



The Silenced Women in Pauline Letters with Possible Interpolation*

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ABSTRACT: Women silenced in the Assembly, prevented from asking their husbands in public, and having to bring their heads covered. All this points to a situation of subjugation of the woman/wife in relation to the man/husband. This textual situation, present in Paul's letters which are considered authentic, generally advocates a situation of gender equality, and raises questions about the figure of the Apostle and about the possibility of late textual interpolation in the Pauline letters. In this paper, we seek to analyze Paul's personality within his cultural and religious background. We also seek to identify who are the women with whom he worked in terms of apostolic and ministerial parity in order to understand the possible reasons for late textual interpolation in his written liberating message. The investigative procedure employed in this research is, mainly, the interpretative and analytic critique of the textual analysis. The main conclusions are that the Word of God is always a force of renewal capable of transforming the structures of a society. Wherever Paul went, this transformation took place in a germ. However, because of the incarnation process, the Word of God can suffer adverse forces, especially in the context of a sexist and misogynist society, making it possible, therefore, to think of textual extracts interpolated within the authentic *Paulinum corpus*.

KEY WORDS: Silenced Women; Pauline letters; Textual Interpolation; Sexism; Misogyny.

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Las Mujeres Silenciadas en las Cartas Paulinas con Posible Interpolación

RESUMEN: Mujeres silenciadas en la Asamblea, impedidas de preguntar a sus maridos en público, y teniendo que llevar la cabeza cubierta. Todo esto apunta a una situación de sometimiento de la mujer/esposa en relación al hombre/marido. Esta situación textual presente en las cartas de Pablo consideradas auténticas, donde aboga generalmente por una situación de igualdad de género, plantea interrogantes sobre la figura del Apóstol y sobre la posibilidad de una interpolación textual tardía en las cartas paulinas. En esta investigación buscamos analizar la personalidad de Pablo dentro de su trasfondo cultural y religioso, así como identificar quiénes son las mujeres con las que trabajó en términos de paridad apostólica y ministerial para comprender las posibles razones de la interpolación textual tardía en su mensaje liberador escrito. El procedimiento investigativo empleado en esta investigación es, principalmente, la crítica interpretativa y analítica del análisis textual. Las principales conclusiones son que la Palabra de Dios es siempre una fuerza renovadora capaz de transformar las estructuras de una sociedad. Dondequiera que iba Pablo, esta transformación se producía en un germen. Sin embargo, tratándose de un proceso de encarnación, la Palabra de Dios puede sufrir fuerzas adversas, especialmente en el contexto de una sociedad machista y misógina, siendo posible, por tanto, en interpolación de extractos textuales dentro del auténtico *corpus Paulinum*.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Mujeres Silenciadas; Cartas Paulinas; Interpolación Textual; Sexismo; Misoginia.

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Introduction

Paul has been accused of silencing women to the subjugation of their husbands with their heads duly covered. It cannot be denied that in our modern society Paul's teaching is usually scorned upon for being apparently a misogynist. True that a cursor and non-exegetical reading of his letters stirs up the hornet's nest without much effort. However, a detailed examination of the same letters reveals his original teachings in a different pulse than those that are interpolated. The basic reason why even his authentic teachings fail to merit the appreciation they deserve is probably that modern humans do not see themselves as Paul saw himself and they fail to see God the way Paul did. Moreover, this despite the fact that modern society provides us with almost a classical illustration of Paul's view of the self-defeating nature of the sinful life one leads. The patriarchal slant of the Pastoral Epistles has taken itself from the surrounding Greco-Roman culture.

A considerable number of Christians are what can be termed as "biblical Christians" for what they believe has to be biblical. In itself, it is undoubtedly a wonderful thing. For what else can be a better inspiration to guide our life other than the Bible? However, unfortunately, many of these Christians arrive at such a faith perspective beginning with a strong and uncritical affirmation that the "Bible is the Word of God" and has to be believed in literally. There are again those who use Paul to justify what they believe in any case. But there are others who are left genuinely puzzled with such literal interpretation of the Word of God such as the clear statements of Paul saying that "Women should keep silence in the Church", "I permit no woman to speak", "Women were made for men" and "Wives, obey your husbands". To them the simple question that vexes their mind is that "Is the Bible wrong on these matters? If so, how can we believe that the Bible is the Word of God?"

Jesus was a revolutionary of his time and preached and walked against the set path of the times, bringing honor and destiny to the scorned half of humanity. His immediate apostles and disciples though charged with the grace of the Holy Spirit remained essentially human and the exigencies of their immediate surroundings compelled them to preach and interpret the gospel with cultural accommodations of the time. Thus, they set rolling the patriarchal formula that Jesus had essentially opposed in an effort to set up an egalitarian community in the true universal sense. This saw the gradual emergence of the different interpolations that have consequently crept up into the Pauline Corpus to give androcity and an authoritative base in the canon.

The liberation that Catholic Christian women find in the gospel of Christ is not vitiated by this tradition's second-class treatment of them but it is both restrained and

radicalized. One is inevitably saddened by the contradiction of the egalitarianism of the gospels with the existence of sexism within and without the ecclesiastic boundaries.

In this study, we shall endeavor to show that the passages attributed to Paul to shade him as a misogynist, in particular that of 1Cor 14: 35-36 is a later interpolation, elaborated with an understanding of 1Cor 11: 2-6 in light of its true light and enumerated further with an interpretation of Gal 2: 26-28 in light of 1 Corinthians.

First, we will seek to understand Paul's person, lineage, education and personality as a condition for understanding his theology, how he works with women in his ministry, who they are, and what their identity and mission is. Then we will investigate the biblical texts considered sexist or chauvinist to understand the possible language of the interpolation of such accounts within Paul's theology. We will conclude with some remarks about the liberating power of the Word of God and its necessary cultural incarnation.

