

TERESA J. CALPINO

Women, Work and Leadership in Acts

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

361

Mohr Siebeck

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Women, Work and Leadership in Acts

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Preface

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List of abbreviations

AAT	Atti della Reale Accademia delle scienze di Torino.
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary. 6 vols., Doubleday, 1992
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AE	L'année épigraphique
ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
BA	W. Bauer; <i>Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur</i>
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BASP	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
BCH	Bulletin de correspondance hellénique. Athènes : École française d'Athènes ; Paris : de Boccard
BEFAR	Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome
CAH	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i> , ed. J. B. Bury et al. (Cambridge: University Press, 1923-1939), 12 vols.
CC	Calvin Commentaries Series
CIG	Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum
CIJ	Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum
CIL	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
FIRA	<i>Fontes Iuris Romani Antejustiniani</i> (Florence: Barbera, 2nd ed.); <i>I. Leges</i> , ed. S. Riccobono (1968); <i>II. Auctores</i> , ed. J. Baviera (1968); <i>III. Negotia</i> , ed. V. Arangio-Ruiz (1969)
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary Series
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
IGRR	Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes
ILS	Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae ; H. Dessau, (Berlin, 1892-1916)
IMT	Inschriften Mysia & Troas: Lacus Appolloniatis & L'Apollon/milet Miletupolis, eds. Matthias Barth and Josef Stauber
JFSR	Journal of Feminist Studies of Religion
JHS	Journal of Hellenic Studies
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman period, (Leiden: Brill).
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament

KNT	Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
MAMA	Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua, 4 volumes, Manchester, 1928-1937
MM	J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan, <i>The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources</i> , London, 1914-29
ND	<i>New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity</i> , ed. G.H.R. Horsley, North Ryde, 1981-1989. 9 volumes
NIS	<i>Nouvelles inscriptions de Sardes</i> , L. Robert
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTsup.	<i>Novum Testamentum Supplement Series</i>
NS	Notizie degli scavi
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
OCD	<i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> , eds. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, 3 rd revised edition, 2003, Oxford
ÖTK	Gütersloher Taschenbücher Siebenstern; Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament
PG	Patrologia Graecae (Migne)
RB	Revue Biblique
RIDA	Revue international des droits de l'antiquité, Bruxelles: service des publications des Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis
Rphil	Revue de Philologie
SB	Sources Bibliques
SCI	Scripta Classica Israelica
SEG	Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum, Leiden
SIG	Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum
SJSJ	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
SNTS	Society for New Testament Studies
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
TAM	Tituli Asiae Minoris
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament; eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TEAS	Twayne's English Authors Series
ThHK	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
TPSup	<i>Tabulae Pompeianae Sulpiciorum: edizione critica dell'archivio puteolano dei Sulpicii</i> , ed. G. Camodeca. 2 vols. Rome 1999. (Vetera 12) Nos.1-26. [Quasar]
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZPE	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik

Chapter 1

Review of Scholarship

A. Introduction

There are approximately thirty stories in *The Acts of the Apostles* that involve female characters or cite women, making it a topic of no small importance to the author.¹ Jane Schaberg has observed:

The author of Luke (and Acts) is interested in the education of women in the basics of Christian faith and in the education of outsiders about Christian women...One of the strategies of this writing is *to provide female readers with female characters as role models*.² (emphasis mine)

Schaberg rightly calls for a conscious critique of transporting this educational strategy into a contemporary setting, but it is crucial to stand back and assess the impact of the above emphasized words. If one of the strategies of the author of Acts is to reach, educate, and edify women, then what we have contained in Acts are invaluable traditions about the roles of women in the Greco-Roman world through the eyes of early Christians, specifically their role in the society and church of the early second century.³ This, of course, does not assume that the

¹ Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Women in Acts of the Apostles: A Feminist Liberation Perspective*, trans. L. Moloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), xxv-vi. In light of recent research on the Acts of the Apostles, it is no longer certain that one can ascribe authorship to Luke, thus the reference to “the author.” Most recently, Patricia Walters, *The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts: A Reassessment of the Evidence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); see also Richard Pervo and Mikeal Parsons, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

² Jane Schaberg, “Luke,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, eds. C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 363. For the opposing view, see the balanced discussions of Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary of the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. J. Limburg, A. T. Kraabel, and D. H. Juel, eds. E. J. Epp and C. R. Matthews (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), xl-xlii; and Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia and Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986, 1990).

