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♀ WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The Pauline Letters. 2. The Post-Pauline Letters. 3. The Gospel of Mark. 4. The Gospel of Matthew. 5. The Gospel of Luke. 6. The Acts of the Apostles. 7. The Gospel of John.

Women disciples and missionaries are clearly present in all four Gospels and in the Pauline letters. However, the portrait of women's involvement in the mission is far from uniform. That women participated in a wide variety of ministries, including leadership, in the early church is apparent; that some New Testament authors sought to restrict women's ministry to the private sphere with behind-the-scenes supportive roles is also evident.

1. The letters of Paul provide the earliest canonical evidence for women's involvement in the Christian mission. They also supply the most names of women ministers in the early church. There were as yet no job descriptions for Christian ministers. The terminology and roles were still very fluid in the first century.

1.1. *Co-workers*. The term Paul uses most frequently of those who minister with him is *synergós*, "co-worker." Paul speaks of "co-workers with God" (1 Cor 3:9; 1 Thes 3:2), "co-workers in Christ" (Rom 16:3, 9), and "my co-workers" (Rom 16:21; 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25; Philemon 24). Among those so designated is one woman: Prisca along with her husband, Aquila, (Rom 16:3). That she is mentioned before her husband indicates her higher status. Paul elaborates on their importance not only to him personally but to "all the churches of the Gentiles" (Rom 16:4). Furthermore, they are heads of a house church (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19). Paul states that co-workers in the mission are equal (1 Cor 3:8-9).

In Philippians 4:3, Paul names Euodia and Syntyche, who "have struggled [*synéhlēsázi*] at my side in promoting the gospel, along with Clement and my other co-workers [*συνεργῶν*]." With the term *synathléō* (to contend or struggle along with someone), Paul likens the tremendous exertion of these women on behalf of the gospel to that of an athlete who strains every muscle in a contest. They are not peripheral to the mission but have been working right at Paul's side. These two may have been a missionary team, as were Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2), Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3), Junia and Andronicus (Rom 16:7), and perhaps Tryphæna and Tryphosa (Rom 16:12). If such were the case, Paul's urging Euodia and Syntyche to "come to a mutual understanding in the Lord" (Phil 4:2) expresses his desire that their team ministry not end in dissolution as did his own partnership with Barnabas after their dispute over John Mark (Acts 15:36-40). Alternately, Euodia and Syntyche may have been leaders of separate house churches in Philippi. Whatever their dispute, perhaps over a theological difference, it is openly expressed and has

an effect on all the members. Because of their prominent leadership in Philippi, Paul is anxious that they resolve their disagreement speedily.

1.2. *Laborers*. Four women in Romans 16 are named as "laborers," that is, for the gospel. Paul sends greetings to Mary, "who has worked hard [*kekoptásen*] for you" (Rom 16:6); to Tryphæna and Tryphosa, "workers [*ás kopiósas*] in the Lord"; and to "beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord" (Rom 16:12). Paul uses the same verb, *kopiáo*, to speak of his own intense apostolic work (1 Cor 15:10; Gal 4:11). Like himself, "co-workers" and "laborers" hold positions of authority. Paul urges the Corinthians, "be subject to every co-worker and laborer [*synergounti kai kopiónti*]" (1 Cor 16:16).

1.3. *Ministers*. Romans 16 begins as a letter of recommendation for Phoebe, who is "deacon" (*diákonos*) at the church in Cenchrae (Rom 16:1). Twice Paul uses the term *diákonos* in tandem with "co-worker" (1 Cor 3:5, 9; 2 Cor 6:1, 4). Paul describes the ministry of *diákonos* in terms of toil and suffering in the service of the gospel (2 Cor 6:3-10; 11:23-29) and recognizes that there are various kinds of service (*diakonia*; 1 Cor 12:5). According to Eph 4:11-12, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers do "the work of ministry." Preaching the gospel is *diakonia* (2 Cor 11:7-8), as is financial assistance (Rom 15:25; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1, 12, 13; see also Lk 8:3). Paul speaks of himself as a "minister [*diákonos*] of God" (2 Cor 6:4), "of Christ" (2 Cor 11:23), "of the gospel" (Col 1:23; Eph 3:7), "of a new covenant" (2 Cor 3:6), and "of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). He asserts that this ministry (*diakonia*) is a gift from God (2 Cor 4:1; see also 2 Cor 3:5; Eph 3:7; Col 1:25).

