

Contents

Pentecost 8

*But the Lord answered her,
"Martha, Martha, you are
worried and distracted by
many things; there is need
of only one thing. . . ."*

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	Page
1. Lectionary Selection Luke 10:38-42	132
2. Exploring the Pattern	133
3. Reading Between the Lines	138
4. Parallel Readings	139
From:	
<i>The Way of Woman</i>	
<i>Lady of the Lotus-Born</i>	
<i>C. G. Jung Letters 1906-1950</i>	
<i>Rough Music</i>	
5. Critical Background	147
Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe	

• **Lectionary Readings (Year C)**

Revised Common Lectionary

First Reading	Amos 8:1-12 or Genesis 18:1-10a
Second Reading	Colossians 1:15-28
Gospel	Luke 10:38-42
Psalm	52 or 15

Luke 10:38-42

1 Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named
2 Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the
3 Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her
4 many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister
5 has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord
6 answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things;
7 there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part which will not be
8 taken away from her."

Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

1. Notice that it is Martha's *home* into which Jesus is welcomed. Who do you imagine Martha is, and what is *her home* like? Who might live there with her, and what might those relationships be like?

What is a *home*? What makes a *home*? Who makes a *home*? What sorts of experiences happen there? How are these experiences different from those experiences that go on outside a home—on the road, in a temple, in the wilderness, or in the marketplace? What work goes into making or keeping a home? Who would typically be in charge of this making and keeping?

What is expected of these "home makers"? What service? What attitude? What sacrifice? What hospitality? How might these expectations be formed? Who forms them? How are these expectations related to the exercise of duty?

What do you know of the value assigned to *home making* by people in Jesus' day? How might *home making* and *home keeping* be rewarded? What beliefs and prejudices might color the acknowledgment and treatment of *home makers*?

Given that Jesus is an itinerant teacher and preacher, what conclusions might you draw about his relationship to home and homemaking?

Likewise, what conclusions might you draw from his itinerancy about his relationship to cultural expectations and duty?

At the Workbench: Pentecost 8; Proper 11

What do you imagine Jesus and his disciples expect when they enter Martha's *home*? What do you recall about the Hebrew requirement to show hospitality?

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. [Deut 10:17-19]

What might such hospitality look like? What duties might it entail? Who would be expected to provide this hospitality, to perform these duties? Who might be expected to assist in executing these duties?

Martha's sister, Mary, sits at Jesus' feet and listens as Martha goes about tending her many tasks, which presumably include the tasks associated with the hospitality she provides Jesus and his followers. Luke tells us that Martha is "distracted" by these tasks. What is distraction? From what is Martha distracted? Who or what causes her distraction?

What work, duties, or *diakonia* (the Greek word for service as defined and described by Jane Schaberg in the Critical Background), might Martha perceive are hers in this moment? Imagine her watching Mary who sits and listens at Jesus' feet? What desires and inner conflicts might Martha be experiencing? How does she respond to these inner conflicts?

How does Mary seem to perceive her duty or *diakonia* in this moment? What conflicts might be going on within her as she sits silently at Jesus' feet?

Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

Luke 10:38-42 • July 18, 2010

What about the disciples in Martha's house—what conflicts might be initiated within them as they witness this exchange between Martha and Jesus?

Jesus tells Martha that "*Mary has chosen the better part.*" Describe these parts or roles. Do you imagine that these parts have been offered freely, assigned, or auditioned for? What considerations might have been involved in choosing their parts? How might this story have looked had Mary and Martha chosen the same part? Would there be a story at all?

What is *the better part* that Mary has chosen? What is there about it that might make it the *better part*?

2. What do you know in your life about home making? What experience do you have in caring for a house—the making of beds, the drawing of water, the scrubbing of pots, and sweeping of floors? What do you know of the gathering and preparing of food for family, loved ones, and guests? Which are the flowers you choose to adorn your table or mantle? From which windows have you watched your children or the neighborhood children play? What do you know of preparing medicines and tending wounds? Of kissing foreheads and closing blinds? Of toting heaping baskets of dirty laundry to be washed yet again? What thoughts and feelings do you have as you go about these tasks?

What expectations are placed upon you as you play this part—by your family, your culture, yourself?

