A veiled woman prays with her hands upraised. This Orante figure is from a fresco painted in the mid-third century. Cubiculum of Velatia, Priscilla Catacomb, Rome.
(Courtesy of Benedictine Sisters.)

I

Preachers, Pastors, Prophets, and Patrons

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THE EVIDENCE FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Under a high arch in a Roman basilica dedicated to two women saints, Prudentiana and Praxedis, is a mosaic portraying four female figures: the two saints, Mary, and a fourth woman whose hair is veiled and whose head is surrounded by a square halo—an artistic technique indicating that the person was still living at the time the mosaic was made. The four faces gaze out serenely from a glistening gold background. The faces of Mary and the two saints are easily recognizable. But the identity of the fourth

is less apparent. A carefully lettered inscription identifies the face on the far left as Theodora Episcopa, which means Bishop Theodora.[1] The masculine form for bishop in Latin is *episcopus;* the feminine form is *episcopa.* The mosaic's visual evidence and the inscription's grammatical evidence point out unmistakably that Bishop Theodora was a woman. But the *a* on Theodora has been partially effaced by scratches across the glass tiles of the mosaic, leading to the disturbing conclusion that attempts were made to deface the feminine ending, perhaps even in antiquity.

At a burial site on the Greek island Thera there is an epitaph for an Epiktas named as priest or presbyter (*presbytis*).[2] Epiktas is a woman's name; she was a woman priest sometime in the third or fourth century.

In the opening scene of the *Gospel of Mary,* a second-century gnostic Gospel, Mary Magdalene rallies the despondent disciples after the ascension of their Lord. By exhortation, encouragement, and finally a rousing sermon on the teachings of Jesus, she revives their flagging spirits and sends them off on their mission. Because of her strong leadership role, she appears in some texts with the title Apostle to the Apostles.[3]

Historical evidence like this, from art, inscriptions, and literature, belongs to the hidden history of women's leadership, a history that has been suppressed by the selective memory of succeeding generations of male historians.

In his book *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church,* Roger Gryson exemplifies this consensus of his and preceding generations of scholars:

> From the beginnings of Christianity, women assumed an important role and enjoyed a place of choice in the Christian community.

Paul praised several women who assisted him in his apostolic works. Women also possessed the charism of prophecy. There is no evidence, however, that they exercised leadership roles in the community. Even though several women followed Jesus from the onset of his ministry in Galilee and figured among the privileged witnesses of his resurrection, no women appeared among the Twelve or even among the other apostles. As Epiphanius of Salamis pointed out, there have never been women presbyters.[4]

Most Christians today, including clergy and scholars, presume that women played little or no role in the Jesus movement or in the early church as it spread throughout the Mediterranean. But women did in fact play crucial roles in the Jesus movement and were prominent leaders along with men in a wide variety of roles in the early church. The Christian church, of course, did not spring up suddenly into a well-defined organization with buildings, officials, and large congregations. In its earliest stages it is best understood as a social movement like any other. It was informal, often countercultural in tone, and was marked by a fluidity and flexibility that allowed women, slaves, and artisans to assume leadership roles.

Why, then, are we so unaware of the prominence of women in the birth of Christianity? Why does this powerful misperception continue to marginalize women in even the more enlightened branches of contemporary Christianity? The answers to these questions are complex, but they begin and end in cultural views about gender.

The societies to which early Christians belonged (like our society) held definite ideas about male and female roles. According to the gender stereotypes of the ancient Mediterranean, public

speaking and public places were the sole prerogatives of males; private spaces, like the household, were the proper sphere for women's activities. Furthermore, society insisted that a respectable woman be concerned about her reputation for chastity and her seclusion in the household; modesty and reticence were accepted as testimony to her sexual restraint. Public activities and public roles seemed incompatible with modesty.

But the real women of that time led lives that were not as circumscribed as we might think. As householders they directed the men and women who lived and worked under their authority and supervised the production and distribution of the wealth. As businesswomen they traveled, bought, sold, and negotiated contracts. Women with sufficient wealth and social status acted as patrons of individuals and groups of lower social standing by providing financial assistance, recommendations to officials, and political protection.

In order to understand the role of women in the early church, it is necessary to understand what functions secular leaders performed and what kind of people they were. We know that leaders arbitrated disputes between members of communities, collected and distributed money, represented the interests of their community to city and imperial governments, financed communal feasts, made gifts of places of worship, taught, and arranged marriages. We also know that social status was the most important factor in the makeup of potential leaders.

For its part the church took its cue from society's leadership models. Mindful of their precarious status in Roman society, Christian communities looked to members with social status and wealth to be patrons and to function as their protectors. On a smaller scale, heads of households, who were accustomed to wielding authority

and who had the stores of the household at their disposal, often became leaders of house churches.

In the ancient world, both men and women were patrons and householders. The social authority, economic power, and political influence associated with these roles were not restricted by gender. Even religious authority in Greek and Roman worship was not limited by gender. Women as well as men functioned as prophets and priests. Each of these social positions in Roman society—patron, householder, prophet, and priest—provided an individual with the kind of status, authority, and experience that could be translated into similar leadership roles in the Christian community.

Among ancient mosaics, paintings, statuary, dedicatory inscriptions, and funerary epitaphs, scholars have found numerous pieces of evidence for women's leadership. In literary sources such as the writings of the New Testament, letters, sermons, and the theological treatises of the early church, women's leadership is also well attested. In the literary sources, however, we can see shadows cast by the conflict over women's leadership and the prevailing social conventions about gender roles. The New Testament writers generally mentioned women leaders only as a passing fact while hurrying on to address more pressing concerns. When they paused for a longer discussion of women's leadership, as Paul did in his first letter to the Corinthian church, one catches tones of ambivalence and anxiety. In New Testament passages where women leaders played prominent roles, the male authors muted their contributions by the way they wrote their stories.

By briefly surveying the Christian communities in three cities of the ancient Mediterranean—Philippi, Corinth, and Rome—we can learn something significant about the nature of women's leadership in the early church.

The ancient road to Philippi leads inland from the coast. Shortly before reaching the city it crosses the river Gangites, then it passes through the walled portion of the city at the Krenides Gate and exits on the other side through the Neapolis Gate. Built in the fourth century B.C.E., the ancient walls of Philippi once provided security for the enclosed city, but by the first century C.E. the unplanned growth of four centuries had spilled over these city walls and clustered like barnacles along the main thoroughfares.[5] The story of Paul and Lydia recounted by Luke in Acts took place in Philippi. According to Luke, when Paul arrived in Philippi he asked, as he had in every city, where the Jewish synagogue was. He learned that the Jews met for worship somewhere outside the city walls, in the newer portions of the city. It was probably a house synagogue. On the Sabbath, Paul followed the road out past the old city walls to find what Luke called a *proseuchēs,* a place of prayer.[6] In his accounts of meetings in other cities, however, Luke used the term *synagogue. Proseuchēs* describes a service of traditional Jewish prayers and readings held on the Sabbath day. Why did Luke prefer that term in this instance? Perhaps because those who attended, read, and prayed were primarily women (Acts 16:13). According to New Testament scholar Bernadette Brooten, Luke's reluctance to use the word *synagogue* may signal his ambivalence about the primary role of women in synagogue worship in the light of his attitudes toward female gender roles.[7]

In Luke's story, Paul engaged these women on questions of the interpretation of Scripture and spoke to them of the Messiah (Acts 16:11–15). The first woman to respond to his message was Lydia, a householder and a merchant. Although she was one of the

women participating in the reading and prayers, she was not a Jewish convert but a so-called God-fearer—someone who worshiped with the Jewish community but had not taken on the full observance of the Law. Paul's teaching about a Jewish-Christian piety that reverenced Scripture but did not require an exact observance of the Law found in Lydia a ready convert.

