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GENDER STATUS AND ROLES IN THE CHURCH: SOME SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Introduction

A major component in a discussion of gender status and roles among churches in America is the social change, both ideological and structural, brought about by the democratization and industrialization within contemporary American society. Far greater than what is usually meant by the phrase "it's cultural," the social modification being discussed in this paper has its ideological origins in the Enlightenment. Facilitated by major technological breakthroughs over approximately a 200-year period, this societal alteration has impacted the very structural bases of human existence. This societal shift is so great that sociologists have identified it as a major transformation in societal types—from an agrarian type to an industrial/postindustrial type of society. Among a number of social reversals are those which impact the way age, gender, and family are viewed, especially manifest in gender-specific public/private behavioral expectations.¹

Advanced Agrarian Societies: A Working Paradigm

Social stratification is most complex in advanced agrarian societies with two leading cleavages: 1) the ruling class above and over all others, both city and country, and 2) the city over rural areas but dependent on agriculture for

¹ Gerhard Lenski and Jean Lenski, *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology* (5th ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill) 176; see Leslie Aitchison, *A History of Metals*, vol. 1 (London: MacDonal, 1960); Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (New York: St. Martin's, 1970); V. Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself* (New York: Mentor Books, 1951); Walter Goldschmidt, *Man's Way: A Preface to the Understanding of Human Society* (New York, 1959) chap. 6; Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968) chap. 2; Robert Nisbit, *Social Change and History* (New York: Oxford University Press) chap. 4

its survival. No major societal type has a more crystallized, hierarchically ordered, male-dominated social order marked by social inequality.² The basic social unit of the city and of the society is the extended household,³ and the leader of most households is a father, to whom obedience is given by all household members. The family counts and individuals are consequential because of the family and for its sake.⁴ Malina calls such interrelatedness the "dyadic personality."⁵

Throughout advanced agrarian societies gender roles are characterized by a basic division of labor.⁶ A woman's place and power are mostly but not exclusively within the private sphere. Through the delegated authority of her husband, a wife manages her own household. Her tasks include the bearing, rearing, and training of children of both sexes at an early age, and of daughters until they leave home.⁷ Sjoberg notes, "Ideally only a servant goes to the local market to purchase food and other provisions for the family. . . . But when the itinerant peddler comes to the house, the women have opportunity to examine his goods to make purchases themselves."⁸ However, when a woman appears in public, she often reflects her husband's standing among his peers through her dress, coiffure, jewelry, makeup, and self-adornment.⁹

The public realm, centered mostly in the political, educational, and religious structures, is the primary, but not the exclusive, sphere of activity and power for men.¹⁰ In the political realm, for example, Elshtain sees the

² Lenski and Lenski, *Human Societies*, 202-04.

³ Wayne Meeke, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 29.

⁴ Gerhard Lenski and Jean Lenski, *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology* (4th ed.; New York, 1982) 207-08.

⁵ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (rev. ed.; Atlanta: John Knox, 1993) 67-71, 86-88.

⁶ E. Michaelsen and W. Goldschmidt, "Female Roles and Male Dominance among Peasants," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 27: 347-49; see Martin K. Whyte, *The Status of Women in Preindustrial Societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978) 156-66; M. K. Martin and B. Voorhies, *Female of the Species* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975) 276-322.

⁷ Gideon Sjoberg, *The Preindustrial City Past and Present* (New York: Free Press, 1960) 164. Sjoberg states, "Figuratively, the husband is a 'god' who requires unswerving obedience." See M. I. Finley, "The Silent Women of Rome," in *Aspects of Antiquity* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 124-36; Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985) chap 12; Susan J. Rogers, "Female Forms of Power and the Myth of Male Dominance," *American Ethnologist* 2 (1975) 727-56.

⁸ Sjoberg, *Preindustrial Society*, 202.

⁹ Sjoberg, *Preindustrial Society*, 166.

¹⁰ Sjoberg, *Preindustrial City*, chaps 1-4; Kathleen E. Corley, "Were the Women around Jesus Really Prostitutes? Women in the Context of Greco-Roman Meals," (SBLSP; Atlanta:

