

CHRISTIANITY AND THE DA VINCI CODE
Teaching #3
The Role of Women in Christianity*

Perhaps the only statement regarding Christianity that I *almost* agree with in all *The Da Vinci Code* is the author's statement that
"Jesus was the first feminist !"

But ironically, this is the statement that most readers would disagree with because there has crept into our culture a definite sense that the Bible, and therefore Christianity, (as opposed to various denominations and cultural interpretations), are oppressive to women

In the ongoing goal of this series which is to help Mr. Brown's claim become a reality ("that the vast majority of educated Christians *know* the history of their faith")

I want to look at the role of women in the Bible
Beginning with a look at the Old Testament
Then the New Testament
Then the recorded practices in the Early Church

I confess to you that for many years I did not know this piece of scriptural scholarship, and was therefore unprepared to even query the decision of my local church when they denied my request to be sponsored for Seminary in 1962.

As in many churches and many denominations,
the decision was based on respect for the Word of God
but *as it was culturally interpreted*
but I didn't have sufficient scholarship to challenge the interpretation,
and actually never even thought to object because *I was also part of the culture!*

Even today, there is much disagreement about the role of women in ministry and in Christianity in general.

I have read many studies of the pertinent Biblical texts,
and done my own word studies at length,
but finally found a work in 1996 which seemed the most credible of all to me.
Willow Creek Church published a paper entitled
"Women and Men in Ministry at Willow Creek Community Church",
and I have taken much of it into the first part of this teaching

So let's begin... rather than attempt to reinvent the wheel

I. The Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)

God's Design in Creation is so clearly full equality between men and women

When God created male and female, He created them equally in His image, without regard to gender. (Gen 1:27)

When God created man before woman, there is nothing in the text to indicate man's priority in status or leadership, as some have suggested.

In fact, one could just as easily argue that the "order of creation" (from vegetation to living creatures to human beings) proves the superiority of woman. (Gen 1:11-2:22)

When God created woman as "helper" for man,
the term translated "helper" is not to be understood as implying a subordinate position, as often thought.

In fact, the term, as generally used in the OT, is applied to God (eg Hos 13:9, Deut 33:7, Psalm 33:20, Psalm 70:5) to indicate helper as essential partner, not for carrying out various projects, but for the task of *being*.

In the creation context, the term refers to the vital role of woman in the task of human beings - which man could not possibly achieve on his own - the creation of community.

When God gave stewardship of the earth to the human race, He gives it to man and woman jointly, not solely or primarily to man. (Gen 1:28)

When God says to woman: "your desire shall be for your husband, *and he shall rule over you*", (Gen 3:16) this statement is most often read out of context and taken as God's original intent for the human race.

In fact, the statement is part of the curse caused by Adam and Eve's disobeying of God's intent. (Remember, Eve was tempted by the serpent, not to become equal with man, which we might expect if she were in subjection to man before the Fall - but to become equal with God).

It is therefore a result of the Fall, and is opposed to God's original purpose for humankind. As part of the curse, it belongs to that order which Christ died to do away with and redeem, and against which the church is to struggle.

Summary: "The consistent weight of the Genesis narrative of creation and the Fall is on the mutuality and communal nature of the relationship between male and female that existed as they were first created. The disruption of this mutuality is expressed as the result of sin and not as God's original purpose for the human race" (Willow Creek, p.3)

Women in the Old Testament

There are a number of examples of women providing leadership and playing prominent roles in the life of Israel.

Miriam (sister of Moses) was called a prophet who ministered during the days of the Exodus (Ex15:20) and was one "through whom the Lord spoke" (Numbers 12). To prophesy is generally understood as "speaking forth the Word of the Lord", the highest form of authoritative speech.

Huldah (I Kings 22:14) was also called a prophet; she spoke the Word of divine judgment to both the priest and to the king of Judah.

Deborah's role as a Judge in the early years of Israel's formation fills two chapters in the book of Judges (Judges 4-5). She was not only "leading Israel at that time" (Judges 4:4), but led them in victory over the armies of Sisera. When she commanded the head of Israel's troops to go into battle, he refused to go "if Deborah would not go with him."

