

LECTURE ON SCHABERG'S BOOK: *THE ILLEGITIMACY OF JESUS*

Jane Schaberg (NY: Crossroad, 1990)

Please, read the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke.

There are three issues which I want to point out regarding the genealogies:

Issue # 1:

In Matthew, Jesus' (1) Jewishness and (2) kingship are emphasized. Jesus is Jewish since his genealogy goes back to Abraham, and he is king because from Abraham, Jesus' genealogy goes through King David. For Matthew, who is Jewish and is writing for Jewish followers of Jesus, Jesus, the Messiah (the Christ, the Anointed), is both Jewish and King of the Jews.

Issue # 2:

In Luke's genealogy of Jesus, Jesus goes back to Creation time, to Adam. Luke is gentile (non-Jewish) Greek who writes for converts to Christianity from Greek ethnicity. Therefore, Luke is interested in showing that Jesus' roots go beyond his Jewish ancestry, to affirm Jesus' kinship with all humankind -- which includes Greeks.

Issue # 3:

There are several differences between the Matthew and Luke's genealogy of Jesus. Here, we will deal only with two differences; namely,

1. Matthew mentions 5 women in his genealogy of Jesus (TAMAR [1.3], RAHAB 1.5], RUTH [1.5], THE WIFE OF URIAH [1.6], AND MARY, FROM WHOM WAS BEGOTTEN (OR BORN) JESUS, WHO IS CALLED CHRIST [1.16]). Luke mentions only one woman: Mary.

2. Matthew divides his genealogy in three sections (verses 1-6a; 6b-11, and 12-16). Each section consists of 14 generations as Matthew writes in verse 1, 17. The problem, however, is that in his third section, he has only 13 generations. (Why 14?. Some believe that 14 reflect the numerical value in Hebrew of the letters DVD (for David): $D = 4 / V = 6 / D = 4 = 14$. And $14 = \text{Messiah and King}$ (since David was King and also called the Messiah of God). (We shall come to this issue of 14 generations later.)

Let's begin with the five women mentioned by Matthew in his genealogy of Jesus; (1)

TAMAR, the mother of Perez and Zerah; (2) RAHAB, the mother of Boaz; (3) RUTH, the mother of OBED; (4) the wife of Uriah and mother of Solomon, that is, BATHSHEBA); and (5) MARY, the mother of Jesus. Why are these 5 women mentioned.

Schaberg offers various interpretations:

- The four women are name because they are sinners, preparing for the presentation of Jesus who will 'save his people from their sins.' (Mt. 1, 21).
- As sinners, the four women contrast to the sinless Mary.
- The four women are included in the genealogy because they are foreigners, preparing for Matthew's presentation of Jesus as the Lord of all nations (28:19)
- Each woman was involved in irregular sexual unions -- as will shall see. The latter sets the context to the irregularity of the union that produced Jesus; namely, that of Mary and the Holy Spirit.
- Then there is Schaberg's interpretation. But first, let's find out who are these the women in the Hebrew Scripture (O.T.).

First TAMAR: (Gen. 38):

- Tamar was taken by Judah (Joseph's son) as a wife for his own son Er. Now Er was so wicked that God slew him (38, 7).
- Er's brother, Onam, was supposed to have intercourse with her in order to produce a male descendant for his late brother. (That was called the law of the Levirate -- found in Deut. 25, 5-10). Instead of having intercourse with Tamar, Onam practiced *coitus interruptus* (referred to in Genesis 38:9 "as spilling the seed on the ground). Onam was immediately killed by God.
- There was still a third brother left by the name of Shelah. But Judah, his father, did not want Shelah to have intercourse with Tamar. Judah thought that somehow Tamar was responsible for the death of his two other sons. Tamar was sent back by her father-in-law, Judah, to her father's house.
- But then Tamar tricked Judah (and according to Schaberg, "for the first time acted on

her own" [v22]). She disguised herself as a prostitute and tricked Judah (her father-in-law) in having sex with her. She was condemned to death by burning for the crime of "being with child by harlotry." Judah, however, overturned the sentence and said: "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah" (v26).

Schaberg comments: "Tamar [was] willing to risk her life in order to bear a son who would continue her husband's name, Er. She takes initiative selflessly and in an indirect way on behalf of her dead husband, showing more loyalty to the name of Judah than Judah himself, and she is rewarded for these actions" (24). Tamar had twins, thus replacing both Er and Onan.)

Secondly, RAHAB (Joshua, 2:6):

- In the Book of Joshua, two men are sent by Joshua to spy on the city of Jericho (which the Israelites were about to conquer). These two men spies "came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there" (2:1). Schaberg adds: "[We are] not told why [these two men] came to her or why she received them; presumably her reputation attracted them and she welcomed them first on the basis of her occupation" (25).
- At any rate, in the story, Rahab protects the two spies against their enemy, the King of Jericho. Before helping the two spies to flee, she asks them to be spared on the day that the Israelites were to destroy Jericho. They promised her. When Jericho is conquered and destroyed -- and all that were in it "men and women, 12,000 in all, the whole population by the Israelites (Josh. 8:25) -- Rahab and her family was saved.

