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The Ordination of Women: A Biblical-Theological Introduction

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Introduction

Theology is popularly defined as “faith seeking understanding”. This popular definition is useful. It highlights a fact of key importance: “Theology” is not simply a matter of lining up a selection of bible texts, as is done in a doctrinal bible study. Rather “theology” draws on a broad selection of resources in attempting to answer foundational questions which confront Christians. Although many of these questions appear to be permanent and universal, confronting people in all times and places, other questions arise in specific cultural and historical contexts and not in others. Theology is thus a dialogue of believers—informed by their situation in history and culture—with scripture (and tradition) inherited from the past.¹

The implication of the dialogical nature of theology is two-fold. First “theology” is never in a final form. Rather it needs to be formulated and re-formulation as time and culture change. Secondly, and sometimes disconcertingly, some of the questions that confront us are simply not issues for the writers of the Bible. One such issue is the ordination of women. The issue simply did not arise for the bible writers. There is no text which says “Thou shalt not ordain women” or “Thou shalt ordain women”! In fact, when scripture is carefully scrutinized, there are only two unchallengeable, irrefutable pieces of data that are *directly* relevant to this issue.² The first is that there were no female priests in the Mosaic cultus of Israel; and, the second, that Jesus did

¹ Adventists like other Protestants are often wary of the concept of tradition. However, two things should be noted: first, Catholics also do theology, and consequently any definition of “theology” needs to be broad enough to encompass their efforts as well as Protestant ones; and, second, a remarkable amount of Adventist theology and practice is based on tradition more than anything else. Why, after all, does Sabbath School start at 9:30 on Sabbath morning and why do we have four ordinance services a year? The first question is answered by the needs of dairy farmers, long before the rise of Seventh-day Adventists, to have church start after their milking was finished; the second goes back to a compromise between Calvin and his early followers regarding the frequency of the Eucharist if it was not regarded as a sacrament. “Tradition” indeed!

² The importance of the word “directly” must be underscored. There is certainly data which is *indirectly* relevant.

not choose any women to be among his twelve disciples.³ Everything beyond this is a matter of interpretation, application and (sometimes) speculation. How, then, is it possible to go forward?

It is not valid simply to leap from the two pieces of biblical data to the negative conclusion, that the bible forbids the ordination of women! Neither of datum forbids *anything*. They tell us what was not done in the past, rather than giving a command about what may not be done in the present. Thus, they are historical rather than theological in nature. It is easy to reach absurd conclusions if theological conclusions are drawn too directly from historical data. Would it be valid to conclude that since the incarnate son of God was greeted by males (shepherds and Magi), and seeing as those who greeted him are representatives of the worshiping church community today, only men can be full members of the church? Absurd nonsense!

One way to bridge the gap is to ask *why* these historical situations arose. Certainly, this is a matter of interpretation and needs to be undertaken with caution. However, the bible does provide information which allows us to evaluate a number of possibilities: that women were physically disqualified, intellectually disqualified, spiritually or ontologically disqualified, or culturally disqualified.

³ Some scholars have suggested that there were, in fact, female priests in Israel. See, for example, I J. Peritz, "Woman in the Ancient Hebrew Cult," *JBL* 17 (1898): 111-48; F. M. Cross, Jr. "Priestly Houses of Early Israel," in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 195-215; B. J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, *BJS* 36 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1982), 83-90. Such scholars have established that women were involved in the ancient Israelite cultus in some way but their arguments fall far short of demonstrating that they were active as priests. For example, the fact that Ex 38:8 and 1 Sam 2:22 refer to women ministering "at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting" does not establish that they had a role inside the sanctuary. Similarly, the fact the Zipporah performs a circumcision (Ex 3:24-26) does not establish her priestly status unless it is assumed that only priests could perform this rite. The suggestion that Jael (Jud 5:24) may have been a priestess at a shrine connected to the terebinth of Elon-bezaananim—or at least be the wife of a priest there—could well be correct. However, this would not establish a role for female priests in Yahwism unless it were assumed that only strictly orthodox Yahwistic Hebrews were in anyway patriotic and hostile to the occupying army of Sisera. Lastly the fact that Miriam was a prophetess is insufficient grounds for assuming that she had a priestly role.

Women as Physically Disqualified

The only tasks which women could be physically disqualified from performing in the strictest sense are those which require male genitalia in order to be performed. Obviously, a woman cannot father a child, the notorious crux of Heb 11:11 notwithstanding! This sort of sexual role is far removed from the Mosaic priesthood of the Old Testament. Such thinking would have been anathema in the Mosaic cultus—especially if the re-enactment of the divine sexual activity was an integral part of the Canaanite fertility religions.⁴

The work of the priests in ancient Israel was often physically demanding, especially those aspects which demanded the slaughter and sacrifice of animals. The animals could be large and sacrifices were sometimes carried out on a large scale.⁵ There is, consequently, a plausible-sounding argument that women were simply not physically strong enough to do such work.⁶ As plausible as this might be, it flounders on the irrefutable fact that the Old Testament legal corpus not specifies “strength” as a qualification for the priesthood. Priests did not have to “retire” when age reduced their strength to an unacceptable level. The plausibility of this argument is also predicated on an error in mathematical thinking. Even if, in general, men are physically stronger than women, this simply would not mean that in every case, all men would be stronger than all women. The statement “men are stronger than women” at best, only reflects a mean of

⁴ On this point, see further, below.

⁵ For example, the dedication of Solomon’s temple involved the sacrifice of “twenty-two thousand cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats” (I Kings 8:62).

⁶ I have vivid recollections of hearing this argument put forcefully in a sermon on the more general topic of the role of women and the validity of feminism, even though it must be almost forty years since I heard the sermon.

the population, and not the reality in each individual case. The terrible unfairness of this sort of argument can be seen immediately when it is transposed into the area of race.⁷

The only physical requirement for the Israelite priesthood were lineage from Levi (Num 1:50-51) and physical wholeness. Physical defect disqualified a man from the priesthood. Leviticus 21:16-23 is explicit on this point:

The LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron: ‘For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; no man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the offerings made to the LORD by fire. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God. He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food; yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the LORD, who makes them holy.’”⁸

The fact that such a man could still eat the holy food suggests that he retains his priestly status even though he was prohibited from performing key priestly duties. However, since women were created *as women*, by God, being female would certainly not have been regarded as a physical defect, akin to blindness or injury. The Torah states explicitly that female animals *without defect* could be found for sacrifice (Lev 3:1, 6; 4:28, 32).

One last area of relevance here is the attitude of the Old Testament to blood and the fact that women menstruate. In the Mosaic law menstruation made women ceremonially unclean

⁷ Although it is possible to gather evidence that “blacks” score lower than “whites” on IQ tests, surely in the light of the Ben Carson story, no right thinking person would say, “Consequently, blacks should be barred from occupations such as brain surgery. They simply aren’t smart enough.” This is not the place to enter a discussion of either race or intelligence. However, even if it were true that blacks were less intelligent than whites (which I certainly do not accept), it would remain true that some blacks are more intelligent than some whites—most whites, even. It may even still be true that some blacks are more intelligent than *all* whites. See. M. Singham, “Race and Intelligence: What are the Issues?” *Phi Delta Kappan* 77/3 (1995): 200-209.

⁸ Unless otherwise indicated all scriptural citations are from the NIV.

(Lev 15:19-24). The defilement of the land by Judah which led to the Babylonian captivity is compared by Ezekiel to the uncleanness of a menstruating women (Ez 36:17) which shows how seriously this type of ritual uncleanness was regarded. Indeed, Ezekiel includes disregard for the prohibition on sexual intercourse, during a women's menstruation, among his list of reasons why God sent Israel into Babylonian captivity (Ez 22:1-16; note especially, Ez 22:10).

