

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

With 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as a Test Case

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Introduction

There is a wide spectrum of interpretations of the biblical literature that could be labeled Feminist. Although sharing some basic common goals, the various feminist approaches differ dramatically in terms of presuppositions and methodology. The present study is an initial attempt to describe and assess feminist NT interpretation. As an introductory study, it is rather reductionistic. No attempt is made at this stage to provide an adequate survey of the literature. Rather, the main goal is to identify some of the key features that distinguish two groups of feminist scholars within the church. Equally, the purpose in doing so is not to determine which approach merits more consideration. It is rather to begin the process of laying a foundation for understanding and dialogue.

In order to draw attention to some important differences, we will consider two categories of feminist biblical scholars. The first is dedicated to the construction of a feminist biblical hermeneutic, committed to the liberation of women from androcentric and patriarchal structures in the church and society, and convinced that much of the teaching of the Bible poses a serious hindrance to the achievement of these goals. One

of the most well known scholars within this broad category is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. She has played a decisive role within this movement to liberate women, and her work will illustrate well this first kind of feminist approach to biblical interpretation.

The second category of feminist can be distinguished from the first in that she or he maintains an optimism towards the usefulness of the biblical text(s) usually discussed; that is, generally, it is believed that a text properly understood against its historical and cultural background, and as written to a specific local situation, will in some way correspond to a theme of equality fundamental to biblical and especially NT theology. Representatives will be introduced below.

Although the presuppositions and methods of these two categories of feminist are not the same, the program of each needs to be explained and evaluated if modern feminist approaches to biblical interpretation are to be rightly appreciated. Interpretations of 1 Tim 2:8-15 will illustrate the very different roles played by the biblical material in the respective feminist programs -- however, the aim of the paper is not to attempt a full and final interpretation of this passage.

Schüssler Fiorenza

Presupposition/Hermeneutic

The starting point for Schüssler Fiorenza is the presupposition, which she holds with conviction, that "the Bible is a *male-centered* book."¹ She argues that "only in and through a critical evaluative process of feminist hermeneutics can Scripture be used as a resource in the liberation struggle of women and other 'subordinated' people."² And in the engagement of this struggle, a hermeneutical starting point is "suspicion" -- and here she distinguishes her aims from those of the more moderate and optimistic biblical feminists: "Rather than presuppose the feminist character and liberating truth of biblical texts, a hermeneutics of suspicion rests on the insight that all biblical texts are articulated in grammatically masculine language-a language which is embedded in a

¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press), 53.

² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 343.

patriarchal culture, religion, and society, and which is canonized, interpreted, and proclaimed by a long line of men."³ Consequently, her whole approach, which she worked out carefully in her 1983 book, *In Memory of Her*, is designed to measure the androcentricity and presence of patriarchy in the NT writings.

Hermeneutics of Remembrance. The positive reconstruction of early Christianity is driven by what she calls a "hermeneutic of remembrance." "Rather than taking the androcentric text or historical model of (for example) Luke/Acts at face value, a hermeneutic of remembrance seeks to uncover both the values inscribed in the text and the patriarchal or emancipatory interests of its historical contextualization."⁴

One final word should be said about her program before we have a look at how it is worked out. She employs not strictly a hermeneutical approach but develops and applies instead what she terms "a critical feminist rhetorical interpretation."⁵

Whereas hermeneutics seeks to explore and to appropriate the meaning of texts, rhetorical interpretation pays attention both to the kind of socio-symbolic worlds and moral universes biblical discourses produce, and to the way these discourses produce them.... A religious-ethical rhetorics and feminist pragmatics of biblical interpretation does not simply seek to evaluate the ideas or propositions of biblical texts; it also attempts to determine whether the Bible's very language and composition promote stereotypical images and linguistic violence.⁶

Finally, "a critical feminist rhetorical interpretation for liberation does not assume that the biblical text is an unclouded window to the historical reality of women. Nor does it consider biblical injunctions and prescriptions as once and for all given divine revelations and norms."⁷

Reconstruction of Methodology

Now, how does this work out in practice? At the risk of oversimplifying Schüssler Fiorenza's carefully executed interpretation of NT developments, an overview must be supplied in order to place

³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 53.

⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 62.

⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 46-47.

⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 47.

⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 47.

the Pastoral Epistles within the framework she constructs. Using the tools of historical criticism, Schüssler Fiorenza reconstructs the development of Christian thought about what she terms "the discipleship of equals" from the earliest and purest community remembrances of Jesus' life and teaching-tradition to a final stage in which patriarchy becomes the firmly established pattern of the post-apostolic church.⁸

At the earliest stage ("the Jesus Movement as a Renewal Movement"), she discovers a tradition which has the woman who anoints Jesus' head (Mk 14:3-11; Jn 12:1-8) being recognized as acting prophetically to point out the Messiah. She is rebuked by the male disciples. But they in turn are rebuked by Jesus. Both the remembrance of her action and Jesus' rebuke of the male disciples indicate the fundamental equality of female and male disciples: "she will be remembered." Luke's telling of the story (7:36-50) has lost this thread, stressing instead that the woman was a sinner. Though in this case Schüssler Fiorenza's rather ingenious reconstruction is highly conjectural and may not stand up to careful scrutiny, the point is she maintains that at the earliest stage the Jesus movement is to be connected with the then radically subversive notion of the coequality of women and men disciples.

The next stage in development expresses in new ways this same emphasis on equality. Drawing in part upon Acts and in part upon what were probably pre-Pauline formulas, the "pre-Pauline missionary stage" is reconstructed. Here we find equality stressed in the Priscilla/Aquila tradition, in the role accorded to women in the Acts stories, and perhaps their role in the early mission work (e.g. Tabitha, Lydia, Damaris). The importance of women is further illustrated by such references as Acts 12:12-17 -- which names the house of meeting as being "the house of Mary the mother of Mark." The importance of this reference to a woman is seen in the ease with which the house might have been called Mark's.⁹ More revealing yet is the pre-Pauline formula preserved in Gal 3:28, which declares that possession of the Spirit signifies equality among women and men.

In Paul's interpretation and application of the Gal 3:28 principle to the believing community's life and worship the third stage is reached. Corinth is the test tube for observing his method, and the results are

⁸ See esp. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*.

⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 166.

"double-edged." On the one hand, he clearly affirms Christian equality and freedom.

He opens up a new independent lifestyle for women by encouraging them to remain free of the bondage of marriage. On the other hand, he subordinates women's behavior in marriage and in the worship assembly to the interests of the Christian mission, and restricts their rights not only as "pneumatics" but also as "women," for we do not find such explicit restrictions on the behavior of men as men in the worship assembly.¹⁰

It is, however, really the next stage which has most bearing on the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2. In post-Pauline Christianity, as represented by Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Peter and the PE, there developed the tendency to order relationships and ultimately the ministry of the church in terms of the Greco-Roman household. The attempt to remain true to Paul may be seen in Colossians' quote of Gal 3:28, but the goal to reduce the tension that Christian liberty produced in secular society is witnessed in the balancing of this formula with the household code.

The praxis of coequal discipleship between slaves and masters, women and men, Jews and Greeks, Romans and barbarians, rich and poor, young and old brought the Christian community in tension with its social political environment. This tension engendered by the alternative Christian vision of Gal 3:28...became the occasion for introducing the Greco-Roman patriarchal order into the house church.¹¹

The motive for reducing this tension was protecting the church's mission in the world.

The last phase of development is evident in the Pastoral Epistles. In them, the whole church and its ministry are now defined in terms of patriarchy. The patriarchal household categories and subordination are still evident in Titus 2 and 1 Tim 3:4. But the merging of these categories with aspects of ministry (particularly teaching) reveals the final development of a patriarchal model of ministry. The function of 1 Tim 2:11, which prohibits women from teaching and having authority over men, is to deny them eligibility for the office of overseer/bishop. According to Titus 2, women may still teach, but now their teaching is restricted to the instruction of other women.

¹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 236.

¹¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 279.

The Fate of 1 Tim 2:8-15: Critique of Method

As a test case, Schüssler Fiorenza's interpretation of 1 Tim 2:8-15 does in fact help us to understand the method and approach of this feminist position. The conclusions of the test, however, are negative. Through her reconstruction of the history of development of the original model of coequal discipleship, passages like 1 Tim 2 are easily typed. Given the goals of her program, 1 Timothy 2:11-15 must be pronounced dead -- cause of death, acute patriarchy. Schüssler Fiorenza entertains no illusions about the possible reclamation or salvage of such a passage of Scripture. Its only usefulness lies in its potential to illustrate the limits reached as a result of the ineluctable process of patriarchalization in the church. It is in understanding the androcentric forces and motives at work in the early church that the divine call to coequal discipleship might be remembered and pursued.

Schüssler Fiorenza has made a contribution to our understanding of the situation and the kind of teaching encountered in 1 Tim 2. (1) The dominant influence of patriarchy in the culture of the first-century church and its inevitable effect upon the shape of ethical teaching must be considered. (2) The tradition preserved in Gal 3:28 (1 Cor and Col) will have to be brought to bear on an interpretation of 1 Tim 2, whether the latter is regarded as Pauline or Pauline-tradition. (3) The motive of reducing tension between church and society and the concern for mission in this may be of help in understanding an element that must be considered in the application of the passage today.