Thirdly, RUTH (The Book of Ruth): Who was Ruth?

- Ruth (and her sister Orpah) were the Moabite daughters-in-law of a widow by the name of Naomi. (Thus Ruth and Orpah were not Jewish, but Naomi was Jewish.) Naomi's husband had died. So had Naomi's sons died -- the husband respectively of Ruth and Orpah.) The situation was that three widows (Naomi, Ruth and Orpah) are left "childless widows, sociological misfits, with no security, worth, protection, or identity in a male-dominated culture" (27). Ruth decides to link her destiny with Naomi, and returns with Naomi to Naomi's homeland, Judah (southern Palestine).
- At any rate, Naomi (who was Jewish) had a relative by the name of Boaz -- "a man of

substance" (2:1) -- who one day meets Ruth in the fields and he likes her. Naomi finds out and plans "to seek a home" for Ruth (meaning getting her to have a male child with Boaz) in order to continue her dead husband's name. Naomi wants Ruth to meet Boaz at night in the field -- where Boaz is winnowing barley. She tells her: "When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then go and uncover the lower part of his body; and he will tell you what to do." The order was quite clear.

- Ruth, however, does pretty well by herself. She goes at night, in the field where Boaz is winnowing barley and takes charge by asking HIM to marry her. (The expression used by Ruth meaning "to marry Boaz" is the following: Ruth commands Boaz: "Spread your win over your maid servant, for you are a redeemer" (3:9. Boaz does marry Ruth who bore him a son; thus Boaz continues the line of Judah that Naomi's husband has broken by dying without giving birth to a son.

What is special about Ruth is that by going to the field at night (under Naomi's recommendation) to see Boaz, Ruth risks of being accused of having had intercourse with Boaz and thus of being accused of being a harlot. The text does not say that she did have intercourse. On the contrary, the text says that Ruth asked Boaz to marry her. By doing so, she was asking Boaz to obey the Levirate by producing a son so that Naomi's late husband's name could continue in history.

Fourthly, THE WIFE OF URIAH (Bathsheba / 2 Samuel 11):

- Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah, a general in David's army. While Uriah was away, David (who was already married), from his palace roof, saw Bathsheba bathing one day. The text then says: "David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her." She becomes pregnant. David eventually had Uriah, Bathsheba's husband killed. Then when her mourning for her husband was over, David sent for her, brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son (v27). The son she bore died as a punishment by God. Then she bore David another son. That one was Solomon, who succeeded David as king. At any rate, Schaberg describes this biblical story as "the most horrifying of the four Old testament stories" (29). Nobody seems to care about Bathsheba.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this presentation, (1) there are several differences between the Matthew and Luke's genealogy of Jesus; and (2), that, in this presentation, we would

deal only with two differences: The first difference: Matthew's mention of 5 women in his genealogy of Jesus -- whereas Luke refers only to Mary. (We shall continue later with Schaberg's conclusions about the five women in Mathew's genealogy.)

At this point, I want to discuss the second difference; namely, that Matthew divides his genealogy in three sections (verses 1-6a; 6b-11, and 12-16). And each section consists of 14 generations, Matthew says. (See Verse 1, 17, at the end of the genealogy.) The problem is that in the third section of his genealogy, he refers only to 13 generations (1, 12-16).

Schaberg first offers some traditional explanations (37-38):

- Matthew's negligence; the inexactness of his sources; a faulty transmission of text. Schaberg sees that interpretation as impossible "in such a carefully composed passage that emphasized the enumeration."
- Jesus is 13th generation; and the title, Christ, provides the 14th. That again has its problems, since Matthew wants to show that Jesus and the Christ (or Messiah) are the same.
- Jesus should be counted twice: (Cf. Schaberg, p. 37 / a bit complicated to explain briefly.)
- Mary counts as the biological parent of Jesus. But that cancels out Joseph who already does not count as the biological parent of Jesus (because of the virgin birth). (See 1, 16) So we're still at thirteen generations.
- God (Holy Spirit) should be counted as the 14th generation -- as one of Jesus' parent with Mary. But Schaberg precisely challenges this view, as we shall soon see; namely, that Jesus did not have a human father; that God is Jesus biological father with Mary. (See the Annunciations stories: to Joseph in Matthew and to Mary, in Luke.)
- Then, there is Schaberg's explanation of the missing generation in Mathew's genealogy 1, 12-16. (pp. 38-39). "My own theory," Schaberg writes, is that Matthew "does not negate [the] human begetting [of Jesus]."

