

EXCERPT

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Nobody's Mother *Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament*

October 10, 2023 | \$24, 208 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0592-7

Does "saved through childbearing" in 1 Timothy 2:15 mean that women are slated primarily for rearing children? Sandra Glahn thinks that we have misunderstood Paul and the context to which he wrote. Combining spiritual autobiography with new research on the Greek goddess Artemis, Glahn lays a biblical foundation for God's view of women.

Why Take a Fresh Look?

As I've taught about women in public ministry for two decades, I have paid attention to the most common reasons people say they consider it unnecessary to take a fresh look at the biblical text on the topic. One might expect that in a seminary the reason would be Paul's statements about women (or wives) keeping silent in the churches (see 1 Cor 11; 14; 1 Tim 2). Yet the number-one reason I hear—maybe even especially among people with high levels of biblical literacy—is not textual. It's historical.

For many, the narrative has gone something like this: "For two thousand years, the church has held a belief and observed a practice relating to women that has remained unchanged. But the influence of the Women's Movement in the United States has infiltrated the church, which has capitulated to culture. The idea that women can hold clergy positions and questions about women teaching biblical truth in public are new, influenced by one factor: feminism."

An author writing in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (RBMW)* put it this way in describing what he calls the historical understanding of Scripture: "This has been the view of historic orthodoxy to the present and, in fact, is still the majority view, though presently under vigorous attack. The very fact that its opponents call the view 'the traditional view' acknowledges its historic primacy. . . . We should begin our discussion with the assumption that the church is probably right" (Lewis S. Johnson, "Role Distinctions in the Church: Galatians 3:28).

The author does well to start with church history. The history of interpretation and practice relating to women is essential. That is why I, too, will start with it. But to be clear, the historical understanding relating to women was that "women were characterized as less intelligent, more sinful, more susceptible to temptation, emotionally unstable, incapable of exercising leadership" (William G. Witt, *Icons of Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Theology for Women's Ordination*). Witt notes a major shift from this position in recent decades: "Somewhere around the mid-twentieth century, the historic claims about women's essential inferiority and intellectual incapacity for leadership simply disappeared. Instead, all mainline churches—Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican—recognize the essential equality between men and women" (*Icons of Christ*). Some of the previous practices related to women have been rooted in an interpretation of Paul's statement that the woman, not the man, was deceived (1 Tim 2:14)—part of the very text we will explore.

A narrative about the history of ideas on the subject has filtered down from the academy to the masses. Consider the words of a blogger, who wrote this more than fifteen years ago: "It was the feminist teachings of the past few decades that first spurred Christians to try to argue for [women in public ministry]. Like it or not, the two schools of thought are intertwined."

This is an incorrect origin story. But because such ideas so frequently shut down the topic, we will look first at the tradition. Here is a brief survey of some of the church's most influential voices.

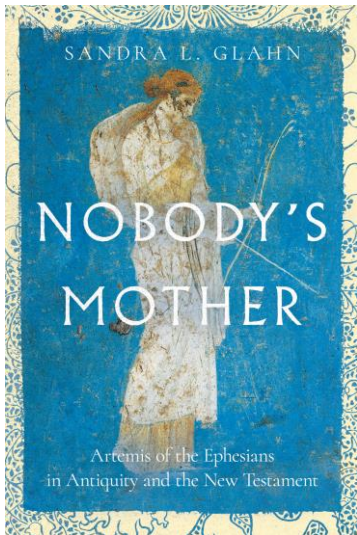
John Chrysostom (347–407 CE), an early church father who served as archbishop of Constantinople, wrote, "The woman taught once, and ruined all. On this account therefore he [Paul] says, 'let her not teach.' But what is it to other women, that she suffered this? It certainly concerns them; for the sex is weak and fickle" ("Homily 9 on 1 Timothy" in *Homilies on the Epistles to the Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; Thessalonians; Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*).



