

## 5. WOMEN DISCIPLESHIP AND EVANGELIZATION (LUKE 8:1-3).

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

The pilgrim church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father. 1

This paper is a short reflection on how women participated actively though indirectly, in the proclamation of the kingdom of God, during Jesus' lifetime, and immediately after his earthly life; as the author of Luke's Gospel informs us, particularly in Lk. 8:1-3 (cf. Lk. 23:49. 55;24:10); and also in the Book of Acts of the Apostles, as the same author is responsible for both works.<sup>2</sup>

It is surprising to see that it is only the author of Luke's Gospel, among the Synoptics, who gave women this privilege of being part of Jesus' missionary team. They went about with Jesus during his announcing ("Kerysmon"), and proclamation ("euangelizomenos"), of the kingdom of God. These women were serving and providing for Jesus and the twelve out of their own resources (Lk. 8:3c). More striking is the fact that Jesus by involving women (Lk. 8.2a), side by side with the twelve (Lk. 8. 1c), showed that the work of evangelization, even during his lifetime, was not limited to any particular group (not even to the chosen twelve), but it is the work of all believers—men as well as women.<sup>3</sup>

This work of evangelization is continued even afterwards, when Jesus had gone back to the Father.<sup>4</sup> We shall also see how the need for it to be continued, is felt in the world of the twentieth century, while looking forward to the third millennium. This need is even more felt today in Africa where the gospel message is hardly a hundred years old in many of her countries.

In Igbo language (one of the main languages in Nigeria), we sing: "Olu Chukwu dili mu na ngi" =God's work is my responsibility and yours. Therefore, women, the African women, and not only men, have to be involved in this enormous task.

## 2 *Jesus' Missionary Team:— the twelve and the Ministering women.* (Lk. 8: 1-3).

**Text:** v.1 And it happened that soon afterwards, he continued journeying about, from city (to city) and from village (to village) announcing and proclaiming the kingdom of God and the twelve with him v. 2 and women, some of whom had been cured from evil spirits and sickness, Maria who is called Magdalene, from whom seven demons were cast out, v. 3 and Ioanna wife of Chouza, steward of Herod and many others some of whom were serving/providing for *them* out of their own resources.

### 2.1 *Delimitation of our text: Lk. 8: 1-3:*

Our text is well defined. It is preceded by the *conversion* of a woman of the city — a call for *faith* in Jesus who loves even the worst sinner; a conversion of heart (Lk. 7:36—50), the effect of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. Our text is also followed by the parable of the sower (Lk. 8: 4—8): — showing the fruits of proclamation, which is living out the proclaimed and the heard word, so that it grows to maturity yielding a hundred-fold measure. In this way, proclamation or evangelization is continued in a life well-lived, so that those around can learn from it and be influenced by it, so much so that they can become believers in the Word themselves, and doers as well.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.2 *The Universal Mission*

Jesus was journeying from city (to city) and from village (to village) *announcing and proclaiming* the kingdom of God (Lk. 8:1). This is the missionary context of the actual evangelization carried out by Jesus himself. The technical words, "*Kerysson*" (*announcing*) and "*euangelizomenos*" (*proclaiming*) which are the key-words to our text underline this.

This mission is carried out to every area of Galilee, both in the city and in the village. This brings out our theme very well: "Universalism and Mission". Thus, by Jesus' proclamation, people are being called to faith in him and in the Father who sent

him.

The N.T. meaning of "keryssein", is not restricted to "to preach", because it is not a delivery of a learned and edifying or hortatory discourse in well-known words, and pleasant voice (e.g. as in rhetorics), rather, it means in the N.T. "a declaration of an event"; "to proclaim".

So, we see Jesus "announcing" and "proclaiming" (Lk. 8:1. "Kerysson") the kingdom of God, which is an event, because of his coming on earth— the rupture between the O.T. and the N.T.

In the N.T., the basic meaning of "euangelion" is "preached — Word". Since preaching bears witness to Christ, his words and his acts, and these constitute the essence of the good news, the writings which contain them came to be called "gospel". The Fathers of the Church often use the term not merely for the N.T. gospels, but for the whole of the N.T.; as distinct from the O.T.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, announcing and proclaiming the kingdom of God (Lk. 8:1) gives a comprehensive picture of the whole missionary activity of Jesus, not only his preaching, but his life, death and resurrection. He is the one who brings the good news ("euangelos"), and at the same time the good news ("euangelion").

