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The Annunciation Narrative (Luke 1:27-38) Read in Times of #MeToo

Bart J. Koet / Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte

Introduction

In a recent article in *JBL* Michael Pope argues that Luke includes sexually violent biblical language and motifs in Luke's annunciation narrative, and suggests that the angel Michael in the annunciation narrative rapes the young girl Mary.¹ To put it in more popular terms: Pope presents Mary in Luke 1:26-38 as an example of #metoo. Pope's argument is essentially that the whole context of Luke 1:1-2:40 'is especially sexually fraught'.² For this reason, the language in which Gabriel's actions and words are put are more than suggestive in nature. According to Pope,³ in Luke 1:26-38, the third evangelist has grafted sexual coercion and violence into the scene. Luke's depiction of Gabriel's entrance makes Mary an object of sexual violence, and the terminology of 'entrance' refers to sexual intercourse.

In this critical note we want to make some critical observations on Pope's arguments. After briefly summarizing his arguments,⁴ firstly, we will look into the argument that the use of the verb εἰσέρχομαι in 1:28 evokes the way in which the LXX describes sexual violence, and thus an indication of sexual action on the side of Gabriel. Secondly, the depiction of Mary as a slave and God as her master will be addressed, since this particular point in the narrative is taken by Pope as further evidence in support of his point.

¹ Pope, Gabriel's Entrance, 701-710.

² Pope, Gabriel's Entrance, 701.

³ Elsewhere Pope mentions Luke 1:26-38, 1:27-35 or 1:27-38 as a unity. He does not give any arguments for these demarcations.

⁴ The arguments in Pope's article tend to be fluid and not always neatly structured. The article is the stringing together of different associations, atmospheric drawings, bold statements, but also possible objections. His language is sometimes unnecessarily colloquial. An example of this is his characterization of Paul's performance in Acts 28: 'Paul entertains'. This is probably a nice description in a sermon, but it does not fit in a scholarly journal (703). Because Pope's language is less scientific and quite colloquial, it is sometimes not very reader-friendly for non-native readers either.

1. The encounter between Gabriel and Mary according to Pope

In Luke 1:26-28 Luke describes how Gabriel is sent to Nazareth, a city in Galilee. In 1:28 Luke introduces the encounter he has with Mary with the words: καὶ εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶπεν.⁵ The expression εἰσέρχομαι πρὸς is used ‘several times’ in Luke-Acts, but Pope argues that the combination εἰσέρχομαι πρὸς αὐτήν is the only example in Luke-Acts where the verb εἰσέρχομαι has a sexual connotation and likely could indicate sexual intercourse.⁶ Luke-Acts normally uses the combination εἰσέρχομαι πρὸς to indicate that the protagonist approaches somebody or enters a place. The LXX synonym to εἰσέρχομαι πρὸς is εἰσπορεύομαι πρὸς. These verbs often translate the Hebrew expressions אָל בְּרָא / בְּרָאָה.⁷ These Hebrew words often express sexual intercourse. Pope argues that by using terms such as virgin (twice) and engaged / betrothed, Luke creates an atmosphere in which sexuality plays a role. The combination of the possible sexual connotation in the LXX of the verb εἰσέρχομαι, used in Luke 1:28, and the depiction of Mary leads Pope to his analysis of Gabriel’s encounter with Mary: ‘Gabriel’s entry immediately pings with biblical sex language in a scene that is sexually fraught’.⁸

Pope even goes one step further. He is convinced that Luke 1:28 is not just about sexual intercourse, but that the passage as a whole even portrays Gabriel’s action as rape. Here, his argument is that the designation of Mary in 1:27 (πρὸς παρθένον ἐμνηστευμένην ἀνδρί; Luke 1:27; N²⁸) recalls Deut 22:23-24 (ἐὰν δὲ γένηται παῖς παρθένος μεμνηστευμένη ἀνδρί).⁹

In this context Pope makes an interesting hermeneutical remark. He thinks that Luke or his audience may not even have looked at the background of the text from Deuteronomy, but by using this expression Luke takes the risk of contamination: according to Pope, the theme of a ‘sexual focus’ in Luke 1 could then – perhaps even without Luke wanting to and knowing about it – be contaminated with the theme of ‘forcible sex and capital violence’.¹⁰ Although maybe even unconsciously, Luke introduces the implicit violent

⁵ See below for some text-critical remarks about this sentence.

