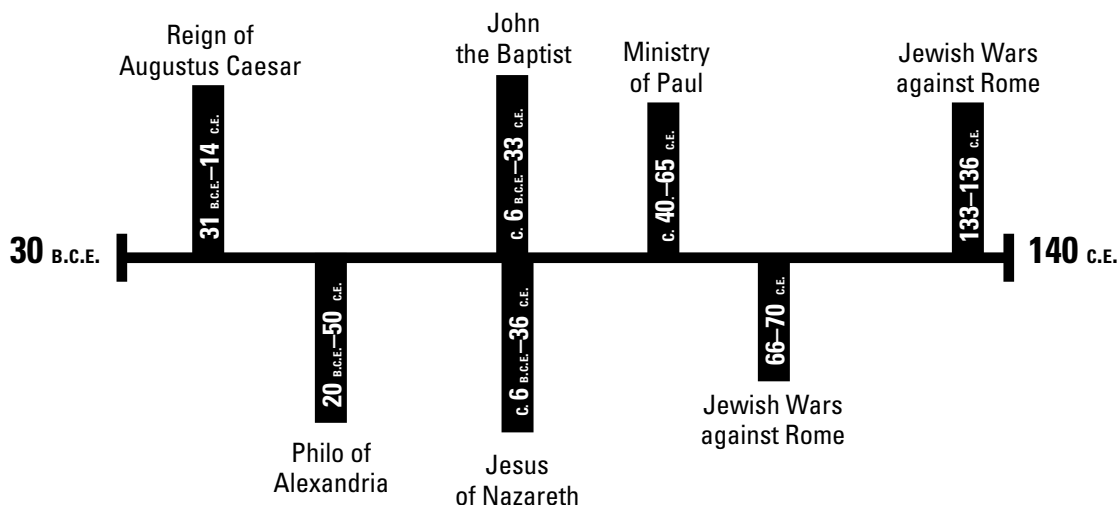


ONE

IN CHRIST NO MORE MALE AND FEMALE?

The Question of Gender and Redemption in the New Testament



In this chapter, I lay the foundation for exploration of the relationship between redemption and the dissolution of gender hierarchy in Christianity, looking at the first century of its development. The focus of this chapter will be the key text found in Paul's Letter to the Galatians:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no

longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:27-28)

The text appears as an interpretation of the transformation that takes place in baptism as the believer enters into a new community that identifies itself collectively as living a redeemed new life "in Christ."

How did this text arise to interpret what the redeemed life in Christ means? What did this text mean in the context of the early Christian movement? How did this

text reshape social relationships specifically between men and women? How was the meaning of this text reinterpreted as the early Christian movement developed? To answer these questions with any precision would require a large volume. New Testament scholarship is intensive and its bibliography immense. For purposes of laying the basis for a study of the ongoing interpretation of the relation between redemption and gender hierarchy in later Christian centuries up to the present, all that can be attempted in this chapter is a very basic outline. In this outline I will present what seems to me the most likely story, distilled from current scholarship, of how this text developed in the context of the early Christian mission and how it was reshaped and reinterpreted to express conflicting visions of gender transformation in baptismal regeneration.

Gender Equality in the First Jesus Movement

The New Testament, together with some extracanonical gospels that record the first Jesus movement, does not lend itself to any definitive reconstruction of Jesus' own teachings. The Gospels have not only gone through a multilayered redaction process in the context of the first century of the Christian movement, but they also are intended to proclaim a message of redemption ever reinterpreted in the context of the believing community, not to give "objective" historical information about Jesus.

Although the debates about which sayings are from Jesus himself and express his own understanding and teaching will probably never be resolved with certainty, reconstructions

that have emerged from intensive scholarly discussion¹ give, in my opinion, a likely picture of the main characteristics of the Jesus movement in Jesus' own time. I summarize these characteristics here primarily with a view to explaining why, in the next stage of the Jesus movement after Jesus' death, it might appear to Christians in mission that gender dissolution was a central meaning of the new life in Christ effected through baptism.

Although baptism quickly emerged after Jesus' death as the central Christian rite of initiation into the new life in Christ, Jesus never baptized anyone. Rather, he himself was baptized by a figure known in Christian tradition as John the Baptist. It is generally agreed that both John the Baptist and Jesus were located within a Palestinian Judaism engaged in intensive religious and social struggle against the political, military, and cultural colonization that had been imposed on the Jewish people in Palestine by the Hellenistic empires from the third century B.C.E., and then by Rome in 60 B.C.E.²

This struggle took external form in efforts to rebel against the colonizing power or else to negotiate with it to allow adequate cultural and religious self-determination to Jews. These were complemented by internal movements of religious renewal either to expel or to adapt to the effects of Greco-Roman cultural colonization. Although temple Judaism with its priestly caste and rituals was official Judaism, the Jewish communities within Palestine and in the Diaspora exhibited a volatile range of religio-political responses to this dilemma, ranging from guerrilla uprisings against the occupying empire to philosophical adaptations of Greek philosophy to interpret Torah observance and temple worship.

A major expression of this struggle against colonization for religious Jews was an intensified development of messianic hope. God would not long allow his people to languish under the power of pagan empires (interpreted theologically as the power of Satan) but would intervene through human and angelic representatives to deliver (redeem) his people from bondage. Since Jewish religious thought interpreted such adversity not simply as innocent victimization but also as punishment for infidelity on the part of Israel itself, this messianic advent must also entail some conversion on the part of Jews. There must be an internal spiritual renewal, a return to faithfulness to God, which would either help evoke coming redemption or prepare Jews for it.³

From the time of the Maccabean revolt against the Hellenistic empire in 165 B.C.E. until the Jewish wars of 66–73 C.E. and 133–36 C.E., Palestinian Judaism saw waves of messianic prophets and movements of renewal across a broad spectrum of ways of interpreting this combined call for internal conversion and preparation for God's delivery from colonial occupation. Although the time of John the Baptist and Jesus did not yet experience the full-scale guerrilla warfare that would arise in the next generation, there was continuous turmoil in their day, both fed by and expressing messianic hope.

This turmoil took a variety of forms. There were spontaneous and more organized non-violent street protests against Roman insults to Jewish religious sensibilities. There were popular bandits, such as Judas the Galilean, who in 6 C.E. organized a revolutionary resistance group. There were scribes and visionaries in rabbinic schools, including groups

such as the Essenes, who searched the Scriptures and reworked new commentaries on them to interpret God's hand at work in history and advise how Jews should behave here and now to promote deliverance. There were itinerant wonderworkers who showed people how God was already at work in their midst through miracles that brought rain and healed the sick.⁴

These ways of envisioning and acting out hopes for deliverance also opened up internal socioreligious tensions within the Jewish community: between the temple priesthood and independent schools of scribes and teachers; between constructions of religious righteousness through intense observance of the Torah and the poor and uneducated unable to follow such a path (the *am ha'aretz* or people of the land); between the politically, religiously, and economically privileged and the disprivileged in these many forms. Deliverance from colonial power and internal repentance and renewal suggested to some a social revolution to overcome these patterns of discrimination that divided Jews from each other.

John the Baptist was one representative of the type of popular prophet who, in the third decade of the first century C.E., announced God's coming wrath and judgment, not only against Rome but also against the internal elites in control of the Jerusalem temple. He gathered into the desert those seeking redemption from both external and internal colonization and offered them a baptism that would seal their decision to repent of their sins and prepare themselves for the "wrath to come," in which God would sweep away God's enemies, including the corrupt temple priesthood, and gather the repentant into a renewed, liberated Israel.⁵ Jesus was first a

disciple of this John, seeking from him the baptism of repentance of sins in preparation for the coming reign.

