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SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND ITS IMPLICATION TO THE
WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN MALAGASY LUTHERANA CHURCH

Romans 16: 1-7

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Glory be to God alone!

DEDICATED WITH LOVE

To Charlys,

My beloved husband and

Fellow-worker in marriage, work, ministry—life

Abbreviations

BDAG: Bauer Danker Arndt Gingrich.

cf: Compare

EDNT: Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament.

ESV: English Standard Version.

KJV: King James Version

LGST: Lutheran Graduate School of Theology

LWF: Lutheran World Federation

MLC: Malagasy Lutheran Church

NASB: New American Standard Bible.

NIV: New International Version.

NKJV: New King James Version

NLT: New Living Translation.

NRSV: New Revised Standard Version

RSV: Revised Standard Version.

TDNT: Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

v.: verse

vv.: verses

YLT: Young's Literal Translation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Women always face hard challenges wherever the patriarchal system is met in local cultures, even though it has often been noticed that women play some crucial roles in many situations in development. And also for most of the church history, in most Christian denominations and movements, women have been denied the privilege of serving as leaders.

Generally speaking, the traditional Malagasy culture reflects a gender-based division of labor. For instance, public speaking is expected of men while women support them silently in the background.

When we have a look back to the women's status in the New Testament, it is seen that women in the early church lived in the patriarchal system. We must bear in mind the great power that fathers had over their daughters and husbands over their wives. When we look especially at the Jewish women, their rights were limited by their fathers or their husbands once they are married. The status of Jewish women was limited by Jewish Law and custom in ancient Israel. Most women could not speak in the public place. Because of that, their roles were restricted to a little or no authority. Women were considered to be inferior to men. They were supposed to remain at home, and there was their only sphere.

It is the same as in Malagasy context. Malagasy women's status is limited by the patriarchal system. Men control women in many spheres of life. Malagasy women stay at home. Their tasks are to take care of the house, to cook the food, to wash clothes, to fetch water, etc... It means that the place of Malagasy women is in the domestic sphere. It reminds me of what Ben Witherington writes about women in Judaism. He said that "the wife's duties included grinding flour, baking bread, washing clothes, breast-feeding the children for eighteen to twenty-four months, making the beds, working with wool, and washing her husband's face, hands, and feet."¹

In a matter of education boys are privileged to receive education in Madagascar. Girls at the contrary are staying in their parents' house to wait for men to marry them. They are born for marriage. Fathers educate their sons to follow their examples. Mothers educate their young girls

¹ Ben Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 5.

to follow their examples. In the Greek world, girls are not allowed to go to school, and when they grow up they are not allowed to speak in the public place.² It is very different from the Roman world. There, boys and girls can have the same education but the girls stopped to learn when they married.³ That is to say that the status of women in many places in the world is quite similar, they are considered as inferior to men.

All these variations of status are affected by the act of Jesus Christ. He valued women and gave them a greater freedom. He treated women with respect and dignity. His actions and teachings raised the status of women to new heights. He violated numerous Old Testament regulations, which specified gender inequality. He refused to follow the behavioral rules established by three main Jewish religious groups of that day that are the Essenes, Pharisees and Sadducees. “The actions of Jesus of Nazareth towards women were therefore revolutionary.”⁴

Jesus allowed women to participate in the life in the synagogue. This synagogue is from a Greek word, means merely “a place of meeting”. Paul followed Jesus’ teaching about women. He gave women an opportunity to lead some house churches, to be his co-workers. He allowed women to participate in the ministry of the word. We can say that women in Paul’s church had much greater roles than women in ancient Judaism.

Because of globalization, the gender-based system in Madagascar has undergone some changes. These changes have been noticed mainly in the cities. Both men and women can have the same education. Both of them can have a decent job with decent earning. Women become respected by the men and both of them can make decisions in what they want to do.

However, this is not the case in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC). The status of women has changed in the social life but the church continues to prohibit women from having the role as leaders in the church. In other words, women in the MLC did not have and still do not have the opportunity to serve as church leaders. Why is it so? There are at least two reasons.

² Alvin Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 99.

³ Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 21.

⁴ B.M. Metzger & M.D. Coogan, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 806-818.

Firstly, Malagasy cultural understanding of women is reflected through the place of women in society as well as within the MLC. From the inception of the MLC's history until now, officials of this church have been males (1950-2010). Even the treasurer's post which could be occupied by lay people, is not given to females. This is, consciously or unconsciously, the echo of Malagasy thought that leaders must be men. Women were not assigned to a position of a "Hazomanga", "Lonaka", and an "Mpanjaka" (each of the three words means leader). However as stated in the story of Madagascar, in the highlands of Antananarivo, women were enthroned as queens. It is not surprising therefore that the Reformed Malagasy Church has consecrated women to pastoral ministry many years ago.

Before 1974, women were not allowed to enter theological schools. Things changed in the 70s, so from 1974 the MLC has permitted young women to go to the seminaries. Women were given the equal opportunity to men. Both males and females have been allowed to get training and education in the theological schools. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) requires that 40% of students of each promotion recruited to come to study at Lutheran Graduate School of Theology (LGST) must be women. The LWF does not release the scholarship grants of one class if their requirement is not respected. Therefore LGST makes the calculation each time new students are recruited that 40% of any new promotion has to be women. And this gives much chance to young women to study theology.

At their graduation, female theological students are given diplomas or degrees such as licentiate and master's degrees. At this level they are equal to male theological students. But quite a number of female theological students suffer from discrimination attitudes of their respective synods after the completion of their studies. The synods appoint all male candidates to different posts but they don't find any post to give to female candidates. Most of male candidates are consecrated to pastoral ministry; this means that they get ordination but female candidates unfortunately are not ordained. Ordination is the right of male candidates, it is not allowed for female candidates. So within the MLC they are called solely theologians. They are not called pastors. Only pastors have the right to baptize and to give communion.

Secondly, the prohibition is due to the understanding of just one or two verses in the New Testament which do not seem to allow women to have a ministry which involves public speaking (1Cor 14: 34), or which involves teaching a man (1Tim 2: 12). There are, however, several women mentioned in the New Testament who did function as church leaders. Even though these

women are mentioned briefly, they do serve as valid Biblical precedents which call into question the widespread and persistent belief that the Bible teaches that church leaders can only be males.

The MLC executive board has been discussing the issue at length during the committee's meetings. As a result we do not find any strong scriptural bases on it. On the contrary, they lay their foundation on the cultural basis that Malagasy have never appointed women as priests in their traditional society. Priesthood is thought as males' affairs. But the Lord did not forbid women for ordination. Nevertheless, up to this time the MLC frustrates its theologians and deprives them of any right for ordination. The MLC executive board did not decide yet to accept women ordination.

This situation of female theologians within the MLC remains a big frustration to female candidates and creates heated debates. This is not surprising because in Malagasy culture, women aren't considered as priests. The concept of priesthood in the Malagasy culture is very different to the priesthood of all believers in the Lutheran confession.

1.2 Purpose of the study

As I stated before, in Madagascar the MLC does not accept women to lead a church until now, although other denominations, such as the Reformed church, ordain women. It is seen also that in the MLC, the "Women's Department" ("Fikambanam-behivavy") is the most active one, and the number of women is very dominant in all departments. These women can lead the MLC into development. This fact leads me to look deeply about the leadership position of women in the New Testament. I will also investigate the leadership position of women in Madagascar and try to create a bridge between the New Testament and the Malagasy context. My deepest purpose of writing this thesis is to convince the MLC to change its mind and accept women to become leaders that are pastors, so that they can use their skills to lead the MLC into development.

1.3 Scope and limitation of the study

As it has been already stated, the purpose of this thesis is to create a bridge between New Testament perspective on women's leadership and the Malagasy Lutheran Church context in order to convince the MLC to consider female theologians who are graduated in the same level as men, as pastors. Hence, this study is limited in scope.

I will use the background of women in the time of New Testament era, such as Jewish women and the women in the Greco-Roman societies, and compare them to the Malagasy women's context. In particular, I will study the passage Romans 16: 1-7 about the leadership of the three women appearing in these verses, i. e., Phoebe, Prisca and Junia. By this study I will show that for each of their important ministries there was at least one woman mentioned in the New Testament who effectively performed that leadership role.

1.4 Composition of the Thesis

This thesis has five chapters in total. The first chapter is the introduction. This thesis has two main parts. The first part consists of chapters two and three. In chapter two I report about the historical background of women. It explains the situation of Jewish women in synagogue, in Greek-Roman society and the attitude of Jesus toward women. In chapter three I talk about women in the Pauline mission and their leadership, and I focus on Romans 16: 1-7 telling about Phoebe, Prisca and Junia, and their leadership. The second part includes chapter four. Inside it, I tell about the situation of women's leadership inside the MLC. During the summer 2014, I did a fieldwork related to the situation of women in Madagascar, specifically inside the MLC. I asked people about the status of women, about their role inside the church. I try to make a bridge between what I found in the New Testament about women's leadership and the fieldwork that I did, and make some analysis and evaluation of it. The last chapter is the conclusion.

PART ONE

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Situation of Jewish women in Synagogue

Because we want to study the situation of women in the New Testament, it is needed to look into the status of Jewish women in that same period. It means that we have to look at it in the period that the New Testament took place, which is during the first century A.D. But before that we have to take a little look about the general status of Jewish women of which their situation in the synagogue is a very important aspect.

At this time, the father had the power over his family, especially over his daughters and his wife. This is what we call “patriarchal” society. The patriarchal laws were very rigid and unchangeable, mostly for women because they tell about the authority of men (father or husband). Ben Witherington mentions in his book: “One must bear in mind the extraordinary power a father had over his daughter and a husband over his wife.”⁵ At this time, women’s and girls’ rights were very limited by their fathers and husbands. And we can imagine that this relationship is like “dictatorship” because women and girls could not express their will. Witherington also said: “A woman was passed from her father to her husband’s sphere of authority, usually without being consulted.”⁶ They are accordingly submissive, and this is not for her humiliation, according to the patriarchal Law, but that they may be directed because the authority has been given to the man. Therefore most of women did not appear in public, but when they did, they were to cover their hair and minimize their conversation.

In sum, Jewish women’s status was severely limited by Jewish law and custom inherited from the ancient Israel as they were in essentially all other cultures at the time. So generally speaking, most of them were restricted to roles of little or no authority, because they were largely confined in their father’s or husband’s house. They were considered to be inferior to men and under the authority of men, either their father before marriage or their husband afterwards. The Mishnah states in Ketubbot 4: 4-5: “The father has authority over his daughter in respect to her betrothals...She remains under the authority of her father until she enters the authority of her

⁵ Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

husband, in marriage.”⁷ So women were expected to remain at home, and the public sector was largely closed to them.

During the time of the early church, most of these laws about women were in force. But anyway, there are some changes to be mentioned. Although most families did not allow women to leave the house, there were others who permitted women to go in the public place, accompanied by a family member or guardian. Mary Rose d’Angelo, Ross Shepard Kraemer wrote in their book that “the Gospels, too, presume the presence of women outside the private domain.”⁸ Jewish women participated in the public life and such participation required their presence in the public places, such as synagogue, at least some of the time.⁹ Women were not obliged to attend the Synagogue, but they could go there if they wished to do so.

However, a number of sources from the first century, relating to Palestine as well as the Diaspora indicate that women were regularly present in the synagogue during worship. We know that the synagogue is like a discrete congregation of Jews.¹⁰ The synagogue served as a place for public reading of Torah. And the main day that people assembled to hear the Law was the Sabbath.

We can see in the Scripture that Jesus met a woman while teaching in a Galilean synagogue.¹¹ And also Paul often met women when he visited Diaspora synagogues.¹² The presence of women is mentioned as well in Thessalonica and in the nearby city Beroea.¹³

There is also a series of rabbinic traditions relating to the second century or later mentioning women who regularly attended the synagogue. Writers pointed out that “women’s presence in the market, in the synagogue, and in other public venues is frequently the backdrop for some rabbinic narrative.”¹⁴

⁷ <http://sites.utoronto.ca/wjudaism/journal/vol2n2/documents/valler.pdf>, accessed on March 30, 2015.

⁸ Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Women & Christian Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 61.

⁹ Judith R. Baskin, *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective, 2nd edition* (New York: University Press, 1998), 54.

¹⁰ Kraemer, *Women & Christian Origins*, 64.

¹¹ Luke 13: 10-13.

¹² Acts 16: 11-13.

¹³ Acts 17: 1-4, 10-12.

¹⁴ Kraemer, *Women & Christian Origins*, 61.

One source tells of a woman in Tiberias who attended the synagogue every Friday night to hear R. Meir's sermons as written, "It is told in Lev 9 (9) that R Meir was preaching Friday evenings and even women came to hear the sermon at that time"¹⁵

The obvious assumption here, at the very least, is that these people regularly attended the synagogue. Ben Witherington also confirmed it by saying that "Babylonian Talmud Meghillah 23a tells us that women were qualified to be among the seven who read Torah in the synagogue, though it appears that after New Testament times and perhaps before that they were expected to refuse."¹⁶

Even though women were like invisible in the synagogue, not very important, as Kraemer mentioned in her book, "women were similarly envisioned as largely absent... Not obligated to attend the Synagogue, women were physically segregated from men if they did."¹⁷ This segregation from men is in the Law of the Old Testament time. At this time women were limited to their own court in Jerusalem Temple. Witherington is not sure when this separation started and mentioned in his book that "it is not certain when the practice of having a special galleries for women in the synagogues began, though they existed in Trajan's time (early second century A. D.)."¹⁸ Despite this limitation of domain in the temple, Josephus explained in detail that there was a special place in the temple reserved for women to worship, and special gates only open for this area. That provides that Jewish women from diaspora, as well as the Jewish women in Jerusalem worshiped at the temple. Hence, Jewish women had access to worship in the temple.¹⁹ And it is one reason to say that women, like men, brought the sacrifices required of them for various reasons, such as after childbirth, and also both women and men came to celebrate festivals with other members of their families.²⁰

The Mishna gives evidence of separating women and men in a second Temple worship setting when it suggests that there was a temporary separation during the annual Water Drawing ceremony of Sukkot:

¹⁵ Lev 9: 9 in *The Jerusalem Talmud, First Order: Kilaim*.

¹⁶ Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 8.

¹⁷ Ross Shepard Kraemer, "Some Caveats" in *Women & Christian Origins*, 36.

¹⁸ Ben Witherington, 8.

¹⁹ Kraemer, D'Angelo, *Women & Christian Origins*, 61.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

The Women's Court [‘ezrat nashim] was 135 [cubits] in length by 135 [cubits] in width [...] later they surrounded [the Women's Court] with a balcony so that the women should look on from above and the men were down below in order that they should not intermingle.²¹

Bernadette J. Brooten suggests that women have participated in the synagogue services:

Rabbinic sources speak of women participating in synagogue services. B. ‘Abod. Zar. 38a-38b reads: (An Israelite) woman may set a pot on a stove and let a gentile woman then come and stir it pending her return from the bathhouse or the synagogue, and she need take no notice of it.²⁵

And the writer continues to tell about that and says that just before these words, the text speaks of a male Israelite leaving a gentile man to watch his meat while he is in the synagogue or house of learning.²⁶

As stated before, there are some traditions saying that women can read the Torah in the synagogue. They mentioned the right of women and minors to be included among the seven people called to read from the Torah on the Sabbath. Kraemer mentions that the Jewish Law permitted women to read the Torah (the Five Books of Moses).²⁷

Some sources say that only men could make up the quorum of ten which was necessary for a service, and if less than ten men were in attendance, even though women were present, then the congregation, to use the words of Mishnah, "... may not recite the Shema with its benedictions, nor may one go up before the Ark, nor may they lift up their hands, nor may they read [the prescribed portion of] the Law or the reading from the Prophets..." (Meg. 4:3).²⁸ Similarly, only men were allowed to read from the Torah scroll, for although women were in theory eligible, it was not customary for them to obey the public call to read. Thus the Talmud declared that, "All are qualified to be among the seven (who read on Sabbath mornings), even a minor and a woman, but a woman should not be allowed to come forward to read out of respect

²¹ Chad Spiegel in <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic1202528.files/Lesson%206/6b%20Spiegel.pdf>, accessed on March 30, 2015.

²⁵ Bernadett J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue – Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* (Atlanta: Brown University, 1982), 140.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Kraemer, "Some Caveats" in *Women & Christian Origins*, 36.

²⁸ Ben Witherington confirms it and continues that it appears after the New Testament times and perhaps before that they were expected to refuse, 8.

for the congregation” (Meg. 23a). The reason for this exclusion on the grounds of “respect for the congregation” is nicely analysed by R. Loewe who writes that,

...the ineligibility of women ... (to act) ... as leaders in prayer for congregations including men (rests) on the principle that whereas obligation may be fulfilled by a plurality of those liable to it acting cooperatively, one of their number taking the lead and the others consciously fulfilling their obligation in unison with him, the situation would be quite otherwise were the quasi-representative figure not under an obligation of precisely analogous quality to that of the remainder of the congregation.²⁹

Anyway, many of the rabbinic traditions mentioned that women go to the synagogue regularly and participate in the service. Brooten suggests that women and children are useful in the synagogue to answer “Amen” to the blessing that the priests give.³⁰

The very precise functions of the synagogues at these times are not so clear. But one thing is sure, the temple is led by the priests but the synagogue is led by an “*archi-synagogos*”, literally meaning the head of the synagogue or the ruler. Although many of them were men, there were also women who had this title of head of synagogue. Evidence of this is found in some Greek inscriptions in which women bear the title *archisynagogos* / *archisynagogissa*.³¹

The first inscription that Brooten cites is from Smyrna Ionia (probably 2nd century C. E.), and it reads:

Rufina, a Jew, head of synagogue (*archisynagogos*), built this tomb for her freed slaves and slaves raised in her house...

In this inscription, there is no husband to be mentioned. It means that Rufina herself is the head of the Synagogue at this time.

The second inscription that Brooten cites is from Kisamos, Crete, and it reads:

Sophia of Gortyn, elder (*presbitera*) and head of synagogue (*archisynagogissa*) of Kisamos lies here. The memory of the righteous one forever.

²⁹ R Loewe, *The position of Women in Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1996), 85.

³⁰ Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue – Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*, 141.

³¹ Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, 136.

