

## Women Leading Today: Additional Study Resources

Introduction: *This series of studies is designed for church groups who wish to explore the issues of women in leadership. It comes out of work done by the Women in Leadership Taskforce, a group set up by the Executive Council of the Baptist Union of Victoria, to mark the 30 year anniversary of the first woman ordained in Victoria in 1978, Marita Munro. The brief of the Taskforce was to audit the progress of the past 30 years and to bring recommendations for ways to enhance the opportunities for women leaders in the future.*

*These studies draw largely upon the 1977 BUV Report on the Ordination of Women in the light of scripture teaching and the practice of Baptist Churches. The scholarship of this original report is to be commended as it has stood well the test of time. We are indebted too to Cheryl Williams who designed the Gender Equity Tool.*

*The Taskforce membership has varied and a number of people have been involved at different stages: Mark Bailey, Val Billingham, Sue Bluett, Darren Cronshaw, Carolyn Francis, Ann Harding, Colin Hunter, Joanne Jarlett, Ann Lock, Alan Marr, Gwyn Milne, Jillian Stewart, Nicholas Tuohy, Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, with Roslyn Wright chairing the team. A final report by the Taskforce was presented to Executive Council in April 2009.*

*The final form of these studies was put together by Mark Bailey, Nicholas Tuohy and Roslyn Wright. We hope that you find here a useful set of resources to guide your explorations of Women in Leadership.*

*May 2009*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION	1
TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	
Breaking Through the Stained Glass Ceiling? <i>Women's Participation in Leadership in Australian     Baptist Churches</i> - Scott Higgins	3

### ADDITIONAL WEB RESOURCES

[http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Women\\_Service\\_Church.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Women_Service_Church.htm)

<http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/free-articles>

<http://www.cbeinternational.org/>

<http://www.benwitherington.com/books-01.html>

# Breaking Through the Stained Glass Ceiling?

## *Women's Participation in Leadership in Australian Baptist Churches*<sup>1</sup>

### **Background**

In the 1980's and 1990s gender roles were the subject of intense debate within the Evangelical community in Australia and beyond. Australian Baptists were part of this.

On the one hand "Complementarians"<sup>2</sup> maintained that at the same time that men and women are equal in value and dignity and gifted for ministry, God calls men to a position of leadership in the church and home and calls women to respond generously and supportively to this leadership. For Complementarians this was to maintain a distinctively biblical approach to masculinity and femininity against the more secular influence of feminism. With respect to ministry in the churches Complementarians celebrated the gifting of men and women, including capacities of leadership and teaching, yet they were convinced that gender must shape how those giftings were to be used. Some Complementarians (whom we will refer to as "Strict Complementarians") maintained that women gifted as leaders and teachers should exercise their gifts to the full with women and children but not in organised ministries that included men.<sup>3</sup> Others (whom we will refer to as "Relaxed Complementarians") argued that the core issue was not teaching but the exercise of authority in the church. Thus as long as the primary spiritual authority lay in the hands of gifted and called men suitably gifted women could teach Scripture and doctrine to men.<sup>4</sup> While there will remain some

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<sup>1</sup> *This report was prepared for Baptists Today, 2008 by Rev Scott Higgins*

<sup>2</sup> We have adopted this language as it is often the chosen label of those holding to the position described. We have attempted to employ non-pejorative language throughout this paper and no labels, such as "Strict Complementarian" or "Relaxed Complementarian", terms we have crafted to summarise nuanced positions among Complementarians should be taken as anything other than non-pejorative shorthand.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Stinson, R., and Cowan, C. (2008), "Women in Ministry: Practical Application of Biblical Teaching" *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Spring 2008:17-22. They say "[T]he Bible affirms the valuable and necessary role of women serving in Christian ministry. A church in which women are not encouraged and granted opportunity to serve as vital members of the Christian community is both disobedient and unhealthy. Yet...God's word...also gives specific instruction regarding the roles of men and women in the church...Christian women are called by God to serve the church, with the exception of teaching or having authority over men in the church. Thus we believe a woman is prohibited from holding any office or position in the church that would require her either to teach Scripture/Christian doctrine to men or to exercise authority over men..." On this basis they advise that women should not be elders/overseers/pastors, teach a mixed gender adult bible class, or teach mixed gender groups in a seminary, parachurch ministry or at bible conferences. Women may however lead and teach in children's and youth ministries (children and youth are still under the primary authority of their parents), lead worship, or sit on the Board of Directors of a parachurch ministry (given the Board as a whole rather than as individuals exercises authority).

<sup>4</sup> See for example John Stott, (1984), *Issues Facing Christians Today*. Marshall, Morgan and Scott. In a later dialogue with David Edwards, Stott says "Part of the essence of Paul's teaching concerns masculine 'headship', to be redefined (as you say) in terms of care rather than control, but still rooted in our created sexuality...The first century cultural expression of this headship, however, related to such practices as veiling, coiffure, jewellery and (in my view) the requirement of silence or not teaching men. My struggle (which I have not yet resolved) is how to give women the fullest opportunities to exercise their God-given gifts, and to enable both sexes to enjoy their 'neither male nor female' equality...without infringing the creational truths of masculinity, femininity and 'headship'..." Edwards and Stott, (1988)

debate among Complementarians as to the ways this works out in practice both Strict and Relaxed Complementarians could be expected to value and promote the ministry of women in a variety of roles traditionally dominated by men, such as being children's and youth ministers, worship ministers, evangelists, women's ministers, pastoral carers, Church Secretaries and Treasurers. Relaxed Complementarians could also be expected to encourage women into more traditional pastoral roles such as preaching and teaching, lecturing in theological colleges, and participating in a church leadership team where the senior leader was a man.

“Egalitarians”, by contrast, argued that God calls women and men to partner together in leadership in the church and home and that leadership responsibilities should be determined on the basis of character and gifting, not gender. They believed that the reality of our churches, where women were numerically underrepresented in leadership, represented the triumph of tradition, misuse of power and unjust gender discrimination over the biblical call for women and men to use their gifts to serve the church. Egalitarians maintained that if the church is to maximise its life, witness and mission there must be strenuous efforts to undo the gender imbalances left to us by tradition and we must work towards a reality where women and men are equitably represented on church leadership teams (whether diaconates, elderships or under some other name) and church pastoral teams. On this basis Egalitarians could be expected to encourage suitably gifted women into all ministry domains traditionally dominated by men, including employment as pastors, pastoral team leaders, associate pastors, elders, deacons, and the like.

Given the Baptist emphasis on the autonomy of the local church and the liberty of conscience it was inappropriate for Australia's State Baptist Unions to impose either a Complementarian or Egalitarian perspective on the churches. Consequently, some States sought to create an environment in which churches could function according to their conviction. In NSW, for example, the denomination ceased ordaining people for pastoral ministry, opting to devolve this to the local church. The denomination 'accredits' men and women for ministry, recognising them as gifted for ministries of leadership, teaching, mission and care and as possessing suitable training and character to be commended for such ministries. Ordination to particular ministries is the responsibility of the churches, allowing them to ordain men and women to ministries that conform with their understanding of gender roles.

