

PIOTR LOREK

Ewangelikalna Wyższa Szkoła Teologiczna we Wrocławiu

## SILENCE OF WOMEN. RHETORICAL DISPOSITIO OF 1 COR 14:34–35

Feminist hermeneutics have had an impact on biblical studies. It has forced exegetes to turn back to those passages, which always seemed to be 'plain' and has sometimes even contested what Christians have believed for ages. Is it possible that 1 Corinthians 14:33b–35 is one of these? Certainly, "the interpretation of verses 33b–36 is extremely difficult."<sup>1</sup> It is situated in an intricate place, is very short, has no direct equivalent in the whole of the NT, and its language is very general.<sup>2</sup> In trying to answer what *kind of silence* Paul requires from Corinthians' women and how today's churches might apply this text, firstly the authenticity of this record is examined, then its precise meaning is discussed, especially on the basis of rhetorical analysis of the *dispositio* of the passage.

### UNCANONICAL SILENCE?

Verses 34–35 are placed in known manuscripts either after verse 33<sup>3</sup> or after

---

<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit. A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books Company, 1987), p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> The Letter to Corinthians consists of two main parts. In the first part (1:10–6:20) Paul responds to the Corinthians' problems which were reported to him by Chloe's people (1:10), while the second part (7:1–16:4) answers the Corinthian's questions about: 7:1–40 'Marriage'; 8:1–11:1 'Food'; 11:2–14:40 'Worship'; 15:1–58 'Resurrection'; 16:1–4 'Collection'. The whole context of Paul's discussion with the Corinthians and their own situation was clear for both sides of this correspondence. Thus, Paul when he answers the Corinthians' questions (notice the use of phrase *peri. de.* in 7:1.25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1), does not have to provide the whole background to his dispositions. This is what makes the exegesis of Corinthians more difficult. Consequently, the meaning of 14:33b–35 even though it was clear for the original recipient, remains general and ambiguous for today's reader.

<sup>3</sup> Papyri: p<sup>46</sup> (II/III); Uncials: a (IV), A (V), B (IV), K (IX), Y (VIII/IX), 0243 (X); Minuscules: 33 (IX), 81 (XI), 88 (XII, contains a textual evidence in the margin), 104 (XI), 181 (XI), 326 (XII), 330 (XII), 436 (XI), 451 (XI), 614 (XIII), 629 (XIV), 630 (XIV), 1241 (XII), 1739 (X), 1877 (XIV), 1881 (XIV), 1962 (XI), 1984 (XIV), 1985 (XVI), 2127 (XII), 2492 (XIII), 2495 (XIV/XV); The majority of Byzantine manuscripts; The majority of lectionaries in the Synaxarion and in the Menologion; Old Latin Versions: Demidovianus (XIII), Bodleianus (IX), Harleianus Londiniensis (VIII); Vulgate (IV/V); Syriac: Peshitta (V), Harclean (VII), Palestinian (V); Coptic Versions: Sahidic (III),

verse 40.<sup>4</sup> They are, however, present in every known manuscript. It has been argued both from the external and internal evidences that verses 34–35 were not written by Paul, but were added later by a glossator.

#### External evidences

Since the most persuasive defence of the uncanonicalness of verses 34–35 has been provided by Fee, his argumentation needs to be examined.<sup>5</sup> Observing that verses 34–35 are inserted in two different places, Fee – on the basis of Bengel's principle, which says: "That form of the text is more likely the original which best explains the emergence of all the others" – proposes three main possibilities: (1) Paul had written 34–35 after 33, and later a scribe placed them after verse 40; (2) Paul had written 34–35 after 40, and later a scribe placed them after verse 33; (3) Paul did not write 34–35 and they are "a very early marginal gloss that was subsequently placed in the text in two different places."<sup>6</sup>

He takes option (3) and argues against (1) that: (a) "displacements of this kind do not occur elsewhere in the NT"; (b) "no *adequate* reason can be found for such

---

Bohairic (IV), Fayumic (IV); Armenian (V). Roman numerals indicate approximate date of origin. Most of data comes from: *The Greek New Testament*, ed. K. Aland, 3<sup>rd</sup> corrected edition (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983) and *Biblia Sacra Hebraica et Graeca* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994): *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle – Aland, 27<sup>th</sup> revised edition.

