

Therefore we must support the cause  
of order and in no wise suffer a  
woman to worst us. Better to fall from  
power, if we must, by a man's hand;  
then we could not be called weaker  
than a woman.<sup>1</sup>

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

Nearly every ancient literary work employed a preface or prologue to reveal its main themes, plots, and characters. Invoking the Muses, Homer foretold of the anger of Achilles and the wandering of Odysseus. Historians from tale-bearing Herodotus and austere Thucydides to Josephus and the Roman historians disclosed their subjects and goals in prefaces. Usually through a main character the dramatists let the audience know in the prologue which myth cycles they were dealing with. The Greek novelists, such as Xenophon of Ephesus, Chariton, and Achilles Tatius, revealed their main characters and plots in the first few paragraphs. Living under the weight of such an august and widespread tradition, Luke in his dual work, *Luke–Acts*, also makes use of two prefaces, one in each volume.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sophocles, *Antigone* (lines 677–80), trans. R. Jebb, in *Greek Drama* (ed. M. Hadas; New York: Bantam, 1982) 96. For a brief discussion of this passage, see J. Arlandson, “‘The Fall and Rise of Many’: A Socio-narratological Analysis of Women in *Luke–Acts*” (diss., University of California, Riverside, 1994) 19 n. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Luke shows evidence of being familiar with some of the literary traditions through his prefaces and speeches and through scenes such as riots, travels, storms at sea, and shipwrecks, all of which occur in histories and novels. D. E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Library

For many decades scholars have seen the value of studying the first four verses in Luke and the first five or so verses in Acts to glean Luke's strategies and purposes, among other things. But they have also moved beyond these verses and have seen the paradigmatic value of the entire first two chapters of the Gospel as disclosing recurrent themes.<sup>3</sup> The term "paradigmatic" here means that the events and words occurring briefly in chapters 1 and 2 serve as proleptic and foreshadowing clues for understanding the rest of Luke–Acts.

One of Luke's main themes is revealed through the words of Simeon in 2:34. It is proleptic, since its content recurs throughout Luke–Acts.

Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed."

In addition, Luke has already cued the audience to people's fall and rise through Mary's song (1:51–53).

<sup>51</sup> He has shown great strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

Simeon's prophecy reinforces Mary's song and puts Luke's strategy into a succinct description. In 2:35 the word *διαλογισμός*, *dialo-*

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of Early Christianity 8; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 77–117, has a thorough analysis of the subject. I use the name Luke without prejudice towards the complex issue of his identity. W. V. Whitney, "Women in Luke: An Application of a Reader-Response Hermeneutic" (diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1990) 39, wisely states, "If the quest for the historical Jesus has turned into a less-than-rewarding enterprise, then the quest for the historical Luke has been even less rewarding." On the dates of Luke–Acts, J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke* (2 vols.; AB 28, 28a; New York: Doubleday, 1981–85) 1.57, is probably correct when he postulates 80–85 C.E. But I do not oppose earlier dates, such as those for which C. J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic Historiography* (ed. Conrad H. Gempf; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989) 365–414, strongly argues: Acts in 62, Luke after 70. In either case my argument will not be affected. For geographical location, I again agree with Fitzmyer: "It is really anyone's guess. The only thing that seems certain is that it was not written in Palestine" (*Luke* 1.57). My assumption is that it was somewhere in the Greek East—Asia Minor or northern Syria.

<sup>3</sup>H. H. Oliver, "The Lucan Birth Stories and the Purpose of Luke–Acts," *NTS* 10 (1964) 202–26; and P. S. Minear, "Luke's Use of the Birth Stories," in *Studies in Luke–Acts* (ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 111–30.