Jesus was at this time a young man of the artisan class from the Galilean village of Nazareth. He had brothers and sisters and, as the "son of Mary," may have been seen as illegitimate.⁶ As a religious seeker, he was attracted first by John's apocalyptic message of repentance. But sometime thereafter he broke with the perspective taught by John, inspired by a vision in which he saw "Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning" (Luke 10:18).⁷ This vision convinced Jesus that those seeking the reign of God did not simply have to wait, fasting in sackcloth, for its coming, but that Satan's power was already broken. The power of God's reign was already "in our midst." Although not yet fully manifest, its presence could be experienced now in miraculous signs of exorcism and healing. Fasting and mourning could give way to feasting and rejoicing.

The distinctive character of the message of Jesus, as he began to preach and to "perform" it in actions for those who "heard him gladly," was the experience of the reign of God already present both in signs and wonders and in celebratory meals that broke down the divisions in Jewish society between the "pure" and the "impure." These divisions between the "pure" and the "impure" had been constructed in the organization of the temple and had been applied in daily life by rabbinic teachers in matters of daily associations, particularly bodily contact through sex and food.⁸ The majority of Jews only partly observed these divisions, but that only confirmed their status in the eyes of the strict observers as members of the "impure," to be

both avoided and condemned as deserving of God's disregard.⁹

Such divisions between the pure and the impure marginalized many classes of people. First of all, they marginalized all women within the Jewish people itself as being of secondary status in relation to both temple holiness and rabbinic study by their very nature as women, and as causes of ritual pollution on a regular basis through their sexual functions of childbirth and menstruation.¹⁰ The religious laws also marginalized the vast majority of poor and uneducated Jews who did not know how to and could not observe the minute regulations of purity.

These laws also marginalized the sick, the lame, the blind, the deformed, lepers, and persons with various kinds of skin ailments and bodily fluxes, such as the woman "with a flow of blood" (Mark 5:25-34; Matt. 9:20-22; Luke 8:43-48). Such persons were seen as in a permanent state of impurity. They were categorized as sinners, for such ailments were regarded as caused by sin, either their own or that of their parents. The laws also marginalized vast numbers of people who made their living by means regarded as polluting and sinful, among them tax collectors, prostitutes, servants, slaves (who by definition could not keep the laws of purity), swineherders, seamen, and peddlers of fruit and garlic.¹¹

Finally, the laws of purity divided Jew from gentile, idolaters from those worshiping the God of Israel, the ultimate division between the holy and the unholy. One can say that the outer limit of the division between holiness and unholiness was the division between Jew and gentile, Israel and the "nations," while the inner and most intimate division between the holy and the unholy divided male from

female.¹² Not only social relations but also time and space were regulated to divide holy from unholy, the Sabbath from ordinary days, the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem from its various levels of inner and outer courts.¹³

Jesus' message that God's coming reign was not to be prepared for simply by repentance (usually construed as redoubled effort to observe these separations), but was already present in our midst in anticipatory "signs," was understood by the first Jesus movement, presumably by Jesus himself as its initiator, as the joyful good news that these separations had been overcome in an overflowing graciousness of God. A new family, a new community of Israel, was arising as these divisions fell, brought together by God's forgiving goodness. This new people included all those previously marginalized within Israel, and perhaps the occasional gentile as well (although the Jesus movement was not yet constructed as a mission to the gentiles, but as a renewal movement within Israel). All these would be collectively referred to by the Jesus movement simply as "the poor," a group whose deprivation was of many kinds, but united in their "unholy" status vis-à-vis "the righteous."¹⁴

It was to these many kinds of "poor" that the Jesus movement announced its glad tidings of "good news to the poor," the setting at liberty of "the oppressed" (Luke 4:18). The liberation that Jesus expressed was not that of a military uprising, a political campaign, or a strategy for economic or social change, but an immediately experienced liberation of the blind, the lame, lepers, those with bodily fluxes, those possessed by demons that caused madness and "fits," all those healed and restored to mental and physical health;

also the "sinners," the prostitutes, tax collectors, and various impoverished people, all affirmed as God's beloved children.

All these previously hopeless ones, including women in every category—widows, prostitutes, those given to fits caused by demons, the bleeding and the bent over, even perhaps a Samaritan or a Canaanite—not only received healing, forgiveness, and hope but gathered in a joyful banquet in which, by sharing with each other their small provisions, they created abundance together, so that twelve baskets were required to gather up all that remained after the feast (Mark 6:43; Matt. 14:20; Luke 9:17).

Such feasting together of the "unholy," together with a popular rabbi and his disciples, and an occasional Pharisee, observing no separation of clean and unclean persons, no careful distinction of holy and profane times was scandalous, a sure evidence for the "righteous" that Jesus was himself an agent of Satan, given his power by Beelzebul (Mark 3:22; Matt. 12:24; Luke 11:15). But for those who "heard him gladly" he was their "rabbi," a true prophet in Israel, an envoy of God's wisdom, perhaps even the messiah himself. In him, and in the community he generated through his teachings and acts, the abundance and goodness of the reign of God were already tasted.

In addition to healing stories, often involving women as both the healed and the believing "poor" who "heard him gladly," two other patterns of thought express the early Jesus movement's experience of the messianic community. One was the understanding of themselves as a "new family" that supersedes the old patriarchal family. The other was the announcement of iconoclastic reversals of social-sacral relationships.

The sayings about the Jesus community as the true family juxtapose the traditional kinship group, represented by Jesus' own mother and brothers, who are presented as "coming to get him," with the community of his followers who are identified as his true relatives, as "my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:31-35; Matt. 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21). It is a new family made up of those who have together experienced newness of life, freed from a condition of marginalization, but one in which the father is conspicuously absent (like Jesus' own family?). Perhaps Jesus' understanding of God as *Abba*, as loving, gracious father, takes the place of the human father in this new family.¹⁵

This new family is not to duplicate patriarchal relationships. Those who wish to be "great" are not to "lord" it over each other "like the gentiles" (Roman imperialists?), but should be like "servants" to each other, and like "little children" who lack power and trust entirely to the goodness of those who love them. They are to "call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven" (God as *Abba*) and to "call no man teacher, for you have one teacher," Jesus (Mark 9:34-36; Matt. 23:8-12).

In the iconoclastic reversal sayings, the reign is likened to unlikely small things, such as a mustard seed (a weed for peasant farmers) that grows into a sheltering bush (Mark 4:30-32; Matt. 13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19); like a leaven that a woman sows in a measure of flour that leavens the whole (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20-21), reversing the holiness of unleavened bread; like an old woman sweeping her floor to search for a lost coin (Luke 5:8-10) or a shepherd who uncharacteristically leaves his ninety-nine sheep to search

for the one that is lost (Matt. 18:10-14; Luke 15:3-7). Entering the reign of God reverses the patterns of righteousness. The last shall be first; the tax collectors and the harlots will go into the reign of God before the chief priests and elders (Matt. 21:31).