<sup>4</sup> This reading is observed in all Western witnesses. Uncials: D (VI), F (IX), G (IX); Minuscules: 88 (XII) – the reading of the original hand of a manuscript; Old Latin Versions: Ardmachanus (IX), Claromontanus (V/VI), Sangermanensis (IX), Augiensis (IX), Boernerianus (IX); Ambrosiaster Sedulius-Scotus; Also Latin Codex Fuldensis (VI), but on its margin of verse 33 it has 34–35. D.A. Carson, *Silent in the Churches: On the Role of Woman in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36*. In: J. Piper, W. Grudem, ed., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> This option is assumed also by C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), p. 330–1; J. Murphy-O'Connor, *1 Corinthians* (Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 1997), p. 160. Also H. Conzelmann (*1 Corinthians. A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. G.W. MacRae, trans. J.W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 246. He, however, sees not only 34–35 as a gloss but also 33b and 36. See: Kistemaker's comment, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), p. 513, Carson, *Silent in the Churches ...*, p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 699. "The fact that it occurs in all extant witnesses only means that the double interpretation had taken place before the turn of the first century." Fee, p. 705. Murphy-O'Connor writes: "Sometime after his [i.e. Paul's] death these lines [i.e. 34–35] were scribbled in the margin of a copy of this letter. Subsequent copyists thought that their predecessor had made an accidental omission which he had immediately corrected, and they wrote it as part of the letter, One put it here [i.e. after verse 33], the other after 14:40," p. 100–1. He adds: "Without any doubt 14:34–35 and I Timothy 2:12–13 [as scribal glosses] articulate the patriarchalism of a fallen humanity." p. 101. He views these glosses as a reaction against Pauline liberalism. Giving the reason he writes: "For certain Christian, [Paul's] churches were too far out of step with contemporary society, notably with regard to the freedoms accorded to women as a right not a privilege. These churches, some believed, would have a greater impact on pagan society if they were better integrated to the standards of the world." p. 101.

displacement were these words originally in the text after v.33.<sup>7</sup> But, using Fee's own observations, it may be said that: (*contra* a) John 7:53–8:11 may be treated as a similar example of displacement;<sup>8</sup> (*contra* b) it is *easier* to read 1 Cor 14:26ff without verses 34–35.<sup>9</sup>

It should be added that Bengel's principle must be referred to known evidence: "*That form of the text is more likely the original which best explains the emergence of all the others,*" not to hypothetical evidence. Fee argues from the transcriptional *probability*, but he fails to recognise that it is *more probable* that one of the known manuscripts is authentic (option (1) or (2)) than that an unknown hypothetical manuscript is authentic (3). Fee has no textual evidence for his option.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, it must be noted regarding option (3) that "it is hard to believe that none of the earliest copies had any influence in the second- and third-century textual traditions to which we have access."<sup>11</sup> Glosses normally aim to clarify text (cf. J 5:4; Acts 8:37; 1 J 5:7b–8), but here 34–35 only add exegetical problems, as will be shown later. It is also difficult to assume that a redactor did not realise that his 'gloss' seems to contradict 11:5.<sup>12</sup> To sum up following Keener: "To regard this [i.e. 34–35] as an addition on such slender evidence would lead us back to the scissors-and-paste approach so common in source criticism early in this century."<sup>13</sup>

#### Internal evidences

Fee adds some arguments from the intrinsic probability (i.e. what as author is most likely to have written): (a) the sense of the text is better without 34–35; (b) 34–35 contain usages foreign to Paul; (c) there is a contradiction between 11:5 and 14:34–35.<sup>14</sup> Carson's response is proper: (*contra* a) according to the principle *lectio difficilior potior* ('the more difficult reading is preferable') scribes tried to solve exegetical problems, but not to cause new ones; (*contra* b) there are many

<sup>7</sup> Fee, p. 700.

<sup>8</sup> Idem.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 701.

<sup>10</sup> W. Grudem (*Systematic Theology. An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994) writes: "Fee's position is surprising in the light of the fact that no ancient manuscript of 1 Corinthians omits these verses." p. 940. Also: J. Dunn, *1 Corinthians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 71; *The Theology of PAUL the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), p. 589; B. Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth; A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1995), p. 28.

Fee gives J 5:3b–4, 1 J 5:7 as the examples of possibility of gloss. In these passages it is possible to argue for a gloss, since there are some evidences which omit these verses. Concerning, however, 14:34–35 all known evidences lack an omission.

<sup>11</sup> Carson, *Silent in the Churches ...*, p. 142.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> C. Keener, *Paul, Woman and Wives. Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrikson Publishers, 1998 [1992]), p. 74.

<sup>14</sup> Fee, p. 701–702.

*hapax legomena* in Paul's letters; longer texts like John 7:54–8:11 can only suggest a foreign usage, but not just two verses; (*contra c*) even though the language of 34–35 is absolute and thus seems to contradict 11:5, its content must be qualified by context (cf. 1 John 3:9 and 1 John 1:6.8.10).<sup>15</sup> To this it may be added that the language of 34–35 itself is not absolute as will be shown later.

#### After 33 or 40?

Were originally verses 34–35 situated after 33 or after 40? Textual evidences unanimously say that verses 34–35 were originally placed after verse 33, and not after 40, since such manuscripts as: p<sup>46</sup>, a, A, B, Y are commonly recognised as the most reliable.<sup>16</sup> The majority, thus, rightly place 34–35 after 33.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, as will be presented below, the proposed chiastic structure of the passage requires 14:33b to be attached to 14:34–35. It consequently answers the question about its original placement.