*gismos* (inner thoughts), in the rest of Simeon's sentence, echoes *διάνοια*, *dianoia* (thoughts) in 1:51, which further supports the parallelism.<sup>4</sup> Both passages heighten the expectations of the audience that the newborn Jesus, surrounded as he is with supernatural visitations and songs, will make many fall or rise when they meet him.<sup>5</sup>

When Luke included Simeon's announcement in 2:34, who were the "many" that Luke had in mind? In 1:51–53 the *δυνάσται*, *dynastai*, are humbled, the *πλουτοῦντοι*, *ploutountoi*, are rejected, the *πεινῶντες*, *peinōntes*, are filled, and the *ταπεινοί*, *tapeinoi*, are raised up. Further designations occur when Luke has Jesus reading from Isa 61:1–2 (Luke 4:18–19). These words also reveal the people's social condition: *πτωχοί*, *ptōchoi*, *αἰχμάλωτοι*, *aichmalōtoi*, *τυφλοί*, *typhloi*, and *τεθραυσμένοι*, *tethrausmenoi*. The words in 1:51–53 and 4:18–19, though not specific sociological categories, are pregnant with social meaning. However one interprets Luke's words about falling and rising, the interpretation has to include at the very least the social location of the characters in Luke–Acts.

Luke's preferred mode of communication is through stories. As he introduces the characters within these stories, he always applies to the characters epithets, titles, or occupational descriptions, such as "synagogue ruler," "centurion," "silversmith," "purple-seller," and so forth. Why are they important for his stories? What do they mean in his society? It seems that Luke is blending, therefore, a social strategy with a narrative strategy. He locates the characters socially and then exploits their location to fulfill his storytelling. In Luke–Acts the social always undergirds the literary, and the literary always assumes the social.

From the beginning of modern biblical scholarship in the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, scholars have widely recognized that Luke favors the poor and needy.<sup>6</sup> In particular, he devotes considerable attention to the plight of women, though, as we shall

<sup>4</sup>R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986–90) 1.32.

<sup>5</sup>J. O. York, *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke* (JSNTSup 46; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991) 10–38, has a thorough survey of scholarship on reversals. Elsewhere in his book he demonstrates quite convincingly that it is a far-reaching theme in Luke (but he does not analyze Acts). His only passage about women is the sinful woman and Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36–50). Thus, his work can only be referred to occasionally. There is much he does not discuss concerning women.

<sup>6</sup>For further study see W. Pilgrim, *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke–Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981); and D. P. Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke–Acts* (Linz: Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt, 1983).

see, not all of them are poor and needy. His nativity narrative, when compared with Matthew's, is usually cited as *prima facie* evidence for his concern. What has been missing so far is the linking of an analysis of women in Luke–Acts with Simeon's prophecy of the falling and rising motion not only as a literary strategy but also as a sociological strategy.

The main argument of this study is that only certain women are portrayed in needy conditions and then are exalted while, in the same pericope or story line, wealthy, powerful, and privileged men fall, thereby fulfilling Luke 2:34; women who come from the lowest levels in Greco-Roman culture not only rise from their ambiguous or troubled circumstances when they confront the kingdom of God, its chief representative, Jesus, and his emissaries, the disciples, but they are also exalted even if men in the same passage fall out of favor when they resist the kingdom and have to be rejected by it. Powerful and wealthy women, however, or even women who, though not necessarily powerful and wealthy, are productive and contributing members of society, are excluded from Luke's theme of women rising while men fall. Several scholars have noted that Luke pairs women with men in a positive light, and some pairings in a negative light, but no one, to my knowledge, connects the pairing with the falling and rising movement.<sup>7</sup> Women serve as test cases for "the rise of many," and men, serving as their foils, are the test cases for "the fall of many."

Since the social undergirds the narratives in Luke–Acts, the primary methodologies for this book are sociology<sup>8</sup> and narratology. Both terms, however, can be polyvalent. As is true for any discipline, they have a variety of angles by which the same data are examined. The sociological method, introduced in chapter 2, entails dividing the women into classes according to those outlined by G. E. Lenski in his book *Power and Prestige*,<sup>9</sup> even though his classifications have

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<sup>7</sup>See M. R. D'Angelo, "Women in Luke Acts: A Redactional View," *JBL* 109 (1990) 441–61, for her study of pairing, along with a bibliography. Since her analysis is the most recent and thorough, I will rely on it.

