

Women in Pauline Theology: A Realistic Appraisal

Joseph Pathrapankal CMI

Paul had to suffer a raw deal not only at the hands of those sly feminists but also from those crafty male chauvinists. While the feminists found a scapegoat in Paul to give vent to their pent-up anger towards the male hegemony, those male supremacists sought the Pauline authentication to legitimize their extreme patriarchal tendencies as if female subordination is a divinely instituted, undisputable destiny which weaker sex has to bear meekly. Prof. Joseph Patrapankal in this scholarly as well as intuitive article, instead of being apologetic, tries to highlight Paul's positive contributions and attitude towards women. He also sheds light into the historical and cultural contexts in which some of those controversial utterances were made. This article is a sure eye-opener for both the parties who attempt to pull Paul to extremities. - Editor

Introduction

Coming as we do to the close of the Pauline Year end of June, 2009 with its major focus on a deep and realistic understanding of the person and mission of Paul in the early Church, it seems that among other significant and critical issues to which Paul gave his conscious attention, a topic on the role and mission of women in the Church very important. At the same time, labelling Paul as a misogynist and misogamist, and advancing some superficial and unscientific exegesis about some passages from the Pauline letters in the past have rendered very little service to the theology and person of Paul. The little that has been achieved so far was in the form of exonerating Paul with regard to some misunderstood and misinterpreted passages related to women. But this apologetic approach has not contributed much towards a realistic appraisal of what Paul has written about the role and mission of women in the early Church, and for that matter, about their continuing role and mission in the Church in our times. It is equally unfortunate that some have developed an *a priori* allergy and antipathy towards Paul without realizing that the meaning of the text separated from the context can lead to very unhealthy conclusions in theological issues. Hence an attempt is made in this study to undertake a critical analysis of the relevant texts of the Pauline writings and propose a realistic appraisal of what Paul has written about

women within the framework of his general theology. Moreover, we intend to present, first of all, the positive and constructive Pauline reflections on the role and mission of the women and then only to try to analyze and explain the so-called negative remarks about the women in Pauline writings. It is the firm conviction of this author that such an approach is more scientific and constructive, and this will have more positive repercussions in Pauline studies in our contemporary society. Apologetics, as such, does not have much constructive value, as has been the case also in olden times.

Paul in the Footsteps of his Master

Before we could say anything specific about the manner in which Paul understood and discussed the role of women in the Church and in the society during his times, it is important that we recall the basic truth about Paul that, as a disciple and apostle of Christ, he was not a self-made person; but rather he was one whose entire personality, mental setup and theological outlook were reformulated through his encounter with the risen Christ. He had to unlearn all what had acquired through his rigorous Jewish training and relearn everything within the framework of his new world vision. Consequently, in the same way as Jesus, being a Jew developed his own theoretical and practical attitudes towards the humanity and the world around him,¹ Paul also had to reformulate his world vision and attitudes towards everyone and everything in the society of his times. We know from the Gospels that Jesus had his own approach to the various components of his society at the religious, social and other related levels. Around the key concept of the kingdom of God Jesus understood the entire human community as the children of God and among themselves as sisters and brothers. He made no discrimination between people on the basis of religion and social status. He associated himself with the poor and the marginalized and he was very much open to all categories of people. He had also great concern for the women, who were very much marginalized in the Jewish society. Though Jesus was a Jew, he could appreciate goodness wherever it existed. It is this broad vision of Jesus that Paul had imbibed from his Master.

The most striking aspect of Pauline theology is the conviction Paul had arrived at that the human society he lived in was egalitarian whether at the religious, racial or the social levels. As a Jew, Paul had believed in the superiority of the Jews over the Greeks, and it was generally understood in the Roman Empire that the slave-owners were superior to the slaves. As in every other society, in Judaism and also in the Roman Empire men were considered superior to women. But once Paul got into the mind and world vision of Jesus, all such discriminatory considerations had to be abandoned, and Paul stood for the equality of all humans. In fact, it was this conviction that forced Paul to go beyond the myopic and centripetal considerations of the pro-Jewish preoccupations of the Jerusalem Church and make the gospel something that can be received by all on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ and baptism in his name. Paul had to fight for his conviction in the Jerusalem Council (Gal 2:1-10) and make those engaged in this discussion become convinced that the gospel of Jesus Christ is something far surpassing the

criteria and inner dynamics of established religious traditions. Paul is responsible for the fact that it was through him that the Christian movement became a universal religion. It was liberating the Christian movement from Judaism and its sectarian moorings. Only through Paul did the community of Palestinian and Hellenistic Jews become a community of Jewish and Greek Christians. Only through Paul could the small Jewish 'sect' (Acts 24:5) in Judea eventually develop itself into a world religion in which East and West became more closely bound together even more than through Alexander the Great.

