

TRANSCRIPT

We know that, for instance, from the Pauline letters that all members had received the gifts of the spirit; therefore, there was equality in and through the spirit in early Christian communities. So women were full members insofar as they received the spirit. And we have an old, probably baptismal formula, which says that neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free—and I would go with Krister Stendahl, with the translation, not “male and female,” but “husband and wife.” (Because slaves and free are also women and men and Jews and Greeks are also women and men so the translation already is misleading.) That is for the Pauline communities.

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We know from the Gospels, we have different Jesus sayings that insist on that their community should not be like those who have power in their surrounding world. You should not have those who are first and lord it over the people but anybody who wants to be first needs to be serving for all, needs to be servant to all. So we have in the Jesus traditions, in the Gospels, already this saying that is multiplied, that the structures of the community should not be the same as the structures of the Greco-Roman world, but it should be so that whoever wants to be great should enable the equality of all. So we have both traditions.

So we know from the Pauline letters that women were apostles, women were diakonae*—and that does not mean diakonos like in our day, Paul calls himself diakonos—that women were leaders of house churches, women were missionaries and founded churches; so we know that all these offices, all the gifts of the spirit men had, women had. We also know from the Gospel literature that women were followers of Jesus. The leading figure here is Mary of Magdala who even in the so-called patristic periods still was called “apostle to the apostles.” So the women [who] went with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem where the first witnesses of the execution of Jesus and the first witnesses to the resurrection.

*Note: Many scholars think that women were both deacons and apostles, because Paul uses those terms explicitly and applies them to women. By “deacon” Paul appears to mean that women were Christian leaders in their own right, and that they held service roles within house churches—not “serving” men dinner, but “serving” a community of Christians in the same way that a male deacon would serve a community. Some conservative Bible translations change Paul’s term “deacon” when it refers to a woman to “deaconess;” in later tradition a “deaconess” was either a deacon’s wife, or a woman whose liturgical role was confined to helping at baptism. But when Paul uses the term to refer to a woman, he doesn’t give the feminine form but the male. The point is twofold: a) he doesn’t think a female deacon is the wife of a deacon, and b) he doesn’t find a female deacon less important than a male deacon.