

### **THIRD CENTURY WOMEN PRIESTS AND ST. PAUL**

Beginning in the Greco-Roman First Century BCE, Jewish and Christian women began to come forward as religious organizers in their communities. Skills as household managers were applied to running Jewish Synagogues and Christian churches in their private homes. (Discussion of Greco-Roman Jewish women to follow.)

By the Third Century, female widows had become powerful church leaders (www, 1- 5). In a study by H. Achelis, he speaks of Christian women as prominent leaders and prophets (www, 30) ordained “by the apostolic canons [of] the church” (www, 49, n. 34), but the institutionalization of basilicas and monarchical bishops in the Fourth Century, challenged home churches and female priests. Additional information from *Didascalia*, speaks to the controversy regarding female widows and priestessing and the desire of the church to bring all ministry under the control and authority of the bishop. Not only were women unable to minister or baptize, but also most all of the former priestessing activities were significantly curtailed (www, 147-149). (This foreshadowed centuries of fiercely contested challenges to the eligibility of women’s spiritual and religious rights.) (www, 1- 5, 30-37, 49, 147-149).

As in all congregations of God’s people, women ‘should not address the meeting. They have no license to speak, but should keep their place as the law directs. If there is something they want to know, they can ask their own husbands at home. It is a shocking thing that a woman should address the congregation. (I Cor 14.34-35.)

In the polemical writings of St. Paul, he “instructed women to keep silent during public discussions” (www, 6.) therefore preventing them from teaching any longer (www, 6). He believed that a woman should speak in the household, but not in the assembly (Cor 11:7-10) and she should wear veils (I Cor II: 1-16) as a public statement of subordination to her father, husband, or master (www, 41, n. 47). He said that a woman without a veil “would be perceived as refusing their female role of passivity, deference, and submission to authority” (www, 145). Men did not have the same restrictions, “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is in the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Cor 11:7-10) (www, 145). It was thought necessary to control women predicated on their shame for not having been created in the image and glory of God as men were (www, 145). (www, 6, 41, n. 47, 145.)

For further information on the development of Jewish and Christian priestessing, see BCE entry: First Century BCE-Sixth Century CE, Summary of Female Priests and Rabbis. For CE entries, see: 45, Roman Prisca and Aquila, and Home Churches; 70, Destruction of Jerusalem Temple; Third Century, Tertullian and Cainite; Fourth Century, Basilicas and Female subjection; 354-430, Saint Augustine; 1483-1546, Martin Luther, German Reformation; 1945, Nag Hammadi Manuscript; 1952, Women and Catholic Theology; 1972, First Woman Rabbi Ordained, United States; 1976, Vatican Declaration on Women and the

Priesthood; 1992, Ordination of Women Priests; and 1999, Rebecca Cohen,  
Second Generation Female Minister.

GSA IMAGE PENDING.