

Jesus and the dignity of women. Biblical premises of Jadwiga Zamoyska's activity

Jezus a godność kobiety.
Biblijne przesłanki działalności Jadwigi Zamoyskiej

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Abstract: The proposed article, which deals with the issue of Jesus' attitude towards women, i.e. significant people in His life and activity, is primarily a part of a broad discussion about the dignity of a woman and her relationship to a man. However, it may be an important biblical background to the achievements of Mrs General Jadwiga Zamoyska. She was definitely ahead of her time not only as a great social activist, but also a faithful follower of the Church, far from militant feminism, ideological emancipation or suffragism. She emphasized doing real good in the spheres of public life, which were socially, culturally and religiously neglected. Today it is difficult to determine to what extent Mrs General Zamoyska was directly inspired by the Gospel. However, it can be assumed that reading the message contained therein, she meditated both on the value of the woman herself and on various forms of her social activity. In this way, she gave a testimony of faith in her own dignity and in the possibilities of female nature: sensitive, compassionate and at the same time strong and decisive. For such was Jesus in His action and teaching.

Keywords: Bible; Gospel; Jesus; woman; imitation

Abstrakt: Proponowany artykuł podejmujący problematykę stosunku Jezusa do kobiet, czyli osób znaczących w Jego życiu i działalności, wpisuje się przede wszystkim w szeroką dyskusję na temat godności kobiety i jej stosunku do mężczyzny. Może być jednak ważnym biblijnym tłem dorobku generałowej Jadwigi Zamoyskiej. Zdecydowanie wyprzedzała ona swoją epokę nie tylko jako wielka działaczka społeczna, ale i wierna wyznawczyni Kościoła, daleka od wojującego feminizmu, ideologicznej emancypacji czy ruchu sufrażystek. Podkreślała czynienie prawdziwego dobra w tych sferach życia publicznego, które są społecznie, kulturowo i religijnie zaniedbane. Dziś trudno określić, w jakim stopniu generałowa Zamoyska bezpośrednio inspirowała się Ewangelią. Można jednak przypuszczać, że czytając zawarte w niej przesłanie, medytowała zarówno nad war-

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tością samej kobiety, jak i nad różnymi formami jej społecznej aktywności. Dała w ten sposób świadectwo wiary we własną godność i możliwości kobiecej natury: wrażliwej, współczującej, a jednocześnie silnej i zdecydowanej. Taki bowiem był Jezus w swoim działaniu i nauczaniu.

Słowa kluczowe: Biblia; Ewangelia; Jezus; kobieta; naśladowanie

Introduction

The proposed topic not only fits very well into the worldwide — including the Church — discussion about the dignity of a woman and her relationship to a man, but it can also be the background for the wonderful achievements of Mrs General Jadwiga Zamoyska. With her achievements, she was ahead of the times in which she lived, not only as a great social worker, but also a faithful follower of the Church, standing among such figures as St. Urszula Ledóchowska, her sister, Bl. Maria Teresa, and also — although in different areas of social life and in a slightly later period — Stefania Sempołowska, Maria Kleniewska and Irena Kosmowska¹. All of them were far from militant feminism, ideological emancipation or suffragism, but they emphasized doing real good in those spheres of public, social, cultural and religious life that were neglected in their times.

It is currently difficult to determine to what extent great social activists were directly inspired by the Gospel, but one cannot fail to mention the influence of figures such as Bl. Honorat Koźmiński on the activity of some of them. There is probably at least an indirect impact of the biblical content on their social work, given that the verse Genesis 2:23 strongly convinced about the equality of the male and female sexes, ‘The man said: «This one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!»’².

The biblical author notes the first enthusiastic statement of a man in the pages of the Holy Scriptures, which stands in contrast to the negative experience that contact with the animal world — however necessary and valuable for man — is not able to eliminate the overwhelming sense of loneliness (v. 19–20)³. The man himself states that the woman is equal to him not only in the sensual and emotional sphere, but fundamentally in dignity. In the Holy Scriptures, the phrase *עצם מן עצמי*, ‘bone of my bones’ and *בשר מן בשרי*, ‘flesh of my flesh’ mean the same essence and

¹ The interested reader can learn more about this subject from the extensive work edited by A. Janiak-Jasińska, K. Sierakowska and A. Szwarz, *Działaczki społeczne, feministki, obywatelki... Samoorganizowanie się kobiet na ziemiach polskich do 1918 roku (na tle porównawczym)*, Warszawa 2008.

² Biblical texts cit. per *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu w przekładzie z języków oryginalnych*, Poznań 1996.

³ A. Wénin, *D’Adam à Abraham ou les errances de l’humain. Lecture de Genèse 1,1–12,4*, Lire la Bible, Paris 2007, pp. 76–81.

subjectivity, and hence the sense of special closeness and kinship⁴. Man is able to define himself unlike animals⁵. It must be emphasized that this distinctive self-determination occurs in the man only after the appearance of the woman in connection with the unquestionable desire to include her in the awareness of his humanity⁶.

Conscious of this, Jesus taught His countrymen a proper, respectful approach to women, which the New Testament shows in a wide spectrum of different life situations and His teaching.

1. Jesus' behaviour towards women

It is significant if we take into account the superstitions prevailing at that time in the environment in which Jesus grew up and was raised. While in the rabbinic parables the topic of women was carefully avoided, Jesus willingly spoke about their everyday life, about their worries, hardships and joys. Moreover, referring to their daily work, He often preached very valuable teachings to His students. In this way, He made the simplest and most banal activities performed by women a source of wisdom for perfecting the lives of those who wanted to imitate Him. This must have undoubtedly been connected with the constant appreciation of women in the minds of, above all, men, who were brought up in the spirit of disregarding the opposite sex and subordinating it to the established standards of family and social life. The following example of an activity in those days, performed primarily by women, allowed Jesus to express the truth about the kingdom of God (Mt 13:33), 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all was leavened'.

The simple act of preparing bread serves to convey knowledge about the development of the kingdom of heaven in the world. The women kneaded the bread dough the day before it was baked. Yeast was added to let the bread rise, covered with a cloth and left overnight. During this time, the dough would rise and the bread would be baked the next morning. The bread could last about a week before mold started growing on it. Since three measures of flour is over 22.5 kg, which is

⁴ Cf. Gen 29:14; Judges 9:2; 2 Samuel 5:1; 19:13–14; 1 Chronicles 11:1.

⁵ J. Lemański, *Księga Rodzaju, rozdziały 1–11*, Nowy Komentarz Biblijny – Stary Testament, Częstochowa 2013, p. 235.

⁶ At the same time, internal difference, i.e. the feeling of differentiation between the two sexes that is essentially different from distinguishing oneself from animals, which results, for example, from a deeper psychological awareness of man, cf. H. Efthimiadis-Keith, *Genesis 2:18–25 from a Jungian and Feminist-Deconstructionist Point of View*, „Old Testament Essays” 23/1 (2010), p. 56.

far too much to bake for one family⁷, this verbal exaggeration of Jesus may refer to the fact that the kingdom of heaven will come in abundance far greater than can be imagined. Thus the kingdom of heaven is like leaven. As little leaven permeates the dough and gives it shape, so the kingdom of heaven gives shape and texture to the community in which it develops. The very effort of the woman who wants to bake bread is worth emphasizing. Jesus undoubtedly likens her work to the work of God Himself.

