

***The Social Matrix of Women's Speech
at Corinth***
***The Context and Meaning of the Command to Silence
in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36***

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A reexamination of Greek and Roman culture highlights women's positive role in religion, as Paul also grants, as well as the nuanced but guarded interactions between the sexes. Paul's injunction to women in 1 Cor 14:34—35 was meant to prevent casual interaction between married women and non-family men in the context of worship, not to prevent sacral speech. This behavior was seen as sexually aggressive, bringing shame on these women and the church in society's eyes.

Key Words: anthropology, Corinth, Greek religion, Roman religion, paganism, Paul, priestess, prophecy, shame, speech, women

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM AND PREVIOUS SOLUTIONS

Paul appears to give conflicting views on the public role of women in worship assemblies in 1 Corinthians, allowing that they may pray or prophesy in 11:5 and 13 and condemning their speaking in 14:33b-36. Could these have been written to the same audience? If so, what did Paul—and his first readers—have in mind?

Previous solutions fall mostly into five groups:

1. Eliminating 11:5 by claiming it is only a hypothetical possibility, whereas 14:34-35 represents Paul's real opinion: women ought not to talk (usually interpreted as leading) at all.¹ A

Author's note: I am grateful to the Social-Scientific Criticism section of SBL, as well as the Constructs of Ancient History section, for the opportunity to present and discuss portions of this research in 1997.

1. E.g., John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (trans. John Fraser; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960; first Latin ed., 1546),

- variant of this makes 11:5 refer not to an "official" meeting but merely a "home" meeting, in an amazing feat of anachronism.²
2. Eliminating 14:34-35 by claiming it is a non-Pauline interpolation. This was first proposed by J. Weiss, later followed by C. K. Barrett and G. Fee, among others, and recently defended by P. Payne.³ This proposal deserves more attention than I can give in this article (since I wish to focus on a new solution rather than extensively refuting old ones). There are manuscripts that show a transposition (placing vv. 34-35 after v. 40) but no manuscripts that actually omit the passage or indicate it as suspect. While Payne believes he has found evidence to prove the latter, his case has been seriously damaged by C. Niccum, who points out errors in his dating and interpretation of manuscripts.⁴ It seems to me that the real persuasiveness of this theory rests on the perceived disharmony between 1 Cor 14:34-35 and statements by the apostle that reflect more generous attitudes toward women (1 Cor 11:5, 11-12; Gal 3:28). This discrepancy vanishes when both text and ancient society are better understood.

231 (on 1 Cor 11:5-6); Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament* (ed. G. Burder and J. Hughes; Philadelphia: Towar & Hogan, 1828), 6.458; A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (2d ed.; London: T. & T. Clark, 1914; reprint ed., 1975), 325. Strangely this conservative view is echoed in the work of a feminist interpreter, who holds that Paul's goal is to crush the prophets (who are mainly if not exclusively women): Antoinette Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction Through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 17, 153-58.

2. J. A. Beet, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1882), 256; C. J. Ellicott, *St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Longman, Green, 1887), 282; Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), 437; F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 251, 341.

3. Johannes Weiss, *Der Erste Korintherbrief* (2d ed.; Meyer's Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament; 9th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910; reprint, 1977), 342; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 330, 332-33.; Hans Conzelmann, *I Corinthians*, (trans. James Leitch; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 246; J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 90-92; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 697-705; cf. discussion of textual evidence in G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum* (The Schweich Lectures 1946; London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 17; Philip Payne, "Fuldensis, Sigla for Variants in Vaticanus, and 1 Cor 14.34-35," *NTS* 41 (1995): 240-62; and idem, "Ms 88 as Evidence for a Text without 1 Cor 14:34-35," *NTS* 44 (1998): 152-58.

4. Curt Niccum, "The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for 1 Cor 14:34-35," *NTS* 43 (1997): 242-55.

3. Eliminating 14:34-35 by claiming it is Paul's summary of a Corinthian position that he rebuts.⁵
4. Defining the "speaking" as not normal prayer or prophecy but some sort of threat to male authority,⁶ or as a threat to the order and doctrine of the church via ecstatic behavior that exhibited charismatic freedom from sex roles.⁷
5. Defining the "speaking" as simply disruptive chatter by women.⁸

A NEW PROPOSAL

I suggest that the injunction to women in 14:34-35 makes sense when seen in its literary and sociohistorical context as (a) directed to married women in particular, but (b) not addressed to the exercise of any particular spiritual gift or the carrying out of any sacral function; (c) intended to deal, not with sacral speech (prophecy, tongues, etc.), but with ordinary conversation that was (d) carried on between these married women and men who were not their husbands, because (e) Paul's concern was behavior that endangered the honor of the women and implicitly called into question their relationship to their husbands. I will show further that in Greek culture, from ancient through Roman times, women filled various cultic positions in public with honor and that this perspective coincided at Corinth with the early Christian belief in a universal bestowal of the Spirit on all believers, regardless of gender, and the widespread practice of prophecy by women as well as men.

5. David W. Odell-Scott, "Let the Women Speak in Church: An Egalitarian Interpretation of 1 Cor 14:33b-36," *BTB* 13 (1983): 90-93; Charles Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 91-93; Raymond Collins, *First Corinthians* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1999), 514-17.

6. Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock; London: Epworth, 1962), 154; M. Thrall, *The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 102; W. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1982), 245-55; D. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 129-31. B. Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 101-2; however, in his recent work on Corinth, Witherington suggests that the problem with questions was more one of disorder than of a threat to authority (*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 287).

7. Ralph P. Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 86-87.

8. Kevin Quast, *Reading the Corinthian Correspondence* (New York: Paulist, 1994), 86.

First I will overview the literary data for clues to what it is Paul is addressing, and then I will summarize some relevant data on women and various expectations concerning their speaking in Greek and Roman culture. It is important here to go beyond the typical generalizations given about women in Greco-Roman society and try to be more specific. Hence I will look closer at the evidence about women in ancient Greek and Roman society in relation to a variety of social settings and functions to identify the shape of what I call the social "matrix" of women's speech: that is, the set of social variables (place, relationship of the people who were present, work or social function that was enacted, etc.) that tended to stifle or promote their speech, to value their speech (positively or negatively), to necessitate their speech, or (to put it another way) the factors that together assigned shame or honor to women's speech.

LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING 1 CORINTHIANS 14:33B-36

1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 comes almost at the end of a long section dealing with various problems that have arisen in the setting of corporate worship, when believers are gathered together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, pray, and express their spiritual "gifts." Not everything in this section has to do with gifts. The conclusion makes it clear that Paul is concerned with having worship that is dignified (εὐσχημόνως, 14:40; cf. 14:33a). He is concerned that their attitudes toward one another and their actions reflect the unity they have as the body of Christ (11:22, 27; 12:12-27). And he is concerned about behavior that demeans the worship gathering and one's fellow believers because of immodesty or disdain for fellow believers (11:4-5, 13-15, 20-22). It is fairly certain that the issues of 11:2-16 also arise from controversy over what today we would call "gender roles" and the expression of (or acceptance of) marital status. Paul is concerned to show the Corinthians that the person who is truly "spiritual" expresses this by a life of Christ-like love rather than demonstrations of spiritual power or insight (12:31b-13:13). And the goal of spiritual expressions in worship is to "build up" others (14:3, 5, 12, 17, 26). It is in light of this larger context that we must view Paul's words about women talking "in the assembly."

