

○ **GENDER TROUBLE IN CORINTH**

QUE(E)RYING CONSTRUCTS OF GENDER IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

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Queer theory closely scrutinises gender behaviour labelled as ‘normal’ (or ‘natural’), often utilising the work of Judith Butler. Her theory of ‘performativity’ demonstrates that it is when the ‘normal’ is unsettled through practices of ‘collective disidentification’ that we can see most clearly how indeterminate gender actually is, as the categories of body, sex, gender and sexuality are disrupted and shown to be problematic. This paper proposes that a connection can be made between this notion of performativity and 1 Cor 11:2-16, one of the most difficult passages to decipher in the New Testament. Previous studies of this passage have focused primarily either on the surface matters of correct attire for worship that occasions Paul’s arguments (hairstyles or head coverings?) or on the exegetical issues concerning Paul’s vocabulary (what does he mean by *kephale*?). The result has been the spawning of countless articles, with scholars divided on every issue. This paper proposes that an approach is needed which examines more closely the gender issues fundamental to this text. The Corinthians, having been made ‘one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal 3:28), are possibly seeking to blur any gender distinctions in their public worship, a site of authoritative ‘repetitive performance’. In response, Paul labels this behaviour ‘shameful’ and by referring to what is ‘proper’, and to what ‘nature’ teaches concerning what is ‘dishonouring’, seeks to prescribe heterosexually organised gender difference. Judith Butler’s notion of ‘performativity’ might therefore enable a new que(e)rying of this passage.

Whatever it was that the Corinthians were doing with their hair or headcoverings, while praying and prophesying during public worship, it was something that greatly disturbed Paul. And in 1 Cor 11:2-16 he addresses this issue, creating a text that while presumably clear to the Corinthians, has confused and confounded readers ever since. It is widely agreed that this passage is one of the most difficult to decipher in the New Testament. Scholars describe this passage, at best, as ‘challenging’ (Christian 1999: 291) and ‘intriguing’ (Delobel 1986: 369), while at worst Paul is criticised for being ‘inarticulate, incomprehensible and inconsistent’ (Bassler 1992: 327). In his commentary, Hans Conzelmann makes the snide comment that this passage ‘is probably a piece that was first talked over and sketched out in the schoolroom, if indeed it was not entirely composed there’ (Conzelmann 1975: 182).

The majority of studies on this passage focus either on the surface matter of correct attire for worship that occasions Paul’s arguments – primarily whether or not the issue concerns hairstyles¹ or head coverings² – or on the exegetical matters concerning Paul’s use of such terminology as *kephale* (‘head’).³ The result has been the spawning of countless articles, with scholars divided on every issue. As an example of the divergence in views on these matters, Ben Witherington (1995) states in his commentary that he sees the issue as clearly involving both the men and the women and that it is without doubt about headcoverings (232, 238), while on the other hand, Richard Hays (1997) equally forcefully declares that Paul only mentions the men hypothetically and that the issue is without doubt about hairstyles (185).

At a deeper level, however, this passage also raises fundamental questions of gender and sexuality. This is discernible not only from the content of Paul's argument – his theological discussion of the ontological and functional relationships between men, women and God – but also in the various hermeneutical stances taken by scholars approaching this text. Most scholars would now agree that objectivity when approaching any text is a myth, and that we must acknowledge our own backgrounds and personal preferences when engaging in any biblical study. However, 1 Cor 11:2-16 has been a playground for such biases – and they have tended to run wild. Liberal scholars have used this passage to illustrate their belief that Paul is 'the only certain and consistent spokesman for the liberation and equality of women in the New Testament' (Scroggs 1972: 283). More conservative-minded scholars have just as strongly declared on the basis of this passage that men have a more direct and thus closer relationship to God than women, who are 'only the reflected glory of man, not God', and who therefore 'should not undertake such a direct confrontation of unequals' (Meier 1978: 222).

This paper proposes that in order to make progress on deciphering this text, rather than further adding to 'an already bulky dossier of literature on the passage' (Engberg-Pedersen 1991: 679), an approach is needed which critically examines these gender issues, both in an examination of the content of Paul's argument and also in terms of the ideological positions taken by the scholars themselves. While not always obvious to those working on this passage, these issues emerge in three main areas. As it is the third of these areas that I wish to address in this paper, I will only briefly mention the first two for the sake of context.

