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# Southern African perspectives on the role of womanhood in 1 Timothy 2:11-15

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## **Abstract**

*An overview of contemporary approaches by Southern African scholars indicates that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 has patriarchal overtones which are irreconcilable with socio-political agenda's that aim at a greater leadership involvement of women in church or society. A philological examination of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 brings similarities in argument to light with Matthew 19:4-6, emphasizing the non-cultural basis for the separate roles for women and men that the author of 1 Timothy envisages. An examination of the textual context shows that this different role for womanhood is not abusive, but aims at an environment that is respectful towards women and in harmony with the purposes of humanity's Creator God. To preserve the integrity of the text and its message, either a traditional or a 'wild life' solution is preferable, where 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is allowed to function in the context of its own habitat and worldview.*

## 1. Distinction between the sexes

Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century the social order and philosophy of the Western world reflected a clear distinction between the sexes.<sup>1</sup> This was considered to be a natural order. This was generally agreed on, whether one consulted Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, St. Paul or even Immanuel Kant. Christianity has interpreted passages like 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in a patriarchal way for most of its existence. Women's exclusion from authority and teaching in the early church on the basis of this passage is well documented: "Teaching and any form of public speech is reprehensible and shameful".<sup>2</sup>

Chrysostom (Homily 9 on 1 Timothy)<sup>3</sup> is representative when he writes:

"If it be asked, what has this to do with women of the present day? It shows that the male sex enjoyed the higher honour. Man was first formed; and elsewhere he shows their superiority. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man. Why then does he say this? He wishes the man to have the pre-eminence in every way... The woman taught once, and ruined all. On this account therefore he says, let her not teach."<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Aquinas<sup>5</sup> writes on the basis of this text that "woman is in a state of subjection: wherefore she can have no spiritual jurisdiction, since the

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- 1 Krebs, Uwe, "Geschlechterspezifisch und Interdisziplinarität. Methodologisch-theoretische Anmerkungen", *Anthropologischer Anzeiger*, 63/3(2005), 294.
  - 2 Zamfir, Korinna, "Women Teaching — Spiritually Washing the Feet of the Saints? The Early Christian Reception of 1 Timothy 2:11-12", *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 32/2(2015), 377. Some argue that in the early Church a surprising number of women may have occupied positions of formal leadership. This is sometimes based on the premise that masculine descriptions in the NT equally apply to women. For instance Eisen, Uke E. *Women officeholders in early Christianity: epigraphical and literary studies*. Translated by L. M. Maloney (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 5-6. However, patristic sources suggest that women's ordination and public teaching in situations of mixed company was only advanced in Gnostic and heretical sects, e.g. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1, 13, 2; Tertullian, *De Praescrip. Haeretic.* 41, 5; Firmilian of Caesarea, in Cyprian, *Epist.* 75; Origen, *Fragmentum in 1 Cor.* (74); Epiphanius, *Panarion* 49, 2-3; 78, 23; 79, 2-4. *Didascalia Apostolorum* (15); *Constitutiones Apostolicae*, 3.6,1-2; 9,3-4; Chrysostom, *De Sacerdotio* 2,2.
  - 3 Chrysostom, John, *Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, And Philemon* (Albany: Ages Software, 1997), 893
  - 4 Chrysostom, *In epistulam ii ad Timotheum, homiliae 1-10* (Athens: Τμήμα Πολιτισμικής Τεχνολογίας και Επικοινωνίας, 2006), 35-36: Τί οὖν ταῦτα πρὸς τὰς νῦν; Ναί, φησί· τῆς πλειονοῦς ἀπέλαυσε τιμῆς τὸ τῶν ἀνδρῶν γένος· πρῶτον ἐπλάσθη. Ἀλλαχοῦ δὲ καὶ τὸ μείζον ἐδείξεν, οὕτω λέγων· Οὐ γὰρ ἐπλάσθη ὁ ἀνὴρ διὰ τὴν γυναῖκα, ἀλλ' ἡ γυνὴ διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα. Τί οὖν τοῦτο λέγει; Πολλαχόθεν βουλόμενος τὸν ἄνδρα πρωτεύειν.....Ἐδίδαξεν ἅπασι ἡ γυνὴ, καὶ πάντα κατέστρεψε· διὰ τοῦτο φησι, Μὴ διδάσκέτω.
  - 5 Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica Volume 6 supplement* (Albany: Ages Software, 1997), 166-167

philosopher also says (Ethic. viii) that it is a corruption of public life when the government comes into the hands of a woman. Consequently a woman has neither the key of order nor the key of jurisdiction. Nevertheless a certain use of the keys is allowed to women, such as the right to correct other women who are under them, on account of the danger that might threaten if men were to dwell under the same roof.”<sup>6</sup> Thomas allows for women to teach privately (cf. Priscilla in Acts and the women on resurrection morning), or to baptize in circumstances of emergency, but a woman may not teach publicly in church.