<sup>8</sup>For a summary of the objections against, and strong apologies for, sociology, see B. Holmberg, *Sociology and the New Testament: An Appraisal* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990) 6–17; J. G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975) 2–14; and P. F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke–Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (New York: Cambridge, 1987) 12–16.

<sup>9</sup>G. E. Lenski, *Power and Prestige: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 189–296. His workable and proven theory will be explained in ch. 2. Some scholars have already made productive and practical use of it. See A. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian*

been heavily adapted. And to locate persons in their class, three concepts will be used for which W. G. Runciman has argued: class (or wealth), status, and power.<sup>10</sup> The narratological method, introduced in chapter 5, is limited to a specific and narrow form and designed to track the falling and rising movement in six of Luke's stories about women. By analyzing this vertical movement in the way proposed in that chapter, we will discover that Luke profoundly understands the social hierarchy in his culture and exploits the hierarchy to tell his stories.

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*Society: A Sociological Approach* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988); D. C. Duling, "Matthew's Plurisignificant 'Son of David' in Social Science Perspective: Kinship, Kingship, Magic, and Miracle," *BTB* 22 (1992) 99–116; and D. A. Fiensy, *The Social History of Palestine in the Herodian Period: The Land Is Mine* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 20; Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1991). H. C. Kee, *Knowing the Truth: A Sociological Approach to New Testament Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 41–42, approves of Lenski's theory. For a definition of class, I have adopted that of G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (2d ed.; Ithaca: Cornell, 1989) 43–44, who writes from a Marxist perspective:

*class* (a particular class) is a group of persons in a community identified by their position in the whole system of social production, defined above all according to their relationship (primarily in terms of the degree of ownership or control) to the conditions of production (that is to say, the means and labour of production) and to other classes. Legal position (constitutional rights . . .) is one of the factors that may help to determine class: its share in doing so will depend on how far it affects the type and degree of exploitation practised or suffered—the condition of being a slave in the ancient Greek world, for example, was likely (though far from certain) to result in a more intense degree of exploitation than being a citizen or even a free foreigner. The individuals constituting a given class may or may not be wholly or partly conscious of their own identity and common interests as a class, and they may or may not feel antagonism towards members of other classes as such.

I have adopted Ste. Croix's definition because, though a Marxist, he is a classicist. Lenski, who is not a classicist, has to depend on classicists when describing the Roman Empire as an advanced agrarian society, though Lenski's definition of class (*Power*, 74) would certainly not contradict Ste. Croix's.

<sup>10</sup>W.G. Runciman, "Class, Status, and Power," in *Social Stratification*, ed. J. A. Jackson (New York: Cambridge, 1968) 25–61. For further discussion, see Arlandson, "Fall and Rise," 21–22 nn. 12–13. There I discuss the concerns of R. Rohrbaugh, "Methodological Concerns in the Debate over Social Class Status of Early Christians," *JAAR* 52 (1983) 519–46; and of classic historians, including M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (2d ed.; London: Hogarth) 41–50; and R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven: Yale) 88–97.

One of the extraordinary features of NT scholarship as it pertains to women is the neglect of class structure, except for a few passing comments in a few works. (It is tempting to trace this oversight to NT scholars living in a Western, post-Enlightenment culture with its emphasis on *égalité* and *fraternité*, but further discussion would exceed the scope of our study.) Too often scholars view women in Greco-Roman societies as homogeneous, thereby making their surveys imprecise. This study represents a departure from that common view because the ancients, female or male, did not see themselves in that way. The advantage of analyzing women's lives according to their class is profound. For example, it may turn out that a wealthy female landowner enjoyed more favorable legal rights, stronger political power, and higher status than a male peasant or artisan. The question is not, How did women fare in the Mediterranean world?—as if their experience were uniform. Rather, we should ask, How did women fare in their own class? How was their daily life according to, say, their access to wealth and political power?<sup>11</sup>