Similarly, the bleeding associated with childbirth made a woman unclean. Giving birth to a girl resulted in a longer period of uncleanness than giving birth to a boy (Lev 12:1-5). The issue is clearly that of blood causing uncleanness (Lev 15:25). Why this should be is puzzle to modern Westerners! The worldview being reflected in these sorts of stipulations is very foreign to that which dominates today, even among Bible believing Christians.⁹

In a matter, like this dogmatism, would be folly but it may well be that Gen 9:1-7 provides a crucial insight. The passage is essentially a retelling of the primordial instructions and blessing given initially given to Adam and Eve, but here, given to Noah, as the world is reborn after the devastation of the flood. Noah is told what he can and cannot eat, and once again, the concept of man being in the image of God is restated. One key addition to the original account, is that "life" is located in the "blood". The reason for the absence of this comment in the Edenic accounts is obvious: it was unnecessary, and even meaningless, in a world without violence and death. However, it is easy to see that the concept may undergird the LORD's comment to Cain, that his brother's blood called out to him from the ground (Gen 4:10). Surely, it is Abel's destroyed life that calls out, not his blood *per se*.

⁹ Interestingly, Adventists whom I have worked with in Papua New Guinea have told me that traditional cultures in Papua New Guinea put a similar value on blood. If two people fight and one of them bleeds as a result it is a very serious matter according to these traditional world views. Christians from such traditional cultures may well be quite bemused that Western Christians struggle to come to grips with these passages.

If life was seen as being in the blood, then it follows that loss of blood equated to loss of life, at least symbolically. A loss of menstrual blood represented a loss of life and was defiling in exactly the same way, that touching a dead body was defiling. Paradoxically, the very act of giving birth, simultaneously represented (in some sense) the loss of life because it entailed loss of blood. To give birth to a female baby was doubly defiling in that the birth entailed blood loss and the child born would become an adult who would become unclean on a monthly basis.¹⁰

How does the New Testament relate to this understanding of impurity? A most telling incident in the life of Jesus gives a clear answer. The synoptic gospels all recount the story of Jesus encounter with a woman who had been bleeding for “twelve years” (Matt 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:42-48) which presumably means she had been experiencing continuous menstrual flow throughout that twelve year period.¹¹ The crucial issue was ritual uncleanness. Robert Guelich notes “This woman was not only defiled, she defiled anything and anyone she touched. Her illness had left her personally, socially and spiritually cut off.”¹² Yet, Jesus does not reject her. She touches his robe, but rather than defiling it (and through it, Him), His power and purity cleansed and healed her. In that one act, Jesus swept away the whole paradigm of women’s ritual impurity, with its possible implication of religious inferiority. When he acted in an analogous way, with regard to ritual cleansings, before eating, Mark explicitly signals that the repudiation the ritual defilement paradigm is entailed: “In saying this Jesus declared all foods ‘clean’” (Mark 7:20).¹³

¹⁰ A similar suggestion is tentatively made by J. H. Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Woman in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1977), 176-77.

¹¹ Donald Hagner regards this interpretation as probably but definitively established. See, D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC 33A (Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 248.

¹² R. A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, WBC 34A (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), 296.

¹³ This in no way undermines the health principles that undergird Seventh-day Adventist practice in regard to “clean” and “unclean” animals. However, regardless of whether or not an animal is fit to be

The Old Testament stipulations regarding the impurity of menstruating women are part of the so-called “holiness code” of the Pentateuch (Lev 17-26). This code includes a considerable range of stipulations, all of which were designed to emphasize that Israel was to be a distinct people, separated from the nations in their holiness. The capstone of these regulations was circumcision. In the New Testament, Paul discusses this stipulation in some detail. His central thesis is that in the Christ, in the church, “circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing” (I Cor 7:19). In saying this, Paul, like Jesus before him, signals the complete negation of the temporary theology of separation, which the holiness code contained. This belonged to the era of spiritual immaturity, not the age of fulfillment (see Gal 3:26-4:6). In the light of this, it is surely illegitimate for us to attempt to extract a prohibitory principle regarding the ordination of women from the holiness code.¹⁴

Women as Intellectually Disqualified

If women are not physically disqualified in scripture, from either the priesthood or apostleship, could it be that they are intellectually disqualified? The likelihood of this being the case, rests on the weakest of all supports: silence. Not one text in either the Old Testament or the New indicates an inherent intellectual inferiority of women (although, such is not denied either). Even Paul, when declaring that women should not teach (1 Tim 2:11-15) does not anchor his statement in women’s inherent intellectual inferiority.¹⁵ A number of subtle, but none-the-less real, hints point away from female intellectual inferiority in the biblical picture.

eaten or not, it cannot be said that eating it today is *ritually* defiling. See the discussion by J. W. Brunt, “Unclean or Unhealthy? An Adventist Perspective,” *Spectrum* 11/3 (1981): 17-23.

¹⁴ Paul who, as we have seen, dismissed circumcision (I Cor 7:19) is equally willing to deny gender divisions: “There is neither . . . male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

¹⁵ This text is discussed in further detail, below.

It is undoubtedly a linguistic accident that both the Hebrew and Greek words for wisdom (חָכְמָה; hohkma, and σοφία sophia, respectively) are feminine nouns. No judgements regarding male and female should be made on this basis. However, there is other data which is not so easily dismissed. First, is the creation narrative, which sees Eve made from the same constituents as man. She is formed from a rib, taken from Adam, as he slept (Gen 2:22). The emphasis in the story, is on the equality of the two human beings.¹⁶ Eve was to be a “suitable helper” for Adam (Gen 2:18). There is no suggestion that this equality did not extend to the intellectual sphere.¹⁷ The Hebrew word עֵזֶר (helper) certainly does not necessarily connote inferiority of any kind. Words from this root can be applied to God in the Old Testament (Ps 10:14; 30:10; 72:11). The qualifying word (כְּנִידָה ; suitable) literally means “as in front of him” and thus indicates complementarity; “a corresponding to him, his counterpart.”¹⁸ Claus Westermann sums up the point nicely: “The man is created by God in such a way that he needs the help of a partner; hence mutual help is an essential part of human existence”¹⁹ The emphasis is rightly placed, not on help with labour or with reproduction, (although both may well be included) but on companionship. Surely, this more likely indicates intellectual similarity rather than difference.

¹⁶ See Ellen G. White’s comments in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press 1958), 46.

¹⁷ There are serious dangers in suggesting that Eve was somehow intellectually inferior to Adam. In terms of the great controversy such inferiority on the part of Eve would leave God open to the accusation that his design in the creation of Eve was responsible for the establishment of sin on earth, on the basis that, if Eve had been as wise as Adam she would have seen through the serpent’s lies.

¹⁸ H. Gunkel, *Genesis*, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies, trans. M. E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 11. See also, J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1910), 67; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 17; G. von Rad, *Genesis*, Old Testament Library, rev. ed., trans. J. H. Marks (Philadelphia, PN: Westminster, 1972), 82; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1987), 68.

¹⁹ C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, A Continental Commentary, trans. J. J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 227.

Perhaps the strongest evidence that the bible does not view women as inherently intellectually inferior to men is provided by the book of Proverbs. This book reaches its climax in a presentation of the “wife of noble character” (Prov 31:10-31). The last verses of Proverbs are fully occupied with this presentation. Such a wife is more valuable than rubies (Prov 31:10). Significantly, her husband has full confidence in her (v. 11), indicating that he “relies on her.”²⁰ Nor is this woman, a stay-at-home wife and mother. Rather she is actively involved in business interests – textiles (v. 12), property (v. 16), agriculture (v. 16) and trade (v 18). She contributes significantly to the household economy (v. 11b). As a result of her activities, her husband’s status is elevated (v. 23).²¹

The “wife of noble character” is not merely praised for her business acumen. Rather we are told that she “speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on tongue” (v. 26). “Whatever she has to say ranks as wisdom and reliable advice.”²² She is a woman who “fears the Lord” (v.30), which is the essence of wisdom in Proverbs (1:7; 9:10; 15:33)—its “first principle.”²³ Her worth is not based on such ephemerals, as “charm” and “beauty,” but on true wisdom (v. 30). There is not the faintest hint here that woman is intrinsically intellectually inferior to man—quite the contrary. Striking, the “good wife” is described in language that Proverbs elsewhere uses for “wisdom”. Both are to be “found” (31:10; 3:15). If the good wife is more precious than rubies (31:10), wisdom is more precious than jewels (3:15).

