

Paul on Women and Gender: A Comparison with Early Jewish Views

JUDITH M. GUNDRY-VOLF

WHAT impact did Paul's conversion have on his views regarding women and gender? The question presupposes that we can determine Paul's views on this subject both before and after his powerful experience on the road to Damascus. But on both of these matters there is much room for debate. Paul's post-conversion views on women and gender are disputed due to what many see as inconsistencies in his letters. And previous scholarly assumptions about his pre-Christian views are seriously called into question by newer research on women in Judaism and the Greco-Roman world.

It is impossible here to engage in a thorough investigation of either of these problems. I will begin, therefore, by simply sketching an overview of Paul's thought regarding women and gender, as based on the main texts in his letters on this subject. It will become evident that Paul's thought retains a considerable degree of tension. Then I will relate this conclusion to current discussions about how Paul's views compare with those of his non-Christian contemporaries, in particular, by asking: How do we account for the tension in Paul's view on women and gender? In this section I will raise briefly the relevant issues about Paul's background in Judaism as explanations for his thought. Third, the main part of this essay will compare the views on women of three Jewish authors who wrote during the period of Early Judaism with those of Paul as present in the key texts in his letters. Here I hope to illuminate Paul's thought by demonstrating that the tension

Paul on Women and Gender: A Comparison with Early Jewish Views exhibits can also be found in other Jewish writers of his day. Finally, some implications of Paul's conversion for his views on women and gender will be highlighted.

1. An Overview of Paul's Thought Regarding Women and Gender

Paul's views on women and gender can be characterized as including both some egalitarian features and the all-pervasive patriarchalism of the ancient world. On the one hand, an egalitarian note is sounded in the assertion that in Christ "there is no male and female" (Gal 3:28). In addition, Paul gives Christian wives and husbands equal rights and responsibilities in sex (1 Cor 7:2-5); he recommends celibacy, which was a path of greater freedom and autonomy for women (1 Cor 7:7-8, 32-35, 40); and he accepts women's praying and prophesying in the assembly (1 Cor 11:4-5). Likewise, he recognizes the important leadership role of women in his circle — including Priscilla the teacher (Acts 18:26; cf. 2 Tim 4:19); Junia the apostle (Rom 16:7); Phoebe the minister (*diakonos*) and Paul's own "helper" (*prostatis*, Rom 16:1-2); Euodia and Syntyche in the Philippian church, "who struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers" (Phil 4:2-3); Mary, Tryphoea, Tryphosa, and Persis who "worked hard in the Lord" (an expression denoting the work of ministers of the gospel, Rom 16:6, 12); and other women who appear to have been leaders in various house-churches (Chloe at Corinth, 1 Cor 1:11; Nympha at Laodicea, Col. 4:15; and possibly Appia, Phlm 2).

On the other hand, Paul reveals his patriarchal background when he insists that women cover their heads while praying and prophesying (1 Cor 11:4-6, 13). Such a command suggests that he accepted the traditional view of women as being subordinate in their status and roles. Paul also sounds rather patriarchal when he says that "man is the head (*kephalē*) of woman" (1 Cor 11:3, with *kephalē* signifying "ruler," "source," or "preminent one"); that "man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man"; and that "man is not from woman but woman from man, and man was not created for woman but woman for man" (1 Cor 11:7-9).

In 1 Cor 14:34-35 we find a prohibition of women speaking in church and an instruction that they keep silent and ask their husbands at home if they want to learn anything. It must be noted, of course, that considerable

text-critical arguments can be made against the authenticity of these verses. But even if we accept them as authentic, it would seem necessary to interpret them as compatible with the instructions in 11:2-16, which speak about women's prophesying and praying in the assembly. Thus they can hardly form a general prohibition but would have to be understood as a prohibition of speaking in a certain way or under certain conditions — though they still, of course, prohibit certain behavior by women in church. Likewise, 1 Tim 2:11-15 forbids women to teach or have authority over a man, affirms women's silence and submission with an appeal to Genesis 3, and declares that women will be "saved through childbearing." Here again, however, there is doubt about the Pauline authorship of this passage — this time not because of text-critical difficulties, but because of doubts that Paul wrote 1 Timothy.