The first issue concerns the question of *whose* behaviour Paul is addressing; that of the women only, or that of both the men and the women? The majority of scholars – whether approaching the text from an egalitarian/feminist⁴ or subordinationist/conservative position⁵ – have simply assumed (usually without any justification) that the text is dealing solely with 'problematic women' (MacDonald 1990: 164). The specific mention of women in this passage appears to trap these scholars into an androcentric framework where the role of women is singled out as a special historical problem, and the behaviour of the men is left unexamined.⁶ Explanations for the women's behaviour are given in terms that are gender specific and are not adequate in the broader community context of which they are a part. The various reconstructions offered by Antionette Wire, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Dennis MacDonald can all be faulted to a greater or lesser extent on this point.⁷

Another group of scholars, however, while also confident that Paul is addressing only the behaviour of the women, are more explicit in their decision to disregard the role of the men in Paul's argument. They dismiss any potential behaviour as hypothetical, despite the lack of any textual or historical reasons for supposing that this is the case.⁸ They openly declare, for example, that, 'There is no reason for supposing that men at Corinth had been making this mistake in the congregation' (Robertson and Plummer 1914: 229), and that, 'The Corinthian men were not guilty of doing this unseemly action' (Zens 1981: 5). That the women would be making such a 'mistake' and engaging in 'unseemly' behaviour is, of course, taken for granted. Again it would seem that there is a 'masculine bias' at work which 'focuses on Paul's injunction for women and assumes that the injunction for men had no occasion' (Oster 1988: 483).

The second area in which we see issues of gender and sexuality emerge is in the suggestion by some scholars that the issue underlying Paul's argument is, as CK Barrett (1971) famously

describes it, a ‘horror of homosexuality’ (257). The failure of so many scholars to understand Paul’s logic – and to deem this passage so troublesome – is said to be due to a failure to correctly identify the problem Paul was facing; recognition that the issue is one of ‘male homosexuals presiding at the liturgy’ (Murphy-O’Connor 1988: 279, 289) supposedly clarifies matters.

However, while this suggestion may hold some validity (although we do not have time here to consider this), it also raises many issues. For those scholars who are prepared to explore gender relations and the sexual mentalities of the first-century Mediterranean world,⁹ there is a need for sound theoretical reflection – yet work done in the field of New Testament studies has tended to be particularly poor at considering such methodological issues.¹⁰ Analysis of the work done by those scholars who see a suggestion of homosexuality in this passage¹¹ reveals insufficient attention paid to the cultural construction of gender in a first-century Greco-Roman context. In particular there is a tendency to gloss over the complex interrelationship between effeminacy, masculinity, and homosexuality¹² and to simplistically equate effeminacy with homosexuality; the long hair on men which Paul condemns as shameful (verses 4? and 14) is seen as indicative of a condemnation of homosexuality.¹³ Such a conclusion in itself raises another methodological concern – the anachronistic placement of 20th century categories of sexual orientation on the first-century data, where it seems rather that sexual *acts* were categorised, not *people* (Halperin 1990).¹⁴

This brief discussion of two of the three areas from which issues of gender and sexuality emerge in this passage leads us directly to the third area of this study – and the focus of this paper – an examination of this text utilising Judith Butler’s theory of ‘performativity.’¹⁵ For some this may seem an odd pairing – Judith Butler, a lesbian philosopher, named by *The Face* magazine as one of the most influential thinkers of the late 20th century (McMillen 1997: A14), whose work has inspired much of queer theory (Jagose 1996),¹⁶ and Paul, 1st century apostle named by many feminists as one of the great all-time chauvinists, whose writing has had a detrimental impact on Western women’s lives for almost 2000 years.¹⁷ In particular there is the unlikely – and somewhat uneasy – pairing of two texts; Butler’s first major work,¹⁸ *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1999, originally published in 1990), and a passage from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. However, this intersection of biblical studies and poststructuralist theory creates a marginal zone of critical inquiry, something which Butler reminds us is required when examining the complex issue of gender (Butler 1999: xxxiii).¹⁹ My suspicion is, therefore, that the fruit of such an ‘unnatural’ pairing – as ‘abject’ as it might be to some²⁰ – has the potential to enable a new que(e)rying of this passage.