In the target text (14:33b-36), Paul first draws attention to the model of "all the churches" to bring to bear the moral force of what is normative practice (14:33b).⁹ He then issues an order for women to

9. For purposes of my analysis it makes little difference whether 14:33b is counted with the preceding section or with what follows.

be silent, which is embellished with several qualifying statements: (1) negating the opposite: talking is not allowed; (2a) a positive action as alternative behavior: they are to "be in submission"; (2b) a rationale for the submission: the law says it; (3) such talking in the church is said to be "shameful" (v. 35b). "Women" ought to be read as "wives," since there is only one word for both (γυνᾶικες), and their husbands are mentioned in v. 35. Paul also takes up a hypothetical objection to the rule: what if such women wish to "learn" something (v. 35a)? Answer: they are to ask their husbands (v. 35a). A final justification for the norm is given, which echoes the reference to the precedent of other churches in v. 33b and reminds the Corinthians that it is not their place to be innovators in regard to how the gospel¹⁰ is to be lived out; they are not its authors or its sole recipients (v. 36). In considering this text, one should note the following crucial items:

(1) Paul's command to silence seems at first blush too absolute. Paul does not specify sacral speech (preaching, prophecy), false teaching, or disruption of worship. He seems to prohibit women speaking generally. Yet he never forbids men to speak altogether when there are false teachers who are men (as at Galatia). Neither does he forbid glossolalia or prophecy altogether—though there are similar commands to "silence" for such speech when it is disruptive. This counts heavily against theories that Paul is here banning women from leading, or providing false teaching, or even from being merely disruptive. It has been suggested that the word for women "speaking" used here suggests trivial "chattering," in the same way that λαλεῖν was used for instance in Aristophanes.¹¹ However, the problem with this theory is that the same verb is used by Paul for legitimate prophesying and speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14:2-4, 27, 29).

(2) There are, however, a few clues as to what it is about women's speaking in a worship assembly that has drawn forth this comment:

(a) The alternative posed is for them to "be subject" (or "submit themselves," though how or to whom Paul never says explicitly).
 (b) He addresses an excuse for speech: to ask questions (v. 34). Is this what caused the offense to begin with, women asking questions? Or is this only a hypothetical case? (c) In the case of having questions, Paul poses the alternative, for women to ask "their own husbands" at home "if they wish to learn something" (see point 5 below). (d) The

10. Literally, "the word of God," which is probably meant to include the gospel proper (redemption through faith in Jesus as Son of God) but broader in that it has in view Christian "instruction," which includes for instance ethical issues.

11. For example, in Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae* 393, a woman gives a list of ill traits that Euripides attributes to women in general, blackening their character. One such trait is that women are τὰς λάλους, "blabbermouths," using a noun built on the same stem as the verb λαλέω.

behavior that is being prohibited is labeled "shameful" in Greek (see point 4 below), a powerful mark of dishonor in this culture.

(3) Paul's command to silence must be understood as not conflicting with his earlier allusion to women prophesying and praying, for at least three reasons. First, if Paul wrote this passage it is a reasonable assumption that he has not changed his mind about what is given in 11:5. Second, there is no evidence—apart from one interpretation of this disputed text—that female prophesying per se was ever condemned in the first two centuries. On the contrary, there is evidence it was viewed positively at first. Acts 21:8-9 mentions four daughters of Philip the evangelist who prophesied. In the latter half of the second century, Montanus is said to have justified his prophetesses with reference to the example of Philip's daughters, implying that the church of his day revered their memory.¹² Eusebius in the fourth century mentions these women admiringly, along with a second-century prophetess named Ammia; and Chrysostom also, though keen on women's silence in his generation, acknowledged that both men and women prophesied in NT times.¹³ The earliest Christian texts that criticize women prophets do so for their association with heretics and false teaching,¹⁴ or for their greed.¹⁵ Never in the earliest years of the church are they criticized because they prophesied as women, nor does the basic right of a woman to prophesy ever enter the discussion. The earliest patristic text I can find that says that women ought not to prophesy because they are women and their speaking is shameful is Origen, writing in the first half of the third century. And even Origen acknowledges that women had been granted the potential to prophesy in apostolic times; yet he argues that it is "shameful for a woman to speak in the assembly," using Paul against himself, as it were.¹⁶ In later years prophesying in general came under increasing suspicion, no matter what the gender of the prophet.

Third, Paul exhorts the entire Christian community to "seek to prophesy" both prior to and immediately following this injunction to women (14:1, 5, 39; implied at 14:12). In none of these places does he explicitly delimit this, as if it were for men only. It would be strange

12. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 5.17; Epiphanius, *Medicine Box* 49; Claude Jenkins, "Documents: Origen on 1 Corinthians," *JTS* 10 (1909): frg. 74 (pp. 41-42).

13. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 3.31.2-5; 3.37.1; 5.17; Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 26 (on 1 Cor 11:4).

14. E.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1:13.

15. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 18.

16. Jenkins, "Documents," frgs. 73, 74 (pp. 41-42); C. Robeck, ed., *Charismatic Experiences in History* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1985), 116. Origen attempts to dismiss examples of prophetesses in scripture—probably used as standard arguments by the Montanists—by claiming these women only spoke to private individuals, never to a nation or a worship assembly (Jenkins, frg. 74).

should the apostle have said, "Seek especially, everyone, to prophesy. . . . I would rather that you [plural] prophesy. . . . No, women must not prophesy. . . . My brothers (and sisters),¹⁷ do all of you seek to prophesy. . . ."

(4) The women's behavior is labeled "shameful" (14:35). This strong term is an important clue in a culture that is highly concerned about shame and honor. What is it about women speaking that is "shameful" here? For men in the Greek world, "shame" was most frequently associated with cowardice, as a few times in the LXX also (2 Sam 19:4) and failure to perform one's duty. In Jewish and early Christian literature it is also connected with an awareness of one's fallenness and moral failure before God and before humanity. For a woman, the term in Greek literature was most frequently associated with sexual misconduct or with being treated (even unwillingly) in a way that violated the integrity of the home and called into question her chastity or sole allegiance to her husband. Women's shame affected their husbands' honor, thus bringing shame on the whole household. This holds true for modern Mediterranean peoples as well.¹⁸

Philo, in discussing laws dealing with prostitution and adultery, holds that a woman who engages in such acts shames herself and her family. The woman accused of adultery "endures two dangers: one is to lose her life, and the other is to shame her whole life, which is more painful than death itself."¹⁹

Paul never uses the term "shameful" to describe the abuse of glossolalia or prophecy in 14:1-33a. Neither does he ever call false teaching "shameful," though he can say of some that they "glory in their shame" (Phil 3:8, probably referring to their obsession with the condition of their genitals). Neither would the word "shameful" fit the situation if the problem were simply disruptive chatter. This could be dealt with by a simple call to order and quiet, as in the case of multiple prophecies or glossolalia when they occur simultaneously (14:27-31).

