

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

The Office of Woman in the New Testament

GEORG GUNTER BLUM

1 *Indications of services rendered by women in the life of Jesus*

THERE are no direct statements by either the earthly or the Risen Christ on the position of women in the Christian community. In spite of this, the question as to the attitude of Jesus to women is both justified and significant. Although there is no answer either in developed teaching or in single statements, yet certain conclusions can be drawn from particular situations in the life of Jesus.

The influence of Jesus, by word and deed, was exercised on both men and women without distinction. The Gospels depict for us a series of encounters of our Lord with women, and we are shown emphatically that it was precisely the women who were honoured by his miracles and his revealing teaching.¹ But of greater importance is the fact that a small group of women lived constantly in the society of Jesus and followed him, just as did the disciples. Luke the Evangelist emphasises this fact, and refers to it in one of his summarised reports of Jesus's activity: 'And the twelve were with him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others which ministered unto him of their substance' (Luke 8:1-3). This report is not exclusive to Luke, nor is it according to a specially Lukan construction. Mark also speaks of several women who were witnesses of the Crucifixion, 'Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him' (Mark 15:40ff).² In the same way as Luke, he mentions a particular service which these women rendered in the company of Jesus. They regarded it as their duty to minister to Jesus and to his disciples of their substance (τὰ ὑπάρχοντα). What is significant is that various women are mentioned by name, an indication of their high reputation and the historical authenticity of their mention.³ Thus it is unlikely that this is a case of reading back into the life of Jesus a

primitive Christian occurrence, but rather a note which completely corresponds to historical facts. It is hardly possible to regard this ministering by women as a preliminary stage of the early Christian office of deaconess. It would be better to speak of typological reference to this office. It is conspicuous that Luke, otherwise so pro-feminine, expressly avoids the feminine form of the term 'disciple', probably of set purpose, as he wishes to restrict the number of disciples to the inner circle of the Twelve and the wider circle of the Seventy.⁴ The women who ministered to Jesus and his disciples of their substance were not called and commissioned specially, as were the disciples. The reason for their ministry lies entirely in their experience of healing from the power of evil spirits and of infirmities.⁵

As during his earthly life, women play a significant part after his Resurrection. In the synoptic Gospels and in John the women near Jesus are not only concerned with his burial,⁶ but are also the first to discover the empty tomb;⁷ it is they who encounter the Risen Lord and his angels⁸ respectively, and who bring the news of the Resurrection to the disciples.⁹ Although this fulfils a fundamental condition of the apostolate, namely the meeting with the Risen Lord, and although Mary Magdalene is vouchsafed a special appearance,¹⁰ there were no women-Apostles, just as there were no women-disciples. Important as was the part played by women in the earthly life of Jesus, and as witnesses of the Resurrection, we cannot overlook the fact that our Lord did not call any women into the circle of disciples and Apostles. The relation of women to Jesus and to his disciples and Apostles lies, on the contrary, in a ministering function of peculiar significance and dignity.

2 Women distinguished by special activities in the Acts and in the Pauline Epistles

WHAT function have women in the Christian communities of the Apostolic Age? Apart from the discussions of St. Paul in 1 Cor. 11 and 14, on the fundamentals, we depend on conclusions deduced from occasional references to women in the Pauline Epistles and in the Acts.

The greetings in the Epistle to the Romans are preceded by a commendation of Phoebe, who is called ἀδελφή ἡμῶν and διάκονος (Rom. 16:1,2).¹¹ Whilst the expression ἀδελφή ἡμῶν can refer to all women members of the community, διάκονος is a designation of office.¹² What the duties of Phoebe's office of deaconess were can only be a matter of conjecture. Perhaps one clue may be the designation προστάτις.¹³ The succour which Phoebe gives to the Apostle and to others is probably a matter of material and administrative assistance.

It is also quite possible that Phoebe gave her services to the poor and the sick of the community. We do not know exactly what her special duty in Rome was.¹⁴ In spite of its lack of clarity, the mention of Phoebe in Romans is sufficient proof of the existence of the office of deaconess in the Apostolic Age, even though no details can be deduced as to the dissemination of the office.¹⁵