What desires arise within you? Which duties and longings are fulfilled by the making of your home? Which duties and longings are set aside or go unfulfilled?

At the Workbench: Pentecost 8; Proper 11

What do you know about sitting and listening? What tasks or duties are required? What abilities are necessary?

What thoughts and feelings do you have as you sit? What expectations are placed upon you as you play this part—by your family, your culture, yourself? What desires, hopes, or longings keep you still? Which hopes, longings, and duties are set aside or go unfulfilled as you sit and listen?

Which parts in your life are assigned to you? Which are the parts you choose to act on or to play? Which parts do you act without choosing? How do you know the difference between these three patterns of action?

Which parts or roles in life do you ignore or reject? Why?

When friends introduce you to others, which parts of you do they reveal? Likewise, which of your roles are you likely to proclaim when meeting someone for the first time? What parts or roles do you fail to mention, or mention only in passing?

3. What does your inner home look like? Do you find flowers and warm bread there? Or is your inner home barren and ascetic? Who inhabits this house? How are the relationships with your inner family members and guests working?

Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

Luke 10:38-42 • July 18, 2010

Who within you is Martha? What aspects of your life does she carefully watch over? What duties does she manage? With what power do you endow her? How do you acknowledge and show gratitude for her sacrifices? How does she voice her complaints? How do you care for her and respond to her needs and worries?

Who within you is Mary? At whose feet does she sit? What wisdom does she contemplate? What is her role within your household? What work does she claim? What work does she shun? How do you affirm, value, and acknowledge her? How does she respond to Martha's complaints?

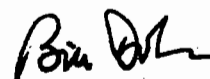
Imagine this house without Martha. What burdens and tensions might be lifted should she choose another part? Likewise, what gifts might you miss should she walk out the door? What smells and tastes? What comfort? What beauty?

Now imagine your inner world without Mary, as a household in which Martha rules the roost. Which burdens and tensions dissipate when Mary disappears? Which are heightened by her absence? Describe a scene in which Mary responds to Martha's complaint by rising and joining her in the kitchen.

Which sister is more necessary? Might there be room for both? How might these two parts of you break their silence and speak directly to one another about reaching a compromise in which both are fulfilled? What scenes might they write and what sets might they paint showing a home in which there is fresh bread for both the body and the soul?

Reading Between the Lines

I recall a time when Gestalt therapists often invited clients to sit opposite an empty chair and speak to the imaginary other—another person or a part of themselves. Take the Jung quote in Parallel Readings to heart and experiment. Be Mary. Sit opposite an empty chair and speak to the Martha part of you. Tell her your side of what is happening in the encounter described in the text. Tell Martha how you are feeling about yourself and her. Then change chairs. Be Martha and speak to your imaginary Mary side in the other chair. Tell Mary how it is for you. If it works, change chairs several times and let the conversation continue. The hope is that you may be better in touch with the opposites of Mary and Martha who are within all of us. Meeting them and enabling them to find a “reconciling third” between the continuing opposites is not only a healing possibility but an opportunity for transformation.

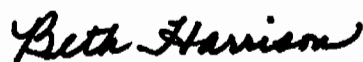


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Jesus often tells stories that begin “A man had two sons...,” and they are often called to work outside. This story involves two sisters, and they are inside Martha’s home.

What are *sisters*? Is this home also Mary’s home? What might it mean that the story describes it as *Martha’s home*?

What do you know of a Martha within you? What do you know of that Mary? How do these sisters get along? Work together? Create a *home*? Take a pen or pencil and imagine a dialogue between Mary and Martha. Allow them to speak to each other, and to you.



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I’ve often said that the worst words to begin a sentence are “I think you should. . . .” We are all too often not content to live our lives as we feel is appropriate, but go on to insist that others around us see things our way, do things our way, and recognize that our way is not only the best way, but the only way. We are ready to prescribe for others what they ought to be doing. It may be that Martha’s problem was not that she was attending to the necessary tasks of hospitality, but that she insisted that Mary do so in the same way.

Where do you find yourself frustrated because your spouse, your child, a co-worker, a friend, is not attending to a task as you think they should? To whom do you go to complain, to demand that they do it “right”? How might you find eyes to see their way as potentially being “the better part”?