Galatians 3:26-29 and the Pauline Concept of an Egalitarian Society.

Ever since the Council of Jerusalem held around CE 49, Paul was convinced that religious identity was a deepening and elevation of human identity on the basis of faith in Christ without other humanly conceived requirements. But the crises in the Churches of Galatia and Corinth made it clear to Paul that there are other deep-rooted powers at work in the realm of Christian theological reflection. So Paul had to confront each situation in a manner which he found necessary. After explaining the entire process of the history of Israel starting with Abraham and concluding with the Christ Event (Gal 3:6-25), Paul concludes his reflections stating that in Christ all humans are made into a new community through faith and baptism. In Gal 3:26-28 Paul begins to reflect on faith and baptism insofar as all those who believe in Christ Jesus and are baptized in his name are children of God. Paul sees his various statements about faith, baptism and divine adoption as a gradual development from one stage to another. Of great significance is the repetition of Greek *gar* in these verses, translated as 'for' in Gal 3:26, 27, and 28. Thereby Paul shows that all these facts are interconnected and that they follow one from the other. Then in Gal 3: 28 Paul refers to the social and cultural transformation that takes place as a result of faith and baptism. The entire theology of this section is profound, when it is read within the context of a Greco-Roman society that was highly stratified, and of a Jewish society that considered it as superior to other nations by virtue of its having the Torah. What is radical about the affirmation in this statement is that it touches not only ethnic and religious elements but also social and cultural ones. In a society that was devoted to patriarchy and servitude to hear that there is no longer slave nor free or that there is equality between man and woman is to welcome the utopian society, the dream and goal of all those who are marginalized and unjustly treated.

Special mention must be made about the expression: "All of you are one in Christ" (*pantes gar hymeis heis este en Christo* (Gal 3:28)). Though it is translated as "you are all one in Christ", there is a conscious use of the Greek expression of *heis* (one) in the masculine gender and not in the neuter gender, specifying that the new community is a coming together of persons and not a neuter entity. Moreover, through the use of *pantes* Paul tries to establish that no one on any ground is excluded from this new community. It means that the new community which is constituted through baptism is a *corporate personality*, a concept that is derived from the covenant theology of the Old Testament.

Ethnically, socially, and interpersonally, the new community is a dynamic reality of inter-related persons, all having their own cultural and social distinctions, but having no discrimination of one against the other. It corresponds to the concept of the "new person" (*kainos anthropos*) in Ephesians 2:15. Speaking about the equality of male and female, Paul is also recalling what the Priestly writer has written about the creation of the humankind in the image of God as *male and female* (Gen 1:27).

After the baptismal greeting in Gal 3:26-28 in Gal 3:29 Paul establishes that, since the Christians belong to Christ, they are also thereby declared as the descendants of Abraham and heirs according to the promise made to him. In this way Paul is linking the story of Abraham discussed from Gal 3:6 onwards to the community of the believers in the Churches of Galatia. The historical analysis centered on the person of Abraham, the paradigm of religious identity through his radical faith in God, reaches its climax in the theological analysis of faith and baptism into the person of Christ. The fact that here Paul is referring to an ancient felicitation given by the believing community to those who were being newly baptized, adds to the significance of baptism as a major event in the early Church which had profound theological, Christological as well as sociological consequences. While the various Churches are now struggling to establish an egalitarian society on the basis of human equality and human dignity, it is hoped that these reflections on the Pauline teaching on baptism will be of some significance.