Other truths are conveyed by the mention in Mt 24:41 about the fate of two women grinding grain, 'Two will grind at the mill: one will be taken, the other will be left'. The eschatological context is indicated by placing this sentence in speeches concerning the future of the created world (Mt 23–25) in view of the need to be ready for the coming of the Lord (24:37–51). The immediate context vv. 37–42 mentions two people about to be taken or left behind⁸. The condition for being taken from this world is opening to the word of God and believing in its truthfulness, which is historically exemplified in the times of Noah (v. 37). Because of his faith, he prepared himself for the coming flood and was therefore saved. In the same way, on the day of the coming of the Son of Man, only those who believe will be saved. Paradoxically, everything will happen in the simplest and most prosaic activities of everyday life, as it used to be (verses 38–39)⁹. Similarly, at the moment of the parousia, of the two working in the field, one will be taken, the other not, and of the two grinding in the mill, one will be taken, the other not (vv. 40–41). The mention of women's work in this case has the same meaning as the information about men's work, and the work of both sexes has been equated. Thus, everyday work should not obscure the awareness of the approaching end of our world for both men and women.

To strengthen the postulate of being vigilant while waiting for Jesus' return, He first gives the parable of the vigilant servant (Mt 24:45–51), and then enriches the theme with the parable of the ten virgins (Mt 25:1–13). In both of these passages, the most important motive is the need to be vigilant and prudent. The attitude of some of the virgins shows negligence, because they did not provide themselves with enough oil in the lamps, 'The unreasonable ones took their lamps, but they did not take oil with them. But the wise took oil in vessels with their lamps' (verses 3–4). Although imprudence can happen to any man, it is worth noting that

⁷ It is estimated that it could feed more than 100 people, C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids 2009, p. 389.

⁸ C.L. Blomberg, *Matthew. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary 22, Nashville 1992, pp. 364–366.

⁹ A. Paciorek talks about the tension between the great signs announcing the parousia (Mt 24:15, 29) and the normality of everyday life of the inhabitants of the earth, *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza, rozdziały 14–28*, Nowy Komentarz Biblijny, vol. 1/part 2, Częstochowa 2008, p. 479.

the hagiographer mentions more delicately the lack of foresight in maidens than in male servants¹⁰. While they did not take the oil — perhaps only inadvertently — the servant responsible for his master's household indulged in drunkenness and carousing, neglecting his duties, which evidently increased his responsibility for those entrusted to his care (24:48–51). In addition, the two parables differ in another important detail regarding the dignity of the sexes. Men, willing to demand independence and full social rights, were referred to as δούλος, 'servant' (Mt 24:45). On the other hand, the term δούλη, 'servant', 'slave' — readily referred to by men to women — does not appear in the second parable, and in its place the noun παρθένος, 'maiden', 'virgin' was used instead.

Similarly, in order to show the necessity of being persistent in asking, Jesus quotes the 'manly' parable of the imposing friend (Luke 11:5–8). The 'female' parable about a widow persistently pestering an unjust judge (Lk 18:1–8) stands in front of it. 'In the same city there was a widow who used to come to him and ask, «Defend me from my adversary!»' (v. 3). In this case, it is worth emphasizing that the scale of difficulties that the heroes of both parables must overcome in order to achieve a positive result of their efforts is different. A persistent friend comes to his companion only once a night. Thus, the rather inopportune time is a source of irritation to one who has already fallen asleep and did not want anyone to disturb his resting time. In the case of the widow, however, the narrator first suggests that her life situation is difficult. Probably without a male guardian, she is at the mercy of all those who could pitilessly exploit her vulnerability. Jesus also strongly emphasized the pride and wickedness of the mighty judge (Luke 18:2,4). Thus the scale of the difficulties that this woman, harassed by the enemy, had to face was much greater. The form ἤρχετο is the past imperfective tense of the verb ἔρχομαι, 'to arrive', 'to come', which in this case means a multiplicity of the undertaken task¹¹. Therefore, the determination and stubbornness of the woman must have been correspondingly greater and more decisive than that of the friend who came at night in the first parable. Therefore, it is clear that Jesus appreciates the woman's attitude.

In turn, to describe the greatness of God's mercy, there is a 'male' parable about a shepherd who lost one of his hundred sheep (Luke 15:4–7). However, immediately after it, Jesus quotes another one — about a poor woman who lost

¹⁰ H.C. Waetjen, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1–13): The Integrity of Identity and Activity*, in: *Distant Voices Drawing Near: Essays in Honor of Antoinette Clark Wire*, ed. H.E. Hearon, Collegeville 2004, p. 124.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. 1 Samuel 17:34; 2 Chronicles 9:21; Mark 2:13; John 8:2. The classic meaning of the imperfectum, next to the extended durability of a given action, cf. J.W. Wenham, *Initiation au grec de Nouveau Testament. Grammaire – Exercices – Vocabulaire*, ed. J.C. Ingelaere, Paris 1986, pp. 51–52. The so-called «Iterative imperfect», R.H. Stein, *Luke. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary 24, Nashville 1992, p. 445.

one of the ten drachmas (Luke 15:8-10), 'If a woman who has ten drachmas loses one drachma, does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search diligently until she finds it?' (v. 8).

The modern reader may be surprised by her concern and effort in finding the lost coin, evident in the thoroughness of the search wherever it might be found¹². Well, in times when these ten drachmas were the earnings of almost two weeks' work¹³, a thorough search of one's household can only arouse admiration and appreciation for the care for the state of material possessions. One can also understand much better the great personal joy shared with the neighbours when the search for the coin was successful. Both parables put at the center the awareness of the material importance of each part of the total possessed (one sheep for the whole flock and one drachma for the whole income). However, the concern for securing material existence through acquired property is also emphasized. In this regard too, the woman's preoccupation with the situation is not inferior to that of a man who is persistently searching for his sheep. Here she lights a candle to look behind the door, under the table, into every corner of the house, she sweeps the house and searches diligently until she finds it. Her behaviour illustrates the means and methods that God Himself uses to bring lost souls to Himself: He lit the Gospel candle to show the way and to bring lost souls to Himself¹⁴. Ultimately, God's mercy expressed in the search for a lost sinner is illustrated not only by male but also female foresight, because in Jesus' opinion representatives of both sexes are worthy to teach with their attitude the most important truths about God's love for every human being.

Another example of lessons learned from the observation of everyday life is provided by the text of John 16:21, 'When a woman is in labour, she is sad, because her hour has come. But when she gives birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of the joy that a human being has been born into the world'. The quoted verse is part of Jesus' second farewell discourse addressed to His disciples, the main theme of which announces His departure from this world (16:4-33). The words of Jesus in vv. 19-28 emphasize the present sadness, which, however, will turn into joy, similar to the experience of a woman in labour, experiencing anxiety at the moment of giving birth to a child¹⁵, but

¹² N. Geldenhuys, *Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids 1951, p. 402.

¹³ Or working days. More on that L. Kidson, *The Anxious Search for the Lost Coin (Luke 15: 8-10): Lost Coins, Women's Dowries, and the Contribution of Numismatics and Phenomenology to Gospel Research*, „Australian Biblical Review” 68 (2020), pp. 80-83.

¹⁴ F. Mickiewicz, *Ewangelia według św. Łukasza, rozdziały 12-24*, Nowy Komentarz Biblijny – Nowy Testament, vol. III/part 2, Częstochowa 2012, p. 157.

¹⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas refers here to the texts of Ps 47.7 and Lm 1.12, which mention physical pain and, at the same time, the spiritual anguish that accompanies them, Tomas Aquinas, *Commēn-*

rejoicing when that difficult moment of her life is over¹⁶. Comparing the situation of the disciples to the pain-inducing birth of a child, Jesus emphasizes that the fulfillment of the mission of giving birth will bring complete joy to the woman¹⁷. Similarly, disciples will experience lasting joy after experiencing difficulties (vs. 22a) when they see Jesus again and God the Father will give them a full understanding of the teachings of His Son (vs. 22b–28). This narrative presents the period after the resurrection as a time when the fear of the disciples will pass away, their doubts will be dispelled, and their mission will be confirmed. The situation of the disciples disappointed that the promised kingdom has not come, depressed by the calamity that would befall Jesus, mourning His premature loss, will be completely changed after His resurrection. Their despondency will turn into joy when He, risen, returns to them¹⁸.