²⁰ W. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM, 1970), 666.

²¹ The text does not explicitly state that his elevated status was the result of his wife’s activities but the fact that the comment is set in the middle of a poem honouring her means that any other conclusion is scarcely possible.

²² McKane, *Proverbs*, 670. It is uncertain who exactly received these instructions with the women’s children, servants and friends all being suggested by various scholars.

²³ D. Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes: An Introduction to Wisdom Literature* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985), 17 as cited in A. D. Swafford “The Valiant Wife of Proverbs XXXI 10:31 as Embodiment of Royal Wisdom,” MA thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2009, 9.

The location of this extended portrayal of a good wife is also significant: it is the last twenty-two verses of Proverbs. Throughout the book, Wisdom has been presented as a woman (Prov 8:1-21). As such, she is explicitly contrasted with Dame Folly (Prov 9:13-18; 6:20-29), an adulteress (Prov 7:1-27; 5:1-23), who is unfaithful to her husband (Prov 7:19). By placing the picture of “wife of noble character” as the final word of the book, the compiler of Proverbs presents this woman as the very embodiment of wisdom itself.²⁴ (This, of course, does not preclude the possibility that the author of this section of Proverbs had an actual woman in mind as he crafted his description).²⁵

A comparison with Psalm 112—widely acknowledged to be a “wisdom Psalm”, shows how easy it would have been for the author of Proverbs, to craft his ideal representative of wisdom as a male figure. Al Wolters notes the numerous points to contact:

Not only are both perfect alphabetic acrostics, but there is also considerable thematic correspondence. Prov. xxxi describes ‘the woman who fears the Lord’ (vs. 30) by listing her God-fearing works. Ps. cxii describes ‘the man who fears the Lord’ (vs. 1) by listing his God-fearing works. In the one case there is a concluding antithesis between the fear of the Lord and deceptive beauty (Prov. xxxi 30); in the other there is a concluding antithesis between the righteous and the wicked (Ps. cxii 10). The woman and the man are both described in terms of wisdom (Prov. xxxi 26; Ps. cxii 5), wealth (Prov. xxxi 16, 18, 29; Ps. cxii 3, children to be proud of (Prov. xxxi 28; Ps. cxii 4, 5, 9) and a fearless attitude to the future (Prov. xxxi 25; Ps. cxii 7,8).²⁶

Far from indicating any intellectual inferiority of women in comparison to men, the book of Proverbs indicates that the status of men and women in this regard is one of equality.

²⁴ Swafford, “Valiant Wife,” 78.

²⁵ B. K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005, 518.

²⁶ A. Wolters, “Proverbs XXI 10-31 as heroic Hymn: A Form-Critical Analysis,” *VT* 38 (1988): 448.

Women as Spiritually Disqualified

There are numerous stories in the Bible of women who were spiritually bankrupt and functioning as enemies of God and God's people—Jezebel and Athaliah in the Old Testament; Herodias in the New. However, there is not a single hint that women are inherently spiritually inferior to men. In fact, the opposite impression is given on numerous occasions. In many stories, the women involved appear to be more spiritual sensitive and open to the presence and leading of God.

The account of the deliverance of Israel from the oppressive presence of Jabin and his army under the generalship of Sisera (Judges 4) is instructive in this regard. Deborah, the prophetess, was the "leader" (Judges 4:4, N. I. V.; Heb: מְדִבֶּרֶת) of Israel at the time. Barak appears to be her Field Marshall. But the unfolding character development in the narrative runs contrary to stereotypical expectations: Where Deborah is confident and unwavering in her belief that God will give them victory (Judges 4:6-7, 14), Barak is timid and frightened. He will only go out to battle if Deborah accompanies him (Judges 4:8)—an attitude which earns him a mocking rebuke from Deborah (Judges 4:9). In the end, in keeping with this rebuke, Sisera is killed by another woman, Jael. Barak once again is shown as passive and ineffectual, arriving on the scene only after a woman has already accomplished his goal (Judges 4:22). The story, thus highlights, the two women as sensitive to hear the calling of God and faithful in their obedience to it. Barak, on the other hand, is shown as a reluctant and somewhat ineffective follower of God.

The story of Manoah and his wife (Judges 13) has a similar feel. When the angel of Lord initially appears it is to Manoah's wife, rather than to Manoah himself (Judges 13: 3). The angelic message is that she is going to have a son, despite the fact that she has been sterile and

childless (Judges 13:3-5). Manoah's wife appears to manifest no doubt about this startling revelation but relates it to her husband in great detail (Judges 13:6-7). The situation is somewhat different with Manoah. He prays that God will send his messenger again and instruct them as to how to rear the child—despite that fact that his wife has already received such instructions (Judges 13: 8 cf., 13:4, 6). When the messenger does return, he appears, not to Manoah but to his wife (Judges 13:9). Rather than repeat his instructions to Manoah, the messenger is content to tell him “Your wife must do all that I have told her” (Judges 13:13).

One text in the New Testament—1 Tim 2:14—may suggest the inherent spiritual inferiority of women.²⁷ However, the picture in the New Testament generally is very similar to that in the Old Testament. There is not a single account of any woman rejecting Jesus in the Gospels. This is not the case with regard to men. The rich young ruler is but one case in point (Lk 18:23). There are others. In a number of ways, women occupy a privileged position in the New Testament. Women are the first to discover that Jesus had been raised to life, and are consequently, the first proclaimers of that good news (Mat 28:5-10). In the book of Acts, the first Christian who dies and is accounted worthy of being resurrected is Dorcas, a woman of Joppa (Acts 9:36-42). The author of Acts does not make clear whether this was because her contribution to the church was so valuable, or because her character was so noble. But it is hardly reasonable to posit that she was spiritual inferior to those men of note who were not raised—Stephen (Acts 7:59-8:2) and James (Acts 12:2) among them.

The general picture of the spiritual equality of women and men in the New Testament is even more noteworthy in view of the fact that views deprecating the spiritual nature of women

²⁷ This text will be examined in some detail in the next section of this paper.

were certainly known within the Judaism of the New Testament era (see, for example, Sir 25:24 and Philo, *QG* 1, 33, 43).²⁸

Women as Ontologically Disqualified

To suggest that women might have been ontologically disqualified from the Old Testament priesthood or for membership of the Twelve in the New Testament, simply because God decreed it to be so, because he had somehow made women inherently unfitted for such roles. Such views were known in the ancient world. Aristotle, for example, is quite explicit on this point: “the male is by nature superior and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind.”²⁹ Nothing in the Old Testament suggests such a thought, but two New Testament texts (1 Corinthians 11:2-10 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15) may seem to do so. A third text—1 Corinthians 14:34-35—is close to these two texts in content, but nevertheless lacks their ontological argument.

The relationship between these three texts is obvious when they are viewed side-by-side (see chart below).

| The Ontological Inferiority of Women: Three Key New Testament Texts | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Corinthians 11:2-10 | 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 | 1 Timothy 2:11-15 |
| I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you. Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who | For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the | A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed |

²⁸ K. Zamfir and J. Verheyden, “Text-Critical and Intertextual Remarks on 1 Tim 2:8-10,” *NovTest* 50 (2008): 402..

²⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*. Trans. B. Jowett, 1.5.12. Available on-line: <http://classics.mit.edu/artistotle/politics5.five.html> (accessed November 25, 2012).

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.</p> | <p>Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.</p> | <p>first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Key points of commonality and difference stand out clearly:

1. In both 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2, but not in 1 Corinthians 14, the argument hinges on the priority of Adam’s creation over Eve’s, with the implication “that because of this priority the man is superior”.³⁰
2. In 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 women are to be silent and in “submission”, but women’s silence is not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11.
3. In 1 Corinthians 11 the issue is “the sign of authority”; in 1 Timothy 2 it “having authority over a man”; but in 1 Corinthians 14 “authority is not explicitly mentioned.
4. In 1 Timothy 2, the issue is women teaching; in 1 Corinthians 14 it is women “inquir[ing] about something”; but in 1 Corinthians 11 neither issue is mentioned.
5. In 1 Timothy women are to “learn” and this is also implied in 1 Corinthians 14 but is not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11.

³⁰ R. Falconer, “1 Timothy 2:14,15. Interpretative Notes,” *JBL* 60 (1941): 375.

6. Among of the three texts, 1 Timothy 2 suggests women spiritual inferiority to man (although this *may* also be implied in 1 Corinthians 14, if the phrase “as the Law says” refers to the fall narrative of Genesis 3 (specifically Gen 3:16).³¹
7. Similarly 1 Timothy 2 alone, declares that “women will be saved through childbearing”

Between 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians, as Korinna Zamfir and Joseph Verheyden correctly point out, there is thus repetition of “key words and themes” but “in a noteworthy manner, implying omissions and expansions as well as the re-interpretation of the recurring themes”.³²

The chronologically latest text—1 Timothy 2—is the most strident and our analysis must start there. However, interpretation of this text is certainly not as straightforward as is sometimes assumed. For a start, neither of the rationales offered seems immediately relevant to the issue at hand.³³ Why should the fact that Eve was created after Adam mean that women should not teach men? Again, why should the fact that Eve was deceived by the serpent, unlike Adam, who was led astray by his wife, mean that women should not teach men? What does “have authority over” (αὐθεντεῖν) actually mean? In what sense will women be “saved through childbearing”, but only if they continue in the fundamental Christian virtues? All of these questions suggest that Paul is responding to a specific constellation of ideas, being faced in

³¹ This is the position of A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *The First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*. ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1911), 325; and C. K. Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC 2nd ed. (London: Black, 1971), 330. F. F. Bruce, on the other hand, thinks the phrase refers to the creation account (specifically Gen 1:26). See, F. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, NCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 136. Gordon D. Fee is even more forthright in qualifying any certain referent for the text: “More difficult yet is the fact that the Law does *not* say any such thing.” See G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 707.

³² Zamfir and Verheyden, “1 Tim 2:8-10,” 397-98.

³³ G. P. Hugenberger, “Women in Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis? A Survey of Approaches,” *JETS* 35 (1992): 345-46

Timothy's church, and that establishing the nature of the problem, being solved, is the key to understanding the solution.

This suggestion is strongly confirmed by a striking element of discord between 1 Tim 2:12 and 1 Cor 11:5. In 1 Timothy, Paul declares "I do not permit a woman to teach . . . ; she must be silent." However, in 1 Cor 11:5, it is clear that women can both "pray" and "prophecy" in worship services, as long as they are properly attired. (The fact that 1 Cor 14 appears to countermand this permission and takes a position closer to 1 Timothy is noted by *all* commentators on 1 Corinthians, many of whom suggest that at least one of the Corinthian passages is a later secondary interpolation).³⁴ The clear implication of Paul's permitting women to pray and prophecy in 1 Cor 11:5 is that the prohibition on them speaking at all in church (1 Tim 2:12) *cannot* be a universal precept. Rather the comment to Timothy, must be understood to

³⁴ Among those who note the tension between the two passages in 1 Corinthians and attempt to resolve them on the premise that both are Pauline are F. W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthian*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 341-43; E. Hie, *Regulations Concerning Tongues and Prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14.26-40*, LNTS 406 (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 139-50; L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, TNCT (London: Tyndale, 1958), 201-02; Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 324-26; B. Witherington, III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 287-88; J. Murphy-O'Connor, "The Non-Pauline Character of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16?" *JBL* 95 (1976): 615-21; *Idem*, "Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *CBQ* 42 (1980): 482-500. Among those concluding that 1 Cor 14:34-35 is a non-Pauline interpolation are, Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 330-33; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PN: Fortress, 1975), 246; Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, 135-36; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 705-08; N. Watson, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1992), 153-54. R. W. Allison regards 1 Cor 14:34-35 as a genuinely Pauline—although misplaced—fragment. See R. W. Allison, "Let Women be Silent in the Churches (1 Cor. 14.33b-36): What did Paul Really Say, and What did it Mean?" *JSNT* 32 (1988), 27-60. Among those who consider 1 Cor 11:2-16 to be secondary are W. O. Walker, Jr, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women," *JBL* 94 (1975): 94-100; *Idem*, "The Vocabulary of 1 Corinthians 11:3-16: Pauline or Non-Pauline?" *JSNT* 25 (1989): 75-88. Garry Trompf argues that both Corinthian passages are secondary. See, G. W. Trompf, "On Attitudes toward Women in Paul and Paulinist Literature: 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and its Context," *CBQ* 42 (1980): 196-215.

mean, “In this particular case, I do not permit a woman to teach . . .” or “I do not permit these particular women to teach . . .”³⁵

Fortunately, 1 Timothy (and the Pastoral Epistles generally) provides considerable information about the specific context to which it was written. Timothy is in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3), a church that is being plagued by false teachers and false teachings (1 Tim 1:3). The false teachings focused on “myths” (1 Tim 1:4; 4:7; c.f., 2 Tim 4:4; Titus 1:14) and genealogies (1 Tim 1:4; c.f., Titus 3:9), a misapplication of the Law (1 Tim 1:4; c.f., Titus 1:7, 14; 3:9) and an emphasis on “knowledge” (1 Tim 6:20) which led to speculation and controversy (1 Tim 1:6; 6:4, 20; c.f., 2 Tim 2:14-16, 23; Titus 1:10; 3:9-10). In some sense, the resurrection was thought to have already occurred (2 Tim 2:17-18; c.f., 1 Tim 1:19-20). Asceticism was advocated, marriage and meat eating were forbidden (1 Tim 4:1-5), but immorality (1 Tim 1:19-20; c.f. Titus 1:10-13) and a desire for material gain (1 Tim 6:5; c.f., 2 Tim 3:2-4; Titus 1:11) were practiced. Thus Paul associates the errorists and their followers with the worst of sinners, hypocrites whose consciences have been seared (1 Tim 4:1-2; c.f., 2 Tim 2:3-5).³⁶

There are three basic understandings of the identity of these false teachers in contemporary scholarship:

1. Hellenistic Judaism,³⁷
2. Proto-Montanism;³⁸ and
3. (Proto-)Gnosticism.³⁹

³⁵ M. D. Roberts, “Woman Shall be Saved: A Closer Look at 1 Timothy 2:15,” *Reformed Journal* 33.4 (April 1983), 20.

³⁶ D. A. Mappes, “The Heresy Paul Opposed in 1 Timothy,” *BibSac* 156 (1999): 455-56.

³⁷ I. H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh Clark, 1999), 46-51.

³⁸ J. M. Ford, “A Note on Proto-Montanism in the Pastoral Epistles,” *NTS* 17 (1970/71): 338-46.