If the "shamefulness" of women's speaking is that they have somehow dishonored their husbands by demonstrating more authority than their husbands in the assembly, by passing judgment on their own husbands' prophetic messages, or some other challenge to male authority,²⁰ then it is difficult to see how the husbands are honored by

17. There is no reason to doubt that Paul uses ἀδελφοί ("brothers" or "siblings" generally) in its usual, inclusive sense here.

18. David Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society: The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 140, 147 (on female honor in Athens), 60-61 (on female honor and sexual purity in modern Mediterranean societies).

19. Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.54 (author's trans.).

20. As per Thrall, Grudem, Carson, Witherington, and others: see n. 7 above.

being so maltreated "at home" instead of in public (v. 35). Paul's advice would not really alleviate the problem of male honor or status vis-à-vis the wife but only make a husband's humiliation a little more private.

Is there anything in the passage itself that suggests that the "shame" arises from a more common source, a threat to the reputation of some women, which in turn would threaten the integrity of the household and the honor of their husbands? Such a threat would explain the tone of Paul's words here, the use of the shame-language in regard to women, and the reference to the practice of other churches (as the cultural norm) in v. 36.

(5) In v. 35 Paul adds that women are to direct their speech to *their own* husbands, making an implied contrast to speaking to *other men*. The assumption that Paul is implying this is strengthened by his emphatic use of ἰδίους ("[their] own"), a word not otherwise necessary to the sense of the passage. The Greek NT commonly signifies possession with αὐτός in the genitive or sometimes dative case (e.g., τοὺς ἄνδρας αὐτῶν). The word ἰδίους is more striking than αὐτῶν; the former term stresses the nature of an object as unique to an individual, as belonging to one's private and personal affairs.²¹ Compare Paul's use of the term in Rom 8:32 ("God's *very own* Son"); 10:3 ("*their own* righteousness," as opposed to God's); 14:4 ("*his own* master," not another). Earlier in the letter Paul had advised, "every man should have *his own* (ἑαυτοῦ) wife, and every woman should have *her own husband*" (τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα, 1 Cor 7:2; the very same phrase—except in the singular—as in 14:35). Paul's solution in chap. 14 strongly emphasizes wives' relating only to their very own husbands and in the context of their own household. This implies that women were speaking to nonfamily males during the worship assembly and recalls the problems in marital relations of 7:2-7, 12-16. Paul indicates to them that even if this speaking was for the high purpose of learning—something Christianity neither forbade nor discouraged—it could not be with nonfamily males.

(6) One other thing in the passage seems to support this exegesis. In v. 34 Paul cites "the Law" but *not in support of his primary injunction to silence*. Instead "the Law" is brought in to support his secondary injunction, "let them be in submission," which seems to be given as the alternative to "speaking." Paul is attempting to restore order where there is some threat to the boundaries of marriage or proper male-female relations. Indeed, the Greek imperative usually translated "let them be in submission" or some such (ὑποτασθήσθωσαν) strongly suggests being in the right order and in one's proper place.

21. See LSJ s.v. ἴδιος.

Was the women's behavior perceived as violating their relationship to their husbands?

(7) Since 11:2, Paul has been dealing with behaviors that disrupt the community at worship through selfish indulgences (dress and demeanor, failure to share food at the Lord's table, despising certain members, and self-centered and elitist display of supposedly spiritual manifestations). They are counter to his goal that worship-assemblies "build up" believers (14:3, 5, 12, 26). Some of these behaviors arise from expressions of "spiritual gifts" but not all of them. This concern with right order during the worship-assemblies is manifested several times in the context surrounding these words to women (14:23, 27-33, 40). Some sort of ordinary speech by the women to men who were not their husbands was perceived by Paul to be "shameful," to be contrary to the goal of "building up," and to be contravening boundaries of male-female relationships for married women. Further, it was seen as a threat to their traditional relationship with their husbands. Paul's concluding admonition in 14:40, "Everything must be done in a respectable²² and in an orderly way," applies to the material of chap. 11 as well as that of chap. 14. It is simply not true to assert, as some do, that the words of 14:34-35 have no connection to their context.²³

WOMEN AND THEIR SPEAKING IN GREEK SOCIETY

We next turn to examining the place of women's speech in the two main cultures that shaped Corinth and its Christians—Roman and Greek—to see what light they may throw on this problem.²⁴

22. Paul uses the word *euschēmonōs* (εὐσχημόνως) for what worship ought to be like, which suggests something like good manners, dignity, and respectability all together. Liddell, Scott, Jones, & McKenzie's *Greek-English Lexicon* (9th rev. ed.) suggests "with grace and dignity, like a gentleman"; for the cognate verb εὐσχημονέω, "to behave with decorum."

23. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 701.

24. Bruce Winter has recently argued that the culture of Corinth in Paul's day was predominantly, and nearly exclusively, Roman rather than Greek. For example, "Corinth invariably took its cue from Roman and not Greek culture" (*After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 12). However, I believe he has exaggerated his case and minimized evidence of the use of Greek language and Hellenization of the population, particularly among the lower classes in Paul's day. In addition, "Roman" culture had already been extensively influenced by Greek culture during the more than half a millennium of contact that preceded Paul's visit to Corinth. Witness for example the temples to Apollo and Dionysus in Rome, the former (re)built by Augustus on the Palatine. On this theme in religion, see Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, eds., *Religions of Rome* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1:172. Therefore, I make no apology for resorting to Greek as well as Roman sources to illustrate the culture of the common person in this city.

MUNDANE SPEECH AND INTERACTION WITH MEN

Greek literature describes as an ideal the woman who worked in the home, helped manage her husband's affairs, and was secluded from all contact with men who were not her immediate relations. This picture is constant in traditional Greek homelands (Magna Graeca, the Greek mainland and islands, Asia Minor) from a very ancient time until after the first century of this era. The good wife did not accompany her husband when he went out in public, whether the occasion was political, business, shopping, or social entertainment. In fact, it was considered shameful for a wife to appear with her husband at a party and drink in public; this was what prostitutes did. Demosthenes attacked a foreigner wedded to an Athenian with the accusation, ". . . the defendant Neaera drank and dined with them in the presence of many men, as any courtesan would do" (*Against Neaera* 24). In Attic vase-painting, this same ideal is apparent, for the virtuous wife is never pictured at a banquet (*symposion*) with men; only prostitutes are seen entertaining their clients there.²⁵ This contrasts somewhat with the Roman attitude, as seen in Cornelius Nepos's comment on the social differences between Romans and Greeks:

Much that in Rome we hold to be correct is thought shocking in Greece. No Roman thinks it an embarrassment to take his wife to a dinner party. At home the wife holds first place in the house and is the centre of its social life. Things are very different in Greece, where the wife is never present at dinner, unless it is a family party, and spends all her time in a remote part of the house called The Women's Quarter, which is never entered by a man unless he is a very close relation.²⁶

As this passage indicates, Greek husbands held that it was dishonorable and shameful for their wives to be seen by, or speak to, other men. The women had a separate section of the house, usually as far from the street and the entertaining areas of the home as possible,

25. On the *hetairai* (ἑταίραι, prostitutes and entertainers) at symposia on vase and cup paintings, see Dyfri Williams, "Women on Athenian Vases: Problems of Interpretation," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* (ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt; London: Routledge, 1993), 92-106; Elaine Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World: Image and Text* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 115-18.