2. Jesus' defence of women's rights

This part of Jesus' social activity is particularly important when we take into account the inequality in the treatment of women and men in the light of the applicable Mosaic law. Two — probably out of many — cases of Jesus' courageous defence of the social status of women will bring this issue closer.

The permission given by Moses for the husband to dissolve the marriage union in the form of a certificate of divorce given to the wife was the exclusive prerogative of the man (Deuteronomy 24:1, 3). Meanwhile, Jesus forbids divorce altogether, recalling the fundamental record of Genesis 2:24, 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh'.

The above verse is unique in many ways, also in the original context of Genesis 2:21–25, which talks about the creation of a woman from the body of a man. First, because it is the only verse in Genesis 2 with the present tense, while all the others use the past tense. It is important to emphasize this as in the present

tary on the Gospel of John. Chapters 13–21, with introduction and notes by D. Keating, M. Levering, transl. F. Larcher, J.A. Weisheipl, Washington 2010, p. 150.

¹⁶ In the Old Testament, the combination of intense suffering and postpartum relief illustrates the pain that God's people must endure before the relief and joy brought with the advent of the promised Messianic salvation (Is 21:2–3; 26:16–21; 66:7–14; Jer 13:21; Mic 4:9–10), D.A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids 1990, p. 544.

¹⁷ Such a state usually evokes the idea of the urgency and inevitability of birth when the time comes. Today, however, it is more about the contrast between the mother's state of mind before and after birth, J.R. Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids 2010, p. 626.

¹⁸ M.C. Tenney, *The Gospel of John*, in: *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, with The New International Version of The Holy Bible in Twelve Volumes Volume 9 (John-Acts)*, Grand Rapids 1981, p. 159.

tense, regardless of the surrounding context, principles and statements are always communicated. Hence, verse 24 is a statement or principle, not just information. Moreover, in a completely arbitrary way, it introduces the (unjustified) existence of a father and a mother, and yet we are dealing with the first ever human couple. Through a man's choice of a woman as his companion in life, and not any other being, the equality of the sexes is shown in the Old Testament¹⁹. The love that the spouses have for each other is stronger than the ties of nature that connect the child with the parents²⁰.

Mk 10:2–9 evokes the same situation in the case of the dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees about the sources of law: the first and general, based on creation, and the second, positively announced in relation to a specific situation between a man and a woman. 'In the beginning of creation, God made them male and female: therefore a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh' (vv. 6–8). Jesus — followed by St. Paul — arbitrarily draw this record from the surrounding context, which indicates that they treat it as the principle of human conduct from its beginning until the last moments of humanity's existence in the world²¹. The fact that Jesus raised marital love to the dignity of a sacrament shows that He perceives a woman as a creature always equal to a man in dignity, in accordance with the original message of the Book of Genesis²². Thus, Jesus condemns both divorces and remarriages of divorced people (vv. 11–12), and adds that no man has the right to oppose God's decision to unite a man and a woman forever, 'So what God has joined together, let no man separate it!' (v. 9). The biggest difference between Jesus and the rabbis is in their approach to the status of the two sexes. By giving the husband control over the wife, the Jewish divorce policy made the man the master of the marriage. According to Jesus, however, it is not man or woman who should rule the marriage, but God, who is

¹⁹ While a man is single, he is part of his father's family, but when he marries, he starts a new family. As long as he is in his father's house, he devotes all his love to his father and mother, but after choosing a wife and bonding with her, his love for his wife exceeds his love for his parents, U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I: From Adam to Noah*, Skokie 2005, p. 137.

²⁰ V.P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Grand Rapids 1990, p. 181.

²¹ Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7–8; 1 Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 5:31.

²² The commentators are right when they write that the determination of the superiority of the law of creation over the law established by Jesus already refers to the eschatological times (Urzeit — Endzeit), when the general law of God will completely dominate the specific, transient provisions of the Mosaic law, D.C. Allison, Jr., *Q 12:51–53 and Mark 9:11–13 and the Messianic Woes*, in: *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*, eds. B.D. Chilton, C.A. Evans, New Testament Tools and Studies 28.1, Leiden 1999, p. 304.

the proper Lord of this relationship. Therefore, regardless of the customs prevailing in a given epoch, man has no right to attack the unchanging will of God²³.

Announcing that after the resurrection people will be like angels, in the pericope Mk 12:18–24, Jesus indirectly opposes all restrictions that in the history of mankind concerned the earthly position of women, treated as exchangeable goods, ‘When they rise from the dead, they will not marry, but they will be like the angels in heaven’ (v. 25). It is worth noting the courage with which Jesus attacks the alleged Torah experts, i.e. the Sadducees. Using His own teaching authority, Jesus states that they are in fact the least knowledgeable of what they profess as specialists in interpreting the Mosaic law. They treat eternal life as an extension of earthly life, while heaven is human existence in completely different dimensions, different from what happens on earth. Therefore, the conditions and conventions of mortality do not apply to heaven. In his statement, Jesus refutes the opinion of the majority of the Jews of His day, who believed that married life would continue after the resurrection²⁴. All the more so, in heaven there will be no inequality between the sexes and the application of the Old Testament law of the levirate, in which care was taken to ensure the name of the deceased husband of a woman, regardless of her feelings or freedom of choice (Deuteronomy 25:5–10)²⁵. Once again, Jesus affirms the equality of men and women when He speaks of the destiny of both sexes to salvation.

3. Mercy towards women in need and morally fallen

It is known that Jesus distanced Himself from all legal and ritual impurities known in the Old Testament law (Mk 12:14–23). It is worth emphasizing that He did not run away or forbid a woman suffering from a loss of blood to touch Him so that she could be healed (Mk 5:25–35), although she was in a state of ritual impurity and was forbidden to approach anyone. In His teaching, Jesus thus combined practice with theory and proved that the Mosaic law, taken literally, is never more important than God’s goodness towards an unhappy man. In this gesture one can see the great respect that Jesus, completely free from Jewish prejudices, had for the female world, which He considered equal to the male world. This equality concerned, for example, the release from suffering. Therefore, it is

²³ W.L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark. The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids 1974, pp. 356–357.

²⁴ J.R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids 2002, p. 367.

²⁵ J. Baldock, *Kobiety w Biblii*, transl. K. Lossmann, Warszawa 2008, p. 75.

not surprising that He aroused in the sick woman the certainty of being healed, which happened.

Much earlier, at the very beginning of His mission, Jesus did not hesitate to heal the woman even on the Sabbath day, after leaving the synagogue. The obvious effect of Jesus' action was to end the inflammation in her body (Mk 1:30–31), 'Simon's mother-in-law was in a fever. They immediately told Him about her. He went to her and lifted her up, taking her by the hand, the fever left her. And she served them'.

A beautiful conclusion to the story of the miracle of Jesus is the mention of gratitude expressed by the willingness to render due service to the guests at home. It is possible that the record about it as the good of a healed man in response to the good of Jesus is to be a response to the controversy regarding the literal, Jewish interpretation of the Sabbath²⁶. Obviously, the above-mentioned event does not testify to the exclusive or even preferential focus of Jesus on the situation of the poor, women or the excluded. In fact, He was in relationship with everyone, including the rich and powerful in the Israelite community, and even His opponents. Peter's mother-in-law was one of those people who needed help at a given moment and who Jesus could help effectively. He thus shows His openness to all²⁷.