Two results occur when scholarship overlooks class structure and women's location in the structure. First, such scholarship reinforces the widespread modern-day belief that all women were universally and uniformly oppressed throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, especially in Palestine; second, it reinforces the neglect of the underclasses. And after concluding that women were uniformly oppressed, scholars usually take the easy next step: the message of the kingdom of God is so unique compared with its historical setting that it alone liberates all women equally from their uniform oppression. While I side with the viewpoint that the gospel liberates—and chapters 4 and 5 will support that claim—it does not liberate in exactly the same way for women in different classes. A survey of representative scholarship should illustrate the problems that arise when class structure is ignored or touched on only lightly.

E. and F. Stagg's book, *Woman in the World of Jesus* (1978),<sup>12</sup> has an overview of women in the Jewish, Greek, and Roman worlds.<sup>13</sup> They base their findings exclusively on literary references. Only

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<sup>11</sup> A. Cameron, "Neither Male nor Female," *GR* 27 (1980) 60–68, was urging NT scholars to avoid facile generalizations about women. For a discussion of feminist hermeneutics, see K. E. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993) 3–11. See also T. Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995) 1–21, for a survey of feminist NT hermeneutics. Others have covered a history of feminist NT hermeneutics, so I defer to them.

<sup>12</sup> E. Stagg and F. Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–100.

rarely does this not pose a problem. References to women may be found in widely ranging authors, from educated Philo in Alexandria and the elite authors in Athens, such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle, to the elite writers in Rome, such as Plautus, Cicero, Catullus, and Ovid. One may ask just how profoundly the thinking of these elite, educated men influenced the rural people in “the world of Jesus” (or even how their writings reflect rural life there). One can quote Plato’s voluminous works, for example, to prove or disprove just about anything.<sup>14</sup> With these intellectuals as their source, the Staggs, not surprisingly, overlook the underclasses and how they really lived. For the Jewish world, however, the Staggs have an easier task because, for example, the Dead Sea Scrolls represent very well the views of the group—or groups—that produced them, since the group was so controlled. That is, it was small, limited in geography, and relatively confined within itself. In the present study, the literature of the Greco-Roman era is cited, but references to it will be very selective and critical.

L. Swidler’s *Women in Judaism* (1976) and *Biblical Affirmations of Women* (1979) include a brief survey of women in the Greco-Roman and Jewish world.<sup>15</sup> In both books he sees the value of distinguishing between social classes, but he rarely follows this otherwise good counsel.<sup>16</sup> When he departs from the Greco-Roman world and enters the Jewish world (mostly in Palestine, and rightly so), he usually does not deal with even the rich and the poor and how Jewish law and custom applied to them. In one example, however, Swidler correctly states, on the issue of women appearing in public, that the restrictions varied with the rural and city environments and the upper and lower classes.<sup>17</sup> Women in the country and among the lower classes were freer than women in the city and in the upper classes. Though one may argue that wealthy women were freer than anyone because, it will be shown, money and power went hand in hand, Swidler’s effort is commendable. But apart from this exception and a few others, he does not systematically work out how the teachings of the rabbis—his main emphasis—should be weighed and sifted with class structure, historical realia, and economic hardships. Our limited purpose in the following chapters does not allow us to

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<sup>14</sup> Finley, *Ancient Economy*, 37–38.

<sup>15</sup> L. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, N.J.: 1976); and *Biblical Affirmations of Women* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979). *Women in Judaism* deals with Hebrew sources, but it eventually elucidates the NT.

<sup>16</sup> Swidler, *Women in Judaism*, 13; and *Biblical Affirmations*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Swidler, *Women in Judaism*, 118–19.

analyze the teachings of the sages systematically; but whenever they are cited, attention will be paid to how the teachings and rulings may be applied to social classes.