The list of greetings in Romans begins with the names of the Jewish-Christian couple, Prisca¹⁶ and Aquila. That the woman's name is put first gives us the idea that Prisca was more active than her husband, and therefore of more importance.¹⁷ We know of this couple that they had collected around them in Rome a house-church, as they also did in Corinth, when they fled there after the edict of Claudius (Acts 18:1-8).¹⁸ St. Paul owed them especial gratitude, because they 'laid down their own necks' for his life.¹⁹ He calls them *συνεργοὶ μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ* as well, a description which he used for those who helped him in spreading the Gospel.²⁰ It is not clear of what this help consisted, whether in active participation in preaching or in an indirect way. It is recorded in Acts 18:26 that Priscilla and Aquila 'expounded the way of God more perfectly' to the Alexandrian Jew Apollos in Ephesus. In the preceding verse it is expressly stated that Apollos was 'instructed in the way of the Lord', and correctly taught about Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. The activity of Priscilla and Aquila probably consisted in supplementing and deepening the Christian teaching (*ὁδός*), possibly with special reference to Baptism. It would be an exaggeration to call Priscilla a woman-apostle in this respect.²¹ In the expounding to Apollos it is not a question of public proclamation, nor does Priscilla play an official part. The gift of Christian teaching, the power to win members to a house-church, and the help given to the Apostle in his missionary work are to be regarded more as spontaneous expressions of their Christian personality. Priscilla's activity is therefore fundamentally different from Phoebe's office of deaconess, and is exceptional in its individual and unofficial character.

This remark is also valid for the four daughters of Philip the evangelist, 'virgins which did prophesy' (Acts 21:9). The verses following, about the 'prophet named Agabus' who foretold St. Paul's imprisonment at Jerusalem, shows clearly that 'prophesying' here cannot be, as for St. Paul, confined to a speaking by inspiration in church (cf. Acts 13:1), but refers to a foretelling of the future (cf. Acts 11:27). Here it is a foretelling of the future rather than a preaching of the word of God. The mention of the four daughters of Philip is designed to prepare the reader of Acts for the prophecy of Agabus. So there can be no essential difference between the activity of the prophet and that of the prophesying virgins. The prophesying here spoken of is neither a general charismatic phenomenon nor an office based on a special commission, but rather, an individual vocation and gift, having

no direct connection with preaching the word in church, and it can thus be bestowed on both men and women.

The greeting in Romans contains other women's names. Mary bestowed much labour on the community (16:6: ἐκοπίασεν). The same expression for corporal or intellectual and spiritual endeavours is used in v. 12 for the work of Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis, with the addition ἐν Κυρίῳ, which better describes the work of these women. This cannot refer to an active participation in missionary preaching, for κοπιῶν is a general expression which always requires a special qualification.²⁵

Finally St. Paul, in Phil. 4:2,3, refers to Euodias and Syntyche 'which laboured with me in the Gospel'. As in Rom. 16:6,12, there can be no reference to an official position, or to a participation in preaching. ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ συναθλεῖν refers to suffering for faith (cf. Phil. 1:27), and is to be understood as the possibility of martyrdom which persists throughout the Epistle to the Philippians.

The examination of all the references in the Pauline Epistles and in Acts therefore shows that women definitely played an active part in the life of the community, without, however, exercising a missionary or teaching office of any kind. Women, whether in official or quasi-official positions, are only found as διάκονοι.

3 *St. Paul's attitude to the position of women in church services*

SO far the picture of women's service in the Hellenistic communities could only be inferred from occasional remarks. St. Paul's fundamental exposition of this theme gives a clearer outline. But before we can discuss 1 Cor. 14:33b-36, we must examine the utterances regarding women's activities in 1 Cor. 11.²⁶

In discussing the question of what kind of head-covering the members of the community at Corinth²⁴ should wear in church, it is assumed that women too can pray and prophesy.²⁵ This does not refer to any official activity undertaken by particular persons, but to a free, charismatic participation which every man and every woman can exercise.²⁶ προσεύχεσθαι means 'praying aloud' and προφητεῦειν comprehensible speech, in contrast to glossolalia, by inspiration, and the spontaneous proclamation in the Spirit of the divine revelation.²⁷ That women, in the assembly at Corinth, prayed and prophesied in a charismatic fashion cannot be denied. But it is another question how St. Paul judged these facts. In 1 Cor. 11 he does not adopt any particular attitude. It would be going too far to deduce a special attitude from an incidental remark in v. 5.²⁸ As St. Paul does not concern himself with this question at all in 1 Cor. 11, we do not know whether, in this case, the praying and prophesying by women in church at Corinth is permitted or disapproved on principle.