Greek example as a contrast between the *polis*, "the reality of a structured body politic," and the *oikos*, the private household which includes a "world of familial and economic relations."¹¹ In the educational sphere, emphasis upon women's education differs among cultures but largely fosters limited literacy for domestic purposes among women.¹² Sjoberg states, "Few girls ever learn to read and write, and those who do, receive this training at home and for a few years at most."¹³ Formal, advanced education often is provided through the male-dominated religious institutions among the upper classes of the urban centers and is largely designed to "socialize the student into the basic values of the social order and . . . to ensure that the rising officialdom is fully indoctrinated into the society's ideal norms."¹⁴ The areas of study "buttress the already concretelike authority structure."¹⁵ And, finally in the religious structure, leadership and participation in public worship settings are largely male affairs due to several contributing factors including a general lack of formal education on the part of women,¹⁶ practices of female seclusion, the close relationship of religion to the political order among the elite,¹⁷ and the dyadic nature of the husband/wife relationship in which the husband, the superior member of the dyad, represents his wife and family in public matters.¹⁸

Throughout the model's description I have carefully used such language as "most," "mostly but not exclusively," "usually," "primarily," and "emphasis . . . differs among cultures" for two reasons. First, societal

Scholars Press (1989) 487-521; idem, *Private Women Public Meals, Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody, MS.: Hendrickson, 1993); Jean B. Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Ernestine Friedl, "The Position of Women: Appearance and Reality," in *Gender and Power in Rural Greece* (ed. J. Dubisch; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) 42-52; Ramsey MacMullen, "Women in Public in the Roman Empire," *Historia* 29: 208-18; Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 126-71.

¹¹ Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman*, 12.

¹² Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 83-87.

¹³ *Preindustrial City*, 298.

¹⁴ *Preindustrial City*, 301.

¹⁵ *Preindustrial City*, 301.

¹⁶ See Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 83-87; Sjoberg, *Preindustrial City*, 301-06.

¹⁷ Lenski, *Human Societies* (1982).

¹⁸ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 67-71, 87-88. My description is primarily of role expectations among elite women. Out of necessity, urban lower-class and rural women lead different lives. Their work often takes them out of the home. Peasant women work next to their husbands in the fields. It is difficult to cloister women in a one- or two-room hovel. In some cultures, peasant women dress similar to men, thus dramatizing less sex differentiation in rural areas.

typology recognizes the reality of variation and the exceptional. Second, more specifically, recent studies concerning the public role of men and the private role of women rightfully have warned against making overly simplistic correlations illustrated in three ways:¹⁹ (1) Older studies emphasized the differences between men and women, but more recent studies stress as well the "complementarity" in relationships between the sexes and sex roles.²⁰ (2) Susan J. Rogers has identified gossip as "the notion of an informal public power" on the part of women which "indirectly affects male political decisions and behavior."²¹ And (3) Ernestine Friedl has found in her studies of a rural Greek community a continuum of tasks related to the household linking men to the agricultural fields, women to the house, but both sexes to the house compound.²² A public/private gender distinction, however, remains a legitimate working model for gender analysis in advanced agrarian societies.

Greco-Roman Illustrations of the Advanced Agrarian Paradigm

Illustrations of advanced agrarian gender-specific expectations may be documented in Greco-Roman society within and near the first century A.D. The following representative illustrations and analyses of the social location of men and women are organized in four ways: within the house, inside and outside the house, outside the house, and at public meal settings.²³

1. *Gender-specific space within the house.* Statements from Xenophon, Plutarch, and Lucian, respectively, identify male and female restricted space within the house.

I showed her the women's quarters (*gynaikonitai*) too, separated by a bolted door from the men's quarters (*andronitidos*), so that nothing which ought not to be moved may be taken out, and that the servant may not breed without our leave.²⁴

For it is impossible to expel extravagance from the wife's part of the house when it has free range amid the men's rooms.²⁵

You come in too, Micyllus, and dine with us. I'll make my son eat with his mother in the women's quarters (*gynaikonitidi*) so that you may have his room.²⁶

¹⁹ See Dubisch, "Culture Enters Through the Kitchen," 195-214.

²⁰ T. R. Hobbs, "Man, Woman, and Hospitality," *BTB* 23 (1993) 93.

²¹ Rogers, "Female Forms of Power," 736; see Hobbs, "Man, Woman, and Hospitality," 93.

²² "The Position of Women," 47-48.

²³ For the household as the basic social unit of the society, see Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 29.

²⁴ Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 9:5; see 9:6.

²⁵ Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom* 144f-145d; see Plutarch, *Pelopidas* 9:5.

²⁶ Lucian, *The Cock/Gallus* 11.

Women, especially unmarried daughters, often are relegated to semisecluded spatial arrangements, especially when a husband or father entertains guests.²⁷

2. *Gender-specific space inside and outside the house.* Hierocles and Xenophon illustrate the outside/inside, male/female, public/private gender-specific spatial dichotomy.