The question we pose in this paper is whether the rhetoric around gender matches the reality. At the time of the 'gender debates' of the 1980s and 1990s it became evident that the reality of women's participation in a range of ministries fell short of that demanded by the rhetoric of both Complementarians and Egalitarians. So since the Evangelical gender discussions of the 1980s and 1990s what change has occurred in Baptist churches across Australia?

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*Essentials*. Hodder and Stoughton. Of course, Complementarian perspectives should not be reduced to the two cited in this paper. Between them lie a range of other possible Complementarian perspectives.

## **Methodology**

This paper proceeds by comparing the ministry roles of women and men in 1998, as recorded in State Baptist Union handbooks, with the same in 2008. This permits us to test against two measures:

1. Women serving in pastoral roles in local churches. These are defined as staffed positions in pastoral rather than administrative areas, and include people serving as employed church staff in the areas of youth ministry, children's ministry, pastoral care, evangelism as well as sole pastors, senior pastors and 'associate' pastors. We have not distinguished between ordained and non-ordained and when considering figures for total numbers of pastors we have not distinguished between roles (eg sole pastor, associate pastor, team leader, 'pastoral assistant' [the term used in some States for women serving in a pastoral role]).

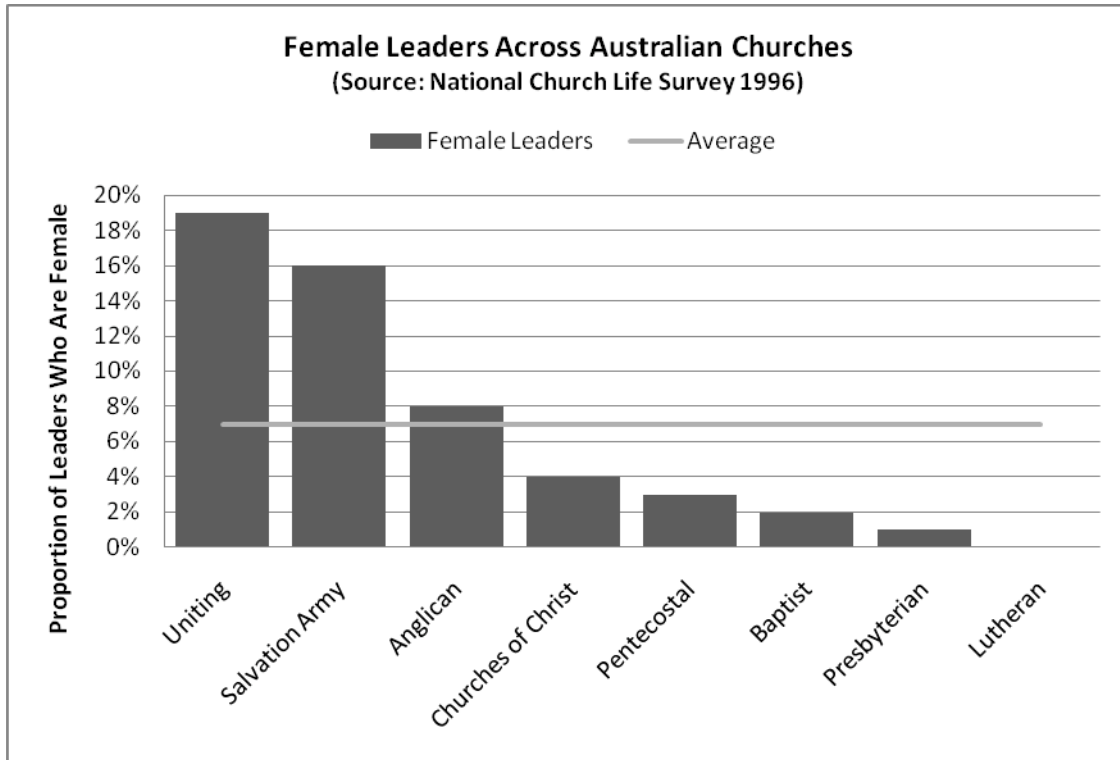
Given pastoral staff are typically central to the life and ministry of churches, that a financial value is placed upon their ministry, and traditionally have been male this serves as a useful proxy for the involvement of women in pastoral ministry areas. To ensure the focus remains fixed on the realities in local churches we have avoided examination of listings of recognised ministers as those who are recognised may not be serving in a local church context.

2. Women serving as Church Treasurers, Secretaries or Administrators. Historically, Treasurers, Secretaries and Administrators are positions of some centrality to the organisational life of churches. Secretaries and Treasurers play key roles on church administrative bodies such as diaconates and so this measure can serve as a proxy for women's involvement at a non-staff level in an area not typically considered 'pastoral'.

For each State with the exception of South Australia we have used the 1998 State Union handbook to glean data for our base period. For South Australia the earliest handbook we were able to access was 1999, which we have used. For the end period we have used the 2008 handbooks for each State, with the exception of Western Australia where the 2005 handbook was the latest available to us.

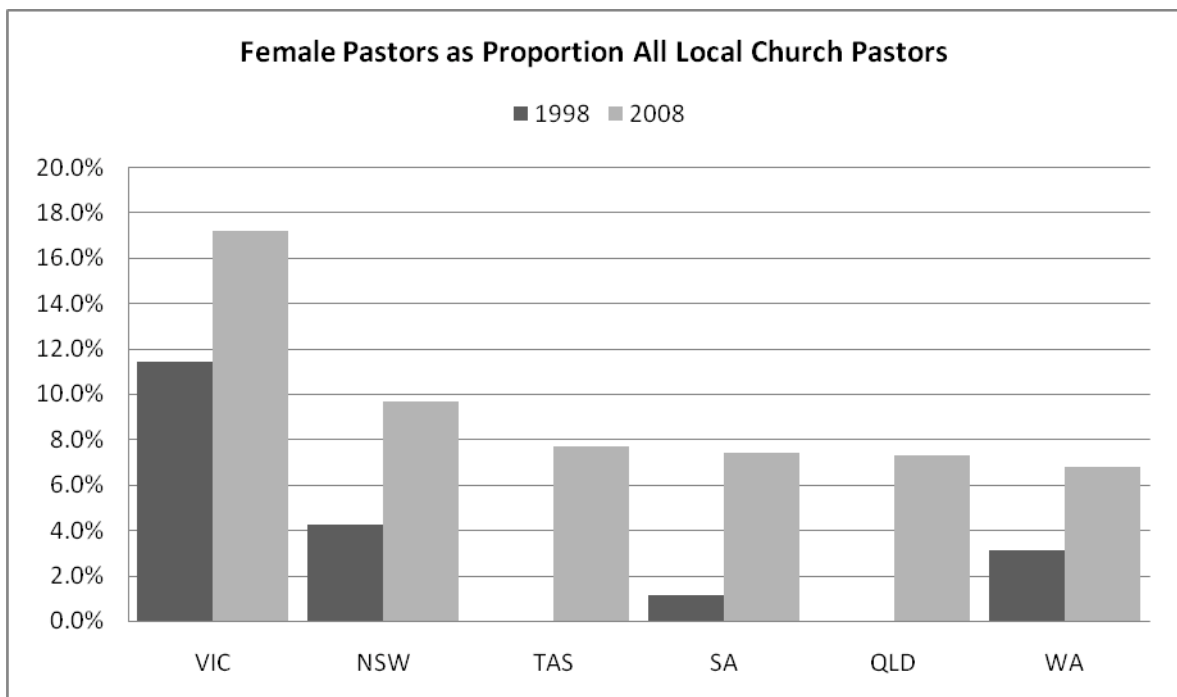
## **Men and Women Serving as Pastors**

In the mid 1990s few women were employed in positions of pastoral leadership in Australian Baptist churches, not only relative to total number of pastors, but also in comparison to other denominations.