Yet at the level of exegesis and historical reconstruction Schüssler Fiorenza's interpretation of 1 Tim 2 -- in terms of the eligibility of women for the office of overseer/bishop -- raises some questions. To see this as an issue in the PE in fact seems to be a case of hypersensitivity. Her reconstruction of a downhill development from coequality in the Jesus-tradition to patriarchy in the Pauline and post-Pauline church made it almost predictable that the worst case scenario -- that in which women are explicitly excluded from ministry offices -- would be realized. The question is whether the meaning of the text actually substantiates the pattern of developments proposed by Schüssler Fiorenza or is coerced by it.

Biblical Feminists

The more moderate Biblical Feminists are, in contrast to Schüssler Fiorenza, rather more concerned to prolong the life of passages like 1 Tim 2:8-15 using any legitimate means available. As I said above, this group is driven by the conviction that the biblical text is relevant, and that clues from background, occasion, lexical evidence, etc. will reveal the reason that the author enforced (or returned to) the outmoded instruction; or, in more extreme attempts to bring this passage to bay, the aim is to show how certain enigmatic features, once understood, demonstrate that the author never really departed from the fundamental principle enunciated in Gal 3:28. Below we will consider how certain representatives of this kind of feminist approach attempt to solve some of the well known problems that the passage poses. It can be argued that the "approach" of the Biblical Feminist is nothing more than historico-grammatical exegesis. In any case, an inspection of the results of this exegesis reveals a pattern which is helpful for us to see.

The Presupposition (Gal 3:28) and Hermeneutics

The starting point for the Biblical Feminist is the conviction that the Scriptures teach the equality of women and men, and that this equality is not simply restricted to spiritual matters. The programmatic texts are Genesis 1-2, which reflect on the man/woman relationship prior to the Fall, and Gal 3:28, which announces or implies the undoing of the curse that sin brought upon certain aspects of various social relationships. It is argued that in Genesis 1-2 there is no unequivocal indication that the woman was created to take her place within a divinely willed male authority structure. The subordination of the woman/wife to the man/husband may be seen as a result of the fall into sin (Gen 3:16). However, with the coming of Christ and the Spirit, the new age of salvation dawned, bringing a redemption extensive enough to remove the curse on women. This, it is held, is the reality alluded to in Gal 3:28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

(οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληγν, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἓστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.)

The teaching of these texts, particularly the latter, must lead the way in the quest to understand and interpret other texts which, though

written in the light of the Christ-event, nevertheless seem to place contradictory restrictions upon women. F. F. Bruce put the matter this way: in Gal 3:28 "Paul states the basic principle...if restrictions on it are found elsewhere...they are to be understood in relation to Gal. 3:28, and not *vice versa*."¹²

The programmatic texts are a call in themselves to continue the search for cultural, historical and local factors behind limitation texts. If the presence of such factors can be demonstrated, the teaching in the texts may all the more justifiably be restricted in application. Yet even if such local factors are not recoverable, the programmatic texts imply the limit of application, anyway.

Nevertheless, with a text like 1 Tim 2:8-15, numerous efforts have been made to bring to light the limiting factors, and a look at these will demonstrate the approach of the Biblical Feminists. But the driving force of the programmatic texts should not be forgotten -- these texts establish the agenda and give life to the project.

The hermeneutic shared by many Biblical Feminists understands the teaching of Scripture in a dynamic way. Careful exegesis will discover that ethical texts, for instance, consist of two dimensions: the principle, and, in the case of the NT, the application of the principle in the specific first-century situation. What the modern exegete must do in order to apply the first-century text to a modern situation is to distinguish between the (unchanging) principle and the application of it by the apostle or biblical writer. Both dimensions are necessary for an understanding of application today. From the first-century application, seen in its theological, social, cultural, historical context, clues about the original author's intention can be discovered which guide the church today towards appropriate application of the basic principle. But original historical particulars may apply only to the original first-century application.¹³

¹² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 190.

¹³ Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988), 58ff.

An Overview of the Passage: Interpretative Problems

1 Tim 2:8-15 consists of teaching to men and women (or possibly husbands and wives) which follows roughly the pattern of the household code. With other examples of this pattern of teaching in the NT (cf. Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet 2:13-3:7), this passage shares an interest in addressing people within a social relationship concerning behavior that is appropriate in the community, and perhaps aimed to calm a situation characterized by social disturbance.