But in 1 Cor. 14:33b-36, a thorough discussion and an enunciation of principle occur. The whole of chapter 14 deals with speaking with tongues and prophecy, and with the effectiveness of spiritual gifts in church.⁸⁹ After a detailed exposition of the use and order of these gifts in the assembly (vv. 26-33a), St. Paul comes to the activity of women. The immediate taking-up of this question, which apparently interrupts the connection between vv. 33a and 37, and the inversion of vv. 34 and 35 in some MSS,⁹⁰ has led to the supposition that a very early interpolation can be found here, based on 1 Tim. 2:11, 12. It has also been suggested that it might be a marginal note by St. Paul himself. But this suggestion is incorrect because in the case of an interpolation, vv. 33b-36 must be regarded as not genuine, as well as vv. 34 and 35, as the MSS referred to would imply. It cannot be seriously maintained that the verses are either not genuine or not in the right place.

The somewhat abrupt passing to a fresh question is probably to be explained by the Apostle's desire to deal at last with the question which he had not yet mentioned in chapter 11, and to speak of women's activities in the assembly. Whilst he merely puts glossolalia within proper bounds, St. Paul absolutely forbids women to speak at all. This command to be silent refers to all ecstatic and edifying speaking, its different possibilities having been enumerated in v. 26. Twice a similar command in a particular case had been given. The speaker with tongues is to be silent if there is no one to interpret (14:28). The prophet is to be silent if a revelation is given to another (14:30). The third prohibition which St. Paul enunciates for the order of the assembly is of a general character and refers to every kind of charismatic speech. In this connection only λαλεῖν is mentioned, not προφητεῦν or διδασκεῖν or ἐρμηνεύειν. Λαλεῖν is not the equivalent of any of these expressions. It embraces all kinds of charismatic utterance. In no circumstances can it refer to a speaking different from that in v. 26.⁹¹ The special nuance of this word lies in its opposition to silence.⁹² The assertion of 'another kind of speaking', which St. Paul is here forbidding, cannot be deduced from the use of λαλεῖν.

If we had only this command to be silent to deal with, there would be no question about its meaning. But in v. 35 comes the direction: εἰ δέ τι μαθεῖν θέλουσιν, ἐν οἴκῳ τοῦς ἰδίους ἀνδρας ἐπερωτᾶτωσαν, the relation of which to the previous command to be silent is of decided significance for the exegesis. For an appropriate interpretation the following alternatives offer themselves: either μαθεῖν interprets the λαλεῖν in v. 34, in which case the prohibition of speech would refer only to intervening questions,⁹³ or v. 35 intensifies the command to be silent. Women⁹⁴ are to be silent as a matter of principle; not even for the sake of μαθεῖν⁹⁵ may they speak in the assembly but are to ask their husbands at home.

V. 36 makes it clear that only the second interpretation is suitable.

The polemic rhetorical question as to whether the word of God came *from* the women or only to *them* would have no meaning except for the preceding general command to keep silent, which refers to all charismatic utterance of the word of God by women. If it were an intervening question and discussion, it would hardly have been denoted by ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ. [It may be that v. 36 refers rather to the coming of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Corinth, in which case it is possible that λαλεῖν does mean the intervening questions; but if Paul is forbidding even intervening questions, he must *a fortiori* be forbidding extended discourse—Ed.] That the command to be silent in v. 34 is intensified is also obvious from the wider context. As the whole of chapter 14, and especially vv. 33b-36, deals with the ordering of charismatic gifts in church, and that theme is continued in v. 37, it is hardly likely that the intervening vv. 33b-36 should suddenly drop away from the main theme and deal with uncharismatic speaking. Vv. 33b-36 are part and parcel of the whole chapter. Therefore the command to be silent refers, as a matter of principle, to all Spirit-inspired speaking by women in the assembly. The direction to have certain questions answered by their husbands at home only underlines this intensification.

What is the reason for this command to keep silence? In the first place there is the direction ὡς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῶν ἁγίων (33b). St. Paul argued in the same way concerning women's head covering in church: ἡμεῖς τοιαύτην συνήθειαν οὐκ ἔχομεν, οὐδὲ αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ Θεοῦ. In modern terminology the ecumenical relevance of the problem is at stake. For the sake of the unity of the Church, no contradictory customs and arrangements should be allowed to spring up in the communities (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17). A single community which differs from the others on the question of the women's right to proclaim the word of God should, for the sake of unanimity in general practice, be ready to abandon its own customs, for in St. Paul's thought the universal Church has always the priority over the single community. In chapter 11 the argument seems to envisage only the bringing into line of a comparatively unimportant custom. As we shall see below it is here also a question of principle concerning the equality of men and women in church.