He similarly treated a woman of eighteen years bent over by the spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:10–17), 'And this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had held captive for eighteen years, should not have been released from these bonds on the Sabbath day?' (v. 16). Again, there is no accidental mention of the Sabbath, literally understood and strictly observed by orthodox Jews. However, Jesus considered the healing of the sick woman to be more important than the soulless fulfilment of the commandment of the law of Moses. At the same time, he reproached the superior of the synagogue for indifference and hypocrisy towards the sick woman and her like²⁸. His attempt to exert pressure on the gathered was all the more unjust because it was Jesus who decided to heal her by calling her to Himself. Therefore, her happiness expressed in praising God must have been fully and completely sincere. It is no coincidence that Jesus also called this un-

²⁶ A. Malina, *Ewangelia według Świętego Marka – rozdziały 1,1–8,26*, Nowy Komentarz Biblijny – Nowy Testament, vol. II/part 1, Częstochowa 2013, p. 141.

²⁷ Same as Mt 8:5–15; 17:14–18; 19:16–22; Mark 5:22–24, 35–43; 7:25–30; 9:17–27; 10:17–22; 12:28–34; Luke 4:38–39; 7:2–17; 8:41–42, 49–56; 9:38–43; John 4:46–53; 11:1–44, L.M. Mead, *A Biblical Response to Poverty*, in: *Lifting Up the Poor. A Dialogue on Religion, Poverty and Welfare Reform*, eds. M.J. Bane, L.M. Mead, Washington 2003, p. 74.

²⁸ An accurate comparison to the procedure of untying animals, even on the Sabbath, to water them, shows that their own animals were more valuable in their eyes than a suffering fellow human being. However, the more important purpose of the pericope is healing as an element of proclaiming the coming of God's kingdom, which is discussed in more detail in R.F. O'Toole, *Some Exegetical Reflections on Luke 13,10–17*, „Biblica” 73/1 (1992), pp. 93–94.

fortunate woman ‘daughter of Abraham’ to remind us that women have the same rights to God’s goodness as men. Moreover, they are also the beneficiaries of the covenant that God once made with the ancestor of the chosen nation²⁹.

A little earlier, Jesus also took pity on the poor widow of Nain by raising her son (Luke 7:11–17). The author specifically emphasizes, ‘When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her: « Don’t weep!»’ (v. 13).

It is worth emphasizing a seemingly insignificant detail recorded in v. 14 that Jesus came closer to the procession, then even closer to the deceased and touched the bier on which he was lying. In this way, he ignored the categorical prohibition against touching the corpse, so as not to be ritually contaminated³⁰. Genuine sorrow over the suffering of the widow (v. 13) was combined with the proclamation of the Messianic era of God’s mercy above the law, which the people greatly expected³¹. There is also a close connection with the Old Testament pericope about the resurrection of a widow’s child by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17–24), which was a sign of God’s power over the laws of death and, at the same time, compassion for a woman after the loss of her only son³². Thus, Jesus also appears as the awaited prophet, which Luke pointed out a little earlier in the reaction of the crowd to the mentioned miracle of Jesus (v. 16)³³.

On another occasion, Jesus condemned the behaviour of the scribes who ‘sponge on widows’ houses’ (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47). The mention of this statement of Jesus in both gospels testifies to its historicity and Jesus’ uncompromising attitude towards those who abused their privileged social status³⁴. It is about some scribes whose piety was for show and who wanted to achieve concrete benefits through it: to be honoured, invited, seated in the best places at banquets³⁵.

²⁹ R.H. Stein, *Luke*, p. 374.

³⁰ Lev 21,1; Numbers 19,11; 31,19.

³¹ What is Luke’s own theology, H.C. Kee, *Jesus: A Glutton and Drunkard*, : *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*, eds. B. Chilton, C.A. Evans, *New Testament Tools and Studies* 28/1–2, Leiden–Boston–Cologne 1999, p. 312.

³² It should be noted, however, that Elijah, unable to raise the widow’s son by his own power, pleads with God, while Jesus does not, thus showing the power of God dwelling in Him.

³³ The note on the resurrection of the young man as a possible influence of Deuterocanonical theology, fulfilling the announcement of Isaiah 26:19, cf. C.A. Evans, *Authenticating the Activity of Jesus*, in: *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*, p. 9.

³⁴ The background of Jesus’ attack on the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes is ultimately the most important of the commandments, i.e. real love of the fellow human being in connection with the love of God. It is inappropriate to use their goods for one’s own purposes, which clearly contradicts this love (Matt. 23:14, 18, 23; Luke 11:42; 12:13–34), E. Waaler, *The Shema and the First Commandment in First Corinthians. An Intertextual Approach to Paul’s Re-reading of Deuteronomy*, Tübingen 2008, p. 227.

³⁵ In the time of Jesus, scribes belonged to the poorer class of society, because they could not be paid for their skills. Thus Jesus attacks those who have evidently abused their status and social recognition by preying on the poor, W.L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 441.

Information about the splendour and distinction of these scribes is a credible setting for Jesus' scathing criticism of them. Having the ability to read and write, and thus to interpret the law, they made an effort above all to ensure a comfortable life at the expense of others, and did not care about the material condition of the poor. Jesus particularly attacks their long prayers to gain social recognition and then use it to make their lives easier³⁶. Thus, Jesus attacks men for abusing their social advantage, while He appreciates the simple work of women consisting in serving others, even to the detriment of themselves and their homes.

On another occasion, summoning His disciples, He praised a poor widow who was throwing a small sum of money into the temple treasury, but it was all her earnings. The fragments of Mk 12:41–44 and Lk 21:1–4 unanimously report this, 'Truly, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all those who put into the treasury. For they all put in out of what they had over. Out of her poverty, she put in all she had, all her livelihood' (Mark 12:43–44). It was this woman that caught the attention of Jesus, who just days earlier had rebuked rulers of the temple, calling it a 'den of thieves' (10:15–17) for not promoting prayer but focusing solely on doing business. However, the wonderful act of the widow that Jesus pointed out is a manifestation of a sincere religious life. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that a poor woman caught the attention of Christ³⁷. God has a special place in His heart for people whose lives are difficult³⁸. It is worth emphasizing that, apart from Jesus, no one noticed the poor widow. In those times and cultures, she was not valued or respected because of her material situation. However, according to Jesus, she became a model of piety and an example of real worship of God³⁹. If His disciples could not imitate the scribes, they could imitate this woman's self-sacrifice. This was certainly not easy for men to accept. How-

³⁶ Broader comment, cf. J.D.M. Derrett, *Eating Up the Houses of Widows: Jesus's Comment on Lawyers?*, „Novum Testamentum” 14 (1972), pp. 1–9.

³⁷ According to the text of Numbers 27:8–11, a woman whose husband died had no inheritance rights in ancient Israel. The Old and New Testaments provide many descriptions of widows struggling with economic problems and deprived of social welfare (e.g. Exodus 22:21; Deut. 24:17, 19–21; 26:12; Zech. 17; Luke 18:2–5; Jas 1:27; Acts 6:1; 9:36; 1 Tim 5:16). More about it, e.g. A. Kubiś, *The Poor Widow's Mites. A Contextual Reading of Mark 12:41–44*, „Biblical Annals” 3 (2013), pp. 349–350.

³⁸ According to the text of Ps 146:9.

³⁹ Jesus' teaching is clearly addressed to the future Church through the use of Mark's formula, 'He called His disciples to Him and told them'. The importance of teaching is revealed in relation to the Passion of Jesus. The behaviour of the woman is commendable, because out of poverty and unreservedly she gave all her livelihood to God. Therefore, her gift is an anticipation of what Jesus intended to do: the offering of His own life. This poor widow becomes a type of the one who 'though he was rich, became poor for us, so that through his poverty (we) might become rich' (2 Cor 8:9), L. Williamson, Jr., *Mark, Interpretation. A Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Louisville 2009, p. 234.

ever, Jesus taught them that in the eyes of God, what is small and despised by the world can be something great and wonderful⁴⁰. The value of a monetary gift does not depend on its size, but on the size of the donor's livelihoods. Jesus thus emphasizes the generosity of the poor widow towards God's sanctuary, which is difficult to understand in human terms.