This patriarchal reading of 1 Timothy remained consistent in the church, well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the meantime society had changed. The French revolution of AD1789 was the effective start of morality being defined from and by humanity, on the basis of a rights philosophy. It took another two centuries for male politicians to realize that equal socio-political rights for women were desirable on that basis. But this was effectively secured after the suffragette movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the aftermath of two world wars, and the sexual revolution of the 1960’s and birth prevention liberating women to play a more dominating role in the public workforce. Since the United Nations adopted these and related causes, most Western governments have opted for a “politically correct” philosophy. Consequently, during the last fifty years or so, there has been substantial socio-political pressure in most western societies to abandon non-conformist views. It should therefore come as no surprise that theologians reflect the convictions, pressures and ideologies of their times and have increasingly experienced unease in dealing with what they consider to be “patriarchal teachings” in holy writ.<sup>7</sup> A feeling of embarrassment seems to prevail regarding the traditional interpretation of these passages in the history of the church. This essay will concentrate on one such passage, 1 Timothy 2, verses 11-15. I will first show how this

6 Aquinas, Thomas, *Supplement to Summa Part 3, QXIX, 3*; “ad quantum dicendum quod mulier, secundum Apostolum, est in statu subiectionis, et ideo non potest habere aliquam spiritualem iurisdictionem: quia etiam secundum Philosophum, in VIII Ethic., corruption ubanitatis est quando ad mulierem dominium pervenit. Unde mulier non habet neque clavem ordinis neque clavem iurisdictionis. Sed committitur mulieri aliquis usus clavium: sicut habere correctionem in subditas mulieres, propter periculum quod imminere posset si viri mulieribus cohabitarent.” See Aquinas, Thomas, *Opera Omnia, Tomus duodecimus, Tertia Pars Summae Theologiae* (Roma: S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1906), 39.

7 Cf. Swart, A.E. & Coetzee, C.F.C., “Die skrifbeskouing van feministiese teoloë, in die besonder dié van Fiorenza, Brenner en Van Dijk-Hemmes – beoordeel in die lig van die gereformeerde teologie”, *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 47/1(2013), 1-9.

embarrassment has become vocal in post-colonial Southern Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and then subsequently focus on the philology and theology of this passage.

## 2. Southern African perspectives

Southern Africa is worth an inventory, as the African continent at grass roots level still carries many elements of a traditional society,<sup>8</sup> although this is not necessarily reflected by the post-colonial Western democratic political system: together with English as official language the two lasting contributions of Colonialism to this region. The African continent traditionally has a male dominated hierarchical social structure, which sits well with the orthodox views on “differentiation between the sexes”, seemingly advocated by 1 Timothy. It is therefore interesting to ascertain whether traditional African role-models are encouraged or opposed by educational leaders at Southern African universities. Do research articles on 1 Timothy 2 seek to confirm or overthrow traditional models of separate roles for the sexes? Was the apostle Paul<sup>9</sup> right or outdated? Are male theologians concerned with this topic at all, or if so in what way? Or is it mainly women taking up a cause against oppression doing away with the traditional understanding of the text? Or are there also those who seek relevance and validity of patriarchal teachings in a contemporary context of male domination and abuse?

Natal University’s Gerald West was one of the first Southern African theologians to write about this passage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. True to the continent he uses terms that are normally reserved for a context of lions and wildlife reserves.<sup>10</sup> He considers 1 Timothy a “text of terror” that needs to be tamed. In the end, West is pessimistic about the possibility of taming this particular lion. He concludes:

“There are no easy answers here. Texts like 1 Timothy 2:8-15 are not easily

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8 Cf. Van Niekerk, Attie, *Saam in Afrika* (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1992), 41-47.

9 Early Christian witness to attribute this epistle to St. Paul is as old as Polycarp of Smyrna. See Berding, Kenneth, “Polycarp of Smyrna’s View of the Authorship of 1 and 2 Timothy”, *Vigiliae Christianae* 53/4(1999), 360: “There is a marked tendency in Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians to cluster Pauline citations and allusions in the three passages in which he mentions the name of Paul. This indicates that Polycarp (consciously or unconsciously) considered the references to be Pauline. In addition, the first cluster contains a phrase from 1 Tim. 6:10 followed by one from 1 Tim. 6:7. The second cluster contains a phrase from 2 Tim. 4:10. The most plausible conclusion which can be drawn is that Polycarp considered these also to be Pauline”.