In sum, Paul seems to affirm *both* equality of status and roles of women and men in Christ *and* women's subordinate or secondary place. He appears to think that sometimes the difference between male and female is to be expressed in patriarchal conventions and that sometimes these conventions should be transcended or laid aside. Robin Scroggs, therefore, clearly overstates the case for a "feminist Paul" when he says that the apostle can be construed as "the one clear voice in the New Testament asserting the freedom and equality of woman in the eschatological community" ("Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40 [1972] 283-303, quoting from 302). On the other hand, the dismissals of Paul as a chauvinist or misogynist also appear to miss the mark. Rather, it seems that we cannot avoid the conclusion that there really is a tension in Paul's thought on women and gender — that is, that he is neither a consistent egalitarian nor a consistent patriarchalist. This tension has led, for example, Judith Plaskow to describe Paul as "deeply ambivalent about women's status" ("Anti-Judaism," 123), and Luise Schottroff to speak of "contending tendencies within Paul's thought" (*Let the Oppressed Go Free: Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament* [trans. A. S. Kidder [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993] 50).

2. Explanations of the Tension in Paul's Thought

How do we account for these different strands in Paul's thought on women and gender? Scholars have usually answered this question in one of two

ways. The first is to say that the liberating tendencies in Paul flowed from his gospel, whereas the patriarchal elements were "pagan" pressures, given the general patriarchalism of the Greco-Roman world. The second answer also attributes Paul's egalitarianist gospel, but traces his patriarchalism to an unreconstructed Jewish noted by Wegner, "Philo's Portrayal," 41-44). Both explanations Paul's egalitarianism *only* to his Christian thought and his pat *only* to something essentially extraneous to his Christian think

The pictures of first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman societies which these explanations operate, however, are skewed. For recent social history of women has shown that both Hellenism and Judaism had a mixed bag when it came to women's status and roles. The cultural systems were patriarchies, women in both milieus enjoyed rights and freedoms — an extension of their social roles was in Paul's day (see K. Thraede, "Frau," *Reallexikon für Antike und Gegenwart* 8, 211-227; J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their History* [London: Bodley Head, 1962]; S. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* [New York: Schocken, 1975]; *Private Women*, 24-79; Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women Leaders*). Such evidence points to the complexity and variety of women held by Paul's contemporaries.

In particular, with regard to the status and roles of women in society, Jewish feminists have criticized Christian feminists for not noting the ways in which the personhood and rights of women were edged and guarded in Judaism. Christian feminists, they say, Jewish sources selectively, and so have portrayed Judaism as negative — thereby setting up Christianity as the great liberator (so, e.g., L. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Judaism* [Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976]). This negative and portrait of Judaism has even been seen as having been motivational Judaism (cf. Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism," 118-24).

It is clear that we cannot go on glibly repeating the conclusion that Paul rose above his non-Christian contemporaries when he nonpatriarchal attitudes toward women or that he succumbed to the influence of those contemporaries when he exhibited patriarchal views. Rather, what is called for is careful comparison of Paul's views with those of those who did not share his belief in the gospel. How views parallel and how do they diverge from those of his non-

contemporaries? By means of such comparisons we can come closer to seeing how Paul's experience on the road to Damascus might have impacted his thought on women and gender. Moreover, the critique of Christian feminist exegesis that comes from Jewish feminists makes it especially imperative to explore afresh the relation of Paul's thought on women and gender to that found in the Judaism of his day. The present investigation is intended as a modest contribution toward that end.

3. Women and Gender in Judaism: A Comparison with Paul

It is entirely appropriate to compare Paul's views on women and gender with other sources that reflect a Palestinian or Hellenistic Jewish milieu. For though Paul was a Jew, he was born in the Diaspora city of Tarsus and was well versed in Greek. And though he probably received his rabbinic training in Jerusalem, Hellenistic influences were by no means absent even there. Moreover, in the Jewish capital there flourished a variety of Jewish communities and pieties holding divergent views (cf. Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* [London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991] 44).

While many Jewish sources include significant material for the study of women and gender — including the Mishnah (see Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 97-149) and the *Testament of Job* (see Chesnut, "Revelatory Experiences") — I have chosen to analyze three from the period of Early Judaism (roughly, from the first two centuries BCE to the second two centuries CE), namely, Sirach, Philo of Alexandria, and *Joseph and Aseneth*. These particular writings have been selected, not because they represent "Judaism" — either of a "Palestinian" or a "Diaspora" type — or because they accurately portray the actual lot of Jewish women, but because they provide extensive material on the subject and illustrate varieties of views within Judaism around Paul's time. The Pauline texts chosen for comparison include Gal 3:28; 1 Corinthians 7; and 1 Cor 11:2-16, which provide the most significant and extensive portrayals of the apostle's views.