For Hierocles gender-specific duties have as their point of reference the household. Concerning household occupations, Hierocles states, "They should be divided in the usual manner; namely, to the husband should be assigned those which have to do with agriculture, commerce, and the affairs of the city; to the wife those which have to do with spinning and the preparation of food, in short, those of a domestic nature."²⁸ Hierocles, however, is careful not to make gender distinctions absolute. A husband and wife should experience the other's work presumably for the sake of reciprocal appreciation and marital concord; yet he insists that separate gender spheres should remain intact without abolishing, diminishing, or mixing the areas of responsibility. When the wife participates in her husband's occupations, she should be limited to agricultural tasks and not perform the duties pertaining to commerce or the affairs of the city. In the final analysis, proper occupations for a freeborn woman are food preparation, water drawing, making fires and beds, and doing similar chores.

Xenophon advocates a gender-based division of labor for husbands and wives. Outside work is for men; inside work is for women because men are physically stronger.²⁹ Xenophon grounds his ideology in the nature of God and what is honorable. "Thus, to the woman," Xenophon states, "it is more honourable to stay indoors than to abide in the fields, but to the man it is unseemly rather to stay indoors than to attend to the work outside. If a man acts contrary to the nature God has given him, possibly his defiance is detected by the gods and he is punished for neglecting his own work, or meddling with his wife's."³⁰ Each sex has a God-given space and task. Neither sex is to dwell or meddle in the other's sphere.

²⁷ Meeks (*Urban Christians*, 30) describes excavated floor plans which set forth such physical/social arrangements of family relationships in Pompeii.

²⁸ "On Duties," *Household Management* 4:28.21=5.696, 15; Hense, *Moral Exhortation*, 98.

²⁹ See *Concerning Household Management* 7:3-10:13. Hierocles also argues for a gender division of tasks based on the greater strength of men even in the domestic realm. "For in other domestic works, is it not thought that more of them pertain to men than to women? For they are more laborious, and require corporal strength, such as to grind, to knead meal, to cut wood, to draw water from a well" (*On Duties*, 5.689.13-20). For additional data and bibliography, see David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code of 1 Peter*, SBLMS 26 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981) 23-26, 33-38.

³⁰ *Oeconomicus* 7:30

3. *Gender-specific space in public settings outside the household.* The public/private gender-specific dichotomy carries over to public assemblies, especially those settings where the deliberation of philosophy and politics takes place. First, marriage is important for a man who seeks public involvement because a wife enables a husband to go out from the house to study and/or pursue political affairs. Antipater states, "For the gentleman who wishes to have leisure for study or political affairs, or both, [married life] is absolutely necessary. For the more he goes out from the house, the more he ought to take to his side someone to take care of the house and make himself free from everyday cares."³¹ Pliny the Younger in a letter to Calpurnia Hispulla extols his wife for her private interest in his public presentations. At one point Pliny describes his wife as being "concealed behind a curtain." "When at any time I recite works," Pliny states, "she sits close at hand, concealed behind a curtain, and greedily overhears my praises."³² Valerius Maximus believed women should have nothing to do with a public assembly. "What have women to do with a public assembly?" he asks. "If old-established custom is preserved, nothing."³³ Finally, public debate is unbecoming behavior for women. Wives are not to speak unless their husbands are present. Plutarch states concerning bold women who take part in debate, "But Numa . . . nevertheless enjoined great modesty upon them, forbade them all busy intermeddling, taught them sobriety, and accustomed them to be silent; wine they were to refrain from entirely, and were not to speak, even on the most necessary of topics, unless their husbands were with them."³⁴ The philosophers and moralists appear to uphold a public/private, gender-specific spatial dichotomy.

4. *Public Meal Settings.* Gender-specific behavior is recognized as well at public meal settings. According to Greek traditions, a respectable woman usually ate in the private space known as "the women's quarters" and did not accompany her husband to banquets or attend banquets alone where "public" women, that is, prostitutes or hetaerae, entertained men.³⁵ Kathleen Corley has identified a Greek epigram of a public meal which describes a "public woman" as one who is "common to all," a euphemism for a whore. A translation states,

I know thy oath is void, for they betray thy wantonness, these locks still moist with scented essences. They betray thee, thy eyes all heavy for want of sleep, and

³¹ Antipater, *On Marriage* (ed. von Arnim) 256, 34-257.

³² *Ep.* 4.19 (LCL 1; New York: Macmillan, 1923).

³³ *Fact. et Dic.* 3.8.6.

³⁴ *Lycurgus and Numa* 3.5.

³⁵ For sources, see Kathleen E. Corley, "Were the Women around Jesus Really Prostitutes?" 489-90, nn. 11, 12.

the garland's track all round thy head. Thy ringlets are in unchaste disorder all freshly tousled, and all thy limbs are tottering with the wine. Away from me, public woman; they are calling thee, the lyre that loves the revel and the clatter of the castanets rattled by the fingers.³⁶

Evaluating the epigram, Corley gives insight to the importance of gender-specific public expectations in Greco-Roman meal settings.