³ Although I will not delve into the arguments of dating and authorship, I do assume the second century date of the material based on the convincing arguments of Richard I. Pervo, although there are many others who support and have done important work on this topic. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2006) and “Acts

portrait of women's lives that Acts provides is not an idealized picture without rhetorical and literary embellishment, but that it is precisely in the choice of virtues that are awarded to women that one has evidence of the ideals of the early Church. The author's favor or disfavor toward women is not the focus of this study, although this will be clarified as a result of this particular analysis of two important but often overlooked pericopae, "The Resuscitation of Tabitha" (9:36-43) and "The Conversion of Lydia" (16:13-15). This is the first attempt, to my knowledge, to analyze these stories and women as a pair.

Although these stories are distinct, they also share some important literary and social similarities that invite their analysis as a pair. First, and quite significantly, both Tabitha and Lydia are presented as working women who are not at all dependent on any man in their intimate circles. Both are without a husband, male guardian, or lawyers. Neither woman is shown as a mother with children. Their "single" status, or better said, independence, is remarkable given the ordinary conventions of the day. Notably, the author has situated both women in a primary position: Tabitha is the first woman to receive a healing miracle in Acts (Acts 9:36-43) and is the final miracle in the Petrine section of Acts (Acts 1:15-12:18). Lydia is the first woman to be "called" (Acts 16:11-15) in the Pauline portion of Acts (Acts 9:1-28:30), and her story bookends the Philippian narratives (Acts 16:11-15; 16:40). In addition, both women are in charge of a household: Tabitha is resuscitated in her home in Joppa, and Lydia – while she is called in a "place of prayer" (προσευχήν) – requests that her entire household be baptized and then invites Paul and Silas to her home, where they stay as guests while in Philippi. Significantly, both stories evince a similar introductory phrase: Lydia is introduced by the phrase *τις γυνή ὀνόματι* (Acts 16:14), and Tabitha with *τις ἦν μαθήτρια ὀνόματι* (Acts 9:36). (Here we should notice the only instance of the feminine *μαθήτρια* in the New Testament). Although this may appear to be a standard character introduction, in Acts it signals the introduction of an important character who is a believer, or who will be soon. Many men are introduced with this formula, both married and unmarried, but the same can only be said for a select few women. Tabitha, Rhoda, Lydia, and Damaris are the only women who are introduced with this formula; we should note that all are portrayed without a spouse.⁴ Both stories are built around the thematic words *αυοίγω, παρακαλέω,*

in the Suburbs of the Apologists," in *Contemporary Studies in Acts*, ed. T. E. Phillips (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009), 29-46.

⁴ Mary is introduced as "the mother of John." Sapphira, Priscilla, and Drusilla are all introduced in relation to their husbands. The man in each of these cases is introduced with the formula "a certain man named..." but the wife is then introduced by "with his wife." Queen Candace and Queen Bernice are both introduced by their names alone, which may be due to their royal status.

κύριος, and μένω, an examination of which will be featured below in chapters four and five. Yet here one might make the observation that first Peter, in the case of Tabitha, and then Paul, with Lydia, will be urged strongly (παρακαλέω) to enter the women's respective households, in which they will remain for some time afterward.⁵

Although neither Tabitha nor Lydia is identified as a widow, scholars have presumed this based on the fact that no men are featured in either woman's intimate circle and based on the demographics of that time period.⁶ More recent investigations of Greco-Roman social systems, however, point to a greater variety of roles for women and their opportunities for independence in the Romanized Mediterranean world.⁷ Even married women could inherit and run businesses and retain use and usufruct of the wealth gained from these ventures without intermediary lawyers.

All these factors combine to invite a thorough investigation of the accounts themselves and in their placement in the document of Acts; to uncover their meaning for the listener; to reveal the significance these stories held for the earliest Christians, such as the audience of Acts; and to better gauge the service these stories provided, the message they announce, and their place against the landscape of Act. In particular, the independent situation of both women, while possible, but still unconventional with regard to the ideals of the perfect woman, call out for careful scrutiny. How did the portrayal of Tabitha and Lydia signal the

⁵ In Acts 9:38, the two men urge Peter strongly to come to Tabitha's home immediately (δύο ἄνδρας πρὸς αὐτὸν παρακαλοῦντες· μὴ ἀκινήσης διελεῖν ἕως ἡμῶν), and in 16:15, Lydia urges Paul and Silas strongly to come to her home (ὡς δὲ ἐβαπτίσθη καὶ ὁ οἶκος αὐτῆς, παρεκάλεσεν λέγουσα). Indeed, in Lydia's story, there is an added force to the request when she prevails upon the men further (καὶ παρεβιάσατο ἡμᾶς). These connections suggest that the author may have shaped the stories to reflect the structural device of mirroring the actions of Peter and Paul.