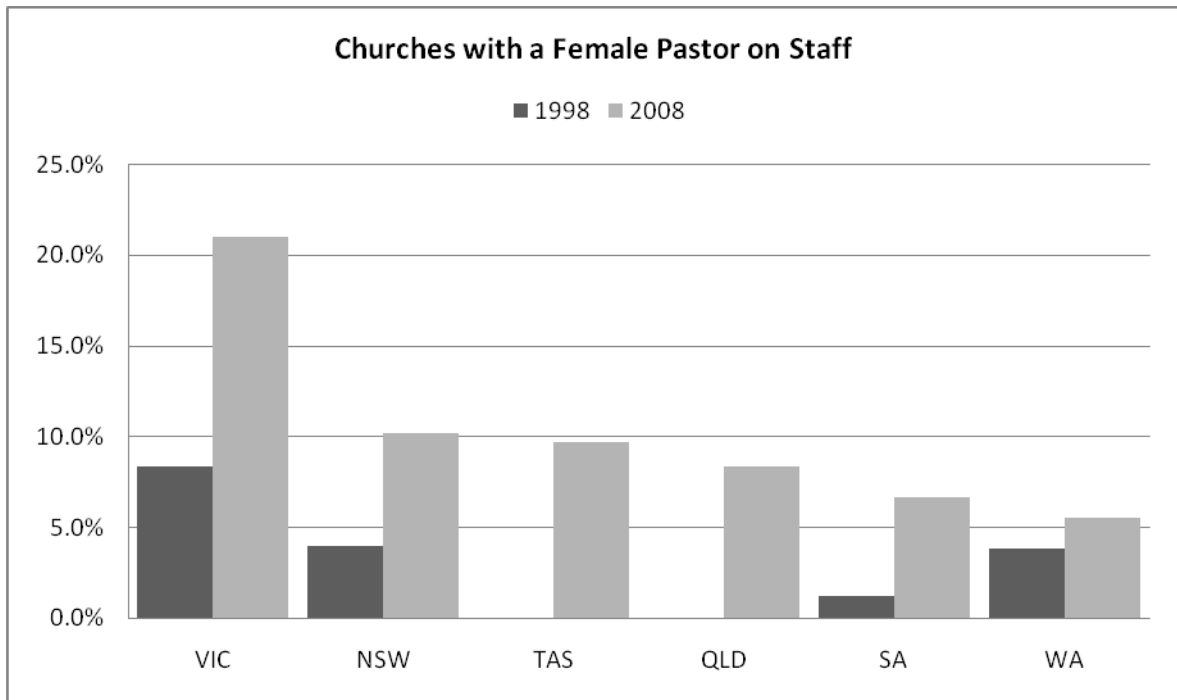


There have been significant changes since the mid 1990s. Nationally, 11.7% of all people serving in a staff pastoral position in a Baptist church are women. This represents a total of 134 women serving in a staffed pastoral position out of a total of 1253 people serving in a staffed pastoral position.

There has been an increase in every State in the representation of women as pastors in Baptist churches. The highest proportion of women serve in Victoria (17.2%), followed by NSW (9.7%), Tasmania (7.7%), South Australia (7.4%), Queensland (7.3%) and Western Australia (6.8%).



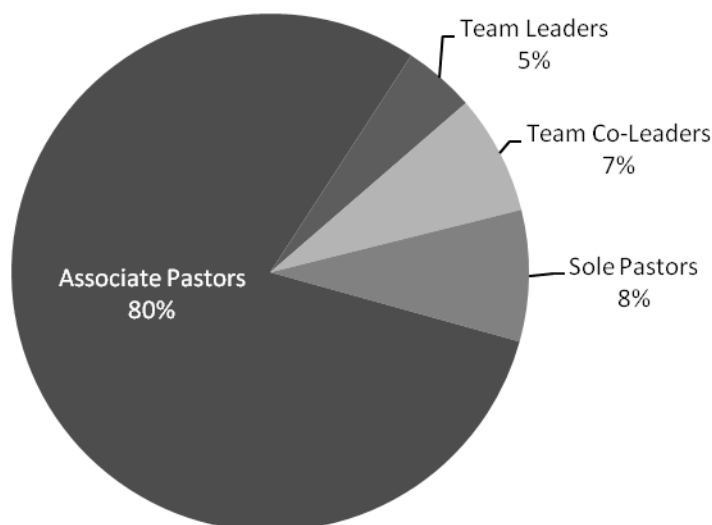
Given some churches have more than one female pastor on staff it is helpful to look at the number of churches that have at least one woman serving on the pastoral staff. Again Victoria has the highest number. Two out of every ten Victorian churches has a woman serving on the pastoral staff. Elsewhere in Australia the figure is one in ten or less. The converse is also true. With the exception of Victoria, attendees at nine out of every ten Baptist Churches do not experience a woman serving in a staffed pastoral role.



## Pastoral Roles

The vast majority of women pastors serve on a pastoral team (92%). Most serve in an “Associate” role, that is, they are not the ministry team leader. Five percent of female pastors lead a ministry team, while seven percent share leadership in a ministry team. Eight percent serve as sole pastors.

