

Dr. Colin Brown: Systematic Theology III

ST503

The Essay

Ordination of Women?

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1. Introduction

Please note that this paper was written in 1993 shortly after we moved to the United States. It reflects a struggle with the new environment and is not very sensitive to the cultural environment. Do not read this if you are easily offended..

Women's ordination is a hot topic in our churches today. Lay people who study the Bible often simply insist that women cannot be ordained. Educated people have more differentiated opinions on this. It seems that the view one has on the ordination of women is largely determined by the way one exegetes Scripture. Or vice versa that the principles used to exegete scripture may also have been determined by one's own views on the issue. It is very interesting to see how people have developed different approaches to Scripture in the course of determining their view.

Ordination of women is of course determined by the view of the role of women in the Bible. Therefore this will be an important issue in the following survey of different views.

2. Pro

2.1. Dautzenberg

Gerhard Dautzenberg has the most radical opinion which I found on the pro-side. His views are laid down in Gerhard Dautzenberg's article *Zur Stellung der Frauen in den Paulinischen Gemeinden* in his Book *Die Frau im Urchristentum* 1983. He is a German scholar and therefore familiar with the historical critical method as propagated in all state controlled universities in our country.

2.1.1. Deuteropauline passages

His starting point is classic historic critical source and form criticism. He distinguishes therefore in Paul's epistles between "Deuteropaulinisch" and "authentisch"¹. The "Deuteropaulinisch" are not by Paul but written by the later developed institutional church. The "Deuteropaulinisch" epistles contain ideological suppression of women and put forth a patriarchal concept. 1 Cor 14:33-36 is problematic since it is in a "authentisch" epistle of Paul. Dautzenberg assumes therefore that this passage is a "interpolation" inserted by later writers into Paul's original texts.²

Dautzenberg sees the "Mitwirkung" (participation in the christian work as equals) of women as common in ancient Christian communities³. The later deuteropaulinic statements reflect the Roman view of the inappropriateness of the speaking of women in the assembly and not the views of the ancient Christian communities.⁴

Similarly Dautzenberg sees in 1 Cor 11:6-10 and 11:14-15 Paul arguing that veiling is necessary and is not to be discarded because of a view of equality. Veiling was required in public and so should also be done in the service. But veiling contains a devaluing of women for

¹p. 183

²p. 193

³p. 188

⁴p. 196

Dautzenberg and therefore this would be a contradiction in Paul which cannot be⁵. These passages are therefore later additions.

2.1.2. Equality of the sexes in early Christianity

For Dautzenberg men and women are totally equal in ministry as he also sees mirrored in early Christianity. This positive view of early Christianity as ideal is noteworthy since others place early Christianity in the dark and primitive patriarchal ages.

Dautzenberg is a representative of the old classical school of dissecting the Bible. Here is another example how easy it is to get rid of passages that do not fit into ones own worldview. He can just invalidate passages that do not fit his own model of Paul's thinking. We will find the same technique in better clothing again in the next writer.

2.2. Jewett

Jewett comes to the same results as Dautzenberg in his book *MAN as male and female* (1975). For him the Bible rightfully poses a patriarchal structure of society as the will of God. The patriarchal structure is conditioned by the fact that superior physical prowess was required to survive in the ancient world⁶. Since the male was physically superior it was natural that he assumed this role.

2.2.1. Subordination incompatible with biblical revelation

Yet for Jewett the Old Testament treats women as objects limiting their "rights". Men tyrannized their wives through these rules⁷. Jewett sees the subordination of women - and thereby not ordaining women⁸ - as incompatible with the creation account, the revelation given in the life of Jesus and the fundamental teaching of Paul in Galatians⁹.

2.2.2. Human and Divine Scripture?

Of course there are still the problem passages where for example Paul teaches subordination. Jewett divides scripture into a divine and human levels. The passages that teach subordination were "produced" "at the human level of the historical process"¹⁰. The passages are essentially conditioned by the historical context. God's true will for male and female is revealed in Galatians 3:28. In the same way that Jesus could clarify the real intent of the Old Testament we also clarify the intend of the New Testament and can therefore see these passages as not for our times.