What is surprising about such accounts, given the completely patriarchal nature of society, is that they are not identified as exceptions to the norm. The role such women played is accepted without comment.

Priesthood in the Old Testament

however,

was an exclusively male domain,
though for no stated reason.

Several possibilities: Prohibition...

may have risen out of women's role in reproduction and laws
regarding ritual purity.

may reflect Israel's struggle against the Canaanite worship of fertility Gods by
priestesses.

may have been a concession to the patriarchal nature of society.

(see Stolen Lives: 20 Years in a Desert Jail by Malika Oufkir)

Women Leadership in 1st C. Judaism

Unfortunately, by the time of birth of Christianity, Jewish women were
segregated in worship
uneducated
veiled in public
and forbidden to speak with strangers

If they were raped, they were given to the rapist in marriage;
If they were found to have had sex before marriage, they could be stoned to death.
(Moynahan, p.35)

Rabbis generally held women to be inferior
and normally refused to teach them the Torah.
("From garments come a moth, and from a woman the iniquities of a man. For
better is the iniquity of a man than the good deed of a woman")

II. The New Testament

Women in the Life and Ministry of Jesus

The Birth narratives of Jesus list a remarkable number of women in addition to His mother Mary ,
stressing from the beginning of Christianity a place for women that goes beyond what was
ordinary in Jewish life.

As a man, Jesus violated Jewish tradition by talking openly with women
and including them in his circle of companions.

As a rabbi, Jesus was unique among rabbis in His relationship with women.
Jesus seemed to teach women as freely as He taught men

²*Crowds* gathered around Him...³and He taught them many
things in parables...

(Luke 14) ¹³The *crowds* followed him on foot from the towns.

¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large *crowd*, he had compassion on
them and healed their sick. ¹⁵As evening approached, the
disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and
it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go
to the villages and buy themselves some food." ¹⁶Jesus replied,
"They do not need to go away. You give them something to
eat." ¹⁷"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,"
they answered ¹⁸"Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹And He
directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five
loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave
thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to the
disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰They all
ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve
basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹The number
of those who ate was about five thousand men, *besides women
and children.* (Matthew 13:1-14:21)

and He even taught the crowd through allusions to women !

e.g., A woman loses a coin and searches for it in same way God searches diligently
for His lost children (Luke 15:8)

Women traveled with Jesus as He preached and ministered

Luke 8:1-3 ¹Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another,
proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were
with him, ²and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and
diseases; Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had
come out; ³Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household;
Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them
out of their own means.

(Notice above: Joanna and Cuza: Women were often the means by
which Christianity penetrated the upper classes of leadership)

Jesus even had women among His disciples,
the only recorded rabbi to do so in His day.

³⁸As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where
a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹She had a sister called
Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰But Martha
was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to

him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things,⁴² but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

Women were named as present with Jesus at the crucifixion, while none of the men are mentioned in the synoptic gospels, affirming the strength of their courage and their faith as compared with the male disciples who had fled.

Mark 15:40, 41⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. *Many other women* who had come up with him (from Galilee) to Jerusalem were also there.

Mt 27:55

Luke 23:49, 55

John 19, 25

Women served as the first witnesses to the Resurrection !

Mt 28:1-10

Mark 16:1

Luke 24:1-11

John 20:10-18

Mary Magdalene, in particular,

uniquely agreed upon by all 4 gospels

as the first to witness the empty tomb

and to be entrusted with taking the message to the Apostles who were locked in a room for fear.

In fact, "That the message of the Resurrection was first entrusted to women is regarded by scripture scholars as one of the strongest proofs of the historicity of the Resurrection accounts. In Jewish law, women's testimony was not recognized. Had accounts of Jesus' resurrection been fabricated, women would never have been included as witnesses." (www.FutureChurch.com p.1)

12 Apostles

It is true that Jesus chose all His Twelve to be male.

Probably an appropriate accommodation to patriarchal culture of His day.

Certainly not clear that this was intended as the model for future leadership, any more than the Twelve's being all Jewish meant that all future leaders should be Jewish.