It is seen that this woman bears two titles. No husband is mentioned. And the last inscription that Brooten suggests, reads:

From Theopempte, head of the Synagogue (*archisynagogos* or *archisynagogissa*) – the title is in abbreviated *archisyn* – and her son Eusebios.

Brooten continues to explain that one task of the head of synagogue seems to have been to invite a member of the congregation to read from Scriptures and to preach. The *archisynagogos* also seems to have been the leading synagogue functionary. Exhorting and teaching also occur in the ancient sources as activities of the *archisynagogos*.³²

Some scholars also confirmed that, and even added that there were other inscriptions identifying women as members of the council of elders and also significant financial contributors to synagogue.³³ There are women who have the desire to promote the welfare of synagogue, expressed especially by the generous donation of money. Brooten states that “the purpose of pointing out the women in the donative inscriptions is not therefore to suggest that all of them held leadership positions or were synagogue functionaries... the point is to consider the implication and existence of women donors...”³⁴ In other words, the identification of women as active donors in the synagogue is to show that women were active members of the synagogue and in control of a certain amount of money. Brooten continues by providing an example of a synagogue where women were very active as donors, in Apamea in Syria.³⁵ A woman, named Tation, was well known as a contributor to the synagogue. She erected the assembly hall and the enclosure of the open courtyard with her funds and gave them as gifts to the synagogue.³⁶ She was honored by the synagogue that gave her a seat of honor even though men and women were separated in the synagogue.³⁷ Jewish women had an important role also in the observance of the festivals, especially Rosh Hashannah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.³⁸

³² Bernadette J. Brooten, *Female Leadership in the Ancient Synagogue* (Portsmouth: Rhode Island, Newport Daily News, 2000), 215-216.

³³ Kraemer, D'Angelo, *Women & Christian Origins*, 64.

³⁴ Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, 142.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Judith R. Baskin, *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective, 2nd edition* (U. S. A.: University Press, 1998), 51.

³⁷ Kraemer, D'Angelo, *Women & Christian Origins*, 64.

³⁸ Judith R. Baskin, *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective, 2nd edition* (U. S. A.: University Press, 1998), 52.

2.2 Situation of women in Greco-Roman society

In Greek society, men were the heads of the families. The society expected women to marry when they reached the age of 12-14. In the Athenian society, the Athenian citizen women got married usually at fifteen or sixteen years of age.³⁹ Their fathers and prospective husbands arranged this marriage. They were simply passed from the house of their father to the house of another. Fathers gave to their daughters their dowry when they married. When women became divorced, or became widows and they had no children, they returned to their former families and took their dowries with them. Women were placed in the very low position in Athenian society, as illustrated in the statement of Thales when he praised the fact that “he was born a human being and not a beast, next a man and not a woman, thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian.”⁴⁰ Women were not allowed to participate in some of the cults, and, further, they were not accepted to bear witness in the court.

There were women called “companions” in Athenian society. They didn’t have civic rights; they were not allowed to participate in public life. Companions and citizen women were very different because companions were not allowed to take over citizen women’s position. In spite of that they could have good education to become a good companion. They were called “the only educated women in Athen”.

And, noteworthy, they were allowed to participate in all religious cults.⁴¹

The ease with which a Greek husband could terminate the marriage is quite disturbing to a contemporary student of history. The only thing the husband needed to do was to send his wife away to her paternal family and the marriage ended.⁴² The society did not allow women to conduct legal or economic transactions without a male guardian. In Athenian Law women could not own property. Women did not generally inherit anything in the presence of equally close males.⁴³

³⁹ Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 11.

⁴⁰ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=D.+L.+1.1>, accessed on March 30, 2015.

⁴¹ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=D.+L.+1.1>, accessed on March 30, 2015.

⁴² David M. Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh:Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 89.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 99.

During their marriage, Greek women were supposed to occupy themselves with weaving within the house confines. The seclusion of women was common among Athenians as well. A respectable woman was not allowed to leave the house unless a trustworthy male escort accompanied her. A wife was not allowed to eat or interact with male guests in her husband's home; she had to retire to her woman's quarters. Men kept their wives under lock and key, and women had the social status of slaves. Women were considered inferior to men. One of the Greek poets equated women with evil, such as they did with Pandora. In men's view, woman was responsible for unleashing evil on the world.⁴⁴

The Greek woman's sphere of life was her family; her active life did not really begin until her marriage. In Greek women's sphere, women had been able to look forward to only two journeys: the first from their father's house to their husband, the next from their husband's house to the grave. In Sparta, women seemed to be freer than the Athenian women. Women there were well trained to become a good mother for their children, especially their sons. If women became good mothers, their husband gave them permission to participate in public life. And of course, women in Sparta were subordinated to their fathers or husbands. It is known also that Spartan women participated in the cults and had official roles. Approximately after two centuries in Corinth, citizen women had more freedom than Athenian women and they had more respect.

Women in Greek society were visible in religious life and almost the center of the divine inspiration even they were confined to the household. Women were allowed to follow the goddesses but their activities in the temple were limited.⁴⁵ But even the rite of the goddesses was dominated by male priests. There was a woman priest of Apollo who was called Pythia. The woman priest of Athena Polias, the patron goddess of Athen, was very important and influential in the political life of the society. Women were also able to exercise a leadership role in the mystery religions. Women priests and religious functionaries were publicly honored in Hellenistic society.

In the 5th century B.C., the situation of Roman women was the same as the Jewish women in the context of early Judaism. The status of Roman women was very low. Wives and

⁴⁴ Alvin Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 99.

⁴⁵ Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 14-15

daughters were entirely under the domination of their husbands and fathers. Roman law placed a wife under the absolute control of her husband who had ownership of her and her possessions. He could divorce her if she went out in public without veil. A husband had the power of life and death over his wife, just as he had over his children.⁴⁶ The Romans did not allow women to speak in public. Women, even though they are full of age, are under the guardianship of their husband or of some other male relative. That means that the father had the power over his wife and children, especially the daughters. Ben Witherington reports what Livy states about women's situation during the time of the Republic:

Our ancestors permitted no woman to conduct even personal business without a guardian to intervene in her behalf; they wished them to be under the control of fathers, brothers, husbands...⁴⁷

This regulation about "guardianship" was relaxed step by step, however, by the time of Augustus (beginning about 27 B. C.).⁴⁸ Augustus was eager to promote child-bearing among the upper classes and suggested that a woman could be freed from all guardianship after she bore a third child. Further, in the early second century (A.D. 117), a married woman did not need a guardian even to draft her will, and a father no more dreamed of forcing her daughter to marry against her will. It means that a marriage could not be made by constraint, but only by consent of the parties thereto. At this time, the free consent of the girl was indispensable. At this time, the guardian was deemed to be totally unnecessary.⁴⁹ But even so, the women in the upper classes could not deny the marriage offer. And so also for the daughter when girls had the full age to marry, they had to accept what was offered to them. Women's most important purpose in life was procreation in the Roman world.

Boys and girls could have the same education but the girls stopped to learn when they married. The poor went to school but the rich were tutored at home. Roman women were well educated. In spite of that they could not work in the public sphere. Most of them stayed at home. Women in the upper class and free women wielded great influence and power and were called matrons. They were free to do what they wanted to do, such as to go to the market place, to the festivals, games, or to stay at home supervising their children. They also had servants and

⁴⁶ Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 20.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

assigned tasks to them. In some cases, the matrons became the head of the house and had control of everything in the whole house.⁵⁰

Women were also free to own property, on which apparently they had the almost unbelievable privilege of not being taxed. Bonnie Thurston also mentions in her book that they could inherit property from both fathers and husbands.⁵¹ We recall that some of the earliest Christians met in the house of John Mark's mother (Acts 12: 12). We recall also Lydia, seller of purple, an Eastern Greek-speaking woman who managed her own business and household and who invited Paul to stay a while at her house (Acts 16: 14-15). Freed women were free to do what they wanted to improve their everyday life, as Ben Witherington states:

Most freed women were shop-keepers, artisans, or domestics, while some were known to be physicians, commercial entrepreneurs, brick makers, and perhaps even owners of brick making or ship-building operations.⁵²

Slave women in the Roman world were classified as property. And it is good to mention that the Roman economic system depended on labor provided by slaves. However, they were treated in a bad manner, because they had to be sexually available to their masters. They also could be sent to work as prostitutes.⁵³

The Greco-Roman world, at the start of the 1st century CE, was polytheistic. People believed in a large variety of gods and goddesses, each the subject of the stories and rites, worshipped at various levels. Roman women had less freedom to become priestesses than the Greek women. The Romans had an official cult of Vesta, goddess of the heart, the house life and the continuity of the family life. There were women called "vestal virgins" who had an important role in this official cult.⁵⁴ The leader of this religion was a male priest.

The vestal virgins were the only Roman women who were legally independent of the authority of the *pater familias*. When they entered the service, they were given a share of property over which they retained ownership. They played an official role in some festivals. Their position was highly visible as they rode through the streets in special chariots and were

⁵⁰ Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 22.

⁵¹ Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament – Question and Commentary* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 22.

⁵² Thurston, *Women in the New Testament – Question and Commentary*, 22.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁴ Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 23.

given the best seats at banquets, spectacles and the theater. Important political documents and wills were entrusted to their care. They sometimes even influenced emperors. The vestals were, however, always under the authority of the pontiffs. It is seen that women were excluded from the highest office of Roman religion.

The wives of priests were sometimes priestesses. The *flaminica* was the wife of the *flamen dialis* and a priestess of Juno. When she died, her husband's priesthood was terminated. In the cults of the imperial family in the provinces, there were female priests serving the divinized empresses.

There were three venues for the practice of Greco-Roman religions, such as public religion, semi-private cults and citizen gatherings. "In both the public and domestic cults, men wielded the primary sacerdotal responsibilities as magistrates, priests..."⁵⁵ Foremost of these Greco-Roman religions were the rites of the traditional gods and goddesses, like Jupiter, Juno, Athena, and the like. In the Greco-Roman world, women played both primary and secondary roles in the cultic setting. They served as priestesses and held other kinds of roles in the temple worship of a wide variety of deities, as well as in temples devoted to emperor worship and the provincial cults. Paganism accorded a prominent role to women in many facets in the temple cults.

It is seen that men and women of all classes were welcome at almost all available religious rites, and women took the position of leader in some places. Thus in the Roman Empire, women did exercise an official role in religion, although they were not admitted to the highest religious offices. Religion was ultimately controlled by men. As I told before, even the cults admitting only women were frequently used by the male authorities to reinforce the subordinated role of women. But, anyway, Roman men and women could convert to new religion.

2.3 Jesus and women in the New Testament

In order to understand Paul's view of women, it is necessary to know how Jesus treated women first, because it is seen in his letters that Paul followed Jesus' teaching about women.

⁵⁵ Thurston, *Women in the New Testament – Question and Commentary*, 24.

Jesus' attitude toward women is found in our four canonical Gospels. Jesus valued women and treated them with respect and dignity (Matt 9: 20-22 cf Mark 5:25-34 and Luke 8:43-48]; John 4: 1-30; 7: 53-8: 11). We do not find the value of women that permeated the teachings of the New Testament in the Greco-Roman culture, or the cultures of others societies. The extremely low status that the Greek, Roman and Jewish women had for centuries was radically affected by the appearance of Jesus Christ. His actions and teachings raised the status of women to new heights, often to the dismay and sharp disapproval of his friends and enemies. By word and deed, He went against the ancient beliefs and practices that defined women as socially, intellectually, and spiritually inferior.

He ignored ritual impurity laws: Mark 5:25-34 describes Jesus' cure of a woman who suffered from menstrual bleeding for 12 years. According to the Law of ritual purity, women should have been at home during their menstrual period, living quietly (see Lev 15: 19-31). They could not go out; any person that women touch during their menstrual period becomes ritually uncleaned. But Jesus cured this woman, ignored this ritual impurity Law.⁵⁶

Jesus talked to foreign women: John 4: 1-30 describes Jesus' conversation with a woman of Samaria. She was doubly ritually unclean since she was both a foreigner and a woman. Men were not allowed to talk to women, except within their own families. Jesus also helped a Canaanite woman, another foreigner, in Mark 7: 24-30. Although he described non-Jews as "dogs", he was willing to talk to her, and is recorded as having cured her daughter of demon-possession.

He also taught women students: Jewish tradition at the time did not allow women to be taught. Rabbi Eliezer said in the 1st century CE: "Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman...Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity."⁵⁷ Jesus overthrew centuries of tradition. In Luke 10:38-42, he taught Mary, sister of Martha.

Jesus used terminology which treated women as equal with men. Luke 13: 16 describes how he cured a woman from an indwelling satanic spirit. He called her a daughter of Abraham,

⁵⁶ <http://jewishchristianlit.com/Texts/StudTxs/4Q274.html>, accessed on April 29, 2015.

⁵⁷ Rabbi Eliezer, Mishnah, Sotah 3:4

thus implying that she had equal status with sons of Abraham. Frank Daniels says: “The expression ‘son of Abraham’ was commonly used to respectfully refer to a Jew, but ‘daughter of Abraham’, was an unknown parallel phrase... It occurs nowhere else in the Bible.”⁵⁸ It seems to be a designation created by Jesus himself.

He told parallel male-female stories. The author of Luke and Acts shows many parallel episodes: one relating to a woman, the other to a man. For example:

- Simeon and Hannah in Luke 2: 25-38.
- Widow of Sarepta and Naaman in Luke 4: 25-38.
- Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5: 1-11.
- Lydia and the jailer’s conversion in Acts 16: 14-34.

H. Flender also quoted nine additional parallel like we see previously in Witherington’s book, *Women in the Earliest Churches*.⁵⁹ The human and respectful way Jesus showed toward the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, was in effect a radical proclamation of gender equality. He started a conversation with this woman in public. He acted at least against three restrictive rules for communication, Samaritan, woman, and public. The rabbinic oral law was quite explicit: “He who talks with a woman in public brings evil upon himself.”⁶⁰

It is not the only example of Jesus’ revolutionary attitude toward women. There was also the story of the sisters Martha and Mary (Luke 10: 38-42). All three the synoptic Gospels note that there were women followed Jesus. In the prevailing culture only prostitutes and women of very low reputation would follow a man without a male escort. Yet, these women were genuine followers of Christ, and some even provided financial support for Him and the apostles as it is seen in Luke 8: 3:

...and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.(RSV)

Jesus elevated the value of women beyond anything the world had seen. He gave women the status and respect they were always intended to have, a status equal to men. Not only did

⁵⁸ Frank Daniels, *The Role of Women in the Church*, <http://www.scs.unr.edu/>, accessed on March 30, 2015.

⁵⁹ Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 129.

⁶⁰ Alvin Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 102.

Jesus break with the anti-female culture of His time, but He also set a standard for Christ-followers. Peter and Paul both rose to the challenge in what they wrote in the New Testament.

III. WOMEN IN PAULINE MISSION AND THEIR LEADERSHIP – ROMANS

16: 1-7

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine how Paul's life intersected with women leaders in early church whose lives touched and shaped early Christianity. The New Testament incorporates the stories of prominent women in the church, who worked alongside Paul as colleagues (Acts 1:14; 16:40; Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:3; Col. 4:15; Philem. 1-2).⁶² These leading women demonstrated initiative, influence and competence. Further examination of the Scripture reveals their significances and roles. These women modeled bold leadership within a highly patriarchal culture. Remarkably, Paul respected these women and embraced their essential contribution to the church. Romans 16: 1-7 will serve as the scriptural foundation, with special consideration of three particular women: Phoebe, Prisca and Junia.

Thus, in this chapter, we will first address more generally Paul's attitude toward women. Second, we will make a survey of women in leadership positions in the Bible. Third, we will discuss one by one the roles of three women mentioned in Romans 16: 1-7.

3.2 Paul and his attitude toward women

All of the statements about women's status and roles are to be found in Paul's letters. We can infer from his letters that Paul followed Jesus' teaching about women. In particular, Paul gave great security for Christian women, especially for women married when he taught about marriage.⁶³

People often accuse the apostle of being misogynist, one who hates and fears women, and many interpreters have been convinced that Paul's view of women was basically a chauvinistic one. Ben Witherington affirmed in his book that "there certainly is no evidence here to

⁶² Griffiths, 643.

⁶³ Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 145.

substantiate the view that Paul was either chauvinist or a feminist.”⁶⁴ “Nor may it be argued that he is some amalgam of the two extremes.”⁶⁵

Yet, if one looks at the church as fraternity within the Roman Empire, one would appreciate the teaching of Paul on the details of social life. Thus, Paul’s teaching on women reflects the creation order and the high value God places on women as creatures made in His image.

Paul’s teachings and description of Christian women indicate a new realm of ministry activity that was denied to the typical Jewish woman, and they present a softened version of the larger society’s patriarchal family structure.

Paul presents a very different equation in his letter to the Ephesians 5:21-33. His formula for marital success reads: “he over Christ plus she over Christ equals one.” Let us examine his teaching in some detail.

He introduces his instruction in verse 21 with the command: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephes 5: 21 RSV) New notice how Paul places Christ at the center of his discussion. This is vital. Secondly, the charge “be subject to one another” is also important. If the husband and wife are “subject to” or “submissive to” one another, there can be no question of who is in the power position. Paul is fully aware that original sin brought disharmony into marriages. The burning issue for Paul is not ruling, but authentic love. Genuine love has two essential qualities: self-sacrifice and commitment.⁶⁶

Self-sacrifice requires surrendering my ego and my desires for someone else. Commitment means that I will sacrifice myself when it is difficult, even painful. When love is perfect the self-sacrifice is total and the commitment is absolute. This is how Jesus loves. It is how fallen men and women can love in Jesus. God identified the impact of original sin on married couples when he confronted the perpetrators in the Garden of Eden. He said to Eve: “yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16b). Two ideas can be drawn from this passage. First, many women will long for their husband’s heart only to have a

⁶⁴ Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 137.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶⁶ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 213.

tyrant instead. Loving is not the strong suit of fallen men. Secondly, many women will engage their husbands in a battle for control. Submissiveness is not the strong suit of fallen women. Let us examine what Paul specifically commands husbands and wives. The Apostle's instruction to wives is contained in the next three verses: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands" (Eph 5:22-24). This is a passage that does not set well with many modern women. The suggestion that they should be "subject to" their husbands makes women uptight and displeased because modern women feel that they have values. Yet, Paul is not giving a suggestion, but a command. Clearly, some explanation is needed. It is clear from verse 21 that submission is equally required of both spouses to each other. Marriage is a relationship of mutual surrender.