⁶ Pope, *Gabriel’s Entrance*, 703.

⁷ Pope (*Gabriel’s Entrance*, 702) refers to examples like Gen 29:23.30 (LXX); Lev 18:14.19; Ezek 23:44; Amos 2:7 and Prov 6:29.

⁸ Pope, *Gabriel’s Entrance*, 703.

⁹ Pope, *Gabriel’s Entrance*, 705. It is interesting to note that in the Deuteronomy passage, although there are quite different words for sexual intercourse during rape, one cannot find the verbs εἰσέρχομαι and εἰσπορεύομαι in this context.

¹⁰ For the words between inverted commas, see Pope, *Gabriel’s Entrance*, 703. It is also Pope who introduces on that page the somewhat ambiguous term ‘contamination’.

context.¹¹ In short, even if Luke did not mean it that way at all, he did consciously take the risk of being read in this manner, and therefore the description becomes a description of a rape.

The second piece of circumstantial evidence Pope brings to the fore, is the tradition of angels falling for human women. That this tradition, notably present in the background of Gen 6:1-4, was known and influential in the first century, is in all likelihood attested by Paul's argument of 1Cor 11:10. There, Paul urges women to prophesy and pray while wearing a veil, and this argument seems to rest on the fact that Paul is convinced angels are present when the community is praying and prophesying.¹² This same belief is attested both in Qumran documents and later by Origen, which underlines the likelihood of the argument. The use of the expression εἰσπορεύομαι πρὸς in LXX Gen 6:1-4 leads Pope to interpret the tradition on angels mixing with human women as 'forcible sex, though not explicit'.¹³

In the second part of Pope's argument, he moves from the beginning of the passage to its end (1:38). According to him, Mary's self-proclaimed status of slave reinforces the theme of violence.¹⁴ Pope translates ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου as 'Look, the master's slave,' and argues that this sentence endorses the angel's initial greeting (1:28). Pope translates that greeting also in an unexpected manner: 'Your master is with you' (ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ).¹⁵ The addition in Pope's translation of the word 'your' to the word 'master' enables him to emphasize (or introduce?) the image of God as a slave owner and thus to Mary as his slave. However, there is no equivalent here in Greek for the possessive pronoun, and the interpretation is thus in need of a better argument. Another point is that Pope here assumes that δούλη automatically indicates a slave status. He sees the relation between God and Mary as that of a male master and a female slave, and then argues that this particular scheme is found in several stories of Genesis.¹⁶ Pope especially stresses the parallel between Genesis 16 and Luke 1:31: the slave Hagar was penetrated by her master, which he considers a parallel to Mary characterizing herself as

¹¹ Interesting enough Pope (Gabriel's Entrance, 705) suggests that probably Luke and his audience may not have readily considered the greater source material along with the phrase (which is not a phrase but only three words).

¹² Pope, Gabriel's Entrance, 705 n. 19, refers to Lietaert Peerbolte, Man, 87-92.

¹³ Pope, Gabriel's Entrance, 705. Pope, Gabriel's Entrance, 706 n. 20, interprets the fact that the offspring of the giants in LXX Gen 6:1-4 is described as μέγας ('great' or 'large') as a parallel to the annunciation narrative, where Gabriel announces that Jesus 'will be μέγας and that he will be called as the son of Highest'.

¹⁴ Pope, Gabriel's Entrance, 707-709.

¹⁵ In both cases, the translation of κύριος as 'Master' is not accounted for.

¹⁶ Pope, Gabriel's Entrance, 707-708; cf. e.g. Gen 30:4-5, 9-10.

a slave, upon the entrance of an angelic agent who announces her impending impregnation.¹⁷

Pope rightly compares Gabriel's announcement to Mary with that to Zechariah. He suggests that while in the proclamation to Mary there are several sexual and servile undertones, the conversation with Zechariah reflects the sexual security of masculinity.

Pope's article does not end with a firm conclusion, but instead, he tentatively suggests a possible line of interpretation. Would Luke have described the scene the way he did because the motifs he used created the ring of biblical narrative in the ears of the first hearers? The slant of the argument, however, is this: the annunciation narrative in Luke 1:27-35 uses sexualized terms and motifs in the description of Gabriel's encounter with Mary, and ultimately suggests a setting of divine rape by an angel on behalf of God himself.