Schaberg's conclusions regarding the five women in the Matthew's genealogy::

- THE FOUR WOMEN: TAMAR, RAHAB, RUTH AND BATHSHEBA -- THE FOUR WOMEN NAMED IN MATTHEW'S GENEALOGY OF JESUS ARE MENTIONED to prepare the reader for the story of Mary -- the mother of Jesus.
- All four women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba) are outside patriarchal family structures: Tamar and Ruth are childless young widows; Rahab is a prostitute; and Bathsheba is an adulteress, then a widow pregnant with her lover's child.
- All four are wronged by the male world:
 - Tamar -- as the wife of Er -- was the wife of a man so wicked that God killed him. Then as an obedient widow to the Levirate, she is put down by Onam; then she is mistrusted by Judah.
 - What about Rahab? Inasmuch as prostitution is a function of patriarchy, Rahab was used by the males of Jericho and perhaps by the two Israelite spies.
 - As for Bathsheba, she was raped by David; then made a widow by him.
 - Then finally Ruth. Somehow, she too -- because of her friendship with Naomi, her mother-in-law -- sees herself as having to marry Boaz to produce a male heir according to Israel's patriarchal obligation of the Levirate.
- "All four women risk damage to the social order and their own condemnations. Accusation of improper sexual conduct is made in the case of Tamar, implicit in the case of Rahab, avoided in Ruth's case . . . and leveled in Bathsheba's case against [David]" (33).
- "The situations of all four [women] are righted by the actions of men (namely; Judah, the two Israelite spies, Boaz, and David) who acknowledge guilt and/or accept responsibility for [the four women] drawing them under patriarchal protection, giving them an identity and a future within the patriarchal structure, legitimating them and their children-to-be. In final analysis, [the four women are exalted for their acceptance of the patriarchal *status quo*, because it is believed that within that *status quo* the covenant promises to Abraham and David are being kept, and the generations move toward the establishment of the nation of Israel . . ." (33) by making sure that a male son is born.

Schaberg concludes: "Mention of these four women [Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba]

is designed to lead Matthew's reader to expect another, final story of a woman who becomes a social misfit in some way; is wronged and thwarted; who is party to a sexual act that places her in great danger; and whose story has an outcome that repairs the social fabric and ensures the birth of a child who is legitimate or legitimated. That child, Matthew tells us (1:1), is 'son of David, the son of Abraham'" (33).

Schaberg's final conclusion:

- Matthew [in his genealogy of Jesus] is handing down a tradition illegitimacy (which might apply to Jesus himself) (74). (Tamar illegitimately conceived a son for Judah; Bathsheba illegitimately conceived a son for David; Rahab illegitimately conceived . . . period; and Ruth's way of approaching Boaz might have been seen as illegitimate).
- In all of these four cases, God did not intervene miraculously.

Schaberg suggests that, in his genealogy, Matthew is speaking of an illegitimate pregnancy (36). "Silence about a human father -- the lack of mention of his name -- need not mean he did not exist" (36). (See genealogy, Mt. 1:16: "Joseph, the HUSBAND of Mary, of WHOM (Mary) Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.")

Schaberg believes that Joseph was the legal father of Jesus; that in addition there was a biological father; and that the Holy Spirit is connected with Jesus conception to indicate that in spite of the irregularity of the conception, God accepts Jesus which allows Jesus to be called God's son (2:15) / (39). (READ Joseph's annunciation: Mt. 1:18-25, PAR. 2.)

Schaberg explains that "the narrative [of Jesus' conception] moves beyond legalities when it implies that more profoundly than the unnamed biological father, more profoundly than Joseph the legal father, God parents the illegitimate Messiah" (68).

According to Schaberg, "[t]his new reading of . . . the narrative results in a new understanding of Matthew 1 as a whole. Matthew is handing down the tradition of the illegitimate conception of Jesus, of his begetting, and of Joseph's acceptance of the messianic child and his mother. Matthew's belief is that this child is truly God's transcendent Son, and that in him, God is with us (1:23). This God, [Schaberg argues] is shown by the story to be the one who sides with the outcast, endangered woman and child. God 'acts' in a radically new way, outside the patriarchal norm but within the natural even of a human conception. God 'acts' here not as a *deus ex machina* interrupting or bringing to an end the history of human betrayal and

violence and subjugation, but as one who reaches into that history to name the messiah. The 'siding with' is not divine intervention in any miraculous sense, though it is announced through angelic dream-revelation" (74).

The story of Jesus' conception in Mary's womb is the story of Tamar, Ruth, Rahab and Bathsheba, the story of 'wronged women righted' by God (72). In Matthew's story, there is a most profound paradox. "The virgin betrothed and seduced or raped is . . . the virgin who conceives and bears the child they will call Emmanuel [God with us]. His origin is ignominious and tragic. But Matthew's point is that his existence is divinely willed and even predicted. That although -- or even *because* he was born in that way [illegitimately], the claim of his messiahship was not thereby negated. It was, rather, in some strange way strengthened" (73).

According to Schaberg, the virgin birth in Matthew relates to a virgin seduced or raped gives birth to a son who is accepted by God to be the Emmanuel (the God with us), the Messiah (the Anointed of God) and Joseph legally accepts both the battered mother and her son. God is with us (truly the EMMANUEL) where humankind refuses to see God: even in the illegitimate child of a battered woman.