These then are some of the characteristics of the movement gathered around Jesus in the experience of a reign of God already dawning. In this experience the poor, the maimed, the sinners, those on the fringes of the people of Israel, including women in all categories, are gathered together in a new community of equals from below. They share their limited provisions to create an abundance for all. It was believed that this reign, experienced in its beginnings in "signs," will soon be completed in a worldwide display of divine power that will sweep away evil within and beyond Israel and create a new world in which "God's will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Thus the eschatology of the Jesus movement was neither apocalyptic nor simply sapiential (i.e., an immanent communion in the Wisdom that sustains creation), but a synthesis of the two in a future-present.¹⁶

Toward the end of the third decade C.E. Jesus became convinced that this time of fulfillment of the Kingdom was at hand. Gathering together his core followers, men and women, he went "up" to Jerusalem to be present for this great day. During his visit to Jerusalem he engaged in performative acts—a triumphal entrance into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-10; Matt. 21:1-9; Luke 19:28-38) and a cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15-19; Matt. 21:12-13; Luke 19:47-48) that convinced both the Roman authorities and some part of the temple elite that he was a dangerous troublemaker, one of those messianic

prophets who arose from the hinterlands from time to time to stir up hopes among the Jewish masses for liberation from both external and internal authorities.¹⁷

Jesus was seized by the Roman authorities, who dealt him the usual death reserved for those seen as revolutionary agitators: crucifixion.¹⁸ He was nailed to a cross on a hill of execution outside Jerusalem to die an agonizing death for all to see. The intention was to terrorize all his followers and would-be followers with the fate they too would meet if they continued his movement, and thus send them slinking back to their humble villages in terrorized silence.

Initially this act of political terrorism by execution of the leader worked. Most of Jesus' followers scattered and fled back to Galilee. But a few of them, perhaps prominent among them some of his women disciples,¹⁹ became convinced that he was not dead but alive. He had risen from the dead and was present with them "in the Spirit." The presence of the reign they had experienced with Jesus continued to be available through his risen presence in their midst, empowering them to live the *New Creation* here and now.

We gain a tantalizing glimpse of what this process of reassembling of the followers of Jesus might have looked like from the perspective of the powerful in the words preserved in Josephus, the major historian who wrote of this period of Jewish history leading to the Jewish Wars:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man. . . . For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. . . . When Pilate, upon hearing him accused

by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. . . . And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.²⁰

From Reassembled Jesus Movement to Early Hellenistic Mission

Scholars suggest that Jesus' teachings on breaking down social discrimination and anticipating status reversal in relation to the reign of God conveyed a liberating message to women, who were particularly affected by these forms of marginalization. It is likely that women played an important role among Jesus' followers, both in the companies of traveling missionaries and in providing places and resources for table fellowship. Many parables and stories affirm poor and marginalized but believing women, over against various religious and social authorities. Women disciples probably played a key role as the first witnesses to the resurrection.

As the Jesus movement spread into major cities in the Diaspora, such as Antioch and Alexandria, first as a party within Judaism and then beginning to differentiate itself as a distinct community, some women played important roles as members of missionary teams and as local leaders, prophets, and teachers. This was not unprecedented in this period. The first century C.E. saw significant numbers of economically independent women appear as priestesses and patrons of religious cults in the Hellenistic world, in both pagan and Jewish communities. Epitaphs for women who are

called “Elders,” “head of the Council of Elders,” and “head of the Synagogue” appear in various Hellenistic cities in the Roman period.²¹

The social and economic basis for this relative autonomy and affluence of some women was the burgeoning manufacturing and trade economy of the first-century Roman empire. The old Greek and Roman aristocracy despised manual labor and commerce. For them political and military leadership, together with supervision of agricultural estates run by slaves, were roles for “gentlemen.” This left wide avenues for upward mobility for ambitious slaves, freedmen, and middle-class provincials, who could move into leadership both in the imperial bureaucracy (the household of Caesar) and in manufacturing and trade. Some women in these groups were able to take advantage of these economic opportunities.

Although women never gained citizen rights (the vote, political office) in ancient cities, legal changes in Roman law allowed daughters to retain autonomous control over their own inheritance in marriage.²² Some Hellenistic cities, notably Alexandria, had traditions that gave relative legal autonomy to women.²³ Although women were married in their teens, often to men who were in their thirties or older, and were generally not given the opportunity for higher education, those who survived childbirth might become propertied widows while still in early middle age. They could consolidate their independence as widows if they did not remarry. Religious views that affirmed celibacy as a means to higher spiritual life could strengthen the hand of such economically independent widows.

Women as slaves suffered arbitrary physical and sexual abuse, and yet a skilled slave

woman artisan in a wealthy household had opportunities to buy her freedom and set herself up as head of a workshop with her former master or mistress as patron. Since slaves could not legally marry, such a freedwoman might find herself independent of husband or children (even though she might have had children who remained with a former master or mistress). It is among these classes of independent widows and freedwomen, with their modest economic wealth through manufacturing and trade, that we find the kind of women who became prominent in the early Christian movement.²⁴

The shaping of a Hellenistic Christian mission to the gentiles began among Greek-speaking Jews with ties to cities in the Diaspora before Paul became a prominent leader in it in the mid-40s to early 60s C.E. Sometime prior to Paul’s leadership in the Hellenistic mission, there probably had been two stages in the development of a baptismal theology of gender change. The first stage identified transformation into the new creation in Christ as overcoming and reversing the sexual dimorphism that arose in God’s creation of the human, “male and female” (Gen. 1:27b). The second stage of development extended this formula to three pairs of social hierarchies: “No more Jew or Greek, no more slave or free, no more male and female.” This is the triadic form that Paul received as already known to him and repeated in Gal. 3:28.

There is good reason to think that “no more male and female” was the original form of this baptismal formula and the other two pairs were added later, in the context of a Hellenistic mission that mingled Jews and Greeks, slaves and free (and freed persons) in their fellowship. The “no more male *and* female” has a

different form from the ethnic and class pairs: Jew *or* Greek, slave *or* free. Also male and female denote the biological rather than the social pair (man and woman), and this echoes Gen. 1:27b. It is clearly intended as a commentary on and eschatological reversal of the development of the biological pair in creation.

Second, several noncanonical gospels speak of redemption in terms of this biological pair only, without the other two pairs, and thus very likely go back to an original form of the formula in which the biological pair stood alone. In the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, Jesus replies to Salome's question about when redemption will happen with the statement, "When you tread on the garment of shame, and when the two become one, the male with the female, neither male nor female."²⁵

A Corinthian sermon from the early second century quotes the dominical saying: "For the Lord himself, when asked by someone when his Kingdom would come, said, 'when the two are one, and the outside as the inside, and the male with the female, neither male nor female.' When you have done these things the Kingdom of my father will come."²⁶ *The Gospel of Thomas* has a similar saying:

Jesus said to them, "When you make the two one and you make the inside as the outside, and the outside as the inside, and the above as the below, and when you make the male with the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female not be female . . . then you shall enter the Kingdom."²⁷

What did this idea that the dissolution of sexual dimorphism was central to the coming of the reign of God mean, and how did it arise? We should not see in the early Christian

movement of Jesus' day or in the first generation after his death a "discipleship of equals," if we imagine by such a phrase either a programmatic theory or a general practice of social equality between men and women.²⁸ Rather we should probably think in terms of a much more ad hoc situation in which some talented, energetic women, in some cases from life situations of economic means that allowed them to live independently, were able to participate in traveling teams of evangelists, to host local Christian fellowships, and to engage in catechesis and public prayer in Christian groups.

This opening to women's participation was facilitated by a movement type of sociology that did not yet have fixed leadership structures in a group that represented mostly working-class people with some but not great class stratification.²⁹ Their place of assembly was the home (hence lacking differentiation of public and private space).³⁰ Women's participation was also validated theologically by teachings that suggested the overcoming of various socioreligious status hierarchies in the reign of God already dawning in the community of believers. Dissolving these status hierarchies (clean-unclean, poor-rich, Jew-gentile, righteous-sinner) gave an opening to women to claim their equality, perhaps even priority, in the reign, but it did not speak specifically of gender.