⁶ For example, Valerie Abrahamsen, "Lydia," and Lucinda A. Brown, "Tabitha," in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, eds. C. Meyers, T. Craven, and R. S. Kraemer; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 111; 160. For an opposing view, see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 159-61; 236-37.

⁷ Especially Natalie Kampen, *Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1981); Jane F. Gardner, "Women in Business Life: Some Evidence from Puteoli," in *Female Networks and the Public Sphere in Roman Society*, ed. P. Setälä and L. Savunen (Rome: Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae 1999), 22:11-27; Sandra Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome: A Study of the Occupational Inscriptions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992); and Shelia Murnaghan, *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations* (London: Routledge, 1998, rpt. 2001).

orientation of the Christian message? What significance was being given, and what ideals were being supported?

Chapter One will survey the important scholarly literature from the time of the church fathers up to the present, which offers exegetical comment concerning Tabitha or Lydia, although my preliminary investigations show this to be minimal at best. This review will fall into three sections: (1) from Irenaeus to the Reformation, (2) the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, and (3) the mid-twentieth century to the present. Chapters Two and Three will focus on the social, economic, and legal capacities of women in the Greek East and Roman West, respectively, and discuss how these affect the interpretation of the narratives of Tabitha and Lydia in Acts. Chapters Four and Five will engage in a phrase-by-phrase analysis of both stories with particular attention to the linguistic and narrative elements of the text. Finally, Chapter Six will summarize the function of the accounts of these two women and make an assessment of the importance of their particular roles in the document, suggesting implications for further study.

B. Three Interpretive Trajectories

I. Tabitha and Lydia as Social Models

This trajectory is exemplified by the tendency to equate Tabitha and Lydia with women from the interpreter's own time period. For example, in Basil of Caesarea's work, he equates Tabitha with the wealthy widows of his own time period who were inclined to support the needs of local churches. Although this will be discussed in more detail below, for Basil, Tabitha serves as social model for how widows could consecrate themselves both sexually and financially to a holy life that was focused on asceticism and prayer. This same interpretive trajectory is also shared, at least in part, by Cyprian, Chrysostom, Erasmus, and Calvin. Tabitha and Lydia are not just moral *exempla* for female readers, but also provide useful commentary on events in the interpreter's time period. The flexibility of the biblical narratives allow for this transference, which on the one hand provides ready moral and exegetical models for homilies, but on the other, devalues the need to understand the social context of Acts.

II. Tabitha and Lydia as Allegories

This trajectory is pronounced in the work of Arator and Bede. However, even recent scholarship is not immune to this tendency to see the sparseness of Tabitha and Lydia's biblical accounts as an opportunity to conjecture about the symbolic

character of their names and the 'deeper meaning' of the stories.⁸ This deeper, spiritual meaning of the text was deemed the most authentic way to encounter scripture because it revealed a truth behind the letters of the Bible.⁹ Tabitha and Lydia are not important in their roles as characters in Acts, but only in the deeper meaning toward which their stories point. For Bede, Tabitha's story discusses the progress of the soul, and for Arator it highlights the necessity of Baptism for salvation. While secular powers work to further political claims, the Bible conceals and reveals the meaning of God's plan at work. In this way, every aspect of the text - character, setting, exposition and dialogue - is a potential gateway to discern this plan.