The great majority of scholarship sees a Gnostic or proto-gnostic background for these false teachings.⁴⁰ All the heretical elements, referred to in the Pastorals, are easily explicable in terms of Gnosticism. Evidence from the first century—not least the book of Colossians—shows the proto-gnostic ideas circulated in the region of Ephesus.⁴¹ Gnosticism was endlessly entangled with “myths” and “genealogies”. In Gnosticism, the universe was conceptualized as a complex interweaving of spiritual emanations—the eons—which were related to one another. The heavenly homeland was not only a place of pure spirit, but also a place of pure undifferentiated unity. With progressive emanations—and emanations from emanation—the spirit became both more and more fragmented and progressively more and more entangled with matter. The relationships between the various layers of emanations became correspondingly more and more complicated and these mythic genealogical relationships were explored in greater and greater detail. Obviously “knowledge” (gnw`si~) was a crucial element of Gnosticism and that ‘knowledge was highly speculative.

³⁹ The difference between “proto-Gnosticism” and “Gnosticism” essentially hinges on whether the Pastorals are regarded as genuine first century letters of Paul or second century productions of a later Paulinist. There are endless terminological difficulties in this area. “Gnosticism” is best reserved for the fully formed Gnostic systems of the second century and later. The corresponding elements in the first century are referred to variously as “pre-gnostic,” “proto-gnostic,” “Gnosticizing,” “‘gnostic’ elements” or such like. The challenge for scholarship is the extent to which such elements in the first century attain their “gnostic” character by virtue of their incorporation in later fully formed gnostic systems. It may be that some of these first century “gnostic” elements. For a thorough discussion of these issues see G. Quispel, “Gnosticism and the New Testament,” in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, ed. J. P. Hyatt (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1965), 252-71; R. McL Wilson, “Response to G. Quispel’s ‘Gnosticism and the New Testament’,” in *Bible in Modern Scholarship*, 272-78; H. Jonas, “Response to G. Quispel’s ‘Gnosticism and the New Testament’,” in *Bible in Modern Scholarship*, 279-93.

⁴⁰ Among those who see a gnostic background for the heresy referred to in the Pastoral Epistles are K. L. Walters, Sr., “Revisiting Virtues as Children: 1 Timothy 2:15 as Centerpiece for an Egalitarian Soteriology,” *LTQ* 42/1 (2007): 37-49; Roberts, “Women Shall be Saved,” 18-22; B. Barron “Putting Women in Their Place: 1 Timothy 2 and Evangelical Views on Women in Church Leadership,” *JETS* 33 (1990): 451-59; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, BNTC (London: Black, 1963), 60; David Kimberly regards, although not prepared to be definitive on the matter, regards a gnostic background as a “distinct possibility.” See D. R. Kimberly, “1 Tim 2:15: A Possible Understanding of a Difficult Text,” *JETS* 35 (1992): 484.

⁴¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 17-26;

The ontological dualism at the heart of Gnosticism emphasized the purity of spirit and the irredeemable corruption of matter. On a cosmological level, the inter-relation of the eons was one of progressive entanglement of spirit in matter, as each emanation was more and more alienated from the heavenly homeland of pure spirit. Human souls were seen as fragments of the divine so lost in the world of matter that they did not realize that their homeland was the realm of pure spirit. Such a view, inevitably led to an ethic, which was either libertine—“the body is irredeemable; let it do what it wants so long as the spirit is pure”—or ascetic—“the body is evil and must be punished by being deprived of that which brings it pleasure”. If the ascetic ethic dominated, sex was frowned upon and strict abstemious diets were mandated. Sex was regarded as a particularly heinous sin. It was not only physically pleasurable, but it resulted in the further scattering and fragmenting of the divine spark in the world or matter, as new children were conceived and born. In such a system, “resurrection of the body”, was not even remotely desired. “Resurrection” was understood as a strictly spiritual event.⁴² This spiritual resurrection corresponds to the moment of enlightenment, the transferences from the death of ignorance to the life of knowledge.⁴³

The Old Testament was used in Gnosticism but it was turned upside down. Its heroes were regarded as villains and its villains as heroes.⁴⁴ The God of the Old Testament was the demonic creator of inherently evil matter. Eve was particularly revered in Gnosticism. Not only

⁴² K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1987), 189-194. Rudolph (*Gnosis*, 190) quotes Epiphanius (“Panarion” 40.2.5) who summarizes gnostic theology at this point: “There is no resurrection of the flesh, but only of the soul.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁴⁴ Birger Pearson suggests that the inversion of the Old Testament is so thorough that “The Gnostics, at least at the earliest states of the history of the Gnostic Movement, were people who can aptly be designated as ‘no longer Jews’.” See B. A. Pearson, “Jewish Elements in Gnostics and the Development of Gnostic Self-Definition,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition. 1: The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, ed. E. P. Sanders (London: SCM, 1980), 155, emphasis added. Pearson is quoting from Irenaeus, “Against Heresies”, 1.24.6.

did she rebel against the “demonic” creator of matter, but she sought “knowledge,” taking and eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. It was through Eve that Adam was enlightened! She gave the fruit to him (Gen 3:6).

When viewed against such a backdrop as this, 1 Tim 2:11-15 becomes much less difficult to understand. Paul is not decreeing that women can never teach because they are inherently spiritually inferior to men. Rather he is countering a specific argument which elevated women *above* men because of the act of Eve taking from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Paul counters that this was not a virtue but a deception—and by implication those women wanting to teach on this basis are also deceived. These women should not teach gnosticing error but need to learn to the errors inherent in this theology. (Significantly, Paul encourages women to “learn” in contradistinction to rabbinic Judaism which forbade women to study the Torah. In their capacity to “learn”, Paul seems to suggest that women are inferior in no way to men.)⁴⁵ Far from child bearing being a particularly heinous sin, which “spiritual” women would avoid, Paul insists that it is no inhibitor of salvation. However, he is no more insisting that no Christian woman can teach or be in a position of authority in the church, than he is insisting that all Christian women *must* have children.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ For further discussion of the attitudes towards women in Judaism for further, below.

⁴⁶ Robert Putnam and David Campbell present a case study of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Houston, Texas, which does not even allow female church members to vote in the congregational assemblies which govern the parish, because that would give them authority over male members. See R. D. Putnam and D. E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 191. This position, at least has the virtue of consistency. It highlights the vast inconsistency of insisting that women cannot be ordained (a topic not directly addressed in 1 Timothy), while allowing them to both teach and hold other positions of authority in the church. Such a position, although common in the modern church is inconsistent to the point of incoherence.

The similarities of 1 Cor 11:2-16 and 1 Tim 2:8-15 are frequently noted. Indeed, the earlier text has been referred to as the “pre-text of 1 Tim 2:8-15.”⁴⁷ It is thus necessary to examine this text also. (A helpful expanded paraphrase of this complex passage, by James Hurley, is found in an appendix to this article). 1 Corinthians 11 also stresses the priority of man’s creation over woman’s. Once again man’s ontological superiority seems to be implied: he is created in the image of God whereas, the woman is only the glory of man! This distinction cannot be derived from Gen 1:26-28, where both man and woman are said to be created in the image of God. It is true, the creation of woman in Gen 2 is secondary to that of the man, but the stress in this creation narrative (as noted above) is on the complementary nature of the relationship, rather than the idea that woman was created “for man”. The meaning of the passage is further obscured by the introduction of “the angels”. For most modern readers, the relation of any of these things to head coverings is far from clear. So it should be noted, that just like 1 Tim 2:11-15, this passage is not straightforward or simple but abounds in obscurities and difficulties. Mark Goodacre correctly notes, that it “remains one of the most perplexing in the interpretation of Paul, and persuasive attempts to understand what Paul is talking about are at a premium.”⁴⁸

Once again, the context of the entire epistle is crucial to the understanding of this difficult passage. The church is rent by serious disunity (1 Cor 1-4); immorality (1 Cor 5-6); legal disputes between members (1 Cor 6); disputes about marriage (1 Cor 7), eating of meat offered to idols (1 Cor 8-10) and spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12-14). The church was characterized by an over-realized eschatology (1 Cor 15); an out-of-control enthusiasm, especially in worship (1 Cor 14)

⁴⁷Zamfir And Verheyden, “1 Tim 2:8-10,” 389.