Specifically, v.8 instructs men about prayer, and the indication is that attitudes characteristic of the false teachers troubling the community were also becoming hindrances within the worship setting. However, the emphasis in the passage is on the conduct of women. Vv.9-10 take up the matter of respectable adornment. Women are discouraged from dressing and adorning themselves in a way that would allow them to be typed according to that culture's critical caricature of wealthy women. Instead, using the vernacular of the PE, the adornment that substantiates the claim to godliness consists of good works. For Biblical Feminists the teaching of vv.11-15 has been the more important. Vv.11-12 set in contrast permission given to women to learn and prohibition from teaching men and engaging in some activity in relation to men described by the Greek verb ἀθηντέω. Then, vv.13-14 either ground or illustrate in some way these instructions to women, but it is not certain whether it does this for all of vv.9-12,¹⁴ or only for the prohibition of v.12,¹⁵ although in neither case does the material of vv.13-14 become any less problematic for this feminist approach. V.13 seems to allude to the chronological order of the creation of Adam and Eve. V.14 then reminds the readers that it was "the woman," not Adam, who was deceived. V.15, as is well known, could mean a number of things. For the moment, it is sufficient to point out that it apparently makes a transition of some sort from the allusion to Eve to the women in Ephesus.

¹⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (NIBC 13. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988), 74.

¹⁵ For this view, see George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 142-43. NB: Knight is *not* a Biblical Feminist.

The Methodology of the Biblical Feminist

As I have already said, it is not my intention to consider all the problems of interpretation. My goal is much more modest and, hopefully, manageable. The approach of the Biblical Feminists can be more easily understood by introducing the two ways in which they attempt to handle the text in order to bring it into line with the programmatic texts.

1. Limiting the Scope of the Teaching

a. The Prohibition

The first approach to the problems created by the text is to attempt to limit the scope of the teaching by restricting the boundaries of the actual prohibition itself. That is, the attempt is made to find an expressed limitation built into the material used -- which later exegetes have missed or ignored. The two points thought most capable of yielding fruitful results here are the prohibition "I do not permit" (οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω) and the unusual verb ἀθεντέω.

In the case of the prohibition, some see in the choice to employ the present tense, rather than an aorist, the implication that the restriction expressed is meant to be limited in time.¹⁶ The translation best capturing the author's intention is thus something like, "I am presently not permitting a woman to teach, nor ἀθεντεῖν men." The prohibition should logically be understood as applying only to the situation in Ephesus, which obviously involved the participation of some women in the heresy.

The verb ἀθεντέω presents another possibility for limiting the scope of the prohibition, and more have attempted to capitalize on it. On the one hand, it is a verb with a very uncertain history of usage and whose meaning is equally uncertain in its single NT occurrence. In view of this, and since it plays a pivotal role in determining the meaning of the prohibition, the strategic importance of "winning this field" is obvious.

Catherine Kroeger has perhaps gone to the greatest lengths to demonstrate that the verb in question is not simply a term meaning "to

¹⁶ E.g. Philip B. Payne, "Libertarian Women in Ephesus: A Response to Douglas J. Moo's Article '1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance'," *Trinity Journal* 2 (1981): 169-97; Alan, Padgett, "Wealthy Women at Ephesus: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 in Social Context," *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 19-31.

have authority over," but rather holds the secret to the very specific kind of teaching (i.e. false teaching) that the instruction prohibits. In her initial study¹⁷ she proposed the meaning "engage in fertility practices," i.e. sexual practices of some sort perhaps reflecting the influence of the Artemis Cult in Ephesus upon the heresy alluded to in the letters. But she leaned heavily upon later occurrences of the term and questionable interpretations of other words connected with it,¹⁸ and her suggestion was never taken very seriously. Recently (1993), in collaboration with her husband, she has argued that ἀὐθεντέω in this context means "to proclaim oneself the author or originator of another." Supporting this translation is her reconstruction of the situation in Ephesus, in which the city is reputed to have been a center of feminism and feminist emancipation. Allegedly current Gnostic traditions extolled the feminine *Zoe* or *Sophia* as the enlightener or instructor of humanity, and Eve as the source of all life. Given this proposed background, the prohibition is held to be directed to the teaching of this particular doctrine, i.e. Eve as the originator of Adam, and is therefore not a blanket prohibition of the teaching of women as such.

A similar attempt, which the background of the letters more plausibly supports, is that of Wilshire.¹⁹ In his (earlier) opinion ἀὐθεντέω prohibits violence, apparently in the form of arguments and disputes as were associated with the teaching of false doctrine in the community.²⁰

Most, however, are far more restrained in arguing along the lines that ἀὐθεντέω envisions the usurpation or misuse of authority, or domineering. If so, the prohibition is mainly concerned to prevent teaching in a domineering manner. Probably due to some influence in the community, some women were teaching in a way that exhibited an attitude of superiority over men.

¹⁷ Catherine C. Kroeger, "Ancient Heresies and a Strange Greek Verb," *Reformed Journal* 29 (1979): 12-15.

¹⁸ See Douglas J. Moo, "1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance," *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980): 67.

¹⁹ Leland E. Wilshire, "1 Timothy 2:12 Revisited: A Reply to Paul W. Barnett and Timothy J. Harris," *Evangelical Quarterly* 65 (1993): 43-55; and reference there to his earlier "The TLG Computer and Further Reference to ΑΥΘΕΝΤΕΩ in 1 Timothy 2:12," *New Testament Studies* 34 (1980): 120-34.