Therefore, the submission Paul is commanding is radically different from the obedience of an inferior to a superior, like a child to his parents. The model he uses is also fundamentally different from the thinking of the world. It is helpful to reflect that Paul is addressing the proper order in a Christian family. Paul's instruction to wives does not in any sense negate the gifts of women. Indeed, many women are more gifted than their husbands. Mary was more gifted than Joseph.

Paul's teaching about submission provided a completely new way to look at marriage: as an earthbound illustration of the spiritual mystery of the union of Christ and his bride, that is the Church. Paul called wives to not only submit to their husbands as to the Lord, but he called husbands to submit to Christ.⁶⁷ Paul called men to love their wives in the self-sacrificing way Christ loves the Church. In a culture where a wife was considered as a property, and a disrespected piece of property at that, Paul elevated women to a position of honor previously unknown in the world. Husbands could treat their wives kindly, as Witherington states:

He treats wives, equally with husbands... [The husband] is to treat [his wife] in a sanctified manner. There could be no devaluation of her personhood, her value in the family, her importance to the husband's life, both physical and spiritual.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Ephesian 5: 22-28.

⁶⁸ Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 160-161.

Paul also provided a highly counter-cultural direction for the New Testament church.⁶⁹ In the Jewish synagogue, the tasks that women could perform were limited, and their voice was almost silent in worship. In the pagan temple, women served as prostitutes. The Christian church, on the other hand, was a place for women to pray and prophecy out loud; it is seen that Paul allows women to prophesy and pray (1 Cor 11: 5).⁷⁰ Paul considered the ministry of prophecy to be the most desirable of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14: 1); and he regarded the ministry of prophecy as important and influential. God gave spiritual gifts to women as well as men. Paul commanded older women to teach younger ones. The invitation to women to participate in public worship of Jesus was unthinkable, but true. There was a great diversity of ministries available to Early Church women to perform.⁷¹

Paul is a certain and consistent spokesman for the liberation and equality of women in the New Testament. It is seen by his way of treating women, as exposed in his letters, not the least in the greetings in Romans 16.

In Gal 3:28, Paul speaks of equality beyond equal access to the salvation by baptism (cf v. 27). This passage has major social implications, such as the removal of gender distinctions for the roles within church. Equality in being should entail equality in function. Goothuis argues that:

...the clear teaching in Galatians 3:26-28 and elsewhere [is] that women and men relate to God [equality in being] and participate in the worship of God [equality in function] in the same way, with no difference in spiritual status or role.⁷²

Witherington continues that Paul's declaration meant that a female no longer needed to be attached to a male to have a place in the community. Women's roles need not be limited to wife and mother. As in Jesus' own teaching, Paul's declaration in Gal 3:28 opened the door to the ministry of the women as women, including the ministry of single women.⁷³

⁶⁹ Bonnidell and Robert Clouse, *Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 191.

⁷⁰ Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 178.

⁷¹ Lisa Bellan-Boyer, "Conspicuous in their Absence: Women in Early Christianity" – *Journal of Cross Currents* 53, (2003), 48.

⁷² Rebecca M. Goothuis, *Good News for Women: a Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), 25.

⁷³ Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 178.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, Paul instructed women to “keep silent in the churches”. This word for quietness is not used. Instead, the silence of women in church is emphasized three times using two other Greek words: they are to be silent (*sigāō*), they are not permitted to speak (*laleō*), for it is improper for a woman to speak (*laleō*) in church. This three-fold repetition was a common technique used by Jews, Greeks, and Hellenistic Romans to emphasize the absolute nature of a statement.⁷⁶ The instruction to “be silent” has been used twice earlier in this passage. Paul commanded the person speaking in a tongue for which there is no interpreter to keep silent in the church (14:28). Also, when a second person receives a revelation from God, the first prophet is to keep silent (14:30). The word is also found in seven New Testament verses outside this chapter, and in each case, unless the context provides a qualifier, it appears to refer to a complete stop of all speaking (Luke 9:36; 18:39; 20:26; Acts 12:17; 15:12–13). In the one verse where a person or people are not directly the subject (Rom. 16:25), it still refers to something being kept unsaid. The other word is a general verb for to “speak,” which here is negated both times it is used. The women are not to speak. This is a typical verb for speaking in the New Testament, occurring nearly 300 times, and variously translated as “speak,” “say,” “tell,” “talk” or “declare.” It almost always refers to the physical act of speaking.

When this vocabulary is considered, it becomes evident that 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 should not simply be read as meaning the same thing as 1 Timothy 2:11–12. While the latter exhorts women to learn in quietness, the former appears to be a far harsher command for women to be silent while in church. Further, since Paul wrote 1 Corinthians a decade before 1 Timothy⁷⁷, he cannot have expected the Corinthians to parse his words through the grid of what he would write later to Timothy in Ephesus.

1 Corinthians 14:34–35 is still used to limit women in other ways, often by appealing to some of the least plausible interpretations of the passage. It is one thing to insist on women not teaching based on 1 Timothy 2:12 and another to insist on women not speaking in church based on 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. It is based on taking each passage literally and plainly. It is

⁷⁶ Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 218.

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians is generally dated to the spring of AD 53 or 54. There is more variation in dating 1 Timothy, partly due to its disputed authorship.

something quite different to argue for a limitation on women other than speaking in church based on 1 Corinthians 14:34–35.

I find it disturbing that this passage is still used to prop up other restrictive views on women's participation, even after the plain sense meaning of the passage has been rejected. Rather than restricting women in any way, I believe 1 Corinthians 11–14 contains one of the sharpest calls for women's full participation in church services. Paul rebukes those who would arbitrarily limit the participants by sex. He reveals a new view of the body of Christ in which gifts are not apportioned by worldly measures. When the church gathers, all are to participate and all are to learn and be encouraged.

Paul allowed women to participate in ministry and accepted to work with them. To further illustrate this point, Euodia, Syntyche, and Prisca, who are listed in this greeting, are technically identified by Paul as his "*synergoi*" or "fellow-workers" (Phil. 4:2-3; Rom. 16:3). Paul uses this language not only to describe these three women, but also to describe various men with whom he co-labored. This terminology is Paul's most frequent designation for his many associates. According to Wolf-Henning Ollrog, a co-worker is "one who works together with Paul as an agent of God in the common work of missionary preaching."⁷⁸ Paul claimed that he was the apostle of gentiles, and as leader he had a team built up with co-workers, men and women, and they shared the grace of being co-workers of Christ.

As we closely examine Paul's attitude in regard to women, it is surprising to see that he was not really negative as many interpreters suppose. And also, rather than a male chauvinist, as some has called him in recent years. Paul allowed wider participation of women in ministry than the Jewish and Greek-Roman traditions and cultures did.

He valued women as Jesus did during his time. Paul gave greater freedom to women stressing the equality of men and women in every respect because of their commitment to Christ. Their position in the church may be varied but they are still equal as persons in Christ. He did not put women down. Paul taught about submission but his idea of submission was firmly grounded in love for Christ and love for one another. And as we saw before, this submission is to one's husband, not to men in general. He dedicated women as his co-workers, as we will elaborate in

⁷⁸ Florence M. Gillman, "Women in Roman 16: 1-16" in *Women Who Knew Paul*. Zacchaeus Studies: New Testament (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 43.

detail when we turn to the passage Rom 16: 1–7, and he praised them. We can say that women in Paul’s mission and churches had much wider roles than women had in ancient Judaism.

3.3 Women leaders in the Bible

The question of women serving as Christian leaders is not a contemporary issue. Biblical leadership is determined, both in the Old and New Testament, by the calling and spiritual gifting of God and by the recognition of these gifts and calling by his people (Exod 3: 10; 4: 12; Judges 6: 14, 34; 1 Sam 16: 13; Acts 6: 3; Rom 12: 3-8; 1Pet 4: 10).⁷⁹

Biblical history reflects the patriarchal culture; yet, Scripture often challenges patriarchal ways. Miriam, a prophet, led the women in celebration and worship following Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Five hundred years later, God said, “I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam” (Mic. 6:4; cf. Exod. 15:20-21).

Miriam was considered one of three celebrated national leaders.-The next, Deborah, became a judge when Israel lived in great moral decline due to a lack of strong national leadership. God appointed Deborah to the highest public office in the land. Even Barak knew that the Lord had chosen to speak through Deborah and discerned that she should accompany him to battle.⁸⁰ She was a prophetess, judge (Judge 4), and of course a mother.

The third female national leader was Huldah who served as a prophetess during the reign of King Josiah in Judah. When the book of the law was found in the temple (621 BC), Josiah, the king, consulted with Huldah, who gave a strong message from God to the nation (2 Kings 22:11-20). Other prophets, including Jeremiah, were available but God chose to use Huldah for this crucial assignment.

Out of these three, there was Esther, through the encouragement and endorsement of Mordecai, rose to a high profile position in order to save the nation. Esther emerged with extraordinary authority (Esther 4:14; 8:7-8; 9:29). Clearly, God called and used these women as national leaders over both men and women.

⁷⁹ Valerie Griffiths, “Women as Leaders” in *The IVP Women’s Commentary*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, (2002), 642.

⁸⁰ “Deborah: Prophet, Mother and Judge,” *The Torah Studies*, on <http://rinahshal.tripod.com/id146.html>, (accessed March 4, 2015).

3.4 Romans 16: 1–7

The whole chapter 16 of Romans contains Paul’s commendation of Phoebe and greetings to significant individuals in the Roman church, a congregation he did not establish. Although Paul had never been to Rome, he knew several believers in the Roman church. This passage indicates that women played a prominent role in the Roman church, not only as members but also as workers. Ten of the twenty-seven Christians Paul greets in this passage are women (more than one third). Six of them (Phoebe, Prisca, Junia, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis) are specifically commended as women who “worked hard in the Lord” (Rom 16:12). The presence of these women fits in with what we know of the Early Church in general and indicates an open atmosphere in which women participated alongside men.⁸²

Based on Paul’s greeting (Rom. 16:1), it becomes apparent that Paul recognized that certain women were gifted with a leadership calling. Paul recognized that God had called these women and commissioned them to ministry. A closer study of the ministry of Phoebe, Priscilla and Junia is instructive.

3.4.1 The ministry of Phoebe in the church of Cenchraea

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchraee, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well.” (Romans 16: 1-2, Revised Standard Version- RSV)

Συνίστημι δὲ ὑμῖν Φοίβην τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν, οὖσαν [καὶ] διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κενχραεῖς, ἵνα αὐτὴν προσδέξησθε ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως τῶν ἁγίων καὶ παραστήτε αὐτῇ ἐν ᾧ ἂν ὑμῶν χρήζη πράγματι· καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ προστάτις πολλῶν ἐγενήθη καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ.

What does the Bible reveal about Phoebe? At first glance, Paul’s greeting indicates that Phoebe delivered the letter to the church in Rome. She served as “Paul’s forerunner.” As a woman entrusted with great responsibility, Paul requested that the church extend to her a heartily reception. He wholly respected and endorsed her: “I commend, (Συνίστημι: transitively; active, as making known one's approval, commend, recommend)⁸⁵ to you, our sister Phoebe.”⁸⁶

⁸² Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 209.

⁸⁵ Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise of Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament – GEDNT* (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1993).

In the two verses headlining Romans 16, Paul calls Phoebe with three Greek nouns which the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translates as “sister” (ἀδελφήν), and “deacon” (διάκονον), and “benefactor” (προστάτις).⁸⁷ Bible translators had their translation, like Revised Standard Version (RSV), the earliest one translates these words like “sister, deaconess and helper”.⁸⁸ And the King James Version (KJV) translates them like “sister, servant, and succourer”.⁸⁹ I prefer to use the RSV translation in all my writing and use the “sister, deaconess and helper”.

Paul commends Phoebe to the Roman church, using the technical epistolary expression for introducing a friend to other acquaintances (Συνίστημι δὲ ὑμῖν). One scholar even goes so far as to conjecture that Phoebe “was the person who was asked to explain the possible obscure and controversial passages of the letter. If this is true, Phoebe may have been the first public commentator on the epistle of Paul to the Romans.”⁹⁰

This is like Paul’s recommendation of Timothy to the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 16:10-11)⁹¹ in that Paul wanted the churches to welcome Phoebe and welcome Timothy, recognize them as ministers, and hold them in high regard. Paul also asks the Romans to “receive Phoebe in the Lord.” The verb used here is προσδέχομαι⁹² and is “commonly employed in diplomatic correspondence for receiving a messenger.”⁹³

He asks the believers in Rome to give this woman any help she might need, again using the usual expression in a letter of recommendation, “in whatever she may require from you...” (παραστῆτε αὐτῇ ἐν ᾧ ἂν ὑμῶν χρήζη πράγματι) (RSV). The reason for Paul's request is that the woman so commended “for she has been a helper (προστάτις) of many and of myself as well”,

⁸⁶ Deborah M. Gill and Barbara Cavaness, *God’s Women Then and Now* (Springfield, MO: Grace and Truth Publications, 2004), 111.

⁸⁷ Michael D. Coogan, ed., *New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocrypha, 4th edition* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸⁸ Herbert G. May, Bruce Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Revised Standard Version, 2nd edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁸⁹ Thomas Nelson, *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (Nashville, 1993).

⁹⁰ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 729.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Missionaries, Apostles, Coworkers: Romans 16 and the Reconstruction of Women’s Early Christian History”, *Word & Word* 6 (1986): 423.

⁹² Friberg Lexicon, used with a person as the object: “accept, receive, welcome.”

⁹³ Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009) p.304.

which may refer to the hospitality extended to Paul when he visited Cenchreae at the occasion of his three-month stay in Corinth (cf. Acts 20:2-3).

Cenchreae was one of the most noted assemblies under Paul's ministry. But for this commendation of this elect lady, we would not have known that there was a church in Cenchreae. Whether that church had a bishop or elder as Phil 1:1, is not stated. Certain is, however, that it had a “deacon,” and that deacon was a woman. Her name was Phoebe, which means “radiant” or “bright” or “pure”.⁹⁴ We know nothing else about this woman. We never hear from her again. We don't know if she was single, married, widowed, a mother or divorced. Somehow none of those labels were needed to identify her. Paul only mentions her office as deacon and her reputation for caring for the church as the reasons why the church in Rome should help her. She was characterized by her position in the early Christian missionary movement. Paul wants to proclaim that she was the minister, the leader of the church in Cenchreae.⁹⁵

As we stated before, Paul calls Phoebe by three Greek nouns, considerably as titles. These titles that Paul gives her merit further consideration because they are critical for our understanding of women's role in the mission of the Pauline community.

3.4.1.1 Phoebe as “Sister” (ἀδελφή)

It is a term that can identify a member of a missionary team because the masculine of this term “ἀδελφός (brother) is a frequent designation for Paul's very important “missionary collaborator”.⁹⁶ To illustrate this, we can see that in the case of 1Cor 1: 1, “Sosthenes” is the “brother”. Timothy is the “brother” in 2Cor 1: 1 and Philemon1:1. It is clear that Timothy was a fellow worker with Paul (Rom 16: 21: ὁ συνεργός: for example). These brothers are “assistants in mission”. In this case Sosthenes could have the sense of “brother”, but may refer to an individual who is missionary assistant. Margaret Y. MacDonald confirms the use of this term “sister”:

⁹⁴ Robert Jewette, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2007), 943.

⁹⁵ <http://thebiblicalworld.blogspot.no/2010/08/women-in-life-of-apostle-paul.html>, accessed on April 27th, 2015.

⁹⁶ https://books.google.no/books?id=6QDOBgAAQBAJ&pg=PT222&dq=women+in+mission+from+the+new+testament+to+today&hl=en&sa=X&ei=2DRBVdaWC8HJsQHF3YFw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=women%20in%20mission%20from%20the%20new%20testament%20to%20today&f=false, accessed on April 29, 2015.

As we have seen, this is a term that could be applied to a female member of missionary partnership (cf. 1Cor 9: 5; Rom 15: 16). Paul also called Phoebe, a leader in the church at Cenchrae, ‘sister’.⁹⁷

And she proceeds by asserting,

In addition to missionary partnerships, Romans 16 offers evidence of women working for the sake of the gospel without specific partners. ... Phoebe is the most obvious example of such a woman (Rom 16:1-2).⁹⁸

It is the context that shows that the reference of “sister” in Phoebe’s case is to a missionary assistant of Paul. This title sister also may indicate that Phoebe was Paul’s co-worker in his mission (Phlm 2).⁹⁹

Again, Mary Rose D’Angelo proceeds to argue that “sister” like “brother”, can designate a partner in mission.¹⁰⁰ MacDonald notes that Phoebe was clearly a benefactor of Paul himself (see 3.4.1.3) , and that the title of “sister” in her case is the same as that used Paul for missionary partners in 1Cor 9:5 when she compares the usage of “brother” for Paul’s partner Timothy in 2Cor 1: 1; Phlm 1, and 1 Thess 3: 2. The conclusion that we can draw is that one of the sense of ἀδελφή was probably a title, “sister”. Phoebe’s status as a partner in the gospel already gives her full mature identity in the new society of believers.¹⁰¹

Again, being referred to as “our sister” is an acknowledgement that Phoebe is a member of the community of Jesus’ followers.¹⁰² She is a “family member” among the believers and therefore has a unique relationship with all other Christians in the emerging church. Lynn Cohick suggests that “as a sister of the household of God, Phoebe would be expected to use her resources to sustain and better the lives of her brothers and sisters.”¹⁰³ The kinship relationship of siblings, or “brothers” (*adelphoi*), is one of the primary paradigms for relationships among Jesus’ followers in New Testament churches. The idea behind this paradigm is that brothers and

⁹⁷ Margaret Y. MacDonald, “Reading Real Women Through the undisputed Letters of Paul” in *Women & Christian Origins*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 206.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁹⁹ J Beutler, “adelphe, sister” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, EDNT, vol 1, s.v. “ἀδελφὴν”

¹⁰⁰ Mary Rose D’Angelo, “Women Partners in the New Testament”, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 6: 1 (1990): 73-74.

¹⁰¹ Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament*, 257.

¹⁰² Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life*, 304.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 304

sisters are children of the same Father – God,¹⁰⁴ and that they have equal status in the household of God (e.g. Gal. 3:26-28). Paul’s inclusion of the pronoun “our” (ἡμῶν) would have helped to promote a ready acceptance of Phoebe into the community of Roman Christians: Phoebe is not just Paul’s sister, a recommendation and honor in itself, but the sister of all followers of Jesus, including those in Rome. When used in reference to a specific individual, however, Paul typically used the term “brother” or “sister” for a fellow minister or prominent Christian (e.g. Quartus in Rom 16: 23; Titus in 2 Cor 2: 13, Apphia in Phlm 2).

