A Trend Emerging

The New Testament comes across as a very male production. It proclaims the advance of a Jesus and his male disciples – with women in occasionally mentioned support roles. And the conflicts throughout are between men – pro or con. Even the mother of Jesus only emerges as a prominent female in the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel *late* in the first century. In the New Testament's earliest writings Saint Paul mentions Mary only once in connection with the birth of Jesus: "When the time was right, God sent forth his son, *born of a woman*." Mark mentions her as "standing outside a meeting pleading with Jesus to come home." And Matthew's birth narrative is all about Joseph and Herod and the Magi – Mary cast in a bit part at best. Only late in the first century does Luke bring her to the fore as prominent in Christ's origin as well as Elizabeth, her cousin, and the elderly prophetess Anna.

The Old Testament also comes across as a drama about men operating within a man's world: about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons and then about Moses, Joshua, the twelve Judges of Israel, Saul, David, Solomon . . . carrying the destiny of a people meant to redeem the world. But a closer look reveals that at almost every critical moment in biblical history where the male characters would prefer a detour from their destiny, a daring woman saves the day. There's Rebecca diverting Isaac's blessing from Esau to Jacob; there's Pharaoh's daughter saving Moses from infanticide; there's Naomi and Ruth compelling Boaz to marry Ruth, without whom there would have been no David (and without Bathsheba, no Solomon). Then there's Tamar seducing Judah; then come Rahab, Deborah, Judith, Esther, each equivalent to an early Joan of Arc.

In every case the men folk are fatalistic; it's the women who have the imagination to perpetuate destiny (as did Eve?). And in every case the women save the situation by not "adhering to the book," but by using their imaginations to the point where their interventions become morally questionable - as in that case of Rebecca's disguising her son Jacob as his elder brother Esau and diverting their father's irreversible blessing to fall upon the younger son from whom would arise the Israel of subsequent history. It's like Rebecca saying: "If I have to lie to save the world, I'll lie, I'll take on the responsibility!" Today we might call that: thinking outside the box.

Which brings us back to the New Testament and Luke's birth narrative. An angel announces to the over aged priest Zachary his equally aged wife's conception of John the Baptist. He can't believe it; he brings up all the reasons it's impossible – and he ends up mute. The same angel announces to Mary her immediate pregnancy of dimensions beyond belief – she wonders *how* but nevertheless says: So be it! Men seem to insist on knowing the facts (in conventional terms) before deciding anything; biblical women seem willing to take a chance; to believe in miracles.

As I view television news nowadays, how different from the old days when it was mostly men who spoke with authority, pundits, broadcasters, peopling politics, arguing, complacent in their role of leadership. Today? Men seem to be fading from such venues – it's women who speak up with authority. An emerging trend but biblically an old one.

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