Before delving into the details of such a ‘queer’ reading, it is probably wise to refresh the audience’s memory of both Butler’s theory of performativity and also the situation at Corinth.

It is not easy to summarise Butler’s theory of performativity. In fact, such was the confusion over the concept when *Gender Trouble* was first received that Butler’s second book, *Bodies That Matter*, was in many ways a clarification of her initial work (Butler 1993: xii).²¹ Part of the reason for such difficulty may in fact be intentional – a resistance to definition based on the principle that such a process inevitably involves exclusion (Butler 1999: 6-8; Butler 1993: ix).²² We thus need to bear in mind Butler commentator Sara Salih’s warning about Butler’s work that, ‘the reader should approach what *do* look like definitions with caution, since they are not meant to be authoritative or final’ (Salih 2002: 14). So what does Butler herself have to say about per-

formativity? She states: ‘performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate “act,” but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names’ (Butler 1993: 2). In other words, it is the *power of discourse* to produce the very phenomena it regulates and constrains. As Butler explains, it is not the idea that one can wake up in the morning, peruse the closet for one’s ‘gender of choice’, don that garment for the day and then discard it at night (Butler 1993: x). In her preface to the 10th anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble* (1999) she notes that one of the difficulties with defining this concept is that her own ideas have changed over time, and she offers a more nuanced definition:

In the first instance, then, the performativity of gender revolves around ... the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration (Butler 1999: xivf).

Gender then, is ‘always a doing’ (Butler 1999: 33) – ‘the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’ (43-44). Performativity is that process of producing gender. And (so far) the gender that has been produced fits the binary framework of relations between ‘men’ and ‘women’ – that which conforms to a heterosexual matrix. The specific formations of power that construct these categories of ontology are designated by Butler as the ‘defining institutions’ of ‘phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality’ (Butler 1999: xxix).²³ Through the language of these institutions gender identities are created and constituted; there is no gender identity that precedes language. Or, as Salih puts it, ‘it is not that an identity “does” discourse or language, but the other way round – language and discourse “do” gender’ (Salih 2002: 64).

At this point we also need to recall the situation at Corinth with regard to what (some of) the men and women may have been doing in public worship that so offended Paul (and possibly some members of the congregation). Many scholars and commentators on this passage see a connection with Paul’s teaching in Gal 3:28 (Wire 1990: 184ff; Fiorenza 1983: 205-241; Fee 1987: 270; Thiselton 2000: 829; MacDonald 1988: 280-281).²⁴ Paul’s initial teaching during the foundation of the church at Corinth is suggested to have included this baptismal formula, indicating the equal standing of all before God in the new community, through baptism into Christ. In this epistle he explicitly refers to Gal 3:28 in 12.13 (and less explicitly in 7:17-24). However, he (deliberately?) does not refer to the third pair of ‘male and female’, perhaps suggesting that this was an area of tension within the community and an area where Paul wishes to provide some corrective teaching. It appears that the Corinthians, ‘having been made one in Christ’, are moving beyond Paul’s teaching by rejecting the semiotic conventions of gender distinction with regard to their clothing and/or coiffure. If there was now neither male nor female, in both social and spiritual dimensions, then they felt free to demonstrate this reality by blurring the distinctions between the sexes in the concrete context of public worship.

Scholars who subscribe to this background inevitably focus on the motivation of the women, as those most likely to approve of and benefit from Paul’s liberating teaching. Traditionally,

some suggested, for example, that the Corinthian women ‘had an ill-timed and dangerous lust for emancipation’ (Tischleder 1923: 156).²⁵ The women’s behaviour is derisively described as emanating from ‘les tendances féministes’ (Héring 1949: 90-91), and even likened by one scholar to the ‘scandalous’ behaviour of women who took up smoking in the 1920’s (Leipolt n.d.: 171-172).²⁶ More contemporary scholars still concentrate their gaze primarily on the women, noting as does Hays that, ‘the Corinthian women who were removing their head coverings or letting their hair down in worship were consciously discarding a traditional marker of gender distinction [that] symbolised their femininity and simultaneously their inferior status as women’ (Hays 1997: 183-4).