Next, let us examine the second characterization of Phoebe, that is, as a “deaconess” (RSV). In fact, Phoebe is the first recorded “deacon” in Christianity.¹⁰⁵

3.4.1.2 Phoebe as “Diakonos” (διάκονος)

διάκονος: masculine, it means servant; helper, minister; deacon; deaconess.¹⁰⁶ This noun also indicates one who executes the activities designated by διακονέω.

It becomes the central expression for Christian conduct oriented to Jesus’ word and behavior and for specifically Christian function in the church: charitable activity, proclamation of the Word, and task of leadership.¹⁰⁷

However, this word **διάκονος** can be used comprehensively for all ministries in the church (1Cor 12: 5). This word appears in several places in the Pauline letters. And it is used of individuals who exercise a special function within the church. However, the Pauline letters give no indication concerning the exact nature of the service to be rendered by the appointees.¹⁰⁸

The evidence declares of Phoebe that she possessed a significantly high level of ministry responsibility and leadership. Although several translations render this word feminine, the word used here for “deacon” or “minister” is actually masculine and is exactly the same one Paul uses to describe himself and Apollos (1 Cor 3: 5), Tychicus (Eph 6: 21; Col. 4: 7), and Timothy (1 Tim 4: 6). Paul even speaks of Christ as becoming a “servant” (minister-deacon) to the Jews on

¹⁰⁴ Joan Cecelia Campbell, *Phoebe: Patron and Emissary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 25.

¹⁰⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16: Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 887.

¹⁰⁶ Barclay M Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament- GEDNT* (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1993), s.v. “διάκονος”.

¹⁰⁷ A. Weiser, “diakonos, servant” in EDNT, s.v. “διάκονος”.

¹⁰⁸ C.G. Kruse, *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (USA, InterVarsity Press, 1993), “Servant, Service”, 870.

behalf of God's truth (Rom 15: 8). A deacon is a minister "of a new covenant in the spirit..." (2 Cor 3: 6). Paul was made a "deacon" of the gospel according to the gift of God's grace (Eph 3: 7). Timothy, as a "deacon of Christ Jesus," is to be "nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which (he) followed" (1 Tim 4: 6). Paul views deacons as people who assume responsibility for sharing the gospel and serve as ministers of the word of God. While the functions of a deacon could include ministering to physical needs, these needs are never separated from spiritual needs. For such an inclusive understand we can consider Acts 6-7 where Stephen cares for the food distribution and also preaches the word.

Don Williams emphasizes Paul's egalitarian view of Phoebe in his book, *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church*, he suggests that because Phoebe's title "deacon" is in the masculine, there are no linguistic or theological grounds to distinguish between her and other male "ministers."¹⁰⁹ Williams continues to assert that some would like to restrict Phoebe's role to that of "deaconess," which refers to a person who ministers to women only, the text does not support that notion. In fact, the order of "deaconess" was not invented until three hundred years later.

It seems unnecessary to restrict Phoebe's role to "material support" of the church in Cenchree. MacDonald¹¹⁰ says:

We have evidence to suggest that there were women deacons in the second century, since this word deacon is the same term that was used to refer to the male office holders who participated in the formal organization that emerged in some branches of early Christianity at the beginning of the second century.

Phoebe's permanent and recognized ministry seemed to be a formal role; one can see an early stage of what eventually emerged as an ecclesiastical office. She performed ministry functions equally held by Paul and others. No sexual qualifications are indicated.¹¹¹ Most likely, she was a woman of means who offered her influence and resources to others. Her work benefited both local believers and Christians who traveled through the Corinthian port, including Paul himself. Presumably the local church actually met in her house, which must have been substantial enough to facilitate church services and large groups of believers.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Don Williams, *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church* (Van Nuys, CA: BIM, 1977), 42-43.

¹¹⁰ MacDonald, in *Women & Christian Origins*, 208.

¹¹¹ Williams, *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church*, 43.

¹¹² French L. Arrington and Roger Stronstad, eds., *Full Life Bible Commentary to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 792.

Paul also used this term to refer to the leader of the community in Phillipi who may have included women and men (Phil 1: 1). By calling Phoebe deacon of the church in Cenchreae, Paul clearly want to communicate the importance of her role. It is possible to conjecture that Phoebe had an apostolic leadership in Cenchreae that qualified her to exercise spiritual authority over the souls in her care. Some scholars claim that the term is used to characterize the apostles who were charismatic missionaries, preachers and spirit-filled apostle in 2 Corinthians. Phoebe had this same title. Yet she is not one of the opponents of Paul's but had a friendly relationship with him. So it is not wrong to say that Phoebe is a charismatic preacher and leader of the community in Cenchrae, the seaport of Corinth.¹¹³

While the term *diakonos* probably was not used by the apostle Paul in any formal or titular way, Phoebe is being recommended by Paul “as an official teacher and missionary in the church of Cenchraea.”¹¹⁴ In fact, since Phoebe is given a letter of recommendation by the Apostle Paul in the same manner as Timothy (1Cor 16: 10-11), it is likely that her significance for the development of the early church is under-acknowledged. “Although earlier commentaries interpret the term *diakonos* as signifying the role along the lines of modern deaconess movement, it is now appears that Phoebe functioned as a leader of the congregation.”¹¹⁵ I cannot check this quotation, but for linguistic reasons I assume that the word marked blue is to be deleted.

Peter Stuhlmacher reinforces Phoebe's significant leadership profile. In his commentary on Romans, he stresses that she was a benefactress financially, someone who exercised care socially, and a confidant in such a way that it gave her authority in the church and made the members of the church responsible to her.

The significance of Phoebe's leadership was underlined by the third title that Paul gave to her – so let us now turn to “προστάτις”.

3.4.1.3 Phoebe as “προστάτις”

καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ **προστάτις** πολλῶν ἐγενήθη καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ.

προστάτις: noun nominative feminine singular, common.

¹¹³ Fiorenza, “Missionaries, Apostle, Co-Workers: Romans 16 and Reconstruction of Women's Early Christian History”, *Word & Word* 6 (1986): 426.

¹¹⁴ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origin* (London: SCM, 1995), 171.

¹¹⁵ Fiorenza, *Missionaries*, 423.

This word appears only here in the New Testament and is, hence, a “hapax legomenon”. The corresponding masculine form of this noun does not occur at all. It is probably to be understood in the technical sense of leadership function. It means a woman who renders assistance from her resources, being a protector, helper, patron (Rom 16.2).¹¹⁷ The usual meaning of this word is “leader”, “president”, “patron”. Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan adds that προστάτις means “guardian”, “protector” and “chief”.¹¹⁸

So the term can mean “patroness” in the case of Phoebe, like Lydia in Acts 16 who “prevailed upon” (παρεβιάσατο) Paul and his co-workers. Phoebe may have been a woman of enough wealth and social position to care for a church. Whatever the exact meaning of the term, it suggests that Phoebe had helped many persons in the church, including Paul himself (16:2). The succor that Phoebe gave to the Apostle and to others was probably a matter of material and administrative assistance. She would have been a patron of her community. The “patron” had a technical legal-sense in the Greco-Roman patronage system. In Greco-Roman society, it was common for people from more elite social group to act as a benefactor to those of lower social status, called “clients”. It is also possible that Phoebe gave her services to the sick and poor people in her community. Her patronage was not limited to the community of Cenchraea but included many others.

The title προστάτις accorded to Phoebe by Paul implies prestige. The masculine of this noun, “προστάτης” refers to the person sponsor of a private association and includes the notion of the social protection provided by that sponsor. Generally speaking, “προστάτης” is one who looks to the interests of others, a defender, guardian and benefactor, while προστάτις is a woman in a supportive role, a patron or a benefactor.¹¹⁹

Exegete declare that in the case of Phoebe the feminine form of this word is probably not to be understood in the technical sense of leadership function, but refers rather to Phoebe’s

¹¹⁷ Barbara Friberg, eds., *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), s.v. “προστάτις”.

¹¹⁸ Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament*, 256.

¹¹⁹ E. A. Judge, *Social and Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 171.

support of strangers and the poor, just as “προστάτις” originally referred to a woman “who looks after the legal protection of strangers and freedmen”.¹²⁰

But when we undertake a closer study of the cognate verb form of this noun, another impression arises. The verb that corresponds to the noun προστατίς is “προΐστημι”.

προΐστημι: 2aor. προέστην; pf. ptc. προεστώς; intransitively in the NT. First, in middle put oneself (responsibly) at the head, lead, direct, rule (1Tim 5: 17); second, in active, of a protective leadership care for, help, give aid (1Thess 5: 12).¹²¹

The verb προΐστημι occurs eight times in three different contexts in the New Testament. These contexts include church leadership (Rom 12:8; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17), household management (1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12), and the practice of good deeds (Titus 3:8, 14). For the purposes of this writing, the first context, προΐστημι in church leadership, will take priority in my analysis. In whatever fashion, προΐστημι is utilized, however, a leadership capacity is being conveyed. Some type of leadership position is in order, for προΐστημι can be defined as “to exercise a position of leadership, rule, direct, be at the head (of),”¹²² which are all perfectly appropriate here.

Romans 12:8 writes of ὁ προϊστάμενος, which is used in describing the different gifts that are bestowed upon members of the body of Christ. It reads, “he who exhorts, in his exhortation, he who contributes, in liberality, he who gives aid (ὁ προϊστάμενος), with zeal, he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” (RSV) Every English translation surveyed conveys the idea of leadership for ὁ προϊστάμενος: “he who leads” (NASB: New American Standard Bible, NKJV: New King James Version), “the one who leads” (ESV: English Standard Version), “the leader” (NRSV: New Revised Standard Version), “leadership” (NIV: New International Version), “leadership ability” (NLT: New Living Translation), and “he who is leading” (YLT: Young’s Literal Translation).

¹²⁰ W. Schenk, “prostatis, protectress, helper, assistant” in EDNT, vol3, s.v “προστάτις”.

¹²¹ Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg, Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker’s Book, 2000), electronic edition.

¹²² W Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian other Literature*, BDAG, s.v. “προΐστημι”.

In surveying the semantic domain of προστάτις in regard to church leadership positions, one can see that the semantic range of meanings for προΐστημι differs from the rendering of προστάτις in English translations in Rom 16:2. According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, in surveying the eight occurrences of προΐστημι (as noted above), the majority of these instances have the sense of “to lead.”¹²³ However, English translations do not take this factor into account in their rendering of Rom 16:2 or the fact that προστάτις in its proper sense means “a woman set over others.”¹²⁴ Instead of seeing Phoebe in a leadership capacity, English translations account for Phoebe as a “helper” (NAS, NKJV), a “succourer” (KJV), a “great help” (NIV), or as “helpful” (NLT). The YLT, however, adhering to the most literal rendering of προστάτις, renders this term as “leader.” Douglas Moo argues that if the cognate verb προΐστημι is considered in determining the meaning for προστάτις, Paul might be characterizing “Phoebe as a ‘leader’ of the church.”¹²⁵

In a similar fashion, 1 Thess 5:12 communicates the idea of one in some type of position of authority with the words τοὺς προΐσταμένους. English translations have recognized τοὺς προΐσταμένους ὑμῶν as persons performing in some sort of leadership function, as is evident from their translations: “are over you” (ESV, NIV), “have charge over you” (NAS), “have charge of you” (NRSV), “your leaders” (NLT), and “leading you” (YLT).

How comes that the noun προστάτις takes the meaning of a “helper” if the cognate verb means “to be a leader”? One possible origin for “helper” as rendering could be Gingrich’s *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*: while in the words “protector” and “patron” appear as suitable meanings for προστάτις, but for some translators Phoebe can be described only as a “helper,” with the supporting evidence limited to Rom 16:2.¹²⁶

As we have seen, both the noun προστάτις and its related verb are used to describe individuals in a position of authority. Gerd Theissen assesses the social position of 70 named

¹²³ B. Reicke, s.v. “προΐστημι” *TDNT* 6:701.

¹²⁴ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “προΐστημι”.

¹²⁵ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 916.

¹²⁶ F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), s.v. “προστάτις”

Christian-believers in the Corinthian Jesus group, and he continues by saying that Phoebe is numbered among the 70 because she is associated with Cenchraea.¹²⁷

What then can we conclude about Phoebe and her role in the early church? It is seen that she was a Christian highly recommended by Paul. She was the bearer of Paul's letter to the Romans and possibly for the other churches, as well, because she moved from place to place. Margaret MacDonald suggests that Phoebe "probably combined travel for business purposes with travel for church purposes."¹²⁸ She was described as a "sister", indicating that she was a missionary partner in Paul's mission (1Cor 9:5). Not only a sister, but she was also called a "diakonos" by Paul. It is amazing to note that this term was used by Paul to designate himself, Apollos, and Timothy, and scholars have translated it as "deacon" because it refers to men. But because the term in Rom 16: 1 refers to a woman, some exegetes translated it as "servant".

The third noun that Paul called Phoebe is "*prostatis*". It is generally used in the church leadership by using the corresponding verb form, "*proistemi*", which means "to exercise a position of leadership, rule, direct, be at the head (of)".¹²⁹ Scholars have translated it as "helper" because it refers to a woman. In sum, the roles of Phoebe as a "*diakonos*" and a "*prostatis*" in Rom 16:1-2 have often been understated in English translations, being rendered as "servant" and "helper" respectively.

It is clear that some kind of leadership and responsibility is envisaged whether this was by virtue of the social status of Phoebe or because of the authority invested in her by the Church in Cenchraea. And this must be a leadership which is exercised by women as much as by men. Fitzmyer concludes, "...Phoebe was perhaps a superior or at least a leader of the Christian community at Cenchraea."¹³⁰

Phoebe is not the only woman appearing in the verses Romans 16: 1-7; there are two more. Let us move to see the second woman mentioned, Prisca.

¹²⁷ Gerd Theissen, *Christianity at Corinth: the Quest for the Pauline Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 104.

¹²⁸ MacDonald, in *Women & Christian Origins*, 209.

¹²⁹ BDAG s.v. "προΐστημι".

¹³⁰ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 432.

3.4.2 Prisca and her ministry

Prisca was perhaps one of the most influential women in the early church, partnering with Paul to pioneer churches. Her life and legacy are an inspiration to women in ministry today, and much can be learned from her example.

Mentioned by name a total of six times throughout of the texts of New Testament (Acts 18:2, 18, 19; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19), Prisca and Aquila were a husband-wife team active in evangelism and church planting in the earliest Christian church. Contrary to cultural norms, four of the six times Scripture refers to the couple, Prisca's name precedes her husband's. In ancient times, the first person mentioned in the pair normally held the greater honor. Both Paul and Luke break with traditional patterns by, except for the two times, referring to the couple by placing Prisca's name first. Margaret Y. MacDonald, in *Women & Christian Origins*, confirm this prominence of Prisca by saying that listing the name of Prisca first in Romans 16: 3 and Acts 18: 18, 26 is probably a sign that she was of higher status than her husband because the usual tradition was to mention the man's name first.¹³¹

Theologian Mary Keller proposes an interesting hypothesis: when the couple was introduced in general, Aquila's name came first; when the couple was referred to in ministry context, Priscilla's name came first. She writes:

When New Testament writers refer to their occupation of tentmakers and to 'their house', the order is 'Aquila and Priscilla' (Acts 18: 2; 1Cor 6: 19). But when ministry is in view, the order is 'Priscilla and Aquila' (Acts 18: 18; Rom 16: 3; 2 Tim 4: 19). This is also the case with the introduction of Apollos (Acts 18: 26), suggesting that Priscilla possessed the dominant ministry and leadership skills of the duo.¹³²

Many scholars, including Gill and Cavaness, take the deviation to be a deliberate indicator that Priscilla was the more gifted teacher of the two:

Luke, a polished Greek author, careful and accurate, would not break literary traditions without purpose. He was so impressed with Priscilla, that he listed her name first intentionally.¹³³

¹³¹ Kraemer, D'Angelo, *Women & Christian Origins*, 204.

¹³² Mary Noel Keller, *Priscilla and Aquila: Paul's co-workers in Christ Jesus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 14.

¹³³ Deborah M. Gill and Barbara L. Cavaness, *God's Women: Then and Now* (Springfield, MO: Grace & Truth, 2004), 113.

The apostle Paul considered Priscilla as one of his “co-workers in Christ”¹³⁴ who was willing to risk her life and is worthy of gratitude from both Paul and the other Gentile churches.

The church father John Chrysostom concurs:

...for he did not say, ‘Greet Aquila and Priscilla’ but ‘Priscilla and Aquila’. He does not do this without a reason, but he seems to me to acknowledge a greater godliness for her than for her husband... She took Apollos, an eloquent man and powerful in the scriptures, but knowing only the baptism of John, and she instructed him in the way of the Lord and made him a teacher brought the completion.¹³⁵

Some scholars have even argued for Priscilla as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. While many once thought that Paul authored the letter, it differs stylistically from his other writings, lacking the traditional Pauline pre- and postscripts as well as his characteristic use of exhortation and argument. Any of the epistles in the New Testament could have been anonymous, but rather this one not. It is so strange.¹³⁶ Why is this epistle anonymous?

Perhaps not leaving a clue as to its authorship, however, was the only way for a woman’s work to be accepted (especially amid the judaistic tendencies prevalent among the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews). But by leaving it anonymous, the epistle would have opportunity to become circulated and accepted on the merit of its contents, in spite of the mystery of its authorship.¹³⁷

Prisca’s predominance is not without controversy. German scholar Adolf Harnack discovered attempts to undermine Prisca’s preeminence by a later interpolator of two early New Testament manuscripts. Aquila’s name had been inserted in three different places without Prisca’s, and his name was also placed first in Acts 18: 26. Harnack concluded:

It is quite certain that the interpolator, taking up his corrections in the first third of the second century, suppressed Prisca’s authority, placing Aquila above her in converting Apollos, and withdrew from them a letter they had written. Thus it is proved that a tendency existed at that time to weaken the remembrance of Prisca’s significance, or to destroy it vigorously.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Rena Pederson, *The Lost Apostle: Searching for the Truth About Junia* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 203.