²⁰ But see Wilshire, "1 Timothy 2:12 Revisited," 43-55.

Advocates of the traditional interpretation of the passage are justified in asking why ἀϑεντέω cannot simply mean "to hold authority over" in a neutral or positive sense. One reply is that of Scholer, who suggested that, if that were the case, the author (Paul) would have chosen his normal term ἐξουσιάζω -- the unusual verb may well suggest an unusual situation.²¹

b. Limiting the Recipients of the Prohibition

Another way to limit the prohibition is to demonstrate that only certain women are in mind. The most plausible attempt to do this is probably that of Keener,²² who argues that the teaching specifically addresses wives, who by engaging in teaching in the community raised questions about the authority of their husbands. In this way, some would argue that the teaching of the passage has abiding relevance for all wives, and others would argue that in a different cultural/historical setting, where the teaching of a wife would not impinge upon the husband's authority, wives may indeed teach. Either way the implication of the passage is at least that the prohibition does not apply to unmarried women.

Most Biblical Feminists are satisfied that by one or a combination of these two methods a legitimate restricting of the prohibition itself can be achieved. If this is achieved, then the remainder of the passage has little bearing on the matter. It is either grounds for the temporary restraining order, or what it grounds (abuses of authority) does not rule out the teaching of women per se, only the teaching of women (or men) done to assert one's authority over another.

c. Limiting the Effect of the Rationale

Nevertheless, because they are so problematic we should consider some of the ways in which vv.13-15 are handled.

²¹ David M. Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9-15 & the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, ed. A. Mickelsen (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986), 193-224.

²² Craig M. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), 101-32; see earlier E. E. Ellis, "The Silenced Wives of Corinth (1 Cor. 14:34-35)," in *New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 213-20.

(1) One view takes vv.13-14 as illustrative -- Adam and Eve providing a model for the present situation in which males had priority in teaching. V.15 provides a safety valve in case vv.13-14 actually are grounds for the prohibition, since the reference is to the birth of the Messiah and presumably to the undoing of the curse on women.²³

(2) A variation on this is suggested by Padgett. Vv.13-14 are again illustrative, Eve being a cautionary type (cf. Israel in 1 Cor 10). She stands as the antitype of the rich Ephesian women. Adam typifies Ephesian men, particularly the church leaders. Their priority ("formed first") consists in the fact that they are older in the faith. Eve's experience is a warning to women who may fall into sin. V.15 urges women to accept the social role normal for that day, in rejection of the false teachers' views. There is also a reference in it to the birth of the Messiah, the fulfillment of Gen 3:15. The social role was normative then, not necessarily now.²⁴

(3) Naturally, Kroeger needs to understand vv.13-15 in relation to her unique interpretation of ἀὐθεντέω. Vv.13-15 provide rationale. But they do not appeal to a creation principle; rather, they affirm the Genesis account as authoritative in refutation of the false teaching that Eve was created first. V.15 sends women back to their feminine roles.²⁵

(4) Typical of some Biblical Feminists, Keener sees the main point of vv.13-14 to be v.14. This allusion to the model, in which the deception of Eve typifies deception by false teachers as in 2 Cor 11:3, is what the author was after. Women were ill-educated in Ephesus and therefore prone to be deceived by false teachers and so prohibited, for the time being, from teaching. V.15 instructs women to adopt the socially acceptable role of the day -- secondarily alluding to the reversal of the curse of Gen 3:16.²⁶

(5) Fee maintains that v.13 supplies the rationale for instructions about women's modest dress and quiet demeanor. V.14 applies to the issue of women teaching; having been deceived, like Eve, and perhaps

²³ D. Williams, *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church* (Van Nuys, CA: BIM, 1977).

²⁴ Padgett, "Wealthy Women at Ephesus," 19-31.

²⁵ R. C. Kroeger, & C. C. Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:12 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

²⁶ Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 101-32.

teaching the heresy, Ephesian women are prohibited from teaching. Eve's deception was the basic reason for the appeal to the creation account. The point of the whole passage is to rescue these women and the church from the clutches of the false teachers. The teaching is *ad hoc*, relevant only to that situation.²⁷

(6) Finally, some maintain that v.13 does in fact place emphasis on the priority of the man in creation and the subsequent subordinate place of women. Deceived women are a danger to their husbands. V.15 teaches the need for women to fulfill the role of motherhood in all godliness. Headship of the man in marriage may indeed be the implication of the passage, but since today, in many situations, women teaching would not call into question the authority of the man/husband, it should be permissible for her to teach.

2. Limiting the Application

A second approach (normally pursued in conjunction with the first) attempts to bring 1 Tim 2:11-15 into line with the programmatic texts by limiting the application of the prohibition to the very specific situation in Ephesus.