The identification of the woman as "public" or "common to all" is not surprising, given the clear demarcation between the realms of "public" and "private" according to gender in antiquity, the public and open areas being the sphere of men, and not of respectable women, who were relegated to the private sphere of the household. Prostitutes were therefore associated with the marketplace and other open air areas that were usually reserved for men and closed to women of good reputation.³⁷

Greek social ideology also held that the names of respectable women were not to be mentioned in public.³⁸ Not only was it forbidden to mention their names, but proper behavior required women to be silent. A corresponding lack of active involvement by wives at public meals was "a sign" of a wife's submission to her husband.³⁹ Courtesans, not matrons, entertained men at banquets by talking and displaying their education and knowledge.⁴⁰

However, during the late Republic and early Empire, involvement of Roman women in public activities, including public meals among the elite, became more prevalent. This "progress," especially in the legal and economic realms and to a lesser extent in the political sphere, began during the Hellenistic period and reached its pinnacle, it appears, just before and during the first century A.D.⁴¹ The "progress" of Jewish women both within the

³⁶ *Anth. Graec.* 5.175.

³⁷ Corley, "Women in the Context of Greco-Roman Meals," 498.

³⁸ D. Schaps, "The Women Least Mentioned: Etiquette and Women's Names," *Classical Quarterly* 27 (1977) 323-30; Eva Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters. The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 124-26.

³⁹ Corley, "Women in the Context of Greco-Roman Meals," 502. See also Corley, "Silence in the Context of Ascent and Liturgy in Gnostic Texts" (paper presented in the NT Seminar of the Claremont Graduate School, Fall 1987) 17-20; and Ronald Hock, "The Will of God and Sexual Morality: 1 Thessalonians 4:8 in Its Social and Intellectual Context" (paper presented at the Annual SBL Meeting, New York, 1982) 11. For additional references, see Corley, "Women in the Context of Greco-Roman Meals," 501, nn. 95, 96.

⁴⁰ Corley, "Women in the Context of Greco-Roman Meals," 501-02.

⁴¹ A selective sampling of a growing body of scholarly studies which document the advances includes J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women. Their History and Habits* (London: The Bodley Head, 1962); Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters*; J. P. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Ross Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings. Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992);

institutional life of Judaism and everyday experience seems to have paralleled their Roman counterparts.⁴² Corley summarizes the larger picture in her discussion of public meals. "Jewish women also lived in the changing environment of the Greco-Roman world. . . . It therefore should come as no surprise that Jewish meal customs during that period were in form quite similar to those in the rest of the Greco-Roman world."⁴³

These changes, however, clashed with the conventions of the older established social ideology in at least three ways.⁴⁴ First, there was a growing concern for the respectability of wives, their reputation and behavior. For example, matrons who attended banquets were expected to avoid social criticism. Wives, accordingly, usually left after the meal, before the symposium began (public banquets had two parts: first the meal, followed by the symposium or entertainment). If on rare occasion a wife attended the symposium, she was to remain silent and nameless. Care was also given to the spatial location of wives and the posture they assumed while eating.

M. R. Lefkowitz, *Heroines and Hysterics* (London: Duckworth, 1981); M. R. Lefkowitz and M. B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (London: Duckworth, 1982); and S. B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves. Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975).

⁴² For inscriptional and archaeological evidence for women in ancient synagogues, see S. J. D. Cohen, "Women in the Synagogues of Antiquity," *Conservative Judaism* 34 (1980), 232-39; Bernedette Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1982); Ross S. Kraemer, "Non-literary Evidence for Jewish Women in Rome and Egypt," *Rescuing Creusa* 85-101; idem, "Hellenistic Jewish Women: The Epigraphical Evidence," (SBLSP 26; ed. K. Richards; Decatur, GA: Scholars Press [1986]) 183-200; L. J. Archer, "The Role of Jewish Women in the Religion, Ritual and Cult of Graeco-Roman Palestine," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* (ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt; Detroit: Wayne State University Press [1983]) 272-87.

For mishnaic studies, see Judith R. Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Jacob Neusner, "From Scripture to Mishnah: The Origins of Tractate Niddah," *JJS* 29 (1978) 135-48; idem, "Thematic or Systemic Description: The Case of Mishnah's Division of Women," in *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism* (Scholars Press, 1979); idem, *The Tosfot: The Order of Women*, (KTAV, 1979); idem, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980).