Understanding Paul the Person

An authentic understanding of the Pauline Corpus needs an appropriate understanding of his lineage, background and the circumstances under which he articulated his thoughts and guided the churches he had formed and where he conducted his mission.

The Person

Lineage and upbringing

Paul's genealogy is spoken of in Rom 11: 1, 2Cor 11: 22. The phrase "Hebrew of the Hebrews" might point to the fact that he pertained to the more exclusive branch of the Israelite tradition rather than to those who were called Hellenists and who practiced assimilation to Greek customs¹.

Paul came from a Jewish education. He grew up in a strict Pharisaic family and was schooled in a rabbinic milieu. As such, his predominant study would be the Tanakh and the body of the tradition. He had grown up around it. His writings corroborate this idea of his education. Having a Jewish mind, his interpretations of the Tanakh as well as his modes of arguments were those that were current in the Jewish schools. Although engaging the standard and allegorical methods of exegesis, he was not carried by them into the extravagances that were common. In spite of the inevitable inheritance of Greek and Roman ideas and life, he would tend to view them from the standpoint of a strict Jew. Paul himself, in polemics with the Judeo-Christian

¹ Orr and Walter, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation with Commentary*, 3.

missionaries who boasted their Hebrew origin, listed seven titles of “glory according to the flesh” (Phil 3: 4-6). His family was Jewish in name, in blood and faithful observance (cf. Rom 11:1; 2Cor 11: 22; Phil 3:5). However, Paul was a Jew from the diaspora, that is, from outside the “sacred territory”. A diaspora Jew was usually more open than those born in the Holy Land. Daily contact with different realities and cultures was a strong invitation to “enculturation”. A certain keenness and catholicity of thought was involved in an easy use of the most cultivated tongue in existence and in possession of the rights and dignities of citizenship in the vast Roman Empire². Paul first adhered to Phariseism and both Acts of the Apostles and his letters agreed on this. The Acts add that he studied in Jerusalem with Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). However, one must keep in mind that Paul was faithful both to the Phariseism of Jerusalem and to the historical-cultural climate of the diaspora. He was a born reasoner. He was the first Christian to construct his belief into a doctrinal system³.

Personality

Paul’s personality, as a great apostolic missionary, has often been overlooked. His letters reveal him as an extremely complicated individual who balanced opposite characteristics making a clear delineation of his basic traits an elusive task. Paul was authoritative and pliant. He was severe in castigating those who rejected his gospel or tried to supplant him in the Church. His only aim was to spread the Good News to as many sinners of human population as possible. In achieving this end, he engaged in the activity of founding churches, refuting Jewish and Gentile opponents and formulating the main lines of Christian theology and buttressing them with scriptural interpretations⁴. He never commented on the custom of the place that he visited which has often added to the difficulty of interpreting his teachings.

As a man of his times, Paul lived in a Patriarchal and male chauvinist society where man was the accepted head of the household. Men exercised almost the entire gamut of leadership in public life at that time. In his letters, Paul did not challenge this basic social structure. In fact, the whole concept of equality of men and women as we understand today was not an issue for him. None of his letters has sections that deal specifically with the concerns of women’s justice as understood today. On the contrary, Paul often comes across as someone who has uncritically accepted the social

² Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, 333.

³ *Ibid.*, 335.

⁴ Orr and Walter, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation with Commentary*, 106.

order of his time. In this sense, “it is futile to attempt to prove that Paul had views on women and the family that would satisfy us today”⁵.

His Theology

The Christian project had to be translated back into life, and first Christians needed a true guidance to turn to. Paul carried out this task with vitality and creativity. His relationship with believers, however, did not show any trace of bureaucracy: he had in fact been able to weave very intense personal bonds (cf. Gal 4: 14-16; 1Ts 2: 17-3, 8; 1-2Cor). “He clearly defined his convictions and carried them out consistently in action. It was not strange that he became a persecutor of Christians”⁶. Paul did not leave any systematic treatise on ethics, theology or social departments but analyzed and treated specific incidents that arose in his communities⁷. He was indeed a theologian, since he rethought his faith, but he was not systematic: his was applied theology.

Paul belonged to three distinct worlds: to Judaism from a religious point of view, to Hellenism for language, and politically to the Roman Empire. “Jewish though he was, Paul made it clear that the work to which he was called was largely to be done among the other nations of the world, that is, the Gentiles”⁸. He was equipped for this in that he was a citizen of Tarsus where he had a good education and became thoroughly familiar with the life in the world of Hellenistic culture⁹. Paul’s letters “were real letters written to people who had real problems. He never attempted to set out in order a summary of his theology. Where there was no controversy he said little”¹⁰. Paul’s letters to the Christian communities were not a pastime, the fruit of personal literary enjoyment and not even a fixation for a future time. The letters he wrote were instead the other side of his missionary and pastoral activity: the voice of an apostle physically distant but close to his community. Furthermore, Paul’s correspondence is his greatest legacy.

Paul’s conversion had to do with his encountering the risen Jesus. The stories of Damascus do not present us a conversion understood moralistically: Paul did not essentially walk the paths of evil before his encounter with Christ. His was conversion to Christ, discovered with the eyes of faith as the keystone of human destiny. “It seems

⁵ Ariarajah, *Did I Betray the Gospel?*, 12.

⁶ Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament*, 327.

⁷ Cf. Orr and Walter, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation with Commentary*, 108.

⁸ Morris, *New Testament Theology*, 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

that Paul was prepared as a Jewish theologian to think through under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”¹¹.

Tradition plays an important part in Paul’s understanding of the gospel. It is upon this tradition that faith life, moral reasoning and action are properly grounded, which is why Paul frequently rehearsed that what “we know” and from it reasoned towards a solution¹². The Dead Sea scrolls of the Qumran community imply that Paul seemed to recognize that there would always be some interaction between the gospel and culture and he even boldly co-opted cultural elements where he thought they may be helpful to him. Once one determines not to leave the world as Paul had, there will always be accommodation to the culture and its practices along with distancing from the culture and its patterns¹³.

