

Université de Montréal

The Contribution of Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics
to a Theology of Ministries

par

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Études bibliques
Faculté de théologie

Thèse présentée à la Faculté des études supérieures
en vue de l'obtention du grade de
Philosophiae Doctor (Ph.D.)
en études bibliques

Mai 2002

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Cette thèse intitulée:

The Contribution of Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics to a Theology of Ministries

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Thèse acceptée le 25 octobre 2002

Résumé

Les échecs, les péchés et les scandales ne sont pas inconnus ou ignorés dans l'histoire de l'Église. L'exclusion de certains groupes de croyants, le silence, et le contrôle, parfois, ont caractérisé la réponse de l'Église face à ces problèmes. Plus que jamais, l'Église doit examiner et étudier avec soin et attention les structures, l'organisation et la hiérarchie, qui l'ont formée et qui la forment. Est-ce que ces structures hiérarchiques reconnaissent et acceptent tous les croyants? Est-ce que le pouvoir d'une autorité authentique est partagé par tous ceux qui ont reçu les dons du Saint Esprit lors du baptême? Est-ce que les oeuvres ministérielles démontrent un esprit libérateur, juste, équitable et affectueux pour ceux qui sont dans le besoin? Est-il encore efficace, et est-il même biblique, qu'un petit groupe de célibataires masculins ayant reçu les ordres ait l'autorité et la direction de la plupart des fonctions ministérielles de l'Église?

Cette thèse étudie une des structures de l'Église: les fonctions ministérielles telles qu'elles apparaissent lors du premier siècle. C'est une étude des oeuvres écrites par les premières communautés chrétiennes qui s'établirent très vite dans les vingt années après la mort et la résurrection du Christ jusqu'à la fin du premier siècle. Cette étude examine la nature des fonctions ministérielles de ces premières communautés. Une partie essentielle de ce travail est de déterminer pourquoi les femmes de ces communautés étaient le plus souvent invisibles malgré qu'elles étaient disciples et qu'elles servaient leurs communautés. Une seconde et tout aussi importante partie de cette étude est la mise en pratique de l'herméneutique féministe afin de déterminer si et comment cette approche modifie l'interprétation de certains textes bibliques. En somme, cette thèse est une analyse féministe de certains textes du corpus paulinien qui ont formé les connaissances chrétiennes des fonctions ministérielles, en vue de déterminer si les femmes en faisaient partie.

Après avoir présenté au lecteur un panorama du développement des perspectives féministes, l'auteure examine les relations entre la recherche féministe, théologique et biblique, et les lectures scientifiques traditionnelles androcentriques. Suit une analyse des données néotestamentaires pertinentes. Le but de la thèse est de déterminer si l'analyse féministe peut dégager l'identité des chrétiens ou des chrétiennes en charge des oeuvres

féministe peut dégager l'identité des chrétiens ou des chrétiennes en charge des œuvres ministérielles, et peut-être même découvrir une compréhension du ministère inaperçue jusqu'ici ou complètement nouvelle. Enfin, à la lumière des résultats, l'herméneutique féministe peut-elle apporter une contribution significative à une reformulation des ministères mieux adaptée au XXI^{ème} siècle?

L'auteure tente donc de vérifier l'hypothèse selon laquelle l'herméneutique féministe appliquée à l'étude de certains textes du Nouveau Testament permet de mieux comprendre l'essence des fonctions ministérielles bibliques et de déterminer comment les premières communautés de croyants pouvaient participer à ces fonctions. Elle conclut de son enquête biblique que les femmes et les esclaves, ceux qui n'étaient pas juifs, et le peuple en général avaient un rôle important dans les fonctions ministérielles de la jeune Église. Ceci représente un élément très important pour la formulation d'un renouvellement d'une théologie des fonctions ministérielles. Les théologiens, grâce à cette étude, auront un champ de vue plus large sur la Bible et pourront donc établir une théologie qui correspondra mieux aux besoins ecclésiastiques et ministériels contemporains.

Mots clés: exégèse biblique; Nouveau Testament; épîtres de Paul; ministères ecclésiaux; herméneutique féministe; théologie des ministères en général.

Summary

Failure, sin and scandal are not strangers to the Church. Exclusion, silencing and control have at times characterized the Church's response to problems. Perhaps more now than any other time in history, the Church must examine the structures that give shape to its life. Are these structures inclusive of all the People of God? Is the power of genuine authority shared by all who have received gifts of the Holy Spirit given in baptism? Do the Church's ministries reflect a liberating, just and loving response to those in need? Is it effective, is it even biblical, to have a small group of ordained male celibates—priests and hierarchy--holding the authority and performing the vast majority of ministries in the Church?

This thesis takes up one Church structure: that of ministry and how it appears in the first century. It is a study of the writings from those earliest Christian communities that emerged so rapidly in the two decades that followed Jesus' death and resurrection until the close of the first century. The research in this doctoral thesis examines the nature of these ministries in the early communities. A significant part of this work is to determine how women in these communities were engaged in discipleship and ministry and why they are so invisible at times. A second and equally important area of research is the application of feminist biblical hermeneutics to decide whether and how it modifies the interpretation of appropriate biblical texts. In sum, my thesis is a feminist analysis of specific texts from the Pauline corpus that have shaped Christian understandings of ministry and how women were or were not a part of them.

After introducing the reader to an overview of feminist development I proceed to demonstrate how a feminist theological and biblical voice enters into dialogue with voices representing traditional and androcentric scholarship. Then follows an examination of the biblical data. My research concern here is to determine whether a feminist analysis can recover and even discover in these texts new understandings of Christian ministries, and new understandings of who was charged with these ministries. This determined, I ask, is there a meaningful contribution that feminist biblical hermeneutics can make to the re-formulation of a theology of ministries suited for today?

I hypothesize that through the application of feminist hermeneutics to selected New Testament texts we come to a fuller understanding of the nature of biblical ministries and how the whole community of faith participated in them. We find that women and slaves, non-Jews and ordinary people played an important part of these ministries in the early church. This is a significant contribution to the formulation of a renewed theology of ministries for today. As a result of this study, theologians will have a broader biblical base on which they can build a theology that is responsive to contemporary ecclesial and ministerial needs.

KEY WORDS: Biblical exegesis; New Testament; feminist hermeneutics; epistles of Paul; ecclesial ministries; theology of ministries in general.

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IN MEMORY OF MY FATHER
IN GRATITUDE FOR MY MOTHER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been able to bring this task to completion because of the guidance and help of my Directress, Olivette Genest. From the very beginning of this thesis she has helped me clarify my thoughts, deepen my research and write with greater precision. Her biblical and literary skills have led me to new meanings and new questions. Her keen sense of the goal has kept me on course and has brought me to this place. We hold in common our love of the scriptures, our desire to advance the liberationist vision of feminist hermeneutics, and the belief that a theology of ministries can indeed be renewed to reflect the fullness and diversity of gifts within the church.

Many people have helped and supported me throughout the long and arduous path of a doctoral dissertation. I thank Nan Cooper and my dear friend Katherine Howard, OSB, for their willingness to read every page offering suggestions, challenges and corrections. I am indebted to them for their help and fidelity. I also want to acknowledge so many others: Kerry O'Reilly OSB, Stefanie Weisgram OSB, and Shaun O'Meara OSB. I thank my "linguistic advisors:" Chuck Villette and H el ene Mercier OSB. For their friendship, I thank Julie Lawson and Paul Geraghty. Last but by no means least, I acknowledge the great debt I owe my late friend Philippe Langlois.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS¹

The following list of descriptions and definitions is intended to help situate the reader to the discourse that follows. Many of the terms or titles used throughout this thesis are described differently in other sources. I have given the meanings to each term as I employed it. My own perspectives and convictions as a Christian feminist are reflected in the definitions or descriptions that follow. I have selected the terms that may need clarification and understanding in order to read, question and, hopefully, challenge some of the points of the project. My understanding of research is that it is useful only when it pushes us to further questions and broader horizons.

ANDROCENTRISM. The term *androcentrism* derives from the Greek, literally meaning “male-centeredness.” The feminist hermeneutical task in reading texts is to identify man-centered conceptions, structures of thought, and patterns of ideas. Androcentrism considers the male as the norm for humanity. Women are seen as man’s “other” and are thus fixed in a place of exception or “a-normality.” Consequently, androcentrism is a perspective in which binary opposites such as male-female, divine-human, slave-free are established. Feminists reject this perspective and strive rather to replace it with holistic, inclusive, and egalitarian patterns. An androcentric perspective puts the male as the center and source of reality thus erasing or silencing any other expressions of what is real. Patriarchy* is the primary social system that supports and promotes androcentrism.

APOSTLES. A derivative from the Greek, *apostolos*, originally meant, “sent.” An *apostle* means someone who is “sent” by another. Christian texts are the first to associate the title with one who is sent through a commission given by a divinity. Secular Greek texts of the same period lack this notion of commissioning by God or any external authority. Officially, the church today uses the term in reference to the Twelve (those disciples of Jesus who were specially called and sent by Jesus to proclaim the gospel) and

¹ This glossary draws particularly on the following sources: Rosemary Radford Ruether “Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1985) and *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 1996).

Paul, whose self-identification is that of “apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13). This is a rather restricted understanding as the New Testament evidence suggests more fluidity in the meaning of this term. The earliest usage is found in Paul’s letters. Some doubt Paul’s authority as “apostle” (1 Cor. 9:2; 15:9) and Paul calls others “false apostles” (2 Cor. 11:1). Apostleship is related to the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. The term is also associated directly and indirectly with women (Junia), with married couples (Prisca and Aquila), and with co-workers of Paul (Phoebe, Euodia and Syntyche, among others) who work to promote the gospel. Thus in its earliest use, a broader understanding of the term seems to have been present than that which is currently operative in the institutional church.

CANON. The word “canon” means rule or norm. A biblical canon is an accepted collection of books considered normative for the life of the believing community. These books are “approved” in their identification as being both inspired and revelatory of the divine will. A feminist perspective is particularly concerned with the question of *who* decides, who authorizes, that is, who determines what is authoritative? Because the biblical canon originates from societies that were patriarchal and androcentric, a strong feminist conviction is that the biblical texts further shaped and transmitted male-oriented norms and perspectives. As a result the interests and insights of women were neglected, distorted, or excluded. Many feminists question whether or how androcentric texts can justly hold any authority over women. Claudia Camp maintains that feminists agree with the need for a canon but asks along with other feminists where that rule (standard of judgment) is to be located.² Different feminist approaches to the question of canon include among others: 1) outright rejection of biblical authority, 2) the reconstruction of biblical history by going beyond the canonical writings to archaeological findings and extra-canonical writings, and 3) the employment of new methods and insights from cross-cultural studies, cultural anthropology, and the social sciences. What these and other feminist approaches have in common is their goal. The goal is to unmask the androcentric biases that permeate the canonical writings and free the word of God for women and men alike. One area of agreement is in the necessity of expanding the basis of resources from

² Claudia Camp, “Feminist Theological Hermeneutics: Canon and Christian Identity” in *Searching the Scriptures: Vol. I*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, (Crossroad :New York, 1993), p.155.

which more can be learned of women and women's activity during this period. Feminists draw from non-canonical, apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings as well as the contemporary literature and archeological findings of the political, philosophical, and cultural societies of both the Hebrew and Christian worlds. These sources help to fill out the faint and often dark picture of biblical women.

DIAKONIA. Literally, the word means "service." This term is related to the Greek *diakonos* (server/servant) and *diakoneo* (to serve), whose New Testament contexts include both table service and cultic office. Until recently, translators and most commentators understood the term in its variations as referring to the table service of women and Christian ministry when applied to men. Paul uses the term in reference to himself (1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:23), to Christ (Gal 2:17; Rom 15:8), to Timothy (1Thess 3:2), and to Phoebe, a minister of the church at Cenchreae (Rom 16:1). The technical meaning "deacon," as an ecclesial office is not supported in the NT use of the term.

FEMINISM. (see PART ONE)

FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS. The term hermeneutics is derived from the Greek *hermeneuo*, meaning "to interpret." Feminist hermeneutics pays particular attention to *how* interpretation is done and *who* does it. Its fundamental presupposition is that the biblical accounts consistently present women either in a negative light or minimize the record of women's involvement in the biblical tradition. Interpretation of these accounts has, for the most part, reinforced the patriarchal values (and at times misogynist views) expressed therein. Thus, since women are often reduced to being objects (most often unseen and unheard), feminist hermeneutics seeks to reclaim women's voice as *subjects* of interpretation. It is interpretation done with an emphasis on the interest of women but is not exclusive of men. Unlike traditional hermeneutical approaches, it places the struggles of women at the center of its attention rather than the Bible itself. As a result, the perspective is keenly attuned to political, social, and religious location of women. What further distinguishes it as a type of interpretation is its recognition that objectivity is never totally free of the questions and biases of the particular interpreter and is thus an illusory and unhelpful goal. Rather, like some other critical liberationist forms of hermeneutics, it takes an advocacy stance on behalf of the oppressed groups in question.

HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION. A hermeneutics of suspicion is first associated with developments in liberation theology, linguistic studies and other disciplines. From it, Paul Ricoeur developed what he called “interpretation as exercise of suspicion.” [sic] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza built upon this in terms of an explicitly *feminist* hermeneutics of suspicion. This process of interpretation grows out of the recognition that what a text says, for example, may not be what another reads out of or *into* the text. The specifically *feminist* hermeneutics of suspicion challenges these disjunctures and asks, among other questions: Who is *not* liberated in this text? Is the *whole* story told? Are there *other* voices or texts that must be listened to or read in tandem with the text in question?³

HIERARCHY. In its broadest sense, this term refers to the rank order structuring of persons, values, virtues, social classes, races and concepts in general. In Christian circles the word describes those holding official, “sacred” authority, in the institutional church. In this sense, separation and distinction place one above another, create dualism, and suggest that authority remains in the hands of the ordained. Feminist hermeneutics focuses attention on hierarchies of sex, race, and class. Contemporary examples of these hierarchies might include: social systems that value male over female, wealthy classes over the impoverished, and differentiation of persons by sexual orientation. In the face of such kinds of structures and divisions, a feminist perspective works toward the biblical vision of justice and equality. Jesus’ ministry is called upon to demonstrate what such a vision might look like. The reversal of social order that allows sinners and righteous, clean and unclean, rich and poor, men and women to live together in the egalitarian community, is witness to God’s reign coming into being on earth.

MINISTRY–FEMINIST MINISTRY. I distinguish between these two terms insofar as the former has come to be understood as the work/service of those holding sacerdotal offices, i.e., the ordained exclusively male celibate in Roman Catholic tradition. Ministry in this sense has come to mean (in many cases) the authoritative leadership and activity of the ordained male who is charged to administer the church, offer sacrifice, administer the sacraments, preach the word, visit the sick and the families within his parish. This is a

³ Amy-Jill Levine, *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* Russell, Letty M. and J. Shannon Clarkson, editors. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996) pp.140-141

dangerous situation both for the individual and for the receiving community. The minister is thought of as God's special representative on earth and is thus set apart and expected to live as an otherworldly role model for the laity.

The basis of my understanding of what we call "feminist ministry" is the difference in approach to hierarchy and service. In this view of service (*diakonia*, see above), actions performed on behalf of the community can be performed by anyone regardless of sex, status, race, or age. Service is seen as a much broader reality than the administrative activities necessary in a parish or other institutional ecclesial structures. While these are recognized as essential to organization and efficient operation, ministry is not limited to those engaged in formal roles with proper titles. One might even say that a distinguishing feature of feminist ministry is its opposition to patriarchal ordination and its support of those who give witness to the value and importance of those marginalized, voiceless members of the Body of Christ. In contemporary expressions, concretely this might mean standing up against injustice in the work place, visiting AIDS patients, extending welcome to new and/or outside members, speaking on behalf of the voiceless—women and children—and working within the ecclesial structures for change and fuller participation for all members.

MISOGYNY. Literally, the term means "the hatred of women." Interestingly, as Kang Nam-Soon notes in *The Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, there is no parallel term for the hatred of men.⁴ Various religious traditions have held misogynist views. Confucianism considers woman to be inferior to man, the source and cause of evil, and whose role in life is to submit. In Western thought and religion, Aristotle has been a strong influence in the development of misogyny, identifying woman as a "misbegotten male." As a result, the belief that women are intellectually and morally weaker than men is a part of misogyny. Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle, considered woman as a defective male. His strong influence in the Christian tradition but especially in the Roman Catholic Church has further blocked the possibility of women's full freedom and integrity. In Catholic theology, woman has been identified with the source of evil in the world. This is often associated with sexual mores and woman's "weakness" and seductive propensities. Feminist thought works against the dualism that presents woman

⁴ Kang Nam-Soon, *Dictionary*, p. 185.

as inherently inferior and man as superior. As well, it tries to counteract negative attitudes toward the body, all in an effort to unmask the sinful injustice of misogyny.

***PATRIARCHY.** “The rule of the father” is the literal meaning of patriarchy. Patriarchy refers to systems through which “patriarchs” or male heads of families have power over all members of the household: wives, children, slaves/servants, and physical property. In a broad sense, the term is used to name the complex of all those forces that oppose women’s achievement of their full humanity. It is impossible to identify a single patriarchal system that would describe patriarchal societies that have existed over many centuries and in many places. However, certain characteristics generally found in all patriarchies are operative in the subjugation of women. Such subjugation is expressed in the loss of their legal status (thus the right to hold property or keep their own names), the preference of male over female children, the understanding that wives/women’s bodies belong to husbands or other men. A high level of illiteracy or minimal education is typical for women in patriarchal societies. Inheritance rights as daughters or widows are restricted, if not denied. As well, the public sphere is largely the domain of men. Cultural, political, and public positions or offices generally are closed to women. Language sees the male human being and human being as identical. *Sexism* is the mind-set that fuels the hierarchical duality and imbalance present in patriarchal societies.⁵

SEXISM. Sexism refers to attitudes or behaviors arising from gender stereotyping of men and women in their perceived sexual roles. Hierarchically ordered, most often men are dominant over women, but both sexes are limited by culturally defined identity roles of “masculinity” and “femininity.” Sexism is complex in that it shapes language, literature, and social systems. It is promoted from one generation to the next through the socialization process children receive in families, schools, public life and churches. *Androcentrism* becomes *sexist* when, according to Marie-Theres Wacker, “it turns into

⁵ In this regard, in the late 1980s, Phyllis Trible wrote of the Jewish and Christian scriptures and the connection between patriarchy and feminist hermeneutics: “Born and bred in a land of patriarchy, the Bible abounds in male imagery and language. For centuries interpreters have explored and exploited this male language to articulate theology: to shape the contours and content of the Church, synagogue and academy; and to instruct human beings – male and female – in who they are, what rules they should play, and how they should behave.” “Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies,” in Ann Loades (ed.), *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, SPCK, 1993, pp. 23-29.

the ideological basis for the exclusion of women, solely as women, from certain activities that it seeks to safeguard for men, solely as men.”⁶

⁶ Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, and Marie-Theres Wacker *Feminist Interpretation: The Bible in Women's Perspective*. Translated by Martin and Barbara Rumscheidt (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1989), p.51.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

At first glance, a feminist approach to the interpretation of the New Testament might appear to be at odds with a monastic approach to the texts of Sacred Scripture. Feminist interests are expressions of relatively recent contemporary experience; monasticism arises from the dust of the distant past. Why would someone deeply formed by and committed to the tradition of Benedict, that sturdy monastic root grown up from fifth century Italy, turn to the voices of feminism to hear anew the word of God? The search for God and the defining principle of Benedictine cenobitism has long been associated with the meditative reading of scripture, the praying of the psalms, and the interpretation of the biblical texts passed down from those early Christian writers, the Fathers of the Church. We might say that this is the methodology for a monastic understanding of the Bible; the cenobium is the method in and through which this happens. Monastic theology results from such practices and reflects the slow, steady growth that has occurred in Benedictine monasteries throughout the centuries.

What I have found in several modern currents of feminist biblical hermeneutics is not as some might think diametrically opposed to a “monastic hermeneutic.” In fact, there are elements in both approaches that are complementary and even analogous. Feminist work recognizes that the biblical texts articulate contradictory traditions. There are some texts that are liberating for the marginalized and oppressed; there are other texts that express and legitimize the patriarchal bias in which women, children and slaves are viewed as objects possessed by men. While Benedict does not identify these particular biblical contradictions, and with different motivations, he too recognizes that some texts in the Bible are particular to times and seasons and he assigns texts accordingly (*Rule of Benedict* 14, 16, 18, 42). The feminist hermeneutics that I use in this thesis, studies and questions the biblical text to see how a discipleship of equals worked in the earliest Christian communities. Benedict also endorses a community of equals (*RB* 63). The Abbot/Prioress (Abbess, in European and a few North American houses) is elected from among the group by the group, (*RB* 64) and the goods of the monastery are distributed according to need, not merit (*RB* 33). Benedict makes special provision for those who are

marginalized in any way—whether by old age, sickness, or youth—all are to be cared for and welcomed “as Christ himself” (*RB* 36 and 37). This is a strong theme in feminist biblical hermeneutics. An important part of feminist hermeneutics is to identify and call forward any marginalized members of society or of the community of believers, especially women. They take “center stage” in the interpretive process and in so doing we begin to understand, not only their struggles, but also the systemic oppression that results from patriarchy. In limiting the number and status of priests in the monastery (*RB* 62), Benedict wards off clericalism and resists the negative influence of hierarchy (*RB* 60). Feminist biblical interpretation is also wary of hierarchy and clericalism because it sees in them the pervasive and abusive nature of patriarchy that seeps into religious, political, and social spheres of life.

As a Benedictine monastic of thirty-four years, I find these and many other characteristic values that Benedict presents in his Rule strikingly familiar to some of the concerns of feminist biblical hermeneutics. A strong feminist concern is similar to Benedict’s care for the outcast, the sick, or those forgotten. Feminist biblical hermeneutics reads and reconstructs patriarchal history in order to reclaim women’s place in biblical cultures. It calls for the release of the oppressed or marginalized. It struggles against the silence, in fact, the negation that patriarchy imposes on women. Benedict focuses on those persons at the bottom of the community and calls them into the mainstream. They are neither higher nor lower than any other members. Feminist hermeneutics does not offer nor claim to offer *the* Christian position *par excellence* as if it is better than any of the other hermeneutical tools available. It works, to the contrary, to expose artificial rankings and to replace competition with collaboration. Significantly, and perhaps surprisingly, the starting point of feminist biblical hermeneutics is not the Bible; rather it “focuses on the struggles of wo/men at the bottom of the [patriarchal] pyramid of domination and exploitation, because their struggles reveal the fulcrum of oppression and dehumanization threatening all wo/men.”¹ Such a beginning point works to destabilize the system of patriarchy that has determined in large part, the biblical texts and their interpretation.

¹ *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, Edited by Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville 1996) 99.

A. The Subject of Research

The field of concentration for this doctoral dissertation is three-dimensional: 1) How and to whether women were engaged in the ministries that arose in the early Christian communities that grew up soon after Jesus' death and resurrection. 2) How a feminist biblical hermeneutical approach modifies the interpretation of the biblical texts. 3) What and who become visible when feminist hermeneutics asks how texts have been read and interpreted as regards women's engagement in the ministry of Jesus. What follows is an analysis of specific biblical texts that have shaped Christian understandings of ministry. The hermeneutical lens for this analysis calls for an examination of the biblical data in a manner that strives to identify presuppositions operative in the texts themselves and in the interpretations that followed. My research concern is to determine whether a feminist perspective helps us discover in these texts new understandings of ministry and how women participated in them. Because this aspect of research is positive, I proceed to explore my central question: What about us? Can this perspective produce new understandings and insights that can contribute to a contemporary theology of ministries? I propose that this contribution is both possible and necessary to address the ecclesial engagement of women in ministries (or the absence thereof) that are needed in the church today.

B. Problematic: The Urgency of the Question

B.1. Understandings of Ministry Today

There is perhaps no area of church life more vigorously debated today in North America than that of ministry—what it is and who “gets” to do it. And the debate is not focused only on positions and parish life—the nature of ministry itself is in question. How is it possible that the institutional church can so badly understand the very organization that it created? Recent scandals involving many levels of the clerical ranks, as well as the drastic drop in the number of priests, have caused many to speculate about the future shape of ministry in general and of the sacramental church in particular. Traditional forms of ministry are in question in all of the churches of the West. Crossing diverse cultures and churches, some common questions emerge: What is ministry? Is it meant to arise from the authority of the Pope, then the Bishops and the priests? What

does ministry have to do with the message of Jesus Christ whose own ministry gives no evidence of Pope, Bishops and priests? And perhaps most importantly, who decides the answers to questions such as these and on the basis of what criteria? In many parts of the world, North America especially, the revolutionary changes of the 1960s called for examination and change clear across the social horizon: "the establishment" (meaning institutions and authority structures), the Vietnam War, "The Quiet Revolution" and systemic oppression (visible among the poor and blacks). Voices like those of Betty Friedan and other "radical" feminists spoke on behalf of women's subservient existence in all of these. As for the church, the event of the ecumenical Second Vatican Council from 1962-65 touched most of the world with new emphases and new perspectives expressed in open dialogue between Catholics and many other churches. It had a strange way of uniting people across continents and cultures. And it restored hope for many in the church. Even today the effects of this period touch us. Tremendous social upheavals, war in dozens of countries, and the tragedy of September 11 cause many people to lose hope and to despair of political, economic and religious institutions of society. The rich development in biblical studies and theology that grew out of Vatican II, especially in feminist research, restores for some people a sense of future and a sense of hope.

Up until the Council models of ministry reflected a highly institutionalized understanding of church. These understandings emphasized a centralized, hierarchically structured and, what was thought (is still thought?) to be an unchangeable pattern of clerical governance. Monarchy and military had also left their marks on the church. Ministry was primarily the work of the ordained shepherds, that is, the priestly class composed of Pope, bishops, and priests. They ministered to the *laity*. It is a hierarchy that, like every other social institution in many parts of the world even today, is male-constructed, male-oriented, and male-dominated. In large part, the interpretations of scripture and the theologies of ministry that came out of the interpretations, both legitimated and sustained this patriarchal, institutional, and hierarchical model of church. In other words, it reinforced the authority and exclusivity of sacerdotal structures of ministry in the church.

With the dawn of Vatican Council, however, renewed church and social teaching caused a true "breath of fresh air," as Pope John XXIII called it. The momentary

(unfortunately) shake-up this created, included a call to Roman Catholics (laity included) to return to the sources of faith. We were challenged to find there the beginnings of a practice of discipleship that arises from the experience of the primitive Christian communities closest to their source, Jesus Christ. This, we find, is not a picture of hierarchy or exclusivity, but one that points us to a church of egalitarian and inclusive participation, with multiple, active ministries and ministers essential for the life and growth of the vision and hope for the hastening of the reign of God.

B. 2. Understandings of Women's Participation in Ministries

For contemporary Christians, Vatican II even now continues to call for a radical shift from the traditional paradigm of church to a new, yet paradoxically, more ancient paradigm of church. Among other things, as we mentioned, this calls for a return to the biblical data to rediscover and to reread the experience of faith recorded there. Did Jesus come to found a church? What is the relationship of Jesus Christ and the ministries described in the New Testament, with the church of our experience? A growing chorus of women's voices pushes the questions further. Why are the models almost all men? Is the model of the ordained male celibate as minister one that Jesus created or emphasized? Why isn't this model found in the New Testament? What are the origins of the biblical record itself? Who is reading and interpreting this record? And why are so few women present?

These questions and others that we voice today arise from our differing understandings of church, what the bible says, and how we interpret tradition. They are not strictly religious questions; they also flow from and affect the myriad cultural and socio-political factors shaping our lives. A certain discomfort among women, especially those who identify themselves as feminist, grows strong when we begin to recognize in all of this a distinct pattern of "we" and "they." As a result, women's voices throughout the world, particularly in Europe and North America,² have been some of the strongest in focusing problems and posing questions about virtually every social and religious institution and how these have come into their present shape. How is it that women are

² I cannot overlook the significant increase in "voices" from other parts of the world. To name a few feminist theologians and biblists from around the world: Kinakawa, Elaine Wainwright of Australia, Ivone Gebara of Brazil, Rigoberta Menchú of Guatemala, and Kwok Pui-Lan of Korea and Ada María Isasi-díaz from Cuba, Teresa Okura of Nigeria.

the “they” while the male celibate clergy is the “we” who will lead “them”? The Roman Catholic Church especially, is under fire from those who see there an oppressive patriarchal structure that has virtually silenced half of its members. It denies women their rights and duties as baptized members of the Body of Christ. As for ministries, we ask how scripture is used and which texts from the bible are invoked to support the contemporary teachings on ministry? What role(s) do women play in the churches, what roles are women excluded from by nature of our gender? The “church” this has created causes these questions and others for many people, especially women. It is a question many considered unanswered or at the least, inadequately resolved. Unfortunately, the reaction to these questions from the institutional church has been, in part, to answer them by simply closing the discussion.

Happily, in tandem with this, feminist biblical scholars have developed an impressive and diverse program for wrestling with the biblical text and how it has been interpreted and applied to praxis in the church. When looking at ministry in the church today, feminist biblical scholars examine how scripture is used and they ask: From which texts and what canon shall we interpret and on what bases is contemporary teaching on ministry formed? What values, norms, and realities have shaped past interpretations? In other words, the feminist perspective in this case asks *whose* values, norms and reality? A feminist perspective gives solid ground for posing a fundamental critique to our reading of scripture. It asks the most obvious question of all: How can women be excluded from decision-making and full participation as equal members in a church that grows from the message of salvation in Jesus Christ? The best of feminist biblical scholarship, in my opinion, is a call to reaffirm a discipleship to Jesus based on the full humanity of each baptized Christian regardless of status or gender. It is a challenge to discover a vision of ministry that embodies and reflects in practice the justice and liberation offered by Jesus—a ministry based on the Spirit of God at work in every member.

C. The State of the Question

C.1. Biblical Data and Theology of Ministries

In his Preface to the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document on “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” of April 1993, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote

that the study of the Bible “is never finished; each age must in its own way newly seek to understand the sacred books.”³ The document, he said, provides an overview of the many and varied methods available for the study of scripture today. He said too, that the document is very helpful for “the important questions about the right way of understanding Holy Scripture and that it also helps us to go further.”⁴ It is this going “further” that is at stake in this thesis. It is clear that the work of biblical exegesis and the development of many new hermeneutical theories take many different approaches to “the right way of understanding” the biblical text. What is not so clear is whether we are allowing those voices to shape our theology and practice of ministry within the church.

A theology of ministry does not come from theory or canons from a council. It comes from the cultural model of church from which we live or in which we see ourselves being called to live. Hence, it is true that the differing voices we mentioned above are about differing visions of church, differing “readings” of the biblical record, and differing understandings of the ecclesial situation of ministries, among other things. In the 1960s the Vatican Council asserted that “since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church’s apostolate.” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 9).⁵ Some women and men knew this to be the case at the time of its writing; many more know it today. Though efforts have been made to return to the sources for the renewal of the church, and women’s importance in the church has been reiterated time and again, women continue to be excluded from ministry by virtue of their gender and continue to be the object of pastoral letters and/or concerns defined by predominately, sometimes exclusively, male groups of pastors.

The biblical text has been used to shape, interpret, and evaluate contemporary teaching on ministry based on the example of Jesus. While it covers a period of less than a century beginning with the ministry of Jesus, the New Testament content is nevertheless so rich and diverse that we can treat it here only in brush strokes. The New Testament is not altogether consistent or complete in its presentation of Jesus, his

³ Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” reproduced in *Origins*, Vol. 23:29, January 6, 1994.

⁴ *Ibid* p. 499.

⁵ A. Flannery, gen. ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Northport, Costello Publishing, 1975, p. 777.

ministry, or the requirements for discipleship. What is more, the presuppositions we bring to a text can have a great effect on the questions we ask and the interpretations we assign a text.⁶ The texts do not speak in the same way about the “Twelve,” the “Apostles,” “the seventy (two?),” “the seven” or “the disciples.” There is great diversity in the texts. How are we to distinguish between these and other such designations; what characteristic functions or activities are identified with them? How have the Gospel writers and early Christian communities re-interpreted the traditions they were given? And what methods are available to us to help distinguish, *à propos* to ministry, between what the text says and what we are bringing to the text? What, in the texts themselves or in our treatment of them, explains how we came to the present model of church and ministry, still largely operative, that is shaped by sharp distinctions between ordained and non-ordained, male and female? Can we speak of the model operative today as a *biblical* model of ministry?

In general, all the writings of the New Testament witness to the existence of ministries. Actions and functions necessary to the life of the churches are attributed to men and sometimes to women, that is, actions or functions distinct from those of the other members of the communities. Relative to what we said above, these ministries like the ministers themselves are identified in great variation. Several different designations seem to have similar functions, but inversely, different roles can carry the same designations (for example, “apostle” as title or as function). Further, the texts on ministry not only witness to several different practices or ministerial organizations, they also are found in cultural contexts in which the theologies are very different (that of Luke and Matthew, for example). They cannot be simply regrouped by extracts in a kind of theological synthesis without betraying the integrity of individual texts.⁷ Charism and ministry are described mainly in specific activities whose titles are taken from the actions of Jesus, e.g., preaching, teaching, healing, and evangelizing. We will see, these titles and actions differ according to time, place, and culture. Even a cursory reading of the text illustrates that the New Testament has no technical definition of what historically we call

⁶ Olivette Genest, “Femmes et ministères dans le Nouveau Testament,” *SR*, 16 (1987) p. 12. Genest devotes the entire opening section of her article to the importance of this point from a feminist perspective. Not only which questions, but how they are formulated, already indicates an interpretative stance. The fact that until the 1960’s biblical scholarship was largely the work of white European and North American men, suggests an interpretative stance that would reflect particular values and common experience.

⁷ Jean Delorme, “Diversité et unité des ministères d’après le Nouveau Testament” dans *Le ministère et les ministères selon le Nouveau Testament*, p. 284.

ecclesiastical offices. Terms for priesthood or any fixed sense of office seem consciously avoided and are never applied to Jesus or to any of his disciples. We find rather, the terms *diakonía*, *diákonos*, *diakonéo* (equally, service, servant and to serve) as words that designate what we hear as “ministry;” all grammatical forms of the verb to serve or to exercise a function.⁸

Amazingly, these words written most 25 years ago by Elisabeth Tetlow in her book, *Women and Ministry in the New Testament*, are still so contemporary: “The crux of the problem is located in the understanding and interpretation of the practice of Jesus and the apostles. The available information on this subject is contained within the New Testament. The tradition of the Church [*sic*] has always accorded a primary place of authority to the word of scripture. Vatican Council II reiterated the belief that scripture contains and presents “divinely revealed realities” which have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus according to the teaching of Vatican II, whatever scripture says about a subject has “a normative value for the Church.”⁹ Today feminist scholars identify many other sources as offering “information on this subject” and fiercely question the sources of normativity and authority in interpretation and application. Both interpretation and application have grown out of thoroughly androcentric values and viewpoints. Suffice it to say, the bible is central to any effort to theologize on current experience, ministry notwithstanding. But only when the bible has been wrested from the hands of every elite patriarchal, male establishment and restored to common people, both men and women, can the authority of their real experience hear and interpret the text as the Word of God. For example, Elisabeth Tetlow also pointed out that one of the theological presuppositions underlying many past interpretations of biblical texts on ministry, is that Jesus did not call women to ministry nor could the early church have possibly permitted women to function in ministry since women are essentially inferior to men. Women’s path of subordination to men is divinely established and therefore unchanging. Many scholars would now simply reject or openly challenge such a preposterous presupposition. Some call upon the work of feminist biblical hermeneutics and theology to help envision and construct a theology of ministries that

⁸ Olivette Genest, “Femmes et ministères dans le Nouveau Testament”, *SR* 16 (1987), p. 12.

⁹ Elisabeth Tetlow, *Women and Ministry in the New Testament*, NY/Ramsey, Paulist, 1980, pp. 1-2.

rejects the belief and practice of any tradition that holds that women are inferior to men. More revealing questions ask why, if the New Testament data witnesses to fluidity in leadership, the central importance of the community in selecting ministers, and service activities clearly based on gift rather than gender, why is the church still locked into interpretations that sustain the sacerdotal status quo.

C.2. Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics

Today an abundance of scholarly writing on women in early Christianity is at our disposal. An immense variety of literature on feminist perspectives and method has also proliferated. The effort to develop hermeneutical theories and theologies of the Bible that work with the reality of the patriarchy and the traces of misogyny that the text itself gives expression to, has evoked many different responses. In Chapter One of this thesis, I offer the reader a general overview of this feminist scholarship and samples of its diverse expression. I deem such an overview important in this context because the more specific choices of texts and methods that I have made continually in the thesis arise from this broader context and are a part of an on-going dialogue among feminists.

D. Hypothesis and Objectives

The work I present here falls within a feminist hermeneutical model which, when applied to the question of New Testament ministries, *seeks new ways to read the texts*. More significantly, through use of this model I press the question further to ask: what about us? Can this “new” reading help us find new ways to respond to the deep wounds of the church, most especially to the inferior position of women and how this affects ministries? Can this reading not contribute to a new theological paradigm of ministries? My work emerges from a vision of liberation that “is informed by the biblical prototype but is not derived from it. It places biblical texts under the authority of feminist experience insofar as it maintains that revelation is ongoing and takes place ‘for the sake of our salvation.’”¹⁰ It is in this sense that I seek “new language” in reading and responding to the biblical text. New responses engender new questions. What new questions arise and what a new reading offers, in terms of opening biblical and

¹⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretations* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 14.

theological perspectives, suggest an on-going movement between methods of interpretation. Concretely, if the central message of Jesus' teaching on the reign of God is one of inclusion, liberation, and justice, the current ecclesial policy and practice as regards ministry evokes questioning and reevaluation.

Thus, I hypothesize that through the use of a feminist hermeneutic applied to texts on the diverse ministries evident in the New Testament and on the place of women in these ministries, a renewed reading and an interpretation responsive to contemporary questions and needs is possible. Such a re-reading of biblical texts will offer both a critical evaluation of previous interpretations and provide new perspectives for understanding the nature of ministries that flow from gifts given the churches in and by the Spirit of Christ regardless of gender or status. Equally important, it will allow new questions to be formulated. The objectives of the thesis are: 1) to critically examine the thematization of "ministries" present in the biblical dossier; 2) to read these texts from the angle of women's experience/presence/absence in the texts; 3) to determine the requirements for ministry contained there; 4) to show that the results *à propos* women and ministries clarify the question of the nature of ministries themselves—a question that the church is compelled to examine in response to mounting questions and to ecclesial problems today.

E. Method

E.1. Feminist Hermeneutics as Methodological Framework

Topics such as discipleship and ministry are two among many themes within which the Bible has been used to define, reinforce and oftentimes prohibit women from ascribed roles. The dilemma is in that the Bible contains both liberating traditions as well as those traditions that seem to legitimate the domination by some (men), and the oppression of others (women, children, and slaves). The biblical texts articulate traditions that clearly demand and promote the liberation of women and men who are marginalized and oppressed by injustice and poverty. At the same time, we recognize that the Bible is the product of a patriarchal culture in which women, children and slaves are the possessions of and objects of control by men. It is an androcentric world and the texts it produces are androcentric. Throughout the texts "woman" is regularly subsumed under

“man” and the male is taken as the norm of human existence. Exclusive use of androcentric language further reinforces a mindset and ideology that legitimizes patriarchy. The hermeneutical framework in this thesis strives to provide the delicate balance needed to hold these two contradictory traditions together. The “profoundly paradoxical” nature of this situation for feminist scholarship, as Mary Ann Tolbert describes it, is that “one must defeat the Bible as patriarchal authority by using the Bible as liberator.”¹¹

Feminist reads through the lens of women’s experience. Such an approach is not without its problems. Which women? Which experience? Feminist scholars are increasingly sensitive to the dangers of simply recreating patriarchal discourse if it comes from a single, isolated scholarly arena—that of the white, middle class, Euro-American feminist perspective. To simply read the text as a woman does not guarantee a feminist biblical interpretation. Nor does a feminist hermeneutical perspective proceed from the biological sex of the exegete. It is not enough to be occupied with themes about women or to use certain tools or a particular technical exegetical approach. Feminist hermeneutics is the exploration of the exegetical and socio-cultural presuppositions of biblical interpretation in the interest of women. Feminist vs. androcentric exegesis is based on a preferential option for women with a view to action on behalf of joining or reaching women through the biblical text. The now familiar expression: “preferential option for the poor” so central in Latin American liberation theologies, applies in feminist criticism. Feminist exegesis makes such a “preferential option for women.” It is critical of sexual differentiation/sexism in the texts, the customs, and the parameters often invisibly circling the manifestations of racism, classism, chauvinism or ageism.¹² The methodological framework for this thesis then, aims to be that of feminist hermeneutics, yet is one developed and articulated from within the limits of a North American, white, Roman Catholic, monastic perspective.

¹¹ Mary Ann Tolbert, “Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics,” *Semeia*, 28 (1983), p. 120.

¹² O. Genest, dans *Les femmes aussi faisaient route avec lui*, Montréal, Médiaspaul, 1995, “Théories féministes dans l’interprétation de la Bible,” p. 57. [cf E.Schussler-Fiorenza, *But She Said*, p. 20].

E.2. Writing and Gender Analysis

The methodology calls for a shift in the interpretative paradigm, from that of an androcentric, “value neutral” scholarship, to a new interpretative paradigm that entails scholarship that is engaged and that takes an advocacy stance in favor of the oppressed. It uses the struggle of women today as its hermeneutical key and provides a challenge to the dominant historical paradigm of detached and objective interpretation. It seeks to reconstruct rather than reinterpret history by simply adding women to the male story. It rejects a positivist notion of history and recognizes that history has been constructed by the men and for the men who have been the power-holders and the winners in history. Therefore, one of the primary concerns is the *theological* reconstruction of early Christianity that is the reconstructed history of women as well as men. The goal of this hermeneutics Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza says, is “not only to restore women’s stories to early Christian history but also to reclaim this history as the history of women and men.”¹³ Key to this historical reconstruction is the application of a “hermeneutics of suspicion” not only to the context of the biblical dossier but to the text itself and its history of interpretation. The hermeneutics of suspicion is that process of interpretation we use to identify and to name the dissonance that occurs when the gap between the text and the reader appears whether through inconsistencies or falsehoods. Interpretation is made out of one’s interest, thus feminist readers and interpreters approach the text to discover and decry the contradictions or silences by which texts present harmful biases or discrimination.

Working to establish the historical reconstruction, while leaving intact the patriarchal and androcentric elements found there, now involves analysis made around the category of gender. Text, context, and interpretation are shaped and influenced by the social construct of gender. As at other points in the study, a hermeneutics of suspicion heightens the sensitivity to see whose interests are being served when titles and roles are identified. Whose interests are served in the interpretation of the texts? And at what price? When and why, and even how are they made gender specific? Starting from the recognition that history is written from the point of view of the winners, we now re-view

¹³ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, p. xiv.

and re-construct this same data from the angle of those marginalized (whether by omission, generalization or invisibility) and from the silences in the texts.

E.3. Heuristic Notions

How to delineate and clarify key ideas in order to evaluate particular biblical texts, their historical contexts, the traditions and their interpretations is another essential task. Since the very nature of feminist biblical scholarship is multi-disciplinary, theoretical models from the human and social sciences—feminist literary critical studies, feminist historiography and archeology, and other tools—aid in clarifying the work. Feminist theory maintains that all texts are products of an androcentric patriarchal history and culture. Feminist scholarship in all areas of research and scientific inquiry, whether philosophy, anthropology, history, or sociology, thus seeks to establish concepts and heuristic constructs that take us beyond the way androcentric models view the world. This hermeneutical tool names as insufficient those articulations of humanity and human history that have neglected women's presence and contributions.¹⁴ My critical perspective builds on a feminist heuristic model that identifies such notions as patriarchy, androcentrism, gender categories, sexism, and presuppositions, as factors that profoundly influence reading.

E.4. Method

Until now, I have spoken of the feminist methodology directing this thesis. Specific exegetical methods and analytical instruments for the chosen biblical texts dealing with ministries are determined in large part by the texts themselves. After a thorough explanation of the criteria used for the selection of specific texts, I employ other literary and historical instruments that work for the analysis. The results of historical-critical scholarship will be used to the extent that it helps us determine when and in what ways the texts may be cloaked in patriarchal values or language of particular cultural and historical moments, and thus cloud the true nature of New Testament ministries. The conclusions rendered by sociological analysis will also be incorporated insofar as they aid us in seeing the profile of communities from which and to which the text communicates. It is literary critical analysis, however, which will be the privileged method in this thesis.

¹⁴Ibid., In the Introduction and first chapter of her book, Schüssler-Fiorenza discusses at length the "new lenses that enable one to read the biblical sources in a new feminist light, in order to engage in the struggle for women's liberation inspired by the Christian feminist vision of the discipleship of equals." p. xxiv ff.

Literary critical work will be central to the search for identifying what is ministry in the New Testament data and what expressions and developments of ministry are evident there. In this regard, my interest is centered on the structure of the text itself and the meaning it gives, more than on questions of authorship or the history of the text's transmission. It is this notion of New Testament ministries, after all, and not an affair of gender that I am interested in seeing emerge clearly from the texts. What is the nature of ministry is one dimension of the question. How the texts indicate ministries' application in the life of the early Christian communities is another dimension of the question. From these aspects of analysis, we see more clearly, women's absence or presence. My literary critical work in the thesis will examine all these aspects of the question as well as asking what hierarchical and centralizing tendencies were already occurring in the New Testament writings. What consequences do these have for women? How these literary critical findings on New Testament ministries stand in relation to the gendered/hierarchical/classed understanding and models of ministry we find operative today is the question that then follows.

Is there a contribution that feminist biblical hermeneutics brings to a theology of ministries? In the final step of the thesis I apply my textual analysis to this question and indeed, I do find significant areas where the hermeneutic can contribute to understanding the nature of ministry and women's engagement in it. Certainly, the value of questions is never without merit. The diversity in functions, services, ministries, and ministers is easily recognizable as true, but my analysis gives flesh, so to speak, to data like this that may be known and acknowledged theoretically, but that rarely seems taken seriously enough to be reason for real change in the formulation of a theology of ministries that challenges the church to change a centuries long practice of ministries that endorses the exclusion of over half its population for the simple reason that they (we) are women.

Chapter One

Feminist Perspectives in Theology and the Bible

INTRODUCTION: GOAL AND METHOD

A. GOAL

The **GOAL** of Chapter One is to become acquainted with some of the major feminist theological and exegetical perspectives relative to the study and application of New Testament interpretation. The focus is Christian, and for the most part reflects the development and work done by white, North American, feminist scholars. Acquaintance with these perspectives helps achieve another aspect of the chapter's goal: it highlights important interpretive issues in feminist work in general, and biblical studies in particular. What perspectives are distinct to North American feminist theology? Can we not legitimately speak of an emerging tradition of feminist theology when we acknowledge the work begun in the nineteenth century by women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Anna Julia Cooper and Matilda Gage? What questions does feminist exegesis ask of the biblical texts? What hermeneutical tools are important and/or unique to feminist analysis? Can anything new be learned as a result of a specifically feminist approach to the Bible and who is it good for?

B. METHOD/APPROACH

One step (**B.1.**) toward achieving the goal of the chapter is to trace a single but significant line in critical feminist consciousness as it developed in the early theological work of Mary Daly. I propose to do this by examining several aspects of Daly's controversial thought as expressed in *Beyond God the Father* (1973),¹⁵ that led up to her rejection of the Christian scriptures as being in any way "normative" and her complete abandonment of institutional Christianity. Daly herself provides, as it were, a "feminist marker" alongside which we can stand the work of other feminist theologians and biblical scholars. In light of Daly's convictions, a second step (**B.2.**) is to examine (with some evaluation) the various categories of feminist thought on biblical interpretation. Tracings of the remarkable development in feminist theology, and in particular biblical critical study, are found in works

¹⁵ As early as the 1960's, Mary Daly was a catalyst for what would become the first task for feminist theology: to critique Tradition itself in light of patriarchal ideology and the patriarchalization of God. *The Church and the Second Sex*, published in 1968 encouraged women to "vote with their feet."

edited and written by Adela Yarbro Collins,¹⁶ Letty Russell,¹⁷ Sandra Schneiders,¹⁸ and Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza.¹⁹

Carolyn Osiek²⁰ offers an outline, now frequently referred to by those seeking understanding of feminist interpretations of the Bible that I too find helpful for our purposes here. As the wealth and diversity of material opens before us, our indebtedness increases for those scholars who have worked to give it order and category. Their work facilitates our journey into this rich and vast feminist landscape. These writers ask how different interpreters examine the biblical record. In most cases, they ask specifically about the Bible's authority and in what ways it reflects patriarchal social structures. In some cases, they ask how the Bible gives expression to and affirmation of patriarchal social structures. In order to achieve the goal of this chapter the third and final step (**B.3.**) is to examine in greater depth the work of another significant feminist biblical scholar and theologian, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. For many women and for some biblical scholars (both women and men) Schüssler-Fiorenza has a central role in feminist biblical work today. Her voice continues to be a part of the lively conversation about the need for explicitly feminist historical reconstruction and theology.

B.1. The way feminist consciousness addresses theology and biblical study today, colors my approach to this chapter. It convinces me that to give expression to my experience, to my own *état de la question*, and to acknowledge my own presuppositions, is all part and parcel of how such an examination unfolds. I single out one event that has become for me a symbol as well as a signal of the gap between my experience and personal values and what our Christian tradition has taught and practiced. Following one tenet held by many feminist theologians, to reflect on this event in light of my own experience of it adds to the intellectual integrity and meaningfulness of this thesis. In doing so, I draw also from a few feminist thinkers, beginning with Mary Daly.

¹⁵ As early as the 1960's, Mary Daly was a catalyst for what would become the first task for feminist theology: to critique Tradition itself in light of patriarchal ideology and the patriarchalization of God. *The Church and the Second Sex*, published in 1968 encouraged women to "vote with their feet."

¹⁶ Adela Yarbro, Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985).

¹⁷ Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).

¹⁸ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Beyond Patching* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990).

¹⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures, Vol. 1: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

²⁰ Carolyn Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives" in *Feminist Perspectives*, 93-105.

clearly for me on that day. Even now, this woman's interest in and dedication to women and to the full realization of our humanity, evokes in me the desire to write with passion and honesty. It encourages me in my personal efforts to face the hard challenges, to articulate the difficult questions, and to trust my experience as I write about feminist perspectives in theology and the Bible. I refer to my experience of the event; it does not necessarily reflect any other person's experience of that event. Much less is it meant to be an authoritative comment upon the role or history of the Catholic Church in Quebec.

I entered the church the day of the funeral with an immense crowd of women, men, and children gathered to mourn the passing of their mother, sister, friend, colleague, teacher—all that she was for us. At the time, I did not know that it would be a Roman Catholic funeral Mass that we would be celebrating. Nor did I know how it would be conducted. As my friends were to say to me later, "Probably most French Canadians would have expected that." And I did not know in the end, if most of those who were there really experienced it as a "celebration of faith in the Resurrection of Jesus," as Roman Catholicism describes its funeral liturgies. I wondered, "Was it a time when grief was shared and pain was lessened because of what we believe in and were doing there together?" I didn't know. What I do know is that the words and ritual actions meant to give expression to consolation and hope in Christ in that liturgy seemed to be spoken to someone else. The lack of connection between what Christians believe about life and resurrection and this woman's lived search for understanding of humanity seemed particularly inappropriate. Was this a real healing and help? What appeared to me to be the lack of engagement, the almost indifferent response by the assembly to the Eucharist, struck me as another loss to endure. Why is it that the homily and particularly the eulogies at the end seemed the only moments when our humanity, our relationships, were expressed?

What I knew then without words and know now from reflection upon the experience of that gathering, is that it is right to own the claim: "It is our church." I found myself saying things like: "It is our faith." Just as women young and old have cried out against violence in the "Take Back the Night" demonstrations throughout Canada and the United States in recent years, I found myself saying, "Take Back the Church!" It is our communal as well as personal search for meaning in the face of mystery that has been taken away from us, or that has never been allowed, perhaps. I refuse to give it up or give it over. I continue to believe that the Christ Event as expressed in and through Jesus is for anyone who seeks to claim it as somehow "saving" or "redeeming." The fact is that "the androcentric fallacy" (Gerda

Lerner) has wrested religion and worship from women and has built upon the distorted “half-story” of humanity. However, what history, patriarchal tradition, and injustice have done to steal it away from most of us, I maintain is not the final word. Part of the work of feminist theology and feminist biblical research is to reclaim the possibility of faith for women by creating it anew. It is not a question of simply filling out the picture of the past by adding women to it, nor does it try to re-structure patriarchy. It is also not a work leading necessarily to the relinquishment of our history and our identity as Christians.

In the years that followed Mary Daly’s groundbreaking and uncompromising critique of Christianity, *Beyond God the Father* (1973), an immensely varied and rich tapestry of incisive, creative feminist critical thought emerged. This book, as well as two of her later works, *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) and *Pure Lust* (1984) were widely read and have deeply influenced women. The first of these three books grew out of Daly’s experience of a Christianity that she found irredeemable and which she therefore had to reject. Needless to say, her rage surfaced and consequently, the sharp language she used in *Beyond God the Father* and in later talks and articles shocked many of her listeners. It won her little sympathy or open hearing from the academy or from the church. Unfortunately, but necessarily, her writings and public appearances also set her at odds with those who engaged in the same work but who remained within the Christian tradition. An enormous amount of work has gone on since that time when Daly’s book was the subject of lively reaction and debate. Much published and unpublished criticism, response and re-creation, has happened in feminist circles where the choice to remain within the Christian tradition is still considered a viable option. It must be said however that there is perhaps no other single woman engaged in a similar work whose writings so galvanized the feminist philosophical/ theological/ biblical debate, at least in the United States, as have those of Mary Daly. Few serious feminist critics today would deny the depth of the problem Daly decried: that of the misogyny shaping human history and its manifestations in historical Christianity. Daly’s profound rage in this regard has, no doubt, been a major factor in helping to produce a feminist critique that refused to be ignored or silenced within academic and church circles.²¹

A first reading of *Beyond God the Father* was at once exciting, affirming, and disappointing. Exciting, because finally, it seemed, someone was speaking “loudly enough”

²¹ Anne Loades, ed., *Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster, 1990). Although it is clear that she takes issue with some of Daly’s conclusions, in Part Three, Practical Consequences, 181-189, Loades traces Daly’s growth and positive influence in feminist and feminist/ecclesial circles.

(or was it “honestly enough”?) about a tradition that had helped shape and was itself shaped on the basis of a lie. The deception of patriarchy, the father-rule, is the mindset and perception of reality that thrives on the oppression of women for the sake of maintaining a domination-subordination pattern of relationships in which males own, rule, and reign. This world is a false world, said Daly, this reality is not reality and we must purge ourselves of it. Mary Daly was the woman who put into words what many others were slowly beginning to see: “if God is male, then the male is God.”²² It was exciting to read someone who was discovering as well as creating new language to describe the reality of the world, one’s self, and the one we name “God.” Daly was doing much more than finding new ways of saying the old things. She realized that even in the speaking, even in the naming, the new is coming to be. Women have been named, have been spoken for, have been made the “other” in relation to creation, to men, and to God for so long, that it is exciting to imagine it could be some other way. Even before Daly wrote *Beyond God the Father*, she recognized that the weary and waning perceptions of world, self, and God, as defined by patriarchy had lost their grip—reality had broken the bonds of “meaning,” which is to say, “meaning-as-given.” Daly calls it: “the non-reality of alienation.”

Daly drew the connections between politics and the patriarchal vision of reality that religion legitimated. She became an outspoken critic of systems and government--creations of patriarchy--and she called for the “castration” of all images and language that give expression to a “phallogocentric value system.”²³ She identified this work of “castration” to be the task of women. Daly began to write and speak of her beliefs about how the images and values of a society are projected into a framework of belief. She observed the ways in which they become fixed and objectified; how the framework of belief is used to justify “the social infrastructure,” appearing to be unchangeable and true in some kind of unquestionable way.

My first reading of Mary Daly was an experience of personal affirmation and celebration of the honesty in her bold identification, critique, and rejection of a “pervasive, controlling sexual caste system at work in our world.”²⁴ But hers is not simply a push for greater individual freedom or “women’s liberation,” nor is it only a call for the critique of patriarchy and its creations. Daly’s is not the facile relativism that can arise from focusing only on the self and each individual’s right to create her/his own form of life based on a

²² Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 19.

²³ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 9.

²⁴ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 2.

belief in what is really of value, what is really real. Her method of liberation affirms, “that to be human is to be able to name.”²⁵ Women have had this human power, this humanizing power stolen from them, says Daly. We will not be able to reclaim this right to name until we move beyond the space and time of patriarchy and find our whole human selves, sister-selves bonded together in new ways of seeing and be-ing in cosmic covenant. But this is where I part from her thinking. The move toward an “Other” reality, to an “Other” world of segregated feminism seems hardly possible or practical for the overthrow of patriarchy. It is unrealistic to think that withholding our power as women, or withdrawing from the world, is really possible for most women. Daly might respond by saying that we are about creating new paradigms of reality. My sense is that there is no room here for even the possibility of a common reality if the story of women’s oppression and suffering is removed from the very locus of its creation.²⁶ There is no past to discover and the future seems an impossible blur in the tangle of her increasingly metaphoric language.²⁷

My disappointment came in reading what appears to be Daly’s increasingly elitist refusal to accept anyone who disagrees with her presuppositions or proposals. Without hesitation, I affirm the call for women to work at unveiling the myth of “feminine evil,” to refuse co-opting institutions that make us “other,” and even to risk “non-being” for the sake of rejecting the “non-being” we’ve been assigned. However, I see it as both inconsistent and illogical, to first acknowledge and proclaim that the beginnings of the awareness that the human being is made in God’s image are already present in traditional Christian doctrine,²⁸ and then to say that there is no model we can take from the past. Is there no truth to be found there either? The disappointment I experienced in reading Daly was in knowing that her conclusion moves her beyond a worldview that includes church and Christianity. I count as great loss her turn away from a whole company of women scholars, her total denial of a tradition that some would claim is as much a part of “herstory” as history. Even more

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁶ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*. In Chapter Six, “Sisterhood as Cosmic Covenant” Daly calls for “an exodus community” which rejects the church and sees the center of this new sisterhood as being “in the promise in ourselves.” 158.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Original Reintroduction, p. xxvii. “The Moon-Goddesses--Gorgons--look toward men and turn them to stone--the doomsday men with their doomsday clocks whose tick-tocks mimic the rhythms of Lunar Time. Gorgons look out-ward, refusing to serve the masters’ commands to peer into mirrors. They tear off the blindfold from captive Justice, crying that the Time has come to activate, to See with Active Eyes. They say that Eye/I beams can stop the doomsday clock...” While I appreciate the drawing power of her poetic flair, phrases such as this taken from the Original Reintroduction, seem to move one away from concrete experience into what could be the dangerous trap of once again falling into “spiritualizing” our experience.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

profoundly, I count as loss her ultimate rejection of Christianity as being irredeemably sexist and therefore not salvific for women. Is there anything after that? If there is, is it enough? It is not enough for me to think that the "Second Coming" is the arrival of new female presence.

Despite my difficulties with her conclusions, much of what I read in Mary Daly's work was so compelling, so challenging, and so impossible to dismiss, that it made her conclusions all the more disturbing to me. Does following her thought and agreeing with her line of argument demand the same conclusion from every reader? I knew as I read her that I wanted to remain within the Christian tradition, but I want to be there as one of the "whole beings", one of those who make choices and redefine for themselves, "church," "god," and "women." I knew when I first read Mary Daly that her questions were the questions of many women and that they were also some of my questions. They were some of those questions I had that day at the funeral liturgy of my teacher. Daly's challenges were ones with which many women like myself could identify. I also realized what some had earlier suggested: that as regards the Church, theology, and feminism, Mary Daly's work and struggle became something of a post-modern watershed for feminist work with the Bible. Many of those who were writing, thinking, and speaking about questions of patriarchy and the liberation of rising feminist consciousness, were doing so in response to Daly. Most were taking a position on one side or the other of her uncompromising stand. I stand with those who question, as Daly and others contend, that the only alternative to a patriarchy-saturated religious tradition with all its institutional baggage is to step outside its reach. Is the only alternative to live on the "boundary," set apart from the "non-reality of alienation" inherent in patriarchy? Must we, if we want to authentically pursue the liberation that is a part of becoming fully human, become post-Christians?

Further questions arise for me from her work. Is it possible to refute, with an equal amount of reason and passion, Daly's attack on the core symbolism of Christianity? What audible, which is to say credible, voice does a Christian feminist critique add to the conversation? In other words, is there a radical Christian feminist perspective operative today, which can stand up next to Daly's challenges or is she correct in concluding that there no possible way to overthrow patriarchy short of leaving this world? And finally, is a reshaping of traditional Christian theology and biblical hermeneutics really working? How have other feminist scholars and writers responded to the profound and apparently irreversible problems that Daly so unequivocally put before us?

Daly's reflection and writing provided the critical focusing of the theological and biblical presuppositions that demanded examination. She called for a critical analysis of women's experience and increasingly, created new terminology while at the same time heightening awareness of the need for changes in religious language as well as language in reference to women and women's experience. Daly helped to open further the door that would expose patriarchy and the patriarchalization of God. She also helped many of us clarify our questions. Some of these questions are answered as we begin to trace the various strands of feminism and more particularly in how some theologians began and continue to address religious questions and to face the realities of the Bible, as we know it.

B.2. My personal goal is to work with, rather than avoid the challenges and rejection that women like Mary Daly present to us. The goal is to continue addressing her work but from within the Christian circle. I am biased in favor of the Bible and want to find in it a liberating, life-giving word. I know that there is no guarantee that this is possible. But I believe that the effort to develop a theology of the Bible and a hermeneutical theory that works with the reality that the text is patriarchal and misogynist, may yet allow us to continue to use the text as revelatory and liberating.