2. Some Critical Observations

Pope's interpretation of Luke 1:26-38 is a reading that seems to reflect the North-American context where the #metoo movement has revealed and denounced much sexual abuse of power in the recent past. It is not surprising that this sharpened way of looking at all kinds of possible forms of abuse of power helped to develop a new perspective in assessing different genres of literary works and that scholars are more open to implicit references to rape and sexual violence.¹⁸ It is good to investigate whether such patterns can be found in a more distant past, and the awareness that also biblical narratives reflect power structures and contain traces of sexual abuse is of crucial importance to 21st century scholarship.

¹⁷ Pope rightly observes the fact that in Gen 30 and 16 the word *παῖδοσκη* is used. However, he ignores the fact that the parallel with Mary is thus to a certain extent less literal and therefore perhaps also less convincing.

¹⁸ That this can sometimes lead to hard confrontations is shown by the example of the Dutch poetess Neeltje Maria Min. As a young girl she became famous with a collection of poems. Decades later, a literary scholar "discovered" that the poems showed that Neeltje Maria was a victim of daughterrape. Maaïke Meijer [*De Lust tot lezen – Nederlandse dichtersessen en het literaire systeem*, Sara / Van Gennep, Amsterdam, 1988] warned that she analyzed the poems and not the history of the poetess. The poetess got angry, also because her father was still alive and could not sleep anymore. Even the poetess herself was invited less often to give lectures. For Neeltje Maria Min, see <http://www.theenchantingverses.org/neeltje-maria-min.html>.

Pope's article is such an attempt, and he tries to show that Mary is an example of such treatment. In a fluent, recruiting, and sometimes even salacious style he puts forward a number of arguments that together form a body of circumstantial evidence. His argument seems to fit within a way of reading that approaches writings of the past with some suspicion.¹⁹

In a certain sense, his argument is also attractive because it seems to offer a quite new and sensational perspective on the annunciation: Luke, whether consciously or not, presents the relationship between God and Mary as a sexual overpowerment or subjugation by a master of a slave woman. However, his arguments can also be read as a radicalization of many sermons and meditations, in which Mary is reduced to a girl who is more than willing, and innocently she accepts an offer she really does not understand.

In reconstruction, there are four aspects in Pope's argument that need evaluation: 1) Mary is depicted in sexualized terms; 2) the language with which Gabriel's entrance is described reflects a similar connotation; 3) the tradition of angelic beings having sex with human females would resonate in the background of the Annunciation Narrative; and 4) the depiction of God and Mary as master and slave is fundamentally sexual in nature. Let us reflect a bit on each of these points.

2.1 Mary's depiction in sexualized terms

Pope introduces this point as a fundamental issue for his reading of the annunciation narrative. According to him, Mary is depicted in 'sexually fraught' terms. The terms Pope refers to are the reference to Mary as a 'virgin', who is 'betrothed'. Here, the question arises about what Pope's definition of 'sexualizing' is. It would seem that to sexualize is to attribute a sexual role to a character, but Pope makes no effort to define the term that is so crucial for his argument. Now the sexual connotation to the term *παρθένος* may well originate in the ecclesiastical tradition that emphasized Mary's virginity rather than in the Greek of Luke. The dictionary of LSJ gives a number of possible meanings for the lemma *παρθένος*, and the emphasis there is consistently on the combination of youth and an unmarried status. It would therefore seem likely that the term is less a sexual term and more an indication of social status. The same observation applies to the use of the verb *μνηστεύω*: this, too, expresses the social rather than the sexual status of the person involved.

¹⁹ However, it is not clear that Pope's interpretation can help men and women liberate from all kinds of gender oppressions.

