

Yesterday I started this thread on the understanding of sex and gender in the ancient world by pointing out how the entire Bible starts, with the creation of the world and both men and women, the woman being created “out of” the man – so that she was secondary to him, dependent on him for her existence, and brought into the world both to keep him from being lonely and to help him out. For most feminists, this would not seem like a very good start.

The story of women in the Bible is long and complex, and I’m not going to go into every relevant passage. That would take years. But I do want to point out how the creation story from Genesis ended up affecting the later Christian tradition.

It is no mystery that Christianity has a very long history of insisting that women should not exercise authority over men, both in the church and in the marriage relationship. That, of course, was, in broad terms, consistent with most social views and policies of broader society for the whole of human history. But I’m interested in the question of the Christian approach to the issue, which in modern times – say, since the end of the 19th century especially – has had to be asserted with some force since some – now most – women have insisted that the views are not merely unjustly patriarchal but completely dated.

The Christian views ultimately ...

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