10 West, Gerald, “Taming texts of terror: Reading (against) the gender grain of 1 Timothy”, *Scriptura* 86 (2004), 160-173.

tamed. Margaret Atwood's harrowing tale of a possible future world in which bits of the Bible are used to ensure that women are only saved (literally) through childbirth (1 Timothy 2:15) and in which this text's other clauses are used to legislate that women should "learn in silence with all subjection" is a chilling reminder of just how difficult it is to tame this text." West hopes for an "enabling voice of God" that will help to overcome the disabling dimensions of this text and its interpretations. He is profoundly embarrassed with its contents and suggests that perhaps the voice of God will appear through human action: "We must take up each and every opportunity we get to contest and destabilise – in the public realm of our communities and churches – the interpretations we have inherited and which continue to do so much damage."<sup>11</sup>

UNISA theologian Maretha Jacobs<sup>12</sup> shares West's embarrassment. While she emphasizes the historical-cultural context of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 for the interpretation of this passage, this is ultimately insufficient to 'redeem' the text for our times. Jacobs acknowledges the influence of this passage in the history of the church, but largely evaluates its effect in a negative way. She 'exposes' the patriarchal roots of the cultures in which this text was interpreted for the greatest part of its existence. According to Jacobs, people taking this passage seriously "closely cohered with the view of the Bible as an authoritative book and answer book". She argues that, in order to deal with issues pertaining to women and other contemporary matters "in a more meaningful and humane way", a different view of the Bible and a different view of our relation to our Christian past is necessary. Jacobs regards the Timothy passage as an irredeemable text, which at best confronts the reader with the dark side of his religious roots:

"Why remember, when reminiscences are all but pleasant? To find out where we have come from, we have said. To identify the human, historical reasons which brought us where we are. Confronting and struggling through our Christian past can for women often be demoralising. For it reveals the darker side of the Bible and its ongoing interpretations, for contemporary people, the side which was and is often still rendered invisible by the unholy piety which characterises so much of biblical interpretation, especially in a church context. At times this rouses acute anger. However, if the exposure of the "malemad(e) ness" of this past could lead to arguing and disagreeing with our sources and their patriarchal authors, this confrontation can become a therapeutic exercise, a turning-point and thereby a starting-point for going ahead in a very different way. Together with those males who have also left the patriarchal dispensation behind or never really felt fully at home within it."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> West *ibid*, 172.

<sup>12</sup> Jacobs, Maretha M., "On 1 Timothy 2: 9-15: why still interpret 'irredeemable' biblical texts?", *Scriptura* 88 (2005), 85-100.

<sup>13</sup> Jacobs *ibid*, 98-99.

Elna Mouton and Ellen van Wolde,<sup>14</sup> writing for Stellenbosch University's theological journal, have a similar approach but a different solution. They struggle to make sense of the utterances regarding women in 2:8-15, and particularly the explanation in 2:13-15, from a Western 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective. In the end they argue that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is a context-specific appropriation of the creation story rather than a universal statement on the relationship between women and men: "We therefore suggest that 1 Timothy 2 be regarded as resembling the dynamic processes through which the early faith communities wrestled to understand the will of God for their particular time, while using available language and metaphors from their contexts."<sup>15</sup>

In other words, its usefulness is primarily dated, at best flowing from a concern with the integrity of the Christian gospel within the larger Greco-Roman society at the time. They rightly conclude that attempts to find an allegorical solution (e.g. Kenneth Waters)<sup>16</sup> do not really solve the problem:

"There is, however, no guarantee that such rhetoric would have produced a counter-cultural interpretation of Genesis 2-3. Allegory as sense-making of the past in view of the (patriarchal) present runs the risk of endorsing a hierarchical interpretation of the creation story similar to that of a literal reading. The reason for this is that both the transformative potential and risk of metaphor lies in its reference. If the 'new' in its reference is not recognisable to an audience, it will not shock or surprise, but (unwittingly) support the status quo."<sup>17</sup>

In short, allegory offers no solution, but would have only contributed to the patriarchal cause in the context of the first century.

Mouton and Van Wolde therefore argue that for today only two alternatives are open. The first option is to "boldly read" 1 Timothy 2:8-15 against its patriarchal grain and history of reception, in other words, deliberately interpret the passage against its original intent and context. This might, according to the authors allow the text "to speak afresh in its full (con)textuality" to readers with opposing views today. This is not even a radical reinterpretation, but using a text against its meaning. This may be "bold", but it is questionable from a scholarly and moral perspective.

Their second option is along the lines of Jacobs, namely to acknowledge that the passage is irredeemable for the modern reader. Rather than to try

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14 Mouton, Elna & Ellen van Wolde, "New Life from a pastoral Text of Terror? Gender Perspectives on God and Humanity in 1 Timothy 2", *Scriptura* 111 (2012), 583-601.

15 Mouton & Van Wolde *ibid*, 596.

16 Waters, Kenneth L., "Saved through Childbearing: Virtues as Children in 1 Timothy 2:11-15", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 123/4(2004), 703-735.