Paul's vision of the Christian movement was more according to the original vision of Jesus of Nazareth, who had announced the kingdom of God as the supreme reality of the new era. So Paul did not create a new theology of his own. Christ is the origin, content and critical norm of Pauline theology. Christ is the embodiment of God's cause as well as human cause. Pauline theology is a radicalized understanding of God in the light of Jesus Christ. What Paul did was to translate into Hellenistic language that line of thinking which had been drawn first in the proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth. In so doing, Paul attempted to make the Christian message understandable beyond Israel in the whole inhabited earth (*oikoumene*) of his time. It all means that without Paul there would be no Hellenistic culture influencing Christian theology. Our attempt to understand the role of women in Pauline ministry and theology is to be understood against the background of these important considerations.

Women Associates in the Pauline Ministry

It is the considered view of the New Testament exegetes that Jesus and his selected Twelve during the course of their ministry had received the assistance of a select group of women disciples, in all likelihood through the initiative taken by Mary of Magdala, who had been probably a fanatic Jewish woman, but who later got relieved of her fanaticism and organized a group of women to help Jesus and the disciples during their itinerant ministry (Lk 8:1-2). It is also true that no sufficient attention is given to these data in the Gospel of Luke in our contemporary discussions.² This fact also explains the committed

presence of women during the passion narrative and also at the scene of the crucifixion. Further, the story of the resurrection is closely bound up with the women disciples of Jesus (John 20:1-18). It is probable that one of the two disciples, who went back to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection, was Mary, the wife of Cleophas, who were both disciples of Jesus (Lk 24:13-35). The Gospels, in general, give ample testimony to the fact that Jesus had the assistance and service of women, whom Jesus has accepted into his ministry on the basis of his comprehensive understanding of the human reality as was willed and planned by God. The role the Samaritan woman played in the evangelization of Samaria is something that cannot escape the attention of the readers of the Gospels (John 4:4-42).

When we try to analyze the role women played during the ministry of Paul, there also we can see an all-embracing attitude of Paul towards the women as partners in his evangelizing work. Already in the Acts of the Apostles Luke refers to a business woman, named Lydia, who was one of the first disciples of Paul: "A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God, was listening to us: She was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple clothes. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14). We are told that later Lydia and all her household believed in the gospel proclaimed by Paul and were baptized" (Acts 16:15). This event is given great significance by Luke insofar as Lydia very soon emerged as a host and probably as an associate of Paul and his ministry in those areas. This is also in tune with the importance Luke has given to the women in his Gospel.

The reference to two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who were involved in the work of the gospel together with Paul and Clement points to the fact that Paul had such women associates practically in all his communities. Now that these two women were separated from Paul and also among themselves, Paul was requesting them to get reconciled and to agree in the Lord, and thereby to start anew their work for the gospel (Phil 4:2). Moreover, Paul is requesting his sister or wife³ to help these two women to come to terms with one another (Phil 4:3). The reference to "other co-workers" also in this context throws much light on the considerable number of co-workers Paul had, both men and women. Prisca and her husband Aquila are referred to as intimate co-workers of Paul in several passages in Pauline letters. They were Jewish Christians who had migrated from Rome and had settled in Ephesus when around CE 49 Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews and Jewish Christians from Italy, and the two of them had been for some time in Corinth. There Paul had become their close friend as they were also tent-makers as Paul himself was (Acts 18:1-3). When Paul left for Antioch from Ephesus, Aquila and Prisca also accompanied him up to Ephesus and later they appointed Apollos to take care of the Church of Corinth because he had been instructed by them in the Way of the Lord (Acts 18:24-27). It is also noteworthy that in all references to this couple the name of Prisca comes first, precisely because of the prominent role she had played in the ministry of Paul.