¹³⁵ Mimi Haddad, “Priscilla, Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews?”, *Prisca’s Paper* 7, n.1 (1993), 10.

¹³⁶ Lee Anna Starr, *The Bible Status of Women* (New York: Revell Co., 1926), 204.

¹³⁷ Deborah M. Gill and Barbara L. Cavaness, *God’s Women: Then and Now* (Springfield, MO: Grace & Truth, 2004), 115.

¹³⁸ Mimi Haddad, “Priscilla, Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews?” *Priscilla Papers* 7, no. 1 (1993): 10, from Lee Anna Starr, Adolf von Harnack, *The Bible Status of Woman* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1926).

One contextual clue suggests Prisca may be the author. It is seen that the author is in contact with the believers from Italy, Prisca's homeland, as mentioned in Hebrews 13: 24. The author is also well acquainted with Timothy and states in Hebrews 13: 23 that he or she plans to travel with him to visit the recipients. This is consistent with the fact that Prisca would have known Timothy well, having ministered with him both in Corinth and Ephesus. Additionally, the author switches effortlessly between the pronouns "I" and "we", suggesting the author is referring to an ally whom the readers know. If Prisca is the author, the plural "we" logically refers to Aquila, her husband and ministry partner.¹³⁹ Again, when the author uses the "I", it indicates the author's position as leader.¹⁴⁰

An additional matter of content favoring Prisca as the author are the repeated references to women in the famous "faith chapter" of Hebrews 11. For example, while Romans 4: 21 cites Abraham as the one who was "fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised", Hebrews 11: 11 highlights Sarah: "And by faith, even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise." Second, Joshua's name is nowhere listed in Hebrews 11, yet Rahab, the woman who hid the spies, is mentioned by name in verse 31. Third, the author fails to mention the great prophets Elijah and Elisha by name and instead makes reference to the widow of Zeraphath and the Shunammite woman in verse 35. It seems that the author purposefully emphasizes the fact that women of old demonstrated faith just as much as men. Prisca's authorship would be sensitive to that detail.

In Greek, the Pauline and the deuterion -Pauline epistles use the form Πρίσκα, while the author of Acts, Luke, uses the diminutive form of the name Πρίσκιλλα.¹⁴¹ The latter has been popularized as the standard form for her name in most modern English translations of the Bible. Prisca was more than just a co-worker to Paul; she was a much loved and intimate friend as revealed by Paul's use of the affectionate name "Prisca" in 2 Timothy 4: 19.¹⁴² It is seen also that

¹³⁹ Ruth Hoppin, *Priscilla's Letter: Finding the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Fort Bragg, CA: Lost Coast Press, 1997), 16.

¹⁴⁰ Lee Anna Starr, *The Bible Status of Women* (New York: Revell CO., 1962), 402.

¹⁴¹ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (International Bible Translator, IBT Inc, 1998-2000), s.v. "Πρίσκα".

¹⁴² Royce Gordon Gruenler, "Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementary without Hierarchy", *Priscilla's Paper* (2006) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsty Press, 2005), 490.

the form Πρίσκαν is decisively supported by P⁴⁶ (preiskan) A B C D F G L P. See also the comments on 1 Cor 16: 19 and 2 Tm 4: 19.¹⁴³

So in this thesis, I will use the name Πρίσκα, Prisca, as Paul used it.

It is difficult to talk about Prisca alone because in the New Testament her name and her husband's as well were always mentioned together. The couple is curious for being the only married couple in the Bible who are always listed together, never independently of one another.

We found the structure of Prisca's story in Acts 18. Paul met her and Aquila first when he went to Corinth as part of his second missionary journey.¹⁴⁴ Prisca and Aquila had just arrived in Corinth from Rome. They appear to have been people of some means, having their own business. They had been forced to leave Rome because of an edict issued by the emperor, Claudius, about expelling the Jews from the city. The date of expulsion is not absolutely clear, but scholars place it in the ninth year of the reign of Claudius, which is 49-50 CE, and this is the date with which most scholars agree. It also coheres with the visit of Paul to Corinth, which would have happened soon after Prisca and Aquila arrived there.¹⁴⁵ Paul came in contact with them because he was in the same trade with them, that is, as tent-maker (Act 18: 3). Paul stayed with them, perhaps for the reason of the ministry as well as the material reasons.¹⁴⁶

Prisca and Aquila had a high honor to give their lives for that of Paul. It is known that Paul was in danger many times and in many places (2 Cor 11: 24-27).

Then an eloquent preacher named Apollos came through Ephesus. Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures, but he only knew the baptism of John. This means that Apollos knew that Christ had come and fulfilled John's prophecies, but he didn't know the significance of Christ's death and resurrection, the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit, or the mystery of the church containing both Jews and Gentiles. Prisca and her husband took Apollos aside and explained these things to him (Acts 18: 24-26). Despite Apollos had this high level of knowledge of Scripture, something was lacking in his theology. He did not know about Christian baptism.

¹⁴³ Bruce M Metzger, *A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Deutsch Bibelgesellschaft, 2002), 475.

¹⁴⁴ Acts 18: 1-3

¹⁴⁵ Marie Noel Keller, *Priscilla and Aquila, Paul's co-worker in Christ* (Minnesota: Collegeville, 2010), 9.

¹⁴⁶ Paul's tentmaking activity may have been not only for meeting his material needs but also a natural setting in which to share the gospel.

Our discussion is now about the status of the leadership of Prisca. Scholars describe her as “teacher”. It is possible also that she led the church in her house, and Paul himself called her his “fellow-worker” or “co-worker”. Now, let us look more profoundly at the ministry performed by Prisca, by studying Rom 16: 3-4.

(3) Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, (4) who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks; (5) greet also the church in their house. (Rom 16: 3-4, RSV)

Ἀσπάσασθε Πρίσκαν καὶ Ἀκύλαν τοὺς **συνεργούς** μου ἐν Χριστῷ
Ἰησοῦ, οἵτινες ὑπὲρ τῆς ψυχῆς μου τὸν ἑαυτῶν τράχηλον
ὑπέθηκαν, οἷς οὐκ ἐγὼ μόνος εὐχαριστῶ ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ
ἐκκλησίαι τῶν ἐθνῶν, καὶ τὴν κατ’ οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίαν.

Paul called Prisca and Aquila his fellow workers (v. 3). “My fellow workers in Christ Jesus”: “τοὺς **συνεργούς** μου ἐν Χριστῷ”

συνεργούς: adjective normal accusative masculine plural no degree from συνεργός

συνεργός: a companion in work, fellow-worker: in the N. T. with a genitive of the person, one who labors with another in furthering the cause of Christ, Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; Phil. 2:25; 4:3; Philemon 1, 24.¹⁴⁸

This analysis shows that Prisca and Aquila worked together with Paul. Paul does not differentiate between Prisca and her husband Aquila; rather, he calls them both by the name **συνεργοί**.

Paul also uses the term “**συνεργοί**” to indicate that he is not standing over the women and men working together with him in missionary activity “in Jesus Christ”, but that they are on the same level.¹⁴⁹ Scholars confirm that by saying that Paul uses this term to designate leaders.¹⁵⁰

Some scholars say that **συνεργός** is masculine. By asserting that, they want to exclude Prisca from these fellow-workers because of her gender. Luke tells us that Aquila and Prisca

¹⁴⁸ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Online version.

¹⁴⁹ W.-H. Ollrog, “synergos, fellow-worker” in EDNT, s.v “συνεργός”.

¹⁵⁰ David Scholer, “Paul’s Women Co-Workers” *Daughter of Sarah*, vol 6 (1980), 3-6.

worked together. The construction continuity and the grammatical structure of Luke's text tell us they were "trio", as stated:

He (Paul) stayed with them (Prisca and Aquila), and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers.(Acts 18: 3).

The fact that the word "συνεργός" is masculine leads the author to not think that Prisca should be excluded from these fellow-workers, but instead to say that the work for men is given to Prisca too.

And also, we see that their names, Prisca and Aquila are always mentioned together. As such, there is no good reason to exclude Prisca from the "they/them" team. They were two of Paul's closest friends.¹⁵¹ Prisca, Aquila and Paul worked together "in Christ Jesus". It means that the couple shared Paul's itinerant ministry. They went to Ephesus and to Rome assisting their friend in every way. They encouraged and protect him. Perhaps this is what Paul referred in his letter to Romans "...for my life, they risked their own necks..."¹⁵² It is probably either at Corinth (Acts 18: 6, 9-10) or more probably at Ephesus. It may have something to do with this "fighting with beasts" (Acts 19: 30-31 cf 1Cor 15: 32). They must have to return from Ephesus to Rome when the edict of Claudius had banished them (Acts 18: 2).¹⁵³ In Romans 16: 4b, "...to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks." (RSV). This is that both for the care they took of Paul, and the danger they exposed themselves to on his account; which the apostle expresses his sense of gratitude for, and which all the Gentile churches were under obligations to do likewise, since they had a common share in his labors and usefulness, he was the apostle of them all; and also for their help and assistance in carrying on the work of the Lord in all the churches of the Gentiles whose special apostle this dear couple had rescued from imminent danger.¹⁵⁴

They ministered with Paul in Ephesus and led a house church in their home in Rome. Keller notes that "Prisca and Aquila are positive example of a team ministry, to the point that

¹⁵¹ Everett F. Harrison, *Romans* in The Zondervan NIV Commentary: New Testament, vol. 2, ed. Richard Polcyn and Verlyn D. Verbygge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 598.

¹⁵² Romans 16: 4.

¹⁵³ <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/romans/16-4.htm>, accessed on April 29, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/romans/16-4.htm>, accessed on April 29, 2015.

both in Luke and Paul, except for Luke’s notice of Aquila’s beginnings, they are never mentioned apart from one another.”¹⁵⁵ Ben Witherington also says that:

They were some of Paul’s closest and most reliable workers and it is likely that they were involved in a wide range of activities from providing hospitality for Paul, to church planting, to teaching and preaching... Clearly they were a major factor in the Gentile mission.¹⁵⁶

As missionaries, they scattered the good seed of the gospel wherever they went (Acts 18: 18; Rom 16: 3; 2Tim 4: 19). Margaret Y. MacDonald in *Women & Christian Origins* affirms that:

Both Prisca and Aquila are called Paul’s co-workers (συνεργός). Both played a vital role in the expansion of the mission.¹⁵⁷

Clearly, Paul viewed Prisca as an equal partner in ministry to himself and included her in the leadership of the Early Church.¹⁵⁸

In the New Testament, there is no teacher identified by name, but Acts offers us a significant tradition about woman teacher: Prisca, who is said to have been the theological teacher of Apollos (Acts 18: 26). As a promising disciple, Prisca and Aquila reached out to instruct and take him to a new level of learning and effectiveness in Christ. Prisca, most commonly displayed as the foremost teacher of the couple, would have deeply influenced Apollos. Prisca was confident enough in her own learning to be able to instruct an articulate, learned Jew who himself had a thorough knowledge of scriptures.¹⁵⁹

ἀκριβέστερον αὐτῷ ἐξέθεντο τὴν ὁδόν: “they explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18: 26).

Some people quibble about the meaning of the word “explain” (ἐκτίθημι) used in Acts 18:26.¹⁶⁰ Commentators claim that it does not mean “teach”. διδάσκω is the Greek word usually

¹⁵⁵ Marie Noel Keller, *Priscilla and Aquilla: Paul’s co-workers in Christ Jesus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 15.

¹⁵⁶ Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 187.

¹⁵⁷ Kraemer, D’Angelo, *Women & Christian Origins*, 203.

¹⁵⁸ Valerie Griffiths, “Women as Leaders” in *The IVP Women’s Commentary*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 644.

¹⁵⁹ Acts 18: 23-24

¹⁶⁰ M.E Glasswell, “explain; expose” in EDNT vol.1, s.v. “ἐκτίθημι”

translated as “teach” or “instruct”.¹⁶¹ BDAG defines διδάσκω as “(1) to tell someone what to do, *tell, instruct*; . . . and (2) to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting, *teach*.”¹⁶²

In the New Testament, only Luke uses the Greek word ἐκτίθημι. It means “to put forth, declare, explain”. In this sense, BDAG gives the second definition of *ektithēmi* as “to convey information by careful elaboration”.¹⁶³ This sounds a lot like teaching to me. Luke uses the word in this sense three times in Acts: of Peter in Acts 11:4, of Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18:26, and of Paul in Acts 28:23. It is important to note that there is nothing at all trivial in these three instances where “explain” (*ektithēmi*) is used.

As a church leaders Prisca would have found many occasions to teach, either informally or in church meetings. Neither Luke nor Paul gives any hint of censure or disapproval about Prisca teaching Apollos, or of her role as a church leader. For Luke, there was no problem in depicting a woman as a teacher of a Christian man and missionary who was already instructed in the Scriptures and filled by the Holy Spirit.

Stanley Grenz states that “the text of Acts will not allow us to transform this narrative into anything other than a clear indication of authoritative teaching by a woman in the church.”¹⁶⁴ Eventually Apollos became a strategic part of Paul’s work in church growth and leadership. Paul later refers to Apollos’ ministry as equivalent to his own: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth . . . he who plants and he who waters are equal” (1 Cor. 3:6, 8, RSV). Prisca and Aquila served as a seminary faculty for this set apart and talented church leader. God used Prisca, a woman, to play an instructional role in the training of a key leader. This story exhibits the reality that God calls and gifts women to be teachers.¹⁶⁵

David A. DeSilva, in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, seems to have this same idea and states:

Prisca is a teacher and co-worker of Paul, who together with her husband Aquila was responsible for teaching the gifted orator Apollos ‘more accurately’ about the faith he preached (Acts 18: 1-2, 24-28). The fact that Luke names Prisca first (Acts 18: 26), which

¹⁶¹ H.F. Weiss, “didasko, teach” in EDNT vol.1, s.v. “διδάσκω”

¹⁶² Walter Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “διδάσκω”

¹⁶³ Walter Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “ἐκτίθημι”

¹⁶⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 82-83.

¹⁶⁵ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of the Female Roles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 202.

is certainly unusual; suggest that she was the more visible and prominent of the pair in the public ministry.¹⁶⁶

Therefore Prisca and Aquila's names were mentioned together many times, it means that they were prominent among the apostles. But in these verses Prisca is given prominence by being listed first. It does reflect an enduring memory in the early church that Prisca was an authoritative teacher who not only performed missionary work herself, but also helped train others. Moreover, people suggest that Prisca was the leader of the pair.

In sum, it is good to pay attention to what Margaret Y. MacDonald concludes about Prisca's ministry:

Two factors should lead us to pay special attention to Prisca's role in her missionary partnership with Aquila. First, Rom 16: 3 and Acts 18: 18, 26 list Prisca's name first; this is probably a sign that she was of higher status than Aquila since the usual practice in antiquity was to mention the man's name first. Second, in both Rom 16: 3-5 and 1 Cor 16: 19, Paul refers to the church (*ekklesia*) that meets in the house of Prisca and Aquila...Moreover, studies of the social status of the early Christians have revealed that the capacity to offer one's house as a meeting place was a factor that affected one's capacity to become leader.¹⁶⁷

God used Prisca, a woman, to play an instructional role in the training of a key leader. She was a very influential woman in Pauline Christianity and even beyond of her partner in mission because of her capacity to lead and her higher social status than her husband's.¹⁶⁸

Conclusion

Prisca was a close friend of Paul and supporter of him, alongside of her husband Aquila. Prisca seems to have been the dominant partner in the marriage. She was trusted by Paul to manage the infant church. She worked with Paul in founding of the churches in Corinth and Ephesus, and with her husband she started another house church in their home upon their return to Rome (Rom 16: 5). Despite the male domination in the first century culture, Prisca proved

¹⁶⁶ David A. DeSilva, *An introduction to the New Testament, Context, Methods & Ministry Formation* (England: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 332.

¹⁶⁷ Kraemer, D'Angelo, *Women & Christian Origins*, 204.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

herself to be an exemplary teacher as she “explained the way of God more adequately”.¹⁶⁹ She was tactful, showing caution in correcting Apollos. It is proved also that she possessed the dominant ministry and had higher leadership skills than her husband. She played a major role in different congregations and perhaps even penned the epistle to the Hebrews.

The third woman mentioned in Rom 16: 1-7 seems to have a more special title than the two formers. It is Junia. Studying her role in ministry is very interesting for women’s leadership.

3.4.3 Junia, a woman apostle

As we enter the words of Romans 16:7, we follow a trail of textual interpretations, ancient and contemporary, as well as enter the world of first century Roman rule where those who had seen and been called by the risen Christ, lived their lives according to a call that did not discriminate between Jews, Greeks, slaves, freed people, men or women.¹⁷⁰ The verse that we will work on is Rom 16: 7:

Greet Andronicus and Junia, My relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. (NRSV)

ἀσπάσαθε Ἀνδρόνικον καὶ Ἰουνίαν τοὺς συγγενεῖς μου καὶ συναιχμαλώτους μου, οἵτινες εἰσιν ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις, οἳ καὶ πρὸ ἐμοῦ γέγοναν ἐν Χριστῷ.

Jews by birth, Andronicus and Junia became believers prior to Paul’s conversion. The church held them in high esteem; they belonged to the circle of apostles who were called to their missionary office before the time of Paul’s ministry.¹⁷¹ Paul speaks very warmly about this couple who were probably a married couple or brother and sister. From this single verse in Romans 16, we can see that both Andronicus and Junia were well known to the church (otherwise Paul would not have mentioned them in his letter); they were related to Paul (or were fellow Jews); they had been imprisoned with Paul; they had been Christians longer than Paul (they may even have been among the founders of the church at Rome); and they were considered

¹⁶⁹ Deborah Gill and Barbara Cavaness, *God’s Women Then and Now* (Springfield, MO: Grace and Truth Publications, 2004), 113.

¹⁷⁰ Galatians 3: 28.

¹⁷¹ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 249.

as outstanding among the apostles. As a husband and wife team, Paul greatly valued their active participation in ministry.¹⁷²

So much commentary work has focused on defining or defending the status of this person that Junia's role in the scriptural story has been overshadowed. Most commentators agree that Paul's use of "συγγενεῖς" (relatives, kin) identifies Junia and Andronicus as fellow Jews, and hardly as blood relatives to Paul. If Junia was a Jew, it is likely that she had either moved to Rome since meeting Paul elsewhere, or that she met Paul while in exile from Rome due to the edict of Claudius.¹⁷³ "συγγενεῖς" is not used in any of the other Pauline epistles and the term may have varying connotations according to use. One potential meaning portrays family connections by referring to a common ancestry or descent.¹⁷⁴ These meanings are unlikely. συγγενεῖς μου means "my compatriots" in the sense of belonging to the same people of the Jews as Paul. The word is used in this sense in Rom 9:3. Paul describes Andronicus and Junia as "συγγενεῖς μου" and "συναιχμαλώτους μου" which gives insight into their relationship with Paul.