The second reason for the command to be silent lies for St. Paul in the νόμος which demands a ὑποτάσσεσθαι of women (14:34). In other places also St. Paul refers to 'the law' for definite directions for community life.⁶⁶ He is thinking either of the Pentateuch or also of the rest of the Old Testament.⁶⁷ Which passage is St. Paul appealing to in 1 Cor. 14:34? He is still citing Gen. 3:16 (cf. Gen. 18:12), where the headship of the man over the woman is spoken of. True, this passage deals with the submission of the married woman to her husband, whilst the ὑποτάσσεσθαι of 1 Cor. 14:34 is a special kind of principle for the service.⁶⁸ But we must not overlook the fact that this

special principle of order is founded on the submission of the woman to her husband which, in St. Paul's opinion, goes back to the story of the Fall. It is less likely that St. Paul, by invoking the νόμος, is alluding to the fact that both in ancient Israel and in the Temple and synagogue services of late Judaism, women were excluded from any active participation in the cult. Even on the basis of the argument in 1 Cor. 11, it is more likely that St. Paul starts from the general subordination of women to their husbands, due to the Creation, i.e., the Fall, and goes on to the special principle of order of the ὑποτάσσεσθαι in the assembly.⁴³

The motives for the Pauline command to keep silence must be distinguished from the reasons for it. The reference to custom and tradition in the other communities and the abruptness of the diction in 1 Cor. 14:36 show that the Apostle is taking a polemical stand against a bad custom which had grown up in Corinth, and which is, in his eyes, a matter of principle. Behind the behaviour in church of the women of Corinth lies a striving for the principle of the equality of men and women. Considering the inner situation of the Corinthian community, this can only be a matter of putting the ideas of Gnosticism into practice.⁴⁴ According to the Gnostic Redemption-myth there can be no more difference between the sexes. The particles of primal man can find a habitation in either a masculine or a feminine σῶμα. In the πνεῦμα all natural and created features are abolished.⁴⁵ We also know that in the Gnostic conventicles could be seen the practical consequences of the fundamental equality of men and women.⁴⁶ The community of Corinth was under the influence of these Gnostic ideas, and tried to put them into practice in its services. This is the real position which St. Paul is attacking. Lastly, it is not for him a matter of this or that custom, but a yes or no to an elementary *theologoumenon* of Gnosticism. If we consider this polemical goal of Pauline argument, then these two reasons for the command to women to keep silence stand out even more clearly. The postulate of the unity of the Church in the ordering of services and the idea that the sexes are unequal by Creation stand in complete opposition to the theory and practice of Gnosticism, and are, at the same time, decisive reasons for the impossibility of associating the Corinthian custom with general church order.

These two anti-gnostic arguments are also found in 1 Cor. 11, where the head-covering of women in church is in question.⁴⁷ Here St. Paul turns against the Gnostic equalisation of men and women. The reference to the custom in other communities (11:16) is, again, not in isolation. The difference of the sexes is established by the Apostle in two ways. He first speaks of the κεφαλή-ship of the man. Whatever conception St. Paul expressed by the idea of κεφαλή,⁴⁸ he wishes, by the gradation God/Christ/Man/Woman (11:3), to prevent the false equalising of the sexes, without expressing thereby a creaturely in-

feriority of woman to man. More persuasive is the Apostle's demonstration in 11:8,9. He is dealing with an interpretation of the Creation-story in Gen. 2:8ff, which excludes the equality of the sexes. The man is εἰκὼν and δόξα of God (11:1), ἡ γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρὸς ἔστιν. The order of creation is emphasised: γυνὴ ἐξ ἀνδρὸς (11:8), and finally the woman was created for the sake of the man (11:9). St. Paul is only concerned to oppose a Gnostic emancipation of women. It would be drawing a wrong conclusion to demonstrate from his arguments that he considered women to be religiously and essentially inferior. St. Paul wants to prevent such a false interpretation of his argument, and therefore adds: 'Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God' (11:11,12). If he did first insist on the created differences of the sexes in his anti-gnostic attitude, yet it would be a misunderstanding if an absolute difference were deduced from this, for ἐν Κυρίῳ this difference between man and woman is abolished and only the principle τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ counts.

In the Epistle to the Galatians St. Paul uses Gnostic notions to express the fundamental equality of man and woman. 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ' (Gal. 3:28). In v. 27 the reason for this unity is said to be in Christ: 'For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ'. For the old differences of religious and social origins, as well as the sexes, have been annulled in those who have received the sacrament of Baptism.⁴⁵ Man and woman are now a unity ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, whose members they have become in Baptism. Their natural individuality has been taken up into the totality of the σῶμα Χριστοῦ, into which they have been integrated by the sacrament.