As a businesswomen who traveled in connection with her enterprises, Lydia had a wide network of associates. She was financially independent and the ruler of her household. When she converted to Christianity, her household was baptized together with her—another indication of her authority. Lydia's household would have included not only family members but also domestic slaves and slaves involved in the production of purple fabric. Lydia's influence extended as well over a network of clients and friends. Her prosperity put her in a position to invite Paul to accept hospitality in her home, where he lodged for some time. It was there that he carried out his ministry of teaching and preaching as newly converted Christians gathered there to hear and discuss the new doctrines (Acts 16:40).

The position of head of household also qualified an individual for leadership roles. Because household management involved administrative, financial, and disciplinary responsibilities, it prepared an individual to assume corresponding responsibilities in the community. Greek political theorists held that the skills required for political leadership were first developed through the administration of a household. In an oration dedicated to a young Nicocles, who was about to assume the responsibilities of household leadership and citizenship, Isocrates explained: "If kings are to rule well, they must try to preserve harmony, not only in the states over which they hold dominion, but also in their own households, and in their

places of abode; for all these things are the work of temperance and justice."[8] This household order was seen as foundational for the right ordering of society as a whole. The harmony and good order of both household and state rested on the virtues of justice (*dikaia*) and self-control (*sophrosynē*). A man who could exercise mastery over himself (*sophrosynē*) was one who would be capable of exercising mastery over others. The ability to impose justice on a household guaranteed that a man would be capable of administering justice in the city-state. (The full range of responsibilities connected with household management is outlined in chapter 2.)

The church at Philippi was not only founded by a woman, but its leadership continued in the hands of women. In Paul's letter to the Philippian church he addressed three women leaders. He exhorted Euodia and Syntyche to reconcile their differences in order to provide more effective leadership for the church. For the third woman he used the affectionate term *syzugē,* which means "mate" or "partner"; he encouraged her to support Euodia and Syntyche, his co-workers, women who "labored with me in the gospel" (Phil. 4:1–3).[9]

Synagogue Leadership

A sketch of the continuity between the house synagogue and the house church, between Jewish worship and Christian worship, can highlight dimensions of leadership that might otherwise be missed. The urban synagogues of the Hellenistic cities functioned as community centers, schools, places of worship, and political lobbies. To be part of the Jewish community was to be part of a *politeuma,* a "commonwealth"; it meant to be part of a nation. This

sense of identity was expressed in a distinctive way of life, a moral code, a set of laws, and a unique form of worship.

The early Christian community understood itself similarly as a people and a nation. The Christian *politeuma,* however, made less sense to the Romans than the Jewish one did, because the Romans could respect the ethnicity of the Jewish people and their faithfulness to ancestral customs. The Christians, by contrast, were a hodgepodge of converts from various ethnic groups. Romans spoke disparagingly of them as a "third race."

From the perspective of the Roman government, the synagogue looked like a *synodos* (assembly), a private association or religious club. The synagogue, like a club, enjoyed the benefactions of patrons, it appointed officers, and it met for both religious and social purposes. The leaders of the synagogue at Sardis successfully lobbied for the rights to have such an association, to be governed by their own laws, and to have a place where they could settle disputes with one another.[10] The influential Alexandrian Jews were successful in their appeal to the emperor Claudius for the restoration of special privileges, particularly the right to govern themselves according to their ancestral laws, but they were unsuccessful in their attempt to gain for Jews the rights of citizenship.[11]

The synagogue was incorporated like a semiautonomous political body that had its own rulers, *archai,* who also represented and lobbied for the interests of their groups with both city and imperial governments. Leaders of Jewish communities acted in the traditional role of political patrons in their relations with governmental authorities. On behalf of their clients, patrons would obtain certain privileges from governmental authorities, such as representation and legal protection in the case of lawsuits, and would secure

certain immunities, such as a tax-exempt status and freedom from the obligation to hold public office.

In Roman society, individuals in a position to exercise patronage could also be drawn into leadership roles on the basis of their donations. Members of a city's aristocracy often made financial gifts to the city by undertaking building projects, by underwriting the costs of repairs for water systems, or by donating expensive ornamentations, such as statues or mosaics, for public places. Such benefactors were honored with dedicatory inscriptions, chiseled in marble or stone, that identified the gift and the benefactor. For the church historian, these inscriptions reveal a dimension of leadership not always conveyed in theological histories. (Chapter 3 elaborates the diversity of these forms of patronage.)

In Dura Europas, a remote Roman military colony on the edge of the Persian frontier, a certain Samuel commissioned a series of splendid paintings to adorn the high walls of the assembly room of a second-century synagogue.[12] His titles "priest" and "elder" show both that he was honored for his benefactions and that he exercised leadership. In Myndos a prominent woman, Theopempte, financed a decorated marble post (and probably also the carved marble chancel screen that went with it) for the synagogue. The fourth-fifth-century inscription announces that she was the ruler, *arche,* of the synagogue.[13] In the late third century Klaudios Tiberius Polycharmos donated the lower floors of his house in Stobi, Macedonia, for use as a synagogue and lived with his family in the upper rooms. The grateful community honored him with the office and title "father of the synagogue."[14]

Leadership positions in the synagogue also involved governance of the community. In Jerusalem the council of elders

(*presbyteroi*) exercised legal and judicial functions for the Jewish community. They were interpreters of the Law and adjudicated civil disputes between members of the community. Synagogue leaders also collected taxes and made provisions for their distribution. The Jewish appropriation of the Greek term *archōn* (ruler) for synagogue leadership expressed the character of this authority.

Women's Leadership in the Synagogue

The predominance of women in the leadership of the Christian community at Philippi may have been a natural carryover from their apparent predominance at the Sabbath worship outside the city gates. Women's leadership in synagogue services was nothing extraordinary. It is well attested by inscriptions. Bernadette Brooten's study of nineteen Jewish inscriptions shows that women held the offices of "ruler of the synagogue," elder, priest, and "mother of the synagogue." An inscription from Smyrna reads: "Rufina, a Jewess, head of the synagogue, built this tomb for her freed slaves and the slaves raised in her house. No one else has the right to bury anyone [here.]"[15] Another from Crete reads: "Sophia of Gortyn, elder and head of the synagogue of Kisamos [lies] here. The memory of the righteous one for ever. Amen."[16] An inscription for a Jewish woman bearing the title of priest reads: "O Marin, priest, good and a friend to all, causing pain to no one and friendly to your neighbors, farewell!"[17]

Where Christian communities adopted the Jewish model of governance by elders, women continued to be chosen for this office. Inscriptional evidence shows that Christian women also held the office of elder in their communities. A Christian inscription, dating

from second- or third-century Egypt, reads: "Artemidoras, daughter of Mikkalos, fell asleep in the Lord, her mother Paniskianes being an elder [*presbytera,* feminine form]." The Bishop Diogenes in the third century set up a memorial for Ammion the elder (*presbytera,* feminine form), and a fourth- or fifth-century epitaph in Sicily refers to Kale the elder (*presbytis,* also feminine).[18]

The axis of synagogue worship was the reading of the Torah scrolls, which were often housed in a niche that dominated the simple architectural features of the synagogue. During synagogue worship any member might read from the scrolls of the Law and then teach the assembly by interpreting the passages just read. Of equal importance to the reading of the Law was its application to the daily life of the community. This was the work of interpretation, and all members of the synagogue participated. For the educated members of the community, who were literate and could afford books, the work of study and interpretation continued in private as well.