Paul also notes that Phoebe "has been a benefactor [*prostáti*] of many and of myself as well" (Rom 16:2). The term *prostáti* implies that she was the patron and host of the house church at Cenchrae, providing for the community financially and probably presiding over its gatherings. That she is in need of a letter of introduction to another community attests that she was a traveling missionary, much like Paul himself.

1.4. *Apostles*. Among those Paul names as apostle is the woman Junia (Rom 16:7). Although he recognizes the Twelve as apostles (1 Cor 15:5), Paul also uses the term of himself (Rom 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor 1:1; 9:1, 2; 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; 12:12; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tm 1:1; 2:7; 2 Tm 1:1, 11; Tt 1:1), Apollos (1 Cor 4:6, 9), Barnabas (1 Cor 9:5-6), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thes 1:1; 2:7), James (Gal 1:19), and Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7). In defense of his own ministry, Paul says that an apostle is one who has "seen Jesus our Lord" and whose "work in the Lord" is visible in bringing others to faith (1 Cor 9:1). The root meaning of *apóstolos* is "one sent," that is, to proclaim the gospel. In contrast to those disciples who ministered in their own home context, apostles were traveling missionaries. In his greeting to Andronicus and Junia in Rom 16:7, Paul also notes that they are relatives of his who were in prison with him and that they are "prominent among the apostles," having been "in Christ" before he was.

1.5. *Heads of house churches*. In Paul's greetings to heads of house churches, it is notable that a number of women are named: Prisca, along with her husband, Aquila (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19); and Nympha (Col 4:15). Most likely Phoebe (Rom 16:7) also served in this capacity. Chloe, whose people brought Paul information about the dissension in Corinth (1 Cor 1:11), may also have been the head of

a house church. The Acts of the Apostles names two others: Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), and Lydia (16:40). Most probably Martha, who welcomed Jesus "into her home" (Lk 10:38), and the "elect lady" to whom 2 John addressed were also heads of house churches. For the first two centuries the Christian communities gathered in private homes. Ministries carried out in this context mirrored the functions typical of the Greco-Roman household. With a woman's usual role being internal household management, it was a logical development for women to preside over the gatherings of believers in their homes.

1.6. Women greeted by Paul. There are three other women mentioned in Paul's letters about whom little more than their names is known. The letter to Philemon is addressed as well to Apphia, "our sister" (Philemon 2). The designation "sister" is also used of Phoebe (Rom 16:1) and may have been a title with ministerial connotations beyond the usual address of Christians toward female members of the community. Another woman to whom Paul sends greetings is Rufus's mother, who he says has been "a mother to me also" (Rom 16:13). Nothing further is known about Julia and Nereus's sister, whom Paul greets in Rom 16:15. That they play an important role in the community can be inferred from Paul's singling them out for public recognition. It is notable that one-third of those greeted by Paul in Romans 16 are women.

1.7. Egalitarian statements about women. In addition to those Pauline texts that name women ministers there are a number of passages in which Paul speaks in an egalitarian way of women. The most well known is Gal 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free person; there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This baptismal formula asserts that incorporation into the Christian community makes distinctions of ethnicity, social status, and gender no longer significant. Alluding to Gn 1:27, to the creation of male and female in God's image, the statement asserts that regardless of differing procreative capacities and social roles assigned men and women in a patriarchal society, all persons become full members of the Christian community through baptism.

There is also a very egalitarian view of the relations between husband and wife in 1 Cor 7:3-5. Responding to a problem about which the community has written, seemingly about sexual abstinence within marriage, Paul concedes that members do practice such abstinence for a time, but only on condition that it be by mutual consent. This is surprising in a patriarchal milieu such as that of first-century Judaism and Christianity, where the husband would normally exercise his right to make decisions unilaterally. In addition, Paul asserts that both husband and wife have their duty toward the other (v. 3) and that each has authority over the body of the other (v. 4).

In the same letter Paul also addresses questions about spouses who are not believers. In this context he states, "The unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband" (1 Cor 7:14; similarly 7:16). In Paul's estimation both wives and husbands are instruments of holiness for their spouses; each can lead her or his partner to salvation.

Paul also speaks highly of unmarried women and virgins. He says that such a woman is "anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy in both body and spirit" (1 Cor 7:34). A woman free from the care of husband and family could more easily devote herself to ministry in the church.