26. Cornelius Nepos, *Praef.* 6f; apud J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their History and Habits* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1962), 201; cf. G. Clark, "Roman Women," in *Women in Antiquity* (ed. Ian McAuslan and Peter Walcot; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 44.

sometimes on a separate floor or with entirely separate entrances.²⁷ Indoors is where women were meant to live and work, we are told by the sources—an attitude strangely still held in twentieth-century rural Greek villages—for this not only befitted their "weaker" nature, it also served to protect them from the advances of other men.²⁸

In correlation with this, classical writers often regard women's appearing in public for profane (i.e., nonreligious) reasons as a dangerous thing, risking dishonor or adulterous liaisons. Lysias argues that the beginning of the downfall of one client's wife was when she appeared in public for a funeral, where Eratosthenes (her future lover) spied her and plotted to seduce her.²⁹ Aristophanes expresses an Athenian husband's typical suspicion that a wife who has gone out in the early morning hours must have been to a rendezvous with some lover.³⁰

And finally, if a woman should have occasion to set foot outside the house, she was expected not to speak to men.³¹ "It is shameful for a wife [or woman: γυνή] to be standing with young men," writes Euripides.³² To speak with a man was almost tantamount to making a sexual advance on him; it crossed the social boundary set up around modest and virtuous women, especially married women. Such conversation signaled a woman's leaving her sphere of protection and inviting the attention of others—attention that was viewed as dangerous.

Two writers of the early Imperial era, Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom, illustrate that this attitude persisted among upper-class Greeks down to the second century AD. In his *Advice to Bride and Groom* (written in the late first century), Plutarch writes:

27. For an example of the upper story's being used for the women, see Lysias 1.9. On the evidence for Greek homes with separate entrances, see Susan Walker, "Women and Housing in Classical Greece: The Archaeological Evidence," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* (ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt; London: Routledge, 1993), 81-91. Walker describes three fifth-century houses, two in Attica and one in Euboea. Xenophon's example of the ideal husband tells Socrates that the women's quarters are separated from the men's quarters in his house by a bolted door (*Oeconomicus* 9.5), although the reasons given there are "so that nothing which ought not to be moved may be taken out, and that the servants may not breed without our leave." Cf. Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 103.

28. E.g., Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 7.22-43; Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society*, 147. For modern Greece: Jill Dubisch, "Women, Food, and Social Boundaries," in *Gender and Power in Rural Greece* (ed. J. Dubisch; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 200.

29. Lysias 1.8.

30. Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 520-32.

31. Sue Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 135-36; Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 101-2.

32. Euripides, *Electra* 343-44; cf. *Iphigenia in Aulis* 821-34.

Not only the virtuous woman's forearm should be withheld, but *not even her speech should be public, and she ought to guard her voice from [being heard by] outsiders, regarding this with the same shame that she would if she were stripped naked before them*, for her emotion, character, and disposition are seen by her talking.

Pheidias³³ made the Aphrodite of the Eleans with one foot on a tortoise, to typify for womankind keeping at home and keeping silence. For a woman ought to do her talking either to her husband or through her husband, and she should not feel aggrieved if, like the flute-player, she makes a more impressive sound through a tongue not her own.³⁴

And he adds that, for women, "*If they subordinate themselves [ὑποτάττουσαι] to their husbands they are praised*, but if they want to rule they are even more disgraceful than those who are ruled by them."³⁵ Notice how Plutarch highlights the immodesty of a woman's speaking to "outsiders" by comparing this action to being stripped naked, like the prostitutes and flute-girls painted on drinking cups and vases. A woman speaking too freely, outside the home, carries a sense of sexual danger: she invites adulterous attention. The action also may be shaming the husband, if his wife's speaking suggests her independence and his weakness. The counterbalance Plutarch proposes to the woman's public speaking is twofold: that she make herself heard through her husband and that she be "subordinate" to him, amazingly similar to Paul's injunction in 1 Corinthians.

Dio Chrysostom, in his first Tarsian oration (early second century or possibly late first century) praises the women of Tarsus for their customs and modesty. In particular, he praises them that their *face as well as their entire body is covered when they go out* and that they look only at the pathway straight ahead when they walk in public (*Oration* 33.48-49). Whether or not this is an "oriental" custom,³⁶ it is notable that Dio praises it as characteristic of women's "self-control and severity (τὸ σωφρον καὶ τὸ ἀυστηρὸν)," an echo of past days when their society was known for its "well-orderedness" (εὐταξία; 33.48). He finds nothing strange or unusual about it. Again, we find a Greek attitude that echoes Paul's Jewish concern for women's modesty (veiling, avoiding contact with men) and loyalty to their husbands. And it is plain from writers like Plutarch and Dio that the concern is not

33. Pheidias was a famous Greek sculptor, and the Aphrodite was one of his statues.

34. Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom* 142C—E; translation adapted from that of E. C. Babbitt in the Loeb series. See *De Genio Socratis* 598C for another story illustrating the ideal of the normally silent women, from the history of Thebes.

35. Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom* 142E.

36. As J. W. Cohoon and H. L. Crosby suggest in the Loeb edition (*Dio Chrysostom*, vol. 3 [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940], 319 n. 2).

simply for the woman herself but for the potential her behavior has to cause shame to her husband and family. S. Pomeroy's study of marriage contracts from Hellenistic Egypt (reflecting the Macedonian and Greek upper classes) revealed several recurring elements, one of which is that the wife promised to do nothing to dishonor her husband. Dishonor might be caused not only by adultery (often cited explicitly in the marriage contract) but also such things as immodest public dress or behavior or scolding him in public.³⁷ And comparison with modern Mediterranean village life, also a shame-honor culture, shows how interlinked are the honor of a woman and her family: "the reputation of a family rests in significant measure upon the public evaluation of the behavior of its women," writes Cohen.³⁸

This view of women is fairly well documented in classical writers and up until about twenty years ago was widely agreed upon by historians as expressing the reality of women's lives with few exceptions. Yet other evidence indicates that not all women lived up to this upper-class ideal. Slave women, most obviously, were not subject to the same social restrictions that married citizens and other free women were. Indeed, they could not be, for they were their mistresses' principal means of communication with the outside world. The maids fetched water from public fountains,³⁹ went on errands, carried messages to and from lovers,⁴⁰ and apparently did other business for their family in public without any sense of shame or impropriety. Next we must think of wives of farmers in the countryside, who must have participated with their husbands in outdoor work—especially in poorer families—in order to ensure that plowing and harvesting were accomplished.⁴¹ And whether in country or city, the distribution of a household's work along male-female lines was often ignored when it came to slaves.⁴² Poor women living in town had to work outside the home, often selling things in the market place; and the evidence of tombstones and vase-paintings testifies to lower-class wives' working

37. Sarah Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt from Alexander to Cleopatra* (New York: Schocken, 1984), 98.

38. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society*, 50; cf. pp. 45, 56.

39. As pictured on vases; an example occurs in Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 108.

40. Lysias 1.8, 20. In Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, even a prostitute is shown sending out a slave to purchase wool, to communicate with or spy on a client, rather than the mistress's going herself (2.3; 9.1-2; 10.2).

41. Walter Scheidel, "The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labour and Women's Life in the Ancient World," *Greece and Rome* 42 (1995): 202-17; 43 (1996): 1-10; see esp. 42:207-8, 210-11; 43:1-3.

42. Scheidel suggests comparison with other—though later—slave-owning societies (*ibid.*, 208-10).

alongside their husbands.⁴³ Yet it was regarded as humiliating for a woman to work or sell in public; the implication is that, if she were from the right sort of people, with the right sort of husband, she would not have to work.⁴⁴

The evidence of the Greek world, taken as a whole, indicates that even in classical times not all women were kept in the house, out of public view. Those who did live this way would generally be free women whose husbands possessed significant financial means. Due to their husbands' income and their supply of slave labor they did not need to sully themselves by mixing with the crowds, and their "seclusion" thus became a status symbol.⁴⁵ Such women, however, must have left the home for a variety of social and religious purposes. Even in classical Athens, women always had free access to travel to other women's homes—to help in the birth of a new baby, to tend the sick, to share gossip with a friend. They had access to temples and could be away from home for several days for some religious festivals (e.g., the Thesmophoria). It is a standard of Greek comedy that women used all the above as excuses to meet lovers, indicating that they were not truly housebound.

Pomeroy's aforementioned study demonstrated that women in Hellenistic Egypt—particularly the Greeks and Macedonians who formed the upper classes—seem to have exercised more legal power and to have had stronger bargaining positions in marriage than in any other location around the Mediterranean in the Hellenistic age, only to be equalled by women in Rome during the Imperial era.⁴⁶ Ramsay MacMullen has shown that in the Greek east during the Roman period there was much more participation by women in the civic realm than older studies had thought.⁴⁷ Through a careful analysis of inscriptions and coins, he shows that women erected public buildings, held civic offices, served as benefactresses, and served as

43. Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 106-9, citing Aristotle, *Politics* 1300a; Demosthenes 57.31-34, 45; Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1396-98; *Lysistrata* 447-48; *Thesmophoria* 443-58; and the evidence of vase-paintings. Wife and husband co-workers mentioned in Mary Lefkowitz, "Wives and Husbands," *Greece and Rome* 30 (1983): 44.

44. Obviously there were exceptions to this, as when a widow took control of a successful and wealthy enterprise. But note Aristophanes' (untrue) jibe that Euripides' mother sold vegetables, thus denigrating her whole family: *Acharnians* 478; *Knights* 19; *Thesmophoriazusae* 455-56.

45. David Cohen, "Seclusion, Separation, and the Status of Women in Classical Athens," *Greece and Rome* 36 (1989): 3-15; Susan Walker, "Women and Housing in Classical Greece: The Archaeological Evidence," 81.

46. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, 86-89, citing P Elephantine 1; *P Tebtunis* 1:104.

47. Ramsay MacMullen, "Women in Public in the Roman Empire," *Historia* 29 (1980): 208-18. Compare Pomeroy's remarks on women's participation in the economic life of Hellenistic Egypt (*Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, 171).

priestesses of important civic cults. They certainly were not serving in equal numbers with men, but they were there. One study of coins from 13 cities of the eastern provinces produced the names of 13 women who served in the highest civic posts, compared with 214 men.⁴⁸ They served as eponymous magistrates (i.e., their names are used to date events in the city) and as high priestesses of the imperial cult or other important civic cults. This is a great increase over the lack of access women had in classical times. Yet MacMullen also notes evidence of the persistence of older values: "women are rarely found in roles like that of grammateus which would require their speaking in public. They are to be seen, then, but not heard."⁴⁹

SACRAL SPEECH IN THE GREEK EAST

When we turn to sacred functions, persons, and places, it is striking what a difference is to be seen. Even during the classical era—in general a more restrictive time for women everywhere than the first century AD—women are found participating and officiating at every level in religious cults, both private and public. "Whereas inequality between the sexes was the rule in the political sphere, it appears that honors and responsibilities in the religious sphere were divided according to some other principle. Priestesses seem to have had the same rights and duties as priests. . . . Religion offered the only sphere in which Greek women could be treated as citizens."⁵⁰ Married women and virgin maidens appear in sacred processions and serve as hierophants, priestesses, and other functionaries. And this is not only in all-woman events such as the Thesmophoria but in mixed-gender settings as well. Blundell reports that more than 40 major cults had priestesses attached to them in classical Athens. The most important of these at Athens was the cult of Athena Polias, whose priestess officiated at "the most important of the state festivals," the Great Panathenaea.⁵¹ MacMullen reports that, in Roman times, "Priestesses are

48. MacMullen, "Women," 213, referring to a dissertation by K. W. Harl; MacMullen also notes that among the praises applied to these benefactresses in inscriptions are a few that are used for their gender only, such as "modesty" (σωφροσύνη).

49. *Ibid.*, 216.

50. Louise Bruit Zaidman, "Pandora's Daughters and Rituals in Grecian Cities," in *A History of Women in the West*, Vol. 1: *From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints* (ed. Pauline Schmitt Pantel; trans. A. Goldhammer; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1992), 373. Cf. Lysias, *Against Neaera* 110-11. See also Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 83, though their emphasis is on the contribution of all-female festivals to the Greek social world. Robin Osborne defends women's participation in sacrifice and the distribution of meat following the average sacrifice in "Women and Sacrifice in Classical Greece," *Classical Quarterly* 43 (1993): 392-405.

51. Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 161.

seen aloft on a throne in the theater, there to preside over the shows, or are crowned by the city or by the women and men of some cult group, or even thrice honorably received by the emperor himself; the deity they serve, they serve on an equal footing with priests; or they alone must preside over certain religious associations."⁵²

In Hellenistic Egypt we have other examples of prominent priestesses, also eponymous—including three who introduce the dating formula on the Rosetta Stone.⁵³ In Alexandria, as in other centers of Greek culture, "religion was the only state-supported activity that reserved an official place for women."⁵⁴ Women served a number of official positions in the cult of Isis, both in Egypt and the many places around the Roman Empire where it spread. Corinth knew this cult, for an Isaeum existed at Cenchreae, one of its harbors. Isis was particularly popular with women, who also contributed a large percentage of the dedications to Isis in the Hellenistic and Roman eras.⁵⁵

At Corinth there was a large *temenos* (or sacred precinct) devoted to Demeter and Kore, in use both in ancient times and after the Roman refounding of the city.⁵⁶ The public rites of Demeter were always administered by a woman. Mystery cults were also attached to Demeter (and Kore and Pluto, accompanying deities) in many places throughout the empire. At the most famous of these, the Eleusinian mysteries held near Athens, we have evidence that female ministrants (the "priestess," ἱεροφάντις, and "torch-bearer," δαδούχουσα) were essential for initiation into and celebration of these mysteries. One *hierophantis* claims in an inscription that she herself had crowned the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus with the garland that marked one's initiation.⁵⁷ There is no literary or inscriptional evidence as to what sort of rites were celebrated at Corinth, but the in-

52. MacMullen, "Women," 215.

53. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, 55-59.