Priscilla, a well-educated woman who had been a member of a synagogue in Rome, was quite skilled in the interpretation of the Law. This acumen in fact provided the foundation for her leadership in the early Christian movement. She was exercising her authority as an interpreter of the Law when she went to Apollos, a silver-tongued rhetorician and new arrival in Corinth, to instruct him more fully in the Christian interpretations of the prophets. Educated Jewish women were also members of a Jewish philosophical school in Alexandria. Days were devoted to a communal scholarship in which men and women studied, discussed, and debated together. In the evenings the community worshiped together with antiphonal singing in which male and female voices answered each other.[19]

Christianity arrived early in the bustling city of Corinth, along with the goods that traveled noisily in carts between the city and its two harbors at Lechaion and Cenchreae. The city stretched up the slopes toward the towering peak called the Acrocorinth. The theater rode upward along the same curve of the slope until it crested at a small plateau, which was crowned with the marble temple of Apollo.

Just inside the old city walls was the temple of Asclepius, where the ill and injured waited for the gift of healing from the god. Near this temple lay a colonnaded court that gave access to three dining rooms with stone couches for dining in a reclined position (cushions were supplied) and tables for food.[20] Here cultic banquets were held in honor of the god. A traveler might also follow the road north from Corinth to Delphi, the famous shrine to Apollo, to seek counsel from the Pythia, a priestess with the title prophetess. She sat on a tripod resembling Apollo's throne and delivered help and advice in the form of oracles from the god.[21] The priestess sat quietly in a trancelike state waiting for the divine inspiration; when it came, words flowed quickly in short, elegant streams of speech called oracles. The rhythmic meter and the imperious tone of these oracles is captured in Aeulius Aristides's memoirs, which records an oracle that he received at the temple of Apollo at Colophon early in the second century:

> Asclepius will cure and heal your disease
> in honor of the famous city of Telephus
> not far from the streams of the Caicus.[22]

The new converts to the Christian movement gathered in private homes, in interior rooms, hidden from the crowded streets. But the ritual activities of the adherents of this new sect would not have seemed strange to the festive throngs who joined the processions taking flowers, grains, wines, and sacrificial animals as gifts to Apollo. In their worship, Christians sang, chanted, and ecstatically prophesied. The Christians also shared a cultic banquet that honored a dying and rising god known simply as *Christos,* the anointed one. Oracles were also a familiar part of Christian worship, especially in Corinth. In writing to the Corinthian community, Paul himself conveyed an oracle that he had received when he prayed for healing from a physical affliction:

> "My grace is sufficient for you,
> my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9)[23]

The oracle Paul received provided comfort, if not healing.

Inside the homes where the Christians met in Corinth, women prophets responded to the Spirit. First one would rise and speak a blessing, a commendation, a revelation, or a word of wisdom. Before her oracle ended, another would arise with a word of encouragement or hope or exhortation. Mingled among these voices were ecstatic exclamations of grace, thanks, or praise.[24] For these new Christians, the presence of the Spirit dramatized the fulfillment of prophecy: "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. . . . And upon the men who serve me and upon the women who serve me I will pour out my Spirit and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:17–18).

Some aspects of the rituals of the Corinthian Christians would have been more familiar to the intellectuals who attended the philosophical schools. There were readings from the sacred texts

followed by interpretations and exhortations much like the readings from the treatises of the Greek philosophers. Those disciples who remembered the pithy sayings and clever retorts of their master rehearsed these anecdotes for the community. Equally important were the moral exhortations, because their observance would lead to virtue and personal happiness.

Prophetic Leadership

Such prophesying was one of the vital forms of leadership in early Christianity. Apostles, prophets, and teachers constituted the recurring trio of leaders mentioned in Paul's writings. Apostles were the traveling evangelists, whose work took them from city to city spreading the good news (*euangēlion*) of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Prophets and teachers acted as local leaders. According to Heinrich Greeven, the leadership of the Corinthian community was actually in the hands of prophets and teachers together, both of whom functioned as mediators of the Holy Spirit.[25] Prophets delivered inspired messages to the assembly, and teachers instructed the community on matters of belief and praxis. These prophets and teachers gained their authority in the community because their roles meant that they were specialists in mediating divine revelation.[26] David Aune identifies at least three types of prophets: groups of prophets who prophesied during Christian worship (the women prophets at Corinth constituted such a group), prophetic schools, where member prophets formed a kind of guild (John the Seer of the Apocalypse belonged to such a school), and traveling prophets, whose ministry was to carry the work of teaching, prophecy, and exhortation to different communities.

Traveling prophets who came "in the name of the Lord" were accorded the hospitality of the Christian communal meal and a ready audience for their teachings. In Acts, Luke retold a miracle story that confirmed Paul's authority as an apostle. While this story is about a dramatic healing miracle, in fact a resurrection from the dead, it is interesting for present purposes because in the course of telling this story Luke created a tableau of a typical community receiving a traveling teacher.

According to Luke's story, the Christians in Troas had come together for a communal meal (the breaking of bread) in a third-floor room whose windows opened onto a courtyard. After an evening meal that included wine, Paul conversed with them. The room was crowded and warm; the burning of the oil lamps brightened even the farthest corner, and Paul's discussion dragged on into the night. The adolescent Eutyches had found a seat in the window, catching the cool night air on his back. As Paul's discourse continued unabated and the hum of questions and answers wove back and forth in the heavy air, Eutyches fell asleep. Suddenly tragedy interrupted the animated flow of the discussion. Eutyches had fallen from the window. Those who reached Eutyches first pronounced him dead, but Paul insisted that there was hope. Once Eutyches was gently laid on a bed, Paul stretched out on top of him (like the prophet Elijah had done, 1 Kings 17:17–24) to restore his life. After assuring them that Eutyches would live, Paul returned again to the third floor and ate with the community, who continued talking with him until the first light of dawn. In general, the traveling teacher was given lodging and meals; in return he or she instructed the community, speaking on God's behalf, and the community responded with questions, comments, and judgments of its own.