17 Mouton & Van Wolde *ibid*, 594.

and interpret a text against its obvious meaning, confirmed by two millennia of church history, one may prefer to regard this passage (or at least some aspects of it) “as irretrievably patriarchal and ‘violent’ without saving it theologically, yet allowing it to function as a mirror for on-going discussions on human dignity and the integrity of creation”.<sup>18</sup>

Another perspective comes from Zimbabwe. While the previous scholars are white theologians, Francis Machingura is a black African man who as a member of a faculty of education is mainly interested in the negative impact of Paul’s injunctions in 1 Timothy 2 on the fight against HIV and sexually transmitted diseases. “We feel that it is our call to interrogate masculine readings of biblical texts like 1 Timothy 2:11 and urge women to speak up and be heard in challenging such readings. The call must involve all weaker groups of society, particularly women, the disabled and children facing HIV and AIDS.”<sup>19</sup> Machingura reflects the ‘bold’ voice of Mouton and Van Woude. He is not so much interested in the message of the text. If necessary the passage must be made to read something completely different than what it says. He feels that African society uses 1 Timothy in an unhelpful way.

“In most cases, when women want to express their feelings, biblical texts (like 1 Timothy 2:11-12) purporting to be ‘inspired words’ of God are invoked to silence women. Yet it is clear that, even though the Bible is the ‘word of God’, it is also the ‘word of men’ which arose in a religiously, economically, politically and culturally defined environment that favoured and gave all the power to men to control the health and reproductive systems of women.”<sup>20</sup>

Machingura suggests that humanity is the legislative authority for its own religion. For all intents and purposes the message of 1 Timothy 2 should not be treated as valid for 21<sup>st</sup> century Africa. “It is our plea and our call that biblical texts such as 1 Timothy 2:11-12 that sound chauvinistic must be read and exegetically analysed in their context rather than being foisted literally on contemporary women. Biblical texts that appear to promote patriarchy at the expense of women must be re-read and re-examined in a liberative way so as to benefit every member of society.”<sup>21</sup>

18 Mouton & Van Wolde *ibid*, 597.

19 Machingura, Francis, “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission (1 Timothy 2: 11): Empowering Women in the Fight against Masculine Readings of Biblical Texts and a Chauvinistic African Culture in the Face of HIV and AIDS”, *Studies in World Christianity* 19/3 (2013), 244.

20 Machingura *ibid*,245.

21 Machingura *ibid*,248.

In Machingura's post-modern approach, exegesis should not be based on the text of Scripture, but on what readers today consider to be helpful, or not. He desperately wants women to be leaders in church and society. If the Bible does not say the 'right' thing to that cause, the church should change it or disarm the passages in Scripture that are perceived to stand in the way. Machingura's call, though motivated by concern for a dire situation he seeks to combat, runs the risk of pressuring scholars into becoming ventriloquists for socio-political causes.

A text based approach from a theological rather than an educational perspective suggests that 1 Timothy 2 intends to have implications for both church services<sup>22</sup> and society in general. NWU Potchefstroom theologian Douw Breed concludes: "From research into the line of thinking in 1 Timothy 2, it has emerged that in this passage Paul addresses the worthy conduct of men and women, according to God's will, conduct that will lead to the salvation of men and to knowledge of the truth. This suggests that it is more likely that Paul addresses in 1 Timothy 2 the conduct of men and women in normal life or in marriage, than their respective behaviour in worship."<sup>23</sup>

Breed's overall conclusion regarding 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is that St. Paul gives prescriptive rules of conduct in married life.<sup>24</sup>

This brief overview of perspectives suggests that regardless of sex, race or orthodoxy African theologians are pessimistic about the possibility to 'redeem' 1 Timothy 2 for anti-patriarchal causes. None of the Southern African scholars mentioned interprets this passage in the traditional way (Chrysostom & Aquinas). Only Breed's exegesis leaves room for traditional African values.

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22 Cf. Yarbrough, Mark M., *Paul's Utilization of Preformed Traditions in 1 Timothy, An evaluation of the Apostle's literary, rhetorical, and theological tactics* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 87.

23 Breed, Douw G., "Die voorskrifte in 1 Timoteus 2:8-15 soos geïnterpreteer vanuit die breër tekstuele konteks van 1 Timoteus", *In die Skriflig* 40/4(2006), 614. Translation by author from Afrikaans original: "Uit die ondersoek na die gedagtestruktuur van 1 Timoteüs 2, het dit geblyk dat Paulus in die gedeelte oor die waardige optrede van mans en vroue in ooreenstemming met God se wil handel – optrede wat tot redding van mense en tot kennis van die waarheid sal lei. Daaruit kan afgelei word dat dit meer waarskynlik is dat Paulus in 1 Timoteus 2 oor die gedrag van mans en vroue in die gewone lewe of in die huwelik handel, as oor hulle optrede in die erediens."