This concept is further clarified in Paul K. Jewetts later book *God, Creation and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Eerdmanns 1991). Here he abandons the distinction between divine and human levels in Scripture in favour of an evolutionary process "**progressive Revelation**". God's will is more and more clarified in history. Gal 3:28 was the true intend of God's will. Passages that talk about subordination or differences of the sexes are caused by the primitivity of

⁵p. 210-213

⁶p.129

⁷p.132

⁸p.163

⁹p. 134

¹⁰p.135

the New Testamental society. We have to view these passages in view of the "light of the New Testament" (Gal 3:28). They do not apply anymore¹¹.

2.3. Gundry

Patricia Gundry's book *Woman be Free!* (Zondervan 1977) is very unique in this series. She is not for declaring the problem passages invalid but wants to "discover what the passages were attempting to teach"¹². Notably she sees people who disregard these passages as those who do not hold to the inspiration of scripture. She states a list of sound principles of biblical hermeneutics and says that she will discuss the problem passages in this light but immediately fails to obey her own principles when she begins to discuss the first problem passage.

2.3.1. Sex Roles caused by the Fall

She sees the differences between male and female arising with the Fall and therefore begins by discussing Gen 3:16. The subordination of women was a result of the Fall and not in God's purpose. But Christ redeemed us and therefore restored the right relationship between male and female. She claims that there is no subordination of women to be found before the Fall (Gen 3:16) in Genesis 1 and 2¹³ despite the fact that Paul bases his discussion (in 1 Cor 11) of the subordination of women precisely on Genesis 2 **before** the Fall. She is violating her hermeneutical principle of considering all relevant scriptural passages.

2.3.2. Women's Silence Necessitated by Uneducatedness

Notable is her interpretation of 1 Cor 14:34-35 (The women shall keep silent). She supposes that there was a special situation at Corinth. Uneducated women were shouting questions and disturbing the service. So there would be no problem at all would women be educated as nowadays and not disrupt the service. When women are able to handle it then they can actively participate in the service.¹⁴ Similarly she argues for 2 Tim 2:11 that this command was given because women were not able to discern spiritual things since they were not taught. When they mature they are able to serve like Phoebe did even in active ministry¹⁵.

2.3.3. Women authors of biblical books?

The weird thesis that Priscilla wrote Hebrews and that Esther wrote the book of Esther is put forth at the end of her book without any reasons given¹⁶. These uncritical speculations make it hard to take the otherwise in many respects appealing book for earnest. The same is valid for speculations about other women in the Bible like Euodia and Syntyche.

Gundry sees no restriction of the ministry of women in the church at all. They can be ordained and function in any way in the church as also they did in the past.

¹¹p. 145

¹²p. 57

¹³p. 60

¹⁴p. 70

¹⁵p. 77

¹⁶p. 99

3. Contra

3.1. Hurley

I would consider Hurley as a moderate on the no-ordination side. His book *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Zondervan 1981) discusses the issue of women thoroughly in their respective cultural backgrounds.

3.1.1. Old Testament

He has a very positive view of the Old Testament position of women. He examines ancient cultures in the near east and comes to the conclusion that women were not regarded as inferior since each culture assumes that widows will be able to raise children and manage their own affairs. Subordination is not based on a view of "intrinsic inferiority"¹⁷. When discussing the judge Deborah Hurley sees that "civil office" was in principle available for women¹⁸.

All cultures show that women preferred and were seen as preferring to be concerned about their children and their home. But women were not restricted to these areas and special women are found in each culture who were involved in business affairs and in the matters of government¹⁹. Hurley sees a principle of male leadership, but exceptions are possible.

3.1.2. New Testament

In the New Testament times he sees a change in the position of women. In the Greek and Judaistic culture women began to be seen as unfit for public position. Only the Roman culture allowed women rarely public office. Judaism developed more and more into excluding females from religion²⁰.

The New Testament must also be understood in the framework of a developing social chaos through the loosening of marital relationships and the appearing of a kind of open-marriage among the wealthy ruling class in the Roman Empire. Paul and Jesus have to be seen in this situation of tension choosing none of the available options in the surrounding cultures but presenting a new one²¹.