The goal of proclamation then is to arouse faith in the person of Jesus Christ, among the hearers, rather than understanding (I Cor. 2:1); and this is the concern of the christian Bible.

Also the word "apostellein" to send, to commission, and the words "euangelizesthai" (=to proclaim), "keryssein" (=to announce), go tightly together. For without commission or sending ("apostellein"), there will be no preaching ("keryssein", "euangelizesthai"), hence no faith will be cultivated.

### 2.3 The Missionary Team:

Let us turn our attention to the missionary team of Jesus, as he proclaims the good news:

The twelve were with him (Lk. 8:1c). To be *with* ("syn") is used to describe the company given to Jesus by the twelve (which is moral presence of personal support), during his missionary activity, even though they themselves do not engage in preaching here in our context of Lk. 8:1. Women were also part of Jesus'

missionary team (Lk. 8:2a).

Women, together with the twelve, were part of the companions of Jesus during his proclamation. Unlike in Mk. 15:41, where the verb "akolouthein" (to follow behind) is used to describe the company of these women with Jesus, during his passion, here in Lk. 8:1c & v. 2a, it is omitted, instead we have the preposition "Syn" (with) thus, bringing out the author's literary artistry.

Contrary to Jewish customs, Jesus accepted to be thus accompanied by women disciples. Thus, by admitting women disciples, Jesus broke through the rigid Jewish custom. He moved ahead of his society. For, no woman was ever permitted to study the Torah, how much more, being a disciple of a Rabbi; and neither was prayer compulsory for her, as her husband was obliged to pray for and on behalf of the entire family.<sup>7</sup>

The company given by women disciples to Jesus was not merely that of passive physical presence, but *an active participation in his missionary work*: these "were serving/providing them out of their own resources" (Lk. 8:3c).

Therefore, these women had a different missionary apostolate — "diekonoun"; they were serving and caring for Jesus and the twelve out of what they themselves possessed. They were providing meals, clothing, housing, for Jesus and the twelve because, while proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus and his team needed, as human beings, to be well-fed, have a place to rest when they were tired, wash themselves and wear clean tunics for their itinerant proclamation. All these, the women did and more. Thus, the women proclaimed the kingdom of God by their services of love to Jesus and the twelve.

We know from this that neither Jesus nor the twelve wrought miracle for their own support. The most interesting thing was that, these women accompanied Jesus and the twelve wherever they went to proclaim the kingdom of God (Lk. 8:1-3). They also continued to care for the young church gathered at the Cenacle before the Ascension of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:14).

The names of some of these women are given. Women some of whom were cured from evil spirits and of illnesses. It is obvious that these women followed Jesus out of gratitude to him for healing them. This was why they were serving and caring for

him and the twelve (Lk. 8:3c). Their healing was a sign of the presence of the kingdom of God among them (Lk. 4:16-21 cf. Isa. 61:1). Thus announcing and proclamation (Lk. 8:1) bring about in reality their salvific content in the lives of the hearers — the healing of the body and the soul (Lk. 8:2ab). There was also Maria being called Magdalene from whom seven devils had been cast out (Lk. 8:26). This Mary is not the same person as the “woman of the city and a sinner” (Lk. 7:37a cf. Mk. 14:3); she is not the sister of Lazarus and Martha at Bethany. Mary Magdalene is seen again among the company of women who were with Jesus in his passion and death (Lk. 23:49-56). She is among the women who witnessed the empty tomb while going to anoint the dead body of Jesus (Lk. 24:1-10). In Acts 1:14, she is among the women who were in the company of the eleven praying in a locked room, awaiting the Pentecost. After the Pentecost, we hear no more of her in the N.T., but surely of other women believers. The others named by Luke are Joanna the wife of Chouza steward of Herod, and Sussana.