**Female Pastors By Role, Australian Baptist Churches, 2008**



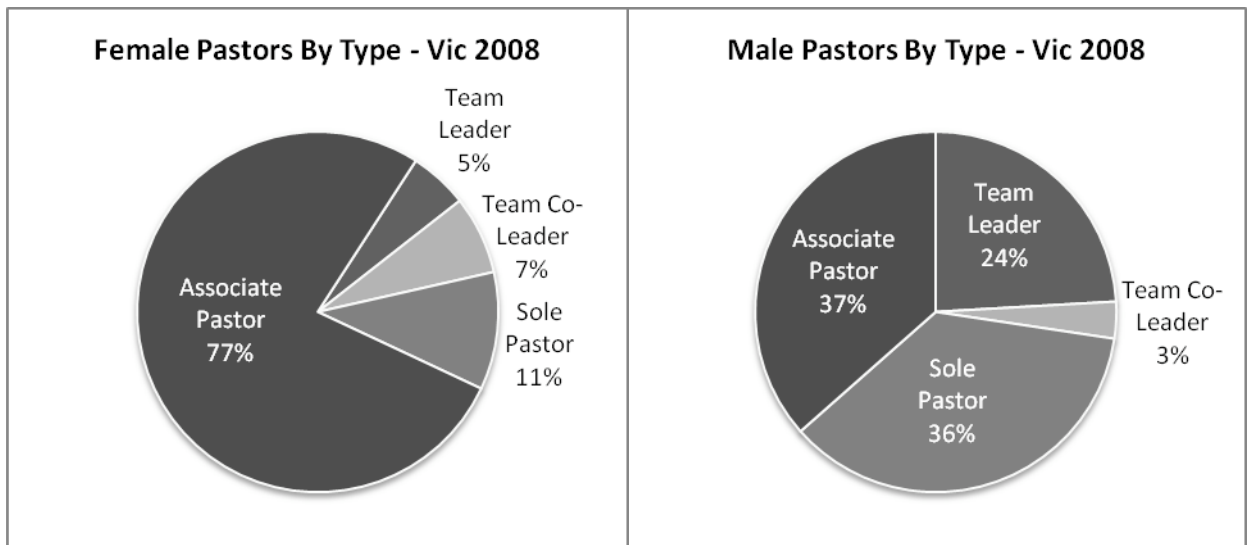
State by State there is some significant variation. In 2008 NSW and Victoria were the only States with women serving as leaders of a pastoral team. Each State bar Western Australia had at least one woman co-leading a pastoral team, while NSW, Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria had at least one woman serving as the sole pastor in a church. With the exception of Tasmania, where the sample is very small, the largest proportion of women in each State were serving in an Associate role.

**Female Pastoral Roles By State 2008 (2005 for WA)**

	TAS	SA	NSW	QLD	WA	VIC
<b>Team Leader</b>	0	0	3	0	0	3
<b>Team Co-Leader</b>	1	2	2	1	0	4
<b>Sole Pastor</b>	0	0	3	1	1	6
<b>Associate</b>	1	4	33	18	7	44

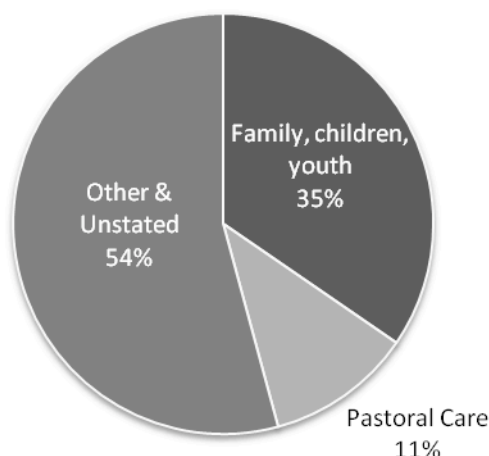
The pattern for female pastors is very different for that of men. The chart below demonstrates the roles of female and male pastors for Victoria in 2008. Where almost 8 in 10 female pastors serve in an associate role, this is true for around 4 in 10 male pastors. One in ten female pastors are sole pastors, as opposed to one in three men, and where only one in twenty female pastors leads a pastoral team, one-quarter of all male pastors lead a team.

Given Victoria has a high proportion of women serving as sole pastors, team leaders and co-leaders the proportionate differences will be even greater in other States.



Those who serve as Associates can do so with a specific focus or with more generalised pastoral duties. Approximately one in three women serving in an Associate role serve as a family, children’s or youth pastor, while just over one in ten serve in a pastoral care type role. In NSW, Queensland and Victoria, the States for which there is a statistically significant pattern, the results were roughly similar. The numbers in each category may or may not be significantly higher given around 40% of the listings for female Associate pastors did not designate a particular responsibility.

**Female Associate Pastors By Role, Australian Baptist Churches, 2008**



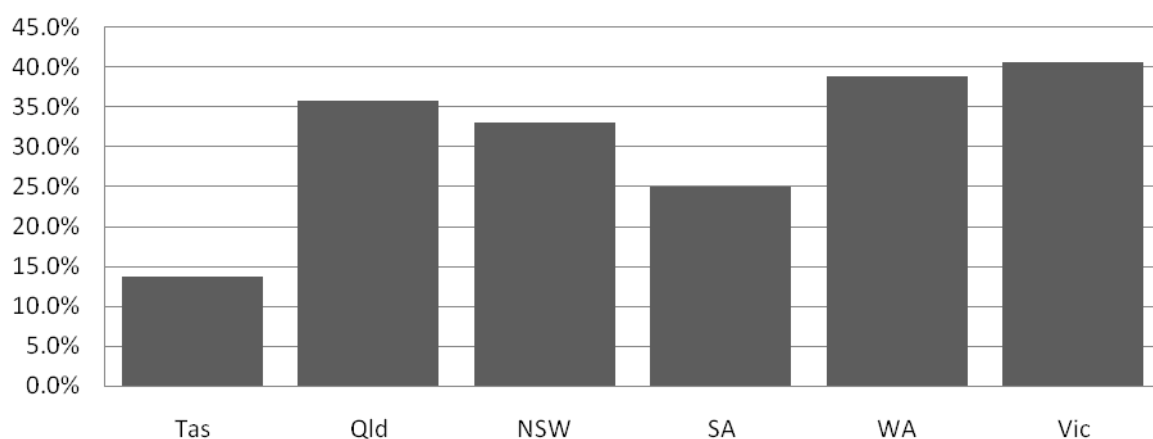
**Female Associate Pastor Roles by State 2008**

	TAS	SA	NSW	QLD	WA	VIC
<b>Family, children, youth</b>	1	0	13	5	4	14
<b>Pastoral Care</b>	0	0	3	4	0	5
<b>Other &amp; Unstated</b>	0	4	17	9	3	25