III. Tabitha and Lydia as Rhetorical Devices

This final trajectory is exemplified by the work of the great scholars such as Baur, Harnack and Schneckengerber. However, the very earliest interpretation of Lydia's story also falls into this category. Irenaeus uses his exegesis to uphold the apostolic authority of Luke (the author of Acts) and the 'authentic' biblical writings as a whole. He argues that there is an absolute unity between God's plan and the biblical witness, therefore, a work such as Acts can provide sure insight into God's plan for human belief and action. Irenaeus, "developed the principles of a reliable explanation of the Bible and tradition and a proof of succession."¹⁰ Irenaeus is not interested in Lydia as a moral example or as an allegory, but only instrumentally as an example of the power that the authentic word of God has to convert pagans. In Baur's work, characters like Tabitha and Lydia are meant to serve the apologetic interests of Acts, namely, to bridge early difficulties between Jewish and Gentile Christianity. In general, this trajectory misses both the cultur-

⁸ For example, Rick Strelan, "Tabitha: Gazelle of Joppa (Acts 9:36-43)," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 39/2 (2009): 77-86. This article makes a case for Tabitha's status as a proselyte based on the symbolic association of her Semitic name with the "gazelle." Strelan argues that the gazelle is a 'clean' animal in Judaism and therefore, Tabitha's name indicates that she is symbolic of the transition between Judaism and Christianity that is occurring in the text of Acts. This is strikingly similar to Bede's exegesis of the passage where he makes the claim that Tabitha's name is an important clue to the meaning and interpretation of the passage as a whole. This will be discussed in detail below.

⁹ Brox, *Kirchengeschichte des Altertums*, (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1992), 13. Brox notes that this type of interpretation, taken over from Hellenistic Judaism, allowed a mediation between the Bible and the philosophies in which Christian theology was conceived.

¹⁰ Brox, *Kirchengeschichte*, 131-135. In large part, Irenaeus' authority came through his bishop office's being in direct succession with the apostles. In essence, his interpretation of the events in Acts held sway over rival interpretations based on this factor alone.

al and narrative context of the biblical text and its ability to shed light on the place of women like Tabitha and Lydia in the early Jesus movement.

The following section will follow the history of interpretation of Tabitha and Lydia in detail. Where necessary, I will make reference to the relevant interpretive trajectory as well as the germane cultural, geographic, and political issues. This is not meant to show a linear progression to interpretation; on the contrary, it shows the cyclical nature of interpretation and how the lines of exegesis continually return to one or more of these methodological pillars.

C. History of Interpretation

I. From Irenaeus to the Reformation

1. Irenaeus (Lydia only)

In the first explicit reference to the conversion of Lydia (Acts 16:13-15),¹¹ Irenaeus (2nd-3rd c. CE), in his work *Adversus Haereses*,¹² states:

¹¹ There is no corresponding reference to “The Resuscitation of Tabitha” (Acts 9:36–43) in Irenaeus’ work. For a discussion of the reception of Acts in the time prior to Irenaeus, see Andrew Gregory, *The Reception of Luke-Acts in the Period before Irenaeus*, WUNT 169 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). Also, Henry J. Cadbury, “The Tradition,” in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, eds. J. F. Jackson and K. Lake (New York: Macmillan, 1920–33), 2:209-64; Hans Conzelmann, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. J. Limburg, A. T. Kraabel, and D. Juel; eds. E. J. Epp and C. R. Matthews, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 3-14; and Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. and ed. B. Noble et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), xxvii-xxxii.

¹² *St. Irenaeus*, ANF, vol. 1, eds. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Hendricksen, 1994). The longer title to which both Irenaeus and Eusebius refer is translated as *On the Detection and Refutation of That Which Is Falsely Called Knowledge*. The Greek version of the text, which is the original, has been lost except for portions of the original Greek quoted in Epiphanius, mainly Book II. Other snippets are found in Eusebius, Hippolytus, Theodoret of Cyrus, John of Damascus, and in Oxyrhynchus 405 and the Jena papyrus. The disappearance is a mystery, since the Greek appears to have been available into the ninth century. The Latin text that remains is a quite literal translation that seems to indicate that the translator knew Greek well but the frequent retention of the syntactical structure from the Greek indicates that the translator did not know Latin as well. For a cogent discussion of the manuscript traditions and issues, see John J. Dillon, *St. Irenaeus of Lyon: Against the Heresies*, Book 1, vol. 1 (Mahwah: Newman Press, 1992), 11-15. The Latin text used here is found in *Patrologiae Graecae (PG)* vol. 7a. The first quotation that Irenaeus makes of Acts is in 1.23.1, when he describes the meeting between Peter and Simon Magus in Acts 8, but the exposition of the importance of Acts on questions of apostolicity is found in 3.12-14. The discussion of Lydia’s conversion is located in 3.14.1.