Jewish and Early Christian Readings of Genesis

Yet there must have been enough of an anomaly of active independent women in such communities to suggest to some early Christian

exegetes the need to thematize the meaning of the new humanity in redemption specifically in terms of gender. These exegetes turned to the interpretations of cosmic anthropology available in Hellenistic Jewish philosophy. A brief excursus on Gen. 1:27 and its interpretation in contemporary Judaism will elucidate these cosmic anthropologies available for early Christians to interpret the relation of gender and redemption.

Gen. 1:27 says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." In the thought of the original priestly authors, the first phrase on God's creation of Adam in God's image and the second phrase, "male and female he created them," are not in apposition to each other but are differentiated. The creation of Adam in God's image is that of a single male-identified generic human who exercises God's dominion over the other creatures. This exercise of God's dominion as God's human representative is the essential meaning of the term *image of God* in this text; that is, it does not mean a physical similarity to God or a participation in the being of God.

The second phrase, "male and female he created them," designated the biological pair (not the social pair, man and woman). According to Phyllis Bird, maleness and femaleness are not identified with the image, but differentiated from it. This points to the biological dimorphism that characterizes the human pair as like the other animal pairs, and as differentiated for the purpose of procreation; both aspects are unlike God.³¹ The male generic Adam, read inclusively as meaning all humans of both genders, suggests to modern Christians that all humans of both genders are "in the image of God" and presumably

participate equally in dominion over creation, read today ecologically as "stewardship" or care of creation under God.³²

I believe, however, that this inclusive reading was far from the intention of the original writers. In an androcentric, patriarchal culture and social system, the male head of household exercised dominion over both the dependent persons of the family (women, children, slaves) and over his nonhuman property, as a collective person; that is, representing both himself and those under him. Today, one can barely begin to imagine women exercising dominion "equally" with men in the context of a modern economic and political system of individualism in which each (adult) person is presumed to represent him- or herself. In our modern context, the earlier family as a collective structure, with the *paterfamilias* as both the public individual and the collective representative of the family, has been (partly) dissolved.³³

But no such individualism, allowing women to stand as political equals, was thinkable in antiquity. Thus, the generic Adam of Gen. 1:27a who was created to exercise God's dominion as God's image is an androcentric patriarchal construct in which Adam, like the *paterfamilias*, is a collective person who exercises sovereignty for himself, and for and as the whole family.³⁴

The creation of Adam in Gen. 1:27 (and 5:1-2) was supplemented by the priestly authors with an older folk story (Genesis 2-3) in which God first created "a man" from the soil of the earth and made him a living being by breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. God then planted a garden with every tree, and a river in four branches to water it, and put "the man" into the garden to till it. God

then formed the birds and animals to be the man's helpers and brought them to him to name them. But because none of these animals could be a helping partner to him, God caused the man to fall asleep and made a woman out of man's rib to be a helper and partner.

This story of the creation of the man, and then the woman from his rib, is even more explicitly androcentric than Gen. 1:27. Although Eve is a member of the same flesh (species) as Adam and hence able to be a partner with him in a way the animals are not, this is hardly an egalitarian partnership, as some modern exegetes have argued.³⁵ The man is both a male individual and the physical source of the woman. She is not denigrated as evil, but neither is she a freestanding person in a companionship of social equals. His priority and her derivative origin from him locate her as both an extension of him and a partner to aid him in procreation and family life. She is "of him" and "for him" in a way that disallows the possibility that she can be "for herself," as he is for himself.

In Genesis 3, this woman is described as initiating the disobedience to God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in response to the "crafty" promptings of the serpent. To prevent man from seizing the fruit of the tree of life and hence becoming immortal, in addition to knowing good and evil, God curses the serpent and the man and woman, inflicting pain in childbearing and male domination on the woman, and hard toil in agricultural labor on the man. God then expels the man and woman from Eden to live out the effects of this worsened existence.

These two stories of the creation of humans, male and female, or man and woman, as well

as the expulsion from Eden, posed many problems for Jewish exegetes in the two centuries before and during the beginnings of Christianity. Was the female of Genesis 1:27 the same as that of Genesis 2–3, or an earlier figure more equal to Adam than the woman created from his rib? Did the derivative nature of Eve's creation from Adam, as well as her priority in sin, suggest that she was morally inferior, ever tending to lead the man astray if he again makes the mistake of "listening to the voice of your wife" (Gen. 3:17)?

The history of exegesis of these texts in early Judaism is extensive.³⁶ Some Jewish commentaries assume the shared image of God in both men and women, while others move to a subordinationist and a misogynist reading of these texts. I will discuss here the second type as background to Paul's assumption (in 1 Cor. 11:7) that the male is the image of God while the female is a secondary reflection of that image. For example, the *Wisdom of Ben Sirach* (c. 190 B.C.E.) says, "From a woman did sin originate and because of her we all must die . . . if she goes not as thou would have her (i.e., according to your hand), cut her off from thy flesh" (i.e., divorce her) (25:24, 26).³⁷

The *Books of Adam and Eve*, compiled in the first century C.E., gather together a wealth of early Jewish midrashim on Genesis 1–4. In these writings, Adam is exalted as a glorious being superior to the angels in his status as God's image. The angels fell because they resented this high status of Adam and God's commandment that they "worship the image of God as the Lord God hath commanded" (14:1).

Adam's sin consists in his foolish decision to listen to his wife and accept her advice, when he should have commanded her. Eve,

by contrast, continually abases herself before Adam for their now miserable condition, for which she takes full responsibility. She suggests that he banish her and let her die. She even walks away to die, weeping and mourning, but when Adam realizes (six months later) that she was pregnant and has borne a child, he kindly chooses to go get her and take care of her and her son, Cain (the son of the devil, not of Adam).³⁸ This birth is followed shortly by that of a second son, Abel, then by Seth, and then by thirty sons and thirty daughters.

After a long life, in which Eve continually acknowledges her fault in causing the evils that have befallen humans, Adam dies. The repentant angels arrive in a glorious chariot and fall down and worship Adam, as they were originally commanded to do by God, crying out to God that Adam is indeed God's image (33:5).³⁹ In this text, being "image of God" is an exalted status of Adam as a male, not shared by Eve, who is the source of all Adam's troubles, even though he is too kind to actually desert her as she deserves.

From the second century B.C.E. to the first century C.E., as Palestinian Judaism entered heightened conflict with the Hellenistic and Roman empires, a pessimistic worldview developed that saw the whole creation as having been taken over by evil cosmic powers. These cosmic powers were identified with apostate angels whom God *allows* to rule, subjugating the world to oppression, although in due time God will intervene to liberate humanity (Israel) from their evil sway.

To explain the origins of these evil powers, some exegetes used the story of the "sons of God" who took daughters of men for their wives, producing giants (Nephilim), at a time

of worsening human wickedness that led to the flood (Gen. 6:1-4), and combined it with the story of Eve's responsibility for the expulsion from paradise. These offspring of the angels and the daughters of men were interpreted as being the evil cosmic powers that presently govern human affairs. Women played a special role in causing these evil powers, because it was precisely women's sexual seductiveness, heightened by cosmetics on their faces and adornments of their hair, that caused this fall.⁴⁰

The author of the *Testimony of Reuben* (c. 109–106 B.C.E.) sternly advises his male Jewish readers to "command your wives and your daughters that they adorn not their heads and faces to deceive the mind; because every woman who uses these wiles has been reserved for eternal punishment. For thus they allured the Watchers who were before the flood." The author then makes clear that forbidding women facial and hair adornment is not enough. Only the strictest separation of men from women, so they have as little opportunity to gaze on each other as possible, will suffice to prevent the sin of lust, the chief cause of every evil, from breaking out. Lust is caused by the very nature of women, who "are overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men." "Evil are women, my sons, and since they have no power or strength over men, they use wiles by outward attraction, that they may draw him to themselves."⁴¹

These expressions of early Jewish exegesis reserved the term "image of God" only for Adam (men), they emphasized the need not to repeat Adam's sin by heeding a wife's advice and suggested that women's sexual seductiveness was the prime cause of cosmic

evil and human fallenness. These interpretations were circulating in Jewish exegetical circles at the time of early Christianity. Yet one should not conclude that Jewish women's status had worsened in that period compared to the era of the priestly authors of Genesis.