54. *Ibid.*, 59.

55. Though never more than men do, Pomeroy notes, most likely due to their more limited finances (*Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, 39). A priestess of Isis is pictured on a mural from Herculaneum officiating alongside a priest at some ritual: R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 23.

56. C. K. Williams II, "The Refounding of Corinth: Some Roman Religious Attitudes," in *Roman Architecture in the Greek World* (ed. S. Macready and F. H. Thompson; London: The Society of Antiquaries, 1987), 26-37; Ronald Stroud, "The Sanctuary of Demeter on Acrocorinth in the Roman Period," in *The Corinthia in the Roman Period* (ed. Timothy E. Gregory; Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 8; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 65-74. Nancy Bookidis, one of the chief excavators, mentioned at her address at the SBL convention in November 2000 that cookware and terra-cotta grills from the early Roman era had been recovered from the sanctuary.

57. George Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 231.

creased emphasis on the chthonic aspects of this cult in Roman times would fit with a tendency to multiply mystery cults in Roman times.

In Greek oracles and prophecy, women figure prominently. At Delphi it was a prophetess, the Pythia, who sat on the sacred tripod and was regarded as the instrument of the god Apollo. Questions were put to her written on slips, and she gave the answer. This ancient oracle had at one time been so much in demand that it employed three prophetesses, though by the end of the first century of our era it seemed to be drying up and had few visitors.⁵⁸ The oracle of Zeus at Dodona--which claimed to be the oldest—was served in classical times by a triad of priestesses who were called "doves."⁵⁹

These are only a portion of the possible examples, and we have not even considered cults that were exclusively for women.

WOMEN AND THEIR SPEAKING IN ROMAN SOCIETY

Mundane Speech and Interaction with Men

It is well known that in the period of the empire in Rome especially and throughout Italy generally, society allowed greater freedom of movement for women in public. In Rome "women went out of the house in order to shop, to go to the baths, to pay social calls, to worship at temples or to attend some public spectacle. The wives of clients were sometimes dragged round by their husbands when they called upon their patrons, in order that they might claim a larger dole. With greater decorum, wives went with their husbands to dinner parties."⁶⁰ Women attended the theater and chariot-races at the circus.⁶¹ Apparently such behavior was not thought immodest. Roman satirists excoriate women who have (in their view) too much learning and too inflated a view of themselves, and who trot out their knowledge of oratory or history or philosophy or politics in front of men at banquets or other social occasions. Such satire shows that, annoying as a man might find it, educated upper-class women began to feel free to converse intelligently with men who were not family members. At Pompeii women might voice their opinions about political candidates in graffiti on the walls, even if they were only slaves; women made small loans; women sold property "of middling size or

58. Plutarch, *On the Obsolescence of Oracles* 411E, 414B; Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 161.

59. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (trans. J. Raffan; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 114; Herodotus 2.54-57; Pausanias 10.12.10. Plato groups the prophetesses of Dodona with the one at Delphi as illustrating that "the greatest blessings come by way of madness" sent to them from the gods (*Phaedrus* 244b-c).

60. Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 277, cf. 200-201; Clark, "Roman Women," 44.

61. Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 278-79.

less"; women administered estates, rented properties, and sued debtors in court.⁶² Women in the empire served as patronesses or benefactors to workers' guilds, *collegia*, and cities, and were honored in civic dedications to them.⁶³ And turning to the legal system, we find that women began appearing in court to plead their own cases for the first time in the late Republic, though this was always a rare event and gave the writers who reported it a shudder.⁶⁴

On the other hand, there is evidence that the older conservative values continued to be held up in many ways. Inscriptions on tombstones maintain an almost identical list of virtues as praise for the good wife in both the republic and the empire, whether aristocratic or poor: she was faithful to her husband, hard-working, modest, decent, beautiful, home-loving, and (for wealthy women) one who managed carefully the husband's property and slaves.⁶⁵ Suspicions about what women got up to when they left home under some religious excuse are voiced by the satirists, in terms reminiscent of Greek sentiments.⁶⁶ Though women might appear more often in active roles in civic life, they were still discriminated against. MacMullen finds that, in the case of civic banquets where food was publicly distributed (usually on the occasion of a religious festival for the patron deity of a city), "not only were women, more often than not, excluded altogether from these occasions . . . if they were indeed invited, they were generally put at the bottom of the pecking order." Fantham et al. hold that women could not hold a civic office in Italy.⁶⁷ Their power and influence and the honors they received from cities were due to their use of personal or family wealth. As Gillian Clark comments on Roman women's status:

Women did not vote, did not serve as *iudices*, were not senators or magistrates or holders of major priesthoods. They did not, as a rule, speak in the courts. . . . As a rule, women took no part in public life, except on the rare occasions when they were angry enough to demonstrate, which was startling and shocking. . . . Women might, then, have considerable influence and interests outside their homes and families, but they were acting from within their families to affect social system managed by men: their influence was not to be publicly acknowledged.⁶⁸

62. MacMullen, "Women," 209-10; Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 334, 336.

63. *Ibid.*, *Women in the Classical World*, 365-68; MacMullen, "Women," 211.

64. Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 273; Clark, "Roman Women," 49.

65. Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 318-20, 369.

66. Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 278.

67. Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 366.

68. Clark, "Roman Women," 49-50.

And it should be noted that women from the lower classes would certainly not have experienced the same social freedoms that wealth and aristocratic lineage brought to the few. For poor free women in the countryside, as well as slave and freedwomen, we find as in the case of Greece that they worked outdoors alongside the men. Varro writes of women working with shepherds, cooking meals, carrying firewood, and tending the field huts.⁶⁹

Women in Roman Religion

When we turn from imperial Roman social practices to the civic religion, there was not the same access for women as we find in the Greek world. The civic cults were mostly controlled by men. Beard et al. observe:

In general, however, although the *attendance* of women at most religious occasions (including the *ludi*) was not prohibited, they had little opportunity to take any active religious role in state cults. So, for example, the occupational or burial associations in the penumbra of the civic cults did not generally include women; only in the purely domestic associations of the great households were women normally members. Much more fundamentally (though the evidence is not entirely clear), they may have been banned—in theory, at any rate—from carrying out animal sacrifice; and so prohibited from any officiating role in the central defining ritual of civic religious activity.⁷⁰

In Rome there were the Vestal Virgins, who made sure the sacred fire never went out in the temple of Vesta. "Their presence was necessary at a number of the most deeply-rooted religious ceremonies of the State."⁷¹ They possessed an unusual legal independence and wealth, not to mention social status, by virtue of their cultic position.⁷² Yet most of the ceremonies they performed were either done by themselves, without any reverent onlookers, or were carried out in all-female groups (such as at the festival of Bona Dea).