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Parallel Readings

From *The Way of Woman*

The Life of the Spirit in Women

If we look briefly at the various contexts in which the word “spirit” occurs, from chemistry to the Christian Trinity, we see that it is predominantly used on every level and without any moral connotation to express that which brings about a transformation. Oil is transformed into power through the spirit in petroleum; spirits of salt and spirits of ammonia burn and cleanse, purify and destroy; the spirit in alcohol lifts a man out of his ego and alters his personality before our eyes; angels or demons have always been invoked to work transformations for good or evil; the spirit that emerged at Pentecost ran like fire through the pagan world and gave birth to the new Christian Era. And, greatest symbol of all, the Holy Spirit in the Godhead entered into a woman and transformed God himself into incarnate man. It is obvious from all this that the spirit basically manifests itself to Western man as an active principle, and therefore it has usually been associated with masculine creative power, though its feminine aspect has been known as Sophia, coexistent with God before creation.

Certainly it is fundamentally androgynous. But for most of us, having emerged to some degree from the original identity of archetypal opposites and being still far indeed from their conscious reunion, the paramount need is for discrimination between them. For until they are fully experienced as separate, they cannot unite in a holy marriage any more than two married people can achieve a conscious relationship until they know themselves as psychically separate. Therefore for the moment let us call the spirit he in accordance with our tradition.

One of the loudest complaints of the liberators of women has been that the dominance of the male in society has prevented women from proving that they are as creative as men. This is a half-truth, whereby the real truth of the matter is obscured and lost. The first essential, surely, in thinking about the transforming power of the spirit is to remember that it creates nothing in a vacuum. There has to be fuel before the fire will burn; there has to be earth as well as seed before new life is created. The masculinity of the spirit is meaningless unless it enters into a feminine container, and ultimately no man can create anything without the equal participation of the woman without or the woman within. Even God could not transform himself into man without the free consent of Mary. In every creative act or transformation—intellectual, emotional, or physical—the

Helen M. Luke, “The Life of the Spirit in Women” in *The Way of Woman: Awakening the Perennial Feminine*, (New York: Doubleday, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1995), pp. 10-13.

What Jung does affirm is that the creative power in a woman can never come to fruition if she is caught in an unconscious imitation of men or identification with the inferior masculinity in her unconscious.

male and the female, the active and the passive, are of equal importance, and real liberation from the weight of the inferior status imposed on women lies not in the reiterated assertion that women must now strive to live like men, but in the affirmation, so difficult for us, of the equal value of the specifically feminine. Nothing demonstrates more clearly the real damage which has been done to us by the dominance of masculinity for so many centuries as the contempt for the feminine implicit in so much of the propaganda of the women's movements. It even creeps unrecognized into the work of some of the most far-seeing women writers of today. Indeed, it requires a great effort of consciousness in every individual woman to remain aware of this destructive spirit which is constantly whispering to her the collective judgment of centuries about the inferiority, the dullness, the uncreativity of her passive feminine nature. Modern woman must therefore face the great danger of assuming that she has only to throw off the yoke imposed on her by men and develop her spiritual gifts in the spheres of activity now opened to her, in order to arrive at that far-off goal of androgynous being.

The great contribution of C. G. Jung toward the restoration of feminine values to Western man is often obscured by a misunderstanding of his concept of the *animus*. In Jung's terminology the animus is a personification of the *unconscious* masculinity in women, the anima being the parallel image of the feminine in a man. Being unconscious, it is necessarily projected and often manifests itself in negative ways, and this has been interpreted entirely out of context by many of those who are devoted to the cause of liberation. Jung, they say, denies to woman any equality with man. He accuses her of producing secondhand opinions and engaging in all manner of inferior masculine activity, as though she were by nature incapable of real creativity. Nothing could be further from the truth. What Jung does affirm is that the creative power in a woman can never come to fruition if she is caught in an unconscious imitation of men or identification with the inferior masculinity in her unconscious. He defined the masculine as the ability to know one's goal and to do what is necessary to achieve it. As long as the animus remains *unconscious* in a woman, he will persuade her that she has no need to explore her hidden motives and will urge her to a blind pursuit of her conscious goals, which, of course, liberates her from the hard and undramatic task of discovering her real individual point of view. Unrecognized and undifferentiated, he will actually destroy in her the possibility of integrating her contrasexual powers. Her spirituality will thus remain a sterile thing and this negative animus will poison her attitude to her own nature. The true function of the animus is to act as an inner guide between the ego and the deep springs both of the spirit and of true feminine wisdom, so that the woman may bring to birth a new consciousness of both. It is when he operates *between* her and the outer world,