Summary:

The ministry and community of Jesus were inclusive of women far beyond the norms of His day! Even the Twelve themselves were "astonished" at Jesus, as when He was speaking to a woman and spending time with her at the well in Samaria. (John 4:27)

The Early Church

This astonishing new treatment of women by Jesus was even augmented by the outpouring of His **Holy Spirit** at Pentecost

At Pentecost, the church was given birth and, with it, radically new patterns of relationship and the use of power.

The writer of Acts makes it clear that the Holy Spirit was poured out on *all* human beings, regardless of gender, age or station in life (Acts 2:17-18)

and that this was the fulfilling of God's original intent. (Joel 2:28-32)
 All were anointed by the Holy Spirit for *ministry*, and were given spiritual gifts without regard to gender. (Acts 2:1-21, 1 Cor 12:7, 11)
 Paul instructed all new believers that
 "in Christ" there is no (distinction between) Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female" (Gal 3:28)
 Members of the church were *all* called to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ". (Ephesians 5:21)
 Husbands were taught to treat their wives with the same love and devotion that Christ Jesus showed for his church. (Eph 5:25)
 (This passage, as well as the one above, is often overlooked when the teaching for women to submit to their husbands – Eph 5:22 – is cited)
 Christian teaching about the sanctity of marriage offered a powerful safeguard to married women.
 The Christian sex ethic differed from the conventional standards of pagan society in that it regarded unchastity in a husband no less serious a breach of loyalty and trust than unfaithfulness in a wife.
 Men and women were dragged equally to prison for their faith. (Acts 8:3, 9:2).

Note: The apostle's doctrine that in Christ there is neither male nor female was not taken to mean a program of political emancipation which, in antiquity, would have been *unthinkable*.
 The special role of women remained that of home-maker and wife.
 At the same time, Christianity cut across ordinary social patterns more deeply than any other religion. As all were not only made equal in God's image, but equally redeemed by Christ, they must all be treated with sovereign respect.
 This doctrine also encouraged the notion of the responsibility of individual moral choice in a way that was quite exceptional.

Many women mentioned in NT reflect this new social structure for leadership.

Note: Since the gospels were written generations after the fact, the survival of the actual names of women followers of Jesus and leaders in the Jesus movement indicates the strength of the tradition asserting their importance.

Phoebe

"I (Paul) commend to you our sister Phoebe, a minister of the church at Cenchraea... (Romans 16:2) (NIV)
 (Interestingly, the Greek word diakonos, was previously translated as *minister* only for men but as servant (KJV) or Deaconess (RSV) for women, reflecting the cultural bias of the translators, not the Bible.)

Priscilla

Also commended by Paul in Romans 16:

"Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus...."

"Fellow worker" indicates that she shared in the same work of the ministry as that of Paul. Notice also that Priscilla is listed ahead of her husband Aquila - which also happens twice in Acts - and is unusual in the case of a husband and wife at that time, possibly suggesting her greater prominence in ministry

In Acts, we are told that she, along with her husband, instructed Apollos, a man "mighty in scriptures" - a clear example of a woman teaching a man.

Junia

"...outstanding among the apostles.." (Rom 16:7)

(nb: small "a" on apostle, not one of the 12 Apostles)

In the original Greek, the name is Junia, but later translators, apparently surprised in the reference to apostles, have changed it to the masculine Junias (see NIV, RSV, KJV)

Note: every Greek and Latin church Father until Giles of Rome, c 1000 AD acknowledged that Junia was a woman.

After that time, various translators added an *S* to suppress her gender. In the early 20th C., a famous German scholar, Hans Lietzmann, who was a superb philologist, made an investigation into all names of antiquity and came to the conclusion that Junia (the feminine form) was definitely correct in Romans rather than Junias (masculine form) - "but since it is not thinkable that a woman was an apostle, we have to read the male name Junias".

Euodia and Syntyche

These two women are mentioned by Paul in Philippians 4:2 as having "contended at my side for the cause of the gospel". Most likely this means that they labored with him in the proclamation of the good news - for the conversion of non-Christians to Christianity.

The Four Daughters of Philip

In Acts 21:9, the writer refers to four daughters of Philip the Evangelist, all four of whom are said to have prophesied

Mary, the mother of John Mark

and other women

ran "house churches" where many gathered together and prayed (Acts 12:12)

Eunice and Lois, the mother and grandmother of Timothy,

cited as examples of great faith (II Tim 1:5)

Summary: Repeatedly in the new community after Pentecost, women moved beyond traditional first century domestic roles to involvement in leadership and authoritative utterance. Of the 40 persons listed by Paul as fellow workers/leaders of one type or another, 16 are women, which is a considerable proportion (40%) of women involved in the missionary effort.