Sirach and Paul

The book known as *The Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach*, or in the Latin tradition as *Ecclesiasticus* (i.e., the "Church's book"), was composed in

Hebrew by Joshua ben Sirach about 180 BCE in Palestine and into Greek by his grandson about 130 BCE in Egypt. It gives us Jewish view of women that was exported into a Hellenistic presumably found an echo among Diaspora Jews in Egypt.

Sirach divides women into two categories: (1) the good, modest, and continent woman, and (2) the evil, insubordinate and sexually promiscuous woman. The harlot or strange woman the latter category, and Sirach warns that a man should beware to ruin through such a woman (Sir 9:3-4, 6-7). Wives can fall category. There is the "good wife," who is understanding and prudent and modest, full of grace, a good housekeeper, who "hon husband and appears wise to all" (26:26) and makes her husband (25:8; 26:1-4, 13-18). Marriage to such a woman is good for a man [29-31], and such a woman is a man's "choicest possession."

There is also, however, the "evil wife," who "has a tongue," and full of malice and makes her husband "sigh bitterly" (25:1-25, 27). She "dishonors [her husband]" and "is known to all a goddess in [her] pride" (26:26). Indeed, for Sirach there is no more than the wickedness of a woman and no greater wrath than a woman (25:13, 15). He opines, "I would rather dwell with a dragon than keep house with a wicked woman" (25:16).

What then is a man to do? He must keep away from the woman (9:3-9), and realize that taking hold of a wicked woman is a "scorpion" (26:7). He must not give power to a wicked woman "if she go not as [he] would have her," he must "cut her off from (25:26). Sirach reminds his readers that "from a woman did sin originate because of her we all must die" (25:24). (The latter text is the evidence for the view that Eve is the origin of sin and death.) Sirach views a woman as a proclivity to evil and, if given power, she causes of things. For this reason it is crucial that women be subordinate. Just as wives divide into two kinds, so also for Sirach the kinds of daughters: the prudent and modest daughter, who is a her husband (22:4), and the headstrong, bold, and shameless daughter brings shame to her father and husband (22:5; 42:11). The prudent daughters to cause trouble for their fathers is so great that Sirach "a daughter is born to [her father's] loss" (22:3). He has in mind the problems associated with a woman's sexuality — her virgineability, continence, and fertility. Thus,

A daughter is to a father a treasure of sleeplessness,
and the care of her banishes slumber;

In her youth, lest she pass the flower of her age,
and when she is married, lest she be hated;
in her virginity, lest she be seduced,
and in the house of her husband, lest she prove unfaithful;
in her father's house, lest she become pregnant,
and in her husband's house, lest she be barren.

(42:9-10)

A daughter, like a bad wife, is seen as prone to evil in the form of sexual promiscuity. Her father must "keep a strict watch" over her lest she bring disgrace on him.

In the place where she lodges let there be no lattice,
or spot overlooking the entrance round about.

Let her not show her beauty to any male,
and among wives let her not converse.

For from the garment issues the moth,
and from a woman a woman's wickedness.

(42:11-13)

And if a headstrong daughter is given liberty, she is sure to use it for sexual license, Sirach declares:

As a thirsty traveller that opens his mouth,

and drinks of any water that is near,

so she sits down at every post,

and opens her quiver to every arrow.

(26:12)

Clearly, Sirach has an ideology of male control over women based on women's perceived susceptibility to evil, especially to sexual immorality (see also, however, the critique of the sexually promiscuous male in 23:16-21; 9:3-9). In particular, Sirach wants to secure the man's control over the woman's sexual function on which his honor as a father or husband, as well as his ability to raise up legitimate heirs, depends (cf. 23:22-23 regarding this latter concern). The good wife or prudent daughter is always a woman

who is under male control, not an autonomous woman or a woman who challenges the authority of a man.

For Sirach a woman's subordination to man is apparent and grounded in the fundamental superiority of the man. Because of prior status, Sirach implies, it is a disgrace for a man to be controlled by a woman: "Give not yourself unto a woman [i.e., into her power] lest her trample down your manhood" (9:2; cf. 33:19a, b). To be in a subordinate position through a woman's beauty or riches is to bring on oneself: "Fall not because of the beauty of a woman, and be not for the sake of what she possesses, for hard slavery and a disgrace to a wife support her husband" (25:21-22). To show weakness in a woman's seductive power, as King Solomon did by taking man shameful for a man: "You gave your loins unto women, and gave rule over your body. Yea, you brought a blemish upon your honor, 20, cf. vv. 12-18). The point is not simply that Solomon *defiled his foreign* women but that he *shamed himself* by falling under women. Here kingly glory contrasts with the shame of being dominated by a woman.