#### TOTAL SILENCE?

At first sight it seems that 11:5: "... every woman who prays and prophesies..." (also 11:13) and 14:34: "... the women should remain silent in the churches..." contradict each other. The question arises as to solve this problem. Some scholars, assuming that 11:5,13 is relatively unclear, try to read them in the light of the more clear 14:34f and I Timothy 2:12f, which together, they believe, require the total silence of women in the church.

#### Public or Private Prophecy and Prayer

On basis presented above, 11:5,13 is viewed as indirectly allowing women to prophesy and pray, not during the official gathering of the church, but during either public, non-congregational situations<sup>18</sup> or private, non-official 'home

<sup>15</sup> Carson, p. 143–144. The precise resolution concerning a 'contradiction' between 11:5 and 14:34–35 (*contra c*), as well as detailed responses to both (a) and (b) are presented in a later part of this paper.

<sup>16</sup> See: Nestle-Aland 27<sup>th</sup>, p. 60\*. Grudem, *Systematic Theology...*, writes: "The few manuscripts that place this section [i.e. 34–35] at the end of chapter 14 are far less reliable manuscripts that have frequent variations in 1 Corinthians as well." p. 940.

<sup>17</sup> Carson, *Silent in the Churches ...*, p. 143, Grudem, *Systematic Theology ...*, p. 940, Keener, *Paul, Woman and Wives ...*, p. 76, S.J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), p. 511.513, Witherington, p. 288, etc. Concerning the evidence which suggests the placement of 34–35 after 40 it should be observed that all of them are from the western tradition. They are not, however, so early (the earliest is Claromontanus V/VI) that the assumption that all of them contain the improper transition is impossible. Cf. Witherington, p. 288; Carson, p. 143.

<sup>18</sup> J. MacArthur (*1 Corinthians*, Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1984) takes this position writing: "[Paul makes] no mention here [i.e. 11:5] of the church as worship or in the time of formal

groups'.<sup>19</sup> Both these situations are speculative, while it is clear that Paul in 11:2–16 (as in 11:17–14:40) means the official gathering of the church, because: (a) 11:2–16 is followed by typically public practices like the Lord's Supper; (b) Paul views prophecy in Corinthians as aiming to edify the gathered community (14:1–5.29–33a), not only as something to be exercised privately; (c) in those times churches met in homes, and such gatherings were seen as public assemblies (R 16:5; Phil 2); (d) 11:16 refers to a public, not a private situation; (e) there is no hint in 11:2–16 that Paul's dispositions are restricted to non-official gatherings; (f) "If the restriction pertains to every venue *except* the church assembly, does this mean the Christian wife must postpone her private prayer until she has hurried to her chambers and donned her headpiece? The restriction is coherent only in a public setting."<sup>20</sup>; (g) On the basis of the structure of 11:2–14:40 in general, and some further thematic and even linguistic similarities in particular (those will be seen further), it may be observed that sections 11:2–16 and 14:33b–35 form a kind of *inclusio* for 11:2–14:40. Consequently, since it is generally assumed (also by MacArthur and Wilson) that 14:33b deals with the public gathering, 11:2–16 by *inclusio* with 14:33b–35 must also refer to a public gathering.

#### Public Prophecy and Prayer but...

Others observing in 11:2–16 a public official gathering of the church treat women's prophesying and prayer as *hypothetically allowed* here, but *clearly forbidden* in 14:34.<sup>21</sup>

Nothing, however, in 11:2–16 indicates a hypothetical situation. Is men's prophesying also viewed here as hypothetical? (cf. 11:4). The difficulties of this

---

teaching. Perhaps he has in view praying or prophesying in public places, rather than in the worship of the congregation," p. 256.

<sup>19</sup> G.B. Wilson (*1 Corinthians*, Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978) quotes Fausset: "Even those 'prophesying' women were to exercise their gift in other times, and places than the public congregation," p. 156.

<sup>20</sup> Carson, *Silent in the Churches ...*, p. 145–6. For further expansion of those arguments, see: Carson, *Silent in the Churches ...*, p. 144–146; T.R. Schreiner, *Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity, 1 Corinthians 11:2–16*. In: J. Piper, W. Grudem, ed., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), p. 132.