E. Schüssler Fiorenza, in her landmark book *In Memory of Her* (1983), states that “women’s actual socioreligious status must be determined by the degree of their economic autonomy and social roles rather than by ideological or prescriptive statements.”<sup>18</sup> Her theory is valid, but I cannot find where she even partially works it out, especially in a way similar to the one proposed in this study. In particular, some questions arise about the Sophia-God and her community of women equals.<sup>19</sup> Though the poor, needy, and oppressed are admitted into this community,<sup>20</sup> it remains unclear who its leaders are and what degree of economic autonomy they enjoy. In Greco-Roman religions aristocratic women occupied positions of power. In the Christian communities, if Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), and Lydia (Acts 16:14–15, 40) are cited as examples,<sup>21</sup> then was not their economic independence very great? And if “feminist historians, therefore, seek a theoretical framework that can maintain the dialectical tension of women’s historical existence as active participants in history as well as objects of patriarchal oppression,”<sup>22</sup> then how does one describe the oppression of the wealthy compared with the oppression of the poor? What are the differences between wealthy women’s active participation in history versus the participation of, say, unclean and degraded women? Schüssler Fiorenza’s work leaves much undone. Even so, her book, which merits respect as seminal—and her articles, for that matter—will be amply referred to, if only to debate her conclusions.

Although J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke* (1981–85), and R. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts* (1986–90), do not treat of women as their main emphasis, their impressive volumes have been selected because they represent scholarship’s typical view

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<sup>18</sup>E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 109 and passim. The quotation is italicized in her book.

<sup>19</sup>See *ibid.*, 130–40, for a discussion of this innovative idea.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 123–43, passim.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 166 (Mary), 178 (Lydia). Schüssler Fiorenza wrongly deduces that Lydia was not wealthy (178). She acknowledges that wealthy and prominent women assumed positions of leadership in Acts, that this is a one-sided picture, and that the records of other women are lost (167).

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 85–86. On pp. 285–315, she discusses wealth, patriarchy, and women’s involvement in the church around the Mediterranean and during later centuries, but there is no systematic discussion of women and the church in Luke–Acts in the context of class structure.

of women when they are not distinguished according to classes. Fitzmyer mixes ordinary women in with “those beyond the pale of respectable society.”<sup>23</sup> Tannehill also blends sick and degraded women (e.g., the woman bent double [Luke 13:10–17], ordinary women such as Mary and Martha [10:38–42],<sup>24</sup> and the wealthy Joanna [8:3]) with “the excluded” and “the poor.”<sup>25</sup> In chapters 2 and 3 it will become evident that the women in Luke’s day would never have seen themselves so indiscriminately.

B. Witherington says that he saw the need for a thorough exegesis of women in the ministry of Jesus,<sup>26</sup> so his book, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* (1984), spans the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel, as well as a few passages in Acts that serve as guides for further study. He proposes broad categories, such as “Women in the Parables of Jesus” or “Women and the Deeds of Jesus,” and then does an exegesis of the pericopes that fit into these categories. Generally, his purpose is to reconstruct Jesus’ attitude towards women as opposed to the typical attitudes in Palestine. Though he sees that some cultural views of women were positive,<sup>27</sup> he concludes that Jesus did indeed have reformational ideas because the Jewish world was, for the most part, conservative and even oppressive towards women.<sup>28</sup> In his introductory survey on women and their roles in Palestine, however, the discussion of economic issues (to cite only these) fluctuates between such topics as property rights and the ketubah with little attention paid to the wealth of these two entities according to women who belong to this or that class. Thus, he raises more questions than he answers. What happens to a woman who was so poor going into her marriage that she only brought the clothing on her back with her ketubah? Knowing that a woman usually retained the price of her ketubah upon divorce,<sup>29</sup> would her husband seek a divorce more easily than if she had brought in a handsome ketubah? How many

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<sup>23</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1.191–92.

<sup>24</sup> I tentatively argue in ch. 4 that Mary and Martha may have been fairly well-off landowners.