A cluster of churches in Asia Minor eventually felt the need to provide guidelines for the reception of traveling prophets and teachers. Their handbook on church leadership, the *Didache,* offered a picture of prophetic ministry similar to the one portrayed by Luke. A traveling prophet was entitled to lodging and meals. When speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit, a prophet could not be interrupted, but after the oracle had been delivered the community could enter into discussion with him, ask questions, and even challenge the message. The leadership functions of prophets were quite diverse, but their authority always rested on their ability to convey divine revelation. Although prophetic authority could be claimed by any individual, that authority also had to be recognized by the community. Normally the legitimacy of prophets would be tested by the correctness of their teachings and by their practice of the Christian life. In the Corinthian community the other prophets were to evaluate and approve the oracles of a prophet once he or she had spoken. The *Didache* developed a rather strict test for determining the legitimacy of a prophet's claim to speak in the name of the Lord:

> Now about the apostles and prophets: Act in line with the gospel precept. Welcome every apostle on arriving, as if he were the Lord. But he must not stay beyond one day. In case of necessity, however, the next day too. If he stays three days, he is a false prophet. On departing, an apostle must not accept anything save sufficient food to carry him till his next lodging. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.[27]

If prophets, speaking under the influence of the Spirit, asked for food or money for themselves, then the community would know that they were not true prophets. (What would happen if televangelists today were evaluated as authentic Christians in this way?)

Christian communities valued the ministries of prophecy and revelation and recognized the leadership of women and men who were thus gifted. In the churches of Asia Minor, a prophet in residence in the community was accorded the honor of presiding over the eucharistic meal. Such prophets were not required to offer a liturgical prayer of thanksgiving but were free to pray extemporaneously as inspired by the Spirit.[28] This kind of prophetic leadership was considered worthy of the financial support of the community.

Women Prophets

Prophecy was central to Luke's story of Christianity, for the activity of the Holy Spirit manifest in prophecy demonstrated the continuity between Judaism and Christianity. Luke's Gospel begins with the story of Elizabeth, who was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave a prophetic witness to the specialness of Mary and the uniqueness of the child in her womb. Mary herself prophesied, and her oracle, the Magnificat (Luke 1:47–55), is perhaps the most loved and recited prophecy delivered by a woman prophet. Mary's words—"He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away"—resound across the centuries as authoritatively as the oracles of Isaiah, Amos, or Ezekiel, yet Luke does not call her a prophet.

Mark's Gospel contains the story of a woman whose spiritual insight, sense of calling, and determination place her among the prophets. Mark's story is skeletal:

> And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. But there were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment thus wasted? For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor." And they reproached her. (Mark 14:3–5)

Who was she? What spiritual insight had led to her sudden appearance at the banquet? Did the guests recognize her when she came in? Did they know who she was? Was she intimidated by their censure? What did she intend through her act? How many understood the prophetic message? The disciples and the Gospel writer did not recognize her as a prophet.

She had received an insight into who Jesus was, and she felt compelled to give a public witness to his identity. She did not choose words for her prophetic revelation; she chose a silent but portentous action. Like the prophet Samuel pouring oil over the head of the rough shepherd David, she lifted her vial over the head of the Galilean Jesus and poured her expensive ointment over his hair. As the prophet Samuel had identified David as the king of Israel, her symbolic action proclaimed Jesus publicly as the Son of David, the coming Messiah, Christ, the anointed one (parallel Matt. 26:6–13). We can hear tones of resentment in the accusing voices of the disciples, who expressed alarm at the money frivolously expended in this gesture. Perhaps she was a landowner and her presence there sparked smoldering tensions between the villagers and landholders. In any case, the Gospel clearly highlights that the disciples—unlike this anonymous woman—weren't able to recognize that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and that they would not throw caution to the winds to proclaim his divine mission.

Luke mentions only in passing the four daughters of Philip who were prophets and does not pause to comment on their important

role in the leadership of the Christian community (Acts 21:8–9). But they no doubt functioned as leaders for the church in Caesarea much as the women prophets of the Corinthian church did.

Women prophets in the Christian communities carried into this new religious movement roles that were similar to those played by their sisters who participated in Greek and Roman religions. Prophecy permeated every aspect of Greco-Roman social life. Professional prophets, or diviners, provided guidance for governments in the matter of military expeditions, the founding of colonies, and the timing of festivals and provided counsel for individuals in matters of marriage, travel, and the bearing of children. In all these arenas prophets were interpreters of a divine will, because they spoke under the influence, inspiration, or possession of a divine spirit. A certain Syrian woman accompanied Alexander the Great on his expeditions and provided oracles. Another Syrian woman, Martha, received prophetic oracles that she conveyed to the wife of Marius and that led to her becoming the religious adviser to this imposing political figure.[29] In both cases the women functioned as professional prophets, or diviners, employed by government officials to serve as consultants.

The authority of women prophets to receive and interpret divine revelations was well established in Greek and Roman religions. Plutarch recorded an incident in which women's prophetic intervention saved an important life. Some Roman women carrying out a ritual sacrifice honoring the Roman goddess Bonadeia and the Greek goddess Gynacea saw a sign. "For on the altar where the fire seemed wholly extinguished, a grey and bright flame issued forth from the ashes of the burnt wood." The virgins presiding over the sacrifice quickly interpreted this sign and sent word to Cicero's

wife, Tyrentia, that he was in danger from conspirators and that the goddess had sent a great light to ensure his safety and glory.[30]

The late second century witnessed a revival of prophetic authority within Christianity, and again women prophets were prominent. In Phrygia the prophecy movement was named after one of its founders, Montanus, who worked closely with two women prophets, Priscilla and Quintilla. Because their prophecies were received as oracles from God, they were carefully written down and preserved as a second Scripture by the Montanist communities. The Montanist community's reverence for the oracles of their women prophets was chronicled by one of their bitter foes, Hippolytus:

> And being in possession of an infinite number of their books, they are overrun with delusion, and they allege that they have learned something more through these than from law, and prophets and the Gospels. But they magnify these wretched women above the apostles and every gift of Grace, so that some of them presume to assert that there is in them something superior to Christ. . . . They introduce, however, the novelties of fasts, and feasts, and meals of parched food, and repasts of radishes, alleging that they have been instructed by women.[31]

Hippolytus's complaint was that the authority of these women prophets was accepted as equal to that of Scripture by the Montanist community.

From Tertullian, who was favorably impressed with Montanist moral rigor, we learn of the activities of an African Montanist prophet:

> We have now amongst us a sister whose lot it has been to be favored with gifts of revelation, which she experiences in the Spirit by

ecstatic vision amidst the sacred rites of the Lord's Day in the church; she converses with angels, and sometimes even with the Lord; she both sees and hears mysterious communications; some men's hearts she discerns, and she obtains directions for healing for such as need them. Whether it be in the reading of the Scriptures, or in the chanting of psalms, or in the preaching of sermons, or in the offering up of prayers, in all these religious services, matter and opportunity are afforded her of seeing visions.[32]

During prophetic ecstasy this woman prophet received revelations about individuals, discerned their internal states, and provided counsel and guidance for them. What she spoke was written down and received by the community as revelation from the Spirit.