How do Paul's views compare with Sirach's? Paul's discourse on marriage and sex in 1 Corinthians 7 and his treatment of male address and gender identity and roles in 1 Cor 11:2-16 suggest shared some basic patriarchal assumptions with Sirach. Yet their important points of divergence. Paul did not view women as morally inferior to men, or idealize marriage and its patriarchal concomitant ordination of women to men. And although shame played a role in defining gender roles along traditional patriarchal lines, he somewhat loosened from this criterion in significant ways.

First, women's moral nature. In 1 Corinthians 7 and 11 the suspicion of women as being especially prone to evil and to sexual immorality, as in Sirach. The situation in the Corinthian church, partly explains this fact, for Paul seems to be facing the exact inclination on the part of some women — that is, some of the Corinthians — apparently some of the women especially, wanted to live as celibates (chap. 7). They wanted to be "holy in body and in spirit" (7:34). If the Corinthians' attention toward the danger of falling into immorality (porneia) if they are not able to live a continent life. Now if Paul had that women especially were in danger because they are morally weak would have indicated so. Yet he does not. Instead he treats men as having the same weakness and the same responsibility and rig-

But on account of sexual immoralities, let each husband have [sexually] his wife, and let each wife have [sexually] her own husband. Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does, and likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. (1 Cor 7:2-4)

The parallelism of the instructions to the woman and the man implies the equality of their moral natures as well as their equal responsibility and personhood. Paul's warning not to withdraw permanently from the marriage bed in order to devote themselves to prayer "lest Satan tempt you on account of your lack of self-control" (7:5) also lacks any differentiation between women and men. So also, he makes no distinction in his recommendation of marriage if continence proves impossible (7:8, 27), and of celibacy if one has this spiritual gift (7:7-8, 37-38, 40). Women are thus neither more likely candidates for marriage nor less likely candidates for celibacy on account of some difference in their moral nature.

Further, Paul does not view woman as man's tempter. Rather, Satan is the tempter of them both (1 Cor 7:5). The only statement in 1 Corinthians 7 that might put women in a negative moral light is 7:1: "it is better for a man not to touch a woman." It suggests that women are a hindrance to male virtue. This statement, however, should be taken as a Corinthian slogan, and not as coming from Paul. He cites it in order to qualify it in the following discussion (see 7:2, "but . . .").

It follows that Paul does not develop an ideology of male control over women because of a woman's supposed moral weakness and lack of sexual self-control, as Sirach did. Instead of asserting a woman's need to be controlled by a man, Paul accepts "autonomous women" who are consecrated to the Lord in body and in spirit, rather than to a man (7:34). By contrast, the autonomous woman in Sirach is always negatively defined. She is either a harlot or a woman who is "cut off from [her husband's] flesh" because she refuses to submit to him. Also in contrast to Sirach, Paul restricts the man's power by prohibiting both husbands and wives from initiating divorce (7:10-16, recalling Jesus' teaching), and possibly also by stipulating that they must reach agreement about abstaining from sex temporarily in order to devote themselves to prayer (7:5).

Second, on marriage Paul differs from Sirach. Paul's comments on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 are consistent with the views on gender just

Paul on Women and Gender: A Comparison with Early Jewish Vi
described. He does not recommend marriage as the ideal in which a man is subordinate to man. Rather, as often observed, Paul's attitude toward marriage in this chapter is less than enthusiastic. He regards it as a hindrance and a source of "tribulation in the flesh" (than of help for he is viewing married life from the perspective of "the impending" (7:26-29), and from this perspective it is better to be single. Paul's Cf eschatological outlook therefore leads him to sit loose to traditional roles and embrace untraditional ones that eschew marriage and procreation.

Third, shame, or loss of social acceptability, which was so central to value in the ancient Mediterranean world, has in Paul's thought a different, but not always determinative, function in drawing the lines between appropriate male and female behavior — shame, that is, defined in patriarchal terms. Paul agrees with the general view that behavior that crossed boundaries brought shame, both shame to oneself and shame to the community whose honor depended on one's own. In 1 Cor 11:2-16 shame is the reason why, according to Paul, a woman should not uncover her head (while he and prophesying; it is shameful to her and to her "head," the man) and to go above her in the social ladder, by going against traditional expectations for women's covered heads. Likewise a man should not cover his head while praying and prophesying, lest he incur shame and cause shame to his "head," Christ, by crossing gender boundaries through "unmanly" dress. In 1 Cor 14:34-35 shame is also the ground for prohibiting a woman from speaking in the assembly, but, as already noted, this statement may very well be an interpolation.