⁴³ Corley, "Women in the Context of Greco-Roman Meals," 513-14. For the diversity of change, see B. Brooten, "Jewish Women's History in the Roman Period: A Task for Christian Theology," *HTR* 79 (1986) 22-30.

⁴⁴ For the clash, see Marilyn Arthur, "Liberated Women: The Classical Era," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (ed. R. Bridenthall and C. Koonz; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977) 84ff.; Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters*, 142ff.; A. Rouselle, *Porneia. On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 85ff.; R. Bremen, "Women and Wealth," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* 234-45; P. Brown, "Late Antiquity," *History of Private Life, I. From Pagan Rome to Byzantium* (ed. P. Veyne; Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1987) 247-48. Brown refers to the "emancipation" of women during the early Empire as a "freedom born of contempt," permitted as long as it did not have political impact, and restricted when it was seen to be harmful to the male political order. Cantarella (142-43) sees the liberation as being relative, certainly not the widespread "emancipation" often described.

Although Roman women increasingly reclined at meals,⁴⁵ men and women customarily also reclined separately,⁴⁶ since women who reclined with men often were identified as prostitutes or hetaerae.⁴⁷ As late as the second century A.D. Lucian refers to sitting as being "womanish and weak."⁴⁸

Second, the number of wives attending public meals was probably quite small. Ramsey MacMullen points out,

Not only were women, more often than not, excluded altogether from these occasions, however, and from apparently all inclusive phrases like "all citizens" or "the entire people"; beyond that, if they were indeed invited, they were generally put at the bottom of the pecking order, as the sequence of mention indicates, and as is sometimes made mathematically clear in differential distributions: largesses might be given out in the ratio 30:20:3 to town senators, Augustales and women.⁴⁹

Third, "progressive" Roman ways apparently did not prevail everywhere since there is evidence that Hellenistic peoples under Roman control remained constant to the customs of their Greek heritage.⁵⁰ Finally, social restraint can be detected in Jewish meal settings as well, in that Jewish women attended Passover meals with their husbands but did not involve themselves in the Seder liturgy.⁵¹ Even though "progress" existed among some elite women, the prevailing gender practices of first-century Greco-Roman society seem to correspond to the behavioral description of our advanced agrarian paradigm.

Public and Private Gender Expectations in the New Testament

Public/Private spatial practices are found as well in the NT and to a great extent appear to follow conventional Greco-Roman and advanced agrarian practices. I will illustrate this phenomenon in Luke-Acts and 1 Corinthians, a reality that can be readily documented in most NT writings.

⁴⁵ Plutarch, *De Gen.* 594D-F; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 7. 67-68. Plutarch knows of children reclining in private settings, *Quaest. Convivales* VII 8, 4.

⁴⁶ Ovid, *Met.* 12.210-220; Lucian, *Symp.* 8-9; Petronius, *Satyr.* 67-69.

⁴⁷ Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 7.76ff.

⁴⁸ *Symp.* 13.

⁴⁹ MacMullen, "Public," 212-13.

⁵⁰ See the story told of Cicero against Gaius Verres. *De Verres.* II. 1.26.65-27.68.

⁵¹ Corley, "Women in the Context of Greco-Roman Meals," 515; See Wegner, *Chattel or Person?* 156-57.

Luke-Acts

The book of Acts, John H. Elliott maintains, "explicitly shows a contrast between 'what is public' and 'what is not.'"⁵² The actions of the church are either "in the temple or at home" (Acts 2:46; 5:42) or "in public and from house to house" (Acts 20:20).⁵³ For instance, Paul shifts his mission to the house of Jason after being separated from the synagogue (Acts 17:1-9),⁵⁴ providing a private space where Paul and his co-laborers could ply their trades as they preached the gospel. A similar situation arises in Corinth. Leaving the synagogue, Paul and his co-workers attach themselves "to the house of a man named Titius Justus" next door (Acts 18:7).

Gender-specific examples of this phenomenon are illustrated in the birth stories of Luke. For example, Mary visits Elizabeth (1:39) in the private domestic location of "the house of Zechariah" (1:39). Luke carefully portrays the encounter as one involving only the two women. Even though it is the house of Zechariah, the patriarch is not present. Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Spirit" (1:41), prophesies (1:42-45). The hymnic response attributed to Mary spans ten verses, contains leading Lucan themes, and describes Mary as a woman of "low estate," a "handmaiden" of the Lord (1:48). Luke's readers not only see the visit but hear what transpires between the two women, a social reality never, to my knowledge, replicated by women in public settings in Luke-Acts.⁵⁵

Conversely, in the public location of the Temple (2:36-38), Luke pairs a prophet, Simeon, and a prophetess,⁵⁶ Anna. He tells the story of Simeon first (2:25-35) and gives no gender-specific details to depict his identity. He is a "righteous and devout" man "looking for the consolation of Israel" (2:25). The Holy Spirit is upon him (2:25). The reader learns that "he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (2:26). Leading up to Simeon's encounter with the parents, Luke notes that Simeon is "inspired by the Spirit" (2:27). The prophet takes the child in his arms, blesses God (2:28), and

⁵² *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 194; idem, "Temple Versus Household in Luke-Acts: A Contrast in Social Institutions" in *The Social World of Luke-Acts Models for Interpretation* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 211-40.