For this to be possible, it is necessary to continue to re-conceptualize the relationship of the ecclesial tradition to the biblical text as revelatory. The development of new vocabulary and a new hereustic framework has begun to open new possibilities for addressing the very nature of the text as text, and how it might be understood. How we conceptualize notions such as "inspiration," the Bible as "the Word of God," and "revelation," radically changes when we apply a feminist critical consciousness to history, tradition, and linguistic theory. For example, recent investigations of the formation of the canon—even the question of what canonicity is—affect how we speak of the authority and normativity of the text. I am predisposed to claiming the Bible as a source for meaning and a text that is human and revelatory. As early as 1976 Sandra Schneiders and others began to write about the need to liberate the word before it can become a liberating word.²⁹ Like Schneiders, I am committed to a feminist perspective that demands a critique of all oppressive cultural structures and their creations. Feminist study underscores the irrefutable point that every text is an interpretation done within its particular context. The interpretation

²⁹ In the Introduction to the collection *Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*, Russel writes of this and refers back to the 1976 work *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible*.

is an effort to understand the reality perceived and that effort is subjective. Fewer and fewer scholars today would defend the myth of objectivity. It is no longer a question of whether we interpret the text we read, but how we interpret.³⁰

Experience of the reader as well as that of the writer shapes, changes, and reveals the meaning of the text. There occurs a dynamic process that allows—demands, even—that meaning changes according to time and context. Like all experience, women’s experience is on going. A feminist exegesis and hermeneutics takes into account women’s experience in a focal way. It recognizes that the authority of the text does not exist solely in the text; that is, the Word of God is not limited to the biblical text, but also lives in the reader. I write from within the context of my experience of the Christian tradition, specifically expressed in Roman Catholicism, and as a white North American feminist. While this limits my perspective, I recognize that it is revelatory.

More broadly, “feminist critical consciousness” has its roots deeper in history than many would suspect. Marla Selvidge writes in her book, *Notorious Voices*, “While feminist criticism is touted as a new methodology employed by scholars of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries...its strategies were employed centuries earlier.”³¹ New work, growing out of a number of different social, political, and religious factors, was however, beginning to take shape in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe and America.³² The increasingly clear and collective realization by women that they were simply not counted in the story of mankind and that their experience had no place or meaning in the shaping of life

³⁰ Sandra Schneiders, “The Bible and Feminism” in Catherine LaCugna (ed.), *Freeing Theology. The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), pp.31-57. Section 2: “The Special Status of the Bible in the Church” (pp. 40-46) was particularly helpful in clarifying my ideas in this regard.

³¹ Marla Selvidge, *Notorious Voices: Feminist Biblical Interpretation, 1500-1920* (New York: Continuum, 1996). To this point, in another place Selvidge writes, “While the term ‘feminism’ may be a twentieth-century invention, its ideals and strategies were practiced long before the suffragettes won the vote, and long before Mary Daly, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Phyllis Trible, Naomi Goldenberg, or Rosemary Radford Ruether penned their scathing critiques of the religious literatures and power structures of society.” p. 6. As well, Selvidge writes of those who demythologized and remythologized texts: Mary Hays, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Antoinette Brown Blackwell. Women such as Luckie Buchan, Joanna Southcott, and Anna Bonus Kingsford were among those interpreters who conceived of the female as God, or the New Christ, the only hope for humanity. Judith Sargent Murray, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Frances Willard, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman “upheld motherhood and the Superior Moral Woman as the highest good.” These women “sought to help society educate all women through their matriarchal readings.” p. 7. Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, and Amanda Berry Smith— all African American women – used their cultural experience and worked from their experience of racism and slavery. Their interpretation came out of their understanding of the plight of all who were oppressed and used by the white male power structure.

³² See overview discussion in Barbara Brown Zikmund, “Feminist Consciousness in Historical Perspective” in Letty Russell (ed.), *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 21-29 and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford’s article, “American Women and the Bible: The Nature of Woman as a Hermeneutical Issue” in Adela Yarbro Collins (ed.), *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 11-33.

or culture began to take effect during this period. Questions regarding women's duties, rights and roles in home and society prompted external reforms. Opponents of reform used the Bible and Christian tradition to argue for the *status quo*; it was not legitimate for women to question, much less to name and value their experience.

Religion was the bastion of patriarchy and everything from women's role to their feminine identity could be and was preached to them from the biblical text. But the heightened awareness of women's disadvantaged status led women to organized action to better their situation and to open the horizons that had been so severely limited by the strictures imposed by the male world. They began to agitate for change in political and social spheres. Women also began to turn to the Bible for justification of their position. The desire for the right to be educated, to vote, and to have some say about such questions as family and fashion made women increasingly aware of themselves as women. The reforms which were taking place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to the growing realization among women that reform and reinterpretation was not enough to either achieve equality or allow for the effective liberation of women (and men) into their full humanity. Structural and systemic changes had to be made. We needed to study the Bible itself and the oppression it legitimated, in a manner that led us beyond using it as a proof-text argumentation. A small but growing number of women were turning to the Bible and asking: How are the scriptures to be interpreted and by whom?³³ Patriarchy, as a principle of social organization and the operative force behind social structures and institutions, promoting dominance over the dependent and powerless, was in the process of being unmasked for what it is.³⁴

It is not my intention here to survey the history or development of feminism, yet it is important to note that feminism did not begin in the academy. Nor did it arise from any single source or for any one reason. The Bible had played a key role in the argument against women's emancipation. As regards Elizabeth Cady Stanton's work on *The Woman's Bible* and other women actively examining the role of the Bible and religion, Elisabeth Schüssler-

³³ The work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton on *The Women's Bible* (1895) and its significance for feminist biblical interpretation is discussed by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza in *In Memory of Her*, (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 7-14. In addition to Selvidge's book, *Notorious Voices*, cited above, the historical importance of such women as Stanton, the Grimké sisters, Matilda Joslyn Gage and Frances Willard is discussed in Gifford's article, "American Women and the Bible" in Collins (ed.) *Feminist Perspectives*, 11-33.

³⁴ Mary T. Malone writes, "The first wave of the feminist movement is associated with the mid-nineteenth century search for women's rights culminating in the demand for suffrage...The normative marital arrangement of male headship and female silence and submission was particularly challenged. With the achievement of the vote and the advent of the two world wars, much of this debate had been forgotten." Malone, *Women and Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 258.

Fiorenza points out; this was a “political act.”³⁵ It was and continues to be women’s experience of sexual oppression that prompts the feminist critical consciousness.

The 1960s and 70s, without question, marked significant turning points in the United States and Canada. As suggested in the General Introduction institutional structures were breaking down. An explosion of information from within the social sciences (especially psychology) increased engagement with personalist questions. The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) highlighted, in dramatic ways, the global dimensions of the church. The church itself was catching the attention of the world. Many bishops, representing countries suffering from centuries of oppression, called for justice for their people. In what seemed like a moment in time, the order and right place of things was uncertain. The church and the gospel, once so distinct and separate from the world, were now spoken of as being rooted in the world. For women, this period gave rise to the second wave of the Christian feminist movement.

Today, scholarly writing on women in the New Testament and in early Christianity is abundant. In recent years, an immense variety of literature on feminist perspective and method has also proliferated. The effort to develop hermeneutical theories and theologies of the Bible that work with the reality of the patriarchy and the traces of misogyny that the text itself gives expression to, has evoked many different responses. It is possible here to offer only an overview in order to give a sampling of this work. At the same time, I deem such an overview important in this context because the more specific choices of texts and methods arise from this broader context and are a part of an on-going dialogue among feminists.

While definitions of feminism are as many and varied as are feminists,³⁶ on some level, most would likely be able to agree that feminism attempts a critique of the oppressive structures of society. Contemporary feminism names patriarchy as the basic cause of such oppression. How one approaches patriarchy—defines and responds to it—determines, in part, where one stands within the work of feminist renewal. In this regard, two general approaches are possible: work to achieve the ascendancy of women, which implies a radical response of

³⁵Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 7.

³⁶ A taste of various definitions: “Feminism is a mode of analysis, a method of asking questions and searching for answers, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women.” By contrast, in the same volume we read: “Feminism is a theory that calls for women’s attainment of social, economic, and political rights and opportunities equal to those possessed by men. Feminism is also a mode for a social state—an ideal, or a desired standard of perfection not yet attained in the world.” *A Feminist Dictionary*, eds. Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler (Boston: Pandora Press, 1985), 159-160.

revolution and separation; and work toward human equality in which reconciliation is sought through establishment of and emphasis given to the full humanity of women. The latter of these two approaches, when applied to feminist biblical interpretation, seeks to understand in new ways the normative authority of the Bible, while the former approach dismisses it as hopelessly lost in its patriarchal web. These approaches need to be nuanced and expanded, but I shall return to this later. Suffice it to say whether the approach is revolutionary or reformist, a social system of father-rule as the basic structure of social organization is unacceptable and must be unequivocally rejected.

A discussion of feminist perspectives in biblical interpretation needs to take into account developments both in feminism and in biblical interpretation. The response among feminists to the dominance of patriarchy has given shape to at least four types of feminism.³⁷

Liberal feminism, based on the Anglo-American Enlightenment tradition, has concerned itself with equal rights and therefore equal opportunity for women within the existing socio-political sphere. The face of patriarchy manifests itself in pervasive sexist mores and practices, and perpetuates systems, which deny the rights and opportunities of individuals based on their sex. Equal rights, equal opportunities, equal pay, and reproductive self-determination are among the goals for which liberal feminism works. Critics of liberal feminism point out that such a perspective is burdened with the weakness of liberalism; that stress on the individualistic understanding of human beings leaves patriarchy basically intact and tends toward the classism produced by laissez-faire capitalism. Such an approach, critics maintain, leaves the poor, women of color, and minorities on the outside of any real change.

The exclusion of women's values and the intrinsic moral superiority of women are the concern of cultural or romantic feminism.³⁸ Cultural feminism seeks to counter the emphasis on the rational and the technical by emphasizing the other side. This perspective holds that women bring the emotional and natural voice to humanize and react against the prevailing values of industrialized, scientific modernity. The so-called feminine qualities of intuition, sensitivity, and creativity are glorified, and among the reformist expression this is a call to the transformation of "the morally and aesthetically inferior masculine world through

³⁷ See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), 41-45, 216-32. Other authors have used Ruether's summary and made their own adjustments and additions. Especially helpful is Carolyn Osiek's treatment in "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives" in Collins (ed.) *Feminist Perspectives*, 93-105.

³⁸ Variations in the use of this title can be seen in Gregory Baum, "Feminism in Christian Theology" *Journal of Gender in World Religions* (Publication of the Faculty of Religious Studies, Montreal: McGill, Vol. 4), Sandra Schneiders in *Beyond Patching*, p. 19 and Ann Loades in *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, 1-3.

infusion of superior feminine values.”³⁹ In its most extreme forms, this perspective rejects the male world altogether. Cultural or romantic feminism in its reformist expression held stronger place in the 19th century than it does today, when family values and the glorification of home and motherhood were elevated as women’s way of transforming society and challenging patriarchy by adding this different voice. It continues to be the perspective often put forth by the official Church. It is still heard in the message of John Paul II. Critics suggest that such a perspective is itself patriarchal; the critique of merely adding women to the picture of humanity is no solution. However it is expressed, the end result tends toward a kind of reverse sexism, a reversal of oppressors and oppressed.

Like liberal feminism, *Marxist/socialist feminism* operates on the belief that the way to equality for women is through complete assimilation into the public, male system. It rejects however, the classism generated by economic systems that are fundamentally sexist and therefore hierarchical. Patriarchy is the collusion among male oppressors, which crosses classes and races to control the division of labor by gender. This feminist perspective concerns itself then, with economic autonomy and the deconstruction of the oppressive economic system, which assigns males the dominant class within every class.

*Radical feminism*⁴⁰ sees patriarchy as the root cause of oppression that corrupts and motivates every social system, making the male the absolute owner and dominant power holder over all. It attacks all institutions and gender self-identity as promoters of hierarchy and refuses to “dichotomize differences into inferior and superior as bases for domination/subordination relationships between people or between humans and the rest of creation.”⁴¹ As with other expressions, radical feminism recognizes that the personal is political. Individual, personal experience is inextricably bound to the institutions and structures in which we live. It recognizes that all spheres of our existence are connected and related. The perspective of relationship, mentioned frequently above, regards patriarchy not “merely as a system of male domination of females, and therefore as a subset of the overall problem of class oppression.” Additionally, it sees it as “the root of all hierarchical relationships including not only sexism but also classism, clericalism, colonialism, racism, ageism, and heterosexism.”⁴²

³⁹ Osiek, “The Feminist and the Bible,” 95.

⁴⁰ Here I am following this distinction as made by Sandra Schneiders and others. See *Beyond Patching*,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴² Schneiders, *Beyond Patching*, 24.

Like the feminist approaches mentioned above, the specifically *Christian* expression of radical feminism, takes on many forms in its biblical scholarship and methodology. It takes seriously the vision and goals of other feminist expressions. It is also concerned with religion's role in the oppression of women and with the liberating possibilities of religion as a manifestation of culture and belief. Some Christian feminists seek to reconcile their views with Christian tradition through the creation of an alternative future of full human liberation, rather than to sever all ties with religion. Attention focuses on the interstructuring of oppressive forms of language, categorization, and social behavior: race, class, sex, etc. Like most of the work of feminism, radical Christian feminism, as applied to biblical study, is contextual and looks at each place where these primary forms of oppression are expressed. Responses have been made and attempts at alternative visions constructed.

As I suggested earlier, two factors that are critical in feminist theology and biblical hermeneutics are experience and authority. Anne Carr believes that "a threefold task of critique, historical retrieval, and theological construction" mark the path of the development of feminist theological reflection.⁴³ Looking back to the time of Mary Daly's early writing in the 1960's, it is clear that she was a catalyst for what was to be the first task for feminist theology: to critique the tradition itself. The fact that women's experience has been denied, ignored, and erased from that tradition is no longer acceptable on any level or in any feminist perspective. Feminist scholars began to make the point that women's experience, specifically as women's experience, is central to a critique and a restructuring/renewing /recreating response to Christian experience and tradition in general, and to the Biblical text as authoritative and liberating, in particular. The fact that women's voices were absent through centuries of that tradition, and that they continued to be absent, needed to be addressed and righted.

The recovery of women's history became the second task of feminist theology. The search for the Christian past of women began to expose not only the denial of their presence in the story of history, but the rediscovery of their place in the preaching and practice of the early church and its foundational stories. People like Schüssler-Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether worked with texts and reinterpreted the stories there, recovering some of the

⁴³ Anne E. Carr, "The New Vision in Feminist Theology," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed., La Cugna (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 9. She writes specifically of the work of Catholic feminist theologians.

lost or stolen history of women in the Bible and in the tradition.⁴⁴ In order to incorporate both the new understandings of historical material and the developing insights of the feminist community, new theological reconstruction had to be done. Increasing numbers of women were studying theology and acquiring the linguistic and biblical tools needed to do the work of reshaping the traditional teaching. All the teachings needed reshaping—revelation, authority, sin, grace, and even the Bible itself.

Carr goes on to point out that although one might expect the topic of theological methodology to be among the first task to be addressed, historically it only came into focus as a kind of fourth engagement of feminist theology.⁴⁵ The providence of this, I believe, is that women studying the Bible learned historical-critical methodology. We pointed out earlier that they were not among the first women to enter the feminist dialogue. And by the time the glory of the historical-critical method was beginning to dim, rich findings were being made through the use of many other critical tools, which could be brought to bear on the biblical text. Feminists were discovering wide-ranging materials and models for interpretive strategies in countless other disciplines.

To reconstruct the early Christian history of women, their participation in leadership, and their contribution to shaping ministry in the early church, feminist biblical work is actively engaged with feminist work done in archeology, linguistic studies, cultural anthropology, and a host of other sciences. The work has helped to recover rich non-canonical and varied sources⁴⁶ that have been lost or forgotten. Another enrichment contributing to this perspective comes in conjunction with feminist work accomplished in the social sciences, literary criticism, feminist historiography, and postmodern critical theory. Feminist biblical studies borrow and employ several methods and interpretative strategies for reading the Bible.

⁴⁴ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* and Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, eds., *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

⁴⁵ Anne E. Carr, "The New Vision of Feminist Theology," in *Freeing Theology*, 11.

⁴⁶ Although focused predominately on the lives of Hellenistic Jewish women, Bernadette J. Brooten and Ross Kraemer are two scholars who have taken the lead in utilizing sources such as legal documents, inscriptional evidence, documentary scrolls and visual art for illuminating women's experience. More helpful to understanding Christian experience, is the treasure house of textual resources edited by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures Vol.II: A Feminist Commentary*, New York, Crossroad, 1994, which explores a variety of Christian and Jewish writings from a multiplicity of theoretical perspectives and interpretive frameworks. It "seeks to transgress canonical boundaries in order both to undo the exclusionary kyriarchal [Schüssler-Fiorenza's term for rule of the master or lord] tendencies of the ruling canon and to renew the debate on the limits, functions, and extent of the canon," 5.

The diversity of tools and the ways of using them explain in part the variety and uniqueness of the feminist approaches to exegesis and interpretation. Today, while many continue to hold strongly to the irreplaceable value of the historical-critical method in biblical study, most would admit to the great value that other methodologies have brought to biblical interpretation.

Although to outline the summaries⁴⁷ of the diverse models and approaches to feminist biblical study is nearly an impossible task, one overview that was developed by Carolyn Osiek⁴⁸ provides help in this regard. Osiek identifies five models, which describe ways in which feminist theologians have used the Bible: rejectionist, loyalist, revisionist, sublimationist, and liberationist. Osiek herself points to the similarities in the first and second positions. The first, the rejectionist model, rejects the Bible as hopelessly patriarchal and therefore not authoritative or useful. Obviously, this describes Mary Daly's position if we add to it the rejection of the whole religious tradition. The second, the stance of the loyalist, is at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. In it, human assent has no relation to the absolute authority of the Bible, the very expression of Divine authority. In addition to seeing this as a position of the "far right," one does well to recall what Osiek points out: that this is often a very thorough, well-honed method. It is often based on solid exegetical method and embraced by many intelligent women as "a means of explaining and interpreting their role within their biblical faith."⁴⁹

The revisionist approach, the third model, seeks to rehabilitate the biblical tradition. Patriarchy is historically but not theologically conditioned. Critics may see it as being too slow, too moderate, and too "soft" since it "attacks more the symptoms than the cause of the illness."⁵⁰ The fourth alternative, the sublimationist position, is reminiscent of the romantic or cultural feminism described earlier in this paper. Feminist symbols are valued as important in their own right, demonstrating and underscoring the otherness of the feminine. Within the biblical tradition the eternal feminine is sought in such figures as Israel as the bride of God, Mary the virgin-mother, and the Holy Spirit. Osiek points out that those who work well with symbols and who understand romantic feminism favor this position as a way of

⁴⁷ In addition to that of Carolyn Osiek's, which we shall refer to, see also: Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, "Feminist Perspectives on Bible and Theology: An Introduction to Selected Issues and Literature," *Interpretation* 42 (1988), 5-18 and Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Method: New Approaches to Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 105-112.

⁴⁸ Op. cit.

⁴⁹ Osiek, "Feminist Perspectives," 100.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

understanding oneself and the world. Such an approach tends toward exclusivism and a spiritualizing tendency, which then moves it out of the social-political sphere.

Many know well the fifth hermeneutical position in this schema, that of liberationist feminism. It understands human liberation to be the central message of the Bible. Therefore, it follows that this position sees the first task of feminism is liberation from the powerful oppression of patriarchy so that all can relate as equals. Osiek recognizes important methodological differences between theologians who hold the liberationist position, but finds basic similarities in their common attempt to interpret the Bible with an alternative vision of salvation and the radical transformation of the social order.⁵¹ One of the values of such an approach is its refusal to accept reinterpretation of texts within the patriarchal framework and its insistence on a total restructuring of the tradition while not completely rejecting it. The task is to create a society based on a biblical eschatology in which the dignity and value of all human beings is central.

What is evident after examining these currents in feminism and the ways in which feminist theology has attended and given further expression to feminism, is that Mary Daly's view is far from being the only response that takes utterly seriously the sin of patriarchy and the hierarchy and sexism that springs from it. The voices of those remaining within the Christian tradition are becoming more skilled and clear in their feminist critique.

In the closing comments of her article, "The Bible and Feminism," Sandra Schneiders notes the richness of approaches that exist among feminist theologians. It remains outside the scope of this section to offer a more thorough examination of specific writers.⁵² I return to my experience and the signal example of the funeral liturgy of a sister. In light of that experience and the foregoing examination, I concur with Sandra Schneiders regarding feminist perspective on biblical interpretation. She comes to the conclusion that any practice of liberating interpretation done by scholars must be accompanied by "a pastoral practice that avoids, first, the public proclamation—without counter commentary—of oppressive texts

⁵¹ Osiek discusses the work of Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Letty Russell as variations on this perspective. One of the key differences between the three is their understanding of revelation and their application of methodology. For a more detailed comparison, see Anne E. Carr, "The New Vision of Feminist Theology," 13-21.

⁵² The rereading of Jane Flax's lecture, "Feminism and Postmodernism" followed by Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord, Ontario: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1991), and then discovering Walter Brueggemann's *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) leaves open many interesting and exciting questions. See also, several helpful articles from *Semeia* 51 (1990), especially that of Gary A. Phillips "Exegesis as Critical Praxis: Reclaiming History and Text from a Postmodern Perspective," 7-49.

and, second, the development of inclusive-language liturgical texts.”⁵³ Such a practice, of necessity, clearly distinguishes between a text read as the history of an ancient community and the same text proclaimed as good news to the community listening.

If the work of feminist biblical hermeneutics is to have meaning, it must come from and return to enrich and enlighten our contemporary human experience where we are and as we are—always new, always beginning.

⁵³ Sandra Schneiders, “The Bible and Feminism” in *Freeing Theology*, 50.

B.3.

Remember me?

I am the girl
With the dark skin
whose shoes are thin

I am the girl

with rotted teeth

I am the dark
rotten-toothed girl
with the wounded eye
and the melted ear.

I am the girl
holding their babies
cooking their meals
sweeping their yards
washing their clothes
Dark and rotting
and wounded, wounded.

I would give
to the human race
only hope.

I am the woman
with the blessed dark skin
I am the woman
with the teeth repaired
I am the woman
with the healing eye
the ear that hears

I am the woman: Dark
repaired, healed
Listening to you.

I would give
to the human race
only hope.

I am the woman
offering two flowers
whose roots are twin

Justice and Hope
Let us begin.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 216-217. Here, quoting Alice Walker, *Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful*, Fiorenza suggests the poem as offering a symbol of both patriarchal oppression and of the *basileia*, a sign of courage and hope in reference to the bent woman of Luke 13:10-11.

Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza uses this poem with reference to a specific biblical text in her book, *But She Said*, and in this context it provides an illustration of one of the central presuppositions of her work. That framework is the operating principle of liberation/oppression that gives shape to our feminist reflection. In fact, it may not be going too far to say that the poem also intimates a second of her presuppositions: that women and men are equal. Despite the fact that our history, our Christian heritage and all the institutions of our culture tell us otherwise, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza maintains (and reminds us), that the gospel tradition witnesses to Jesus' radical rejection of all relationships of inequality based upon dependence or domination. Through creative use of the historical-critical method and feminist analysis she reclaims early Christian history as women's history and makes it possible to see that history as the heritage of both women and men. It is in the critical and thorough reading of the Bible with its silences and its words, and in doing theology in a way that takes account of more than the "historical winners" that we will discover the power that is our heritage. As Alice Walker's poem suggests (and I believe Schüssler-Fiorenza would agree), it will be in the listening to women themselves that we will learn. In listening to the struggle for liberation and selfhood, in remembrance of their history and heritage, we will realize the justice and hope promised by Jesus to women and men equally.

The work of this thesis falls within a feminist hermeneutical model which, when applied to the question of New Testament ministries, seeks new ways to read the texts. I attempt to read with/through a vision of liberation that "is informed by the biblical prototype but is not derived from it. It places biblical texts under the authority of feminist experience insofar as it maintains that revelation is ongoing and takes place 'for the sake of our salvation.'"⁵⁵ It is in this sense that I seek new language in reading and responding to the biblical text. New responses engender new questions. What new questions arise and what such a new reading offers in terms of opening biblical and theological perspectives, suggests an on-going movement between methods of interpretation. Concretely if the central message of Jesus' teaching on the reign of God is one of inclusion, liberation and justice, the current ecclesial policy and practice as regards ministry evokes questioning and reevaluation.

⁵⁵ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretations* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 14.

My hypothesis is that through the use of feminist hermeneutics applied to texts on the diverse ministries evident in the New Testament and on the place of women in these ministries, a renewed reading and an interpretation responsive to contemporary questions and needs is possible. Such a re-reading of biblical texts will offer both a critical evaluation of previous interpretations and provide new perspectives or status. Perhaps more importantly, it will also allow new questions to be formulated.

The methodology employed, shifts the interpretative paradigm from that of androcentric “value neutral” scholarship, to a new interpretative paradigm that entails scholarship that is, as Schüssler-Fiorenza calls it, engaged scholarship. The starting point is “the advocacy stance for the oppressed,” over against that of an apologetic of scientific objectivity and detachment in critical investigation. I consider the struggle of women today as the hermeneutical key that provides a challenge to the dominant historical paradigm of interpretation. I examine Schüssler-Fiorenza’s books, then, to seek with her and others to reconstruct rather than reinterpret history by simply adding women to the male story. One of the primary concerns is the theological reconstruction of early Christianity that is the reconstructed history of women as well as men.

For consistency with the taxonomy given above, this section is divided into two parts. They are indicated as **B.3.1.** and **B.3.2.** In **B.3.1.** the development of Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza’s thought as expressed in three of her books: *In Memory of Her* (1983), *Bread Not Stone* (1984) and *But She Said* (1992), is addressed. This is first presented by looking more closely at the presuppositions mentioned above: the framework of liberation/oppression, the equality of women and men, and the centrality of historical reconstruction informed by feminist hermeneutics. This is followed by a brief discussion of the four principles she applies throughout her work. Finally, I discuss the focus of each of the three books in an effort to see the development of her thought and work. The next section, **B.3.2.** delineates concepts central to Dr. Schüssler-Fiorenza’s work: historical reconstruction, women-church, revelation, inspiration, and rhetorical analysis which is her “strategy of interpretation.”

B.3.1. Presuppositions. As liberationist feminist, Schüssler-Fiorenza situates her biblical and theological method within the experience of women who are struggling for liberation, and then seeks to use it in order to help in overcoming oppression. As she writes in *In Memory of Her*: “The basic insight of all liberation theologies, including feminist theology, is the recognition that all theology, willingly or not, is by definition always engaged for or

against the oppressed.”⁵⁶ Dr. Schüssler-Fiorenza sees her feminist theology as a critical liberation theology that seeks to explore and expose women’s experience of struggle under the oppressive reality of systemic patriarchy. Working out of this presupposition, or the ever-present interplay, we might say, of liberation/oppression, she combines feminist hermeneutics and historical-critical scholarship in order to identify, reconstruct and re-interpret those patriarchal structures and texts that have dehumanized and alienated women.⁵⁷

Like liberationist perspectives discussed earlier, Schüssler-Fiorenza’s feminist liberation theology holds a similar basic premise. It is the belief that the central message of the Bible is human liberation--that this is what the “reign of God” is about, and that this announcement of salvation by Jesus is meant to be experienced in history, within time and space by everyone. The message and ministry of Jesus is addressed to, and creates, a “discipleship of equals.” Socio-political or economic systems and social structures of life based on false dualisms or double standards that inherently give rise to behavior and thought marked by oppression rather than liberation must be rejected as distortions of the Biblical message. Texts and traditions that present or condone models based on patterns of dominance/subordination or superior/inferior valuations are judged inadequate, but are not reason enough to relinquish the Bible to those who would use it to reinforce patriarchy as Christian.

Operative in this, is another of her presuppositions: that women and men are equal. The oppression of women as inferior and unequal is part of a larger pattern of dominance-submission that has political, economic, and social as well as theological implications. When elaborating some of the concepts specific to her work, shows that the Jesus movement and the early Christian missionary activity gives strong evidence of being egalitarian and surprisingly free of the patriarchal elements which could be found in the culture of the time. It is “particularly in those texts of the New Testament that transcend androcentric-patriarchal structures” that she gives expression to “a new vision of redeemed humanity.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 6.

⁵⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 5. She discusses her use of patriarchy’s classical expression as found in Aristotelian philosophy, and as such is “a pyramidal system and hierarchical structure of society and church in which women’s oppression is specified not only in terms of race and class but also in terms of ‘marital’ status.”

⁵⁸ Carolyn Osiek, “The Feminist and the Bible,” in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Collins, 103.

One constant in feminist interpretation of the Bible and of feminist theology that Schüssler-Fiorenza returns to again and again, is that Christian self-identity is not simply a matter of religious beliefs but is also a communal-historical identity. That women's voices have been silenced and their experience made all but invisible in and through the biblical record—its transmission and interpretation—is a reality that must be addressed and analyzed with the most refined critical tools. “Both Christian feminist theology and biblical interpretation are in the process of rediscovering that the Christian gospel cannot be proclaimed if the women disciples and what they have done are not remembered.”⁵⁹ The task of historical reconstruction, so central to Dr. Schüssler-Fiorenza's work, as we shall see, “must not only restore women to history, it must also restore the history of Christian beginnings to women.”⁶⁰

As expressed in her early book, *In Memory of Her*, Schüssler-Fiorenza recognized the need for the cultural-historical shift from an androcentric to a feminist paradigm of reality. Such a construction needed to be made in order to arrive at a rigorous historical and scholarly methodology that would put women at the center of “a continuous history and tradition that can claim Jesus and the *praxis* of the earliest church as its biblical root model or prototype, one that is open to feminist transformation.”⁶¹ She was beginning to articulate and develop her own hermeneutical process in an effort to discern the real attitude towards women within the Jesus movement and how early Christian *praxis* involved both men and women in its inclusive vision of the “reign of God” that Jesus proclaimed. When writing *In Memory of Her*, she distinguished her liberationist method from various other theoretical models of biblical interpretation: doctrinal, positivist-historical, and dialogical-hermeneutical. She describes the theoretical tensions between theological and historical scholarship present in each model and how such questions as revelation and Biblical authority are handled. Her work, particularly as expressed in historical reconstruction that is taken up so vigorously in *In Memory of Her*, challenges the interpretative models used by scholars whose understanding of history is androcentric.⁶²

⁵⁹ *In Memory of Her*, p. xiv. It is as Rosemary Radford Ruether writes in *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983) “...socioeconomic humanization is indeed the outward manifestation of redemption,” 216.

⁶⁰ *In Memory of Her*, xx.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4-7. Followed by serious consideration of other types of feminist theology, Fiorenza touches on the work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others involved in her work. Dr. Fiorenza makes this important observation: “While the feminist historical hermeneutics of *The Woman's Bible* has established the androcentric character of

Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza contends that what is true of all liberationist methodologies and theologies is true of her approach as well. She describes her scholarship as being, out of necessity, engaged rather than neutral (i.e., disengaged?), and of a sort that arises from a position of advocacy, over against an apologetic of intellectual detachment and objectivity. It can be no other way—because, says she, the Bible itself is engaged. It conditions powerful pastoral and ecclesial conclusions and wields tremendous influence in even wider cultural and political situations.⁶³

In *Bread Not Stone*, chapter two, Schüssler-Fiorenza presents models of biblical interpretation. They appear in slightly different form and context from her earlier writing, *In Memory of Her*. In chapter two (*Bread Not Stone*) Dr. Schüssler-Fiorenza speaks of the relationship between the community of faith and biblical interpretation, identifying three patterns that she calls “The Doctrinal Paradigm,” “The Historical Paradigm,” and “The Pastoral-Theological Paradigm.”⁶⁴ The latter of the three has benefited from the methodologies of form and redaction criticism and has demonstrated “how much the biblical writings are theological responses to pastoral, practical situations.” Once we employ the results of these critical tools in hermeneutical discussion, the notion of a value-free, objectivist study of history, becomes obsolete. In this regard, in *Bread Not Stone* Dr. Schüssler-Fiorenza goes further in her application (or at least in her articulation) of such an engaged hermeneutics and of the new scholarly paradigm expressed in part by the “Pastoral-Theological” model she describes. Again, we see the author struggling to hold in balance the tension between the specific historical character of biblical texts in the interest of historical-critical scholarship, and the contemporary questions of Christian life and faith that concern the Christian community.⁶⁵ Schüssler-Fiorenza’s work in the 90s found her still committed to some of the same goals and ideas but with great development. “I have sought in my own work to contribute to the articulation of such a critical ethical-political paradigm for biblical

biblical texts and interpretation, it has not brought into focus the history of women as participants in patriarchal biblical history, society and religion not set free the liberating impulses of the biblical tradition,” 27

⁶³ *In Memory of Her*, 29. “Regardless of how androcentric texts may erase women from historiography, they do not prove the actual absence of women from the center of patriarchal history and biblical revelation. ...feminists cannot afford to disown androcentric biblical texts and patriarchal history as their own revelatory texts and history.” Appreciative of the incisive work of Mary Daly, Schüssler-Fiorenza nevertheless, is at odds with Daly’s conclusions when she writes in this same vein: “The text *may* be the message, but the message *is* not coterminous with human reality and history.”

⁶⁴ *Bread Not Stone*, 25ff.

⁶⁵ In her 1999 book, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), Dr. Schüssler-Fiorenza describes how over the last decade and one half this model “evolved into a hermeneutic-cultural one, which is rivaled by a rhetorical-political ethos of interpretation.” 31.

interpretation for liberation. Exploring wo/men's positioning in the margins of biblical scholarship and Christian theology, my work has pioneered a critical feminist biblical interpretation for liberation."⁶⁶

In her book, *In Memory of Her*, she has entered into the work of historical reconstruction in order to put in place the paradigm shift required for a feminist liberationist hermeneutics. Here, she not only questions patriarchal texts and traditions, but also the "traditioning" that took place as later writers re-worked and "androcized" (my word) texts that were originally free of androcentric mistranslation or misinterpretation.⁶⁷ Dealing with the patriarchal context, that is so pervasively present and increasingly influential, demands that we employ what Paul Ricoeur has called (Schüssler-Fiorenza often identified with) a "hermeneutics of suspicion."

Four Hermeneutical Principles. Schüssler-Fiorenza focuses on questions of reconstructing early Christian history and the development of a feminist critical method in *In Memory of Her*. It is in *Bread Not Stone* where we find she develops in greater detail the principles of interpretation she identifies as constitutive for a feminist critical analysis. Here, and throughout this book, *Bread Not Stone*, she works to make the paradigm shift necessary to put these principles of feminist interpretation into effect. It is a shift from understanding and interpreting the New Testament as "archetypal myth" which suggests a binding, unchanging pattern, to the New Testament as a "prototype" which suggests openness to the possibility of change and transformation. Only when such a paradigm shift occurs, will new readings be possible. Relative to this, she reflects in her later work, *But She Said*, that even when employing such feminist principles, we must remain vigilant in making certain that such an approach does not reinforce the patriarchal system. That indeed, it does not end in being co-opted by the dominant patriarchal mind-set and method. With good reason she asks "whether we 'squander' the word."⁶⁸

What are these four hermeneutical principles or "structural elements," as she calls them, and how do they work? As noted above, *the hermeneutics of suspicion* recognizes the androcentrism and patriarchy of many biblical texts and asks whose interests are served. It assumes that the text and its interpretations serve the interest of patriarchy and therefore must be thoroughly analyzed at the level of interpretative model, scholarly and popular

⁶⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁷ *In Memory of Her*, 52.

⁶⁸ *But She Said*, 4.

presuppositions and understandings, and the biblical writers and traditioning processes themselves, before the full truth—the feminist inheritance—can be restored. This is also the element of hermeneutics that addresses the questions of biblical translation, inclusive language, God-language, and one-sided reconstructions.

Secondly, a *hermeneutics of proclamation* evaluates which texts are suitable for liturgical use. As we shall see when discussing Schüssler-Fiorenza's understanding of revelation, she holds strongly to the conviction that texts which in any way underscore oppressive patriarchal patterns or sexist traditions, cannot be included among those we identify as having the authority of divine revelation.⁶⁹ It is the hermeneutics of proclamation that must also be used to insure that feminist-neutral or feminist-positive texts not be taught or proclaimed in such a way as to reinforce the oppressive values that are at work in contemporary patriarchal culture. Just as in her earlier work, *In Memory of Her*, she insists that there are texts that express "a liberating vision of human freedom and wholeness." These are texts that place women as well as men in a central position as agents and active participants in history, and which must be proclaimed as such. Applying the first of these two hermeneutical principles then, the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of proclamation, works toward a critical translation of the Bible that is carefully evaluated for its oppressive or liberating potential in specific cultural settings.

The third principle is a *hermeneutics of remembrance* I take it up in some detail as a part of the discussion of Schüssler-Fiorenza's focus on historical reconstruction. In the present context, suffice it to say that through this process of reconstruction, all biblical traditions are recovered in the search for traces of women's history as active and central figures in early Christianity. As with the two principles mentioned above, historical-critical analysis is employed, but it is used to move beyond the androcentric text in order to reclaim and remember women's sufferings and hopes. The task of a hermeneutics of remembrance is to become "a dangerous memory"⁷⁰ which allows and inspires the reclamation of our biblical heritage, one of suffering and oppression but also of liberation and religious agency.

Through use of a *hermeneutics of creative actualization*, Schüssler-Fiorenza supplements the work of historical reconstruction. Women claim our biblical heritage by the use of historical imagination—the retelling of biblical stories from a feminist perspective.

⁶⁹ *Bread Not Stone*, 18.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 19. Dr. Schüssler-Fiorenza borrows the term used in Johann Baptist Metz' *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*.

Through ritual and art women reformulate biblical visions from the viewpoint of the discipleship of equals. A part of her explanation of this hermeneutical principle resists paraphrase, as one finds in it a rare moment of warmth—even passion as she writes:

We [women] rediscover in story and poetry, in drama and liturgy, in song and dance, our biblical fore Sisters' sufferings and victories . . . we retell the story of the Passover or of the Last Supper; we re-vision the liturgy of advent . . . In ever new images and symbols we seek to rename the God of the Bible and the significance of Jesus. We not only spin tales about the voyages of Prisca, the missionary, or about Junia, the apostle, but also dance Sarah's circle and experience prophetic enthusiasm. We sing litanies of praise to our fore Sisters and mourn the lost stories of our foremothers. Only by reclaiming our religious imagination and our sacred powers of naming can women-church 'dream new dreams and see new visions.' We do so in the full awareness that creative participation in the biblical story must be won in and through a feminist critical process of interpretation that repents of the structural sin and internalized values of patriarchal sexism.⁷¹

Finally, in analyzing the three works writings of Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza that I have identified, I trace the trajectory of her thought. Is there movement in her perspective and development in her work? Though much of the foregoing should help to answer these questions, a further look at the expressed goal and general focus of each book helps with the summation that follows.

Focus. As she herself said of the first part of *In Memory of Her*, her focus is on the question of how early Christian origins can be reconstructed so that Christian history and heritage can be identified as women's history and heritage. She concludes that women as well as men are legitimated as agents and leaders in shaping that history. As a feminist historian and theologian, Schüssler-Fiorenza recognizes and employs historical-critical methodology while allowing a feminist critical hermeneutics to inform and reform the androcentric interpretative paradigm habitually applied to the androcentric texts habitually read. She provides a thorough and comprehensive look at the issues in methodology and hermeneutics that are involved in restructuring early Christian theology and history.

In Chapter 2 of *In Memory of Her*, "Toward a Feminist Critical Method," her discussion of several methodological questions is the closest she comes in the first section of the book to actually applying or illustrating her theoretical construct. Here, one understands concretely what she means by learning to read the silences in the texts. She examines how

⁷¹ *Bread Not Stone*, 21.

androcentric language when read as generic language changes translations, understandings, interpretations, and conclusions. She points to how the feminist historian must work to take text and context seriously, while always sorting the androcentric traditioning, which conditions meaning.

Greater precision, even a shift in focus, is evident as we take up the next work: *Bread Not Stone*. The fact that Schüssler-Fiorenza focuses on her notion of “women-church” as the hermeneutical center of feminist biblical interpretation is not insignificant. In *Bread Not Stone* she works to develop a full-fledged feminist hermeneutical model. She says her goal in *Bread Not Stone*, is “to position a critical feminist biblical interpretation for liberation within the center of biblical studies”⁷² She proposes elements of this model of interpretation which arise from the experience and praxis of women-church. She addresses the questions arising from historical-critical scholarship and its restrictive limits for the community of faith. Though clearly, she is rooted in the academy and a tradition of solid historical scholarship, she manifests an understanding and appreciation of the tension between complex biblical interpretive work and the concerns of the ordinary believer. She delineates the pastoral and moral theological concerns which surface in the face of historical-critical interpretation and proceeds to demonstrate that a feminist liberationist model takes as its center women-church, and not the patriarchal church. It can use biblical and theological intellectual tools rightly when it works to transform oppression and patriarchy into the liberated discipleship of equals it once was and can become again.

Even a cursory perusal of her book, *But She Said* suggests that the author is expanding her intellectual horizon, stretching her ideas and trying to discover new applications or forms. The incorporation of poetry and ideas from other women’s writings, as well as the employment of references to “reader-oriented” and other newer forms of literary criticism, including diagrams and semiotic significations, makes clear that Professor Schüssler-Fiorenza is expanding her method and doing further exploration. She writes in the Introduction to this book:

By contextualizing feminist biblical interpretation within the variegated space of feminist interpretative practices, this book seeks to situate a critical feminist interpretation for liberation *differently*. [Italics, hers.] By problematizing women’s

⁷² Taken from the Introduction to *But She Said*, 7.

voice and agency, by making women the subjects of biblical readings . . . I seek to articulate a critical feminist interpretation on feminist political terms.⁷³

In the ten years that have ensued since the writing of *In Memory of Her*, she has evidently become more consciously political. Her use of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as an opening image is indicative of what she says later as regards discourse and its political implications. In *But She Said*, Schüssler-Fiorenza builds on her previous work with critical feminist interpretation, but also attempts to construct another hermeneutical center, that of woman-church, from which a feminist discourse can engage. She says that in so doing she tries to "destabilize the center and the margins of 'malestream' biblical studies," and thus a different biblical reading will emerge. The section of the book with which we are concerned proves her true to her chapter title, "Charting the Field of Feminist Biblical Interpretation." Indeed, in her typically thorough and precise manner she lays out a taxonomy of strategies of interpretation. She includes her own approach among them, serving to further underscore her point that these are not meant to be in competition with one another or in any way placed in rank-order of importance or value.

From this first chapter, Schüssler-Fiorenza moves toward what she calls a rhetorical paradigm, introducing a method of inquiry that goes beyond the exploration and understanding of the meaning of the text. It remains somewhat vague to me in terms of how this changes the feminist liberationist model she has established. As I found myself so often noting as I read much of her work, "but what does this look like? What does this mean concretely? I want to see more of it." Though technically it is outside the scope of this chapter, one notes that later in the book, she calls for situating feminist historical reconstruction "within a critical rhetorical paradigm of historiography"⁷⁴ in order to reconstruct early Christian history differently. Perhaps the emphasis on rhetoric—be it feminist biblical, political historical, or theological—is a shift in accent or emphasis which will make a significant difference. The "historical re-imagination" of Mark 6:17-29 which she includes at the end of chapter one, in *But She Said*, is engaging, yet it again demonstrates a greater freedom in employing/applying something of her method rather than a change in the model she had already established in *Bread Not Stone*.

⁷³ *But She Said*, 7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

The remarkable contribution of Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza in hermeneutical and methodological theory opens critical questions and challenges the very best scholarship. Much of the work of applying her theory remains to be done. We proceed now to address some specific concepts of Schüssler-Fiorenza's work.

Historical Reconstruction. Biblical religion is historical religion. Christianity in particular has a history and a heritage that has shaped centuries of thought and cultures. We have noted earlier that Schüssler-Fiorenza bases the work of historical reconstruction on the growing realization among Christian feminist theologians and biblicists that the Gospel cannot be "good news," and cannot be proclaimed as such, if the women leaders and disciples around Jesus are not remembered. As long as women remain invisible, marginal, and incidental to the biblical texts, and subsequent translations, interpretations, and theology, the patterns of domination and oppression will remain in place. Patriarchy will continue to be blessed as orthodoxy and the "historical winners" will nearly always be the men whose names and actions are remembered and recorded in Christian history. Hence she calls for an examination of this history and heritage, beginning with the texts and their contexts.

But how to "write women back into early Christian history?" Historical and theological critical analysis must be fully employed to assure more than an apologetic treatment of women in the Bible. Where there are traces indicating things "lost" in the text, the blanks must be filled in. Clues and suggestions woven into texts are searched out to discover realities about which the texts do not speak. Conflicts of interest or ideology within the early Christian community are brought to light through examination of the biblical and extra-biblical literature of the period. Both feminist and historical perspectives are employed in order to allow new questions to surface. A cultural-religious critique that reveals patriarchal history for what it is can begin to undermine the legitimization of corrupt religious structures, while at the same time empowering women in their struggle against such structures. In fact, a reconstruction of early Christian history is absolutely essential to restore women's heritage to that story, and to restore that story as the history of women and men.

Feminist theory poses challenges to androcentric models and methods, insisting that all texts are products of patriarchy and must be dealt with as such. Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, in integrating such a perspective, places women at the center of the hermeneutics employed in biblical reading and historical reconstruction. The feminist paradigm stresses the interaction between the situation and text, insisting that texts cannot be taken at face value but must be read in such a way as to discover their liberative as well as their oppressive

capacity. Feminist historical reconstruction, as has also been acknowledged, is consciously contextual and engaged. Since scholarly discussions have led to the conviction that there is “no single way of conceptualizing early Christian origins,”⁷⁵ renewed interest in the social world of Christian beginnings is in evidence. In reviewing the various models that have been applied to such sociological reconceptualizations, she points to the methodological problems involved in each, and again calls for a method of evaluation or reconstitution which can identify the gradual patriarchalization of segments of early Christianity. On the one hand, liberationist historical reconstruction is advanced when the sociological-theological model used, is not one that is looking to establish history as “what actually has happened.” On the other hand, it can actually be liberating, when it takes account of social interaction and religious transformation. It can actually be liberating, when it holds in balance a Christian “vision” and an historical realization that remembers struggle for equality and struggle against patriarchal domination.⁷⁶

Such a cultural-religious critique reveals patriarchal history for what it is, and can begin to undermine the legitimization of corrupt religious structures while at the same time empowering women in their struggle against such structures. The point of historical reconstruction then, is not to create history that is unreal or to make up words where there is silence. It is not to bring us to the “real facts” about Mary of Magdala. It is, in the words of Schüssler-Fiorenza, “to open up to historical memory what has been suppressed in traditional historiography in order to examine the exclusions and *choices* (italics mine) that constitute our historical knowledge of early Christian beginnings.”⁷⁷

Women-Church. As we shall see when discussing Schussler-Fiorenza’s understandings of revelation and inspiration, the notion of “women-church” or *ekklesia gynaiikon* is profoundly related to these other concepts in her understanding. Women-church is the movement of self-identified women and women-identified men in biblical religion, past and present, which as we shall see becomes the locus of divine revelation and grace.⁷⁸ Just as in the history she seeks to reconstruct, there is nothing intended here as exclusive or inversely sexist. She speaks of women-church as a “political-oppositional term” to the patriarchy she defines and

⁷⁵ *In Memory of Her*, 69.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁷⁷ *But She Said*, 81.

⁷⁸ *Bread Not Stone*, Introduction, p. xiv. Many of the ideas I have included here are taken from the Introduction to this book. The concept is interwoven throughout the book, however, and in many other of her writings.

defies as a heuristic category.⁷⁹ Because it is understood as the dialogical community of equals—based on the Greek notion of *ekklesia*, the gathering of free citizens—women-church is the obvious of such a feminist biblical interpretation that seeks to render critical judgment and embody genuine freedom. In so being, women-church becomes the fullest expression of the New Testament meaning of church: the public assembly of free women and men empowered by the Holy Spirit to struggle for the liberation urged by the biblical vision of justice, equality, and salvation.

The work of historical reconstruction involves both critique and retrieval, but it does not end there. A new *praxis* must arise from the incorporation of the reconstituted historical material and the contemporary insights of the feminist investigation, and would seem to point us to women-church as the locus of such dialogue and creative construction. As we shall see again shortly, the norm for feminist theology and biblical interpretation cannot be limited to particular biblical texts, since these are part of an androcentric perspective. It is the women themselves who struggle for liberation and wholeness who become the criterion for judging claims of authority or authentic revelation as to whether they are oppressive or liberating. It is women-church who discover how to reclaim the Bible as the root-model for a discipleship of equals—as bread not stone.

Revelation. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) deals in one of its chapters with the controversial question of the sources of revelation. Whether there are two sources (Scripture and Tradition) or one source (Scripture alone) remains unanswered by the Council. They did, however, insist that it is not from the Bible alone that the church could be certain about everything that has been revealed. Working with the writings of Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza shifts our interest in the understanding of revelation and its sources radically. An obvious and immediate question surfaces in this regard: How can a God of liberation, salvation, and life be revealed in texts and traditions which are androcentric and oppressive of women?

Of the various models of biblical interpretation the author discusses in *In Memory of Her*, it is the doctrinal approach that understands the Bible not as a historical moment or even as an expression of divine revelation but as revelation itself. The Bible is God's word. At the opposite extreme in such an understanding, is a positivist historical exegesis that attacks such an a-historical notion of authority and revelation. In its place, it identifies revelation

⁷⁹ cf. Endnote #3 on Schussler-Fiorenza's use and understanding of "patriarchy."

and divine authority with historical facticity. Both approaches remain deaf to the question raised. Schüssler-Fiorenza, on the other hand, says that one thing divine revelation cannot be, is identified with texts or traditions that perpetuate or legitimate patriarchal oppression and human suffering arising from injustice. She goes further to say that any texts that do have this effect, that “forget” or remain silent about women’s sufferings, must be “demythologized as androcentric codifications of patriarchal power and ideology.” In this same vein the question of the canon—which texts we shall identify as sacred—is linked to life and liberation. She offers the idea that the canon cannot be derived from the Bible itself, but can only be formulated in and through women’s struggle for liberation.

Schüssler-Fiorenza returns consistently to the feminist vision of a liberationist theology that, as in most of its forms, would insist “revelation and biblical authority are found in the lives of the poor and the oppressed whose cause God, as their advocate and liberator, has adopted.”⁸⁰ In these writings, the relationship between revelation and women-church is strong. It is not only women’s oppression that is brought to light, but their power is also highlighted as the locus of revelation itself. A critical feminist hermeneutics of liberation suggests “*the* litmus test for invoking Scripture as the Word of God must be whether or not biblical texts and traditions *seek to end* (emphasis, mine) relations of domination and exploitation.”⁸¹ Finally, she challenges biblical scholarship to develop a new paradigm for understanding biblical revelation. Such a paradigm would envision the New Testament as a prototype rather than a monolithic archetype, and which therefore would allow for an ongoing, developmental understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus that continues to be revealed in the discipleship community that he called into being.

Inspiration. Following on the heels of her understanding of revelation, a word about Dr. Schüssler-Fiorenza’s notion of inspiration is in order. Again, we begin with what inspiration is not. If, as we saw above, one cannot accept the political or personal “ethos and ethics” of a biblical text because of its inherently oppressive nature, neither can one accept its authority as Holy Scripture, revealing a God of life and justice. We cannot speak of the text as being inspired nor can we “locate inspiration in the text,” as the author herself says, “not even in its ‘surplus’ or polyvalence of meaning.” Rather, inspiration must be situated “in biblical people and their context.”⁸² The on going dialogical and prototypical understanding of biblical

⁸⁰ *In Memory of Her*, 34.

⁸¹ *Bread Not Stone*, Introduction. xiii.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 140.

revelation mentioned earlier, comes to mind as Schüssler-Fiorenza emphasizes the process of inspiration. Inspiration is not a static reality to be contained or fixed in written word or text. It is what is found in those who are struggling and poor, especially women: what moves them to remember and to believe in the God of life and freedom.

In describing the new biblical hermeneutics and the kind of scholarship it calls for, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza insists that while it continues to enhance rather than obstruct historical-critical scholarship, it also centers on the people rather than the text. "If the process of inspiration is located in the history of God's people, then it is historical in character. But this history is not closed, it is ongoing, and it looks to the future of liberation and salvation for all humanity."⁸³

Rhetorical Analysis. The contours of Schüssler-Fiorenza's strategy of interpretation are in focus. How she speaks of and understands rhetorical analysis, in surprising ways summarizes some of the recurring themes in her work. She uses "rhetoric" in the sense of a strategy of persuasion. By the time of writing *But She Said*, she speaks directly about the political impact of discourse. In the introduction to this book, using Atwood's novel as her vehicle, Schüssler-Fiorenza is, I believe, speaking of her own recognition of the "subversive" potential of reading and writing. She writes there, "Scholarly discourse that remains unconscious of its rhetorical functions and which is abstracted from its political contexts is in danger of 'squandering' the word." The work that one does in reconstructing history, deciding upon text and translation, and determining the meaning of such, depends also on the rhetorical goal one has in mind. Her increasing awareness of this is evident in subsequent work. It is in this sense, that I would identify her as becoming increasingly "political." Throughout all of her work she has been pointing the reader to recognize that history is never "just" history, the "history of" someone or something. It is written and read "for" someone or some purpose.

The critical feminist rhetorical model she suggests is based on such an awareness of history and its potential for shaping meaning. It presents interpretation as both "a complex process of reading and reconstruction and as a cultural-theological practice of resistance and transformation."⁸⁴ Her strategy of interpretation for liberation seeks to practice a method of rhetorical inquiry that goes further than trying to explore and understand the meaning of

⁸³ Ibid., 147.

⁸⁴ *But She Said*, 40.

texts. Its work is to question texts and their symbol-content, if you will, in order to determine the effects such discourses produce and how these effects are produced.

Schüssler-Fiorenza's model also espouses "a rhetorical reading strategy." Such a strategy deals with language and translation being strictly observed and not compromised or co-opted.⁸⁵ Among other things, employment of such a strategy demonstrates the sense in which she is using the term "rhetoric." This is not mere word play, not is it faddish manipulation of texts and terms. The rhetorical analysis she is suggesting is for the purpose of helping determine whether and how the biblical text itself promotes biased perspectives and plants seeds for lasting stereotypical images.

A model such as the one that Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza has presented holds the important potential for opening the Bible in such a way that perspectives and persons once relegated to the margins can participate from the center. As she herself says, this model does not perceive the Bible simply as "a historical source of evidence documenting women's reality, but it sees the Bible as a perspectival rhetorical discourse" which constructs meaning in particular historical-political moments. It is to be able to see, to name, and to reconstitute our Christian heritage and history for the present as well as for the past.

To know me may not have been to love me, BUT
 To know me only from this biblical text is NOT to know me.
 My hope now lies in YOU, My Sisters--
 Have courage to question
 to be suspicious of biblical texts about women like me found on pages dubbed
 GOOD NEWS and proclaimed as WORD OF GOD.
 Be tenacious in your struggle to know the truth
 to name the oppression where you find it
 and to set free and proclaim a
 LIBERATING WORD . . .⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid. See p. 43 for the interesting detail to this three-pronged rhetorical reading strategy.

⁸⁶ Ibid. , 50.

Feminist Critique of Scholarly Works Dealing with NT Data Regarding Church and Ministry

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS to Chapters Two, Three and Four

The interest of this thesis is, in part, ministry as it appears in the New Testament data, and therefore as understood within the context of a community of faith, a church. Equally important to the project is the examination of how this data has been interpreted and what theology of ministry developed out of it. What were the implications for the members of the first Christian communities? What are the implications for contemporary communities of faith, most particularly women? This section of the project considers the work of noted scholars that treat this topic or at least aspects of it. "To consider" in this sense, means to read such scholarship critically, through a particular lens: that of a feminist optic. How I re-read the texts and study the scholarship on this topic is through such an optic. I critique as a believing Christian feminist woman reading to find the liberation for all promised in the Gospel.

My objective in this task is threefold:

- 1) To read each author noting his/her goal, method and choice of biblical texts in order to determine which texts he has selected and how he interprets them. What conclusions does the author draw and how does he use the biblical texts. In each study, I also read to see what has *not been said* in a given author's work. This includes asking which texts he/she does *not select* and why these might be relevant to his study.
- 2) To determine what a feminist analysis can add to the understanding of church and of ministry through a feminist reading and examination of each work under consideration. This may mean pointing out texts other than those the author has selected; it may mean asking questions in order to further the dialogue; it means adding my point of view and experience as a Christian feminist woman.
- 3) To answer what previous conclusions for a theology of ministry must be challenged, reshaped, or expanded when adding the feminist optic.

The majority of scholarship on ministry up until recently has been done by men and for men even if, at times unintentionally or inadvertently. A feminist analysis, by contrast, hopes to bring new or alternative perspectives and fresh questions to studies we may have once considered “all sewn up”/already covered. White male perspectives and presuppositions have dominated biblical scholarship until recently. This has resulted in androcentric and patriarchal interpretations and the theology that follows. With Mary Rose D’Angelo of the University of Notre Dame, I consider the canonical texts such as those examined in Raymond Brown’s work to be the “official common memories of the Christian communities.”⁸⁷ Time and experience change our memories and sometimes reveal new aspects or dimensions of such memories. Feminist analysis, D’Angelo notes, shifts the importance of some texts when it examines them in light of women’s experience, of ancient sources that have been rediscovered and reevaluated, and with the use of interdisciplinary tools such as new forms of literary criticism, and socio-cultural studies. Thus we read the studies done on NT texts with the hope of *adding to* rather than diminishing the memory common to our past and allowing it to help us articulate our contemporary experience. In so doing, the goal is to discover and add the common memory of *women* where it has been forgotten or erased altogether. A feminist critique of NT data and the traditional exegesis that has “opened the meaning of the texts,” is not only intended to restore women in the earliest Christian communities and church history. It evaluates with a hermeneutics of suspicion how we have translated texts, whether we teach or preach “man-made” history paralleled with patriarchal biblical interpretations, and androcentric theology. It challenges the underlying presuppositions of what is considered “objective,” “normative,” and “universal.” A feminist perspective asks whether such work adequately reflects God’s salvific action among God’s people both past and present. One contribution that its analysis offers theology and biblical study is to

⁸⁷ The discussion surrounding the “canon,” its boundaries and meaning has been an on-going struggle in feminist circles. This topic will be taken up in depth in our examination of biblical feminist hermeneutics. However, if a general overview on feminist engagement in this question would be helpful at this juncture in our study, I refer the reader to the following articles. See the introduction of *Searching the Scriptures Volume 2: A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), “Introduction: Transgressing Canonical Boundaries,” Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza: 1-14. The article in Volume 1 of *Searching the Scriptures* (1993) “Feminist Theological Hermeneutics: Canon and Christian Identity” by Claudia V. Camp, pp. 154-171 may also be of help.

bring women from the margins to the center of the Christian story.⁸⁸ Equally important, it strives to create a variety of models and paradigms for studying and teaching scripture from non-triumphalist, inclusive, non-racist perspectives. “Feminist writing of history,” according to Luise Schottroff, “has to break through the silence of androcentric sources and their androcentric interpretation. Carla Ricci calls this process ‘the exegesis of silence.’”⁸⁹ This demands a careful reading, sometimes it means reading *against* the texts, as it were. It means finding in the scenes and hearing in the voices what and who is there. Who and what is being portrayed, who is speaking and for whom. Further, we apply such a reading to both the texts and their interpretations. Having done this, one then can ask the important question: who is absent from this picture and whose voices are not heard?

⁸⁸ Recently in a presentation and discussion led by Dr. Douglas Hall (professor of Theology, McGill University, Montreal) he lamented the loss of Christianity’s sense of MOVEMENT and noted that this is reflected in the theology of this century. He remarked that it is those “who are on the edge” of faith, of the institutional churches, and the world, who are the important ones for promoting a lively, dynamic dialogue with those “at the centre”. This is the dynamic that may help return us to a sense of our being “followers of the Way” and Christianity as *movement*. In his book, *Why Christian?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) p.130ff, he speaks of life *as* change and that the only really permanent is God’s love. “So movement is not only a matter of the church’s structure, it is bound up with its very message and mission,” p.130. Women, people of color, the poor, and other marginalized groups have been on “the outside looking in” for decades, even centuries. Their questions, challenges and critical observations about the “status quo” are key for a renewal of scholarship that is in *real* touch with the *real* world.

⁸⁹ Luise Schottroff, “Toward a Feminist Reconstruction of the History of Early Christianity” in *Feminist Interpretation The Bible in Women’s Perspective*. Eds. Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, Marie-Theres Wacker (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998): 181.

Chapter Two

FEMINIST CRITIQUE IN CONVERSATION WITH RAYMOND BROWN

The Churches the Apostles Left Behind, (New York: Paulist 1984).

A. AUTHOR'S GOAL IN *THE CHURCHES THE APOSTLES LEFT BEHIND*

The first selection from the scholarship dealing with New Testament data regarding church and ministry is Raymond Brown's *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*. Although now dated in one sense (published in 1984), it stands as a solid, enduring study—so typical of Brown, perhaps one of the greatest NT scholars in North America. This particular work is pertinent to our topic because in it the author examines “a number of different church situations reflected in the sub-apostolic works of the NT ... concentrating on the most important element that enabled each church to survive after the apostolic hero or guide had departed the scene.”⁹⁰ Brown explains in the Preface to his book that it has grown out of a series of lectures that were intended to meet pastoral needs of the audiences present without neglecting solid biblical and theological scholarship. The primary audience of this material was a listening rather than a reading audience. Reflective of this audience, his examples most frequently draw from or point to the ecumenical implications of his study of the texts. This book is the result of the Sprunt Lectures, given at a Presbyterian seminary. He views the book as a companion to two of his earlier works, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, and another book which he wrote with John Meier, *Antioch and Rome*. His pastoral goal in this book, Brown states, is the same as the companion books just mentioned. He wants to speak to the churches today by way of corrective, challenge, and encouragement. In *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, Brown does this through the investigation of Christian communities from the viewpoint of their diverse understanding of what was important for survival and growth

⁹⁰ Raymond Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist, 1984): 19.

after the death of the apostles. The immediate goal, then, of Brown's work, clearly is to answer this question of the survival of the churches.

B. AUTHOR'S PRESUPPOSITIONS AND METHOD

B.1. One of Brown's presuppositions as regards the dating of the texts is in agreement with most scholars today. We can no longer assume that the NT was written within "the apostolic lifetime". Brown is in accord with the majority of scholarship in saying "most of the NT was written after the death of the last known apostle." He briefly touches on the question of whom he means by "apostle," though I find his explanation incomplete. This is a point that comes into our discussion further on in the work. However, it does indicate that Brown supposes he can find an adequate response to his questions without treating the texts of Paul. He notes that the number of texts available would be considerably larger if one included second-century material and the gnostic writings. But Brown limits his study to just seven of these witnesses, which is to say seven from among those post-Pauline works written between 67-100 C.E. In the general overview of this work, a further assumption or presupposition is evident. It is his belief and hope that Catholic scholars in dialogue with Protestant scholars might experience a certain "meeting of minds" as to what NT strengths and weaknesses can mean for Christians today. He also believes the task of exegesis to be "not only to determine what the NT situation was, but also to ask what it means."⁹¹ The implications of this statement will surface as we continue our study.