Another significant passage is 1 Cor 11:11-12, "Woman is not independent of

man or man of woman in the Lord. For just as woman came from man, so man is born of woman; but all things are from God." Paul seems to argue here for equality and mutual dependence for women and men in general, not only for husbands and wives. He observes how the order of creation in Genesis 2, to which he alludes, is reversed in the natural order. Since all things have their origin in God, there can be no more superiority or inferiority based on precedence.

1.8. Restrictions on women. Although these egalitarian statements exist in Paul's letters, there are other passages that contradict them. The same pericope that offers an egalitarian vision of the relationship between women and men (1 Cor 11:11-12) undercuts it with, "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ" (v. 3); and, "Man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man" (1 Cor 11:7-9).

The same letter in which Paul speaks approvingly of both men and women praying and prophesying in the liturgical assembly (1 Cor 11:4-5) contains the admonition, "As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. 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" (1 Cor 14:33-36).

1.9. *Liberationist or chauvinist?* In trying to resolve these contradictions in Paul, scholars propose various solutions. Some see him as revolutionary, with liberated attitudes toward women, rooted in the boundary-crossing praxis of Jesus. For them, the passages that attempt to silence women are non-Pauline interpolations. Others find ways to reinterpret apparently sexist statements in a way that makes Paul consistently egalitarian. Still others see Paul as neither completely sexist nor egalitarian, allowing that he himself was still working out the ambiguities in diverse and changing situations. Another possibility is that Paul championed equality for women, as well as for Gentiles and slaves, on the level of religious understanding, but not in the social sphere. In 1 Cor 7:17-40, Paul advises believers not to make changes in their social situation with regard to circumcision, slavery, or marriage. He asserts that the time until the parousia is short (7:29-31), that one's state in life is a gift from God (7:17), and that "the slave called in the Lord is a freed person in the Lord, just as the free person who has been called is a slave of Christ" (7:22). By the same reasoning, it may be said that Paul considered men and women no different "in the Lord," but he did not advocate revision of patriarchal structures in the social sphere.

However one understands Paul's attitudes toward women, his egalitarian statements do open a space for Christian communities to configure relations between women and men in patterns of genuine equality, mutuality, and collaboration in all spheres.

2. If statements about women in Paul's own letters are ambiguous, such is not the case with those who wrote subsequently in his name and with the mantle of his authority. There is a clear movement in the post-Pauline letters toward subordination of women to men and increasing restrictions on women's ministry.

In three different letters (Col 3:19-4:1; Eph 5:22-6:9; and 1 Pt 3:1-7) there

appear similar versions of a Christianized household code advising submission of wives to husbands, children to parents, and slaves to masters. The most fully developed treatise on subordination of wives to husbands is found in Eph 5:21-33. These codes reinforce the rule of the husband/father/master according to the patriarchal household structure advocated from the time of Aristotle on. These New Testament texts are prescriptive, rather than descriptive. They portray an ideal, already outmoded in many Greco-Roman households. They clash entirely with texts such as Gal 3:28 and those that portray women as heads of households and in other independent, decision-making positions. The adoption of these codes would have consequences far beyond the family, as faith communities saw themselves as the "household of God" (Eph 2:19; 1 Tm 3:15) and so patterned their relationships.

The Pastoral Letters (1-2 Timothy, Titus) give witness to an even greater effort at reinforcing patriarchal structures in the church at the turn of the first century. Qualities desired in those who serve as overseers (*epískopoi*), ministers (*diákonoi*), and elders (*presbíteroi*) are those of the ideal male head of a household (1 Tm 3:1-13; Ti 1:5-9). That women also exercised the ministry of *diákonos* is clear from 1 Tm 3:11, where they are addressed directly.

Although the author of the Pastorals lauds Timothy's mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois (2 Tm 1:5), for their having transmitted "sincere faith" to Timothy, he is no advocate of women preaching, teaching, or holding positions of authority. In 1 Tm 2:11-12 he advises that women "receive instruction silently under complete control," and he forbids "a woman to teach or have authority over a man." For him the way to salvation for women is through childbearing (1 Tm 2:15) and occupation with domestic concerns. His ideal older woman is one who teaches younger women to love their husbands and children and be good homemakers (Ti 2:3-5).