Rather, we should assume that the lesser need in the earlier period to add explicitly subordinationist and misogynist interpretations meant that patriarchal relations were relatively unchallenged then. In the two centuries surrounding Christian beginnings, however, Jewry in Palestine and the Diaspora were experiencing a breakdown of a more insulated society, unleashing opportunities for Jewish women to take part in activities for which they are memorialized in epitaphs as "Elders," "Mothers of the synagogue" or "Head of the synagogue" by grateful members of their communities. As gender relations loosened, intensive debates about gender relations took place, with commentary on Genesis 1–6 as one locus classicus for such debate.⁴²

Particularly in Alexandria, home to one of the most prominent communities of Hellenistic Jews, exegetes elaborated a commentary on Genesis 1–3 influenced by Platonic mystical philosophy. Philo, our primary source for this Hellenistic Jewish exegesis, explains the original image of God and the advent of evil through women by a three-stage interpretation of human creation. The original Adam, formed according to the image of God, was wholly spiritual, "perceptible only to the intellect, incorporeal, neither male nor female, imperishable by nature."

Only secondarily does God form the earthly Adam out of clay, into which God then breathes the divine spirit. This earthly

Adam is made up of two parts, the corporeal part that is mortal, and the spirit that is immortal, partaking of the divine Logos, the original Spiritual Adam. This Adam of body

JEWISH WOMEN LEADERS

Rufina, a Jewess, head of the synagogue, built this tomb for her freed slaves and the slaves raised in her house. No one else has the right to bury anyone here. Smyrna, Ionia, 2nd century C.E.

Sophia of Gortyn, elder and head of the synagogue of Kisamos lies here. The memory of the righteous one forever.

—Kastelli Kissamou, Crete, fourth / fifth century C.E.⁴³

and soul was happy and lived an exalted and immortal life as the image of the cosmos, as long as he was single. His downfall was the creation of his wife. With the creation of Eve came sex, "which is the beginning of iniquities and transgressions, and it is owing to this that men have exchanged their previously immortal and happy existence for one that is mortal and full of misfortune."⁴⁴

The very creation of Eve, then, for Philo, is the fall of Adam, the separation from him of that mortal part pertaining to the body that was previously kept from asserting its evil power by being under the control of the immortal soul. With the separation of Eve out of Adam, the mortality of the body asserts its power over the immortal soul, dragging the man down to sin and death. Philo sees a remedy for this fall: Men can reject marriage

and sexual activity and return to their original celibate state, recovering their spiritual wholeness and union with the immortal part of themselves that partakes of the divine nature.

Although women represent the fall of the immortal soul under the sway of the moral body, causing sin and death, they too can choose celibacy, and thus paradoxically reclaim virginal wholeness in communion with God. In "The Therapeutae," Philo describes a Jewish double monastery in which both men and women live celibate lives, spending six days contemplating the Scriptures and the seventh day in holy Sabbath celebration.⁴⁵

These Hellenistic Jewish readings of Genesis 1–3 most probably lie behind the development of the early Christian baptismal theology as gender transformation into a redeemed state in which there is "no more male and female." While this baptismal theology affirmed women's spiritual equality, it did so in terms that were wholly negative toward women as female sexual bodies. Women (and men) regained their spiritual wholeness and immortality only by returning to a celibate state prior to sexual bimorphism. (This need not mean they cease to have bodies, but that the mortal and sinful proclivities of their bodies would be controlled by being united to the divine Spirit they share with the Logos of God.)⁴⁶

This understanding of return to spiritual wholeness is androcentric in form (not androgynous; that is, no more male and female; not both male and female). Women are called to construct their spiritual identity as "putting off the works of the female" (i.e., sex and reproduction) and becoming spiritually "male."⁴⁷ Redeemed life is perfected

THE THERAPEUTAE

And after the feast they celebrate the sacred festival during the whole night. . . . when each chorus of men and each chorus of women has feasted separately by itself . . . both men and women together, under the influence of divine inspiration, becoming all one chorus, sang hymns of thanksgiving to God the Saviour, Moses the prophet leading the men and Miriam the Prophetess leading the women. After their prayers they each retired to their own separate abodes, with the intention of again practicing the usual philosophy to which they had been wont to devote themselves.

—Philo, *Therapeutae* XI

spiritual masculinity. Women can become "perfect," whole, and spiritual, only by rejecting everything about themselves that, both culturally and biologically, was identified as specifically female.

Redemption and Gender in Conflict in Pauline Churches

We have suggested that Paul did not originate the baptismal theology of overcoming gender bimorphism (no more male and female), and also did not add the religio-ethnic and class pairs to this theology (no more Jew or Greek, no more slave or free). This addition was probably pre-Pauline, but in the context of a Hellenistic Christian mission closely associated with the one Paul joined, one that combined

membership of slaves, free people and freedmen, Greek and Jews, and active women. The triadic formula also suggests the reversal of social patterns of discrimination in Greek and Jewish culture that prized the superiority of one's ethnicity, as well as maleness and free status, at the expense of women, slaves, and "barbarians" (in the case of Greek men), and women, slaves, or "uneducated boors," and gentiles (in the case of Jewish men).⁴⁸

The addition of these pairs focuses baptismal theology more on the social consequences of "oneness in Christ." Women as well as men, gentiles as well as Jews, slaves and free people, all share the same community and the same table fellowship, they speak in prayer and prophecy, they teach proselytes and evangelize on a somewhat equal basis. What does this mean for women's subordination to their fathers and husbands? What does this mean for the subservience of slaves to their masters and mistresses?

The baptismal formula of "no more male and female" suggested an ontological change in which baptismal regeneration returned men and women to a pre-fallen spiritual wholeness before sexual bimorphism. For Philo this was expressed sexually by celibacy, and socially by retirement to a monastic community of religious contemplatives. This was not the social setting of early Christianity that used this formula. When slave and free, Jew and Greek are added, this suggests overcoming the religious and ethnic-cultural privilege and superiority claimed by both Greeks and Jews (in different terms), and also the sociopolitical and legal power of the paterfamilias over wives, daughters, and slaves in the household.

I believe that Paul did not create this baptismal formula, either in its single paired form

or its triadic form, because he did not actually promote either an ontological return to pre-fallen wholeness or its implications of social equality of women with men, slaves with masters, that would allow either women or slaves to throw off their subordination to the paterfamilias of the household.⁴⁹ He includes this text in Gal. 3:28 because he was not focused on either of these implications: ontological or social. The part of the formula that concerned him in Gal. 3:28 was the religio-ethnic pair, Jew-Greek; or, as he puts it in Gal. 5:6: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love."

Only when a conflict arose with the church in Corinth, which had a strong constituency that endorsed this baptismal theology in both its ontic and social meanings, did Paul take heed of these gender implications and begin to formulate his own theology of redemption to differentiate his view from theirs. In the process, he reformulated the baptismal formula itself so that it lost both its ontic gender implications and its social implications for both women and slaves in the patriarchal household.