### III. **Evangelization after Jesus Christ by men and women disciples (Acts of the Apostles)**

After the resurrection, Jesus Christ renewed the commission he gave to the twelve to preach the kingdom of God (Mtt. 10:7ff. //Lk. 8:9.2ff.; 10.1ff. //Mk. 3.14; 6.7-12), this time to the whole world not only to Israel (Mtt. 28:19-20; Acts 10:42; Mk. 16:15). The Apostles and disciples (Lk. 10; 1ff.), proclaimed the saving event of God for men and women in Jesus Christ — his death and resurrection.

The women disciples of Jesus (Lk. 8:1-3), even though they were never sent out to preach by Jesus, during his lifetime, continued their own apostolate: “*diakonein*” services of christian love (Lk. 8:3c).

According to Beyer<sup>8</sup>, “*diakonein*” means “to wait at table” (Lk. 12:37, 17.8; Acts 6.2), “to minister to someone”, “to care for someone” (Lk. 22:27); “to be serviceable” (Lk. 8:3; cf. Mk. 15:41). In Mtt. 25.42, “*diakonein*” has an extended meaning of “giving food and drink to someone”, “giving shelter”, “clothes”, “visiting the sick”, “and the prisoners”. The term “*diakonein*”, thus, comes to have the full sense of “active

christian service of love for the neighbour", and as such, it is the mark of the true disciples of Jesus. In Lk. 22:26f., the astonishing act of Jesus in the appraisal of service (*diakonia*), is to reverse in the ethical estimation the relationship between serving and being served.

The time of the institution of the diaconate as an official ministry in the church is hard to determine. In the early church (pre-Pauline tradition) any kind of service or ministry is called "*diakonein*", and there is no distinction between ministry as church office and service. For example the "apostolic office" is service (Acts 1:17.25; 20:24; 21:19; Rom. 11:12; 2 Cor. 4:1 etc), so too is the office of the evangelist (2Tim. 4:5), or the activity of Mark, who combines personal service and assistance with missionary work (2Tim. 4:11). All these different services (*diakonia*), were rendered to the brethren, and hence to the One Lord, Jesus Christ. Therefore, our women, in Lk. 8:2-3, were also evangelizers, just like Jesus (Lk. 8:1). But it is in Paul we first find the distinction between the official obligations ("*kuberneseis*", administrators) and service ("*antilempsis*", helpers I Cor. 12:28) we then have office-bearers and deacons (Phil. 1:1).

The women disciples (Lk. 8:2-3) who cared for the body of Jesus by preparing ointment for the anointing (Lk. 22:55;24:1) were the *first* eye-witnesses for the empty tomb (Lk. 24:1ff). The angel sent them to tell the eleven that Christ had risen from the dead. Mary Magdalene (Lk. 8:2bc), being the *first* and *chief* witness (Lk. 24.10) is named *first* in our list of the women disciples (Lk. 8:2-3). These women were among the disciples who awaited patiently with the eleven for the coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:14). They, too, actually received the Holy Spirit with the rest of the disciples at the Cenacle. Therefore, these women were qualified to be apostles; yet, they were never seen preaching the Word, nor casting out demons, nor healing in the name of Christ, according to the accounts of our four evangelists — not even Luke — just for the fact that they were women. Thus, the depreciative Jewish concept of women persisted in the early church, and also persists in the church of the twentieth century with the denial of the ministerial priesthood to women.

After the Pentecost, we never heard again of these women disciples (Lk. 8:2-3). But, surely, there were other women

believers:- e.g. Priscilla, with her husband Aquila at Ephesus, expounded the way of God more accurately to Appollos, (Acts 18:24-26 cf. 2 Tim. 4:19). Paul called them "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 16:3). They also practised hospitality towards the believers (Rom. 16:5). Euodia and Syntche were women who "laboured side by side in the gospel with Paul and Clement" (Phil. 4:2-3). Nympha was a woman disciple, who practised hospitality towards the believers (Col. 4:5). Phoebe was a deaconess in the community church of Cencreae (Rom. 16:1). Thyatira, a worshipper of God, a seller of purple goods, became a believer with her household at hearing Paul's preaching. She later practised hospitality towards Paul and Barnabas (Acts 6:14-15). Again in Rom. 16:6, the author said "Greet Mary, who worked much hard (*"ekopiasen"*) among you". Tabitta, a woman disciple at Joppa, is described as "full of good works and acts of charity" (Acts 9:36). Philip, the deacon (Acts 6:6) had four unmarried daughters, who were all prophetesses at Caesarea (Acts 21:8-9 cf. Joel 2:28).

