciple has become her son, the Johannine Jesus is logically claiming the Disciple as his true brother. In the fourth Gospel, then, as well as in the Synoptic scene, Jesus has reinterpreted who his mother and his brothers are and reinterpreted them in terms of discipleship.²⁸ If in Acts 1:14 Luke brought back the mother and brothers of Jesus as disciples after the Ascension, John chooses the "hour" when Jesus has been lifted up

the Christological proclamation about Jesus' divine sonship (formerly attached to the baptism of Jesus but now attached to his conception). Her response is drawn from Luke's positive understanding of the Marcan scene, namely, that she was one who heard the word of God and did it: "Let it be done to me according to your word." See R. E. Brown, "Luke's Method in the Annunciation Narratives of Chapter One," in *No Famine in the Land: Studies in Honor of John L. McKenzie*, ed. J. W. Flanagan and Anita Robinson (Missoula, 1975).

²⁷ John's failure to use the personal name of the mother of Jesus is striking because John is not shy of that name. "Mary" occurs some fifteen times in the fourth Gospel: for Mary the sister of Martha, for Mary Magdalene, for Mary the wife of Clopas. His insistence on the title "the mother of Jesus" or "his mother" is probably because John is interpreting a tradition about what constituted her true motherhood.

²⁸ I repeat what I stated at the beginning of the discussion of the mother of Jesus: this is not the only symbolism. It should be noted, too, that Mary does not become simply a disciple among many; she has an eminence as the mother of the ideal Disciple. While John and Luke move here in the same general theological direction, Luke is reinterpreting the role of Jesus' physical "brothers," i.e., relatives. John (7:5) treats the physical brothers as nonbelievers, and so he chooses to deal with the brotherhood of the Beloved Disciple, who is not a physical relative of Jesus.

(12:32) to bring onto the scene the mother of Jesus who is made the mother of the Beloved Disciple, now Jesus' brother.

I pointed out earlier that discipleship is the primary Johannine category and that John included women as "first-class" disciples by telling us that Jesus loved Martha and Mary and that Mary Magdalene was one of "his own" sheep whom he called by name. John's treatment of the mother of Jesus is a step further in that direction. If the Beloved Disciple was the ideal of discipleship, intimately involved with that Disciple on an equal plane as part of Jesus' true family was a woman. A woman and a man stood at the foot of the Cross as models for Jesus' "own," his true family of disciples.

I spoke earlier of the Samaritan woman to whom Jesus revealed himself as the source of life and the Messiah, a woman who in a missionary role brought men to him on the strength of her word. In the scene in 4:27, we are told that when Jesus' male disciples saw him speaking to her, they were surprised that he was dealing in such an open way with a woman. In researching the evidence of the fourth Gospel, one is still surprised to see to what extent in the Johannine community women and men were already on an equal level in the fold of the Good Shepherd. This seems to have been a community where in the things that really mattered in the following of Christ there was no difference between male and female—a Pauline dream (Gal 3:28) that was not completely realized in the Pauline communities.²⁹ But even John has left us with one curious note of incompleteness: the disciples, surprised at Jesus' openness with a woman, still did not dare to ask him, "What do you want of a woman?" (4:27). That may well be a question whose time has come in the Church of Jesus Christ.

²⁹The rule that a woman should keep silence in the churches, if it was authentically Pauline (see n. 3 above), was scarcely in effect in the Johannine community, in whose gallery of heroes were the Samaritan woman who brought men to faith by her word and Mary Magdalene who proclaimed the good news of the risen Jesus.