Pauline Communities and House-Churches taken care of by Women

Towards the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, written from Ephesus, Paul sends the readers the greetings of the Churches of Asia as well as the greetings of Aquila and Prisca, together with the "Church in their house (1 Cor 16:19). It seems that by the time Paul wrote this letter Aquila and Prisca had formed a 'house-church' in their house and it is also probable that Apollos was further instructed in the Way of the Lord in this house-church (Acts 18:26). This enabled Apollos to work successfully in the Church of Corinth so much so that one group of Christians there went to the extent of extolling him over Paul (1 Cor 1:12). In the letter to the Romans once again we see Prisca and Aquila in a list of people to whom Paul sends greetings: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also the Churches of the Gentiles. Greet also the Church in their house" (Rom 16:3-5a). The inference from this passage is that by now Aquila and Prisca had left Ephesus and had gone back to Rome where also they started a house-church. According to Lietzmann, they had handed over their house and business to some of their slaves during their stay in Corinth and Ephesus, which they took over on their return to Rome.⁴ Aquila and Prisca helped Paul in his ministry and they even endangered their life for him when they were in Ephesus.⁵ Their coming to Christian faith must have, as in the case of Paul, enabled them to remain strong and committed believers and this must have also prompted them to open their house to make it a place for Christian gatherings, something similar to the synagogue gatherings in their parent religion.

Scholars maintain that there existed in Rome several "house-synagogues" which may have been the immediate inspiration for the house-churches in Rome. Paul writes: "Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers and sisters who are with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and his sister and Olymphas, and all the saints who are with them" (Rom 16:14-15). The references to the "brethren who are with them" and the "saints who are with them" seem to be allusions to the house-churches these Christians had, as in the case of Aquila and Prisca. The names of Andronicus and Junia in Rom 16:7 also suggest that there existed a house-church in their house which included also "kinsmen and fellow-prisoners of Paul, who were prominent people among the apostles".⁶ In his shortest and the most private letter to Philemon, Paul makes a clear reference to the house-church in Philemon's house: "Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house (*te kat' oikon sou ekklesia*)" (Philm 1-2). The letter, as such, is not sent to an individual but to the house-church and consequently it had to be read out in that group. It is even suggested that Apphia was the wife of Philemon. Philemon is called a co-worker (*synergos*) of Paul insofar as he was in charge of a community. He is supposed to have been a native of Colossae; but others suggest Ephesus as his native place. Whichever be his actual native place,

Philemon's house had a house-church in which he, as the head of the family, took care of the administration of the community. The Deutero-Pauline letter to the Colossians also has a direct reference to a house-church in the house of a woman: "Give my greetings to the brethren at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the Church in her house" (Col 4:15). Laodicea was a town not far from Colossae and the house-church is said to be that of Nympha, who had such excellent qualities to lead a community of believers. What we can conclude from these various references to house-church is that it was a regular phenomenon in the early Church and that most of these Churches were taken care of by women associates of Paul.⁷ It was in such smaller units of believers that fellowship and Christian instruction could be exercised in a better way and this rendered the communities more active and dynamic. Occasionally it also led to factions and disorder, as it happened in the case of the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the Church of Corinth which had an inbuilt tendency to party politics (1 Cor 11:17-22).

Paul's Recommendation of Phoebe, the Deaconess of the Church of Cenchreae

In Rom 16:1-2 we read about a certain Phoebe who is designated as a sister (*adelphē*), deaconess (*diakonos*) of the Church of Cenchreae and a benefactress (*prostatis*) of many as well as of Paul himself. By designating Phoebe as a sister and deaconess Paul emphasizes the effectiveness of her ministry and the significant contribution she had made to the Church of Cenchreae. This is further confirmed by the reference to her as a benefactress (*prostates*) of many people in that Church. Cenchreae was a town close to Corinth. It is probable that Phoebe was a leader of the Church helping many and organizing a small community there, similar to a house-church. Some exegetes understand her ministry as extending hospitality to and sharing her resources with those who were needy and helpless. Others propose that her office was something implying authoritative responsibility similar to that of an elder. In any case, Phoebe had to accomplish her mission in a spirit of service, which was the characteristic note of a deacon or a deaconess. The masculine form of the noun (*diakonos*) used here to designate a woman is sometimes a topic for critical discussion. Whereas for some it is a proof that the title designates an office and not merely the quality of a person, for others it reflects the patriarchal bias of the first century Church.⁸ Whatever be the reason for this masculine form, the fact remains that Phoebe was a women deaconess, and it is surprising that such a clear reference to an office in the early Church in a canonical writing of the New Testament does not receive sufficient attention in the the theological discussions of the Church.