Paul's insistence on avoiding shame by observing gender boundaries in headress (as is characteristic of many cultures) reinforces patriarchal notions of gender. This is clear from the theological arguments Paul uses to support his practical instructions. "The head (*kephalē*) of every church, Christ, and the head (*kephalē*) of the woman is the man" (11:3); "the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man, for not from woman but from man" (11:7-8). Both of these statements presume the preeminence or priority of man in relation to woman in the cosmological order man is preeminent — which, in my view, is the basis of the much disputed term *kephalē*, or "head." And according to the creation story, man has chronological and therefore ontological priority. The man's preeminence or priority is the ground of the woman's obligation to him honor instead of shame.

Paul applies the principle of avoiding shame when it comes to head-dress that transgresses gender boundaries, but, significantly, he does not apply it across the board. He accepts women's crossing traditional gender boundaries by taking the same roles as men through prophesying and praying in the assembly as the Spirit leads them. This behavior is not excluded as shameful. Patriarchy is here undermined. He also gives the wife the "authority over" her husband's body—that is, for sex (7:4)—which is precisely what Sirach objected to in the case of King Solomon as bringing shame on the man. Patriarchy is again undermined. Paul disregards the priority and preeminence of the man in both of these examples of crossing gender boundaries. Here other considerations weigh more heavily than the avoidance of shame. Thus patriarchal notions of gender are not sacred for Paul. His inconsistency in applying the principle of avoiding shame by respecting gender hierarchy illustrates this fact. In contrast to Sirach, for Paul shame based on the idea of the man's fundamental priority does not govern the *entire* relationship of man and woman in the Lord.

We have seen that Paul participates in the patriarchal worldview of Sirach. But he breaks out of it as well—in some cases for specifically Christian reasons (though parallels in Judaism can also be pointed out, as Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 103-24, has shown). He is much less bound to the patriarchal framework of Sirach than the author of 1 Tim 2:12-15, who calls for women to be silent, to submit, and not to exercise authority over a man. These instructions are grounded not only in the man's priority according to the creation story, but also in the woman's being deceived and becoming a transgressor, according to the fall narrative. There is no hint of an impact on gender roles of the apocalyptic shift through Christ's death and resurrection. The "woman will be saved through [or in the process of] bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty."

Sirach's obvious misogyny has earned him the label of one of the most conservative voices on women in Judaism. The comparisons of Paul and Sirach made here do not serve to portray Paul the Christian as a hero of liberation in comparison to Sirach the Jew. The fact that Paul transcends the patriarchal framework of Sirach in important ways simply shows that Paul, thinking about gender in the light of Christ, significantly differed from one of the most conservative traditions within Judaism.

Philo of Alexandria and Paul

Philo was a Jewish philosopher and a contemporary of Paul who the city of Alexandria in Egypt and interpreted the Jewish Scriptural Platonic categories of thought. His views on women and gender are characterized by a distinctive blend of Jewish and Hellenistic thought (see further Wegner, *Chattel or Person?; Philo's Perception*, 2). result, as we will see below, is not only the reinforcement of patriarchy also, remarkably, the possibility for women to attain the same status roles as men.

Philo's social thought is deeply patriarchal. He thinks a woman inferior to a man by nature (*On the Special Laws* 2.124). He attributes her both intellectual inferiority—she is more easily deceived than (*Questions and Answers on Genesis* 1.33)—and moral inferiority in his approving description of the reason why Essenes do not marry: wife is a selfish creature, excessively jealous and adept at beguiling morals of her husband and seducing him by her continued impurity (*Hypothetica* 11.14-17).

Consistent with Philo's view of a woman's "natural" inferiority, his beliefs about her "proper" place and role. A woman belongs in the domestic sphere, while the greater, public sphere is proper to a man (*the Special Laws* 3.169-70). Because of a woman's "natural weakness" (*the Special Laws* 4.223) she is "best suited to the indoor life which strays from the house," "a life of seclusion" (*On the Special Laws* 3.4.225). "To a man are entrusted the public affairs of states; while to a woman the affairs of the home are proper" (*Questions and Answers on Genesis* 1.33). A wife, of course, should be subordinate to her husband (*Hypothetica* 11.14-17).