And then he [Luke] carefully indicates all the rest of their journey as far as Philippi, and how they delivered their first address: “for sitting down, he says, ‘we spoke to the women who had assembled’; and *certain* believed, even a great many.”¹³ (emphasis mine)

Here the nameless “certain woman” and the “great many” are Lydia and her household, who are baptized. This citation is embedded within a larger argument that maintains the apostolic authority and truth of Luke’s version of Paul’s missionary activities.¹⁴ Irenaeus’ status as bishop gave his interpretation authority over rival, Gnostic interpretations of the text. Very little is known about Irenaeus except that he was a bishop (presbyter) in Lyon in the late second century CE. It is speculated that he directed his treatise to Rome during a time of stability that lacked persecutions. It has also been suggested that the treatise was directed to the churches of Asia Minor that had been influenced by the Gnostic teachings that had proliferated in Alexandria.¹⁵ These two differing points of view suggest the divide that had already come to exist between the eastern and western communities of the early church in both their liturgy and scriptural interpretations. The importance of the work is not only Irenaeus’ description of the various Gnostic sects of his time, but also in his systematic presentation of Christian doctrines that were prevalent in the Western church of his day.¹⁶

In his own testimony, Irenaeus states that he has listened to Polycarp’s teachings in Rome, thereby stressing the importance of apostolic witness and foundations. In Book III, in which he discusses the text of Acts most fully, Irenaeus is not as much concerned with exegesis as with providing an exposé and refutation of Gnosticism, especially the Valentinian movement, based on reason.¹⁷ By link-

¹³ *Et deinceps reliquum omnem ipsorum usque ad Philippos adventum diligenter significant, et quaemadmodum pimum sermonem locuti sunt: sedentes enim, inquit, locuti sumus mulieribus quae convenerant; et quinam crediderunt, et quam multi, PG, 3.14.1*. It should be noted that this is in fact a paraphrase of the biblical account in Acts 16 and that Lydia’s name is not explicitly mentioned, but it is clear from the context that Irenaeus uses the word “certain” (*et quinam crediderunt*) to mean Lydia and the “great many” (*et quam multi*) to mean the women present, or her household.

¹⁴ Here it must be remembered that Irenaeus presumes that the author of the Gospel of Luke is also the author of Acts, who is “the dear and beloved physician” of Col. 4:14 and, therefore, can be counted on to be in continuity with Paul. Also, the fact that Irenaeus cites the text of Acts authoritatively so many times is proof of, as André Benoit observes, the fact that “Irenaeus is not just familiar with the text of Acts, but recognizes it as Scripture.” André Benoit, *Saint Irénée: Introduction à L’Étude de sa Théologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), 122.

¹⁵ Dillon, *Against the Heresies*, 3-6.

¹⁶ Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyon* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1-10.

¹⁷ *St. Irenaeus of Lyon: Against the Heresies*, ACW, trans. D. J. Unger and J. J. Dillon, eds. W. J. Burghardt, T. C. Lawler and J. J. Dillon (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 55:6-7. See also

ing Luke's gospel to Acts, Irenaeus can demonstrate the unbroken line of apostolic authority beginning with Jesus' command in Luke 10:16 and continuing on to Peter and Paul as narrated in Acts.¹⁸ Irenaeus argues that Paul and Luke were "inseparable companions" and if Paul had known of any mysteries that were not revealed in his letters, Luke would have known these mysteries and written them down in Acts. In essence, the Lukan gospel and Acts can lay claim to apostolic authority through relationship to Paul even though the author "Luke" is not an apostle himself. Also, the fact that Irenaeus uses the narrative of Lydia's conversion to make these claims is proof that the text was well known by 180 CE, since Irenaeus assumes that his reader will know the object of his reference without the benefit of direct citations or names.¹⁹ Of course, the detailed descriptions of the characters that Paul (and by corollary Luke) encountered in Acts help Irenaeus demonstrate that Luke was the constant companion of Paul and, therefore, all of his writings have equal validity and apostolic authority.²⁰ Irenaeus' use of Lydia's story is instrumental to his larger project as is evidenced by the fact that he does not even call her by name, only, "a certain woman."

2. St. Cyprian (*Tabitha only*)

In his work, *De opera et eleemosynis* (5-6), St. Cyprian cites the Tabitha narrative as an example of the importance that works of mercy play in cleansing one of sins committed after baptism.²¹ Tabitha's good works are not only the reason for

Andrew Gregory, "Irenaeus and the Reception of Acts in the Second Century," in *Contemporary Studies in Acts*, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009), 47-65, esp. 48-55.