Another second-century manual on church organization, the *Statutes of the Apostles,* instructed churches to ordain two widows precisely for this ministry of praying and receiving revelations: "Let them ordain three widows, two to continue together in prayer for all who are in trials, and to ask for revelations concerning that which they require."[33] Some revelations responded to individual needs for healing or advice; other revelations were messages for the community as a whole. These widows were also prophets.[34]

THE COMMUNITY AT ROME

Magnificent Rome. By the first century C.E. this city reveled in the luxury of the new wealth brought by trade and tribute from conquered peoples. Like a gleaming magnet, the imperial city drew philosophers, who founded new schools, and religious visionaries, who taught new doctrines. Christian evangelists arrived too, and the Christian community in Rome was well established within a

decade of the death of Jesus. Many of the numerous converts to Christianity came from the synagogues in the imperial city. Conflicts arose between these newly converted Jewish Christians and the skeptical Jewish majority. Eventually their bitter rivalries sparked civil unrest, which required the intervention of government authorities. Emperor Claudius dealt with these "rivalries" by expelling the Jews from Rome in 45 C.E. Prisca and Aquila, Jews who had recently converted, followed their network of connections across the Mediterranean to Corinth and established their household there as exiles from the imperial city. By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Romans (ca. 67 C.E.) the Jews had returned to Rome, and the Jewish Christian community flourished once again.

The city's population density made apartment dwellers of urban Romans. Merchants had living quarters above their shops; more prosperous citizens lived in larger apartments; and the wealthy owned villas. In a metropolis the size of Rome the Christian community was too numerous to meet at a single location. Consequently a number of prosperous householders gathered congregations in their homes. When Prisca and Aquila returned to Rome, they organized and supervised such a house church (Rom. 16:5). Many of these house churches survived into the second and third centuries bearing the name of the householders who originally convened the Christians in their homes. They were known as *tituli* churches. According to tradition, the Church of St. Clement, located east of the Colosseum, had once been a house church belonging to Clement. Excavations under the present church uncovered a first-century private house adjoining a warehouse. In another neighborhood, where the Roman aristocracy lived, is the Church of St. Pudentiana. Tradition has it that Pudens, a Roman senator, gave his house to the Christians to be used as a church and that he

dedicated this church to his daughter, Pudentiana.[35] In many cases these householders functioned as patrons of the churches that met in their homes by taking care of their financial needs.

WOMEN PATRONS IN THE GOSPELS AND EPISTLES

Phoebe, the minister (*diakonos*) of the congregation at Cenchreae, carried Paul's letter to the Romans.[36] She was a woman of some wealth and social status and traveled to Rome in connection with her business and social life and the affairs of the Christian church. She had agreed to carry Paul's letter to the Romans, which he hoped would provide him entry into the Roman Christian community on his upcoming visit. In his letter Paul also introduced Phoebe to the Roman Christians, identifying her as his patron (*prostatis*). With this title Paul acknowledged her generosity and her support of him, then he urged the Roman Christians to help her in whatever way she required in repayment of his own debt of gratitude to her.[37]

Joanna, the wife of Chuza, a steward in Herod's household, was a woman in a position to be a patron (Luke 8:1–3). It is intriguing to find her traveling with the group of evangelists that accompanied Jesus from village to village. Certainly her connections to the ruling Herodian family would have eased the way in any conflicts with minor local officials. It seems that she was a member of a group of women—Mary of Magdala and Susanna are also mentioned—whose patronage protected and supported the Jesus movement. Women as well positioned socially and economically as these often established patron-client relationships.[38]

Paul concluded his letter to the Roman Christians with personal greetings to the leaders of the community there; some he

knew by reputation, and others he had met in the course of his ministry. Among the leadership of the Roman Christian community were many women. Prisca, Junia, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis were women whom Paul addressed as co-workers; they had established the faith of the Christian community through their work of teaching and exhortation. Other prominent women greeted by Paul were Julia, Olympas, the mother of Rufus, who Paul says was a mother to him also, and the sister of Nereus. Of the twenty-eight prominent people whom Paul considered it politic to greet, ten were women.[39]

Among these women leaders of the Roman congregation was a woman apostle, Junia, whom Paul hailed as "foremost among the apostles" (Rom. 16:7).[40] She and her husband, Andronicus, traveled teaching and preaching from city to city. The turmoil and riots occasionally provoked by Christian preaching landed her and her husband in prison, where they encountered Paul. She was a heroine of the fourth-century Christian church, and John Chrysostom's elegant sermons invoked the image of Junia, the apostle, for the Christian women of Constantinople to emulate.[41]

Wherever Christianity spread, women were leaders of house churches. Mary, the mother of John Mark, presided over a house church of Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem. It was on her door that the astonished Peter knocked to announce to the Christians assembled there that he had been liberated from prison by an angel (Acts 12:12–17). Apphia presided with two others as leaders of a house church in Colossae (Philem. 2). Nympha in Laodicea, Lydia in Thyatira, and Phoebe at Cenchreae supervised the congregations that met in their homes (Col. 4:15; Acts 16:15; Rom. 16:1).

In John's Gospel Mary Magdalene, not Peter, is presented as the model for discipleship. At a time when Peter and the other male

disciples had fled, Mary stood loyally at the foot of the cross. She was not only the first witness to the resurrection but was directly commissioned to carry the message that Jesus had risen from the dead. The original version of the Gospel of John ends with the resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene and her witness to the Twelve in chapter 20. The story of the appearance to "doubting Thomas" at the end of chapter 20 teaches early Christians to believe without seeing. "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life" (John 20:30–31). A later copyist added another ending to the Book of John, chapter 21. In this chapter Peter was made the key witness of the resurrection when Jesus appeared to Peter and the disciples while they were on a fishing expedition in Galilee and commissioned Peter to be the shepherd of the flock. New Testament scholars have long puzzled about the reasons for this Gospel's two endings, chapter 20 highlighting the role of Mary Magdalene as witness to the resurrection and chapter 21 highlighting Peter. A recent proposal suggests that chapter 21 was appended at a time when the Johannine community was seeking to integrate with the Christian community that saw Peter as its head. Thus chapter 21 was added to bring the Johannine community within the pale of Petrine orthodoxy by emphasizing Peter's leadership.[42]

AMBIVALENCE AND CONFLICT OVER WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

When Paul wanted to claim that he too was an apostle because he had seen the risen Lord, he listed the appearances of Jesus: "He was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. . . . He appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time. . . . Last of all . . . he appeared to me" (1 Cor. 15:4–8). Paul omitted the announcement of the resurrected Christ to Mary even though it is attested in all four Gospels. Even some of the Gospel writers themselves betray signs of ambivalence over women's leadership. Matthew and Mark recount the women's witness to the resurrection, but the women's witness plays no role in the the faith of the rest of the disciples. Luke reports that the women delivered their message to the rest of the disciples, "but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (Luke 24:12).

Women's leadership was a widespread phenomenon in the early Christian churches. Tensions were nevertheless generated by the disparity between the socially established fact of women's leadership and the strict Greco-Roman demarcation of gender roles. The mixed messages about Mary Magdalene's significance reflects the ambivalence about women's leadership as the Gospels were taking their final canonical form.