That many women had devoted themselves, instead, to public ministry in the church is evident from the long section that restricts their activities (1 Tm 5:3-16). Celibate women, often living in groups, were dedicated to prayer, charitable works, and teaching, with compensation for their ministry coming from the church. In an attempt to contain their growing numbers and influence, the Pastor sets forth qualifications for those who would aspire to the order of widows. A woman who has children and grandchildren is to be supported by her family and not the church (1 Tm 5:3-4). To be enrolled as a widow a woman must be sixty years old and married only once (1 Tm 5:9). Very few women in the early church would fulfill these qualifications. According to the Pastor, a widow is to dedicate herself to prayer and charitable works rather than teaching (1 Tm 5:5, 10). And "women who have widows" (1 Tm 5:16), that is, those who sponsor houses of widows, are to assume their financial support rather than look to the church for compensation for their ministry.

3. In the Gospel traditions the portrait of women is no less ambiguous. In the Gospel of Mark women are most frequently portrayed as recipients of Jesus' compassion. In the course of the Galilean ministry Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law (1:29-31), Jairus's daughter (5:21-24, 35-43), a woman afflicted with hemorrhages (5:25-34), and a Syrophenician woman's daughter (7:24-30). One negative tradition about women is found in Mk 6:17-29, where Herodias and her daughter effect the beheading of John the Baptist. No women are listed among those called as disciples (1:16-20; 2:13-17; 3:13-19), yet women play a crucial role in the passion narrative.

As Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem moves to its climax, he lauds a widow who put two small coins into the temple treasury (12:41-44). Jesus' remark that "she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole life" (12:44), interprets her action as one that mirrors Jesus' own pouring out of his life. In the prelude to the passion a nameless woman anoints Jesus' head (14:3-9), the action of a prophet identifying the king (see 1 Sm 10:1; 16:13). In contrast to the followers of Jesus who "left him and fled" at his arrest in Gethsemane (14:51), women disciples witness his crucifixion, death, and burial. Mark 15:40-41 names "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome" among the many women who "used to follow him and ministered to him when he was in Galilee" and who had come up with him to Jerusalem. Those who saw where the body was laid were "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James" (15:47).

In the concluding episode of the Gospel (16:1-8), Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome find the tomb empty and are the first to receive the news of Christ's resurrection. They are commissioned to go and tell the disciples and Peter, but the Gospel ends, "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (16:8). In this Gospel all are portrayed as fallible followers, including the women. Yet they become the indispensable link between the historical Jesus and risen Jesus.

4. Many of the same traditions involving women are taken over by Matthew from Mark. Matthew recounts the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (8:14-15), the official's daughter, the woman with a hemorrhage (9:18-26), and the Canaanite woman's daughter (15:21-28). He tells of Herodias and her daughter's complicity in the death of John the Baptist (14:3-12). Matthew likewise preserves the traditions about the woman who anointed Jesus before his passion (26:6-13) and the Galilean women witnesses of his crucifixion (27:55-56) and burial (27:61). He names Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee among the "many women . . . who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him" (27:55-56). Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" are the ones who remain to see the place of burial (27:61) and who come back after the Sabbath to see the tomb (28:1). Different from Mark's account, Matthew narrates that as they "ran to announce" the news of the resurrection to the disciples, Jesus himself appeared to the women and greeted them. He reassures them and reiterates the commission to tell the others to go to Galilee, where they will see him (28:8-10).

Several traditions about women are unique to Matthew. In his opening verses he includes in the genealogy of Jesus: Tamar (1:3), Rahab (1:5), Ruth (1:5), and the wife of Uriah (1:6). Each of these four women is in an anomalous situation; each is outside the boundaries of a regular patriarchal marriage. As such, each represents a threat to the patriarchal order. Each acts in an unconventional manner that ends in furthering God's purposes for Israel. This points forward to the unusual situation of Mary's conception of Jesus (Mt 1:16) and prepares the reader to see God's purposes come to fruition in another extraordinary way.

Also unique to Matthew is that in the account of the ambition of Zebedee's sons, it is their mother who asks Jesus to let them sit at his right and left in his kingdom (20:20-21). In addition, only Matthew recounts that Pilate's wife sent Pilate a message during the trial of Jesus, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man. I suffered much in a dream today because of him" (27:19). Matthew alone preserves

the parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13), challenging disciples to readiness for the coming reign of God.