However much St. Paul represents this view, couched in Gnostic terms, of the sacramental-ontological equality of all the baptised as members of Christ's body, he yet decisively, on the other hand, opposes an equality of the sexes which disregards the natural order of Creation. For the Apostle there is a sharply-drawn frontier between the positive assimilation of Gnostic ideas and the clear rejection of the same ideas in the case of their incompatibility with the Christian idea of Creation. St. Paul finds no direct practical inferences from the sacramental reality of the Body of Christ for the ordering of the assembly and its services. The decisive rejection of an equalisation of men and women in the concrete situations of 1 Cor. 11 and 14 is the more weighty in the face of the *theologumenon* of a fundamental equality of the sexes represented in 1 Cor. 11:11,12 and Gal. 3:28. Was St. Paul inconsistent? Did he let himself be led astray by his anti-gnostic polemic to make the principle of the equality of the sexes relative, or even to abolish it, in 1 Cor. 11 and 14? Can the Apostle's command to keep silence be

discounted by the Church, since it arose out of a particular polemical situation, in contrast to his original insight? But it is not suitable to make St. Paul's different views relative, or to play off one against the other.⁴⁶ The duty of every serious interpretation is to seek after the complementary meaning of such differing statements without becoming involved in the search for a false harmonisation. Both the sentences about the equality and inequality of the sexes are therefore to be understood not only in their temporal but also in their fundamental theological meaning. The difference between man and woman arising from Creation, and the sacramental unity and equality originating from Redemption, are not contradictory, nor do they cancel each other out. The recourse to the order of Creation is in no way a concession to anti-gnostic polemic, but it corresponds absolutely to the fundamental theological insight that the circumstances of Creation have been transformed sacramentally by Redemption, though they are still valid for the concrete ordering of the community. The complete negation of the theological relevance of the reality of Creation on the Gnostic side and the resulting practical consequence were for St. Paul an immediate impulse to his insight and decision that in Christian worship men only were to be called to the various offices of proclaiming the word. So it cannot be doubted that St. Paul, with his apostolic authority, has given a decision, in his command to women to keep silence, which is still binding on the Church of to-day.

4 *The duties of women according to the Pastoral Epistles*

Some decades after St. Paul we find in the pseudo-Pauline Pastoral Epistles a further discussion of the woman-problem. 1 Tim. 2:8-15 deals with a kind of regulation for the community concerning the behaviour of men and women in church.⁴⁷ Contrasted with 1 Cor. 14:33b-36, this passage shows an intensification: 'Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence' (1 Tim. 2, 11, 12). As in 1 Cor. 14:35, the matter is that of learning in connection with the preaching of the word. But whereas in 1 Cor. 14:35 the woman is recommended to converse with her husband at home, 1 Tim. 2 mentions only the possibility of learning quietly at home in all subjection. The woman must submit to the regulations for the assembly and must receive the preaching of the men without interfering with questions. The ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ μανθάνειν corresponds to the command to keep silence, the ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ to the ὑποτάσσεσθαι of 1 Cor. 14:34. 1 Tim. 2:13 shows that a subjection of the woman to the man is meant, the origin of which lies in the Creation of man, and which has practical results for behaviour in church. The generally disseminated *paraenesis* of the subjection of the woman to the man⁴⁸ is

here taken up and applied to the conditions of the assembly. In contrast to 1 Cor. 14, the command to be silent is now made more precise by an explicit prohibition of teaching: διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω (2:12). διδάσκειν cannot refer to charismatic speaking, but to official teaching in the assembly. Because the Pastoral Epistles do not, as does 1 Cor. 14, deal with the exercise of free personal charisma, but with the preaching of the word legitimised by ecclesiastical authority,⁴⁹ the mere command to keep silence must be replaced by an express prohibition to teach. The writer of 1 Tim. seems to be in a polemical situation when he forbids a woman to desire lordship over the man. The αὐθεντεῖν ἀνδρός is too subtle a controversial formulation, and is directed against a Gnostic equalisation of men and women in church. Possibly there is an allusion to the pretensions of 'charismatic' women to taking precedence of the official teachers and to a tendency to interrupt.⁵⁰ The anti-gnostic polemic is made particularly clear by the recommendation of τεκνογονία as the duty suitable to woman (2:15; cf. 5:14). This high estimation of child-bearing is joined with a condemnation of a Gnostic ascetism grounded in mythology (cf. 1 Tim. 4:3). Thus here also there is a likeness between 1 Cor. 14 and the regulations of the Pastoral Epistles, just as the εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ (2:12) corresponds to St. Paul's command to keep silence. The reason given in v. 13 for the subjection of the woman, that Adam was created before Eve, coincides with the Pauline way of thought of 1 Cor. 11:7-9, which also lies behind the notion of subjection in 1 Cor. 14:34. The second reason, given in v. 14, that it was Eve, and not Adam, who was tempted, does not occur in St. Paul, although the idea of the women's proneness to temptation is not foreign to him (2 Cor. 11:3). Whether this coincidence of both terminology and subject matter is due to the imitation of the Pauline example (this would explain the pseudonymous character of the Epistle), or whether this comes from a tradition of teaching influenced by St. Paul, cannot as yet be definitely decided. But the pertinent correspondence is not in doubt. In his directions concerning the ordering of the gifts of the Spirit in the assembly St. Paul emphasised his apostolic authority,⁵¹ and the commands in 1 Tim. concerning the behaviour of men and women in church are also grounded on such an authority. The conscious and decisive desire of the Apostle is meant to be expressed by βούλομαι (2:8) and ἐπιτρέπω (2:12).⁵² The ordering, which includes the prohibition to women to teach, is therefore not only bound up with a temporal situation, but is rather to be regarded as generally binding and valid for the life of the Church.⁵³ The formal claim, which the Pastoral Epistles make, in their pseud-epigraphic dress, receives its corroboration by its pertinent conformity with the teachings of the Apostle Paul.