On another occasion, He exposed the hypocrisy of His opponents, who brought Him a woman caught in prostitution. They did not even bother to identify the accomplice of this sin, or they deliberately overlooked the fact that under the law of Moses, a man caught in the act with such a woman was equally liable⁴¹. Jesus refused to condemn her under the law, but encouraged her to abandon her previous way of earning a living (John 8:1–11). 'Jesus said to her, «Neither do I condemn you. — Go, and sin no more from now on!»' (v. 11). The key point of this gospel narrative is to state who accused this woman of adultery, demanding the maximum death penalty, sanctioned by the law of Moses (Leviticus 20:10; Deut 22:22–24)⁴². The apostle John deliberately and clearly indicates that these were the scribes and Pharisees, and therefore the male leaders of the people. Because of their knowledge of the law and the respect they enjoyed among the people, the woman they accused had no hope of experiencing mercy and forbearance. Supporters of the literal interpretation of the law did not bother to ask about the possible reasons for such a lifestyle, to look for answers to complex economic, social or family issues. For it was the easiest to condemn⁴³. Bringing to Jesus only the woman caught in flagranti testifies to the bad will of the Pharisees not only towards herself, but also towards Jesus. They hoped that they would be able to accuse Him of either breaking the law or inconsistency of His teaching with the practice of mercy towards sinners⁴⁴. The solution of this situation by Jesus not only (and not so much) protects women from abuse by men, but above all,

⁴⁰ Already in the Old Testament, many texts emphasize the difference in the approach to assessing matters and people between God and man, e.g. 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; Psalm 147:10–11; Proverbs 16:2; Hi 10:4; Isaiah 55:8–9.

⁴¹ E.M. Baloyi, *A Re-Reading of John 8:1–11 from a Pastoral Liberative Perspective on South African Women: Original Research*, „Hervormde Teologiese Studies Theological Studies” 66.2 (2010), p. 3.

⁴² The particularly unpleasant situation of fallen women in the light of the law is highlighted by e.g. K. Vermeeren, *The Liberation of the Adulteress Woman in John 8: 1–11. An Interpretation*, Norderstedt 2016, pp. 5–8.

⁴³ Paradoxically, Jesus does not reject their accusation — right, because formulated on the basis of the law — because he knows that they need forgiveness just as much after admitting their faults before God, S. Arterburn, B. Farrel, *The One Year Devotions for Men on the Go*, Carol Stream 2013, p. 69.

⁴⁴ G.L. Borchert, *John 1–11. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary 25A, Nashville 1996, p. 373.

by showing mercy, encourages every sinner — regardless of gender — to respect this act of God’s goodness and abandon the current wicked way of life.

Another time, despite the great astonishment of the disciples, Jesus had a long conversation with a Samaritan woman, a schismatic who was held in contempt (Jn 4:1–42). ‘His disciples came and marvelled that he was talking to a woman. However, none of them said: «What do you want from her? — or: — Why are you talking to her?»’ (int. 27). One can imagine the awkwardness of the situation faced by the disciples who avoided eye contact with Jesus and the woman⁴⁵. One can also imagine a woman staring at the ground, avoiding eye contact with the disciples. Meanwhile, Jesus looked confidently at both the woman and the disciples. His conscience was clean because His motivation for the meeting was clean. When the disciples looked at this woman, they saw only a Samaritan and a woman, and therefore someone to be avoided. When Jesus looked at her, He also saw the Samaritan and the woman, plus the sinner. However, His way of looking was completely different. Before Him stood the one who needed to hear the Gospel, and the one whom God was looking for as much as men, because sin does not select sex, but attacks everyone. Thus, Jesus made His disciples understand that His way of thinking and ways of reaching people were often contrary to existing and reproduced cultural norms. Seeing her open mind, ready to accept His teaching, He entrusted to her the secret about the new way of worshiping God (vv. 23–24). As befits a typical Jew, Jesus may have had three reasons for avoiding the woman mentioned. First, she was a Samaritan, and Jews often avoided contact with Samaritans, primarily because they viewed them as schismatics (v. 9). Second, she was a woman, and an Orthodox Jew would never talk openly to a woman the way Jesus did. Third, she was an adulteress, which Jesus knew very well. After all, He revealed the embarrassing circumstances of her life when He described her family status as far from the ideal generally accepted and respected in society (verses 17–18)⁴⁶. This was a lesson for the disciples who witnessed the conversation of the Teacher with the woman from Samaria. They learned that God cared about the salvation of the world, including those who were easily excluded, when one considered oneself superior. God cares about the spiritual salvation of women, because they are no less important to Him than men. Both are unique, but equal in

⁴⁵ In Jesus’ time, men, especially rabbis, generally did not talk to women in public. For many of them, it was not out of decency, but out of misogyny, deep mistrust, disrespect and antipathy towards women, D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 227.

⁴⁶ Despite her unregulated moral life, the Samaritan woman can be compared with the women known from the Old Testament who influenced the fate of those with whom they were connected: Rebecca, Rachel and Sippora, they share the theme of meeting at the well. An interesting comparison in this connection was made by E.J. Wyckoff, *John 4:1–42 Among the Biblical Well Encounters Pentateuchal and Johannine Narrative Reconsidered*, Tübingen 2020, p. 91.

the eyes of God. Finally, God is interested in calling sinners to change their lives. The disciples had to adapt their viewpoints of the world to that revealed to them by Christ, the eternal Son of God.

Exceptionally clearly, although in a similar situation, the mercy of Jesus was manifested towards another harlot who came to Him, as stated in the fragment of Luke 7:36–50. She led a sinful life⁴⁷, but realizing the futility of her path so far, she expressed her deep regret with a simple gesture of crying, kissing Christ's feet and anointing them with oil (verses 37–38). She gave proof of it not only because of her life so far, but above all she expressed her hope that God's mercy is infinite, as long as a man recognizes his faults and wants to take advantage of it.

4. Jesus' acceptance for the female world

Numerous pericopes, especially from the third and fourth Gospels, seem to testify to Jesus' interest in women's lives. For He made no distinction between men and women, neither in conduct nor in teaching⁴⁸.

For example, Luke 8:2–3 recalls, 'Several women whom he freed from evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven evil spirits left, Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, Susanna, and many others who served out of their possessions. Mentioning the presence of women at Jesus' side, Luke wants to inform not only that they are more open than men and interested in being taught by someone so extraordinary. He does not even mean the openness of Jesus treating women on an equal footing with men, although He did not appoint any of them to the strict group of disciples. In Luke's theology, this is an announcement of the great role that women will play in the entirety of His mission to save the world, especially during His crucifixion (Lk 23:49), the discovery of the empty tomb (Lk 24:1–11) and the creation of the Church (Acts 1, 14)⁴⁹. Undoubtedly, however, their following Jesus has these two important reasons: gratitude for healing from diseases and release from evil spirits tormenting them, and a desire to learn His teachings. The first of these motives appeared already in the case of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, who, having recovered, served Jesus and the disciples (Mk 1:30–31). The note about the presence of women with Jesus contradicts the belief that spiritual service to the Master is more valuable than service in earthly matters⁵⁰. Otherwise, Luke simply would not have

⁴⁷ In a strictly moral sense, as vv. 47–50 make it clear, R.H. Stein, *Luke*, p. 236.

⁴⁸ R.K. Harrison, *Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics*, Nashville 1987, p. 152.