B.2. His method in answering this question as suggested above, is not to deal with different models of the church presented in the NT, but rather to stand seven witnesses side by side, finding the emphasis or thrust of each church in living Christian community life. He works under the methodological problem of the partiality of the texts. That is to say, our texts are limited insofar as letters, for example, provide only one side of the conversation. Some texts are simply incomplete or consist of several bits of different texts stitched together. There are variations in the ancient sources. He acknowledges that caution must be given to how completely the writing portrays a community's views. Whether the writing is the expression of a single individual's thought or if it truly

⁹¹ Ibid., 9.

conveys a community's convictions, is another question that remains in shadow.⁹² After a general survey of the communities detectable in the NT, the author examines seven very different churches, demonstrates clearly the great diversity in emphasis within each one, and concludes each study with a section entitled "Strengths and Weaknesses." In discussing the strengths and weaknesses, as he perceives them, he makes somewhat more contemporary applications.

The first chapter of his book gives this overview of the different churches discernable in the NT. He finds a remarkable diversity in thought and identifies at the outset three variant forms of post-Pauline thought.⁹³ The first to be discussed is that found in The Pastorals [I and II Timothy and Titus], second, Colossians/Ephesians, and finally, Luke/Acts follow this. A post-Petrine witness is examined in I Peter. Next he finds two different strains of post-Johannine thought (the epistolary writer's audience and the secessionist adversaries). Here he includes chapters on The Gospel of John and The Epistles. Finally he concludes with a "a witness of a more conservative Christianity respectful of the Law." This chapter examines the Gospel of Matthew. He maintains that all these texts come from the last third of the first century.

Brown's workshop is filled with historical critical tools. The importance of historical criticism is evident throughout his study as he focuses on questions of authorship, date, and authenticity. Who the author is, what he is literally trying to say, and when, are important elements in historical criticism. It is a consistent part of Brown's examination of the literature he has selected. The examination of the Petrine heritage gives hints of form and redaction criticism. Source and redaction criticism are evident, especially in his chapters on the Johannine literature. Brown names "Author Criticism" as

⁹² Taking this cautionary word as regards *texts* a step further in the direction of a feminist optic, we want to underscore another "partiality" from which we work. Not only are the texts themselves partial, but their study and interpretation have also been limited in many respects. Until recently, women have been denied or have been marginalized as regards involvement in scholarly exegetical work. We have worked with (and under) an historical vision presented in male terms and from primarily male models of scholarship and perceptions of "what really happened when." Only recently have we been free and trained to question a historiography of early Christianity in which "male" is normative. Luise Schottruff, in the same article from *Feminist Interpretation*, p. 180, quotes from an article of Gisela Bock who writes of traditional historiography. "Women are not merely forgotten; the feminine is understood as a special instance of the male species of 'mankind,' whereas the history of men is defined as normative history." (Bock, 1987).

⁹³ See C. K. Barrett, "Acts;" and also his "Pauline Controversies." Brown follows Barrett's discernment of these 'three strains' of post-Pauline thought discernable in the texts.

a branch of Redaction Criticism in his book, *An Introduction to the New Testament*.⁹⁴ This is the “tool” he is using as he examines how the writers creatively shaped the material they inherited. Because he is dealing with deutero-Pauline letters in several cases, it is a tool frequently used.

C. FEMINIST PRESUPPOSITIONS AND QUESTIONS

My goal is to examine certain of Brown’s presuppositions and the manner in which these may shape his findings. I do so from a Christian feminist stance, relying on the feminist biblical hermeneutic discussed at length elsewhere in this paper. I have tried to read each “witness” and Brown’s analysis of it, in the context of the whole work, keeping the author’s intention in mind. Feminist criticism (which Brown identifies under the “umbrella title” of Advocacy Criticism) is not unfamiliar with or opposed to historical critical analysis. What is unique to feminist criticism is that analysis begins from the question of women’s experience and women’s struggle against patriarchal oppression. The starting place in this perspective is to read and question the scriptures based on the presupposition that women are an oppressed group. Applying this perspective to Brown’s analysis will surface additional questions and additional examples. In my reading and response, I examine which texts Brown selects and ask which texts are omitted. I want to know how the exegete arrives at his conclusions and the applications he makes from them. I also want to know who gets to say what “it means.” Ecclesial structures or even doctrinal content should arise out of the reading rather than using the scriptures as a support or defense of structures or doctrine already in place. Feminist criticism calls for a reexamination of the patriarchal reading of history and the androcentric structures that give shape to these texts. This analysis of Brown’s book poses questions from a feminist point of view in regard to language and approach. Adding a feminist voice to the conversation means looking carefully (with “suspicion”)⁹⁵ at what the author chooses as texts and seeing how he and tradition itself has interpreted such texts. Perhaps there are texts that have been omitted. Perhaps there are new interpretations available to fill out the “ministerial picture.” Are there further insights, challenges, and considerations that

⁹⁴ Brown, Raymond *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997): 23.

feminist reading can raise today, more than ten years after Brown's writing? How does a different method of reading this literature help us do that? In light of intense and extensive feminist work done in the last decade, how might the selection, interpretation, and application of these NT texts have to be expanded or revised to answer or add to Brown's question? What are the implications and ramifications of Brown's answers to the question of community survival for understanding ministry in particular? Of course, I read from a different point of view than that of Raymond Brown. I bring to my reading a strong consciousness of feminist issues and critical methods of reading that Brown did not employ. I do not consider it a David and Goliath scenario that we are creating here. Two individuals, a man and a woman, from different generations, backgrounds, and experiences approach these texts differently. Someone of the stature and skill of Raymond Brown commands my utter respect. Wise scholar that he was, I trust he would want his work to prompt discussion, challenge, and critique.

D. BROWN'S PROCEDURE and FEMINIST RESPONSE

Brown selects seven different NT witnesses seeking to answer one specific question: What were Christians in the Sub-Apostolic Period⁹⁶ being told that would enable their respective churches to survive the problem of the passing of the authoritative apostolic generation? What messages, what teachings were they being given that would enable them to go forward in faith and to grow? My procedure simply will be to follow along the order of Brown's study—interjecting questions, alternative responses, interpretations, or emphases. In addition to this, I have tried to apply examples from his exegetical conclusions that reach beyond his ecumenical applications. These examples will identify other current experiences of church and church structures—again, with an emphasis on women and other marginalized groups in the institutional church. This in no

⁹⁵ This concept was first employed by Paul Ricoeur and later became well known through the work of Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza.

⁹⁶ Brown identifies three periods shaping the first century, cautioning that this is a "convenient generalization" which should not be held too rigidly. He speaks of: the "Apostolic Age" (30-60/33-66?), the "Sub-Apostolic Age" (60-90/67-100 when most of the NT is written except Paul's writings which come from the earlier period), the "Post-Apostolic Period" (100 - Ignatius of Antioch, I Clement). This "third generation was moving away from claiming the direct mantle of the apostles." Therefore, we can say that Brown is taking all of his texts from the Sub-Apostolic Age. 6.

way is to suggest a lesser importance given to ecumenical concerns. Following Brown's lead, let us begin.

D.1. THE PAULINE HERITAGE IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

In the Pastorals, the first witness of Brown's examination, he identifies the emphasis on church structure required for the continuance of the church after the death of the apostles (meaning, in fact, Paul). The texts (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) underscore the importance of church order modeled after the household. Institutionalization is put in place through the setting up of an authoritative administrative structure. In light of this, Brown points out a significant shift of roles in the persona of Peter and Paul. Paul, the ever-zealous missionary preacher, becomes in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus the spent apostle now portrayed as a pastor concerned with the on-going life of the churches. "As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (II Tim 4:6-7). Hence, we have the term "Pastorals" for these Deutero-Pauline writings. Peter too, once the "fisher of men" becomes the "shepherd of the flock," as we shall see in the Petrine pastoral epistle and Johannine writings. The establishment of a structure in the Pastorals is most directly expressed by the appointment of local presbyter-bishops. In some cases, these roles are already in place. They are to be the official teachers and are responsible primarily for passing on "sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9b). It remains unclear as to whether every church had them, yet Titus is advised to appoint leaders if they are not yet identified (Titus 1:5).⁹⁷ A further complication arises from the fact that the terms *presbyteros* and *episkopos* are used inconsistently and have more than one meaning. Texts that Brown doesn't mention that might broaden the picture include the two places where the name of Onesiphorus is mentioned (2 Tim 1:16; 2:19). Along with Prisca and Aquila (2 Tim 4:19) have "rendered service" to an extent that Paul does not want it to go unnoticed. As we shall see in other places, the role of the householder often hints at including teaching and/or leadership.

⁹⁷ The *Didache*, a manual of Church Order (ca. 100?), encourages *the members of the community* of faith to elect leaders (*italics, mine*). "Appoint for yourselves therefore bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek and not lovers of money, and true and approved; for unto you they also perform the service of the prophets and teachers." [15:1-2]

From a feminist viewpoint, these letters are very frustrating and offensive. They reveal in tone and language (*gynaikaria* “morally silly women” 2 Tim 3:6b, and *graodeis mythous* “old wives tales” 1 Tim 4:7, for example), a definite negativity towards women’s roles in early Christian communities. These texts are laced with prejudicial attitudes toward women and slaves in particular. 1 Timothy, for example, speaks of the manner in which men should pray and of how women should dress (1 Tim 2:8-9). While it is clearly not a part of Brown’s agenda to single out questions specific to women or to feminist concerns, these indeed “lace” my reading of both biblical texts and Brown’s analysis of them. For example, if we extend the reading to look at 1 Tim 3:11, which Brown has not included, we wonder if this may refer to women deacons or the wives of deacons? The text prompts this relevant question. Brown notes that such an exclusive stress on the structure of leadership can become over time a consistent way of life. He marks this as a danger and a weakness. As a result, he says, new developments and new ideas are more often suppressed rather than encouraged. Relative to this point, he uses Vatican II as a contemporary Roman Catholic example of the expressed wisdom of the church in relaxing some of the “negative doctrinal controls” that have grown up over the centuries. A question in response to this observation might be who has benefited from these “relaxed controls”? Women, the divorced, the poor, gay and lesbian persons are among those whom a feminist analysis views as the invisible or marginalized of church and society. In practice, are they more visible and more welcome today to join in open, constructive ecclesial dialogue and development? How has their experience of faith changed the Post-Vatican II church? Unfortunately, we know them best as voices in protest, expressions of pain, and what some would label “unhappy dissidents”—silly and unrealistic—not satisfied with what “rights” and freedoms have been extended to them.⁹⁸

Brown acknowledges another weakness in the texts in that the emphasis on “sound doctrine” and the idea of entrusted truth (1 Tim 1:3-4; 2 Tim 1:14) can lead to a fear of new ideas. Those having “itching ears”, he says, may in fact be inquisitive minds with new questions and new paradigms to suggest. This is a very good point. A

⁹⁸ The presider at a Sunday Eucharist recently quoted notes from the *SYNODE DIOCESAIN DE MONTREAL* (May 1999). He read from Point Three: “Que faire pour lutter contre...la discrimination faite aux femmes?” Point four followed: “Des communautés ouvertes, accueillantes et fraternelles.” One

contemporary application might be sighted in the official silencing of the voices of such as Edward Schillebeeckx, Charles Curran, Leonardo Boff, Hans Küng, Ivone Gebara, and Tissa Balasuriya. While this is unfortunate, the author says, after all, theology can't be "created anew in each generation." Feminist criticism challenges this idea. It asks: if inquisitive minds are formed and informed by Scriptures and Tradition, and invited to express themselves, why can't it be created anew? In fact, we know that experience forms and informs us constantly. This suggests—even demands—it seems to me, that theology and our reading of Scripture must be created anew through and in the experience of each generation present to the Spirit of God. Another weakness Brown identifies is that there is no hint of encouragement to the faithful in the Pastorals to be contributive and constructive in the upbuilding of the church. Brown lists this among the weaknesses in the Pastorals' response. Feminist analysis reads this differently. It is more than a "weakness." It is a sin against the Holy Spirit. Feminist analysis urges significant, visible changes that must arise from the contemporary church's experience.

Brown's perspective does not take note of the fact that a great deal of the content of the Pastorals deals with regulations, exhortations, and rules for personal life or community life which in large part vary according to one's sex. Reading the lists of qualities as a whole, it is striking to see a remarkable contrast in what is demanded of men and women. The qualities insisted upon for the bishops and elders (who are presented/named as being only male) and for the "old men" and for the "young men" are not the same as those cited for women. Is there more than one Christian identity? Elsewhere we read "There is one body and one Spirit...there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5). Yet this text from Timothy suggests that there are different norms for men and for women regarding how to identify in and with Jesus Christ. Brown writes that these requirements for public figures (Titus 1:5-9, for example) assure "religious respectability" for the "common good."⁹⁹ They include such points as being good money managers, not greedy, but generous and devout. They shouldn't be addicted to wine and should marry only once (1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-23; Titus 1:5b-9). As mentioned above, in 1

wonders if the English translation found a more inclusive way of describing these "open" and "fraternal" communities.

Tim 2:8-15 the contrast is especially striking. The pericope begins with the encouragement to and the manner in which men should pray. In the very next breath, within the same phrase in fact, women are instructed as to how they should dress and wear their hair. They are reminded more than once of the importance of their silence and submissiveness, particularly to their husbands (not how many times they marry but how they should behave in that marriage and family). The manner in which there is mention of women teaching is specific, in the case of the Pastorals. The older women should teach the younger women to love their husbands. They will, after all, “be saved through childbearing . . .” (1 Tim 2:8-15). Brown does make reference to these lists and demonstrates some of the inherent weaknesses in them. It appears however that he does not see any noteworthy weakness in the Pastoral’s misogynist treatment of women and the unjust demands made of slaves.

The texts that follow, along with some of those in 1 Cor 11 and 14 (1Tim 2:8-15; Titus 2:4-5, 9-10; 1 Tim 5:3-16), are texts that a feminist analysis will not omit or gloss over. These and other texts will be examined at another point in the project. Like so many established exegetes, Brown suffers from gender blindness, which exhibits itself when these texts are studied. He has not mentioned, for example, 1 Timothy’s treatment of widows. Most of chapter five in the letter is concerned with distinguishing the “real” widows and what their “ministry” entails. This is pertinent to the analysis of church structure, since “widows” appear as a distinct group that the author of the letter is dealing with. The actual role of widows is also somewhat vague. In 1 Tim 5:9-10, there is a question of their having a particular responsibility for visitation, prayer, intercession, and other good works in the community. It seems this is included in the title “widow.” The biblical author distinguishes “real widows” from those who are not to be counted. This suggests that the text is not about establishing a role or order that did not exist. He is placing limits on the group of whom he seems not to approve. Why? In fact, evidence of a group of widows in the early church is very strong. The author of 1 Timothy is concerned with limiting their activities. If we look at 5:3-16 we find that the requirements tend to put boundaries around their activities. Who is a real widow? A woman without

⁹⁹ The complaint that an all male celibate hierarchy may not be the “best” group to determine rules on such topics as birth control for the “common good” is one example of the flaw in thinking that an exclusive,

without children, grandchildren, or any other means of support? A widow without children would be rare in this society. Only older women can be among the “real” widows, “not less than sixty years old and has been married only once, she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children” Isn’t there an inconsistency here? A “real” widow is without children. Whatever the case in all of this, Brown makes no mention whatsoever of the widows or their role in the “structure” of the churches as portrayed in the Pastorals. 1 Timothy seemed quite concerned about them.

Almost every reference to women or slaves makes reference to how or whether they should *speak*. “Let a woman learn in silence . . . I permit no woman to teach . . . she is to be silent” (1 Tim 2:11).¹⁰⁰ “Some people have deviated . . . and turned to meaningless talk, desiring to be teachers, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions” (1 Tim 1:6a). Brown and others identify these deviants as gnostic teachers, but a text such as 2 Tim: 3:1-9 which speaks of “weak or silly women” makes one less certain that the text cited above may not in fact refer quite particularly to women. In response to this reference, Brown says that some may be offended by what “appears to them as sexist,”¹⁰¹ and that “preachers should take the trouble to interpret the passage critically.” Once again, according to official church teaching, this means that a man should explain to women what this tone suggests and how the words are to be interpreted. Theology and biblical exegesis done from an androcentric model of analysis reads it this way. Feminist interpretation is concerned with how women read and interpret tone and verbiage. Women should be the first to say what these texts have meant in their experience. To say it appears sexist does not confront it directly. It is sexist. Women are all but silenced in the Pastorals. This has played itself out in church history again and again. In lieu of cutting out offensive Bible passages in public reading, Brown suggests, “an intelligent audience...ask *themselves* [*italics, mine*] constructive questions that will lead them to recognize the human conditioning in the biblical account.”¹⁰² This is reminiscent of the “what is the sound of one hand clapping?” koan. What Brown does not address is what intelligent hearers do

closed group can know infallibly what is in fact, for the common good.

¹⁰⁰ Paul’s ambivalence toward women can be demonstrated in examining the authentic letters. The core idea in the text from I Timothy 2:8-15 is almost identical to that found in I Corinthians 14:34-36.

¹⁰¹ Brown, *Churches*, 44.

lead them to recognize the human conditioning in the biblical account.”¹⁰² This is reminiscent of the “what is the sound of one hand clapping?” koan. What Brown does not address is what intelligent hearers do with the questions they ask themselves. Should they not be encouraged to ask those who have the power to open the interpretations and change the sexist, exclusive (and at times misogynist) ministerial applications that have resulted from androcentric reading and the resulting patriarchal structures? This response is similar, I find, to the way he treats “the unpleasant fact that women personify the dangerously weak and naïve.” He says he would “like to go beyond” it in order to concentrate on the problem of the class of those who are taught. This, it seems to me is begging the question. If women’s experience is taken seriously and the text is read as a unity, this is a question that must be addressed. It is crucial, in fact, because it underlines the basic question of the interpretation of the Bible. If only for the sheer fact of the amount of space given in these letters, to setting the norms of women’s behaviour, they cannot be overlooked.¹⁰³ Looking to other great religious traditions we find, curiously enough, the same kind of efforts to codify women’s lives. The Koran, The Hebrew Scriptures, and other sacred normative writings are laced with instructions as to how women are to behave and live. The mobility between teachers and those taught, Brown concedes, has not been encouraged in the Pastorals.

Brown says he will pick up the Pastorals’ treatment of women in Chapter Seven. There, in dealing with the Johannine writings, he emphasizes Johannine egalitarianism. He then illustrates the “no second-class Christians” in the Johannine vision. He does so in terms of “no second-class status, no second-class geography and no second-class chronology.” At this point, he does not even mention gender after the kind of head nod he gives it in chapter two, saying, “we’ll deal with this later.” It is curious, to say the least, that Brown leaves this so general. We know by implication whom he means. One wonders if Brown would see explicitly in the Johannine vision “no second-class sex.” Without disrespect to the author, these letters are openly hostile to women and slaves, yet

¹⁰² Ibid., 44.

¹⁰³ Linda Mahoney, notes that “twenty-eight verses out of the total of 242 are devoted exclusively to women; if we were to include references to groups of unspecified membership that certainly include women [those in the group that is taught—mine] they would encompass more than half the total.” Linda Mahoney, “The Pastoral Epistles,” in *Searching the Scriptures A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994): 377.

he has few remarks about this fact. Since his intention in writing this book is essentially pastoral, I find it disappointing that his response to the Pastorals' treatment of women is so minimal. He doesn't come close to the explicit identification of equality in Christ we find in Gal. 3:28. Along this same line, Brown notes that the church is named in the Pastorals as "the household of God." He sees in this, the second half of the Pastorals' solution for survival. The presbyter-bishops "are to be like fathers taking responsibility for a home, administering its goods and providing example and discipline."¹⁰⁴ The very mention of the household codes says a great deal about where women fit in the grand scheme of things. Why not stay with the unpleasant fact of how women have been silenced and immobilized in almost every public sphere, according to these codes? In doing so we might see more clearly the reasons for the lack of mobility. The strength Brown sees in the virtues demanded of these church's leaders is the concomitant assurance of "a benevolent, holy, and efficient administration."¹⁰⁵ The word "benevolent" reminds one of Brown's earlier comments about the teachers and the taught. While the word may mean the good wanted for another, for many contemporaries, the word "benevolent" suggests one in a position above another. It suggests someone who has something that another has not. One often hears the term used with "despot" or "dictator." It suggests a hierarchy and the notion of superior/inferior, the strong helping the weak. Patriarchy generally values order, rank/status and efficiency. Would a "just" and "Spirit-filled" administration not be a more desirable way of describing Christian leaders? Let efficiency take second place to being responsive to world need. Let good order follow good service and responsible stewardship. Let holiness be manifest in compassionate, inclusive, openness to diversity.

The analysis closes on a positive note: that despite the acknowledged weaknesses in the texts, Brown believes that the Pastorals offer a helpful response to the church's survival. From a feminist point of view, the "weaknesses" have not been adequately acknowledged in the analysis here. These letters give expression to vicious and defamatory polemics against their unidentified opponents. They are directed at persons,

¹⁰⁴ Brown, *Churches*, 34.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

not simply ideas or points of view, and need to be named and strongly challenged.¹⁰⁶ The Pastorals reveal more than any other NT writing the role assigned women in early Christian communities. Brown says that the “firm administration of official teachers . . . has tended to dominate church history precisely because it (this structural proposal) worked so well.”¹⁰⁷ This is one perspective. As we shall see, there are many signs of resistance both within and outside the texts, sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant, when all the voices are heard. Without intending sarcasm, it would be interesting to ask the Jews, the Muslims, and the divorced or gay Roman Catholic, celibate priests and women religious, how well it has worked. Ask women, the poor, and people of color how well it has worked. Ask those outside the circle of official teachers. We may need to adjust our read on just how well it has worked. Ours is a church that has been engaged in wars, discriminatory practices and tacit approval of violence against women, and even genocide. As for the assurance of a future, ours is a church struggling with a diminishing participation in sacramental liturgies, a priest shortage, married persons resisting Church teaching on birth control and questions of sexual morality, religious communities not drawing new members. This is not to say that the Spirit has abandoned us, but it does challenge us to ask how trusting we have been of the Spirit’s mysterious and creative ways.

D.2. THE PAULINE HERITAGE IN COLOSSIANS/EPHESIANS

The second Pauline strain of thought Brown examines is that found in Colossians and Ephesians. The answer to survival in the churches envisioned in these texts, according to Brown’s interpretation is an emphasis on holiness and love. Colossians is the first of the Deutero-Pauline Epistles. Dated within a decade after Paul (ca. 67-77?), this is the beginning of the creation of a “new Paul.” And as Brown points out, in these two Epistles we see a pronounced shift in Paul’s eschatology. The church, through an emphasis on love and holiness, is at times equated with the kingdom. The Father “has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His

¹⁰⁶ A shocking but sensible idea expressed first by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is echoed in the article cited above by Linda Mahoney, “The Pastoral Epistles.” No text that is destructive of the human and personal worth of women (or anyone else) can be the revealed word of God.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

beloved Son in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins”(1:13-14). “You were also raised with him [Christ] through faith in the power of God” (Col 2:12). Brown notes the similarities with the Pastorals insofar as there is mention of the church as the “household of God” and some emphasis on the ethical behavior of members of that household. There is an awareness of a charismatic church structure evident in these letters (Col 2:12-17; Eph 4:11) and unlike the Pastorals there is no stress on apostolic succession or on the institutional aspects of the church. We find here an exalted ecclesiology in which an almost divine character is given to the church. Christ is the head of the body, which is the church. In this vision, Christians are already exalted through baptism in Christ, the Head *over* the body of the church (Eph 1:22-23; 4:4-6; 5:23; Col 1:18, 24). Alongside these texts, it is important to see also those texts that use the Pauline metaphor differently. Here Christ is seen as the Body—all the members making up that Body (Eph 4:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-31).

Brown sees half of the question of survival answered in the approach to the church in which the theme of love is very strong. He writes of the bridal imagery present in the authentic Pauline texts. In the vision presented by Ephesians and Colossians such imagery is expanded to a relationship between Christ and the church. The love between husband and wife is to reflect the kind of love Christ has for the church. The church is presented as the “radiant Bride of Christ” (Eph 5:27). If one puts women’s experience at the center of this reading it is clear that the author (s?) of these Epistles has a definite idea as to the place women play in the church. Both letters tell wives to be submissive to their husbands (Col 3:18; Eph 5:22). This is very unlike at least one undisputed Pauline text in which both husband and wife are warned to recognize the physical authority each holds over the other (Cor 7:4). In fact, the passage in Ephesians 5 manifests unequivocally the attitude toward women. “For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands” (Eph 5:23-24). Another text that is often cited in relation to this of Ephesians 5 is that of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. However, here we have another approach that might be suggested. This text has traditionally been interpreted as a text about women’s head coverings and the submission that is appropriate for a woman. Yet today, more and more interpreters see this as an

affirmation of the fact that women were prophesying, as well as men, and that this text is Paul's call for the appropriate manner in which they should prophecy. It is not about submission or domination by a man. Brown makes no comment on any of these verses.

The author interestingly picks up and includes in the "Strengths" section of his chapter the fact that "the body of Christ imagery personalizes the church and encourages our love for it in imitation of the love that Christ has for his Bride" (p.53). He laments the fact that before Vatican II the language of "mother church" was common. Lamentable, indeed. Brown sees it as lamentable because, he says, it "smacked of over-supervision and of a maternalism that reduced everyone to a child status, or at times to a childish status" (p. 53). Yet, in the end, he caves in and says we don't really have anything better. If we reversed this pejorative descriptive (maternalism) of the sexist "mother-church" image to "paternalism," although it still remains pejorative, it creates a more accurate and even more lamentable situation. That the Bridal imagery is present in several of the canonical texts, there is no question. What developed out of it institutionally is not really a "mother-church" but a "father-church," with all official ecclesial ministries and decision-making roles held by men. Hence, we might more rightly say that the image "smacks" of over-supervision and paternalism. Following the teaching and ministry of Jesus as presented in the canonical Gospels, it is hard to believe that the institutional church which resulted, accurately reflects the inclusive call to discipleship and the full participation in the new life that Jesus promised. The author points out the shift in Vatican II's understanding of church wherein we are called "The People of God" and the "Pilgrim Church." I am offended and I cannot accept Brown's conclusion to the discussion of church titles. "For all its defects," he writes, "'mother church' was both personal and familial; and even when a mother overdoes her role, she can be loved by her children."¹⁰⁸ One wonders just how does a mother overdo her role, and by whose standards is this judged? This is no more than a reversion to a sexist cliché that does not promote creative discussion.

Brown comes back to the example of Vatican II and the shift it made from the imagery of "Mystical Body of Christ" to "The People of God" in describing the Church. Analysis from the perspective I am suggesting stands this observation of Brown's

¹⁰⁸ Brown, *Churches*, 54.

alongside the aforementioned problem of “Mother Church” imagery. Have Post-Vatican II patterns of behaviours led to radical reform of hierarchical and patriarchal structures? One must recall too, that it is by changing our patterns of thinking that we are able to change our behavior.

In this same section of Brown’s work, he points to the attitude of Christ giving himself up for the church (Eph 5:25). It follows that the apostle gives himself for the church. What isn’t said is that it also follows that spouses give themselves up to one another in mutual love. Brown continues, “if there are still others who are willing to give themselves for the church, the church will survive.”¹⁰⁹ In John’s gospel Jesus speaks of laying down his life for the sheep (10:15, 17). In response to Brown’s suggestion or hope of “still others willing to give themselves,” verse 18 from this same chapter in John comes to mind: “No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down...” Love demands freedom. Jesus sets the example of a life freely given. There are indeed others who want to give their lives and are willing to serve lovingly in Christian faith communities. The freedom to choose to “lay down their lives” is simply not given to them. It becomes a question of who “gets to;” who is free to share in the sacramental and ministerial life of the church? Women admitted to ordained ministries and the sacramental participation of married priests are just two examples where we have heard individuals say they feel called to serve in a ministry but are not allowed to respond. Brown speaks at one point of the defining moment and the primordial importance of baptism in a Christian’s life. Yet when it comes to the question of being willing to give one’s life following the example of Christ, it seems baptism isn’t enough of a prerequisite for full participation. A feminist perspective says, no—it is more so a question of being able to choose. How one lays down one’s life is simply not a free and open question for all the members of the body of Christ.

The call to “holiness” and its realization in Christ as the Bridegroom to the “spotless bride, holy and without blemish,” (the church) is the second part of the answer to survival in the Ephesian and Colossian church. In Brown’s analysis of the texts he recognizes the presence of sin in the early church as well as in the contemporary church. This is a problem, he says, particularly when we try to mask errors or protect those guilty

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 54.

of injustices. In fact, he identifies these as “sins and stupidities, especially those of public church figures.” He refers to the Apostles’ Creed and the statement of belief in the holy catholic church. “As long as people have that faith,” he goes on, “the church will last, no matter how inefficient its administration.”¹¹⁰ Our critique has to ask: What church? What face will that church have? Are we meant to put our faith in the church? Finally, what does an “inefficient administration” mean for the sacramental life of a church for whom the sacraments have been the nourishment of faith? The implications are not insignificant.

Brown proceeds to jab at *The National Catholic Reporter* when he discusses the extreme contrast from closing our eyes to dishonesty and oppression to “breaking the silence and telling all.”¹¹¹ A man of Brown’s stature, both in the eyes of the church and in the academic world, cannot make such a remark without it having significant influence and repercussions. Brown sees a weakness in the silence these NT letters may have demanded and acknowledges the harm done at times by such silence. His rather off-handed comment as regards the *NCR* does not suggest to me an open reception of differing opinions or “breaking of silences.” What happens to those who speak out against injustices within the institution of the church? Sometimes it is the prophetic voice that is most difficult to hear or understand.

In the concluding section of the Colossians/Ephesians’ analysis, the author speaks of another of the weaknesses in the ecclesiology presented in these letters. An emphasis on the church, he says, has tended over the years to weaken the sense of the local churches. The undisputed Pauline letters all address a specific, local church. Brown suggests that it would be a loss to let go of the sense of the church but notes the critical need on the local level for a “knitting together of the members”. Fifteen years after the writing, we are witnessing the drop in church attendance and in individual identification with a home parish. In some cases this is due to liturgical activity or a lack of social concern and response to contemporary problems. Feminist critique of the current situation struggles not to be simplistic or reactionary in responding to this lack of identification with the local church. Rather, it asks questions such as: What do local

¹¹⁰Ibid., 55.

ordinaries (bishops) do to support the development of unique, individual parishes? A local church should reflect the lives of the members—their concerns, interests and particularly their charisms. Too often we hear of cases where Bishops or pastors become authoritarian and legalistic in the daily operation and life of the parish community.¹¹² No doubt, the creation of Parish Councils and a more active lay participation in parish life has helped in recent years. There are local churches that have a strong sense of community identification. Unfortunately, however, it is not uncommon to hear of members dropping off because “Father has to have the last word on all decisions” or “he doesn’t come to the meetings”. What looks like a circle of conversation and discernment arising from common concern, in fact, works like the old pyramidal model where power resides in a small, often singular voice. Decision-making resides there too.

Finally, a partial phrase at the conclusion of this chapter may appear to be a minor point but prompts a comment from my perspective: “Lest I end this section on a negative note...” At the risk of sounding “nit-picking,” it strikes me that this hints at the very fear or inability to face defects that Brown has spoken of earlier. There are negative points to be confronted when we analyse texts, interpret them, and evaluate the resulting behaviors and choices. What is wrong with ending a section on such a point?

D. 3. THE PAULINE HERITAGE IN LUKE/ACTS

In Luke/Acts, Brown examines the third variant strain of Pauline thought. He focuses on two important elements in the ecclesiology found there: continuity and the Holy Spirit. These are constants throughout Luke and Acts: the continuity from Israel, through Jesus, to the apostles and the earliest communities, and the powerful intervention of the Holy Spirit in all these actors. These two factors, Brown suggests, are the answer to the church’s survival. The author’s analysis in this chapter focuses on a relatively few texts from Acts and even fewer from the Gospel. He cites approximately 38 texts from Acts and 6 from the Gospel. However, the two books are generally accepted today as a

¹¹¹ Comparisons are odious in this case. Brown writes, “The dubious service that the *National Enquirer* renders to the nation, the *National Catholic Reporter* renders to the church.” *Churches*, 56.

¹¹² At the time of Brown’s writing, I heard a visiting Bishop announce to a community of Benedictine sisters before the reception of communion: “For the sake of unity in the house, we will all receive communion on the tongue.” In a certain sense this did knit the community (accustomed to receiving

two-volume work written by the same hand. The answer to Brown's original motivating question may be more obviously found in Acts. This might explain the textual emphasis. An interpretation drawn from a complete; that is to say, a single reading of Luke/Acts, may yield other conclusions. It also may not change the conclusions. Reading the material as a unity however, does raise some important questions that affect one's analysis and evaluation of the ecclesiology found there. As noted, the author identifies the sense of continuity as a major factor in the survival of the church. It is a sense "wherein the church is closely related to what went before"¹¹³ Therefore, it seems one must look at how the church in Acts is in continuity with the message and manner of the Jesus of the Gospel.

From a feminist hermeneutical perspective, I find myself focusing more on questions and points of interest that Brown fails to discuss or even mention, such as the fact that Luke's Gospel shows a particular interest in women. He guards the material about women found in the Synoptic parallels and even adds his own unique stories accenting women. There is more material about women in this Gospel than appears in any other NT literature. Although recent evaluations of this fact challenge the traditional notion of Luke as the "champion of women," this makes it all the more interesting when asking the question of what the church looked like and it survived. In addition to this, there is a marked change in the material regarding women when one comes to "Vol. II—The Acts of the Apostles." The presence of women is down played; their appearance is more sporadic. While the biblical writer cannot eliminate their activity entirely, it is somewhat more subtle and less defined. Brown takes no particular notice of this or of what it might mean for the profile of the church that survives. In fact, he sees the continuity factor linking Jesus' life and ministry to the call for the young church to witness what Jesus has done. He does not question or remark on the fact that the Gospel does not have major blocks of material focused around any one particular disciple or apostle. By contrast, Acts focuses first on Peter and then on Paul with a striking amount of narrative material. And although women are depicted as prophets, witnesses, and active disciples in Luke's Gospel, Brown takes no notice of this fact either, nor of the

communion in the hand) together—but certainly not in the sense of identification with church that Brown intends.

apparent change in the treatment of women in Acts. Somewhat hidden but nevertheless present, women in Acts *are*, as in the Gospel recipients of the Holy Spirit, missionaries, and witnesses to the faith, heads of households (that is to say, leaders of churches in their homes), prophets, and teachers. This is very significant, particularly in light of what Clarice Martin describes as the “tendencies of biblical writers to proscribe women’s presence, participation, leadership, and agency in traditions that narrate Christian origins.”¹¹⁴ If the strength is placed on continuity, then, feminist analysis questions this omission in Brown’s evaluation. There is an important message here.

As noted, Brown’s analysis of the dynamic young church reflects the biblical writer’s preoccupation with Peter and Paul and the “apostles and elders” and their missionary /teaching activity, which is to say, the predominately male leadership. Relative to this point, Brown later notes that one weakness that arises from the presentation of the church in Acts is its triumphalistic tone. Taking into account some of the considerations mentioned above might soften such a tone and the elitism it projects. We might soften such a tone by bringing into focus some of the other actors of the story as we read through this lens. We may in fact reinterpret our texts and come to other applications of them in practice. Early in his work, Brown reminded us that we must always keep in mind that we are working with partial texts. In the study of the Acts of the Apostles this is especially important to remember: that in fact Acts does not report “fully what actually happened in the beginnings of Christianity.” The “hermeneutics of suspicion” that feminist analysis applies reminds us, as I have briefly demonstrated above, that references to women in the texts are already filtered through androcentric interpretations. Most exegetes simply do not question the fact that historically nearly all of the primary actors are men or males. The result is that the “historical role of women (and not men) is perceived to be problematic, because maleness is the ‘adequate’ historical norm, and the hegemony of an almost exclusively male presence, leadership, and agency in the Christian movement is accepted *ipso facto*.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Brown, *Churches*, 63.

¹¹⁴ Clarice Martin, “The Acts of the Apostles” in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994): 771-772.

¹¹⁵ Clarice Martin’s commentary raises an important idea in writing: “Androcentric reconstructions of early christian history thus depict as acceptably normative a reconstruction of the history of the early church according to the male model of masculine dominance that marginalizes women.” With the expertise and

Brown also calls for “taking seriously the fullness of the canon”. One simply cannot avoid aspects of these texts that do indeed reflect a triumphal, exclusive church, as the author notes. His analysis highlights several such texts: 1:5,8; 2:32-33; 4:8,31; 6:1,7; 14:23; 15 (great apostle Peter); 20:28; 28:28, to name a few. However, a feminist reading strives to read the text as a whole—attending particularly to marginal or invisible groups and individuals. Such a method is one way of expanding our perspectives and understandings while taking utterly seriously the fullness of the canon. It brings to center stage the understudies, as it were, rather than *les grandes vedettes*. We look for disciples mentioned in passing, some named and some unnamed. For example, actors such as Candace and her royal administrative official (8:26-40) suggest a dimension worth noting. At first glance, the two might be thought to simply add to a “high church” model. Royalty though she is—she is a foreign Queen, black, and a woman at that! The conversion narrative of her black Ethiopian eunuch, an official in Candace’s monarchy, points to a church that ignores the boundaries of culture and color. Bring Tabitha (Dorcas), “a disciple and devoted to good works and acts of charity” (Acts 9:36-43), to center stage, and we see not a triumphal church but a humble, servant church. This is a church in which women are disciples; consequently they minister and are socially active in their witness to the Risen Jesus. Priscilla and Aquila (18:1-28), also not mentioned in Brown’s analysis, demonstrate a tradition and a model of partnership in family life, work, and ministry. They are, we would say today, “animators of faith” forming and teaching Apollos, among others. They witness and work in the community of believers. Further, they seem to pose a challenge to a uniform understanding and practice of the household codes imposed more and more in Greco-Roman society. Sapphira, too, should be mentioned, despite her unhappy fate (Acts 5:1-11). She is a partner with Ananias in the decision about keeping a piece of property. The church in the deception holds her equally accountable. She appears to be a woman of some means. To speak of Lydia (Acts 16:13-15) would also add a dimension to a profile of the ecclesiology found in the text. Her story offers a source for investigation of women’s participation in religious practice, social and economic activities—all of which are factors that would affect how the church

long-standing reputation for the highest scholarship, it does seem to me that Brown too, labors under the presuppositions Martin speaks of here. In *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*: 774. See also

survived. This is a Spirit-filled church that is experienced by all the followers of the Way. Acts 2:17-18 points to a church in which “sons and daughters,” “male and female slaves,” would receive the Spirit and would prophecy. “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Every voice counts in this church. A circle rather than a pyramid offers a more accurate symbol for a feminist reading of Acts 2:43-47. This is another text Brown does not cite or comment on.

The omissions that we have noted in Brown’s treatment raise the question of whether Brown himself does not struggle with what he sees as the real origin of the church. It would seem that the church is born in/through the official ministries and the administration of the organization and that of the daily life of the ordinary Christian is simply what follows.

The text in Acts describing the community’s manner of dealing with the question of the distribution of food and the choice of the seven servers (6:1-7) is revelatory for many reasons. One point it demonstrates is a wholly new and innovative ministerial response to a community need. Secondly, it is the community who selects the seven. Thirdly, “select from among yourselves” would suggest the Spirit-filled community is the agent of identifying the charisms necessary to meet the community’s need. On the downside, the names of seven men are listed as those qualified and apparently made official by “the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.” Brown makes no reference to this text and the part it plays in the church’s survival. Yet obviously it helped solve a problem that could have become very divisive for the ongoing life of the church. Androcentrism surfaces again in this text. Yet a feminist critique considers this text important as an example of the obvious flexibility and freedom to create structures through which humans are responding to real human needs and to what work/ministry is appropriate, depending upon one’s sex. No, here the emphasis should be on acknowledging a new ministry created in the Spirit of Jesus.

A weakness that Brown has identified in Acts is a potential lack of mobility and freedom of spirit in the community. The text in chapter 6, while not without problems for a feminist reading, nevertheless manifests both mobility/flexibility in the community and freedom of spirit.

fn 35 in this document, 28.

A feminist critique further identifies a question in relation to Brown's recognition of Luke/Acts presenting the continuity from Israel through Jesus to Peter and Paul and the growing church. This same text from Acts 6 makes reference to something we have first seen in I Tim 5:22: "Do not ordain anyone hastily (do not readily lay hands on) and II Tim 1:6 "rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands." In these cases and others, the laying on of hands (*epi-tithenai tas cheiras [epi]*) are references to ordination to a particular office or ministry.¹¹⁶ As for continuity with the Gospel on this point, we see Jesus laying hands on women and men in order to heal, to bless, to forgive, to comfort, to include, or to invite (see Luke 4:40; 13:30; 18:15-17). There is nothing in the Gospel texts that suggest Jesus' laying on hands is meant to be an official appointment or mandate for leadership or necessarily to perform any particular function.

Brown concludes this chapter with another example from the reforms of Vatican II. He refers back to his earlier prediction that the Roman Catholic Church would have "to rediscover as prominent the image of the body of Christ in order to preserve the sense of a church holiness that comes from Christ and goes beyond the status of the members."¹¹⁷ Feminist analysis demonstrates that we have not yet gone beyond the status question. The experience of women in the church today is one where status is the defining principle for mobility and accessibility in and to the "Body of Christ" in its institutional form. Countless examples could be given wherein the discrimination against women and the laity in general, as well as the scandals around high-ranking church leaders, have threatened the holiness of the church today. It goes without saying—we have work to do in this regard.

In the past, corporate life in North America spoke of "a span of control" and marveled at the model of the Roman Church and its effective, extensive power structure.

¹¹⁶ While many see this in these texts, it suffices for our purposes here, to cite the observation made in the commentary by Robert Wild, S.J. "The Pastoral Letters" from *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer and Roland Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990): 899. Wild writes without flourish or question, "As in I Tim 4:14 and II Tim 1: 6 a reference to ordination." In *The Anchor Bible Commentary Vol. III*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), the article by Robert O'Toole on "The Laying on of Hands" writes, "In I Tim 5:22 Paul advises Timothy not to be hasty in the laying on of hands. Since the context (vv. 17-21) considers Timothy's treatment of elders and since the 'laying on of hands' parallels I Tim 4:14 and II Tim 1:6, the author is speaking of Timothy's *ordination* [italics, mine] of elders" (Grelot 1983:225). 49.

¹¹⁷ Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, 74.

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Chapter Three

FEMINIST CRITIQUE IN CONVERSATION WITH JEAN DELORME

« Diversité et unité des ministères d'après le Nouveau Testament » dans *Le ministère et les ministères selon le Nouveau Testament* (Parole de Dieu) aux Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1974.

A. AUTHOR'S GOAL IN «DIVERSITÉ ET UNITÉ DES MINISTÈRES D'APRÈS LE NOUVEAU TESTAMENT »

The precision and rigor with which Jean Delorme analyzes the subject of ministries in the New Testament simplifies the task of reading his work with an eye to applying a feminist critique. At the outset he clearly states that his goal is to write a biblical theological essay on the diversity and the unity of the ministries identified and identifiable in the New Testament. Two questions shape and substantiate his study: What is the rapport between the diverse ministries and their ministerial agents? What is their unity? He proposes to find a synthesis, thus a reconstruction, in his work with the texts, while being aware throughout his study, of its “philosophical and theological implications.” He strives to achieve this by returning always to the test of the NT data itself. He does not intend to present an historical tableau of the NT ministries and their development as partially witnessed in the origins of the church. He refers us to André Lemaire¹¹⁷ and others who have written from this perspective elsewhere. History cannot be ignored, Delorme acknowledges, but this is not the primary concern in this work. His research perspective is to build a biblical theology of ministry. The theology that arises from his study, he states, is based on the New Testament data alone. He recognizes that historical problems will always be present when dealing with texts of human provenance. The author acknowledges that most of these problems will not be treated here. His

¹¹⁷ Lemaire, André. *Les ministères dans l'Église*, Paris, Centurion, 1971. Delorme notes « On trouvera dans cet ouvrage une bibliographie très riche. Voir aussi de même auteur, *Du service aux ministères: les services ecclésiastiques dans les deux premiers siècles*, *Concilium* n° 80 (1972), 39-51. I add to the list: Simon Dufour and Rémi Parent, *Les ministères*, Québec, Éditions Paulines, 1993. Other similar studies Delorme mentions will be referred to in other places in this study.

position as regards the texts themselves is an acceptance of a tradition that gives these Scriptures a canonical authority. He does not write as an historian but rather as a biblist.

B. AUHOR'S PRESUPPOSITIONS and METHOD

B.1. The foregoing discussion of the author's goal reveals some of his implicit and even explicit presuppositions. As Delorme enters into his study, he expresses more of his presuppositions. The data found in the NT is marked by an historical evolution that cannot be overlooked. Sociological and cultural settings differ and thus shape the texts in particular ways. Delorme points to the fragmentary and sometimes anachronistic elements in the texts. Even if dating is established for some of the events described, the author acknowledges that their movement through time does not always correspond to what the "facts" of the texts say. He recognizes the pitfalls of borrowing from one part of the NT to judge the rest. He guards against viewing the diversity in the writings on ministry from the "ministerial forms" developed after the period of the NT. Forms of ministry that appear in the texts may themselves have existed elsewhere beforehand and disappeared in fact by the time of the writing. Even a cursory reading of the NT reveals tremendous diversity when one begins to lay out the data around the topic of ministry. Delorme reminds his readers that entire aspects of primitive Christianity are little known to contemporaries, and that there is always the subtle danger of projecting on the past our current conceptions. Finally, Delorme frequently returns to the emphasis the texts give to community. While some activities distinguish certain members of communities from others, this is never a reality that can be considered outside the boundaries of the community. Each member is called and gifted. He believes it is impossible to treat ministries according to the NT without having the role of all the baptized, and even more importantly, the relationship established between the Church and humanity as the backdrop, the context—virtually the key—to solid analysis of the question. It is a dialectic one enters into when discussing the specificity of a ministry. Those activities that single out individuals or groups in some way in the texts, by titles, names, or functions, for example, are always to be seen in the context of the gifts given to all those without functional distinction. For Delorme it follows without question that a theology of ministry implies a theology of church.

B.2. As regards method, we have once again anticipated some of this in the previous sections. The texts containing references to “ministers” and “ministerial activities” are read in context, respecting the different communities, times, and places from which they arise. As well, Delorme adds, we must respect the varying theological perspectives and language, and the fact that different titles are sometimes used for similar tasks or works, and that sometimes the same titles describe differing tasks or works. He warns against the temptation to harmonize or homogenize these activities. Rather, he asks what is the rapport between the texts? As well, it would create an incomplete if not thoroughly false picture, to build an entire theology around a single text or even a few privileged texts. Rather than to try and harmonize diverse readings, we look for a language that bridges yet respects the differing perspectives, such as those between John and Paul, for example. I favor a method, such as this, which involves reading and working with the texts synchronically rather than diachronically. The synchronic approach works “together with” (from the Greek, *syn*) or alongside the present form of the text. Thus he moves through successive approaches before trying to come too quickly to a principle of unity among the texts. More of his method is uncovered as we watch his work unfold.

C. FEMINIST PRESUPPOSITIONS AND QUESTIONS

Before proceeding further into the details of Delorme’s study it seems an appropriate point to identify the presuppositions, intentions and the questions I bring as a Christian feminist to this critique of his work. Delorme and I share the same question as to how one might distinguish between the various designations assigned to individuals and groups (appellations such as the Twelve, deacon, apostle, prophet, co-worker, etc.). One wonders how fine or how definitive these distinctions can be, given the limitations and inconsistency of our data. Added to this question, I wonder how, if paying attention to the smaller details, the lesser figures who only appear “in the wings of the stage” might change the distinctions or uncover the commonalties in characters and roles of community service. I too read with his awareness of the variety and evolving socio-cultural and political-religious settings of the texts. Delorme has already noted that in this study the process of history in the shaping of the text is of secondary importance to him here. This fits perfectly with a literary synchronic approach which asks about the shape of

the text in the here and now. "In literary criticism, the dialogue is with the text and the present concerns of the reader foremost in mind."¹¹⁸ The discourse one constructs for this reading must be constantly surveyed and critiqued. This holds true for feminist criticism as much as anything Delorme is doing with language. Feminist discourse must be vigilant about reading answers into the texts to every issue of concern for women today. However, a feminist perspective must be equally vigilant to bring women's experience into the public formulation of the traditions from which they have been excluded or forgotten.¹¹⁹ In the same vein, Delorme warns against speaking out of the context of today's terms of "ecclesial structure," "institution," "priesthood," or "ministry." Whether he succeeds in this or not is yet to be seen. I agree with Claudia V. Camp when she writes, "all interpretation is constrained by the questions (and I would add, experience) of the contemporary interpreter." To a certain degree, this flies in the face of the statement made early on by Delorme when he says, "the theology that arises from my study is based on the New Testament data *alone*." (italics, mine.) Theology always has a point of view; it takes a stance and it reflects someone's experience. If Delorme is suggesting that the biblical texts is the only basis for his theology, I ask "whom is it good for?" For whom is he doing this "reconstruction"? It is unclear what Delorme's foremost concerns are in seeking the answers to his two questions and why these are important for a theology of ministry.

My desire to use a feminist hermeneutic is because, in part, what it does is it interprets existence. I am particularly interested in the existence of the whole of the disciples of Jesus and of the whole of the early communities of faith. This is to say that existence of women and their experience needs to be brought into the light in all biblical textual study. In an essay entitled "The Bible and Feminism," in *Freeing Theology*,

¹¹⁸ Gillingham, Susan E. *One Bible, Many Voices – Different Approaches to Biblical Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing Company 1998):173. A lengthier, more developed discussion of this topic can be found in her book. (See especially chapters 5-7).

¹¹⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether elaborates this point: "By women's experience as a key to hermeneutics or theory of interpretation, we mean precisely that experience which arises when women become critically aware of these falsifying and alienating experiences imposed upon them as women by a male-dominated culture. ... The critique of sexism implies a fundamental principle of judgment. This critical principle of feminist theology is the affirmation of and promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, to be appraised as not redemptive." In Letty Russell, ed. *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985): 115.

Sandra Schneiders makes two points that most serious New Testament scholars would not refute today. The first is that the Bible is the ultimate patriarchal text and has been used misogynistically throughout its history. One has only to think of how a text like that of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 has been used for decades to keep women in their place, and even worse, as a defense for abusive and dismissive acts against them. The basis for Schneider's statement above, more gently put, is the recognition that the scriptural record privileges the male as normative and presents females as subject to males by divine design. German scholar, Marie-Theres Wacker says of 1 Tim. 2:12-15, that the argument of this text "is sexist because it dispossesses women of ecclesiastical authorization to teach and counsels them instead that their way to salvation lies in giving birth to children."¹²⁰ Woman is seen, as man's "other." Schneider's second point is one many feminist readers struggle with, in addition to being a very unpopular topic for non-feminists. The Bible presents God in primarily, though not exclusively, male terms. It is not a far stretch to the conclusion that "since God is male, men are gods."¹²¹ Following this line of thinking leads to the infamous solution to the women's ordination problem: it is clear that a woman can't possibly physically represent Jesus Christ as priest when we know that Jesus was a man.

Though patriarchy has assumed diverse forms, the understanding of it that I bring to this critique is as that which institutionalizes male dominance over women in home and society at large. This will not be a conflictual stance in the present work, since the feminist optic I assume is altogether like that of Delorme. My optic rejects entirely the paradigm of domination/subordination in all forms, master over slave, male over female, and humans over the earth. Delorme, too, while not consciously setting out to oppose systems of dominance, uncovers patterns of service and ministry that are inconsistent with hierarchical power structures of service and which cannot, at least overtly, operate effectively on the basis of dominance. I, however, will be looking for the subtle ways that

¹²⁰ Waker, Marie-Theres, in *Feminist Interpretation: The Bible in Women's Perspective*. Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds. (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1998): 51.

¹²¹ Feminist scholarship has produced important studies on the topic. The works of Elizabeth A. Johnson (*She Who Is*), Catherine LaCugna, ed. (*Freeing Theology*), Sally McFague (*Models of God*) are among those worthy of attention. Simone Weil wrote: "There is a God. There is no God. What is the problem? I am quite sure that there is a God in the sense that I am sure that my love is no illusion. I am quite sure that

the texts betray themselves; how on many occasions they portray certain people as “bit players”—nearly invisible and often voiceless, slaves and women, for example. This pattern shows itself while the mission of Jesus and the emergence of the church unfold in the texts as if it is carried on through, by, and for men.

To Delorme’s question of the rapport between various “ministerial agents” and their activities, which he has defined as “the service of God,” I add the question: what is the rapport between those who are “served” and those who “serve”? Is there gender distinction made in these categories of ministerial agents? If gender is problematic in any respect, I ask, for whom and according to whom—the biblical writers or the interpreters of those writings? Jesus gives no evidence of having a gender bias in his mission and teaching. Are tasks or charisms among the followers of Jesus determined or limited in any way by sex? If so, in what ways and for what reasons do these become tasks or charisms limited to/by gender? Does service mean something different for men than for women? The texts reveal discrepancies or inequities between groups such as slaves and householders, men and women. Delorme makes no comment on this point. But how does this affect our understanding of ministry and our reading of the texts? So much depends on how we ask the questions. And our questions arise from our experience. So if it is a woman who is reading these texts, or a poor, disenfranchised member of her society, how do the questions change?¹²² How is she to interpret the meaning of her existence on the basis of these texts or this interpretation? What legitimates changes in the criteria for interpretations of the texts? These are real questions that make a difference for those who have been and still are excluded from free or full participation in ministerial activity, the service of God, on the basis of their biological sex. Once again, while Delorme looks at the rapport between ministerial agents from a different angle, a feminist criticism cannot ignore adding this perspective and bringing these questions to the conversation.

As mentioned earlier, the author speaks of forms of ministry that appear in the texts that may in fact have existed elsewhere and beforehand, and had probably

there is no God in the sense that I am sure that there is nothing which resembles what I can conceive when I say that word.” In *Waiting for God*, 32.

¹²² Olivette Genest, « Femmes et ministères dans l’Église » *SR*, 16 (1987). Genest devotes a long opening section of her article to the importance of this point from a feminist perspective. Not only which questions, but also how they are formulated, already indicates an interpretative stance. On this point I refer the reader back to Ringe’s article in *The Women’s Bible Commentary* cited above. 1-9.

disappeared by the time of the writing. The implication of this possibility for feminist concerns is that the contrary may also be true. *Women's* stories, activities, and functions may have at one period been more visible than at other times. When applications of ministerial agents and their activities in the biblical texts take on concrete expression—women quite simply are different, and in most texts, are less visible. Carol Ringe writes, “Clearly, women’s perspectives or the consequences for women’s lives were not the primary concern of the biblical authors.”¹²³ I think it is safe to say also that this is clearly not a primary concern for Delorme in his analysis. Fair enough. This is, however, the perspective and primary concern that I want to add to the conversation. As I read Delorme’s work and the biblical texts themselves, I will be looking for texts that might be brought into the discussion. I will read Delorme’s work with the vested interest of women in ministry in order to see if it makes a difference to any aspects of Delorme’s examination and/or conclusions. I believe that the gender of believers is not an issue in the NT, and along with Sandra Schneiders I say, “we should not allow ourselves, either as believers or as scholars, to be manipulated into acting as if it is. The burden of proof lies with those who wish to set limits to the exercise of Christian freedom by female members of the community.”¹²⁴

D. DELORME’S PROCEDURE and FEMINIST RESPONSE

To achieve his expressed goal of writing this biblical theological essay, Delorme proceeds to answer his questions by working within the limits of the internal relations of the corpus of NT texts. His work takes shape in three parts. He begins with a thorough elaboration of the multiple types of « Figures et fonctions ministérielles ». Next he moves the reader through his study to a second section which examines the notion of « Serviteurs et service en Église ». Finally, the third section, « Le service de l’oeuvre de Dieu au profit des hommes », rounds off the author’s conclusions to the initial motivating questions.

D.1. When speaking of ministers or ministries in the New Testament, we discover immediately the vast scope of data with which we must contend. Delorme

¹²³Sharon H. Ringe, “When Women Interpret the Bible,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, Eds, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993): 2.

¹²⁴ Sandra Schneiders, in an article entitled, “*Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church*”, BTB (12) 1982, 35.

considers the multiple titles such as apostles, prophets, and teachers. Likewise, he identifies ministerial activities identified, often vaguely, by functions such as deacons, presbyters, and overseers. We need consider those named and unnamed workers. Individuals such as Timothy, Apollos, Barnabas, Paul, Phoebe, Priscilla, Lydia, and Mary are named. In some cases, Paul also greets or refers to “co-workers,” “brothers,” “sisters,” and “Chloe’s household,” without further identifying details. The analysis begins with the group of the Twelve, the apostles, prophets, and teachers. He then considers other diverse figures that appear in scattered places throughout the texts. This is the first step towards a synthesis. The answer to the first question of the relationship between the diverse ministries and their agents emerges from their activities—what they do distinguishes one from another. Delorme writes that only after this relationship is studied in some depth can we identify a relatively simple network of relationships that leads to a few « grandes fonctions fondamentales ». Delorme approaches this diverse spectrum one step at a time, coming at it from different directions.

D.1.1. Close inspection of the texts manifests different yet similar uses of the titles “The Twelve” and “the apostles.” The Twelve are mentioned in all four gospels and in Acts 6:2 and 1 Cor 15:5-7. In each of these cases, they seem to be a separate group from the apostles. In only two places are “The Twelve” put together with “the apostles” (Mk 3:14//Mt 10:2 and Rev 21:14). Yet the term “apostle” or “the apostles” occurs about 83 times, if one counts the synoptic parallels and Paul’s frequent reference to himself as an apostle. Space limits a long summation of Delorme’s work on this complex question of apostleship. It is enough perhaps to note one example of the complexity: the Pauline use of the figure of the “Twelve” is replaced or assimilated in Luke-Acts by that of the “apostles.” Delorme thinks that this points to a missionary experience that has transformed the image that the church has of itself at its origins. It also emphasizes what is hinted at in various places in the gospels and the letters and is at times expressed directly: that this is a universal church, open to all. What can be said of this ministry of apostleship? The first Messenger, Jesus, announces God’s reign (Mk 1:14-15), and through his life, death, and resurrection has himself become the Message. It is a particular ministry characterized by a “sending out,” a “mission” to announce the work of God accomplished in Jesus. It is foundational and it springs from the call of Jesus Christ.

Whatever we are to make of it, this ministry appears more frequently than any other service in the NT, and the “apostle” appears first in the two lists of ministries or charisms (1Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). This is not to say it has any kind of hierarchical value above other activities or gifts of the Spirit. That “apostles” appears first in both these lists and occurs so frequently in the texts, simply emphasizes its predominance and importance as a ministry in the growth of the church.

At this juncture, I want to make explicit what Delorme doesn’t address. An obvious feminist question asks, “So are there women apostles in the NT data?” Delorme’s treatment of apostles on one level is very thorough, but he really never notes directly that all sorts of people—again, named and unnamed—are apostles. They appear sometimes as partners, sometimes as married couples, sometimes as men, and sometimes as women. Sex or class does not seem to enter into the question. Some of Paul’s writings are among the earliest references to apostleship and clearly indicate the presence of women active in this service. Romans 16:7 refers to Andronicus and Junia as being “prominent among the apostles.” Of course, there is a long and telling history of changing the name to “Junias,” a name that is unattested in ancient sources but nevertheless works to change Andronicus’ partner to a man.¹²⁵ Prisca and Aquila, though never called apostles, fit the description of apostles in several respects (cf. Rom 16:3-5; Acts 18:1-3, 18-19). Other women Paul refers to without the title of “apostle,” include Phoebe (Rom 16:3-5), and Euodia and Syntyche who “struggled beside me [Paul] in the work of the gospel” (Phil 4:2-3). There are several elements in these references that suggest apostleship.

Relative to the question of women apostles in Jesus’ mission, John’s Gospel (4:7-41), gives the account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. It is an important missionary narrative. Often the interpretation of this text has focused on Jesus as the liberated male, or at least on his openness, compassion, and divine insight, receptive to sinful women and even foreigners. And thus the woman is cast as a sinner and foreigner. Looked at from another angle, she plays the important role of witness. She receives and accepts Jesus’

¹²⁵ See Mary Rose D’Angelo’s “Women Partners in the New Testament”, in *JFSR* (Spring 6:1) 1990, 67. An even more fascinating and developed study of this in “Junia...Outstanding among the Apostles (Romans 16:7)”, by Bernadette Brooten in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, ed. L. Swidler and A. Swidler (New your: Paulist, 1977), 141-144.

self-revelation to her. She brings the revelatory news of Jesus to her village and announces the Messiah to the people. “The witness which the woman bears is quite clearly apostolic in the Johannine perspective.”¹²⁶ Her apostolic witness and effectiveness is evident in 4:39. “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony . . .” (*dia ton logon*). For John, the effectiveness of the apostolic witness is to lead others to Jesus as Savior of the World. John 4:41-42 contains the seal of authenticity, so to speak, of this apostle. The echo of her apostolic witness is heard again in 17:20 when Jesus prays for those present at table “but also for those believing in me through their word” (*dia tou logou*).

In the same Gospel we have a named woman apostle. Mary Magdalene is with Jesus at his death on the cross (19:25), goes in search of Jesus at the tomb on Easter morning (Jn 20:1-2; Mk16:1-8 //s), recognizes the Risen Jesus (20:14-16), and is commissioned by Jesus to announce his Resurrection to the disciples (20:17-18). Mary’s place in the tradition as apostle and leader stands alongside Peter’s. Yet sadly, any awareness of her part in the biblical tradition has for centuries been overshadowed by the stronger and incorrect version of the tradition—that she is the seductive prostitute turned repentant sinner. This is an involved and complicated issue also and will be taken up at another point in the study. It is another striking example of how interpretation changes our perceptions of reality. It is curious that Delorme never refers to this text in John, but only the later verses (20:21-23) where the group present with the Risen Lord is less clearly defined.

This is but a sampling of the evidence that we shall discuss at another point in the study on a feminist reading of/for ministry according to the NT.