2.2 The entrance of Gabriel

The first question to address here is: what is the original text of the description of Gabriel's entrance? The reading of Luke 1:28 given in NA²⁸ is καὶ εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶπεν κτλ. The Tyndale edition of the NT has the same reading, and so do GNT5 and SBLGNT. Nevertheless, there are two variant readings that seem to fall under the rule of *lectio brevior potior* and thus qualify as explanatory readings. The first option is καὶ εἰσελθὼν ὁ ἄγγελος πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶπεν (A C D K Γ f⁴³ 33.892.1424.2542.12211 M latt sy^h bo^{pt}), and the alternative is καὶ εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπεν (Σ Δ 579.700). Both readings seem to clarify the situation, and for that reason qualify as explanatory attempts to smoothen the text. It is the first variant reading, incidentally, that forms the basis for the Vulgate: *et ingressus angelus ad eam dixit*. The Latin tradition here clearly decides to interpret πρὸς αὐτὴν as linked to εἶπεν and not to εἰσελθὼν. The reading of Sinaiticus, Sangallensis, and the two minuscules (579 and 700), seems to be the only evidence of the reverse. So the preferred reading, taken over in the MCT, is ambiguous, since the words πρὸς αὐτὴν can be read as belonging to εἰσελθὼν, but also to εἶπεν. Regardless of this, however, the decision has to be made on how to translate the participle εἰσελθὼν. Let us suppose that εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν should be read together, and describes Gabriel's entrance with Mary. Pope argues that this expression should be interpreted as a reference to sexual penetration, because it would reflect a Septuagintalism.

John A.L. Lee has given a clear description of a Septuagintalism.²⁰ He emphasizes the importance of looking into the broader context of Koine Greek, and stresses the fact that an expression can only be labelled as a 'Septuagintalism', if it clearly deviates from what is customary in everyday language.²¹ This observation inverts Pope's argument in that it raises the need for him to show that the expression εἰσερχομαι πρὸς here clearly deviates from everyday language. The best way to find an answer to the question whether this is the case or not, is to look at other passages where the author of Luke-Acts uses the same expression. The gospel of Luke contains no such passage, but the book of Acts does. In Acts 10:3 an angel of the Lord is described as visiting Cornelius, and the description is put in the exact same expression as used in Luke 1:28: εἶδεν ἐν ὄραματι φανερώς ὡσεὶ περὶ ὥραν ἐνάτην τῆς ἡμέρας ἄγγελον τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσελθόντα πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ εἰπόντα αὐτῷ· Κορνήλιε. It is clear that here the expression εἰσερχομαι πρὸς simply means 'to visit someone'. The same observation goes for Acts 11:3, where

²⁰ John A.L. Lee, *Exapostello*, 99-113. A thorough discussion of the phenomenon can also be found in Hogeterp / Denaux, *Semitisms*.

²¹ Lee, *Exapostello*, 112-113.

the exact same expression is used: εἰσηλθεις πρὸς ἄνδρα ἀκροβυστίαν ἔχοντας καὶ συνέφαγεσ αὐτοῖς. The parallel passages mentioned clearly indicate that the expression used should be seen as a description of someone paying a visit to someone else, unless the context clearly requires another meaning. Thus, the question becomes: is that the case in the annunciation story?

In Pope's reconstruction, the context is so strongly colored by sexual connotations, that the answer should be positive. He claims that the context is pregnant with sexual connotations. He believes that the reference to Mary's status as a virgin is reason enough to introduce here also the theme of forced sex and capital violence.²² One of his arguments is an alleged link with LXX Deut 22:23. This suggestion is mainly based on the fact that there is a verbal overlap between both passages: in both cases, the Greek combination παρθένος μεμνηστευμένη ἄνδρῖς is used.²³ According to Pope, there are a few other elements that make it logical that both Deut 22:23-24 and Luke 1:26-38 are about rape. He suggests that the fact that Luke mentions that Gabriel goes to the city is a parallel to two phrases in Deut 22:23-24: When a young woman and a man sleep *in the city*, she can – because of adultery – be stoned, because she could have shouted, because she is *in a city* (ὅτι οὐκ ἐβόησεν ἐν τῇ πόλει 22:24).²⁴ For Pope, the fact that the word 'city' appears in both passages is one of the reasons to see Deut 22:23-24 as a background of Luke 1:26-38. It is remarkable that the word εἰσπορεύομαι is not found in LXX Deut 22:23-24, but rather the sexual euphemism 'to sleep' (κοιμάω). It would seem to us, that the verbal agreement between the texts mentioned is insufficient evidence for interpreting the Lukan passage as 'sexually fraught'. This means that there is insufficient argument for interpreting the expression εἰσέρχομαι πρὸς in a sexual sense. Instead, it should be interpreted in the traditional way: Gabriel pays Mary a visit. An additional argument for this is formed by the opening words of the angel: 'Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you!' (χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ). Apparently, Mary is at least confused by this encounter, for Gabriel quickly continues by addressing her fear: 'Do not be afraid, Mary' (μὴ φοβοῦ, Μαριάμ). It hardly makes sense for Luke to introduce the conversation between the two protagonists if this scene was preceded by a description of rape, especially since the words

²² It is not a surprise, that for some authors, the reference to the word 'virgin' is an indication that there is no sex at all!