<sup>25</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, 1.131–39, esp. 139.

<sup>26</sup> B. Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* (New York: Cambridge, 1984) 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 125–31.

<sup>29</sup> Swidler, *Women in Judaism*, 158–59, gives a few exceptions from a few rabbis. L. J. Archer, *Her Price Is beyond Rubies: The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine* (JSOTSup 60; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990) 171–88, has a thorough discussion of the *ketubah*. Essentially the *ketubah* is the marriage contract and includes any settlement due to the wife if she should be divorced.

peasants had property large enough for its inheritance to play a significant economic role except for the oldest son? How did rabbinic laws in the Mishnah apply to widows with little or no property?

In Witherington's book *Women in the Earliest Churches* (1988),<sup>30</sup> he looks at women in the early Christian communities, mostly through the Pauline letters, along with a brief review of Luke's Gospel and a survey of Acts. In the first chapter the cultural background includes the larger Mediterranean world. But a quick glance at his bibliography shows that he ranges from classical Athens to Egypt and Rome, with a few works on the status of women in the larger Roman Empire. A glance at the chapter reveals a similar pattern: he moves from classical Athens and Sparta, to ancient Corinth in Pindar's time and then Hellenistic times, over to Egypt, and finally to Rome in the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. A sociological analysis demands a greater control over the data. For the Greek East, Witherington rightly acknowledges that the plight of upper-class women was improving, especially in Asia Minor, but unfortunately his discussion is limited mostly to them.<sup>31</sup> What about the underclasses? Did the benefits of the wealthy trickle down to commoners? What was life like for them? Taken together, Witherington's two books serve as occasionally valuable cross-references. But his methods, the amount of data, and the reconstruction and interpretation of them differ from the present study.

W. Whitney's dissertation, "Women in Luke" (1990), is an application of a particular reader-response hermeneutic that incorporates a feminist perspective. It is based on an article written by Patricinio Schweikert. Put briefly, when we the readers approach a text, we must consider our own location in time (the twentieth century), the setting of the original audience (men and women in the first-century Mediterranean), and the author (a male in the same time and place as his audience). Luke has a high view of women, but he is writing in a society, Whitney argues, that does not view women highly.<sup>32</sup> Luke is caught between his own view and the larger society's view. The discrepancy should show up in his Gospel and create dissonance within the ancient and modern readers who are informed of women's status in Luke's period. This feminist hermeneutic takes into account the problem of a text that liberates but is time- and culture-bound in a patriarchal society. Thus, a work swings between two poles, which

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<sup>30</sup>B. Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (New York: Cambridge, 1988). His third book, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (ed. A. Witherington; New York: Cambridge, 1990), is virtually a reworking of the same material with little added.

<sup>31</sup>*Women in the Earliest Churches*, 15–16.

<sup>32</sup>Whitney, "Women," 66.

Schweikert and Whitney call continuity/legitimation (C/L) and discontinuity/revolution (D/R). C/L in the text reflects the dominant view of the original setting, a male-dominated society. It would be unrealistic to expect a literary work not to have some continuity with, and even legitimation of, its culture. But in some sense a text appears discontinuous and revolutionary (D/R) by challenging the status quo of its culture.

For example, women in Luke's time were considered nothing more than "baby-makers," says Whitney, a particularly mundane and sexist role for women in the ancient world<sup>33</sup> and probably a way of keeping women from interacting with society.<sup>34</sup> Mary is depicted as subjected to these ordinary customs and mores of the day, which would place childbirth on the C/L end of the continuum. But when God breaks in on the scene, he lifts the mundane to sublime heights, which constitutes D/R. Whitney does an exegesis of every passage in which women are mentioned in the Gospel and comments on how Luke supports the culture of his day (C/L) but breaks from it with the supernatural (D/R).