D.1.2. The prophets and the teachers (doctors) are frequently mentioned in the texts. Along with apostles they appear in the two lists mentioned above. Acts recognizes the presence and place of prophets in the Jerusalem community and gives importance to their role at Antioch (Ac 13:1-3). The prophets and teachers are identified by their names in this text: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. Later in Acts (21:8-10), four daughters of Philip who have “the gift of prophecy,” are not given names, though

¹²⁶ Brown, R.E. “Role of Women in the Fourth Gospel,” *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist): 188-189.

curiously, in the very next verse we have this, "...a prophet named *Agabus* came down from Judea"(10). Delorme makes reference to the text from chapter 13:1-3 several times, but doesn't cite the text from the text in chapter 21 in a single place in his work. Delorme writes that the prophets are held in great esteem among the brothers—both those who move about and those who remain in one community. In this case he has left out what I consider a significant text insofar as it is a clear reference to the diversity of the ministry he is writing about. Including these texts we can add that prophecy is manifest in men and women, those who move about and those who remain in one particular church.

In general, prophetic activities vary in many cases. They intervene in the assembly to instruct or interpret; they are inspired by the Spirit of God, and have a first place in certain churches (1 Cor 14:4-5, 29-33). The prophets' words might be about a mission, an individual, and a message of reproach or of consolation and encouragement. Their message is to manifest the will of God, and the ministry is always for the upbuilding of the church (1 Cor 14). My reading of the texts indicates that both men and women are given this ministry. 1Cor 12:7-11 speaks of a gift that seems to be available "for the common good," regardless of sex. In fairness to Delorme, one notes that he does cite these passages, but makes no direct point of this being a ministry shared by women as well as by men. To the contrary, he omits those texts that would clearly demonstrate this point.

Another obvious text on this subject that Delorme overlooks is that of Luke 2:36-38. Here we have a rare case in which a woman is both named and identified as a prophet. We are even given some detail of her life and a hint of her prophetic message. Anna, the prophet, meets Jesus and his parents in the temple and "began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem"(v.38). In Luke's second volume, Acts 2:1-21, he quotes the prophet Joel, "Your sons and daughters shall prophecy." There is nothing to suggest that women would not have been present in the group of disciples gathered in the house when the Holy Spirit filled them with prophetic speech on that Pentecost day. This demonstrates a point to which feminist criticism is sensitive and from which we can learn a new way of reading. In failing to mention the two texts mentioned above, where women are specifically identified as prophets, one is more inclined to simply overlook or simply never consider

the possibility that women would be among those gathered in the house when the Holy Spirit filled them with prophetic speech. The text Luke quotes from the prophet Joel loses something of its concreteness and power when we think of a room filled with men only and Peter then coming out with them to announce what is happening. This is an example of what happens when texts are interpreted through androcentric, patriarchal terms. We read and further interpret in a manner that truncates rather than enriches the meaning of the message. We overlook persons or perhaps misread meanings.¹²⁷ Another text that I find is a glaring omission in Delorme's discussion of prophecy, is that of 1 Cor. 11:2-16. Read in context, Paul takes for granted that women gave the service of prophesy in early communities and here, insists only that they veil their heads ("their hair be bound") when offering their prophetic message. However much the text is laden with sexist problems, it is about prophecy, and women are included. So, despite the fact that there is little mention of this point, it is clear that prophecy would have been a role or charism active among men and women in the community of believers.

Teachers complete the triad of ministries Delorme takes up according to the two lists (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11) mentioned earlier (although the latter of the two adds evangelists and pastors before naming teachers). In the Gospels, Jesus is often presented as teaching individuals, his disciples, or the crowds. He is recognized early on as a "teacher with authority" (Mk 1:22 //). Delorme suggests that the appearance of the title/role of teacher in the community of disciples is a manifestation of the development of the doctrinal reflection and the teaching that arises based on the word of the apostles given through Jesus Christ. Having received the Word, the community now needs instruction for living it out. Act 1:1-3 witnesses to the presence and importance of the prophets and the teachers. These are gifts/services that complement one another. The one who teaches is the disciple of "the one Teacher," Jesus. As to the feminist question: a text in Acts 18:26 indicates that both Priscilla and her husband taught Apollos of the Way. Delorme cites this passage as an example but makes no comment. Phoebe, a deacon and benefactor of Paul (Rom 16:1-2), was a prominent leader in the church at Cenchreae and most likely would have taught. The household led by Chloe (1 Cor 1:11) might easily

¹²⁷ More than once I have heard a man say (with some variations), "It's not that I don't *want* a woman for this job/role/ministry—I just never *thought* of having a woman do it".

have been under her tutelage or instruction. Along these fragmentary lines, other witnesses appear over time. Second century texts, or more likely legends, as one example, tell of a woman missionary, Thecla, who was a companion of Paul, and was commissioned to teach the word of God.¹²⁸

D.1.3. Another group of ministerial figures Delorme clusters together in a kind of general category. These figures are particular to certain writings, and like so much of the data we have already considered, details are scant and consistent patterns rare. Here we speak of itinerant missionaries or delegates of the churches sent from one place to another as apostles.” Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen are identified as prophets and teachers before Barnabas and Saul, also named among prophets and teachers, and are sent out by the Holy Spirit. At Salamis in the synagogues of the Jews they proclaim the word of God (Acts 13:5). Co-workers or collaborators in the labor of the gospel are frequently mentioned in the Pauline corpus (Rom 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 1:24; 8:23; Phil 2:25; 4:3; Col 4:11; 1Thess 3:2; Philem 1:24, and also in 3 Jn 8). Sometimes they are identified by name, as in the case of Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3), Urbanus, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, and Titus. At other places we have vague references to nameless “co-workers” for the Gospel. Regardless of the scant detail, clearly, “co-workers” include women and men. The vagueness of ministries manifests itself again in 1Th 5:12-13 where Paul tweaks our curiosity when he appeals to the community to “respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you . . .” The Pastorals introduce such titles as *presbyters*, *overseers*, and *deacons*. Long lists of required qualities and characteristics for those who fill these roles appear in these letters. What is not clear is if they existed anywhere outside these particular churches. Although we have seen the term *diakonos* in other, earlier texts, “servant” rather than “deacon” seems a less problematic and clearer description of what is meant. Presbyters, in other places translated as “elders,” may designate older, wise persons or a specific role. It is not entirely clear. To translate “overseers” as “bishops” is also problematic and probably anachronistic.

¹²⁸ McGinn, Sheila E. “The Acts of Thecla” chapter 38 in *Searching the Scriptures Vol. 2 A Feminist Commentary*. Edited by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994): 800-828.

What does Delorme do with such a melange of titles and functions? He concludes that a) the basis for and roots of these diverse activities simply remain undetermined and indeterminable; b) the best that can be said is that change and adaptation is present from the beginning of these various forms and activities within the community. Change and growth are necessary in each community and manifest themselves in the dynamic, fluid quality of these ministerial activities. The relation of all ministries seems to come back very often to the apostles—and their role in the communities. In this light Delorme concludes that there is a foundational ministry: that of the Holy Spirit at work in believers, most particularly in the apostles, to which I would add, those apostles Delorme identifies and those he does not!

D.2. A certain clarity or order begins to crystallize as the author next identifies three dimensions in the exercise of ministries. The first is that of the relationships with non-Christians and the mission/expansion of the church. Paul's letters and Acts provide many examples. Ministries are manifest in a second manner through the communion between the young churches themselves (Acts 8:14-17; 15; Gal 2:1-9, *et al*). The third dimension of the exercise of ministries appears in those glimpses we get of the internal relations within specific communities (1 Cor 12 and Mt 18, for example). At times these are problematic situations. We have only to look at the Johannine community as an example. Paul is often dealing with problems within particular communities, whether questions of justice or orthodox practice (1 Cor 1:10 ff; 11:17-34; Gal 3, for example).

Two points appear particularly relevant from a feminist critical perspective in Delorme's approach of grouping the diverse ministries according to these dimensions of their exercise. First is that even in this regrouping which Delorme has made in terms of the rapport with non-Christians in terms of the mission, the rapport between churches, and the relationships established within individual communities, there is no clear unity in this multiplicity of ministers and their activities. Not every role or title means the same thing in every case. He draws this conclusion but does not make any theological applications. An application I would look for might be how this study influences a biblical theological of ministry. Secondly, he concludes that the data does not give primacy/superiority to three special ministries or to the fact that they are exclusively male. The possibility of drawing conclusions contrary to this fact indicates an incomplete

or mis-reading of the NT texts. So how is it that we end up with a theology of ministry that gives primacy to apostles, prophets, and teachers? Even the latter two fall far behind the ministry of apostleship—which somehow has become equated with ecclesiastical hierarchy.

With the disappearance of the apostles in the early part of the Book of Acts, their ministry does not die, but it is taken up in new forms and in new persons ready to announce the gospel. They are not replaced as Judas in the opening section of the Book of Acts. In the missionary service and in the deepened communion within local churches, Delorme notes that the roles of a few—especially gifted for certain tasks—exist, but they are meaningless without the active participation of all the members. It is easy to understand why he maintains that a theology of church is the necessary complement to a theology of ministry.

D.2.1. In another of his successive approaches Delorme now reexamines the texts on the diverse ministerial figures in terms of common values. He identifies two major functions common to all, with individuals being more involved in one or the other function. These functions are named: the Service of the Word, and the Service of Communion (that is the unity of believers, the upbuilding of the church in Jesus Christ).

D.2.1.2. The priority of the Word and its proclamation is clearly central to the NT texts. Jesus begins his public life teaching and preaching. “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news’” (Mk 1:14). As Delorme notes, many of the verbs associated with the early followers of Jesus who are sent out—“to proclaim,” “to teach,” “to be witnesses to the word”—again places emphasis on the service of the Word. The aim is to gather the people and to announce the good news of the Gospel to them: God’s mysterious action with them and through them in Jesus. It is as Paul says of himself: “Christ has not sent me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel...” (1 Cor1:17). Those who receive it welcome its transforming power manifest in new relationship between brothers and sisters. The Word gathers the hearers into a community.

D.2.1.3. In the ministry of the service of communion we see in a general fashion the service of those who help direct, those who offer a service of assistance, and the role

of a presider. “But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them highly in love because of their work.” (1 Th 5:12). There are many similar verses Delorme cites: in the Pastoral letters, in 1 Peter, Acts and James for example, we know of the presence of presbyters, deacons, and overseers. At best, these roles or functions witness once again to great diversity and originality in the communities. The ministry of Stephen, Philippe, Apollos, and Phoebe as co-workers and servants is another evidence of leadership in the communities, but just what such service is, is difficult if not impossible to either define or typify. In most cases the meanings and roles mentioned in such texts are fragmentary and vague at best.

D.3. Given the ongoing interest and controversy (despite the Pope’s efforts to close any discussion on the topic) surrounding priestly ordination and institutional sacramental practices, particularly today in the Roman Catholic Church, a comment on Delorme’s brief treatment of the *Service of the Sacraments* should not be overlooked. Delorme identifies the actions of birthing, feeding, and reconciliation of relationships (my terms, not his) as organic to the life of the community. Is this a distinct service, he asks, able to be offered by a select few? One thing is certain: it is in the context of the Service of the Word and the Service of Communion, that baptism, eucharist, and the pardon of sins might be seen as services performed within but also by the assembly. Do the texts point to particular agents who perform these actions? As with many other similar questions, whether in regard to leadership or participation, most often the texts that refer to what we might call “sacramental” activities are not consistently or clearly described, especially in reference to the question of who does it and with and for whom. As to baptism, it is not necessarily the acknowledged “pillars” (James, Cephas and John in Gal 2:9) or other leaders (Peter, for example, in Acts 10:48) who “perform” the action. Paul, although he has baptized (1 Cor 1:14-16), he protests that his ministry is to be a missionary preacher rather than a local baptiser? (1 Cor 1:17). The same blurring of the question occurs when we examine texts that might refer to eucharist and reconciliation. In the synoptics (e.g., Lk 21:14 ff.), it would seem that the eucharistic table envisions Jesus and the apostles at the head. Yet, stand this text next to the earlier image described in 1 Cor 11:26, and it appears that it is the community who makes eucharist. The community

is encouraged to decide when to forgive or to exclude members who have broken with community, according to the Spirit of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 5:2-5; 2 Cor 2:6-10; Mt 18:10-35). Despite a lack of great detail, Delorme notes that order and some form of leadership are necessary to the life of the churches. Further along in his work he presents a model for determining what competencies or gifts are called for in the performance of these important communal activities.

Delorme's summary of this section in his study is simple and clear. For the Gospel to be served, he writes, there needs be a receptive community where the Word is lived out in brother/sisterly relationships of loving service to one another. These two basic activities, the service of the Word and that of Communion point to the common ground for unity. Although the New Testament data is characterized by a certain indeterminacy as regards the forms of service and the organization of ministries, at the same time it manifests a simple enough model in these fundamental functions that would seem to transcend time and cultures. With the possibility of the same fluidity of response to the basic call of Service to the Word and Service to Building Communion, the model appears to be applicable for the Church in any age. The mission, Delorme writes, is for the gathering of people (*le rassemblement*); the gathering is for the mission. It is difficult to stand Delorme's conclusions and their implications alongside the praxis that has developed over the centuries. It is hard to believe we have used the same texts to arrive at where we are today. The bulk of Delorme's work is in this first section, and now we are ready to move on.

D.4. A second major step in Delorme's work leads him to see in the vocabulary of the NT a global category from which we gain another perspective on the diverse ministerial activities enlivening the early church. The category is that of service. Thus he entitles this section: « *Serviteurs et service en Église* ». It is at this point that Delorme distinguishes between the terms "ministers/ministries" and "services"/"servants." As he says, these words are not equivalent, but given our historical situation, if we limited ourselves to the familiar terms of "ministers" and "ministries" from the beginning of this study, we would have been more restricted in our identification of relatively stable activities, functions and titles as "ministries." As he rightly suggests, contemporary experience for the most part would have us identifying these former terms with sacerdotal

categories. Perhaps until recently, the figure of the priest and his work consecrated through sacramental ordination has dominated our notion of ministry. Delorme is in favor of allowing for the less definite, more fluid notion of minister/ministries as we pursue the questions. Without it, we end up with this notion of “sacerdotal priesthood” (ministers of Jesus Christ) at one end of the spectrum and “laity” (non-ministers/followers of Jesus Christ) at the other end of the spectrum. Thus if we keep these terms more open, as Delorme suggests, there is much more room for seeing the plurality of “ministries” being carried out both in the early Christian communities and throughout history. In this way, such diverse expressions of ministry pose no threat to or diminishment of the importance of “sacerdotal priesthood.” A feminist hermeneutical approach affirms what Delorme concludes here. It is not interested in diminishing or destroying ministry; on the contrary, it is always in search of expanding and including all activity that will “build up the body of Christ.”

D.4.1. Delorme continues to read the texts by way of comparison, bringing together those elements that help us see a common ground for the figures or functions presented thus far. As mentioned earlier, the general function of service and servant works as an “umbrella” category. The Pauline writings frequently employ the term for service (*diakonein, diakonon, diakonia*). Delorme points out the fact that this is neither a characteristic word in the religious language of the period, nor is it typical of NT Greek. On one level it suggests a meaning around the notion of “table service.” We find this sense of it in texts such as Acts 19:22 and Philemon 13. However, more commonly, in the writings of Paul, we find the word associated with interdependence and assistance (service) in the community of believing brothers and sisters. As well, many individuals are identified as servants or for their service: Paul, Apollos, Phoebe, Timothy, and Epaphras, for example. Paul boasts of his ministry as one of service par excellence (2 Cor 6:3). The word *doulos* and its forms also appear in the New Testament. Jesus makes himself a *slave* out of obedience even unto death (Phil 2:7). This kind of self-giving for the “good of the many” plays itself out in the various forms of service the followers of Jesus offer to one another.

D.4.2. *Service* is linked with *authority*. The vocabulary for authority that manifests itself in Jesus’ public life and in that of his disciples is unlike any that is related

to socio-political or even religious language of the period. The “authorities” or “leaders of the synagogue” identified in the NT data, refer to heads of the State or of Judaism (as in Lk 12:11). The “authority” (*exousia*) identified with Jesus and his disciples is marked not by political power or social status (10:1 //; Mk 3:15; Mt 28:18). It is authority that shows itself in service. Jesus’ power and authority is consistently identified with service. It is this power and authority that is shared with his disciples. Those sent by Jesus are given authority by virtue of the Word they carry to others (Lk 10:16). John’s Gospel gives a most striking example in the portrait of foot washing (Jn 13:1-16). Any power or authority shared by Paul or Peter or other members of the early communities is that exercised through the power of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen—the servant who lays down his life for his friends.

Not all services carry the same weight of authority in the communities of believers; not all servants hold the same place in the churches. Some within the community command greater authority than others do. Paul instructs, directs, corrects and at times sends “orders” based on his authority. He appeals for respect for “those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you” (1 Thess 5:12). Similarly, the letter to the Hebrews calls for submission and obedience to the “leaders” who are keeping watch and who will give an account of souls (Heb 13:17). Paul, likewise, admonishes Titus to “speak, exhort, and reprove with all authority” (Ti 2:15).

D.5. Anticipating this final major section of his study, « *Le service de l’oeuvre de Dieu au profit des hommes* », Delorme describes the “agents” identified in the first step as those he called « *serviteurs* ». The service they render is that of the “work of God for the benefit of God’s people.” This is a work accomplished in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and is continued in and through the church. This final section, which also is moving Delorme closer to his second major question as to the unity in all of this, is to look for an underlying principle that holds together the diverse elements.

D.5.1. Such a principle, he concludes, is the very work of God. It is the action of God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit and continuing through the life of the community. It has a dynamic, double aspect: both a past and a present expression. Above all, this is evident in the diversity of the gifts/competencies given to women and men to participate in this divine action. Delorme sees its explanation expressed most clearly in Paul’s words

to the Corinthian community. “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself . . . we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us...we work together with God . . .” (2 Cor 5:18-6:1).

D.5.2. Once again, Delorme cautions against generalizing or harmonizing the multi-layered patterns of service uncovered. And in order to counter this temptation, he employs what he calls a simple *grille d'analyse*. The model he proposes follows certain elements of the work of A. J. Greimas.¹²⁹ He applies it not to the titles he has delineated—the diverse types of servants—but uses it rather to determine the type of competencies necessary to be able to render a particular service. He notes that every ministerial activity is accomplished as the service of God for the benefit of God’s people. This supposes the capability (*une compétence*) or qualification, which makes it possible. This competence is received with a charge or commission (*un mandat*) and is at the basis of all service in the church. Someone (*un destinateur*) gives the mandate to or for an individual or a group (*les destinataires*). When the commission is accepted, the person to whom it is given has a contract (*un contrat*) to perform the service. It is made official (*une investiture*) when both competence and contract are present. Delorme proceeds to apply this model to the triad of apostles, prophets, and doctors (teachers)—in part because of the frequency of their appearance and activities in the texts.

Those sent to announce the good news (*les envoyés/apostles*) are always linked to the revelation Christ made to them in his resurrection. It is an “investiture,” Delorme says, that is very different from what was expected and not totally unlike that of the prophets of the Hebrew Testament. To welcome this revelation is to recognize the mission and competence of the apostles. The investiture of the apostles after Easter implies an original relationship between them and the church. The mandate concerns the people they are to evangelize. This then brings them into being as church. But the church comes into being not only from the work of those strictly called apostles. The competence and investiture is given to many others. Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:6) “he [the Risen Christ] appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at

¹²⁹ Delorme, « Je suis particulièrement redevable à A.J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale*, Larousse, 1966; *Du sens*, Seuil, 1970.

one time. . . .” Acts too, recounts the one hundred twenty persons among the believers before whom Peter stood (Acts 1:15). On the day of Pentecost the Spirit is given to all present (Acts 2:1-4,11b). The evangelist Luke speaks of the women who came to the tomb (23:55), the pilgrims at Emmaus (24:13-32), and the companions of the eleven who gathered together saying, “ The Lord has risen indeed” (Lk. 24:33). So the church and the apostles receive at the same time the capacity or competence to fulfill the mandate that defines them. The church itself (*le destinateur*) has an apostolic mission. Not all are apostles in the same way, some are envoys and some are *destinataires*. Delorme sees a correlation that exists between the apostles and the church, which corresponds to that which links the Twelve and the disciples in the church.

The prophets are, in general, the organs of communicating a Word given from the Spirit (*le destinateur*). They prophesy in a particular situation for a particular hearing in order to convey an understanding of the Gospel and a concrete expression of the Divine will. In prayer, they interpret tongues or actions of grace. There is no particular investiture for prophecy except in the case of the Book of Revelation under the form of the vision (1:9-20; 10:1-11). The prophets’ mandate, as it were, comes from within the community (which is also *le destinataire*). The apostles and the community recognize the Spirit moving in those prophets who practice discernment in the name of the Word of God. This is the same Spirit, who lives in the community and is the source of the gifts given to all but to some members in particular.

The teachers/doctors mentioned in 1 Cor 12 are established by God. Delorme finds no investiture texts for the teachers, as such, but the competence is recognized first off as a gift of the Spirit. It is the capacity to instruct in the Service of the Word of God. Like the apostles and prophets, the teachers are established gifts given to the Church by God for its life and growth in Christ. In the letters to the Ephesians, Hebrews, to Timothy, and Titus, the pastoral charge of those responsible for the community (the meaning of which is vague), does seem to include teaching.

As for the detail of “the laying on of hands,” we know that it was a rite practiced in Judaism to ordain or invest the teachers. Delorme points out that beyond this Judaic practice, there is no clear meaning or consistent carry over of the practice of the laying on of hands (*epi-tithenai tas cheiras*) in the Christian communities. In Acts, where it is

mentioned five times, it is linked to the Holy Spirit and the reception of baptism. Acts 19:5-6 is a striking example. Those present with Paul at Ephesus are baptized in Jesus' name and have "hands laid on them." Not unlike the scene at Pentecost, they experience the power of the Holy Spirit and "spoke in tongues and prophesied." In Acts 8:16-19, Peter and John are sent to the believers in Samaria. "They prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit". Through prayer and "the laying on of hands," they receive the Holy Spirit. The group of Seven are chosen by the community in Acts 6:1-6 ("men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom") to care for the needs of the Hellenist widows. Once the community had selected them, they stood "before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them." In all these texts except that of Saul's conversion story (Acts 9:1-19), it is the apostles who perform the action, always in the presence of the community, whether large or small in number. Ananias in the case of Saul, "laid his hands" on him and his sight was restored, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17-18). The presence of the Holy Spirit is perhaps the only consistent factor we can identify from this evidence.¹³⁰

Paul's writings never use the term *presbyteroi*, yet they appear in the Pastorals and are occasionally associated with the "laying on of hands." In 1 Timothy, for example, Paul encourages Timothy to teach and exhort, "not neglecting the gift that is in you which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders" (1 Tim 4:14). Curiously in 2 Timothy, the same Paul addresses Timothy to "rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim 1:6). Whether through the laying on of hands *by* the council of elders (*presbyteroi*) (1Tim 4:14) or by prayer and fasting in the appointment of elders (Acts 14: 23), the investiture of the Spirit is affirmed socially where the community and certain individuals together play the role of human *destinateur*. Once again, the role of the community is affirmed. For example, in

¹³⁰ Robert F. O'Toole discusses this in his article in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary Vol.3* Edited by David Noel Freedman. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p.48-49. O'Toole points out that in the NT this practice relates to the assignment to a given task, baptism, and the Spirit -- as Delorme has also demonstrated. But here O'Toole also reminds us the laying on of hands, particularly in the Gospels, is related to healing and blessing. Despite the variety in possible meanings for the term/action, there are common characteristics O'Toole says that we can identify. "The context is always religious, as the frequent mention of prayer demonstrates; and obviously the laying on of hands is a symbolic action". p. 48. See also, Richard Dillon's commentary on "The Acts of the Apostles", *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* Raymond E. Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, Eds. (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) Art. 44:75-79.

the case of the Seven referred to earlier, the community is not simply the recipient of the service but is also able to discern the gifts of the Spirit. Delorme notes that the community “gives itself its servants and at the same time receives them.”

From a feminist point of view looking at the meaning and practice of the “laying on of hands,” there is something further to be said. As Delorme’s analysis clearly emphasizes, the role of the community comes into play in this practice as well as in every action of service. Also, the fact that its origin and meaning in the Christian community is hazy at best makes it difficult to draw hard and fast conclusions as to its interpretation. However, somehow over time we seem to have gotten the little we know about the “laying on of hands” and its significance to the early Christian community, turned around and associated with an institutionalized and official action. Although the Greek is the same in these texts, out of ten different translations I verified, the New Revised Standard Version translates the text from 1 Tim 5:22 as “do not ordain anyone hastily.” Despite the fact that ordination does not always or necessarily mean sacerdotal ordination, the connotations that this contemporary translation leave, would strike many readers as a text about ordination of priests. There is no evidence for this in the texts we’ve looked at. To speak about “laying on of hands” raises a red flag for feminist readers who are suspicious of texts that have become in practice much bigger and more official and hierarchical than they appear in the biblical record.

Of utmost importance in Delorme’s thesis is the recognition that these distinctions as ministers are of secondary importance in relation to the fact that it is by their functions/competencies that the three come together and can be exercised. The divine gift is recognized by its fruits and is expressed in an act of social investiture. The title of “minister” has become institutionalized, yet once again, what makes the difference in the life of the community is not so much the title as it is in the gift that is bestowed and itself bestows the competency.

The persisting debate around the terms “charisms” vs. “institution” is fuelled by the fact that “charism” is borrowed from the Paul’s writings and is thus often thought of in Pauline terms alone. “Institution,” on the other hand, has negative nuances associated with it and is rarely linked with biblical vocabulary. Delorme concludes that in the biblical texts it is not the question of charism vs. institution that presents itself. What is

important, he believes, is the relationship between divine investiture in full human participation with the work of God on behalf of all people and the social action arising from and in response to the divine gift of the Spirit in the Church. The roles or actions of those who receive the mandate do not oppose one another—regardless of their identification as “charism” or “institution.”

In conclusion, Delorme refuses the question “unity or diversity” of ministries in the New Testament and speaks rather in terms of “unity in diversity”. First, he sees the multiplicity and diversity in these ministries and ministers as a sign of vitality. Secondly, the ministerial figures that appear in these texts are always figures of service. Their service is patterned after that of Christ. Authority, as well, accompanies their service and is also exercised after the manner of Jesus Christ: in obedience to God for the good of the many. Third, Delorme concludes that there is continuity and discontinuity, as it were, in the expressions of service of God on behalf of men and women. Within the texts themselves we have seen the development and evolution of Jesus’ mission and expression of service as it is taken up after the Resurrection. When needs are met, sometimes ministries change or end. Jesus’ activity and mission as presented in the Gospels, expresses itself in new forms and applies itself differently in different communities. It is in this sense that Delorme identifies divine activity in the community as having about it a sense of past and present. This suggests to me the dynamic and creative quality of the Spirit’s presence in every community, in every epoch. In Delorme’s fourth conclusion he returns to the necessity of receiving the competence to perform a ministry. There are many types of competencies, but they always arise from the Spirit within the church. The work of the apostles takes on primacy insofar as all the ministries that evolve come after the birth of the church that the apostles have gathered through their mission of preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit. This stresses the importance of apostolic ministry at the source of the church’s life. A certain caution is called for at this point. A feminist critique is uneasy with, in fact, rejects a conclusion that identifies this apostolic ministry as then somehow above all other ministries. Delorme does not suggest this, but he does come back to the fact that their authority continues even after they are gone. Throughout his study he stresses the important role of the community. A feminist critique wants to see the implications of this in the playing out of this vision of church. A hermeneutics of

suspicion is cautious with words like “primacy” and “official.” The affirmation of ministries does not confer an authority based on power. Any authority that accompanies the work of God expressed through ministerial figures or their activity manifests itself in service. There is nothing in Delorme’s analysis that directly leads to the image of a pyramid of ministries or a power-based diversity. The texts demonstrate that it is an ordered church but not that it is a hierarchical church. I have tried to fill out the ministerial picture with texts that Delorme has not included. This is to underscore that it is an inclusive, universal church that crosses boundaries of race, sex, and class, not only in membership, but also in the expressions of service within itself. It is a church that offers service and calls people to be servants without distinction based on any measure of value or hierarchy. As Delorme has insisted, who does what is based on the competency or qualification of the individual. This approach provides a helpful contrast to one that makes distinctions based on whether we are dealing with charisms or established/institutionalized ministries.

The feminist eye sees in all of this an image of church that is a circle. There is complementarity in all the services rendered to God for the good of the body. Paul’s reminder in 1 Corinthians 12 takes on fresh meaning when we think of this vast diversity of ministries carried on within this interdependent body that is the church. It is a giant step from this vision of church to that of a church that expresses its mission informed by notions of the “primacy of Peter” and the “first place” of the apostles that became over time such a central force in shaping the theology of ministry and its praxis. Delorme makes a further reinforcement of the point that though the apostles disappear from the scene, the threefold service of which they were a part, continues on in the life of the church. This, he concludes, demonstrates the Church’s on-going dependence on the mission of the apostles. In his conclusion he identifies the “laying on of hands” as the rite that manifests the dependence of the church on apostolic authority. Yet the texts have indicated that it is not the apostles alone who perform this action. Delorme does not mention that according to the texts, prayer and fasting are also ways of confirming the competence and giving the mandate to perform a particular ministry. Unless I misread his earlier discussion of this rite, this is not a clear or consistent pattern for passing on apostolic authority. Those individuals we have identified as apostles earlier in this work:

Prisca and Aquilla, Phoebe, Junia among others, were active before Paul was with them. There is no indication that they had an investiture such as “laying on of hands,” yet they stand solidly within the circle of apostolic authority, it seems to me. A further point Delorme does not make clearly enough, from my perspective, in this biblical theological essay is how theologically, we have become a church that identifies the papal and episcopal hierarchy as the direct line of apostolic succession. What is the biblical basis for this jump?

Finally, Delorme comes full circle in the recognition that the unity of the NT manifests itself in its very diversity. One part of the NT writing, one text, does not neutralize or silence another. It is between and with all the diversity in the writings, Delorme says, that the unity expresses itself. The same is true with the ministries he has examined. The dialectic is between God and humanity. Unity and diversity are a part of both sides of the equation. This is a hopeful and idealistic conclusion to a fine study. However, even Delorme recognizes the fragility of the unity because of the human tendency to see diversity as division. The final word from a feminist analysis is to affirm the principles that Delorme holds up, but to reject the many ways in which the interpretation of these biblical principles betray the very message they convey. As I have tried to point out, even in this fine work of Delorme, his selection of texts and the interpretation he gives to certain actions make a difference in the way we experience and live out the diversity of ministries according to the NT. There can be no real dialectic¹³¹ until all the voices in these texts join in the conversation. Feminist criticism makes the effort to see and listen anew to these texts; it questions which texts are selected, which are omitted, and how they are interpreted. I have tried to join Delorme in his effort to answer the question of diversity and unity in NT ministries by adding those voices that were silent or silenced, particularly those of women.

¹³¹ *Webster's Dictionary* defines the word *dialectic* as “the art or practice of debate or conversation by which the truth of a theory or opinion is arrived at logically” and the juxtaposition or interaction of conflicting ideas, forces, etc.” (New York: Random House, 1992).

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« Diversité et unité des ministères d'après le Nouveau Testament »

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*Underscored verses are those cited more than one time throughout the work.

Chapter Four

FEMINIST CRITIQUE IN CONVERSATION WITH DAVID L. BARTLETT

Ministry in the New Testament [Overtures to Biblical Theology Series], (Fortress Press: Minneapolis 1993).

A. AUTHOR'S GOAL IN *MINISTRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT*

In the opening chapter of this comprehensive and challenging book, the author discusses the understandings of and challenges to ministry according to official church documents from the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. He briefly considers other scholarship on the subject. These writings become the author's point of entry for joining the conversation he wants his book to express. He writes for an audience of ministers, priests and seminarians—whom he refers to as “practical theologians.” Yet he adds that his even deeper hope is to truly further the conversation not only with those engaged in ministry, but also with those who anticipate entering ministry. It is a conversation about how ministry is practiced, understood, and might be developed in all its diverse expressions today.

Bartlett's goal, in part, is to examine aspects of the ecclesiological formulations of *Lumen Gentium* and *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* from the work of a few theologians and clerics who have also sought to understand and broaden the implications of those documents. Similar to Raymond Brown and Jean Delorme's works, Bartlett argues for the diversity in understandings and expressions of New Testament ministries. He reminds the reader that the diverse visions of ministry arise not only out of different understandings of the gospel, but also out of different cultural, social, and historical situations. This too, is a point of agreement with the two other authors examined prior to the present work. If read with openness and care, the book brings one to a greater certainty that the unity of the church does not depend on a uniform style of religious leadership. My analysis of Bartlett's study will place greater emphasis on the Roman Catholic documents, theologians, and interpretations than on the Protestant data. A point with which I am in full agreement is in Bartlett's suggestion that “it may be that we shall

discover that, in our quite new situation, what we need to learn from the New Testament is not how to combine old traditions but how to adapt the ancient visions to our own needs.”¹³²

The author’s idea is that by examining some of the major strains in the NT we will find clues that help us to judge and shape our understanding of ministry today. If we hope to move toward a clearer, perhaps more unified (more biblical?) vision of ministry, it is important that it be shaped by our own time as well as by the gospel’s claim. To this I would add that “shaped by our own time,” also means shaped by our own experience—the positive and negative dimensions of church, ministry, and the gospel itself. “Shaped by our own time,” means shaped by a time in which women are taking a place in every public sphere of life, religion and religious scholarship notwithstanding. I would insist further, that the “gospel’s claim” be clarified adequately to be able to hear each individual NT voice in this conversation. Here I return specifically to women’s part in the conversation that has been neglected and shut out in so many circles for so many years. I might add at this point that of the three works I have treated in this chapter (Part Two), Professor Bartlett’s goal is by far the one I find most encouraging, hopeful, and most in accord with the goal of feminist work on the topic.

B. AUTHOR’S PRESUPPOSITIONS and METHOD

B.1. Bartlett writes that Scripture “ought to be our guide in matters of faith and practice. Commitment to Scripture comes with membership in the Christian community. The Bible is the charter out of which every church should read its life.”¹³³ He concedes immediately, however, that this does not mean that Scripture is the answer book to many contemporary questions, or that any “answers” scripture does provide, may necessarily be the same answer suggested in every text of the NT. Bartlett calls his interpretation of Scripture conversational. The Scriptures are in conversation with themselves; for example, note the striking differences in how Paul and Matthew understand Torah, apostleship, or even church order. Just so, Bartlett adds his own contemporary understandings to the conversation. In a certain sense, in this way Bartlett circles the

¹³² Bartlett, *Ministry in the New Testament*, 19.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 21.

question of the authority of Scripture rather than taking a clear position on the issue. He identifies his preference to reflect “on the nature of scriptural authority rather than to argue a particular doctrine of inspiration.” Is this a neat way of avoiding the question, or is it simply a wise response? For reasons both personal and practical, he asks not how Scripture originated but how it can be used faithfully. Once again, I find myself very much in agreement with this presupposition. My application from a feminist point of view will lead to at least some different questions and/or interpretations, as we shall see. My consideration of texts in addition to those Bartlett has selected may also color the picture differently.

B.2. Bartlett describes his method as selective and typological. The principle of selection is easily stated though not so easily explicated. “I shall look at those scriptural passages that provide special help in moving toward a contemporary understanding of ministry. Some of the passages will suggest directions for development; some may represent approaches to be shunned. None will be studied simply out of historical curiosity.”¹³⁴ Adopting an historical sequence, his method is to survey the major sections of NT literature. Thus, he begins with Paul’s undisputed letters, then continues with the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, John, and the Acts of the Apostles, and concludes with the Pastoral Epistles. By attending to the latest scholarly contributions on questions of dating and setting of different documents, Bartlett presents a full spectrum of diverse practices and theology/theologies of ministry in the historical and literary context of each block of literature.

Like Jean Delorme, Bartlett speaks of his method as typological and looks “not only at the title” used for various offices or functions in the early church, but also at specific texts, narrative stories, and symbols. These may give some clues to the ways in which the first-century Christian communities understood leadership. His assumption is that these may provide models for our present understanding and practice, but only typologically. For example, he points out that the apostle is not a bishop, and John the elder is not a member of any official presbytery. “No one in the New Testament went to seminary, and if there was real ordination for New Testament church leaders, it did not

¹³⁴ Ibid., 20.

function as ours does or is apt to do.”¹³⁵ The New Testament offers rich images, symbols, types, and models that can help us determine what indeed is a biblical ministry for our own time. It must be one led by the Spirit but informed by the word and interpreted out of contemporary experience as well. Bartlett challenges the church today to take a bold look at the New Testament. He comments that “every church structure we discover in or behind the New Testament documents stands far to the left of establishment American churches today—Catholic and Protestant alike.”¹³⁶

C. FEMINIST PRESUPPOSITIONS AND QUESTIONS

Just as Bartlett speaks of wearing the glasses of a “free-church male cleric” who has been primarily occupied with life in an academic setting, I too wear a specific pair of glasses. As a Christian feminist I am interested in broadening our understanding of ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, in particular. I read the biblical texts with an eye to seeing the ways in which the texts lead us to something other than a two-tiered, ordained male clergy and laity, understanding of ministry. I read the biblical texts asking who is in this text—speaking or being spoken to or about. I ask of the biblical texts: who is acting, who is present, and who is absent. I review David Bartlett’s writing through a feminist lens. This means reading both as a white, Roman Catholic woman of North America, and as someone interested in finding women’s involvement in ministry and the service of the gospel at the time of Jesus and the period of NT writing. I ask how a text is being interpreted. What can we conclude definitively and what must be left as an open question? I look at the author’s work in this book to see whether women are visible, present, or even spoken of. Does Professor Bartlett leave us with the assumption that the people involved in these texts are all male? Does he write for a male audience or for an audience of women and men?

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁶ John Donahue, S.J. commenting in the Editor’s Forward to *Ministry* on Bartlett’s observation, x.

D. BARTLETT'S PROCEDURE and FEMINIST RESPONSE

As in the earlier critiques, I follow Bartlett's study step by step and respond with questions, alternative responses, interpretations or emphases. His procedure, as mentioned above, is to take the NT data in historical sequence, asking the same five questions of the literature he is examining. I respond within each section. At times, I refer to the contemporary implications for women as Bartlett himself speaks of writing theology that is shaped by our times and experience. Women's experience is of great importance in my reading and reacting to Bartlett's work.

D.1. CONTEMPORARY VIEW OF MINISTRY

My attention in this section is given primarily to the Roman Catholic document from Vatican II and its implications for ministerial applications. While I will look at the Protestant document written by the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, my predominant experience and critique come from and for a Roman Catholic perspective. Because so much contemporary theology of ministry has fallen back on these documents and the study of them, I think it is worth our time to look in some detail at Bartlett's treatment of these texts.

D.1.1. OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

Lumen Gentium (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), written during the Second Vatican Council, sought to define for Catholics, in a positive way the role of ordained clergy in their relationship to the community of faithful church people. For Protestants, the study document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, published by the World Council of Churches, sought to provide the grounds for conversation as the various Protestant and Orthodox churches move toward greater unity. Documents, Catholic and Protestant, and the works written in response to these documents are exceedingly helpful as a means toward understanding the church's self-definition and as aids toward self-understanding for clergy and seminarians. They also provide grist for feminist research to raise questions, challenges, and perspectives that can enrich our understanding of church, gospel and the ministries that arise from it.

D.1.1.1. LUMEN GENTIUM

Lumen Gentium signals a change in the church's approach to ministry. It speaks of ministry first in terms of the whole people of God and not of the ordained clergy. At

first glance this is hopeful, new, and encouraging for the lay reader. The emphasis points to Christ as the sole Teacher and Shepherd. The Church is a sheepfold whose one and necessary door is Christ (Jn. 10:1-10). She is a flock of which God Himself foretold that He would be the Shepherd (cf. Is. 40: 11, Ez. 34: 11 ff.). Although guided by human shepherds, her sheep are nevertheless ceaselessly led and nourished by Christ Himself, the Good Shepherd and the Prince of Shepherds (cf. Jn. 10: 11; 1 Pet. 5:41), who gave His life for the sheep (cf. In. 10:11-15). (LG 1, 6). The document highlights as well that priesthood belongs to the whole people of God and is not exclusively given to ordained clergy (LG 2, 10). Nonetheless, when the Council Fathers (literally) write of the gifts that the Spirit has given to the whole church, the order in which these gifts are mentioned suggests a priority of authority and value: "The Spirit . . . furnishes and directs her [the church] with various gifts both hierarchical and charismatic, and adorns her with the fruits of His grace (cf. Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:4; Gal. 5:22)" (LG 1, 4). Bartlett himself observes this shift in emphasis. Obviously, it has implications for a feminist critique of the question of ministry. How can hierarchy result from the gifts of a Spirit that is like the wind? "It blows where it chooses, and . . . you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:8). The Spirit of God is given without measure (Jn 3:34). This seems a contradiction of the biblical witness.

The Council document goes on to say that the bishops have primary authority for the life of the church because they succeed the apostles to whom Christ himself gave special authority. Foremost among the bishops is the pope, the bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter, who was foremost among the apostles (LG 3, 18). The bishops are responsible for *administering all* (italics mine) the gifts of official ministry within the church: preaching, officiating at the sacraments, teaching, and governing. Through the bishops, Christ himself preaches the word and administers the Eucharist and the other sacraments (LG 3,21). What can one say in response to this? The words, "administering" and "all" in this context are very problematic. Gifts generally are "given" rather than "administered." And I find no biblical evidence that supports Jesus Christ "administering the Eucharist and the other sacraments." Bartlett does not comment on this text from the Council document.

“Associated with their bishop in a spirit of trust and generosity, priests make him present in a certain sense in the individual local congregations of the faithful, and take upon themselves, as far as they are able, his duties and concerns, discharging them with daily care” (LG 3, 28; see also 3, 21). Clearly, the authority of priests derives from their bishops and is not independent of episcopal authority. Indeed, priests serve as the apostles of the apostles, ambassadors for the bishop. This commentary from the document is reminiscent of an early Christian text in which Mary Magdalene is called “the apostle to the apostles.” She wasn’t sent by the apostles, but to them. *Lumen Gentium* continues on the topic of priests. Above all, it points out, the priest’s responsibility is to preside at the Eucharist. Here, as host at the meal, the priest represents the presence of Christ himself (LG 2, 10). In a celebration where community is so visibly, tangibly central, I ask in response to this line from the document, and whom does the community represent?

“At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons, upon whom hands are imposed ‘not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service’” (LG 3, 29). Hierarchy manifests itself again in this brief mention of deacons. Yet I wonder, isn’t all ministry intended to be service in Jesus’ own ministry?

At its closing, *Lumen Gentium* returns once more to the role of the laity. “For their sacred pastors know how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the entire church”. And how is this evident? Of what kind of “welfare” are we speaking? “Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary, they understand that it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their services and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in the common undertaking with one heart” (LG 4, 30).¹³⁷

Bartlett comments that it is perhaps “not only Protestant bias that detects in these lines the sense that the hierarchy is called to condescend to share some of its proper ministry with lay people.” The further discussion of the proper role of laity in church reinforces the inference. “An individual layman, by reason of the knowledge,

¹³⁷ I am reminded of a new University chaplain who told a veteran female campus minister as regards her role in the community, “Well, yes but you must see that I’m like the big shepherd and you are like a little shepherd.”

competence, or outstanding ability which he may enjoy, is permitted and sometimes *even obliged* (italics mine) to express his opinion on things which concern the good of the Church” (LG 4,37). One is inclined to say, “Thank you. Members are not fools or children and members make up the church no less than its leaders.” Women are pointing out this condescension over and over. The married deacon’s program is just one example of where the attitudes and inequities manifest themselves!

A document as important as *Lumen Gentium* provides an understanding of the church and its ministry that is clear and consistent, Bartlett observes. And because it presents a particular Roman Catholic perspective, it also raises some questions. The author identifies five of his questions.

First, what is the appropriate manner to use Scripture as a resource for understanding church and ministry? *Lumen Gentium* draws from every portion of the New Testament to provide illustration or proof texts for its points. Using the Scripture in this manner implies that there is a uniform understanding of ministry in the New Testament and that every writer in the New Testament can be used to support the vision of every other writer. Bartlett disagrees, as do I, and sees different biblical texts suggesting different and sometimes conflicting visions of ministry. As with Delorme, Bartlett resists the temptation to simply force them into one homogenized understanding.

Second, Bartlett questions the relationship between biblical texts about the twelve or the apostles, and the institution of the bishop. This, surely, is a question with which I identify. *Lumen Gentium* assumes that bishops are direct descendants of the apostles, and that what Scripture says about the apostles, the church can affirm about its bishops. This is a question that demands some exegetical attention. If such attention is given, to whom is it given? Who can hear “bad news” in terms of the biblical data as it stands along side contemporary praxis?

Third, what is the relationship between the baptized assembly, the people of God, and its leaders? Is the authority of the clergy the sole source of direction and instruction for the people, or do clergy receive some authority from the whole body of Christ? Does the New Testament give substantiation for a hierarchical understanding of church leadership, or is there evidence for a greater reciprocity between people and leaders?

Fourth, Since the New Testament never explicitly mentions any particular group of Christians to be responsible for presiding at Eucharist, how are we to evaluate the claim of *Lumen Gentium* that the fundamental role of the ordained clergy is to officiate at the Eucharist? The New Testament presents a great variety of roles and functions for specific church leaders. Who is to preside at the Eucharist is never clearly defined.

Fifth, there is little information on the selection and appointment of leaders in the New Testament. The significance of the laying of hands is not consistent or clear in the NT texts, as we discussed in our response to Jean Delorme's work. How does the understanding of the nature of ordination in *LG* relate to this reality?

D.1.1.2. BAPTISM, EUCHARIST, AND MINISTRY

The document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (hereafter referred to as *BEM*), was written by the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, as an attempt to provide "theological support for the efforts the churches are making toward unity" (*BEM*, preface, 1). Wisely, and rightly, the document, whose aim is to promote unity, looks both in the NT and in church tradition for insights that might provide the basis of agreement.

For our purposes, both the section on baptism and the section on the Eucharist are relevant, since both have implications for the meaning of Christian ministry. In its study of baptism, the document states "Baptism is normally administered by an ordained minister, though in certain circumstances others are allowed to baptize" (*BEM*, "Baptism," 5, 22, 16). The presentation that follows, on Eucharist, includes a paragraph that raises significant questions for our examination:

In the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ gathers, teaches and nourishes the Church. It is Christ who invites to the meal and who presides at it. . . . In most churches, an ordained minister signifies this presidency. The one who presides at the Eucharistic celebration in the name of Christ makes clear that the rite is not the assemblies' own creation or possession; the Eucharist is received as a gift from Christ living in his Church. The minister of the Eucharist is the ambassador who represents the divine initiative and expresses the connection of the local community with other local communities in the universal Church

(*BEM*, “Eucharist,” 3, 29, 27). Bartlett notes that in both sacraments—Baptism and Eucharist—the document suggests but does not require that an ordained person preside at the sacrament. What is interesting is that when the ordained person does preside at Eucharist, he or she presides as a representative of the divine initiative, and therefore to some degree as a representative of Christ himself. It makes me wonder who represents Christ when an ordained person does not preside?

The document gives three reasons for the need for ordained ministers. First, the ordained ministers are “publicly and continually responsible for pointing to [the church’s] fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ.” Second, according to the document, ordained ministers provide a focus for the church’s unity. This I find puzzling. It is so similar to the Roman Catholic position on explaining the need for ordained ministers. Is not Christ the center and focal point of unity for Christians? Third, “The Church has never been without persons holding specific authority and responsibility” (*BEM*, 2A, 8, 31). To this I would ask, does this necessarily mean that the authority and responsibility of all baptized members is somehow less significant or important as regards the unity and functioning of the Body of Christ, the Church? When the document talks about the role of the clergy, especially as regards proclamation and sacrament, it speaks of the necessary interrelationship of clergy and people. The next passage, on the Eucharist, suggests the relationship between the clergyperson as focus of the church’s unity and the clergyperson as representative of Christ. Once again, one might raise questions. However, here the claim is explicitly descriptive rather than prescriptive (cf. *BEM* “Ministry” 2A, 14, 33).

Section 3, “The Forms of the Ordained Ministry,” in *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* affirms the church’s threefold form of ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. The authors of this document recognize that there are a variety of patterns of church leadership witnessed in the New Testament. The threefold pattern of ministry, they acknowledge, did not emerge until the second and third centuries. The identity and subsequent responsibilities of the three offices have evolved from those early centuries until now. It states clearly, nevertheless, that “the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it” (*BEM*, “Ministry,” 3, 22, 38-39; see also 3, 19-21, 37-38).

Many laity, at least in the Roman Catholic tradition, would not agree with such a blanket statement. In fact, it clearly is an uncertain, if not unsupportable, claim for many Roman Catholics. How does it see an exclusively male, threefold ministry, as a “means” for achieving unity? Unity with/among whom? Most mainline Protestant churches have allowed women to share in this three-fold ministry. I fail to see the logic in concluding that this system, admittedly a departure from the variety witnessed in the NT, itself expresses unity with the non-ordained, non-clerical, yet baptized members of congregations.

More directly, and more directly, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* argues that every church needs to maintain some form of *episkope* (oversight), though it does not go so far as to argue that each church needs *episkopoi*, persons designated as “bishops” (*BEM*, “Ministry,” 3A, 24, 39).

In its conclusion, the document calls both men and women to help build a more comprehensive ministry. So reminiscent of Roman Catholic statements, *BEM* finally leaves open for further discussion and conciliation the issue of whether women should be admitted to the ordained ministry (*BEM*, “Commentary,” in “Ministry,” 2D, 18, 36-37). This seems to imply that ministry is expressed solely in the aforementioned three-fold system of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, and that being primarily for men only.

In response to his readings Bartlett poses five challenges or questions that he determines essential to the conversation:

1. Both documents prompt questions as to the use of Scripture. Claims about the nature of ministry are drawn from Paul, from the Pastoral Epistles, from Luke-Acts, from Matthew, and from Mark. Does the attempt to bring together such diverse scriptural witnesses while omitting others—perhaps inadvertently—do justice to the particularity and irrefutability of the New Testament witness to the meaning of ministry?¹³⁸ As regards, Bartlett’s question, the signs of increasing rigidity and further hierarchical entrenchment, in the Roman Catholic Church, at least, suggest to me that the question is a non-question or a rhetorical one at best.

¹³⁸I would suggest we also look at the omissions, and ask on what basis are texts included or not included? Which texts made it into the biblical canon and which didn’t, and why? How have we arrived at this three-fold office of ministry?

2. Even with a somewhat modest disclaimer, Bartlett recognizes the assumption that once again arises: the primary function of the ordained clergy person is to preside at the Eucharist. Again he points to the fact that New Testament evidence for such a special role is scant.¹³⁹

3. The suggestion that some particular subgroup of Christians (the ordained ministers) is peculiarly representative of the lordship of Christ and the unity of the church at the very least needs scrutiny in the light of the New Testament witnesses.¹⁴⁰

4. The claim that the apostles appointed early church officers, ministers, is at least open to discussion. Paul's Letter to the Romans, for instance, clearly recognizes church leaders who simply could not have been appointed by him.¹⁴¹ How was their authority recognized? As we continue to see a variety of ways in which church leaders in different congregations were chosen, how can we justify any uniform description of lines of appointment and authority today?

5. The *BEM* document acknowledges the different forms of leadership in the early church and that these forms resulted in part from varying social, religious, and ethical contexts in which Christian communities emerged. Different kinds of religious leadership were responsive to different needs and hopes. In our own situation, is it true today that the threefold form of ministry is responsive to the actual situation in which the church finds itself? It certainly responds to one pressing hope, the hope for deeper church unity. This is Bartlett's observation. Personally, I see it at best as a response to a hope for uniformity, but unity? I don't see it as a response to that need. Bartlett then asks, but does it neglect other equally important concerns? I would suggest that there is an underlying question that precedes that of Bartlett! Is there a clear awareness of what the real needs and hopes of different Christian communities are? Once again, this raises for me the question of church unity in general. Is it structures and doctrines between churches that we want reconciled and unified? What is the value in this if the local communities are not experiencing fuller and richer unity in celebration and faith? It seems to me that unity that

¹³⁹ Relative to this, feminist analysis has long asked, how do we *explain* this complex and rigid system of ordained clergy and all its trappings, in light of the biblical data?

¹⁴⁰ I would add, scrutiny that demands follow-up and necessary changes.

¹⁴¹ This being so in light of the fact that when the letter is written, Paul had not yet even visited the church at Rome!

leads to more expansive diversity in communion has to happen first within each believing community, regardless of what church it is.

6. Bartlett concludes this section with the question: Can we really stand with this document in its indecisiveness on the question of the ordination of women? Why does Bartlett put this in the form of a question? Is he himself not sure? He poses it in such a way that the reader feels Bartlett himself would like to say no. Yet one wonders if he formulates it as a question perhaps because the response to a statement may be sharper or less forgiving than a reply to a question. I would find him more convincing if he simply said, “We really cannot stand with this document in its indecisiveness on the question of the ordination of women.” A statement suggests a position; a question more often expresses an inquiry. Yet, Bartlett goes on, “may it not be that both the biblical witness and the issues of justice and reconciliation in our own time call us to say an unequivocal yes on that question, though the pace of Christian reunification be thereby slowed?”¹⁴² After some confusion, I realize that here Bartlett is saying yes to the question, being the ordination of women. Once again he does so by posing a bold, but nonetheless, safe question.

Bartlett gives us a hint at some of the new directions appearing in both Catholic and Protestant thinking on ministry. As regards to Roman Catholic thinking, Bartlett mentions the work of Bernard Cooke, Nathan Mitchell, Tom O’Meara, and a series of essays published by The Canon Law Society of America.¹⁴³ I will discuss these works in some detail at a later point in my work. I do find it just a bit curious that although Bartlett entitles the subsection “*New Movements and Directions: The Situation of the Minister Today*,” the works he sights are all close to ten years behind the writing of his book.

D.2. MINISTRY IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL

We now plunge into the biblical texts and follow the framework for analysis that Bartlett establishes. He applies the following five questions as his “*grille d’analyse*” throughout each major block of NT material. Hence we begin with Paul’s letters—the earliest of the Christian writings that we have. Paul’s hopes and frustrations come

¹⁴² Bartlett, *Ministry*, 10.

¹⁴³ James H. Provost, ed., *Official Ministry in a New Age* (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1981); Bernard Cooke, “Fullness of Orders,” in Provost, *Official Ministry*; Nathan Mitchell, *Mission and Ministry: History and Theology in the Sacrament of Order* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982); Thomas Franklin O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983).

through clearly enough in some cases, but Bartlett will not present an argument for saying that Paul's vision of church and its ministry is normative.

The five questions that provide the schema for Bartlett's discussion are first applied to the authentic Pauline literature.

1. What is the historical, social, and theological situation for which these letters were written?
2. What is Paul's understanding of apostleship?
3. How are disputes settled within the Pauline congregations? This will help us understand the nature of leadership and its authority.
4. What kinds of officers or leaders are present in the Pauline churches? What are the grounds of their authority?
5. What are the predominant images of the church for Paul?

D.2.1. THE HISTORICAL SITUATION FOR WHICH PAUL WRITES

We know that the Pauline churches are in urban centers. The work of Wayne Meeks has uncovered helpful information as to what these churches may have looked like, how they would have been structured, and who would have been a part of them. Because they reflect an urban setting, they give us some insight into the pressures and potentialities of a cosmopolitan and varied environment. Meeks demonstrates that at least the named members of the Pauline churches were apparently dynamic and actively developing within these somewhat flexible urban environments. House churches, as they've come to be called, became the loci of relatively small groups of Christians meeting in private homes. There is little doubt that certain aspects of the structure of the Christian community reflected the structure of the households in which they met.¹⁴⁴

What is so evident and striking, particularly in face of contemporary ministerial applications, is that these letters demonstrate real diversity in structures and leadership in the churches that Paul founded or was intending to visit. As well, Christian communities may have borrowed from other social or political titles and official roles in their town. Structures would very likely also have been borrowed from local customs. Though the evidence is sparse, Paul and other early Christians seemed quite willing to adopt and to adapt structures appropriate for each unique and diverse community. One somewhat appealing possibility in this regard is that the term *episkopos* emerges particularly from

¹⁴⁴ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 111-131.

Hellenistic towns and temples and the term *presbyteros* may simply be a carry over from the synagogue. Yet once again, the evidence is a bit thin.¹⁴⁵ Bartlett notes that what does appear as a constant is the importance and authority of the apostle, as itinerant church founder but also, he says, as ongoing mentor and guide for the church's practice. As we shall see in Paul's letters, the need to set up structures was not a priority but was rather to acknowledge the gifts within individuals and to allow and encourage these diversely gifted people to live together without chaos, boasting, or shame. A basic and simple organization was all that seemed necessary to keep unity in the community. Heads of households where churches met probably carried some of their authority into the community. I would add to this a reminder that some of these householders were women. Chloe's people (1 Cor. 1:11) are mentioned, as is "Appia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier and the church in your house" (Philemon 2). Phoebe mentioned in Rom. 16:1-2 and Lydia in Acts 16, both may have been church leaders. The expression "benefactor of many" (*prostatis pollon*) occurs a single time in the New Testament. It is found in Romans 16:1 in reference to Phoebe. The word *prostatis* usually means "leader," "superintendent," or "patron." Lydia and Phoebe may each have had wealth and social position enough to oversee and represent the church in official and unofficial matters. Paul's fellow workers, prophets and administrators—all were taken seriously because of their gifts—whether authority, charisma of leadership, or the fact that they could prophesy or balance the books. Here again I want to bring into light women such as Prisca and Mary, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. All are referred to as *synergos* (co-worker).

As we saw with Raymond Brown's study and with that of Jean Delorme, Bartlett too recognizes the strong interactions between congregations and communities as bodies of faithful believers, but also among individual churches, though never without some conflicts. Clearly, in the writings of Paul and elsewhere throughout the New Testament, devotion to the gospel is the *raison d'être*. Although today we may find this somewhat

¹⁴⁵See Hermann W. Beyer's article on the term *episkopos* in *The Theological Dictionary of the NT* (1968): 2:608-22, in which he demonstrates the variety of Greek and Hellenistic uses for that term...sometimes gods as overseers; sometimes it was a title given to officials of the state...or to a local official, sometimes a cultic official....The term *presbyteros* (elder) may have its background in Jewish communities. Even if this was the case, Günther Bornkamm, in the same collection, *TDNT* (1968) 6:651-83, notes that it was used for civic leaders in Sparta.

surprising, the churches of the early Christians existed for the sake of the gospel, and not the other way around.¹⁴⁶

Bartlett turns again to the work of Ernst Käsemann as he notes that the longer the time of waiting for Jesus' return in glory becomes, the less strong is this vision of charismatic ministry. As the imminence of the Second Coming fades into history, charismata give way to offices. The active, dynamic presence of the Spirit gives way to official recognition by ordination. "Community gives way to hierarchy. Christ is no longer Lord over the church, but head of the church: part of the ecclesiastical machinery."¹⁴⁷

D.2.2. PAUL'S UNDERSTANDING OF APOSTLESHIP

Many texts reveal Paul's understanding of himself above all as an apostle (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; and Gal. 1:1). Interestingly, Luke for the most part does not identify Paul as one of the apostles (Acts 1:26; 1 Cor 15:5-7). Paul definitively distinguishes the apostles from the twelve who accompanied Jesus in his Galilean ministry. 1Corinthians 15:3-9 gives a list of those who saw Jesus. Paul includes himself (v.8) among the other "apostles" listed.

Two aspects of Paul's understanding of apostleship reveal themselves in this passage. First, the apostle, in Paul's eyes, is one who has seen the risen Lord, though not all who have seen the risen Lord are considered apostles. Paul surely considers this one of his qualifications. Second, among other duties the major responsibility of the apostle is to preach (1 Cor 15:11; 1 Cor 2:1-5). Bartlett points out that the stress on the apostle as ambassador (2 Cor 5:20), and therefore as preacher, may possibly be related to the

¹⁴⁶Ernst Käsemann, "Paul and Early Catholicism," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. W.J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 245. Käsemann, traces the development of the early church as a decline toward what he calls "early Catholicism," and argues that what was best in the history of the church consists of what was best in the Pauline communities—and that this inevitably, but nonetheless sadly, began to disappear as church history progressed. In his disputes with the Corinthian enthusiasts, suggests Käsemann, Paul already had to make some appeals to structure, order, and authority. However, the "ideal" church, evident at the heart of the Pauline writings, is a church where gifts rather than offices mark the distinctions among Christians, and where the Spirit of God binds Christians together under the lordship of Christ: "To put it pointedly, but without exaggeration, the Pauline church is composed of nothing but laymen[and I add laywomen, simply to make the point more precise], who nevertheless are all, within their possibilities, at the same time priests and officeholders that is, instruments of the Spirit for the enactment of the Gospel in the everyday world".

¹⁴⁷ Bartlett, *Ministry*, 27, citing Käsemann, « Paul and Early Catholicism », 245-247.

rabbinic notion of the *shaliach*, the one who is sent.¹⁴⁸ In part, Paul's apostolic authority derives from his call. The fullest statement of that call is found in Gal. 1:11-16.

Thus Paul's criteria of apostleship are clear: that one has seen the risen Lord and is henceforth commissioned to preach the gospel. When necessary, the apostle exercises authority over the churches he or she has founded. Bartlett's footnote on this point merits our attention.

Fn. #17. See Rom. 16:7 and the reference, almost certainly, to Junia, a woman esteemed "among the apostles." In addition to raising the question of whether women were considered apostles, this passage suggests that perhaps sometimes Paul uses the term "apostle" of church delegates whether or not they were founders of congregations. Cf. 2 Cor. 8:23, and see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 47, 48, 172 (p. 31, Bartlett).

At first glance, this looks like a new and interesting idea. On second thought, I wonder how is it that Rom. 16:7 raises the question as to whether or not women were considered apostles. Why is there so much hesitancy to name or give titles, roles, and to identify activities when women are involved? Many declarative statements are made about other points on ministry or about male personages engaged in ministry based on even more vague or more scant NT evidence. Looking at Jesus' ministry and personal interactions in the Gospels and considering of whom Paul speaks, encourages, addresses, praises, I find it illogical and simply incorrect that we make so much of whether and how women were engaged in the early Christian communities. However unintentional, it adds to thinking of women's roles in furthering the gospel as the exception or something extraordinary.

The apostle's right to exercise authority over the churches derives in part from the call of God that sets the apostle apart as apostle. Surely, for Paul, it derives in part from the churches themselves and from the fact that their very existence is due to the apostle's labors. Paul's authority is further based in the fact that his life and ministry have taken on the shape of Christ's own life and ministry: humility to death (almost), resurrection to new life. Paul's assertion of his apostolic authority does not disguise the fact that he does

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

have to argue for that authority again and again. This, to my mind, says something of the local church's sense of identity and confidence in its own authority.