For Philo the boundaries of gender identity and roles are woman who transgresses those boundaries loses her sexual identity as her respectability. If, for example, she engages in the public context are a man's domain, she will "unsex herself by a boldness beyond nature permits" (*On the Special Laws* 3.172-75). And to appear in public which is not proper for a woman, is to "show herself like a vagrant street before the eyes of other men" (*On the Special Laws* 3.171). However, cross gender boundaries in a way that is impossible to do as did Julia Augusta by adorning the Temple, but in so doing transcend her sexual identity—or, in Philo's words, "exceed all her

through training "supplement nature and practice" and exhibit "virility" in her reasoning power" (*On the Embassy to Gaius* 319-20). That is, she can sometimes overcome her inferiority by acting like a man. The practical barriers to participation in the higher, male sphere, however, are great. For example, Philo sanctions women's going to the Temple to make oblations and say prayers only "when most people have gone home" (*On the Special Laws* 3.171; on the patriarchy in Philo's social thought, see further Sly, *Philo's Perception*, 179-209).

In Philo's philosophical thought, we find the same division between male and female spheres and the same higher valuation of the male over the female as in Philo's social thought. Influenced by Platonism, Philo characterizes all that is positive or superior—that is, mind, activity, self-control, etc.—as "male," and all that is negative or inferior—that is, passion, sense perception, body, irrationality, passivity, etc.—as "female" (cf., e.g., *Allegorical Interpretation of the Laws* 2.38; 2.49-50; 3.49-50; 3.222-24; *On the Special Laws* 1.200; *On the Creation of the World* 165-67; *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 1.43; 4.15-18; *On Flight and Finding* 51; see further Baer, *Philo's Use*, 38-44; Wegner, *Chattel or Person?* 48-50; Sly, *Philo's Perception*, 96-97).

The ultimate goal in Philo's philosophical system is the attainment of divine wisdom. To reach this goal it is necessary for the soul to strip off the body and passion—that is, leave the "female" sphere and become "male" (*On the Cherubim* 50; cf. *On Rewards and Punishments* 159; see further Baer, *Philo's Use*, 45-49). A woman, however, suffers great disadvantage at this point in Philo's system, just as we would expect, since the basic polarity is built around the more "sensual" feminine and the more "spiritual" masculine. For in Philo's philosophical scheme, she belongs to the sphere of sense and passion—just as in his social scheme she is relegated to the domestic sphere. Indeed, she is quasi-bound to the sphere of sense and passion by her female body.

The resulting disadvantage of a woman becomes clear when Philo discusses sex. For him sex is a potential problem for both men and women because it links them to the realm of desire. Philo would like to think of the patriarchs as *not* having had sex at all with their wives, and argues in *On the Cherubim* 40-41 that their wives were, in reality, not real women but virtues. Nevertheless, when a man has sex he can keep from "emasculating" himself through desire and do it just for procreation; he simply sows his male seed in the "cornfield" of the woman's body at the right time when

Paul on Women and Gender: A Comparison with Early Jewish Views it can reproduce (*On the Special Laws* 3.32-34; cf. *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 4.154). But a woman cannot keep herself so far removed from the world of the senses, for her monthly flow of blood symbolizes passion and sense (cf. *On the Special Laws* 2.54; *On Flight and Finding* 188-9); womb, in fact, is "nature's laboratory" where the living creature is created and ties her to the sensate world (*On the Special Laws* 3.33). Thus a woman appears to be slated by her female body not to participate in the realm of the mind and of knowledge, which "comes into being through estrangement from sense and body" (*On the Cherubim* 41).

Nevertheless, there is a way also for a woman to attain divine wisdom. It emerges precisely from the division between the spheres of the mind and the body that initially excluded her from the realm of knowledge and knowledge itself. She must return to the realm of sense perception. A woman, just like a man, can participate in the "female" sphere of the body and desire. This is done by abdicating and sexual activity, which puts the soul on the path of heavenly ascent. For a woman, however, it also includes ceasing her reproductive functions, which tie her to the sensate world. She must return to a state of "virginity," or inability to conceive and give birth. The ideal of "virginity" in the sense of barrenness appears in Philo's discussions of the soul's attainment of divine wisdom. The soul must "become barren and produce . . . children," which are "pleasures" and "desires," and it is "transformed into a pure virgin" (*On Rewards and Punishments* 159-160; Baer, *Philo's Use*, 51-53). "When God begins to consort with the soul, he makes what before was a woman into a virgin again, for he takes away the degenerate and emasculate passions which unmanned it" (*On the Cherubim* 50). Sarah is Philo's allegorical representation of the re-virginized soul; she is able to commune with God: God "will not talk [with Sarah] till she has ceased from all that is after the manner of women" (*Gen* xviii.11), once more as a pure virgin" (*On the Cherubim* 50).