The city of Corinth had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C.E. and refounded by Caesar in 44 B.C.E. as a Roman colony and settled with Italian freedmen. In 50 C.E., when Paul arrived there, Corinth was a booming center of commerce where Italians, Greeks, and Orientals mingled, as well as many Jews.⁵⁰ Paul evangelized in Corinth and the region of Achaia for about eighteen months. During that time Apollos, a Jewish Christian originally from Alexandria, arrived. Acts describes Apollos as "an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures . . . with burning

enthusiasm" for the "things concerning Jesus." Originally a follower of a version of Christianity from disciples of John the Baptist, Apollos was further instructed by Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus and then encouraged to come to Corinth (Acts 18:24-27).⁵¹

Paul left Corinth for Ephesus in 51. In 54 he wrote a letter to the Corinthians to reestablish his authority there and to refute many ideas and practices with which he disagreed. Many Christians of Corinth had come to espouse a theology and practice of realized eschatology associated with Apollos. For these Corinthians, the new life in Christ, begun in baptism, overcame the old world of sin and brought the believer into a present experience of resurrected life. This new life in Christ was experienced particularly in Spirit-filled assemblies in which all members, women and men, could participate in spontaneous testimonies of prayer and prophecy that combined "intelligible" and ecstatic forms of speech or "tongues."

The church at Corinth was made up of lower- to middle-status urban people who ranged from household slaves to some local officials, but most were artisans and small merchants. Among them were significant numbers of independent women. The Jewish Christian evangelist couple Priscilla and Aquila lived in Corinth while Paul was there. They were tent-making artisans with extensive trade connections, moving easily from Rome to Corinth to Ephesus.⁵² The household of Chloe was apparently headed by the woman of that name and had slave and freedmen members who traveled readily from Corinth to Ephesus, most probably through trade connections.⁵³ Paul also speaks

of a Phoebe as deacon of Cenchreae, the port city near Corinth, who was a leader (*prostasis*) for many, including Paul himself (Rom. 16:1-2).⁵⁴

These women belonged to those who were Paul's supporters in Corinth. We can assume many more women were prominent but followers of other factions, particularly that of Apollos.⁵⁵ Paul does not name these women, although they were among the central targets of his various proscriptions. The Corinthian women, and presumably men who shared their views, believed the new life in Christ in some way overcame gender differences. Since gender difference was dissolved through celibacy, many of these women were either withdrawing from sexual relations in marriage or not marrying at all (or not remarrying if they were widows). Particularly when possessed by the Spirit, praying and prophying in the Christian assembly, they discarded the head coverings traditionally worn by married women in public, thereby testifying to their liberation from female subordination, having become "like men"; that is, with uncovered heads.⁵⁶

These Corinthians also seem to have believed that in the *New Creation*, which they had already experienced, the power of demons or fallen angels was overcome. Therefore they no longer needed to observe strict divisions between their table fellowship and that found in the temples of the city where meat sacrificed to idols was shared, nor worry about buying and eating such meat sold in marketplaces. They could disregard worry about ritual pollution from contact with idols, since such evil cosmic powers no longer existed. They practiced an open fellowship, allowing the unconverted to attend

their assemblies and even to speak. They also allowed a man to attend who was living with his father's wife.

In short, the Corinthian opponents of Paul practiced what Mary Douglas has called "weak grid and semi-weak group";⁵⁷ that is, dissolution of gender and other status hierarchies within their community, and open boundaries between themselves and the world around them. These practices were not arbitrary but reflected a theological belief that the evil powers that lay behind a world divided by gender, social status, and clean and unclean spheres had already been overcome in the new life in Christ.

Paul finds these practices, as well as the underlying theology that justifies them, highly threatening and sets out to change them on a number of fronts. In the process, he seeks to shore up both internal status hierarchy (gender and leadership class) and external boundaries between Christian and pagan, the moral and the immoral. Paul begins (1 Corinthians 1–4) by shoring up his own apostolic authority, claiming that he seeks to overcome factions in the church (particularly between himself and Apollos). He praises Corinthian opponents for the many spiritual gifts of speech and knowledge they have already received from Christ. He then speaks of his own weaknesses and sufferings, laying out a theology of the cross by contrast to which the Corinthian belief that they already possess transcendent wisdom is identified with a worldly foolishness of those who are still "infants in Christ," not yet ready for "solid food."⁵⁸

Having brought the Corinthians down to their proper place as infantile beginners in

the faith, not those already possessed of the fullness of redemptive life, knowledge, and power, Paul brandishes his paternal power over them as their "father in the gospel," even threatening to "come to you with a stick," if they fail to heed his admonitions (4:21). He then addresses a number of disciplinary issues that he sees as exemplifying their ignorant assumptions, which they have foolishly taken for spiritual wisdom.

The first issue is the case of a man living with his father's wife (5:1). Since women were married in their early teens, often to much older men, a grown son of a previous marriage might well be of an age similar to that of his father's young wife. Paul sees this as a shocking case of incest, but if the wife divorced her elderly husband or was widowed and then married the son, it may not have seemed so to the Corinthians.⁵⁹ The fact that this is the only real case of immorality that Paul mentions specifically suggests that he may be exaggerating the issue of sexual immorality; i.e., there is no reason to think the Corinthians were "gnostic sexual libertines."⁶⁰ The key is Paul's insistence on reassertion of strict boundaries between the pure and the impure. Even one case of immorality allowed in their midst could corrupt the whole body of the community, like a bit of yeast that can permeate an entire batch of dough. The Corinthians are to have no association with such a person, but "drive out the wicked person from among you" (5:13).

Paul goes on to rebuke the Corinthians for taking their legal disputes to the ordinary courts. His objection is not simply to the fact that they have disputes, but that they submit such disputes to pagans—the

“unrighteous”—rather than “taking them before the saints.”⁶¹ The issue again is one of boundaries. “The unrighteous” and the “saints” are to be strictly separated. Those who are to “judge the angels” should not allow themselves to be judged by unbelievers. Paul denounces the Corinthians’ assumption that they are not contaminated by such contacts with the “impure”; that because the evil powers are already conquered, therefore “all things are lawful”; he uses the analogy of the whole body being corrupted by contact with a prostitute. We should not assume, however, that the Corinthian church is filled with people who frequent prostitutes. That this section follows the one about lawsuits suggests that, for Paul, any contact with unbelievers or the immoral is construed as analogous to “fornication.”⁶² Like the “yeast of corruption,” one bit of contact corrupts the whole batch.

Paul then addresses the issue of some Corinthians desisting from marital relations (1 Corinthians 7). He approaches the issue cautiously since he himself is celibate and espouses a version of the belief that withdrawal from sex anticipates the reign of God. But he is distressed by the widespread adoption of this lifestyle by the Corinthians, both because he does not believe they are really capable of celibacy and fears they (the males) will fall into immorality, and also because he recognizes that celibacy is a prime basis for the Corinthian women’s assertion of their transcendence of sexual subordination.⁶³ Although his insistence that each spouse has authority over the body of the other appears egalitarian, in the context of the first-century Corinthian church this principle in effect denied what the women sought to gain by

celibacy: having authority over their own bodies.⁶⁴

Paul advises that almost everyone should marry and maintain sexual relations. The married may by mutual agreement abstain briefly for a time of prayer, but they should “come together again,” lest they fall into the worst case, lust. Paul has a more difficult case with widows and virgins, but here too he advises that although “it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am” (7:8), if they cannot repress their sexual feeling they should marry. Nor need the believing wife or husband separate from the unbelieving spouse if they consent to live together, although Paul consents to the separation of such a couple if the unbeliever initiates it.