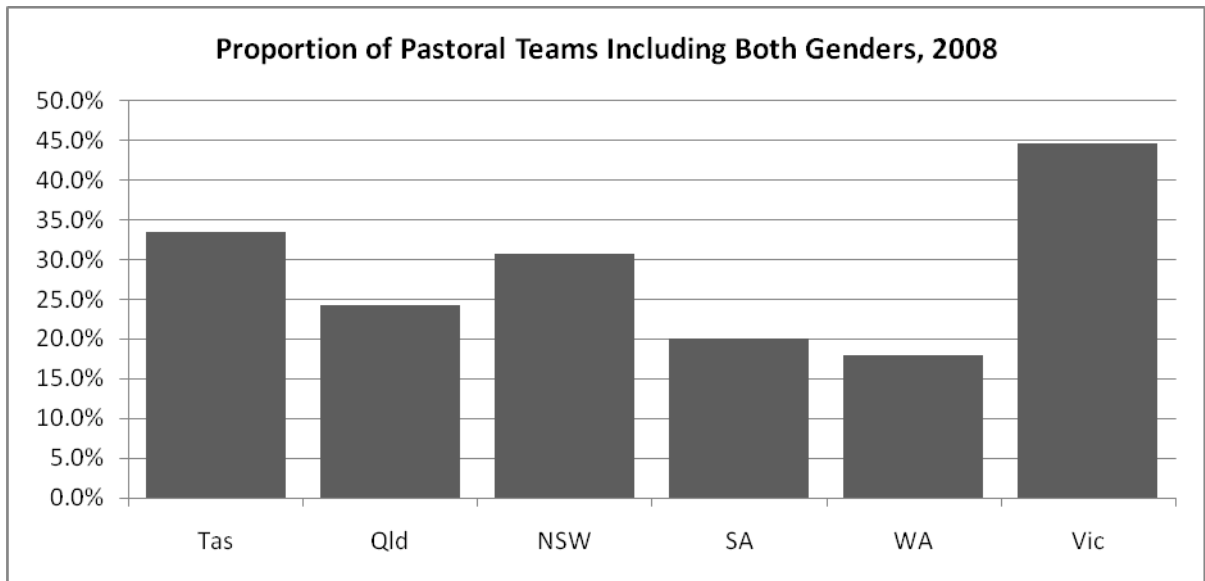
## Pastoral Teams

As noted above, nine in ten female pastors serve in a pastoral team environment. This suggests the prevalence of pastoral teams is particularly significant to opportunities for women to serve pastorally. Nationally, one third (34.4% in 2008) of Baptist churches have a team ministry, understood as two or more people in a staff pastoral role. State by State there is significant variation, with a low of 13.6% in Tasmania and a high of 41% in Victoria.

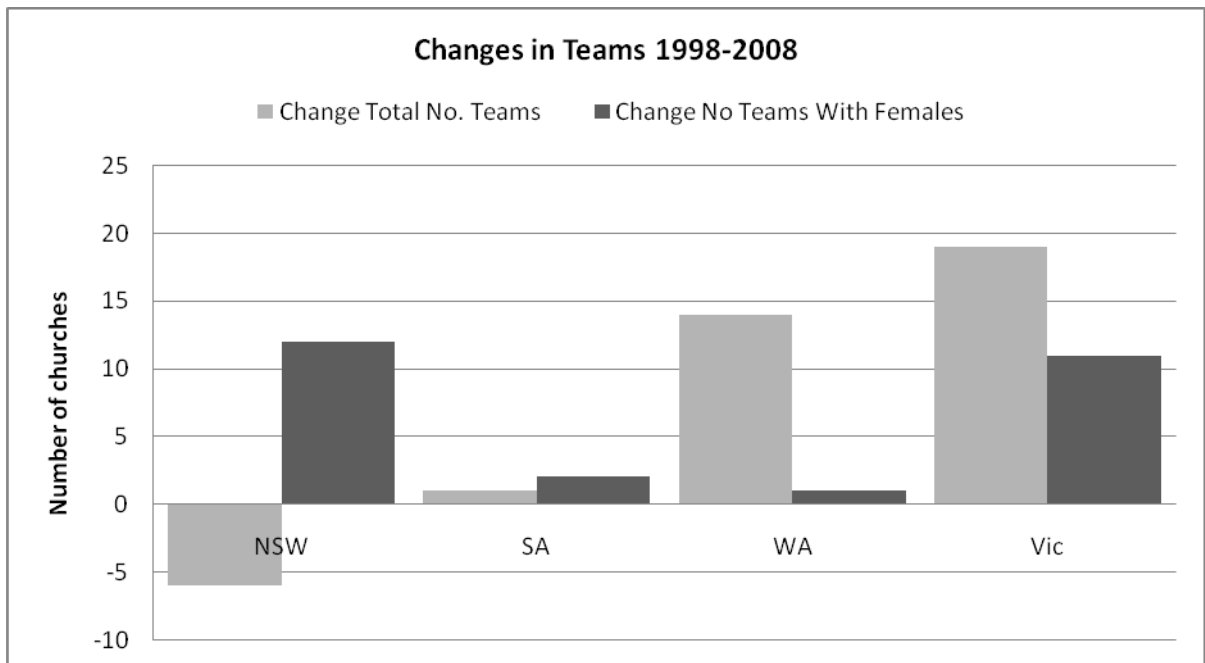
**Proportion of Baptist Churches With a Pastoral Team, 2008**



When these teams are examined for gender breakdown, around one-quarter nationally include at least one male and one female pastor.



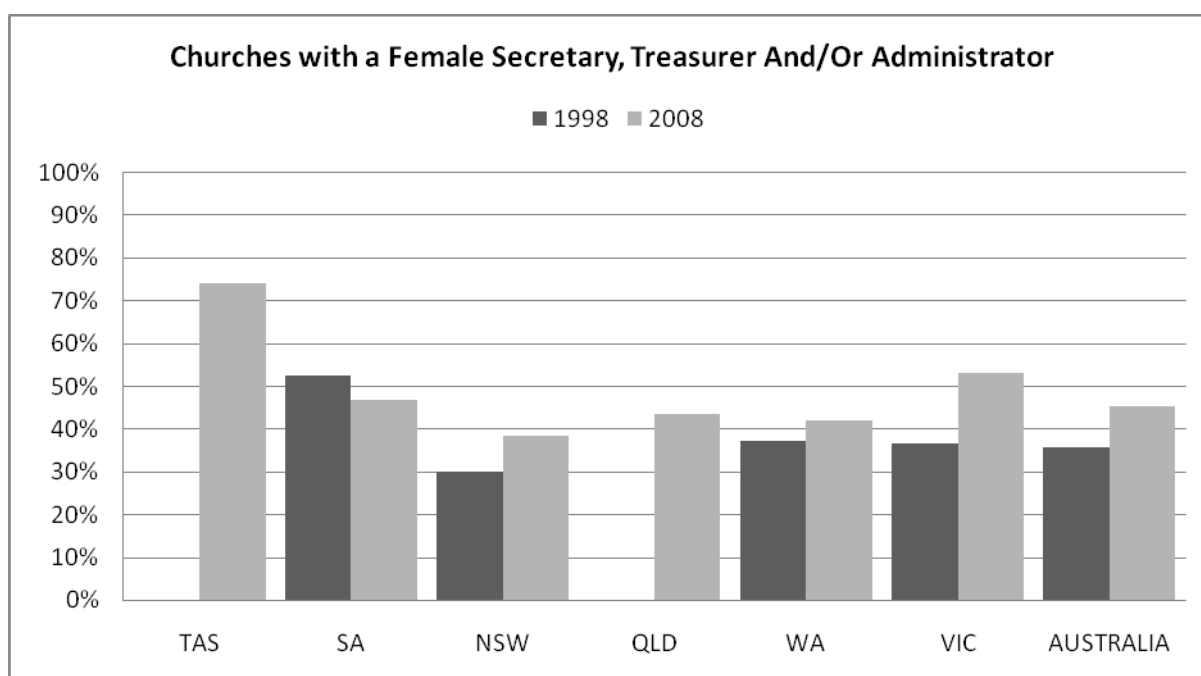
It is of interest to note that in the last decade in NSW there was an increase in the number of churches with a pastoral team including at least one female at the same time that the total number of teams declined. In South Australia and Victoria there was an increase in the number of churches with pastoral teams and the rate of increase in teams including females outstripped that of the growth in male only teams. Only in Western Australia did the rate of growth of all male teams outpace the rate of growth in teams including women.