A more nuanced reflection on the situation at Corinth might be as follows. As part of the Corinthians’ ‘over-realised eschatology’ (Thiselton 1977-78)²⁷ it would seem that they ‘considered ecstatic worship a suspension of one’s normal condition, as a momentary denial of mortal contingencies, as a liminal event in which one achieved a more perfect ontology’ (MacDonald 1988: 282). Without wanting to label the Corinthian spirituality as full-blown gnosticism, an examination of gnostic texts reveals that the framework behind such a conception of ritually achieved ontology is likely to be the myth of the primal androgyne, found in both ancient Greek and Jewish traditions (Delcourt 1961; Meeks 1974; MacDonald 1987). Here the creation of the primordial human was as an androgynous spiritual being; with the soul’s fall into materiality the binary division into male and female occurred. Consequently, the unification of opposites in general, and the symbolisation of a reunified humanity in particular, became a well-known motif in religious experience and ancient philosophy (Meeks 1974: 166-167; MacDonald 1988: 282-283).²⁸ Based on their understanding of Paul’s teaching behind Gal 3:28, the Corinthians – both the men and the women – may have decided to symbolically dramatise their belief in a re-unified humanity through their appearances.

It is important to note, however, that the androgyne is primarily male. Sexual unity is, in fact, ‘reconstituted masculinity’ where the female becomes male (MacDonald 1988: 285). We ought not be surprised, then, to observe that in Gal 3:28 the believers are no longer male *and* female (where the other pairs have been *nor*), but have become one male person – Paul uses the masculine *heis* rather than the neuter *hen*. As MacDonald notes, ‘the androgyne myth is not antiquity’s answer to androcentrism; it is but one manifestation of it’ (MacDonald 1988: 285).

At this point we need to return to considering 1 Cor 11:2-16 in the light of Butler’s theory of performativity. This theory demonstrates that when the ‘normal’ is unsettled through practices of ‘collective disidentification’ (Butler 1993: 4) we can see most clearly how indeterminate gender actually is, as the categories of body, sex, gender and sexuality are disrupted and shown to be problematic. Through the ritualised repetition of their ‘gender scrambling’ (Redick 1994: 39) practices in the context of public worship, a site of authoritative performance, the Corinthians are quite possibly subverting the notion of a stable heterosexual model. By playing with the established sign systems of clothing and coiffure it is possible to suggest that the Corinthians are (consciously or unconsciously) engaging in what Butler calls ‘gender parody’ (Butler 1999: 175) – a way of doing gender that draws attention to the constructedness of heterosexual identities, revealing the imitative nature of *all* gender identities.

But of course, as Butler states, not all parodic performances are subversive; some forms of drag merely serve to reinforce existing heterosexual power structures. Butler cites the performance

of Dustin Hoffman in the movie *Tootsie* as an example of what she calls ‘high het entertainment’, where ‘the anxiety over a possible homosexual consequence is both produced and deflected within the narrative trajectory of the films’ (Butler 1993: 126).²⁹ Butler suggests that only those performances which ‘compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality’ and ‘a reconsideration of the *place* and stability of the masculine and feminine’ (Butler 1999: 177) are those which can be deemed subversive. It is also to be expected that subversive performances cannot be programmed, stylised or specified in advance – they arise in a context of marginality, and as Margaret Nash notes, ‘they must be played from that space where repetition always involves slippage and so a kind of failure’ (Nash 1990: 173). In addition, it is those who have less at stake in the dominant culture who perhaps have the freedom of movement which is necessary to subvert and destabilise the categories of gender, sex and desire (Martin 1991: 421). Does the behaviour of the Corinthians fit into these notions of subversive performance?