Besides the prohibition to teach, the Pastoral Epistles also contain references to the fact that women exercised certain functions in the

community. 1 Tim. 5:9 refers to widows who are to be 'taken into the number'. The condition for being thus 'taken into the number' is fulfilled by a widow who is not 'under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well-reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work' (5:9,10).⁵⁴ It cannot be definitely decided whether this refers only to the condition of widowhood in general, or to a regular office of widow with defined duties and rights. What is striking is that some of the activities here listed could well belong to the sphere of a deaconess such as Phoebe, mentioned in Rom. 16:1. But a regulated and organised charitable activity in a particular condition of life does not necessarily mean that all widows who have been 'taken into the number' administered an office, in the specialised meaning of the word.

5 The actual authority of the New Testament statements concerning the services and duties of women in the community

THUS the witness of the New Testament gives us a clear and homogeneous picture of the office held by women in the Christian community. As in the life of Jesus, women in primitive Christianity also exercised functions of service. The office of deaconess gave expression to the special gifts and duties of women. But women are not allowed the office of preaching (and that would naturally include administration of the sacraments), whether in a free, charismatic or a specific, official form. This is not a matter of accidental, temporary character, due to the position of women in the classical world of primitive Christianity; it is a deliberate decision. Though this decision was arrived at in a particular controversial situation, it is meant as a permanent principle. As it rests on the highest authority possible in the Church, i.e., Apostolic authority, this decision must be equally valid and binding for the Church of the present day.⁵⁵ The recognition of the Apostolic command to keep silence and to refrain from teaching in the assembly should be not merely an act of obedience to Apostolic authority, but also the recognition of the theological reasons for this command. For both the reasons given by the Apostle Paul are of actual significance and validity. He who sees the unity of the Church as the goal and standard for ecclesiastical work, and who recognises the relationship between the order of Creation and that of Redemption correctly (i.e., according to the Apostles) must regard the command to women to keep silence and to refrain from teaching in the assembly as still valid and binding for today.

NOTES

- ¹ cf., e.g., Mark 5:21ff, the healing of the woman with an issue of blood and the raising of Jairus's daughter; Mark 7:24ff, the healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter; John 4:1ff, the woman of Samaria; Luke 10:38ff, Martha and Mary; Luke 7:36ff, the anointing by the woman that was a sinner; Mark 14:3ff, the anointing by the woman of Bethany. In general cf. J. Leipholdt, *Jesus und die Frauen*, 1921, and *Die Frau in der antiken Welt und im Urchristentum*, 2nd ed., 1955.
- ² cf., Luke 23:49,55, the reference to 'the women who followed him from Galilee'.
- ³ Luke names Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna (8:2ff); Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James (24:10); Mark names Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (15:40). The discrepancy amongst the lists of names is due to the fact that in oral tradition, names are easily changed about. A comparison of Luke with Mark reveals that (i) Mary Magdalene held the most important place amongst the women; (ii) the circle of women who followed Jesus in Galilee and ministered to him is fundamentally the same as the group mentioned in Luke 8:2,3.
- ⁴ Tabitha is described in Acts 9:36 as μαθήτρια. It is said of her, 'this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did'. We find here an unqualified expression. In Acts the Christians are generally referred to as 'disciples', cf., e.g., 6:1,7; 9:19. In the technical meaning of the word, Mary is spoken of as a μαθήτρια τοῦ Κυρίου in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter (15:20).
- ⁵ This is specially underlined in Luke 8:2.
- ⁶ cf., Mark 15:47; Matt. 27:61; Luke 23:55.
- ⁷ cf., Mark 16:3; Matt. 28:1ff; Luke 24:2; John 20:1.
- ⁸ cf., Mark 16:5; Matt. 28:9; Luke 24:4.
- ⁹ cf., Mark 16:7; Matt. 28:8; Luke 24:9; John 20:18.
- ¹⁰ cf., Mark 16:9ff; John 20:11ff.
- ¹¹ For exegetical details cf. the respective commentaries, esp. O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 1955.
- ¹² This is obvious from the preceding participle οὔσαν and the genitive following, τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κενχρεαῖς.
- ¹³ προστάτις can, like the masculine form προστάτης, be a reference to office, but here the word is probably used in its general meaning. cf., the parallels in the dictionaries.
- ¹⁴ Perhaps it was she who delivered the Epistle. Her duty in Rome seems to be referred to in Rom. 16:2. πρᾶγμα can refer to a legal matter (cf., 1 Cor. 6:1). The usual meaning of the word, 'affair, business', is here to be preferred.
- ¹⁵ Whether 1 Tim. 3:11 refers to deaconesses is doubtful. Probably the reference is to the wives of deacons.