In this context mention is to be made of the reference to the deacons and deaconesses, about whom the author of the first letter to Timothy also writes with full details. After writing about the deacons and their qualities (1 Tim 3:8-10), the author refers to "women" (*gynaikas*) insisting on their qualities, such as to be serious, not slanderers, but temperate and faithful in all things (1 Tim 3:11). The question is whether the author is referring to the women deaconess themselves or the wives of the deacons. The arguments can go in

both directions. The reference to the one time marriage of the deacons in 1 Tim 3:12 would suggest that in 1 Tim 3:11 the instruction is given to the women deaconesses and not to the wives of the deacons. But there seems to be no point in describing the qualities of the partner when the whole question is about the various officials in the Church. This is reinforced by the fact that the instruction given to the bishops that they should be married only once (1 Tim 3:2) does not lead the author to give any instruction about the qualities of their wives.

This discussion about the women deaconesses in the early Church also leads us to a reference to the long discussion about the widows (*cheraï*) in 1 Tim 5: 3-16. In the context of the increasing number of widows in the Church during the early centuries as a consequence of several sociological factors it seems that attempts were made to integrate these helpless persons into the mainstream of the life of the Church. One such attempt was to have them organized as a group of persons with a definite role to play in the community. 1 Tim 5: 9 refers to a certain enrolment (*katalegein*) they had to go through, in which case younger widows were to be avoided and only exemplary ones were to be selected, who have proved themselves through their good works of charity and hospitality (1 Tim 5:9-16). The problem was that these undisciplined widows were prone to violating a pledge (*pistin athetein*) they had made to the Church. Here again what is significant is the responsible role women played in the early Church soon after the ministry of Paul who had already established a tradition of integrating the ministry of women during the first century itself⁹.

Misinterpreted and Misunderstood Passages in Pauline Writings

After we have analyzed the clear and important passages from the Pauline writings, which deal with the role of women in Pauline ministry, it is now important also to look at the so-called misunderstood and the so-called scandalous Pauline texts on women, all of them coming up in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Here we must keep in mind the fact that we have to analyze these texts in their context, and not in the abstract. Hence it is the context that we should pay attention to, before we analyze the texts themselves. We also need to be aware of the rhetorical styles and other grammatical considerations used by Paul in the analysis of such complex contexts as well as the texts that accompany them. First of all, the first letter to the Corinthians is basically a pastoral letter, in which Paul had to attend to several pastoral issues, both doctrinal and ethical. Added to this fact, the Corinthian community was known for its party-spirit at all levels, which Paul understood as the most serious situation for a community which he had founded after his experiment with Athens and its apparent failure. In such a complex and confusing situation, it is important that we pay sufficient attention to the context in which Paul had to deal with different pastoral issues in that community.

Some of the Corinthian Christians were very sure of their knowledge, while others were too ascetic and weak. While some indulged in such slogans as

"all of us possess knowledge" (1 Cor 8:1), "all things are lawful for me" (1 Cor 6:12) and got involved in such vices as prostitution, others held the view that it was better for married people not have any marital relationship with their partners on the ground that they were reborn in Christ and so they have to lead an entirely different way of living. Some gave equal freedom to men and women to participate and pray in the worship (1 Cor 11:2-16), while some others held the view that women should keep silent in such gatherings (1 Cor 14:34-35). In such controversial situations Paul had to maintain the unity and discipline of the community. He wanted all things to be done with a sense of discipline and order. When some Corinthians claimed that all things are lawful for them, Paul reminded that not all things are beneficial and that they should not allow themselves to be dominated by anything. It is within the wide spectrum of this Pauline pastoral and theological concerns that we have to take up any pastoral or theological issue treated by him. Taking a text out of the context and interpreting it according to one's own likes and dislikes has been one of the major problems in biblical exegesis in the past and also at present, especially by some fundamental interpreters, who are more concerned about the letter and not the spirit behind it. So also there has been a constant neglect of understanding the Bible as the word of God written in human language, and we have to keep in mind that the human language accounts for many of the sociological, psychological as well as the theological limitations of any human author.

a) Touching Women and its inner meaning (1 Cor 7:1-7)