While we might agree that the Corinthians’ behaviour arises from a context of marginality (being a small group of converts to a fledgling religion), and thus involves a certain amount of freedom and innovation, there are clearly some concerns if we think back to the myth of the primordial androgyne. If the Corinthians viewed themselves as symbolically – or even actually, in those liminal moments of ecstatic worship – demonstrating the reunification of humanity, then as already noted, such behaviour will most likely be reflecting an androcentric ontology. The female worshippers may well be discarding the surface signs of identification as ‘women’ in order to become ‘male.’ Jesus’ teaching, as found in the *Gospel of Thomas*, may be illustrative of their thinking; Jesus states that in order to retain Mary in the ranks of the disciples he will, ‘make her male, that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven’ (logion 114). As disciples of Christ, these women, who are now honorary males through transcending sexual differentiation, have a new-found freedom and authority to pray and prophesy in public worship.³⁰ The Hellenistic Jewish narrative *Joseph and Aseneth* may also be illustrative of such thinking; after her conversion to Judaism, Aseneth is told by an angel to remove her head covering, ‘because you are a holy virgin today and your head is as that of a young man’ (15:1-2). Clearly, while potentially subversive in the deliberate removal of their ‘tokens of ontic inferiority’ (MacDonald 1988: 292), the underlying ideology of gender hierarchy and disembodiment suggests that these repetitions are inevitably ‘instruments of cultural hegemony’ (Butler 1999: 177).

But what of the men? In her critique of MacDonald’s proposal of this primordial androgyne myth as the framework behind the Corinthians’ behaviour, Bernadette Brooten notes that MacDonald’s reconstruction gives no basis for explaining the motivation behind the men’s behaviour (Brooten 1988: 295). If a scenario could be suggested that adequately included the behaviour of the men, then perhaps we can return to the notion of a more subversive performance. Certainly if the men were challenging the accepted gender hierarchy, then such behaviour has the possibility of creating instabilities which would call into question the hegemonic force of the dominant ideology of heteronormativity.

Here, then, we can note that gender role reversal was an important component in various religious festivals celebrated by the Greeks, particularly those regarding Heracles and Dionysos.³¹ The male worshippers of these gods would engage in ‘ritual transvestism’ (Seaford 1996: 180),

donning feminine apparel in order to ‘show themselves off as ambisexual beings, striving to transcend gender categories’ (Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarrague 1990: 228-229). We also know that female worshippers of Dionysos (and in other cults, such as that of Isis) would engage in an ‘ecstatic frenzy’ which involved loose and dishevelled hair (Fiorenza 1983: 227-228), and exchange of clothing – a vase painting from Corinth, for example, shows a woman dancing before Dionysos dressed in satyr pants and equipped with a male organ (Kroeger 1987: 37).

It is possible, then, to suggest this scenario of ‘ritual transvestism’ as the background behind the behaviour of both the men and the women.³² Corinth was a major centre of the Dionysian cult, a religion where male adherents would don feminine apparel in imitation of the god himself, who was closely associated with feminine clothing – the other name by which he is known, Bacchus, is derived from the word *bassara*, a woman’s dress (Farnell 1971:160). With regard to the followers of Dionysos, many observers regarded this ritual transvestism as a shameful activity. The Roman historian Livy criticises the male followers saying, ‘there are men very much like women’ (XI, 39.15.9), while in his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* Philostratus records an episode where Apollonius criticises them saying, ‘disguised as female harlequins ... they shine in shame alone’ (IV.21).³³ Such language of shame is exactly how Paul describes the Corinthians’ behaviour (11:4-7, 13-15).

In relation to this, Brooten has some important methodological points to note when considering transvestism of any sort however, given that we do not have the writings of those who practiced such behaviour. She warns that:

Transvestism, whether partial or full, is in fact a much misunderstood phenomenon. Cultural explanations on the part of its despisers should not be equated with the motivations of men who dress as women and women who dress as men ... We should not assume that those who wrote about transvestism and same-sex love in antiquity held the same views of these phenomena as those who practiced them ... one should not identify cultural understandings of behaviour with individual or group perceptions of their own behaviour (Brooten 1988: 295-296).³⁴

At this point we ought to move our investigation to a consideration of the writing which we *do* have, Paul’s response to the Corinthians concerning their behaviour – whatever that may have been in reality. What emerges from a reading of this text in the light of Butler’s theory of performativity?