Critical Passages:

Three NT passages deserve special attention because they are so often used to argue for the Bible's subordination of women.

I Corinthians 11:3-16

³Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and *the head of the woman is man*, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵And every *woman who prays or prophesies* with her head uncovered dishonors her head-it is just as though her head were shaved. ⁶If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. ⁷A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.

¹¹In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹²For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. ¹³Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice-nor do the churches of God.

Observations:

Among hard-to-understand words re veils, etc, nevertheless

Paul is expressly affirming that women *do* pray and prophesy in public (verse 5), and to both men and women.

The verb to prophesy refers to "public teaching, admonishing or comforting, delivering God's message to the congregation" (14:1, 3, 24, 31, 39)

To prophesy is listed as the highest gift in Paul's list of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:28, 1 Cor. 14), not carrying less authority than to teach as has been argued by some in an attempt to reconcile 14:5 with 14:34. (see below)

vs 3: The term for "head" (verse:3b) has been hotly contested.

Some scholars contest that Paul intended the term to be understood metaphorically in terms of "ruler" or "boss", suggesting a hierarchical model with males in authority over females.

Other evidence reveals that Paul's contemporaries most often took the term "head" to refer to the origin or source of something: (In creation, God was the source of man, man was the source of woman)

The problem with the former translation (i.e., "boss") is that it means Paul would then be saying (above, verse 3a) that Christ is the "ruler" of every male, as opposed to every man *and* woman. (He uses the word *andros*, which means exclusively male, as opposed to *anthropos* which can mean both genders)

vs 5: Paul's discussion of veils and hair lengths obviously refers to cultural conditions that were clear to the Corinthians, but are difficult to reconstruct 2 millennia later. It may have had something to do with distinguishing the Christian female leaders from the pagan priestesses.

Few churches require women to cover their head in our day, whether in leadership or in worship, though the custom persisted for centuries

vs 9: Woman's being "created for man"

cannot be interpreted as "created for man's use or as his subordinate assistant" (as it is often interpreted) because that would rule out verses 11 and 12.

Most likely, Paul is simply reflecting on the meaning of the Genesis text: Man was alone and incomplete on his own, and God saw that this was not good. Therefore, woman was created "for the sake of" the man - so that he could be complete and together they could form humanity.

vs 10: deserves special notice because it is so often mistranslated.

The Greek literally reads,

"Because of this, the woman ought to have authority upon the head because of the angels."

The most likely reading seems to be that when women are praying or prophesying in Corinth, they should have some symbol on their heads (a veil or hairstyle) to indicate that they have authority (from God) to speak.

However, some modern translations go far afield. Good News for Modern Man, for instance, translates this verse, "On account of the angels, then, a woman should have a covering over her head to show that she is under her husband's authority" – even though Paul uses no words that can be translated husband or man in this passage.

I Corinthians 14:33-35

³³As in all the congregations of the saints, ³⁴*women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.* ³⁵If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is *disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

This passage has often been taken out of context to mean that women are forbidden by Paul (as inspired by God) to speak at all at public gatherings of the church.

But consider the context, the "bookends"

1 Cor 11:5, 13: Paul has just *affirmed* the public praying and prophesying of women a few paragraphs earlier. (see above)

1 Cor 14:40 - Paul's summary statement of this section of his letter "Let everything be done in a fitting and orderly way".

A clear theme that runs through his instruction for those who prophesy or speak in tongues, as well as for women, is that sometimes it is necessary to restrict one's speech for the sake of congregational order.

Then look at other verses in the text:

vs 34: mentions "as the Law says", which probably refers to the general demand of the OT that all worshippers be silent and submissive before God. Nowhere in the OT "Law" is there a command for women to be silent in worship.

vs 35: indicates that Paul's concern is focused on the disruption of learning or worship by the asking of questions. This would naturally tend to involve women since by and large they lacked education. They would have little background information about the Bible, and would, therefore, be filled with questions as they began to receive teaching.