¹⁸ Gregory, "Irenaeus and the Reception of Acts in the Second Century," in *Contemporary Studies in Acts*. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009), 48. Luke 10:16 ὁ ἀκούων ὑμῶν ἐμοῦ ἀκούει, καὶ ὁ ἀθετῶν ὑμᾶς ἐμὲ ἀθετεῖ· ὁ δὲ ἐμὲ ἀθετῶν ἀθετεῖ τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με. "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

¹⁹ This fact, coupled with the focus on building, stabilizing, and protecting communities from internal and external threats along with the omission of Luke or Acts from the fragments of Papias suggests a date in the second century (prior to 115 CE) for Acts. Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches*, SNTSMS 60 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Pervo, *Dating Acts*.

²⁰ *Non enim conceditur eis, ab his qui sensum habent, quaedam quidem recipere ex his quae a Luca dicta sunt, quasi sint veritatis; quaedam vero refutare, quasi non cognovisset veritatem.* (3.14.4) Here Irenaeus is specifically refuting the "corrupt" interpretations Marcion and Valentinus give of Luke and Acts.

²¹ All texts and translations are from Edward V. Rebenack, *Thasci Caecili Cypriani de Opere et Eleemosynis: A Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1962). Rebenack makes clear that his translations are based on the work of W. Hartel in the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (3.1. 373-94). The

her resuscitation, but also the merits of her good works were “stored up,” and “such was the miracle wrought by the merits of mercy, such was the power of just works.”²² The emphasis in the story for Cyprian is not on the *things* done or produced for the widows, but on the very *doing or giving* itself. That is, the action itself is what is stored up and saves the Christian from a second death, not in any way the monetary value of what is given (6.3-5).²³ For Cyprian, Tabitha’s role as a disciple is not highlighted, only her value as role model of Christian charity. It is important to notice that Cyprian does not count Tabitha as one of the widows, as Basil does in his later work, but as the one who provides alms to them. Based on Cyprian’s exhortations to rich matrons elsewhere in this work, he seems to use Tabitha as an example tailored to this audience.²⁴

3. St. Basil of Caesarea (Tabitha only)

In a brief, but important, citation, St. Basil of Caesarea (329-379 CE) views Tabitha as a widow even though the text makes no mention of this status.²⁵ It would seem that this is due in large part to the absence of a husband. Moreover, it reflects Basil’s own enthusiasm to see models of the holy widow figure as a sort of

work is dated between 250-56 CE and was written early in Cyprian’s episcopacy during a time of extended peace in order to call his congregation out of apathy and to remind them of their duty to tend to the poor and needy. The subject of *eleemosyna* is taken up by later writers such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa (the brother of Basil of Caesarea, see below) and John Chrysostom. Although it is uncertain that any of these writers was directly influenced by Cyprian’s work, it seems evident that the subject of *eleemosyna* and their role within the Christian life was an important topic for Eastern writers in the third through fifth centuries. Rebenack, 1-21.

²² *Tantum potuerunt misericordiae merita, tantum opera iusta valuerunt. Quae laborantibus viduis largita fuerat subsidia vivendi meruit ad vitam viduarum petitione revocari.* (Cyprian, 6.12-13) Tabitha’s good works during her lifetime have been stored up and are cited as the reason for her resuscitation because *nec defuturum Christi auxilium viduis deprecantibus, quando esset in viduis ipse vestitus.* Tabitha’s good works done on behalf of the widows are recognized by Christ and on account of this he grants Peter the power to perform the miracle. This meaning is also supported by Cyprian’s statement in 7.3-6, *inter sua mandata divina et praecepta caelestia, nihil crebrius mandat et praecipit quam ut insistamus elemosynis dandis, nec terrenis possessionibus incubemus, sed caelestes thesaurus potius recondamus.* By corporeal works of mercy, Christians like Tabitha lay up treasures in heaven. *Et quae matrona locuples et dives es, ungue oculos tuos non stibio diabolico sed collyrio Christi, ut pervenire ad videndum Deum possis, dum Deum et moribus et operibus promereris.* (Cyprian, 14.12-15) Rebenack, *De Opere Eleemosynis*, 63-75.