⁴⁸M. Goodacre, “Does περιβόλαιον mean ‘Testicle’ in 1 Corinthians:15?” *JBL* 130 (2011): 391.

and a libertine ethic (1 Cor 5-10). Given the notoriety of Corinth in antiquity for sexual licentiousness, it is scarcely surprising that issues of sexual morality were rife in the church.⁴⁹

What exactly Paul meant by the head being “covered” or “uncovered” has been much discussed and absolutely certainty still alludes scholarship. It may refer to a veil of some sort, although a reference to the hair itself seems more likely in light of the parallel between being uncovered and having a shaved head (1 Cor 11:6).⁵⁰ What is undisputed is that Paul makes an explicit appeal to the custom of the day when he ask, “Does not the very *nature* (φύσις) of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?” (1 Cor 11:14-15). It makes no sense here to suggest that trimmed hair on a man is “natural” but long hair is “unnatural.” That would be analogous to suggesting that the phrase *au naturel* implied fully clothed rather than naked! Rather Paul is referring by way of analogy to “the prevailing custom (which is held to be in harmony with nature).”⁵¹ The fact that

⁴⁹ It is true that many of the explicit comments about the sexual licentiousness characteristic of Corinth refer to the old Greek city of Corinth, destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. and not the new Roman city established a hundred years later which was visited by Paul. It may well be that the old city’s reputation was exaggerated in any case. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor observes that “in reality, [old] Corinth was neither better nor worse than its contemporaries.” See J. Murphy-O’Connor “Corinth,” in *ABD*, 6 vol., ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1: 1136. Barrett (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 3) similarly observes that “In Paul’s day, Corinth was probably little better and little worse than any other great sea port and commercial center of the age.” However, that comment in itself suggests an environment well familiar with sexual immorality!

⁵⁰ For the “hair” interpretation see, Murphy-O’Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 482-500, *Idem*, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Once Again,” *CBQ* 50 (1980): 265-74; . J. B. Hurley, “Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 and 1 Cor. 14:33b-36,” *WTJ* 35 (1973): 190-220; Yeo, K-K. “Differentiation and Mutuality of Male-Female Relations in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *BibRes* 43 (1998): 7-21; A. Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church: The Contradictions of Coiffure in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *JSNT* 20 (1984): 69-86. For the more traditional “veil” interpretation see J. W. Roberts, “The Veils in 1 Cor. 11:2-16,” *RestQ* 3 / 4 (1959): 183-98; D. W. J. Gill, “The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *TynBul* 41 (1990): 245-60; B. K. Waltke, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation,” *BibSac* 135 (1978): 46-75; P. T. Massey, “Long Hair as a Glory *and* as a Covering; Removing an Abiguity from 1 Cor 11:15,” *NovTest* 53 (2011): 52-72.

⁵¹ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 191. See, similarly, Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 527; L. T. Stuckenbruck, “Why Should Women Cover their Heads because of the Angels? (1 Corinthians 11:10),” *SCJ* 4 (2001): 228-34.

Paul evaluates behavior here in terms of the social construct, “shame” confirms a social understanding of “nature” in this passage.

In the ancient world, a woman’s hair was considered sensuous, if not outright erotic. Married women’s hair was worn long but tied up in bun signifying her sexual unavailability. Chaste women’s hair was not worn loose in public, except in carefully defined delimited circumstances, especially ecstatic prophecy or occasions of great emotional outpouring (extreme grief or extreme gratitude).⁵² This fact seems particularly important in the context of 1 Corinthians which explicitly deals with concerns about both sexual morality and ecstatic worship (including “prophecy”).

But what exactly is Paul’s advice on the matter? Most scholars have thought that it has to do with whether or not women’s hair was covered or veiled. However, much of the comparative material used to confirm the prevalence of the veiling of women in the Greco-Roman world of the first century, is either far too early or far too late to be compelling.⁵³ An alternative is suggested by 1 Cor 11:15b, ὅτι ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ περιβολαίου δέδοται [αὐτῇ] which may legitimately be translated “because long hair is given to her instead of a veil.”⁵⁴ The passage makes surprising good sense on the assumption that Paul is dealing with hair rather than veils.

⁵² C. H. Cosgrove, “A woman’s Unbound Hair in the Greco-Roman World, with Special Reference to the Story of the ‘Sinful Woman’ in Luke 7:3-50,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 678-86.

⁵³ J. B. Hurley, “Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of I Cor. 11:2-16 and I Cor. 14:33b-36,” *WTJ* 35 (1973): 194-96. Preston Massey, for example, draws on several passages from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to illustrate the practice of women being veiled in public but these sources pre-date Paul by hundreds of years. See, “P. T. Massey, “Long Hair as a Glory *and* as a Covering: Removing an Ambiguity from 1 Cor 11:15,” *NovTest* 53 (2011): 55-64.

⁵⁴ Massey, (“Long Hair,” 52-55) rejects the interpretation given here but recognizes, none-the-less how difficult verse 15 is for those who interpret the passage in terms of veils. The key issue in in verse 15 is the meaning of the word *ajnti*; which *may* mean “instead of” but could equally be translated “as”.

Paul's topic in this whole passage is "Propriety in Worship."⁵⁵ He opens with a key thought: "the head of every man is Christ" (v. 3a). This is supported with an extended analogy drawn from the relationship between men and women, or more correctly, husbands and wives, which is also described in terms of headship (3b). For a woman to have her hair tied up, indicates that she has come under the authority of her husband. For a Christian man to pray with his hair tied up would be tantamount to proclaiming that he has also put himself under the authority of another man, which dishonours his head—Christ (4). The reverse situation is true for a Christian woman. For her to pray with her hair loosened would indicate (in that social context) her sexual availability to other men, which would shame her head, her husband (5). This puts her virtually on a par with a woman whose head has been shaved—the prescribed penalty for adultery (5). Not only is her husband shamed by such behavior, she is also (6).

Paul next endeavors to anchor his analogy in ontology, making a three-point argument:

1. Man is the "image and glory of God", but woman is only the "glory of man"
2. Man did not come from woman, but woman came from man
3. Man was not made for woman but woman was made for man

His conclusion: "for this reason [!], and because of the angels" woman should not have "the sign of authority on her head".⁵⁶ There is a certain obscurity here: according to Gen 1:27-28, both man and woman were made in the image of God. However, the general point is clear. Paul

⁵⁵ Correctly indicated in this section heading in the N.I.V. See also J. W. Robert, "The Veils in 1 Cor 11:2-16," *RefJ* 3 / 4 (1959): 184. Harold Holmyard's attempt to disassociate 1 Cor 11:2-16 from the setting of public worship is unconvincing. See H. R. Holmyard, III, "Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-15 Refer to Women Praying and Prophe0073ying in Church?" *BibSac* 154 (1997): 461-72.

⁵⁶ The reference to angels has been much discussed and absolute certainty regarding Paul's means is impossible to come by. However, he is probably alluding to the fact that eschatology is not yet fully realized. The freedoms which will be fully possessed by Christians in the heavenly future when they will even judge the angels (1 Cor 6:3) are not their prerogative while the present age remains. See Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils", 209-11.

argues that the custom of the day (cf., “nature”, v. 14) which saw wives come under the authority of their husbands could be justified by the order of the creation of man and woman in Genesis 2. It is important to note that gender relationships was not his primary topic. Rather he is concerned with propriety in worship. The Christian worship service is not the place, Paul suggests, for flouting the conventions of the day regarding gender, which would bring the church into disrepute. To do so would be an abuse of Christian freedom, a topic Paul addresses in the immediately previous section of his letter (10:23-11:1).