<sup>21</sup> J. Calvin's position (*The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, tran. J.W. Fraser, ed. D.W. Torrance, T.F. Torrance, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960 [1546]) is representative: "The answer can be given that when the apostle disapproves of the one thing here, he is not giving his approval to the other. For when he takes them to task because they were prophesying bare-headed, he is not giving them permission, however, to prophecy in any other way whatever, but rather is dealing the censure of that fault to another passage (14:34ff).", p. 307. Also C. Hodge (*A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988 [1857]) who follows, as he admits (p. 209), Calvin: "He is speaking here of the propriety of women speaking in public unveiled, and therefore he says *nothing* about the propriety of their speaking in public in itself." p. 208 [italics added]. Also A.T. Robertson, A.A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), p. 324–325.

assumption are obvious, to quote Calvin himself: “It seems to be unnecessary for Paul to forbid a women to prophesy bare-headed, since in I Tim 2:12 he debars women from speaking in the church altogether. Therefore they would have no right to prophesy, even with their heads covered, and the obvious conclusion is that it is a waste of time for Paul to be discussing the question of head – covered here.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the majority, having different theological presuppositions, agree that Paul talking about veils implicitly assumes that it is proper for women to prophesy and pray.<sup>23</sup> According to the arguments presented above concerning 11:5,13, 14:34 does not require a total silence from women. This, will be additional strengthened by reconstruction of the disposition of the passage as well as the exegesis of its content.<sup>24</sup>

## SPECIFIC SILENCE

### Translation

**I Cor 14:33b** As in all churches of the saints, **34** the women<sup>25</sup> should remain silent in the churches; for it is not permitted<sup>26</sup> for them to speak,<sup>27</sup> but they should be in submission,<sup>28</sup> as the Law also says. **35** If, however, they want to learn<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Calvin, p. 307.

<sup>23</sup> Barrett, p. 250.331; Carson, p. 140; Dunn, *1 Corinthians...*, p. 70, *Theology...*, p. 586.589; Fee, p. 702.703; Grudem, *Systematic Theology ...*, p. 939; Keener, p. 72; Kistemaker, p. 512; Lees, p. 144; L. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, revised edition (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 197; D. Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p. 180; H. Ridderbos, *PAUL. An Outline of His Theology* (London: SPCK, 1977), p. 461-2; Witherington, p. 287.

<sup>24</sup> Calvin, Hodge, Roberson are inclined to read 11:5.13 in the light of 14:34, while Prior does exactly the opposite reading 14:34–35 in the light of 11:5.13. He begins his comments with „Whatever this section [i.e. 14:34–35] is teaching, it is not telling women to keep quiet in church. In 11:5, Paul has already referred to women praying and prophesying.”, p. 251–2. Even though it is necessary to read one passage in the light of the other, one should aim to avoid starting his exegesis on particular passage with an ‘inflexible’ assumption of the meaning of its content.

<sup>25</sup> D F G insert ὑμῶν after αἱ γυναῖκες and read: *your women*. NKJV follows this reading. However, the manuscripts like a A B Y lack ὑμῶν. This insertion of ὑμῶν is “a scribal harmonisation with *your own husbands* (v. 35).” Kistemaker, p. 515.

<sup>26</sup> a A B rightly have ἐπιτρέπεται. Y 1881 have: επιτρεπται.

<sup>27</sup> The infinitive here (λαλεῖν from λαλέω) refers to the *act* of speaking. The *content* of speech is normally introduced by λέγω. Kistemaker, p. 515.

<sup>28</sup> ὑποτασσέσθωσαν: a A B. But: D F G Y have: ὑποτάσσεσθαι. These are, however, secondary manuscripts comparing to a A B. Even if one argues for this reading (i.e. ὑποτάσσεσθαι) the sense remains the same. Barrett, p. 330. Codex A inserts: τοῖς ἀνδράσιν after ὑποτασσέσθωσαν and reads: *they are to be submissive to the husbands* (or *men*). It is done on basis of τοὺς ἰδίους ἄνδρας in verse 35, aiming to provide the object of the verb.

<sup>29</sup> μαθεῖν: p<sup>46</sup> a (second corrector) B (D F G) Y 0243 1739 1881 The majority text. But *μανθάνειν* is read by a (the original hand); A (correction) 33 81 104 365 1241 1505 2464 a few manuscripts which differ from the Majority text. This change from aorist into present may have been aimed at harmonising this verb with the rest of the verbs, which are in the present tense in this passage. This change is not significant.

something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is<sup>30</sup> a shame for a woman<sup>31</sup> to speak in the church.