Women Missionaries with Paul

Paul could not have functioned or proceeded in his mission of spreading the gospel and evangelizing “to the ends of the earth” excluding the service and patronage of one-half of humanity, that is women. A study of the Pauline Corpus illustrates amply the life, mission and service of women who were immediate and active partners of Paul as co-workers, without whose participation Paul would probably be rendered handicapped in his mission.

Identity

Women occupied a central position in the early Church and its bearing both by way of contributing and supporting it materially as well as by being active missionaries. Scholars recognize that women not only fully participated in the early Christian movement, but also held leadership positions, challenging the androcentric culture of the time¹⁴. “The exceptional contribution of prominent women of wealth and social

¹¹ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 361.

¹² Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians, The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 926.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 931.

¹⁴ The most notorious women of the early Christian missionary movement emerge not as an anomaly to the rule but as exemplars of early Christian women who have outlasted the androcentric redactions and historical silence. Their influence and repercussion must not be seen as abnormal but should be comprehended within the framework of the early missionary movement that allowed for full participation and leadership of women. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 167-168.

status to the Jewish as well as Christian missionary movements is more and more acknowledged in scholarship”¹⁵.

Paul’s female co-workers were not just assistants, women subordinated to him, but deaconesses and apostles. “The genuine Pauline letters applied missionary titles and such characterization as co-worker to Prisca, brother/sister to Apphia, *διακονος* to Phoebe and *αποστολος* to Junia”¹⁶. They were women who played a central role in the early Church”¹⁷. Therefore, Paul did not regard women as inferior to him in the ministry¹⁸.

Women sharing Paul’s missionary work seemed to be a regular fact. For instance, Evodia and Syntyche were members of such prominence and significance that their estrangement posed a serious hindrance to community life. They may well have acted as representatives of the Philippian’s community, which seems to have entered into a formal partnership with Paul in sharing missionary work. (Phil 4: 5). Phoebe, Prisca and Aquila, Andronicus and Funia(s), Mary Tryphaena and Tryphosa are other key women figures in Paul’s missionary work. Phoebe is normally referred to in the standard translations as ‘deaconesses’ and her role was then understood in terms of that played by deaconesses in the later Church.

The Acts of the Apostles attest to the presence of couples committed to evangelization and community leadership. Aquila and Priscila formed a couple that illustrates this, with indications that Priscila played a leading role (Act 18; Rom 16: 4). Alongside with the couple in Paul’s greetings, we have Adronicus and Funia(s). In the short appendage to the greetings, Paul gave us quite a bit of information about this pair, that they were related to him and had been converted to Christianity. Mary, Tryphaena and Tryphosa were among those greeted in Romans. “We find women such as Mary who has worked hard among you and Tryphaena and Tryphosa as those workers in the Lord”¹⁹.

¹⁵ Ibid., 169.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ To the Church of Rome Paul commends Phoebe whose home is in Cenchreae. The implication is that Phoebe is a businesswoman who is able to travel independently and for Paul to trust her with a letter like this speaks volumes for the respect in which she was held, so it is no surprise to discern that she is a deacon in the Church (Rom 16: 1-7). Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, 761.

¹⁸ Paul affirms that women worked with him on an equal basis. Phil 4: 2-3 explicitly states that Evodia and Syntyche have “contended” side by side with him. Paul considers the authority of both women in the community at Philippi so great that he fears that their dissension could do serious damage to the Christian mission. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 169-170.

¹⁹ Cleary, “Women in the New Testament, St. Paul and the Early Pauline Churches”, 69-73.

Mission

Inarguably Phoebe (Rom 16, 1ff) is a particular character in the Pauline literature. She is the only to receive an official letter of recommendation and she is given three substantive titles: sister, *διακονος*, and *προστατις*. Although there is debate about the translation and meaning of these titles, they show the stature of this woman's leadership. It has been an androcentric tendency to interpret it as less than that of a 'minister,' 'missionary,' or 'servant,' as translated in case of it being conferred to men. "Phoebe's 'office' in the church of Cencreae is not limited by prescribed gender roles. She is not a deaconess of the women, but a minister of the whole church"²⁰.

In addition, Junia and Andronicus were probably partners in the mission as Jewish Christians from Tarsus. They presumably had become Christians before Paul and worked together with Paul in Antioch and even shared imprisonment with him. It can be conjectured that they belonged to the circle of apostles in Jerusalem who, "together with James, received a vision of the Resurrected Lord (see 1Cor 15: 7). Paul even stressed that they were outstanding members of the circle of the apostles"²¹.

In the Acts of Paul and Thecla²², Thecla was converted by Paul and taking a vow of continence was persecuted by her fiancé and family for this. She was commissioned by Paul to "go and teach the word of God." Women in Carthage at the beginning of the third century still appealed to the apostle Thecla for women's authority to teach and to baptize.²³

Prisca or Priscilla who was founder of a house church, together with her companion Aquila, disseminated the gospel supported by their commerce business and independent of any local church. Like Barnabas and Apollos, Prisca was a missionary co-worker with Paul but she was independent of the apostle and did

²⁰ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 170.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

²² It is a work of the second century (CE) devoted entirely to the story of a woman missionary. In many regions, this book was regarded as canonical in the first three centuries. It mentions a great number of women besides the apostle Thecla. It is suggested that Tryphaena adopts Thecla, becomes her new mother and thus incorporates Thecla into a new family: the Christian community. Bremmer (Ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 16. Thecla became the type of the female Christian teacher, preacher and baptizer and her story was quoted as early as the second century as a justification of the right of women to teach and to baptize. Thecla is not pictured as an isolated woman but is surrounded by a number of supportive women. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 174.