⁵³ Stuart L. Love, "Women's Roles in Certain Second Testament Passages: A Macrosociological View," *BTB* 17 (1987) 54.

⁵⁴ Abraham J. Malherbe believes Jason's house possibly became "the base for Paul's work among the Gentiles after his separation from the synagogue. . . ." *Paul and the Thessalonians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 13-14.

⁵⁵ For women to function as prophetesses does not seem to violate a role for women. Prophets have a status and authority of their own. See M. R. D'Angelo, "Women in Luke-Acts: A Redactional View," *JBL* 109/3 (1990) 456.

⁵⁶ The term "prophetess" is mentioned only here and in Rev. 3:20 in the NT.

prophesies a carefully crafted recorded message (2:29-32, 34). Like Mary's (1:46-55), Simeon's hymn highlights Lucan themes.

In contrast, Anna, mentioned after Simeon,⁵⁷ is largely identified in gender-specific terms. She is an ascetic widow who "did not depart from the temple" (2:37).⁵⁸ She is "the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher" (2:36). Her great age is marked by her virginity, the time she lived with her husband, and her widowhood (2:36). Even though she serves as a parallel to Simeon as she speaks about the child to others (2:38), unlike with Simeon, the reader never hears the words of her message. Anna's message is muted. She simply speaks of the child "to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38). Whether the term "all" is gender inclusive or specific is not clarified by the writer. The fact that women could not enter certain areas of the temple is well known. If such is the case, Anna prophesies in a gender-specific public location. Women, too, are recipients of the good news, and they are told in a socially acceptable way by one of their own.⁵⁹

Public/private gender-specific behavior can be detected in the behavior of Mary. Three times Mary ponders in her mind, that is, privately and in silence, the meaning of what she hears (1:29; 2:19, 51). She speaks only when alone with the angel (1:34, 38) and/or Elizabeth (1:46-55). In the presence of the shepherds (2:15-19) and Simeon (2:25-35) she is silent. Even though she later speaks in the temple, her words are those of an anxious mother directed only to her son (2:48).

⁵⁷ Compare the gender order of the healing of the centurion's slave (7:1-10) and the raising of the widow's son at Nain (7:11-17) or the parable of the man who has a lost sheep (15:3-7) followed by the woman and the lost coin (15:8-10).

⁵⁸ Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 24-25. See A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907) 72; Gustav Stahlin, "Chra," *TDNT* 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 451.

⁵⁹ A similar example is found in Acts. Philip, the evangelist, has "four unmarried daughters, who prophesied" (Acts 21:9). The fact that they are virgins may strike a chord of the author's possible ambivalence toward marriage. See Stevan Davies, "Women in the Third Gospel and the New Testament Apocrypha," in "Women Like This": *New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. A. Levine; SBLEJL 1; Atlanta: [1991] 187). Without fanfare, the evangelist locates the unnamed daughters in Philip's house, after which nothing more is said. However, what follows is quite different. A male prophet named Agabus enters the house (21:10). We are told of his prophetic actions and message. He takes Paul's girdle and binds "his own feet and hands" (21:11), a prophetic act (Isa 20:2-6; Jer 13:1-11). He then states, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles'" (21:11). The four daughters and Agabus form a gender dyad. The inferior members, the daughters, are silent in the presence of a male prophet.

1 Corinthians 14

Stephen C. Barton views the clash between Paul and the Corinthians (1 Cor 14:33b-36) as a spatial boundary struggle between church and household.⁶⁰ On the surface, the passage contrasts the public character of churches, that is, "in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence" and the private status of households, "If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home" (1 Cor 14:33b, 35). Barton contends that the boundary struggle hinges on acceptable gender-defined speech in the church and the house.⁶¹ The controversy is complicated in that the church meetings, usually construed as public occasions, take place in the private space of the house, a spatial sphere of "female activity and authority."⁶² Three times Paul enjoins silence for wives (women) in the public space ("church") located in the private space ("house"). The call for silence, Barton believes, is a control mechanism utilized by Paul to establish order in the church as well as to reinforce the apostle's authority and that of Christian husbands. Barton appears to be on the right track in identifying the quasi-public/private status of early Christian household churches. Churches, especially to outsiders (14:23, 24), are public spaces. Households, however, are primarily private spaces.⁶³

These illustrations are bound up in the social ideology of the household, the basic social unit of the society. One leading NT scholar, Luke Timothy Johnson, in his discussion of behavior at worship in comments on 1 Tim 2:1-15, summarizes the social dilemma we face.