Several further things need to be noted: Paul does not here use an ontological proof to argue that women should be silent in church. Nor does Paul use his ontological argument to show the spiritual inferiority of women—or any other kind of inferiority either. Rather his point is very narrowly limited: women should not be using their Christian freedom to flout the social conventions of the day in Christian worship services. However, Paul subtly undermines the patriarchal conventions by stressing the complementary nature of the sexes. It is true that woman came from man originally (v. 8) but it is equally true that man comes from woman at birth (v. 12). Male and female are not independent of one another but rather are dependent on each other (v. 11).

The situation in regard to 1 Cor 14:33-35 is simpler. Again the issue is propriety in worship. Paul makes this very clear with his opening gambit: God is a God of order (v. 33) and that fact should be reflected in Christian public worship services. Women are to remain “silent” (v. 34). However, Paul makes it absolutely clear that he is talking about a specific kind of speech when he adds “If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home” (v. 35). He is clearly not referring to women preaching, praying, or teaching.

Rather he is referring to the asking of disruptive and disorderly questions. No ontological argument is introduced to support this position.

What then, can be concluded about the suggesting that women are ontologically disqualified from either the priesthood or the apostolate? There is no evidence to support this at all in the Old Testament, and the only texts that might appear to support it in the New Testament when read within their textual and cultural context, do not lend any support to it either.

Women as Culturally Disqualified

The fourth possible reason for women's absence from the priesthood and the apostolate is the most difficult to evaluate. In the same way that a fish in the ocean presumably does not know that it is "wet," cultures generally, do not engage in self-analysis. There is nowhere in either the Old Testament or the New Testament when anything is *said* to be forbidden or permitted on cultural grounds. Such an evaluation is only possible when a culture is viewed from the outside. This means that any evaluation of the cultural disqualifications from the priesthood or the apostolate involve arguments from silence (in the text) and the importation of data from the surrounding cultural environments.

It is, however, generally agreed that the absence of female priests in Israel's cult was highly unusually in an ancient Near-Eastern world—indeed, it was "probably a unique case."⁵⁷ John Otwell correctly observes that "Since other peoples in the ancient Near East worshipped in cults which used priestesses their absence in the Yahwism of ancient Israel must have been

⁵⁷ J. B. Doukhan, "Women Priests in Israel: A Case for their Absence," in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. N. Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 31.

deliberate.”⁵⁸ What was the reason for this deliberate exclusion of women priests? Otwell wisely cautions that all attempts to answer this question must be “conjectural.”⁵⁹ In light of this fact, it would be wise to be cautious and conservative with the data, rather than to give free reign to speculation.

It was once widely agreed that the priestesses of the nations surrounding Israel—and especially those of the Canaanites, the closest of Israel’s neighbours—were integral to fertility rites including sacred prostitution.⁶⁰ However, “recent studies seriously question this widespread assumption.”⁶¹ Nevertheless an essential element of the previous consensus remains: the nations surrounding Israel held to fertility religions, worshipped a pantheon of gods, and attributed the origins and on-going fertility of this world to the sexual activities of those gods. Joan Westenholz allows that in Mesopotamia at least, a “sacred marriage ritual,” which did involve ritualized sexual intercourse, was carried out once a year as part of the New Year’s celebration.⁶² Both the plurality of gods and the importance of ritualized sexual rites were thus easily associated with those (fertility) religions with a dual gender priesthood.

Carol Meyers, although admitting that any details of cultic imitation of divine mating are “tantalizingly vague and distant in the face of our modern inquiries”, endeavours to place the fertility cults in a broader context.⁶³ She insists that concerns over “fertility” should not be

⁵⁸ Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed*, 155.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ C. Meyers, “The Roots of Restriction: Women in early Israel,” *BA* 41.3 (1978): 92; S. L. Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* (Philadelphia, PN: Fortress, 1985), 78; Doukhan, “Women Priests in Israel,” 31.

⁶¹ E. A. Goodfriend, “Prostitution (OT),” *ABD*, 6 vol., ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5: 507. See also J. G. Westenholz, “Tamar, *Qēdēšā, Qadišu*, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia,” *HTR* 82 (1989): 245-65; S. Ackerman, “Cultic Prostitution,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. D. N. Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 300.

⁶² Westenholz, “Tamar,” 262.

⁶³ C. Meyers, “The Roots of Restriction: Women in Early Israel,” *BA* 41.3 (1978): 92.

thought of exclusively in terms of the land. Rather, especially in Palestine, they must have included questions of human fertility and population growth.⁶⁴ Such concerns are reflected in a religion centering originally on the great Mother Goddess.

All of this was anathema to Yahwism and to Israel. Both the Torah and the Prophets taught the oneness of God, who created and sustains by his word and not sexual activity.⁶⁵ It is scarcely surprising that the oneness of God was represented in Israel by a single gender priesthood. As the feminine gods vanished from the theology of Israel, the female priesthood vanished also.

The situation of Jesus and the apostles is also readily understandable in the cultural context of first century Israel. Jesus was a wandering preacher who pointed out his lack of a permanent residence (Mat 8:20). His opponents cast thinly veiled aspersions on his legitimacy, and by implication, his mother's sexual history (John 8:41).⁶⁶ The Pharisees who held to strict standards of purity were regularly astonished, not to say horrified, at his willingness to come into physical contact with "unclean" people. They had strict rules regarding contact

⁶⁴ Ibid, 93. The great River Valley civilizations may have had periodic concerns with overpopulations but Palestine, buffeted as it was by waves of warfare, pestilence, famine and disease would have been more concerned with depopulation. Meyers describes this as an "archeologically demonstrable" fact.

⁶⁵ The archeological find at Kuntillet 'Ajrud shows that some worshippers of Yahweh understood him in terms similar to that prevailing in the ancient near eastern context—as a god with a consort. See A. Meshel, "Did Yahweh have a Consort?" *BAR* 5 (Mar-Apr 1979): 24-34; J. A. Emerton, "New Light on Israelite Religion: The Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud," *ZAW* 94 (1982): 2-20; W. G. Dever, "Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet 'Ajrud," *BASOR* 2554 (1984): 21-37; D. N. Freedman, "Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah," in *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation*, 2 vol (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 1:403-08; A. D. H. Mayes, "Kuntillet 'Ajrud and the History of Israelite Religion," in *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. J. R. Bartlett (London: Routledge, 1997), 51-66.

⁶⁶ Matthew's inclusion of four women who are all tainted by scandal in his genealogy of Jesus is regarded by some scholars as a counterstrike against this sort of slander against Mary. See R. V. G. Tasker, *Matthew*, Tyndale Commentaries (Leicester: Intervarsity, 1961), 32. For scholarly reservations regarding this idea see, R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 15; E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1975), 24-25.

with women who were rendered “unclean” by menstruation. It is certainly not difficult to imagine the firestorm of controversy and scandal which would have engulfed Jesus if he had included women, along with men, in his group of companions. Such women would easily have been vilified as prostitutes, in analogy to the “camp followers” who were historically drawn to armies on the march.⁶⁷ (It is instructive that scarcely a hundred years after the ministry of Jesus, the rigourist and ascetic reformer, Montanus engaged in a similar itinerant ministry accompanied by two women—Pricilla and Maximilla. He could not escape the charge of “reeking of every impurity and licentiousness.”⁶⁸ Nor could his female companions!)⁶⁹

There remains a further issue: Palestinian Judaism in the New Testament period does not appear to have allowed women to study the Torah or take a leading role as religious teachers. The only unambiguously Palestinian source material from the first century is the Dead Sea Scrolls. The evidence for women leaders at Qumran is ambiguous at best. The *Community Rule* makes no mention of women.⁷⁰ On the other hand, *Damascus Document* (4Q270 7.i.13-14) refers to “fathers” and “mothers” [of the community], suggesting that women held positions of respect and honour in the community. This evidence is ambiguous, however. The penalty for “complaining” against the fathers was permanent expulsion from the community, but the penalty for complaining against the mothers was ten days punishment. Eileen Schuller and Cecilia Wassen suggest that 4Q512 (41.2) permits either a man or a women to pronounce the blessings

⁶⁷ J. D. Buckley and H. E. Bicheno, “Camp Followers,” in *Oxford Companion to Military History*, ed. R. Holmes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 170-71.