²³ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 173.

not stand under his authority. Paul was grateful to Prisca and Aquila for having risked their lives for him²⁴.

The Roman church counted on the participation of remarkable women. No less than twenty-five persons were greeted by name in Romans 16. Eight of them were women. Two more women, Rufus' mother and Nereus' "sister", were mentioned without proper names.

When we read the Pauline literature carefully, we realize that women were not only patrons of the churches, but were evangelizers and held leadership positions. They did not depend on Paul or any male authority for their ministry. "As Jewish Christian missionaries, these women might have belonged to the Christian communities in Galilee, Jerusalem and Antioch which stood at the very beginnings of the Christian missionary movement"²⁵.

Women as Portrayed in 1Cor 11: 2-16

The social indicators and patterns played to the structuring and to the attended maintenance of honor in the times of Paul. Seating arrangements at social events were carefully arranged in accordance with varying degrees of status (Lk 14: 7-11). "The right to speak and when granted as well as the order in which persons were expected to speak were structured on the notions of the degree of honor"²⁶. In Paul's time, everyone had a lord, that is to say, someone who could rightly be constructed as being over someone else, to whom that person was responsible. There was a chain of this belonging and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius mused that he was responsible to God. An abiding issue before the Corinthians in this letter is the identity of the one to whom they belong. This becomes the source of Paul's tapping of this cultural reservoir as a means of expressing and defining the basic relationship in all of life. Paul constantly reminded them that the Lord Jesus Christ was the one they were ultimately responsible to. Paul's counter-cultural understanding of the gospel runs headlong with the convention of some lording it over the other²⁷. This section explores the interpretations put forth by different exegetes and their evaluation of the scenario in which Paul situated women in one of the most controversial passages of the Biblical texts.

²⁴ Not only Paul but the entire Roman church has reasons to give thanks to these outstanding missionaries (Rom 1: 4). It is significant that whenever Paul sends greetings to the couple (Rom 16: 3ff), he addresses Prisca first, thus emphasizing that she is the more important of the two. Ibid., 178.

²⁵ Ibid., 161.

²⁶ Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 782.

²⁷ Ibid., 782-783.

Cor 11: 2-16 – an Analysis

This passage has raised the consternation of women liberationists as it has been used for the intellectual, moral and social subjugation of women through the ages until a couple of decades ago. The passage (1Cor 11: 2-16) is so problematic and employs so much vocabulary that is not used elsewhere in Paul's undisputed letters that various scholars have suggested that the passage was not written by Paul. Paul was a man of practicality and he amply exhibited so in the 1 Corinthians. He concretely addressed the problems of the Church of Corinth illustrating them with understandable examples of the organic body and the various gifts people were endowed with to mention a few. In light of the deep theological implications embedded within the practical advise postulated, the discussed passage would be deprived of its true allusion taken at face value.

Nature and Exegesis

Although the exact content of the complications in the Church of Corinth is difficult to ascertain, Paul's praise of the Corinthians includes a reference to the traditions, so perhaps "the matter was related to the instruction of practices with Jewish background in a Church where pagan influences were very persistent and Paul tried to settle on theological grounds"²⁸. Corinth was located in Achaia, on an isthmus between two gulfs - the Saronic, with its port of Cenchraea on the Aegean Sea, and the Corinthian, with the port of Lechaem on the Adriatic Sea. This geographical position assured Corinth, increasing material prosperity, as travelers flocked there, with their goods and their systems of life, coming from different parts of the world. In 27 BC, Caesar Augustus made Corinth the capital of the Roman province of Achaia (Southern Greece). The temple of Aphrodite, located at the city center, held a thousand priestess-prostitutes attached to it and the city was rife with all manner of sects, religious cults and mysterious religions which taught self-gratification and sexual exploits as ways to spiritual liberation. "Women were being enticed from the bonds of the family into believing and selling their bodies to ritual prostitution that would bring them both self-fulfillment as well as spiritual release"²⁹.

Paul took for granted the fact that women were prophesying in the Church of Corinth, 'but any woman who prayed and or prophesied with her head unveiled disgraced her head – it was one and the same thing as having her head shaved,' 'Judge

²⁸ Orr and Walter, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation with Commentary*, 262.

²⁹ Ariarajah, *Did I Betray the Gospel?*, 20.

for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head unveiled?’ (1Cor 11: 5, 13). Prophesying, in this letter, was a public mode of discourse that could edify, encourage, console or lead to conviction in the hearts of others. Unarguably, women of Corinth had heard Paul’s gospel as welcoming them into the full participation in the life of the Church. “Women in Corinth, at least some of them, had stopped wearing head coverings in worship and may have considered themselves in line with Paul’s teaching about freedom in Christ with Paul’s embrace of equal standing of the sexes in the Lord”³⁰. There was not the slightest innuendo that Paul yearned for subjugating one sex to the other. His concern was distinction and not discrimination. In order to drive home his point that the difference between the sexes should be not only respected but also made obvious, Paul used two lines of argument: the first drawn from the divine intention expressed in creation and the second drawn from common sense. The argument from the order of creation appears in v. 3-9 and Paul made it needlessly complex by using ‘head’ in two senses, the literal sense and a metaphorical sense meaning ‘source or origin’ as expected Paul’s understanding being drawn from Gen 2. Using the metaphorical sense of ‘head’ he began by saying, ‘every man’s source is Christ, the source of woman is man, the source of Christ is God’ (v.3). Thus, Christ was involved with God in the creation of man and all three in the creation of woman. This interpretation is almost as polyvalent as Paul’s statement but the key point is made unambiguously in v. 8-9 which simply repeats Gen 2: 18-23³¹.