From traditions Matthew shares with Luke comes the parable in which Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to the work of a woman mixing bread dough (Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21). And as Jesus approaches the holy city he uses the feminine image of a mother hen wanting to gather her brood under her wings to describe his own desire to gather together the children of Jerusalem (Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34; see Ps 91:4).

5. The Third Gospel retains many of the same traditions of women who are healed by Jesus: Simon's mother-in-law (4:38-39), Jairus's daughter, and the woman with a hemorrhage (8:40-56). Luke omits the account of the Syrophenician woman and that of Herodias and her daughter but includes unique stories of Jesus' compassion toward a widow in Nain whose only son had died (7:11-17) and toward a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years (13:10-17). The tradition of the woman who anointed Jesus for burial becomes quite another story in Lk 7:36-50. Placed in the midst of the Galilean ministry, the focus of this account is the lavish love poured out on Jesus by a woman who had been forgiven many sins. Luke retains the story of the widow who gave her whole life (21:1-4) in much the same form as Mark.

Luke's opening two chapters preserve traditions unique to him that profile three prophetic women. Elizabeth is portrayed as "righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly" (1:6). She is the sign of encouragement to Mary (1:36) and mentor to her (1:39-45) when both women become pregnant under extraordinary circumstances. Her naming of John opens the way to faith and praise of God for her husband and relatives and all those "throughout the hill country of Judea" (1:57-66).

The annunciation to Mary (1:26-38) portrays her as a woman of faith and courage in the most unusual and difficult circumstances. Filled with the Holy Spirit (1:35), she prefigures the ideal disciple who hears the word of God and acts on it (8:21; 11:28). Mary's canticle (1:46-55) prophesies the lifting up of all the lowly, words that typify the mission of her son (4:18-19). Mary is shown to be faithful in observing Torah as she presents her son in the temple (2:22) and annually journeys with her family to Jerusalem for the Passover feast (2:41). She searches to understand God's ways, "pondering on them in her heart" (2:19, 51). Two further allusions to Mary (8:19-21; 11:27-28) emphasize that discipleship is dependent not on blood relationship to Jesus but rather on hearing and acting on the word of God. Mary only appears among the disciples in the postresurrection setting of the gathering of the women and men who await the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:14).

Luke 2:36-38 features the prophet Anna, a widow advanced in years who has dedicated herself to prayer and fasting in the temple. As one of the first Lukan characters to recognize Jesus, she speaks about him "to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38).

These powerfully prophetic women in Luke 1-2 are cast in the mold of the female prophets of the First Testament such as Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Judith. But such portraits of women are not to be found in the remainder of the Third Gospel. Taking a position similar to that of the author of the Pastoral Letters, Luke's portraits of women followers of Jesus reinforce silent, passive roles for

them. In the story of Martha and Mary (10:38-42) it is receptive listening that is exemplary for a woman, not active leadership in ministry (10:40).

The Galilean women disciples appear much earlier in this Gospel (8:1-3). Luke names Mary Magdalene, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna among the many other women who accompanied Jesus and the Twelve on the itinerant mission. However, they are portrayed not as preaching but rather as wealthy patrons giving financial backing to the mission (8:3). The silencing of the women reaches its apex in the empty tomb narrative. After having witnessed the death of Jesus (23:49) and his burial (23:55-56), Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women who accompanied them proclaim the message of the resurrection to the "apostles." But, as Luke relates, "their story seemed like nonsense, and they did not believe them" (24:11).

Three parables, two of them unique to Luke, undermine the portrait of silent, passive women that Luke attempts to reinforce. The parable of the baker woman hiding leaven in the dough (Lk 13:20-21) likens her action to that of God in the divine realm. The woman searching diligently for a lost coin portrays God's extravagant search for those who are lost (15:8-10). And the insistent widow exemplifies God's persistent pursuit of justice and divine power in seeming weakness (18:1-8).

6. In Luke's second volume women wait along with the men in the upper room (1:14) and likewise receive the gift of the Spirit (2:1-4). Both women and men become believers (5:14; 8:12). Many of the women are of high status (17:4, 12). The name of one woman convert from Athens, Damaris, is preserved in Acts 17:34. Women as well as men are persecuted for their faith (8:3; 9:2). Philip's "four virgin daughters gifted with prophecy" receive brief mention (21:9). A negative example of one who threatens the unity of the fledgling community by lying is Sapphira along with her husband, Ananias (5:1-11).