Though Whitney's overall goal is valid and admirable, a problem emerges when he has to conclude that women were universally and uniformly "repressed" and "oppressed" in Palestinian and Greco-Roman society.<sup>35</sup> He has the strongest motivation to draw this conclusion because he needs to show how Luke makes a break (D/R) from the norm (C/L). But what if, according to Luke, Mary was not merely a "baby-maker" nor oppressed socially? What if Luke grants her a religious lineage and Joseph a royal one? Not every woman in Luke-Acts was oppressed in the same way and to the same degree.

R. Kraemer's book *Her Share of the Blessings* (1992)<sup>36</sup> deserves attention as well, since she surveys women in a variety of religions. Her remarkable book extends from the Brauron girls in Attica to John Chrysostom. Her three chapters (10–12) on the NT and early Christianity cut across chronological layers, mixing Luke-Acts with other Christian documents. Therefore, her treatment of Luke-Acts is necessarily very slim. The material does not include a systematic analysis of the social hierarchy. In her analysis of women's religious offices in Greco-Roman paganism, she quite rightly emphasizes that the offices were held by wealthy, powerful, and prestigious

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 136, 159, 312.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 148. If anything, a woman's having a baby gave her freer interaction in society.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 60–66.

<sup>36</sup>R. S. Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford, 1992).

women.<sup>37</sup> But since the inscriptions and literary references on this subject almost exclusively emanate from this level, Kraemer confines most of her discussion to them.

A bright light in this array of scholarship is K. Corley's book, *Private Women, Public Meals*,<sup>38</sup> in which she analyzes the meal settings in the Synoptic Gospels. Its second chapter contains her long survey of the dinner setting in the Greco-Roman world and of women's place at it. She begins by dividing the women into four classes: aristocrats, freedwomen, free women, and slaves. This is very useful for her subsequent examination of public meals and symposia because she can now determine the kinds of women who were excluded or included and avoid the easy generalization contained in the word "woman." A major weakness emerges in her study, however, as it touches on the present work: Corley's choice of classes is too vague and broad. It will become evident in our chapters 2 and 3 that her choice does not at all account for women who are in many other classes in Greco-Roman society. For example, a free woman might be a wealthy purple-merchant, an artisan, or a common day laborer—three "professions" that belong to three different classes according to the present study. Ancient sources, while mentioning Corley's four classes, assume social locations that outnumber her four. The present survey will attempt to fill out the picture of women in various classes a lot more. This criticism notwithstanding, her effort to divide women into classes brings precision to her analysis.

In light of NT scholarship's neglect of social hierarchy as it relates to women, it seems, then, that the time is ripe for an attempt to apply a theory of classes to Luke–Acts. This becomes all the more necessary when we realize that Luke is concerned about hierarchy. The first two chapters of his Gospel assume an understanding of it. And beyond these two chapters Luke leaves all sorts of hints and clues about the social location of his characters, with such descriptions as synagogue ruler, centurion, jailer, purple-seller, and so forth. What did they mean in his time and, hence, in his stories? Why mention them at all? Since the social undergirds the literary and the literary assumes the social, it seems appropriate to blend two methodologies, sociology and narratology, if they are narrowly defined.

The format of this study goes from the general to the specific by following four groups.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 80–92.

<sup>38</sup> see note 10 above.

<sup>39</sup> The word "group" here is defined very loosely. It is not as if the persons in the Greco-Roman world and the characters in Luke–Acts realize that they belong together.

(1) Chapters 2 and 3 survey women in Greco-Roman society according to the classes outlined by Lenski, although Lenski's ideas are modified.

(2) The end of chapter 3 shows that all the men and women of Luke-Acts, the second group, easily fit within the classes described in chapters 2 and 3.

(3) Chapter 4 discusses the third group, women who in Luke-Acts are among the upper classes or among those who, even if not located there, are productive, contributing members of society.

(4) Chapter 5 analyzes the target group, women who are the lowest members in society: only they will rise at the expense of wealthy, powerful, and prestigious men, according to Luke.

Finally, chapter 6 draws conclusions to our findings.