The thrust of Paul’s argument therefore is that the difference between men and women should be obvious, even though they are equal in terms of their capacity to speak to God in prayer and to declare His words in prophecy. It would be going too far to say absolutely equal because Paul did introduce a requirement for women which was not applicable to men, ‘Therefore, a woman ought to have *authority* on her head, because of the angels’ (v.10). The initial ‘therefore’ refers to the summary of Gen 2: 18-23 in v. 8-9 which he had traditionally used to prove the subordination of women to men. For Paul this situation had changed ‘therefore’ the woman had to have some symbol on her head to show that she now had the ‘authority’ to fulfill a role

³⁰ Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 927-928. “The problem is about a woman wearing a head-covering or her failure to do so (v. 5, *akatakalyptō tē kephalē* [“with uncovered head”]; v. 6, *katakalyptesthō* [“let her cover herself”]; v. 13); it is not a way of dressing her hair or a specific hairdo, despite some of Paul’s comparisons that refer to shorn hair (v. 6), shaved head (v. 6), or long hair (vv. 14, 15)”. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 406.

³¹ Murphy-O’Connor, *1 Corinthians*, 107-108.

previously denied to her (v.10). This was for the sake of ‘the angels’ who were associated with the giving of the Law (Gal 3: 19) whose application had been modified³².

Analyzing 11: 3-5, we find that Paul’s most elaborate argument was theological and built on a claim already made in the letter and reaffirmed later. 11: 3 assumes the hierarchy of God, Christ and men but it ran in the other direction and started where no reader would have any objection with *ανδρος*/husband/man, having Christ as *κεφαλη*/head (11: 3a). To this, Paul added that the head of a *γυνη*/wife/woman was her husband (11: 3b), followed directly by “and the head of Christ is God” (11: 3c). This hierarchy is also maintained in 15: 24, 27-28, where Paul’s teaching is laid out in more detail. Culturally it was considered shameful for a woman to have shaved or bald head. Thus, one praying or prophesying with uncovered head dishonored her head and she might as well have her head shaved off, he declared (11: 5) or having the hair cut off which was equally shameful as the other (11: 6).

In 11: 14-15, Paul capped off his reasoning with what he described as an argument “from nature”, a carefully phrased rhetorical question whose Greek supposed an answer yes and thus expected the Corinthians to agree with him, though actually it was not an argument from nature but from the contemporary social custom. 11: 7 quotes Gen 1: 27 that man is the “image of God” and that woman was made from man (Gen 2: 22 quoted in 11: 12a). Some modern interpreters find the thought “because of angels” (11: 10) puzzling except for that it might reflect Gen 6: 1-4³³. In 11: 3-10, Paul single-mindedly piled up one point after another to sustain the hierarchical distinction between men/husbands, women/wives. However, in 11: 11-12, he interrupted his own argument with the particle *πλην*/nevertheless/however/but, which is a standard Greek way to break into a previous discussion and emphasizes that it is very important and it introduces what amounts to a strong counterpoint to his own argumentation advanced in 11: 2-10. In 11,13a, he calls for the Corinthians to make their own judgement in the matter concerned and in 11: 13b-16, he once again returns to compiling more arguments to urge the Corinthian women to accede in favor of his view³⁴.

Theological Interpretations

From the basic conviction that no other God exists, there is no rival God, Paul posits an orderly universal hierarchy which bears the problem of women’s covering their

³² Ibid., 109.

³³ Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 928-929.

³⁴ Ibid., 930.

head directly. The argument is one of source or head of women which when not covered implies dishonoring her husband or even Christ and God. The claim that man is the source of woman probably draws on the scriptural basis of Gen 2: 21-23³⁵. It is questionable whether the Corinthians would have already known before having heard from Paul that the head of a wife is her husband (v. 11, 3). Evidences suggest that they have either not heard it or at least have not subscribed to it in their practice as evident from Paul's stacking of his arguments to bolster his position³⁶.

Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as women came from men, so men come through women: but all things come from God" (v. 11-12). The word "nevertheless" the freedom that we have in the Lord is contrasted with the man-woman relationship structured within the traditions of society. The strength of the freedom in the gospel that reminds men that they are not independent of women and since tradition taught that women are dominated by men "because she came out of his side," they need to be reminded that they themselves have come out of a woman's womb³⁷. The relationship of husband and wife has basically been compared to that of Christ and the Church, elevated it to the relationship to a mystery of profound self-giving love, which requires of the husband the same kind of self-offering that Christ showed on the cross for the church³⁸.

By his treatment of head covering, it could be safely assumed that Paul took them to be customary and expected the Corinthians to have understood as such. Though Paul endorsed women's maximum involvement in worship, he nonetheless required them to wear some sign that actually differentiated them from men. In old times, it was considered shameful for a woman to have a shaved or bald head. He asserted that any woman who prayed or prophesied with uncovered head, dishonored her head and she might as well shave off her head. His rhetoric stacked up arguments that women should comply. This in fact cast in strong cultural categories of praise and honor scheme of the times³⁹. He argued that it was natural for a man not to have long hair whereas the same was the crowning glory of women. All these contentions have been stacked up by Paul to drive home the understanding of the necessity of covering heads in worship setting. Paul realized the element of conflict in his argument in that he demanded women believers to "accommodate to the culturally aligned

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 928.

³⁷ Ariarajah, *Did I Betray the Gospel?*, 19.

³⁸ Ibid., 47.

³⁹ Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 928.

practice of wearing head covering during worship. On the other hand, he believed that in Christ the cultural difference between men and women was eschatologically challenged by the gospel⁴⁰.