Tabitha, a disciple at Joppa, is "completely occupied with good deeds and almsgiving" (9:36), in particular, making tunics and cloaks (9:39). She is a leader among the widows (9:39) and is resuscitated by Peter. Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, from the city of Thyatira, is baptized by Paul along with her household. She prevails upon Paul to accept her hospitality (16:13-15). It is in her house that Paul returns after his release from prison following the uproar over the slave girl from whom he cast out an oracular spirit (16:16-24). That Lydia's home had become the meeting place for the Christian community is evident in Acts 16:40.

Luke recounts Paul's relations with Prisca and her husband, Aquila, in Acts 18. Paul stays with them in Corinth and works in the same trade with them (18:2-3). The missionary couple sails with Paul to Ephesus, where he leaves them to minister. The importance of the leadership of both is evident from the episode in which Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, "an eloquent speaker" and "an authority on the scriptures" (18:24), arrives in Ephesus and begins preaching in the synagogue. When Prisca and Aquila recognized that he was in need of further instruction, together they "took him aside and explained to him the Way of God more accurately" (18:26). Although these women are given brief mention in Acts, the primary focus is on Peter and Paul as the apostles who carry forth the mission in ways that closely parallel the actions of Jesus.

7. Preserving traditions different from those of the Synoptics, the Fourth Evangelist conveys very strong portraits of ministering women. Jesus' mother is a catalyst for the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry at Cana (2:1-12) and is a

witness at his death (19:25-27). A woman in Samaria is portrayed as the first missionary (Jn 4:4-42). She engages in a deep theological discussion with Jesus, which leads to her belief in him as Messiah (4:29). In a gesture parallel to that of the first fishermen called (Mk 1:18, 20), she leaves behind her water jar (4:28) and goes to testify to her whole town, who also come to faith (4:39).

In the Fourth Gospel it is Martha who makes the most complete confession of faith. In her discussion with Jesus about resurrection, prior to his resuscitation of Lazarus, Martha proclaims, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world" (Jn 11:27; cf. Mk 8:29 and pars., where it is Peter who makes such a proclamation). In John's version of the burial anointing, it is Mary of Bethany who performs the action, while Martha serves (12:1-8).

As in the other three Gospels, Mary Magdalene is a witness of the crucifixion. In John's account she is joined by Jesus' mother; his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas (19:25); and the Beloved Disciple (19:26). But in Jn 20:1-2, 11-18 she goes alone to the empty tomb. She is the first one to whom Jesus appears, and he himself commissions her to tell the news of the resurrection to the rest of the community. In this account there is no hint that her word is not believed.

From this brief survey of New Testament texts concerning women it is evident that there are conflicting and ambiguous traditions. Women disciples are clearly present and are often mentioned alone, without reference to their husbands or fathers. From the traces of women believers and ministers mentioned in the Gospels and in the Pauline letters, one can surmise that women's participation in the mission was not unusual, nor was it marginal. But it is clear that the early church and the New Testament writers were not of one mind about the propriety of women exercising public ministries and taking leadership positions. The most telling illustration comes from comparing the differences in the four Gospel accounts of the women's witness about the resurrection along with 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul omits any mention of women in the list of resurrection witnesses.

In evaluating the New Testament evidence for women's participation in the mission of the early church it is important to recognize that the traditions have been written predominantly by men, for men, and about men. One should not presume, then, that if women are not mentioned in the text that they were not present. Nor should those women mentioned in the texts be regarded as unique; rather they should be thought of as representative. Interpreters must also evaluate the patriarchal biases of New Testament authors and distinguish between what is prescriptive and what is descriptive. Finally, the canonical traditions preserve only part of the story. Other versions are found in apocryphal works; still others are lost to us forever.

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WORD OF GOD

1. Historical Survey. 2. Systematic Theology Alternatives.

1. This article will first survey the topic of the word of God from a historical perspective, discussing the Old and New Testaments and then addressing the major successive attempts to deal with the subject.

1.1. In the Old Testament the word is essentially a word about the way one should live (Torah). It is rooted in the covenant between Yahweh and Israel and is proclaimed by the priesthood at the shrine: Yahweh is Israel's God; Israel is Yahweh's people. As such, Yahweh is shown as the true God before other peoples and also before their gods. The people are promised victory over their enemies, prosperity, and peace if they obey the commandments.