## Church Secretaries, Treasurers and Administrators

Our second proxy indicator for women's involvement in church leadership is the prevalence of women serving as church secretaries, treasurers or administrators. This is an area of some interest as these are roles that Complementarians and Egalitarians would commonly agree should be open to gifted people regardless of their gender.

Australia wide women serve in the role of secretary, treasurer or administrator in 45.4% of churches, a modest increase over the 35.7% of 1998. In all States for which we have 1998 data (SA, NSW, WA, Vic) the proportion of churches with a female serving in one or more of these roles has increased, with the exception of South Australia, where there has been a slight decline. Nonetheless, participation rates in South Australia remain higher than all other States with the exception of Tasmania and Victoria.



The data should not be read to imply that a rate of 50% is gender equitable. The vast majority of churches listed entries for two or three roles (ie Secretary, Treasurer, Administrator. We excluded churches without any entry from our totals). Thus for NSW the figure of 38.5% indicates that around four in ten churches have a woman in the Secretary or Treasurer role. For gender equity to prevail the figures should approach 75-100% (ie one woman and one man in each role, with an error margin to allow for situations where some churches have two women filling the roles while others have two men). On this basis only Tasmania is approaching gender equity in these roles.

## Conclusions

The data allow a number of conclusions to be drawn.

1. The participation of women in pastoral and administrative leadership roles in Baptist churches in Australia has increased in the course of the last ten years. In Victoria the number of female pastors has almost doubled (30 in 1998, 57 in 2008); in NSW the numbers have more than doubled (17 in 1998, 41 in 2008); in Queensland the numbers have more than tripled (2 “Pastoral Assistants” in 1998, 7 in 2007<sup>1</sup>); and in South Australia there has been a sixfold increase (1 in 1998, 6 in 2008).
2. Despite the increases, women remain substantially underrepresented in staffed pastoral roles. Given the rhetoric of both Complementarian and Egalitarian Baptists that God gifts women and men to lead, teach, care and administer and that the church suffers when women and men are not encouraged to fully employ their giftings, it is noteworthy that the reality falls short of this. From a Complementarian perspective we would expect to see much greater numbers of women serving on church pastoral teams in ministries to children, youth and women, in pastoral care, worship, community formation, and in the case of Relaxed Complementarians, in bible teaching. From an Egalitarian perspective the underrepresentation of women is vast both in terms of the proportion of women serving in pastoral ministry compared to men and in the roles they play. It is striking that staffed pastoral ministry opportunities across Australia are, for women, mostly restricted to serving in an Associate role on a pastoral team.
3. The underrepresentation of women on church pastoral staffs is mirrored by an underrepresentation of women in non-staff administrative roles. Given few objections could be raised to participation on biblical grounds, Baptist churches appear to be carrying into the present the legacy of our gender unequal past.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that for 2008 we identified 20 women in pastoral roles in Queensland but we lacked figures for 1998. Email correspondence indicated an increase in “Pastoral Assistants”, which refers to women in recognised pastoral roles, from 2 in 1998 to 7 in 2007.

## The Anchor Bible Dictionary

### Women in the NEW TESTAMENT

Ben Witherington, III, *Professor of New Testament Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary*

In order to understand the position and roles of women in the NT era, it is necessary first to examine the historical and social context in which 1st century women lived. The primary matrix for assessing women's roles in the Jesus movement and in early Jewish Christianity is the status and roles women had in early Judaism, especially in Israel. The position and roles of women elsewhere in the Roman Empire is also of relevance in assessing the place of women in the Pauline communities and in the communities of the gospel writers.

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- A. The Historical Setting
    - 1. Women in Early Judaism
    - 2. Women in Other Mediterranean Cultures
  - B. Women in the Ministry of Jesus
  - C. Women in the Pauline Communities
  - D. Women and the Third and Fourth Evangelists
  - E. Conclusions
- 

#### A. The Historical Setting

**1. Women in Early Judaism.** The Palestinian Jewish culture was one of the most patriarchal in the Mediterranean crescent. The home and family were basically the only spheres where women could play significant roles in early Judaism. This was true not only because of the extensive power that a father had over both his wife and daughters in determining their activities and their relationships, but also because various levitical laws were interpreted in such a way that women were prohibited from taking significant roles in the synagogue due to their monthly period of levitical uncleanness.

Women could not make up the quorum that constituted a synagogue, could not be counted on to recite the daily *Shema* or make the pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the major feasts, nor are there any known examples of women reading the Torah in the synagogue in Jesus' era (cf. *m. Hag.* 1.1, *m. Ber.* 3.3). Mishnah *Qidd.* 1.7 teaches: "The observance of all the positive ordinances that depend on the time of year is incumbent on men but not on women . . ." Women did receive and pass along some basic religious education in the home. There were, however, various teachers in early Judaism that frowned on women being given anything more than a rudimentary religious education, especially in regard to the oral *halakah* (Witherington 1984: 6–7).

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BEN WITHERINGTON, III Associate Professor of Biblical and Wesleyan Studies, Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, OH  
NT New Testament  
1st first  
cf. *confer*, compare  
*Hag. Hagiga*  
*Ber. Berakot*  
*Qidd. Qiddušin*

Furthermore, there is no evidence that prior to Jesus' ministry Jewish women were ever allowed to be disciples of a great teacher, much less travel with such a teacher, or to instruct anyone other than children. In such a restrictive context, Jesus' relationship to women must have seemed radical indeed, though on the wider scale of 1st century Mediterranean culture it seems not to have been unprecedented. In fact, seen from the broader cultural context, Jesus can be described as a reformer of patriarchal society, but not as one who outright rejected a patriarchal orientation.

In regard to the legal position of a woman in early Judaism, her testimony was considered valid by some early Jewish teachers, but suspect by others (cf. *m. Ned.* 11.10). In practice, women were entrusted with much responsibility and their word was normally accepted, especially in the home. The legal position of a woman even in a family, however, was seriously restricted in regard to the right of inheritance (she was basically entitled only to maintenance not inheritance) and the right of divorce (strictly speaking only the male could divorce, though a woman could precipitate a divorce). Furthermore, a woman was often passed from the control of her father to that of her husband with little or no say in the matter, not least because Jewish women in this era married at or soon after the time they came of age. The laws which were later codified in the Mishnah say that a woman, like a gentile slave, could be obtained by intercourse, money, or writ (*m. Qidd.* 1.1), though normally marriage was transacted by the heads of the households who would make an agreement and settle on a bride price.

These facts should not cause us to overlook the positive statements made by early Jews about honoring and respecting women, nor should we ignore the extensive responsibilities placed on a Jewish husband in regard to his wife and daughters, nor forget that much of what we have discussed resulted from the attempt by an occupied people to preserve their culture and religious way of life. Nevertheless, the dominant impression left by our early Jewish sources is of a very patriarchal society that limited women's roles and functions to the home, and severely restricted: (1) their rights of inheritance, (2) their choice of relationships, (3) their ability to pursue a religious education or fully participate in the synagogue, and (4) their freedom of movement.