Scroggs, whose study of Paul is marked by a particular psychological interest, made the suggestion that a hidden agenda lay behind the difficulties of Paul's argument here – a fear of homosexuality. Paul was determined at all costs that the distinction between the sexes was preserved and shown in the Corinthian assembly⁴¹. Like Scroggs, Murphy-O'Connor's well-received study of the 1Cor 11: 2-16 was marked by a fear that homosexuality was an important factor in Paul's reaction. The wearing of long hair on the part of men was associated with homosexuality in Greek culture. Like-wise women who wore their hair in a disordered and unbound-up way presented themselves as unfeminine and so along with the men contributed to a blurring of sex distinctions⁴².

Traditionally, exegetes have conjectured that Paul was claiming that the pneumatic women leaders wear the veil according to the Jewish tradition. Yet v. 15 maintains that women have their hair instead of a head covering and thus such interpretation is unlikely. Hence, it is more credible that Paul was speaking of the form that Christians should wear their hair while praying and prophesying. It appears that during their ecstatic-pneumatic worship reunions for liturgical purpose some of the Corinthian women prophets and liturgists loosed their hair, letting it flow freely rather than keeping it bound in coiffure. Such behavior regarding the disheveled hair would be quite common in the ecstatic worship of oriental divinities. This looking discomposure could be seen in the Isis cult that had a major center in Corinth⁴³. "The Corinthian pneumatics presumably took over such a fashion because they understood their equality in the community and their devotion to Sophia-Spirit by analogy to Isis"⁴⁴. Paul's major concern was the protection of the Christian community from being mistaken for one of the orgiastic, secret, oriental cults that undermine public order and decency⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ Ariarajah, *Did I Betray the Gospel?*, 929.

⁴¹ Scroggs, "The Heuristic Value of a Psychoanalytic Model in the Interpretation of Pauline Theology", 136.

⁴² Byrne, *Paul and the Christian Woman*, 6.

⁴³ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 227.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

No theological interpretation is without friction to fit in neatly. Any theological assertion must take into account not only the problems of the dogma but also the complexity of life and social arrangement that add on their own complicating nuances to applied theological claims⁴⁶. Paul certainly argued from his Jewish cultural background. In this environment, man had to uncover his head to pray or prophesy (1 Cor 11:4). Moreover, as women also assumed this role of presidency of prayer and prophecy, a problem was created: in Jewish customs, women were not supposed to uncover their heads in public, to avoid manifesting their beauty (Dn 13: 32), or to guard against possible lecherous interpretations (Song 7: 5). Hence, it can be seen that the reasoning of the Apostle to the Gentiles was very much dependent on the customs to which he was accustomed, which gave relative value to his conclusions.

Gal 3: 26-28 in perspective of 1Cor 11: 2-16

Looking into Galatians 3: 26-28

For you are all sons of God through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ Jesus have put on Christ: There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3: 26-28)

Exegesis

The passage essentially speaks of the abolition of the Mosaic law and to be one in the person of Christ by virtue of being the descendants of Abraham. If this was a stand alone practice of the Christian community of the time, it would have stood out in conflict with the practices of the surrounding Greco-Roman cultural milieu. Ideas of radical equality, including equality of sexes, were also to be found in other associations that flourished in the wider Greco-Roman culture while standing in some tension with it. The mystery cults that had spread from the East with the exception of Mithra, initiated women on a par with men and set aside distinctions of racial origin or servitude. These parallels serve to show that the early Christian movement in proclaiming and ritually enacting the overcoming of divisions as expressed in Gal 3: 27-28 was not doing something unique or unheard of in the cities of the Mediterranean world. It was in fact giving expression to longings for unification and equality that were pervasive throughout that world⁴⁷. The third pair of “male and female” seems to be an echo of the Genesis account of creation Gen 1: 27 in accordance to the Jewish understanding

⁴⁶ Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 930.

⁴⁷ Byrne, *Paul and the Christian Woman*, 7.

of creation. However, this crucial pair is missing in the formal parallel text of 1Cor 12: 13. This passage deals with instructions to cover the various possibilities concerning the marriage relationship between the man and the woman to almost a point of monotony. In either case of retaining the unity or breaking off, Paul entitled both the man and the woman to have the privilege and not being enslaved to any unsatisfactory unions. As one scholar puts it, “It looks as though Paul were laboring to express the male and female roles in almost precisely the same language”⁴⁸. It is in this light that the omission of this passage has to be treated and not abolishing the sexes.

Though many try to subdue Gal 3: 28 with the so-called household-code of the New Testament, advocating subordination of women with the Biblical distinction between the “order of creation” and the “order of redemption, though neither expressions

are found in the New Testament, it is viewed as the focal point of Paul’s teaching on women and the organizing center of his theology. The myth of androgyny was widespread in the Hellenistic and Judaic cultures and Wayne Meeks has argued that it is in this light that Paul refers specially to the “new man” represented by the garments that are “renewed after the image of his creator” of Col 3: 10. In doing so, Paul understood “neither male nor female” in Gal 3: 28 in terms of the “eschatological restoration of man’s original divine, androgynous image.” In 1Cor 11: 2-16 and 14: 33b-36, “Paul seems primarily concerned to reassert the distinctions belonging to the humanity of the old Adam” but conceded the abandonment of “functional distinctions,” so long “as the result leads to the ‘building up’ of the community.” Toeing the line of Meek, Robin Scroggs elaborates: “Paul wanted to eliminate the inequality between the sexes, while the Gnostics wanted to eliminate the distinction between the sexes”⁴⁹.

Implications

The straightaway context in Galatians speaks neither about baptism nor about social relationships. Paul’s apprehensiveness in Galatians was the religious relationship between Jews and gentiles and not the cultural-political distinctions between Jews and gentiles as two different types of people and cultures. Therefore, he did not use the expression in Gal 5: 6 and 6: 15 and instead refers to circumcision/uncircumcision. Furthermore, the immediate context speaks about bondage and slavery which are referred to not as the social situation of the Galatians, but denotes the religious “slavery” and “freedom” leaving no role for the “male” and “female” pair to play in the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁹ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 205-206.

argument of Paul in the Galatians and subsequently in the 1Cor 7: 19. It is this light that the omission of the pair “male and female are missing in 1Cor 7: 19⁵⁰.

