

Foreword

The complex and contested Corinthian situation prompted Paul to address the role of women in the community's worship at some length in his first extant letter to that community, principally in 1 Cor 11:2–16 and, much more briefly, in 14:33–35. Needless to say, these discussions have subsequently become critical points of reference as the church has pivoted in the modern era to reevaluate its understanding of gender, along with its implications. But the reconstruction of the original sense of ancient texts is always a fraught business, and is, in addition, difficult to disentangle from the concerns and locations of the modern scholars undertaking the reconstruction. Hence I view Lucy Peppiatt's attempt to reinterpret these texts here in a way that is more sensitive to a live ongoing debate at Corinth, with the voices of the women themselves being seen in the text and thereby heard, as both bold and significant (so here she stands—to a degree—in the same interpretative trajectory as Antoinette Clark Wire's provocative work¹).

Methodologically, this is a step beyond a rather flat account of Paul's text that is too strongly influenced by the tacit view that he is pronouncing himself in all his texts for posterity. I do not deny of course that his texts are important for posterity, but they were written in a unique way within the NT that we tend to lose touch with, namely, as fundamentally occasional, and hence lively, interactions with other, at times cantankerous, points of view. So I view Peppiatt's work as an important recovery of this dimension within their original production. Scholars frequently pay lip service to this dimension, but Peppiatt is really developing it. This is where her reading "lives," and, as a result, it is a lively, dramatic, gritty account.

1. *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

However, this book is an important methodological step forward in another respect. Peppiatt brings training in theology and argumentation to bear on the analysis of Paul. New Testament scholars are at times embarrassingly weak in these disciplines, which are actually critical for good exegetical work. Paul crafts arguments, generally in theological terms, and their assessment is therefore an important part of broader interpretation. So it is important to challenge the New Testament guild with scholarship and readings that are more sophisticated in terms of the actual argumentative issues, and Peppiatt does so. The result is an especially distinctive and helpful contribution to the broader exegetical discussion (at which point she is rather distinct from Wire's work, and similar treatments). Peppiatt's purview is theologically informed and argumentatively sensitive, but also deeply constructive.

At the end of the day, I suspect that Peppiatt's conclusions will be controversial. Not everyone will react well to her suggestions, and I have no doubt that she will be the target of criticism. But in my experience, much of this can be the proverbial heat not light, thrown off by defenders of readings that undergird important personal locations but whose exegetical foundations are eroding. Having said this, Peppiatt's reading will probably not solve everything. There are still some issues to be ironed out. But what I would say is that without taking a step in the direction that Peppiatt is traveling, these problems cannot be solved. So it is a highly strategic argument and treatment. I expect it to break the broader discussion open in a new and constructive way.

Douglas Campbell

Professor of New Testament, Duke Divinity School