

Jill E. Marshall, *Women Praying and Prophecy in Corinth. Gender and Inspired Speech in First Corinthians* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 448; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2017). Pp. 255. 79,00 €. ISBN 978-3-16-155503-9

ANNA RAMBIERT-KWAŚNIEWSKA

Institute of Biblical Studies, Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław
e-mail: anna.rambiert@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-9491-6786

The subject of the place of women and their rights in the Corinth community of the 1st century is certainly not easy – especially when you look for the answers in the New Testament. Particularly difficult are two seemingly contradictory texts: 1 Cor. 11:2-16 about praying women having their heads covered and 14:34-35 with a firm order of women’s silence during assemblies. The solution to this apparent contradiction was studied by Jill E. Marshall, who already in the introduction to her book asks bold questions that set the course of her deliberations (p. 5), with the most important in my opinion: “What would these modes of speaking [praying and prophesying – added by A.R.-K.] look like to an observer, and would Paul and Corinthians view such communication with God differently if voiced by man nor woman?” (p. 1). The fact that this question is crucial already shows the structure of the whole work, the largest part of which was devoted to the meticulous gathering and describing of sources that could shed light on the perception of a prophesying and praying Mediterranean woman, and finally accurately describe her social situation in the Corinth itself. Marshall has, as befits a (also) historian, awareness, which many experts on Paul lack – that the Mediterranean was not a monolith, and ideas known in one city or *polis* were not necessarily so obvious in another, social structures also differed, which is why early Christianity faced various problems when adapting to the conditions of specific cities. So if we study the Corinthian texts, we must consider the strictly Corinthian context (p. 8).

The structure of Marshall’s book is well thought out, and the accents are well placed, despite the accusation that the author has already encountered – Matthew V. Noverson review in: *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 40/5 (2018) 83 – stating that allegedly the number of pages dedicated to the biblical texts themselves were too small. This fact stems from the author’s approach:

in the first place she tries to understand the realities, to later go *ad rem*, thus avoiding committing errors typical to, among others, commentators, which she herself writes about using an example taken from a well-known commentary to *First Corinthians* on pp. 39-40. She notes that previous research has used simplifications, caused by a selective comparison material and neglecting the rhetorical function of fragments, adding that “they distort the reality of women in the ancient Mediterranean world” (p. 4), which is a problem in many similar works that build their vision of women on the premises taken from Aristotle’s works. Marshall divides her dissertation into six chapters – the content of which she announces already in the introduction (pp. 6-7) – of which two are dedicated to *First Corinthians*. In a relatively long first chapter (pp. 9-41), the author presents the history of research on women’s activity in the Corinthian commune and known charisms: prophecy and tongues. She emphasizes that in the context of Corinth, sex and public speaking should be examined together, which is often neglected by exegetes. Each of the presented concepts is considered in four thematic groups – reconstruction of the situation in Corinth, women in the Corinth assembly, prophecy and prayer in tongues, female prophets in the ancient Mediterranean – from Christian Baur by Robin Scroggs and Wayne Meeks, Elisabeth Schüsler Fiorenza, Antoinette Clark Wire to Jorunn Økland – and many others. The author accurately assesses these researchers without deprecating their conclusions and gradually revealing her own point of view to the reader. Such a wide discussion of the state of research seems necessary to allow understanding the problem of reductionism with which the author polemizes. The second chapter of the book is dedicated to the history of Corinth and the sanctuaries within and close to it. From the archaeological sources, the author draws mainly the epigraphic material associated with women. In the inscriptions, she finds both women asking for the gift of fertility or the addressees of curses, and significant female inhabitants of Corinth and the surrounding area, such as priestesses Polyæna and Chara, Regilla, wife of Herod Attic, or Junia Theodora, who was engaged in the political and economic life of the city, all of whom were publicly honored. She notes that women played an important role in the public space, engaging in worship, trade and charity. Equally important is the successful attempt to deny the existence of the Temple of Apollo in Corinth, an idea which has been fixed in the minds of many researchers. According to the researcher Corinth was subject to the sanctuaries in Delphi and Klaros, with both its “female and male prophets” (pp. 43-71). In the third chapter, Marshall examines literary texts of representatives of three co-existing cultures – Latin represented by Livy, Jewish – by Philo of Alexandria and Greek – by Plutarch – each of which had very clear and extremely similar views on women. Based on their works, the author defines the possibilities and limitations of women’s