and she identifies with him, that he destroys her creativity. Esther Harding quoted Jung as saying in conversation that the true feminineness of the man is not the anima; likewise the true masculine spirit in woman is not the animus, though he leads her to it. The conscious integration of her dormant spirit of clear discrimination alone can free the individual woman from the compulsive yoke of the negative animus. Without this freedom, no amount of liberation in the outer world can do more than throw her into another and more dangerous slavery.

Helen M. Luke

From *Lady of the Lotus-Born*

Along with a number of other religious traditions, Buddhism has been criticized for its failure, on the institutional level, to grant parity of status and opportunity to women, and its seemingly implied refusal to admit perfect equality between the sexes in terms of spiritual potential. It is an undeniable fact that, for instance, the Bhikshuni Sangha, or order of nuns, was founded later than that of the monks and apparently with some reluctance on the part of the Buddha. It is also a fact that on the level of Vinaya discipline, the nuns take vows that specifically subordinate them, administratively, to the male branch of the order. And in Tibet, for instance, it is noticeable that while womanhood is not a disqualification (as it is in some religions) from public positions of respect and influence in the religious hierarchy, the incidence of acknowledged female lamas (although high attainment among women has on all accounts been very considerable) is rare. How does all this tally with the fact that Buddhist teaching aims at states of liberation and enlightenment in which the physical and emotional distinctions that separate the sexes have no meaning?

To begin with, it is worth making the obvious but important point that institutional religion, regardless of its spiritual content, is in significant measure a purely human creation. It is conditioned by, and its administrative structures reflect, the societies in which it takes shape. Thus in the management of religious affairs, the relationship between the sexes has usually followed secular imperatives according to which human society traditionally presupposes the private domesticity of women encircled by the external, civic activities of men. While social considerations seem to have been decisive in the formation of institutional structures, this has of course not meant that women have been denied the possibility of engaging in spiritual practice. But though almost all traditions admit in theory that the ability to gain high levels of insight and sanctity is equal in both sexes, the fact remains that the practical possibilities open to women have in many societies often been defined and curtailed by essentially nonreligious considerations. In Buddhism,

From *Lady of the Lotus-Born: The Life and Enlightenment of Yeshe Tsogyal* by Namkhai Nyingpo and Gyalwa Changchub. Copyright © 1999 by the Padmakara Translation Group, Boston: Shambala Publications, Inc., pp. xxviii-xxxi.

Later, she is obliged, and prepared, to follow a lonely path and is never spared the physical disadvantages of womanhood in a harsh and uncomprehending world.

as we have said, the first disciples who followed the Buddha's call to embrace the life of homelessness were exclusively men. It was not long before women signaled their own intentions to do the same. In view of what has just been said, however, the Buddha's initial hesitation to ordain women and his subsequent insistence that the Bhikshuni Sangha should be subject to the administration of the monks, may be regarded as a reflection of the social patterns just outlined. And the apparent anxiety that it was necessary somehow to locate a group of unattached women within an outer masculine framework may well have been a measure necessary to ensure that the order of nuns would be intelligible and acceptable to the society at that time. The arrangement was in other words dictated by historical and cultural considerations and need not be regarded as immutable in situations where such considerations no longer obtain.

Turning to *Lady of the Lotus-Born*, we find that practically the first picture we have of Tsogyal is of a young woman struggling desperately against the social pressures of her time. Despite her supplications, and forgetful of his wondering assessment of her as a young child, her father insists on her marriage. And she, in her bid for freedom, is subjected to cruelty and outrage. Later, she is obliged, and prepared, to follow a lonely path and is never spared the physical disadvantages of womanhood in a harsh and uncomprehending world. Witness the resentment seething behind the criticism of the royal ministers: "This girl of Kharchen has destroyed her reputation and is the ruin of her family. Will she now be left to bring disaster on the entire kingdom?" Tsogyal is routinely singled out for particular blame and as an object of spite. At one point, she herself speaks her mind to Guru Rinpoche with extraordinary frankness. The circumstances were a request for a specific teaching, but in her outburst we can easily sense the years of struggle and frustration that lay behind it. . . .