Paul's instruction . . . leads us into a symbolic world shared by him and his readers, although in many ways strange to us. . . . We are not surprised that he wants them to pray "for kings and all who are in high positions" (2:2), for in the empire the king was regarded as head of the whole "household" of the civilized world (*oikoumene*). Among the "household duties" of all people, therefore, were respect and obedience to the emperor.

Visions of alternative societies were not totally unknown in the ancient world: Plato's *Republic* was thoroughly utopian and reformist. But under the empire—which was by the time of Paul the only real political fact in the world for over three hundred years, much longer than the whole history of the United States—such alternatives were not seriously entertained. The most massive fact available was this: A single hierarchical order reached from the top to the bottom of the "human family," an order in which authority moved downward and submission moved

⁶⁰ "Paul's Sense of Place: An Anthropological Approach to Community Formation in Corinth," *NTS* 32 (1986) 225-46.

⁶¹ "Paul's Sense," 232.

⁶² "Paul's Sense," 233.

⁶³ The problem is complicated further by households led by women such as Lydia and Chloe (Acts 16:15, 40; 1 Cor 1:11).

upward. Moralists had further solidified this symbolic world by taking it as given, and asking "What are the duties (*kathēkonta*) of the various members of society within this structure?"⁶⁴

Societal typology indicates that what predominated for three hundred years of Roman history prevailed for about three thousand years among advanced agrarian societies.

Industrialization, A Revolution Without Parallel

The advent of industrialization, according to the Lenskis, brought about a revolution of "new societies" with "distinctive life patterns," including the changing status and roles of men and women. From the perspective of social stratification, prior to the Industrial Revolution every major technological advance led to an increase in the degree of social inequality within societies. In contrast, advanced industrialization thus far indicates "this 9,000-year trend toward greater inequality has begun to falter, even to show signs of a reversal."⁶⁵ Further,

Nowhere are the effects of industrialization on society's norms, values, and sanctions seen more clearly than in the changing role of women. Throughout recorded history most women were destined to spend their prime years bearing children, nursing them, caring for them when they were sick and dying, and rearing them if they survived; doing domestic chores; tending a garden; and often helping in the fields. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that women seldom played significant roles outside the home or made outstanding contributions to the arts.⁶⁶

I will now describe three interrelated areas where striking consequences in the changing statuses and roles of women have taken place.

Technology

Technological innovations have affected the size of families and the domestic workload. Birth control, effective substitutes for breast feeding, and household appliances reduce family size and the time required to care for the home. For example, British marriages contracted around 1860 produced a median of six children. Two generations later, the median had dropped to two. Families with eight or more children declined from 33 percent of the total to only 2 percent.⁶⁷

A number of laborsaving devices such as refrigerators, freezers, automatic washing machines and dryers, vacuum cleaners, electric irons,

⁶⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (KPG; ed. John H. Hayes; Atlanta: John Knox [1987]) 63-64.

⁶⁵ *Human Societies*, 313. The reference to 9,000 years includes the eras of historical dominance for horticultural as well as agrarian societies.

⁶⁶ *Human Societies*, 340.

⁶⁷ Royal Commission on Population, *Report* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1949)

frozen foods, and microwave ovens have greatly reduced the time and effort necessary to maintain a household. The Lenskis, for example, describe what this means in doing the laundry, recalling that laundry was another time-consuming task, requiring numerous time-consuming activities including the transporting and boiling of water, and the starching and ironing of clothes.

Today, according to the Lenskis, technological advances have reduced the expenditure of time and energy by 95 percent, even as standards of cleanliness have risen.⁶⁸ Technological innovation is essential to societal change, and every major technological alteration modifies a society.

Family Structure

The Greco-Roman household is no longer the basic social unit of advanced industrial societies. Although the traditional family exists (but should not be confused with the advanced agrarian household), it is diminishing in number. In addition to the variety of family structures that are present in contemporary society, our society has a large number of single persons. In the older society, the single life would have rendered one vulnerable and outcast. The single life is advocated in the Bible only in 1 Cor 7:8 and Matt 19:12.