Therefore Hurley sees the New Testament propagating a view of women that is close to the Old Testament view of women and abandoning the Judaistic devaluation of women²². Jesus made no distinction between the sexes and brought the good news to men and women alike²³. Jesus changes some key elements of Old Testament teaching. For example not only women can commit adultery but also men. A radical historical step placing husband and wife in this respect on the same level²⁴.

¹⁷p. 53

¹⁸p.50

¹⁹p. 54

²⁰p. 77

²¹p.78

²²p. 82

²³p. 93

²⁴p. 97

Correspondingly Paul and Acts give lots of evidence of the participation of all in the sharing of the good news even women. The apostolic communities included women²⁵ thereby leaving the scope of Rabbinic laws. They included women in worship and taught them scripture. Women of the early Church played a highly visible role hosting Paul and others communicating the good news by means of mercy and hospitality. Women also hosted churches in their home (Acts 12:12)²⁶.

From the example of Priscilla and Aquila Hurley develops the opinion that women were active in the missionary enterprise (at least alongside their men). Nothing is said though of Priscilla holding a position as a teacher or other office²⁷.

3.1.3. Galatians 3:28

Especially important is Hurley's discussion of Galatians 3:28²⁸. This is the pivotal passage used by the pro-ordination wing to argument for their views. He sees Galatians 3:28 in the context of the discussion who can become a member of the kingdom of heaven. The Gospel is for all persons. Their race, slavery and gender have no effect on their right to stand before God²⁹.

Gal 3:28 is often pinned down in contrast to other passages where Paul still holds distinctions between Jew and Gentile, male and female and slave and master. Hurley sees no contradiction since 3:28 is not concerned with relations within the body of Christ. It is an error to say that there are no distinctions within the body of Christ. Paul himself did not feel any tension at all between both aspects of his teaching. Paul even claimed a special authority and thereby a special role in the body of Christ for himself(1 Cor 15:38)!³⁰

In the same line of thought Peter expresses similar views in 1 Peter 3:1-7. In one and the same passage Peter speaks about differences of the sexes and that both are "joint-heirs of the grace of life" (verse 7). Paul's view of unity in Christ does not abolish distinctions within members of the community and this view is not only Paul's but shared by the early Christian Community³¹. The interpretation of Gal 3:28 as abolishing distinctions between male and female is therefore invalid.

3.1.4. Women not allowed to exercise Authority

Hurley concludes that Paul taught that the creational pattern of male headship forbade that women should have spiritual oversight. The office of elder, bishop and presbyter are not available to them. Hurley sees Paul's argumentation not based on a historical situation or on a result of the Fall or on a special cultural situation, such as the educational level of women. He sees no room for using cultural aspects to invalidate Paul's position³².

The office of deacon has some other aspects. If the office of a deacon is understood as representing the church in ministry to the poor and needy and administering Christian love in this way then it does not entail teaching and authority of the sort prohibited. The example of Phoebe is

²⁵p. 117

²⁶p. 118

²⁷p. 120

²⁸p. 126ff

²⁹p. 126

³⁰p. 127

³¹p. 128

³²p. 233

a primary example of a woman ministering in this respect. The passage in 1 Tim 3 concerning women deacons is dubious to him and does not conclusively speak one way or the other. He leaves the door open for each church to choose their specific position on women deacons³³.

3.1.5. But allowed to speak

Hurley's book contains a curious chapter on the passage where Paul forbids women to speak in the assembly (1 Cor 14:33-35)³⁴ but instead to ask their husbands at home when they want to learn anything. In 1 Cor 11:5 Paul talks about women having to wear a veil while they are praying or prophesying. Hurley sees a contradiction here and proposes that the two passages address different situations. He sees 1 Cor 14 only applying to the judgment of prophecy by the community because the immediate prior subject in chapter 14 is the evaluation of prophecy. Therefore women have to be quiet when authoritative judgment is made about the validity of doctrine expressed in prophecy. This only occurs in charismatic churches and therefore has no applications in most churches today. Women are free to speak in church.