For I am a timid woman and of scant ability; of lowly condition, the butt of everyone. If I go for alms, I am set upon by dogs; if food and riches come my way, I am the prey of thieves; since beautiful, I am the quarry of every lecherous knave; if I am busy with much to do, the country folk accuse me; if I don't do what they think I should, the people criticize; if I put a foot wrong, everyone detests me. I have to worry about everything I do. That is what it is like to be a woman! How can a woman possibly gain accomplishment in Dharma? Just managing to survive is already hard enough!

All this of course only serves to throw Yeshe Tsogyal's achievement into sharper relief. Beset by physical weakness that makes her the easy victim of bullies, thieves, and rapists, she succeeds nevertheless, and the great inner confidence deriving from the relationship with Guru Rinpoche, together with

the fruits of her meditative experience, allow her to ignore the clamorous disapproval of mere society over which in the end her triumph is absolute.

Namkhai Nyingpo and Gyalwa Changchub

From C. G. Jung Letters 1906-1950

Letter to Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn

Bollingen, 20 August 1945

Dear Frau Fröbe,

The opus consists of three parts: insight, endurance, and action. Psychology is needed only in the first part, but in the second and third parts moral strength plays the predominant role. Your present situation is the result of pressure of circumstances which are unavoidable. It is conflicts of duty that make endurance and action so difficult. Your life's work for Eranos* was unavoidable and right. Nevertheless it conflicts with maternal duties which are equally unavoidable and right. The one must exist, and so must the other. There can be no resolution, only patient endurance of the opposites which ultimately spring from your own nature. You yourself are a conflict that rages in itself and against itself, in order to melt its incompatible substances, the male and the female, in the fire of suffering, and thus create that fixed and unalterable form which is the goal of life. Everyone goes through this mill, consciously or unconsciously, voluntarily or forcibly. We are crucified between the opposites and delivered up to the torture until the "reconciling third" takes shape. Do not doubt the rightness of the two sides within you, and let whatever may happen, happen. Admit that your daughter is right in saying you are a bad mother, and defend your duty as a mother towards Eranos. But never forget that Eranos is also the right thing and was latent within you from the beginning. The apparently unendurable conflict is proof of the rightness of your life. A life without inner contradiction is either only half a life or else a life in the Beyond, which is destined only for angels. But God loves human beings more than the angels. With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,
C. G. Jung

"Letter to Olga Frobe Kapteyn" from *C. G. Jung Letters 1906-1950*, selected and edited by Gerhard Adler in collaboration with Aniela Jaffe. Translated by R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series XCV: 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 375. Reprinted with permission.

*Eranos is a discussion group dedicated to the study of psychology, religion, philosophy, and spirituality. It was founded by Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn in 1933, from which time it has held annual conferences.

From *Rough Music*

Broom

More than my sixteen rented houses and their eighty or so rooms
held up by stone or cinderblock foundations,
most facing north, with useless basements,
wrought iron fences to the curb,
beat-up black mailboxes—
eagles impaled through breasts to edifice—
or set like lighthouses
some distance from the stoop a thousand miles inland,

or close enough to sea the sea gulls
settled mornings in the playing fields I passed
on this continent and others
as I walked my sons to school or to the train—

more than the kitchen door frames where is carved the progress
of their growth, one then the other on his birthday
backed against the wall, almost on tiptoe—

and more than the ruler
I have laid across their skulls
where the older's brown hair like my own,
or the younger's blond like his father's, covered abundantly
what was once only a swatch of scalp
I'd touch as they slept to know their hearts beat—

more than the height at which, and in this house,
the markings stopped like stairs leading to ground level,
and they walked out into the world,
dogged, no doubt, by the ghost of the man, their father,
and the men who tried to be their fathers,
father their wildness—

and more, even, than the high sashed windows
and windows sliding sideways
through which I watched for them, sometimes squinting,
sometimes through my hands cupped on cold glass
trying to see in the dark my men approaching,
my breath blinding me,
the first born surely the man I would have married,
the second, me in his man's body—

more than the locks left open and the creaking steps,
the books left open like mirrors on the floor
and the sinks where we washed our faces
and the beds above which our threefold dreams collided,

Deborah Digges, "Broom"
from *Rough Music*, (New
York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995),
pp. 3-5.