speech in a private and public context, especially religious one. At the same time, she concludes that women involved in *religio* were allowed to speak in a public space reserved for men and even influence the state. This was possible as religious space blurred the differences between the sexes. However, when we talk about speaking in other contexts of public life, and even at inappropriate moments of private life, it was definitely not right for a woman to do (pp. 73-108). The fourth chapter is dedicated to women whose words gained them unquestionable political authority, mainly oracles and prophets (incl. Sibyl and Pythia). At the same time, she notices that the language describing female and male prophets differs quite a lot. It is difficult not to give reason to Marshall when she describes the female prophets as the brides of male deities, while the moment of entering prophetic ecstasy in literary visions (and not necessarily in reality) is full of madness and violence (descriptions from Lucan and in the Sibylline Oracles), which is not something characteristic of male prophets in the Bible (pp. 109-155). She also analyzes poetic, philosophical and prophetic texts, whose common denominator is admiration for prophesying women who were the embodiment of communication between the divine and human world. The last two chapters, fifth (pp. 157-179) and sixth (pp. 181-213), are dedicated to the exegesis of problematic texts from First Corinthians. The key to understanding both messages is for Marshall the proper understanding of ἐκκλησία, which cannot be limited to religious space, because it can also be understood as οἶκος, as well as public space. Therefore, already in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 we can notice the first problems resulting from the difficulty in showing women their role in ἐκκλησία. On the one hand, Paul introduces the hierarchy, and on the other, he emphasizes equality, further showing the Church as a community transformed by Christ, full of interdependence. Paul's image of the place of a man and a woman is full of contradictions and internal tensions. The author notes that Paul probably faced the same social, difficult to eradicate, ideas (not necessarily real problems!) about the women prophesying in a frenzy, as it was described in the literature of his time (1 Cor. 12:1-3 and 14:9-25). All this and much more leads Paul to change his attitude towards women and issue the firm prescript "women are to remain quiet in the assemblies" (14:34). The incompatibility of the texts results therefore from the development of Paul's argumentation and growing with the issue of prophecy and tongues doubts raised by the realities known to him and the limited knowledge about the specificity of the Corinthian community.

Reaching for this book by Marshall, I felt anxiety, especially after encountering her enthusiastic citation from Judith Bulter speaking about the performative role of sex (p. 5), to which the author returns in the final conclusion. I was afraid that this would be a book with a thesis, manipulating sources, what happens in gender discourse. Admittedly, it is not always necessary and justified to

constantly emphasize the “sexualized” nature of the female prophecy and the violence that is perceived in it. However, preciseness of the author, her accurate analysis of the studies of the researchers from the 19th to the 21st century dedicated to the problem of Corinthian women, critical analysis of ancient archeological and literary sources and the freedom with which she uses them, finally boldly presenting her own theses, bring me to respect both – her chosen methodology (despite my general skepticism towards it) and the author herself, as she showed the female members of the Christian community in a new light, and made it possible to understand two seemingly contradictory messages about women as elements of a coherent, evolving argument built on the peculiar images of the prophesying women in ἐκκλησία, which unites public, private and religious space. The book is full of nuances and details that greatly broaden the reader’s knowledge about the social realities of Corinth, but they are not always easy to capture, so one-time reading of this study is definitely not enough. This makes the final conclusion (pp. 215-220) even more valuable as it is itself a wonderfully carried out reasoning with clearly defined statements.