Paul says that Junia and Andronicus had been fellow prisoners with him. Whether Paul means that the three had been imprisoned together or that Andronicus and Junia were fellow believers who had been imprisoned at the same point is not clear, but it can be drawn from this formulation that Junia had been at the same point placed in the hands of the law with Andronicus and Paul. Ben Witherington writes:

It is hardly likely that a woman would be incarcerated in Paul's world without having made some significant public remark or action. Junia said or did something that led to judicial action.¹⁷⁵

However, before making more distinct statements about Junia, we must now turn to some issues which have been discussed intensively over the years. The identification of Junia's name in Rom 16 has been a familiar problem in biblical interpretation. Most studies however are preoccupied by the gender of the name, assuming that Junia's apostolic status is not in doubt. In other words, some commentators attempt to masculinize her name, and read "Junias". Again, the

¹⁷² Florence M. Gillman, *Women Who Knew Paul: Zacchaeus Studies*, New Testament (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 69.

¹⁷³ Ben Witherington, *Paul's letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 376.

¹⁷⁴ E. Earle Ellis, "Paul and his co-workers", cited in Susan Mathew, *Women in the greetings of Romans 16: 1-16: A Study of Mutuality and Women's Ministry in the Letter of Romans* (USA: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), 105.

¹⁷⁵ Witherington, *Romans*, 390.

meaning of the phrase “ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις” rises great debate among scholars. It is better to discuss these two issues, so that we can take our conclusion.

3.4.3.1 Junia: male or female?

Through the years, questions have been raised about Junia’s identity. So it is necessary to examine the name to determine if it is the feminine name Junia or the masculine name Junias. It is normally a simple task to determine the gender of Greek noun; one need only examine the inflection, since the masculine and feminine name nouns generally have separate endings. But in this particular instance the accusative ending “-αν” is ambiguous and therefore problematic, it could be either masculine “Ἰουνιᾶν” or feminine “Ἰουνίαν”. This undisputable reason raised great debates about the gender of Junia.

First, translators have different translation about the gender of the name. Let us have a look at some of the English translations. The New English Bible (NEB), American Standard Version (ASV), Revised Standard Version (RSV), New International Version (NIV) prefer “Junias”, while King James Version (KJV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New King James Version (NKJV) prefer “Junia”.

A large influence in the shift from feminine to masculine occurred with the translation of the text. Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible into German takes the acute accented to be masculine name regardless of its accentuation. He writes “Great Andronicus, the manly one, and Junias, of the Junian family, who are men of note among the apostles.”¹⁷⁶ Luther was working largely from LeFevre d’Etaples’ heavily flawed 1522 commentary on Romans, which takes the name of “Julias”.¹⁷⁷ Thus, one of the most influential translations of all times propagated a faulty misreading of a Greek word, translated into the Latin and after that translated into German. In this context, Luise Schottroff remarks: “Only since the Middle Ages, and primarily because of Luther’s translation, has the view prevailed that Junia was not a woman, but a man by the name of Junias.”¹⁷⁸

This divergence on translation serves to highlight the problem faced by modern readers of the text. Furthermore, Eldon Jay Epp suggests that the feminine Junia is how Romans 16: 7

¹⁷⁶ Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, 38.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁷⁸ Luise Schottroff, *Let the Oppressed Go Free: Feminine Perspectives on the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 36, cited in Epp, *Junia*, 38.

has been read in English translation of the New Testament from Tyndale in 1526 until the last quarter of the 19th century.¹⁸⁰ The word “Ἰουνιᾶν” is a singular accusative noun. Already we have a problem however. The circumflex accented over the penultimate letter, which denotes a masculine form, is an editorial choice and not original to the text.¹⁸¹ We know from the writings and documentaries of early Christianity that the unaccented name was universally read as a feminine name.¹⁸² Once accents were added, all Greek New Testaments from 1616 to 1927¹⁸³ wrote the name as “Ἰουνίαν” with the acute accent over the iota, indicating the first declension, which is feminine. Moreover, Leon Morris writes in his note that the noun ‘Ἰουνιᾶν’ could be a contraction of the masculine “Junianus”, but no other example of this contraction is known. It is more likely that it is the accusative of the feminine ‘Ἰουνία’.¹⁸⁴

One of the parts of the problem is that the noun “Junia(s)” appears only once in the Greek New Testament, and shown in accusative form with an accent mark. Scholars and Bible commentators generally use the Greek New Testament in their translations and interpretive pursuits. If the word should have the circumflex over the ultima like “Ἰουνιᾶν”, then it is a man’s name; if it should have the acute accent like “Ἰουνίαν”, then it is a woman’s name.

As Bernadette Brooten puts it, “we do not have a single shred of evidence that the name Junias ever existed.”¹⁸⁵ While the name Junianus does exist, a contraction in the form of “Junias” never appears. Thus, it is speculative to think that Paul’s use of Ἰουνιᾶν in Rom 16: 7 is the only one contraction occurrence in all extent Greek texts. Since there is no support for even the existence of the name Junias, much less in use in Rom 16: 7, Ἰουνιᾶν must mean Junia, and be accentuated Ἰουνίαν.

According to Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, the major support for Junias comes from numerous minuscule manuscripts from mostly the 13th-14th centuries. These later minuscules contain accent marks reflecting the writer’s interpretation that “Ἰουνιᾶν” was a masculine name. However, according to Douglas Moo, the 9th century minuscule 33 actually

¹⁸⁰ Epp, *Junia*, 66.

¹⁸¹ Ray R. Schulz, “Romans 16:7: *Junia or Junias?*”, *Expository Times* 98 (1987): 109. Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 24, 2015).

¹⁸² Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, 33-35.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁸⁴ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (United States: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998), 533.

¹⁸⁵ Brooten, cited in Epp, *Junia*, 26.

represents an important exception to the contracted form and supports the feminine form rather than the masculine.¹⁸⁶

For all the reasons mentioned thus far the past ten years have brought about a general scholarly consensus that the masculine name in Romans 16:7 is incorrect and that “Ἰουνία” (acute accent included) must be read as Junia. The assertion of Junia’s gender, however, spawned a whole new set of reactions to Roman 16:7, including bringing into doubt what Paul meant by the term apostle,¹⁸⁷ and whether Junia and Andronicus were “outstanding among the apostles” or just “well known to the apostles.”¹⁸⁸

According to many scholars, including Bernadette Brooten, Peter Lampe, Leonard Swidler, Bruce Metzger and Dianne McDonnell, the male name “Junias” is unattested to in ancient writings. But even so, the manuscripts and lectionary support cited provide little justification to support a male reading.¹⁸⁹

Also the early church fathers differed by their ideas about Junia’s gender. There was a church father, Epiphanius (315-403), who wrote an Index of Disciples, in which he writes: “Iounias, of whom Paul makes mention, became bishop of Apameia of Syria.” According to those church fathers, Epiphanius wrote “of whom” as a masculine relative pronoun thereby indicating that he thought Iounias was a man. Piper and Grudem also present the results of their computer search of ancient Greek writings looking for the name “Junia(s).” Based on their findings, they conclude that “no one should claim that Junia was a common woman’s name in the Greek speaking world, since there are only three known examples in all of ancient Greek literature.”¹⁹⁰ To this point of view, Douglas Moo discusses Epiphanius and calls into question the reliability of this evidence because in the same passage, Epiphanius thought “Prisca” (Priscilla) was a man.

The weakness of this argument is that the masculine name Junias never occurs in any ancient Greek manuscript or inscription that dates before the 13th century AD, while the female

¹⁸⁶ Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 922.

¹⁸⁷ C Hodge, cited in Michael H. Burer and Daniel B. Wallace, “Was Junia really an apostle? A re-examination of Rom 16:7”, *New Testament Studies no. 1, vol. 47* (Jan. 2001): 81. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 24, 2015).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Epp, *Junia*, 44.

¹⁹⁰ <http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/PCBC/vol-6-no1/piper-and-grudem-recovering-biblical-manhood-and-w/>, accessed on April 29, 2015.

name Junia appears frequently. Even Aegidius mentioned the possibility of feminine reading, despite his interpretation of the name as masculine as Brooten explains:

Aegidius noted that there were two variant readings for the second name: *Juniam* and *Juliam* (accusative in the verse). He preferred the reading *Juliam*, which modern scholars would take to be clearly feminine, has been considered masculine in the context of the title ‘apostle’.¹⁹¹

James Dunn writes:

Lampe in his *Patristic Greek Lexicon* indicates over 250 examples of ‘Junia,’ none of Junias, as was taken for granted by the patristic commentators, and indeed up to the Middle Ages. The assumption that it must be male is a striking indictment of male presumption regarding the character and structure of earliest Christianity. . . We may firmly conclude, however, that one of the foundation apostles of Christianity was a woman and wife.¹⁹²

Also, many scholars including Brooten, Lampe, Metzger, Moo, McDonnell and Osburn claim otherwise, and state that “Junia” was a common name.¹⁹³ However, the real significance of Piper and Grudem’s search is the fact that they could not cite any example for a male named Junias. James Walters states that “researchers have been unable to locate a single example of the male name Junias in ancient literature or inscriptions, either Latin or Greek.”¹⁹⁴

Several commentators read this noun as female gender such as “Ἰουνίαν”. For example, according to Douglas Moo, Nestle-Aland²⁷ and the Greek New Testament (GNT) cite “Junia” as a variant reading. This variant reading is attested to by *Codexes Sinaiticus*, A, B*, C, D*, F, G, P. The GNT also cites “Julia” as a variant reading. Support for this female name is evidenced by P⁴⁶, a papyrus manuscript, dating from around A. D 200.¹⁹⁵ This papyrus represents the earliest known and most reliable testimony in support of Julia. The newest editions, such as Nestle-Aland²⁸ and Greek New Testament, Fifth Edition, compared to the previous editions, have now changed the accentuation of “Ἰουνίαν” and read “Ἰουνίαν”.

¹⁹¹ Brooten, cited in Epp, *Junia*, 35.

¹⁹² James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 38B*, (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 894.

¹⁹³ Epp, *Junia*, 44.

¹⁹⁴ James Walters, *Phoebe and Junia(s)*, 186.

¹⁹⁵ Barbara & Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 2012), 515.

The church father Jerome (340-419) wrote that Junia was a female. According to Epp, no Greek minuscule manuscripts used the masculine “Ἰουνίαν”. He concludes that all extra biblical literature, including primary sources, point to Junia being a woman apostle. In that case Junia served as the first woman apostle empowered by the Holy Spirit and endorsed by Paul himself.¹⁹⁶

According to many scholars, Junia was a common name that appeared in Greek and Latin inscriptions and literature. Brooten states that “the female Latin name Junia occurs over 250 times among inscriptions from ancient Rome alone.”¹⁹⁷ Peter Lampe, as cited before, has also discovered over 250 examples of the female name Junia. Bruce Metzger, editor of the GNT, likewise agrees that Junia is well attested to in ancient literature.¹⁹⁸

The 3rd century Coptic, 4th century Vulgate, and 5th century Latin versions provide additional early support for this female name. These early manuscripts clearly support a female named “Julia.” Junia, the other variant reading, is supported by the earliest known manuscripts available. Sinaiticus dates from the fourth century and is the earliest surviving complete copy of the Greek New Testament.¹⁹⁹ “The Vulgate version and the early Greek and Latin fathers onwards affirm a female apostle.”²⁰⁰

It is seen that the quality and age of the above manuscripts provide strong support for a female name whether it be rendered “Julia” or “Junia.” The research from many different scholars clearly support that a female named Junia occurred frequently in ancient writings.

Epp shows in his study about Junia’s gender that most of the old Greek New Testament, that is from Erasmus through the first quarter of the 20th century (with one exception), read “Ἰουνίαν” as feminine. While the latest version of Greek New Testament, on the other hand

¹⁹⁶ Epp, *Junia*, 24.

¹⁹⁷ Brooten, “*Junia*,” *Women in Scripture* (2000), 109; quoted by Dianne D. McDonnell, “Junia, A Woman Apostle” [on-line article]; available from <http://www.churchofgoddfw.com/monthly/junia.html>; accessed 23 February 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Bruce M. Metzger et al., *The Greek New Testament, Dictionary 4th edition* (Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 1994), 564.

¹⁹⁹ David Alan Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism, A Concise Guide*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 19.

²⁰⁰ Epp, *Junia*, 23-24.

almost contained the masculine “Ἰουνιᾶν”.²⁰¹ But as I stated before the newest edition of Greek New Testament, Nestle-Aland28 has now changed the accentuation and read “Ἰουνίαν”.

During the 5th century , church father John Chrysostom affirmed that Junia was a female apostle and, what is more, a distinguished apostle. According to Brooten, Chrysostom made his remark on this issue with this following statement:

Greet Andronicus and Junia...who are outstanding among the apostles: To be an apostle is something great! But to be outstanding among the apostles - just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this *woman* must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle.²⁰²

The earlier commentator Origen of Alexandria (185-253) understood the name to be feminine.²⁰³ Others included Jerome (340-419) who wrote that Junia was a female.²⁰⁴ External evidences from writings of early church leaders testify that Junia was a woman apostle. Douglas Moo agrees that commentators before the 13th century were unanimous in favor of a female rendering.²⁰⁵ Ray R. Schulz states that the Church Fathers agreed that Junia was a female apostle.²⁰⁶ Epp gives a summary and says that: “The feminine understanding of “Ἰουνίαν” appears to have been dominant for at least the first millennium of Christianity...”²⁰⁷

Moreover, Rom 16 contains significant indications that women were involved in active ministry at many different levels. As a result, the feminine name, Junia is the most likely translation of “Ἰουνιᾶν”.

Knowing that Junia was a woman raises a great debate about her apostleship.

²⁰¹ Epp, *Junia*, 62-63.

²⁰² Brooten, *Junia ... Outstanding among the Apostles (Romans 16.7)*, Epp, *Junia*, 32.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Epp, *Junia*, 32.

²⁰⁵ Moo, *Romans*, 922.

²⁰⁶ Schulz, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology*, 95.

²⁰⁷ Epp, *Junia*, 39.

3.4.3.2 Junia's relation to the apostles

The second problem concerning the position of Junia is whether Andronicus and Junia were “outstanding among the apostles” as “one of” the apostles or were simply “highly regarded by” the apostles. Some scholars say that grammatically both meanings are possible. Even though almost all translations assume the first meaning, this translation was one of the topics debated among scholars. In order to resolve this issue, study of the two items is much needed, such as the lexical field of the adjective “ἐπίσημος” and the syntax implication of this adjective with the preposition “ἐν” plus dative.

The term *episēmos* is not a very common word in the NT.²⁰⁸ In fact, it is used only twice; here in Rom 16:7 and once in Matthew 27:16 (there it is used with a negative connotation to refer to the “notorious” prisoner Barabbas). It appears twice in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (14.1; 19.1), both times to denote how prominent Polycarp was as a Christian leader. The former reference likens him to a “noble ram out of a great flock”, while the latter refers to him as “a notable teacher.”²⁰⁹ The idea being conveyed is that Polycarp stood out among the other Christian teachers of his day, he was very prominent.

“ἐπίσημος” can mean “well known, prominent, outstanding, famous, notable, notorious”. This adjective can be used either with comparative sense or in a relative sense. Second, the key to determining the meaning of the term in any given passage is both of the general context and the specific and collocation of this word with its adjuncts. Daniel B. Wallace exposes in his study of this issue that when Paul meant to say that Andronicus and Junia were outstanding among the apostles, in its *inclusive* sense, we might have expected him to use the genitive. On the other hand, if Paul wants to suggest the *exclusive* sense of the adjective, we might expect to have ἐν + dative.²¹⁰

Many scholars accept that “Junia” was a female, but they do not want to admit the inclusive sense of “ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις”, but only the exclusive sense. However, many

²⁰⁸ BAGD, s.v. “ἐπίσημος”, 298.

²⁰⁹ J. B. Lightfoot, *On the Martyrdom of S. Polycarp in the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 113-115.

²¹⁰ Wallace cited in Epp, *Junia*, 72-73.

commentators follow the inclusive sense, but their interpretation is simply assumed with little or no support.

It seems that for some commentators the issue of Junia's gender is decisive in determining whether she is an apostle. William Sunday and Arthur Headlam noted in their 1985 commentary on Romans:

Junia is of course a common Roman name and in that case the two would probably be husband and wife; Junias on the other hand is less as usual man's name... if, as is probable, Andronicus and Junias are included among the apostles..., then it is more probable that the name is masculine, although Chrysostom does not appear to consider the idea of a female apostle impossible.²¹¹

There is also one example of those who support the masculine translation of Junias, such as F. W. Gingrich who reveals the prejudices in statements as follow:

Grammatically "Iounian" might be feminine (so KJV), though this seems inherently less probable, partly because the person is referred to as an apostle.²¹²

In contrast, W. Burer and Daniel Wallace proposed that Junia was a female and that she and Andronicus were admired by the apostles.²¹³ Again, Belleville, in her study about Junia gives her clear conclusion, saying that Junia was female and one of the apostles.²¹⁴ Epp also makes a well- documented case in one book for Junia as woman and one of the apostles.²¹⁵

Quite a few commentators favor the idea that Junia was one of the apostles "appointed by the risen Christ Jesus".²¹⁶ Grenz and Kjesbo argue that there are four different possible meanings for apostle: the Twelve; witnesses to the resurrection whom Jesus commissioned into special ministry; those commissioned by the congregation to spread the Gospel; and those commissioned by the church for a special task. They classify Junia as an apostle of the third type, accepting the interpretation that she was considered an apostle.²¹⁷

²¹¹ Sunday and Headlam cited in Epp, *Junia*, 71.

²¹² F. W. Gingrich, cited in Eldon Jay Epp, 58.

²¹³ Epp, *Junia*, 72.

²¹⁴ Linda Belleville, "'Iounian . . . 'epísēmoi 'en toīs'apostólois: A Re-examination of Romans 16.7 in Light of Primary Source Materials" *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005), 239.