- ¹⁶ The diminutive of this name is Priscilla. cf., Acts 18:18,26.
- ¹⁷ 2 Tim. 4:19 seems to follow the Pauline example in a pseud-epigraphic manner, but also in Acts 18:18,26, Priscilla is named first. However, in 1 Cor. 16:19 the order is reversed.
- ¹⁸ cf., Rom. 16:3 and 1 Cor. 16:9. House-churches under the leadership of women are attested elsewhere. In Col. 4:16, greetings are sent to Nympe and the church in her house.
- ¹⁹ cf., Rom. 16:4. Where this took place is not known. Perhaps in Ephesus, cf., Acts 19:23.
- ²⁰ e.g. Rom. 16:9,21; Phil. 2:25; Philemon 1,24.
- ²¹ as does Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 4th ed., 1924, p. 593.
- ²² e.g. in 1 Tim. 5:17.
- ²³ cf., Else Kähler, *Die Frau in den paulinischen Briefen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Begriffes der Unterordnung*, 1960, where all previous literature is summed up in an exemplary fashion. Otherwise we need only cite H. Lietzmann-W. C. Kummel, *An die Korinther I/II, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 1949, W. Schmithals, *Die Gnosis in Korinth*, 1956, and G. Fitzner, 'Das Weib schweige in der Gemeinde'. *Über den unpaulinischen Charakter der mulier taceat-Verse in I Korinther xiv*, 1963.
- ²⁴ That this should refer only to a house-church assembly is impossible in face of the discussion of the Eucharistic service which follows in 11:17ff.
- ²⁵ 1 Cor. 11:5: Πᾶσα δὲ γυνὴ προσευχομένη ἢ προφητεύουσα. Cf. v. 13, which refers only to women praying.
- ²⁶ 1 Cor. 11:4: πᾶς ἀνὴρ . . . 11:5 πᾶσα δὲ γυνὴ . . . πᾶς, πᾶσα testifies that no further qualification is necessary.
- ²⁷ cf., 1 Cor. 13:9; 14:1,3-5,24,31,39; Matt. 7:22; Acts 2:17; 19:6; 21:9, Rev. 11:3.
- ²⁸ St. Paul proceeds in the same way in 1 Cor. 15:29, in dealing with vicarious Baptism. The mention of the prevailing custom of Baptism for the dead is here used in the special argumentation, cf., chap. 15. But that does not by any means imply that the Apostle approves of the custom. The contrary is more probable.
- ²⁹ cf., the enumeration is v. 26: ψαλμός, διδασχῆ, ἀποκάλυψις, λαλεῖν ἐν γλώσσῃ, ἐρμηνεῖα. The meaning and goal of all charismatic activity is summed up in the sentence: πάντα πρὸς οἰκοδόμην γενέσθω.
- ³⁰ The vv. 34,35 are placed at the end of the chapter in the MSS DG 88 and in Ambrosiaster.
- ³¹ This is against Kähler, *op. cit.*, p. 77, who espouses the opinion, without evidence, that λαλεῖν could not include any προφητεύειν. The use of the word in 1 Cor. 14:6 in connection with γλώσσα, ἀποκάλυψις, γνῶσις, προφητεῖα, διδασχῆ makes this assertion impossible (cf., 14:27, 28,29). True, λαλεῖν can mean chatter (cf., 1 Cor. 13:11; 1 Tim. 5:13), but a positive meaning is much more frequent, e.g. Rom. 7:1;