The expression "touching women" in 1 Corinthians has unfortunately become a topic of confusing speculations both in theological and in practical circles. First of all, it is to be remembered that from 1 Corinthians 7:1 onwards Paul is answering some questions and giving practical guidelines to the Corinthian community in the context of their sending these questions to him through the people from Chloe (1 Cor 1:11), namely, regarding marriage (7:1-40), regarding the dispute about eating the meat of animals offered in the worship places of the Gentiles (8:1-11:1) and also regarding the dispute about the relative importance of the gifts of prophecy and tongues operating in their community. As a well-educated Rabbi and also as a pastoral theologian, Paul had to take up the task of educating the community along sound principles of Christian living. It seems that this contextual understanding has been very much missing in the traditional interpretation of these texts, and this is particularly so with regard to the question about marriage and virginity in 1 Corinthians 7:1-40 which has resulted in the emergence of a lot of confusion about marriage, virginity and celibacy. It is important to keep in mind that "touching woman" in 1 Cor 7:1 is a euphemistic expression for "making use of marital rights". Coupled with these confusions is also the problem of the wrong English translation of the Greek text in 1 Cor 7: 9b in several versions of this text, which has resulted in understanding marriage mainly as a remedy for sexual passion.¹⁰

The major problem is that 1 Cor 7:1 has been traditionally understood as a Pauline statement, meaning thereby that it was Paul who was recommending abstinence from marriage as the ideal for Christian life. Understanding the

custom employed by Paul to cite slogans current among the Corinthians in view of either refuting them or clarifying them, Paul goes on to explain the other side of it with a Greek *de*, which means that Paul has a different view. Then in 1 Cor 7:2-6 Paul explains how both husbands and wives should exercise their normal marital rights, and how both have their rights as well as duties towards their partner. In particular, it is to be noted that in Judaism husbands had only rights and wives had only obligations. But Paul makes it clear that both husbands and wives have equal rights and equal obligations. Although Paul proposed his own state of life as something which he prefers, he goes on to confirm that all have their gift God has granted them, one this gift and another that gift. In the whole discussion there is not even a hint at a negative position of the woman in the Corinthian Church. What Paul writes about virgins (*parthenos*) (1 Cor 7:25-38) is also about both men and women and a discussion on the various issues treated there is beyond the scope of this study.

b) Women having to wear a veil (1 Cor 11:2-16)

Chloe's people had also brought to Paul several disturbing news about the Corinthian community. One such report was about the disorder during the worship of the community regarding the dress code and the disunity in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In the same way as Paul appreciated the Corinthians for their knowledge and spiritual gift (1 Cor 1:4-9) before he took up the serious violations of their Christian unity and ethical behaviour (1 Cor 1:10-6:20), so also Paul recommends the Corinthians for their remembering him and adhering to the traditions handed down to them, before he had to clarify certain abuses in their community. According to the patriarchal and hierarchical structure of the Greco-Roman family the head of the woman was man (11:3b) and woman was the glory of man and man was the image and glory of God (11:7). If one goes by the Genesis narrative that the woman was made from the man (Gen 2:18-22), it can be equally established that biologically both man and woman are born from woman. Hence Paul refers to the practice of women praying and prophesying during the worship (11:5). For Paul the decisive argument about human greatness is derived from his reflection on Christ. Christ is the head of every man and woman, and God is the head of Christ. So in 11:11 Paul argues: "In the Lord woman is not independent of man or man is independent of woman". The expression "in the Lord" at the beginning of Paul's response confirms the Christian interpretation of the creation story. Paul also refers to what is more natural and fitting. It is natural for women to cover their head (11:14-15). It is a question of aesthetics and decorum.