This approach may take several courses, but each focuses on something about the situation that is unique and not universal.

a. The context of heresy

First, it is quite popular to take note of the situation to which the letter (or the whole of the PE) is addressed. False teachers have emerged within the church and some of their doctrines and aims have women specifically in view. The heretics forbade marriage (1 Tim 4:3), and some of the younger widows were engaging in behavior that may be associated with the false teaching, and some seem to have actually become followers of the opponents (5:13, 15). Other women were also prone to listen to these teachers and the teachers may have targeted at least certain women (2 Tim 3:6-7). From these indications Biblical feminists have drawn a connection between the false teachers and the women prohibited from teaching in 1 Tim 2:11ff. Thus Padgett, for instance, argues that wealthy women naturally wanted leadership

²⁷ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*.

positions in the church, and the false teachers, whom they supported, promulgated the emancipatory doctrines to satisfy this desire. And others, reconstructing the situation in various ways, agree that it is false teaching, not teaching in general, that is prohibited.

Kroeger²⁸ and Gritz²⁹ have attempted the most in this respect. Kroeger argues that the heresy was a mixture of Jewish-Gnostic doctrine and Ephesian devotion to Artemis. The false teachers proclaimed the priority of Eve over Adam and that Eve enlightened Adam with her teaching. Paul's words on Adam being created first and Eve's deception were intended to counterbalance the adversaries' exaltation of Eve. If this reconstruction is accurate, then the thesis that Paul's instruction contains temporary restraints upon women is strengthened. Gritz similarly (but without recourse to Gnosticism) maintains that the restriction on women teaching men was due to the infiltration of the cult of the mother goddess, Artemis, in Ephesus.

b. The social/cultural context

A second factor often appealed to in order to limit the scope of the text is the status of women in Greco-Roman culture. It was a man's world then, and the author is driven more than anything by the outlook of his day in prohibiting women. Now this could work two ways. First, assuming authenticity, some have argued that Paul is simply teaching in a way that is sensitive to the culture, prohibiting wives/women from teaching because it might hurt the church's testimony in the world. His basic program is still to be found in Gal 3:28, but false teaching (of an over-realized eschatology) or emancipation tendencies in Ephesus led some women to take the position of teachers too quickly or in ways that were inappropriate. In time, or in other places at that time less troubled by the problems of Ephesus, women teaching would present no problem. The other way this argument is used is to assume that the author (maybe Paul, maybe not), whatever he might believe in principle (Gal 3:28), nevertheless continues to operate more on the basis of cultural bias than eschatological promise.

²⁸ Kroeger & Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*.

²⁹ Sharon H. Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of the Religious and Cultural Milieu of the First Century* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 31-49, 105-16; cf. Payne, "Libertarian Women in Ephesus."

c. The broader context of Paul's ministry

One final way of limiting the application of this text is to appeal to Paul's ministry practices as recorded elsewhere. Texts which affirm that women in fact occupied significant positions within the church and carried out authoritative ministry, even teaching men, are viewed as the logical implementation of the programmatic text Gal 3:28. The teaching ministry of Priscilla (Acts 18) and her status as Paul's co-worker (Rom 16:3), Phoebe's position as deacon (16:1-2), and other women listed in Rom 16 as participants in Paul's "work," as well as Euodia and Syntyche in Phil 4 all show that women played an important role in Paul's missionary ministry. In view of this record, it is argued, the prohibition in 1 Tim 2 must be limited in one way or another to the situation or the writer's bias; the basic Pauline view allows the participation of women in ministry according to gift.

Reflections on the Biblical Feminist Methodology

1. Limiting the Prohibition

As Schreiner points out, the present tense of ἐπιτρέπω is very weak grounds for placing temporal limitations on the prohibition. Numerous injunctions are given by Paul in the present active indicative first singular which are universal commands. For instance, the command to present one's body to God as a living and holy sacrifice is introduced with a present active indicative first singular, παρακαλῶ, "I exhort," in Rom 12:1, and it is obviously a universally applicable command. In many other instances such universal commands are expressed with present active indicatives in the first person (e.g. 1 Cor 7:10; 1 Thess 4:1, 10; 5:14; 2 Thess 3:6, 12; Rom 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 4:16; 2 Cor 10:1; Eph 4:1; Phil 4:2; 1 Tim 2:1, 8; 5:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Tit 3:8). In view of this kind of evidence, the present active indicative first person form in 1 Tim. 2:12 should probably not be considered a certain indication that the prohibition is intended to be temporary.³⁰

ἐπιτρέπω also does not imply a limitation based on its inherent meaning, as some have argued. That the verb may relate to a specific situation is obvious in a number of contexts (Matt 8:21 par.; Mark 5:13

³⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15: A Dialogue with Scholarship," in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, eds. A. J. Kötenberger, T. R. Schreiner, H. S. Baldwin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 105-54.

par.; John 19:38; Acts 21:39, 40; 26:1; 27:3; 28:16). But this argument is tenuous. It is the context which makes the situation specific, not the verb itself. Thus Matt 8:21 describes a temporally limited situation--the request for permission to bury one's father before following Jesus. But it is not the verb that imposes the limits; it is simply a fact that normally one would only bury one's father once. In other contexts ἐπιτρέπω is not necessarily limited to a specific situation.³¹ Whether or not what is permitted or forbidden is temporary or universal cannot be determined by the tense of the verb, nor its intrinsic meaning. The matter must be decided on the basis of context.