D.2.3. CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE PAULINE CHURCHES

Bartlett selects three examples from several in Paul's writings. In most of these examples, in which we have only one side of the conversation, he attempts to bring things to a resolution relative to his understanding of the gospel and his knowledge of the community.

D.2.3.1. The first example comes from 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. This is a conflict dealing in part with the question of who has greater apostolic authority for the Corinthian community: Apollos, Cephas, or Paul? Bartlett refers to Nils Dahl's analysis of the problem and its resolution. Dahl believes the letter itself is a response to the question of authority. The Corinthians are arguing over several different issues: some are related to one another and others are independent issues. Stephanas (baptized by Paul) and others are suggesting that the congregation write to Paul to ask his advice. Perhaps others among the Corinthian community have suggested that they should turn to the counsel of Apollos instead of Paul.¹⁴⁹

As v. 10 indicates Paul recognizes that the fundamental authority for solving this dispute is the authority of Jesus Christ. He writes with passion "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement". Paul pleads, encourages and begs (in this case, however, he does not command!). Another proposition that Dahl raises is that the Corinthians are seeking their identity in the "names" of the persons who baptized them. What is certain is that Paul believes he has the authority to answer the questions addressed to him. What seems clear is that this is about a question of leadership and authority. This is not a new issue, evidently. It may be that Paul is suggesting that the Corinthians should respect the authority belonging to Stephanas due to his hard work with Paul in establishing the gospel.

Bartlett notes the "fascinating" reconstruction Antoinette Wire makes as she describes the Corinthian community. She finds evidence of a group of Corinthian women prophets who, she contends, take more seriously and radically than Paul the claims of equality in the Spirit. They share actively in worship; prophecy with heads uncovered,

¹⁴⁹ Dahl, Nils A. "Paul and the Church in Corinth" *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972).

and evidently do not wait on one another to speak. Stephanas, Wire contends, may well represent Paul's less radical view of Christian freedom. This would suggest that Paul's insistence that the community gives Stephanas the respect and deference owed him arises from Paul's concern for decorum and right order as expressed throughout 1 Corinthians: 12-14.¹⁵⁰ However, Paul does not suggest any exclusive prestige or hierarchical authority for Stephanas. When urging "subjection" or "service" to Stephanas and his companions, Paul goes on to urge the same deference "to every one who works and toils with them."

D.2.3.2. 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 is Bartlett's second example demonstrating how conflicts are resolved. In this case, there is concern about the topic of immorality. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you . . . And you are arrogant! . . . When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man [the guilty party] over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

Citing Wayne Meeks, Bartlett quotes: "Paul's directive about the assembly is hardly a limitation of his apostolic authority in deference to a more democratic polity. It is more nearly the opposite. In the decision of the assembly, about which he allows no doubt, it will become apparent to the Corinthian doubters that the apostle's physical absence makes no difference."¹⁵¹

What we see once again is Paul's effort to balance Christ's authority with his own as well as that of the congregation. Even from a distance, Paul can still be Christ's ambassador. Clearly as a secondary action, then, the community acts upon the judgment the apostle announces. Advice and consent have no place in this case. There is room only for obedience. Many times Paul exhorts or begs a congregation as a kind of elder brother in Christ. With this question/conflict Paul commands as a stern father.

Bartlett agrees with New Testament scholar Adela Collins who writes that the hope that Paul expresses is not hope for the redemption of the spirit of the believer but for the reign of the Spirit in the community. Collins contends that it is not only the behavior of the incestuous man that Paul condemns, but also a radically incorrect understanding of

¹⁵⁰ Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 179.

¹⁵¹ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 28.

Christian freedom. Reading with the NRSV's margin notes, she maintains that the guilty party is actually living incestuously "in the name of the Lord Jesus." What is worse is that the congregation, also misunderstanding Christian freedom, cheers him on. Hence Paul's warning: "Your boasting is not a good thing!"¹⁵² Bartlett points out that this passage gives a clear message about apostolic authority. It is an authority intended not so much for the sake of the individual as for the sanctity and unity of the churches. While this may be true, I find that because Bartlett's commentary focuses around the aspect of authority, little is said of the offense or resulting prohibition.

D.2.3.3. A third example of conflict resolution is found in Galatians 2:1-10.

In this case it is a dispute over what aspects of Jewish law (namely, circumcision) gentile converts to Christianity must adopt. Possibly the Judaizers have written to the authorities in Jerusalem (probably Peter, James, and John—those reputed to be pillars in the young church) for their response to this conflict. As Bartlett rightly notes, the gospel is Paul's driving concern. Any dispute over whose authority holds place, is a moot point if the gospel is threatened. Paul's response in several instances (1 Cor 1 and 1 Cor 16, for example) manifests his recognition that the authority of Christ is the source of authority in the apostle as a Christian leader. Paul's authority and that of Apollos is sure. He is less enthusiastic in acknowledging the authority of the Jerusalem leaders. Most important in all of this is the fact that Paul's letters acknowledge and encourage the reality of the congregation's authority. Paul does not appeal only, or even primarily, to church leaders to validate his claims for the gospel. His appeal is consistently to his "brethren" or "brothers and sisters"—to the whole congregation.

A feminist response to this examination made by Bartlett to Galatians 2:1-10 is to both underscore and even applaud two points that the author highlights: that Paul recognizes that authority is, in the first place, derived from Jesus Christ, and secondly, that the community's authority is not nominal or insignificant in relation to the authority of its leaders—both hold real authority.

¹⁵² Adela Y. Collins, "The Function of 'Excommunication' in Paul," *HTR* 73 (1980): 251-267.

D.2.4. OFFICES IN THE PAULINE CHURCHES

In this section Bartlett begins with the same central claim that Jean Delorme makes so effectively in his work, “Diversité et unité des ministères d’après le Nouveau Testament.” There is no consistency in the titles and descriptions of “offices” or “roles” in the churches to whom Paul writes. Different churches apparently have different structures. As Bartlett wrote earlier in his work, different needs and interests require different gifts and different responses. Variety in congregations is surely going to reflect the variety in individuals who make up the congregation. The author spoke of each church tending to borrow its understanding of office, title, and function from its own society, from other associations in its community. Though equality in the Spirit is the principle that holds the churches in unity, there is some evidence, which suggests that heads of households and of house churches were perhaps among the wealthier members. Other social or political engagements may also have influenced who held positions of leadership in the church. Bartlett concedes with other scholars, that inequalities based on wealth or social status very possibly existed. What he fails to mention is the fact that although Paul greets and acknowledges various women in his letters, it is rare that the majority of scholarship has identified women as having any particular role or title relative to leadership in the early church. It is really only recently that we hear with greater frequency the mention of Phoebe. And at that, she is often spoken of as “deaconess,” which is a mistranslation of the Greek *diakonos*.

Scanning the authentic Pauline letters, Bartlett identifies those who have or appear to have some responsibility for the local churches:

- 1) Those whom Paul mentions as traveling companions (Sothenes, Timothy, Silvanus, and others). They assist in his work and in his writing. (1 Cor. 1:1; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1). Their presence with Paul gives them a share in Paul’s apostolic authority.
- 2) Sometimes Paul’s co-workers serve as “apostles from the apostle.” He sends them to a particular community to provide direction and encouragement in his place. Timothy goes for Paul to the Philippian community (Phil. 2:19-22), as does Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25, 29-30). In 1 Thess 3:1-2 Paul writes that

in his place he is sending Timothy to strengthen and encourage that community.

- 3) Bartlett points out that Paul acknowledges the position of the local church leaders. Sometimes they are heads of house churches: Stephanas, Aquila, and Prisca, for example, but sometimes they are not. No distinction is made between male and female house church leaders. Philemon and Apphia are mentioned equally, Bartlett notes. Textually this seems accurate, but in practice, both in the early church and today, women are never as prominent as men in these cases, and distinctions are made.
- 4) From the hazy picture we have from scant data, we at least can tell that there are also local church leaders whose authority does not derive from their association with Paul, nor does it derive from their role as the head of households.

Paul exhorts the Christians at Thessalonica to respect and give credence to their leaders (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). It is clear from this text that the participles, “labor,” “care for,” and “admonish,” refer to the functions of the leaders rather than their titles. These are both pastoral and supervisory functions. The participle *proistamenous*, which the NRSV translates “have charge of you,” is used in the nominal form in Rom 16:2, where Phoebe is identified as a *prostatis*. The NRSV translates that term as “benefactor.”

Care and authority are the two concerns suggested in 1 Thessalonians. Bartlett says his suspicion is that in the next verse (5:14) we have an admonition for the church leaders. In it he further specifies their functional responsibilities: “And we urge you brothers, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them” (following the NRSV’s marginal note (1 Thess. 5:14)). For a contemporary Christian feminist, it is encouraging to think of care and authority as complements of one another when Paul writes of leadership and responsibility.

Bartlett’s observations about Phil 4:2-3 are worthy of citation. He writes:

Paul states: I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these women,

for they have labored side by side with me in the Gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life' (Phil. 4:2-3; RSV). Are the *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* represented in part by Euodia, Syntyche, the yokefellow Clement, and the fellow workers? If so, their authority (like that of Timothy) seems to derive in part from the fact that they have been Paul's co-workers. But we have no evidence whether such "bishops and deacons" were elected by the congregation, appointed by the apostle, or chosen in some other way. We also have no evidence that the terms "bishop" and "deacon" represent set offices, with particular requirements and hierarchical legitimacy. If 1 Thessalonians and the images in 1 Corinthians and Romans are any guide, we can guess that Paul still sees leadership functionally more than officially, but we cannot know this for sure.¹⁵³

Throughout Paul's writings he makes no other reference to *episkopos* or *episkope*, (oversight or governance) than that of Phil. 1:1. On the other hand he uses the term *diakonos* (minister or deacon) quite frequently. It appears, for example in 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:15, 23. These and other similar Pauline texts give credence to John N. Collins's argument that the *diakonos* in the Hellenistic world was not primarily a servant and certainly not primarily a table servant. Collins contends that the *diakonos* was primarily an intermediary, one entrusted with a message or a commission by another. In Rom 16:1-2, Phoebe is a *diakonos*—either a deacon or a minister. Again we are not sure what the title implies (if it is a title). Phoebe is commended for two things: helping others, and helping Paul. If John Collins is right, her ministry consists primarily in her role as an emissary. It is also likely that Phoebe has been a patroness of the Christians as well as a helper and emissary, and perhaps also a benefactor of Paul.¹⁵⁴

As with Delorme's findings, there is little clarity or certitude in Bartlett's reading of things as to how the authority of leaders was legitimated. Bartlett asks if the apostle

¹⁵³ Bartlett, *Ministry*, 43.

¹⁵⁴ John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

appointed them? Did the congregations choose them? As the author has stated earlier, Paul recognizes his authority to be that of Jesus Christ, but he does not claim the power to appoint these leaders. Paul urges, pleads, even begs communities to recognize the authority of their leaders, but he does not claim a power to appoint leaders. What Paul does do is to acknowledge and praise leadership's gifts and service to the gospel, and he urges the church members to do the same.

D.2.5. IMAGES OF THE CHURCH IN PAUL

D.2.5.1. *THE BODY OF CHRIST*

1Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 are the two examples from Paul's writing that Bartlett chooses to illustrate the image of the church as the Body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12

In his discussion of this chapter, Bartlett makes note of something that Jean Delorme has also expressed, though not directly in relation to this text. That is, gifts are not identified in theoretical or conceptual terms, but rather, they are identified principally in functional terms. They are not appointed or empowered to any individual in the congregation by any external authority that is conferred upon them whether that be Paul, some kind of hierarchy, or even the community itself. Individuals are delegated by what they are capable of doing. Three of Paul's central beliefs appear in this image in 1 Corinthians 12. Though he refers to the relation between Christ and the church in other letters, here in particular Paul expresses his conviction that the church lives only under and through the lordship of Christ. In this text Christ is over against the church that is his body, unlike what we find in Ephesians where Christ as the head of the church is very nearly identified with the community itself. A second belief that also recurs in several places but which is well illustrated here is Paul's claim that varying gifts are given to each member of the church. No one has the right to either boast or reason to be ashamed of his/her gift. All gifts are necessary to the body; all are gifts given by the Spirit. A third point worth noting is Paul's claim that in the body of Christ, all Christians are interdependent. The exercise of one Christian's gifts depends upon another who brings his/her gifts to the community as well. All church members, whatever their office or function are servants of one another, and all are ministers of Christ.

Romans 12

Similarly this chapter from the letter to the Romans uses the image of the body of Christ and the notion of gifts being defined more in terms of function than in terms of office. Though the image of the body of Christ is less developed here than in 1 Cor 12, the notion of functions in relation to ministries is strong. Paul speaks of “prophecy,” not prophets. “The one who teaches” (as in the RSV translation) is really a better translation of Paul’s terms than “teachers.”

However, though the gifts here are not really offices, they are not totally functions, either. Bartlett sees them more like “virtues” (giving aid with zeal, doing acts of mercy with cheerfulness). He makes the same point that in 1 Corinthians is so clear: the “higher gifts” prove to be not even apostleship or prophecy, both of which Paul ranks very highly, but rather faith, hope, and especially love. Where Paul has mentioned what appear as offices, the distinctions or lines separating them from gifts are blurred. Church leadership like so much of early church activity seems fluid and flexible, “marked,” as Bartlett writes, “by gifts as well as responsibilities.”

D.2.5.2. MINISTRY BY MERCY: 2 COR 4:1-6

Another distinct image, which expresses Paul’s understanding of ministry and the church, emerges from 2 Corinthians 4:1-6. In this case, the image of light is the metaphor Paul uses to speak of ministry: “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. . .”(v.4), and “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”(v. 6). In several of his writings Paul identifies his ministry of apostleship with being a servant (*doulos*).¹⁵⁵ In these verses two points are evident. The first is that Paul understands himself as a servant of the mercy he has received. Secondly, he is a servant of the community to whom he declares that mercy: “For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5).

Bartlett concludes from his work on these central images of church, that for Paul leadership is in the first place a matter of God’s mercy and secondarily a matter of the gifts God has given. Members of the community are identified more by their functions,

¹⁵⁵ For Paul’s use of *doulos* as regards his self-understanding, see for example, Rom 1:1; 1Cor 3:5; 4:1; 2Cor 4:5; 6:4; 11:23; Gal 1:10 and Philemon 1:1.

and even by their virtues, than by titles or offices. On the other hand, it is clear that apostleship takes a certain “official” priority and that prophecy and teaching may do so as well.

While there are hints of a kind of ranking in Paul’s understanding of gifts (apostles first and speakers in tongues last), there is no sense of hierarchy or even superiority. What is stressed is the interdependence of all Christian people. Apostles, not excepted, must be servants of other Christians. The call to service is for all Christians, the Spirit is given to all “for the common good,” and gifts are always intended for upbuilding the community.

A feminist response to all this might simply be: Bravo! The writing from 1 Corinthians is strikingly similar to the actions and expressed attitudes of Jesus in his ministry as conveyed through the gospel writers. There is no distinction between titles and dualism in those “higher up” or “lower down.” In Jesus’ teaching, the last are called to be first, the least are identified with Jesus himself, and the most unlikely—foreigners, women, slaves—those who appear least gifted, are invited into the circle of Jesus’ community of disciples. “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (12:13). Jesus’ actions throughout his public ministry reflect perfectly this Pauline conviction. Though there is no forethought of establishing a church, in my opinion, Jesus clearly recognized the gifts of individuals and constantly called for those gifts to be used in love and for the service of one another. How can we do any less today than to call forth and recognize the gifts that appear in the Body of Christ, the Church? Paul admonishes his readers/hearers in this text from Romans, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (12:2). This is a timely message for the Church today. In a society where racism and sexism still determine to a large extent one’s possibilities and one’s boundaries and is still at the basis of so much violence, hatred, and destruction of gifts, the image of the Body of Christ—each member uniquely gifted and all interdependent—is a critical one. A ministry given and received by mercy calls for, if not demands, a community to recognize and to welcome the engagement of all its members

whether they are of a minority race or culture, of a homosexual orientation, or whether they are women.

On the other hand, as regards these particular texts that Bartlett has selected and discussed, I fail to see from these texts alone, a final point that Bartlett makes: “it is clear that apostleship carries a certain ‘official’ weight and that prophecy and teaching may do so as well.”¹⁵⁶ Other than the reference in 1 Cor12: 27-31, I see little basis for such a statement. The reference to prophesy in Romans 12:6 does not suggest any official weight as far as I can see. While such a conclusion may be supported by other Pauline texts, making it here, on the basis of these three texts alone, incorrectly reinforces and gives greater importance to a belief and resulting praxis that has had negative consequences for those who are outside the hierarchical institution.

D.2.6. THE PAULINE CHURCHES AND MINISTRY TODAY

At the conclusion of this chapter the author makes five observations and raises some unanswered question. 1) The presence and centrality of the Spirit in the Churches is evident. This is manifest in the fact that the Pauline churches were not operating out of structures and offices, but rather out of charisms and the flexibility and freedom that this kind of operation engenders. Bartlett says that they were “lay”—almost egalitarian—in the every day life of the community. Some people today would wish for this Spirit of freedom and flexibility despite the fact that it is both a challenge for and judgment of our more structured churches and hierarchical ministries. Since the *eschaton* was believed to be close, leadership would have been fluid and responsive to current need. Nevertheless, Paul assumed that the churches needed to acknowledge some clear authority—and that was his own authority.

2) Paul gives an image of the church that is quite different from what appears in the Acts of the Apostles, or the Pastorals, or for that matter, most of our church structures today. As the author has noted earlier, ministry was a function according to the gift or charism one received rather than by external approbation or education. The importance of community and the interdependence manifest itself insofar as all forms of ministry even apostleship, existed for the sake of the gospel and upbuilding of the church and thus were considered by all as servant ministry.

¹⁵⁶ Bartlett, *Ministry*, 53.

3) Though the data is often vague, it does indicate that there were those who were leaders *in situ* and those who moved about from community to community. It is neither clear what their relation to one another was or how they were chosen. Bartlett believes this could have included both apostles and perhaps prophets. As we have seen, according to Paul, the criterion for apostleship was that one had seen the risen Lord. Since this becomes even less clearly defined when we see it played out in the growing church, Bartlett rightly asks, did the apostles appoint the local officers? Did the local congregation choose their leaders? Or were their gifts simply and informally acknowledged? Bartlett goes for this last option though it remains uncertain.

4) We know from various texts that Paul understood himself as being called in the first place to proclaim and preach the Good News. While he distinguishes apostles from prophets in 1 Corinthians, the question remains as to how the apostolic function of proclamation relates to other forms of service (*diakonia*), both in the first century and today.

5) Clearly, Paul thought of himself as an ambassador for Christ, which for him meant to be one who held as his highest priority the proclamation of the gospel. What is missing in the discussion of apostleship, surprisingly, is any claim that the apostle or any officer is designated to be presider at the Lord's Supper. For Paul, Christ is both represented by the whole community of faith and at the same time is more than or beyond the limits of community.

In light of Paul's letters and teachings, the need for discernment in our own day is evident. We are experiencing in our churches many of the same challenges of Paul's time. Bartlett writes, "Are we at a time in our history when the dangers of dissension, enthusiastic excesses, spiritual anarchy, or growing secularity call us to circle the ecclesiastical wagons? Or is it an era where the church needs to be driven more by the call to mission than by the obsession with preservation?"¹⁵⁷ Although the author responds to his own question by opting for the latter, I do think it worth noting the importance of language once again. To link the word "dissension" with "dangerous," shapes attitudes and deepens fear that disagreement is somehow bad. It is reminiscent of the sentiment Raymond Brown expressed when he closed a chapter with words to the effect, "lest we

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

end on a negative note.” The prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures seem often to have caused some dissension, and their message sometimes ended on a negative note. If Paul teaches us anything it is clear to me that unity is not found in uniformity but rather in Christ and the rich diversity of expression of Christ’s gifts given in the Spirit. Bartlett believes that ours is a time to rekindle new passion for the call to preach, evangelize, teach, and act. What gifts is the Spirit calling forth from the church in our own era? On the basis of his study and reflection, Bartlett concludes that any vision of ministry that places ordained leadership, as the fundamental mark of the church’s life is inaccurate and unacceptable from a Pauline perspective. He questions the claim that those who are ordained as priests or ministers should declare as their own the whole diversity of gifts that Paul explicitly describes as belonging to the body of Christ. He writes, “Why should any one person be expected or required to be equally adept at administration, preaching, pastoral care, and spiritual healing and spiritual direction?”¹⁵⁸ To this I would add an even sharper response. How could we even imagine, reading Paul, that the Spirit bestows gifts on one individual to the deprivation of the other members? “The body does not consist of one member but of many,” Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12. To act as though all gifts are found in one ordained individual brings to mind other words from Paul. Is it not like saying, “If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?” or the eye saying “to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (1Cor 12:14, 18, 21). Paul does emphasize the centrality of proclamation in the mission and upbuilding of the church. When he puts apostleship first among the gifts, it is not the apostle as overseer or organizer that he stresses, but the apostle as *diakonos*, servant and ambassador between God and humankind. The apostle is one who proclaims the word. This is the first activity or function that leads to the blossoming of all the other gifts and growth of the community. Bartlett is convincing in his argument that apostolic authority means the authority of the gospel. It is an authority that Paul received, proclaimed, and applied to each church, as it had need. This being the case, it is reasonable to say that for our time too such authority inheres not in particular church leaders but in the body of Christ itself. Contemporary structures need to be found that express the clear fact that the church serves the gospel and not the other way around.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 55.

Such structures must combine charisma with order, Spirit with structure. My feminist perspective is in accord with much of Bartlett's thought.

D.4. GENERAL REMARKS ON THE REMAINDER OF BARTLETT'S STUDY

I have followed the first three chapters of Bartlett's book with great detail in order to demonstrate both his structure and his methodology. When appropriate, I have attempted to further the conversation by adding a feminist perspective by way of questions, comments, or by expanding conclusions when possible. Although Bartlett also treats the four Gospels, I omit them in my discussion here and take up the Pastoral Epistles in closing.

D.4.1. MINISTRY IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

The central scholarly problem in dealing with these letters is that of authorship. How one answers this question often falls in line with one's theological position in general. Bartlett therefore begins with a lengthy catalogue of those scholars who favor Pauline authorship and why, and those who subscribe to a pseudo-Pauline author and why. I agree with Bartlett's sense that these letters come from a non-Pauline thought world and from a later period of time. What Bartlett does not mention is the fact that these letters are riddled with advice, criticism, and negative limitations directed at women. There is more negative attention given to women and their roles in the Pastoral Epistles than in any other section of the New Testament. Bartlett makes no note of this and says nothing of its implications as regards ministry.

On the one hand, I find his conclusions somewhat bold and daring. He suggests in light of the Pastorals that those who receive gifts for leadership ought not to be trained in ways that set them apart from others. The Pastorals indicate, he says, that ordination is not yet a sacrament and it may even be that while it recognizes gifts of leadership it does not bestow them. He sees a primarily didactic responsibility on the part of the elder or bishop. And he sees in the Pastorals a stress on the congruity between right teaching and right practice on the part of the "elder or deacon (or widow)." On the other hand, I find certain aspects of his conclusions not at all bold and daring. When Bartlett speaks of the clergy he brings up the question of gay men and lesbian women being ordained. He speaks of the problems and seems tolerant in looking at all angles of the issue. However,

I find it very striking that at some point in these conclusions, particularly here, that he makes no mention whatsoever of women or ministerial challenges the church faces in accepting women as persons. Bartlett makes no observations about the way women are dealt with in these Epistles. He has no comment about how consistently throughout history churches have drawn heavily from the “advice” in the Pastorals as norms for what women can and cannot do and be in their faith communities.

D.4.2. NEW TESTAMENT MINISTRY and MINISTRY TODAY

From a feminist perspective what has been so laudable and so solid throughout David Bartlett’s work, comes through once again in this final chapter of his book. He reminds readers that “God gives us the gospel, and then the church, and then the church’s ministers.” He observes that despite *Lumen Gentium*’s discussion of the church as Christ’s own sheepfold, “there is the clear sense that the role of God’s people is subsidiary to the role of their priests.”¹⁵⁹ The author rightly places priesthood within the context of baptism and associates validation and credit in the same terms as every Christian—the gospel and service to others. Regarding institutional structures and individual gifts, he calls for the freedom and creativity of the Spirit. In his discussion on sacraments he also thinks creatively saying that just as early Christian churches were unique and individual, so too our churches today should reflect their uniqueness in response to the gifts, the problems and the personalities within each congregation. He speaks of priesthood as service and insists that it must never be a service that sets individuals apart or above any other Christian. For that matter, he says, why not let others who are able share in taking their turn at presiding at Eucharist? His Protestantism manifests itself in this section in refreshing and reasonable ways.

There is much that Christian feminist analysis can applaud in Bartlett’s work. It makes a solid case for recognizing the gap between the New Testament documents and the churches we have created today. At times when I read I felt there is more hope for women being engaged in ministry in Protestantism than in Roman Catholicism. But in the end two important ingredients for this being possible, I find missing. First is Bartlett’s failure in any section of his work to ever take up the question or role of women

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 185.

specifically. Of course he makes mention of Prisca and Phoebe in passing. Yet in his critique of present ecclesial or ministerial realities at the end of each chapter, he simply does not see women. It appears once again that it is a case of “if God is male, male is god” and women are “other.” The second missing ingredient is what I sense to be his inability to think consistently of ministry as anything other than leadership. His second question in his schema, “What is . . . understanding of apostleship (discipleship, in the case of Matthew)?” is interesting. It is not a question of what is the understanding of ministry. As he treats apostleship he consistently returns to questions of or points about leadership. Leadership, according to Paul in 1Cor 12:27 ff., is one among many ministries and is certainly not at the top of the list.

All in all, Bartlett makes an excellent “conversationalist” and appears to be open to the voice of feminist criticism. As he writes in the Introduction to his book, today’s experience, especially that of women, calls us to learn from the New Testament not so much how to combine old traditions as how to adapt the ancient visions to our own needs.

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2:6

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2:11-14

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PHILIPPIANS

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2:19-22

2:25

2:29-30

3:1

4:2-3

1 Timothy

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1:2

3:1-3

5:12

5:12-13

5:15

1 Timothy

1:2
1:3-4
1:6-9a
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1:12-16
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2 Timothy

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2:5
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2:22-26
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4:16-17

TITUS

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PHILEMON

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 4
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1 JOHN

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1 John (cont'd)

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2 JOHN

1
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3 JOHN

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

Chapters Two, Three, Four

In this chapter and the two preceding I have chosen to look in detail at the writings of three significant authors rather than do a more superficial overview of a broad selection of writings. Each of the three has studied the New Testament texts that illuminate the life and ministries in Jesus' time and in the life of the early Christian communities. Each had a different goal and audience in mind. No author here was directly focusing on the roles women play in these texts or in the life of the community. And certainly none of the three was entertaining the "feminist question." I selected these three authors, Raymond Brown, Jean Delorme and David Bartlett because each is known for solid, reputable scholarship. Two are Roman Catholic and one Protestant. Two are American scholars and the third is French. Brown's book grew out of a series of lectures and because of this as well as the purposes of his audience, Brown's book is not heavily documented with other scholars' writing and thought on the topic. His goal was more pastoral and his work directed at an ecumenical group. Thus despite the lack of formal references to other works, one sees that Brown has a vision bigger than his own work, formidable as that is. The other two authors, Delorme and Bartlett, give evidence of their familiarity with a broad range of writings on the topic as well, often making reference to other works.

In each case I have attempted to highlight those elements that might be thought of differently when a feminist analysis is applied. It has been a "conversation" insofar as I was able to "listen" to what each said, and respond from my particular feminist optic when appropriate. In each, I found some openings for broadening the notion of ministry to include women. Granted that none of the three is intending to write about women, nonetheless I found in each, a general lack of interest or concern for women's participation in ministries—so central to the life of the early church. Although each made references to individual women who are named in these texts, clearly the underlying sense that one gets in all of the readings is that men are the "normal," the usual backbone of the church and its ministries. In one sense, these authors are reading what is there in the texts. Men *are* presented as the norm, for the most part, in the texts. A feminist critique calls for more. It calls for conversation that arises from demanding: "Imagine

the kind of theology of ministries we develop for the whole Christian community.” How can it possibly reflect the “church,” or for that matter, “build up the body of Christ”? How are we going to read and interpret these texts and how can we apply them in ways that are genuinely liberating for *both* men and women?

The next step in this work, Chapters Five and Six, is for me to present my own analysis of biblical texts and my questions on ministry in the New Testament from a feminist critical point of view. Surely, along with other scholars these three authors and their writings will form and inform me and at the same time, spur me on to see “the more” that is there.

The foregoing chapters have been an in-depth “conversation” with what might be called “traditional scholarship.” The writings of Brown, Bartlett and Delorme, have provided me with the opportunity to apply the feminist methodology that I intend now to employ in examining my own selected biblical texts and to ask what these texts might mean for women and ministry in the early communities and what it means for today’s church. In examining their work, for example, we noted how Raymond Brown’s treatment of the Pastoral letters, omitted the text from 2 Tim 1:16; 2:19. The text that speaks of Prisca and Aquila (2 Tim 4:19), is another text that Brown does not comment on. Jean Delorme offers an extended treatment of the apostles. As I noted in my analysis of this, he does not make explicit mention of those “others” that are presented as apostles as well. In Romans 16:7, Paul identifies Andronicus and Junia as being “prominent among the apostles” though Delorme does not specify this text. Nor does he note that Prisca and Aquila, while not holding the moniker, *act* like apostles. The description of this couple in Romans 16:3-5 and Acts 18:1-3, 18-19, is striking in its similarity to those others officially identified as “apostles.” As regards teachers, I noted that Delorme presents a clear understanding of the development of this role. In doing so, however, he makes no mention of Priscilla (Prisca) and her role in teaching Apollos (Acts 18:26). My work in this section is the application of this feminist interpretive tool to solid scholarship that takes a more traditional historical-critical path. It provides the basis on which I proceed. Because we have seen additional texts and new angles that can add to or extend the work of these scholars, I proceed now to the biblical data itself, using this same feminist hermeneutic as the primary interpretative tool. In the same way that these men

selected and interpreted biblical texts to draw theological profiles of the early Christian communities, my next task is to now identify my selected texts and to determine their meanings under the scrutiny of a feminist examination.

Chapter Five

Feminist Textual Study on Women and Ministry: Undisputed Letters of Paul

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

A. GOAL

In the following two chapters the goal is to examine New Testament texts while working from the feminist hermeneutical model I describe in Chapter One. My intention is to *select* and *interpret* texts from the Pauline letters with the help of the Acts of the Apostles in order to determine how one may justly and responsibly say *more* about the *nature of ministry* and *women's* involvement in it. This prompts questions as regards our contemporary theology of ministries. The final section of the thesis responds to the central question: *What are the contributions of the biblical findings for developing a new or renewed theology of ministries?* Furthermore, I make every effort to let the texts speak for themselves, not “laying meanings” on them before letting them speak “for themselves.”

B. PRESUPPOSITIONS AND METHOD

The principal presupposition in this work is that through the use of a feminist hermeneutic applied to texts on the diverse (and sometimes overlooked) ministries evident in the New Testament and on the place of women in these ministries, a renewed reading and an interpretation responsive to contemporary questions and ministerial needs are possible.

Another presupposition I make is that this interpretation could give new openings to some of the “closed doors” in official and unofficial circles on the subject of ministry; it will at the least provide enrichment in the exegesis of the biblical texts themselves. This underscores another of my presuppositions. Namely, that the Word of God is living and active, always creative and creating. Theology must therefore, reflect the dynamic and organic reality of scripture alongside the changing face of human history and experience.

My initial method has been to read and re-read the whole of the NT allowing those texts to surface in my reading that had any connection to the notion of ministry. I take

ministry to mean actions done on behalf of the gospel performed for the good of the community, its growth in the Spirit. Although limiting, of necessity I have chosen to restrict my written findings to the Pauline Corpus and a few selected themes that appear in the Acts of the Apostles. Nonetheless, I have lifted out many texts, the majority of which have not necessarily been considered texts about ministry on which traditional theologies of ministry have been based. I then proceed to read again with an eye to seeing which of these texts might shed new light on our understanding of ministry as it was played out in early Christianity. I look for images of “church,” which is to say, the early communities of Christians that are visibly emerging in these texts. Next I begin to ask who is doing what? The majority of people who take center stage in this question of ministry and the proclamation of the gospel are men. Is this because of socio-cultural or religious reasons? Does this mean that Jesus did not intend women to be engaged in the project of God? This seems unlikely given the proclamation of liberation and love that is at the heart of the gospel message, as well as the fact that all humanity, women as well as men, share the same dignity in being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27).

C. PROCEDURE

The study of these texts will follow a pattern consisting of four parts.

1. With each letter or writing treated in the following chapter, I begin with a brief statement of background (dating, authorship, and audience, for example), highlighting primarily points relative to our main questions.
2. 2.1. The texts I then cite are the result of a long gleaning process, in which I read and re-read each text and decide whether the text has anything to do with ministry.
2.2. My comments on ministry follow the selected biblical texts.
3. Then follows a discussion as to how or whether the text reveals women or women’s activities in gospel life. Or, on the contrary, does it hide or diminish women in any way.
4. Finally, I make comments or raise questions in face of the biblical findings and the principles of contemporary theology of ministry.

1 THESSALONIANS (A.D. 50 or early 51)

1. BACKGROUND

First Thessalonians is the oldest extant Christian writing. There is little disagreement today that this is Paul's own work. It is a letter of encouragement and support for the fledgling community that Paul founded during his second missionary journey. Acts records that Paul and Silas had crossed over from the province of Asia to Macedonia (16:6ff.). From there they stopped at Philippi, passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia and finally to Thessalonica. The city had a population marked by cultural and religious diversity. Paul spoke first in a Jewish synagogue but seems to have made more converts among the Gentiles of the city. Acts records that, due to an angry uprising prompted by jealousy at Paul's success, he and Silas had to flee the city and that they immediately moved on to Beroea (17: 1-10). Thus, unable to return to Thessalonica, Paul sent Timothy to verify the spiritual steadfastness of the new community and to support them in what they were suffering from their "compatriots" (2:14). His report that they were indeed holding fast to the teaching of the gospel prompts this letter. In it Paul gives little new teaching but rather reinforces what he had taught them from the beginning. Paul's concern is principally to calm any unrest and to reassure the believers in his beloved community.

2.1. BIBLICAL TEXTS

1:1 Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ
Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ
εἰρήνη.

1:1 **Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy** to the **church** of the Thessalonians in God ...

1:4 εἰδότες, ἀδελφοὶ ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τουῦ] θεοῦ, τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν,
1:5 ὅτι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ μόνον
ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ [ἐν] πληροφορίᾳ
πολλῇ, καθὼς οἴδατε οἷοι ἐγενήθημεν [ἐν] ὑμῖν δι' ὑμᾶς.

1:4 For we know, **brothers** beloved by God, that he has chosen you,

1:5 because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake.

2:1 Αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἶδατε, ἀδελφοί, τὴν εἴσοδον ἡμῶν τὴν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ὅτι οὐ κενὴ γέγονεν,

2:2 ἀλλὰ προπαθόντες καὶ ὑβρισθέντες, καθὼς οἶδατε, ἐν Φιλίπποις ἐπαρρησιασάμεθα ἐν τῷ θεῷ λαλῆσαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πολλῷ ἀγῶνι.

2.1 You yourselves know, **brothers**, that our coming to you was not in vain,

2:2 but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God **to declare to you the gospel of God** in spite of great opposition.

2.7 δυνάμενοι ἐν βάρει εἶναι ὡς Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολοι.

[...though we (Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy) might have made demands as **apostles of Christ.**]

3.2 καὶ ἐπέμψαμεν Τιμόθεον, τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν καὶ συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλέσαι ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν

3:2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and **co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ**, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith...

5.12 Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, εἰδέναι τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ καὶ νουθετοῦντας ὑμᾶς

5.13 καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι αὐτοὺς ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ διὰ τὸ ἔργον αὐτῶν. εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς.

5.12 But we appeal to you, **brothers**, to respect those who labor among you, and **have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you**;

5.13 esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

5.20 προφητείας μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτε,

5.20 Do not despise the words of **prophets**, but test everything...

2.2. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS ABOUT MINISTRY

The opening greeting and introductory thanksgiving (1:1, 4-5) immediately highlight the work of the gospel as a collaborative work. Paul's authority will often be underscored, but here, as in several other letters, he writes not in his name alone but with those of his missionary companions. This is a rare case where Paul does not open his

greeting with his identification as “apostle.” Clearly though, he considers himself, Silvanus, and Timothy as “apostles.” This is evident from 2:7.

In 3:2 is the first use of a term Paul will often employ to describe his collaborators; in this case he refers to Timothy, “our brother and *coworker for God*” [συνεργὸν]. The term identifies important “missioners” as individuals instrumental in the proclamation and teaching of the good news. We shall see it used of both men and women at various points in Paul’s writings. It suggests not only their relationship to the other apostles but also their relationship to God in the work of evangelization. The proclamation of the gospel is a communal task. Paul describes the courage, honesty, and humility necessary to bringing the message of the gospel (2:2, 7). It is a *work* [κοπος] that is here referred to several times (1:3-5; 2: 4, 9; 3:2; 4:2) even if somewhat indirectly. Yet it describes the apostolic activity for which Paul has already undergone suffering and persecution. To do the work of God is to proclaim Jesus Christ crucified and risen [τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ]. It is to lead those who hear and receive the message to identification with Christ through and in baptism and Eucharist. To do the work of God is to teach [παραγγελίας] the values and precepts that follow in the development of faith. Paul’s service is not referred to in title or precise outline of ministerial duties. To proclaim the message of the gospel is his task; indeed, this is the “labor and toil” with which he is entrusted by God and for which he identifies with “the apostles of Christ.” In later readings, these same apostles will become more clearly described in terms of their “ministerial duties.”

The dynamic quality of both the work of proclamation and the word of God itself is manifest in the believers who, as a result of accepting the word, “became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea”(2:14). It is significant that Paul’s work of announcing the gospel and the effectiveness with which he accomplishes his task is, at the outset, intimately linked to the *recipients* of the message and the action of God. The gospel comes not in word alone, but with power. It would seem that God’s choice of the Thessalonian community and their openness is what allows them to receive the word with full conviction and, despite persecution, with joy (1:6b). Their response, even in the face of any resulting hardship, offers an example “to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia” (1:7). Hence in this earliest of Paul’s letters, ministerial activity (the

proclamation of the gospel) and its coming “with full conviction” is linked to the assembly of believers.

The question of authority and a suggestion of organization also appear in this early text. There are signs that early in its existence, the community (or Paul himself?) has identified individuals who are “in charge of you in the Lord” and [who] admonish and work among the assembly (5:12).¹⁶⁰ Individuals identified as “prophets” are also singled out as having an importance within the community that is worth respect and attention (5:20). We don’t know from whom or how the role of authority comes to be in the Thessalonian assembly but we do know that it is present. We also don’t know *who* fills these roles. Though we have no precise detail, Paul urges the Thessalonians to respect those who “have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you” (12). We don’t know who they were, how or if they received specific authority. In this regard, we also can’t say definitively that they were exclusively males. We do not know how they functioned, yet these closing verses indicate some kind of organization (order?) however loose it may have been. The image of church is thus one of an assembly of believers, a family of faith, who face together local opposition to that faith. Paul and others encourage and support them—beyond that, they appear to be functioning independently of any outside help or direction.

This is a young assembly of Christians from Jewish and Gentile origins. It is a community that has embraced the gospel and, despite persecutions and harassment, has remained steadfast in faith. The imminent Second Coming of Christ (referred to in all five chapters) gives cause for hope.

¹⁶⁰ It is interesting to note, however, that Raymond Collins in his commentary in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* sees verses 12 and 13 as pertaining to the *building up* of the community (*laboring, caring, and admonishing*). Many commentators attribute these functions as three distinct attributes of the leaders of the Thessalonian community. But Collins singles out the work of J.Hainz who claims that they “speak cumulatively of the ministry of caring for the community and imply that all the members of the community are involved in that ministry.” *NJBC*. Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, Eds. (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1990) 46:37, 778. While the verses in question may pertain to the *building up* of the community, in themselves they distinguish members from one another. There are those who are “in charge” and above (πρόϊσταμένους). I disagree that they “speak cumulatively of the ministry of caring.”

3. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS/HIDES ABOUT WOMEN

Paul addresses this letter, as he does with most of his letters, to the *ekklesia*, that is, the assembly of those called to faith. The tone of the letter is warm and affectionate; the frequent exhortation to the “brothers” from their “father” (Paul) draws on a familial image. Some feminist writers see here *not* a familial image in Paul’s frequent use of *adelphos*, so much as it being an extension of Paul’s use of the term ἐκκλησία as a voluntary fellowship or meeting of (exclusively) freeborn male citizens.¹⁶¹ This seems too narrow a conclusion when one considers the sincere encouragement expressed in this letter and the whole of the Pauline corpus.¹⁶² To identify as “father” does not exclude the possibility of having daughters as well as sons. Although the family was androcentric and sexist (according to contemporary standards), nonetheless, Paul frequently uses terms from the familial model when he could as easily have used terms from legal or governmental models.

Women do not appear in the text at all. Nor are they spoken of in any direct way. There are no clues in the letter as to what activity women may have had in the Thessalonian church. However, as noted above, the use of familial titles, although exclusively male, suggests the presence and participation (however silent) of women. The only reference that may be indirectly associated with women comes in chapter 4:2-8 where admonitions to holiness include the call to sexual morality by an honorable marriage. It is neither positive nor negative, but v 4 and v 6a at least imply a female presence among the brothers. There is no gender issue per se, as we will find in other letters (2 Timothy, for example), yet throughout it is clear that this is a gendered letter.¹⁶³ Surely, there were women among the converts in Thessalonica. Acts 16 and 17 refer to several women in that city, some of whom were prominent in the community. Despite certain historical inaccuracies in Luke’s work, texts such as 16:14 (Lydia) and 17:4 (“leading women” who join Paul and Silas), leave no doubt that this was the case.

¹⁶¹ Lone Fatum holds this position. “1 Thessalonians” *Searching the Scriptures: Vol. 2* (Crossroad: New York, 1994), 250-262.

¹⁶² The tenderness and affection expressed in the letter continues in the image, “we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children” (2:7b).

¹⁶³ On this point, I agree with Lone Fatum who reads Paul’s bias as one shared by his male audience. The patriarchal patterns of virtues and social values are assumed. Within the letter there is nothing convincing to suggest that the Thessalonian community was one that included full and equal membership for women. Lone Fatum, *Searching the Scriptures: Vol. 2*, 259.

4. COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

What possible implications could this text have for our churches today? Is the congregation as important to the preaching and teaching of the Word as is the one who proclaims it? Can ministry even be Christian ministry without someone (a community?) to receive, support, and shape it? Can a minister work alone? The Second Vatican Council, in its document on the church, emphasized the importance of the believing community. In practice, has the believing community been the central concern of the church's teaching on ministry, or is ministry understood primarily from the focus of ordained priesthood?

As noted earlier, there is evidence of authority in the person of Paul and in the appearance of those who "have authority over the members." We take caution here, to avoid laying on these texts a contemporary understanding of authority that is often conceived of and experienced as a hierarchy of power. We must try and hear what the text itself says. There is nothing in this letter to the Thessalonian community to suggest the kind of hierarchical divisions or the concern for power that exists today.

Does this letter have something to say to women? Is the teaching, support, or admonition directed to everyone in the assembly? Does reading the letter aloud in congregations of believers, simply but subtly, reinforce patriarchal values and androcentric household structures? For women to constantly be admonished (or even encouraged!) by readings that begin, "Brothers . . ." may be more than disheartening. Without opening the text more broadly as we have done here, women may stop listening, believing that they are not among those being addressed.

1 CORINTHIANS (early in A.D. 54)

1. BACKGROUND

At the time of Paul, Corinth was the major, most modern city in Greece with a population of about four hundred thousand and a prosperous and diverse economy. Under Paul's tutelage, beginning with his first visit in AD 50/51-52, this became one of the most important centers of early Christianity. Raymond Brown points out that we have more correspondence to Corinth than to any other of Paul's communities. Diversity, both

religious and ethnic, created problems that demanded Paul's attention. "Paradoxically," Brown writes, "the range of their problems (rival 'theologians,' factions, problematic sexual practices, marital obligations, liturgy, church roles) makes the correspondence exceptionally instructive for troubled Christians and churches of our times."¹⁶⁴

While the dating of the letter is uncertain, most scholars opt for a date in the middle of a period from AD 52-57. The content clearly focuses on a series of problems about which the Corinthians sought Paul's advice. But this is not all. The report from "Chloe's people" suggests that another source of information was in contact with Paul about other Corinthian "problems."

2.1. BIBLICAL TEXTS

1.1 Παῦλος κλητὸς ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ καὶ Σωσθένης ὁ ἀδελφός 1.2 τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὐσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ,
1:1 Paul, called to be an **apostle** of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 1:2 **To the church of God** that is in Corinth.

CHLOE—A HOUSEHOLD CHURCH?

1:11 ἐδηλώθη γάρ μοι περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί μου, ὑπὸ τῶν Χλόης ὅτι ἔριδες ἐν ὑμῖν εἰσιν.

1:11 For it has been reported to me by **Chloe's people** that there are quarrels among you, my brothers.

1:14 εὐχαριστῶ [τῷ θεῷ] ὅτι οὐδένα ὑμῶν ἐβάπτισα εἰ μὴ Κρίσπον καὶ Γάϊον...1:16a ἐβάπτισα δὲ καὶ τὸν Στεφανᾶ οἶκον

1:17 οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλέν με Χριστὸς βαπτίζειν ἀλλὰ εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου,

1:14 I thank God that **I baptized** none of you except Crispus and Gaius... 1:16a (I did baptize also **the household of Stephanas...**) 1:17 **For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel...**

3:5 τί οὖν ἐστιν Ἀπολλῶς; τί δὲ ἐστιν Παῦλος; διάκονοι δι' ὧν ἐπιστεύσατε, καὶ ἐκάστω ὡς ὁ κύριος ἔδωκεν.

3:5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? **Servants** through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each.

3:9 θεοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί, θεοῦ γεώργιον, θεοῦ οἰκοδομὴ ἐστε.

3:10 Κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθειᾶν μοι ὡς σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων

¹⁶⁴ Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 511.

θεμέλιον ἔθηκα, ἄλλος δὲ ἐποικοδομεῖ. ἕκαστος δὲ βλέπετω πῶς ἐποικοδομεῖ.

3:9 For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, **like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it.** Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.

4:1 Οὕτως ἡμᾶς λογιζέσθω ἄνθρωπος ὡς ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ καὶ οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων θεοῦ.

4:1 Think of us in this way, as **servants of Christ and stewards** of God's mysteries.

4:15b... ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς ἐγέννησα.

4:15b Indeed, in Christ Jesus **I became your father through the gospel.**

9:1 Οὐκ εἰμι ἐλεύθερος; οὐκ εἰμι ἀπόστολος; οὐχὶ Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἐώρακα; οὐτὸ ἔργον μου ὑμεῖς ἐστε ἐν κυρίῳ; 9:2 εἰ ἄλλοις οὐκ εἰμι ἀπόστολος, ἀλλὰ γε ὑμῖν εἰμι· ἡγὰρ σφραγίς μου τῆς ἀποστολῆς ὑμεῖς ἐστε ἐν κυρίῳ.

9:1 **...Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?** Are you not my work in the Lord? 9:2 If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

9:16a ἐὰν γὰρ εὐαγγελίζωμαι, οὐκ ἔστιν μοι καύχημα· ἀνάγκη γὰρ μοι ἐπίκειται· οὐαὶ γὰρ μοί ἐστιν ἐὰν μὴ εὐαγγελίσωμαι.

9:17b οἰκονομίαν πεπίστευμαι...

9:16 **If I proclaim the gospel...and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!** 9:17...**I am entrusted with a commission...**

11:4 πᾶς ἀνὴρ προσευχόμενος ἢ προφητεύων κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ. 11:5 πᾶσα δὲ γυνὴ προσευχομένη ἢ προφητεύουσα ἀκατακαλύπτω τῇ κεφαλῇ καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς· ἐν γὰρ ἔστιν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῇ ἐξυρημένη.

11:4 Any man who prays or prophesies ... 11:5 but any woman who prays or prophesies...

Chapters 12-14

On Spiritual Gifts

12:4 Διαιρέσεις δὲ χαρισμάτων εἰσὶν, τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα· 12:5 καὶ διαιρέσεις διακονιῶν εἰσὶν, καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς κύριος· 12:6 καὶ διαιρέσεις ενεργημάτων εἰσὶν, ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς θεὸς ὁ ἐνεργῶν τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν.

12:4 **Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;** 12:5 **and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;** 12:6 **and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.**

12:7 ἐκάστω δὲ δίδοται ἡ φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον.
12:7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good...**

12:13 καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἑλληγες εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ πάντες ἐν πνεύμα ἐποτίσθημεν.

12:13 **For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.**

12:27 Ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐστε σῶμα Χριστοῦ καὶ μέλη ἐκ μέρους. 12:28 καὶ οὗς μὲν ἔθετο ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ πρῶτον ἀποστόλους, δεῦτερον προφήτας, τρίτον διδασκάλους, ἔπειτα δυνάμεις, ἔπειτα χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων, ἀντιλήψεις, κυβερνήσεις, γένη γλωσσῶν.

12:27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 12:28 **And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.**

Chapters 13-14

The gift of prophecy [ch 13:2, 8-9; 14:1-5] is highly valued and is used for the building up of the church [14:5, 6, 12, 26 ff].

14:34 αἱ γυναῖκες ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις σιγάτωσαν· οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτρέπεται αὐταῖς λαλεῖν, ἀλλὰ ὑποτασέσθωσαν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ νόμος λέγει.

14:35 εἰδέ τι μαθεῖν θέλουσιν, ἐν οἴκῳ τοὺς ἰδίους ἀνδρας ἐπερωτάτωσαν· αἰσχρὸν γάρ ἐστιν γυναικὶ λαλεῖν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ.

14:34... **women** should be **silent** in the churches. For they are **not permitted** to speak, but should be **subordinate**, as the law also says. 14:35 If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is **shameful for a woman to speak** in church.

15:3 παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις, ὃ καὶ παρέλαβον, ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφάς

15:5 καὶ ὅτι ὠφθη Κηφᾶ εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα·

15:6 ἔπειτα ὠφθη ἐπάνω πεντακοσίοις ἀδελφοῖς ἐφάπαξ, ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν ἕως ἄρτι, τινὲς δὲ ἐκοιμήθησαν·

15:7 ἔπειτα ὠφθη Ἰακώβῳ, εἶτα τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν· 15:8 ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὠφθη κάμοι. 15:9 Ἐγὼ γὰρ εἰμι ὁ ἐλάχιστος τῶν ἀποστόλων ὃς οὐκ εἰμι ἱκανὸς καλεῖσθαι ἀπόστολος, διότι ἐδίωξα τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ·

15:3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures...15:5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 15:6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 15.7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 15.8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 15.9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Ch 16 takes up the question of the collection and relations between churches. In his final messages and greetings, Paul names Timothy, Apollos, Stephanas, and his household, Fortunatus and Achaicus, Aquila and Prisca "and the church in their house"(16:19).

2.2. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS ABOUT MINISTRY

Paul's self-designation as *apostle* opens this letter along with the mention of Sosthenes, ἀδελφός. It is addressed *to the church of God that is in Corinth* (1:1-2). As in the Thessalonian correspondence, this letter clarifies our understanding of how Paul sees his mission. In this epistle, Paul's apostleship identifies his call to "proclaim the gospel . . . with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (2:4). It is with a very real sense of mission, of having been sent, that Paul conveys the message of Christ crucified--a wisdom not "of this age" but rather, "God's wisdom, secret and hidden" (2:7). He is the servant and steward of this proclamation.

Paul describes his ministry of apostleship as a work of proclamation and teaching, rather than of baptizing (1: 4-7,13-17). Yet, he acknowledges, that he "has baptized some." These verses are reminiscent of the scene in Acts 6 when the twelve call the community together to appoint seven men to distribute food at table because they themselves do not want "to neglect the word of God." To proclaim the gospel is Paul's primary commission, command, and expression of his apostleship. At least in the case of Paul, we can say that there is a clear sense of being called to a particular service. At the same time, however, we know that Paul also thinks of himself as a prophet and that he is engaged in the work of teaching (see for example, Rom 16:26; I Cor 13:2, 14:37). *How* one is to perform a service appears of less importance than that there *is* a unique service for individuals to perform according to the gift received in the Spirit.

As regards the assembly of the faithful at Corinth, Paul mentions specifically those he has baptized as entire households, where the gathering of believers meets (1:14-

16; 16:15-18). Acts 18:8 makes reference to Paul's baptizing Crispus and other members of the synagogue in Corinth. It is a question without a clear response to know whether these groups all "looked" the same. The household of Stephanas, the "first converts in Achaia," possibly similar to others, may likely have manifested some traditional, patriarchal values such as the subordination of slaves, women, and children. Synagogue traditions, self-rule, and the structures to support it might easily have been carried over to these house churches.¹⁶⁵ In the present context, we have no detail of the assembly that met in Chloe's house, nor that of Prisca and Aquila (1:11; 16:9). Further on, however, we will discuss the possible roles played by these households.

In chapter 2:13, the *primacy* of the gospel is clear. Again and again, it is the *gospel* that is the central, Spirit-driven, and directed power of God at work in individuals. Ministry is always understood in light of and springing from this reality. It is ministry to and from the gospel on behalf of the people. The emphasis on Paul's proclamation of the gospel reappears, following the rhetorical questions about his apostleship in 9:1 ff. This is the essence of his ministry (9:16-17). In these early letters it is clear that the task at hand is the promotion of the good news and the desire to deepen faith within the believers. There is not a great deal of attention given to special roles or positions of authority, insofar as human power is concerned. The power of the gospel, Paul believes, transcends competition or separation that arises from one's status. Interestingly, however, very early on there are disputes and rivalries over authority, orthodoxy, and who is able to receive this good news.

Paul's work is a service offered in God, that through God's power "you came to believe." Neither Paul nor any human minister gives the growth in faith but rather acts only as "servant[s] of Christ" (ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ) and "stewards of God's mysteries" (οἰκονόμους μυστηρίων θεοῦ 4:1). Paul's defense of his apostleship beginning in chapter 9 touches another aspect of apostleship which we shall see again in other contexts: that of being an eyewitness ("Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" 9:1). "Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" (9:2).

¹⁶⁵ Antoinette Wire, "I Corinthians." *Searching the Scriptures* Vol. 2 Ed. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 150.

Another recurring theme is the notion of reciprocity—the church needs servants (ministers) and servants need (exist for) the good of the church (3:9-10).

Chapters 12-14

Beginning with 12:4-7, Paul speaks of “varieties of gifts,” “varieties of services,” and “varieties of activities.” To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Three important points surface in this section: obviously, one is the great diversity of gifts and ministries present in the community. The diversity of gifts, given through the Spirit, ranges from one who is given wisdom, to another faith, or the gift of healing, to one who has the gift of tongues. After the discourse on the unity of the body, with its many parts (vv 12-26), richly diverse services and activities are delineated (apostles, prophets, teachers, “then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues” v 28).

The second point to be underscored is the recognition that the one Holy Spirit of God is the Source and Origin of all gifts. The presence and use of these gifts is the manifestation and confirmation of the presence of the Spirit. It is this same Spirit in whom all the members are baptized and through whom all barriers of difference are broken. All are one in Christ. All are free in Christ. All are members of the same Body.

Thirdly, all gifts and ministries have a communal dimension; each is given and exercised “for the common good.” Just as God has arranged the body, so one member affects and is affected by all the other members. “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it”(12:26). This communal dimension is evident further on, in chapter 14 for example, where the expression “for the common good,” or “for the upbuilding of the church,” is used at least five times when referring to prophecy or other gifts. There is no sense of exclusivity on any level, either in how these gifts and ministries are received or shared.

The well known “list” at the end of chapter 12 has often been interpreted as a hierarchy of ministerial roles listed in order of importance (“first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing . . .”). Another explanation for the arrangement of the list is based on chronology. The roles or gifts are listed in the order that they appear in the communities. Something prophetic is declared after the gospel has been proclaimed. You only need teachers when something has been

said. Hence, the order in the text: “first apostles, second prophets, third teachers.” This seems a more likely explanation when one considers the substance of the gospel message itself.

3. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS/HIDES ABOUT WOMEN

There is a community that is centered in/established in the house of Chloe, a woman, and a householder. Is this a unique or exceptional occurrence--that a woman is in this prominent position? Paul takes seriously the report that comes to him through this group (1:11). This report seems to have prompted Paul’s writing the letter. It must have come from either a house-church headed by Chloe or from a Christian group that she led. There is no further detail; nor is there any disapproval or negative tone associated with Chloe or her household.¹⁶⁶ Would Chloe’s household be significantly different from that of Stephanas, mentioned a few verses later (1:16)? We know that women had become Christians and held leadership roles in the Christian communities before Paul came on the scene. Prisca [and Aquila] was well known before Paul came to Corinth (1:16:19). She led a “church in their house,” worked with Paul, and risked her life. We read elsewhere that she was a teacher (Apollos being one of her well known students). At the end of the letter, the reference to Aquila and Prisca and “the church in their house” at Ephesus (16:19) fills out a picture of diversity in these local churches. The “collection” that we will hear mentioned in other letters points to collaboration and concern (even if at times problematic) between the churches (16:1-3).

A striking and important point becomes clear as we examine 9:5 more closely. “Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?” If this verse is even taken up by commentators, it is often in relation to marriage or sexual issues.¹⁶⁷ From a feminist perspective we find hidden here at least three significant points in relation to women, the gospel, and ministry. First, women are clearly members of the Christian community. Conversion and commitment to the gospel obviously worked for them as it did for men.

¹⁶⁶ Further comment on this can be found in Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* “Companion to the New Testament Series” (Crossroad: New York, 1998), Section on the Pauline Letters, 30-61.

¹⁶⁷ See Jerome Murphy-O’Connor’s commentary in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988): [49], 806. *The Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1966) offers this note: “Lit. ‘a sister, a woman (wife?).’ *To look after the apostle’s needs.*” [italics, mine] p.301.

Secondly, women did not all stay in the home and the private sphere of Greco-Roman society. Men's travel is called "missionary work," why wouldn't the same term be applicable to women's travel? Thirdly, we have the example of Prisca [and Aquila], mentioned earlier. The verse in question here (9:5) suggests that there were perhaps many other women like Prisca.

Chapter 11 contains several difficult and confusing messages from Paul. A hint of Greco-Roman cultural influence and the role shame plays in women's lives shows itself in relation to the ministry of prophecy and the question of veiling (11:4-5). The distinction Paul makes for men and women in this case may be based on the Greco-Roman conviction that woman is a mentally and physically inferior creature. In Greek society women were, for the most part, without education and political power. A woman shames her husband and herself when she appears in the public sphere, much less, speaks publicly. "A man [is] shamed when his honor is challenged and not publicly defended, a woman when hers even needs defense."¹⁶⁸ It is difficult to know whether Jewish or Greek customs were observed in regards to veiling. The cultural questions are blurred by lack of precise information. What is clear is that Paul shamed women who prophesied with heads uncovered. Obviously, for our interests, it is clearly an affirmation that both women and men perform public prayer and share the ministry of prophecy. This point has typically been blurred or simply overlooked when put in the context of vs. 3 and 7-10 which is a discussion of women's subordination. Now the emphasis is on how a woman should *dress* (veils being a highly symbolic article of dress) and *behave* (in subordination to men). The vehemence and negativity of these verses are such that one can reasonably conclude that women's prayer and prophecy were both a significant and powerful reality in the life of the community.¹⁶⁹ After a somewhat convoluted series of verses establishing man as the head of his wife and man as the glory of God (while woman is said to be the

¹⁶⁸ Antoinette Wire, "1Corinthians," *Searching the Scriptures Volume Two: A Feminist Commentary*, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994): 179.

¹⁶⁹ Although much debated, Antoinette Clark Wire in *The Corinthian Women Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990) is convincing in her claim that women prophets had seized upon their freedom in this role and took leadership in the community as independent individuals. Wire contends that they withdrew from sexual relations (7:1-10), removed their head coverings (11: 2-16; 8:1-13), and claimed the freedom to eat meat offered to idols. They spoke out at public meetings through inspired speech (chapters 12-14) and Paul did not directly object to it or call a halt to their activity.

glory of man, Paul seems to offer as a concession that, after all, “man is born of woman. And all things are from God” (vv 11-12).

These verses regarding the silencing of women in the churches, regardless of their origin, are clearly an inhibition if not a prohibition to women’s offering of their gifts in the assembly. If a woman cannot speak and has the gift of prophecy, this ministry is silenced. If a woman cannot speak and has the gift of tongues, or the gift of assistance, or that of leadership (13:27ff), this ministry is silenced. How can the ministry be shared for “the upbuilding of the community”? The gifts of the Body are refused and “when one member suffers, the whole body suffers.”

4. COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

In this letter as in so much of Paul’s writing, the gospel’s power is intimately linked with the message of Christ crucified. This power does not express “a wisdom of this age”(2:6) nor is it likened to this world’s power. Believers must live now according to the standards of Divine Wisdom and detach themselves from the human standards that lead to the kinds of disorder and division the Corinthian community was experiencing. The challenge for contemporary Christians is to do this kind of self-reflection and judgment. The authenticity of Paul’s preaching demanded that he refuse clever and persuasive arguments for the sake of couching an otherwise confounding and challenging message: a crucified Messiah. In light of this truth, there is good reason to pay attention to religious language today. We speak of the importance of allowing the gospel to be adapted to contemporary cultures--to grow uniquely in and among the people of various times and places. How much of our preaching and teaching reflects the effort to allow the gospel to be authentically rooted in local settings, open to all members without distinction of status or sex? How much of it is an attempt to soften the standards of life demanded by the gospel? Have we allowed the values (the “wisdom”) of contemporary culture to dominate, diminish, or determine the impact of the gospel?

How do we reconcile Paul’s notion of apostleship with the concept of ordained priesthood operative in the contemporary church? *The Dogmatic Constitution on The Church (Lumen Gentium)* stated, “The Lord Jesus, having prayed at length to the Father, called to himself those whom he willed and appointed twelve to be with him, whom he

sent to preach the kingdom of God (cf. Mk. 3:13-19; Mt, 19:1-42). These apostles (cf. Lk 6:13) he constituted in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from amongst them (cf. Jn 21:15-17)."¹⁷⁰ In First Corinthians apostolic ministry more clearly arises from the Gospel imperative than from "a line of succession." Prisca, Chloe, Apollos, and Timothy might all have been considered "apostles" in Paul's understanding and experience.