### Delimitation

The whole phrase: “as in all churches of the saints” (v.33b) may be linked either (1) with what precedes (i.e. v.33a) or (2) what follows (i.e. 34a). Those who see 34–35 as a gloss consequently argue for option (1). For example, Barrett notes: “It is against this that *in the churches* and *in the assemblies* (both translating ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις) follow very awkwardly, and verse 34 is best taken as a new beginning.”<sup>32</sup> Fee adds that for the early Greek-speaking church it was never a problem to relate 33b with 33a. “Chrysostom did not have a verb in his text (*hom.* 37.2) but he simply added διδάσκω (*hom.* 36.7 [twice]) as indicating that it was meant by Paul.”<sup>33</sup> The majority, however, argue for option (2).<sup>34</sup> Hodge rightly observes that v.33a is natural conclusion for v.32, so 33b begins new section.<sup>35</sup> If 33b is linked with 33a then 32–33 loses its permanent sense. Furthermore, observing a thematic connection between 14:34–35 and 11:2–16, one may notice similar wording and argument in 11:16 (αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ θεοῦ). Even though there is repetition of ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις in 33b and 34, it provides not only an emphasis but also a distinctive and precise meaning. First ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις means ‘churches in general’, then ‘worship services’.<sup>36</sup>

Interpreters differ also whether verse 36 belongs either to (1) 33b–35 as a continuation of the argument or (2) to 37–40 as a part of a general summary. Since in verse 36 the tone and the theme is changed, Paul now pays attention not only to the women but to the whole congregation (notice: ὑμῶν) option (2) is preferred. Furthermore, verse 36 is more closely linked with verse 37 than verse 35, because verse 37 provides clarification on the questions asked in verse 36. 14:36–40 may be seen as Paul’s summary of 29–35 concerning the necessity of order during the worship in particular (cf. v.40), and also as a summary of the whole chapter 14 which is focused on prophecy and tongues (cf. v. 39).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Manuscripts: p<sup>46</sup>B 81 omit ἐστίν, which, however, does not have a significant impact on the interpretation.

<sup>31</sup> Manuscripts: a A B 17 rightly, have: γυναικὶ λαλεῖν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ while D E F G K L have: γυναιξὶν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ λαλεῖν. The order between λαλεῖν and ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ is not very important. The plural of γυνή (i.e. γυναιξὶν) in D E F G K L is “an obvious correction to agree with the preceding plurals.” Robertson, p. 326.

<sup>32</sup> Barrett, p. 330.

<sup>33</sup> Fee, p. 701. Also Murphy-O’Connor, p. 160.

<sup>34</sup> MacArthur, p. 392; Cason, p. 140–1; Dunn, *Theology...*, p. 589; Hodge, p. 304; Kistemaker, p. 511; Prior, p. 252; Wilson, p. 207; Witherington III, p. 287.

<sup>35</sup> Hodge, p.304.

<sup>36</sup> Kistemaker, p. 511.

<sup>37</sup> Robertson (p.326) sees here a summary for the chapters 11–14.

The rhetorical analysis of the *dispositio* of the passage provided below confirms those interpretations that link v.33b with v.34 and see v.36 as part of 37–40. Thus reconstruction of structure of the passage allows for its precise delimitation.

### Structure

No scholar known to me has recognised the chiasmic *dispositio* of 33b–35. Once this chiasmic structure is observed, it clarifies Paul's thought. Without going into detailed exegesis, some basic linguistic and thematic similarities and contrasts between respective parts of the chiasm can be graphically displayed:

33b	A	Ὡς <u>ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις</u> τῶν ἁγίων
34a	B	αἱ γυναῖκες ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις <u>σιγάτωσαν</u>
34b	C	οὐ γὰρ <u>ἐπιτρέπεται</u> αὐταῖς <u>λαλεῖν</u> ,
34c	D	ἀλλὰ ὑποτασέσθωσαν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ νόμος λέγει.
35a	C'	εἰ δέ τι <u>μαθεῖν θέλουσιν</u> ,
35b	B'	<u>ἐν οἴκῳ</u> τοὺς ἰδίους ἄνδρας <u>ἐπερωτάτωσαν</u>
35c	A'	αἰσχρὸν γάρ ἐστιν γυναικὶ λαλεῖν <u>ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ</u> .

On the basis of the similarities and contrasts noticed in the Greek text, the English translation and composition would look as follows:

33b	A	As <u>in all churches</u> of the saints,
34a	B	the women <u>should remain silent in the churches</u> ;
34b	C	for it is not <u>permitted</u> for them <u>to speak</u> ,
34c	D	but they should be in submission, as the Law also says.
35a	C'	If, however, they <u>want to learn</u> something,
35b	B'	they <u>should ask</u> their own husbands <u>at home</u> ;
35c	A'	for it is a shame for a woman to speak <u>in the church</u> .

Now the relation between all these clauses needs to be shown.

### Double Argumentation

Many scholars view the argumentation of 33b–35 either as merely cultural<sup>38</sup> or as wholly universal.<sup>39</sup> It needs, however, to be examined, because it seems that Paul is

<sup>38</sup> So W. Barclay (*Letters to Corinthians*, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1973): “Paul, in his conception of the place of women within the church, was unable to rise above the ideas which he had known all his life,” p. 151. C. Keener (*Man and Woman in: Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Hawthorne, Martin, Reid; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993) argues that the subordination of women must be viewed as cultural, not creational. He writes: “Paul clearly regarded the subordination of humans as unnatural,” p. 586. Also Dunn, *Theology...*, p. 591–593.