69. Varro, *On Agriculture* 2.10.6-8; cf. Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World*, 267-68.

70. Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 1:297. On women and sacrifice, see also Plutarch, *Roman Questions* 85 (= *Moralia* 284F); and J. Scheid ("The Religious Roles of Roman Women," in *From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints* [vol. 1 of *A History of Women in the West*, ed. Pauline Schmitt Pantel; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1992], 379-80), who discusses possible cases of Vestals presiding over and/or conducting sacrifice.

71. Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 235.

72. Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken, 1975), 211, 213; Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 235-43.

There were two other priestesses who had some prominence in Roman life. The wives of the Flamen Dialis and the rex sacrorum--the *flaminica Dialis* and *regina sacrorum*, respectively—held office by virtue of their marriages. They may have had the right to sacrifice; and they were regarded as forming together with their husbands a kind of integrated pair, whereby both are necessary to carry out the office. These and the Vestals are notable exceptions to the usual Roman practice, which was from ancient times that all deities, whether gods or goddesses, were served by male priests.

Finally, there was the important post of the priestess of Ceres, the only woman after the Vestals who presided over a state cult.⁷³ By the first century BC the cult had been highly Hellenized, imitating the Eleusinian mysteries. Yet men were excluded from these rites, so male–female segregation is again confirmed here. From the third century BC on, it was priestesses taken from Magna Graeca who carried out the office.⁷⁴ Hence, in its new Greek dress, the worship of Ceres had become tantamount to a foreign cult, like that of Isis. Its foreignness allowed it to operate with different rules, without challenging traditional Roman rites and values. Scheid's opinion is characteristic of many: Roman women did not have the power to speak in the name of a community, to issue commands, or represent the community as a whole.⁷⁵

There were certain all-female celebrations⁷⁶ at which women had more freedom, such as the Bona Dea, the Nonae Caprotinae, and the Matronalia. However, these seem to have expressed in cultic form a segregation of the sexes. Women did have sacral functions but exercised only in the presence of other women.

When it came to household religion, the *paterfamilias* was "high priest" of his home; he led the family in daily prayers and, when required, made offerings to the *lares*, the family's ancestral deities, or any other minor deity as the occasion should require (e.g., gods of planting, harvesting). It was the wife's duty to clean and care for the *lararium*, the shrine for the *lares*, which might consist of a niche in the wall of the kitchen or an altar in the atrium. The wife does, however, seem to have been responsible for at least one offering a month at the time of the new moon (i.e., calends), usually some fruit, honey, bread, milk, or wine.⁷⁷

73. Pomeroy, *Goddesses* 214.

74. Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 1:71; Pomeroy, *Goddesses* 215-16.

75. Scheid, "The Religious Roles of Roman Women," 406.

76. Even these were often restricted to married women, free women, or aristocratic women.

77. Robert Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 29-31, 14-18; David G. Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion: The Evidence of the Household Shrines," *ANRW* 11.16.2:1557-91.

There seems to be nothing in traditional Roman religion that parallels the role of the priestesses at oracular shrines in the Greek world, or the exalted position of the priestess of Demeter and the *hierophantis* at Eleusis, or a number of other priestesses at other sites where both sexes worshiped. When we finally come across a woman with a prominent role at a religious site frequented by both men and women, it is either an entirely foreign import (as with the cult of Isis), or has been deliberately remodeled to conform to foreign standards (e.g., the temple of Ceres).

WOMEN IN THE SYNAGOGUE

Jewish practice, as defined by the traditional rabbinic literature written down after the second century AD (Mishnah, Talmud), prohibited women from participating in leadership in a worship service or teaching scripture.⁷⁸ The impression this literature gives is that women should not, and did not, play any part in a synagogue service other than as passive listeners. However, inscriptional material provides evidence that some women in some places did serve as patronesses of local synagogues in the diaspora, providing funds for building and maintenance; and held positions in at least some synagogues, which probably involved administration of finances, participation in a judicial council, and perhaps reading scripture or even exhortation.⁷⁹ Their titles include "elder," "mother of the synagogue," "leader," and "head of synagogue."⁸⁰ All of the evidence for these titles, except that of "priest," comes from outside Palestine: Italy, Asia Minor, Crete, Thrace, and Thessaly.⁸¹ Perhaps in the diaspora the synagogues felt free to follow a different practice than that pursued in Palestine. Away from the centers of power of conservative thought, and influenced by surrounding cultures, the synagogues allowed women to lead in financial patronage and to participate as honored leaders in the running of the synagogue.⁸² It may also be significant that, while in Palestine the synagogue was only one small part of the total cultural life for a Jew, in the diaspora the synagogue was the center of all Jewish social life and religious identity, an

78. Judith Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 6, 146-47, 153-54; Ross Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 104.

79. Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982); see esp. pp. 20-21, 32-33, 38-39, 55, 78.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*, 78-99.

82. Compare similar thoughts in Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 123.

island in a sea of Gentiles. This may have increased pressure on the institution outside Palestine to give some representation to women in leading roles.

COMPARATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY NOTES

Twentieth-century studies of modern Mediterranean village societies show surprisingly similar results as to both the ideals for and the actual behavior of women, particularly when compared with the ancient Greek model. As in the first century, these small village societies operate on a "shame/honor" basis, in which ethical decision-making is governed largely by whether the individuals believe a course of action will cause shame or will improve their reputation in the eyes of the community. The honor of the woman is in a sense central to the honor of her husband and her entire household in such societies. Her honor and reputation can be lost by losing her sexual purity; or, one should say, losing it and having the community discover this. If she is dishonored, so is her husband, father, brother(s), and son(s), who have failed to guard her or inspire her sufficiently. However, given the nature of the way a shame/honor community operates, *the issue is not so much the actual behavior as the perception*. If the community believes that a woman has committed adultery or is having questionable meetings with a man, then that very belief is enough for her and her husband to lose honor and reputation. Juliet Du Boulay, after her study of a Greek village in the 1960s, put it this way:

Because it is the community rather than the individual that is the custodian of social values, the villager's honour is, broadly speaking, something which is granted him by public opinion and which may not be possessed in defiance of it. A man who is denied a reputation for honour by the community has, except in a very specialized sense which will be discussed later, no honour. Avoidance of social condemnation therefore equals retention of honour, rather than avoidance of doing wrong. Thus it comes about that there is a very significant sense in which *it is considered more important to be seen to be honourable than it is actually to be so*, and the villager passes much of his time in trying to extract from public opinion by whatever means he can (including lying and deceit) such a reputation. The result of such a situation is that, although theoretically it is the reality of honour that is considered to be fundamental to personality, it is in practice the appearance of honour which is in this society the vital arbitrator of behaviour.⁸³