Although Paul agrees with the Corinthians that it is good for women to cover their heads, he disagrees with the reasons given by them. He holds the view that women and men are independent by nature and they are equal before God. Paul underlines the fact that there is a radical equality between men and women in the Lord and that God is the origin of everything. The major concern of Paul is not biological and theological, but rather the common good and the unity of the community. Maintaining good order and the

common good were of primary importance for Paul while he was making decisions on practice and customs. The issue of covering the head or not covering is subordinated to these greater concerns of Paul. Hence Paul's concluding word on the issue is an appeal from his own example and that of the Churches of God not to be divisive or contentious (11:16). As a conclusion, it may be observed that any discussion on the veiling of the women during worship in our times is a bygone issue, and pastoral prudence demands that it should never become an issue for a discussion whether at the theological or at the pastoral levels.

c) *Women advised to keep silent in the Church* (1 Cor 14:26-40)

In the contemporary phenomenon of women becoming more and more active in the society, including women speaking from the pulpit as invited by the officials in the Church, the Pauline passage under discussion, especially 14:33b-36 seems to be one of the most intriguing parts of the Pauline literature. Consequently, Paul is often accused of being against women's initiative and leadership in community worship. If we recall the active role played by women during the apostolic activities of Paul, which we have already analyzed in this study, it is very difficult to understand how and why Paul could take a different and totally negative stand towards the active presence of women during worship in the Corinthian Church. It means therefore that there is something entirely different to look for in the interpretation of this passage. It is clear that Paul is discussing this topic in the context of his answering the disputed question among the Corinthians about the relative importance of the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues during the worship as it was practiced in the Corinthian community. Though Paul personally prefers prophecy to the gift of tongues, he did not deny the role of the latter during the worship. It is in the context of this discussion about gift of tongues that Paul brings in this topic of women playing an active role in the worship.

There are two strong views maintained by the exegetes with regard to the interpretation of 1Cor 14:33b-36. While some take this passage as a later interpolation, others take this passage as the position taken by some misogynistic men in the Corinthian community whom Paul confronts through his correct teaching about the rights of women to speak during the worship assemblies. Those who hold the view that it is an interpolation refer to the later emergence of misogynistic trends in the Church, which is reflected in the Pseudo-Pauline text in 1 Tim 2: 9-15 and also in 1 Peter 3:1-4. However, there is no manuscript evidence for a text of 1 Corinthians without these verses. But we do have some manuscripts which placed verses 34-36 in a different place, namely, after verse 40.¹¹ We can conclude from this that some ancient copyists felt that these verses interrupt the flow of the discussion of prophesy and the gift of tongues.¹² In some other texts these verses were placed in the margin to emphasize the non-Pauline nature of the verses.¹³ The attempt by copyists to place these verses in different places can also be explained by the lack of their harmony with the attitude of Paul towards women reflected in other letters. Among the translations, at least New Revised Standard Version of the Bible has placed verses 33b-36 within bracket.

The second view is more challenging and more difficult to explain, but, at the same time, it is worth analyzing because of the stylistic nature of this entire letter in which Paul from time to time encounters his readers with challenging questions akin to the ancient literary form of diatribe. This approach to the issue presupposes that there was a certain group of overzealous men who maintained that women are not allowed to have any role in the worship gatherings. It is their view that is reflected in verses 34 and 35.¹⁴ It is not clear to what category these men belonged, whether they were Jewish Christians or Gnostic Christians with their pessimistic concept of sexuality and marriage. But the reaction of Paul in verse 36 is strong enough. At least the second part of the question is directed at these arrogant men who claimed that the word of God is their exclusive monopoly. Then Paul goes on to speak soberly about how all those who claim to have special gifts should listen to Paul who is speaking with the authority derived from the Lord. Those who do not accept the teaching of Paul about special gifts given in the long section from 12:1 to 14:37 do not have any acceptance before Paul. Paul makes his point once again clear. Prophecy, insofar as it is a clear and encouraging word, is to be preferred; but the gift of tongues is not to be discouraged. But it is important that all things are to be done with decorum and in order. The cumulative weight of the evidence suggests that Paul expects women also to participate in discussions and prayer meetings in the Pauline communities. It also goes well with the role women have played in the Pauline communities. In fact, when it is a question of clear as well as ambiguous statements, it is the clear statements which have to guide the scientific study of exegetes and theologians. But it is equally clear that inherited prejudices are hard to die, especially in the context of the prevailing male bias in the society and also in the Church.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that in his letters Paul was dealing with pastoral issues and not with abstract theological issues. Consequently, pastoral issues are to be treated from a practical and theological perspective where theological precisions are not the ultimate concerns. Consequently, it is possible that certain ambiguities and lack of clarity emerge when we deal with some particular issues, such as the ones we have analyzed in this study. Moreover, these are pastoral issues related to a society which is far removed from our times and our culture. As a convinced and committed theologian and pastor Paul was quite sure of the equality of all those believe in Jesus Christ, both Jewish and Greek Christians, both men and women. Though we are all fully convinced of this fact from the very letters of Paul, there remain among some well-meaning Christians confusions, misunderstanding and apprehensions about Paul's real attitude towards women. Inherited misunderstandings are hard to die, apprehensions of all sorts remain submerged and time and again they come up for discussions and disputes. This is especially so when it is question of the basic reality of the human society, namely, man-woman relationship and their specific roles in the society. This is bound to happen within the framework of a male-dominated society, whether in the past or at present. What is important is that we have to enlarge the horizons of our thinking and expand the world