<sup>39</sup> So, for example, MacArthur, p. 392.



more precise here. He uses double argumentation, since the clauses A and A' argue from the common practice of the churches, while the clause D from creational order.

In A Paul refers to the common practice and understanding of the churches.<sup>40</sup> Similarly in A' he refers to 'shame' as a common estimate of the particular behaviour.<sup>41</sup>

The rules B and B' deal with the same theme, and since B is general, while B' is specific, B explains and clarifies B'. Thus, forbidden 'speaking' in B is the same as forbidden 'asking' in B'. This may be deduced from the connection between verse 35b and 35c: "They should ask ... at home, for it is a shame ... to speak in the church." 'Asking' here is contrasted with 'speaking'. The relation between 'speaking' in B and 'asking' in B' is also strengthened when the relation between 'permission to speak' in C and 'willingness to learn' in C' is observed (those two clauses are connected by *de*).

Since 'asking' is more specific it must be treated as an explanation for 'speaking'. This contrast between 35b and 35c is also underlined by the phrases: 'in church' and 'in home' in those verses.

Thus Paul in B' is neither *a proviso*<sup>42</sup> nor *a fortiori*.<sup>43</sup> So, even though 'speaking' in 33b–35 seems to be general (so absolute), it is rather specific (i.e. 'asking'). Moreover, from the relation between C and C' the activity of 'asking' should be seen not as general, but as specific, assuming the intention of learning. To sum up, Paul's 'speaking' is 'asking' in order to learn something.

By both its position and its content reason D is Paul's main argument. This argument is universal, since Paul talks here about the universal order of creation, by referring to the Law. Since Paul does not clarify ὁ νόμος the opinions concerning what he exactly means by *no,moj* are divided. (1) Some suggest Genesis 3:16<sup>44</sup>, but it seems to be improper, because Gen 3:16 talks about the post-lapsarian order which cannot be viewed as something recommendable. (2) Baldwin understands ὁ νόμος here as the Jewish tradition: "If a rabbinical argument suited his purpose Paul felt free to use it. The trust of this part of his letter was to end the disorderly worship of the Corinthian church, and his argument from Jewish practice needs to be seen in context, and not made a generalisation for all time."<sup>45</sup> Paul, however, seems to never use ὁ νόμος referring to Jewish tradition. In R 3:19 and 1

<sup>40</sup> Morris rightly writes about, 'accept Christian practice', p. 197. The similar argument is used in parallel 11:16.

<sup>41</sup> Greek ἀισχρός significantly appears in 1 Corinthians only elsewhere in 11:6, where it refers to the women's head-covering. Compare with Barrett (p.331) who writes about 'the common feeling of mankind'. Thus, it may be said that by both the chiasmic placement of A and A' and their similar way of argumentation they may be treated as complementary. Paul says that women are forbidden to speak because it is seen as a shame in all the churches.

<sup>42</sup> So Fee: „If their wanting to learn is the reason for them to speak out, then...”, p. 708.

<sup>43</sup> So Wilson (p. 208) who writes: „the prohibition is absolute and extends *even* to the asking of questions” [italics added].

<sup>44</sup> Barrett (p.316), Robertson (p.325), Wilson (p.208).

<sup>45</sup> J.B. Baldwin (*Response to James Hurley and Daphne Key*. In: S. Lees, ed., *The Role of Women*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984, p. 156).

Cor 9:8 where he uses also the phrase “the law says,” he clearly means the Mosaic Law. (3) Others view ὁ νόμος here as Paul’s own *principle/rule*.<sup>46</sup> (4) Some rightly understand here ὁ νόμος as allusion to Gen 2: 18–24.<sup>47</sup> It may be derived from both the content of v. 34 itself (the theme of submissiveness) and the thematic, as well as structural similarity between 11:2–16 and 14:33b–35. Paul does not have to be precise in 14:34 stating what he means by ὁ νόμος,<sup>48</sup> since he has already clarified it in 1 Cor 11:2–16. It is worth observing that 6:16 alludes to Gen 2:24. It must be noted that Paul in all the main passages (i.e. 1 Cor 11:2–16; 14:33b–35; cf. I Tim 2:11–15), which deal with the women’s submissiveness and their place in public worship, always refers to the creational order.