²¹⁵ Epp, *Junia, The first Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

²¹⁶ Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Reconstructing 'Real' Women From gospel Literature" in *Women and Christian Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 121

²¹⁷ S. J. Grenz and D. M. Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry*

Now, let us study further the New Testament concept of apostle.

“Apostle” derives from the Greek noun “apostolos” and the cognate verb “apostello” (send, dispatch). The verb typically means to send a message or to send a person with a task or message; it occurs in the New Testament more than two hundred times in diverse contexts. The noun has varied meanings related to sending in more ancient Greek, but in the New Testament it refers to Christians sent out with the message of the gospel and charged to proclaim that message with the authority of the person or persons who sent them.

In the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, “apostle” is identical with “the twelve”. The “twelve” is the apostle appointed by Jesus himself (Mark 13: 13-19). In Paul’s letters, however, it quickly becomes clear that ‘apostolos’ describes persons beyond the twelve.²¹⁸ This title is a frequent self-designation of Paul, found along of his name in the opening of nine of his letters.²¹⁹ Paul recognizes the apostleship of Peter²²⁰. He goes beyond over the Twelve, however, and calls James the brother of Jesus an apostle.²²¹ Paul speaks more than once of a plurality of the apostles beyond the Twelve and call them brothers (Mark 13: 13-19 cf Acts 17: 10, 14). Beyond Paul’s own writings, Acts 14:14 call Paul and Barnabas apostles.

What does Paul means by the term “apostle”?

Along with Jews and fellow prisoners, Paul writes that Junia and Andronicus were “πρὸ ἐμοῦ γέγοναν ἐν Χριστῷ” (in Christ before me). This is a helpful phrase in trying to discern what Paul meant by apostle: whether those who served alongside of Christ and to whom Christ appears after the resurrection, or simply a broader term meaning the one who was “sent”.

When he exhorts the Corinthian Christians to distinguish between true and false apostles, he is not talking about the Twelve (2 Cor 11:5, 13; 12:11, 12). When Paul appeals to verifying “signs, wonders, and powerful deeds,” which are “the signs of an apostle” (2 Cor 12:12), he is not describing the verification of messengers in general. When Paul positions “apostles” at the head of the enumerated list of gifts God has placed in the church (1 Cor 12:28, cf. Eph 4:11), he

(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 93.

²¹⁸ 1Cor 15: 3-8.

²¹⁹ Rom, 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Col, 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus; see also Rom 11:13; 1 Cor 9:1–2, 15:9; Gal 2:8; 1 Thess 2:6–7; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11.

²²⁰ Gal 2: 8

²²¹ Gal 1: 19

speaks neither of the Twelve nor of messengers in general. For Paul, therefore, an apostle is someone gifted by God to proclaim the gospel, sent out with the blessing of the church to do so with a high level of authority, and sometimes verified by miraculous signs.

Whatever the specific meaning, “apostle” makes up a special group of people who carried out Christ’s mission, much as Paul did. Clearly neither Andronicus nor Junia is being numbered among the twelve. However they were Jewish Christians like Paul and his relatives. It is quite possible therefore that Andronicus and Junia were companions of Jesus and witnesses of the resurrection. It is certain that they were among those recognized and sent out by the churches as missionaries to preach and teach. Commentators argue that the name refers to a woman and “ἀπόστολος” in the case of Junia is used in general sense, i.e. as one sent by the church for an appointed task.²²²

Junia was a female apostle. This is the preferred view. The evidence is authoritative, compelling, diverse, and objective. Junia has been demonstrated to be a woman based on the testimony of early manuscripts, recorded statements of various church leaders through the 6th century and research performed by many other scholars attesting to the name Junia or Julia existing in ancient times.²²³ The description of Junia and Andronicus as “συγγενεῖς μου” and “συναιχμαλώτους μου” seem to imply an equal standing in mission with Paul and his co-workers. But the other two descriptions, “ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις” and “πρὸ ἐμοῦ γέγοναν ἐν Χριστῷ”, explicitly state their relationship to the early church community and their significant contribution to the Christian mission. In fact, Paul’s descriptions imply why they were remarkable to the Roman church. First Junia is portrayed as an associate of Paul. She is not only an apostle but also prominent among them. The reason for her distinctiveness is not specific, but one can postulate that the reason might have included her toil (as fellow prisoner) and missionary zeal (as she was in Christ before Paul). Second, Paul’s description of Junia as “prominent among the apostles” seems to return the benefaction to Paul through the reputation of those who associated with him (Rom 16: 3, 4). Third, it reveals the mutual obligation which comes about by being in Christ. The phrase “in Christ” places the human relationship in a deeper context, i. e.

²²² Bernadette Brooten, *Junia ... Outstanding among the Apostles (Romans 16.7)*, on-line article, available from <http://www.womenpriests.org/classic/brooten.htm>; accessed 23 February 2015.

²²³ Epp, *Junia*, 32.

they all, Andronicus, Junia and Paul, belong together because they are in Christ. All are mutually obliged in the body of Christ. Lastly, after his long discussion about Junia, Eldon Jay Epp seems to be determined and concludes:

...the conclusion to this investigation is simple and straightforward: there was an apostle Junia. For me, this conclusion is indisputable, though it will not, I fear, be undisputed – for the ‘cultural context’ of which I spoke earlier remains in many quarters.²²⁴

And he continues by asserting:

...even apart from these other passages, and how critical scholarship may view them, it remains a fact that there was a woman apostle, explicitly so named, in the earliest generation of Christianity, and contemporary Christians, lay people and clergy, must (and eventually will) face up to it.²²⁵

Finally, Christ gives spiritual gifts to all His children (Rom 8: 14-17, 29), men and women, so that we can build His Church. Junia is one of Christ children, so “there is no reason to deny the title of apostle to her.”²²⁶

3.4.4 Conclusion

We know Paul interacted with women on a regular basis, and in almost all of his letters, we find references to specific women. Paul’s “patronesses” are famous: Prisca, Lydia, Phoebe, Junia, Mary and others.²²⁷ These women seem to be people of some position, such as chief women, honorable women, having a household which they are able to influence, conducting church meetings in their own homes.²²⁸ Romans 16 provides us many women who were involved in the work of the church.

Confirming that, Ben Witherington says “they were doing a variety of things including acting as missionaries, carrying letters, serving in charitable tasks as deaconesses, providing aid or shelter for traveling apostles, etc.”²²⁹ Paul worked with women in his time and he used the

²²⁴ Epp, *Junia*, 80.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

²²⁶ Getty-Sullivan, 258.

²²⁷ Acts 16: 14; Romans 16: 1-7.

²²⁸ E. Margaret Howe, *Women & Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 30.

²²⁹ Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 189.

term “co-worker” to indicate them; he used these women like his assistants, in the practical way as well as in the ministry of the word.²³⁰

Some of these women were described as Paul’s sponsors, as cultivated social elite, through whom the apostle was able to reach their social dependents by a sort of *clientele* system.²³¹ Many of these women mentioned in the Pauline letters seem to have enjoyed some level of economic and social independence. Wayne Meeks relates the well-known prominence of women in Acts to an arising status of women and to the questioning that had begun of male and female roles.²³² Paul’s female converts demonstrated a freer participation of Roman society as well. Their story amounts to a functional equality in leadership roles that would have been unusual, and strongly rejected in that society prior to Christ. We do not know what any of these women did exactly in the church to merit Paul’s commendation, but it seems that women worked with men in the church of Paul, and that they did so with Paul’s approval (Rom16:1-7).

Among the women Paul mentions in his epistles are Phoebe, Prisca and Junia in the last chapter of Romans. In Romans 16: 1-7 he uses the same terms used to designate male church leaders to these three women. He called Phoebe his “sister” and called their male partners in mission “brothers”. Phoebe was designated as “deacon” like men did during Paul’s time. Paul also called Prisca his co-worker. This title is used by him to designate those who associated with him in mission. Prisca was a teacher and her name mentioned before her husband’s on such a consistent basis suggests that she was the most prominent of the two in the ministry. She is also told to be the leader of the church in her own house. Based on Romans 16: 7, Junia held an authoritative apostolic office. I will end this chapter by quoting from the conclusion of Margaret Y. McDonald’s article “Reading Real Women Through the Undisputed Letters of Paul”:

The comparison of women of the Pauline mission to Jewish women and women belonging to other Greek and Roman communities in the Roman imperial world has proved to be especially instructive. Perhaps the most important conclusion that has resulted from the reconstructions of the many women coworkers who participated in the Pauline mission is that women’s leadership was neither different nor diminished in

²³⁰ Ibid., 190.

²³¹ Timothy H. Lim, “Not in Persuasive of Wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and Power-*Novum Testamentum* 29 (1987), 140.

²³² Wayne Meeks, “The image of the Androgyne: Some uses of a symbol in Earliest Christianity” – *History of Religion* 13 (1974), 165.

relation to that of men... the appearance of women in leadership roles should not be seen as unique in ancient society.²³³

²³³ Margaret Y. McDonald, "Reading Real Women through the Undisputed Letter of Paul" in Kraemer, *Women & Christian origins*, 218.

PART TWO

IV. WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE MALAGASY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Understanding the status of women in the Holy Scriptures leads to set some comparison from which should be drawn a conclusive position for the Malagasy Lutheran Church. Does the Malagasy Lutheran Church have a biblical view of the status of female theologians, and what is the implication of that view? These are the main questions posed in this chapter. In order to give well-founded answers to these questions, an investigation at the ground level must be done. That is why a fieldwork was required.

4.1 Introduction

Jews live in patriarchal system in their social life. It is sure that the context of the writing of the New Testament books is influenced by this cultural pattern. The system in its own might be featured as subordination of women to men. The crucial question is: Has Jesus established a law in which he set that kind of gender hierarchy?

For instance, there are statements about the husband having authority over his wife and about fathers having authority over their daughters (Eph 5:22-25; 1 Cor 7:39; Col 3:18; cf. 1 Pet 3:1). Consequently, women could not do anything outside the household. In that case it is not a simple subordination; in fact, women are not free at all in a patriarchal system, they were and still seem to be under the rule of men.

This situation generates consequently another one, which is the rejection of women leadership. Of course the understanding of Paul's writings in patriarchal system plays an important role in this issue. When Paul says in Eph 5:24, "ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί", it is often wrongly understood within an biased analogy in which subordination of believers to Jesus Christ must be the model for women subordination to men. So, not only women are not free, but they are not supposed to be leaders.

Malagasy people also have this patriarchal system in their social life. As seen in Malagasy context, the understanding of that wrong short form is emphasized by the fact that women must remain at home and take care of the household, for not saying that they are in reality "servants" not even "helpers". Consequently, girls are often neither sent to school nor given the opportunity to have good and further education, because they are "set to serve at

home”. And this thought is still generally prevalent; it even occurs in Christian society or family.

First of all, the important fact to notice is that women had the opportunity to take part in the synagogal service even though Jews followed the patriarchal system. Actually, there is evidence for their active attendance in the synagogues. Based on three inscriptions Brooten even emphasizes that women not only attended the service but some of them were even leaders of synagogues.²³⁴

“The appearance of women in leadership roles should not be seen as unique in ancient society.”²³⁵ It is noticed also that both in Jesus time and in Paul’s time, women are seen to be active not only in society but also in religious life, precisely when Jesus had brought remarkable changes on their status (as seen in 2.3). It should be remembered however that all these events occurred in Greco-Roman period, and again, and both nations followed patriarchal system. But that situation had never hindered women leadership. “Rather, early Christian women acted in ways that were in keeping with the leadership of women in other communities in the Roman imperial world.”²³⁶

And of course, women have opportunities to be active also in the Malagasy Lutheran Church. There are deaconesses, women shepherds, women teachers and women theologians. This means that the MLC gives value to having women in human resources, which is theologically the way it should be.

In short terms, to have women as leaders of congregations is biblically true. It seems that the problem of the MLC’s consideration of female theologians is not a biblical-based matter, for not saying that there is no serious theological issue at all. What is then the issue?

4.2 Methodological Reflections

As told in the introduction, I did a fieldwork during the summer of 2014. It related to the women’s position in MLC. My aim during this fieldwork was to investigate people’s opinions, attitudes toward women leadership in MLC, and I focused in particular on the leadership of the

²³⁴ Brooten, *Female Leadership in the Ancient Synagogue*, 217.

²³⁵ Margaret Y. McDonald, “Reading Real Women through the Undisputed Letter of Paul” cited in *Women & Christian origins*, 218

²³⁶ Ibid.

three special women, co-workers in Pauline mission found in Romans 16: 1-7, Phoebe, Prisca and Junia.

I did my fieldwork in Madagascar because my thesis is related to the leadership of women in the MLC. The main method to collect data that I used was the employment of Qualitative Interviews. This method is very relevant in collecting data in my country, because people there like to talk to others, mostly if they know the reason of the discussion. So the informants and I interacted and talked in form of conversation. Inside this conversation, my interviewees explored their everyday life related to my theme easily. This method is very useful in order to explore ideas, opinions, attitudes, and experiences of the people. I used this method because I wanted to know how people think about the position of women in Madagascar in general and the situation of women in MLC. Specifically, I wanted to know what are people's opinions in having women leaders in general, and their opinions about women's leadership in MLC.

My prime focus is to prove biblically that women are able to be leaders and that they can bring development inside and outside of the church by using their natural and acquired skills. As I told before, I used as a reference three of the women that Paul greets in Romans 16: 1-7.

4.3 Presentation and evaluation of the fieldwork

The preliminary helpful tools are the results of the fieldwork done in Madagascar. This section will present along the discussion about women's status both the used method and the results of the qualitative research done.

4.3.1 Presentation of the fieldwork

The basic used methods in this qualitative research are interviews and focus group.

The qualitative interview is more effective when the researcher uses a prepared interview guide, and I did it. So I prepared many questions, but three questions are linked directly to the leadership performed by Phoebe, Prisca and Junia. I asked these questions because I wanted to know further people's opinions about women's leadership in MLC, specifically if women can be pastors inside the MLC.

During the field work, I asked ten persons who have different levels of education. My motivation for this choice was to get different points of view according to their knowledge. I

mean that these ten informants have different backgrounds, education and skills. Some of them did not have deep education; some had high education and were even highly graduated. Some stay at home and work as home maids, and some have a great responsibility in the government and inside the church. These informants included four lay men, two ordained men and three lay women from the MLC as well as one ordained woman from the Reformed Church. My informants were all between 40 and 50 years of age. People of such age are more aware of the Malagasy context regarding women's status in the community, even in the church, specifically in the MLC.

My goal by asking laymen about this theme was to know if there is a change in men's consideration of women in Malagasy society, or if they still hold the patriarchal mind and denigrate women. Also, my aim by asking ordained men and an ordained woman was to make clear the opposite point of view on woman's leadership, because the Reformed Church already ordains their women, while MLC is still hostile to this idea.

I chose one parish, one Lutheran Church in Tsaratanana, in my Synod at Mahajanga to be a place of my fieldwork. I chose this place because I have relation to the current pastor of this parish. The pastor was like my gate-keeper who was very useful to help me to choose my informants. I also went to Ivory Avaratra Fianarantsoa, mainly in Lutheran Graduate School of Theology, to interview the MLC's great theologians who teach there. I met my informants in the place where they wanted me to talk with them. My schedule also depended on the time that they gave me to meet. Qualitative interviews are very successful when the researcher knows how to put informants to be at ease. So to reach my point, I introduced myself and my theme to the informants before we started to talk. When the informants were informed of what I wanted to get through them, they started to be opened to me.

I also organized one focus group whose aim was not to reach consensus about, or solution to, the issues discussed, but to bring forth different views of point. This focus group gathered 25 women from the Women's Department inside the MLC. I felt lucky at this time because they already had the weekly meeting in the church, and they accepted to give me one of their meetings to organize the focus group. This focus group was very interesting because women in this group had their respective positions. Some of them accepted the idea that women can be

leaders and some were contra thinking that women are inferior to men and can never be leaders. Between them were some who thought that women and men are just equal in the image of God.

During the fieldwork, I took my role of researcher as pastor's wife, student and church member in the MLC.

4.3.2 Evaluation of the Fieldwork

My basic suspicion is that the issue of not letting women be ordained is still the strength of the patriarchal system in social life in most of the regions of Madagascar. In fact, it is a cultural issue and not a theological one. Letting women be leaders is like denigrating the value of men who strive to sustain it. The church is just following this cultural stream afterwards; and being a pastor is holding an important leader position and role in the church and in the community, even in social life. It is conceived as a function dedicated to men.

The result of the qualitative research is very conclusive. It starts with the reality that it is not the whole Malagasy people who adopt this cultural patriarchal pattern, but only some clans in some regions. And this fact leads the MLC to deny for instance the ordination of women. The history of Madagascar for instance already presented that there were queens, which means that there were already women who got the highest position in social life. The account of these queens in its turn proves that some clans had already overcome the old patriarchal system longtime ago, precisely those who are from the highlands.

A man, one of my informants, stated: "Women have the capacity to be leaders; they can be church leaders as pastors as well"²³⁷. He claims that the patriarchal system is already "old-fashioned and must be abandoned". Speaking about the MLC, he brought his point in higher level in affirming that cultural patterns should not have something to do with the ordination of women. At the end of the interview he said: "Letting women be pastors will bring development in the church because women have talents and special skills in organization and planning as experienced through their household responsibilities."²³⁸

At this point a comparison with and reference to the practice of Jesus is appropriate. It is told in Luke 8:1-3 that Jesus had women co-workers in addition to the Twelve who accompanied him from village to village. Comments on that event assume that those women were supporting

²³⁷ Informant X-1.

²³⁸ Ibid.

the mission financially and materially. They had been in mission with Jesus and the disciples everywhere although some were married, like Susanna who was Chuza's wife. The fact is that even if they had their household, husbands and perhaps children, they were able to manage to follow Jesus and spend their time, energy and money in serving Him and the disciples. As dealt with in the previous exegesis, Paul attested that Phoebe also was like that. She spent a lot in his mission and even was called "*prostatis*" which may be translated "leader", "president" or "patron".