Paul's authority over the Corinthian community was powerful but was not hierarchical in a sense of superiority. A feminist point of view affirms authority that arises from God and is grounded in the life of the community. It has a reciprocity that assures responsibility on every front. In 9:2, Paul recognizes that it is the community who confirms his gift and call ("you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord"). What is the *modus operandi* in the church today for the discernment of gifts and the call to particular ministries? The community is clearly not a free agent in determining the authenticity of a call to service. Nor is it clear how the authority or affirmative power of the community of faith is expressed.

2 CORINTHIANS (A.D. 57)

1. BACKGROUND

The authenticity of this Pauline letter is not questioned, but the unity of the letter (or lack thereof) has prompted much debate and many theories as to how many independent pieces make up the whole. The hypothesis that most appeals to me rejects the five-letters-in-one partition promoted by scholars such as Günther Bornkamm. The proposition that seems more likely identifies two distinct and independent parts in the letter. This hypothesis maintains that chapters 1-9 are a unity followed by another unit found in chapters 10-13. The tone and "sarcastic self-vindication"¹⁷¹ of chapters 10-13 could hardly have been done in the same sitting as the grateful celebration of reconciliation characterizing chapters 1-9. Many interpreters hold this view, foremost among whom is Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. Referred to as Letters A and B, Murphy O'Connor dates the

¹⁷⁰ *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, Vatican II. 21 November 1964, #19.

¹⁷¹ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Second Letter to the Corinthians" *NJBC* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 816.

former (chaps. 1-9) in the spring of C.E. 55 with Letter B (10-13) following about a year later. Letter B would have been written shortly after Paul had received news of a radical deterioration and personal betrayal in the Corinthian assemblies.

For our purposes, what is relevant to the question of ministry is the fact that Paul's authority was being undermined and his apostleship questioned. This mistrust was stirred up by a group of his opponents, false-apostles (ψευδαπόστολοι), as Paul calls them. They were hostile to Paul and apparently claimed to have the authenticity he lacked. This prompts Paul to spill a good deal of ink in an angry, somewhat outrageous defense of his apostolic ministry and its divine origin in Jesus Christ. He presents himself as the apostle, rejected and burdened with much suffering. He persuasively describes his trials as a part of his apologia. He acknowledges that he has no printed credentials and uses the community itself as the authentication of his ministry ("you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God . . ." (3:3). Further along in Letter B, after listing specific sufferings and hardships he has endured because of his apostleship he concludes, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness" (11:30). Despite Paul's sarcasm and some acerbic reproaches to his opponents in this section of the letter, the entire affair and mistrust it has created in his Christian "children," prompts some of Paul's most persuasive and beautiful writing.¹⁷² Thus, despite having only one side of the conversation, this letter is important particularly for the detail of Paul's ministry and his relation to the Christians at Corinth. As well, it is important as a demonstration of the dynamic stages of growth in these early Christian communities.

2.1. BIBLICAL TEXTS

2:1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ, καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφός, τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὔσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ, σὺν τοῖς ἁγίοις πᾶσιν τοῖς οὔσιν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ·

2:1 Paul, an **apostle** of Christ Jesus **by the will of God**, and **Timothy our brother**, To the church of God that is in Corinth, **including all the saints throughout Achaia:**

¹⁷² "So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ: for whenever I am weak, then I am strong"(2 Cor. 12:9b-19). See also, other persuasive and strong texts such as 2 Cor. 4:7-12,16-5:21.

2:12 Ἐλθὼν δὲ εἰς τὴν Τρωάδα εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θύρας μοι ἀνεωγμένης ἐν κυρίῳ, 2:13 οὐκ ἔσχηκα ἀνεσιν τῷ πνεύματί μου τῷ μὴ εὑρεῖν με Τίτον τὸν ἀδελφόν μου,

2:12 When I came to Troas to **proclaim the good news of Christ**, a door was opened for me in the Lord; 2:13 but my mind could not rest because I did not find **my brother Titus** there.

3:5b . . . ἀλλ' ἡ ἱκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, 3:6 ὃς καὶ ἰκάνωσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης, οὐ γράμματος ἀλλὰ πνεύματος·

3:5b . . . our **competence** is from God, 3:6 who has made us **competent to be ministers of a new covenant**, not of letter but of spirit . . .

3:8 πῶς οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἡ διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος ἔσται ἐν δόξῃ;

3:9 εἰ γὰρ τῇ διακονίᾳ τῆς κατακρίσεως δόξα, πολλῷ μᾶλλον περισσεύει ἡ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης δόξῃ.

3:8 . . . how much more will **the ministry of the Spirit** come in glory? 3:9b . . . much more does the **ministry of justification** abound in glory!

4:1 Διὰ τοῦτο, ἔχοντες τὴν διακονίαν ταύτην καθὼς ἠλεήθημεν, οὐκ ἐγκακούμεν

4:1 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that **we are engaged in this ministry**, we do not lose heart.

4:5 οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτοὺς κηρύσσομεν ἀλλὰ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν κύριον, ἑαυτοὺς δὲ δούλους ὑμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦν.

4:5 . . . we **proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord** and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.

5:18 τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ καὶ δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς, 5:19 ὡς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσων ἑαυτῷ, μὴ λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν καὶ θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς.

5:20 ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύομεν ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντος δι' ἡμῶν· δεόμεθα ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, καταλλάγητε τῷ θεῷ.

5:18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**; 5:19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and **entrusting to us the message of reconciliation**. 5:20 So we are **ambassadors for Christ**, for God is making his appeal through us.

8:16 Χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ τῷ δόντι τὴν αὐτὴν σπουδὴν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ Τίτου, 8:17 ὅτι τὴν μὲν παράκλησιν ἐδέξατο, σπουδαιότερος δὲ ὑπάρχων ἀθθαίρετος ἐξῆλθεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς. 8:18 συνεπέμψαμεν δὲ μετ'

αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀδελφὸν οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ διὰ πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν, 8:19 οὐ μόνον δὲ ἀλλὰ καὶ χειροτονηθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν συνέκδημος ἡμῶν σὺν τῇ χάριτι ταύτῃ τῇ διακονουμένῃ ὑφ' ἡμῶν πρὸς τὴν [αὐτοῦ] τοῦ κυρίου δόξαν καὶ προθυμίαν ἡμῶν, 8:20 στελλόμενοι τοῦτο, μή τις ἡμᾶς μωμήσῃται ἐν τῇ ἀδρότῃ ταύτῃ τῇ διακονουμένῃ ὑφ' ἡμῶν· 8:21 προνοοῦμεν γὰρ καλὰ οὐ μόνον ἐνώπιον κυρίου ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐνώπιον ἀνθρώπων. 8:22 συνεπέμψαμεν δὲ αὐτοῖς τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν ὃν ἐδοκιμάσαμεν ἐν πολλοῖς πολλάκις σπουδαῖον ὄντα, νυνὶ δὲ πολὺ σπουδαιότερον πεποιθήσει πολλῇ τῇ εἰς ὑμᾶς. 8:23 εἴτε ὑπὲρ Τίτου, κοινωνὸς ἔμὸς καὶ εἰς ὑμᾶς συνεργός· εἴτε ἀδελφοὶ ἡμῶν, ἀπόστολοι ἐκκλησιῶν, δόξα Χριστοῦ. 8:24 τὴν οὖν ἐνδειξίν τῆς ἀγάπης ὑμῶν καὶ ἡμῶν καυχήσεως ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν εἰς αὐτοὺς ἐνδεικνύμενοι εἰς πρόσωπον τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν.

8:16 But thanks be to God who put into the heart of Titus the same eagerness/diligence for you that I myself have. 8:17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but since he is more eager than ever, he is going to you of his own accord. 8:18 With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his proclaiming the good news; 8:19 and not only that, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us while we are administering this generous undertaking for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our goodwill... 8:22 And with them we are sending our brother... 8:23 As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service; as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. 8:24 Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

9:1 Περὶ μὲν γὰρ τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους περισσὸν μοί ἐστιν τὸ ὀγράφειν ὑμῖν·

9:1 Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints . . .

9:3 ἔπεμψα δὲ τοὺς ἀδελφούς,

9:3 But I am sending the brothers . . .

9:13 διὰ τῆς δοκιμῆς τῆς διακονίας ταύτης δοξάζοντες τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ τῇ ὑποταγῇ τῆς ὁμολογίας ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀπλότῃ τῆς κοινωνίας εἰς αὐτοὺς καὶ εἰς πάντας,

9:13 Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing . . .

12:12 τὰ μὲν σημεῖα τοῦ ἀποστόλου κατειργάσθη ἐν ὑμῖν ἐν πάσῃ ὑπομονῇ, σημείοις τε καὶ τέρασιν καὶ δυνάμεσιν.

12:12 The signs of a **true apostle** were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works.

13:10 διὰ τοῦτο ταῦτα ἀπὸν γράφω, ἵνα παρὼν μὴ ἀποτόμως χρήσωμαι κατὰ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἣν ὁ κύριος ἔδωκέν μοι εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεσιν.

13:10 So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using **the authority** that the Lord has given me **for building up** and not for tearing down.

2.2. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS ABOUT MINISTRY

Paul opens the letter with a greeting identical to that of the first letter to the Corinthians, identifying himself as apostle. In this second letter Paul names Timothy rather than Sosthenes, “brother.” Silvanus is another co-worker to Timothy and Paul. As earlier, there is evidence of a collaborative, shared effort in preaching the gospel. “For the Son of God, Jesus Christ,” Paul writes, “whom we proclaimed among you . . .” (1:19). Paul is not alone in this work. He also refers frequently to his “brother Titus” whom he has sent as a co-worker (8:23) and trusted emissary (7:6; 12:18). Titus has also assisted Paul with the collection for the church in Jerusalem (8:6). More will be heard of Titus in other NT writings. Thus far in our study, this collaboration and mutuality in the work of the gospel appears consistently in Paul’s writings. This is very significant for the feminist perspective I am presenting. In a technical sense, this feminist method of hermeneutics employs other disciplines and welcomes diverse scholarship that adds insight and understanding. Collaboration and inclusion are characteristic values of a feminist hermeneutic. It does not exclude male experience but strives for the kind of collaboration and mutuality described in these texts. The feminist hermeneutic I employ here, seeks biblical grounds for cooperation and mutuality in the sharing of tasks/ministries in the life of the faith-community.

In the case of 2 Corinthians a wave of opposition to Paul and to his apostolic authority at Corinth made other internal problems of the community more complicated for Paul to deal with. Hence, a fundamental theme running throughout the letter is Paul’s apostleship. Paul preaches “. . . Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake” (4:5). He is a minister [*diakonos*], he says, of “a new covenant” (3:6) for

which God has made him competent. Paul describes his ministry variously as being “of the Spirit” (3:6b), a “ministry of justification” (3:9), and “the ministry of reconciliation” (5:18). It is by God’s power, God’s competence, and God’s mercy “that we are engaged in this ministry” (4:1).

Paul exerts his authority within the community in various ways. In Letter A (chaps 1-9) he is careful to exercise his authority indirectly, through his tone and by way of suggestion (1:23-24; 2:10; 7:2-4; 8:8). Letter B (chaps 10-13), however, is an angry attempt to reestablish his authority in the face of “false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (11:13 f). Paul is prepared to exercise discipline if necessary. “So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down” (13:10). Yet it is the community that gives Paul the approbation as minister and servant. As he writes in 1 Corinthians, it is the community of believers that is the “seal” of his apostleship-- “are you not my work in the Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1b-2).¹⁷³ In this case, the mutuality exists in the relation between minister and community.

A hint of the rapport between the new Christian communities shows in Paul’s address to “the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia” (1:1b). The relations between these communities are seen somewhat more clearly (though more through implicit rather than explicit detail) in texts such as 8:1ff, where the generosity of the churches of Macedonia is cited as testimony of God’s grace at work among them. Paul testifies: “They voluntarily gave according to their means and even beyond their means . . . begging for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints”(8:3-4). He makes appeal to and encourages the zeal already shown through the generous sharing between churches. “Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you” (8:24). The commendation of Titus (8:16-24) is interlaced with references to the churches and those who have been “messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ” (8:23).

¹⁷³ Paul seems to have understood well the relationship between authority and community. In his commentary on First Corinthians, *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Jerome Murphy O’Connor writes, “The basis of Christian authority is effective service to the community” (p. 814).

3. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS/HIDES ABOUT WOMEN

The second letter to the Corinthians mentions women twice. The first reference (6:18) has positive implications for women; the second (11:2-3) reinforces negative, sexual stereotypes. In chapter 6:16b-18, Paul has woven together pieces of several verses of the Hebrew bible. Verse 18 is formed from 2 Samuel 7:8 and 14.

The text in 2 Corinthians reads [καὶ ἔσομαι ὑμῖν εἰς πατέρα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔσεσθέ μοι εἰς υἱοὺς καὶ θυγατέρας.] “And I will be your father, and you shall be to me sons and daughters.” In contrast, 2 Samuel 7:14 (God’s promise to David as son), the LXX reads [εἰς πατέρα καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν.] “I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.” The women prophets and individuals named in the first letter to the Corinthians are never mentioned in the second letter, but this adaptation of the Hebrew scripture for the purpose of gender inclusivity is noteworthy. The presence and influence of women had to have had a significant and positive impact among the Corinthian community. Whoever made this adaptation, whether it was Paul or not, understood the new creation to include women as well as men. Men and women are the children of God; they are called *hagioi*, “holy ones.”¹⁷⁴

The second text that makes reference to women is 11:2-3. Paul describes the church as the bride of Christ. Paul is the father of the bride, feeling “a divine jealousy for you . . . to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” He fears that “as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray . . .” Although the Genesis account presents both Eve and Adam as culpable, Paul presents Eve alone as the symbol of the gullibility of the whole community. While Paul recognizes that any member, whether male or female, may turn away from the gospel, he uses Eve alone as the subject of deception. Both the paternalism of verse 2 and the use of the “first woman” as the paradigm of one who succumbs to temptation in verse 3, reinforce a sexual stereotype

¹⁷⁴ Shelly Matthew, “2 Corinthians,” *Searching the Scriptures: Vol. 2*, Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Editor. (New York: Crossroad, 1994): 208. See also Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 196. In her discussion of the early Christian missionary movement, the author considers this textual adaptation from 2 Samuel 7. “Several exegetes,” she notes, “have observed the ‘sexual egalitarianism’ and even ‘feminism’ that comes to the fore in this alteration.” The author herself sees this passage fitting into the predominantly Jewish Christian missionary movement that is based on faith in Jesus Christ. “The boundaries here are not drawn between men and women, Jewish and gentile Christians, but between believers and unbelievers” (p. 196).

that holds women in a weak, helpless, and sinful image.¹⁷⁵ Clearly, this could not have been the example that women like Chloe, Prisca, and others would have given among the believers.

4. COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

Working from a feminist perspective, we note the frequency with which Paul speaks of his authority as the founder/father of the community at Corinth. While the familial model of authority and leadership has its advantages, as noted in our discussion of the first letter to the Corinthians, there are also some problems that come with it. The weight of Paul's authority allows him to persuade, command, or punish his "children." In today's context, if we take this familial model too literally, there is danger of building structures of authority and models for leadership based on unequal relationships. A parent (authority figure)—child (the laity) relationship precludes a paradigm of leadership that encourages reciprocity, mutual responsibility, and honest debate.¹⁷⁶

The themes of suffering and weakness are "red flag" topics for many women today, particularly in the context of religion and the bible. Many of us experience a double standard in the value systems operative in the church. In the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul boasts of his weaknesses and inadequacy.¹⁷⁷ His reply to his opponents is to embrace, rather than to deny, his trials and tribulations. "When I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10b). Paul ties his authenticity and authority to the folly of the cross of Jesus Christ. He points to God as the source of his strength, wisdom, and authenticity." "My grace is sufficient for you; for power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9). These arguments are both moving and persuasive. However, women frequently have not been in the position to choose to embrace such a response to adversity. It has been foisted upon us.

The cross of Jesus has been used many times to justify the oppression of women and the suffering we experience because of our gender. Women are encouraged to hang

¹⁷⁵ Both the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* [50:47] and *The Women's Bible Commentary*, "2 Corinthians" [p. 331] comment along these lines.

¹⁷⁶ Matthew, "2 Corinthians," *Searching the Scriptures: Vol.2*, 214.

¹⁷⁷ "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you" (2 Cor 4:8-12). See also, 2 Cor 6:3-10; 11:21b-30.

on to and cherish their submissive attitudes and feelings of inadequacy because these are their way of sharing Christ's suffering and weakness. A message such as, "Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ" (2 Cor 12:10a) needs to be read and interpreted in a contemporary and culturally sensitive context if it is to offer any kind of liberating or justly challenging message for women. Those who promote a viewpoint that justifies or dignifies unnecessary suffering, seem to forget that the suffering that Christ experienced arose from the strong stand he took against falsehood and double standards and the life offering he made to promote truth. Instead, such interpreters of the NT use the themes of the cross and suffering in ways that reinforce a discriminatory and false dualism in which women are the "weaker" in face of the "stronger sex." How can the cross of Jesus Christ be a true vehicle of saving grace and liberation for women, the suffering poor, the abandoned, and the beaten of the world today? Concomitant with this question is the requisite establishment of their dignity as the sons and daughters of God.

PHILIPPIANS (A.D. 56-57)

1. BACKGROUND

Though the precise date is uncertain, Paul wrote this letter from prison to the Philippian community sometime in the mid-50s. Where Paul wrote it is also under debate, though recently Ephesus is gaining preference as the place of origin¹⁷⁸ over past opinions favoring Rome (Acts 28:30) or a Caesarean location (cf. Acts 21-26). Philippi had been a Thracian city that later was refounded by the Roman leader Marc Antony about 40 B.C.E. At first a Roman colony, it eventually became a major city and home for many Roman military veterans. Roman law and administration predominated.

Scholars question the unity of the text because of several rough transitions. Chapters 3:1 and 4:9 both read like conclusions, but the first is followed with a change of topic in 3:2, and the second (4:9) is followed by a thanksgiving formula normally found at the beginning of a letter. These disjunctures suggest a conflation of two or three originally distinct letters. More specific to our interests here, we note that the overall style

¹⁷⁸ Carolyn Osiek in her chapter on "Philippians" in *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol. 2 presents the textual support for an Ephesus location for the writing of the letter, 238-239.

in the letter has been classified as the rhetoric of friendship. Paul uses this strategy to evoke from the Philippians a continuation of the warm and mutual friendship they share and to encourage them to remain loyal to his teaching as well as to strengthen the internal bonds of community.¹⁷⁹ Thus, despite the problems posed by the literary unity, the text as a whole underscores relationship, communication, and human sensitivity. This will be developed later in the analysis of the text.

2.1. BIBLICAL TEXT

1:1 Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δούλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνους,
 1:1 **Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:**

1:15 Τινὲς μὲν καὶ διὰ φθόνον καὶ ἔριν, τινὲς δὲ καὶ δι' εὐδοκίαν τὸν Χριστὸν κηρύσσουν· 1:16 οἱ μὲν ἐξ ἀγάπης, εἰδότες ὅτι εἰς ἀπολογία τοῦ εὐαγγελίου κεῖμαι,

1:15 Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 1:16 These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel;

1:17 οἱ δὲ ἐξ ἐριθείας τὸν Χριστὸν καταγγέλλουσιν, οὐχ ἀγνώως, οἰόμενοι θλιψὴν ἐγείρειν τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου. 1:8 τί γάρ; πλὴν ὅτι παντὶ τρόπῳ, εἴτε προφάσει εἴτε ἀληθείᾳ, Χριστὸς καταγγέλλεται,

1:17 the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. 1:18 **What does this matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.**

2:22 τὴν δὲ δοκιμὴν αὐτοῦ γινώσκετε, ὅτι ὡς πατρὶ τέκνον σὺν ἔμοι ἐδούλευσεν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον.

2:22 But Timothy's worth you know, how **like a son with a father** he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

2:25 Ἐπιπροσέτιον δὲ ἡγήσαμαι Ἐπαφρόδιτον τὸν ἀδελφὸν καὶ συνεργὸν καὶ συστρατιώτην μου, ὑμῶν δὲ ἀπόστολον καὶ λειτουργὸν τῆς χρείας μου, πέμψαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς,

2:25 Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus--**my brother and co-worker and fellow soldier**, your messenger and minister to my need;

¹⁷⁹ R. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 482.

4:2 Εὐοδίαν παρακαλῶ καὶ Συντύχην παρακαλῶ τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν κυρίῳ. 4:3 ναὶ ἐρωτῶ καὶ σέ, γνήσιε σύζυγε, συλλαμβάνου αὐταῖς, αἵτινες ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ συνήθλησάν μοι μετὰ καὶ Κλήμεντος καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν συνεργῶν μου, ὧν τὰ ὀνόματα ἐν βίβλῳ ζωῆς.

4:2 I urge **Euodia** and I urge **Syntychē** to be of the same mind in the Lord. 4:3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, **help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers**, whose names are in the book of life.

2.2. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS ABOUT MINISTRY

The letter begins with Paul's self-identification as the slave/servant (along with Timothy) of Christ Jesus. His opening address follows the customary pattern for a letter in the ancient world. And although he does not use the term apostle for either himself or Timothy in this letter, clearly, as 1:12ff indicates, Paul sees his mission as one of proclamation.¹⁸⁰ As in all his letters, he changes the pattern only to expand on his identity as apostle.

To translate the terms ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνους, bishops and deacons (1:1), in addition to being anachronistic, is confusing to contemporary readers since Paul certainly was not thinking of the office of bishop and deacon as we know it today. A more accurate translation of these terms is *overseers* and *helpers/ministers*. Nevertheless, that Paul singles out this group suggests that these “administrators” or leaders (*episkopoi*) were clearly identifiable in the community.¹⁸¹ Acts 20:17-35 presents presbyters and *episkopoi* as synonymous. The term “deacon” is closer to contemporary understandings insofar as all evidence from the first century “indicates that they were trusted assistants of the presbyters, often responsible for administration, correspondence, and even representation of their own church to other churches.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ In fact, *apostolos* is used only once in 2:25 and that is in reference to Epaphroditus.

¹⁸¹ Carolyn Osiek, “Philippians,” *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol. 2 writes, “This verse is one of the earliest indications that Christian communities were beginning to have a recognized collegial governing body, probably after the example of most Jewish synagogues governed by a group of presbyters or *archons* (leaders),” 240-241.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 241.

3. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS/HIDES ABOUT WOMEN

Although it is not obvious from Paul's letter, women played leading roles in the establishment and growth of the community at Philippi (4:2-3; Acts 16:14-15). Timothy is named three times; the "brothers" are addressed four times; Epaphroditus is mentioned positively twice; Clement is named as a co-worker once in the letter along with one specific reference to women: Euodia and Syntyche. These two are the only women identified by name, and that is in relation to a disagreement about something (4:2). Paul adds that these women have "struggled beside me in the work of the gospel" (4:3). Various commentators have speculated on what may or may not have been a "quarrel," but few have made much of these verses where Paul speaks of their significant role as "co-workers" with him and of what that might mean. In a study on the text written in 1967 we read, "The plea to a couple of members of the church (4:2-3) to be of one mind suggests that some *petty bickering* was harming Christian unity."¹⁸³ Recently exegetes have given these verses greater attention. Their work has helped us see more clearly what has remained hidden until now. Among others, the following is helpful, "Their [Euodia and Syntyche] prominence as co-workers with Paul may have been more acceptable at Philippi than it would have been in other parts of the Empire; inscriptions indicate heavy involvement of women in the religious activities of this city."¹⁸⁴ These women may have been leaders of groups in the Philippian community, perhaps heads of households. They may have been a missionary team. Whoever they were, their disagreement must have been affecting the life and peace of the Christians at Philippi. One would hardly think that Paul would single out two women to stop "some petty bickering," to say nothing of wasting precious parchment to address a strictly

¹⁸³ E.H. Maly, *New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 11* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1967), p. 278. Note also the tone of blame in *A New Catholic Commentary on Scripture* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons LTD, 1969) where these verses are given this comment: "1-3. He entreats them [the Christians] to live in this way of the Lord, addressing particularly two rival women (one of whom may be the Lydian woman of Acts 16). *These seem to be the root of some disharmony in the church.*" [italics, mine] More positive but relatively unhelpful, the *NJBC* cites another author on the verses: "*Euodia and Syntyche: Two women, prominent in the community (v 3), otherwise unknown to us*" (W.D. Thomas, *EXPTim 83* [1971-72], 117-120.

¹⁸⁴ Craig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: NT* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 565.

personal problem. The influence of these two women, co-workers with Paul and Clement, must have been considerable among the believers.

Another woman important in the Philippian community is Lydia. She is *never* mentioned directly in the letter. However, Luke's Acts of the Apostles (16:14-15, 40) leads us to believe that she was an instrumental and significant leader in the life of the community. According to the Acts of the Apostles, Lydia is the first person Paul meets on this, his first mission in Macedonia (Europe). She is the only woman identified in Acts as a "God-fearer" (σεβομένη τὸν θεόν), that is, a Gentile attracted to Jewish worship and customs. Luke identifies her as "a dealer in purple cloth" which, though uncertain, suggests a modest level of financial independence (Acts 16:14).¹⁸⁵ The fact that she is from Thyatira in Asia Minor and moves to Philippi, suggests independence and that her work may have brought her into the public sphere of society. Though similarities have been drawn between Lydia's household and that of Cornelius (Acts 10:7), the latter of which included at least "two slaves and a devout soldier who served him," there is no firm evidence to suggest that she had slaves or soldiers under her direction.¹⁸⁶ However, work with purple cloth required many workers and we may thus tentatively conclude that as head of a household, Lydia had numerous people around her (Acts 16:13-15), not necessarily slaves, however. Thus she was thus able to welcome Paul and the community into her home. She is one of the few female characters who have a speaking role in the New Testament letters and in the New Testament as a whole. Recall that she invites Paul and his companions, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." Lydia's statement carries a double invitation: one of hospitality and one

¹⁸⁵ Ivoni Richter Reimer, in *Women in the Acts of the Apostles A Feminist Liberation Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 111. The author presents a fascinating and detailed discussion of various scholarly studies that have examined Lydia's work and the textile trade in general. She goes on to draw her own conclusions. (On this topic see especially, 99-109). Also Luise Schottroff, " 'Leaders of the Faith' or 'Just Some Pious Womenfolk'?" and "Lydia: A New Quality of Power," in *Let the Oppressed Go Free*, 60-79 and 131-137. Also, her chapter in *Lydia's Impatient Sisters*, "The Work of Women in the New Testament" (79-90, esp. 83).

¹⁸⁶ H. -J. Klauck, *Hausgemeinde und Hauskirche im frühen Christentum* (SBS 103, Stuttgart, 1981). Klauck sees no context for surmising the elements he has found in Cornelius' house, yet he does contend that Lydia was "an independent businesswoman, possibly a widow" and that her house must "with some certainty [have included] servant women and slaves who [were] indispensable in her mercantile business" p.19.

requesting a decision about her fidelity to the Lord.¹⁸⁷ Lydia may be one of those referred to in Phil 4:16-18 who helped provide financial support for Paul.

Clearly, women as well as men helped in the spread of the gospel both through preaching and material support. In his closing words to the Romans, Paul sends greetings to Andronicus and Junia “who were in prison with me” (Rom 16:7). Obviously then, Paul had women as well as men in mind when he wrote of “the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well” (Phil 1:29-30). Even from this brief investigation into the church at Philippi and the role Lydia played in it, it seems possible that Lydia might have been called a servant (*diakonos*) and thus be considered among the group of leaders addressed in Paul’s opening greeting.

An observation that is both striking and strong is that offered by PHEME PERKINS in her comments on the letter to the Philippians.¹⁸⁸ She points to the ambiguity in the images that Paul employs relative to the role women played in the life of the community. Paul offers the Philippian Christians an image of himself and others as “athletes” engaged in competition (1:27) for the preaching of the gospel. Paul is himself “straining forward to what lies ahead . . . pressing toward the goal for the heavenly prize” (3:13-14). As “soldiers” Paul and Epaphroditus fight for the spread of the gospel (2:25). “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! For it is we who are the circumcision . . .” (3:2). Images of athletes, soldiers, and circumcision are all male experiences. Although women’s leadership and influence are evident in the Philippian community, this series of metaphors hides women’s presence, in fact, actually renders them incapable of identification, while it presents a picture of exclusively male service in the church.

¹⁸⁷ Ivoni Richter Reimer, in *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*, illustrates the hidden significance of this text and its implications. “The decision to enter Lydia’s house cannot be made by Lydia herself, in the final sense, but depends on the missionaries’ judgment. They are to decide about her fidelity to the Lord. That fidelity may be a precondition for baptism, or something constituted by it, since κρῖνειν is in the perfect tense and therefore describes something that has already occurred. We may suppose, then, that in baptizing Lydia the missionaries have already made a positive judgment about her “fidelity.” The founding of the house church is therefore only to be understood as a direct consequence of her baptism to the extent that the positive judgment about fidelity to the Lord, that is, Lydia’s faithfulness, belongs to and is a part of baptism.” 114.

¹⁸⁸ P. Perkins, *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 343.

4. COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

The “kenosis” text (2:6-11) calls for the imitation of Christ’s surrender to empty oneself and to accept the status of a slave even to death. Being raised to divine exaltation follows death. This well-known hymn emphasizes the necessity of surrendering oneself to the good of the group (2:1, 5, 12). Preaching this message to women and slaves was meant as a message of submission to violence or abuse from masters or husbands (and is still meant as such, in some cases). To interpret this text for the world of today, we must recontextualize it. The scope of horrendous acts of violence and injustice seems to increase rather than decrease as we move into the new millennium. Anyone who reads or preaches from this text today will be wise to keep the whole of the hymn as one. Before Christ Jesus “emptied himself” to be a slave, he was equal to God (2:6). The text admonishes Christians to “have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.” Those who are poor or cast out of the mainstream of society because of race, religion, sex, or color can only struggle against injustice and their poverty when they know that this is not “their fate”-- they only know emptiness. To know ourselves as the sons and daughters of God, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ is the first step that can lead to this divine “self-emptying.”

GALATIANS (A.D. 54-57)

1. BACKGROUND

Scholars disagree about the dating of this letter. It seems to come from a time close to when Paul wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians, which sets it around the mid-50’s. There is little doubt that it comes from Paul or that he wrote it after he had visited the province of Galatia, probably twice (4:13). According to Acts, Paul, Barnabas, and others proclaimed the gospel in various cities in the southern region: Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country (Acts 13:14, 51; 14:6; 16:1-2).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ There are two principal schools of thought as to the location of the Galatian churches. One holds to the Roman province in the south of Galatia. The second defends a more northerly location that traditionally bore the name. R. Brown briefly discusses both hypotheses in his *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 474-476 as does J. Fitzmyer in “The Letter to the Galatians” *NJBC* 47:3-5, 780-781. Vincent M. Smiles in

There are two distinguishing points to the letter's form. Paul does not identify by name a co-sender in this letter as he does in his other letters. The letter is unique in that it is the only letter we have of Paul's that is addressed to a group of churches in a territory larger than a single urban center. Thus it was a letter that had to circulate from one community to another in the province. By contrast, the other Pauline letters are addressed to separate but closely related house-churches in one particular city or defined area.

The letter is a response to missionary preachers¹⁹⁰ who had arrived in the region and proclaimed the gospel differently from Paul. In fact, Paul calls it "a different gospel" (1:6b-7). Theirs was a message to Gentile Christians (1:9) demanding observance of certain aspects of the Mosaic Law—circumcision (6:12-13) and the celebration of Jewish "days, months, seasons, and years" (4:10). Their "ministry" in Galatia was undermining that of Paul's as well as subverting his credibility as a legitimate evangelizer. It is a significant letter insofar as it reaffirms that Gentiles need *not* be circumcised in order to be full members of the Christian assembly (which obviously means women can be full members as well as men) and that Christianity is distinct from its Jewish origins. Paul's own conviction that it is through the cross of Christ that we are saved, is strikingly clear in this letter (2:16,3:13-14,24; 6:14). His message of a radically new freedom from the law, ". . .the freedom we have in Christ Jesus . . ." (2:4), and the much debated statement from 3:28, stand in stark contrast to the message of the "Judaizers"¹⁹¹ and merit our attention in this study insofar as they relate to ministry.

The Gospel and the Law in Galatia Paul's Response to Jewish-Christian Separatism and the Threat of Galatian Apostasy (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998) concurs with Brown and Fitzmyer, that the "North Galatian" hypothesis is the more convincing of the two. Carolyn Osiek, in "Galatians" *The Women's Bible Commentary*, on the other hand, favors the "South Galatian" (province) theory because, among other reasons, "Paul usually uses Roman political names for places," 333.

¹⁹⁰ There are many debates over just *who* these opponents were. Three main arguments persist among scholars: They were "men from James" (2:11), nationalist agitators wanting to assert the requirements of Torah; they were recent converts of a Judaizing Christian movement in Galatia; or they were "Jewish-Christian syncretists who advocated circumcision for its symbolic character." See Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament Questions and Commentary* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 36, for more on this topic.

¹⁹¹ The Judaizers insisted that gentiles conform to Jewish law. In 2:14 Paul gives a sense of who these opponents were: "But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'" (See also, Gal 2:3 and 6:12.)

2.1. BIBLICAL TEXT

1:1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος...2.b ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας,

1:1 Paul an apostle...1:2b to the churches of Galatia:

1:11 Γνωρίζω γὰρ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ εὐαγγελισθὲν ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον·

1:11 For I want you to know, brothers, that **the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin;**

1:17 οὐδὲ ἀνῆλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους,

1:17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me

1:19 ἕτερον δὲ τῶν ἀποστόλων οὐκ εἶδον εἰ μὴ Ἰάκωβον τὸν ἀδελφὸν τοῦ κυρίου.

1:19 but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother.

2:2b... καὶ ἀνεθέμην αὐτοῖς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ κηρύσσω ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, κατ' ἰδίαν δὲ τοῖς δοκοῦσιν,

2:2b Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) **the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles,**

2:9 καὶ γινόντες τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι, Ἰάκωβος καὶ Κηφᾶς καὶ Ἰωάννης, οἱ δοκοῦντες στῦλοι εἶναι, δεξιὰς ἔδωκαν ἐμοὶ καὶ Βαρναβᾶ κοινωνίας,

2:9 . . . and when James and Cephas and John who were the acknowledged pillars . . . they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship . . .

3:28 οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληγ, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

3:28 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.

6:10 ἄρα οὖν ὡς καιρὸν ἔχομεν, ἐργαζώμεθα τὸ ἀγαθὸν πρὸς πάντας, μάλιστα δὲ πρὸς τοὺς οἰκείους τῆς πίστεως.

6:10 So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

2.2. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS ABOUT MINISTRY

In face of a threat to the fidelity of the Galatian churches, Paul takes up the defense of his apostleship and of his proclamation of the gospel. The assertions he makes throughout the first two chapters of the letter are a response to those who challenge his authenticity as apostle and the gospel he proclaims. Paul counters the difference in the gospel he has brought the Galatians, and the accusations apparently made about it, with the fact that his ministry is by God's direct commission (1:14-16).¹⁹² His main purpose in the letter, as suggested earlier, is to reinforce his teaching that faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is incompatible with Jewish law, and is opposed to its observance. Whatever his opponents have taught about the law, Paul is quick to use the Hebrew Scriptures to demonstrate how they are in contradiction to the gospel. As a result (for our interests), any attention Paul pays to ministry (outside of his own) or to specific roles within the community, is secondary, and can be detected only implicitly, by conjecture.

The "law vs. gospel" debate was an ongoing struggle in the early years of the church. We witness it here in Paul's writing to the Galatians.¹⁹³ As well, Acts 15, despite its dubious historical accuracy, suggests the same.¹⁹⁴ This debate is the heart of Paul's concerns in the letter to the Galatians. He is vehement in his portrayal of the law's obsolescence and suggests that it is a power that has led the Galatians into illusion and misunderstanding (3:1-5, 10-14; 23-26; 5:2).

Paul stands self-assuredly as one of the apostles and speaks without hesitation of those who were "already apostles before [him]" (1:17), as he retells his story of conversion and the call to proclaim "the faith he once tried to destroy" (1:23). Paul

¹⁹² "I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being" (Gal 1:14-16).

¹⁹³ "You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted" (Gal 4:10-11).

See also 6:12-13 "It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised--only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh." V. Smiles in *The Gospel and the Law in Galatia* writes convincingly of the importance of reading the letter within its context in the history of the earliest Christian decades and particularly of the "gospel-law debate of which Paul was a part" (p. 5).

¹⁹⁴ "Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them . . ." (Acts 15:1-2a).

recounts his unique contribution in the work of the gospel by presenting it in contrast with Peter's mission (2:7-8). Just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised, Paul has been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised. The human approbation of this grace to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles is evident when James, Cephas, and John, who were "acknowledged pillars," recognized Paul's call and extended to both Barnabas and Paul "the right hand of fellowship" (2:9).

In addition to highlighting Paul's particular ministry, these verses also give us a sense of the tradition of authority that is developing in the Christian community. Though somewhat tentatively and indirectly, Paul accepts the authority the "pillars" in Jerusalem had over him. "I laid before them [James, Cephas, and John] (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel . . . in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run in vain" (2:2). A tradition has already begun to congeal around certain persons. James, Cephas, and John are those identified as "leaders" (2:2b-c).

As regards ministry, my reading of this letter (sometimes spoken of as the "Charter of Christian Freedom") leads me to think that in the case of the Galatian churches, Paul's teaching would result in ministerial activity within the communities that was born out of freedom and spontaneity rather than a legalistic interpretation of codes, rituals, and tradition. It would have been a ministry, in my view, that would be a kind of organic response to communal needs, one responsive to the Spirit rather than the law. In principle, at least, it would matter little whether it was "Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female" who performed the necessary service—the one to whom the Spirit gives the gift, gives the service, because, after all, "all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). But, of course, this is precisely what the Judaizers were threatening to discredit.

The final section of the letter gives us something of a portrait of the churches of Galatia, or at least what Paul was teaching them. He writes about what "freedom in Christ" will look like in practice. The implications of a life in Christ, a Spirit-filled community, include (among other characteristics) non-submission/resistance to a "yoke of slavery" and "not being subject to the law" (5:18b). It means manifesting the fruits of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (5:22-23). It demands bearing one another's burdens and acknowledging "those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher" (6:6).

Paul closes with this final word on what “ministry” in the Spirit requires: “So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (6:10).

3. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS/HIDES ABOUT WOMEN

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” In recent years, Galatians 3:28 is perhaps one of the most frequently quoted, studied, and debated texts on the subject of Paul and women, women and religion, and other related topics. Interest focuses especially on the last part of the list, “male and female.”¹⁹⁵ Many scholars consider it the *locus classicus* of Paul’s teaching and primary theological statement on the status of women in the church. Those who suggest this, often maintain as well, that this is Paul’s endorsement of putting to an end the social and sexual discrimination present in his world. Such a position becomes problematic when one considers other Pauline texts inconsistent with this point of view. Hans Dieter Betz¹⁹⁶ and Wayne Meeks¹⁹⁷ argue convincingly that the communal practices of early Christians expressed the theology out of which they were working. Both scholars agree that Paul is quoting from a part of a baptismal formula that reflects the belief held by early Christians that baptism truly immersed one into a new creation in which all social and religious differences were abolished. Thus, in Galatians 3:28, Paul uses this text to dramatize the radical breakdown of social divisions that occur when one is baptized in the Spirit and freed of the law.

Following the arguments of Betz and Meeks, Sheila Briggs¹⁹⁸ points out that baptism, for early Christians, gave not only the community its distinguishing mark, but also signaled the individual’s real entry into a new creation. Paul’s use of the text clearly affirms the new creation in which “new behavior was engendered, at least with respect to

¹⁹⁵ In her commentary on “Galatians” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, Carolyn Osiek succinctly presents five major approaches to interpreting this text. See 335.

¹⁹⁶ Hans-Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 189-200.

¹⁹⁷ Wayne Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *History of Religions* 13 (1974), 197.

¹⁹⁸ S. Briggs “Galatians” *Searching the Scriptures* Vol. 2, 218-236.

women who exercised leadership roles in the house churches and mission of the early Christian movement.”¹⁹⁹

In addition to the remarkable statement that sets aside ethnic, economic, and gender distinctions (3:28), Paul also makes special mention in this letter that God’s son was “born of a woman” (4:4). He refers to himself not as a father to the Galatians as he so often does in writing to his communities, but rather, as the mother who is in the process of giving birth to the Galatian communities. “My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (4:19). These observations obviously do not directly shed light on the subject of ministry in the Galatian communities. They do, however, say a great deal about the attitudes and values Paul fostered in his teaching. We can surmise that behavior within the community would reflect these values. In 5:13 Paul admonishes the Galatians to use their freedom to become “slaves to one another”. In so doing, Paul upholds the female value of service as one that all members, both men and women, should embrace.²⁰⁰

4. COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

Circumcision was a male ritual in every respect. It incorporated the male child (or adult convert) into his relationship with the Law. The rite of initiation for Christians that was becoming more frequently used at the time of the letter to the Galatians was that of baptism or ritual immersion. There is no evidence that suggests that this ritual discriminated between women and/or men.²⁰¹ There is also no evidence in this letter to suggest who participated in or performed the initiation rite or ritual of baptism. Little concern is expressed as to who or how new believers are to be baptized into life in Christ. What matters is that once baptized all share equally in the same new life in Christ. “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ” (3:27). A study of the biblical roots of the liturgical and sacramental life of the church today might reveal this same emphasis. Who did perform these actions? Were the same individuals or

¹⁹⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza *In Memory of Her*, 209.

²⁰⁰ B. Thurston, *Women in the New Testament*, 38.

²⁰¹ “This practice [ritual immersion] probably grew out of the Jewish custom of purification by periodic ritual washing by immersion in a *miqveh*, or pool...Probably when it began, baptism symbolized cleansing from the total impurity of being a Gentile.” Carolyn Osiek, “Galatians” *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 334.

groups always involved? It seems that it was not a high priority for Paul, at least, to specify the details about these questions. More is written about what faith in Christ demands and how it manifests itself in the life of individual believers and their communities than about the questions of precisely how or who should baptize. What would the consequences in our theology of ministry be, if our emphasis was ordered in this way: faith, community (i.e., those who participate in it), and only then, “those who perform” and ceremonialize the acts of commitment?

ROMANS (A.D. 58)

1. BACKGROUND

On the significance of Paul’s letter to the Romans, Beverly Roberts Gaventa writes, “One might argue that Romans belongs first [among Paul’s letters] because of its place in the history of Christian theology. Through the interpretations of such theologians and church leaders as Augustine, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth, Romans has exerted incalculable influence in Western Christian theology.”²⁰² This treatise-like letter was probably written between 54 and 58 C.E., from Corinth or possibly the port-city of Cenchreae. Paul did not found the thriving church at Rome, nor had he ever been there. He writes of his long-held desire and intention to visit the community there (1:9-11, 13, 15; 15:22-24). As these verses indicate, Paul intended to go first to the community at Jerusalem to bring the collection he had gathered from the Gentile communities. “For Macedonia and Achaia,” Paul writes, “have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem” (15:26). On his way to Spain, Paul planned to stop in Rome, hoping to share with believers “some spiritual gift” and to encourage each other’s faith (1:11b-12).

Scholarly proposals addressing the purpose and meaning of the letter are legion. As for the goal of this thesis we mention only one principal theme that a majority of scholars agree runs throughout the letter. This is Paul’s announcement that the gospel is

²⁰² Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Romans” *Women’s Bible Commentary*, p. 314. Joseph A. Fitzmyer in his commentary on “The Letter to the Romans” (*NJBC* 51:12), writes “Romans has affected later Christian theology more than any other NT book. Scarcely an area of theological development has not been influenced by its teaching. Its influence is manifest even in other NT writings (1 Pet, Heb, Jas) and subapostolic works (Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin). Patristic and scholastic commentaries on Romans abound . . .” 832.

God's power to save all who believe, "the Jew first and then also to the Greek" (1:16). The "righteousness" of God is a quality of God. For human beings this means God offers the free gift of a just judgment that springs from divine graciousness. Salvation is offered without distinction of persons to all that believe. In our examination of chapter 16 of this letter, we will see that the house church as well as the entire church in a city counted women as well as men, persons from different cultures and races, and persons with high or low social status among its membership and leadership.

2.1. BIBLICAL TEXT

1:1 Παῦλος δούλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, κλητὸς ἀπόστολος ἀφωρισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ,

1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

1:9 μάρτυς γὰρ μου ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, ᾧ λατρεύω ἐν τῷ πνεύματί μου ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, ὡς ἀδιαλείπτως μνησθῆναι ὑμῶν ποιούμεναι

1:9 For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, [is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers,]

1:16 Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι.

1:17 δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται, Ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith.

2:11 οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν προσωποληψία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ.

2:11 For God shows no partiality. [For God is not a 'respector' of persons.]

12:6 ἔχοντες δὲ χαρίσματα κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν διάφορα, εἴτε προφητείαν κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως, 12:7 εἴτε διακονίαν ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ, εἴτε ὁ διδάσκων ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ,

12:8 εἴτε ὁ παρακαλῶν ἐν τῇ παρακλήσει· ὁ μεταδιδούς ἐν ἀπλότῃ, ὁ προϊστάμενος ἐν σπουδῇ, ὁ ἐλεῶν ἐν ἰλαρότητι.

12:6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 12:7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 12:8 the

exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

16:1 Συνίστημι δὲ ὑμῖν Φοίβην τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν, οὖσαν [καὶ] διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχραεῖς,

16.1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a minister of the church at Cenchreae . . .

16:2 ἵνα αὐτὴν προσδέξησθε ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως τῶν ἁγίων καὶ παραστήτε αὐτῇ ἐν ᾧ ἂν ὑμῶν χρήζη πράγματι· καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ προστάτις πολλῶν ἐγενήθη καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ.

16:2 . . .so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

16:3 Ἀσπάσασθε Πρίσκαν καὶ Ἀκύλαν τοὺς συνεργούς μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 16:4 οἵτινες ὑπὲρ τῆς ψυχῆς μου τὸν ἑαυτῶν τράχηλον ὑπέθηκαν, οἷς οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος εὐχαριστῶ ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τῶν ἐθνῶν, 16:5 καὶ τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίαν.

16:3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, 16:4 and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 16:5 Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ.

16:6 ἀσπάσασθε Μαρίαν, ἥτις πολλὰ ἐκοπίασεν εἰς ὑμᾶς.

16:7 ἀσπάσασθε Ἀνδρόνικον καὶ Ἰουνιᾶν τοὺς συγγενεῖς μου καὶ συναιχμαλώτους μου, οἵτινες εἰσιν ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις,

16:6 Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you. 16:7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, [and they were in Christ before I was].

16:9 ἀσπάσασθε Οὐρβανὸν τὸν συνεργὸν ἡμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ

16:9 Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, [and my beloved Stachys.]

16:12 ἀσπάσασθε Τρύφαιναν καὶ Τρυφῶσαν τὰς κοπιώσας ἐν κυρίῳ.

ἀσπάσασθε Περσίδα τὴν ἀγαπητὴν, ἥτις πολλὰ ἐκοπίασεν ἐν κυρίῳ.

16:12 Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.

16:13 ἀσπάσασθε Ῥοῦφον τὸν ἐκλεκτὸν ἐν κυρίῳ καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐμοῦ. 16:14 ἀσπάσασθε Ἀσύγκριτον, Φλέγοντα, Ἑρμῆν, Πατροβᾶν, Ἑρμᾶν, καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀδελφούς.

2.2. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS ABOUT MINISTRY

While not at all new in Paul's writings, there is a striking reoccurrence of the theme of service that runs throughout the letter to the Romans. Paul is the servant of the proclamation of the gospel (1:1, 9). In 15:16-19 Paul likens his work to a priestly act of worship offered to God: ". . .to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God . . ." In fact, this letter contains more "liturgical" language, that is, language of Jewish worship, than the other Pauline letters. He describes Christ as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood (3:25) and admonishes believers to present their "bodies as a living sacrifice" to God (12:1). Though the vocabulary suggests it, Paul is not writing about liturgical action, but his entire ministry. Almost every mention of Paul's apostleship is spoken of in this context. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God" (1:1). Here we see the terms "servant" and "apostle" (δοῦλος and ἀπόστολος) are even used in the same phrase.

The vocabulary and choice of images also tell us something about those to whom Paul was writing and what "language" of service they would understand. If they were primarily Jewish Christians originating from the Jerusalem community, as supposed, such language would be very effective. In an effort to speak pastorally to the community at Rome and (more importantly) to have his gospel understood and appreciated, Paul uses persuasive rhetoric to convince his readers that he is a legitimate and faithful minister of the gospel. Again we note the expression, "gospel of God" (εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ), so frequently employed in Paul's writings. It is the "gospel concerning his [God's] Son" through whom apostleship is given "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name" (1:5). It is God whom Paul serves "by announcing the gospel of his Son" (1:9), and God who gives Paul power and "eagerness to proclaim the gospel"(1:15).

Unlike so many other Pauline writings, the opening greeting does not include the term ἐκκλησία. This letter is addressed to "all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints"(1:7). The only place where Paul does use this term (*ekklesia*) is in chapter 16 where he is referring to the local church. The letter is not a comprehensive and uniform teaching, not a code of doctrine or corpus of orthodoxy. If it were, surely we would find Paul's teaching on Eucharist, the resurrection of the body, and the church. All of these

strong Pauline themes are missing in the letter.²⁰³ There is only that teaching that is the gospel itself: “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (1:16). All have sinned, Paul teaches, but through the death of God’s Son all are reconciled. He writes, “much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life” (5:10b). “But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted . . .” (6:17).²⁰⁴

We turn now to texts from chapter 12. We find here, one of three similar ‘lists’ of gifts (χαρίσματα) associated with Paul (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). Paul does not assign any hierarchical priority when he writes of the gifts given to the body of believers (vv 6-8). The explanation for this is evident in the verses that precede the list: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (12:4-5). Because we are in Christ, we are one body. As the result of faith, individual members receive from the one Spirit different gifts, and thus can serve in different functions for the good of the community (12:6-8). In the first letter to the Corinthians, the “list” appears in 12:28. There, Paul writes of apostles, prophets and teachers (preceded by numbers, i.e., “first apostles, second prophets, third teachers”); then “deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues” (1 Cor 12:28).²⁰⁵ He does not identify the same gifts or ministries that he lists in writing to the Romans. Here, in chapter 12, Paul writes of “prophecy,” “ministry,” “the teacher” (note the shift occurring from function to title), “the exhorter,” “the giver,” “the leader,” and “the compassionate.” What does this shift suggest? Is it intentional? Does it suggest a difference between charismatic gift and those gifts that are expressly ministries within the community? Whatever it may signify, it does

²⁰³ Joseph Fitzmyer, “The Letter to the Romans” *NJBC* 51:4, 830.

²⁰⁴ We will see in 12:6-8, the distinction made between the gift of teaching and that of preaching. In chapter 10:14-15, although it does not describe the ‘gift of preaching’ as such, the importance of the ministry of proclamation is once again dramatically underscored. “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

²⁰⁵ The deutero-Pauline letter to the Ephesians contains another variation on the list of gifts (4:11), though the term χαρίσματα is not found in this context. But, as in the other two cases, the gifts are mentioned in the context of the Body of Christ.

not appear that one gift has greater value over another. As with the case in 1 Corinthians, there is no sense of a hierarchy of power or importance of one ministry over another. If *any* emphasis or priority of ministry can be suggested from this letter, it is given to prophesy. Paul closes the letter with a kind of innuendo about his own role as prophet and conveyor of the “mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles...” (16:25-7). This is reinforced when recalling 11:13 where Paul identifies himself as “apostle to the Gentiles.”

It is not surprising that, since Paul is writing to a community he doesn't really know, the letter does not reveal a great deal of direct information about how the church operated or what the current communal challenges were. Chapter 16, however, offers fertile ground for an investigation of certain aspects of ministry in the Roman church. This is true if we approach it as more than a simple text containing “personal greetings” or a suspicious “addition” tacked on to the “original” fifteen chapters, as some have understood it. Often it is left out of discussion or studies because of its lack of theological content yet much can be learned if we look more closely at the text even with its frustratingly scant detail.

The chapter opens with a recommendation written to introduce a minister (διάκονος) of the church at Cenchreae by the name of Phoebe. This is a recommendation very similar to the one Paul gives Timothy in 1 Corinthians 16:10-11. I will discuss Phoebe's role in greater depth in the next section of the paper, but it is pertinent here to note that, as regards ministry, letters of recommendation were a typical means of introduction of friends or business partners to a new city or group of persons. Examples are found in the letter collections and papyri of this period and serve as evidence that Phoebe's example was neither uncommon nor unusual. They often followed a similar pattern of naming the person to be introduced and a brief word identifying her or him. The sender would then describe the relationship to the person s/he was recommending, and then request some favor for the person. Such letters of recommendation gave traveling missionaries and church leaders access to hospitality in communities where they

were unknown.²⁰⁶ If Phoebe was Paul's envoy in the case of the letter to the Roman community, this would surely speak for Paul's trust and confidence in Phoebe's ability to represent him and to win the respect of the letter's recipients.

Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza²⁰⁷ finds the greetings of chapter 16 (vv 3 ff) clearly structured in terms of "ecclesial standing" rather than by any other measure such as social or economic status. Prisca and Aquila, "co-workers" who "risked their necks" for Paul, are named first, followed by "the church in their house." This missionary couple was established in Corinth by the time Paul arrived (Acts 18:1-4). They moved with him to Ephesus where they also had established a house church (1 Cor 16:19). Besides Prisca and Aquila, Paul identifies Mary, Junia, Urbanus, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, and Persis all as co-workers for the gospel and leaders in the community. Andronicus and Junia are another missionary couple who suffered with Paul in prison, and whom he identifies as being "prominent among the apostles"(16:7).

What conclusions can we make about ministry in the Roman church and Paul's understanding of it? Once again it is clear that the proclamation gospel is a collaborative work that demands hard labor and sacrifice. Paul recognizes and respects those who preceded him in the faith. Paul holds a definite authority but it is not singular by any means. We see leaders who are both men and women--apparently single, and sometimes working as couples. Both women and men teach; women and men alike have been imprisoned for their work of evangelization. Paul specifically identifies and praises women and men apostles. Phoebe is identified as a minister of the church at Cenchreae which suggests, as we shall elaborate further, a position of prominence among the community of believers.

3. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS/HIDES ABOUT WOMEN

Considering the length and importance (both theologically and historically) of the letter to the Romans, there is very little specific reference to the Roman church and even

²⁰⁶ In "Missionaries, Apostles, Coworkers: Romans 16 and the Reconstruction of Women's Early History" *Word and World* (VI: 4), Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza writes, "Phoebe's example testifies that early Christian women leaders officially represented early Christian communities and that their travels served the communication between them. It is likely—but not explicitly stated—that she was the carrier of the letter to the Romans and thus the personal envoy of Paul," 424.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 428.

less about women. Without chapter 16, important women leaders and co-workers for the church would remain unnamed and unknown. Women—named and “titled”—are included here who are otherwise invisible in the entire NT writings. Prompted by the insights of Beverly Roberts Gaventa,²⁰⁸ I want to begin with what is hidden in the letter that has implications for women particularly. Gaventa rightly places emphasis on Paul’s interpretation of the “righteousness of God.” Within this context she sees Paul drawing on the traditional Jewish belief in the impartiality of God (2:11). The impartiality of God is not in reference to God’s indifference to or detachment from human concerns. It is more so an expression of the standards by which God judges human concerns. Wealth, religious or social status, or power are human standards, not God’s. The Hebrew Bible that Paul knew so well presents a God who takes sides with the weak and lowly, the widow, and the orphan. As the prophet Isaiah speaks for God, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord”(55:8). Gaventa believes Paul radicalizes this conviction as regards God’s impartiality in the letter to the Romans and applies it to all human beings, not only Gentiles or Jews, rich or poor, slave or free. On this basis, “women may find in it a significant way of addressing the value judgments that still elevate men over women.”²⁰⁹ If God is impartial, then all human beings have the same value in God’s sight. The followers of Jesus had and still have the challenge to put this into practical application. On this point alone, we can see justification for believing that early Christian life was based on a “discipleship of equals,” as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has identified it. Chapter 16 of the letter, which I will discuss shortly, gives us the sense that this equality may have been a value that was in place in the Roman church.

Another point that has implications for women is that in this letter Paul personifies sin as a force loose in the world that pervades the lives of all individual beings (1:18,21-24). Humanity lives in rebellion against God (1:25) serving other creatures rather than the Creator. Here again, women are hidden—but in this case we might say, it has positive ramifications that they are. Women as well as men share in this sinful human condition (1:26-27). Sin takes expression in different ways within every individual and is not laid at the feet of women alone as the source, cause, or the promoters of sin and evil.

²⁰⁸ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Romans.” *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 315-316.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 316.

This is not the case in all the NT texts and it is far from the case in the writings of the early church fathers.

In looking more closely at chapter 16, we note, as many scholars have before us, that there are 26 names listed in the chapter and that of those, roughly one third are women. This is a surprisingly large number of women to be identified so specifically. There are also references to two women who are not named but, as is more typical, are characterized by their relationship in the family unit: the “mother of Rufus” and the “sister” of Nereus. It is not clear what Paul is intending when he speaks of the “mother” of Rufus as his own mother and it is even more puzzling to know what he means by the term “sister” in the later reference. Unfortunately, even those women who are named are, for the most part, hidden actors in the gospel community.

What *is* clear at the outset of the chapter, as noted above, is that Phoebe is being recommended to the Roman community as a minister or leader of her church. Paul further identifies her as “our sister.” It is significant that she is not characterized by her relationship to any man, as is so often the case with women who are mentioned. They are “daughters,” “widows,” or “wives” of someone. It is also striking that Paul refers to Timothy, his close companion, in a similar way that he speaks of Phoebe (1Thess 3:2).²¹⁰ In the letter to the Colossians we shall see that the author recommends a certain Tychicus in the same way: “our beloved brother and faithful *diakonos*” (4:7). Phoebe’s example witnesses to the fact that women officially represented early Christian communities and like Prisca and Junia, for example, traveled and thus were able to communicate with other women.

As discussed earlier, patriarchal exegetes and commentators have been guilty of “feminizing” terms and titles in such a way that denies them any authority or suggestion of leadership. In speaking of Phoebe, for example, translators sometimes use the verb

²¹⁰ I find it surprising and inaccurate that Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza writes, “Just as the closest co-worker of Paul, Timothy is called ‘our brother’ and God’s *diakonos* (1 Thess 3:2) . . .” [italics, hers]. “*Missionaries, Apostles, Coworkers: Romans 16 and the Reconstruction of Women’s Early Christian History.*” The Greek text in this case identifies Timothy with the term for co-worker, that is *synergos*, and not *diakonos*, as Schüssler-Fiorenza writes. The author herself has written elsewhere of the importance of precision particularly in these questions, whenever possible. Elizabeth A. Castelli in “Romans” (*Searching the Scriptures*, Vol. II) makes the same error on pp. 277-278. I do concur with ESF that Phoebe has the same title as the charismatic preachers in Corinth, as well as Apollos and Paul (1 Cor 3:5; Col 1:23, 25) and that she was an acknowledged charismatic preacher and leader of the community in Cenchræe.

form (rather than the noun as it appears in the original Greek). The Greek term *diakonos* is grammatically masculine but, despite this, it is sometimes incorrectly translated as “deaconess”(the Revised Standard Version, for example). To translate the term as “deaconess” is anachronistic in that the Greek word for *deaconess* is not the feminine equivalent of *deacon* but is a distinct office that existed only two centuries later. This translation also betrays the androcentric assumption that men alone held leadership and that the terms for such roles all pertain to men.²¹¹ “She serves” the community or “she has assisted many” are translations given in place of the title by which Paul identifies her. Whenever Paul calls Timothy, Apollos or Tychicus, *diakonos*, translators and commentaries frequently translate the term “deacon” or “minister.” When Paul uses it of himself, this is not the case. Why would the translation “deacon” be more justified for Timothy, Apollos, or Tychicus than Paul? In the case of the woman, Phoebe, although the same designation (*diakonos*) is used translators and commentaries use equivalents like “helper,” “servant,” “assistant,” or “deaconess,” but rarely “deacon” or “minister.”

In addition to being minister and sister, Paul writes that Phoebe “has been *prostatis* of many and of myself as well” (16:2b). This is a feminine form of the masculine noun *prostates*, often translated by titles such as leader, patron, guardian, president, chief protector.²¹² The verb form found in 1 Thess 5:12 (referring to the leadership of the community) and in 1 Tim 3:4, 5:17 (where it refers to the functions of bishops, deacons, and elders) also gives support to this translation.²¹³ In the case of Romans, one commentator manifests this mind-set in his observation about Phoebe as *prostatis*:

Prostatis, which occurs only here in the NT, cannot in the context have the juridical sense of the masculine form, i.e., the leader or representative of a

²¹¹ “A good many Jewish and Christian funerary and business inscriptions that name women presbyters and deacons are known from the first centuries of the Christian era in a variety of locations.” Osiek, *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol. II, 241. In her commentary from *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, Pheme Perkins writes of the “partnership” the Philippians have with Paul to spread the gospel (1:5). “In the commercial world, partnerships were established by groups for a specific purpose . . . Women involved in business or in running their own households, like Lydia, were a source of material support in the Pauline mission. They were also among those who preached the gospel.

²¹² This is according to Bernadette Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* (Brown Judaic Studies 36; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), p. 151.

²¹³ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, “The ‘Quilting’ of Women’s History: Phoebe of Cenchreae” in *Embodied Love Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values*, Paula Cooney, Sharon Farmer, & Mary Ellen Ross, Eds. (Harper & Row: San Francisco 1987), 47.

fellowship . . . There is no reference then to a “patroness” . . . Women could not take on legal functions, and according to Revelation only in heretical circles do prophetesses seem to have had official ecclesiastical powers of leadership . . . The idea is that of personal care which Paul and others have received at the hand of the deaconess.²¹⁴

It is Dr. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza who points to the fact that here the literal meanings of both terms (*diakonos* and *prostatis*) have to be “explained away” when read from an androcentric perspective which cannot imagine or conceptualize women in leadership roles.²¹⁵ Prisca is another co-worker with Paul. She and her spouse (?) Aquila appear here in chapter 16 as well as in 1 Corinthians and the Acts of the Apostles. They “risked their necks” for Paul’s life, Paul himself writes, intimating their closeness to him and their commitment to the gospel. Paul sends greetings to “the church in their house” (16:5). We know from 1 Corinthians that they also headed a house church when they were there (1 Cor 6:19). It is hard to imagine, since any reference to the church is to “their” house, that this was an exclusively male assembly. While they were in Ephesus, Luke tells us, they played an important role in teaching Apollos, an outstanding missionary preacher of the early Christian movement (Acts 18:24-28). Piecing the evidence together, it is clear that Prisca is herself an outstanding missionary, church leader, and teacher. Unfortunately, the biblical texts reveal little other detail of her life and work.