There are also real flesh-and-blood women in Philo's world who attain divine insight through re-virginization, or continence and barrenness. These are the women of the Therapeutic community (the "Therapeutae"), a group of Jewish ascetics who had withdrawn to the desert where they lived in solitary cells and came together only for divine worship. They dedicated themselves to contemplation of the law, and they saw visions and spoke ecstatic speech (*On the Contemplative Life* 12, 26, 84).

The reason why the women were able to attain such heights of spiritual wisdom, Philo says that most of them were "aged virgins," that is, abstinent

past their childbearing years. They were not only continent but barren: "In their ardent yearning for wisdom they have spurned the pleasures of the body and desire no mortal offspring"; rather, they seek "those immortal children which only the soul that is dear to God can bring to birth unaided because the Father has sown in her spiritual rays enabling her to behold the verities of wisdom" (*On the Contemplative Life* 68). In other words, the female Therapeutae had escaped the realm of passion by not only renouncing desire but escaping their female bodies that tied them to this realm and exchanging physical conception and childbirth for its spiritual equivalent. In this way they attained divine insight just as the men did.

This equality of women with men through asceticism and revirginization is made tangible in the Therapeutics' "sacred vigil," where men and women came together — just as the Israelites did at the Red Sea to sing of the miracle of their redemption — to "form a single choir" (*On the Contemplative Life* 85-87). Daniel Boyarin (*Radical Jew*, 188) has argued that "this ritual of the Therapeutae is a return to the originary Adam," which in Philo's view is an "incorporeal" androgynous, "neither male nor female" (*On the Creation* 134). The Therapeutics' ecstatic "joining of the male and the female in a mystical ritual recreates in social practice the image of the purely spiritual masculine-feminine first human of which Philo speaks in his commentary [on Genesis]." It is through the disappearance of gender distinctions through return to a primal disembodied state, then, that equality is attained in Philo's thought, if Boyarin's analysis is correct. Such equality was lived out in the sect of the Therapeutae.

Philo, then, reinforces patriarchal values by applying Platonic categories in his thinking on women and gender. He also, however, because of his Neoplatonism, opens up for women the possibility of equality with men in access to the divine sphere — but at the cost of their becoming defeminized and "disembodied" (cf. Baer, *Philo's Use*, 100-101).

There are both striking similarities and profound differences between Philo and Paul with respect to women and gender. Both entertain an ideal of humanity beyond gender inequality, at least implicitly. And both, significantly, express that ideal in very similar terminology. Philo speaks of the ideal human being, created in the image of God, as "neither male nor female." Paul's foundational statement about the new humanity in Christ in Gal 3:28 contains the words: "there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Despite these similarities in formulation, the way Philo and Paul ground their respective statements and what they do with them are fundamentally different. Philo grounds his ideal of androgyny in the denial of the body — that is, bodily differences are stripped away, and so in the of the pure spirit there is neither male nor female. But this notion poses a Platonic and radically non-Jewish denigration of the body that does not share, Paul, on the other hand, grounds the claim that there male and female" in baptismal unification with Christ, which entails the stripping away of the body, but coming to be "in Christ" as men and women on the same basis — Christ's death and faith in him — thus as equals.

Paul's lack of sympathy for Philonic denigration of the body, i results in there being no need to practice sexual asceticism to come with God or to attain divine inspiration, as Paul's treatment of the question of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7 shows. While it is true that Paul correlates celibacy a better choice than marriage, he does so for practical reasons related to the eschatological character of the present age — the "impatient distress" and the special burdens that it causes for the married — and because denial of the body is a precondition for receiving the Spirit positively commands marriage for those who cannot live a continence. At the same time, he raises the Corinthians' expectations for spiritual inspiration: "Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but more to prophesy" (1 Cor 14:5); "Strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy" (14:1); "When you come together, each one hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation" (14:26) the indulging of desire does not prevent one from participating in spiritual realities — though some Corinthians may have assumed so. In contrast Philo, then, Paul disassociates the sphere of divine wisdom from a of the body and of passion.