From the chiasmic structure, it must be emphasized that the reason D is not used to support the *required silence*, but rather the *required submission*.<sup>49</sup>

To sum up. The reason D orders women to be submissive (D), while the reasons A and A’ order women to be silent (B) by refraining from uttering questions (B’) with intension of learning (C’). On this basis it may be said that for Paul in this passage the submissiveness women follows from the order of creation, while the silence in church from the common practice of the churches.<sup>50</sup>

#### Activity of Speaking

The question arises as how to put together Paul’s argumentation in order to reconstruct his thought.<sup>51</sup>

In that time it was improper for women to ‘speak’ in church. This speaking cannot be understood in general as every kind of ‘speaking’, since neither for Paul or for the Corinthians was it improper for women to pray or prophesy. This is also supported by the relationship between B and B’, which shows that the prohibition in 14:33b–35 is not even itself absolute. It is also worth noting here is the use of the verb σιγάω in chapter 14. It appears in v.28 and v.30 and does not convey its absolute meaning (v.28 orders silence *when* there is lack of interpretation,

<sup>46</sup> See Kistemaker’s response, p. 514.

<sup>47</sup> Carson, *Silent in the Churches ...*, p. 152; Keener, *Paul, Woman and Wives ...*, p. 87.

<sup>48</sup> *Contra Fee*, p. 707.

<sup>49</sup> Scholars very often confuse this. For example Wilson (p.208) writes: Paul enjoys *silence* upon the women of Corinth during public worship; it is as authoritative command because it is of divine *origin*” [italics added].

<sup>50</sup> It is interesting to observe that in the passage 11:2–16 which is thematically related to 14:33b–35 double argumentation also appears. Paul argues for the submissiveness of women from the universal truths of the relationship between God and Christ (11:2) and creational order (11:3.7–9), but for the necessity of ‘head-covering’ from the common practice of churches (11:4–6.13–16).

<sup>51</sup> Also the context for right interpretation is necessary. Chapter 14 consists of both its main discussion on ‘Tongues and Prophecy in Worship’ (14:1–25) and the appeal for ‘Order in Worship’ (14:26–40). It is in the second part of chapter 14 that verses 33b–35 are situated, so they need to be understood in this context.

while v. 30 orders silence *when* another revelation occurs).<sup>52</sup> On this basis one may expect that in v.34 the verb *σιγάω* is also not used in the absolute, but rather in a particular and conditional sense.<sup>53</sup>

It cannot be stated exactly what kind of speaking it was. From the passage itself it is only clear that this 'speaking' was in form of 'asking' which aim was to learn, but *not* to teach.<sup>54</sup> This 'speaking' was not even itself authoritative, since Paul talks about learning. It was only viewed as being against men's authority. Scholars aim to clarify this 'speaking' by the context of passage. (1) Barrett wants to understand it as 'inspired speech', but that would be in contradiction with 11:5, as he himself observes.<sup>55</sup> (2) MacArthur links 'speaking' with tongues and prophecy saying "women are not allowed to exercise any such ministries".<sup>56</sup> Verse 35, however, talks about 'asking' and 'learning' so it contradicts his position. (3) Prior, being aware of both the content of 11:5 and the general language of 14:33b–35, talks about the *sarcasm* of Paul.<sup>57</sup> 14:33b itself, however, gives no hint of this suggestion. Significantly, Prior himself does not aim to prove his position. (4) Some suggest that 'speaking' refers to 'judging of prophecies'. Paul allows women to prophesy (11:5) but not to weigh prophecy (14:33b–35), because it would violate, as a form of teaching, men's authority. 14:29 is seen then as the main verse for 30–35. Its first part about uttering prophecy is described in 30–33a, while the second about evaluation of prophecy is detailed in 33b–35.<sup>58</sup> There are a few problems with this interpretation: there is no hint in 33b–35 that it refers to the judging of prophecy; judging prophecy is no more authoritative than the prophetic gift itself (cf. order of gifts in 12:28). Moreover, even though 33b–35 is placed in a paragraph which deals mainly with the proper use of tongues (26–27) and prophecy (28–33a) it does not need to be linked directly with them, since the content of the introductory verse 26, goes behind tongues and prophecy. (5) Some suggest that in Paul's time women were uneducated.<sup>59</sup> Verse 35b seems to assume that the husband knows more than his wife. It is, thus, possible that part of the women's the problem in Corinth was lack of knowledge, and consequently their irrelevant, disruptive questions. This view may be opposed by observation that Paul cannot assume that 'in every church' (33b) all women were uneducated, since he was aware of women such as Priscilla (Acts 18:26).

<sup>52</sup> See: D. Key, *Women in the Church*. In: S. Lees, ed., *The Role of Women* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), p. 146.

<sup>53</sup> *Contra* Fee, p. 702.706, MacArthur, Calvin, and Wilson.

<sup>54</sup> *Contra* Calvin, p. 306; Hodge, p. 305.

<sup>55</sup> Barrett, p. 332.

<sup>56</sup> MacArthur, p. 392.

<sup>57</sup> Prior, p. 252.

<sup>58</sup> Carson, p. 151; Schreiner (p.132) and D. Key (p.144) in S. Lees' book; Dunn, *1 Corinthians...*, p. 75; Kistemaker, p. 512; Grudem, *Systematic Theology ...*, p. 939.