24 Breed *ibid*, 615.

### 3. Philology confirms patriarchal meaning

These Southern African perspectives are also reflected in scholarship elsewhere. Perhaps most clearly by Larry Kreitzer who summarizes:

“We see a brief indication of this when we turn to the passage in 1 Timothy 2:13- 14. There the assumption of Adam as the first historical man underlies the author's point, but 'Adam' begins to take on an additional meaning as well. We see this in the way that the writer delivers his instruction concerning the submission of women to men and bases it upon the Genesis account of the creation of woman from man. Adam and Eve are called into service as historical, and normative, examples of how men and women should interrelate. However, here an additional problem surfaces by the way in which 'Adam' and 'Eve' are used in a manner which betrays a male-centred culture. In short, the story presented in 1 Timothy smacks of the worst kind of chauvinism. The author has interpreted the Genesis stories in such a way as to support his understanding of the natural hierarchy between the sexes.”<sup>25</sup>

Even a reinterpretation of the Timothy passage is attempted, the results are unconvincing. At best it justifies a possible adjustment of elements of the text, but it does not warrant a proclamation that the overall picture has changed.

Jamin Hübner,<sup>26</sup> for instance, attempts a reinterpretation based on the Greek verb for exercising authority in 1 Timothy 2:12: διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω οὐδὲ ἀυθεντεῖν ἀνδρὸς, ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ (“I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent”). Hübner argues against “exercising authority” as translation and insists on a negative or ‘perjorative’ interpretation. Admittedly, this is how the King James version translates ἀυθεντεῖν, “to usurp authority”, probably following the Vulgate: *docere autem mulieri non permitto, neque dominari in virum, sed esse in silentio*. If “dominari” was considered to be a proper Latin rendering in days when both Latin and Koine Greek were still spoken as native languages, it is likely to be at least a possible translation. Still, it must be mentioned that one of the best classical Greek authorities firmly insists on “to have full power or authority over” as translation for ἀυθεντεῖν and takes care to specifically refer to 1 Timothy 2:12 as example.<sup>27</sup> Bauer & Aland take a similar approach

25 Kreitzer, Larry, “Adam as Analogy: Help or Hindrance?”, *New Blackfriars* 70/828(1989), 278

26 Hübner, Jamin, “Translating ἀυθεντεῖν (*authenteō*) in 1 Timothy 2:12”, *Priscilla Papers* 29/2(2012), 16-26.

27 Liddell, H.G. & Scott, R. *A Greek-English lexicon, with a revised supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 275.

with “herrschen”.<sup>28</sup> Collins takes it in a profoundly positive meaning, as he believes that in Greco-Roman society authority was not so much about obedience, but about knowing one’s place in the greater whole.<sup>29</sup> Without observance of one’s distinct place, society would be negatively affected.

Note however, that even when one allows a negative thrust for αὐθεντεῖν, it is very hard to argue the same for διδάσκειν. In the Latin Vulgate translation “teaching” is not regarded in a negative way and neither is it in the English KJV. Even if the text were only directed against women *unlawfully* usurping authority over men, this would not change the fact that the Timothy passage is far from ‘gender’ neutral. There is no evidence in this otherwise cohesively structured epistle<sup>30</sup> that there are any lawful ways in which wives can exercise authority over their husbands. Or, ‘women’ over ‘men in general’, as Gordon Fee points out that ‘women’, in this context, is used without the definite article, implying or suggesting a broader context than merely wives and marriage.<sup>31</sup> This also weakens Breed’s thesis that was discussed earlier.<sup>32</sup>

Köstenberger’s rule for positive parallel structures applies,<sup>33</sup> as in this particular case Hübner requires “teaching” to be a parallel negative entity. For his anti-patriarchal interpretation to work. He wants the passage to argue against women doing *bad* teaching and against women abusing authority *to lead others into sin*. Which could be as easily said of men, and eureka, arguably the perfect gender neutral solution. Woman doing proper teaching of man and woman exercising authority over man (as long as she does not tempt them into sin like Eve did), would then be quite all right.

Still, this is a rather desperate intellectual exercise. At micro level with a sentence read in isolation from the passage and the rest of the epistle and its context, it seems to work. But is this convincing? No, the apostolic motivation from Genesis that follows the prohibition in verse 12 is as definite as it is

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28 Bauer, W., Aland, K. & Aland, B., *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. 6., völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1988), 242.

29 Collins, Raymond F., *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary* (Louisville: John Knox press, 2002), 69.

30 See Reed, J.T., “Cohesive ties in 1 Timothy: in Defense of the Epistle’s Unity”, *Neotestamentica* 26/1(1992), 146.

31 Fee, Gordon D., *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 73.

32 See Douw G. Breed, “Die voorskrifte in 1 Timoteus 2:8-15 soos geïnterpreteer vanuit die breër tekstuele konteks van 1 Timoteus”, *In die Skriflig* 40/4(2006), 597-616.