Paul omitted the third element when he alluded to the formula in 1Cor 12: 13 perhaps because of the difficulties and controversies in Corinth over issues of sexual conduct and marriage. The reality that the Letter to the Galatians is not preoccupied with gender roles does not diminish the force or importance of this element of Paul’s vision for the Church as a transformed community. Rather he stressed that these diverseness were no longer the determining identity makers, no longer a ground for status or exclusion. The Baptism’s disposition, identical for both sexes, is distinctly appropriate as the sign of inclusion within a community in which the old distinction between ‘male and female’ has ceased to separate those who are in Christ⁵¹.

Through Baptism Christians enter the force field of the Spirit, partake in ecstatic and rejoicing experiences and are sent to announce the good news in the power of the Spirit, having become “a new creation,” Spirit-filled people, purified, sanctified and justified, all equal irrespective of social, cultural or sex differences. Gal 3: 28 is thus not just a Pauline “peak formulation” but also a theological self-understanding of the Christian missionary movement that had far-reaching historical impact⁵².

There is a progressive unity in Paul’s legitimate work. Chapter 7 speaks of the fundamental reciprocity between man and woman in marriage and human sexuality. In Chapter 11, he spoke of women prophesying in the Church and in Chapter 14, each is designated to reveal according to the inspiration of the *pneuma*. In addition, it is in this context that Gal 3: 28 ends the distinction of the two sexes in Christ Jesus, “there is neither male nor female.”

Silenced Women in 1Cor 14: 35-36

“If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in Church”. (1Cor 14: 35)

1Cor 14: 34-36 is unique when one considers the picture and roles of women in all of the other undisputed Pauline letters. The passage 1Cor 14: 34-36 seems to be a sudden irruption of the injunction imposing silence on the women and appears of something as a bolt from the blue as in the previous passage Paul emphasized that irrespective of ones gender, each has to contribute to the worship as a result of the gift of ones person. In the context, what Paul speaks of is an orderly spirit-inspired

⁵⁰ Ibid., 208.

⁵¹ Hays, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 273.

⁵² Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 199.

worship, a revelation that all irrespective of their sexes are entitled to. This chapter engages itself in ascertaining the truth, authenticity and implications of a singular passage attributed to Paul.

1Cor 14: 35-36 – an Analysis

Verifying Authenticity

Ephesians, Colossians and the Pastoral Epistles project a trajectory wherein Ephesians and Colossians represent one stage of reaccommodation and the Pastorals yet another. In this trajectory of the ‘early decade’ of Christianity, Paul pioneers in welcoming women into full participation in the life and work of the gospel and the worship it generates. As the Pauline tradition was carried beyond Paul’s death and as Paul’s reassurance of the imminent *Parousia* failed to realize, Paul’s disciples felt compounding pressure to reaccommodate to the gregarious habits and customs of their unbelieving neighbors. When one looks at 1Cor 14: 34-36 against this trajectory, one finds that it fits best with the view of women projected in the Pastoral Epistles⁵³.

A large number of scholars have advocated the application of the excision technique to the controversial passages (1Cor 11: 2-16, 14: 35-36). To them, the ruling contradicts not only the clear presumption in 11: 2-16 that women pray and prophesy publicly in the assembly but also the immediate context. It is not just that women are banned from asking questions. Total silence would seem to be imposed, which would rule out having “a human, a lesson, a revelation”⁵⁴ or even a prophecy. This is how he begins and ends in v. 39-40. The ruling concerning women’s silence sharply disturbs this pattern. If the ruling comprising v. 34-35 is excised from the text, the sequence of thought, far from being disturbed, is notably improved. The passage is in glaring consistency with Paul’s statements elsewhere. It is sufficient so to warrant the conclusion that it is not authentically Pauline⁵⁵.

The renowned biblical scholar Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, in his exposition of the 1 Corinthians in his book titled *1 Corinthians*, explicitly states that,

In the above exposition, no notice has been taken of v. 34-35 which prohibit women to speak in Church. The reason for this is that Paul did not write them. If these verses are removed no violence is done to his argument. In fact, it gains in clarity. Not only are they not integral to this section, but they contradict 11: 4, 13 where Paul takes it for granted that women can speak in Church and

⁵³ 1Cor 14:33b-36 is considered by some scholars as a post-Pauline interpolation.

⁵⁴ Byrne, *Paul and the Christian Woman*, 26.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

even assume a leadership role. Finally, the mention of the Law (presumably the reference is to Gen 3:16) as a decisive argument on a practical issue is totally at odds with Paul's habitual practice. The textual tradition sometimes places v. 34-35 at the very end of this chapter. Hence, they probably originated as a marginal note at a time when social conventions were permitted to limit the freedom of the Spirit.⁵⁶

The injunction to be silent during worship does not fit with what Paul apparently takes for granted in 11: 5, 'but any woman who prays or prophesies ...'. One is urged to ask what the topic is doing in this context. Some manuscripts (the Western family) transpose v. 34-35 after v. 40. Thus, the stance posed is that the whole passage or part of it, that is, v. 34-35 is post-Pauline intrusion⁵⁷.