Summary: Paul's general line of thought, then, seems to be this: "If you can't learn in the church without disrupting the experience of others, you need to ask your husbands at home." He is not saying, "Let women only learn from their husbands at home and not at church services," but rather "don't learn so loudly at church". They are to learn in a spirit of submission, consistent with true reverence for God.

I Timothy 2:9-15

⁹I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. ¹¹A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

This passage is sometimes taken as a straightforward restriction on women's roles in ministry intended for all times and places. However, there are a number of factors that need to be understood as part of interpreting Paul's meaning:

vs 9, 11-15: Cultural sensitivity to the culture in Ephesus is essential in these verses, just as it is in verse 9 where the women are forbidden to wear braided hair or gold or pearls.

In vs 11: it is striking that the verb "learn" is in the form of an imperative.

In other words, Paul is not merely saying that he would "permit" a woman to learn (although that would have been revolutionary enough), but that they must learn. This is a revolutionary command that 20th C. readers are likely to miss.

Paul says they are to learn "in quietness and in all submission", but Paul does not say to whom or to what. I could mean husbands, but this would not deal with unmarried women. Most likely, it refers to having the appropriate attitude of a learner for one's teacher or to the subject matter being taught.

vs 12: is much debated.

The verb *authentain* is not Paul's usual term for the correct exercise of authority, and suggests what Paul is warning against - not just teaching, but teaching that seeks to dominate and control. Furthermore, Paul uses the present tense of the verb and therefore says neither "Do not permit a woman to teach" nor "I do not permit a woman to teach", but, rather, "I am not currently or presently permitting a woman to teach". In this case, Paul would be emphasizing that women must learn before they can teach.

vss 13-14: are problematic in that Paul seems to lift his instructions out of the "cultural" and into the "creational" by appealing to the Creation account in Genesis.

However, scholars have pointed out that Paul often uses the Creation narrative in a flexible way to underscore his point. While in I Timothy 2:14 Paul singles out Eve as the sinner ("Adam was not deceived") in Romans 5:12-21, Adam, not Eve, is singled out as the transgressor who brought sin and ruin to the human race.

Other scholars explain the inconsistencies in Paul's letters by pointing out the varying dates of the letters and the probability that some letters attributed to Paul were actually written by his pupil in his name. This theory would not explain the inconsistencies within Paul's own single letter as between Chapter 11 and Chapter 14 in I Corinthians.

Some people think Paul (or a writer in the Pauline school) is saying here that women are to be subordinate because Eve was deceived. This would be odd, however, in light of Paul's clear teaching that all humanity (including male and female) has participated equally in the Fall, and that all can be fully redeemed !

Summary: It seems unlikely, then, that this passage is to be understood as restricting women permanently and universally from Christian leadership. The principle at stake is that those who do not understand the Scriptures and are not able to teach them accurately should not be permitted to teach others.

III. Generations after Jesus and Paul: Christianity reverted to patriarchal patterns of relationships

2nd Century

Despite the clear mandate in the Bible

From the Creation narrative in the Old Testament

To the teachings and life/death/resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost resulting in the teachings of Paul

and the recording of women's public leadership in gospels,

the majority of Christian churches in the 2nd C

went with the majority of the middle class

in opposing the move toward equality,

which had found its support primarily in rich

(or what we would call bohemian) circles

Early 2nd C.

Writing in about 110 AD,

Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna,

allowed women no role beyond virgin, widow or faithful wife.

Mid 2nd C

Even though, in earlier times, men and women sat together for Christian worship, orthodox communities began to adopt the synagogue custom segregating women from men.

(Note: this is same time as the church began to struggle with Gnosticism) (see below)

By the end of 2nd C.,

women's participation in worship leadership was explicitly condemned:

The Church encouraged their charity and their role in good works, and protected the dignity of vulnerable widows and the unmarried; but it blocked any aspirations to leadership.

3rd Century

By the year 200, the majority of Christian communities endorsed as canonical the strictest interpretation of I and II Timothy (see above), Ephesians and Colossians.

Clement, Bishop of Rome

Women are to "remain in the rule of subjection to their husbands.