<sup>59</sup> Keener, p.70ff; Morris, p. 197–198.

From the above rhetorical analysis of *dispositio* of 1 Cor 14:33b–35 the last (i.e. 5<sup>th</sup>) mentioned interpretation of Paul's recommendation for women's silence in the church is most probable.<sup>60</sup>

#### Silence and submissiveness

As it has already been shown from the structure of 1 Cor 14:33b–35, Paul argues for submissiveness of women from the created order (clause D), and for silence from the common practice of the churches (clauses A and A'). What is not clear, however, is the relation between these two kinds of argument. Paul's strong contrast (*avlla*,) between A–C (v. 33b, 34b) and D (v.34c) is ambiguous: "As in all churches ... it is not permitted for [women] to speak, *but* they should be in submission, as the Law also says." Paul here changes both *the quality* of argument (observational > creational) and *the content of prohibition* (silence > submission). He does it, however, without clarification of the relation between them. Thus, there are two possibilities for understanding his argumentation, which probably cannot be solved by this particular text:

(1) The argument which comes from the common practice of the churches *is dependent upon* the creational argument, and thus is still binding for today's Christianity (i.e. it cannot merely be treated as cultural). Women are not allowed to speak authoritatively in church, because the order of creation does not allow that. According to this view, Paul commanded this understanding of the creational argument, because he saw that all churches in his time had a correct view of women's role in the church.<sup>61</sup>

(2) The argument which comes from the common practice of the churches *is distinguished* from the creational in order to show that the practice of the churches concerning women speaking cannot be seen as universal, but as cultural. Only the submissiveness of women is universal. The churches applied the creational submissiveness of women in forbidding the women for an authoritative speech.<sup>62</sup> From this interpretation the question arises as to why Paul does not simply say that the women's silence cannot be seen as a universal rule, but rather orders women not to speak in the church. Why does he order Corinthian women to act according to a cultural rule? The reason is that Paul wants to preserve the order

<sup>60</sup> For a list of other interpretations and their critiques: Carson, *Silent in the Churches...*, p. 145–151; Fee, p. 702–705; Keener, *Paul, Woman and Wives...*, p. 74–81; Kistemaker, p. 513–514.

<sup>61</sup> For example Calvin (p.306) writes: „If the woman is under subjection, she is therefore debarred from having authority to teach in public.”

<sup>62</sup> One may want to confirm this by observation that Paul encourages and allows a woman to learn and ask, although she has to do it not in church, but rather at home. On this basis, one who assumes position (2) may argue against (1) as follows. If the wife is not allowed to speak in a way, which is against her husband's authority, because it would be against the order of creation, why can she do so at home? Is it not, first of all, marriage, which must reflect the creational order?

and integration of the church.<sup>63</sup> According to this interpretation the contemporary churches – in times when it is 'normal' in the society for women to speak publicly without seeing it as acting against men's authority – have to rethink and to reapply the universal submissiveness of women in the life of the church.<sup>64</sup>

## CONCLUSION

By reconstruction of the chiasmic *dispositio* of the passage and providing the argumentation that follows from it, the article provides additional reasons to discussion about 1 Cor 14:33b-35's: (1) authenticity, (2) placement, (3) delimitation, (4) content, and (5) contemporary application. This shows value of the rhetorical analysis that adds new rationale for various disciplines within the field of the biblical studies.

*Ewangelikalna Wyższa Szkoła Teologiczna we Wrocławiu*  
*ul. Świętej Jadwigi 12, 50-266 Wrocław*

## SILENCE OF WOMEN. RHETORICAL DISPOSITIO OF 1 COR 14:34-35.

Keywords: New Testament, Paul the Apostle, First Corinthians, rhetorics, women in ancient society

---

<sup>63</sup> Similar situation may be noticed in 8:1–11:1. Here Paul also ask some members of the Corinthian church not to exercise the universal rule but rather accept cultural situation in order not to scandalise some Christians, who before they became believers had sacrificed food to idols. After their conversion their thinking were not changed enough to be able to eat everything. They still refrained from eating the food, which was sacrificed to idols. Paul's response to this situation is also twofold. Even though he does not deny that Christians can eat everything (universal rule), he still induces those who share this knowledge that they should take care of those who are 'weak' and with regard to their cultural as well as personal convictions refrain themselves from eating sacrificed food (cultural rule). Paul says: „I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall.” (8:13).

<sup>64</sup> H. Marshall (*The Role of Women in the Church*. In: S. Lees, ed., *The Role of Women*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984) writes: “It is not obvious ... that in contemporary society and the contemporary church women who took part in a service would be regarded as showing in subordination to her husband or it would seem shameful”, p. 190–1. On this basis he states: “there is no reason why a woman may not participate in a church service from pure and lofty motives, and exercise whatever spiritual gifts the Spirit may bestow upon her”, p. 191.