The second-century *Gospel of Mary,* discovered in 1945 among a collection of manuscripts at Nag Hammadi in upper Egypt, reveals a lost tradition about the leadership of Mary Magdalene and portrays Peter as her opponent. The scene described in the fragments of this Gospel took place on the Mount of Ascension after Jesus had departed into heaven. The disciples were disconsolate, depressed, and afraid until Mary stood up and addressed them all. She exhorted them to stop grieving, assured them that the grace of the Savior would be with them, and urged them to prepare for the work of preaching to which they had been called. Finally the disciples took heart and began to discuss the teachings of the Savior. After a while, at Peter's prompting, Mary began a long teaching

discourse. When she had finished, she was quiet. Andrew was the first disciple to break the silence. He said, "'Say what you [wish to] say about what she has said. I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas.'" Peter then broke in with a resentful challenge: "'Did he really speak with a woman without our knowledge (and) not openly? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?'" Mary, hurt, turned to Peter and said, "'My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think I thought this up myself in my heart or that I am lying about the Savior?'" Finally Levi rebuked Peter:

> "Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you are contending against the women like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us. Rather let us be ashamed and put on the perfect man and acquire him for ourselves as he commanded us, and preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said."[43]

When Levi finished his speech, the disciples set out on their teaching mission.

The ambivalence about women's role, implied in Peter's comment "Did he prefer her [a *woman*] to us?" indicates tensions between the existing fact of women's leadership in Christian communities and traditional Greco-Roman views about gender roles. The discomfort of the writer/editor of John with Mary Magdalene's prominence as a witness to the resurrection, and the other Gospels' similar ambivalence about the importance of the women at the empty tomb, betray the deep conflict over women's place that

developed as Christianity was becoming established and the canon was being set.

There seems to be no doubt that women figured prominently in Jesus' life and ministry, both during his lifetime and after his resurrection when the first communities were formed and his message began to spread. If these accounts of women's important participation hadn't been grounded in intractable fact, they would not have survived in such a male-dominated culture. But because such independence and prominence on the part of women conflicted directly with the view of women's roles that pervaded Greco-Roman society, these traditions were ignored and submerged as much as possible in order to conform Christian teaching and practice to social convention.

Yet up until the mid-third century, only occasional sparks were generated by this clash between the social strictures on women's roles and the freedom women found in Christianity. For more than two hundred years Christianity was essentially a religion of the private sphere, practiced in the private space of the household rather than the public space of a temple. Its concerns were the domestic life of its community rather than the political life of the city. But during the third century Christianity began evolving toward its eventual form as a public religion. The burgeoning numbers of adherents and the new formality and dignity of the Christian liturgies meant that Christian participation was increasingly a public event. By the fourth century Christians were worshiping in their own public temples, called basilicas. During this period the friction between the social conventions about women's place and women's actual long-standing roles as house church leaders, prophets, evangelists, and even bishops precipitated virulent

controversies. As Christianity entered the public sphere, male leaders began to demand the same subjugation of women in the churches as prevailed in Greco-Roman society at large. Their detractors reproached women leaders, often in strident rhetoric, for operating outside the domestic sphere and thus violating their nature and society's vital moral codes. How could they remain virtuous women, the critics demanded, while being active in public life?

With their survival instincts honed, Christian communities had gradually begun to assimilate themselves into Hellenistic culture. Jewish communities had done the same. In their increasing desire for credibility and legitimacy, the church leaders no longer resisted the tide of culture. Gradually they adopted Greco-Roman conventions regarding women's proper place and behavior. Both Jewish and Christian writers, like their pagan counterparts, argued that it was inappropriate for women to hold positions of authority in the public sphere. For both Jewish and Christian theologians, as for pagan philosophers, the good woman was a chaste woman. In their view, female sexual promiscuity posed the greatest threat to women's character. Every aspect of female deportment should evince a concern for shame, expressed through reticence, deference toward men, and sexual restraint.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CHALLENGED

In the Mishnah, a compilation (ca. 200 C.E.) of the theoretical discussions of the rabbis, there are passages that reveal the attitudes toward women that the rabbis held in common with the larger Hellenistic culture. In the course of their discussion in a tractate entitled *Sotah* (On the Suspected Adulteress), the rabbis debated whether a woman should study the Torah. This case rests in part

on the assumption that the wife is the sexual property of her husband. In fact it is for the sake of his suspicion of her sexual infidelity that a wife was required to undergo the ordeal of drinking bitter water. If her body did not respond to the supposedly toxic waters then her innocence was proven. The provisions of the tractate read:

> Hardly has she finished drinking before her face turns yellow and her eyes bulge and her veins swell and they say, "Take her away! take her away! That the Temple Court be not unclean!" But if she had any merit this holds her punishment in suspense. Certain merits may hold punishment in suspense for one year, others for two years, and others for three years; hence Ben Azzai says: "A man ought to give his daughter a knowledge of the Law so that if she must drink [the bitter water] she may know that the merit [that she had acquired] will hold her punishment in suspense." Rabbi Eliezer says: "If a man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law, it is as though he taught her lechery." Rabbi Joshua says: "A woman has more pleasure in one measure with lechery than in nine measures with modesty."[44]

Rabbi Eliezer's surprising assertion equating the teaching of the Torah to a daughter with the teaching of sexual license reflects the Greco-Roman notions of male honor and female shame. A woman who studied the Torah was regarded as acting out of a desire for honor, precedence over men, and personal initiative. Such a woman would no longer be manifesting the requisite concern for the purity of reputation, modesty, sexual restraint, and passivity. It was only by maintaining those qualities associated with shame that a woman could demonstrate her virtue. Because a woman was viewed as sexual property, any sexual independence she might manifest was considered threatening. It was this anxiety about a woman's sexual

independence that was expressed by Rabbi Joshua's concern for women's dangerous attraction to the seductive pleasure of lechery.

Jewish women, as was shown earlier in this chapter, did participate in and lead synagogue worship. A passage from the Talmud reveals that women were also called on to read the Torah, but that women could perform this function only in private space. "All are qualified to be among the seven [who read the Torah in the synagogue on Sabbath morning] even a minor and a woman, but a woman should not be allowed to come forward and read the law in public."[45]

Likewise Greco-Roman society, as we have seen, defined proper roles for men and women according to whether they were household (and thus private) functions or public functions. This system gave a great deal of power to women in the household but segregated them from public political life, since public space was male space. The role of teacher, for instance, was not restricted to one gender, but the social space in which teaching occurred was. A woman could teach in the privacy of her household but not in public. Here we may appropriately ask whether the rabbis viewed the synagogue as private space.

The traveling evangelist Paul expressed a similar concern for the boundaries between public and private space in his comment on women's public speech in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35: "The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law 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." Here we may ask the same question of Paul: Did he view the Christian assembly, the *ekklēsia,* as public space and thus forbid women's speech in this setting?[46]

There is considerable disagreement among scholars about which kind of speaking Paul meant. Was it the prophetic, ecstatic speaking of the women prophets, whose authority Paul had acknowledged in 1 Corinthians 11? Or was it the kind of speaking involved in interpreting Scripture and handing on the tradition? His use of the term *lalein* for "to speak" was used in Greek society for free-ranging discussion rather than formal teachings. For Paul the proper place for women's speech was in the household not in the assembly. Paul thought that women's speech in the household would always reflect women's subordination to her man (father, husband, or master). It worried him when women spoke in the public context of the assembly because there women's subordination to men was not clear. Paul also thought that a woman's speaking in public contained the seeds of sexual scandal. *Aischron,* the Greek term that Paul used to insist that it was a disgrace or a scandal for women to speak in public, referred to sexual indiscretion when it was applied to women, and it was most often applied to women.