While the case for a positive or neutral meaning for ἀυθεντέω (i.e. simply "to have authority over")³² is not certain,³³ the extreme interpretation offered by Kroeger is almost entirely unfounded. Her argument depends upon a historical reconstruction of the situation in Ephesus to confirm the suitability of the remotely possible (though highly questionable) meaning of "to proclaim herself originator of man." But the evidence which would demonstrate the existence of a progressive feminist movement in Ephesus connected to the Artemis cult has not yet been produced;³⁴ and Kroeger's reconstruction of the Gnostic movement is highly conjectural and surely exceeds the indications of the Pastorals themselves. Far more reasonable is the view that ἀυθεντέω means "domineering," or wielding authority in a way that vaunts one's position over another.³⁵

In any case, the prohibition might bear limiting on the basis of the meaning of domineering for ἀυθεντέω.

With regards to the Genesis material, it need only be said that it gives the appearance of providing rationale for the prohibitions.

³¹ Cf. 1 Cor 14:34; 16:7; Heb 6:3; and refs. in Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15," 126.

³² As George W. Knight, III, "ΑΥΘΕΝΤΕΩ in reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2.12," *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 143-57.

³³ Though cf. H. Scott Baldwin, "A Difficult Word: ἀυθεντέω in 1 Timothy 2:12," in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, 65-80.

³⁴ See S. M. Baugh, "A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century," in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, 13-52.

³⁵ But cf. Baldwin, "A Difficult Word."

2. Limiting the Application

Limiting the application based on the context of heresy, or the social/cultural situation, or on the basis of Paul's views about women in ministry elsewhere would seem to be more legitimate. The unusual circumstances cannot be denied, but the implications of the Genesis material will need to be taken seriously.

However, it is not immediately obvious from the PE or from 1 Tim 2 in particular that women (those in mind in the passage) were teaching the heresy. This is a possibility, but it is certainly no more. Kroeger's view that the prohibition of teaching is actually a prohibition specifically of *false* teaching (ἀϋθεντέω being the content) would certainly merit more serious consideration were the term ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖν (cf. 1:3) used in 2:12 instead of διδάσκειν.

Closing Thoughts: Methodological Omissions/Adjustments

It is in the nature of this study to raise questions that might contribute to the dialogue, rather than to offer answers or criticism that is in any way final. Both feminist approaches suggest a few items that might bear some further discussion.

Gal 3:28

Some questions need to be asked of the methodological framework of the feminist approaches surveyed, and we turn first to Gal 3:28. It has to be asked again whether Gal 3:28 was clearly meant as a proclamation of liberty to be experienced immediately and fully in all dimensions of life. There may be reason to suspect that the biblical writers did not hold this view. How is Paul's apparent reticence to urge the abolition of slavery to be explained. One possibility is that he was simply inconsistent. But there are other explanations which perhaps bear consideration. Gal 3:28 addresses three kinds of fundamental relationships or social distinctions -- racial, economic (perhaps), gender. But are all these relationships to be viewed on the same basis? Slavery was already common to Hebrew culture when the covenant is made with Moses. The law provides guidelines for its regulation. It may be argued that racial distinctions between Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) were encouraged for a time, but bigotry and exclusive claims to spiritual

superiority have human origins. Of the three pairs, only distinctions related to gender trace directly back to the record of God's creative activity. This is not to say that Gal 3:28 has no bearing on the issue. But such questions suggest that the view that this passage is a straightforward declaration of the immediate eradication of all social distinctions is too simple. Unless the inconsistency line is argued, Paul's own approach to the three relationships may provide evidence that his view was more complex.

There are at least two other questions that might well be raised in this context of a Pauline or NT approach to social institutions and movement in the direction of freedom, or in the direction of patriarchal bondage, as the more radical feminist views it.