²³ Note that in Deut 22:23 the Greek word παῖς is added to the description of the παρθένος and that is thus a difference with the designation of Mary.

²⁴ In Deuteronomy a distinction is made between rape in the city and in the field. After all, in the city a victim can cry out for help and if she does not cry, this can be interpreted as a form of consent. In the field, a woman is alone and cannot shout. She always gets recognition that it is an involuntary rape.

with which Gabriel addresses Mary's fear are an exact parallel to the words he uses in his encounter with Zechariah: *μὴ φοβοῦ, Μαριάμ* (1:30) vs. *μὴ φοβοῦ, Ζαχαρία* (1:13).²⁵

2.3 The Fall of the Angels

In order to substantiate his view that the angel had a sexual encounter with Mary, Pope refers to the tradition of the fall of the angels who were attracted to human women.²⁶ This tradition is found in a veiled manner in Gen 6:1-4 and more explicitly in 1En 7:7; 12:4; *Jub* 7:21, and a number of other passages in early Jewish sources.²⁷ Tertullian indicates that the tradition of the fall of the Watchers, who fell from heaven because of the beauty of human women, is the reason why Paul instructs the Corinthians that women should prophesy with their heads covered. In *De oratione* 22 Tertullian explains Paul's instruction of 1Cor 11:10 by a reference to Gen 6:2, and elsewhere this same argument recurs (see *Adv. Marc.* V.8.2; *Corona* 14.2; *VirgVel.* 7.2; 17.2). The crucial element in the tradition as it is shaped in the first two centuries of the Christian era is that women who pray are exposed to the presence of angels, and for that reason may cause a dangerous situation: their beauty may cause the angels to stumble and fall.

Obviously, the fear of the intermingling of women and angels fits the development of a patriarchal culture in which the position of women was narrowed down within the confines assigned to them by men. Annette Yoshiko Reed has analyzed the use of the legend of the Watchers by second-century Christian authors and speaks of a "Christianization" of Enochic material.²⁸ In this process of Christianizing the tradition of the Watchers, especially Tertullian and Cyprian both pick up this tradition in order to instruct Christians to limit the freedom of women. It seems that the Watchers formed a convenient argument for patriarchal authors in their attempts to establish male dominance as the organizing principle of their faith communities.

Notwithstanding the fact that the legend of fall of the Watchers and their mingling with human women was clearly present in the minds of at least a

²⁵ In 1:34 Mary asks a question. The nature of Mary's question is also an indication of how her attitude can be read. Estes (Questions, 182-183) typifies this question as a sequence question. He argues that Mary does not ask "*how it is possible*, but *how this will proceed*". The conversation between Gabriel and Mary thus becomes much more a real exchange of information than a conversation between a rapist and his victim.

²⁶ See Pope, *Gabriel's Entrance*, 705-707.

²⁷ See the discussion in Lietaert Peerbolte, *Man*, 86-91.

²⁸ Cf. Yoshiko Reed, *Angels*, esp. 160-189.

number of first- and second-century authors, the most important element which Paul mentions in 1Cor 11:10 is missing from the annunciation narrative: the fact that women pray and then enter into the presence of angels. In Luke 1, Mary is not seeking the presence of angels, but the movement is the reverse: Gabriel comes to her in order to announce his message. And the element that Pope refers to as another potential reference to the legend of the Watchers, the fact that Jesus is called “great” in 1:32, does not seem to refer to Jesus’ physical shape as is the case in Genesis 6.²⁹ Thus, the implication is clear: neither the setting, nor the context, nor any textual reference invokes the tradition of the Watchers in Luke 1:28-33.

2.4 God and Mary as owner and slave

The final step in Pope’s argument is his interpretation of the relationship of God and Mary as that of an owner and his slave: he interprets the term κύριος for God as a reference to a slave master and Mary’s characterization as ἡ δούλη κυρίου as referring to Mary’s status of a slave girl / woman.³⁰

The designation δούλη is in itself not sexual in nature, although slave owners were entitled to use their property in every imaginable manner.³¹ Franco Montanari’s dictionary describes the meaning as ‘servant, slave-woman, handmaid’, and emphasizes the servile nature of the status expressed by this word.³² Whether or not a sexual connotation is implied should appear from the context, and in Pope’s argument the context that would necessitate this reading is the announcement of the fact that Mary will become pregnant: ‘In view of Gabriel’s subsequent announcement of impending conception, Mary’s acquiescence is both servile and sexual.’³³

In his argument Pope compares Mary to Hagar and assumes that both are portrayed as a slave. However, he knows that the term used in the LXX to describe Hagar is παιδίσκη and not δούλη. It would be good to assess the differences between these words.