Nor did women's prophetic leadership in Corinth go unchallenged. Although the prominence of women in leadership may not have been problematic for the Corinthian community in the beginning, it was soon troubling to others. After a time, the church there received a perplexing letter from that traveling evangelist Paul in which he insisted that women prophets must wear veils when giving public instruction (1 Cor. 11:1–16). It was not that Paul directly opposed women functioning in the role of prophets, but if a woman was to prophesy in the assembly then Paul insisted she ought to have her head covered. For Paul the veil carried several symbolic meanings. It meant that a woman was concerned for propriety, specifically sexual modesty, since it preserved the sight of her hair for only her husband and family. The wearing of the veil also meant

that a woman publicly acknowledged her subordination to men.[47] It was a way for a woman to remain "private" even in public. Paul was ambivalent about, but not opposed to, women prophets. He acknowledged the authority and leadership that came with prophetic gifts, but his acceptance of the social restrictions on women made his acceptance of women prophets conflicted and problematic. If only the women prophets would wear veils when they were prophesying, then it would be clear that the early Christian movement did not intend to undermine society. (There is no evidence, however, that the Corinthian prophets ever did don veils.) This concern for propriety is more fully explained in chapter 5, where the values of male honor and female shame are elaborated.

The social conventions about women's character also generated tensions relating to women presiding at the eucharistic meal. We catch echoes of such a controversy in an enigmatic passage from the *Statutes of the Apostles,* a second-century manual on church organization. Here stereotypes about women's character are invoked:

> John spoke, "Have you forgotten, brothers, that our Master, when He has asked for the bread and wine, blessed them and said, 'This is My body and My blood,' He did not permit the women to be around us?" Martha said, "It is because of Mary, because He saw her laugh." Mary said, "That was not the reason I laughed. He said to us before when He taught that the one who is weak will be saved by the one who is strong."[48]

In this controversy, women defended their right to participate in the eucharistic ministry by arguing that women normally participated in the Passover meal and would have been present at the Last Supper. To counter the women's defense of their right to preside over the Eucharist, the writer of the *Statutes of the Apostles*

created a speech for Martha in order to put in a woman's voice the legitimation for excluding women from the Eucharistic ministry: Women, said this Martha, were sent from the room for laughing.

The assertions that women were more frivolous than men and that the weaker sex should be ministered to by the stronger were based on prevailing social views. Roman law held women by nature to be both the weaker sex (*infirmitas sexus*) and mentally frivolous (*levitas animi*), that is, lacking in seriousness. This concept of female nature justified the legal authority of a father over a daughter (*patria potestas*) and the authority of a husband over a wife (*manus*). In both cases the woman, regardless of her age, was effectively a minor and needed a male to represent her in legal transactions.[49]

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEFENDED

It would be interesting to know how women prophets defended their right to speak publicly in the community, but unfortunately their writings and their treatises were ignored by the generations of scribes who copied valuable books. Male polemicists against women's leadership sometimes repeated—in order to denounce—the arguments by which women defended their public authority, thereby retrieving for us at least elements of their testimony. Epiphanius, a notorious fourth-century critic, recast the multiple forms of Christian spiritual experience as so many forms of deviance from his fourth-century orthodoxy. For him the Montanist movement was a heresy and its women prophets illegitimate:

> They bring with them many useless testimonies, attributing a special grace to Eve because she first ate of the tree of knowledge. They acknowledge the sister of Moses as a prophetess as support for their

practice of appointing women to the clergy. Also, they say, Philip had four daughters who prophesied. Often in their assembly seven virgins dressed in white enter carrying lamps, having come in to prophesy to the people. They deceive the people present by giving the appearance of ecstasy; they pretend to weep as if showing the grief of repentance by shedding tears and by their appearance of lamenting human life.[50]

We can glean from this at least that the women prophets of the Montanists appealed to Eve and Miriam in the Old Testament and to the daughters of Philip in the New Testament writings, and that the authenticity of their prophecy was underlined by the familiar signs of prophetic ecstasy. Epiphanius claimed that this prophetic ecstasy was just for show.

In the end Epiphanius denounced women prophets not for heretical beliefs or practices but because their active leadership roles in public assemblies contravened his ingrained assumptions about women's place in society. By the fourth century, polemicists against women's leadership called on the authority of Scripture to support their insistence on women's subordination. Epiphanius did not hesitate to base his own objections on arguments from Scripture:

> Women among them are bishops, presbyters, and the rest, as if there were no difference of nature. "For in Christ there is neither male nor female." . . . Even if women among them are ordained to the episcopacy and presbyterate because of Eve, they hear the Lord saying: "Your orientation will be toward your husband and he will rule over you." The apostolic saying escaped their notice, namely that: "I do not allow a woman to speak or have authority over a man.'" And again: "Man is not from woman but woman from man"; and "Adam was not deceived, but Eve was first deceived into transgression." Oh, the multifaceted error of this world![51]

Here we see the exegetical battle lines for the fourth-century debate over women's leadership. Defenders of women's right to leadership roles argued from Gal. 3:28, "In Christ there is no male or female," that women were entitled to hold public office in the church because women and men possessed the same nature. The opponents of women's leadership, on the other hand, argued that men and women had different natures and that Scripture (Gen. 1–3) showed that women possessed an inferior nature. Epiphanius interpreted the curse pronounced on Eve, "Your desire will be for your husband and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16), to mean that woman had an inferior nature, because it was her fate to be ruled rather than to rule. By the fourth century, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians had become part of the canon and was given equal weight with the Old Testament. Epiphanius used Paul's argument that woman was created from man to bolster the conviction that women had an inferior nature and so were not fit to rule. Women's inferior nature was further demonstrated by a statement in 1 Timothy: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim. 2:11–14). By this time the prevailing system of female marginalization had been given a thoroughly Christian baptism.

It was the perceived vulnerability of female sexuality that required the safeguard of male protection. Protection implied subordination, and as subject to fathers and husbands, women became subordinate to all men in general—their subordinate role reinforced by an assumed inferiority of woman's nature. Women's natural inferiority was the declared basis of Paul's insistence in 1 Corinthians 11 that women wear a veil, for it functioned as a public

symbol of women's subordination. The writer of the *Statutes of the Apostles* invoked the same view of women's nature when he argued that women were weak and intellectually frivolous and therefore should be excluded from presiding at the Eucharist. Epiphanius appealed to the same understanding of woman's nature for his interpretation of Genesis 1–3 and 1 Corinthians 11. These two critical aspects of Greco-Roman gender beliefs—the distinction between public and private space and the notions about male and female nature—functioned as powerful social forces against women's leadership.

NOTES

1. Dorothy Irvin, "The Ministry of Women in the Early Church: The Archaeological Evidence," *Duke Divinity School Review* no. 2 (1980): 76–86. See also Joan Morris, *The Lady Was a Bishop: The Hidden History of Women with Clerical Ordination and the Jurisdiction of Bishops* (New York: Macmillan, 1973).