Andronicus and Junia are another missionary couple whom Paul greets in the letter. Paul’s admiration and affection for them is evident in his address to them as being “prominent among the apostles” (16:7). Junia suffered in prison along with Andronicus and Paul. Women as well as men endured the hardship of their belief. This willingness to suffer for the sake of the gospel demonstrates their commitment to it. “Since they had become Christians before Paul, it can be conjured not only that they had worked together

²¹⁴ Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 411 as cited in *Searching the Scriptures* Vol 2 by Elizabeth A. Castelli, 278. However, Olivette Genest points out in conversation that we have many examples « où une dame riche se porte garante de voyageurs, d’immigrants.»

²¹⁵ Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, “The ‘Quilting’ of Women’s History: Phoebe of Cenchreae,” She continues, “The much-invoked objectivity of historical-critical scholarship has a difficult time prevailing when the texts speak about women in a way that does not fit into the traditional androcentric models of historical reconstruction.” 46.

with Paul and Barnabas in Antioch, but also that they belonged to the circle of apostles in Jerusalem who together with James and the twelve received a vision of the Resurrected One” (1 Cor 15:7).²¹⁶

The term *synergos* is often translated as “co-worker.” Another description is “those who toil” or “labor among you” (1 Cor 16:16-18). “Respect those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you” (1 Thess 5:12). In 1 Corinthians 16:16-18 Paul encourages the community to subordinate themselves to “every co-worker and laborer.” In Romans 16:6 and 12 Paul commends Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis—four women—for having “labored hard” in the Lord. “These women are thereby characterized as leaders of the community who, like Prisca, deserve respect and recognition for their tireless evangelizing and community-building ministry.”²¹⁷

The body of the letter to the Romans contains rich Pauline theology and eloquent passages expressing it. The closing chapter strongly suggests that women played a notable role in shaping Paul’s belief and his theological articulation of it. Chapter 16 gives a hint of the rich tapestry of early Christian communities, as well as of women’s leadership contributions to it.

4. COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

The titles used in chapter 16 to describe the work done in the early Christian community at Rome are not gendered, that is, they are not sex-specific. Both men and women assumed the various leadership roles mentioned. There is nothing in this letter that would make us think that women didn’t help fill the varieties of ministries listed in chapter 12. Chapter 16, for one, offers names to support this claim. There are now many feminist writers who have commented on the fact that certain terms have consistently been interpreted as “male” when in fact there is no grammatical or logical basis for this. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has written in many places of the need to approach androcentric language with a hermeneutics of suspicion when it functions as inclusive

²¹⁶ Schüssler-Fiorenza, “*Romans 16 and Women’s Early Christian History*,” 430.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

language in a patriarchal culture.²¹⁸ Androcentric language is masculine inclusive language and mentions women only when we are exceptions, or are explicitly addressed, or are problems. Otherwise, women are “included” under *man* and *he*. The masculine language of the Bible functions as generic when masculine terms (in the original Greek) such as saints, holy ones, elect, brothers and sons include both women and men. So androcentric language is inclusive of women but does not mention them explicitly. However, when leadership roles such as apostles, elders, missionaries, ministers or overseers are used the same masculine language becomes gender-specific.

What the final chapter in the letter to the Romans teaches us is that we have only glimpses of what women did in the early Christian communities and only hints of history. Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “These references to early Christian women therefore should be read as the tip of an iceberg indicating how much historical information we have lost.”²¹⁹

PHILEMON (ca. A.D. 55 if from Ephesus, 61-63 if from Rome)

1. BACKGROUND

Philemon was a slave owner in Colosse who had become a Christian. Onesimus, the central figure in this brief letter from Paul, was one of Philemon’s runaway slaves who met Paul and, through his teaching, became a Christian whom Paul baptized in prison (v. 10b “whom . . . I have given birth to [as] Onesimus.” Whatever prompted his escape (apparently, goods stolen from Philemon), Paul wrote this letter of appeal to Philemon on behalf of his “child,” asking Philemon to receive Onesimus back—not as a slave deserving severe punishment but as “a beloved brother.” S.C. Winter, in her commentary on the letter to Philemon,²²⁰ calls this the fugitive-slave interpretation. This has been the accepted and dominant understanding of the letter’s background for centuries. In 1935, John Knox suggested another approach to understanding the letter. It is this point of view that S.C. Winter has developed and written about. She refers to it as the sent-slave interpretation. Its main tenet is based on the argument that Onesimus did not flee slavery

²¹⁸ Ibid. “*The ‘Quilting’ of Women’s History*,” p. 38-40; *In Memory of Her* (Crossroad: New York, 1983), 44-46; *Bread Not Stone* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1984), 16-18.

²¹⁹ Ibid. “*The ‘Quilting’ of Women’s History*,” 40.

²²⁰ Winter, “Philemon” *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol 2, 301-311.

but that Philemon sent him to assist Paul in prison in the same way that the Philippian community had sent Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-30). In the following sections we will refer to both interpretations and their possible implications for ministry and for women.

The letter itself is the briefest of Paul's extant letters and follows the pattern of ordinary Hellenistic letters. Often grouped with Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians, the letter to Philemon, like these others, claims to be written from prison. This was probably near the end of Paul's life, either from Ephesus or Rome ca. 55 or 61-63. Its brevity does not imply a lack of importance and it would be a mistake to see it only as a letter of intercession on behalf of an individual. This is not simply a letter requesting mercy toward a repentant slave; it is asking much more. Paul is putting Philemon's faith to a test and he does so in a public fashion. Baptism makes a sister or brother a completely "new creation." Paul asks Philemon, while addressing at the same time the "church in his house," to receive the newly converted Onesimus as Paul's "own son" and as Philemon's own "beloved brother." Is his faith strong enough? Is the love for which Philemon is renowned deep enough?

2.1. BIBLICAL TEXT

1:1 Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφός
Φιλίμων ἰσὺ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν 1:2 καὶ Ἀφίᾳ τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ
Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ,

1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To **Philemon** our dear friend and co-worker, 1:2 to Apphia our sister, to **Archippus** our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

1:23 Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφράς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,

1:24 Μάρκος, Ἀρίσταρχος, Δημάς, Λουκάς, οἱ συνεργοί μου.

1:23 Epaphras, **my fellow prisoner** in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,

1:24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, **my fellow workers**.

2.2. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS ABOUT MINISTRY

The opening salutation names Paul and Timothy as the senders, to Philemon (a "dear friend and co-worker"), Archippus ("fellow soldier"), and the church in "your house." The closing greetings (vs. 23-24) identify other specific persons (co-workers and fellow slaves). This makes the issue of Onesimus and Philemon a public one on several

fronts. It also identifies specific individuals who have worked in the proclamation of the gospel and in the effort to increase the number of believers. As suggested above, the sent-slave interpretation reads v. 5 (where Paul writes of Philemon's "love for all the saints and [your] faith toward the Lord Jesus") as the introduction to Paul's request to *keep* Onesimus ("I ask you for my child" v. 10). The interpretation developed by S.C. Winter²²¹ sees in the main body of the letter (vs. 8-20) a literary construction following the pattern of legal petitions that would have been made in a court of law. Other words in the text are thus interpreted in a legal context. Translations vary according to a fugitive-slave or a sent-slave perspective. For example, the verb in v. 10, "I *ask* you for" reflects a legal request for a gift of Onesimus, more than does, "I ask you *on behalf of*" as it is often translated.²²² Winter believes that interpreting Paul's terminology in this vein is more in keeping with Paul's usage elsewhere and that of other first-century writings. The results of this interpretation lead one away from the more traditional understanding that Onesimus had escaped and had somehow gotten to Paul in prison. There he was converted and baptized by Paul and, as a result, had Paul as his ambassador pleading for his total amnesty as Philemon's slave and, moreover, as in a new status as "a beloved brother." According to Winter, this more traditional fugitive-slave interpretation relies on inferences drawn from the text. The explicit statements that Onesimus has *fled* (and that he has stolen from Philemon) and that Paul expressly asks for *forgiveness* for Onesimus are simply absent in the text. However, throughout Paul's writing we have often had to rely on inference, silence, and context in order to make what are, in the end, tentative conclusions.

The connection I make between ministry and the foregoing is that of how "point of view" and "contextualization" can change understanding. We cannot harmonize texts or understandings of texts and then draw hard and fast conclusions. We work with hints and innuendoes. Being mindful of this allows and promotes different approaches and different understandings. The letter to Philemon once again reinforces several observations that we have already made as regards ministry. Paul aligns himself with other co-workers for the gospel (1-2, 24). There is shared suffering as a result of the

²²¹ Ibid. Winter builds her proposal along the lines of a similar interpretation made by John Knox in 1935.

²²² Winter gives several examples demonstrating the contrast in translation of verbs according to the perspective one takes on the letter's meaning ("Philemon," *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol II).

proclamation and teaching about Jesus Christ (v. 23). Philemon is not addressed without the mention of some of his co-workers and more importantly, “the church in [his] house”(v. 1). The other point that I find worth noting is to recognize the influence of “the minister” (in this case, Paul) in the life of a community and its leaders. While this may appear to be insignificant, the fact that Paul can make a significant impact both on individuals in their personal conversions and on communities in their coming to recognize the implications of conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ is not without importance as we read and re-read these texts. The letter is often described as a “personal appeal.” The fact that it was added to the official canon is significant in my estimation. The “personal is political,” many feminists say. Here is a case where one sees this principal in action.

3. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS/HIDES ABOUT WOMEN

To the dismay of those who recognize the inherent evil in slavery, Paul does not take a clear stand against slavery in these verses. Paul is ambiguous on many subjects. As a result, his writings have been used for decades to justify and even encourage the continuation of certain social institutions and values such as slavery, patriarchal marriages, or sexism that are clearly out of sync with the gospel Paul preached. It is not difficult to see how one could take a text such as the following as a reason to uphold the *status quo* even when it is unjust. “For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord . . . In whatever condition you were called, brothers, there remain with God” (1 Cor 7:22-24). As regards the letter to Philemon, I find the insight of Pheme Perkins helpful on this topic.²²³ She believes that in the letter to Philemon, Paul changes his language from that of a direct, public request for the freedom of a runaway slave, Paul makes a request that is more socially acceptable for Philemon to comply to. The renaming of the relationships to “my child,” “my own heart,” “beloved brother,” and “a partner,” make Paul’s appeal significantly different because of publicly shared language. Perkins writes, “The renaming of the relationships among Onesimus, Paul, and Philemon that takes place opens up the possibility of a response to Onesimus different from that anticipated on the basis of common social practice. ‘Philemon is not

²²³ Perkins, “Philemon,” *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 363.

asked to free a bad slave.”²²⁴ The Roman legal system of Paul’s time distinguished the free person, the slave (who was the property of another person), and the ex-slave or “freedperson [sic].” Even freedpersons continued to have obligations to their former “owners” but they did acquire some rights and could, over time, become citizens. Perkins draws from this shift in “naming” the point that new patterns of naming are essential to changing institutions and values (such as I suggested above) that have deeply ingrained patterns of domination.

Where do women appear in this letter? Paul greets Appia whom he calls “sister” (v 2). From other Pauline letters (Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4:2 and especially Phoebe and others in Romans 16), it can be assumed that Paul greets her because she was a church leader. Considering the length of the letter and what we have found in other Pauline writings, this is at least notable.

How are women hidden? The same Appia whom we have just identified as a woman who “appears,” has also been “hidden” by the many interpreters who have identified her as the wife of Philemon. He would have been a man of some means and the owner of the house where the church met. The problem is that, as noted in other letters, when Paul refers to a church that met in a house, the possessive pronoun “your” would either be singular or plural reflecting whose house it was. Romans 16:5 shows the church that met in Prisca and Aquila’s house, as “their”/ “yours,” plural. In verse 2 of Philemon, the pronoun is singular. Again, it is PHEME PERKINS who points out that the conflicts between the institution of slavery and the Christian call to mutual love and equality spoken of in Gal. 3:28, for example, are hidden because of the interpretations that have been given texts such as Philemon. The tensions that arise between the treatment and naming (or not naming) of women and the Christian reality are similar, but don’t even appear in this letter.

4. COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Religion, in general, has been notoriously ambiguous in its response to slavery and other forms of subordination of one group by another—whether human over animal species, whites over persons of color, or men over women. In this regard, we might say

²²⁴ Ibid.

on the one hand, that the letter to Philemon “muddies the waters” more than clears them. On the other hand, perhaps one of the hidden blessings the Letter to Philemon can give contemporary readers is the awareness that consciousness changes and develops. As a result, institutions and values we may have once considered acceptable and even necessary are now recognized as being both unjust and inhumane. Paradigms can and do indeed shift. This has radical implications for our understanding of ministry and women’s role in it. In the final chapter of this thesis I will address what these implications might be.

Chapter Six

Feminist Textual Study on Women and Ministry: Disputed Letters of Paul

COLOSSIANS (C.E. 61-63/90-100)

1. BACKGROUND

Multiple questions surround the letter to the Colossians including authorship, date, origin, and audience. More engaging questions than these are questions that concern noticeable shifts in literary style and vocabulary, and significant theological emphases that are not found in the undisputed letters of Paul. While it is tempting to pursue these in some depth, I hold to the limits of my thesis and offer only a brief summary of the major scholarly questions that affect our examination of ministry and women. Several pieces of evidence link this letter with the letter to the Ephesians, and as a result, I mention both letters at times in this section. Looking first to the Colossian correspondence and the question of authorship, we learn that it was not until the early 19th century that authentic Pauline authorship came into question. Though there are many Pauline characteristics in the letter—typical greetings, thanksgiving, and conclusion (“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand” Col 4:18; 1 Cor 16:21)—Raymond Brown writes that today about 60 percent of biblical scholars view Colossians as a deutero-Pauline text.²²⁵ I too, hold to the position of pseudonymity. Those who support this view point to differences in vocabulary, writing style, and theology from that found in the undisputed letters of Paul, and I am persuaded by the weight of their arguments. A brief examination of a few such arguments now follows.

Working from the position that Colossians is a pseudonymous text, a significant number of scholars (Meeks, Käsemann, Lohse, among others) identify the letter as coming from Ephesus in the last third of the first century. Nonetheless, for some, the similarities to authentic Pauline writings are strong enough to justify an earlier dating,

²²⁵ Raymond E. Brown, in his book, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, discusses the question of authorship and makes reference to surveys that highlight some scholars and the nuances each has in her/his various approaches to the question. See pages 610-615.

suggesting that the epistle was written by a companion or disciple of Paul, who was still alive but imprisoned.²²⁶ I agree with those who hold that the letter to the Ephesians follows closely in chronological and geographical location to the letter to the Colossians. *Colossae* was about 110 miles from *Ephesus* and both cities lay along an important commercial route. *Laodicea*, mentioned twice in the letter to the Colossians (2:1; 4:16), was the most important commercial center along the same route. One could move from there to the north to *Hierapolis* or continue straight along to *Colossae*.²²⁷ In addition to the geographical and chronological proximity, there is also a strong similarity in the content of the two.²²⁸ Consequently, the two letters are often treated together.

The letter to the Colossians itself tells us that it was Epaphras, not Paul, who founded the church at Colossae (1:7-8; 2:1; 4:12-13). Furthermore, "Paul" suggests that he had not even visited the community there ("I am struggling for you . . . for all who have not seen me face to face" 2:1). Like the questions surrounding authorship, the reasons prompting the letter remain a disputed issue. Generally, there is agreement that the Colossian Christians were being influenced by false teachings that threatened the clarity of traditional Pauline teaching and life that had shaped the earlier generation of Christians at Colossae (2:8, 16-23). The author writes in Paul's name and draws from Paul's authority to counteract the influence of this dangerous body of teachings that had begun to affect the community. These teachings seemed to promote the necessity of acquiring a "knowledge" of heavenly beings and spiritual rulers that had control over humanity and the powers of creation, separating individual believers from God. The author objects to these teachings by emphasizing that God's act of redemption in Christ is fully accomplished, thus making religious rituals and ascetic disciplines unnecessary for

²²⁶ Margaret MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches A Socio-historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings*, (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 86. Relative to this point, MacDonald cites Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 125.

²²⁷ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 599.

²²⁸ Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament, Questions and Commentary*, 129-141. The letters to the Colossians and Ephesians express similar theological points of view and tend to rely heavily on traditional materials such as vice and virtue lists, remnants of liturgical texts, and household codes. These genres of texts occur much less frequently in the earlier letters of Paul. "Most tellingly, there is remarkable similarity in the *content* [italics, mine] of the two letters. About a third of the words in Colossians are found in Ephesians, and 73 of the 155 verses in Ephesians have close parallels in Colossians." Thurston, 132. See also, Margaret MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches*, 87.

union with God (2:8-10, 16-23). Because of Christ's saving act, all trespasses have been forgiven, and rulers and authorities have been brought to subjection (2:13-15).²²⁹

Though absent from Paul's authentic writing, the idea of a pre-eminent, cosmic Christ (1:13-23) dominates the Christology of this letter. As well, an uncharacteristic lack of emphasis on the Second Coming of Jesus gives way to a realized eschatology, elevating Christians to the status of being already fully *in Christ* (1:13). The concept of *ekklesia* (assembly, church) that Paul employs in his writings appears almost exclusively in reference to a particular local Christian community (1 Cor 1:1, for example), or to local groups of communities (Gal 1:2). In the letter to the Colossians, although the author uses greetings that suggest this same sense of specificity ("greetings to Nympha and the church in her house" 4:15b), the greater focus is on "*the church*" as the body of Christ who exercises his rule over the whole world (1:15-18). "He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything" (1:18).

As mentioned, many writers have noted the strong similarities between the letter to the Colossians and that written to the Ephesians. In both letters, baptism is presented as the means of establishing the believers' identity in the heavenly rather than the earthly realm. It is therefore a spatial distinction (heaven and earth), rather than the more typically Pauline temporal separation (this age and the age to come) that baptism signals in these two letters.²³⁰ At the same time, baptism does have behavioral consequences for the individual (Col 3:5-11; Eph 2:3; 4:25-32). Unfortunately, the letter to the Colossians does not directly reveal a great deal about how these consequences might have affected ministry or women's roles in the community. However, the Household Code in chapter 3:18-4:1 is based on the Roman imperial model of patriarchy and marks another shift in emphasis that is absent in the authentic Pauline letters. It is a shift that inevitably involves women and slaves and it moves attention from the life of the community of believers to the good ordering and maintenance of the household. Now it is appropriate behavior between members of the household (wives/husbands, children/father, slaves/masters) that

²²⁹ MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches*, 92.

²³⁰ Elizabeth Johnson, "Colossians" *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 346-347.

reflects the well-being and good order in the church. More will be said about this in the section on women in the text.

2.1. BIBLICAL TEXTS

1:1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ δια θελήματος θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφός

1:1 Paul, an **apostle** of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and **Timothy our brother** . . .

1:7 καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν, ὃς ἐστὶν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

1:7 This you learned from **Ephras**, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful **minister of Christ** on your behalf.

1:18 καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας· ὃς ἐστὶν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων,

1:19 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶντὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι

1:20 καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν, εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ, [δι' αὐτοῦ] εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

1:18 **He is the head of the body, the church**; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 1:19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 1:20 and through him God was pleased to **reconcile** to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by **making peace** through the blood of his cross.

[See 2 Cor . . . ministers of reconciliation]

1:23b ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος.

1:23b I, Paul, became a **servant** [of this gospel.]

1:25 ἣς ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ διάκονος κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ,

1:25 I became its **servant** according to God's **commission** . . . to **make the word of God fully known**,

1:28 ὃν ἡμεῖς καταγγέλλομεν νουθετοῦντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον καὶ διδάσκοντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ, ἵνα παραστήσωμεν πάντα ἄνθρωπον τέλειον ἐν Χριστῷ·

1:28 It is he whom we **proclaim**, **warning** [all men] everyone and **teaching** [all men] everyone in all wisdom . . .

2:1 Θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ἡλίκον ἀγῶνα ἔχω ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν

Λαοδικεία καὶ ὅσοι οὐχ ἔδρακαν τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἐν σαρκί,
 2:1 For I want you to know how much **I am struggling** for you, and for those in
 Laodicea . . .

2:19 καὶ οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα διὰ τῶν ἀφῶν καὶ
 συνδέσμων ἐπιχορηγούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον αὐξεῖ τὴν αὐξησιν τοῦ
 θεοῦ.

2:19 and not holding fast to **the head, from whom the whole body**, nourished and held
 together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.

4:7 Τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ πάντα γνωρίσει ὑμῖν Τυχικός ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς
 διάκονος καὶ σύνδουλος ἐν κυρίῳ,

4:7 . . . **Tychicus** will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, **a faithful
 minister**, and a fellow servant [slave] in the Lord.

4:15 Ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἀδελφοὺς καὶ Νύμφαν καὶ τὴν
 κατ' οἶκον αὐτῆς ἐκκλησίαν.

4:15 Give my greetings to **the brothers in Laodicea**, and to **Nympha and the church in
 her house**.

2.2. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS ABOUT MINISTRY

The letter opens in typical Pauline fashion: “Paul” identifies himself as “apostle” (*apostolos*), with mention of Timothy as a collaborator or co-sender (here, called “brother,” *adelphos*). Epaphras is almost immediately singled out and praised as Paul’s “beloved fellow servant” (*doulos*). “He [Epaphras] is a faithful minister (*diakonos*) of Christ on your behalf . . .” (1:7). Both terms applied to Epaphras, *doulos* and *diakonos*, are ones Paul uses of himself when writing to the churches he founded.²³¹

Although the early Christian communities were relatively independent, clearly they looked to Paul or his coworkers for guidance. Paul’s service of the gospel and his willingness to suffer for it is dramatically expressed in this letter. “I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel. I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (1:23b-25). The author is careful to clearly underscore the authority of Paul’s coworkers, namely Epaphras, Tychicus and Onesimus (1:6-8; 4:7-9). But when the author

²³¹ Mary Rose D’Angelo, in her commentary on “Colossians,” in *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol 2, reminds the feminist reader to be alert to the fact that the author of Colossians creates “Paul” as both “author and hero of the letter.” “Thus,” she writes, “Colossians is the first step in creating the Paul of the Pauline school that produced not only Ephesians but also the Pastors” (p. 313).

presents Christ as “the head of the body, the church,” and the source of reconciliation between God and all things, whether in heaven or on earth (1.18 f), something new happens. The image harks back to 2 Corinthians where Paul writes of God, “who reconciled us to himself through Christ” (2 Cor 5:18a). Yet, a subtle but significant difference, in this regard, marks the letter to the Colossians and its implications for ministry. The text in 2 Corinthians continues, “[God] has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, . . . entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” And even more, “So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us . . .”(2 Cor 5:19a, 20). We see in the letter to the Colossians a shift from human participation in the ministry of reconciliation to action that is initiated and fulfilled by God in and through Christ. The notion of “human ambassadors” for Christ, or any sense of ministerial activity on the part of human agents as “ministers of reconciliation,” has disappeared. While Paul’s ministry remains an important part of the message to the Colossians, there is no hint of Paul’s “ambassadorial role” in the ministry of reconciliation. With Paul’s death, obviously, adaptations in governance had to be made. The Christian community needed to insure that fidelity to the traditional teaching could be maintained.²³² The author of the letter to the Colossians strives to make Paul’s presence an ongoing reality for the community. Paul’s ministry of proclamation and teaching remains a formative influence “so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” “For this,” ‘Paul’ writes, “I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me” (1:28-29).

As I noted in the Background section above, when Paul speaks of Christ as a body having many members (1 Cor 6:12-20; 12:12-31; Rom 12:3-8), he speaks of the risen body of Christ with individual Christians as members. Just as the members of a physical body, including the head, share equally in the life of the body, so does each Christian share in the life of the Body. The author of Colossians, however, develops a cosmic vision in which Christ is the fullness of God and the power of God, and is now head *over*

²³² Margaret MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches*, pp. 126-130. In her investigation of the implications of the pseudonymity of Colossians and Ephesians, MacDonald discusses the development of a Pauline movement that stretched beyond the boundaries of the Apostle’s own lifetime. “Further institutionalization was required to deal with the new problems of management surrounding the absence of the charismatic leader and the incorporation of people farther removed from the events that called the sect into being” (p. 127).

the church.²³³ On the one hand, this is a more universal vision of *ekklesia* than what we have generally seen in Paul's letters, and suggests a broadened concept and understanding. On the other hand, the introduction of the Greco-Roman Household Code in 3:18-4:1 applies rigid, patriarchal authority structures to a settled, particular Christian community. The *ekklesia*, which Paul so emphatically declared to be free of division and distinction between members (Galatians 3:28, for example), becomes for the next generation of Christians a sphere and focal point of life that is more and more marked by unbending rules of behavior and roles in which some members are dominant over others by virtue of their economic status or biological gender.²³⁴

3. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS/HIDES ABOUT WOMEN

The only direct reference to women is found in 4:15. An individual woman, Nympha, is identified in the same way as are Mary and Lydia in the Acts of the Apostles (12:12; 16:11-15, 40). "Give my greetings . . . to Nympha and the church in her house." Nympha is a householder who was in a position to offer the local church a place to meet. Bonnie Thurston²³⁵ discusses the textual uncertainty of the name, that is, whether "Nympha" is a male or female name. She reminds readers that androcentric scholarship had the same struggle with the name "Junia" in Romans 16. For some scholars it seems more difficult to envisage a woman as the leader of a house-church than it is to piece together scant data that concludes that "Nympha"(f) is a contracted form of "Nymphodorus"(m). Along the same lines, the pronoun in the following phrase, "and the church in her/his house" (4:15b), is found to be masculine, thus *autou*, rather than *autes* (*his house/her house*).²³⁶ What is clear is that the author of the letter does not (perhaps cannot, because of her

²³³ Although Raymond Brown stands with those who favor deuterio-Pauline authorship for this letter, he makes a convincing case for the tenuousness of both sides of the authorship argument, saying that those who contend that Paul *could not possibly* have held such developed views about church, Christ, and eschatology overstate the issue based on the evidence available. *An Introduction*, pp. 610-617.

²³⁴ "Parenetic shifts in Colossians enhance the emerging pattern of domination. Where Paul once hailed the slave as Christ's freedperson, warning that the freedperson is Christ's slave (1 Cor 7:21-23), Colossians requires, 'slaves obey your masters.' Where Paul warned that both woman and man yield physical autonomy to their sexual partners (1 Cor 7:4), . . . Colossians insists, 'Wives, be submissive to your husbands' (3:18)." Mary Rose D'Angelo, *Searching the Scriptures* Vol 2, 314.

²³⁵ Thurston, *Women in the New Testament*, 134.

²³⁶ See also Mary Rose D'Angelo, *Searching the Scriptures* Vol 2, 317, where she notes specific manuscripts that disguise Nympha's as a man's name.

prominence) hide Nympha or her role as church leader. At the same time, this is not necessarily an approbation of her or any woman in this role.

The Household Code (3:18-4:1) that precedes “Paul’s” greeting to Nympha, begins with an exhortation to women/wives to submit to their men/husbands. The author of the letter borrows this traditional literary form that organized a household in a hierarchical structure of economic dependence and gendered mores. All the tasks carried out by the members of the Roman household were under the control of the male head of the household. The letter to the Colossians Christianizes structures and ways of operating within them that are based on domination and subordination. Bonnie Thurston suggests that perhaps it was because slaves, women, and children in the Christian community had more “status” in their households than in the larger, public sphere that they were a potential source of criticism of Christianity by their society.²³⁷

If it is not yet clear what the Household Code, as it appears in Colossians, has to do with women and ministry, reading further on in the “Paul” of the Pauline school will demonstrate that Colossians is a first step in an evolving pattern of patriarchal domination. There may certainly have been traces of its beginnings in Paul’s time and in his writings. Colossians, however, reinterprets the baptismal vision expressed in Gal 3:28 by omitting the third distinction “no longer male and female” (Col 3:11), leaving women on the fringes of (perhaps hidden at the bottom of an increasingly hierarchical) community life. The author of Colossians is more concerned with slaves than with wives. The letter to the Ephesians reinforces and imposes increasingly restrictive ethical codes especially for women and secondarily for children and slaves.

4. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

As soon as we forget that the “personal” is indeed “political,” we move into a realm of naïve idealism when engaging in daily activities. The letter to the Colossians is sometimes overshadowed by the longer, treatise-like letter to the Ephesians, but is itself important in our examination of the New Testament witness to ministry and the role women played in the early Christian communities. Colossians contains eloquent

²³⁷ “The Code instructs them to behave in ways that society would find inoffensive and thus not bring attention and censure to Christianity. The author seems to want to ensure that the ‘otherness’ of relationships among Christians is not an affront to the larger society and, as a result, a threat to the Christian community itself.” Thurston, *Women in the New Testament*, 137.

expressions of faith and encouragement to “know” wisdom and the knowledge of God’s will. The danger with such writing is in its potential to mask certain assumptions that do not take an authentic gospel shape. In the case of the letter to the Colossians, Paul’s theology and practice is reformulated in a way that facilitates the enforcement of patriarchy. The introduction of the Household Code has given authority for the endorsement of unjust and sometimes violent treatment of the members of the “household of God.” Without doubt, these codes had a deep influence on the “place” of women in the Church as well.

If we read Colossians in liturgical settings, or “borrow” from its theology, without always being mindful of the letter as a unity, we run the risk of forgetting the part it has played and plays in the creation and promotion of a pseudo-Christianity that operates on the basis of distinctions and differences, rather than a community of equals.²³⁸ In accord with Mary Rose D’Angelo,²³⁹ I consider Colossians as a canonical text, that is, one that offers the official common memories of the Christian communities. In this case, it contains memories that have had many unfortunate ramifications for women throughout history.

EPHESIANS [c.e. 61-63 OR 90-100]

1. BACKGROUND

Prof. E. Elizabeth Johnson²⁴⁰ brings a significant point to the fore as regards the question of authorship of both the letter to the Colossians and the letter to the Ephesians. She suggests that it is more accurate to speak of the identity of the author as being “disputed” or “undisputed,” rather than to speak of the texts as “authentic” or “inauthentic,” the reason for this being that it is a question of authorship, *not* authority. In one of his last major works, Raymond Brown estimated that “at the present moment about 80 percent of critical scholarship holds that Paul did not write Ephesians.”²⁴¹ What are the ramifications of this? Johnson’s observation and Brown’s conclusion as regards

²³⁸ In her commentary on “Colossians,” Mary Rose D’Angelo, in *Searching the Scriptures Vol 2*, is even stronger on this point in saying, “Thus, Colossians is a step toward a Christianity that became increasingly restrictive and even abusive for women, children, and slaves . . . The codes should be read liturgically or cited as scripture *only* to be challenged.” 323.

²³⁹ D’Angelo, “Colossians,” 313.

²⁴⁰ E. Elizabeth Johnson, “Ephesians,” *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 338.

²⁴¹ R. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 621.

authorship suggests that these deutero-Pauline letters (Colossians and Ephesians) address a different group of Christians (second or third generation), living in a different period of time, and experiencing challenges different from those of early Christian communities founded and addressed by Paul. Concretely, this means that we will see a development in Paul's thought and teaching, and an ongoing process of institutionalization in the believing communities.²⁴² The phenomenon appears most clearly when we begin to examine the question of ministry and the presence/absence of women in the sections that follow.

Textual differences in style and linguistics, and differences in the circumstances of the church, explain, in part, why many scholars believe that it was not Paul who wrote the letter, and that it was not written during Paul's lifetime. The general quality and surprising lack of circumstances also point to pseudonymity. Whereas, Paul's style is generally characterized by short, clear (sometimes almost brusque) sentences, the letter to the Ephesians (like Colossians), has long, complex sentences containing many clauses, repeated words, and redundancies. (See 1:3-14 or 4:11-16, each of which is one sentence in Greek.) Some of the central concerns evident in Paul's work are absent or are significantly changed in Colossians and Ephesians. For example, the tension between Gentile and Jew that was so dominant a theme in Galatians and Romans does not appear in the letter to the Ephesians.²⁴³ The Jews are not mentioned in the letter. "Paul" writes as one who has not seen the recipients of the letter ("I have *heard* of your faith in the Lord Jesus." Eph 1:15) though Acts 18-20, indicate that Paul was in Ephesus for about three years and wrote several of his letters from there. In the "Ministry" section that follows, we will also see a change in the understanding of the *ekklesia* similar to what we saw in the letter to the Colossians.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Margaret MacDonald's project in *The Pauline Churches* argues convincingly that in examining various aspects of Christian community life, there are both continuity and a development in the process of institutionalization from the middle of the first to the middle of the second century. She works from the hypothesis that the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians come shortly after or even before Paul's death, during his imprisonment. I follow those who locate the letters in a later period, though I do not see this as being incompatible with the continuity and development MacDonald suggests.

²⁴³ B. Thurston, *Women in the New Testament*, 138.

²⁴⁴ On the letter's resemblance to that of the Colossians, R. Brown writes that "between one third and one half of the 155 verses in Eph are parallel to Col both in order and content. One quarter of the words of Eph are found in Col, and one third of the words of Col are found in Eph." (See note #17, as well.), in *An Introduction*, 627.

Because it is not clear who the addressees are (“To the saints who are in/at Ephesus” is missing in several important manuscripts),²⁴⁵ and because there is none of the typical detail referring to individuals or specific issues or events, it is impossible to establish either authorship or audience conclusively. Ephesus, as mentioned earlier, was a major city of the period, the capital of a Roman province, and a busy trade center. It was also a center of religious activity and a crossroads for travelers.²⁴⁶ Ephesus had been the base of operation for Paul and his co-workers in their Christian missionary work. The fact that the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians are so closely linked in content, and that 1 and 2 Timothy concern the church at Ephesus, attests to the ongoing importance of the city for Christianity.²⁴⁷

2.1. BIBLICAL TEXTS

1:1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν [ἐν Ἐφέσῳ]

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus . . . To the saints who are [in Ephesus]

1:22 καὶ πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκεν κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, 1:23 ἣτις ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου.

1:22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him **the head over all things for the church**, 1:23 **which is his body**, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

2:19 ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροιχοι ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, 2:20 ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 2:21 ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὕξει εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ, 2:22 ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι.

2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of **the household of God**, 2:20 **built upon the foundation** of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as **the cornerstone**. 2:21 In him the

²⁴⁵ M. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches*, p. 86; R. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 626. (See also Brown's footnote #15 in which he lists some of the specific manuscripts.)

²⁴⁶ B. Thurston, *Women in the New Testament*, 136.

²⁴⁷ Richard E. Oster, Jr. "Ephesus," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary Vol 2*, (David Freedman, editor-in-chief, New York: Doubleday, 1992), "The Ephesian Christian community of the 2d century is documented, in part, by the evidence available in the letter to it from Ignatius of Antioch. The name of the Christian apologist Justin Martyr was also associated with Ephesus in the first half of the 2d century A.D.," 549.

whole structure is joined together and grows into a **holy temple** in the Lord; 2:22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a **dwelling place** for God.

3:2 εἴ γε ἠκούσατε τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς,

3:2 for surely you have heard of **the commission** of God's grace that was given me for you . . .

3:14 Τούτου χάριν κάμπω τὰ γόνατά μου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, 3:15 ἐξ οὗ πᾶσα πατριὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς ὀνομάζεται,

3:14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 3:15 **from whom every family in heaven and on earth** takes its name.

4:4 ἐν σῶμα καὶ ἐν πνεύμα, καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν·

4:4 There is one body and one Spirit . . .

4:11 καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφῆτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους, 4:12 πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἀγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

4:11 The gifts he gave were that **some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers**, 4:12 to equip the saints for the **work of ministry**, for **building up** the body of Christ,

THE HOUSEHOLD CODE according to the letter to the Ephesians 5:21-6:9. (I cite here only those verses from the Code that are relevant to our topic.)

5:21 ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ,

5:21 **Be subject** to one another out of reverence for Christ.

5:22 Αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ, 5:23 ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος· 5:24 ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί. 5:25 Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε τὰς γυναῖκας, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς,

5:22 **Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. 5:24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

6:5 Οἱ δούλοι, ὑπακούετε τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις μετὰ φόβου καὶ

τρόμου ἐν ἀπλότητι τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ,
6:5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ.

2.2 WHAT THE TEXT SAYS ABOUT MINISTRY

Though perhaps not quite as intimate or warm as some of Paul's letters, (no reference to the "beloved brothers," for example), the salutation and the opening and closing greetings appear typically Pauline. Paul, an "apostle," writes this letter to the "saints" [at Ephesus]. Chapter 1:13-14 also begins, as one would expect in one of Paul's letters, with an emphasis on the importance of proclamation and the blessing received "when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." As the letter continues, however, subtle and then more distinct contrasts from Paul's understanding of "apostleship" and ministry can be detected. It is likely a second or third generation author who writes to second or third generation Christians (circa 90-100 c.e.). Certainly, with Paul's passing, his successors needed to shore up their own authority by re-emphasizing Paul's. These followers of Paul wrote under the authority of Paul's name (pseudonymous letters like this had their precedents),²⁴⁸ adapting his teaching to the changing circumstances of their churches. Just as the writer to the Colossians wrote to respond to the challenges facing that church, the writer to the Ephesians does the same. Like Epaphras, Paul's fellow servant and faithful minister Tychicus was commended to be the intermediary between "Paul" and the Colossian community (Col 1:7), and commissioned to communicate all things to the Ephesian Christians (Eph 6:21). Among other similarities in the two letters, one is particularly striking in its ramifications for ministry. As with Colossians, Paul's repeated reminder of the difference between this age and the age to come (temporal dualism) is overshadowed by a spatial dualism (heaven and earth), through repeated emphasis on the heavens and the "heavenly places" (Eph 1:3, 10, 20; 2:6; 3:10, 15; 4:6, 8, 10:6:9, 12).²⁴⁹ This is pertinent to our discussion of ministry because of the indirect but important implications and impact this shift must have had on ministry as it had been expressed in the earliest Pauline communities.

²⁴⁸ The books of Daniel, Baruch, and Enoch are examples, as is Plato writing under the name of his great teacher Socrates. Thurston, *Women in the New Testament*, 130.

²⁴⁹ E. Elizabeth Johnson, "Ephesians" *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 339.

Ministry no longer is so urgently concerned with the proclamation of and conversion to the good news of the Gospel in preparation for the imminent return of Jesus. Community leaders or ministers would no longer have been focused on the separation between Jew and Gentile. To the contrary, in the letter to the Ephesians, their *unity* is proclaimed as accomplished in the declaration that, because of Christ, they are “no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (2:19). Those who were “once far off have been brought near” (2:13). Ministry, therefore, becomes the effort to teach the kind of ethical behavior that will transform the “present darkness,” eliminating any distinction between the earthly realm and that of the light-filled unity of the heavenly realm. Christians are admonished to reflect this unity by living as “children of light—for,” as the author of Ephesians writes, “the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true” (5:8-9). The letter to the Ephesians, like that to the Colossians, portrays an understanding of the Body that is considerably changed from the authentic Pauline writings. The church is Christ’s body and he is its head (Col 1:18, 24 and Eph 1:21-22; 5:23). We noted that in Colossians, two of the four references to *ekklesia* are to a local church (4:15, 16) and two uses of the term are in reference to the universal church (1:18, 24). The letter to the Ephesians employs the term nine times, and always in reference to a universal reality and not to a local church.²⁵⁰

On the basis of these and other texts cited in Section 2.1 above, we can conclude/surmise that ministry’s task is to exhort believers to enter into the cosmic unity that is “the mystery of God’s plan” (1:9-10). And, as we shall see, the Household Code (5:21-6:20) teaches Christians how to “lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1). Ministry is a work of encouragement to “put on the whole armor of God” (6:11) so as to fight against “the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (6:11). In this, it is not only Christ, but the “church” as well, that takes on a cosmic role.

²⁵⁰Brown, *An Introduction*, p. 625. Fr. Brown comments briefly on the nine references to *ekklesia* found in the letter to point to the stress on the *universal* quality of church. Another point worth noting is that in seven out of the nine places where the term is applied it is in reference to Christ being *over* the church. Six of the nine appear within nine verses of each other, and all are in the context of the Household Code, the section dealing with wives’ relationship to their husbands (1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32).

There are three direct references to “apostles and prophets” in the letter (2:20; 3:5; and 4:11). In each occurrence, the tone or context suggests that these titles do *not* refer to the present activity of individuals in the community so much as they refer to the apostles and prophets active at an earlier time.²⁵¹ The apostles and prophets (Paul, and those active throughout the life of Jesus and Paul) are the anchor point, as it were, the foundation of the relationship between the faithful and Christ. The Ephesian Christians are reminded that they are “members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone” (2:20). Some scholars identify “the prophets” with those of the Hebrew Scriptures. But the second appearance of the term in 3:5 makes it clear that this is not the case.²⁵² “In former generations this mystery was not made known . . . as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets” (3:5). In the third reference, the apostles and the prophets (4:11) head the list of various ministries that are performed for the ongoing life of the body. A concern for the organization of the community is hinted at, though there is no direct discussion of how governance or order within the community is being passed on to the growing number of Christians. Margaret MacDonald makes an important point about ministry in her discussion of Eph 4:1-16.²⁵³ The pericope is a declaration of the unity of the community. The various ministries listed within it are for the preservation of the body. The author emphasizes that they are Christ’s gifts, given to believers for service to the church.

Based on the letter as we have it, remarks regarding “What the Text Says About Ministry” of necessity remain tentative and mostly inconclusive. At best, they express an effort to understand the letter as it reflects a changing and developing church following Paul’s death. The Household Code, incorporated in 5:21-6:9, is perhaps the most helpful source for our examination. I take it up under the section immediately following.

²⁵¹ Margaret MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches*, sees the mention of apostles and prophets as reflecting a perspective of a “built up” church looking back to its origins, 31.

²⁵² Paul Bony, “L’Épître aux Éphésiens,” *Le ministère et les ministères selon le Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974). “Quant aux ‘prophètes’, il ne s’agit pas de ceux de l’Ancien Testament, puisque Ep 3,5 leur attribue le rôle d’avoir été avec les apôtres les instruments de la révélation du mystère qui n’avait pas été dévoilé aux générations passées comme il vient de l’être maintenant.” 77.

²⁵³ MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches*, “The list of gifts reveals even less about the differentiation of roles in the community or communities of Ephesians than similar lists in Paul’s own letters. All of the ministers listed perform functions of preaching or teaching. We hear nothing of the more practical functions of administration or caring for the needs of the poor.” 132.

3. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS/HIDES ABOUT WOMEN

If Colossians was minimal in its references to women, the letter to the Ephesians does not mention so much as a single woman or give any detail of women's participation in the leadership or ministry of the community. It is only in the context of the Household Code, which is an expanded version of that found in Colossians, that women are addressed, and that is in their roles as "wives." In these letters, and in most of the NT texts that follow them (particularly the Pastorals which, like Colossians and Ephesians, claim the authority of Paul), we witness this shift toward the ordering of relationships based on the Greco-Roman household.

From the German, the term *Haustafeln* is used by scholars to designate biblical texts that define the responsibilities and duties that are associated with efficient management of private life. The basic argument behind the Household Code is that the authority of males over females ensures the proper or ideal running of the household and, by extension, the state. It is a traditional literary form borrowed from what can be found extensively in Stoic, Hellenistic Jewish, and early Christian sources. But the central idea for the model is traced to Aristotle's *Politics* (1.1253b. 1-14).²⁵⁴ In Roman society the household played a central role in the economic life of society. The implementation of the code meant that the household was organized in a hierarchical structure that clearly identified the husband/master/parent (the father) as the authority figure who held power over those who were economically or socially dependent on him.

Christian writers by the end of the first century apply this model (which assumes a patriarchal structure) to their communities. Increasingly, the "church" that meets in someone's "house," is presented and understood as a church that is "the household of God" (Eph 2:19). The churches in Asia Minor, the most frequent recipients of "Paul's" letters, were diverse theologically and culturally. As we saw in the undisputed Pauline letters, each local church's organization and operation had an obviously fluid quality about it. Questions of false teachings, rivalries among different groups and leaders, prophetic authority, Judaizing tendencies, and challenges to marriage and family must have made Christian life dynamic and engaging for both women and men. Yet, we saw

²⁵⁴ David L. Balch, "Household Codes" *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 3, 318-319. See also, Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament*, p. 135. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her*, chapter 7, offers a list of other sources where material of the same or similar literary forms are found, 290-291.

that in Colossians the introduction of the Household Code under “Paul’s” pen flies in the face of what had been certainly not typical, but equally not unheard of, in first century Jewish and Greco-Roman life: women *were* sometimes heads of households. Assemblies of believers sometimes met in these women’s households. Women were leaders, teachers, and prophets. Women were co-workers and co-missionaries of Paul. We heard mention of leaders such as Lydia, Priscilla, Phoebe, Apphia, and Nympha (as late as the writing of Colossians. 4:15). Many names are given with reference “to the church that meets in [her] house.”²⁵⁵

For our purposes here, the Household Codes are important because of this very relationship of the house-church in early Christianity and the role of the household in Roman society. Households had been a central factor in shaping and organizing the growing Christian communities, as we have seen. With the introduction of the codes, the subordinate members of the household have to submit to the householder or *paterfamilias* (understood to be a male). The introduction of the Roman codes deeply affected Christian leadership structures that were in the process of becoming more fixed and more institutionalized. Women and slaves were more restricted in leadership functions, and their activities, in general, became defined more rigidly with the imposition of the Codes.

Admittedly, the development of ministry and church officers is not entirely clear, despite numerous studies of the subject. The reasons for the incorporation of the Household Code, too, have been explained in various ways. In my examination thus far, it is Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza who most accurately describes what my study of the texts has led me to believe. Unlike many studies, Schüssler-Fiorenza’s point of departure is not the tracing of the question of office or ministry in its move toward hierarchical and monarchical institutionalization. Rather, she begins with the assumption that the early Christian missionary movement created and fostered a discipleship of equals. She observes that “the early Christian missionary movement was not defined by *the dichotomy* [italics, mine] between the religious equality of all members and the spiritual

²⁵⁵ An important perspective on women’s participation in social and religious life of this period is offered by Schüssler-Fiorenza. “Such influential position and leadership of women in the Asian churches is quite in keeping with the general religious position and social influence women had in Asia Minor. Even under Roman rule women were of remarkable prominence in the political, social, and religious life of the country. The large number of inscriptions and ancient monuments mentioning women are unusual. Even in the most Hellenized and Romanized cities women functioned as magistrates and officials, as priestesses and cultic staff.” *In Memory of Her*, 249.

superiority of the apostle and other ministers. Any basic distinction between forms of leadership is primarily one between *local* and *translocal* leadership.”²⁵⁶ What shifts with the introduction of the Household Code is not a change in emphasis from charismatic leadership to the institutionalization of gifts, she says, but rather, it is a shift in understanding authority as a charismatic, community-based authority, to an authority based in offices. The former allowed all baptized members access to leadership and a share in the power of the community. The latter restricted leadership to male heads of households that themselves were structured along patriarchal lines, stripping women and slaves of authority and power.

What we see in the letter to the Ephesians is the move away from a discipleship of equals in which each member had the same status: a “Spirit-gifted person,” given unique gifts for service or leadership in the community. It is a move toward patriarchalization and the relegation of women’s leadership to the margins-- where women, children, and some slaves, “belonged.” “Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church . . . Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.”²⁵⁷

Following the section title, we have to conclude that in the case of the letter to the Ephesians, women are hidden as leaders, ministers, Spirit-gifted disciples of the Christian community. The Household Code “hides” them in a more overtly offensive and

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 286. Although I have not used the terminology of “local” and “translocal” as regards leadership, obviously, I have recognized distinctions between the local leadership, that is, permanent members [heads of house churches and leaders], and missionary preachers and servants [Paul and Barnabas, for example] who moved from community to community. Schüssler-Fiorenza goes on to point out that the leadership of apostles, missionaries, and prophets was authoritative because of a commissioning by the resurrected Lord through a direct revelation, and was “translocal.” She contends that, on the other hand, local leadership seems to have developed “by analogy to the administrative offices of Greco-Roman private associations and Jewish synagogue organizations,” 286. This local leadership develops into forms of heads of house churches, bishops, deacons, and elders.

²⁵⁷ I find the following observation of Bonnie Thurston a striking demonstration of how deeply this code gets ingrained into a mindset. She notes that the verb for “be subject,” *hypotassomai*, appears in Col. 3:18, but not in Eph 5:22, even though it is often translated that way. “The words translated ‘be subject’ in English are literally *tois idiois*, ‘one’s own.’” The verb for “be subject” has been carried over from v.21. Thurston, *Women in the New Testament*, pp.138-139. It is for this reason, among others, that I disagree with Sarah Tanzer, “Ephesians,” *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol 2, who does not include 5:21 as a part of the code. The inclusion of this verse, on the contrary, gives weighty authority to the command to be submissive and helps reinforce the author’s desire to liken the lordship of Christ over his church to a husband as head over his wife.

destructive way: they lose their status as full members of the baptized faithful and are reduced to being “wives.”

The Pastorals (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) will draw us more deeply into what many consider an even more unfortunate and dark development as regards the church, ministry, and women’s exclusion from that life. The Pastorals reformulate Paul’s authority and teaching and, at times, manifest blatant misogyny (2 Tim 3:6-7).

4. COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

The letters to the Colossians and Ephesians point to the cosmic significance of Christ’s resurrection (Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:20-23). Evidently, Paul’s missionary work and that of his followers was successful enough to allow those who came after to move from an understanding of *ekklesia* as a local, “embodied” gathering of believers to that of a universal salvation at work in the whole of creation and the world. In this vision, Christ is over all and above all; Christ is the head *over* his body, the church (Col. 1:17-18; Eph 1:23; cf. Col 1:19).

The admonition to “seek the things that are above” (3:1) and to “set your minds on the things that are above”(3:2) that we heard in Colossians, is re-echoed in Ephesians’ call “to speak the truth in love” (4:15) and to be “imitators of God” (5:1). Texts such as these have a sort of dangerous beauty about them. I return to the thought of Mary Rose D’Angelo who says of Colossians, “no portion can be read as ‘the word of God’ as if it were detached from the Household codes, or from the cosmic vision and theological rationale that undergird them.”²⁵⁸ Certainly, the same holds true for the letter to the Ephesians (and 1 Peter and the Pastorals, as we shall see).

The impact on human history has been harsh. Slavery in the United States, for example, was justified in part through teachings such as “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ.” The abusive child-labor practices of the early 19th century were overlooked too long, perhaps because of the implications of a teaching such as, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” We have to ask what are the ongoing historical and social manifestations of these teachings?

²⁵⁸ Mary Rose D’Angelo, “Colossians” *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol 2, 323.

Furthermore, to teach women of color to “seek the things that are above” suggests one of two things: that they can break through two “ceilings”—that of their skin color and of their sex, or that this is about some disembodied relationship with God or Christ. How can this be “spiritualized”? It seems almost inevitable that teachings that exhort us to “cosmic” unity and love end in submissive acceptance or silent withdrawal for those who are on the downside of the Household Codes.

What has been and is the impact on families who have been shaped by admonitions such as that of 5:22, “Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord”? What teachings have resulted from these attitudes as regards birth control or divorce? What does re-contextualizing these texts in light of contemporary experience in multiple cultures challenge ministry and ministers to be? What does it mean for those engaged in ministry today to be “subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21)? In light of the foregoing, at the very least, we can identify one gospel challenge to ministry today: to be honest about the double standards we have taught and been taught for so long.

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES (C.E. 80-125)

1. BACKGROUND

For several reasons, First and Second Timothy and Titus, have traditionally been grouped together under the title of Pastoral Epistles. They form a cluster containing similar content and are written in a similar style. Each claims to be a letter from Paul to one of his co-workers, yet none is written by Paul nor are they letters in the strict sense. The designation “Pastoral” is associated with the central concern of the three letters that is, “shepherding” the church. The “advice” offered in these letters has been seen as the sort given by an older pastor to a younger one. In many respects this same “advice” has shaped church practice for centuries. Today, though the content is questioned and, in places is thoroughly rejected, the title “Pastoral Epistles” is generally accepted without question.

The closest to being a personal letter is 2 Timothy because it follows the standard “letter pattern” which includes an Opening Formula or Greeting, a Thanksgiving, the

Body, the Conclusion, and Final Greeting.²⁵⁹ This letter is also distinct from the other two letters insofar as it reads like Paul's final testimony as if written shortly before his death. "As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day" (2 Tim 4:6-8).

The question of 2 Timothy's authorship has been a major point of investigation and debate in recent years. A minority of scholars continues to defend authentic Pauline authorship. These scholars maintain that 2 Timothy is so distinctive that it can support the hypothesis of an author other than that of 1 Timothy and Titus.²⁶⁰ Subsequently they settle on a date during or close to Paul's lifetime.²⁶¹ Clearly, there are traces of continuity between the undisputed Pauline letters and the Pastorals. The significance of the household (1 Tim 3:14-15; 2 Tim 1:5, 16-18; 4:19), the struggle against false teaching (1 Tim 1:3-7; 2:1-7ff; 2 Tim 2:14-26; 4:3-4; Ti 1:10-11), and the defense of Paul's authority (1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11, 12b-14) are themes that frequently appear in the undisputed Pauline texts.

A more studied look at the Pastoral texts, however, reveals a church at a stage of life very different from that of the apostolic church of Paul's day. If we assume a date as late as C.E. 90-125, the social and political pressure of Roman society on the Christian church

²⁵⁹ See Brown, *An Introduction*, 410. The author differs from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and others in identifying the Pastorals as "letters." He bases his judgment on the distinction made by A. Deissmann, in *Light from the Ancient East* (2nd ed.; London: 1927). With Deissmann, Brown classifies a "letter" as a nonliterary means of communicating information between a writer and a real correspondent separated by distance from one another. An "Epistle" is an artistic literary exercise that is often produced in cultured, educated circles, and which generally presents a moral lesson to a general audience.

²⁶⁰ In Raymond Brown's *An Introduction*, p. 639, he cites an article from *Revue Biblique* by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "2 Timothy Contrasted with 1 Timothy and Titus," *RB* 98 (1991), 403-418, in which Murphy-O'Connor identifies over thirty points on which Titus and 1 Timothy stand in agreement against 2 Timothy. Brown adds that "even when they use the same terms, it is often with a different nuance." Murphy-O'Connor and others would maintain that two writers were involved, with the writer of 2 Timothy closer to authentic Pauline style.

¹⁰² "about 80 to 90 percent of modern scholars would agree that the Pastorals were written after Paul's lifetime, and of those the majority would accept the period between 80 and 100 as the most plausible context for their composition." R. Brown, *An Introduction*, p. 668. In his earlier work, *The Churches the Apostle Left Behind* (New York: Paulist, 1984), Fr. Brown writes in a footnote, "I agree with the vast majority of scholars that Paul is already dead... But what I write above does not depend for its validity on the authorship question. If post-Pauline, the Pastorals preserve certain strains of genuine Pauline thought." fn 45, p. 31. In company with the likes of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, David Bartlett ("later than Paul but before Ignatius"), Bonnie Thurston, and Luise Schottroff, I favor a later dating, between 90-115 c.e.

explains, in part, the author's insistence on conformity to secular standards and the proper running of the household. Unquestionably, this is a church in transition, on its way to becoming institutionalized. Margaret Y. MacDonald²⁶² draws from sociology and her earlier work on Pauline Christianity in observing that often new religious groups operate out of quite informal structures of authority and rely heavily on the teaching and guidance of a charismatic leader. With the passing of the leader, however, questions of governance as well as other internal or external problems (such as new membership, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy) often lead to more defined structures and an increase in rules created to clarify community life and practice. MacDonald rightly maintains that such a dynamic was at work in Pauline Christianity. The more fluid leadership roles endorsed in Paul's letters, particularly as regards women, appear in the Pastorals in restricted hierarchical relationships between the leaders and the led.

It is apparent that the author attempts to reduce tensions in the community, though the nature of these tensions is unclear. The content of the letters reveals a church concerned with good order and the resolution of internal problems. The thorough instructions given to different household groups demonstrate this concern. This was achieved through clarification of the lines of authority and the identification of strict qualifications for leaders (1 Tim 3:1, 8, 15; 4:11-16; 5; 6:1-2; 2 Tim 2:24-26; Titus 1:5-9). Concern for clear, "correct" teaching increased a centralizing tendency of authority. The attention given to clarifying roles and rules, especially in the instructions to various household groups, suggests that false teachers and teachings presented a threat from within the community itself (1 Tim 1:3-7; 4:1-3; 6:3-5; 2 Tim 2:16-18, 23; 3:4-7; 4:14-16; Titus 1:10-16; 3:9-11). Increasing pressure from outside the community made accommodation to social mores and the avoidance of controversy or any display of "difference," the necessary response to assure the church's survival (1 Tim 2:1-2; 3:1, 7; Titus 2:7-10; 3:1-2).

²⁶² Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Rereading Paul—Early Interpreters of Paul on Women and Gender" in *Women and Christian Origins*, eds. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 236-253.

2.1. BIBLICAL TEXTS

1 TIMOTHY (C.E. 95-100)

2.7 εἰς ὃ ἐτέθημ ἐγὼ κήρυξ καὶ ἀπόστολος, ἀλήθειαν λέγω οὐ ψεύδομαι, διδάσκαλος ἐθνῶν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀληθείᾳ.

2:7 For this **I was appointed a herald and an apostle** (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), **a teacher** of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

2.11 γυνὴ ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ μαθησθήτω ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ· 2.12 διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω οὐδὲ ἀθροῦν ἀνδρὸς, ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ.

2.13 Ἄδὰμ γὰρ πρῶτος ἐπλάσθη, εἶτα Ἐὕα. 2.14 καὶ Ἄδὰμ οὐκ ἠπατήθη, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν· 2.15 σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας, ἐὰν μείνωσιν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ καὶ ἀγιασμῶ μετὰ σωφροσύνης·

2:11 Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. 2:12 **I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man**; she is to keep silent. 2:13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 2:14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 2:15 **Yet she will be saved through childbearing**, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

“Qualifications of Overseers” (3:1-7)

3:1 Εἴ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀρέγεται, καλοῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖ.

3:1 The saying is sure: whoever aspires to [the office] of **bishop** desires a noble task.

3:2 δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίλημπτον εἶναι, μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα, νηφάλιον σώφρονα κόσμιον φιλόξενον διδακτικόν,

3:2 Now a bishop (overseer) must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher . . .

3:4 τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου καλῶς προϊστάμενον, τέκνα ἔχοντα ἐν ὑποταγῇ, μετὰ πάσης σεμνότητος

3:5 (εἰ δὲ τις τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου προστῆναι οὐκ οἶδεν, πῶς ἐκκλησίας θεοῦ ἐπιμελήσεται;),

3:4 **He must manage** his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way--

3:5 for if someone does not know how to **manage his own household**, how can he **take care of God's church**?

[3:7 δεῖ δὲ καὶ μαρτυρίαν καλὴν ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἕξωθεν, ἵνα μὴ εἰς ὀνειδισμόν ἐμπέσῃ καὶ παγίδα τοῦ διαβόλου.

3:7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

“Qualifications of Ministers/Servants” (3:8-13)

3:8 Διακόνους ὡσαύτως σεμνοὺς, μὴ διλόγους, μὴ οἶνω πολλῶ

προσέχοντας, μὴ αἰσχροκερδεῖς, 3:9 ἔχοντας τὸ μυστήριον τῆς πίστεως ἐν καθαρᾷ συνειδήσει. 3:10 καὶ οὗτοι δὲ δοκιμαζέσθωσαν πρῶτον, εἶτα διακονείτωσαν ἀνέγκλητοι ὄντες. 3:11 γυναῖκας ὡσαύτως σεμνάς, μὴ διαβόλους, νηφαλίους, πιστάς ἐν πᾶσιν.

3:12 διάκονοι ἔστωσαν μιᾷς γυναικὸς ἄνδρες, τέκνων καλῶς προϊστάμενοι καὶ τῶν ἰδίων οἴκων.

3:13 οἱ γὰρ καλῶς διακονήσαντες βαθμὸν ἑαυτοῖς καλὸν περιποιοῦνται καὶ πολλὴν παρρησίαν ἐν πίστει τῇ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

3:8 Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; 3:9 they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 3:10 And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. 3:11 Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. 3:12 Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; 3:13 for those who serve well as deacons . . .

“Household of God” (3:14-16)

3:15 ἐὰν δὲ βραδύνω, ἵνα εἰδῆς πῶς δεῖ ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι, ἥτις ἐστὶν ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ζῶντος, στῦλος καὶ ἐδραῖωμα τῆς ἀληθείας.

3:15 if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

4:14 μὴ ἀμέλει τοῦ ἐν σοὶ χαρίσματος, ὃ ἐδόθη σοὶ διὰ προφητείας μετὰ ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν τοῦ πρεσβυτερίου.

4:14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.

“On Widows” (5:3-16)

5:3 Χήρας τίμα τὰς ὄντως χήρας.

5:3 Honor widows who are really widows.

5:17 Οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες πρεσβύτεροι διπλῆς τιμῆς ἀξιούσθωσαν, μάλιστα οἱ κοπιῶντες ἐν λόγῳ καὶ διδασκαλίᾳ.

5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching . . .

5:19 κατὰ πρεσβυτέρου κατηγορίαν μὴ παραδέχου, ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ ἐπὶ δύο ἢ τριῶν μαρτύρων.

5:19 Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

5:22 Χεῖρας ταχέως μηδενὶ ἐπιτίθει μηδὲ κοινώνει ἀμαρτίαις ἄλλοτρίαις· σεαυτὸν ἀγνὸν τήρει.