⁴⁹ R.H. Stein, *Luke*, p. 240.

⁵⁰ This dedication of women, to whom God has not given any specific vocation, can be a valuable help to God's Church. Their ministry allowed more time to be devoted to the preaching of the Good News, freeing them from a series of necessary but trivial tasks that took up a lot of time. That

noted this fact. There is no record of anyone who was healed following Jesus, although the person who was freed from the evil spirit begged to be allowed to stay with Him. However, Jesus sent him as a witness to the great things God had done for him (Luke 8:27–39).

The women who followed Jesus came from all walks of life. Mary Magdalene may have been a type of a fallen woman because Christ cast out seven unclean spirits from her (Mk 16:9). Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, a man of high office, probably possessed considerable wealth. Perhaps after joining the companions of Jesus, she lost all her previous benefits and prestige, as well as friends and acquaintances. We do not hear about Susanna and 'many others' later. It is almost certain that they took some of their possessions with them, cared for the needs of Jesus and His disciples, and tried to make their lives more comfortable. They could wash and repair their clothes, cook their food, run errands, and do other things⁵¹. This readiness to serve Jesus and His disciples was not short-lived, nor was it the result of a woman's whim, but a constant service, because they accompanied Him from Galilee to Jerusalem (Mk 15:41). The evangelist Matthew specifies that their faithfulness lasted until Jesus' death on the Cross (27:55).

The text of Lk 10:38–42 emphasizes in particular the hospitality of the Lazarus sisters shown to Jesus when He wanted to stay in their house, 'On His journey, He came to a village. There a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home' (v. 38). The theme of hospitality is extremely important throughout the biblical world, and especially in the Gospel of Luke. When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Martha showed hospitality by welcoming Jesus into the home she shared with her sister, Mary. This was expressed in assuming the duties of serving the guest, which Luke expresses with the term *διακονία*⁵². Although there is no exact mention of what her tasks were, it can be assumed that she began to prepare a meal, perhaps following the pattern from the time of the patriarch Abraham in Genesis 18:5–8. Although Marta did not avoid the mistake of being too involved in meeting the material needs of the guests and thus deprived herself of

is why their ministry is so important even in the context of salvation. Already in the times of the Old Testament, an unknown inhabitant of Zarephath took care of Elijah (Lk 4:26), a similarly unknown Shunamite took care of Elisha (2 Kings 2:8–11). The women who ministered to Paul were highly recommended by him, especially a certain Mary 'who gave us much trouble' (Rom 16:6), Lydia of Philippi, who offered Paul hospitality (Acts 6:14–15). Women ministering in this way were certainly fulfilling their part in God's great plan.

⁵¹ A broad analysis of the social status of these women is offered by Kimberly Penner, *The Work of Wealthy Women: Female Discipleship in Luke 8:1–3. A thesis presented to the University of Waterloo and Conrad Grebel University College in fulfillment of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Theological Studies*, Waterloo 2011, pp. 75–92.

⁵² More about this term, cf. H.W. Beyer, "διακονία", *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* vol. II, eds. G. Kittel, G. Friedrich, Stuttgart 1935, pp. 87–88.

the closeness of Jesus, He certainly did not oppose undertaking the service for the fellow human being⁵³. It is even more noteworthy that shortly before the meeting with Martha, Jesus and His disciples were not received by the inhabitants of the Samaritan town (Lk 9:52–53), which made it impossible to teach them while visiting. This, in turn, took place at Martha's house, who welcomed the Guest in accordance with the then social rules. Her attitude was in stark contrast to the Samaritans' refusal and was in line with Jesus' instructions. By accepting Him, this woman also created the right conditions for the fulfilment of His mission⁵⁴. Jesus' answer to Martha leaves no doubt as to the choice to be made. For accepting in the name of socially appropriate cultural principles is not enough, and therefore her sister made a better choice by becoming a disciple of the Lord. This narrative shows both women in a very good light, both because of the hospitality practiced (although not without errors and distractions)⁵⁵ and the ability to listen carefully to His teachings⁵⁶.

Paradoxically, in the long description of John 11:1–40, most often called the 'resurrection of Lazarus', paradoxically, it is not him but Martha and Mary who come to the fore thanks to their conversation with Jesus and their deep faith in the possibility of bringing their brother back to life and the general faith in the dead — the resurrection of the dead (vv. 20–24).

On the other hand, in the fragment of Luke 11:27–28, the fascination and attention that women showed to teaching Jesus is emphasized. 'While he was saying this, a woman in the crowd cried out to him in a loud voice: «Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that you suckled»' (v. 27). After listening

⁵³ This theme had already appeared in the parable of the Good Samaritan, immediately preceding the story of Mary and Martha. The problem with Martha is not that she served, but rather that she worried unnecessarily about many side issues. At the same time, she was distracted and so inattentive that she did not listen to Jesus' teaching, which in turn was excellently exploited by Maria. Martha's distraction leaves no room for the most important aspect of hospitality — kind attention to the guest. In fact, she broke the rules of hospitality by trying to embarrass her sister in front of the Guest and asking Him to intervene. She even went so far as to accuse Jesus of not caring about her.

⁵⁴ M. Crimella, *Martha, the Hostess, and Mary, the Listener: A Discussion with the Feminist Interpretation of Luke 10:38–42*, „*Verbum Vitae*” 40/1 (2022), p. 60.

⁵⁵ Scientific research clearly indicates an error in the feminist interpretation of the text, which wants to see Martha's ministry as an example of oppressive treatment of women in the early Christian community, J.N. Collins, *Did Luke Intend a Disservice to Women in the Martha and Mary Story?*, „*Biblical Theology Bulletin*” 28 (1998), p. 109.

⁵⁶ Again, the feminist interpretation of the entire pericope must be opposed. While describing the attitude of the two allegedly opposing women, it referred to the authority of Jesus in order to prove that women were deprived of authority, and their ministry in the early Christian community was limited, E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Theological Criteria and Historical Reconstruction: Martha and Mary, Luke 10:38–42*, Protocol of the Fifty-Third Colloquy. 10 April 1986, ed. H. Waetjen, Berkeley 1987, p. 9.

to Jesus' excellent speeches, an unknown woman, evidently honest and sincere, gives her praise. The reason why she blessed the Mother of Jesus was not given. Since women were generally expected to remain silent in the presence of men, speaking in this manner in a crowd showed courage and boldness⁵⁷. The statement expressed gratitude for the entire ministry of Christ, and due to the fact that at that time the mother was valued because of the achievements of her son, Mary was honoured in this way⁵⁸. This reaction is quite different from the judgment made by self-confident scribes and Pharisees who reject the Master's teaching. The woman marveled at the wisdom and power with which Jesus spoke. It may have been what she saw and heard that brought her praise: convincing force and argument, putting the Pharisees to shame, defeating them in arguments, and refuting their wicked insinuations, and then some of the many miracles this woman may have witnessed. She expressed great respect for Christ because of His teaching. Simultaneously, she emphasized the value of natural kinship and, perhaps, expressed regret that she did not belong to the family of Jesus, because she could listen to His speeches much more often and be closer to Him⁵⁹. This interpretation is confirmed by the answer in which Jesus pointed out to her that it is not so much the origin of man as openness to His teachings that is what God values most in man (v. 28). This remark was only advice to her because of her sincerity and willingness to listen, while for Jesus' enemies it was a warning against completely closing themselves off from the truth he spoke. Again, there is a fundamental difference between the simplicity and fascination of a woman in the crowd and the self-confidence of men who reject everything that does not agree with their interpretation of the facts (John 7:46–49; 9:24–34).