Next to the priestly word of command comes the word of the prophets. This word assumes the tradition of the saving action of Yahweh in favor of Israel, as well as the covenant and the law, but also proclaims the will of Yahweh now relevant to the historical situation of the people of the covenant. In contrast to the priest, who holds a fixed office at the shrine, the prophet — excepting the institutionalized cultic prophets — is charismatic, spontaneously called to a task of fixed duration. Therefore, the prophet's authority is easily challenged, especially if his or her message is not acceptable to the elite. The lack of a recognizable authority for his or her office is made good by the prophet's claim to being called, directly and inescapably and despite his or her own resistance, and to having been entrusted with an urgent message from Yahweh which is valid in absolute terms. The word of the prophets receives unqualified recognition for the first time after the national catastrophes of 720 and 586 B.C.E., when Jeremiah's message of damnation, for example, appeared to have been fulfilled. The classic word of the prophets dries up with the loss of independent statehood, that is, is transposed gradually into apocalyptic (→ apocalyptic and mission). We see already here breaking out the tension between office and spirit that has accompanied the history of the concept of the word of God ever since. The word of Yahweh is a word with the power to create. The determining factor is the confrontation of faith in Yahweh with the cults of its environment. The giver of fertility is not the Canaanite Baal but Yahweh.

Yahweh is the Lord of nature and of history. Yahweh's control over salvation and damnation presupposes the reality of Yahweh's power.

The word of God in the Old Testament is in the first place a spoken, proclaimed word. Nevertheless, it was set down in writing very early on. The Ark of the Covenant tradition knows of a decalogue written on tablets of stone. The later prophets wrote down their proclamation, or it was written down for them. There is the idea of heavenly scrolls. During and after the exile, the time of collecting, checking, editing, and forming the canon of the holy scriptures began. The desire for certainty of salvation led to the postulation of the verbal inspiration of the text of the law, conscientious obedience to which can alone bring hope of participation in Yahweh's future. Judaism becomes a religion of scripture and doctrine. In apocalyptic texts charismatic immediacy is retained, but the writers of these texts present their works as infallible revelation and impose the curse of God on omissions or alterations to their text.

1.2. The turning point of the New Testament begins with Jesus' proclamation (→ Jesus) that the → reign of God is near; his assuring the penitent, the afflicted, and the rejected of God's concern; and his warning the self-righteous of the incurability of God's judgment. Jesus' preaching put in question the religious self-understanding of the Jewish elite and the social order based on it; this eventually led to his being rejected and condemned to death. The disciples' testimony regarding their encounter with the resurrected Jesus and with the Spirit led to the gathering of the Christian congregation. The words of Jesus and the recollections of his days were handed down and collected; through this process, the "words of the Lord" that the resurrected one, through the gift of the spirit of → prophecy, proclaimed to his community flowed into the tradition.

Through the apostolic witness, Jesus, the proclaimer and communicator of the → reign of God, becomes the proclaimed Christ. With this development the word of God is turned into gospel, into joyful message: the eschatological future is anticipated in Jesus as the Christ and in faith becomes accessible to everyone through the → Holy Spirit. Jesus' death on the cross effects atonement, his resurrection new life with God. Because the Spirit creates faith through the proclamation itself, the missionary word becomes the basic event of the community of Christ. According to John's Gospel, God in God's fullness is contained in the person, the word, and the work of Jesus. In the Prologue, Jesus is the eternal word of God become flesh. The concept of Logos, appropriated from early Judaism/Hellenism, plays a paramount role in the subsequent history of christology and the doctrine of the word of God. This development implies also that faith in the creative power of the word of God is carried over to Jesus Christ (Jn 1:3), that, for example, this creative power is ascribed to the word of Jesus (Heb 1:3). It is significant that in New Testament times the word of God is chiefly preached and accepted in faith. The word is the existential → communication of the gracious but also judging presence of God, which one accepts in faith and responds to in → prayer. In the debate with Judaism the Old Testament was used as a source of proof-texts, and the original sense of the words of the text was applied very freely. At first scope was given for the communication of the word and the response of prayer within a fullness of spiritual gifts. A few basic offices were crystallized out of this, which were further reduced under the impact of syncretistic false doctrine. So the word was withdrawn from the itinerant prophets and was reserved to the overseer (*episkopos*),