Tertullian, c 200 AD/CE

On the Veiling of Women

"It is not permitted for a woman to speak in church"

By end of 4th Century

Council of Laodicea (352 AD)

Women were forbidden from the priesthood and from presiding over churches.

Fourth Synod of Carthage (398 AD)

"A woman, however learned and holy, may not presume to teach men in an assembly ...A woman may not baptize."

IV. Reason for the dramatic change?

Scholars disagree, but suggest several possibilities:

- Move from House Churches (where women's leadership was more easily acceptable) to worship in public places (where women's leadership was deemed inappropriate)
- The influx of many Hellenized Jews (ie from around the Greco-Roman Empire) into the Jesus movement may have influenced the church in the direction of Jewish tradition
- As the Christian church grew and began to attract the notice of the Roman authorities, there was an increasing pressure to conform to the norms of society, which meant that women were pushed out of leadership roles as they developed (deacon, priest, bishop)
Feminist scholars and others cite "sell out" in generations following Jesus and Paul as capitulation to Aristotelian patriarchal vision of Greco-Roman society. (See Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza's landmark work, In Memory of Her (1983))
- The change may have resulted from Christianity's move up in social scale from lower to middle class. Professor Morton Smith observes that in the lower class, where all labor was needed, women had been allowed to perform any services they could. (So too, today, in the Near East only middle-class women are veiled) (Pagels, p. 76)
- The polarization between Gnosticism and Orthodoxy (Did the Orthodox throw the baby out with the bath water?)
Gnostics followed the principle of *strict* equality between man and women refused to acknowledge any distinction between laity and clergy even casting lots to determine leadership roles

Gospel of Mary:

Records Mary Magdalene as the Apostle of Apostles, teaching and rebuking Peter

Presents her as greatest of the Apostles

Orthodox responded with attack

Tertullian: Re. casting lots for church leadership positions: “How frivolous, how merely human it is, without seriousness, without authority, without discipline, as fits their faith”

Irenaeus: Notes with dismay how many women are going over to “the heretics” because they are seduced by the invitation to prophesy...to act as priests in celebrating the eucharist...”

May well be that reaction to Gnosticism on many issues led to polarization on *all* issues.

(see Gnostic doctrine from Teaching #2)

Summary: Reason for dramatic change from Biblical times to early church centuries:

Accommodation to the culture

Reaction (or over reaction) to Gnosticism

Identification of Mary Magdalene

During same time frame (2nd to 4th C)

as roles of women changing

we see memory of Mary Magdalene change

from that of a strong female disciple and proclaimer of the Resurrection to that of a repentant prostitute and public sinner.

Why?

Nowhere in Scripture is Mary Magdalene mentioned as a prostitute, only as a trusted companion of Jesus

whom Jesus had healed “from seven demons” (Luke 8:2)

Some scholars conjecture that this was deliberately done

to minimize the strong leadership roles of women in the Gospels

so as to discourage female leadership in 3rd and 4th C churches

whether in reaction to Gnostics

or in accommodation to culture (or both)

Others point out that it is a fairly easy mistake to make:

As knowledge of Jesus’ many female friends faded from historical memory, the stories associated with them were combined.

So, for instance, the two anointing texts (sinful woman in Luke 7:36

merged with Mary of Bethany’s anointing in John 11 and 12 –

neither one of which was Mary Magdalene) became merged into

one generic prostitute named Mary, and later conflated with “the seven demons” of Mary Magdalene.

While the “seven demons” of Mary Magdalene are not described, it is not

difficult to confuse her “demons” with prostitution since in

Luke’s gospel, the first mention of Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2)

immediately follows the story of the unnamed prostitute who

washed Jesus feet (Luke 7:36-50)

Added to this is the notation in the Talmud (Jewish Rabbinical

writings) that Magdala (Mary’s hometown on the SW coast of

the Sea of Galilee) had a reputation for prostitution.

For whatever reason, the final identification of Mary as public reformed sinner achieved official standing with the homilies of Pope Gregory the Great (540-604 AD)

Why persist to this day?