3.1.6. Practical Applications

Hurley has a chapter of practical implications for our churches today³⁵. He takes the position that women can speak and teach in church as long as it is not proclaiming authoritative doctrine. Leading a Sunday-school class teaching doctrine would be forbidden under these guidelines. The crucial point for him is exercising authority. If this is taken into account a woman can speak freely in the assembly.

3.2. Robbins

John W. Robbins book *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries* (Trinity Foundation, Jefferson, Maryland 1985) is the most radical position I have found on the contra-side. Robbins book is a critique of three other books on this topic. He specifically criticizes Hurley for his views. In a very outspoken way he criticizes the hermeneutical methods used to arrive at the position of each author. Women's ordination is a fashion for him that theologians push on the Bible³⁶. Robbins biggest complaint against others is that they do not read what actually is written in the text³⁷.

3.2.1. Critique of Hurley

Robbins begins with a discussion of 1 Cor 14:26-40. Verse 34 contains Paul's statement that women should be silent in church. Robbins presents the passage as self evident meaning what it says and then cites Calvin on this confirming his view that women should not teach or publicly prophesy. Specifically Calvin mentions that he sees this passage as also forbidding prophesying in public. Teaching is inconsistent with subordination for Robbins³⁸.

³³p. 233

³⁴Chapter 7.B *The silence of women in the assembly* pages 185ff

³⁵chapter 9

³⁶p. xi

³⁷p. 11

³⁸p. 7

3.2.1.1. Cor 14 against 1 Cor 11

Robbins then cites Charles Hodge addressing the problem that Hurley sees in 1 Cor 11:5 where women are told to pray and prophesy with their head covered. Hurley assumes that this allows public praying and prophecy. Hodge's opinion is that women can receive the gift of prophecy as indicated here but that this gift and prayer is not to be practiced in public because of what Paul says later³⁹.

Hurley's approach to this passage is criticized by Robbins because Hurley did not consider the thought of Hodge properly, dismissing this option as "essentially poor" without any exegesis or reason given instead choosing to argue over a problem. Robbins sees this as Hurley's doing violence to the passage, so that Hurley can arrive at the conclusion that women can speak in church⁴⁰. As a result Robbins severely doubts Hurley's commitment to the authority of scripture.

3.2.1.2. Silent only during Evaluation of Prophecy?

Robbins criticizes Hurley's linking 1 Cor 14:34 with 14:29 to produce this restricted interpretation. There is nothing there for Robbins that warrants this linking and thereby the restriction to silence only during prophecy.

Hurley tries to support his view by claiming that without the link verse 34c would claim that the silence of women was according to the Old Testament law. There is nothing like that in the Old Testament so there must be this link. Robbins rightfully makes the point that Paul does not say that the silence of women is according to the Law, but that in 34b Paul claims that **subordination** is to be found in the Law⁴¹.

Robbins' final argument is that if Hurley's interpretation is correct then women need only be silent during prophecy. Since prophecy has rarely happened in church history it follows that there has almost never been a situation when women had to be silent⁴². Paul's command would have been useless.

3.2.2. Female Deacons?

For Robbins the earlier problems of Hurley are artificially posed to allow Hurley to argue for the ordination of deacons. Since women cannot speak in public meetings they cannot be deacons. Robbins does not see that even allowing women to speak in church could mean that women would be able to be ordained as deacons since there are still clear passages that forbid it (1 Tim 3:12; Acts 6:3)⁴³. Robbins sees Hurley making the issue muddy on purpose and not clarifying it.

3.2.3. Greater trends in Society

Robbins sees the world in a movement to irrationalism. Logic is not seen to be conclusive anymore but is futile. Anti-Intellectualism is spreading. Scholars pose contradictions to make up a mystery and thereby produce absurdities. He sees this as a great threat to the Church. People are

³⁹p.6

⁴⁰p. 9

⁴¹p. 15

⁴²p.29

⁴³p. 20

told that the Bible contains contradictions. Flight into mysticism is the natural reaction. He sees contemporary theologians as anti-theologians⁴⁴.