As assumed previously, the most active department in development within the MLC is the Women's Department. This fact already shows that Malagasy women are fervent in giving and offering to support the mission of the church. Besides, the feminine gender is the majority of the members of the MLC, as this last is vaguely around 60 or 70% of the members. Development will be effective if this awesome human resource is well managed and activated. Human resource is the first required pillar in being in mission as well as in all community missions. Having such resource is the primary tool to reach a goal for leaders. The number of female theologians in the MLC is today more than 200, but they are not ordained and consequently are not allowed to hold parishes despite the lack of pastors in many parishes; this lack of pastors is due to the fast growth of the MLC.

All these are assumptions which would not be reached without the qualitative research. Informants understood the problem and have their own position. Both the interviews and the discussion in the focus group show that some were glad to have women as leaders and some were not. It is obvious that their arguments contribute to the data building in the sense that their positions about women leadership are understood, through which the success of the fieldwork is shown.

The most important thing is now to use these collected data in the light of the New Testament in order to propose an updated position to the MLC.

4.3.3 Contrast between New Testament Accounts and the Outcome of the Fieldwork

The clear contrast is shown by the comparison of the status of women who were church leaders in the time of the apostles with the status of women who are working today in the MLC. Here comes the problem of the ordination of women.

Those who are against the ordination of women infer that there would be more and more problems and troubles in the households of female theologians. They claim that if women are fully responsible for a ministry in a parish or in congregations, they will not be able to take care of their household and family as exactly expected, because they will surely lack time and energy. And if they are occupied in household, they will not be able to handle the ministry in the parish as expected too. It is certain that if Malagasy women hold parishes, they have to adopt some planning and organization between their ministry and the household occupation in order to fulfill the mission of the Church. I interviewed an ordained woman from the Reformed Church about how she manages all these, and she then said: “I have never had problems either in my ministry or my family life even if I am fully responsible of three congregations. Everything depends on planning and timing. These are the clues of the development in the ministry”²³⁹. If women from the other denominations are able to do this, those in MLC would surely also be able when ordained. But on the other side, the church must contribute in that planning so that both the ministry in the church and the family of the pastor are all well taken care of.

Phoebe’s contribution was not only in the financial support according to Paul’s recommendation; she was a deaconess. The insight view of her service assumes that she had a full ministry service and was not a simple helper. By the title “Deacons or Deaconesses”, MLC points out those who are helping during service, precisely those who are responsible for maintaining order in the church, those who are giving seats, receiving people, serving during offering, filling the chalice with wine or adding bread during Holy Communion. However, there are people who are serving and doing good deeds for the church, but they are not called deacons or deaconesses.

The point is that churches do not understand what Paul meant by the term “diakonos” as he thought of it. The analysis shown before claims that it is a masculine word and describes a task dedicated to men who were in charge of ministerial service as well as ministry for ordained people. And if Paul, knowing exactly what this title meant in his context, gave this title to Phoebe, it means that this masculine task was given to Phoebe. The MLC has deaconesses, but they are given only the tasks listed above just as according to the told understanding of the term deacon, having no full ministerial duty. The MLC should study further Pauline letters in order to know what he exactly meant. Nevertheless, it might be affirmed that in his time women were

²³⁹ Informant X-8

already given tasks which were supposed to belong to men. The gender task attribution is not hindering the ordination of women anymore; even Paul has challenged this task attribution. Some still think that gender task attribution must be respected. When asked if to ordain women is good or not, an informant said: “No, to be a pastor or a priest belongs to men, it is not a woman’s task. Women’s task is the household occupation. Man is the head of woman, priesthood is reserved for men, and there was no woman priest in the history of Israel”²⁴⁰. This means that some people do not really understand pastoral ministry. It is commonly argued that women are not allowed to take part in the service in the temple. There, men and women have even had separate rooms. In addition, the fact that women were not supposed to learn the Torah already reflects the inequality in religious life. Since women are not allowed to learn and to act, they do not consequently have opportunity to be leaders anymore.

An ordained man argued against women being pastors. He claimed that “The Holy Scriptures said that evangelization starts first in Jerusalem, then in Samaria and Judea”²⁴¹. He inferred that the household is the Jerusalem of each preacher; therefore, if the house is not well taken care of, it is something which is against the Holy Scripture. Many are those who fall into such misinterpretation and misuse of the Holy Scriptures in arguing. This pastor said that there are many reasons for not letting women be pastors. He went on in affirming that “if women are given a leader function or become pastors, they will boast and denigrate men”²⁴².

It is clear that his argument is not biblically based nor related to theology, but just an assumption of a sexism biased mind which still gulps him, and shouts that men have a higher status than women. All this is just to say that Malagasy women are able to hold ministerial functions and become pastors too.

Those who said that “the only task of women is at home, pastoral ministry belongs to men, as man is the head of woman, there is no account of women priest in the Bible” are wrong. Christians do not yet apprehend Luther’s teaching about the priesthood of all believers, that is why they think and act wrongly as they do. And also, lay people do not know what a pastoral ministry or the function of a pastor exactly is. Many people still think that the service at the altar during worship is a priestly office.

²⁴⁰ Informant X-3

²⁴¹ Informant X-2

²⁴² Ibid.

Phoebe is not the only one contributor in Paul's mission, according to Rom 16:1-7, there is also Prisca. She is said to be one of Paul's co-workers. Paul called those who were in mission with him in his ministry. It is clear that there was no problem in men and women co-working at that time, precisely in being in mission. Paul did not have a problem with that. In Madagascar when I asked about co-work between men and women, an ordained man said: "It is easier to come to an agreement with women than with men, and it surely keeps peace among colleagues and co-ministers".²⁴³

He underlines that women also have good ideas and opinions in development of the church, and it is good to have them as co-workers and advisers. Relying on women's services is more effective than putting goals in men's hands. It is to be noticed that MLC already has female catechists and evangelists who work with male pastors, and there is no problem. The church's mission can only be enhanced and made more effective when gifted and called men and women minister together using their complementary skills and abilities. Men and women should be united in the cause of the gospel and in building up the body of Christ.

Prisca also was a church leader, in Corinth (Acts 18: 2-3), in Ephesus (1 Cor 16: 19), and in Rome (Rom 16: 3-5). And again, let it be reminded that it was a congregation which attends service in private homes, and generally it was in the homes that worship and service took place, and she, as the main steward of the household, was therefore the leader of the congregation and consequently a full responsible. The fact that her name is mentioned before the name of her husband Aquilas in these passages proves that. And it seems that she was more active than her husband.

Scholars affirm that Prisca was not the only one woman who led a church in the New Testament, there are still many. In Acts for instance, we see Mark's mother providing a home for the Christians to assemble (Acts 12: 12), and at Philippi we hear of believers meeting in the house of Lydia (Acts 16: 14-15, 40). Writing to the Colossians, Paul greets Nympha and the church in her house (Col 4: 15). Perhaps Chloe is also the host of a home church (1 Cor 1: 11), as may have been some of the other women Paul greets in the last chapter of Romans (Rom 16). Possibly Apphia (Phil 2), the chosen lady (2 John 1), the chosen sister (2 John 13), Euodia and Syntyche (Philp 4: 2-3), etc. also are church leaders.

²⁴³ Informant X-7

Another argument of some of those who are against women being pastors is the false prophecy in the church in Thyatira, which was done by a woman (Rev 2: 20-24), and the false teaching of the woman in the Church of Ephesus (1 Tim 1: 3-4 cf. 2: 12). These arguments lead some leaders to opt for not ordaining woman, because when women are too talkative or often argue against men, they are called “Crowing Hen”²⁴⁴. This implies that she is not considered as worthy to be listened to. Nevertheless, it is by contrast proved that some churches in the time of the apostles were led by women. I am convinced that the discrimination in church leadership on the basis of gender is merely out of date. What must be done now is to take care of the future of the church and its development. I have asked a Christian if it was possible to have a female pastor within the MLC or not, and he said: “I wonder why it is possible to have women pastors in the other denominations and not in the MLC.”²⁴⁵

Women in MLC are still not allowed to be ordained. Following the same stream, the Reformed Church of Madagascar (FJKM) accepted the ordination of women. Did that decision cause anything hindering the development of church and the evangelization? It was not so, it never hindered the development at all. The women pastors are fully exercising their function as ministers, while in the MLC women are just called theologians, and even if they are appointed to take care of parishes, their ministry does not involve the sacramental ones. It means that they will not entirely exercise their functions as fully responsible of them, because they still have to ask for help for the baptism and the Holy Communion.

This creates two major problems: a problem of timing and schedule and a financial one. When a theologian is asking for a pastor’s service, he always has to check his schedule in order to find available time. But what then if he is not free to come? This occurs often during great events of the church, like Easter period or Pentecost period. Pastors are supposed to have service in their own churches. It goes on that schedules in parishes led by women depend totally on those held by pastors. Besides, these parishes have to support financially the coming of the pastor and have to cover the whole charge.

Seeing a pastor holding more than six congregations is common in the MLC, but it would be better if women were able to have the same functions. Having women in the rank of pastors will surely solve these two major problems, especially now that MLC is growing fast and a lack

²⁴⁴ Literally, “Akohovavy maneno”: Crowing is the task of a rooster, not a hen, but when a woman is too talkative and boastful in front of men, she is considered like a hen that is taking the task of the rooster.

²⁴⁵ Informant X-2

of human resources in pastoral ministry is depicted.

The previous analysis proves that Prisca was a “teacher”. And those who were taught by her were not new-comers in religious belief, but although they already knew more about the Holy Scriptures, they knew less of Jesus. As I have said before, the account of the false prophetess Jezebel is used by some as an argument against the ordination of women, despite its particularity. It is not to be generalized at all. This misuse of biblical passages also is frequent in this side of argumentation, such as the misinterpretation of Paul’s message to the Church in Corinth when he said: “the women should keep silence *in Church...*” (1 Cor 14:34, RSV). This phrase is therefore generally quoted in a short sarcastic form “Let the women keep silent!” in the light of the cultural pattern. Used without its original context, used as foundation of argument for the sake of the patriarchal system, this short form infers that women are not supposed to teach or to be leaders at all, in church first, but everywhere after.

Those who are called theologians have studied the same thing in the same way that male pastors have done. I remember that when I was still studying at the seminary, one of our lecturers said that from the opening of the seminary until that time which counts six groups of alumni, the highest grades were always reached by women, and it happened also in the seventh, in which I was. The best student among our classmates was a woman.

I asked also a Christian about women in teaching during my fieldwork, and one of the strong answers I got was: “There should not be problems for Malagasy women to be pastors because the comparison shows that women are better to be listened to than men in teaching.”²⁴⁶

I am sure that the informant’s intention was not to denigrate or humiliate men anymore, but to share that female theologians have ability and capacity to teach as well as men in the MLC. Some say that women may be better teachers than men in MLC. When I talked with a theologian about the non-ordination of women, she said: “What those male pastors of our church do is shameful; I said this because most of those leaders were my students, I transmitted to them my knowledge; I taught them and that contributes to their success today.”²⁴⁷ This shows that a woman has already the ability to study further than men in the field of teaching and monitoring, as men were taught and tutored by this woman theologian. Besides, what she taught was the Lutheran doctrines which are the basic foundations of faith and practice of the MLC.

²⁴⁶ Informant X-3

²⁴⁷ Informant X-9

It is also said that Junia is a female apostle who worked with Paul. Paul did not have any issue related to that despite his awareness of the tradition which claims that it was a task of a man not a woman to be apostle.

Having a female apostle is not a new thing if the history of the MLC is considered. History reveals that within the MLC the shepherding ministry brought tremendous changes. Women were consecrated as shepherds before entering the revival movement. They are appointed to be leaders of the camps (*Toby*). They are given the right to lay hands on men's heads. They are allowed to preach God's words in public. It is noticed too that many of those who were pious and active in being in mission with the apostles were women, and the main task in doing mission is to preach the gospel, invite the listeners to repent and make them disciples of Jesus. These steps in mission are exactly what make an apostle an apostle according to Grenz and Kjesbo, who define the term "apostle" as "those commissioned by the congregation to spread the Gospel; and those commissioned by the church for a special task"²⁴⁸.

4.4 Necessity of Change in the light of New Testament Accounts

Lay people are today aware of the issue related to the ordination of women, and leaders are now forced to explain their position. Lay people wonder why women are not ordained in the MLC as they are in other Protestant denominations. Lutherans advocate the principle *Sola Scriptura*, but too often they do not act consistently in accord with this principle. One informant said that "Jesus already brought changes into women's status according to the Holy Scriptures. Therefore it is nonsense to keep the principle *Sola Scriptura* if the MLC still hold the patriarchal system in the culture above the Holy Scripture in denying women's ordination."²⁴⁹

Jesus has brought a change to the situation of women. In Luke 8:1-3, three names are mentioned: Mary, Joanna, wife of the manager of Herod's household and Susanna. But then, just after these three names comes the continuation of the list "καὶ ἕτεραι πολλαί", which claims four things:

- It is a list of names of women, not men.

²⁴⁸ S. J. Grenz and D. M. Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry*, 93.

²⁴⁹ Informant X-10

- The list does not end with Susanna’s name.
- There were more women than the three mentioned with names.
- But the list may be too long if all of them were named.

Therefore, there were many women who took part in the congregation among Jesus’ followers, and it already means that not only they could bear witness of what the author shared, but they were the first women who participated in Jesus’ service, lived and worked with the twelve. And here, it is amazing how Luke knew to make the order of the list, because he cited these names just after pointing the twelve. He just does not want to say directly that these women were called by Jesus too, listened to Him and sent by Him later. He meticulously separates the women from the twelve but at the same time puts them in the same rank in the same sentence and verses. In all, women position changes from Jesus’ time.

Malagasy women are both fervent and active; therefore when there is something to do, above all in the church, they are eager to take part and do what they can to achieve the goal. Women’s mission in making disciples is more effective than men’s, for women’s department is increasing faster than men’s. During my fieldwork I asked if having women as pastors will bring development within the MLC, and an informant said “I am convinced that the evangelization will go well and fast if women could be fully responsible of church, not in this partial service, because women are the most involved in it in the church; they are the ones who are really active for it”.²⁵⁰ It follows from this statement that if a woman get ordained and is fully responsible of a parish, that parish will flourish and grow. And according to this informant, it is because a woman is created with this talent to draw or convince people.

As seen above, Jesus initiated this change in position of women. Apostles knew his teachings, and they themselves knew very well that many of these women were with them and with Jesus. They knew how Jesus received and treated them. What they were doing was just to go on in keeping this state of women in Jesus’ service and mission, although the price was a cultural and religious challenge. The twelve were conscious of their call, and they were aware that Jesus could call and send other people, men or women. Consequently, the MLC is supposed to follow and respect this call, because women also may be called to be pastors.

²⁵⁰ Informant X-7.

4.5 Conclusion

Even though the informants knew that I am a theologian from the MLC, they shared their views with me, and those who were hostile to women's leadership dared to express it without hesitation. The fieldwork provided arguments both for and against on the topic, and varieties of data were collected. It helped to depict different views on women as leaders inside church, as ordained women in the other denominations, and outside church or in social life as the queen herself.

Assessments from the fieldwork's outcome conclude that women's leadership is limited in the MLC and that this is related to culture. Compared with the status of women in the time of the apostles, Malagasy women's status is still not the same as Jesus himself conceived and considered it to be. Even lay people have noticed that. And if there is no theologically based argument to support this rejection of women to be pastors, the MLC has to provide at least any relevant and strong arguments. That is why the MLC's perspective in women's leadership must be updated according to the consideration of women in mission from Jesus' time.

V. CONCLUSION

Although Paul taught about the submission and subordination of women, what characterized his attitude toward women was mutuality and equality, both as regards women in the family and women in the churches. In his teaching about submission and subordination Paul affirmed the mutuality and equality of the sexes. It is important to recognize that in his treatment of women he attempted to bring together two important theological categories, namely, the category of new life in Christ and freedom, in which equality and mutuality are prominent, and, further, the category of what God has done by means of creation in which order, submission and subordination are features. It is necessary to take the situation of his teaching into consideration, because Paul taught all these things in the gospel in a particular situation and in a particular need, but not just abstractly. In other words, when Paul taught people, he let himself be influenced by the circumstances, and framed his words to the specific situation. In some instances, Paul simply urged women and men to do what was best for themselves and the gospel in a particular time and in a particular place. In doing that, Paul set a pattern and marked out a path for Christian thought and action after him to follow.

Nowadays, inclusivity is a matter of reality. Women are expected to be placed in key positions as well as men within the church. Women also are eligible to key positions in the church. But women could not be ordained to be pastor in the MLC, they were not appointed to congregations although they might be also called.

It is known that the call through grace is for a specific purpose. Paul describes it through his advice and teaching about the different spiritual gifts or gifts of grace. Whatever the gift was, it was supposed to be in the service of the Lord. Consequently whoever receives the call is supposed to be understood as so, male or female. Three co-workers of Paul might be mentioned here according to their call: Phoebe, a deaconess, Prisca a church leader, and Junia an apostle.

Choosing to be a pastor in the Lutheran tradition often involves a sense of spiritual “call,” which makes the pathway to a life of ministry somewhat distinct from other careers that people choose based on income potential, prestige, work conditions, and so on. The most prominent feature of being a pastor is not choosing the profession but being called by God. The recommendations of Paul towards these women proved that they did a lot in their service in serving the Lord and in Paul’s mission, for not saying that they played a crucial role in the development of the church both as a religious institution and a communion of saints. In short, they might be considered as hard worker women model in the Christian church.

What Malagasy women experience in the country is similar to what women experienced in Jesus’ time, where the patriarchal system is in rigor but where some women are called. The same dilemma prevails. There is neither equity nor equality in sharing services or functions. Those which are ascribed to men are *supposed* to not belong to women even though it is well known that they may be able to take care of these services and functions in a fully responsible way.

It would be wonderful if the church as a whole would recognize that, according to the New Testament, women did function as leaders – as apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers – and that they were respected and valued in these roles by such people as the apostle Paul. In short, it is not unbiblical for a woman to be a church leader! The meaning of the New Testament word “pastor” is “shepherd”, and so we think of pastors as leaders who tend a flock. Psalm 23 speaks of the Lord as our Shepherd, teaching, leading, guiding and providing for us. Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd, setting a model for all true spiritual leaders who lay down their lives for the sheep. When Jesus called Peter the second time after His resurrection, He

asked him to “feed my sheep” (John 21: 15-18). Thus, pastors are to nurture people and help them to grow. The MLC has more female shepherds than male, and almost all female theologians are shepherds. The MLC must draw from the New Testament the right lesson and ordain women to be pastors.

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