New Yorker article (2/13/06) suggests interesting theory:

Humanity needs redeemed sinner as role model, hero

Virgin Mary more difficult to connect with because so pure

V. Sadly, this low regard for women in leadership (noted above) continued through the centuries

In accommodation to culture

No longer in reaction to Gnosticism

1500s - Reformation

Calvin and Luther

Very clear in teaching on patriarchal family and church structure,
(in keeping with social structures of the time)

Small Catechism by Luther

Wives “submit yourself unto your own husbands as unto the Lord” – *but without the surrounding verses of Ephesians 5 21-25 (Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her)*

Women were believed to be oversexed,
best restrained by dull clothing, no cosmetics and seclusion

Luther “A woman does not have complete mastery over herself. God created her body that she should be with a man and bear and raise children. The words of Genesis clearly state this, and the members of her body sufficiently show that **God himself** formed her for this purpose.” He held that men have broader shoulders and narrow hips, and “accordingly they possess intelligence.” Women, by contrast, have narrow shoulders and broad hips. Women ought to stay at home. The way they were created indicates this for they have broad hips and a wide fundament to sit upon”. (Moynahan, p. 390)

etc

1800's

Ordination of Women has been slow but steady beginning in the 1800s

Early 1800s Quakers publish famous pamphlet to justify equal roles for women and men in the denomination.

1853 Congregational Church ordains first woman, Antoinette Brown

1865 Salvation Army founded, ordaining men and women from the start.

1920s Some Baptist denominations

1939 United Methodist Church

1956 Presbyterian Church (USA)

1976 Episcopal Church

1992 Church of England

2000 Southern Baptist Convention reversed earlier ordination of women. “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture”

Note: Denominations in which the role of clergy had least authority were first to ordain.

Quakers – with no authority in leadership – accepted female leadership first

Episcopalians, Church of England – which have hierarchy of authority – accepted female leadership last.

(It's all about power” Brown p233

Roman Catholics, for whom the Priest at Mass is a reenactment of Jesus at the Last Supper, continue to deny priesthood to women.

In 1977, Pope Paul VI declared that a woman cannot be a priest “because our Lord was a man”.

CONCLUSION: Where does this leave us?

The Early church grabbed for a few glorious generations the essence of the life-changing Way of Jesus in regard to many things, including the role of women - but the pressures/morays of the world/culture soon squeezed the teachings into a doctrine of compromise. But the good news is that the Word of the Lord will stand forever. Jesus was not a feminist in the sense of setting women above men. He was much more than that ! His desire was for all men and women to love and honor one another as God's equally created, equally loved and equally redeemed children ! and that remains our mission as His church. And for this tremendous mission, He has given us His Holy Spirit. Amen

CHRISTIANITY AND THE DA VINCE CODE
Teaching #3
The Role of Women in Christianity

Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place In Church and Family
by Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian
Baker Book House, May 1985

"Mary of Magdala - Apostle to the Apostles"
www.futurechurch.org

"Mary Magdalene: Saint or Sinner"
by David Van Biema
Time Magazine, August 11, 2003, pp.52-55.

"Women and Men in Ministry at Willow Creek Community Church"
Excerpt from Participating Membership Manual
Willow Creek Community Church, Barrington, Illinois
(Soft cover book, available from Willow Creek for \$15.95)

"The Role of Women in the Christian Churches of Paul's Day"
by Dr. Helmut Koester
[www.bibletexts.com/terms/women01,htm](http://www.bibletexts.com/terms/women01.htm)

"The Saintly Sinner" by Joan Acocella in The New Yorker, 2/13/06 and 2/20/06

"Women as Clergy"
www.ReligiousTolerance.org

"Women as Religious Leaders: in the Bible and early Christian Writings"
www.ReligiousTolerance.org

"Women in Ancient Christianity: The New Discoveries"
by Karen King
www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shops/religion/first/women.html

"Women in the Early Christian Church"
www.u.arizona.edu/~kari/intro5.htm

"Women in History - Early Christianity"
http://womenshistory.about.com/library/etext/b11911_womend.htm

TRUE OR FALSE ?

1. "Jesus was the original feminist" (p.248)
2. "(Jesus) intended His church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene" (p.248)
3. "Nothing in Christianity is original". p. 232
4. "It was all about power!" p. 233
5. The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, clearly prohibit women from leadership roles in the church.