Paul’s argument grows more confused as he discusses virgins—the never-married who have resolved to remain virgin in preparation for the coming reign of God. Paul acknowledges that they should remain virgins if they are able to do so without being distressed by sexual feelings. This includes those already engaged, where one of the partners wants to remain unmarried.⁶⁵ His argument moves to a theology of “eschatological reservation.” Although the time of final crisis is approaching in which all the separations between the married and the unmarried, slave and free, Jew and Greek, will be overcome, the time is not yet here. So no one should “jump the gun,” anticipating the transformation to come by changing their status of circumcision or uncircumcision, seeking freedom if they are a slave, or withdrawing from marriage if they are married.

To remain in one’s present condition is Paul’s basic advice (7:17-24); in other words,

do not anticipate a transformation of socio-biological conditions that will happen in the redemptive future but is not yet here. Paul clearly has the triadic baptismal formula of Jew-Greek, slave-free, male-female in mind here. He is saying that these changes will happen only in a still-future reign. They have *not* happened in baptism; the baptized are not authorized to begin such changes now.

Paul then turns to a series of issues having to do with the liturgical assembly. He addresses the questions of Christians eating foods that have been consecrated in pagan temples (including using such foods in the fellowship meal); disorderly eating in which some do not wait for all the others to begin; women praying and prophesying with uncovered heads; and disorderly prayer where many offer testimony at the same time.⁶⁶

Again Paul is in a dilemma, for he concedes some of the theological reasons why the Corinthians do these things and has taught such principles himself; for example, "that no idol in the world really exists, and that there is no God but one" (8:4). He cautions against eating foods consecrated in temples as a concession to the "weaker" brothers who think idols exist and are scandalized by such transgression of the boundaries between the holy and the unholy. But soon he sounds as though idols really do exist and are dangerous demonic powers. To bring such foods into the Lord's Supper is to pollute it; "You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (10:21).

Paul then moves to an insistence that women should cover their heads when they pray and prophecy (1 Corinthians 11). He opens this section with an assertion of a

hierarchical theology of "orders of creation": God as head of Christ, Christ as head of the male, and the male as head of the female. This counters what was probably the Corinthians' belief in an original spiritual unity of male and female joined to the divine Logos, a unity that has been restored in Christ through baptism. For Paul, not only is the order of creation one of God-Christ-male-female, but this hierarchy has not been changed for the baptized.⁶⁷ Therefore the women have no right to discard their head coverings in prayer. Far from the fallen angelic powers having already been overcome, so that Christians pray with angels, the angels are still fallen powers. Women should continue to have "authority" on their heads, for this not only signifies their subjugation to the authority of male over female but also points to the dangerous role the uncovered female head played in seducing the angels and generating demonic powers.⁶⁸

Paul then turns to disorderly eating and disorderly prayer. The Corinthians should practice an ordered fellowship meal in which the eucharistic elements of the Lord's Supper are clearly separated from ordinary eating. By strengthening the lines between regular eating and the Lord's Supper, Paul relegated ordinary eating to private meals in the home apart from the church assembly. This also separated women's food preparation in the private home, rather than having women come early to the place of liturgical assembly to prepare food that was both a fellowship meal and the Lord's Supper.⁶⁹

Paul then insists that orderly, intelligible speech and interpretation should be separated from speaking in tongues. Only a few should speak in each form, and in sequence. But if

there is no one to interpret a tongue, “let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God” (14:28). The statement that absolutizes this silencing for women as a group, “Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says” (14:34), is probably not from Paul himself. But the editor of Paul’s letters who added this gloss was not entirely wrong in thinking that he was merely spelling out Paul’s intentions.⁷⁰

In a culture where women were mostly uneducated and banned from the exercise of public rhetoric but were allowed ecstatic, Spirit-possessed speech, women felt able to participate in Christian assemblies in spontaneous, ecstatic testimony, mingling with tongues. This was further mandated by a belief that women’s status had already been raised to equality with men in the New Creation. If both this form of speech and its theological validation, signaled by the uncovered head, were rescinded, most women would not have felt empowered to speak. The priority for ordered, explanatory speech would also have prioritized an educated male elite and silenced those without these skills.

Paul seeks to counter the argument that since all Christians are members of the body of Christ, all should participate in the same way in prayer, prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues, various forms of leadership, and assistance (12:12-31). He argues that although all Christians—Jew and Greek, slave and free (significantly, male and female are dropped here)—are baptized into the one body of the church, this body is hierarchically ordered. As in the physical body, all parts are indispensable but have different

functions that are not to be confused. Indeed those that are weaker are indispensable, and those that are thought less honorable are treated with greater respect by being clothed. Paul has in mind here women, who are seen as like the genitalia of the body, “weaker” but indispensable, thought to be “inferior” and “less respectable,” but which one “honors” by covering them.⁷¹

The letter culminates with Paul’s theology of resurrection. It is not that the Corinthians do not believe in the resurrection, but they do not believe in Paul’s understanding of it. They think the resurrection has already begun, and they experience it already in their transformed lives. Paul corrects this by a separation of salvation history into distinct stages that are not to be blurred.⁷² First, there is Jesus’ resurrection, followed by a series of male witnesses to the resurrection (culminating in Paul), who authorize apostolic mission. The resurrection appearances to women, found in all four canonical Gospels as well as in extracanonical gospels, are significantly missing here.⁷³

The present life of Christians is one of receiving the message in faith while continuing to struggle against the power of sin in their bodies, signifying the active demonic powers still in charge of the cosmos. Only in the future will there be a third stage of redemption in which Christ conquers the demonic powers, and finally death itself, and “hands over the kingdom to God the Father” (1 Cor. 15:24). Only then will sin and death be conquered; only then will the divisions between male and female be nullified. Here and now, however, such divisions and hierarchical orderings are still in place, and the Corinthians are not to

anticipate such changes as if they had already happened, as if they already sojourn in the new creation where there is “no male and female.”

Gender and Redemption in Two Forms of Pauline Churches

The reception of Paul's efforts to reimpose his authority and correct the Corinthians' patterns of Christian life and thought caused great dissension between factions and anger toward him by those of different views, although later communications and visits by Paul and his representatives may have smoothed this over.⁷⁴ Paul's interventions probably did not change the theology or practices of those most committed to an alternative viewpoint. But the confrontation between Paul and his Corinthian opponents should be seen as a key turning point in early Christian development.

In the generation after Paul, those who claimed to speak for him became increasingly divided. One line of Pauline tradition moved toward patriarchalization in which equality in Christ is spiritualized and combined with continued social subordination of women and slaves. A second viewpoint continued to mandate a spiritual equality for women, signaled by celibacy, a break with subordination to the patriarchal family, and freedom to engage in itinerant preaching and teaching. The first line of Pauline tradition became “orthodox” and entered a canonized New Testament collection, while the second line was relegated to the fringes and transmuted into various forms.

We see the first line of patriarchalizing Paulinism in the post-Pauline letters of Colossians

and Ephesians.⁷⁵ Colossians contains one of the strongest New Testament statements of a baptismal theology of (almost) realized eschatology. The author continually claims that the baptized have already been rescued “from the power of darkness and transferred . . . into the kingdom of his beloved Son” (1:13), have conquered the demonic powers and elemental spirits of the universe, and come “to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority” (2:10). Already in baptism they have passed through death and been “raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (2:12).

This already realized life in the *New Creation* liberates them from the old regulations in regard to food, drink, and festivals. The Christian can ignore the old taboos that said, “Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch.” Having “stripped off the old self with its practices” and being clothed in a “new self . . . renewed in knowledge according to the image of the creator,” the old social divisions are no more. “There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” (3:9-11).