## **2. Women in Other Mediterranean Cultures.**

Within the patriarchal framework that existed throughout the Roman Empire, there was a surprising degree of variety in the roles and positions women could and did assume from culture to culture. For example, in Rome women could at most be the power behind the throne, whereas in Egypt women could openly rule. Or again, in Athens married citizen-women seem to have been confined to domestic activities, whereas women in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Egypt engaged in their own private businesses, served in public offices, and had prominent roles in various religious cults.

Note that with the rise in popularity of the Isis cult came also the rise to prominence of all sorts of women in various significant religious roles, besides the traditional ones of being a Vestal Virgin (in Rome), or an oracle (e.g., at Delphi) roles open only to a few women who led atypical lives. Since Corinth in Paul's day was a Roman city, and Rome was generally suspicious of imported oriental religions, allowing only an indigenous religion to receive official sanction, it is difficult to assess whether the

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*Ned. Nedarim*  
e.g. *exempli gratia* (for example)

oriental cults (e.g., Isis) played any significant role in Corinthian life. More certainly, in various places in Greece and elsewhere in the Mediterranean world in the 1st century women were allowed: (1) to be the organs of revelation; (2) to have prominent roles in the Dionysian cult; (3) to take the lead in the mystery plays, and the agricultural and fertility rites (Farnell 1907, 3: 106–16).

The degree that the father/husband controlled the family varied somewhat from culture to culture in the Mediterranean world. In Asia Minor women could dispose of their own property, and their dowry remained their own. This was also true in Egypt, but in Athens women's property rights were more restricted.

In Rome, the *patria potestas* had been attenuated by laws that allowed marriage without the traditional patriarchal *in manu* procedure. Women as well as men could also end a marriage even on very flimsy grounds in Roman society. In general, a Roman woman's property rights and freedom in marriage were greater than that of women elsewhere in the Empire, with the exception of Egypt and perhaps Asia Minor and Macedonia.

It is notable that in Roman society, unlike some parts of Greece, the education of women was considered important and desirable. Even among poorer families both daughters and sons received at least a rudimentary education, while in wealthier families all children regularly had tutors (Balsdon 1962: 252). Yet this did not lead Romans, even during the age of the Empire, to allow women to vote or hold public office, unlike the case in Asia Minor.

In summary, in terms of personal, property, and educational rights the women of Rome, Egypt, Asia Minor, and Macedonia fared better than the women of Greece or Judea, but in terms of political rights Roman women were at a disadvantage when compared to Egyptian or Macedonian women (and those women in Asia Minor, Egypt, and elsewhere who inherited the benefits of Hellenism). In terms of roles and status in religious settings, women in Egypt, Asia Minor and Macedonia had more possibilities than Greek or Roman women in general, until the coming of various Oriental cults and Hellenistic ideals into Rome and the Roman colony cities in the Empire.

## **B. Women in the Ministry of Jesus**

On a cursory examination of the gospels it might be possible to see Jesus as just another advocate of a patriarchal society, since he chose twelve men to be his personal followers, and since he probably exhorted his listeners to follow the OT commandment about honoring parents (Mark 7:10; 10:19 and parallels). In fact, it appears that he taught that for two people joined together by God divorce is not a legitimate option (Witherington 1984: 18–28). This is only one side of the story, however, for the gospels also portray Jesus as one who accepted women both as followers and as traveling companions (Luke 8:1–3). This same Jesus is said to have preferred for a woman to listen and learn from him as a disciple would, rather than to serve him in a woman's traditional capacity (Luke 10:38–42). It seems that Jesus rejected many levitical laws about clean and unclean since he apparently fellowshiped with the unclean, allowed unclean women to touch him, and was willing to touch a corpse and stop a funeral procession to help a woman (Mark 5:25–

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OT Old Testament

34 and parallels; Luke 7:11–17, 36–50). Nowhere is it recorded that after such occasions Jesus went through the regular levitical procedures to make himself clean again.

Further light is shed on Jesus' attitude toward women by the radical sayings which suggest that among his followers the family of faith supercedes the physical family as the primary group of identification (Mark 3:34–35 and parallels; Matt 10:34–39= Luke 14:26). One must also bear in mind a saying like Matt 19:3–12, which may have been Jesus' vindication of his own celibate lifestyle, but which also allowed for both women and men to remain single for the sake of the Dominion of God. Such a teaching was foreign not only to the Jewish ethos where marriage and procreation were considered obligations (Gen 1:28), but also to the larger context of the Roman Empire where writers from Greek and Roman cultures were known to expound on the duty of marriage and procreation (Daube 1977). This teaching about being given the ability to be single for the sake of the Kingdom opened the door for women to assume roles in the Jesus movement other than the traditional domestic ones. It is not accidental that the gospel tradition records that women were among the witnesses of Jesus' crucifixion, burial, empty tomb, and resurrection. Herein we see the liberating effect the teaching and life of Jesus had on women, and the loyalty with which they responded to that life.

Taking all the probably authentic material in the gospels together, it would appear that Jesus was a reformer of patriarchal society, sometimes making suggestions that would have been considered radical in a Jewish context. This applies both to what he said and to what he allowed in regard to women's religious roles in his movement. Also his teaching about marriage, divorce, and singleness would have been seen as radical not only by Jews but also by various people outside a Jewish context in the Roman Empire (Witherington 1984: 49–52, 77–79, 123–31).

### **C. Women in the Pauline Communities**

When one investigates the letters of Paul, one finds concepts already in evidence in the Jesus tradition. On the one hand, there is an affirmation of marriage and family (1 Cor 7; Eph 5:22–31; Col 3:18–25; 1 Cor 11), and a modified, Christianized patriarchal structure seems to be advocated. On the other hand, the family of faith is seen as the primary unit of identity and there is a clear advocacy of women assuming important roles in the Christian community including proclamation roles (1 Cor 11:5; 16:19; Rom 16:1, 3, 7; Phil 4:2–3).

The "occasional" nature of Paul's letters must be taken into consideration when evaluating such difficult texts as 1 Cor 14:34–35, or its parallel in 1 Tim 2:8–15. In both cases, Paul and/or the Paulinist who wrote these verses is dealing with problems in the Pauline communities. The rulings given apply to specific problems of women disrupting the worship service, or usurping authority over others. In both cases, the abuses are being ruled out, but this does not foreclose the issue of whether or not women who did not abuse their privileges might speak or exercise authority if it was done in a proper and orderly manner (Witherington 1988: 90–104, 117–24). In fact, in view of the evidence that various women were Paul's co-workers in the Gospel ministry it is unlikely that these texts were ever intended to do more than rule out certain abuses.

Many recent interpreters have seen in Gal 3:28 the Magna Carta of human equality (Stendahl 1966). However, closer attention to both the baptismal context of this saying (which suggests that it is about entrance requirements for being “in Christ”), and the specific wording of the text (which reads “no male *and* female” *not* “no male or female”), suggests a different interpretation (Witherington 1981: 593–604.). Paul says that neither one’s racial nor social nor marital status should determine whether or not one can be in Christ. In Christ such distinctions as Jew and gentile, or married and unmarried, still exist (Romans 9–11; 1 Corinthians 7), but they have no inherent salvific value, nor do they determine whether or not one can be in Christ.