Education and Employment

An increasing number of women have opportunities for higher education and professional training. This includes academic doctorates and first-professional degrees in fields such as medicine, law, dentistry, theology, veterinary medicine, and optometry. Sociologists believe that a college-educated population serves as a social barometer for both the work force and marriage and family relationships. For example, college graduates often are recruited for management positions. Accordingly, an increasing number of women are breaking through the industrial "caste" system, which magnifies the number of dual-career marriages that, in turn, breaks down gender-specific labor practices. More husbands and wives are joint providers and share in household responsibilities including the rearing of children. One of the social elites of an industrialized society is the educated. For women, a college education and/or professional training is a powerful influence for sexual equality. Technology also plays a role. Physical strength is no longer the criterion for job performance. Thus a gender-based division of labor tends to break down advanced agrarian female/male, inside/outside, private/public social distinctions.

Without precedent, the societal shift described here impacts the underlying social ideology and societal structures of advanced

⁶⁸ *Human Societies*, 341.

industrialization. Who knows which comes first, the chicken or the egg? At any rate, hereditary monarchies and the proprietary theory of the state have given way to the will of the masses, including women. Luke Johnson again summarizes the radical societal shift we have experienced.

It is difficult for us who live in fragile if not fragmented social worlds to appreciate the sheer facticity of that ancient order. It was generally regarded, in fact, as part of the *oikonomia theou*—the dispensation of God. Nature and society were part of the same continuum, all of which was governed by God's will, or "providence." To deviate from the norms of the social order, then, was really to deviate from "nature" and from God's ordering of the world. The point of these observations is simple: It was as impossible for Paul to have envisaged a Jeffersonian democracy as it was for him to have imagined the contemporary nuclear family with dual-career spouses. His instructions were for a world not only different from ours structurally, but even in conception. Part of the "symbolic world" we live in, after all, is the concept that society is in fact a changeable thing. Precisely that perception would not have been Paul's as a human being of the first century. There may have been good or bad emperors but surely there would always be emperors! ⁶⁹

Johnson lays open the practical impossibility of foreknowing the future or of returning to the past. A major social philosophical question that must be answered is whether any given societal structure, past or present, is divinely ordained.

Personal Observations

1. The gospel critiques any given social ideology and social structure. For example, the gospel upholds the human dignity of persons, but it critiques the individualism that pervades American society. Conversely, Jesus upheld the dignity of women in the face of male exploitive power in Palestinian society. He went against the grain in his treatment of women over such issues as lust, divorce, and adultery. He ate with women (Luke 10, Martha and Mary), and he defended a woman's presence and behavior at a Pharisee's banquet (Luke 7). He conversed with and witnessed to a Samaritan woman in a public location (John 4). The gospel upholds the power of love emanating from the cross of Christ but critiques the use of power to manipulate or to "lord it over" others in any social setting.

2. The gospel works within a given society. Slavery is a good example. Slaves who became Christians remained slaves but became "brothers and sisters in Christ." The social implication that "there is neither slave nor free" had to be worked out within the social realities of the Roman order. Onesimus is Philemon's brother, but Paul, under Roman legal constraints, had to send him back to his owner (Phlm 18). Slaves were to pay their masters all honor

"so that the name of God and the teaching may not be defamed" (1 Tim 6:1). The breakup of slavery is tied to the process of industrialization. Not many in American society today would advocate slavery as a viable institution or argue for its just demands!

3. No societal type is divinely ordained. But this is one of the most important questions we must answer. What societal structure, if any, is divinely ordained? The social order found so prominently in the Bible and a democratic social structure apparently do not mix and match. I do believe there is a divinely ordained social order. It is the kingdom of God. But the kingdom of God is not synonymous with agrarian or industrial societies. The "household of the kingdom" is "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matt 12:50). It is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Gal 3:28). But the household of the Kingdom between the times must both critique and accept the societal realities of its time.

4. We are not bound by the public/private expectations of agrarian societies. Outsiders in the social world of the Pastorals raised their eyebrows at a new religion that might allow women to teach in a public place. Outsiders in today's world see it strange that churches and worship services are led only by men. To recognize the views of outsiders is to be realistic, as was the early church, concerning the social realities. We cannot live out the social past in the social present. There are social settings in the contemporary world where agrarian practices, anchored in love and mutual submission, probably are still more viable. This is especially true in some Third World countries and in certain cultures within our own society. However, rapid social change is happening for all. The societal changes over the past 200 years have impacted the very structural bases of human existence including the way age, gender, and family are viewed. And surely we have moved beyond the societal metaphor of an "animal-drawn and iron-tipped plow."

⁶⁹ 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, 63-64