2. *Bulletin de Correspondence Hellenique* no. 101 (1977): 210, 212.

3. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Mary Magdalene: Apostle to the Apostles," *UTS Journal* (April 1975): 22ff.

4. Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church,* trans. Jean La Porte and Mary Louise Hall (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1976), 109.

5. Philip II captured the ancient city Krenides in 356 B.C.E., settled it with Greek colonists, and renamed it after himself. It was at this time that the city wall was built. Anthony and Octavian conquered the city in 42 B.C.E. and settled it with Roman colonists. Given that there were several long periods of growth and development in the first five centuries between the building of the city walls and first-century

Philippi, it would be natural to assume that the reference to a place outside the city wall is a reference to a newer quarter of the city. (The perimeter of the old walled city at Philippi [two miles] was quite modest compared with the walls at Corinth [six miles] and Ephesus [five miles].) The excavations at Ostia demonstrate this kind of growth. See J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Cities of Ancient Greece and Italy: Planning in Classical Antiquity* (New York: George Braziller, 1974), plates 48–51.

6. Unlike Greek worship, which involved sacrifices offered in open areas before the temples where the presence of the god or goddess resided, Jewish worship, focused as it was on the reading and exposition of the Torah, took place indoors. We have no evidence for Jewish religious gatherings of this kind conducted out of doors. In the light of this, it is strange that many commentators assert that the women were participating in an open-air prayer meeting by the banks of the river.

7. Bernadette Brooten, *Women Leaders of the Ancient Synagogue* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 139–40.

8. Isocrates, *Nicocles,* 36; cited by Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 171–72. See also 166–84.

9. Clement of Alexandria argued, a century later, that Paul's partner was actually Paul's wife, who elected not to travel with him. Clement believed Paul was referring to his wife when he remonstrated, "Have we not a right to take about with us a wife that is a sister like the other apostles?" (1 Cor. 9:5). Clement assumed that apostolic couples traveled together as a preaching team. Women apostles, he theorized, would have had access to the women's quarters in households (Clement, "On Marriage," *Strommateis* 3).

10. Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), 34.

11. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians,* 38.

12. Hagith S. Sivan, *The Painting of the Dura-Europas Synagogue: A Guidebook to the Exhibition* (1978), 11.

13. Brooten, *Women Leaders,* 13–14.

14. Thomas Kraabel, "Social Systems of Six Diaspora Synagogues," in *Ancient Synagogues, The State of Research,* ed. Joseph Gutman (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 84. See Brooten, *Women Leaders,* for discussion of these offices/titles: ruler, 37; elder, 46; priest, 77; mother/father, 64.

15. Brooten, *Women Leaders,* 5.

16. Brooten, *Women Leaders,* 11. Ross Kraemer has added to this collection six other epitaphs about women who were elders: Sara Ura, Beronike, Mannine, Faustina, Rebeka, and Makaria. *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 219.

17. Brooten, *Women Leaders,* 73.

18. Paniskianes, *Cahiers de recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Egyptologie de Lille* 5 (1974): 264, no. 1115; Ammio, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 16 (1975): 437–38; Kale, *L'Anee epigraphique* (1754): 454.

19. Philo *On the Contemplative Life,* 83.

20. Jack Finegan, *Archaeology of the New Testament* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 143–52.

21. David Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 23, 28.

22. Aune, *Prophecy,* 60.

23. Aune, *Prophecy,* 149.

24. Antoinette Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 135–58.

25. Heinrich Greeven, "Propheten, Lehrer und Vorsteher bei Paulus: Zur Frage der Ämter im Urchristentum," *ZNW* (Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenchaft) 1–2 (1952): 1–43.

26. Aune, *Prophecy,* 201, 202.

27. *Didache* 11, trans. Cyril Richardson, *The Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 176.

28. *Didache* 10.

29. Aune, *Prophecy,* 41.

30. Plutarch *Life of Cicero,* 20.1–2, trans. M. Lefkowitz and M. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), 253.

31. Hippolytus *Refutation of All Heresies* VIII.12, trans. Kraemer, *Maenads,* 255. See Ronald Heime, *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia,* North American Patristic Society, Patristic Monograph Series, no. 14 (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1989), 2–9, for a collection of the surviving oracles delivered by these women prophets. All that is left is what has been preserved by their detractors.

32. Tertullian *On the Soul* 9, trans. Kraemer, *Maenads,* 224.

33. *Statutes of the Apostles* 21, Sahidic text, trans. G. Horner, *The Statutes of the Apostles or Canones Eccleseastici* (London, 1904), 304.

34. A third-century manual on church organization, the *Didascalia,* reveals that widows were powerful leaders in the communities for which this manual was written. H. Achelis, in his analysis of the widows who functioned as leaders in the *Didascalia,* states that "the widows the author has in view are not weak little women but spirit-empowered prophetesses." Achelis's assumption that the widows in the *Didascalia* were prophets was based on the practices enjoined by the apostolic canons that the church was to ordain two widows to receive revelations. Hans Achelis and Johs. Flemming, "Die Syrische Didascalia," *Texte und Untersuchungen,* Bd 25,2: 275. See also chap. 5 below.

35. Finegan, *Archaeology,* 233–34.

36. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 170–71.

37. Phoebe's title *prostatis* means "leader" or "president." In New Testament writings the term is used for persons with authority in the community. This would certainly describe Phoebe's relationship to the congregation at Cenchreae. But Paul says of her in Rom. 16:2 that she is his *prostatis* and that of many others. In this context *prostatis* would be better translated as "patron." Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 181.

38. L. Wm. Countryman, "Patrons and Officers in Club and Church," *SBL Seminar Papers,* no. 11 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 135–43.

39. See also Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* 169ff.

40. The RSV reads, "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are men of note among the apostles" (Rom: 16:7). Junias is in fact a woman, but the bias of male translators has suppressed this fact.

41. Bernadette Brooten, "Junia, Outstanding Among the Apostles," and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Apostleship of Women in Early Christianity," in *Women Priests,* ed. L. and A. Swidlers (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 135–40.

42. G. Franklin Shirbroun, "Mary Magdalene and the Editing of the Fourth Gospel," unpublished paper delivered at the Pacific Coast Regional Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, April 1989.

43. *Gospel of Mary,* 17, trans. Karen L. King, George W. MacRae, R. McL. Wilson, and Douglas M. Parrott, *The Nag Hammadi Library,* James Robinson, gen. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 526–27.

44. Soṭa iv.3, trans. Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933), 296.

45. Tosephta *Megilla,* iv.II.226. See also *Nedarim* iv.3.

46. Although many New Testament scholars read 1 Cor. 14:34–35 as a later interpolation into Paul's letter, Antoinette Wire has presented a convincing argument based on the manuscript tradition that this passage is vintage Paul. See Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets,* 149–52.

47. Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets,* 116–34.

48. *Statutes of the Apostles,* 25–26, trans. Horner, *Statutes,* 305.

49. Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 150.

50. Epiphanius *Medicine Box,* 49, trans. Kraemer, *Maenads,* 226.

51. Kraemer, *Maenads,* 227.

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