Sensitivity to Culture

The first has to do with an understanding of and sensitivity to culture. On the one hand, Paul and other New Testament writers seem to have viewed their world and its structures as a part of God's design. They could encourage the church to "submit to" the institutions of the world (1 Pet 2:13) and through socially respectable behavior to make a redemptive impression in it (1 Thess 4:11-12; 1 Tim 3:7; 6:1). But this was a view held in tension with a firm belief that the world is an evil force opposed to God. The church was by no means to allow culture or society to dictate its policies (Rom 12:2; 1 John 2:11-17); yet, where possible, peaceful coexistence would be a help to the church's evangelistic mission. The NT household codes give some evidence of social awareness and cultural sensitivity, but it is doubtful that they ever advocate conformity for conformity's sake.³⁶ Ultimately, it is not unreasonable to think that Paul or any other New Testament writer would have stopped short of directly advocating the immediate abolition of, for example, slavery (as it then existed) because the culture might perceive it as a threat.

The Nature of Salvation

Another question is the way in which the NT conception of salvation should figure in the Feminist and Biblical Feminist methodology? For

³⁶ David L. Balch, "Household Codes," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 3:318-20; P. H. Towner, "Household (Station, Church) Codes," *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, eds. P. H. Davids, R. P. Martin, D. G. Reid (Downers Grove: IVP, forthcoming).

Schüssler Fiorenza (as with Liberation Theology in general) salvation is for the "here and now" and means liberation. And the church's brief is to actualize it in its present historical situation. But others, applying the construct of the "already and not yet," argue that the early church's view of salvation was more complicated or more nuanced. Salvation does indeed pertain to the whole of life, but its realization is a progressive process -- already underway but ultimately only finished at the Eschaton. The latter view might be regarded by Feminist liberationists as an excuse for inaction or as grounds for justifying an intolerable *status quo*. Or it may be an honest attempt to make sense of the early church's existence and sense of mission in its own historical circumstances.

Adjustments?

In any case, we need to ask how far the agenda of modern feminist biblical interpretation, as represented by Schüssler Fiorenza, ought to correspond to that of the NT writers. Are the developments in Colossians, Ephesians and perhaps also 1 Timothy possibly theologically motivated? Or do they simply illustrate how even the biblical writers faced with the pressures of the church's survival chose the course of least resistance? I doubt if the answer is this simple. If Paul could affirm that an individual was free, and yet urge a believer to refrain from expressing that freedom for the sake of another, might he not also possibly take a similar course with regard to the church and its experimenting with the implications of the gospel for freedom in its first-century social context? The concept of a progressive salvation might have implications for the church's experience of freedom and equality. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the original mandate in this respect was to push for freedom whatever the cost, and that any trend contrary to this, even if motivated to protect the mission, is retrograde and due to androcentric bias and the forces of patriarchy both inside and outside of the church. But it may be sensitivity to the patriarchal structure of society that we see in the NT letters instead of capitulation to it.

What is the result if a passage such as 1 Tim 2 is jettisoned. If 1 Tim 2 is actually an attempt on the part of a church (facing its own unique challenges) to find the way forward in a cultural situation that is strongly patriarchal, then perhaps to jettison the passage is to throw away a tool that might help the church today as it faces similar challenges--especially in Asian, Latin American and African cultures in which patriarchy is still a current factor.

Questions such as these remain open and so too should the dialogue that takes them up. The two approaches surveyed above employ different methodologies and understand hermeneutics differently. Some of the differences are the stuff out of which a dialectic of praxis might be formed -- present historical circumstances and the biblical accounts of the circumstances of God's people. There may never be agreement on how these things ought to work out in practice, but out of the disagreement may come a deeper understanding of the issues and needs involved.

Abstract

The present study is an initial attempt to describe and assess feminist NT interpretation with 1 Tim 2:8-15 as a Test Case. No attempt is made at this stage to provide an adequate survey of the literature. Rather, the main goal is to identify some of the key features that distinguish two groups of feminist scholars within the church. Equally, the purpose in doing so is not to determine which approach merits more consideration. It is rather to begin the process of laying a foundation for understanding and dialogue.

In order to draw attention to some important differences, Towner considers two categories of feminist biblical scholars. The first is dedicated to the construction of a feminist biblical hermeneutic, committed to the liberation of women from androcentric and patriarchal structures in the church and society, and convinced that much of the teaching of the Bible poses a serious hindrance to the achievement of these goals. The second category of feminist can be distinguished from the first in that she or he maintains an optimism towards the usefulness of the biblical text(s) usually discussed.

撮要

本文嘗試描繪及評估女權主義的新約詮釋（以提摩太前書二章8至15節作為測試），並分辨教會中女權主義學者兩大流派的特徵；主要目的並非找出哪個進路更可取，而是要奠下互相了解及對話的基礎而已。

本文作者探討了女權主義聖經學者的兩大派系，從而找出他們之間重要的差別。第一個派系致力於建構女權主義的聖經詮釋，將女性從以男性主導的教會和父權社會中解放出來，並堅信聖經中許多的教導嚴重阻礙婦解的目標。第二個派系的不同之處是他們對經文的用途抱樂觀態度。