⁶⁸ David Wright attributes this accusation to Cyril of Jerusalem and suggests that little weight should be given to it. See, D. F. Wright, “Why Were the Montonists Condemned?” *Them* 2/1 (September 1976): 18.

⁶⁹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C. F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 175.

⁷⁰ S. W. Crawford, “Not According to the Rule: Women, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Qumran,” in *Emanuel: Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*, ed. S. Paul, R. Kraft, L. Schiffman, and W. Field (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 127.

of purification, which were integral to ritual washings.⁷¹ However, the text is so fragmentary that it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions from it. Lastly, 4Q502 19.2 may speak of male and female “elders”, but given that this reference is part of a sequence of gendered pairs (young men and young women, boys and girls), it is more likely that the correct translation is “old men and old women”. There is thus, no unambiguous evidence of female leadership at Qumran.⁷²

Three other sources are rooted in Palestinian Judaism of the first century but are written at a later time or with a different audience in mind. The first of these is the writings of Flavius Josephus. He was a witness to and a participant in events in first century Palestine, especially the Jewish revolt of A.D. 66-70. However, he wrote in Rome and his target audience appears to have been sophisticated Gentiles, rather than Jews. In his picture of the first century A. D., and the century before, a number of prominent women are mentioned—Alexandra, Queen of the Jews; Mariamme, Wife of Herod the Great; Salmone, the sister of Herod; Antonia, a Roman noblewoman who saved the Jewish prince Agrippa; Herodias, wife of Philip; Berenice, the daughter of Herod Herod Agrippa I and the supposed lover of the future Ceasar Titus; Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt; and Poppaea, wife of Nero. All of these women—Jews and Gentiles alike—are members of royalty. Josephus refers to no women exercising authority in Palestine as either warriors or as religious leaders. Rather their sphere of influence is the home.

The second of the sources dealing somewhat obliquely with first century Palestine, is the New Testament, specifically the four gospels. Like Josephus, the Gospel writers describe events

⁷¹ E. M. Schuller and C. Wassen, “Women, Daily Life,” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2 vols., ed. L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2: 983.

⁷² This leaves aside the question of how significant such evidence would be even if it were present. If community represented some sort of reformist sect at the time, how representative should we understand its practices to be?

in first century Palestine but again like the works of Josephus the Gospels, were written with a primarily Gentile audience in mind and after a gap of a number of years, from the events described. In each of the Gospels Jesus interacts with a variety of Synagogue rulers and Jewish religious teachers. However, none of his interlocutors are female despite the fact that Jesus is presented as having a wide range of social contacts, with women at various levels of society. From the perspective of the literary context of the Gospels themselves, Jewish religious teachers in Palestine were unknown in the time of Jesus.

The last of the three sources is the early rabbinic writings, particularly the Mishnah. This source is different to the previous two in that it does not purport to be a description of first century Palestine or to deal with the situation, as it existed at that time. This means there are inevitable methodological difficulties in using the rabbinic sources because it is impossible to be certain that any given detail given in them, actually reflected the first century situation. To what extent is the comment attributed to R. Eliezer—“Whoever teaches one’s daughter Torah teaches her lasciviousness”—reflective of the situation in the first century? Since Eliezer was one of the earliest of the Tannanim the comment presumably had some roots in first century thought but it is impossible to know for certain. What is certain is that the Mishnah preserves no names of female religious leaders or teachers of the Torah from that period. Bernadette Broton has demonstrated that there were female religious teachers and synagogue leaders in early Judaism.⁷³ Significantly, however, all of her sources, except for one fourth century inscription, come from outside Palestine. This is not simply because of a lack of inscriptions in Palestine. Broton is able to document numerous inscriptions testifying to female donors to synagogues in Palestine.⁷⁴

⁷³ Broton, *Women Leaders*, 1-99.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 157-65.

Conclusions

If women were excluded from the priesthood and the apostolate for cultural reasons rather than physical, spiritual, or ontological reasons, what are the implications for the modern church? The bible, itself, may provide an answer to that question. Even though Jesus did not include a single female among the apostles, there are clear indications that Paul's practice in regard to female religious leadership was different. He refers to a lady, Junia, as an apostle in Rome (Rom 16:7). Similarly, he lists Euodia and Syntyche among his "fellow workers" (sunergw`n; see Phil 4:2-3)—a clear reference to ministry. Why is Paul willing to act so differently to Jesus on this matter? The most obvious answer is that he was working in a different cultural context—the broader gentile world where in Judaism, female synagogue leaders were known.⁷⁵ There was also a clear, even if regionally diverse heritage of female leadership in the Greco-Roman world.⁷⁶ If this reconstruction is valid, then two conclusions can be drawn for the contemporary church: 1) there is no reason why women could not be ordained for the ministry if such an action were acceptable in the cultural context in which it were happening; and 2) there is no reason why the church's practice need be uniform throughout the entire world instead of being responsive to cultural contexts on a case-by case basis.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 1-99.

⁷⁶ B. Witherington, III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*. SNTSMS 59 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 5-23

Appendix: Expanded Paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16⁷⁷

I am glad that you try in every area to remember what I said and that you hold fast the traditions just as I handed them on to you. I praise you for your faithful efforts. I would, however, have you know that of every man, Christ is head; the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. It is clear that any man who prays or prophesies with his hair up as a woman's announces that he is under the authority of a man and thereby dishonors both himself and Christ, under whose authority alone he ought to stand. Conversely, any woman who lets her hair hang loose dishonors both herself and her husband. By letting her hair down, she puts on herself the sign of an accused adulteress. If she herself does that, it is as if she had been convicted and shaved. If, then, a woman will not wear her hair up to show her proper relation to her husband, let her shave it off. It is shameful to have it clipped or shaved off, let her wear it up!

A man should not have his hair up because his dominion reflects God's and by his exercising of it he honors God. His wife, on the other hand, honors him by her obedience. The bare head and loose hair of the man show his place under God's authority and his own authority in relation to his wife. Because of her different role the wife wears her hair differently. She wears it up as a sign of 'authority.' It signifies her husband's authority over her and her authority over the angels.

The subordination of women to their husbands does not mean that the men are of higher value than the women. In the Lord neither the man is independent of the woman nor the woman independent of the man. From creation it was His design that there should be an authority relation between them but that they should be of equal value. Thus the woman was taken from the side of the man to be his helper, but men are born of women. Within the church we see this pattern continuing until the Lord returns, in that both men and women are the source of prayer and prophecy through the gifts of the Spirit and at the same time the husband is that head of the wife.

You asked me to judge whether it is proper that a woman pray to God uncovered. I've told you enough that you can see to judge for yourselves. God's plan in nature shows you the way. A man is shamed if he has long hair, while the same long hair brings glory to a woman. You can see that hair is given to be a sign of the distinction between men and women. This natural sign of long hair is also sufficient covering and there is no need for a shawl.

If anyone still wants to argue about the need for a covering he should know that neither we nor the churches of God have any other custom than that women should pray and prophesy with their heads covered . . . by their hair.

⁷⁷ Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils or Silence," 219-20.

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