The passage Luke 23:27–31 shows the power of compassion with which the inhabitants of Jerusalem felt Jesus suffering on the way of the cross, which contrasts with the lack of tenderness of the men who took part in the Master's crucifixion, 'And a multitude of people followed Him, including women, who wailed and wept over Him' (v. 27). Even the denial by many exegetes of the authenticity of the events mentioned in this textual unit⁶⁰ does not change the conclusions about Luke's way of thinking about the relationship of Jesus to women. It is true

⁵⁷ Luke himself most of all the evangelists appreciates women around Jesus, F. Mickiewicz, *Ewangelia według św. Łukasza, rozdziały 1–11*, Nowy Komentarz Biblijny – Nowy Testament, vol. III/part 1, Częstochowa 2011, p. 604.

⁵⁸ The way of expressing praise is typically Eastern, spontaneous, therefore the event should be considered historical, N. Geldenhuys, *Gospel of Luke*, p. 331.

⁵⁹ Therefore, Mary belongs not only to relatives according to the flesh, but above all because of the possibility of listening to her Son and incorporating his teachings into one's life, R.H. Stein, *Luke*, p. 333.

⁶⁰ A short summary, S. McKnight, *Jesus and His Death. Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory*, Waco 2005, pp. 141–142.

that this detail of Jesus' way of the cross has been preserved only in Luke's account, but this does not question its historicity. The presence of crowds following the unusual phenomenon of the crucifixion of the Convict, especially a few days after Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, is not surprising. However, while most people focused on satisfying their own curiosity, some women accompanied Jesus, sincerely lamenting His fate. They showed deep compassion and helplessness against the violence of the male world of Jewish power and the Roman army acting together. But He, without questioning this compassion, encouraged the women to reflect on their own lives as they were awaiting the imminent terrible judgment of their sinful city⁶¹. He used their natural, if misdirected, kindness to make them and their sinful children examine their consciences, so that they would find the time for repentance (vv. 28–29)⁶². The coming times will be more terrible than the circumstances surrounding His crucifixion⁶³.

According to the description of Jn 19:25–27, apart from Mary, the Mother of Jesus, persistent and faithful female disciples showed exceptional heroism and the power of love, 'Next to the cross of Jesus stood: His mother and His mother's sister, Mary, wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene' (v. 25). This record is of extraordinary value in the context of the sad announcement of Jesus that, with the exception of the beloved disciple, almost all who had been faithful to Him until then would disperse and leave Him completely alone (John 16:32). Apparently, however, the closeness of the male disciples was replaced by the closeness — as it is calculated — of four women⁶⁴ who, under the guidance of Mary, gathered more love and courage to accompany Jesus until the very end of His life. They did not escape the horror of death that befell the beloved Lord, they fought the fear of possible reprisals from the people's superiors⁶⁵. They could have stayed in the immediate vicinity of the Cross, while the soldiers who had been guarding it had probably moved away a bit to draw lots among themselves to whom the remains of the Convict would fall, and did not pay special attention to the very place of His crucifixion (19:23–24)⁶⁶. In this way, the love of women was

⁶¹ N. Geldenhuys, *Gospel of Luke*, pp. 603–604.

⁶² For at this stage of events they are unable to understand the meaning of His suffering in God's plans for the salvation of humanity, while their city will experience a catastrophe caused by their disobedience (Luke 21:20–24), F. Mickiewicz, *Ewangelia według św. Łukasza, rozdziały 12–24*, p. 533.

⁶³ W.L. Liefeld, *Luke*, The Expositors Bible Commentary with The New International Version in Twelve Volumes, vol. 8: *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. F.E. Gaebelin, Grand Rapids 1984, p. 1042.

⁶⁴ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *John. Revised Edition*, Word Biblical Commentary 36, Grand Rapids 2015, p. 348.

⁶⁵ G.R. O'Day, *Women's Bible Commentary, Expanded Edition with Apocrypha*, ed. C.A. Newsom, S.H. Ringe, Louisville 1988, p. 388.

⁶⁶ G.L. Borchert, *John 12–21. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary 25B, Nashville 2002, p. 268.

opposed to unbelief, discouragement, fear and pain caused by the terrible end of a life full of kindness, patience, gentleness and mercy — the features that are probably the most dear to women. Conversely, their presence predisposed them to enter deeply into the mystery of the saving death of the Lord, because it is faithfulness that testifies to the exceptional opening of their hearts to the redemptive aspect of Jesus' death⁶⁷.

5. Women in the Easter message

Several important biblical testimonies show the extraordinary role of women as witnesses of the resurrection in proclaiming the Easter message. For all the evangelical traditions convey the message of their most persevering presence with the dying and dead Christ, although the evangelists give different names for them. However, this is not the problem that will be dealt with in this article. It has already been developed in numerous commentaries on various Gospels.

The story Mk 16:1–8 testifies to the concern of women for the body of dead Jesus when they went to His tomb, 'After the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices to go and anoint Jesus. Early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb as the sun had risen' (vv. 1–2). Women in the Gospel of Mark play a key role and their attitude is commendable. Their presence at a certain distance from the Cross of Jesus (15:40) is shown as a wonderful consequence of the total fidelity they showed in following the Master throughout His life⁶⁸. They are listed first among the disciples following the record of Peter's denial. It is they who go to the burial place as mourners, soon becoming the first witnesses of all the events at the tomb after Jesus' burial. Writing about this, Mark requires from the community of his disciples that its members identify themselves with women in their faithfulness in service, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It should be noted that the Greek verb ἐκθαμβέω, 'to be terrified', 'to be frightened' expressing women's surprise at meeting the angel (v. 5.6) is the same one used by Mark to define Jesus' fear during the prayer before the Passion in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:33). This expresses the closeness of women's feelings to what Jesus experienced. Conversely, their fear in v. 8, already expressed in other terms, was surely shared by Mark's community, which also had difficulties in accepting great events with faith. Therefore, this

⁶⁷ The phrase 'the cross of Jesus' can be likened to the similar phrase 'the cross of Christ' in Paul's theology (1 Corinthians 1:17; Gal 6:12,14; Phil 3:18), X. Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l'Évangile selon Jean. Tome IV, Parole de Dieu*, Paris 1996, p. 137.

⁶⁸ However, it cannot be overlooked that the purpose of their departure in the early morning was to anoint the body of dead Jesus. This means that, like the disciples, they also did not fully understand Jesus' announcements regarding His resurrection.

community is encouraged to move beyond fear and to take on the discipleship role of women who testified to the Lord's empty tomb⁶⁹.

Writing about the same event, Matthew mentions their role as witnesses of Christ's victory over death in more detail (28:1–8), 'So they left the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell His disciples' (v. 8). The audacity of the women, which Mark interpreted as 'escape' (ἔφυγον), is called by Matthew 'hasty departure' (ἀπελθοῦσαι ταχὺ), which indicates a desire to inform the other disciples as soon as possible about the great news, rather than fear caused by an unexpected situation. In Matthew's opinion, their quick departure is also an expression of obedience to the angel's command, while Mark focused on their reaction to meeting him. Matthew does not hide the fear (μετὰ φόβου) of women. The uncommon nature of the resurrection must have first caused fear about its authenticity, especially in connection with the possible reaction of the disciples to the women's account (28:17). Meanwhile, their own ambiguous experience of meeting resurrected Jesus caused them great joy (χαρᾶς μεγάλης)⁷⁰, a factor as necessary to believe and as strong as their earlier fears of credulity. The narrative shows that often God sends His message to those whom society despises (1 Corinthians 1:26–28). Not all testimonies were assigned the same value, because it was primarily determined by the credibility of the witnesses. It is worth recalling that most of the Jews of Jesus' time did not respect the testimony of women⁷¹. Perhaps that is why Matthew puts such a strong emphasis on their testimony. Thanks to this, everyone who hears them can choose either the truth or the lie, which in the meantime was sent by soldiers, i.e. men, bribed by the people's superiors (28:11–14). It was the testimony of men that could be of great importance to those who heard and believed them⁷².