#### **IV. Evangelization in this twentieth century: especially in Africa by African men and women believers.**

The same announcing (*"kerysson"*) and proclaiming (*"euangelizomenos"*) of the kingdom of God, reached North Africa directly from Jerusalem, in the first three centuries — Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, Sudan (cf. Acts 2:10; 8:26-36). It was however routed by the invasion of Islam in the seventh century (with the exception of Ethiopia) and was hardly heard of any more. Africa, south of the Sahara, only came to hear the preached-Word in the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries through Northern Europe.<sup>9</sup> Again, the dark era of the slave trade (fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries), set back the work of evangelization. So, it was not until the nineteenth century that the revival of Catholic Mission in Africa, South of the Sahara, took place— the modern era of the Catholic Mission. The Church has reached a hundred years in many parts of Africa; and, today, Africans have become Missionaries to themselves. This involves men and women believers.

We want to show therefore, how African women help in proclaiming the Word of God in Africa, just as the women disciples of Jesus (Lk. 8:1-3):

(a) **The Family or the Domestic Church** (cf. Vat. 11:L.G. no. 11):

In our society we recognise the role women play as wives, mothers and educators. The mutual love between them and their husbands creates a healthy environment for the nourishment and upbringing of their children. They together with their husbands are transmitters and teachers of life, love, faith, hope and holiness.<sup>10</sup>

To educate a woman is to educate the nation, since it is the way she is brought up, that she will in turn bring up her children.

As Justice S.C. Oputa says:

Everybody's education starts from the eyes, lips and the bearing of his or her mother. The mother imperceptibly yet affectively impresses the imprint of character of virtue or vice on the child.<sup>11</sup>

b) **In the civil society**, women believers live a life of witnessing to Christ's love for all among their closest neighbours, believers and non-believers alike. They strive to abolish certain African cultural practices that dehumanize women and discriminate against them. They have thus gone beyond being limited to the kitchen and to begetting children to assume their responsible positions in society. In this way they are effectively equipped to carry the work of evangelization to their places of trade or business: market stalls, shops, hair saloons, restaurants, and so on; hospitals, schools, the mass media etc. They thus make their contribution at all levels of public and private establishments.

African women believers are therefore helping in the proclamation of the word of God in our society. They render active service to their fellow men and women. This is the same *diakonein* (Lk. 8:3) exercised on double merit — as good citizens and as faithful disciples of Christ (what is done for the brethren is done for the Christ — Mtt. 25:42).

c) **In the Church**, christian women play a fundamental role in living and deepening the faith either as religious or lay women. Some teach christian religion at all levels of learning including Catholic Major Seminaries and Higher Institutions of learning. Others form ecclesiastical organisations like Catholic Women

Organisation (C.W.O.) which are geared towards giving moral and religious support for the women themselves. All kinds of services of christian love like admonishing their fellow women (and at times husbands of fellow women) about peace and love in the family, giving material aid to widows, orphans, the sick, the aged and handicapped, teaching catechism etc, are rendered. When they give material aid to the parishes and the dioceses, when they maintain priests, religious and bishops, when they come to the aid of the unfortunate ones of the society, they evangelize like the women disciples who were with Jesus and the twelve (Lk. 8:3c).

Women religious in African christian communities live their baptismal promises deeply as a way of spreading or witnessing to the good news. Thus these women through their consecrated life preach the gospel in the midst of the people with whom and among whom they live. They are like leaven in the midst of the people. They continually bear witness to the love of Christ for all men and women, and point to the fact that this world is transient and that our true happiness is in the eternal life in God.

#### **d) The discriminations women suffer in society and**

**church** are set-backs to the participation of women in the evangelization of Africa.

In many parts of Nigeria (and Africa) women are denied right of inheritance (e.g. the Igbo and Gwari). Widowhood is a traumatic experience for women. If a woman has no male issue at the death of her husband, the brother-in-law inherits everything. If she can still bear children she is given in marriage again to one of the dead man's brother (*ikuchi nwanyi* in Igbo). Jews have similar practices (cf Lk. 20:27-40 and parallels). Or the widow can ask one of her daughters to stay at home and beget male issues for her husband or she may even marry another woman to beget issues for the dead husband.