²⁹ Pope, *Gabriel’s Entrance*, 706.

³⁰ When assessing εἰσέρχομαι πρὸς Pope mentions Joseph Fitzmyer’s remark about Septuagintalism: see Fitzmyer, *Gospel*, 114-116. Pope fails to mention that Fitzmyer (113) argues that the term κύριος is a Semitism that in the LXX has become the standard designation for God. Besides, women who say “Lord” to a man are not always servile. See also the story of Jael, who characterizes Sisera as “Lord” and subsequently hits a pin through his head: ἐξῆλθεν Ιαηλ εἰς ἀπάντησιν Σισαρα καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν Ἔκνευσον κύριέ μου (Judges 4:18 LXX).

³¹ This is correctly noted by Pope, *Gabriel’s Entrance*, 707 n. 29.

³² Montanari, *Brill Dictionary*, s.v. Cf. LSJ: ‘bondwoman’. Für dieses Wort in der LXX, siehe Fußnote 39 unten.

³³ Pope, *Gabriel’s Entrance*, 707.

Although in recent years a lot of literature has been published about slavery in Early Christianity and in Judaism at the time, one aspect that is often forgotten is that the Hebrew word עֶבֶד that is used for slavery has quite different meanings.³⁴ The recently reprinted book by Ingrid Riesener clearly shows that there is sometimes a relationship with slavery, but not always.³⁵

What applies for the Hebrew is also important for the Greek of biblical traditions. The ease with which δούλη or δούλος are translated with “slave” or “slave girl” is not without problems either.

In this context, it is not possible to go into this in detail and we limit ourselves to referring to what is written about the difference between the use of in classical Greek and biblical Greek in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. When we turn to δούλος the Greek Bible and investigate its use of the word group [i.e. δούλος, κτλ], we are struck at once by the degree to which it has crowded out the various synon. (διακονέω, ὑπηρετέω, etc.). Whenever there is reference to service, it is usually expressed by a word from this group. The group is thus freed from the restriction to the service of slaves which marks its use in non-Biblical Greek. The reason for this is that it is almost always used for the root עֶבֶד and its denominatives.³⁶

In the TDNT it is also argued that because of this background the word group is used to denote a relation of dependence which may be forced, but it can also refer to relations which were sometimes voluntary, albeit mostly in situations which are to be seen as restrictive.³⁷

So, it is important to look at when a term like δούλος or δούλη is used to see what aspect of serving is emphasized; is it voluntary or is someone a δούλος on an involuntary basis?

However, Luke 1:38 is a special expression. Mary calls herself ἡ δούλη κυρίου and for the purpose of this article it is sufficient to quote TDNT:

“Where we have δούλος τοῦ θεοῦ” it is almost always in connection with the righteous of the OT in relation to God, or in quotations. This is always true of δούλη (Lk 1:38.48; Acts 2:18 [quotation]), and cf. esp. Rev (1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 10:7; 19:2,5; 22:3,6) where Moses is given the title δούλος τοῦ θεοῦ in 15:3.³⁸

Here it suffices to say that when Mary speaks about herself, she does so in proud terms, rather than describing herself as a willing and submissive

³⁴ For a recent survey of slavery in the Ancient Mediterranean World, see Bradley, Chain, 149-176; for slavery in Jewish circles, see Hezser, Slavery.

³⁵ Riesener, Stamm. For the chapter about slavery, see 112-135.

³⁶ TDNT, II, 261- 280 [lemma δούλος, κτλ; Rengstorff], here 265.

³⁷ TDNT, II, 266, An interesting example is 3Kgs 12:7 where the elders advise the young king Rehoboam to be δούλος to the people (see TDNT, II, 267).