The incredible message of the angels given by the women to the disciples of Jesus was also recorded in the Gospel of Luke 24:1–10, 'Then they remembered His words and returned from the grave, and told all this to the Eleven and to all the others. And they were: Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary, the mother of James, and others who told the apostles about it' (verses 8–10). In this account, it is worth emphasizing in particular what other evangelists omitted, namely the role of memory that the women activated when they heard the message of the angels inside the empty tomb of Jesus. The encouragement to recall the teachings

⁶⁹ C.S. Mann, *Mark. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 27, Garden City 1986, p. 662.

⁷⁰ A phrase present only in Mt 2:10, when the magicians saw the birthplace of Jesus, A. Pajiorek, *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza, rozdziały 14–28*, p. 704. It is possible that then great joy was given as a reward for searching by people while today Jesus Himself is reaching out to people who no longer need to seek Him.

⁷¹ J.M. Baumgarten, *On the Testimony of Women in IQSa*, „Journal of Biblical Literature” 76 (1957), pp. 266–269.

⁷² C.S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids 1999, p. 699.

of Jesus from the time when He was still among His disciples first indicates the fact that the women accompanying Him were not idle or limited only to providing simple services that ensured the comfort of life for men and relieved them of thinking about the basic matters of everyday existence (Lk 8:2–3). They, too, listened attentively to the Lord's teaching, originally addressed to the closest group of disciples. In the empty tomb, the angels reminded the women of the words of Jesus' teaching recorded by Luke (9:22,44 and 18:32)⁷³. They thus made them aware of the importance of what they might not have appreciated before, or believed in when the Master was at the peak of His fame and popularity, or what they might have simply forgotten. The memory of the announcements of Jesus, which the women now accepted as true as a result of their confirmation by the angels, prompted them to resign from the desire to anoint His body and to quickly tell the disciples about what they had experienced at the tomb⁷⁴. Again, they showed a much greater readiness to accept faith in the resurrection than men who, being disciples, did not want to accept the truths given by the first witnesses of the Lord's resurrection, probably because they were not men (24:11).

Undoubtedly, John was also aware of the role of women, although in the context of the resurrection of Jesus, he wrote only about Mary Magdalene (John 20:1–2). Continuing the pericope about the resurrection, in verses 11–18 he mentions her as the first herald of the joyful news of the victory of life over death, 'Jesus said to her: «Do not hold me back, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Instead, go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God»' (v. 17). The fourth evangelist focused on the role of one of the few women whose importance in the events after the resurrection of Jesus was noted by the synoptics. It is about Mary Magdalene, who had the honour of accompanying Jesus to the very crucifixion. This episode was generally noted also by Matthew (27:56,61) and Mark (15:47), and even less explicitly by Luke, mentioning only 'women' (23:49,55). John, in contrast, mentioned the presence of Mary Magdalene under the Cross (19:25) and then her conversation with Jesus after His resurrection (20:15–17). It is worth emphasizing that the noun γύναι, 'woman', appearing in v. 15, is used by Jesus in the Gospel of John when inviting women to go deeper and deeper into the depths of faith (2:4; 4:21; 8:10; 19:26; 20:13–15)⁷⁵. By telling her 'not to touch Him', Jesus probably wanted to prevent her from stopping Him, even if her joy was pure desire⁷⁶, which could be interpreted in the light of Song 3:4⁷⁷.

⁷³ L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina Series Volume 3, Collegeville 1991, p. 388.

⁷⁴ F. Mickiewicz, *Ewangelia według św. Łukasza, rozdziały 12–24*, pp. 579–580.

⁷⁵ J.P. Meier, *Un certain Jésus. Les donnés de l'histoire. II: La parole et les gestes*, Lectio divina, Paris 2005, p. 716.

⁷⁶ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *John. Revised Edition*, p. 376.

⁷⁷ As recalled by S. Mędała, *Ewangelia według Świętego Jana, rozdziały 13–21*, Nowy Komentarz Biblijny – Stary Testament, Częstochowa 2008, p. 290

After the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples did not meet with Him in the same way as before. The call to Mary was to make her (and the other disciples) aware that the time of Jesus' mortal experience had just come to an end and that He would be with all of them now more spiritually than physically. In turn, the sentence that He has not yet ascended to the Father and God emphasizes that Christ's presence on earth will be short, and then He will definitely leave it at the moment of His ascension⁷⁸. Hence, it is also understandable to urge Mary Magdalene not to waste time on personally experiencing the meeting with Him, but to quickly bring to the other disciples the wonderful news of His return to life.

Thus, women, as people open to faith in the resurrection of Jesus, brought the news to the disciples before they themselves became convinced of it as a result of the Teacher's later epiphanies. It was not women, but Christ who reproached them for the lack of faith in the truth of the message, of which they became the first witnesses (Mk 16:14).

Conclusion

A wonderful spectrum of Jesus' behaviour towards women, His teaching and the example of life that He left behind can (and should) inspire all His disciples who seek the highest standards in formulating their own attitude towards their fellow men. A short and necessarily very superficial review of the New Testament texts allows us to draw several conclusions that may be a biblical justification for the wonderful activity of women themselves. They are not only to be the object of respect on the part of men, but should positively influence the shaping of the reality that surrounds us. This is how Mrs General Jadwiga Zamoyska, as a believing and practicing female disciple of Jesus, could read her vocation to acts inspired by the Bible. This assumption should be justified and grounded by analyzing her notes in the light of the biblical narrative, which would be a very valuable undertaking. Here only the fragments of God's word were marked that could give the heroine a spirit in her struggle and work to raise the standard of living of female youth. She perfectly and fruitfully combined the priorities of home life with religious and patriotic values, educating generations of compatriots to take up duties both at home and in wider areas of social life.

There is no need to justify that Mrs General, thanks to the correct reading of the text of Genesis 2:18–24, which is fundamental in this respect, was always aware of the dignity of the female sex equal to men. From many New Testament texts, she could read that the simplest activities of women often provide great life wisdom (Mt 13:33; Jn 16:21). Women, just like men, are called to inherit

⁷⁸ X. Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l'Évangile selon Jean*, pp. 221–224.

eternal life (Mt 24:41; Mk 12:18–24) thanks to prudence, patience (Mt 25:1–13) and perseverance (Lk 18:1–8), using their inquisitiveness and diligence (Luke 15:8–10). They have the same access to God's grace, acceptance and help as men (Mk 1:30–31; 5:25–35; Lk 7:11–17; 13:10–17; Jn 4:1–42). God gladly forgives everyone (Jn 8:1–11) and zealously defends them (Mk 12:40; Lk 20:47). They, conversely, are able to honour Him even by doing small things (Mk 12:41–44; Lk 21:1–4), they are fascinated by Him (Lk 11:27–28) and skilfully combine this with helping others in need (Lk 8:2–3) and hospitality (Lk 10:38–42). They are able to sympathize more with their suffering fellow human being (Luke 23:27–31; John 19:25–27). Instead, they must fight for their dignity and not allow men to treat themselves objectively (Mk 10:2–9). Finally, their distinction by resurrected Jesus as the first witnesses of His victory over death teaches us that they not only accept matters beyond ordinary human thinking with greater and more willing faith, but also become heralds of a new, better era in people's lives, especially representatives of their own sex (Mk 16:1–8; Mt 28:1–8; Lk 24:1–10; Jn 20:1–18). It turns out that in order to live one's earthly existence, one does not need the ideologies of feminism and genderism that are so fashionable today. It is enough to have a real sense of dignity of one's own sex and rely on the eternal values of the Gospel, the best teacher of life defined as valuable.

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