I have loved the broom I took into my hands
and crossed the threshold to begin again,
whose straw I wore to nothing,
whose shaft I could use to straighten a tree, or break
across my knee to kindle the first winter fire,
or use to stir the fire,
broom whose stave is pine or hickory,
and whose skirt of birch-spray and heather
offers itself up as nest matter,
arcs like the equator
in the corner, could we see far enough,
or is parted one way like my hair.

Once I asked myself, when was I happy?
I was looking at a February sky.
When did the light hold me and I didn't struggle?
And it came to me, an image
of myself in a doorway, a broom in my hand,
sweeping out beach sand, salt, soot,
pollen and pine needles, the last December leaves,
and mud wasps, moths, flies crushed to wafers,
and spring's first seed husks,
and then the final tufts like down, and red bud petals
like autumn leaves—so many petals—

sweeping out the soil the boys tracked in
from burying in the yard another animal—
broom leaving in tact the spiders' webs,
careful of those,
and careful when I danced with the broom
that no one was watching,
and when I hacked at the floor
with the broom like an axe, jammed handle through glass
as if the house were burning and I must abandon ship
as I wept over a man's faithlessness, or wept over my own—

and so the broom became
an oar that parted waters, raft-keel and mast, or twirled
around and around on the back lawn,
a sort of compass through whose blurred counter-motion
the woods became a gathering of brooms,
onlooking or ancestral.

I thought I could grow old here,
safe among the ghosts, each welcomed,
yes, welcomed back for once, into this house, these rooms

in which I have got down on hands and knees and swept my hair
across my two sons' broad tan backs,
and swept my hair across you, swinging my head,
lost in the motion,

At the Workbench: Pentecost 8; Proper 11

lost swaying up and down the whole length of your body,
my hair tangling in your hair,
our hair matted with sweat and my own cum, and semen,
lost swaying, smelling you,
smelling you humming,
gone in the motion, back and forth, sweeping.

Deborah Digges

Critical Background

From *The Women's Bible Commentary*

Martha and Mary (10:38-42). Popular literature and traditions associated with Martha give evidence that many women have long been uncomfortable with this familiar story, which pits sister against sister. A glance at different commentaries will show that there is no agreement about its basic meaning. Jesus is a guest at the house of Martha, who is "distracted with much serving (*diakonia*). Sitting at his feet listening to his "word" is Mary, who is silent throughout. Martha says, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve (*diakonein*) alone? Tell her then to help me" (author's translation). Her question echoes that of the disciples in the sinking boat in Mark 4:38 (a story Luke does not relate): "Teacher, don't you care if we die?" Unlike the response of Jesus in the storm at sea, which indicates that Jesus does care (he calms the storm), here he gently chides Martha and leaves things as they are. Her request denied, Martha is silenced. She is the loser, with whom the reader is not supposed to identify, but with whom many readers do.

The textual variant found in some manuscripts at v. 42 ("few things are necessary, or only one") is often understood incorrectly as a comment on the menu for a meal and Martha's excessive preparations. However, the shorter reading, "one thing is necessary," is probably more original. Nothing is said about a meal. The "one thing" that is necessary is the "better part" Mary chooses. The implication is clear that Martha's part is lesser. One traditional interpretation sees the two women as abstract principles or types. For example, they are said to represent active and contemplative life styles, or justification by works and justification by faith, or Judaism and Christianity. Another approach pays attention to the fact that the protagonists are women and attempts to read the story in terms of female careers or priorities or jealousies. Some see here a feminist manifesto of the rights of women to theological education. Jesus defends Mary's right to study with him. His action is often contrasted—incorrectly—with the denial of the right of Jewish women to study Torah. But no such rule existed in Jesus' day, and so to oppose Jesus to Judaism in this way is simply inaccurate.