- 1 Cor. 15:34; 2 Cor. 13:3. In Rom. 3:19 and 1 Cor. 9:8 λαλεῖν and λέγειν are used synonymously.
- ²⁸ cf., e.g. Mark 1:34; Luke 4:41; Acts 18:9.
- ²⁹ cf., Kähler, *op. cit.*, p. 76: 'In the situation considered by St. Paul the prophesying woman is not in question. St. Paul deals only with the 'speaking' woman (λαλεῖν) who disturbs the service and who is therefore commanded to be silent.'
- ³⁰ St. Paul is thinking chiefly of married women, who probably formed the majority of the community. Unmarried women naturally come under the same principle.
- ³¹ Probably μαθεῖν is not to be equated with the charismatic διερμηνεύειν in v. 27 and the διακρίνειν of v. 29. It is more likely to be a matter of questions and discussion following the interpretation of glossolalia and prophecy.
- ³² cf., 1 Cor. 9:8ff; 14:21. Concerning St. Paul's use of language, cf., the article νόμος in *Theologisches Wörterbuch* (ed. Kittel), Vol. IV, pp. 1062f.; 1070.
- ³³ In 1 Cor. 9:8 the quotation is Deut. 25:4 and in 1 Cor. 14:21 it is Isa. 28:11b and Deut. 28:49.
- ³⁴ This is specially brought out by Kähler, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
- ³⁵ This principle of subordination also disposes of the objection that St. Paul could not have opposed the gifts of the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19,20).
- ³⁶ cf., Schmithals, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-209. The hypothesis that 1 Cor. 11 and 14 come from different Epistles, and that this results in different views on the question of women, cannot be substantiated.
- ³⁷ cf., as the best example the notice from the Egyptian Gospel by Clement of Alexandria, Strom. III. 99ff. (ed. Stahlin, 238, 22ff.): 'Said the Lord: "If ye tread the robe of shame underfoot, and if two become one, the masculine with the feminine [will be] neither masculine nor feminine".' In this respect we should also remember the Gnostic preference for masculine-feminine primal beings. cf., the last logion of the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas!
- ³⁸ cf., e.g., the description of the prophetesses of Marcus in Irenaeus. *Adv. Haer.* 1.13.3.
- ³⁹ For all exegetic details, cf., Kähler, *op. cit.*, pp. 43ff, and Schmithals, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-207.
- ⁴⁰ cf., the excursus in Kähler, *op. cit.* pp. 47ff.
- ⁴¹ Similar enumerations in connection with Baptism can be found in 1 Cor. 12:13, and Col. 3:11. In both cases, however, the apposite pair is missing, ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ.
- ⁴² Here we are in opposition to Schmithal's argument, *op. cit.*, pp. 230ff, where he makes one idea of the Apostle's into a temporary polemic, for the benefit of another.
- ⁴³ For all exegetic details cf. Kähler, *op. cit.*, pp. 147ff, and M. Dibelius

and H. Conzelmann, *Die Pastoralbriefe, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* 13, 1955, *ad loc.*

- ⁴⁸ cf., Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:22,29; 1 Peter 3:1,5; Titus 2:5; here the purpose of the subjection is seen in 'that the word of God be not blasphemed.'
- ⁴⁹ cf., the ordination of Timothy, 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6. For the 'character of office' in the Pastoral Epistles, cf. Kähler, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
- ⁵⁰ cf., the translation and commentary by Dibelius and Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, *ad loc.*
- ⁵¹ cf., 1 Cor. 14:37; ἃ γράφω ὑμῖν ὅτι Κυρίου ἐστὶν ἐντολή.
- ⁵² For βούλομαι in 2:8, cf., 1 Tim. 5:14 and Titus 3:8.
- ⁵³ Kähler, *op. cit.*, p. 160, denies this claim, because, together with some other theologians, she believes that certain statements in the Pastoral Epistles should be placed in the periphery of the Canon. That in such a proceeding the theological prejudices of the commentator play a decisive part is obvious.
- ⁵⁴ Titus 2:4,5 sees the chief duties of the widows to be the education of younger women for marriage and family life. Charitable duties are not mentioned.
- ⁵⁵ As to the fundamental question of the validity of an Apostolic decision, cf., H. von Campenhausen, *Die Begründung kirchlicher Entscheidung beim Apostel Paulus*, Heidelberg, 1957.

[*Note.* This essay was first published in German, in *Novum Testamentum*, VII, 2, 1964. It now appears in English with acknowledgments to its original publisher, E. J. Brill of Leiden.]

This article is published by permission of Marcham Manor Press, and forms part of a forthcoming book on the Ordination of Women.