²³ *Et quod eleemosynis non tantum a secunda sed a prima morte animae liberentur, gestae et impletae rei probatione, conpertum est.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *St. Basil: Ascetical Works*, trans. Sr. M. M. Wagner, (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1950), 191-92.

consecrated cenobite since he himself was focused on the ascetical, monastic life. For example, he writes:²⁶

And before all things my care was to make some amendment in my character, which had for a long time been perverted by association with the wicked. And accordingly, having read the Gospel and having perceived therein that the greatest incentive to perfection is the selling of one's goods and the sharing of them with the needy of the brethren, and the being entirely without thought of this life, and that the soul should have no sympathetic concern with the things of this world, I prayed that I might find some one of the brethren who had taken this way of life, so as to traverse with him this life's brief flood.²⁷

This propensity toward renunciation of wealth and adherence to a strict moral and ascetic code led Basil to create what was probably the first true coenobitical monasticism open to all socio-economic classes and both genders.²⁸

A widow who enjoys sufficiently robust health should spend her life in works of zeal and solicitude, keeping in mind the words of the Apostle and the example of Dorcas (Basil, *Herewith Begins the Morals*, 74).

It appears that Basil was the first to explicitly name Tabitha a widow who was a member of an order of widows devoted to charity by the conflation of two texts, Acts 9:36 and 1 Tim. 5:9-10.²⁹ Thus by virtue of proximity to other widows, it is

²⁶ Besides growing up in a staunchly Christian household, which boasted of several bishops, monks and nuns, his eldest sister Macrina was one of the most famous ascetic women of the fourth century and his brother was St. Gregory of Nyssa. *The Ascetical Works*, ix.

²⁷ *St. Basil: The Letters III*, trans. R. J. Deferrari, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1930), 292-93 (Letter 223). Καὶ πρό γε πάντων ἐπιμελὲς ἦν μοι διόρθωσίν τινα τοῦ ἥθους ποιήσασθαι πολλὸν χρόνον ἐκ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς φαύλους ὁμιλίας διαστραφέντος. Καὶ τοίνυν ἀναγνοὺς τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον, καὶ θεασάμενος ἐκεῖ μεγίστην ἀφορμὴν εἰς τελείωσιν τὴν διάπρασιν τῶν ὑπαρχόντων, καὶ τὴν πρὸς τοὺς ἐνδεεῖς τῶν ἀδελφῶν κοινωνίαν, καὶ ὅλως τὸ ἀφροντίστας ἔχειν τοῦ βίου τούτου, καὶ ὑπὸ μηδεμιᾶς συμπαθείας πρὸς τὰ ὄδε τὴν ψυχὴν ἐπιστρέφασθαι, ἠυχόμεν εὖρειν τινα τῶν ἀδελφῶν ταύτην ἐλόμενον τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ βίου, ὥστε αὐτῷ σὺδιαπεραὶ ὠθῆαι τὸν βραχὺν τοῦτον τοῦ βίου κλύδωνα. Here Basil is dependent upon Mt. 19:21, ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· **εἰ θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι**, ὑπάγε πώλησόν σου τὰ ὑπάρχοντα καὶ δὸς [τοῖς] πτωχοῖς, καὶ ἔξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, καὶ δεῦρο ἀκολουθεῖ μοι. ,εμπήσισο μινέ.

²⁸ *St. Basil: The Ascetical Works*, ix-xi. The place where Basil differs most markedly from the earlier practices of asceticism is in his conviction that the eremitic life does not offer the opportunity to practice humility and obedience and is therefore opposed to the divine laws of charity. He was resolutely in favor of the apostolic life as prescribed in Acts 4:32-37. This is one of the chief reasons that Basil established monasteries in towns rather than in deserts.

²⁹ *St. Basil: The Ascetical Works*, 191-2. Acts 9:36 Ἐν Ἰόππῃ δέ τις ἦν μαθήτρια ὀνόματι Ταβιθά, ἣ διερμηνευομένη λέγεται Δορκάς· αὕτη ἦν πλήρης ἔργων ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἐλεημοσυνῶν ὧν ἐποίει. 1 Tim. 5:9-10 Χήρα καταλεγέσθω μὴ ἔλαττον ἐτῶν ἐξήκοντα γεγονυῖα, ἐνὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή, **ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς μαρτυρομένη**, εἰ ἐτεκνοτρόφησεν, εἰ ἐξενοδόχησεν, εἰ ἀγίων πόδας ἔνιψεν, εἰ θλιβομένους ἐπήκεσεν, εἰ παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ ἐπηκολούθησεν.

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