³⁸ TDNT, II, 273.

slave, but that the terminology radiates a certain self-awareness. It is well known that Luke in the first chapters of his gospel has Old Testament concepts, stories and words. This seems to be a determining factor for the interpretation of Mary as an important Old Testament comparator in the stories about Hannah in 1 Samuel. When we look at how the female form is used in the LXX, it is not obvious that it means slave here. Hanna also calls herself δούλη and that does not mean that she is a slave.³⁹

Conclusion

In the above, we have analyzed the claim made by Michael Pope that the Annunciation Narrative in Luke 1 reflects sexual language and contains an implication of Mary being victim of rape by the angel Gabriel. The result of our enquiry is clear: we find the evidence for this claim unconvincing. The elements used in favor of Pope's argument reflect circumstantial evidence at best and fail to convince us. Mary's introduction as a virgin, the use of the verb εἰσερχομαι, the encounter with an angelic being as such, and the δούλη-terminology used for Mary, even when taken together, do not form enough ground for interpreting the passage discussed as a description of rape. Finally, the conversation between Mary and Gabriel in 1:34-35 is the ultimate argument against Pope's reading: had rape been implied in 1:28, Mary's question in v.34 would have been senseless, and Gabriel would not have responded with a future tense in v.35.⁴⁰ This settles the case and shows how Pope's reading reflects the 21st-century #metoo setting rather than the first-century discourse of Luke.

The emphasis on the political dimensions of a text is an important element of the current academic climate, especially in North-America, but from a continental perspective the present authors would suggest looking at first-century politics rather than letting twenty-first century problems *dominate* our readings of Scripture.

Summary

In this article we assess the claim made by Michael Pope in his article in JBL 137 that the Annunciation Narrative in Luke 1 reflects sexual language and contains an implication of Mary being victim of rape by the angel Gabriel. The result of our enquiry is clear: we find the evidence for this claim unconvincing. The elements used in favor

³⁹ For Hanna as an important model for the women in Luke 1-2, see Koet, Place, 45-72; reprinted in Koet, Dreams, 123-146. For a more elaborate article about Mary in this passage, see Koet, Ancilla (forthcoming). Rehkopf, Septuaginta-Vokabular, *sub verbo*, 81, mentions as the only meaning 'Dienerin' (servant).

⁴⁰ For this question, see Estes, Questions, 182-183; see footnote 25 above.

of Pope's argument reflect circumstantial evidence at best and fail to convince us. Mary's introduction as a virgin, the use of the verb εἰσέρχομαι, the encounter with an angelic being as such, and the δούλη -terminology used for Mary, even when taken together, do not form enough ground for interpreting the passage discussed as a description of rape. Finally, the conversation between Mary and Gabriel in 1:34-35 is the ultimate argument against Pope's reading: had rape been implied in 1:28, Mary's question in v.34 would have been senseless, and Gabriel would not have responded with a future tense in v.35. This settles the case, and shows how Pope's reading reflects the 21st-century #metoo setting rather than the first-century discourse of Luke.

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel beurteilen wir die von Michael Pope in seinem Beitrag in JBL 137 aufgestellte Behauptung, dass die Verkündigungserzählung in Lukas 1 sexuelle Sprache widerspiegelt und eine Implikation enthält, dass Maria Opfer einer Vergewaltigung durch den Engel Gabriel wurde. Das Ergebnis unserer Untersuchung ist klar: Wir finden die Beweise für diese Behauptung nicht überzeugend. Die Elemente, die zu Gunsten von Popes Argument verwendet werden, spiegeln bestenfalls Indizien wider und überzeugen uns nicht. Die Vorstellung Marias als Jungfrau, die Verwendung des Verbs εἰσέρχομαι, die Begegnung mit einem Engelswesen als solche und die für Maria verwendete δούλη -Terminologie bilden auch in ihrer Gesamtheit keinen ausreichenden Grund, die besprochene Passage als Beschreibung einer Vergewaltigung zu interpretieren. Schließlich ist das Gespräch zwischen Maria und Gabriel in 1,34-35 das ultimative Argument gegen seine Lesart: Wäre in 1,28 eine Vergewaltigung angedeutet worden, wäre Marias Frage in V.34 sinnlos gewesen, und Gabriel hätte in V.35 nicht mit einem Futur geantwortet. Damit ist der Fall erledigt und es zeigt sich, dass Popes Lesart eher das #metoo-Setting des 21. Jahrhunderts widerspiegelt als den Diskurs des ersten Jahrhunderts bei Lukas.

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