Butler’s exploration of gender identity centres on the way in which discourse produces gender, prescribing ontologies of gender that are seen as naturalised and legitimate. She states that, ‘the regulatory norms of “sex” work in a performative fashion ... to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative’ (Butler 1993: 32). And these norms arise from what she calls ‘regulatory fictions’ (Butler 1999: 5, 32) – performative speech-acts that regulate identificatory practices. These ‘ritual fictions’ or ‘just-so’ stories include authoritative enunciation in the form of imperatives, injunctions, invocations, sanctions and threats of exclusion (Bech 1995: 188). We can see such discourses operating right from the moment of birth, when we hear the pronouncement, ‘It’s a girl!’ or ‘It’s a boy!’ Butler (1993) suggests that

'in that naming, the girl [boy] is "girded", brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender' (7).

These discourses have also been powerfully present in Western society through the biblical accounts of human origin, primarily reflected in Genesis chapter 1-3. While some might argue that scientific discourse has replaced religion in prescribing ontologies of gender (Matthews 1993: 648), particularly in the area of socio-biology, there is little doubt over the historical impact such biblical teaching has had on legitimating heteronormativity as natural. Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 11:2-16, particularly his pronouncements that 'man is the head of woman' (v. 3) and 'man is the image of glory of God, but woman is the glory of man' (v. 7), has been a significant part of this historical divine sanction of gender hierarchy.³⁵

Paul responds to the reports he has about the Corinthians' behaviour through the use of several levels of argumentation. He labels their behaviour as 'shameful' (vv 4-6; *disgraceful* NRSV) and rhetorically asks them to consider what is 'proper' and what 'nature teaches' concerning the appearances of men and women (vv 13-14). In verses 5-6 he also uses a *reductio ad absurdum* argument in order to point out the 'abject' nature of what the Corinthians are producing through their behaviour; to be 'a shaved woman' is a horror to be repudiated and this ought to therefore circumscribe and constrain the Corinthians' gender identifications (Butler 1993: 3).

Paul also appears to argue for sexual differentiation and hierarchy based on Gen 1-3 (vv 7-12), stating that 'man was not made from woman but woman from man, neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man' (vv 8-9). Such language appears to echo that of the creation story where Eve is created from Adam's side to be his helper (Gen 2.18ff). We have already noted verse 7 where Paul refers to man being 'the image and glory of God', again a probable reference to the creation account, but with the significant alteration that in Gen 1:27 we find both male and female are created in the image and likeness of God.

Here we can clearly see, I believe, a discourse at work which is seeking to prescribe heterosexually organised gender difference. Paul, in a position of apostolic authority, is engaging in a rhetoric of persuasion in order to affect a change in the behaviour of the Corinthians with regard to their gender performances. He invokes 'nature' as a way of setting the necessary limits of gendered life, including the threat of shame and dishonour for those who transgress such boundaries. And he also calls on the powerful 'just-so-' story of Genesis to give divine sanction to heteronormativity.

However, Paul's response in this passage does not end there. There are some surprising elements in his argument that do not fit with the chauvinistic image of Paul we might otherwise be envisaging. In particular, verses 11 and 12 are clear statements of gender equality and mutuality: that man and woman are interdependent 'in the Lord' (a possible reflection of Gal 3:28), and that they both have their origin through the other, and in any case 'all things are from God.' While some scholars dismiss these verses as concessions or merely parenthetical (Barrett 1971: 255; Murphy-O'Connor 1988: 272; Fatum 1991: 74), and others see them as the climax of Paul's arguments (Scroggs 1972: 300n47; Fee 1987: 522n39; Gundry-Volf 1997: 161), at the very least they create some ambiguity over Paul's position on these matters.

We can also note the unexpected way in which he has set out the supposed gender hierarchy of verse 3. A surface reading of this verse may indicate a hierarchy of ascending order from woman, man, Christ and God, but a closer look reveals that Paul 'disrupts' the 'natural' hierarchy

by beginning his series of pairs with that of ‘every man’ and Christ. It is clearest in the Greek, but he also surrounds the middle pair, of man and woman, with the two mentions of Christ, perhaps again reflecting Gal 3:28 (Murphy-O’Connor 1980: 494).