But again, as in 1 Cor. 12:13, the male-female pair is omitted. Moreover, the author construes this overcoming of social divisions as a coexistence in diversity of spiritual equals in the one Christian community, but does so in a way that does not change the hierarchical relations of the patriarchal family. Thus he moves to the statements, “Wives, be subject to your husbands”; “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord,” and “Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while

being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord" (3:18, 20, 22).

The commands for submission by the three subjugated groups in the patriarchal family—the wives, the children, the slaves—is balanced by commands to the *paterfamilias* as husband, father, and master to be kind, forbearing, just, and fair to his wife, children, and slaves. Thus the earlier subversive vision of equality in Christ has been transmuted here into "love patriarchalism," in which patriarchal power is softened by the call to kindness toward subordinates, but the subordinates are to internalize their submission to their earthly "Lord" as their Christian duty.⁷⁶

Ephesians contains a further Christianizing of the patriarchal family. Not only are wives, children, and slaves again called to submit to the *paterfamilias*, but the relation of the husband to the wife is assimilated into a theology of the church, in which the husband is compared to Christ, the head of the church, and the wife to the church, his body. "Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be [subject] in everything, to their husbands" (5:24).

The force and repetition of these strictures in successive New Testament books (see also 1 Peter 2:18–3:8),⁷⁷ addressed to wives, children, and slaves and calling them to submit to the patriarchal head of the household, testifies, however, to a different reality. Women continued to reject the role of wife, and young people and slaves flouted their fathers and masters to adopt a religion other than that of the head of household (itself a subversion of familial and political order).⁷⁸ And

they continued to see this new religion as liberating them from subordination to these traditional authorities.

This continued conflict between two visions of Christianity is expressed most directly in 1 Timothy, an epistle attributed to Paul but written sometime in the first half of the second century. In this epistle, women are not only called to submit to their husbands, but this is related specifically to a prohibition against women teaching in church or having authority over a man: "she is to keep silent" (2:12b). The silencing of women as teachers and leaders in the church is then related to the stories of the creation and fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2–3: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (2:13–14). This exegesis reflects the view we have seen in rabbinic commentary that tended to lessen Adam's fault while heaping most of the blame on Eve.

This silencing of women, in view of women's secondary place in creation and primacy in sin, is then related specifically to marriage: "Yet she will be saved through childbearing" (2:15). The epistle denounces the views of Christian teachers who "forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods" as "the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron" (4:2–3). The church is further assimilated into the patriarchal household by making the qualities of a good *paterfamilias*—"manag[ing] his household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way" (3:4)—the chief qualifications for the choice of bishop.

The gender and generational hierarchy of the patriarchal family is now the pattern for

the Christian church. The bishop is to be like the paterfamilias. Deacons are to be like good adult sons of the paterfamilias, themselves “manag[ing] their children and households well” (3:12). Women who serve as deacons are to be like frugal housewives, “serious, not slanderers . . . temperate, and faithful in all things” (3:11). Younger men and women are to honor older men as fathers, older women as mothers, younger men as brothers, and younger women as sisters (5:1-2).

The church of 1 Timothy continues to have a female ministry, but it is now relegated to a separate service to women. There is a group of widows who serve the church, but this is to be limited to elderly women over sixty years of age who have no living relatives to support them (5:3-9). With these strictures the author seeks to cut off some groups of celibate women ministers who exist in his church: women who are younger, who have chosen not to marry or remarry, who have relatives who could support them, but who have left their families and live together as a household of women.

Such younger women, who are not “true widows” (that is, have never married, are insufficiently elderly, quiescent, and destitute) yet claim the office of widow, are eyed with suspicion as “gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say . . . some have already turned away to follow Satan” (5:13,15). It is particularly such women ministers, whose chief office is to visit other women and to catechize them in their households, that the author probably has in mind when he warns Christian teachers to “have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives’ tales.”⁷⁹

Prominent among the “profane myths and old wives’ tales” against which the author writes is an alternative form of Christianity. This alternative Christianity was probably one that also claimed the authority of Paul, but taught views opposite to those endorsed in 1 Timothy. Its primary promulgators were probably communities of celibate women teachers who prepared other women for baptism. This Pauline Christianity is found in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, which can be dated as a written text to the late second century but probably existed in oral forms at the time of the writing of 1 Timothy. It, like 1 Timothy, comes from Asia Minor. First Timothy very likely was written to refute the kind of Christianity reflected in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*.⁸⁰

In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*,⁸¹ Paul arrives in Iconium to preach and converts a beautiful young virgin, Thecla, who is betrothed to a man named Thamyris. Thecla immediately expresses her new Christian identity by rejecting her marriage to Thamyris. He and her mother, Theocleia, complain to the governor against Paul’s influence on women and Thecla’s rejection of marriage. The governor orders her to be brought to the theater to be burned at the stake, but a hailstorm extinguishes the flames and Thecla is saved.

Thecla then cuts her hair, adopts male dress, and follows Paul to Antioch, asking him to baptize her. Paul hesitates, believing that she is not yet ready to resist the temptations of the world (i.e., the temptation to marry). While they are traveling, a Syrian named Alexander falls in love with Thecla and tries to seduce her, but she rejects his advances, tearing his cloak and ripping off the golden crown

THE ACTS OF PAUL AND THECLA

But Thecla yearned for Paul and sought after him. . . . He was astonished when he saw her and the crowd who was with her. . . . But observing this she said to him: "I have taken the bath, Paul; for he who worked with thee for the Gospel has also worked with me for my baptism." And taking her by the hand Paul led her into the house of Hermias and heard from her everything (that had happened), so that Paul marvelled greatly and the hearers were confirmed. . . . And Thecla arose and said to Paul, "I am going to Iconium." And Paul said: "Go and teach the world of God!"⁸²

that signified his honors. He too leads Thecla to the governor, who throws her to the wild beasts in the arena. But now the women of the city, including Queen Tryphaena, support her. Even a female lion defends her against a bear and then a male lion.

A panoply of wild beasts are now unleashed against Thecla, but she stands with hands upraised in prayer and then throws herself into a tank of water, baptizing herself. A cloud of fire surrounds and covers the naked Thecla, killing the seals in the tank. The governor and Alexander now recognize that Thecla is too powerful for them. The governor orders her clothing to be brought and releases her into the arms of Tryphaena and the rejoicing women. Thecla instructs the entire household of Tryphaena in the faith. Thecla, again dressed in men's clothes, then leaves with a retinue of male and female followers to find Paul, who is teaching in Myra of Lycia. When

she announces that she has received baptism, he affirms all she has done and then sends her on her way to "teach the word of God" in Iconium.⁸³

Such a form of Christianity not only taught that women converts should reject marriage, thereby attaining the male status of freedom to travel, teach, and baptize, but did so in a way that claimed the authority of Paul (while making women themselves the main *dramatis personae*). If these are the sort of "old wives' tales" the author of 1 Timothy has in mind, and the communities of teaching "widows" are the likely promulgators of such a women-affirming Christianity, we can better understand the adversaries against whom he complains. These adversaries were not in some other church, but taught and ministered out of the very houses of widows that his own church supported; these he sought to limit and control.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1 Research the divisions between the pure and the impure in Jewish law: how did these differentiate groups along class and gender lines in Jewish society?
- 2 Research economic opportunities for women in first-century Greco-Roman society: How were some women of free or freedman status able to become economically independent? What were their areas of work? How did this group of women become important sponsors of early Christian churches?
- 3 Research the roles of women in the second and third century apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: What kind of Christianity is portrayed in these Acts? What roles do women play in these writings? How does this differ from that roles of women in the canonical letters of Paul and deuterio-Pauline letters?

READING SUGGESTIONS

Primary Sources: New Testament Gospels and Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Letters

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