4. Evaluation

As stated in the introduction the view on women has a lot to do with inspiration and hermeneutics. I have learned to appreciate Dan Fuller's **Grammatico-Historical Interpretation** put forth in *Syllabus NE500 Hermeneutics* (sixth revision 1983). The intend of reading scripture is to grasp its meaning based on the historical data available. Patricia Gundry's guidelines are very helpful in this respect and overlap to a large part with Dan Fuller's methods.

3.3. The "Zeitgeist"

To understand correctly we first have to analyze our own contemporary tendencies, our fashions of thought that are so prevalent in our society today but are largely foreign to biblical thought. This way our thinking will be aware of our own biases.

3.3.1. Self-determination, Individuality and "Rights"

Especially the American Society promotes these concepts. Everybody has a right to make his own choices and has a right to develop as a person as he likes. Everyone has to act independent as a responsible individual. There is a "Right" to be treated properly. No one has to be subjected to another.

The Bible does not put such a high value on individuality but sees people more as groups of people acting together. The New Testament calls the church the body of Christ. Families are commonly acting in one accord (for example the conversions in the New Testament).

It is unthinkable that somebody could claim his "rights" before God or work for self-realization or self-determination. Are we not his subjects and his servants? Should we not serve others instead of feeding our egos? These concepts are foreign to the bible. The bible has a different value system.

I fear that Paul Jewett's reason for his exegesis is the high value he gives to these values in his social background. The biblical view is offensive since it does not assert these values and therefore a way to correct this (progressive revelation) has to be found. It seems that the culture shock of the Kingdom of God was too much for him.

3.3.2. Gender Equality?

The view that both sexes are totally equal is consistently brought to our attention in our society. We often tend to forget that there are essential differences between male and female. Male and females have:

- Evidently different body systems. There is a greater muscle strength on the male side but greater muscle endurance on the female side.
- Different ways of thinking and making moral decisions⁴⁵.

⁴⁴p. 110

⁴⁵James W. Fowler *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* page 39

- Different ways of personality development⁴⁶.
- Males cannot bear children.
- Males cannot nurse children.

We should not forget that there is a lot of difference between male and female. The assumption that they could be equal needs to be qualified.

We should not forget that attempts of equality in some form or the other have already been made frequently in the past. This is not a new thought. See for example Lawrence Foster *Women, Family and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse University Press 1991).

3.4. Roles of the Female and Male

From the different characteristics of male and female it is natural to conclude that God created them differently, equipped them differently for life and it is most logical that he assigned them different roles in life and faith.

The creation account in Genesis 2 already supposes distinct roles. The male is created to rule over the earth. In Gen 2:19 God assigns Adam the task of **naming** all creatures. The power of **name giving** was usually seen in ancient times as the mastery of that what was named⁴⁷. So we find that Adam's task was to rule and preserve the earth (Gen 2:15).

Eve is created by God so that Adam would not be alone (Gen 2:18). This is evidence for the role of females which is especially oriented to the community or family and towards relationship. Again Adam gave Eve her name signifying his authority over her (Gen 2:23) and already showing subordination.

Here in the second chapter of Genesis we already have a full-blown role assignment to the sexes. Therefore they cannot be culturally dependent since they already existed in the Garden of Eden. These concepts must therefore be very important. Paul expresses this too in 1 Cor 11 and this concept shows up consistently in a lot of other places in the whole Bible. In fact the whole Bible seems to be built on this foundation. Gundry's argumentation of total equality before the Fall is evidently wrong. Any attempt to seriously modify these foundation correspondingly leads to total changes in the understanding of the biblical message. Those that attempted to redefine the biblical roles of the sexes have to redefine their approach to inspiration of Scripture.

3.5. The Problem Passages

I therefore affirm the literal sense of the passages mentioned before in the plain sense that Robbins views them. The New Testament consistently emphasizes the different roles. There is no way around them without seriously tampering with biblical hermeneutics.

1 Cor 14:33- is clearly to be understood as Paul's command that the women should be silent in church. Definitely it is true that women are not to exercise authority over men or teach men. 1 Cor 11:5 must therefore be seen as not applying to a public church service.