33 See Köstenberger, Andreas J. & Thomas R. Schreiner, *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1Timothy 2:9-15. 2d ed.* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 53-84.

general. This is not a pronouncement against a few dominating busybodies, but one that concerns womanhood in general. The fact of the matter is that the apostle argues against all teaching by women in church.<sup>34</sup> If anything, it is this very teaching of men by women in Christian congregations that the author of 1 Timothy considers “unsuitable domineering behaviour” and “usurping authority”. Heinz-Werner Neudorfer explains that the concepts of teaching and taking up authority are closely related. Teaching in mixed company implies taking up authority over men, and it is exactly this, what the apostle prohibits: “Der Lehrende stellt nicht nur sein Denkvermögen aus, sondern er gebietet. Die lehrende Frau geböte also dem Mann, und dazu gibt Paulus ihr Erlaubnis nicht”.<sup>35</sup>

That this passage hardly lends itself for a non-patriarchal reinterpretation is also clear from the specific road to redemption that Paul recommends for women. He does not suggest proper teaching and non-domineering ways of taking authority. His answer could be argued to be feminism’s worst nightmare: “she will be saved through childbearing” (σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας) and that only if she continues to aspire to faith, love and purity in all modesty. Waters argued for ‘Childbearing’ in 1 Timothy 2:15 as a metaphor for ‘virtuesbearing’,<sup>36</sup> but at a philological level his translation

34 In the early Church Paul’s command that women should not teach in the congregations, also applied to prophecy (1 Cor 11). Origen argued that the prophesying of women both in Old and New Testament was of a private nature and did not involve public teaching or taking up authority over men, *Fragmenta ex commentariis in epistulam i ad Corinthios* (74 xiv 34–35): Ὡς γὰρ πάντων λεγόντων καὶ δυναμένων λέγειν, ἐὰν ἀποκάλυψις αὐτοῖς γένηται, φησὶν Αἱ γυναῖκες ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις σιγάτωσαν. ταύτης δὲ τῆς ἐντολῆς οὐκ ἦσαν οἱ τῶν γυναικῶν μαθηταί, οἱ μαθητευθέντες Πρισκίλλη καὶ Μαξιμίλλη, οὐ Χριστοῦ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τῆς νύμφης, ἀλλ’ ὁμῶς εὐγνωμονῶμεν καὶ πρὸς τὰ πιθανὰ ἐκείνων ἀπαντῶντες. τέσσαρές φασι θυγατέρες ἦσαν Φιλίππου τοῦ εὐαγγελιστοῦ καὶ προεφήτεον. εἰ δὲ προεφήτεον, τί ἀποτόν ἐστι καὶ τὰς ἡμετέρας, ὡς φασὶν ἐκεῖνοι, προφήτιδας προφητεύειν; ταῦτα δὲ λύσομεν. πρῶτον μὲν λέγοντες ὅτι Αἱ ἡμετέρας προεφήτεον, δεῖξατε τὰ σημεῖα τῆς προφητείας ἐν αὐταῖς; δεύτερον δὲ εἰ καὶ προεφήτεον αἱ θυγατέρες Φιλίππου, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ἔλεγον· οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν τοῦτο ἐν ταῖς Πράξεσι τῶν Ἀποστόλων. ἀλλ’ οὐδ’ ἐν τῇ παλαιᾷ· Δεββώρα μεμαρτύρηται προφητικῶς εἶναι, λαβουῖα δὲ Μαριάμ ἡ ἀδελφὴ Ἀαρὼν τὸ τύμπανον ἐξήρχε τῶν γυναικῶν. ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἂν εὐροῖς ὅτι Δεββώρα ἐδημηγόρησεν εἰς τὸν λαὸν ὡς περ Ἰερεμίας καὶ Ἡσαΐας· οὐκ ἂν εὐροῖς ὅτι Ὀλδὰ προφητικῶς οὐσα ἐλάλησεν ἡ λαὸν ἀλλ’ ἐνὶ πινὶ ἔλθοντι πρὸς αὐτήν. ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ ἄνα γέγραπται Ἄννα προφητιῶν, θυγάτηρ Φανουήλ, ἐκ φυλῆς Ἀβραάμ· ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐλάλησεν. ἴνα οὖν καὶ δοθῆ ἕκ σημεῖοι προφητικοῦ εἶναι προφητικῶς γυνή, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπεται ταύτη λαλεῖν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ. ὅτε ἐλάλησε Μαριάμ ἡ προφητικῶς ἀρχουσα ἦν τινῶν γυναικῶν· αἰσχροὺν γὰρ γυναικὶ λαλεῖν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ, καὶ διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπεται ἀπλῶς ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ αὐθεντεῖν ἀνδρό.