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Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) was a theologian, philosopher, bishop in North Africa, and one of fewer than forty people named as "doctor of the church." Many consider Augustine one of the most important figures of the Latin church in the patristic period. He wrote this: "[Satan made] his assault upon the weaker part of that human alliance, that he might gradually gain the whole, and not supposing the man would readily give ear to him or be deceived" (*The City of God and Christian Doctrine*).

We see similar ideas in the works of theologians in the Middle Ages.

Bonaventure (c. 1217–1274 CE), also named as a doctor of the church, was an Italian bishop, cardinal, scholastic theologian, and philosopher. He argued that only males could serve at the altar because women lacked the image of God, "but man by reason of his sex is 'imago Dei' " (*Commentarium in IV Libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*).

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 CE) was a theological and educational doctor's doctor. His views on male and female were deeply influenced by those of Aristotle, who saw woman as "defective and misbegotten" (*Summa Theologiae*). Such ideas endured through the Renaissance.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536 CE) was a prominent Dutch philosopher and theologian. He said that that while woman was deceived by the serpent, man was impervious to such beguilement: "The man could not have been taken in either way by the serpent's promises or by the allure of this fruit" (*Collected Works of Erasmus: Paraphrases on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, the Epistles of Peter and Jude, the Epistle of James, the Epistles of John, and the Epistle to the Hebrews*).

Of the Protestant reformers, who celebrated the priesthood of all believers, the most influential was German priest, theologian, and author Martin Luther (1483–1546 CE). Rather than seeing male mastery of the woman as rooted in the fall, Luther believed that "by divine and human right, Adam is the master of the woman. . . . There was a greater wisdom in Adam than in the woman" ("Lectures on 1 Timothy," in *Luther's Works*).

The next generation of Reformers taught similarly. Here's an example: John Knox (c. 1514–1572 CE), founder of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, was a theologian and writer who described women as "weak, frail, impatient, feeble and foolish" as well as "inconstant, variable, cruel and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment" (Section Two: The First Blast to Awake Women Degenerate," in *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*).

This is no random sampling of obscure theologians. Some tremendously influential leaders whom the church has revered through the centuries (and still does) held unbiblical views of women. William Witt, in *Icons of Christ*, observed, "Historically, there is a single argument that was used in the church against the ordaining of women: women could not be ordained to the ministry (whether understood as Catholic priesthood or Protestant pastorate) because of an inherent *ontological* defect. . . . Moreover, this argument was used to exclude women not only from clerical ministry, but from all positions of leadership over men, and largely to confine women to the domestic sphere."

The ontological-defect argument of traditionalists is why a segment of Christian believers in the United States began to call themselves *complementarians* rather than *traditionalists*. Unlike the men quoted above, complementarians affirm that, on an ontological level, woman is equal with man. Complementarians make the following affirmation in the Danvers Statement: "Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen 1:26-27; 2:18)" (Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood). Such a pronouncement was a break with tradition. Yet on the foundation of traditionalist views of woman's ontology, practices for society, church, and home were built.

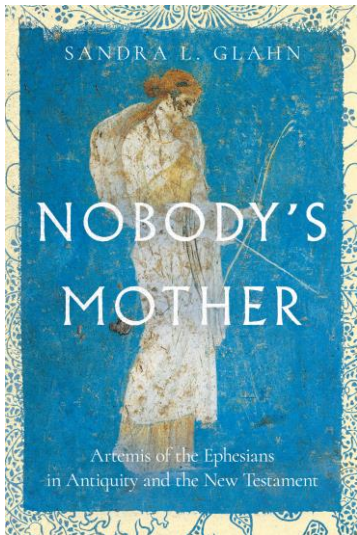
—Taken from chapter one, "Why Take a Fresh Look?"



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Q & A



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Reexamining Artemis's Influence on Paul's Context

What led to your interest in researching and writing about Artemis and the context of Paul's letters?