We also need to bear in mind the *sitz im Leben* of the early church where, for example, Paul had women ‘co-workers’, and sent greetings to a woman Junia whom he names as ‘prominent among the apostles’ (Rom 16). Many women’s names are sprinkled throughout his letters as those who had leadership roles, including those at the church in Corinth. Paul makes specific mention of Chloe, in whose house the church met (1 Cor 1:11), Priscilla, who with Aquila is named as a co-worker (Acts 18:1-3, Rom 16:3), and Phoebe, who is named as a deacon at the church in neighbouring Cenchrea (Rom 16:1). The practice of having women as ‘co-workers’ and leaders, and as we see in this particular passage, as those who could pray and prophesy in public worship, was something radical. This may therefore be an example of how those on the margins have the freedom required for subversive acts which undermine the stability of ‘natural’ gender behaviours.

Nevertheless, there is still the binary framework within which Paul’s teaching undoubtedly operates, whether it is in the service of reinforcing a gender hierarchy as part of that binary, or in seeing mutuality as a positive operative for relations within that binary. If the Corinthians, through a repeated recitation of their gender-blurring performances – parodic or not – are destabilising the gender categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’, then Paul is seeking to prescribe clear gender boundaries. Whether he is advocating that women can pray and prophesy in public worship *as women* without having to become honorary men, something we might concede as ground-breaking, his teaching is still part of a greater discourse which has buttressed heteronormativity ever since.

To read both the Corinthians’ behaviour and Paul’s response to that behaviour through Butler’s theory of performativity has thus allowed us to reconsider the gender issues in this passage in a way which at least does some justice to their complexity.

ENDNOTES

- 1 For example, see Fiorenza (1983: 227-230).
- 2 For example, see Oster (1988), and Gill (1990).
- 3 Bedale (1954). One should also see Grudem’s articles (Grudem (1985; Grudem 2001), and the rebuttal by Cervin (1989), as well as the articles by Gundry-Volf (1997) and Dawes (1998) for a full discussion on this issue.
- 4 Such as Fiorenza (1983) or Wire (1990).
- 5 Such as Schreiner (1991).
- 6 This is usually discussed in relation to the tendency of scholars to ignore the presence of women unless specifically mentioned; see Fiorenza (1978: 154). See also Fiorenza (1983: 41-67).
- 7 Wire’s Corinthian women prophets, Fiorenza’s Isis worshippers and the primal androgyne imitators of MacDonald (1987) are all scenarios that offer little or no explanation for the motivation for the men’s behaviour.
- 8 The language Paul uses to describe the behaviour of both the men and the women is remarkably parallel and also lacking in the grammatical forms we might expect if Paul was being hypothetical (ie. ‘if ... then’ structures with the use of the subjunctive); some scholars in this category will therefore

insert such forms into their discussion of the text. For example, see Delobel (1986: 374). Even scholars who acknowledge the parallelism in the text still declare that it is only the women's conduct that is at issue; see Conzelmann (1975: 184 n35) and Meier (1978: 218). In addition there are historical possibilities from which to determine the nature of the men's behaviour; for example, see Gill (1990) and Oster (1988). In his commentary Anthony Thiselton (2000: 800) makes the exceptional declaration in his opening paragraph on this passage that the issue involves both men and women.

9 And we should note that there is a reluctance within (conservative) biblical studies to deal thematically with the topic of sexuality, particularly the 'touchy subject' of homosexuality; Scroggs (1972: 297). The recent debate over the Civil Unions Bill in NZ and the response of various denominations (particularly the Destiny Church) is testimony to this. In addition there is the long-standing debate over the ordination of openly gay and lesbian ministers (particularly in the Presbyterian church). There are undoubtedly deeper ideological reasons why sexuality is seen as an illegitimate area of biblical research, but these lie beyond the scope of this paper. The article by Tony Simpson (1992) is a revealing example of just how 'touchy' this issue can be for some writers.

10 For a discussion of works by various scholars see Szesnat (1995); we would want to note a few exceptions who do take methodological concerns into account, however, such as Brooten (1985), Brooten (1996), Boyarin (1994), and Boyarin (1997).

11 Notably Barrett (1971), Scroggs (1972) and Murphy-O'Connor (1980).

12 And the ways in which these are entwined with certain misogynist views of women, namely that to be effeminate is to be as a woman, something to be avoided at all cost! See RandC Kroeger and Clark (1979).