It is striking how Paul, in his assessment of marriage, divorce and singleness, seems to be drawing directly on the Jesus tradition in several ways. First, Paul agrees that there is a creation order that God used to set the pattern for proper marital relationships that supercedes Mosaic legislation (1 Cor 11:3–15; Matt 19:3–12 and parallels) (Witherington 1985: 571–76.). Second, Paul prohibits divorce for marital partners who are both believers (1 Cor 7:10–11; Mark 10:11). Third, he prefers the single status and states that the ability to lead a celibate life is a gift from God not given to all (1 Cor 7:7 and Matt 19:11–12). Furthermore, Paul seems to have had a healthy respect for marriage and human sexuality, as did Jesus, for he believes marriage is not merely a *remedium concupiscentiae* (1 Corinthians 7). This becomes especially clear if Ephesians 5 was written by Paul as seems probable. Finally, we may note that Paul’s constant use of family language to refer to his fellow believers indicates that he, like Jesus, saw the family of faith as the central and controlling social reality. Paul certainly does not warrant the title of chauvinist, but he was also no radical feminist. Rather, as was the case with our investigation of Jesus, what we see in Paul is: (1) an affirmation of new religious roles for women, and (2) a reaffirmation—with some Christian modifications—of the traditional roles women had been assuming in the family. In some contexts, particularly among Jews and Jewish Christians, both (1) and (2) would have made Paul appear to be radical. In other contexts, among some gentiles, Paul’s moral conservatism and reaffirmation of traditional roles for women would have appeared too confining (this appears to have been the case in Corinth). 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 seem to be Paul’s reaction to those whom he perceived to be overly “liberated” women. For Paul, the family of faith was central (as it was for Jesus), and this meant that the structure and roles of the physical family would be affected, and in some ways transformed, by the transcending practices of the family of faith. Paul walked a difficult line between reaffirmation and reformation of the good that was part of the creation order on the one hand, and the affirmation of new possibilities in Christ on the other (Witherington 1988: 125–26).

#### **D. Women and the Third and Fourth Evangelists**

Apparently, various 1st century churches struggled with the teaching of Jesus, Paul, and others about the new roles women could assume in the Christian community. This can be inferred from the fact that when the Third and Fourth Evangelists set down their gospels in the last quarter of the 1st century they felt it important to stress the new roles of women and the equality of women with men as objects of God’s grace and gracious endowments.

This stress is especially apparent in Luke–Acts where we find as part of Luke’s redactional agenda a tendency to pair parables and stories about men and women to show their equal place in God’s new activities through Jesus. Thus, for instance, we

may point to such parables as Luke 13:18–21, or 18:1–14, or the pairing of the story of Aeneas and Tabitha in Acts 9:32–42 (Witherington 1988: 129). One may also note how the paradigmatic sermon of Jesus in Luke 4:18–19 seems to structure how Luke presents the liberation of various women from diseases or infirmities in Luke 4:38–44 or 8:1–3. H. Flender (1967: 10) rightly concludes: “Luke expresses by this arrangement that man and woman stand together and side by side before God. They are equal in honor and grace; they are endowed with the same gifts and have the same responsibilities. . . .” Luke is also not reluctant to portray a woman as a prophetess (Acts 21:9), a religious teacher of a notable male Christian leader (Acts 18:1–3, 24–26), a hostess for a house churches (Acts 12:12–17), the first convert in a new region (Acts 16:12–40), and as assuming the roles deaconesses were later to have (Acts 9:32–42). It is not accidental that Luke clearly mentions church meetings in the homes of women (Acts 12:12; 16:40). Luke has carefully chosen five vignettes to show the different roles women were assuming in the early Christian communities. In fact, these five stories show how the Gospel progressed through the female population across the Empire from Jerusalem (1:14; 12:12–17), to Joppa (9:36–42), to Philippi (16:11–15), to Corinth (18:1–3), to Ephesus (18:19–26), to Thessalonica (17:4), to Beroea (17:12), and to Athens (17:34). In this way, Luke not merely chronicles the effect of the Gospel on women in the early churches, but also provides a written precedent for women to continue in such roles.

In the Fourth Gospel there are at least five episodes which feature women and their roles: (1) Mary, Jesus’ mother (John 2, 19); (2) the Samaritan woman (John 4); (3) Mary and Martha (John 11–12); (4) the mention of the women at the cross (John 19); and (5) the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. Taken together, these tales reveal women on their way to becoming Jesus’ disciples, progressing in understanding and faith in Jesus. Thus, for instance, while Jesus clearly disengages from his mother’s parental authority in John 2, nonetheless they are reunited at the cross where Mary is accepted into the family of faith. Or again, in the story of Mary and Martha we find women who believe in Jesus, but inadequately, and who learn to fully confess who Jesus is. The same can be said of the detailed account of the Samaritan woman in John 4 where the immoral woman is portrayed as one who better understands and shares Jesus’ real “food” than the disciples who are still operating on a more material level. This woman bears witness about Jesus in the community in a way the disciples are not portrayed as doing.

John 20 is very important for here we find not only that a woman received the first appearance of the risen Lord, but also that she was commissioned to be an evangelist to the Eleven, proclaiming the Good News to them. The witness list mentioned in John 19 also indicates that the testimony of women was critical in regard to another crucial element in the Christian creed—Jesus’ death. Since it is improbable that early Christians would have invented the idea of women being the key witnesses to the concluding events in Jesus’ earthly career, it is more likely that the Fourth Evangelist is basing at least some of these narratives on historical data.

One may wish to ask why the Fourth Evangelist felt a need to stress a positive portrayal of how women responded to Jesus. At the end of the 1st century a.d. the role of women in the Christian community was probably still being debated, and in order to further the teaching of Jesus and other early Christians on these matters the Fourth

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A.D. *anno domini* (year)

Evangelist has presented various women as models of the process of coming to faith, and bearing witness to that faith in various ways.

### E. Conclusions

There seems to be a consistent trajectory from the life and teachings of Jesus to the life and teachings of various of the earliest Christians including Paul. The authors addressing the earliest churches argue for the new freedom and roles women can assume in Christ. However, evidence shows an attempt at *reformation*, not *repudiation*, of the patriarchal structure of family and society evident in the 1st century. This reformation must take place “in Christ.” Therefore, we find no call to social revolution or to the overthrow of a patriarchal society outside of the Body of Christ. This reformation, however, led to greater stability and equality in the marriage structure, and to greater roles in the church both for married and unmarried women. Understanding the tension between the family of faith and the physical family was key to understanding the new roles women could play in the Church. Men, too, found that greater freedom meant more responsibility, not more privilege.

This affirmation of women was not quickly or universally accepted in the fledgling Christian Church. The writers of the New Testament documents had to argue for these new ideas even as late as the end of the 1st century. In fact, a review of post-NT and pre-Nicene material suggests that the resistance to both the reformation of the roles of women, and the affirmation of women in general, intensified. The modern debate on the role of women continues, but the starting point for each discussion should continue to be the biblical material.

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*BJRL* Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester  
vols. volumes  
*LTQ* Lexington Theological Quarterly, Lexington, KY  
*SNTSMS* Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series

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