Recently the narrative has been read by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as reflecting debate at the end of the first century C.E. both over the roles of women and over emerging offices in the house-churches, some of which were founded and led by women. As has been noted above, in Christian usage,

From *The Women's Bible Commentary*, edited by Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe. Copyright © 1992 John Knox Press. Used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press.

In contrast to their fate in Luke, Martha and Mary of Bethany, evidently well remembered in the early church, appear in quite a different light in John There, both are loved by Jesus, and they are not in competition with each other.

diakonia became a technical term referring to Eucharistic table service, proclamation, and ecclesial leadership. In the story of Mary and Martha, however, Luke distinguishes *diakonia* (Martha) and “listening to the word” (Mary) as two distinct roles. Mary’s choice of the latter over the former is praised and defended by the Lord. Luke, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, is thus prescribing for the church of the time, not describing a condition that prevailed then or earlier.

It has long been seen that there is some connection between this story and Acts 6:1-6. In the latter passage there is also a separation of the two tasks of *diakonia* (preaching and table service) and the subordination of the latter (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17 and 3:8-13). It is clear, however, from the description of the preaching ministry of those devoted to table service (6:8-7:60), that in the tradition Luke is using, *diakonia* still refers to both ministries. “Service” (*diakonia*) and “the word” are not really split apart, as they are in the story of Martha and Mary, the two sisters who do not even speak to each other. With that split, the *diakonia* of women is reduced and discredited. Finally, it disappears. Acts does not mention any *diakonia* of women, but only of men (1:17; 6.1; 11:29; 12:25).

Several additional points of contrast should be noted between Mary’s *diakonia* of the word and that of various male characters. “The word” is preached by both the Twelve and the Seven in Acts, but it is only listened to by Mary, who never speaks even to question. Her study is totally receptive and passive, not creative learning. In contrast, the missing twelve-year-old Jesus is found in the Temple “sitting among the teachers [not at their feet], listening to them and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). The next verse mentions his answers, not his questions. The Gerasene demoniac sits healed at the feet of Jesus, begs to stay with him, but is sent away to proclaim what God has done for him (8:35-39). Mary’s position at the feet of Jesus is like Paul’s brought up at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), but Paul’s subordination to his teacher is temporary; in contrast, Luke tells of no subsequent independent teaching or other leadership by Mary.

The disciples and apostles in Luke learn often in dialogues (e.g., 5:1-11; 8:4-15; 9:10-11), but Mary is silent. Her attitude is that of a disciple, but she is not a disciple. She is only an audience. What she has heard and learned at the Lord’s feet is private; it does not instruct and shape the whole community.

In contrast to their fate in Luke, Martha and Mary of Bethany, evidently well remembered in the early church, appear in quite a different light in John 11:1-45; 12:1-8. There, both are loved by Jesus, and they are not in competition with each other. Martha, who serves at table, makes the central christological confession of this Gospel, of Jesus as the Christ (cf. the confession of Peter in the Synoptics), and Mary, who also enters into dialogue with Jesus, performs the prophetic action of anointing Jesus’ feet. In John’s portrait of the two sisters, *diakonia* of the table and of the word remain integrated.

Critical Background
Luke 10:38-42 • July 18, 2010

Luke does not present Jesus saying, "I permit no woman to teach or preach" or "Women must be silent" or "Only men can be apostles or disciples or deacons." In the world of Luke, Jesus is not a "divider" (see 12:13). Approved women are shown choosing for themselves the passive role, which the Lord in Luke calls "the better part" (10:42). Martha, who serves unaided, is called "distracted," "anxious" and "troubled" about many things that are not necessary. Her request for Mary's help is understood as a spiritual threat to her "sister."

But if Luke 10:38-42 is called on to authorize women's solid theological education, this text can perform a subversive function—subversive, that is, of Luke's intent, which is to undermine the leadership of women. The educated woman sees through the text, sees its different levels and sees Luke's strategy. Most important here is recognition of the tone of affection and concern and perhaps exasperation, as in the repetition, "Martha, Martha. . ." This is the kindly voice of "love patriarchalism." But if one listens—as this passage urges—to the "word of the Lord," but in one's own experience and that of other women, one may hear behind the text another voice encouraging women's leadership and reconciliation.

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