13 Meier (1978) makes the brief comment in a footnote that, 'The reference to the shame of long hair on males may be [an] indication of Paul's fears that the Corinthians could fall into a confusion of sexual differences and therefore into homosexuality' (223 n24).

14 This, of course, also raises the debate between an essentialist and a social constructionist approach to a history of sexuality, and the legitimacy of viewing homosexuality as a phenomenon that can be identified, described, and thus analysed throughout history. See the discussions in Halperin (1990), Boswell (1980), Matthews (1993), Phelan (1992) and Bech (1995).

15 This theory is developed in her two key works, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Butler 1999) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (Butler 1993).

16 McMillen states that Butler's work, 'gave intellectual shape to the emerging movement of queer theory', (McMillen 1997: A14).

17 This view is of course dependent on one's theological and political positioning with regard to women, scripture and culture, but is one generally held by most feminists, Christian or otherwise.

18 But not her first work, which was *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France* (Butler 1987).

19 Butler (1999) says of her own methodology, which is informed through the political convergence of feminism and philosophy, that, 'This inquiry seeks to affirm those positions on the critical boundaries of disciplinary life ... The complexity of gender requires an interdisciplinary and postdisciplinary set of discourses in order to resist the domestication of gender studies or women studies within the academy and to radicalise the notion of feminist critique' (xxxii).

20 To use a favourite word of Butler's, albeit one borrowed from Julia Kristeva (see Butler 1999: 169-170), and to note the suspicion and animosity with which those in staunchly Christian or queer camps might (do) view each other; there would be few readers of one text who are also familiar with (or even aware of!) the other.

21 See also similar comments in book reviews of *Bodies that Matter*, such as that by Zita (1996: 788-89).

22 It is also possibly difficult because while Butler makes frequent allusions to performativity, her most sustained elucidation of the theory is tucked away in a brief section at the end of chapter 3 (Butler 1999: 171-180).

23 The latter is a term coined by Adrienne Rich; see Salih (2002: 49).

24 For the sake of context – and because some important points of connection are otherwise often unexplored – I prefer to consider verses 25-29. I also prefer the NIV which doesn't neutralise the gender terms in this passage.

25 P Tischleder, *Wesen understanding Stellung der Frau nach der Lehre des heiligen Paulus* (1923: 156), cited in MacDonald (1988: 280).

26 J Leipolt, *Die Frau in der antiken Welt understanding im Urchristentum* (n.d. pages 171-172), cited in MacDonald (1988: 280 n. 17).

27 A term used by many scholars to describe the Corinthians' spirituality; see the discussion in Thiselton (1977-78). However, there is a suggestion that the Corinthians lacked any eschatological framework at all; this will need to be investigated further.

28 Brooten (1988) provides a valuable critique of this view, however.

29 She also mentions Jack Lemmon's performance in *Some Like It Hot*, and we could add many other examples, in particular Robin Williams performance as *Mrs Doubtfire*.

30 See the discussion in Fee (1987: 497-498). There is also the issue of whether the Corinthians viewed themselves as 'angelic beings' and how this relates to the primordial androgyne mythology – I have not yet examined this strand of thought in enough detail to include a discussion on that here.

31 See Plutarch, *Moralia* IV, 304C, *Diodorus of Sicily*, II, 4.14.3 and the discussion on Herakles in Loraux (1990); also Apoloodorus, *The Library*, 3.4.3, Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyrana*, IV.21, and Euripides, *Bacchae*, lines 235 and 353, for example.

32 This is different from Fiorenza (1983) who addresses only the behaviour of the women, or those scholars such as Oster (1988) and Gill (1990) who address only the behaviour of the men.

33 We must remember, however, that the cult of Dionysos was also denigrated because of its debauchery, not just its practices of cross-dressing.

34 At this point we might note that Cantarella's well-received book, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, does not address ritual transvestism, or any such religious practices, despite its otherwise comprehensive account of almost every other facet of ancient sexual life (Cantarella 2002).

35 Doing a historical study of the impact of this passage on views of gender, sexuality etc. would easily reveal such a conclusion. See the thesis by Mercadante (1978) for an overview of scholarship on this passage from 16th century until 1970's.

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