⁴⁶Max Sugar, M.D. *Female Adolescent Development* Second Edition 1993 Brunner/Mazel Publishers, New York

⁴⁷The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology Vol. 2 page 649

I appreciate Hurley's insight that Gal 3:28 is **not** prescribing equalness of the sexes as often postulated in the past. Claiming this leads to "contradictions" that are used to modify the biblical message. "Contradictions" are usually an indication of the inability or unwillingness of an interpreter to accept biblical statements.

Pushing Phoebe or Priscilla as active ministers in the New Testament is not conclusive. The data available does not allow this conclusion and certainly not the conclusion that Priscilla was the author of Hebrews.

3.6. Women in Ministry

So what is the place of women in ministry? They certainly cannot be ordained in the common sense usually understood. Commonly there is no place for women in office in the church. Women should be concerned about their family and about caring for others. In this way they also can minister to others. They can and should pray and talk with people about faith. They should instruct each other in the faith as Paul also mentions. They participate in the worship of the church as attested in the Old and New Testament.

Rarely exceptionally gifted women appear like Deborah or Hulda the prophetess. They certainly have a place in the ministry. I cannot see the "rules" as rigid as Robbins sees them since the Old Testament itself is flexible. We should be flexible too, but there is no way that biblical teaching would allow a large number of women to be ordained as it is done today. Neither does the bible support the teaching that man and women are equal.

3.7. Suppression

The view that I stated above against the ordination of women is held by many but is certainly not very popular since it is not according to the fashionable views of our time. One must be aware to face pressure when taking these positions. One is reminded of Orwell's book *1984* when thinking about the following measures taken. Is "inclusive language" not something like "Newspeak"?

3.7.1. Inclusive Language

Fuller Theological Seminary has a policy that mandates the use of "inclusive language". This has the effect of making it impossible to refer for example to clergy just by male pronouns. One of my friend's sermon was downgraded because of this. One is therefore not free to hold and defend this position against women's ordination. The view of ordination is enforced by this means on the students. Most of them never notice it.

The need for mandating this at a Seminary that otherwise leaves great freedom in beliefs gives an interesting insight in the forces at work. Certain people want to "improve" faith by dictating it to others.

3.7.2. Modifications of the Bible

Since common people usually read the Bible and not theological books it is difficult to convince the laity of the validity of women's ordination or the postulated gender indifference of the faith. So the newest edition of for example the New Revised Standard Version of the bible was modified to show male and female pronouns in place of where the original languages just show male pronouns. This is certainly a very effective means of promoting these ideas.

3.8. The effects of imposing "Equality"

The issue here is a sign of our times. Women are pressed nowadays to be concerned about themselves and about their life. In the past they used to spend most of their time caring for the members of the family and caring for relationships with the bigger family thereby ensuring healthy relationships with others. They provided and cared for the mental well-being.

Nowadays women have their job and no time anymore for this. No time for their husband. Instead they try to imitate their husbands and try to become like them striving for success in the business world.

They do not have time anymore for their children. When my wife and I attended a birthing class a few months ago before my son was born almost all women said that they would start working again 6 weeks after birth! My wife was the only one who would have time for the baby after this time.

I would call this child neglect. People in the Germany where I come from would call it the same. The German society provides for the possibility that a woman can spend the first 18 months with her child if she prefers to. Treatment like here could result in attention by the authorities.

Similar things are true for the further education of children. The mothers and fathers are usually not available for them. With two working, a lot of time at home has to be spent managing the home. So even the small time that there is cannot be spent with the children. It is no wonder that there is such a big problem with gangs (where children finally find somebody with time for them), crime, drugs and so on.

I can understand that strange views on equality are promoted in the secular world. But selling this as the will of God seems to me to be almost the ultimate sin imaginable.

4. Conclusion

All of the people arguing for the ordination of women have to argue in some form or the other against the evident meaning of scripture trying to somehow devalue problem passages. From these circumstances itself one has to conclude that this view must be false. Logic applied solely to the way of argumentation comes to this result.

I struggle between Hurley and Robins. Many issues that Hurley raises I find quite valuable. For example the discussion of the role of women in Old and New Testament times. Yet I agree with Robins that some of his arguments are very weak especially on 1 Cor 14 where he produces a way of reasoning similar to Gundry.