of our concerns. Even as we are trying to cross the borders of caste and creed to embrace the whole human community within the parameters of a global village, it remains true that for many the most important border and the barrier to cross is the one which God has planned for the survival of the human species with it is divine mission (Gen 1:26-27) and which the humankind finds hard to accept for itself, namely, an authentic and elevated approach to gender justice.

End Notes

¹R.R.Ruether, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*, Sheffield, 1998.

²R.R.Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, London, 1983, pp.18-19.

³Cf. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (New York: Doubleday, Vol. I 1991; Vol. II 1994); Cf. Joseph Pathrapankal, *The Christian Programme* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1999) pp.144-146.

⁴It is gratifying to know that Sr. Virginia Rajakumari SAB from Bangalore has very recently completed and defended a doctoral dissertation on this topic in the University of Louvain. It was not possible for this author to get more information about this study.

⁵In Phil 4:3 Paul requests a certain "zuzugos" translated as "loyal companion". It is the opinion of scholars that "zuzugos" can mean either "sister" or "wife". We cannot conclude to anything about the marital status of Paul from this one word. But it is clear that Paul had many close associates in Philippi.

⁶Cf. H. Lietzmann, *An die Römer* (Tübingen: HNT, 1971) pp. 128 ff.

⁷The reference may be to 2 Cor 1:8-10; cf. 1 Cor 15:32.

⁸It seems that in Rom 16:7 the reading 'Junia' is to be preferred and that she was an active woman in the Church. Cf. G. Lohfink, "Weibliche Diakone im Neuen Testament" *Diakonia* 11(1980) 391-393.

⁹Cf. A.J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, (Rockwell Lectures), (London: Boston Rouge, 1977) p.70.

¹⁰Cf. E.S. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM Press, 1983) p.170; M. Hauke, "Deaconess in the Ancient Church: A Historical Sketch" in *The Church and Women: A Compendium*, H. Möll (ed), (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) pp. 126-7.

¹¹Cf. Joseph Pathrapankal, "Church and Churches in Corpus Paulinum" in *Unité et Diversité dans l'sé*, (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1899) pp. 175-182.

¹²The Greek text *purousthai* means "to be on fire", but it has been usually translated as "to be aflame with passion" (NRSV); "burn with vain desire" (NEB). In fact, there is no reference to "passion" in the whole section. Only the New American Catholic Bible has translated it as "be on fire".

¹³Cf. Murphy-O'Connor, "Interpolation in 1 Corinthians ", *CBQ* 48 (1986) 91-92.

¹⁴For some of the valuable insights and observations in this study the author is very much indebted to Rekha Chennattu and her presentation of the paper on "Paul and Women" in a Seminar held in Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, in October 2008.

¹⁵Bruce M. Metzger, *A textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Suttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) pp. 499-500.

¹⁶Cf. M.J. Evans, *Women in the Bible* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1983) p. 99; N.M. Flanagan and E.H. Snyder "Did Paul put down women in 1 Cor 14:34-36?" in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 11.1 (1981) 10-11; D.W. Odell-Scott, "Let the Women Speak in Church: An Egalitarian Interpretation of 1 Cor 14:33b-36" in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13.3 (1983) pp.90-93. W.L. Liefeld, "Women, Submission and Ministry in 1 Corinthians" in *Women, Authority and the Bible* (Ed., A. Mickelsen, Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1986) p. 149.