83. Juliet Du Boulay, *Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 81.

This concern for the *appearance* of one's behavior (and its interpretation) by the community, coupled with a concern for preserving one's honor, was clearly a concern for ancient Greeks and Romans as well.⁸⁴ And it is a concern for Paul that the Corinthian community—apart from the question of intentions—may be shaming the church as a group in the eyes of its urban neighbors, thus endangering not only their reputation but also the status of the gospel itself. Hence Paul characterizes the women's behavior in house churches as "shameful" (not simply disorderly). Also observed in the 1960s Greek village, as in ancient Greece, was a separation of the sexes in most ordinary social contexts. This was due to the felt need to avoid the danger of compromising situations that would bring dishonor and shame. Women were perceived to be weak, illogical, and sensual, and hence in danger of initiating or giving in to seduction, resulting in loss of honor. Yet a double standard existed whereby a man might show his manliness and *increase* his honor by seducing a woman without getting caught.⁸⁵ The fact that work roles tended to be distinct and divided by gender furthered the lack of contact between the sexes. Behavior by women that took them out of their ordinary path in any way (taking too long collecting water, being gone from the house too often or at odd hours) might put them under suspicion by the community. And this was especially so if it was known to involve contact with a man, however casual. To quote Du Boulay again:

the Greek villager has, with regard to his relationships with women, an attitude which is so dominated by the concept of women as weak and sensual that any possibility of a personal relationship with them which is not physical, or which is not strictly controlled by ideal roles [i.e., father /husband /brother], is completely excluded. . . . Personal relations between all men and women, except those closely related through blood, are thought to be inevitably characterized by overtones of physical sexuality (*πονηρία*, lit. cunning, as it is called); a girl is thought not to be able to have confidence in the honour even of her brother-in-law.⁸⁶

As Cohen has pointed out, the layout of classical Athens gave individual streets and neighborhoods the same sort of closeness as is seen in village life.⁸⁷ The physical proximity of houses, the open doors and /or windows (remember there were no glass windows in antiquity), and the natural inquisitiveness and gossip of people meant that

84. See Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society*, for classical Greece; also essays in Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, for Roman society.

85. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society*, 63-64.

86. Du Boulay, *Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village*, 118-19.

87. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society*, 48-50.

every facet of people's behavior and dress was regularly observed and commented on. As in one modern Italian town studied, "When there are quarrels within the family, when a child is beaten or a woman weeps, the neighbors know immediately."⁸⁸ Life in Corinth must have been identical.

So one can see Paul's concern with behavior at the worship meetings in Corinth. Everyone in the neighborhood of the house that sponsored the church meeting knew that something was going on there. They observed people coming and going—in some cases without their spouses. They heard things going on in the house. The behavior of the women in the assembly was being observed and noted, not only by their fellow believers, but by neighbors and all to whom their gossip should come, including in some cases the non-Christian husbands of these women (cf. 1 Cor 7:13-14). That some Christian women were spurning marital relations with their husbands, dispensing with the veil that marked them as modest and virtuous married women, and then having casual conversation with men who were neither husbands nor close relatives was all clearly material for scandal. All this was on top of the fact that these religious meetings very curiously occurred in a private home (contrary to normal Roman practice) and probably during nonworking hours, which would mean dawn or dusk. Conservative Mediterranean society would surely have labeled the behavior of these women "shameful," like that of an adulteress or a "loose" woman. Paul is concerned for the honor of the women, the women's families, the church meetings, and their host-patron (in whose house the assembly met), and the reputation of the gospel itself. Some gossip-provoking elements may have been unavoidable—such as the hours at which they met—but other elements of the meetings could be controlled so as to fit with societal norms for honorable behavior. This protected the reputation of believers and of the gospel itself.

CONCLUSION

Social expectations in Roman era Corinth for women interacting with men and the attribution of shame or honor to their speaking cannot be reduced to a simple rule but form a complex matrix where several factors come into play simultaneously:

1. Is the speaking to another woman or a man?
2. If to a man, what is the relation of the man to the woman (husband, brother, or father)?

88. *Ibid.*, 50.

3. Location: public or private?
4. Social status of the woman (slave or free? poor, well off, civic elite)?
5. Occupation of the woman?
6. Does the speaking have a sacral purpose/context or other sacral legitimation?
7. Is the speech in connection with some regular religious office or function (priesthood, prophetess, a procession celebrating one of the civic deities, the household cult . . .)?
8. Does the speaking have some other acceptable purpose (e.g., business and trade, or an emergency of some sort)?

We observed above that, in the Greek world, there was a somewhat unexpected shifting of boundaries and roles with regard to women's actions and speech in the area of religion. This shift corresponds exactly to the puzzling statements of Paul to the Corinthians that appear to our cultural eyes to be contradictory: a woman should cover her head when she prophesies or prays; and a woman should not speak at all. The "speech" that is branded "shameful" by Paul in 1 Cor 14 was not sacral speech at all; it was *ordinary conversation with men who were not relatives*. What the content of this conversation was we do not know, for it is not Paul's main concern. The main danger is clear from the fact that Paul turns them away from speaking to men in the assembly, directing them to speak with "their very own personal men" (i.e., husbands) and to do so "at home." Women's leadership is not the issue; rather, it is modesty and honorable behavior.

Of course, this is not to say that it was the Corinthian women's intention to solicit romantic attention from other men. Their behavior could have been given impetus by the boundary confusion noted already, combined with the new social construct that Christians had been given: they are all family; these men are "brothers," and so forth. There could of course have been motives such as the desire for their social interaction to echo the greater freedom they had in sacral speech or a desire to show their freedom in the Spirit from the conventions of Corinth's social matrix (as may have been the case with the church's "pride" concerning the case of incest, 5:1-2), or even a desire for extramarital affairs (following the example of some of the men). Whatever the intentions of the Corinthian women may have been, Paul sees the effects as dangerous. They are violating the cultural boundaries between married men and women, and this is about to bring shame on them, on the church, and on the gospel.

Paul in his judgment on sacral speech seems to follow conventions that are closer to Greek thought than either Roman or Jewish. This may have been in part due to the presence of a large number of

lower class and slave people in the church, whose social networks were heavily Greek. However, early Christian practice also seems to have broken from that of Palestinian Judaism in its inclusion of women praying and prophesying. The book of Acts suggests that this had a theological warrant: the prophets had predicted that God would send his Spirit in the messianic age on all of his people, women included. Prophecy was one manifestation that this had begun, thanks to the risen Jesus (cf. Acts 2:17-21, citing Joel 2:28-32 ET; Paul cites the end of this same passage in Rom 10:13).⁸⁹

Paul is not overreacting here, I think. Evidence of problems related to sexuality and marriage at Corinth are evident in several other places in this letter (1 Cor 5:1; 6:12-20; 7:1-5, 13-14; 11:5-10). On top of these issues that cumulatively represented a real threat both to the reputation of the community and to the well-being of its members' marriages, there were conversations between women and men that Paul judges to be an added danger to the community. They represented a threat to sexual purity and to these women's marriages by inviting inappropriate attention (as seen by Greek and Roman culture). And due to the way this Mediterranean shame-honor culture operated, the behavior risked needlessly bringing shame upon the women, their households, and the Christian community as a whole.

89. We might add that even in Roman religion, there was room for women to have leadership roles in "foreign" cults.