Since for Paul the body is not a hindrance to life in the Spirit woman, who possibly has a stronger body-identification than a man not suffer any disadvantage in her aspirations to participate in the Spirit. To be a pneumatic she does not need to "defeminize" herself by denying her female body through sexual asceticism. Nor do her reproductive functions need to cease. When Paul affirms a difference between the sexes difference rooted in the body — as, for example, in 1 Cor 11:2-16, it does not lead to a view of woman as barred from, or more distant to, the of divine insight. And he does not expect the Corinthian women to

continue praying and prophesying in the assembly, but simply to "cover" their heads in order to symbolize their female identity. In Paul's thought, women can become pneumatics, attaining divine insight, while remaining women. He does not idealize "virgin" prophetesses in the sense of the women Therapeutae, who were beyond femaleness. For Paul prophets are clearly male and female. He does not deny or denigrate the gender of either.

Nevertheless, precisely because a woman remains a woman and does not escape her femaleness — rooted in the body — a woman in Paul's thought seems to be vulnerable to a subordinate, even inferior, status in relation to man. Paul requires a woman to cover her head in manifestation of her female identity, which is a cultural symbol of her secondary status and role in relation to man. Paul, in fact, says that a woman can shame a man by not covering her head, which also implies that she is his social inferior.

So in his supporting arguments for the requirements (1) to maintain the symbols of sexual difference and (2) to avoid shame through the abandonment of these cultural signposts, Paul uses a hierarchical framework in his "Christian cosmology" and theology of creation: "the head of man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man" (1 Cor 11:3); and "man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man" (11:7-9). Thus, although a woman's difference, as rooted in her female body, does not make her inferior to a man as far as access to the Spirit and divine revelation are concerned, there remains a gender hierarchy and inequality in some other respects — which Philo's virgins escaped (or, at least, minimized) by "exiting" the body.

There appears, therefore, a tension in Paul's thought between, on the one hand, equality in Christ, as lived out in the pneumatic worship of the community before the world, and, on the other hand, inequality as evident in his explicit approval of patriarchal relations. For Paul, in contrast to Philo, there is no escape from this tension. The reason there is no escape is not that Paul is willingly or unknowingly falling back to his alleged Jewish patriarchal persuasions. Rather, it is because of his genuinely Christian, and at the same time Jewish, belief that the body, marriage, and sex are "goods" to be affirmed. Yet given the pervasive patriarchal culture of the time, such an affirmation of the body could only be lived out under the conditions of inequality. And insofar as there is no escape from the body, which must be either male or female, there is no escape from this culturally conditioned inequality.

There is also, however, another, more Christian, reason we affirm inequality while at the same time affirming equality, as he Gal 3:28: the Church has a mission to accomplish, and so it cannot withdraw from the world into the kind of community that the Therapeutae living in the world, and for the sake of a world that is patriarchal affirming that the body, marriage, and sex are good meant — to degrees, at least — living out the inequality inherent in that world. within the framework of Paul's thought and within the context of his both egalitarianism and patriarchy could be — indeed, had to be — affirmed on genuinely Christian grounds.

Joseph and Aseneth and Paul

Joseph and Aseneth is best described as a Greco-Roman romance, of Jewish origin, which probably dates from between the first century and the early second century CE. It tells the story of the conversion of an Egyptian woman named Aseneth to Judaism and of her marriage to which is mentioned in Gen 41:45.

The story may have been intended as an apologia for women converts to Judaism, who were not few (cf. Chesnut, "Revelatory Experience" 112-13). Further, it can be read as portraying how, through conversion to Judaism, Aseneth is freed from a social milieu oppressive to women and gains an impressive new status and role, while still remaining within patriarchal context. This work, therefore, portrays Judaism in far more positive terms for women — though of the two textual traditions in which preserved, the shorter version gives a more positive view of Aseneth. Kraemer, "Book of Aseneth," and Stanbharinger, *Das Frauenbild*, discuss differences and the dispute regarding which version is earlier.

The book opens by describing Aseneth as a ravishing eighteen-year-old virgin fought over by all the most eligible bachelors in Egypt because of her famed beauty, which no man has ever espied (1:3-9). For her she hates men and secludes herself in a high tower (2:1) where virginity was being fostered" (2:7) and where she worships and feeds the Egyptian gods and sacrifices to them daily (2:3). In other words, Aseneth is a very pious young woman with the highest sexual morality determined to resist objectification by men. She will not be prized