5:22 Do not ordain [**lay hands on**] anyone hastily, and do not participate in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

TITUS

(1:5-9)

1:5 Τούτου χάριν ἀπέλιπόν σε ἐν Κρήτη, ἵνα τὰ λείποντα ἐπιδιορθώσῃ καὶ καταστήσῃς κατὰ πόλιν πρεσβυτέρους, ὡς ἐγὼ σοι διεταξάμην,

1:5 I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and **should appoint elders in every town**, as I directed you:

1:7 δεῖ γὰρ τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεγκλήτων εἶναι ὡς θεοῦ οἰκονόμον, μὴ αὐθάδη, μὴ ὀργίλον, μὴ πάροινον, μὴ πλήκτην, μὴ αἰσχροκερδῆ,

1:7 **For a bishop [overseer], as God's steward, must be blameless . . .**

1:9 ἀντεχόμενον τοῦ κατὰ τὴν διδαχὴν πιστοῦ λόγου, ἵνα δυνατὸς ᾖ καὶ παρακαλεῖν ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ τῇ ὑγιαινούσῃ καὶ τοὺς ἀντιλέγοντας ἐλέγχειν.

1:9 He (the overseer) must hold firm to the sure word in accordance with the teaching, so **that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.**

2 TIMOTHY

1:6 δι' ἣν αἰτίαν ἀναμνησκῶ σε ἀναζωπυρεῖν τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃ ἔστιν ἐν σοὶ διὰ τῆς ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν μου.

1:6 For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you **through the laying on of my hands;**

1:11 εἰς ὃ ἐτέθην ἐγὼ κῆρυξ καὶ ἀπόστολος καὶ διδάσκαλος,

1:11 For this gospel I **was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.**

4:5 σὺ δὲ νῆφε ἐν πάσιν, κακοπάθησον, ἔργον ποιήσον εὐαγγελιστοῦ, τὴν διακονίαν σου πληροφόρησον.

4:5 As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, **do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.**

4:19 Ἐσπασαί Πρίσκαν καὶ Ἀκύλαν καὶ τὸν Ὀνησιφόρου οἶκον.

4:19 **Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.**

2.2. WHAT THE TEXTS SAY ABOUT MINISTRY

As stated in the introduction, two of the three Pastorals, 1 Timothy and Titus, contain instructions extended to various groups in the church for the protection and promotion of the authentic apostolic teaching and tradition. Timothy and Titus are presented as ideal Christian leaders. They are loyal, faithful followers of the teaching, authoritative leaders of their well-behaved (i.e., obedient) flocks, and they are male.²⁶³ Following in Timothy and Titus' footsteps, "ministers" are envisioned as the protectors and promoters of "sound teaching." How they are to fulfill their roles is a major preoccupation of the letters' author. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza believes that the Pastorals "do not promulgate a church order, as such, with clear delineation of particular offices and functions, but are instructions on 'how to behave in the household of God,' the church."²⁶⁴ They are concerned with what the believers *do*. From these instructions written to different groups in the congregation, there are points that can be gleaned about ministry and its workings.

As the church of the late first and early second century was gradually being inculturated more and more into society, a shift in the locus and role of ecclesial authority was inevitable. The shift can be described as a move away from a communal life animated and led by the Spirit's unique gifts active within members, to a common life modeled after the Greco-Roman household structure of relationships between members. Earlier, Paul's teaching and correspondence had emphasized ministry as "charismatic." Paul does not employ titles such as overseers (bishops), deacons, or elders, clearly or consistently in any of his letters. He wrote of the Spirit who freely bestows gifts on individuals for the service of the common good (1 Cor 11-14). For the earliest Christian communities, this meant a more fluid, spontaneous expression of leadership and ministry. In contrast, the author of the Pastorals "adjusts his ecclesial lens" and presents lists of detailed qualifications for distinct offices known as "bishops/overseers" (*episkopoi*), "deacons/ministers" (*diakonoï*, male and female), "presbyters/elders" (*presbyteroi*), and widows (*Χήρας chieras*).²⁶⁵ This "lens" envisions a very different profile of authority

²⁶³ Linda Maloney, "The Pastoral Epistles," *Searching the Scriptures* Vol 2, 366.

²⁶⁴ *In Memory of Her*, 288.

²⁶⁵ Thurston, *Women in the New Testament*, "The church had reached a turning point in her understanding of ministry. The reasons for centralizing authority in 'offices' included strengthening the unity of

and service. Karl Donfried in his introductory essay regarding Judaism and Christianity in the late first century quotes William Lane in stating “Even though formal criteria for leadership are being developed, there is ‘no explicit evidence for a hierarchy of leadership in the Roman church’ according to *1 Clement*.”²⁶⁶ However, from the perspective of a feminist rereading, I draw a conclusion different from that of Lane. Since leadership was increasingly reflective of the values operative in the Roman household, it manifested distinct signs of hierarchalization by the very fact that it was patriarchal. The household codes that appeared in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, for example, are expanded in the Pastorals and applied quite specifically to the “household of God” (1 Tim 3:15). The Pastoral Epistles present a church in which ministries arise from and are shaped by a patriarchal ordering of relationships. These codes, we recall, express the conviction that the authority of males over females ensures efficient running of the household, and, by extension, the state. Subservience, fixed status, and economic dependence all contributed to making this leadership hierarchical, and increasingly sexually exclusive.

Because the author of these letters is concerned that the church conforms to society, overseers (*episkopoi*, bishops) are admonished to manage their households well since this will surely reflect on their management of the church (1 Tim 3:4-5). They are to have a “*good reputation*” among those on the outside (1 Tim 3:7). The writer sees the bishop as the ambassador for the church in society. The bishop (overseer, *episkopos*), is admonished to be both an irreproachable household manager and the protector of “sound doctrine.” Close to the time the Pastorals are written, Ignatius of Antioch wrote in his letter to the Trallians, “In like manner, let all reverence the deacons as an appointment of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Father, and the presbyters as the Sanhedrim [sic] of God, and assembly of the apostles. Apart from these,

congregations and rooting out heresy. Leaders of the church of the second century were aware of threats to the church from within.” 142.

²⁶⁶ William L. Lane, “Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity during the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva: Romans, Hebrews, 1 Clement,” in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, (ed. Karl P. Donfried & Peter Richardson; Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 231.

there is no Church.”²⁶⁷ In his letter to the Smyrnaeans, he compares the bishops with God the Father, admonishing his hearers to follow him, “even as Jesus Christ does the Father” (8:1). In response to the rapid evolution of the Christian mission and an increasing influence of cultural values, the overseer’s/bishop’s role, and the role of leaders in general, becomes more defined and increasingly powerful in church and society.

In these letters, the self-consciousness about how the community is perceived by outsiders explains why any “speculations rather than the divine training,” or any behavior that falls outside social customs would be worrisome for the Pastoral writer. As a result, the young women are encouraged “to love” and be self-controlled, “being submissive to their husbands, so that (*hina*) the word of God may not be discredited” (Titus 2:5). The younger widows, in accord with Roman custom and not characteristic of Paul, are encouraged “to marry, bear children, and manage their households so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us” (1 Tim 5:14). Young men are to speak with integrity in order that any opponent will be put to shame, “having nothing evil to say of us” (Titus 2:7b-8). Not surprisingly, slaves as well are admonished to behave so that God’s name and “the teaching may not be blasphemed” (1 Tim 6:1). It is the reason given for these admonitions to each group that highlights a shift from earlier Pauline motivations as well as a change in the community’s *modus operandi*. Ministry is increasingly identified with “leadership” and is significantly implicated in the survival of the church in society.

The author of the Pastorals also endorses and encourages respect for political authority. “I urge that prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made . . . for kings and all who are in high positions” (1 Tim 2:1-2). Members of the church, “the household of God,” are reminded to “be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient” (Titus 3:1). It is difficult to determine with any assurance the size or shape of these churches (i.e., were house churches still the model?), but it is clear that the church was now patterned after the operative socio-political model we have spoken of: the patriarchal household. Respect for political authority, acceptance by society, and a compliant congregation were now the crucial concerns of ministers. The “ministry” of anyone who serves the community, then, is to insure good order, hold fast to “correct” teaching, and maintain the social *status quo*.

²⁶⁷ Ignatius, “Epistle to the Trallians” 3:1. Taken from Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. and trans., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, *The Apostolic Fathers—Justin Martyr—Irenaeus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 67.

The echoes of Gal 3:28 are not heard in this church. Members are distinguished, which is to say, stratified, by social status, gender, and age. “In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary. All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner of the house, ready for every good work” (2 Tim 2:20-21). A detailed description of the overseer or manager (*episkopos*) of the church names the ministry of teaching as one of “his” duties. The greater emphasis, however, is given to those qualities or qualifications discussed above: the ability to control “himself” and to manage “his” household well, “keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way” (1 Tim 3:4). Titus also associates “household” language with the overseer when he writes of the overseer (*episkopos*) “as God’s steward” (Ti 1:7). Good repute is assured the church insofar as the overseer/steward of the household manages all things well.

If it is essential that the overseer be thought well of outside the community (1 Tim 3:7), likewise is it so for ministers, or “deacons” as the term (*diakonoi*) is so frequently translated. Management functions and personal conduct, to a large extent, shape their service as it appears in these later deuterio-Pauline letters. The letters do not clearly specify a “deaconate” in the sense of an office, but the suggestion that such an office exists is certainly present. These individuals must “first be tested” and then, “if they prove themselves blameless,” they are then allowed to “serve as deacons” (1 Tim 3:10). Whatever this process of “testing” was, it gives the role an “official” tone. Earlier in this chapter, I highlight those places where Paul has used the title of *diakonos* to describe himself (1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:23), to identify Timothy (1 Thess 3:2), Phoebe of the church at Cenchreae (Rom 16:1), and Christ himself (Rom 15:8; Gal 2:17). In the Acts of the Apostles, we will see that the title is used very specifically, yet inconsistently, as it refers to the *diakonos* of the table and the service of the word (Acts 6). In theory, the *diakonos*, even in the Pastorals, does not appear to be an exclusively “male” role.²⁶⁸ To

²⁶⁸ This is against Francine Cardman who sees in the lists of “qualifications” for bishops, deacons, and elders or presbyters, that “the most important requirements are that a man be ‘the husband of one wife’ . . . all the recognized offices seem to be filled by men.” (Emphasis mine) Curiously, Cardman cautions the reader that though the texts are far from clear and that their roles would have been significantly compromised, she proceeds to take exception in regard to the elders and deacons, stating that women may have been among them. In “Women, Ministry, and Church Order in Early Christianity” *Women and*

the contrary, one might read 1 Timothy 3:11 (“Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things”) as a parallel verse to verses 8 and 9. “Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued (=slanderers?), not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money (=temperate?); they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (=faithful in all things?). More on this subject will follow in the section on Women.

In 1 Timothy and Titus, as elsewhere in the NT texts, we find texts referring to the “elders” or presbyters both as individuals and as a body or council of individuals. In 1 Timothy 4:14, “the council of elders” (πρεσβυτεριον) pass on gifts through the “laying on of hands” (μετὰ ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν). In 5:22 they are cautioned not to “lay hands” on just anyone. The meaning of this action is uncertain and appears infrequently in these texts. There is insufficient evidence in the Pastorals, at least, to suggest that this is some kind of sacerdotal or “priestly” act, and it is anachronistic to make it so. In other New Testament texts where this act occurs, it has a wide range of meanings and significance.²⁶⁹ Interestingly, the rapid development of ministry and “offices” in the process of the church’s institutionalization leads, by the end of the second century, to an understanding of the action of the “laying on of hands” (*cheirotonein*) as synonymous with the ordination that is required for certain ecclesial offices.²⁷⁰

The obscurity that surrounds the ministry of the “widows” does not lessen the importance of our consideration of this group. To the contrary, the author gives considerable attention to who is eligible to be identified as a “real” widow and how they are to behave. In the letters to Timothy and Titus, widows are the sole group of women being addressed with such focus and detail. The author of the Pastorals recognizes that they are numerous and that they are influential in the community. We identify them often as a needy group that is supported by the church. On one level, these letters leave the

Christian Origins, eds. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 303.

²⁶⁹ In 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Acts 8:17-19; 9:12 and 17, the “laying on of hands” is for the transmission of a gift whether that be the “gift of God,” the gift of the “Spirit,” or that Saul’s sight is miraculously restored.” It is true that these examples clearly reflect actions of Jesus in the Gospels when he cures, raises from the dead, and empowers individuals (Mt 8:3,15; 9:18; 19:13, 15; Mk 1:41; 5:23; 6:5; Lk 13:13), but this is not in any way enough to assign a single meaning to this action. Therefore, to translate 1 Tim 5:22 as: “Do not ordain anyone hastily” (NRSV Bible) demands that this be understood as commissioning or benediction and not as the sacerdotal action later assigned to the bishop and to “his” priests.

²⁷⁰ See *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*.

impression that widows are not only needy, but are also “misbehaving,” actively weakening, even falsifying the Christian message by their actions. Still, questions remain. Is there a real ministry that they perform in the community or are they primarily objects of pity, passive recipients of community servants? Is theirs a negative presence or is it one that actually builds up the community? I address these questions and the texts pertaining to widows in the section on Women below.

The Pastoral letters demonstrate that, both for deacons and overseers, service to the believing community is expressed largely in management functions; pastoral concerns have taken on organizational rather than charismatic expression. Francine Cardman’s assessment is fitting here, “the Pastorals tend to transmute charisms into duties.”

3. WHAT THE TEXT SAYS/HIDES ABOUT WOMEN

In her commentary on the Pastorals, Linda M. Mahoney²⁷¹ turns the focus of her study away from the traditionally “central” figures (Paul, Timothy, and Titus). Instead, she turns to the material that contains rules for community life (i.e., groups within the household) and personal behavior as they (these rules) relate to women in particular, but men as well. In other words, she focuses on those to whom much of this material is directed. Rather than listen to/read the “voice” that we have always thought the author intends us to hear, Mahoney proposes that we listen to and read those voices that are like echoes in the text. She exercises “historical imagination” in her attempt to pursue a hypothesis that sets aside the traditional assumption that the Pastorals author speaks with impeccable “apostolic authority” in laying down the law. Her hypothesis rejects interpretations that assume that the writings accurately describe his opponents. These echoes (opponents) are not the voices of a few “rebellious women” talking silliness, swept up in popular mythology, or trying to make a “fashion statement.” In these texts, Mahoney contends we see an authority-figure under fire; his opponents are heard in the echoed voices of the active leaders from within the local communities. This is his attempt to establish control over them and silence their voices.²⁷² Reading from this point of view

²⁷¹ Mahoney, “The Pastoral Epistles,” *Searching the Scriptures* Vol 2, 361-380.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 362.

affords us the chance to see that ministry is still an activity meant to engage women and men alike, even in the church of the Pastorals.

Mahoney rightly observes that the Pastoral letters give considerable and direct attention to women and women's roles in early Christian communities. In fact, it exceeds that found in all other New Testament writings. This is both encouraging and discouraging in the investigation of the question of ministry and women's relation to it. If we hold to the hypothesis proposed by Mahoney, clearly the women in this church look more like the women who actively served in the earlier Pauline churches than we have been led to believe. Women are teaching (1 Tim 2:12), preaching, praying, and prophesying (1 Tim 2:8), traveling and carrying on the ministry of service (1 Timothy 5:13-15). Their involvement in active service is significant enough to evoke an almost tyrannical authoritarianism in the author in his efforts to silence or erase them. By the late second century, his work is accomplished and women are silent, hidden, and excluded from any significant offices in the church's work

Widows [*chera* needs plural form] are clearly marked out as a distinct group in the community. They receive the fullest treatment of any group of women in these letters. 1 Timothy 5:3-16 suggests that widows had a special leadership role. It is not clear just what that role was, however, or whether it was a definite office in the community at the time of this writing. What is clear is that the early Christian community demonstrated an acceptance and openness to these women. The restrictions as well as the "rights" of this group are laid out in these verses. They are to be honored by the community.²⁷³ The role of prayer and supplication is assigned to those 'real' widows over sixty years old and who have only been married once. A widow has to have proven herself by good works: "one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way" (5:9-10). This is a rather specific as well as impressive list of requirements.

²⁷³ Margaret MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches*, makes the point that while "honor" might mean "payment" (as some have argued) and may therefore be evidence for the existence of an "office" of widows, the use of the word 'τιμη' elsewhere in the pastorals (such as in reference to slaves) cannot possibly refer to payment. It remains that such women were "enrolled" (καταλεγχο) does not, in itself, mean more than the writing of names down on a list. But MacDonald continues, "since the church keeps such a list and membership is limited in terms of certain characteristics, the existence of an office seems likely." 184-185.

Earlier we noted that the authority of “official” leaders as the protectors of true teaching is emphasized throughout. The community is encouraged to avoid false teaching and preoccupation with “myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than divine training that is known by faith” (1Tim 1:4). Instructional material from the Pastorals has been so central in the church’s teaching with regard to women, it is not surprising that Pauline authorship was and is of particular importance for those wishing to uphold the authoritarian commands repeatedly directed at women and slaves contained in these letters. Obviously, if Paul is the author, these letters bear more weight and are more persuasive as regards their teaching and instruction than would those of a pseudonymous author writing in Paul’s name.²⁷⁴ In the writings to communities that Paul himself founded and taught, women are acknowledged, accepted, and praised. They work in spirit with and sometimes even along side Paul as apostles, prophets, deacons and teachers. Their ministry in the church has not been either limited or singled out on the basis of sex. In the case of the Pastorals, there is no doubt that the author had, as a central objective, the proper conduct and control of the “household of God” (1 Tim 3:15). This meant, in effect, the control of women--regardless of class or rank, and of slaves--male or female. As we have seen, the texts, particularly 1 Tim 2:9-15; 5:11-16; 6:1-2; 2 Tim 3:6-7; Titus 2:3-5, 9-10, convey a spirit of discrimination and dehumanization. Yet, they are a part of the Christian canon and ought not to be overlooked. A refusal to gloss over or apologize for “unchristian” attitudes will be important to an honest, critical reading.²⁷⁵ Whoever the author is, his attitudes are so thoroughly androcentric and negative, that many women (myself included) object to their being considered “divinely inspired” writings. We base this conclusion on the argument that any text that is destructive of the

²⁷⁴ Linda M. Maloney believes that while Paul *could* have written some of the most unpleasant passages in these letters, rhetorical analysis convinces her that they are pseudepigraphical. “To put it simply: the Paul of the authentic letters argues, reasons, cajoles; when necessary, he uses a verbal rapier. The Pastor, on the other hand, does not enter into discussion with the opponents, and even states this refusal to argue with them as a principle (cf. 2 Tim 2:14-16). His weapon is a bludgeon, and he makes no attempt to win over those who disagree.” “The Pastoral Epistles” *Searching the Scriptures* Vol 2, 364.

²⁷⁵ Luise Schottroff, in *Lydia’s Impatient Sisters*, writes “Although it is not enough to subject such texts to critique, it would be a mistake to remove them from the canon or to conceal them. A new understanding of the canon is needed: it is a document of a history of contempt for human beings, of a history burdened with guilt. And yet, at one and the same time, it is the gospel. The life-giving gospel will surely not suffer damage when Christian women and men face up to the history of Christianity, tainted as it is with contempt for women, colonialism, persecution of Jews and Judaism, and its traffic with patriarchy.” p. 78.

worth of any human person simply cannot be the revealed word of God.²⁷⁶ The bittersweet encouragement in all of this is the awareness that women's activity and influence in the early second century Christian communities were significant enough to draw such attention and acerbic attempts at silencing and control.

3. COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

Our study of the Pastoral letters witnesses to some of the developments and changes that were occurring within the Christian communities by the time Christianity took root in the Greco-Roman world. By the end of the first and the early second centuries, the process of institutionalization had begun. The structures that were evolving in Christian communities reflected the world in which they operated. This had, as we have seen, a definite effect on women's lives and the expression of their faith. Among feminist scholars and some others over the past twenty years or more, the question of women's leadership in the early Christian mission and in the local churches remains the subject of investigation and ongoing debate. This study could greatly inform our churches today and deepen the offering made by the Spirit-filled members to serve the community.

²⁷⁶ In her discussion of the "advocacy stance" of feminist hermeneutics, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza states that such a position "cannot accord revelatory authority to any oppressive and destructive biblical text or tradition". Further, this measure must be applied to "all biblical texts, their historical contexts, and theological interpretations, and not just [emphasis, mine] to the texts on women." *In Memory of Her*, 33.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Chapters Five and Six

The previous two chapters have demonstrated my texts, findings and questions surrounding them. In the same way that I had a “critical conversation” with the writers of chapters two, three and four, I read the biblical texts with questions about what was visible in these texts and what was not visible. Applying a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” I worked to identify underlying assumptions that the biblical author has. How have cultural and social elements conditioned the perspectives, attitudes and the writings of those who appear in these texts and those who are rendered silent or invisible by the omission or intention of the author(s)?

Throughout my work, from chapters two until now, I ask feminist questions. In so doing, the conversation about ministry and women’s part in it is advanced. The two preceding chapters reveal not only that women were very much a part of these early Christian communities and the ministries going on, but also just what these ministries were. My reading of the texts confirms what I set out to demonstrate: that ministries are those services given or rendered on behalf of the group. This offers a much broader basis from which to speak about individuals engaged in these ministries. Thus, a feminist perspective and applied hermeneutic does change the way I read the biblical texts and sheds light in places where traditional scholarship might not see.

Some of the questions I posed with Brown, Delorme and Bartlett, come from this way of reading the texts. As these “conversations” unfolded, I noted many areas where these scholars had not looked. The same is true in these chapters on the Pauline Corpus, I read with the question: “Who is doing what for the community?”

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Feminist work in theology and scripture has found a place in the scholarly arena and presents exciting new ways of reading and reinterpreting biblical texts. Through incorporation of new methodologies and a variety of approaches, we have seen that feminist hermeneutics enables us to ask questions that stretch the horizons of traditional exegetical work.

The “conversations” we have had in Chapters Two, Three and Four of this thesis has been both rewarding and challenging. Clearly, the intention of each author, the texts they select and study, and the conclusions they draw, demonstrate that it is possible to identify these factors and see how they work together to form a perspective. On the other hand, it is also revelatory of the fact that if you do not see a particular horizon, an interest group, or someone who is consistently excluded from a text or a reading of the text, neither can you include them in your study or its results. In Chapters Two, Three and Four, many of the challenges had to do with asking authors why certain of the texts were omitted. I asked, “If you include a particular text, how does it change your conclusions?” For example, I suggested that Bartlett, when discussing the historical background of Paul’s writing, not forget to include that Chloe, Phoebe and other women were householders and most likely heads of the church that met in their homes. With all three of the writers in these chapters, we pushed the horizons of their conclusions by asking from a feminist approach a different set of questions based on presuppositions other than their own. For both reader and writer this is an arduous exercise, but one which I trust proved worthy of the effort.

As for my questions in regard to ministries and women applied to the biblical texts (Chapters Five and Six), feminist hermeneutics has proven to be an important path that leads toward fuller understanding of the early Christian communities and their responses to needs. As always, it is important to keep in mind that the sub-groupings within the early heuristic category of gender are becoming increasingly complex and sophisticated. Race, culture, and ethnic identity are factors that raise vastly different questions for feminist interpreters of scripture, even when their methods are the same. It is also important to keep in mind that “the contribution of a feminist hermeneutic to a theology of ministries” comes out of a context of particularity.

A. Contributions of Feminist Hermeneutics

A.1. The Method Itself

One general contribution to theology comes from feminist hermeneutics itself. Feminist hermeneutics has welcomed and built upon the work of scientific, historical and synchronic linguistics, all of which made extraordinary advances in the twentieth century. This contribution is the ability that feminist hermeneutics has to bring to these ancient biblical texts the incorporation of the most recent developments in language, the social sciences and literary criticism. Using the findings of these studies, that there are multiple layers of meaning in the text and multi-dimensional experience of readers, is particularly helpful in the search for hidden persons or meanings. A feminist interpretation of scripture recognizes that biblical writers and interpreters, each according to his/her own point of view, have already changed the received text through omissions, additions and manipulation, whether conscious or unconscious. Hence the text has more than one meaning and all meanings grow out of a context. Like other methods of exegesis or interpretation, feminist hermeneutics also holds certain presuppositions. In light of the

realities mentioned above, feminist hermeneutics identifies as one of its presuppositions that an attitude or an experience of freedom is intended though not always available to all. Another aspect of this same contribution of feminist hermeneutics to a theology of ministries is that it offers the ability to respond with openness to new meanings in the texts when overlooked or hidden dimensions of the text begin to appear and new interpretations are possible. Understanding this process gives the interpreter a greater sense of the word as a dynamic and living reality. Just as the text is multi-leveled in its origins and development, so too readers come with multiple dimensions of experience that influence their understanding of the meaning of the texts. The word of God is by nature a changing reality. It stands in the fine balance of permanence and impermanence. The word conveys the unending, unconditional love and fidelity of divinity, but it does so through all the light and shadows of human motivations and intentions of both the biblical authors and all the readers who follow. "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12a).

A.2. "A Hermeneutics of Suspicion"

When a feminist reader applies a "hermeneutics of suspicion," she/he seeks to identify those texts or elements of texts that stand in contradiction to or are inconsistent with what the reader perceives to be valuable, liberating, or factual. As suggested above, because of our consciousness of both the liberating and oppressive elements that are contained in the very process of the text's creation, the hermeneutics of suspicion helps us ask what or who is missing from this text. What cultural codes or patriarchal constructs shape this text? How can we "decode" (Paulo Freire's term) a text that ignores or is oppressive of some groups of people (particularly women), in such a way that liberation is possible? Through the very act of seeing the text in light of our experience and redressing the disjunctions or dissonant elements that arise between text and reader, the text is liberated. Thus the hermeneutics of suspicion also helps regain balance in our experience of the word. It allows us to distinguish between those elements that are unchanging (that Jesus called apostles, for example) and those elements that can and need to change (that apostles = men, for example). In this way, it sheds light on the difference between what is human description, which itself is politically, culturally and socially

marked, and theologically speaking, what is written in the text that can be understood as divine intention. When applying this principle to contemporary structures of ministries operating in the church, theologians ask questions like: Which of these structures are biblical and which are not? How is the biblical notion of ministries different from our current practices in ecclesial systems? So that the contribution of a “hermeneutics of suspicion” is not for knocking some structures, offices, or persons down, but it is to say, can we do more?

A.3. Hermeneutics and Ministry

Feminist hermeneutics makes an important contribution to the construction of a theology of ministries by providing a critical reminder that there is one God, and all of us are in God. All of us, women and men, poor and rich, experience the saving power of God. By dethroning any monolithic approach to the interpretation of the word of God, which is part of that ageless story of humans wanting to create God or *to be* God, feminist hermeneutics helps avert the temptation to create another idol, the move toward absolutizing a single approach to scripture. There is not one definition or understanding of ministry in the New Testament. If theology rests on a single and unchanging interpretation of biblical texts, it squanders the Christian communities’ ministerial life and it squelches the Holy Spirit. Since the basis of all ministry is mutual love rooted in the saving love of God, true ministry is intended for “the upbuilding of the church” and can only be supported by a reading of scripture that is inclusive. “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 3:28).

B. Crossing Boundaries

B.1. The Bible and Community: Portraits of Ministry

A second observation can be made. The contribution of feminist hermeneutics to a theology of ministries reminds us that the systems and institutionalization of ministry we know today did not exist in the earliest Christian communities. Although this has long been known among students of the early church and the New Testament, our present situation in the church’s organization suggests that the experience of the early church is either overlooked or not considered significant enough as one standard for the

formulation of something new in our current ministerial picture. Fixed structures of church ministry are part of late antiquity and of the medieval and modern worlds. Frequently in this thesis we have observed that in terms of ministries, the early Christian communities made a more dynamic, open and informal response to meet the needs within the group. “Ministries” developed from the spontaneous offerings of individuals in the community who had the charism necessary to meet particular and changing needs. In some cases, when those needs were met, ministries tended to fade into the background or disappear altogether. We saw in the case of the twelve Apostles, who are last heard of after they make the replacement choice of Matthias (Acts: 1:26). One exception occurs if one considers “the Twelve”²⁷⁷ as the same group who gather the community to select “the Seven” (Acts 6:2-6) who were enlisted to serve the daily needs of the Jerusalem community. The service of “the Seven” appears to have been an established though short-lived ministry, and only this citation refers to them. They are not mentioned again outside of this setting.

Paul, one of the first to serve the gospel, helped these early communities to recognize their common needs and thus the need for ministry, that is, service to one another. His authority often had an influence over communities and those who served in them. He commends, approves, admonishes, and encourages the community and the leaders to whom he writes. To the Thessalonians Paul expresses his love: “We sent Timothy our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ to strengthen and encourage you...” (1Thess 3:2). He seems to know some of the members well: “But we appeal to you to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work” (1Thess 5:12-13) “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, διάκονον (minister) of the church at Cenchreae...” (Rom 16:1).” It is interesting that in 2 Timothy 1:11 Paul says of himself: “For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.” As noted earlier, already in the Pastoral Letters we see the collapsing of multiple ministries into

²⁷⁷ Luke appears to identify the “Apostles” with the “Twelve.” In 9:1 Jesus “called the twelve together and gave them power and authority...and he sent them...” Nine verses later we read “On their return the apostles told Jesus all that they had done.” Again, Judas’ name is in the list (6:14) when Matthew writes that Jesus “called his disciples and chose twelve of them whom he also named apostles” (6:13). In both chapter 22:3 and 22:47, Judas, the betrayer is identified by Luke as “one of the twelve.” (emphasis, mine)

fewer and fewer services performed by fewer and fewer people. In this text from 2 Timothy, Paul ascribes to himself the roles of herald, teacher, and apostleship. But Paul did not initiate or appoint all of the ministers, by any means, nor did he seek these roles for himself. We saw that in some cases there were persons (women in particular) who were functioning as special servants in communities even before Paul had visited them. A few examples illustrate this: Phoebe (Rom 16:1), Junia and her husband Andronicus (Rom 16:7), Prisca and Aquila (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5), and Lydia who led a house church in Philippi but is mentioned only in Acts 16:14-15, 40.

The life Paul promulgated so passionately grew out of Jesus' teaching and actions during his public ministry. In this ministry Jesus inspired an egalitarian spirit that became the new foundation for counter-cultural ways of recognizing women and men, slaves and the poor, as sisters and brothers equally called to serve the gospel. A well-known text from Luke's gospel identifies in one sentence both women and their ministry. "Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages...the twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities... (8:1-3)." Bonnie Thurston comments on this passage, saying that it "is a powerful description of the ministry of women in Jesus' ministry,"²⁷⁸ because from it we can conclude that women were in the company of Jesus, that they traveled with him, and seemed, at least in this text, to be the female counterparts of the Twelve.

We know that Jesus crossed social boundaries and broke religious laws by associating with sinners, the sick and outcast. Jesus violated all the laws and mores about women, touching them (the bent woman of Lk 13:13) and allowing them to touch him (the woman who bathes and anoints Jesus' feet in the house of Simon in Lk 7:36-50). The woman with the flow of blood (Mk 5:24-34) is a remarkable demonstration of a woman's daring and of Jesus' acceptance of her. She is in the public sphere, she touches Jesus' cloak, she speaks to Jesus, and she is taboo because of her illness. Jesus' response to her is equally surprising. He calls her "daughter" affirming their kinship, then praises her faith, and finally, heals her. Still another striking example comes to us from John's

²⁷⁸ Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (Crossroad: New York, 1998) 107.

gospel. The Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:1-42) becomes an evangelist causing many to believe in Jesus through her testimony.

Though Jesus' public ministry was very brief, its effectiveness and influence carried over into the earliest Christian communities. Paul's labor among them was to proclaim the gospel whose power transformed social custom and invited everyone equally to share in the good news of Christ's freeing death and resurrection. Paul's letters are filled with both admonitions and gratitude. For example, in the letter to the Philippians we read, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers" (Phil 4:2-3). In a beautiful passage from 2 Corinthians Paul reminds the community of its need *as a community* to forgive the offender. "So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him" (2 Cor 2:8). When Paul corrects a community or its leaders, gratitude and praise stand along side the correction. Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28 "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave and free; there is no longer male and female" was a lived reality in Jesus' lifetime and continued to be a *modus operandi* for two or three generations after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Seeing this existential unity and the mutuality of the early Christian communities prompts reclamation by a contemporary theology of ministries, especially in its insight that the existential unity of the community requires ministry to arise out of the context of the whole community. The affirmation of this inclusive context serves as a reminder that a theology ought to look to the entire community when identifying the charisms necessary to build up the body. To envision new models for ministry is extremely difficult without a strong theological affirmation of "the discipleship of equals," (ESF) and that diverse ministries can *unite* rather than separate members from one another. Boundaries were broken and crossed frequently in Jesus' ministry and in these early groups of Christian. The ministerial life developed spontaneously from just such "boundary crossing." Ministries expressed the life-works of the believers. And believers came from a variety of religious, religious and cultural backgrounds. These were not offices or elected positions filled by one overseer with authority. These ministries are

expressions of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and not first of all products of culture, religion or office.

B.2. New Lights on Ministry: A Contextual View

The Pontifical Biblical Commission discusses feminist hermeneutics under the heading: "Contextual Approaches." This is an accurate placement/categorization insofar as feminist hermeneutics sees context, that is, social location and experience as essential elements in its application. More profoundly, this hermeneutical construct arises from the subject who reads the situations that make this hermeneutic necessary. The theology of liberation has reinterpreted the scriptures from the experience of the poor and oppressed of Latin America. In just the same way feminist theology has reread or reinterprets the Bible from the experience of women and their situation in life. The pontifical document further speaks of feminist hermeneutics as not having created a new method, saying that it rather builds on the work of other methodologies. Feminist hermeneutics employs many interpretative tools and draws from a wide variety of sources. Its interdisciplinary work has proven very successful. This contextual approach of feminist interpretations of scripture highlights the need for specific focused attention to context and relationality in any theology of ministries. Christian ministry today, just as in the early Christian communities, is absurd or simply cannot exist, outside the context of a community. It is from within the daily life of ordinary people that the need for any particular type of ministry or service arises.

By now it is clear that almost without exception, the vast majority of feminist hermeneutical approaches use women's lived experience as their starting point. Subjectivity is a choice that sides with advocacy and engagement on the part of the feminist interpreter. A theology of ministries could be stronger and perhaps more honest if it allowed the subjective character of ministry in contemporary believing communities to determine in some respects who is engaged and what need is being met, that is, who needs an advocate in the Christian community? This might mean lessening an emphasis on requirements and rules for ministries, in order to think beyond "who is eligible for this or that ministry?" and "is 'leadership' the only source for calling one to serve?" Men could partner with women to build a strong theology of ministries. The "ministries" we have seen in the Pauline communities are need-driven. It is only later that they become

role-driven. As it is, today “the ministry” and the roles or functions that the church puts under that title, are all fixed positions in the local churches and in the church at large. They are defined as having an objective identification and structure, as well as clear statements of requirements for those who sense a call to serve. The theology of ministries that is operative in the church today at times appears to be more reflective of North American society than it is biblical.

Ministry in the Pauline churches was not a dull, carefully programmed role. Paul’s letters are filled with action words describing co-workers, comforters, or servants. Those who teach or proclaim the gospel are dynamic, active servants. Today our theology of ministry continues to be flooded with words of offices, orders, and holy states, a reflection of the dominant pre-Vatican II theology. A theology of ministries incorporating insights from feminist hermeneutics would enunciate principles that could shape a more creative or engaged way of discerning ministers and ministries. Such a theology would be more in touch with the real needs of the local church and the individuals who are its members. The very fact that feminist hermeneutics is not tied to a single method in its application (whether historical-critical, rhetorical, or canonical), it allows a re-reading of the biblical text with the freedom to let the text speak anew. Looking for the assumptions or presuppositions underlying a text and learning to see what is hidden, prompts the feminist exegete to turn at times to other texts to draw fuller meaning from the text in question.²⁷⁹ Bringing passages and persons from obscurity into greater light is a significant contribution to a theology of ministries since it adds to the fullness of the cited passage.

Briefly we recall here some of the texts that demonstrate this possibility. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul makes only one direct reference to the two women who are named and who have “have struggled beside me [him] in the work of the gospel” (4:3). Paul praises Euodia and Syntyche for their work with him and encourages them “to be of the same mind.” Commentators, as we saw earlier; have made much of the phrase “to be of the same mind,” suggesting that it is a quarrel between the two women. Some even propose that it is “petty bickering” about which Clement and some other men are to “help

these women” (4:3). Until feminist hermeneutics gave attention to biblical texts, no one recognized these women as “apostles,” ministering as co-workers with Paul. Yet, this is what Paul himself writes without hesitation or qualification. Prisca and Aquila appear as the leaders in their household church (1 Cor 16:19). The precedence of Prisca’s name in nearly every appearance gives her an unusual prominence. Is this a married couple leading a church? Is Prisca teaching Apollos, the man known for his eloquence and knowledge of the scriptures and who is mentioned ten times in Acts and the letters? We glimpse Prisca and Aquila within their household in Ephesus, doing the ministry of teaching and proclaiming the gospel. Their work is apostolic yet they are not called apostles. There is rich information that we can examine here. The light that we shed on this and other couples has significant implications for our theology of ministries.

An earlier text from 1 Corinthians (9:5) in which Paul asks if he has the same right as the other apostles to be accompanied by a believing wife, has often been treated in relation to marriage or sexual issues. Yet the points highlighted by a feminist hermeneutics applied to this same text are different. We note three points: that women were active believers (“a believing wife”) of the Christian community; that women did not all stay at home, and that the example of Prisca’s activity may not have been unique to her. As the picture of the activities of both women and men in the churches becomes more focused and specific in its detail, it is more possible for contemporary theologians to imagine other models of ministries or ministers that are described with action words similar to Paul’s. The dynamic work of these early Christians cannot be contained in the strict definitions of our current vernacular.

One final example that bears repeating is that concerning the identity of Junia (Rom 16:7). This woman “suffered prison for the sake of the gospel.” Paul praises her as being “prominent among the apostles” (Rom 16:7) and notes that she was “in Christ” before he was. From the 13th century until recently, scholars fought to prove that she was a he named Junias. It was so unthinkable that a woman would be named an apostle that they sought rather to prove the error in the name Junias. However, feminist work and other more recent scholarship verifies that the masculine form, Junias, does not hold up in

²⁷⁹ In an article by Amy-Jill Levine, she gives the example of counter-balancing the Pastoral’s restrictions of Christian women with *The Acts of Thecla*. “Hermeneutics of Suspicion” in *Dictionary of Feminist*

the manuscript tradition and is non-existent in antiquity, while the name Junia has been attested to in other literature from the period.²⁸⁰

Our re-reading of the biblical texts from a feminist perspective has allowed us to see clearly that there is no strong indication of a hierarchy of roles in the communities of faith. Paul certainly had unique authority along with those who led assemblies in their own households, but there is no strict hierarchical structure in Jesus' ministry or in any of those communities immediately following after Jesus. At this point this is not so much about women, as it is a gradual transformation from dynamic life to static existence, so to speak. Feminist hermeneutics allows the freedom to question present structures for ministry and to envision alternative models for ministry. We noted signs of conflict already as early as Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:10 ff). Quarrels over who should minister and how brought out competition and division in the Corinthian community. By the time the Pastoral letters were written, we recognized a move toward selection and exclusion that threatened women's involvement in ministry. Elders, says the letter to Titus, are to be "blameless, the husband of one wife" (Titus 1:6). Now, whether women were prophesying (1 Cor 11:4-7), leading a congregation, entering public discussions (1 Tim 2:11-12), asking questions (1 Cor 14:33b-35), or teaching (1 Tim 2:12), they were to be silent, passive, and subject to their husbands. Despite these dubious changes in rhetoric, Paul ends 1 Corinthians with a final greeting to "Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house." Even the author of 2 Timothy closes with a greeting to Prisca and Aquila. Evidently the Pastoral writer could not overlook these two whose names and works were obviously well known.

The Pastoral Letters, and other of the later writings of the Pauline corpus, manifest a strong move toward institutionalization and hierarchical control of the many functions of service. This was accompanied by another move--that of getting women back in their "proper" place—the private milieu of the household where their speech was

Theologies eds. Russell Letty and J. Shannon Clarkson (Westminster: Louisville, 1996) 141.

²⁸⁰ Ute E. Elsen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies* (Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 2000) 147-148. Earlier in her book Elsen gives evidence that the early church in the Greek tradition seemed to accept Junia. This wonderful text from John Chrysostom: "It is certainly a great thing to be an apostle but to be outstanding among the apostles—think what praise that is! She was outstanding in her works, in her good deeds; oh, and how great is the philosophy (ἡ φιλοσοφία) of this woman, that she was regarded as worthy to be counted among the Apostles!"

stifled and their engagement in the work of the gospel was “domesticated.” By affirming and highlighting the initial impetus in those communities immediately following Jesus’ death and resurrection, feminist hermeneutics stresses what was a more fluid approach and need-specific orientation of ministries in the New Testament. At the same time it counterbalances the increasing rigidity of the Pastoral Letters. Feminist hermeneutics underscores the theological principle of discernment of a Spirit-given charism in relation to tasks or needs of the community. This recognition is a contribution to contemporary theology of ministry. Genuine service to the community is prompted by the Spirit’s charism within the individual, and not any kind of static vocation or role that an individual strives for.

By the end of the 1st century the great varieties of ministry arising from the communal theology operative in the earliest communities, had given way to a less developed ministerial life and a church order that was tightly fixed, with only 3-6 ministries. The emphasis was increasingly placed on the roles of authority/leadership, and titles such as *bishop/overseers*, and finally *priests*. This emphasis was reinforcing a different mind-set than that of the early communities and accelerated the centralizing tendency of power and authority.

B.3 Theology and the Bible: A Meeting of Minds

In his comments on the church from the 1950’s until Vatican II, Thomas O’Meara, O.P. notes the ambiguity regarding ministry and the roles of leadership. O’Meara is a systematic theologian, an ecclesiologist and philosopher. To his theology of ministry we add the voice of feminist analysis of biblical texts. Since there is little if any value in identifying new biblical insights or emphases from a vacuum, we again enter into conversation in order to see what contributions can add to a renewed understanding of ministry. O’Meara speaks of the wisdom of past epochs and also of the failures. He refers to long periods in the church’s life “during which there was no discussion of ministry outside of that concerning the spirituality of the celibate male priest.” Further, he speaks of these dry, silent periods as a “negative tradition” in the church’s life.²⁸¹ In bold

²⁸¹Thomas O’Meara, *A Theology of Ministry* “We should be aware that there is in certain areas a lack of discussion and theology—in those areas the Spirit seeks to enlighten the church, even to the extent that we must speak of ‘negative traditions,’ that is, questions that have been resolved over a period of time but

contrast to this pre-Vatican II notion of ministry and the dull, sparse results of it for the life of the church, the apparently fully-participative assemblies of disciples of the gospel in the period after Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, have been rediscovered and brought to light, due in great part to the work of feminist hermeneutics. These New Testament roots need to be reclaimed if we are to make the passage from a centuries long tradition that seems to have frozen in time, to a more creative, more engaged way of discerning ministries and ministers so that they may respond to the real needs of the local church today.

In 1Thessalonians, as well as in other places, Paul highlights the work of the Gospel as a collaborative work. (1:1, 4-5). He uses *synergon* (co-workers) to describe his collaborators. Paul's letters are at times prompted because of disputes or threats to the community. But it is to the works of the Gospel: to proclaim, to teach the good news, to be sent, and to proclaim the gospel, all these and others--that Paul devotes his attention and energy. He shows little indication of being preoccupied with structure and qualifications for these works. In 5:20, Paul reminds the community at Thessalonica that the activities of the prophets are to be respected (5:20). He writes no word of correction; he does not mention how, where or who can prophesy. It is assumed that some have the gift and are exercising it. Even more than being a collaborative work, the proclamation's effectiveness and power are intimately linked to the recipients of the message. For a contemporary theology of ministries, this New Testament witness demands that the cooperative, reciprocal, and communal elements are more than theoretical characteristics contained in rubrics or a rule. It is the power of the gospel that is loosed through these three qualities when they are tangibly operative. Paul makes no mention of status, position, or sex in relation to the various services listed here.

The primacy of the gospel is again emphasized in 1Cor (2:13). That it is a Spirit driven reality is important, in fact, essential. It is proclaimed on behalf of the people; it is a power at work in individuals. Who proclaims this power is secondary to the message, whether "Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female." Ministry is always understood in light of and springing from this single reality. Recall another passage of Paul's:

without any discussion of them. A negative tradition is not an engagement of the organic life of the church whose soul is the Spirit but simply the nonconsideration or minimal consideration of an area." p.138.

For when one says, 'I belong to Paul,' and another, 'I belong to Apollos,' are you not merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose...For we are God's servants, working together... (1 Cor 3:4-9).

Reciprocity is once again emphasized: the church needs ministers (servants) and the servants need (exist for) the good of the church (3:9-10). Feminist interpretation values collaboration and relationality. To construct a theology of ministries where the gospel is recognized to be the fundamental power at work in individuals is to underscore the possibility and the necessity of communion and collaboration between members. Competition or stratification fall away in the clear presence of the Spirit at work. Thus far, we see no biblical basis for assigning ministries according to one's status in the community, one's economic profile, or one's race or sex.

Another expression of the importance of unity in the church is in Paul's encouragement of the work of mutual correction in community. "Chloe's people" report to Paul that there is quarreling in the community at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1: 10ff). He responds to the report and writes of the power of God, calling the Corinthians back to the Gospel. There is no mention made of the source of the report or the householder/leader of these people. No concern, no comment about Chloe. Their messages are credible to Paul and he takes them very seriously. He focuses on what is good for the community's life. And he does not consider women's work an issue of lesser importance. Evidently women were very active in the Corinthian community. It must not have been that unusual for a woman to be leader of a household church. And it may have been women's enthusiastic involvement that prompts Paul's restrictions on women: to veil themselves, to be silent and subordinate to their husbands. He doesn't try to control the Spirit. There is no direct prohibition against prophesying. There is no further comment about Chloe as church leader.

The variety of gifts, services and activities present in the body are the manifestation of the one Spirit for the common good (1 Cor 12:4-7). Paul stresses once

again the unity of the Body while reaffirming the multiplicity and necessity of gifts/services and activities. Uniformity is not the goal; building up the church in the unity of the Spirit is. Our reading of the texts in this thesis underscores these values and asks how they can be emphasized in current theological models for ministry. A theology of ministries needs to acknowledge the many and diverse gifts given to the community. Paul moves from this metaphor of the body to the three “lists” that we find in these letters: apostles, prophets, teachers, “then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, and various kinds of tongues” (12:27-28). These, “God has appointed.” Few of them have to do with liturgical activity. In a theology of ministry that marks these gifts, the community discerning along with leadership, needs to call forth and honor those ministries that exist in the body for upbuilding and growth. Paul is very strong in these chapters (12-14) in stressing that all comes from within the community empowered by God’s Spirit, and all is for the building up of the body. This assures that the community is open to the new, the foreign, and the developments of culture. Backed by the assurances in this letter, a theology of ministries can confidently encourage the necessity of calling forth and supporting the multiple gifts and services that exist in the church.

In a theology of ministry for today, renewing our consciousness of the gathered community as bearing the image of Christ, might help move us beyond individual conflicts or quarrels that erupt over external issues of lesser importance. However, if voices from the assemblies raise messages of stress or trouble, from where does the authority come to act on these messages? Only if we believe that the Spirit is the source and origin of all gifts, can we hear them speaking for the upbuilding of the church. If leadership is on the outside, or if it exercises too rigid an approach to roles/ministries, leadership may discard negative messages and silence the members’ requests. Silencing such complaints can lead to losing the opportunity for growth or grace. A theology of ministries might be enlivened, however, by stressing the point that conversion and the commitment of baptism in Christ make up the strong and timeless key that unlocks our freedom to see that we are “all one in Christ” (Gal 3:28b). Reading the whole of the biblical texts and not simply carving out particular points allows for interpretation that exposes the fullness of the message.

The letter to the Philippians reveals two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who were co-workers with Paul whom he himself acknowledges as having “struggled beside me in the work of the gospel” (4:3). This arrangement is not patterned on a patriarchal family with set roles and authoritarian leadership. The relationships are not determined by sex or status. And yet, in this same letter, we find a curious occurrence. PHEME PERKINS²⁸² observes the ambiguity in Paul’s images for co-workers, both male and female. He refers to them as “athletes” and “soldiers” and cautions them about circumcision. These are male experiences that women could not share in. Using male images only hides women’s engagement in the community at Philippi. We know that women were engaged and were significant in the leadership. Perhaps Paul just didn’t see it or didn’t think it mattered to his audience.

Any likening of Paul’s authority to a father over a household, or any comparison of a community to a family, would be an interpretation necessarily made from a patriarchal model of family and contrary to all that baptism in Christ means. A patriarchal model is uneven in its relationships and is built on hierarchical principles. All members are subject, in greater or lesser degree, to the “head of the household,” that is, the father. The *paterfamilias* ruled over all: slaves, dependent sons, and male and female slaves. But it was women in particular who are abused in this system. Daughters and wives are dependent and subjugated completely in this familial arrangement. Women had no legal status of their own, could not be in public roles, nor were they free to administer their own property inherited as a widow or daughter. Even sons and male slaves fared better and could be emancipated eventually. The earliest Christian communities were free of the restrictions and inequalities of this model. Slaves and women were free to stand in the assembly as equals with all members. We know that women in the early Christian communities (Prisca and Junia), led households and spoke in public (Phoebe and Chloe), and worked successfully in commerce and/or trade (Lydia and Prisca).

²⁸² Perkins writing in *the Women’s Bible Commentary*, see fn 29.

C. Contributions to Change

C.1. Meeting Today's Challenges to Ministry

Today, the churches need a theology of ministries free from patriarchal models and mindsets in which relationships are always unequal whether based on vocational status, merit, or sex. Re-emphasis on baptism and the power of the Spirit at work in the free bestowal of charisms is our biblical identity and the only route back to the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. From this, a theology of ministries can learn or re-learn how easy it is to employ metaphors, comparisons, and other symbols that assign weighted value to certain functions and certain persons. And in assigning weight to some (most often male celibates), others (often women) are placed in the paralyzing silence of the kitchen or pew. The public proclamation of the gospel is a service not limited by titles of clergy or laity, male or female. If one has the charism it is for the building up of the body and should be exercised for that purpose. This is no "office" to which one is appointed, nor is it a self-serving action, but is a word and action whose sole purpose is to serve and hasten the kingdom it proclaims.

"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 3:28).

As we have so often noted in this work, to look behind texts and their structures is one of the preliminary tasks in feminist biblical hermeneutics. What are the assumptions that underlie the writing? What presuppositions are operative here? How is the text shaped or affected by these presuppositions? Are these presuppositions helpful or hurtful to women's experience today? Do they reflect values within our experience? And perhaps most importantly, do they enhance or inhibit the power of the liberating word of the gospel? These questions are familiar by now since they have surfaced at a several times in this thesis. We reflect on these questions in the framework Thomas O'Meara's work in his book, *Theology of Ministry*.²⁸³ There he formulates several theses about the nature of ministry that he then examines in light of scripture and history. He refutes each of these theses—but what is important to realize is that people have and do hold these beliefs. He treats each thesis as a challenge that works to help him develop a theology for ministry in the church today. I restate some of these theses here by way of making an ordered

²⁸³ Ibid., 150.

respond from my analysis of the biblical data. It is in the attempt to see what further contribution feminist biblical hermeneutics makes to developing a theology of ministry.

C.1.1. O'Meara's first thesis is that "Every act an ordained minister does solely by virtue of ordination and not necessarily by the action itself achieves effectively a ministerial goal."²⁸⁴

This dangerous statement can be interpreted in different ways. Obviously, it comes from a post-biblical understanding of ordination. Baptism and ordination are both ecclesial signs marking an individual for action. It is the action that affects/effects the goal. Both Jesus and Paul resisted external titles or fixed functions for believers. Apostle, prophet and teacher are three prominent gifts that signaled an action in the service of the community. "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues" (1 Cor 12:28). I highlight that it is *God* who has appointed *in the church* all these gifts that ready individuals for action. It is the Spirit-filled action and not the title that achieves a ministerial goal.

C.1.2. O'Meara proceeds to a second challenge: "Acts of the baptized that resemble ministry are either secular actions or actions motivated by Christian virtue in the secular sphere because the layperson by definition is excluded from formal ministry."²⁸⁵

The hermeneutics of suspicion mentioned earlier helps us raise two immediate inconsistencies that hold the statement together. Is there not only *one* baptism? Here, it appears that baptism grants some individuals the opportunity to serve in formal ministry whereas others are not given access to ministry. This is a blatant misunderstanding of baptism that flies in the face of the Pauline texts we have examined. What human authority has the power to decide which actions are "secular" and which are formal ministerial acts? Furthermore, Jesus' ministry and the ministry of Paul, at least for Christians, leveled the barrier that separated public and private worlds. If, by "secular sphere" we are marking a reality that is somehow distinct from a "sacred sphere," once again the question of baptism arises as well as the pneumatic presence of God in the

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 150.

world. Do these realities have real meaning or are they doctrinal deceptions? Referring to the laity's "special and indispensable role in the mission of the church," the Council participants writing the *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People* spoke of how "spontaneous and fruitful" was this role in the mission of the church. The decree goes on to cite scripture passages to illustrate this point. Among them is included: Romans 16:1-6, which mentions along with others, Phoebe (a deacon of the church at Cenchreae), Prisca and Aquila (and the church in their house), Epaenetus and Mary. Another verse is from Philippians: "help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers..." (Phil 4:3). This time we look at these familiar women and see more. Each citation points to a woman who is not ordained and yet is serving in ministry, meeting needs of the community, and who shares in the leadership of the church.

Since part of the purpose of applying a hermeneutics of suspicion is to raise consciousness, the ambiguity of language needs to be addressed. On the one hand the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* and the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, both reinforce the belief that the laity are full members of the People of God, and yet they relegate them to the "temporal sphere" where they can perform actions that resemble ministry and flow from Christian virtue. Feminist hermeneutics calls for a careful reading of the biblical texts used for support. The texts cited above, in my analysis, give every reason for supposing that members in the first Christian communities were fully participative according to the charism someone was given and when the need for the service that flowed from that charism arose. There were, no "spheres" or lines of demarcation that separated Paul and various leaders of churches, apostles, and co-missioners. "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" (Gal 3:28).

C.1.3. O'Meara presents another challenge for a contemporary theology to face. "Baptism is only metaphorically a commission to real, formal, charism-grounded ministry; baptism constitutes a person in the Christian laity, which is by definition outside of serious church activity."²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 150.

For Paul, baptism was the act that incorporated men and women into Christ. It is not a metaphor in his understanding. Paul uses symbolism when he identifies Christians as being buried into Christ's death in the waters of baptism (Rom 6:4a). But he is not speaking metaphorically when he concludes, "so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6: 4b). Baptism initiates a person into the Holy Spirit, source and giver of charismatic life, ready to minister in the church when needed. To suggest that the Christian laity is "by definition" incapable of "serious church activity" is once again an elitist misinterpretation of baptism. Because feminist interpretation pledges to oppose marginalization and to unmask histories of subjugation and subordination, it can assist in making a theology of ministries inclusive and biblically responsible. O'Meara quotes Benedictine Godfrey Diekmann, when he writes, "Diekmann saw the greatest achievement of Vatican II to be 'the restoration of the baptismal dignity of the laity, an achievement even greater than episcopal collegiality.'" ²⁸⁷

C.1.4. A fourth challenging proposition from O'Meara: "There have been and can be only three serious ministries that deserve ordination and the designation of church office: deacon, presbyter, and bishop." ²⁸⁸

The rereading of the biblical texts that I have made in this thesis is in harmony with and is supported by scholars who have made more exhaustive studies. They demonstrate convincingly that the early church was a vibrant, charismatic community that actively expressed a rich diversity of ministerial services. Furthermore, we know that these ministries were not, at the outset, denied a person because of race, status, or gender. The letters to the Romans, First Corinthians, and Ephesians are those that contain lists of ministries. Some interpreters find in these lists an ordered ranking on the basis of which is most valuable or esteemed. However, it is more likely that the lists are made on the basis of what ministry appeared first in the life of the community. Paul's list in 1 Corinthians 12:28 ranks ministries, "first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...." there is no indication that other public actions performed for the good of the community were considered less serious or valuable. The letter to the Ephesians varies the order

²⁸⁷ O'Meara, p. 210, quoting from Max Johnson, "Back Home to the Font: Eight Implications of a Baptismal Spirituality," *Worship*, 71 (1997): 499.

²⁸⁸ Op. cit., p. 150-151.

slightly: “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ*” (Eph 4: 11-13) [italics mine]. As in the First letter to the Corinthians, Romans uses the image of body and the diversity of its members (Rom 12:4-8) to explain that such diversity of gifts is “according to the grace given to us: prophecy...ministry....teacher....” Not surprisingly, the three lists differ from each other. Each is for a different church—in a different place and with its own unique social profile. What is the common denominator that again appears? The Holy Spirit is the giver of all gifts.

Feminist biblical hermeneutics reads a proposition such as the one above and emphasizes that this is the result of interpretation and reinterpretation and that serves some particular interest. The exercise of suspicion asks who is liberated by this statement and at whose expense? A contribution to a theology of ministries will be in naming the gaps it recognizes that exist between biblical language that describes the fluidity and diversity of ministries, “the freedom we have in Christ Jesus” (Gal 2:4), and the language of “office” and “ordination” that limit and divide. Language is of special interest in this feminist approach. Descriptive words for the various ministries in early Christian life often turn up as verbs, demonstrating the action of service: teaching, evangelizing, healing, and preaching. These verbs become titles and later, states in life, so that static words like office and hierarchy and priesthood define and delimit what was once dynamic and changing. Such demarcations most surely are exclusive and most likely are sexist. And if a local church suffers from passivity or inaction on the part of the people, we are reminded of the list of charisms activated for ministry. Are the gifts in the “body” being encouraged to expression? Can the Spirit breath in this church? We know there is no lack of gifts given by the Spirit of God and must ask how they get blocked.

C.1.5. O’Meara concludes his propositions by saying that upon reflection “they are incomplete if not false.” Unfortunately, these attitudes or beliefs have been operative in many situations and often have been reinforced either by the theology of ministry or the interpretation of the theology of ministry.

“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: 28).

We noted earlier that the beginnings of the hierarchalization of ministries were evident even before the New Testament era had ended. Our rereading of Colossians, Ephesians, and particularly the Pastoral Letters indicates dramatic moves toward more defined structures for the community. There is a concern for good order, and an almost apologetic stance in the effort to keep the apostolic teaching pure, calling for restrictions and rules to assure authenticity. The process of institutionalization had begun. We noted that even the naming of these letters, *The Pastorals*, reflects a changing church and a changing sense of ministries in the church. The “advice” offered in these letters is that of an older “shepherd” to a younger one, and it says enough to make one question the changes from earlier, undisputed Pauline writings. From the content of the letters, clearly these leaders or “shepherds” were now exclusively male. There seems to be a deliberate attempt in these letters to put women back in their households, out of public view, and remaining silent. Even though Paul’s own view on women is somewhat ambiguous, most often he gives thanks or praises the ministry of his women co-workers or apostles. Nowhere does he object to a woman exercising a ministry for which she has received the charism. Paul’s ambivalence towards women shows itself in a very few places where we see him speaking out about women’s domestic status and their behavior or dress.²⁸⁹

The Greco-Roman household codes reinforced Christian households, and the brief moment of spontaneous, lively ministerial practices coupled with a more egalitarian lifestyle among believers, changed dramatically. In our textual analysis we saw that these codes or at least traces of their influence appear in several of these later letters (Ephesians, and the Pastorals). They reflect the cultural norms and social ethic of the late first century. Though with some variations, the pattern in most households is the same: a set of imperative instructions for at least three pairs in the household: slaves and masters, wives and husbands, and children and parents was enforced. In each situation it is a relationship of subordination to a higher authority. The hierarchal ordering kept everyone in their proper place, that is, separated by age, status, gender, and duties, each

²⁸⁹ 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Cor 11:2-16 are exceptions, it seems. There is, however, the text in 1 Tim 2:8-15. In many cases Paul applauds women who are co-workers, church leaders, deacons or apostles. There is no disparagement of any ministerial role women play.

one with prescriptions for behavior and proper conduct. All of this would also help to ward off any accusations that Christianity might threaten the social order by spreading notions of equality among its advocates. Various in Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastorals we see attempts to “Christianize” the cultural message, but applying a hermeneutic of suspicion it is easy to see that there is increasing movement away from earlier models of community and ministry. With the major shifts in emphasis, we can expect that some groups or some individuals either fall out of sight or are silenced and relegated to the background. This is a sort of concession to cultural mores, but more importantly it reinforces the values of patriarchy that run throughout all these letters.

A feminist reading of the Pastoral Letters acts as a reminder to a theology of ministries that what we see here is the centralizing tendency of authority. The more defined and centralized authority becomes the more powerful and dominant it becomes. Its centrifugal force spins the lowest and least in the group (women, children, and slaves) to the outskirts of the communal horizon where they are no longer seen or heard. They become the “objects” to whom authority ministers. It is important to remember at all times that this is not how the majority of Pauline churches were experiencing the gospel. A theology of ministry will benefit by the feminist hermeneutical “gadfly,” that continually reminds the church of the lasting negative influence the Household Codes had in these communities and for the communities that came behind them.

C. 2. Confronting Challenges with Conversation.

A theology of ministries will be stronger and more “biblical” if it is based on listening to all the voices in the Christian community, if it de-emphasizes rank and divisions, and if it encourages communal discernment as regards ministry and life in the Spirit. No one individual or group has the answers to all the community’s needs, and it is the entire community responsibility to see that the acknowledged leaders listen to all voices, not just their own.

Jesus and his followers and the churches that grew up in the first decades after his resurrection were clearly alive and active. Almost everything in the profiles of the Pauline communities points to communal life lived in the freedom of the Spirit and served by individual members whether “Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female.” Following in the Spirit of Jesus, Paul inspired and encouraged the same “discipleship of

equals.” The entire message of the gospel and the individuals who preached and lived by it were counter signs in the culture. The apparent absence of official duties or set offices of service became more and more troublesome by the close of the first century. Conformity to the cultural status quo and its megalithic patriarchal penetration of every aspect of life drew the churches into a new form of community—one that looked like society.

Today, a theology of ministries must build on the principles from Vatican II. Two principles of special importance are our recognition that “the church is in the world,” and that all people have dignity. Keeping these principles at the forefront of our thought can serve such a theology well; the challenge is to be watchful for signs that the church in the world is beginning to reflect society’s values and mores more than those of the gospel. The hierarchy must understand the dynamics of consumerism, militarism, individualism, and competition that the United States society lives with daily. Only then can they help Christian communities here discern the extent to which our values as a church are those of the gospel or whether they are social and cultural values that we profess to eschew by being a church that is counter-cultural.

Finally, a reading of the New Testament, such as this, is done from the starting point of women. We have learned a great deal about the situation of women in the Church and about their relation to ministries. As well, we have a deeper understanding of the very nature of ministries themselves and of the Church that is so desperately in need of them.

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