This unjust pressure on women calls for proper evangelization. Women in Africa, and not only men, should have the right of inheritance as is practised among the Ashanti of Ghana. The humiliation of widows and barren women goes against the teaching of Jesus and the principles of christian confession (cf Gal. 3:28). Such a humiliation is inhuman and should have been abolished were the right relationship established between the

gospel and culture. African women believers should fight for their rights through women organisations like the International Federation of Women Lawyers, and they should put pressure on Episcopal conferences of such affected areas to remove the shame on the gospel brought about by the dehumanisation of women.

The appropriation of the positive values in African culture will help to achieve a more active participation of African women in evangelization. The first value is life — *ndubuisi* (life is foremost in whatever one is planning to execute). The life of every person (male and female), the life of each family, of each group of people is promoted and respected. On the other hand the church repudiates those practices which dehumanise and discriminate against life (especially the life of women). This allows the gospel to penetrate African cultures, assume their values, uplift or transform them where necessary giving them a christo-centric emphasis (inculturation).

To move into the new era of evangelization, the church in Africa must assume the boldness of Jesus Christ who during his own time went forward to break the Jewish closed mentality about the capabilities of women. He made them co-workers in spreading the Kingdom (Lk. 8:1-3). In the 20th century the church in Africa should allow women to act and serve at various levels and according to their capacities. Catechetical services and pastoral ministries should be open to women — especially in places like hospitals where they obviously dominate. Women who are properly commissioned or ordained would administer the sacrament of the sick, give them holy communion, baptize and perform other liturgical functions and services for the good of the community (like the male and female deacons of the early church).

In Africa today the proclamation of the Word of God is the duty of men and women. A male-oriented church should not deny women their right and duty to serve in the church. Our civil society of the twentieth century has become aware of the hidden riches and potentials of women in the areas of politics, economy, health, education and so on for the progress and development of the world. The church, in imitation of her master, should not fail to awaken in these same women the need to fulfil the important role of proclaiming, catechizing and

bringing Christ to their fellow men and women.

... in the past... men told women that seven plus seven was six and women accepted gracefully and even marvelled at such beautiful computation. But today, women know that seven plus seven is fourteen. They now know another thing too, that men plus women equals progress, progress of a nation, progress of mankind.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

From our study of Luke 8:1-3 we learn that Christ not only chose the twelve to proclaim the good news but also took women to help in the same missionary work *diakonein* — active christian services of love, services of christian love).<sup>13</sup> This leads us to the conclusion that the interest of the gospel of Jesus is best served today when women assume fully their role as disciples of the Lord to continue rendering their indispensable service for evangelization.

## References

1. Vatican Council II. *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church), no.2.
2. cf. Acts 1:1-3 //Lk. 1:1-3; 24:49// Acts 1:4; Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982, p.6.
3. cf. Paul VI; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Dec. 8, 1975; "it is as we have already said, the whole church which evangelizes. Therefore, both for the whole world and for every part of it, it is the church which has the responsibility of spreading the gospel" (no. 60).
4. Mtt. 28, 20; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 63
5. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no 21-24.
6. Friedrich, TDNT II, 717-727: "euangelizomai", "euangelion".
7. cf. Jn. 27; Lk. 10:39; Mk. 12:40-41.6; Oepke, "gyne" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* I, 776-789.
8. Beyer *Diakoneō*... in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* II, pp. 81-93.
9. C. Obi (et al) *A Hundred Years of Christianity in Eastern Nigeria* Onitsha: Africana-Fep, 1985, p. 12.
10. See H. Eboh, "Are Women Taking over Churches" *Daily Star* Sept. 19, 1990, p. 8.
11. S.C. Oputa, "Shanahan Planted: Heerey Watered...", an unpublished paper presented to the Immaculate Heart Sisters of Nigeria on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of their foundation, 1937 — 1987, p. 7.
12. Article in *Daily Star* Nov. 21, 1990, p. 9.
13. See A. Cunningham, *The Role of Women in Ecclesial Ministry*. Biblical and Patristic Foundations. Washington: US Catholic Conference, 1976.