Sandra L. Glahn: As a Bible teacher experiencing infertility and pregnancy loss, I read Paul's statement that “she will be saved through childbearing” (1 Tim 2:15 NRSV) and was told it meant women (including me) needed to redirect teaching gifts away from the church and toward our own children—which I lacked. In making this statement about childbearing, was Paul laying out a universal truth rooted in creation order, or was he drawing on the Genesis creation story to correct a local one in Ephesus, where Timothy—the recipient of his words—resided? The answer lies in understanding the spiritual and cultural context, part of which Acts 19 provides. The goddess Artemis had a stranglehold on Ephesus at the time of the earliest Christians. So, who was Artemis of the Ephesians at the time of Paul and Timothy? The answer is essential to determining a biblical anthropology of woman: Who is woman and what did God make her to do?

How would you describe your methodology and thesis in *Nobody's Mother*?

Glahn: Scholars in the 1980s saw a connection between the Ephesian Artemis's cult and Paul's instructions to Timothy about women, especially about childbearing. These scholars' work was largely discredited because they drew on super early sources (7th century BCE) or late sources, such as Jerome (4th century CE). But while their approach had weaknesses, some of their critics went too far in assuming a lack of connection between Artemis's influence on Paul's context. Others who acknowledged a connection perceived Artemis as a mother goddess or the center of a fertility cult—both of which several prominent Ephesus scholars insist are untrue. The evidence demanded a fresh look. So I determined to answer, Who was Artemis Ephesia at the time of the earliest Christians?

First, I explored ancient sources such as Homer to establish Artemis's backstory. Then I considered literary sources only from the time of the earliest Christians. I then explored sculptures, inscriptions (epigraphic sources), architecture, and art—all from the time of the earliest Christians. I established that Artemis was neither a mother nor connected with fertility. Rather she was a confirmed virgin and a midwife—which might have included being a euthanizer of women suffering in labor.

Who did you have in mind as you were writing this book?

Glahn: In the past decade, sixteen million American women have left the church, according to author and journalist Ericka Andersen. I received a text last Saturday from a friend in Austin who wrote this: “I just spent a week with forty women in Christian leadership who were almost all devastated by and grieving over this [sexism in the church]. It made me feel so much less alone and helped me conceptualize what it's costing the body.”

Nobody's Mother is for the person who doesn't want to sacrifice a high view of Scripture to support men and women partnering in public ministry.

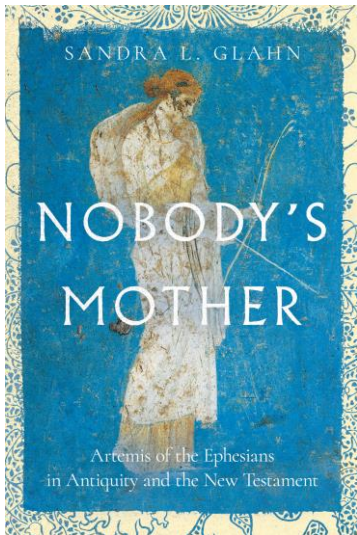
It's for the reader who suspects the apostle Paul has been misunderstood and actually affirms women in public ministry.



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It's for the person who looks at the history of the church regarding women and knows her story has been buried.

It's for the person who sees God giving spiritual gifts to women for the maturing of the body of Christ and has a hunch she's supposed to use them far beyond the nuclear family—especially while noticing that a woman can use her gifts in a Fortune 500 company yet has to sit quietly sidelined in church.

It's for the person who knows the Protestant Reformers emptied the nunneries and exchanged an over-elevation of celibacy for the over-elevation of marriage and children—with devastating results for the church.

It's for the person who knows the church is supposed to look like a family, and not a single-parent one.

What do you hope your book contributes to the field of New Testament studies?

Glahn:

- Corrects falsehood relating to biblical anthropology and ecclesiology about woman
- Provides social and spiritual context for 1 Timothy (with ramifications for other pastoral epistles)
- Lays to rest the myth that Artemis was a nurturing mother goddess or bringer of some sort of feminine principle
- Establishes the identity of the Ephesian Artemis described in Acts 19



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