Since the societal relation between man and woman in Jewish faith was normally that of husband and wife, Paul is probably thinking of marital submission rather than some kind of subordination of all females to all males. The instruction's aim is to rule out situations in which wives publicly contradict what their husbands say and thereby be no longer subordinate. In 11: 5 Paul indicates that women can pray or prophesy in the Church, so unless Paul is contradicting himself or unless it is a non-Pauline interpolation, he here enjoins silence in matters other than praying and prophesying. He may be referring especially to speaking in tongues or even to any sort of clamorous discussion of controversial issues that have arisen in the assembly. The advice about asking 'husbands at home' suggests that some of the talk Paul is telling them to suppress may have been questioning out aloud about what the last speaker said or meant which is more likely in case of tongue-speaking. The disgraceful aspect of the wives' action would thus refer to shame imposed on the husband by the public conduct of the wife⁵⁸. Efforts to interpret 14: 34 in line with 11: 5 may claim that the praying in question was silent prayer and that the women were just speaking among themselves, though 11: 5 does not give any indication for the scope of such interpretation⁵⁹.

Exegesis supposing Authenticity

The patriarchal slant of the Pastoral Epistles has taken itself from the surrounding Greco-Roman culture. The Pastoral Epistles, Ephesians and Colossians are thought to be the interpolation of a subsequent generation and are indeed more in line with 1 Cor

⁵⁶ Murphy-O'Connor, *1 Corinthians*, 133.

⁵⁷ Lambrecht, *1 Corinthians, The International Bible Commentary*, 1627.

⁵⁸ Orr and Walter, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation with Commentary*, 312-313.

⁵⁹ Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 970.

14: 35-36 where there are arguments for submission of women and their silencing (1Tim 2: 11-12, Titus 2: 5, 1Pet 3: 1) by reference to “the law” (1Tim 2: 13-14)⁶⁰. These facts can be cited for the lack of authenticity in the letter as two facts stand out in contrast. Firstly, his counsels about marriage and human sexuality took care to acknowledge that the same rights belong to men and women, to husbands and to wives (1Cor 7: 25). Secondly, Paul had already assumed that women were praying and prophesying in Church and he treated that activity as quite appropriate (1Cor 11: 5).

If 14: 34-36 is not a later interpolation into the Pauline corpus, then two interpretations merit attention. Firstly, the passage enjoining silence for women is in a sequence of affairs where Paul imposed silence upon a certain sub-group within the Church rather than allowing them to interfere into other people’s worship. The counsels to silence remain as a part of his proneness to offer practical suggestion aiming to improve the well-being of the community. Secondly, the interpretation of 14: 34-36 as authentic must account for 14, 36 as a rather stern rebuke and identify for what sub-group the reprimand is intended. Alternately, it could as readily be understood as addressed to some men in the congregation who claim in maxim that *they* have formulated, in line with much of their culture, “that it is shameful for a woman to speak in the Church” (14: 35b). It could well be a maxim of the men who advocated “it is good for a man not to touch a woman” (7: 1) and could be generated by a male-dominated faction that tried in several ways, in opposition to Paul to relegate women to a lesser role in the life of the Church. Read this way, 14: 36 would be Paul’s challenge of the men’s *hybris* reflected in their maxim by asking: “Was it from you that the word of God went out? Or, has it arrived at you only?”⁶¹.

Conclusion

Paul certainly has much more to say about women than any other New Testament writer, and he is given a unique place in any discussion of women’s place in the nascent Church. What he has to say about the woman is both original and complex, all the more so because others wrote some things under his name, long after his death. The general framework of his thinking about women in Christianity allows us to look both backwards, that is, to the women who were associated with the Jesus movement, and forwards, that is, to the suppression of his ideal within a church that was becoming increasingly closed to the active participation of women in the liturgy and worship.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 969-970.

⁶¹ Ibid., 971.

Concluding, Paul was neither a woman hater/misogynist nor a chauvinist. On the very contrary, he acknowledged the important roles played in the early Church both as apostles and as ministers. He recognized their leadership in the realm of prayer, teaching, evangelizing and administration⁶², and that the two most controversial passages are but a later interpolation eked out by the upholders of the patriarchal law.

Paul's elucidation and readjustment of the baptismal anthem (displayed in Gal 3: 28) in his writings to the community of Corinth clearly assert the parity and charismatic fecundity of Christians in the community, both women and men. Women as well as men have the call to marriage-free life as well as the mutual obligations within the sexual relationships of marriage. Although he introduced an element of severe tension between the Christian community and the wider society with his emphasis on the marriage-free state of Christians, in his injunctions concerning the worship assembly of the Corinthians he was concerned to reduce this tension as much as possible. Since he yearned to avoid "outsiders" to mistake the Christian assembly as the festivity of an orgiastic cult, he reasserted the "proper" hairstyle for women active in the liturgical assembly. He then upheld this habit theologically by explicating it as a symbol of their spiritual vigor in Christ. Additionally, he demanded wives to be silent during public speaking according to traditional Roman sentiment, since that behavior was regarded as being against "law and custom." Similarly, in the case of mixed marriages, he restricted the freedom of the Christian partners to separate from their unbelieving spouses by making the separation dependent on the nonbeliever. Paul's interest in doing so was not directed against the spiritual freedom and charismatic involvement in the community. Thus, Paul's impact on women's leadership in the Christian missionary movement is double-edged, as without the inherent practical tension, Paul is alternately condemned as a "chauvinist" or hailed as a "liberationist"⁶³.

The use of scriptural text to continue to render women powerless and silent in Church is incompatible with the word of God who involved Him/Herself in the daily struggle of people for freedom. God's Word is liberative and empowering, not enslaving or dehumanizing. Yet, it comes to us through the human instrumentalities of language, thought pattern and cultural conditioning of the times. It thus demands prudence on the part of human agents to excise the anthropocentric and sexist elements while applying them to human contexts. Today when women have proved their mettle in effective leadership in all secular spheres, the official Church is called to further the full and equal rights of Christian women in all aspects of the Church's mission.

⁶² See Gillman, *Women Who Knew Paul*, 83.

⁶³ See Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 235-236.

In this regard, it is imperative that the Church captures the original vision of Jesus and the liberative thrust of Paul and moves towards the realization of a community of disciples of equal.

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