35 Neudorfer, Heinz-Werner, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an Timotheus* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2004), 130.

36 Waters *ibid*, 734.

“All women and men must give birth to and continue in faith, love, holiness, and temperance in order to be saved”<sup>37</sup> lacks support in the textual context or the reception and history of this passage. And as Mouton and Van der Wolde already pointed out, this hardly helps the cause against a patriarchal reading, because this metaphor would only reinforce existing traditionalist conditions.

But taken literally in context, this “childbearing salvation” is the final patriarchal sting, as it shows that according to the author of 1 Timothy, a woman will be saved in her very relation to her husband. Admittedly, this phrase can also be translated as “But she will be kept safe through <the ordeal of> childbearing”,<sup>38</sup> but this would only intensify the patriarchal nature of this passage. The conditional clause causes that that a woman’s survival of childbirth now becomes dependent on her faith, love, purity and overall modesty. From a feminine perspective this would make the passage worse, not better. It is the equivalent of “Don’t forget that lots of women die in childbirth and you might be next”. It also emphasizes that physical union with a husband might be deadly, but that a woman may still survive all real and present dangers if she has enough faith. This message spoken in a society where at least one out of ten women died in childbirth is rather nightmarish. If a woman doesn’t survive the consequences a bodily relationship with a man, one may infer it is due to her lack of faith, love, purity or modesty. Only a 21<sup>st</sup> century male theologian could come up with a solution that carries these implications.

Perhaps the most significant for this debate, is the fact that the structure of the apostle’s argument for the silence and submission of women is built on non-cultural factors.

<sup>11</sup> Let a woman learn in silence<sup>39</sup> with full submission. <sup>12</sup> I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve; <sup>14</sup> and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. <sup>15</sup> Yet she will be saved through

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<sup>37</sup> Waters *ibid*, 735.

<sup>38</sup> See Hubbard, Moyer, “Kept safe through childbearing: maternal mortality, justification by faith, and the social setting of 1 Timothy 2:15”, *Journal Evangelical Theological Society* 55/4 (2012), 743-62; cf. Fuhrmann, Sebastian, “Saved by childbirth: struggling ideologies, the female body and a placing of 1 Tim. 2:15a”, *Neotestamentica* 44/1(2010), 31-46.

<sup>39</sup> Paul’s view is not unlike that of Aristotle who says that it is a special attribute of women to be silent but of men to command, quoting a poet who insists: γυναικι κόσμον ἢ σιγή φέρει; freely translated as “silence is a woman’s glory” (*Politics* I.V). See Aristotle, *Politics*. Loeb Classical Library 264 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944), 64-65.

childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (1 Tim. 2:11-15, NRSV)<sup>40</sup>

To warrant his silencing of women in church, the apostle takes his readers back to the prehistorical creation events that are revealed in Genesis. For Paul these have repercussions for all times. In his apostolic teaching it is decisive that in God's role model or prototype, man was created first and woman only subsequently as a help for man (Gen. 2:20). In Paul's view, the distinct places of the sexes in the congregation of Ephesus, or wherever for that matter, should be naturally modelled after this same authority structure.

After pointing to God's creation purposes and the order of creation, Paul moves on to mankind's fall into sin (Gen. 3). The historical events leading up to the fall with God's subsequent curse are a second reason to warrant the silencing of women in church and to prevent them from usurping authority over men. 'Woman' (ἡ δὲ γυνή: generic use, not 'Eve') took the initiative in humanity's disobedience against God and actively took prohibited fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. She also gave to her husband, who ate as well. While Adam was ultimately responsible and accountable as head of woman, it is clear that 'the weaker sex' took the active role in ruining humanity's relationship with its Creator.

Significantly, there is a parallel for this creation-based differentiation between the sexes in the Gospels. The Lord Jesus provides a similar pattern of argument in his view of marriage. Particularly Mark's Gospel places these teachings within a context of little children and Jesus' protective concern and welcoming attitude towards them. Although not as a sandwich, similar emphasis is also found in the parallel passage in Matthew. While not outspoken, the structure of the narratives suggests that Jesus' teachings on marriage and divorce were also with wider family life and the vulnerability of children in mind. In the Gospels these teachings are not argued on the basis of culture or general humanistic values, but Jesus states that he derives his view from God's revelation about the historical creation of mankind. This is particularly clear in Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus specifically refers to a written record of revelation (Matt. 19:4-6):

<sup>4</sup> "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'<sup>15</sup> and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and

40 1 Tim. 2 (NA28): 11 Γυνή ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ μανθανέτω ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ· 12 διδάσκειν δὲ γυναῖκι οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω οὐδὲ αὐθεντεῖν ἄνδρος, ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ. 13 Ἀδὰμ γὰρ πρῶτος ἐπλάσθη, εἶτα Εὐά. 14 καὶ Ἀδὰμ οὐκ ἠπατήθη, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν· 15 σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας, ἐὰν μείνωσιν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ καὶ ἀγιασμῷ μετὰ σωφροσύνης·

mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Like the author of 1 Timothy, Jesus points to the record of God's revelation in Scripture as the source and authority for his views. Like Paul he also takes this creation account as historical and with enduring effects. Therefore these events in the Genesis narrative are taken as normative, even though there were no humans present or able to observe and record. In that sense the creation stories are prehistoric, and Jesus and Paul take God's (and Moses') Word for it. This makes their views entirely reliant on the reliability of God's revelation in Scripture.

Jesus' line of reasoning in Matthew is very similar to the argument in 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Paul's reasons for insisting on public submission of women, in church or elsewhere, are not cultural but historical:

- 1) His first argument points to God's purpose in creating woman originally as a support for man, Genesis 2:20-25 (NRSV):

<sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. <sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." <sup>24</sup> Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

The NRSV introduces the word "partner," but this suggestion of equality is not found in the Hebrew or the LXX, which both read "an help meet for him" (cf. KJV).

- 2) Also Paul's second argument is founded outside temporary cultural circumstances: the role of the woman in humanity's original rebellion and God's subsequent curse on creation, which would historically be overcome by the continuation of life, Genesis 3:15-16 (NRSV):

<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." <sup>16</sup> To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

So although the cultural Greco-Roman context may have played a role of some sort, and may have helped Paul and his readers (including Jews with similar views) to embrace these views more readily, it does not feature in the apostle's argument. Had Paul motivated the submission and silence of women on the basis of not giving offence to others; that would have been a different scenario entirely. However, he does not. Paul's argument lies in God creation purposes and the historical events leading to the post-Fall condition of this present world. Exegetical options for any other than patriarchal use of this passage are rather limited.

This being said, it is also important to put the question whether Paul's patriarchal teachings in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 automatically equals a call for discrimination of women, exposing them to health risks and all sorts of abuse? The short answer to this is "no", and the long answer has been given by others already.<sup>41</sup> Within the context of Paul's worldview, it is the main thrust of this pastoral letter that all Christian conduct, especially by male leaders, should be marked by "love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). He explains this at the very start of his epistle:

"But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). In a practical way this is expressed in man's respectful attitude to women. Timothy is enjoined by Paul to speak to "to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters—with absolute purity" (1 Tim. 5:2). The care for widows is especially encouraged: "And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8).

This shows that while the apostle's teaching calls for distinct roles for women and men, this is not in any way aimed at promoting a situation of an abusive male leadership. The very opposite is called for: a safe environment for women, dominated by love, social care and sexual purity.

#### **4. Conclusion: a way forward?**

An overview of approaches of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 by 21<sup>st</sup> century scholars from Southern Africa has shown that none defend traditional African values on that basis of this passage, or at all. Instead nearly all contemporary contributions are vocal in their support for socio-political agenda's that aims at a greater leadership involvement of women in church or society. At the

41 E.g. Van Houwelingen, P.H.R., 'Macht, onmacht en volmacht in 1 Timoteüs 2:8-15', HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies 68/1(2012), 1-9.

same time all theologians concerned are pessimistic that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 lends itself for that purpose. However, attempts to 'redeem' this passage have been shown to fail at a linguistic or theological level. A philological examination of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 indicates that this failure is largely due to the non-cultural arguments which are employed by the author of this epistle, who points to God's revelation about a pre-historical creation order and fall of mankind into sin as basis for the separate roles for women and men that he advocates. It is also clear that, in the context of St. Paul's worldview, these distinctions are not perceived discriminatory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century sense. His admonitions are directed at women taking God's intended place, as all men and women are pieces of this jigsaw puzzle of a fallen world. One may not agree with 1 Timothy's perspective, but its attitude towards women is one of concern and the greatest respect.

As a result there seem only two viable ways forward to come to terms with this passage in a 21<sup>st</sup> century situation, in or out of Africa:

- 1) A traditional solution. This approach adopts 1 Timothy's view of history and revelation and prefers the traditional interpretation of the Church and the cultural heritage of the African continent over and against the prevailing Western socio-political pressures of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is not a popular solution, but it carries textual weight and scholarly integrity.
- 2) The 'wildlife solution'. A realisation that failures to 'redeem' this passage were not caused by a want of trying or lack of scholarship, leaves the alternative of preferring the socio-political paradigm over and against the teachings of 1 Timothy. Rather than to try and tame an African lion, and using Scriptural primary source against its message and context, the preferred course would be to leave the 'text of terror' in his natural habitat. Lions belong to the African Savanna.

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